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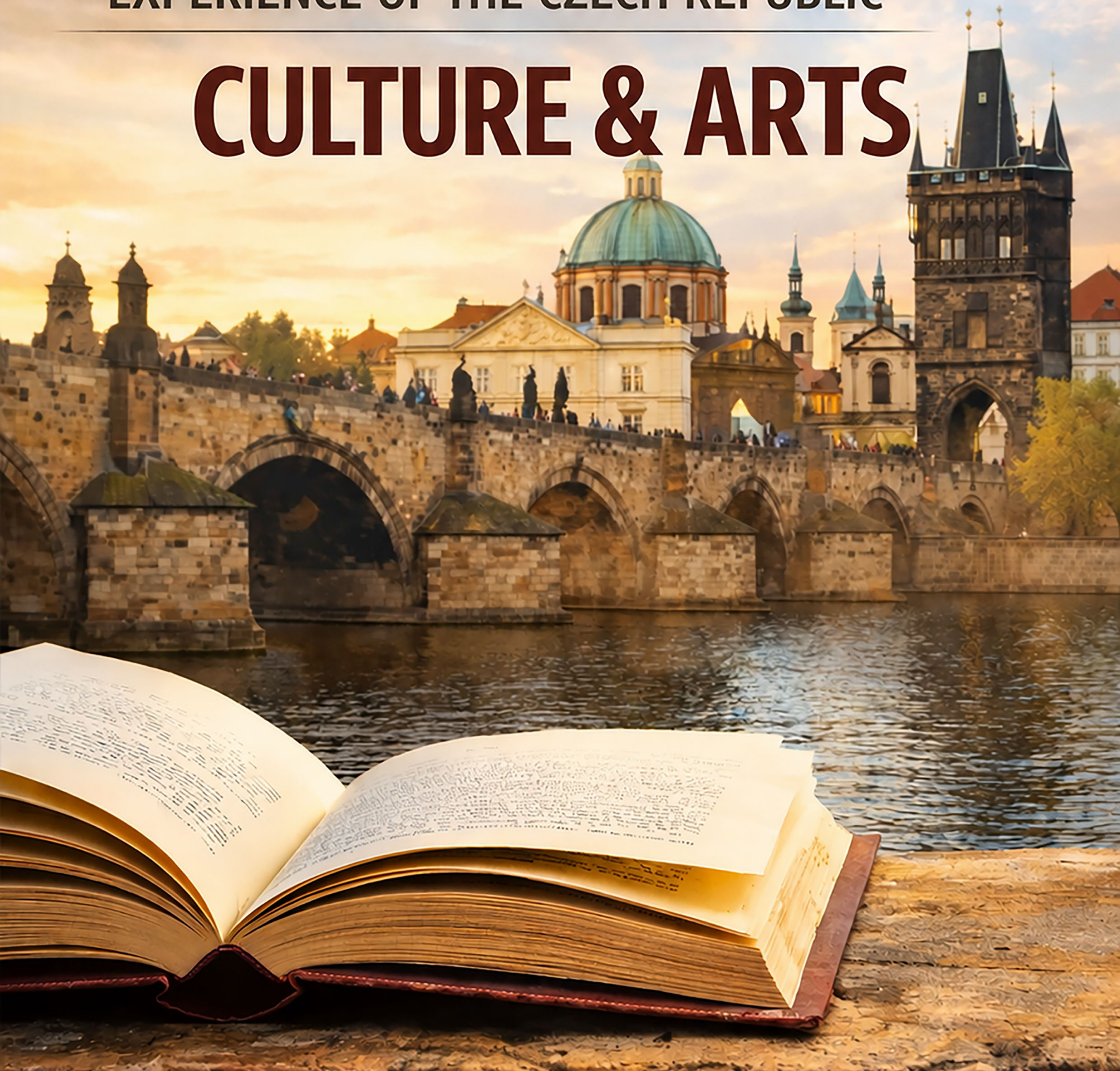

EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR INNOVATION DEVELOPMENT

Implementation of Innovations in Culture, Cultural Heritage and Arts

Experience of the Czech Republic

Dr. Alexander Buychik

Ostrava–Opava, Czech Republic

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Part One

Historical Evolution of Culture, Cultural Heritage, and Art Studies in the Czech Republic, 1993–2025

1993 as a Watershed: Continuity and Reorganisation of the Czech Cultural and Humanities Space

The year 1993 occupies an unusual place in the cultural history of the Czech lands because it was both decisive and, in another sense, remarkably undramatic. On 1 January, the Czech Republic emerged as an independent state, acquiring the sovereign institutional framework within which cultural policy, heritage protection, museums, galleries, universities, academies, and the arts would henceforth operate. Yet Czech culture itself was plainly not born at that moment, nor did the scholarly disciplines concerned with culture, heritage, and art suddenly acquire their intellectual foundations with the disappearance of Czechoslovakia. Their genealogies extended through the 20th century into the Habsburg period, the Czech National Revival, the First Czechoslovak Republic, and, in several cases, much earlier European scholarly traditions. The principal museums, libraries, university departments, collections, monuments, research archives, and professional communities that entered the new state were overwhelmingly inherited rather than newly created. Many of the most important transformations in intellectual freedom had already begun after the Velvet Revolution of November 1989, when censorship collapsed and academic life reopened to ideas, authors, methods, and international contacts previously restricted by the communist regime. The significance of 1993 must therefore be located neither in a cultural beginning nor in a sudden epistemological revolution, but in the reorganisation of an existing and rapidly changing cultural world within the political boundaries of an independent Czech state. This distinction between creation and reorganisation is essential for understanding the subsequent development of culture, cultural heritage, and art studies in Czechia.

The deeper continuity becomes especially visible when one considers the age of the institutions that carried cultural memory into the post-Czechoslovak era. The National Museum traced its origins to 1818, while the institutional history of the National Gallery reached back to the Society of Patriotic Friends of the Arts founded in Prague in 1796 and to the later Modern Gallery of the Kingdom of Bohemia. Charles University preserved traditions in aesthetics, archaeology, history, philology, and the study of art extending far beyond the 20th century, while Masaryk University and Palacký University had created influential regional centres of humanities scholarship. Art history in Brno possessed an institutional lineage dating to the interwar period, and the Olomouc department founded by Václav Richter in 1946 drew upon the intellectual legacy of the Vienna School of art history. The Academy-based tradition was similarly layered, combining institutes established under the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences with older projects of documentation and scholarship associated with the Czech Academy for Sciences, Literature and Arts. Even the state system of monument protection that the Czech Republic inherited in 1993 rested upon decades of administrative and professional practice. Such institutional depth meant that independence did not confront the new republic with an empty cultural landscape awaiting construction. It confronted it instead with the far

more complicated task of deciding how inherited cultural institutions should function in a democratic society, a market economy, and an increasingly European intellectual environment.

For this reason, 1989 and 1993 performed different historical functions. The events of 1989 broke the political monopoly that had determined the permissible boundaries of scholarship, artistic production, publication, exhibition, and public cultural debate. Previously marginalised scholars and artists could return to public life, forbidden or restricted works could re-enter libraries and curricula, and foreign intellectual currents could again circulate without the same ideological filtering. Universities and research institutes began reconsidering curricula, appointments, disciplinary boundaries, and the theoretical vocabularies through which Czech society and its cultural past were interpreted. Artistic institutions faced a comparable liberation, as the official distinction between authorised and unofficial culture rapidly lost the political machinery that had sustained it. The early 1990s consequently became a period of extraordinary intellectual opening in which restitution, memory, national identity, modernism, religion, exile, the Holocaust, the communist past, and previously marginalised artistic movements could be reconsidered from new perspectives. In strictly intellectual terms, the larger rupture was therefore 1989 rather than 1993. Independence nevertheless changed the framework within which the consequences of that rupture were to be institutionalised, financed, regulated, and represented internationally.

The dissolution of Czechoslovakia altered the scale of cultural governance in a particularly direct way. Institutions that had operated within a federal or Czechoslovak symbolic framework now had to define their place within a specifically Czech state, even when their collections and scholarly traditions remained inseparable from shared Czech-Slovak history. Administrative competences had to be clarified, public organisations had to be anchored in Czech law, and cultural diplomacy had to acquire an explicitly Czech institutional voice. National representation abroad, applications to international organisations, heritage nominations, bilateral cultural agreements, and the presentation of Czech art could no longer rely upon an overarching Czechoslovak state identity. At the same time, the separation was peaceful and did not destroy the dense linguistic, professional, and personal connections linking Czech and Slovak cultural life. Scholars continued to read one another's work, artists moved across the new border, and the historical record of the common state remained part of the cultural memory of both successor societies. The result was therefore not cultural separation in any absolute sense but a change in the political container within which cultural institutions defined their responsibilities. Czech culture after 1993 became nationally sovereign without becoming historically detached from the Czechoslovak world from which it had emerged.

The Ministry of Culture provides one of the clearest institutional illustrations of this process. It did not need to be invented for the new republic, because a Czech republican ministry had already existed within the federal arrangements of Czechoslovakia, but its responsibilities acquired a different significance after state independence. The Ministry became the central state authority for the arts, cultural and educational activities, monuments, churches and religious societies, copyright, publishing-related matters, and a range of other cultural functions. This placed under one administrative roof several domains whose subsequent development would not follow identical trajectories. The performing arts and publishing sectors increasingly encountered market mechanisms and plural forms of ownership, while museums, heritage institutions, major galleries, libraries, and monument protection continued

to depend strongly upon public authority. The new Czech state therefore inherited not one cultural sector but a family of sectors possessing different economic structures, institutional traditions, and relationships with government. That complexity helps to explain why cultural policy in the 1990s often developed through separate legislative and administrative interventions rather than through a single coherent doctrine established immediately in 1993. Statehood clarified sovereignty, but it did not by itself answer the more difficult question of what a democratic state's cultural responsibilities ought to be.

Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of the first post-communist years was the absence of an instant and comprehensive replacement for socialist cultural governance. The old system had been discredited politically, but many of its institutions remained indispensable because they cared for collections, maintained theatres, protected historic buildings, supported archives, and preserved highly specialised professional knowledge. Market liberalisation could be applied relatively quickly to some cultural industries, but a medieval manuscript, a baroque church, a national museum collection, or an archaeological site could not sensibly be treated as though it were simply another privatised commodity. Czech cultural policy therefore developed through negotiation between competing principles: freedom from state ideological control, public responsibility for cultural goods, decentralisation, property rights, professional autonomy, and severe fiscal constraints. The first strategic documents appeared only gradually, with an initial policy framework emerging in the middle of the decade and a more explicit strategy of cultural support being adopted towards its end. This delay is revealing because it shows that the transformation of culture was initially driven as much by institutional necessity as by a settled philosophy of cultural governance. The Czech cultural order of the 1990s was assembled pragmatically before it was fully theorised strategically.

Property restitution made this tension between historical justice and cultural continuity particularly visible. Communist nationalisation had transferred a vast range of buildings, artworks, collections, ecclesiastical objects, estates, and other assets into state or public hands, sometimes under circumstances that remained legally and morally contested after 1989. Restitution legislation sought to redress at least part of this history, but cultural property posed problems that ordinary economic assets did not. A castle might be both a restituted property and a monument of national significance; a painting might have a private ownership history while also forming part of a collection presented to generations of museum visitors; a religious building could be simultaneously a place of worship, an architectural monument, and an object of historical scholarship. Restitution consequently forced museums, heritage specialists, lawyers, state administrators, churches, and private owners to reconsider the relationship between possession and stewardship. It also made provenance, documentation, archival research, and legal history newly important to cultural institutions. What had once appeared to be stable public holdings could now become the subject of historical reconstruction and competing claims. In this respect, the transformation of ownership after 1989 helped turn cultural heritage into a field where law, ethics, scholarship, memory, and public policy could no longer easily be separated.

The inherited system of monument protection offers an equally instructive example of continuity under altered political conditions. The Czech Republic entered independence with Act No. 20/1987 on State Monument Care still providing the principal legal framework for the protection of cultural monuments. The language of the original legislation bore unmistakable traces of the socialist state in which it had been written, yet the fundamental professional functions it regulated did not disappear with the political regime. Monuments still required

identification, documentation, conservation, expert assessment, restoration, archaeological protection, and mechanisms preventing destructive alterations. Rather than discard the entire legal structure, the democratic state repeatedly amended and reinterpreted it within a new constitutional, administrative, and property order. This was characteristic of the transformation more generally: institutions and instruments inherited from socialism were not necessarily preserved because their ideological origins were accepted, but because some embodied technical capacities that remained socially necessary. Heritage conservation therefore demonstrates especially clearly why the post-1993 story cannot be reduced to a simple movement from an old system to a completely new one. The Czech state changed the political meaning and administrative operation of heritage protection while retaining substantial professional and legal continuity.

The protection of movable cultural heritage faced a different and in some respects more immediate post-1989 pressure. Open borders, expanding private trade, the emergence of art and antiquities markets, and a sharp rise in theft from cultural and especially ecclesiastical properties created risks that the former system had not been designed to manage under conditions of democratic mobility and international commerce. The Ministry of Culture's museum and gallery administration was consequently reorganised, and in 1993 a separate museum and gallery unit emerged as part of the response to the new environment. The problem was no longer merely how state institutions should administer state-owned collections, but how a plural ownership system could protect objects whose cultural importance exceeded their commercial value. Legislation adopted in 1994 concerning the sale and export of objects of cultural value created a mechanism for controlling the permanent removal of defined categories of significant objects from the country. Museums and specialist institutions became participants in this regulatory system because expert knowledge was needed to identify and assess material whose significance might not be visible in ordinary commercial transactions. The change illustrates a broader feature of the post-communist cultural transformation: liberalisation itself generated new reasons for professional regulation. Freedom of movement and ownership did not make heritage protection obsolete; they made the creation of more sophisticated forms of protection increasingly urgent.

Museums and galleries therefore entered the Czech Republic in a condition of simultaneous continuity and uncertainty. They retained buildings, professional staffs, scientific collections, regional networks, and accumulated knowledge that could not easily be reproduced if lost. Yet they also inherited organisational cultures shaped by a system in which public authorities had exercised far more extensive control over institutional objectives, funding, appointments, and interpretation. Democratic transformation required museums to reconsider not only what they displayed but also how they understood their relationship with visitors, communities, scholarship, and contested histories. The move away from ideological prescription opened exhibition narratives to subjects and interpretations previously excluded from official representation. At the same time, declining or unstable public resources created pressure to attract audiences, seek sponsors, develop educational programmes, publish more effectively, and cooperate with new civic organisations. These changes did not instantly convert Czech museums into market institutions, nor was such a conversion generally desirable. Instead, the 1990s initiated a gradual shift from the museum as a largely state-defined repository towards the museum as a public, scholarly, educational, and increasingly communicative institution.

The National Gallery in Prague embodied these tensions at the highest level of the visual arts. Its collections had been shaped by more than two centuries of aristocratic, civic, state, and

scholarly activity, making the Gallery a powerful demonstration of how cultural institutions survive repeated changes of political regime. The post-1989 period confronted it with the task of reassessing 20th-century artistic canons, reconnecting Czech art with international narratives, and addressing works and artists whose status had been distorted by ideological exclusion or institutional neglect. Its organisational and publishing structures changed repeatedly during the 1990s, reflecting the wider search for an appropriate model of management in the new environment. These adjustments were not merely bureaucratic, because decisions about collections, exhibitions, catalogues, acquisitions, and institutional priorities inevitably influenced the public history of Czech art. The Gallery also operated within a newly developing art market and a much more open international exhibition system, which altered both scholarly expectations and public visibility. By the end of the decade, its efforts to rethink publishing and professional communication showed that the institution was attempting to define itself not simply as a custodian of objects but as a producer and distributor of art-historical knowledge. The National Gallery thus became one of several arenas in which the meaning of a national cultural institution had to be renegotiated after independence.

The National Museum represented another form of institutional continuity, rooted less exclusively in fine art and more broadly in the 19th-century idea of collecting and organising knowledge about nature, history, society, music, and non-European cultures. Such institutions acquired renewed importance after 1993 because national independence inevitably intensified questions about how the history and identity of the Czech lands should be narrated. Yet the Museum's inherited collections also resisted any narrow conception of national culture, since they included archaeological materials, scientific specimens, musical archives, ethnographic objects, manuscripts, and evidence of historical connections extending far beyond the borders of the new state. The institution therefore stood at the intersection of national representation and scholarly universality. Its collections could support narratives of Czech statehood while simultaneously demonstrating the transnational, imperial, religious, linguistic, and cultural entanglements through which Czech history had developed. This tension would become increasingly productive in later decades as museums moved towards more contextual and critical forms of interpretation. In the early 1990s, however, the primary task was to stabilise institutional functions while responding to changing legal, political, and intellectual expectations. The National Museum's survival across regime change again underscores that the cultural transformation was a process of reinterpretation rather than institutional creation from nothing.

The reorganisation of the Czech Academy of Sciences was perhaps the most consequential change for the humanities research system itself. Act No. 283/1992 established the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic before the formal dissolution of Czechoslovakia, enabling the new institution to begin the independent state's existence with a defined legal basis. This timing is significant because it demonstrates that the transition from a Czechoslovak to a Czech academic framework was anticipated rather than improvised only after 1 January 1993. Humanities institutes concerned with history, archaeology, art, ethnology, philosophy, literature, and language entered the new Academy as research organisations carrying substantial documentary collections, scholarly series, archives, libraries, and long-term projects. At the same time, they entered a system in which international evaluation, competitive funding, publication quality, and institutional justification were becoming increasingly important. The Academy could no longer derive legitimacy from its place within a centrally planned scientific hierarchy. Its institutes had to demonstrate that long-term basic

research in the humanities remained valuable to a democratic society and internationally credible scholarship. The survival and subsequent development of these institutes ensured that cultural research retained a strong non-university institutional pillar in the new Czech Republic.

The Institute of Art History offers an especially revealing case of how this continuity was understood from within the scholarly community. Originating in the Cabinet for Art Theory and Art History established in 1953, it adopted the name Institute of Art History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic in 1992. Yet the Institute explicitly located itself within a much longer tradition associated with the Czech Academy for Sciences, Literature and Arts and its 19th-century programme of scholarly investigation, documentation, and protection of artistic and historical monuments. Its major activities likewise crossed political boundaries: systematic art-historical research, inventories of artistic monuments, photographic documentation, bibliographical work, specialist libraries, exhibition cooperation, and the journal *Umění* had developed over decades. The post-1989 transformation made it possible to reconnect these resources more freely with international art history and with methodological debates that had previously circulated under political constraints. It also allowed the history of Czech art to be reconsidered without the same obligation to organise artistic development according to Marxist ideological hierarchies. What changed was therefore not the existence of an art-historical profession but its conditions of interpretation, communication, and institutional legitimacy. The Institute exemplifies the broader Czech pattern in which scholarly continuity supplied the material infrastructure for intellectual renewal.

Archaeology experienced a related but more visibly structural transformation. The Institute of Archaeology in Brno, for example, underwent substantial reorganisation between 1990 and 1995, including a major reduction in personnel and a clearer concentration on basic research. Some responsibilities associated with rescue archaeology and administrative practice shifted elsewhere as the division of labour between research institutions, state administration, local authorities, and heritage bodies was reconsidered. This represented more than a budgetary contraction, because it changed the conception of what an Academy archaeological institute was expected to do. The new model emphasised long-term scientific investigation while the protection of archaeological heritage increasingly required cooperation among a broader set of institutions. Archaeology thus stood at the boundary between humanities research and heritage management in a particularly visible manner. Excavations generated historical knowledge, but they also raised questions of ownership, development, planning, conservation, and public responsibility. The early 1990s therefore helped establish a distinction, never absolute, between research-oriented archaeology and the administrative mechanisms of archaeological heritage protection.

Ethnology demonstrates another important feature of the Czech humanities after 1993: disciplinary identities were being redefined without severing themselves from older collections and traditions. The Academy institute that would later take the name Institute of Ethnology traced its institutional roots through the study of folk song, ethnography, and folklore back to projects begun in the early 20th century. Its structure stabilised substantially during the first half of the 1990s, while its research gradually broadened beyond classical documentation of traditional culture towards questions of ethnicity, migration, urban life, memory, identity, and social change. This evolution reflected a wider European movement from older ethnographic models towards forms of ethnology and sociocultural anthropology more attentive to contemporary society. Yet the Czech case retained a particularly strong relationship with

archives, folk culture, music, oral traditions, and material culture because these had generated rich collections over many decades. The post-communist transformation therefore produced expansion rather than simple disciplinary replacement. Older fields were reinterpreted, new questions were added, and the distinction between documenting tradition and analysing cultural processes became increasingly important. These developments would later prove central to the emergence of cultural heritage, memory studies, and critical heritage research as significant parts of Czech humanities scholarship.

This is also why the term *cultural studies* must be used carefully when describing the Czech environment of the early 1990s. Unlike in Britain or some other academic systems, cultural research in Czechia did not immediately crystallise around a single institutional discipline bearing that name. Questions that elsewhere might have been gathered under cultural studies were distributed among ethnology, cultural history, aesthetics, literary studies, sociology, philosophy, theatre studies, film studies, media studies, anthropology, and art history. Such dispersal did not indicate intellectual weakness; on the contrary, it reflected a dense humanities tradition with established disciplinary institutions of its own. The opening after 1989 allowed those fields to borrow more freely from semiotics, anthropology, memory studies, gender theory, post-structuralism, sociology of culture, and other international approaches. Czech cultural research consequently developed through interdisciplinary contact rather than through the rapid institutional domination of one imported model. This feature would remain important throughout the following decades and would help explain the later diversity of research dealing with identity, everyday life, cultural memory, minorities, media, and public culture. The history of cultural studies in Czechia is therefore best approached as the history of a research space rather than merely the history of a department with a fixed disciplinary label.

Universities were crucial to this reopening of the humanities. The end of ideological supervision made possible the restoration or renewed independence of departments whose institutional positions had been weakened, merged, or politically reshaped under communism. At Charles University, aesthetics recovered a fully independent departmental form in the early 1990s after having previously been integrated with art history, reconnecting contemporary teaching with a tradition extending back to the 18th century and to figures such as Jan Mukařovský. At Palacký University in Olomouc, art-historical teaching was institutionally renewed in 1990 and a separate Department of Art History emerged in 1992, restoring a lineage associated with Václav Richter. Classical archaeology at Charles University was likewise re-established as an independent institute at the beginning of the decade. Masaryk University's art-historical environment could similarly move beyond its late-socialist organisational framework and reconnect the Brno tradition with broader European scholarship. These developments multiplied the sites in which new generations could be trained and in which inherited canons could be reassessed. The university transformation therefore gave post-1993 Czech cultural research an increasingly polycentric character rather than concentrating renewal exclusively in Prague.

The recovery of disciplinary autonomy had an important methodological consequence. Under late socialism, the humanities had never been entirely reduced to ideological formulae, and significant scholarship continued to be produced, but the institutional environment constrained which questions could be asked publicly and which theoretical traditions could be treated as legitimate. After 1989, aesthetic theory, art history, cultural anthropology, religious studies, and related subjects acquired access to a much wider intellectual repertoire. Scholars

could revisit structuralism without filtering it through official ideological requirements, engage more openly with Western European and American theory, and restore links with émigré and dissident scholarship. Previously sensitive themes such as religion, nationalism, exile, Jewish culture, German-speaking culture in the Bohemian lands, and the cultural history of political repression could be investigated with fewer political prohibitions. The effect was not an automatic replacement of supposedly Eastern methods by Western ones, nor would such a description capture the persistence of strong Czech scholarly traditions. Rather, post-1989 pluralisation allowed scholars to choose among multiple methods and to combine domestic intellectual inheritances with international approaches. By 1993, methodological freedom was becoming one of the most important foundations of the new humanities order.

Competitive research funding reinforced this shift in ways that were initially less visible than political liberalisation. The 1992 legislation on state support for scientific activity and technological development created the framework for the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic, which began operating in the new state's first year. Project competition introduced a different logic from automatic dependence upon inherited institutional plans, although institutional financing remained essential, particularly in the humanities. Scholars increasingly had to formulate research questions as defined projects, justify methods and outputs, and compete before expert panels. For cultural and art research, this encouraged the formation of teams around specific subjects, archives, catalogues, editions, regional studies, and interdisciplinary problems. It also contributed gradually to a stronger culture of evaluation and to closer comparison with international research standards. The transition was not without difficulties, since long-term documentary projects and collection-based humanities scholarship do not always fit easily into short grant cycles. Nevertheless, the emergence of competitive national funding added an important new layer to the institutional ecology inherited from Czechoslovakia.

The arts themselves underwent an even more visible transformation because the collapse of state ideological control coincided with the arrival of market forces. Private galleries, independent publishers, commercial music enterprises, new theatres, festivals, foundations, associations, and other non-state organisations entered spaces previously dominated by public institutions or politically supervised structures. Artists acquired freedoms that would have been unthinkable under normalisation, but they also lost some forms of predictable state support and encountered the uncertainties of market demand. The removal of censorship did not therefore mean that cultural production became free of constraints; it meant that political restrictions were increasingly replaced or accompanied by economic, organisational, and competitive pressures. International contacts expanded dramatically, allowing Czech artists to exhibit, perform, publish, and collaborate abroad with far greater freedom. At home, foreign cultural production entered the market on a scale that challenged inherited habits and exposed audiences to new forms of commercial and popular culture. The 1990s consequently produced both liberation and anxiety, as cultural actors debated the difference between artistic freedom and commercialisation. Independent Czech statehood was established in the middle of this larger transition and gave it a new national institutional setting.

Civil society was another new participant in the cultural system. Associations, foundations, civic initiatives, independent cultural centres, professional networks, and locally organised heritage campaigns expanded after 1989 as forms of collective action ceased to require incorporation within a state-socialist organisational structure. Their importance extended beyond the direct production of cultural events. Civic groups could campaign for threatened

buildings, organise festivals, recover local traditions, support minority cultures, raise funds, establish galleries, publish periodicals, and create forums in which cultural policy could be publicly criticised. This complicated the older assumption that the state was the natural organiser of cultural life. It also complicated the opposite assumption that withdrawal of the state would automatically generate a self-sufficient private cultural sphere. In practice, Czech cultural development increasingly depended upon combinations of public funding, municipal support, voluntary labour, sponsorship, grant programmes, and professional networks. The cultural field that emerged after 1993 was therefore plural in ownership and initiative even when major institutions remained publicly maintained.

Public institutions did, in fact, prove far more durable than some early transformation rhetoric had implied. Research on Czech cultural financing has shown that privatisation, commercialisation, decentralisation, and the growth of the non-profit sector did not eliminate the dense network of publicly supported cultural organisations. Museums, galleries, theatres, libraries, heritage bodies, and major national institutions continued to provide services that neither commercial markets nor voluntary associations could reliably replace. This durability was partly a legacy of the Czechoslovak system, but it also reflected the character of cultural goods themselves. Maintaining a national collection, conducting archaeological research, conserving a historic building, or sustaining an opera ensemble involves long-term costs and public benefits that do not correspond neatly to short-term market revenue. The central question consequently shifted from whether public cultural institutions should exist to how they should be governed, financed, evaluated, and protected from inappropriate political interference. That debate would continue long after the formal economic transition was declared complete. Its origins, however, lie directly in the institutional uncertainties of the early 1990s.

The creation of the Czech Republic also intensified the politics of cultural memory. Every new state requires narratives through which its existence can be placed within historical time, but the Czech case was unusual because the new republic did not arise from a war of liberation or the collapse of an empire. It emerged peacefully from the dissolution of a democratic federation only three years after the fall of a communist regime that had itself repeatedly rewritten national history. Scholars, museums, schools, publishers, artists, and political actors therefore confronted several overlapping pasts at once: the democratic First Republic, Nazi occupation, the Holocaust, the expulsion of Germans, communist seizure of power, Stalinism, the Prague Spring, normalisation, dissent, exile, and the Velvet Revolution. These subjects were not new historical events, but the conditions under which they could be publicly interpreted had changed fundamentally. Cultural institutions became arenas in which competing memories could be documented, exhibited, commemorated, or challenged. The transformation of memory was thus inseparable from the transformation of the humanities. Independent statehood gave these debates a new national frame without supplying them with a single authorised conclusion.

Czech national identity after 1993 was consequently characterised by a curious combination of historical confidence and conceptual uncertainty. The Czech lands possessed an exceptionally dense visible inheritance of historic towns, castles, churches, synagogues, industrial sites, museums, archives, artworks, musical traditions, and literary monuments. Such material abundance could easily support the impression of an old and self-evident national culture. Yet the history represented by these objects was rarely exclusively Czech in an ethnic or linguistic sense. German-speaking communities, Jews, Roma, Slovaks, Austrians,

religious orders, imperial institutions, aristocratic families, migrants, and transnational artistic networks had all contributed to the cultural landscape. The democratic humanities increasingly had to confront the difference between possessing a national heritage and claiming a nationally homogeneous past. This distinction gradually opened the way for interpretations of Czech culture as a historically layered Central European formation. The cultural self-definition initiated around 1993 was therefore less a discovery of a single identity than a prolonged negotiation over the plurality contained within the national story.

The Czech-Slovak relationship formed one element of that plurality. The political separation created two sovereign cultural administrations, but it could not retrospectively divide the 20th century into two entirely independent histories. Archives, artistic careers, publishing networks, universities, theatrical traditions, film production, broadcasting, scholarly organisations, and family histories had developed for decades within a common state. The linguistic proximity of Czech and Slovak further ensured that intellectual exchange could continue with relatively low barriers. The very peacefulness of the dissolution made it possible for cultural ties to survive without being burdened by the kind of violent heritage disputes that accompanied the breakup of some other multinational states in the region. Nevertheless, national institutions now increasingly narrated the common past from the viewpoints of two separate republics. This created opportunities for comparison as well as for divergence in memory politics, museum administration, heritage decentralisation, and cultural policy. The post-1993 Czech cultural field therefore remained post-Czechoslovak in historical substance even as it became Czech in administrative sovereignty.

Internationalisation began almost immediately, and cultural heritage became one of its most visible expressions. The Czech Republic formally succeeded to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention on 26 March 1993, signalling continuity with international commitments previously undertaken within Czechoslovakia. Prague, Český Krumlov, and Telč had already been inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1992, which meant that the new state inherited from its predecessor not only monuments but internationally recognised responsibilities for their protection. Further inscriptions followed rapidly, including the Pilgrimage Church of St John of Nepomuk at Zelená Hora in 1994, Kutná Hora in 1995, and the Lednice-Valtice Cultural Landscape in 1996. This sequence gave heritage an unusual diplomatic visibility during the first years of Czech independence. Historic environments became symbols through which the young state could present itself internationally as the custodian of a much older European civilisation. At the same time, international recognition imposed standards of documentation, conservation, management, and professional accountability that encouraged closer engagement with transnational heritage practice.

European reorientation extended well beyond UNESCO. Cultural organisations renewed ties with Western European partners, research institutions joined international scholarly networks, universities expanded exchanges, and artists re-entered circuits from which normalisation had restricted many of them. German, Austrian, Polish, Slovak, French, British, Italian, and other European connections acquired new institutional intensity, while the prospect of eventual integration into European structures increasingly influenced government policy. This did not mean that Czech culture simply turned westwards and abandoned its regional environment. On the contrary, the opening of borders made Central Europe itself newly available as a field of comparative research, cultural cooperation, and historical reinterpretation. The shared legacies of the Habsburg monarchy, interwar states, fascism, communism, and post-socialist transformation could now be examined across national boundaries with greater intellectual

freedom. Art historians, archaeologists, ethnologists, historians, and heritage specialists benefited particularly from this widening geography because their objects of study had rarely respected modern state borders. By the mid-1990s, internationalisation was becoming not an additional activity but an increasingly normal condition of serious cultural and humanities research.

The first years of independence also revealed that cultural heritage deserved to be understood as more than a subcategory of general cultural policy. It possessed its own legislation, administrative authorities, specialist professions, conservation practices, documentation systems, archaeological responsibilities, property conflicts, and international obligations. A theatre company and a medieval castle could both belong to the sphere of culture, but the public problems associated with them were fundamentally different. Living arts required conditions for creation, artistic autonomy, production, circulation, and audiences, whereas heritage additionally required long-term physical preservation and decisions about what could legitimately be altered, restored, excavated, sold, exported, or transferred to private ownership. Museums occupied an intermediate position because they were simultaneously scholarly institutions, public cultural organisations, and custodians of movable heritage. Art history also intersected with heritage protection without being reducible to it, since the interpretation of artworks and architecture could generate knowledge that informed conservation while pursuing broader historical questions. The administrative experience of the early 1990s made these distinctions increasingly apparent. For the history developed in this book, cultural heritage must therefore be treated as an autonomous field interacting with cultural studies and the arts rather than disappearing inside either of them.

This autonomy was reinforced by the peculiar temporal character of heritage work. Contemporary artistic production can respond rapidly to political change, but monuments, collections, archaeological records, and documentary archives are accumulations formed across generations. The institutions responsible for them must therefore think in periods longer than electoral cycles, market fluctuations, or temporary cultural fashions. The events of 1989 and 1993 changed ownership structures, administrative responsibilities, and interpretative possibilities, but they did not alter the material age of a Romanesque church, a baroque landscape, an industrial complex, or a medieval manuscript. Heritage professionals had to reconcile sudden systemic change with objects whose significance derived precisely from historical continuity. This made them guardians not simply of the past but of continuity through political discontinuity. It also explains why professional expertise inherited from the previous system could not simply be discarded along with its ideological vocabulary. The post-1993 Czech heritage field emerged from the difficult conversion of accumulated expertise into a new democratic and legal order.

A similar temporal tension shaped art history. The discipline acquired greater methodological and institutional freedom, yet its fundamental objects of inquiry remained collections, monuments, archives, photographs, buildings, and artworks accumulated long before the new republic existed. The transformation therefore centred upon questions of interpretation, canon formation, accessibility, research priorities, and international comparison rather than upon the invention of an entirely new subject matter. Works excluded from official narratives could be restored to scholarly attention, while familiar canonical works could be interpreted through questions of patronage, gender, religion, nationalism, social history, or transnational exchange that had previously received less attention. The post-communist art world also encouraged closer examination of the institutional mechanisms through which artistic value is produced.

Galleries, exhibitions, collecting practices, criticism, and the art market themselves became legitimate objects of historical inquiry. This expanded the field beyond the older concentration on style and attribution without rendering those traditional methods obsolete. Czech art history after 1993 thus developed by widening its questions around an exceptionally rich inherited documentary and material base.

The broader study of culture experienced an analogous enlargement. Ethnologists could investigate migration and urban life alongside folklore; historians could explore memory and everyday experience alongside political institutions; sociologists could analyse cultural consumption and identity; scholars of literature and media could examine new markets, representations, and publics. The breakdown of rigid ideological boundaries made interdisciplinary borrowing easier, although Czech academic institutions continued to preserve recognisable disciplinary identities. This combination of strong disciplines and increasing interdisciplinarity became one of the most productive features of the post-1993 humanities. It prevented cultural research from becoming detached from historical expertise while allowing new objects and methods to enter scholarly practice. Over time, areas such as memory studies, visual culture, museum studies, heritage studies, media studies, and cultural anthropology would benefit from precisely this institutional arrangement. The early 1990s did not yet constitute a mature interdisciplinary system, but they created the intellectual freedom from which such a system could develop. In that respect, reorganisation was as much epistemic as administrative, even though its decisive intellectual impulse had originated in 1989.

Regional diversity further distinguished the Czech cultural and humanities space from a simple Prague-centred model. Prague inevitably concentrated ministries, national collections, the Academy, Charles University, the National Museum, and the National Gallery, giving the capital exceptional institutional density. Yet Brno possessed powerful traditions in art history, ethnology, musicology, archaeology, architecture, and museum work, while Olomouc experienced an important revival of art-historical and other humanities disciplines after 1990. Opava, Plzeň, České Budějovice, Pardubice, Hradec Králové, Liberec, and other cities sustained museums, galleries, archives, universities, and heritage organisations with their own regional collections and research agendas. These centres mattered because Czech cultural heritage is territorially distributed rather than concentrated in a single metropolitan archive. Regional institutions preserved local evidence that could complicate or correct narratives generated from the capital. They also maintained professional communities whose work linked scholarship with municipal and regional cultural life. The foundations of the later polycentric Czech cultural research system were therefore already visible at the moment of independence.

What emerged from 1993 was consequently not a neat replacement of one cultural order by another but a hybrid institutional settlement. The new republic embraced democratic freedoms, private ownership, market exchange, civil society, competitive research funding, and international openness, yet it also retained substantial public responsibility for institutions inherited from Czechoslovakia. Old laws were amended rather than universally abolished, long-established museums were reinterpreted rather than dismantled, Academy institutes were reorganised rather than abandoned, and university disciplines were restored or pluralised rather than invented from nothing. Even the most visible symbols of Czech independence were frequently institutions whose histories were older than Czechoslovakia itself. This hybrid character was not simply a temporary weakness of transition. It provided the basis for a model in which continuity could coexist with institutional experimentation. The success of later Czech

cultural, heritage, and art research would depend heavily on this capacity to modernise without destroying the accumulated resources on which serious humanities scholarship relies.

The year 1993 should therefore be understood as the moment when three historical movements intersected. The first was the democratic and intellectual opening begun in 1989, which removed ideological controls and restored pluralism to cultural life and scholarship. The second was the creation of an independent Czech state, which required the national reorganisation of administration, research, representation, legislation, and international responsibility. The third was the preservation of much older institutional and intellectual continuities embodied in museums, collections, universities, Academy institutes, archives, monuments, scholarly journals, and professional expertise. None of these movements can explain the period adequately on its own. Taken together, however, they reveal why Czech cultural development after independence was neither a simple continuation of Czechoslovakia nor an entirely new beginning. It was a selective reconstruction in which inherited institutions were compelled to justify, reinterpret, and often redesign their roles under democratic conditions. That combination of continuity and reorganisation established the structural foundations upon which the subsequent stages of Czech cultural studies, cultural heritage protection, and art research would develop between 1993 and 2025.

The First Post-Czechoslovak Stage: The 1990s and Early 2000s as a Period of Institutional Reconstruction and Cultural Self-Definition

If 1993 established the sovereign framework within which Czech cultural life would henceforth operate, the decade that followed was the period in which the contents of that framework had to be worked out in practice. The cultural sphere inherited institutions, buildings, professional communities, collections, legal regulations, and habits of administration whose origins lay in several different historical periods and whose compatibility with the new democratic order could not simply be assumed. At the same time, the extraordinary intellectual release that followed 1989 created expectations of rapid change that were often impossible to fulfil institutionally. Cultural organisations were expected to become freer, more open, less bureaucratic, and more internationally connected while frequently operating with uncertain budgets and legal forms designed under very different political circumstances. Scholars were expected to recover suppressed traditions, absorb international methodologies, and explain a society undergoing rapid transformation, often while their own institutes and universities were being reorganised. Heritage professionals faced the still more paradoxical task of protecting historical continuity within a political and economic system built around accelerated change. Artists acquired unprecedented freedom but entered an environment in which public patronage, commercial demand, sponsorship, municipal support, and project funding had yet to settle into a stable relationship. The first post-Czechoslovak stage should therefore be understood not as a smooth passage from state socialism to a finished European cultural model, but as a prolonged experiment in constructing a democratic cultural order from a highly complex inheritance.

One of the most powerful ideas of the early transformation was that the state should cease directing culture in the manner characteristic of the communist period. This aspiration was entirely understandable, because ideological control over artistic production, publishing,

exhibitions, appointments, and scholarly interpretation had made the state itself appear synonymous with restriction. The first years after the Velvet Revolution consequently produced a strong liberal vocabulary of autonomy, private initiative, decentralisation, sponsorship, foundations, associations, and the market. Some political actors expected that a substantial part of cultural life could gradually free itself not only from state ideological supervision but also from direct dependence upon state institutions. Such expectations corresponded to a broader belief that civil society and private initiative would rapidly fill spaces previously occupied by socialist administrative structures. Yet culture soon proved resistant to any simple application of the logic used for commercial enterprises, because the economic conditions of a theatre, research library, archaeological service, museum collection, symphony orchestra, historic castle, or specialist humanities institute differed fundamentally from those of an ordinary firm. The question was therefore transformed from whether the state should withdraw to where public responsibility remained indispensable and how it could be exercised without recreating ideological control. This tension between cultural freedom and public responsibility became one of the defining dilemmas of Czech cultural policy throughout the 1990s.

The creation of the State Cultural Fund already revealed the difficulty of translating liberal expectations into a sustainable financial model. Conceived during the transformation period, the Fund was intended to support cultural projects rather than simply reproduce automatic institutional subsidies inherited from the previous system. Its underlying logic was important because it recognised that creative activity could benefit from competitive and purpose-specific support while remaining distinct from direct governmental programming of artistic content. At the same time, the original legislative reasoning acknowledged that many cultural fields could not realistically finance themselves through earned income or domestic private sponsorship alone. Libraries, heritage protection, serious music, specialised collections, and projects of exceptional public significance all generated forms of value that could not be captured adequately through ticket sales or commercial transactions. In practice, attempts to develop alternative revenue mechanisms proved considerably more difficult than their architects had expected, and private patronage did not suddenly acquire the capacity to replace public funding. Project support became an important component of the emerging cultural environment, but it developed alongside rather than instead of institutional subsidies. The history of cultural financing in the 1990s consequently demonstrated that democratisation could diversify the sources and procedures of support without abolishing the structural economic reasons for public cultural expenditure.

The persistence of publicly funded cultural organisations was therefore not merely evidence of failed reform or bureaucratic inertia. Many institutions classified as contributory organisations had indeed been shaped by socialist administrative practice, and proposals to transform their legal status repeatedly appeared in subsequent cultural-policy debates. Yet these organisations also contained accumulated specialist knowledge, equipment, collections, buildings, artistic ensembles, archives, and long-term professional relationships that could not be reconstructed easily after dissolution. A museum whose collections had been assembled over a century could not be evaluated solely according to its annual revenue, just as a heritage institute could not be judged by the profitability of the monuments whose survival it protected. Publicly supported theatres and orchestras faced similar problems because their cultural output depended upon stable ensembles and technical infrastructures that were expensive to maintain even when performances attracted substantial audiences. The

transformation therefore exposed a fundamental distinction between bureaucratic form and public function, two things that had sometimes been treated as though they were identical. Czech cultural policy gradually learned that institutions could require administrative reform while the public functions they performed remained indispensable. This distinction helped explain why the supposedly transitional public cultural network proved remarkably durable.

Decentralisation became one of the principal alternatives to direct central-state control. Municipalities acquired a greater role in supporting libraries, theatres, local museums, cultural centres, festivals, monuments, and community activities, while local political authorities gained considerable responsibility for defining cultural priorities. This shift had democratic advantages because cultural decisions could be made closer to the communities that used and sustained the institutions concerned. It also encouraged cities to understand culture as part of urban identity, local development, tourism, and competition for residents and investment. Yet decentralisation introduced new inequalities because the fiscal resources and political priorities of municipalities differed considerably. A historically important theatre or museum could become dependent upon the willingness of a particular municipal leadership to recognise obligations extending beyond the electoral cycle. Cultural professionals therefore gained distance from central ministerial administration while becoming exposed to other forms of political and financial dependence. The emerging Czech model was consequently decentralised without becoming politically neutral, and the relationship between cultural autonomy and local public authority became a recurring issue.

The re-establishment of self-governing regions at the turn of the millennium carried this process to a new institutional level. Public-administration reform redistributed competences that had previously been concentrated in central ministries and district structures, creating a territorial layer capable of maintaining important cultural organisations of supra-local significance. In the museum and gallery sector, the Ministry of Culture prepared the transfer of twenty-nine institutions to regional administration in 2001, a change that fundamentally altered the geography of institutional responsibility. State scientific libraries likewise moved into regional administration at the beginning of 2002 and subsequently functioned as regional libraries within the new territorial system. The reform reduced the degree to which Prague-based ministerial administration directly managed cultural institutions distributed across Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. At the same time, it transferred to relatively young regional governments organisations with substantial buildings, collections, staffing obligations, conservation needs, and accumulated operating costs. Later research would show that devolution did not automatically produce greater efficiency, partly because inherited institutional patterns remained powerful even after formal administrative responsibility changed. Nevertheless, this redistribution of authority was a decisive step towards the polycentric cultural system that would become characteristic of Czechia in the following decades.

Museums and galleries provide perhaps the clearest example of how institutional reconstruction proceeded through a combination of emergency response, legislative modernisation, and professional consolidation. After the dissolution of the former regional national committees, a substantial number of regional museums and galleries temporarily came under the authority of the Ministry of Culture, producing an unusually centralised transitional arrangement. A separate museum and gallery department was created within the Ministry in 1993 precisely because the new conditions demanded administrative attention that could no longer be treated as a subsidiary function. Between 1994 and 1999, this department

acted as the founder of forty-four museums and galleries, making it an important centre of practical museum policy during the formative years of the new republic. Its responsibilities extended beyond budgets and appointments to the creation of legislation, security mechanisms, professional cooperation, and international exchange. This was also the period in which Czech museums began to redefine themselves as institutions serving scientific, educational, conservation, and public functions within a democratic environment. Their development illustrates an important feature of the transformation: institutional centralisation could temporarily increase even while the long-term political objective was decentralisation. The purpose of this temporary concentration was increasingly to construct rules capable of supporting a more plural system.

The opening of borders created one of the most urgent reasons for such new rules. Churches, museums, local collections, and historic buildings faced a sharp increase in theft and illicit movement of cultural objects during a period when commercial art and antiques markets were expanding rapidly. Movable heritage therefore became a domain in which the freedoms of the new order produced vulnerabilities unknown in precisely the same form under the previous regime. The state responded by developing the Integrated System for the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage and by adopting Act No. 71/1994 on the sale and export of objects of cultural value. These measures were not attempts to restore closed borders but to distinguish legitimate circulation from irreversible cultural loss. Museum professionals, art historians, conservators, police authorities, customs officials, and administrators increasingly had to cooperate because the protection of objects depended upon identification, documentation, security, legal status, and expert judgement. The period consequently encouraged the development of heritage protection as an interdisciplinary professional field rather than a narrow administrative task. In this sense, the vulnerability of movable objects accelerated the modernisation of the institutional mechanisms designed to preserve them.

A more comprehensive transformation of museology came with Act No. 122/2000 on the protection of collections of a museum nature. The importance of this legislation lay not simply in the replacement of an older museum law but in its attempt to define the museum collection as a legally protected entity with explicit public and scholarly functions. The Act established a Central Register of Collections and placed obligations upon owners concerning documentation, conservation, inventory, security, and access for scientific and public purposes. It also articulated the museum and gallery as institutions that acquire, preserve, study, professionally process, and make collections available rather than merely storing valuable objects. This was a significant conceptual development because the value of a collection was understood as residing partly in its integrity, documentation, research potential, and accessibility. Public ownership was linked explicitly to public service, while the state acquired a clearer informational overview of collections dispersed among different institutions and levels of government. The law thus converted several practices that had previously depended heavily upon institutional custom into components of a more coherent national system. By the beginning of the 21st century, Czech museum policy had moved considerably closer to a professional model in which preservation, knowledge production, documentation, and public access formed interconnected responsibilities.

Libraries underwent a parallel transition from inherited cultural institutions towards a modern public-information infrastructure. Czech and Czechoslovak librarianship possessed deep traditions, but the rapid development of information technologies during the 1990s transformed expectations concerning cataloguing, databases, networking, access, and the

relationship between local collections and national systems. The Library Act adopted in 2001 and effective from the beginning of 2002 defined a system of libraries providing public library and information services under contemporary legal conditions. Its significance extended beyond books, because the concept of public information service increasingly connected libraries with digital catalogues, networked knowledge, educational access, and the emerging information society. Regional reform simultaneously redistributed responsibility for important scientific libraries, giving the new regions a central place in maintaining research and public information resources. Libraries therefore became one of the spheres in which cultural policy and information policy increasingly overlapped. The preservation of documentary heritage was no longer sufficient unless users could discover, consult, and eventually access information through new technological environments. In the early 2000s, the Czech library system thus began the transition from a primarily collection-centred model towards the hybrid cultural and information infrastructure that would become much more visible in the subsequent period.

Immovable heritage presented a different set of challenges because the market transformation changed not only institutions but also ownership and patterns of development. Restitution returned many buildings, estates, religious properties, and other assets to private, municipal, ecclesiastical, or other non-state owners, creating a heritage landscape in which public cultural value and private property rights had to coexist. The revival of real-estate markets increased pressure for reconstruction, commercial use, demolition, new construction, and changes to historic urban environments. After decades in which some buildings had suffered from neglect and insufficient maintenance, private investment could save endangered structures, restore historic houses, and bring abandoned properties back into use. Yet liberalisation also generated cases in which economic pressure threatened historically valuable fabric or encouraged reconstructions insensitive to authenticity. Heritage conservation therefore became one of the most visible arenas in which post-socialist society negotiated the limits of ownership. The state no longer claimed universal control over property, but the public interest in monuments could not disappear merely because ownership had changed. This was one reason why heritage protection retained a distinctive institutional identity within the wider cultural transformation.

The continuing validity of Act No. 20/1987 on State Monument Care demonstrates this mixture of continuity and adaptation particularly clearly. The legislation originated in the final years of state socialism and inevitably reflected the administrative environment of that period, yet the democratic state repeatedly amended rather than immediately replaced it. Its persistence was partly practical, because it already provided legal categories and procedures for cultural monuments, protected areas, archaeological interests, restoration, and professional heritage assessment. At the same time, the early post-communist years expanded forms of area-based protection that had been prepared before 1989 but could now operate in a substantially altered social context. Large numbers of urban conservation zones were declared during the early 1990s, while village heritage reservations and zones further widened recognition beyond individual monumental buildings. Cultural-landscape protection likewise strengthened the idea that heritage could consist of relationships among architecture, settlement, nature, infrastructure, and historical land use rather than isolated masterpieces alone. These developments gradually enlarged the conceptual scale at which Czech conservation professionals understood the historic environment. The 1990s were therefore both a period of legal continuity and an important stage in the spatial expansion of what counted as protectable heritage.

The creation of the National Heritage Institute in 2003 represented the institutional culmination of this first stage. During the 1990s, the former combined system of monument and nature protection had been separated, while heritage institutes operated through a mixture of central and regional structures. From 2001, the regional bodies were designated State Heritage Institutes, but the system remained organisationally divided. On 1 January 2003, the Ministry of Culture merged the State Institute of Monument Care and the regional State Heritage Institutes into a single National Heritage Institute with a central workplace and territorial professional branches. The importance of this reform lay in the creation of a unified professional organisation capable of combining documentation, research, methodological guidance, conservation expertise, and the management of an exceptional body of state-owned historic properties. It also provided a more coherent national counterpart to the newly decentralised structures of public administration. The reform did not eliminate regional expertise; rather, it incorporated that expertise within a common institutional framework whose territorial network would subsequently continue to expand. By the eve of European Union accession, cultural heritage had consequently acquired a national professional organisation substantially more integrated than the arrangement inherited at the beginning of the 1990s.

International recognition reinforced this domestic consolidation. After the three Czechoslovak inscriptions of Prague, Český Krumlov, and Telč in 1992, the independent Czech Republic experienced a remarkable sequence of additions to the UNESCO World Heritage List. The Pilgrimage Church of St John of Nepomuk at Zelená Hora was inscribed in 1994, Kutná Hora in 1995, and the Lednice-Valtice Cultural Landscape in 1996. Holašovice and the Gardens and Castle at Kroměříž followed in 1998, Litomyšl Castle in 1999, the Holy Trinity Column in Olomouc in 2000, Villa Tugendhat in Brno in 2001, and the Jewish Quarter and St Procopius' Basilica in Třebíč in 2003. By the end of this first stage, the Czech Republic possessed a remarkably diverse group of internationally recognised sites representing historic cities, religious architecture, aristocratic landscapes, vernacular settlement, modern architecture, and Jewish-Christian urban history. The sequence mattered not merely as a record of prestigious labels but as evidence that Czech heritage policy was increasingly operating within international systems of nomination, documentation, comparative assessment, conservation, and reporting. It also strengthened the political visibility of heritage within a society still defining the cultural symbols through which the independent state would present itself. World Heritage thus became one of the bridges linking national self-definition to an explicitly international understanding of cultural value.

The intensity of UNESCO recognition also altered the relationship between heritage and tourism. Historic centres and monumental landscapes became increasingly important destinations within a country newly accessible to large numbers of international visitors. Prague experienced this transformation most dramatically, but Český Krumlov, Kutná Hora, Telč, Lednice, and other heritage towns also became symbols of the Czech Republic within the expanding European tourist economy. Tourism brought revenue, international visibility, incentives for restoration, and new possibilities for local development, yet it also introduced pressures on historic environments and encouraged the commercialisation of cultural space. Heritage professionals therefore confronted a contradiction that would become even more important in later decades: successful preservation could increase the intensity of use to the point where the qualities being preserved came under new forms of pressure. Local authorities likewise had to balance the interests of residents, entrepreneurs, visitors, conservation

specialists, and property owners. The 1990s made clear that heritage was simultaneously a cultural responsibility and an economic resource, although reducing it to either category distorted its actual significance. This tension would become one of the enduring features of the Czech heritage model.

Traditional folk culture followed a very different path towards recognition as heritage. Ethnographic research, folklore collecting, folk-song documentation, regional museums, festivals, and amateur ensembles had existed for generations, but the social environment sustaining many traditional practices changed rapidly after 1989. Mobility, commercial media, changes in rural life, declining intergenerational transmission, and broader transformations of work and leisure challenged the continuity of practices that could not be preserved simply by placing objects in museums. Czech specialists increasingly recognised that songs, dances, oral traditions, rituals, craft knowledge, festive customs, and locally embedded skills required documentation and transmission as living cultural phenomena. Research in ethnology and folklore therefore began to intersect more explicitly with what would soon be internationally conceptualised as intangible cultural heritage. The government's 2003 Concept for More Effective Care of Traditional Folk Culture sought systematic identification, documentation, preservation, presentation, transmission, and international cooperation. Its adoption at the end of the first post-Czechoslovak stage is especially significant because it indicates that cultural heritage was already moving beyond the older monument-centred paradigm. The Czech heritage system was beginning to encompass not only historic objects and buildings but also cultural practices sustained by communities and generations.

Restitution added a moral and historical dimension to this institutional reconstruction. Property seized under communist rule, and in some cases objects whose histories reached back to Nazi persecution and wartime dispossession, forced the new democratic order to address ownership as a question of justice rather than merely economic reform. Museums and galleries had to examine the origins of some holdings, churches and religious organisations sought the restoration of rights and property, and private claimants attempted to recover assets removed by earlier regimes. These processes were legally complicated because different categories of confiscation had occurred under different governments and historical circumstances. They were culturally significant because a work of art or historic building could belong simultaneously to a family history, an institutional collection, a religious community, and a wider public narrative. Restitution therefore stimulated archival investigation, provenance research, legal scholarship, and a more critical examination of the mechanisms through which collections had been assembled. It made ownership history part of cultural interpretation rather than a purely administrative matter. The transformation of property relations thus helped change the intellectual culture of museums and heritage institutions themselves.

The Jewish Museum in Prague provides one of the most important examples of this relationship between restitution, institutional autonomy, research, and memory. Nationalised in 1950, the Museum had operated for decades under state control while ideological restrictions constrained the range and independence of its scholarly activities. In 1994, its buildings were returned to the Prague Jewish Community and the bulk of its collections to the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic, after which the Museum regained a non-state institutional form. This change allowed systematic acquisition, conservation, provenance investigation, research, publication, and international cooperation to develop under substantially different conditions. The Museum's collections also embodied an especially

difficult history because many objects had entered centralised wartime deposits after the destruction of Jewish communities during the Holocaust. Questions of ownership, custodianship, memory, loss, and scholarship were therefore inseparable. Later legislation adopted in 2000 concerning the mitigation of property injustices connected with the Holocaust further strengthened the legal context for addressing dispossessed artworks and other property. The Jewish Museum illustrates how institutional reconstruction after 1989 could restore not only organisational independence but also the capacity of a cultural institution to confront the violent history contained within its own collections.

The public memory of the 20th century more broadly underwent a comparable transformation. The end of communist rule removed an official hierarchy that had privileged certain narratives of resistance and liberation while suppressing or distorting others. Memorials associated with Nazi occupation, wartime persecution, communist repression, democratic resistance, exile, and political imprisonment could now be reconsidered within a more plural historical framework. In 2000, the Ministry of Culture developed a programme devoted to the rehabilitation of memorials connected with struggles for freedom, independence, and democracy. Subsequent work involved institutions and sites including Lidice, Terezín, Ležáky, the Vojna Memorial, Hrabyně, and the National Memorial at Vítkov, contributing to a substantial reconfiguration of public historical memory. The significance of these projects was not exhausted by reconstruction of buildings or exhibitions, because they changed the narratives through which 20th-century Czech history was presented to citizens and visitors. Museums and memorials increasingly became places where research, commemoration, moral reflection, and political debate overlapped. By the early 2000s, the cultural landscape of memory had become one of the principal arenas in which the Czech Republic defined its relationship with dictatorship, war, resistance, and democracy.

Cultural self-definition also required greater attention to communities that had been marginal within traditional narratives of Czech national culture. The Museum of Romani Culture, founded in Brno in 1991 by Romani intellectuals as a non-governmental organisation, represented a particularly important institutional innovation. Its creation asserted that Romani history, material culture, art, oral traditions, photography, documentation, and lived experience belonged within the cultural record rather than outside it. The Museum developed collections at a time when the social transformation of the 1990s was accompanied by serious tensions concerning prejudice, exclusion, and the position of Roma within Czech society. Its existence therefore carried both scholarly and civic significance, connecting collection building with cultural dialogue and minority self-representation. Unlike older national institutions that had gradually expanded their interpretative frameworks, the Museum emerged directly from the plural civil society created after 1989. Its subsequent development demonstrated that the cultural infrastructure of the new republic could be enlarged not only through administrative reform but also through initiatives originating within communities themselves. The growing visibility of Romani heritage thus challenged the notion that national culture could be narrated adequately through an ethnically homogeneous Czech canon.

The academic humanities were undergoing their own reconstruction during these same years. Institutes of the Academy of Sciences concerned with art history, archaeology, history, ethnology, philosophy, literature, and related fields entered an environment in which research priorities and standards were no longer determined by the institutional logic of the socialist academy. Competitive grant funding, international conferences, foreign fellowships, new publication opportunities, and cooperation with universities gradually changed scholarly

careers and research planning. Long-term documentary work remained crucial, particularly in fields dependent upon archives, inventories, archaeological records, bibliographies, catalogues, photographic collections, and critical editions. At the same time, scholars were increasingly expected to formulate projects capable of demonstrating originality, methodological clarity, and international relevance. This combination could create tension, because the cumulative infrastructures of humanities scholarship are often built over periods far longer than ordinary grant cycles. Yet the Czech academic system largely preserved these resources while exposing them to new standards of evaluation and international comparison. The resulting model allowed intellectual renewal to develop upon a substantial inherited research base rather than requiring a complete institutional restart.

Art history offers a particularly clear illustration of this process. Established departments and Academy researchers could revisit periods, artists, and interpretative frameworks whose study had been shaped by ideological priorities under state socialism. The history of modernism, the avant-garde, religious art, aristocratic patronage, German-speaking artistic culture in the Czech lands, exile, and unofficial art could now be reintegrated more freely into scholarly narratives. International cooperation also made methodological debates in German, Austrian, British, French, Italian, Polish, and American art history increasingly accessible as part of ordinary professional exchange. Yet Czech art historians did not simply abandon domestic traditions in favour of imported theory. Strong traditions of formal analysis, architectural history, monument research, iconography, documentation, and the study of regional artistic centres continued to inform scholarship. The transformation was therefore characterised by methodological pluralisation rather than wholesale replacement. By the early 2000s, Czech art history had become more internationally connected while retaining a strong relationship with collections, monuments, archival sources, and the professional practice of heritage conservation.

Universities played an equally important part in producing this new humanities environment. Departments restored or redefined after 1989 gradually trained a generation of students for whom international travel, foreign-language scholarship, previously inaccessible literature, and methodological pluralism were increasingly normal parts of academic life. Art history, aesthetics, ethnology, archaeology, philosophy, history, literary studies, theatre studies, film studies, sociology, and emerging forms of cultural research interacted more freely than under the former ideological system. The development of cultural studies at Charles University was one expression of a broader attempt to conceptualise culture across disciplinary boundaries rather than merely to preserve inherited academic compartments. Significantly, the Department of Cultural Studies was involved in research commissioned by the Ministry of Culture concerning the relationship between the state and culture, showing an early connection between theoretical reflection and cultural-policy analysis. A major study prepared in 1996 and later updated around 2003–2004 examined European cultural-policy models and Czech choices within a comparative framework. Such work demonstrated that cultural research was beginning to address the institutions and policies of contemporary society as legitimate scholarly objects. The humanities were therefore becoming not only freer interpreters of the past but also participants in the analysis of the cultural order being constructed around them.

The visual arts experienced transformation in a more immediate and often turbulent form. The disappearance of official ideological criteria liberated exhibition programmes and artistic practice, while works and movements excluded from public institutions could return to

galleries, catalogues, scholarship, and collecting. Private galleries and art dealers entered the cultural landscape, and artists became exposed to the mechanisms of an emerging art market alongside new possibilities for grants, foundations, international residencies, and independent exhibition projects. Contact with foreign curators and institutions expanded rapidly, allowing contemporary Czech art to be positioned within debates extending beyond the former Eastern bloc. Yet institutional adaptation was uneven, and disputes emerged over the missions, leadership, financing, and exhibition strategies of major public galleries. The 1990s consequently cannot be described simply as the triumphant liberation of art from politics, because the retreat of ideological authority was followed by new conflicts over markets, institutional power, cultural prestige, and public subsidy. The plurality of the new art world was productive precisely because no single institution could again determine the boundaries of legitimate artistic practice as effectively as the former state had attempted to do. By the beginning of the 21st century, Czech visual culture had become substantially more diversified, though its institutional ecology remained unsettled.

The performing arts revealed the financial consequences of this pluralism particularly strongly. Czech theatre possessed an unusually dense institutional tradition, including national, municipal, regional, studio, experimental, independent, and amateur forms whose economic structures differed greatly. After 1989, theatrical freedom expanded immediately, but the financing of permanent ensembles, historic buildings, technical staffs, repertory production, and new independent projects became the subject of recurring political conflict. Municipalities assumed major responsibilities for theatres outside the small group maintained directly by the central state, making local cultural politics especially important. Grant systems created opportunities for independent artists and organisations but also generated disputes about transparency, expert evaluation, continuity, and the relationship between established institutions and project-based production. Research on Czech cultural funding has shown that these debates survived long after the formal transformation period because they concerned competing understandings of what public cultural support was supposed to achieve. Similar questions affected music, dance, festivals, and other forms of live artistic production. The performing arts thus demonstrated that artistic freedom could be secured more rapidly than a consensual system for financing the institutional conditions on which that freedom depended.

Publishing, film, recorded music, and the media underwent still more visible marketisation. The lifting of censorship generated an extraordinary expansion of titles, publishers, translated works, newspapers, journals, and previously prohibited authors, while literature from exile and samizdat returned to ordinary circulation. At the same time, the removal of state-controlled distribution exposed cultural producers to commercial competition, concentration, changing audience habits, and the growing influence of international media products. The 1990s therefore reintegrated Czech cultural production into transnational markets at the same moment that the country was redefining its national cultural identity. Copyright became increasingly important within this environment, culminating in a major new Copyright Act in 2000 that responded to technological change, international obligations, and the transformation of cultural production and distribution. Cultural goods were now understood simultaneously as expressions of creativity, objects of intellectual property, market commodities, and components of public cultural life. This multiplicity complicated older distinctions between state culture and commercial culture. The early post-Czechoslovak period was thus also the moment when the Czech cultural sphere began to confront the economic and legal conditions of the global cultural industries.

These developments changed the meaning of cultural self-definition itself. In the immediate aftermath of 1989, the language of a 'return to Europe' often implied recovering a political and cultural belonging interrupted by four decades of communist rule. By the later 1990s, this apparently simple formula had become more complicated, because Czech society was discovering that Europeanisation did not mean the recovery of a frozen pre-1948 identity. The cultural history of the Czech lands included German-speaking traditions, Jewish communities, Roma, Slovaks, Poles, Austrians, Hungarians, religious cultures, regional identities, imperial legacies, exile communities, and many other forms of historical entanglement. Scholars increasingly explored precisely those borderlands and overlapping identities that older nationalist or ideological narratives had simplified. The resulting picture of Czech culture was less homogeneous but historically richer. National self-definition began to depend not only upon identifying what was uniquely Czech but also upon understanding the networks through which Czech culture had always interacted with Central Europe. This intellectual shift would later provide an important foundation for European integration in the cultural and humanities sphere.

Cross-border cooperation made that Central European dimension tangible. Czech-Polish cultural initiatives in border regions drew upon networks formed by dissidents before 1989 and developed theatre, film, religious, literary, and community events under the new conditions of open borders. Czech-Slovak cultural relations remained unusually dense despite the division of the federation, sustained by linguistic proximity, personal ties, publishing exchange, academic cooperation, and a shared 20th-century history. German-Czech relations acquired growing cultural importance as the two societies confronted questions of war, expulsion, memory, minority histories, and their contemporary European relationship. Austrian connections revived older Central European patterns of scholarly and artistic exchange that had been restricted by the Iron Curtain. These interactions made borders increasingly permeable cultural spaces rather than merely territorial limits. They also encouraged researchers to place national history within comparative and transnational frameworks. By the early 2000s, the Czech cultural field was already developing many of the cross-border habits that EU membership would subsequently intensify.

Civil society was essential to this change because cultural pluralism required institutions outside both the market and the state. New associations, foundations, heritage initiatives, community organisations, independent galleries, festivals, journals, artistic groups, and educational projects multiplied after 1989. Some survived only briefly, but others created durable organisational forms that became important components of local and national cultural life. Their significance lay partly in the activities they produced and partly in their demonstration that cultural initiative no longer had to originate within a government hierarchy. Civic organisations could draw attention to neglected monuments, minority cultures, environmental and landscape values, alternative art, regional histories, or controversial memories that established institutions approached more cautiously. At the same time, dependence upon grants, donations, volunteers, and short-term projects made this sector structurally fragile. Czech cultural pluralism therefore developed through an uneven ecology in which public institutions possessed continuity and infrastructure while civic organisations often supplied experimentation, advocacy, and responsiveness. The interaction between these sectors became one of the characteristic features of the post-communist cultural system.

By the turn of the millennium, the accumulated experience of improvisation was beginning to generate a stronger demand for explicit strategy. During the first half of the 1990s, institutional reconstruction had often proceeded sector by sector because immediate legal, financial, and organisational problems took precedence over comprehensive policy design. By the early 2000s, however, government documents increasingly attempted to define cultural policy in terms of access, heritage protection, creativity, diversity, public responsibility, regional development, international cooperation, and the emerging information society. The cultural-policy strategy updated by government resolution in January 2001 reflected this movement towards a more systematic conception of the state's role. Sector-specific concepts followed or developed alongside it, including strategies for museum collections and traditional folk culture, while public-administration reform clarified the division of responsibilities among the state, regions, and municipalities. The establishment of the National Heritage Institute in 2003 provided a new professional architecture for monument protection at precisely the moment when decentralised cultural governance was taking shape elsewhere. In other words, the apparent contradiction between decentralisation and institutional consolidation was actually a defining feature of the emerging system. Different functions were being allocated to the level of government or professional organisation thought most capable of sustaining them.

The period also produced a gradual change in the vocabulary through which culture was justified publicly. Immediately after 1989, freedom from censorship and state ideological intervention was understandably the dominant principle, but freedom alone could not explain why collections should be conserved, archives maintained, regional libraries funded, archaeological sites investigated, or artistic experimentation supported. The language of public service became increasingly important, particularly in museum and library legislation. Heritage discourse emphasised responsibility to future generations, while cultural-policy analysis increasingly discussed access, participation, diversity, education, social cohesion, and regional development. The arts remained valuable in their own right, yet policy documents also began to recognise their relationships with tourism, urban identity, international representation, and economic activity. These additional arguments did not eliminate older humanistic conceptions of intrinsic cultural value, but they placed them within a broader vocabulary of democratic public benefit. The early 2000s thus marked the beginning of a more complex Czech understanding of culture as simultaneously inherited value, creative activity, knowledge infrastructure, public service, and developmental resource.

This change was particularly significant for the relationship between culture and research. Museums increasingly defined themselves through professional documentation and scholarship as well as exhibitions; heritage institutes treated research as essential to responsible conservation; libraries became information systems; and universities expanded interdisciplinary investigation of contemporary culture. Archaeology remained simultaneously a humanities discipline and a practical component of heritage protection, while art history linked academic interpretation to collections, conservation, exhibitions, and architectural preservation. Ethnology connected archival research with the study of living traditions, identity, migration, and social change. The borders separating cultural institutions from research institutions therefore became increasingly porous. This did not create a single unified discipline called cultural studies, nor did it erase the specific methods of art history, ethnology, archaeology, museology, conservation, and history. Instead, it produced an ecosystem in which different disciplines could cooperate around shared cultural objects and problems. The

maturity of the later Czech system would depend heavily upon this capacity to combine disciplinary depth with institutional collaboration.

By 2003, cultural heritage had consequently become recognisable as a field with an institutional logic distinct from cultural studies in the broad sense. Monument protection possessed its own legislation, professional organisation, territorial network, conservation methods, and system of state-owned properties. Museums operated through a dedicated collections law, central registration, specialist conservation, security systems, research, and public-access obligations. Traditional folk culture had acquired a governmental strategy centred upon identification, documentation, transmission, and preservation of living practices. UNESCO obligations connected domestic conservation with international standards, while restitution and provenance research linked heritage with questions of justice and historical ownership. Archaeology, libraries, archives, and memorial institutions contributed additional forms of cultural preservation that could not be reduced to the interpretation of culture as an abstract social phenomenon. At the same time, heritage remained inseparable from art history, ethnology, history, architecture, and other humanities disciplines that generated the knowledge required for informed preservation. The first post-Czechoslovak decade therefore laid the institutional foundations for the later emergence of cultural heritage as one of the strongest and most distinctive components of the Czech cultural research system.

Art studies arrived at the same historical threshold through a different trajectory. Their primary transformation was not the creation of a new protective administration but the restoration of methodological plurality, international circulation, access to previously marginalised material, and a freer relationship with contemporary artistic practice. Museums and galleries broadened their narratives; university and Academy research reconsidered inherited canons; and the return of exile, unofficial, religious, minority, and transnational themes enlarged the boundaries of legitimate inquiry. Contemporary art simultaneously developed through public institutions, commercial galleries, independent initiatives, international exchange, and new curatorial practices. The resulting field was heterogeneous and sometimes conflictual, but this very pluralism distinguished it from the cultural order that had preceded 1989. By the early 2000s, Czech art history and art studies no longer needed to define themselves primarily through liberation from ideological restriction. They increasingly faced the more mature task of determining how a small but historically rich national research culture could participate confidently in international scholarly and artistic networks. This shift from liberation to positioning prepared the field for the deeper internationalisation that followed EU accession.

The same can be said of Czech cultural self-definition more generally. The first decade of independence began with a society seeking to recover suppressed histories and establish the symbolic vocabulary of a new state, but it ended with a cultural landscape that was more plural than any simple national revival could contain. Restitution had exposed competing histories of ownership, UNESCO had transformed national monuments into elements of world heritage, minority institutions had widened the boundaries of public memory, and regionalisation had dispersed cultural authority territorially. Universities and Academy institutes had returned Czech scholarship to international debates, while civil society and private initiatives had created forms of cultural activity outside traditional public institutions. The market had opened enormous possibilities for cultural circulation while simultaneously demonstrating its inability to sustain every form of cultural value. Public institutions had survived, but they increasingly operated within a mixed system of state, regional, municipal, private, non-profit, and

international relationships. Czech culture had therefore not simply exchanged socialism for the market or Czechoslovak identity for Czech nationalism. It had entered a more complicated condition in which cultural identity was negotiated among history, democracy, pluralism, public responsibility, regional diversity, market pressures, and an increasingly European horizon.

In summary, the period from the establishment of the independent Czech Republic to the eve of European Union accession should be understood as the formative phase of the contemporary Czech cultural system. Its principal achievement was not the creation of culture, heritage protection, or art scholarship anew, but the conversion of inherited institutions into a more plural and increasingly professional democratic ecology. During these years, cultural governance moved away from direct central control while retaining a substantial public institutional network; regional and municipal authorities gained major responsibilities; and new non-profit and private actors enlarged the sphere of cultural initiative. The museum system acquired modern collections legislation, libraries received a new framework for public information services, heritage protection was consolidated in the National Heritage Institute, and traditional folk culture began to be treated systematically as living heritage. Restitution, provenance research, Holocaust remembrance, Roma cultural representation, and reconsideration of the communist past widened the moral and historical scope of cultural institutions. Academic humanities and art studies recovered methodological plurality and international connections while continuing to rely upon deep Czech traditions of documentary, historical, and collection-based scholarship. By 2003, the Czech Republic had not yet reached the mature Europeanised cultural model that would develop after accession, but it had assembled most of its essential institutional foundations. The first post-Czechoslovak stage can therefore be characterised as a movement from revolutionary opening and institutional uncertainty towards a polycentric cultural order capable of combining continuity, pluralism, professionalisation, heritage responsibility, and an increasingly confident search for its place within Europe.

European Integration: 2004–2013 as a Period of Internationalisation, Professionalisation, and New Cultural Infrastructures

The accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union on 1 May 2004 marked the beginning of a new phase in the development of its cultural, heritage, and art-research system. Unlike the transformation of the 1990s, this stage was not primarily concerned with dismantling the institutional legacies of state socialism or determining the basic distribution of cultural responsibilities within an independent state. Its central challenge was instead to make the structures created during the preceding decade function within a much denser European environment of regulation, funding, professional standards, international mobility, and comparative evaluation. European integration did not remove the specifically Czech characteristics of cultural life, nor did it substitute a supranational cultural administration for national policy. The European Union possessed limited direct competence in culture and continued to respect the principle that member states remained primarily responsible for their own cultural systems. Yet membership changed the practical environment in which cultural organisations operated because European programmes, networks, legislation, policy

concepts, and financial instruments became part of everyday institutional planning. Museums, theatres, heritage organisations, libraries, universities, artistic associations, research institutes, and ministries increasingly learned to formulate their activities in a language intelligible to international partners and competitive programmes. The period from 2004 to 2013 should therefore be understood as the decade in which Czech culture moved from post-socialist reconstruction towards systematic European embeddedness.

The importance of accession lay partly in the cumulative administrative preparation that preceded it. By May 2004, Czech legislation relevant to culture, audiovisual policy, copyright, the movement of goods, and associated areas had already undergone extensive harmonisation with the legal framework of the European Union. The Ministry of Culture was no longer merely observing European debates or adapting foreign examples to domestic conditions; it became a participant in committees, working groups, Council formations, Community programmes, and mechanisms through which European cultural policy was negotiated. This demanded a different institutional competence from that required during the improvised transformation of the early 1990s. Officials needed expertise in European law, international project administration, multilingual negotiation, structural funding, reporting, and programme evaluation. Cultural institutions likewise had to acquire the capacity to prepare applications, construct international partnerships, formulate measurable outputs, and operate within increasingly elaborate financial and procedural rules. These requirements sometimes appeared burdensome, particularly to smaller organisations with limited administrative staffs. Nevertheless, they gradually professionalised the sector by making project management and international accountability permanent parts of institutional culture.

The European dimension was especially visible in the fields of copyright and audiovisual regulation, where technological change was rapidly altering the meaning of cultural circulation. Digital reproduction, satellite broadcasting, new media services, expanding online distribution, and the international movement of cultural products made purely national regulatory approaches increasingly inadequate. Czech policy in these areas was consequently shaped by European directives as well as by domestic legislation adopted during the preceding transformation period. Copyright ceased to be viewed primarily as a technical legal issue affecting publishers and collecting societies and became central to wider debates about access, cultural production, digital dissemination, and the economic position of creators. Similar questions confronted film and audiovisual institutions as the distinction between broadcasting, cinema, physical media, and internet-based distribution became progressively less stable. European integration placed Czech regulators and cultural organisations inside a common framework in which these problems were discussed across national borders. The effect was not simply legislative conformity but a change in professional perspective, because Czech cultural policy had to consider technological developments and markets operating at continental scale. This legal and regulatory Europeanisation formed an important, if comparatively invisible, part of cultural professionalisation after 2004.

European cultural programmes gave this new international orientation a more immediate institutional form. The Culture 2000 programme and, later, the Culture programme for 2007–2013 encouraged cultural organisations to cooperate across borders, develop multiannual partnerships, circulate works and artists, and address cultural diversity through international projects. The MEDIA programme offered a parallel European framework for the audiovisual sector, helping film and related industries operate within a market otherwise dominated by much larger national and global producers. Participation required Czech organisations to

move beyond occasional bilateral contacts and to become members of structured project consortia with shared objectives, schedules, budgets, and reporting obligations. This transformed international cooperation from an exceptional prestige activity into a normal component of professional cultural work. Curators, theatre professionals, festival organisers, musicians, publishers, designers, librarians, and researchers increasingly encountered colleagues from other European states through recurring networks rather than isolated exchanges. Such cooperation also encouraged comparison, because Czech institutions could evaluate their methods against organisations facing similar problems elsewhere. By the end of the period, international partnership had become one of the principal indicators of institutional capacity in substantial parts of the Czech cultural sector.

Mobility acquired particular importance within this Europeanised environment. During the 1990s, the ability of Czech artists and scholars to travel freely had itself represented a dramatic break with the restrictions of the communist period. After accession, however, mobility became less a symbol of newly recovered freedom and more a structural condition of professional life. Artists could participate in residencies, festivals, exhibitions, and collaborative productions; academics could teach, study, and conduct research within expanding European networks; and museum and heritage specialists could exchange professional experience with partner institutions abroad. The movement of collections and cultural objects likewise became more closely connected with common procedures concerning insurance, security, conservation, and legal protection. Such mobility did not automatically eliminate the asymmetry between wealthy cultural centres and smaller national or regional institutions. Czech cultural actors still operated with financial and organisational resources often more limited than those available to leading Western European institutions. Yet regular participation in European networks reduced intellectual isolation and helped shift the Czech cultural field from a post-socialist position of catching up towards one of increasingly routine cooperation.

The growing strategic character of cultural policy became especially visible in the National Cultural Policy for 2009–2014. Earlier documents had already attempted to define the relationship between the democratic state and culture, but the 2009 policy operated within a considerably more mature conceptual environment. It addressed globalisation not solely as a threat to national culture but also as an opportunity for circulation and exchange, and it treated culture increasingly as an economic as well as a symbolic phenomenon. The policy connected cultural development with regional policy, sustainable development, tourism, information technologies, education, research, and the competitiveness of the economy. It also drew together a series of sectoral strategies concerning professional art, libraries, movable heritage, traditional folk culture, research, digitisation, and cinematography. This represented a significant departure from the fragmented problem-solving that had characterised much of the early transformation period. Cultural policy was beginning to function as a coordinated field of public policy with measurable objectives and explicit relationships to other areas of government. The Czech cultural system had therefore entered a stage in which strategic coordination increasingly supplemented the institutional survival and reconstruction that had dominated the preceding decade.

The Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2009 made this new position unusually visible. For six months, Czech officials were not merely adapting to European cultural priorities but helping to formulate and coordinate them at the level of the Union. The Ministry of Culture placed particular emphasis upon access to culture, cultural

heritage, cultural tourism, artistic education, mobility, digitisation, creativity, copyright, and the protection of cultural property. Prague hosted the Forum for Creative Europe in March 2009, bringing together political representatives and cultural professionals to discuss relationships among culture, creativity, society, education, and economic development. In May, a further conference addressed digital access to cultural heritage and the emerging European Digital Library, linking national digitisation strategies with a broader continental information infrastructure. The Czech Presidency also contributed to Council conclusions describing culture as a catalyst for creativity and innovation. Such activity demonstrated that Czech cultural policy had moved far beyond the position it occupied at the beginning of the 1990s, when the central problem was the reconstruction of domestic institutions. By 2009, Czechia was sufficiently integrated into European structures to participate in defining the vocabulary through which culture itself was discussed at European level.

The emphasis upon creativity represented a particularly important conceptual innovation of this period. Traditional cultural policy had generally distinguished between publicly supported high culture, cultural heritage, popular or commercial culture, and the economic sectors producing cultural goods. European policy increasingly questioned the rigidity of these divisions by drawing attention to cultural and creative industries as fields capable of generating employment, innovation, urban development, and economic value. Czech policy gradually adopted this vocabulary, although its incorporation was neither immediate nor uncontroversial. Some cultural professionals feared that the language of competitiveness could reduce artistic and cultural value to economic indicators, while others recognised that it gave culture a stronger position within development strategies traditionally dominated by industry and infrastructure. The Forum for Creative Europe in 2009 helped move this discussion into the Czech policy mainstream. By the beginning of the following decade, cultural statistics, creative-sector mapping, and the relationship between culture and the economy were becoming subjects of systematic research. This was a significant expansion of cultural analysis because it brought commercial, non-profit, public, artistic, and technological activities into a common analytical field.

The transformation of the Theatre Institute into the Arts and Theatre Institute in 2007 symbolised this widening of perspective at the institutional level. The older Theatre Institute possessed a strong documentary and research tradition focused upon theatre, archives, bibliography, publishing, and international presentation. The addition of the Arts Institute expanded its remit towards wider artistic fields, cultural policy, international cooperation, information services, and the systematic promotion of Czech arts abroad. Such a change did not mean that theatre lost its institutional specificity; rather, it reflected recognition that contemporary artistic practice increasingly crossed disciplinary boundaries and operated through international networks. The institution also became an important Czech interface with European cultural programmes and later housed structures supporting participation in European cultural cooperation. Its research activity increasingly addressed not only works of art and artistic institutions but also the organisational and economic conditions of the cultural sector. The Arts and Theatre Institute therefore represented a new type of cultural organisation combining documentation, research, policy expertise, professional services, and international representation. In this respect, it embodied the broader professionalisation of Czech cultural infrastructure after European accession.

This institutional broadening prepared the ground for the project Mapping the Cultural and Creative Industries in the Czech Republic, launched in 2011. The project sought systematic

quantitative and qualitative information on sectors ranging from visual and performing arts to film, design, architecture, music, advertising, digital games, television, applied arts, monuments, and software. Its significance lay not simply in the accumulation of statistics but in the construction of a conceptual framework capable of describing cultural production across traditional administrative boundaries. The project also developed methods for mapping cultural and creative industries at local and regional levels, thereby linking national research with the development strategies of individual cities. Such work reflected a wider European tendency to understand culture through clusters, networks, employment, creative labour, innovation, and territorial concentration. At the same time, the Czech mapping programme retained the public and heritage dimensions of culture rather than reducing the field to commercially successful industries. This combination was characteristic of the Czech approach, in which new creative-economy concepts were added to rather than substituted for older traditions of public cultural responsibility. By the early 2010s, cultural policy analysis had therefore become markedly more empirical, spatial, and economically literate than it had been a decade earlier.

The most materially transformative consequence of European integration came through financial instruments rather than cultural programmes in the narrow sense. Structural Funds made available resources of a scale that the Czech cultural budget could rarely have generated independently, particularly for major heritage and infrastructure projects. During the 2007–2013 programming period, the Ministry of Culture participated in several operational programmes and acted as an intermediary for significant investment in cultural institutions and heritage sites. The Integrated Operational Programme was especially important because it recognised the use of cultural-heritage potential as a legitimate component of territorial development. This formulation changed the scale of what could be imagined in heritage policy. Instead of financing only incremental repairs or emergency interventions, public institutions could prepare complex projects combining restoration, new visitor facilities, research functions, education, interpretation, accessibility, and professional services. European funding therefore did more than provide additional money; it encouraged institutions to conceptualise heritage projects as integrated systems. The resulting infrastructure would become one of the most visible material legacies of the 2004–2013 stage.

The intervention devoted to the utilisation of cultural-heritage potential represented an investment environment without close precedent in the post-1993 period. The programme provided hundreds of millions of euros when national co-financing was included, and the Ministry of Culture became a central intermediary between European funding rules and Czech heritage institutions. Projects were expected to demonstrate not only historical importance but also sustainable future use, public accessibility, regional significance, and organisational capacity. This encouraged heritage institutions to think beyond the conventional opposition between conservation and development. A restored monument could become a methodological centre, an educational institution, a research site, a venue for cultural production, or an anchor for regional tourism without ceasing to be an object of conservation. Such multifunctional thinking was increasingly visible in proposals prepared during the later years of the programming period. The very preparation of these projects professionalised participating organisations because applications required architectural planning, conservation research, procurement expertise, financial control, long-term operational models, and measurable outputs. Heritage management consequently acquired a much stronger project-based and interdisciplinary dimension.

Several projects initiated within this framework illustrate the changing philosophy particularly well. The Kuks project sought not merely to repair the celebrated baroque hospital complex but to reactivate underused spaces and create educational and interpretative functions connected with medicine, pharmacy, art, and baroque culture. At Kroměříž, investment in the historic gardens was linked to the creation of a National Centre for Garden Culture, transforming restoration into a platform for specialist knowledge and professional training. Veltrusy was conceived through the Schola naturalis project as a site where cultural landscape, estate history, environmental knowledge, and education could be brought together. Valtice was connected with the development of a National Centre for Theatre and Dance, while projects devoted to 20th-century architecture sought to create specialist methodological capacity rather than simply refurbish individual modern buildings. The National Technical Museum's project at Plasy similarly connected the restoration of a historic monastic economic complex with the creation of a centre devoted to building heritage and traditional construction knowledge. Many of these projects reached completion after 2013, but their conceptual and financial foundations belonged to the 2007–2013 European funding period. They therefore demonstrate how European integration transformed the very ambition of Czech heritage infrastructure before their full effects became visible.

The National Heritage Institute was itself changing as these new investments expanded. The unified NPÚ created in 2003 entered the European period as an exceptionally large organisation combining specialist monument-care expertise with responsibility for more than a hundred publicly accessible state heritage properties. During the following decade, the institution increasingly developed internal methodologies, research activities, digital documentation, educational programmes, project-management capacities, and specialised approaches to different categories of heritage. European programmes supported not only large restoration projects but also digitisation of heritage records and improvements to information systems. The institution had therefore become substantially more complex by the end of the decade than the organisation initially created through the merger of earlier heritage institutes. A major internal reform taking effect on 1 January 2013 separated territorial specialist workplaces more clearly from four territorial heritage administrations responsible for the management and operation of state castles, châteaux, and other accessible properties. The Prague central office simultaneously became the General Directorate, producing a structure intended to clarify the distinction between professional monument care and property management. This reform can be interpreted as the culmination of a decade in which Czech heritage administration moved towards greater functional differentiation within a unified national system.

Professionalisation also meant that heritage was increasingly understood as a field of research rather than solely a regulatory or conservation service. Scientific knowledge had always been essential to archaeology, architectural history, conservation, art history, materials analysis, and monument documentation, but the relationship between heritage practice and organised research became more explicit during this period. The Ministry of Culture developed research concepts during the 2000s and eventually established the Programme of Applied Research and Development of National and Cultural Identity, commonly known as NAKI, for 2011–2017. NAKI represented an important institutional innovation because it created a dedicated framework through which museums, heritage organisations, universities, libraries, archives, research institutes, and interdisciplinary teams could address culturally specific problems as applied research. Projects could develop methodologies, databases, technologies, exhibitions, maps,

conservation procedures, documentary systems, and other outputs intended for practical use as well as scholarly publication. The concept of national and cultural identity also provided a broad research umbrella linking tangible heritage, intangible traditions, arts, historical documentation, and cultural environments. By making research funding a structural component of cultural policy, NAKI helped reduce the older separation between academic humanities scholarship and the operational needs of heritage institutions.

This development was particularly important because it changed the status of cultural institutions as producers of knowledge. A museum was no longer expected merely to safeguard a collection and prepare exhibitions, nor could a heritage institute be understood simply as an expert advisory body issuing conservation opinions. Collection documentation, provenance research, materials analysis, restoration science, historical investigation, digital cataloguing, visitor research, conservation methodology, and interpretation all required research competences. The NAKI framework encouraged institutions to formulate these competences as explicit research agendas capable of evaluation and external funding. It also strengthened cooperation among organisations that had previously occupied different administrative sectors. University historians and computer scientists could work with museum specialists; architects and materials researchers could cooperate with conservation professionals; ethnologists could develop databases with regional cultural institutions; and librarians could participate in projects requiring sophisticated digital infrastructures. Applied heritage research therefore became one of the areas in which interdisciplinary cooperation was not simply an intellectual aspiration but a practical necessity. The period established foundations for the much larger research ecosystem that would emerge around cultural heritage during the following decade.

Museums experienced professionalisation through standards, associations, and new approaches to public engagement as well. The Association of Museums and Galleries of the Czech Republic, established during the transformation period, increasingly functioned as a professional representative body connecting institutions that had become administratively dispersed among the state, regions, municipalities, and other founders. The revised ICOM Code of Ethics approved internationally in 2004 reinforced concepts of professional responsibility, public service, collection stewardship, documentation, legitimate acquisition, and respect for communities that were already influencing Czech museum practice. Professional discussion increasingly concerned not merely the preservation of objects but exhibition methodology, museum pedagogy, visitor communication, ethical collecting, collection mobility, marketing, and institutional management. The museum sector was therefore becoming more explicitly self-reflective about what constituted professional practice. This did not mean that Czech museums converged instantly upon a single model, since resources and institutional cultures remained highly unequal. Yet the vocabulary of professional museum work became increasingly international and standards-based. European integration reinforced this development by placing Czech museum professionals in networks where institutional practices were continuously compared.

The extraordinary success of museum nights illustrates how professionalisation could coexist with experimentation in public communication. The first Prague Museum Night was organised in 2004, drawing upon a format already familiar in several European cities. Strong public interest led to the establishment of a nationwide Festival of Museum Nights from 2005, organised through cooperation among the Association of Museums and Galleries, the Ministry of Culture, the National Museum, and numerous participating institutions. The importance of

the phenomenon was not simply quantitative, although the large attendance demonstrated demand for new forms of museum access. Evening opening, special programmes, performances, lectures, transport arrangements, and informal encounters changed the social atmosphere in which collections were experienced. Museums presented themselves less as solemn repositories visited primarily through conventional educational routines and more as civic cultural spaces capable of attracting audiences who might not otherwise enter them. This reflected a broader European movement towards participation, audience development, and experiential interpretation. The museum night therefore provides a small but revealing example of how European cultural models were adapted successfully to Czech institutional conditions.

Museology itself possessed an unusually strong Czech intellectual tradition, and European integration gave that tradition renewed opportunities for international exchange. The UNESCO Chair of Museology and World Heritage at Masaryk University in Brno, established in 1994, continued to serve as a bridge between theoretical museology, museum practice, education, and international professional cooperation. Its conception was broader than the administration of museum collections alone and connected museology with the processes through which societies identify, preserve, and interpret heritage. This approach was particularly compatible with the expanding international concept of cultural heritage during the 2000s. Conferences and publications dealing with museums in transformation placed Czech and Central European experience within a comparative framework rather than treating post-socialist institutional change as an isolated national phenomenon. Brno therefore retained its importance as a centre where museum practice could be subjected to theoretical reflection. The existence of such a specialised academic environment distinguished Czech museum development from systems in which professional training was largely detached from museological theory. Europeanisation consequently strengthened not only institutional standards but also the international visibility of a distinctive Czech contribution to museum thought.

The expansion of heritage beyond monuments and collections became especially apparent through intangible cultural heritage. The Czech Republic deposited its instrument of ratification of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in February 2009, giving an international legal framework to work that had already developed through the National Institute of Folk Culture and the Ministry of Culture. A national list of intangible elements was established, creating procedures through which living traditions could be identified, documented, supported, and nominated internationally. Slovácko Verbuňk, initially proclaimed by UNESCO in 2005 and later incorporated into the Representative List, provided an early internationally visible example. Shrovetide door-to-door processions and masks in the Hlinecko area were inscribed in 2010, while the Ride of the Kings in south-eastern Moravia followed in 2011. Czech participation in the multinational falconry nomination further demonstrated that living heritage could cross national boundaries as naturally as music, craft knowledge, ritual, or historical cultural landscapes. These developments shifted heritage discourse towards communities, transmission, practice, and continuity rather than material authenticity alone. By the early 2010s, Czech cultural-heritage policy therefore encompassed a much wider conception of what preservation could mean.

This new approach had important consequences for ethnology and cultural anthropology. Traditional folk culture had long been documented through archives, museums, recordings, festivals, fieldwork, costume collections, musicological research, and regional scholarship, but the language of intangible heritage altered the relationship between documentation and

living practice. A tradition was no longer significant merely because scholars could record an endangered remnant of an older rural culture. Its viability depended upon communities that continued to recognise, transmit, reinterpret, and perform it. This required specialists to work with bearers of traditions rather than treat them simply as sources of ethnographic information. UNESCO procedures reinforced principles of community participation and consent, encouraging a more collaborative form of heritage practice. The Czech experience proved particularly suitable for this approach because institutions such as the National Institute of Folk Culture already possessed deep regional knowledge and long-standing relationships with practitioners. The 2004–2013 period consequently brought ethnological scholarship and heritage policy into closer interaction without making the two fields identical.

Digitisation was perhaps the most consequential technological transformation of the period. Czech libraries had already begun significant digitisation projects before accession, but the mid-2000s placed these efforts within a much larger European information-policy environment. The National Library emerged as one of the most active institutions in Central and Eastern Europe in developing digital access to historic collections and modern printed materials. Manuscriptorium brought manuscripts and other historical documents from numerous institutions into a common digital environment, while the Kramerius system provided access to digitised books and periodicals published predominantly after 1800. These systems gradually changed the practical meaning of accessibility because researchers no longer needed to encounter every document exclusively through physical consultation in the institution holding the original. Digitisation also encouraged standardisation of metadata and cooperation among libraries possessing collections of very different sizes. As digital content accumulated, however, the problem shifted from scanning documents to preserving, describing, integrating, and providing durable access to them. The digital library was becoming an infrastructure rather than simply a collection of electronic reproductions.

European initiatives accelerated this transition. The Czech Ministry of Culture participated in the MICHAEL Plus project from 2006 to 2009, contributing to the development of an eCulture platform and connecting national cultural-content inventories with wider European strategies. Such projects reflected the EU's increasing emphasis upon online access to cultural resources and culminated symbolically in the development of Europeana as a continental digital cultural platform. Manuscriptorium became an aggregator for historical collections within the Europeana environment, demonstrating how a Czech-developed digital system could function as part of a larger European infrastructure. The direction of influence was therefore no longer simply from Western Europe towards Czech institutions. Czech libraries and specialists possessed expertise capable of contributing directly to European digital-heritage architecture. This was an important sign of maturation because internationalisation now involved exporting institutional competence as well as importing standards. Digital heritage became one of the fields in which Czech cultural infrastructure could claim genuine comparative strength.

The Czech Presidency in 2009 gave digitisation particular political visibility. The Ministry of Culture explicitly identified digital access to cultural heritage and long-term preservation of digital documents as priorities, linking them with the European Digital Library and national digitisation strategies. The Prague conference on Digital Access to Cultural Heritage brought European initiatives and national projects into direct dialogue. This policy emphasis helped redefine digitisation as a public responsibility rather than an optional technological experiment undertaken by individual institutions. Digital preservation presented especially difficult problems because data could become inaccessible through obsolete formats, software,

storage systems, or inadequate metadata even when the original digitisation had been technically successful. Heritage organisations therefore had to begin thinking in terms of trusted repositories, preservation standards, migration strategies, and long-term information management. The problem was conceptually similar to traditional conservation but technologically unfamiliar: a digital object could disappear without any visible physical deterioration. By the end of the decade, the preservation of digital cultural memory had become a recognised part of heritage policy.

The creation of the National Digital Library project transformed these ambitions into large-scale infrastructure. In 2010, the National Library applied for support through the Integrated Operational Programme and secured funding of approximately CZK 300 million, including national co-financing. The project envisaged the digitisation of tens of millions of pages together with metadata management, long-term preservation, and legally appropriate public access. Implementation required industrial-scale scanning technology, sophisticated workflows, digital repositories, quality control, and coordination among specialists whose professional backgrounds ranged from librarianship to information technology. Such a project differed fundamentally from the earlier digitisation of selected rare manuscripts or individual titles. It treated digitisation as a national preservation and access system capable of processing cultural materials on a mass scale. The project also demonstrated how European structural funding could support intangible information infrastructure just as it supported the restoration of physical monuments. By 2013, digital capacity had become one of the most important new dimensions of the Czech cultural system.

Archives, museums, and galleries faced related problems, although their progress was less uniform. Born-digital documents raised archival questions that could not be solved simply by transferring procedures designed for paper records into an electronic environment. Museum and gallery collections presented additional complexity because digital documentation had to accommodate three-dimensional objects, conservation records, provenance histories, photographs, exhibition histories, rights information, and different systems of professional classification. Czech initiatives explored centralised and interoperable solutions, but financial and organisational constraints repeatedly demonstrated that digitisation itself was easier to fund than sustainable digital preservation. This distinction became increasingly apparent during what later researchers described as the Czech heritage sector's long decade of digital preservation from the early 2000s to approximately 2014. The period produced many successful digital datasets and services while also exposing fragmentation and weaknesses in long-term coordination. Such difficulties are historically important because they prevent an overly triumphalist interpretation of technological modernisation. The digital turn represented genuine progress, but it also created new categories of institutional vulnerability.

The modernisation of physical museum infrastructure proceeded alongside this digital transformation. The National Technical Museum offers an especially striking example because the reconstruction of its Prague building, begun in 2003, continued through most of the period under consideration. Five major new permanent exhibitions reopened in February 2011, presenting transport, architecture and civil engineering, astronomy, printing, and photographic technology through redesigned interpretative environments. The renewed museum attracted strong public interest, demonstrating the capacity of traditional national institutions to regain audiences through investment in exhibition quality and visitor experience. By October 2013, the long process of completing and furnishing the building had reached a major milestone, allowing the Museum to present the history of Czech technical and industrial culture on a

substantially renewed scale. The transformation involved more than architecture because libraries, archives, conservation facilities, collections, research functions, and educational programming formed part of the institution's wider role. It illustrated the convergence between museum modernisation, heritage preservation, research, and public communication characteristic of the period. Old institutions could therefore become new cultural infrastructures without abandoning the collections and historical identities on which their authority rested.

Art history and gallery scholarship were similarly affected by the international standards of the period. Czech art historians had already recovered methodological plurality in the 1990s, but after 2004 international publication, research cooperation, exhibition exchange, and peer review became increasingly routine components of professional legitimacy. The National Gallery's scholarly publishing activity, including its peer-reviewed Bulletin, reflected the growing expectation that major collecting institutions should function not only as exhibition venues but also as research organisations. Exhibitions increasingly situated Czech art in Central European, European, and global contexts rather than presenting national artistic development as a self-contained sequence. International loans and collaborative projects required high conservation, documentation, insurance, and curatorial standards, thereby linking scholarly quality with institutional capacity. Czech and Slovak participation in the shared pavilion at the Venice Biennale retained a particularly visible symbolic connection with the common Czechoslovak cultural inheritance while allowing successive post-1993 generations to present contemporary artistic positions internationally. Art history thus became more transnational in both method and institutional practice. By the early 2010s, European and international comparability had become an ordinary expectation of major Czech art institutions.

University humanities were undergoing a parallel form of internationalisation. European student and academic mobility expanded substantially after accession, while the Bologna framework and the wider European Higher Education Area encouraged greater comparability of degree structures and formalised international cooperation. For art history, archaeology, museology, ethnology, cultural studies, aesthetics, theatre studies, musicology, and related disciplines, such mobility altered the intellectual environment of students as well as senior researchers. A Czech student could spend part of a degree at a foreign university and return with methodological assumptions, bibliographies, and professional contacts that previously might have been acquired only through exceptional individual opportunity. Departments could participate in joint conferences, research networks, visiting lectureships, and international doctoral cooperation with far less institutional friction than during the early transformation period. English became increasingly important as a language of scholarly communication, although German, Polish, Slovak, French, and other languages retained particular relevance within Central European humanities research. The resulting internationalisation did not abolish national scholarly traditions but placed them in more continuous conversation with neighbouring and global research cultures. Academic Europeanisation therefore strengthened the human infrastructure underlying later developments in heritage and art research.

Internationalisation also transformed the professional arts. Theatre companies, dance groups, musicians, visual artists, curators, festivals, and independent cultural organisations participated increasingly in European networks in which mobility and co-production became routine working methods. The Czech arts sector retained a substantial publicly supported institutional base, but its international activity was no longer organised primarily through state

cultural diplomacy. Independent organisations and individual artists could establish their own European partnerships, apply directly to programmes, participate in residencies, and develop productions whose creative teams crossed several national borders. The result was a more dispersed model of cultural representation in which Czech culture abroad was presented by many institutions rather than through one centrally coordinated narrative. This plurality also altered domestic artistic practice because international contacts introduced different production models, curatorial approaches, audience strategies, and organisational forms. Yet mobility remained unevenly distributed, favouring actors with language skills, administrative competence, and access to networks. Europeanisation thus opened opportunities while simultaneously creating a premium on professional organisational capacity.

Regional cultural development acquired a new European dimension as well. Structural and regional programmes encouraged cities and regions to treat culture not merely as a budgetary service but as a potential component of urban regeneration, tourism, social development, international branding, and the creative economy. This approach was visible in the increasing interest of Brno, Ostrava, Plzeň, and other cities in cultural strategies extending beyond the maintenance of existing institutions. The competition for European Capital of Culture provided a particularly powerful mechanism because candidate cities were required to formulate long-term programmes with a European dimension rather than simply propose a calendar of festivals. Plzeň's eventual designation as European Capital of Culture for 2015 was formally realised beyond the central chronological focus of this section, but the successful candidacy and preparatory transformation belonged to the closing years of the 2004–2013 stage. The process encouraged new partnerships among municipal authorities, cultural organisations, artists, civil society, and international networks. It also demonstrated that European cultural policy could influence the strategic imagination of a Czech regional city rather than remaining an affair of ministries and national institutions. By the early 2010s, culture had become more explicitly territorial and developmental in Czech public policy.

Europeanisation was not limited to the institutions of the European Union itself. Following accession, the Czech Republic obtained access to the EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms, whose priorities included the conservation of European cultural heritage. These programmes financed numerous projects and introduced another form of international partnership into Czech cultural and heritage practice. The Visegrad framework likewise supported cultural exchange across Czechia, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary, strengthening regional cooperation that had historical foundations independent of EU membership. Bilateral projects with Germany and Austria addressed borderland heritage, shared histories, arts, and cultural memory, while Czech-Slovak cooperation retained a density derived from the former common state. European integration therefore operated through overlapping geographical scales rather than a single Brussels-centred relationship. Czech institutions learned to combine EU programmes with regional, bilateral, UNESCO, EEA, and professional networks according to the nature of individual projects. This multilayered internationalism became one of the defining institutional characteristics of the period.

The global financial crisis after 2008 nevertheless exposed the limits of the optimistic assumption that internationalisation and professionalisation would automatically produce financial security. Public cultural organisations remained dependent upon state, regional, and municipal budgets, and economic pressure revived familiar debates about subsidies, institutional reform, grants, and the legitimacy of cultural expenditure. Research on Czech cultural funding showed that the dense network of public cultural organisations inherited and

transformed after 1989 remained remarkably resistant to radical restructuring. This persistence could be criticised as institutional conservatism, but it also demonstrated that markets and non-profit organisations had not replaced the public functions of theatres, museums, galleries, libraries, and other cultural institutions. European funding offered major investment opportunities, yet such grants were typically unsuitable for covering the permanent operating costs of complex organisations. New infrastructure could therefore create future financial obligations at the same time that it improved cultural provision. The crisis made clear that Europeanisation supplemented rather than replaced national systems of cultural responsibility. Professionalisation had increased institutional capacity, but it had not resolved the fundamental political question of how much public culture a democratic society was prepared to finance.

The same caution applies to the interpretation of European structural funding. Large grants enabled restorations and technological investments that would otherwise have been delayed for many years, yet the project model could favour institutions capable of managing complex applications and co-financing requirements. Smaller museums, local associations, independent cultural organisations, and modest heritage sites often lacked the professional staff necessary to compete on equal terms. Investment programmes could also privilege visible capital projects over less tangible needs such as research, collection care, staff development, routine maintenance, or long-term audience work. Czech cultural institutions therefore encountered a familiar paradox of European funding: unprecedented access to capital could coexist with persistent weaknesses in ordinary operational finance. The most successful organisations learned to combine national, regional, municipal, European, and project resources rather than depend exclusively upon a single source. This capacity itself became an important form of professional competence. By the end of the period, institutional strength increasingly meant not merely possessing collections or scholarly expertise but being able to navigate a complex funding ecology.

Despite these limitations, the years 2004–2013 fundamentally altered the relationship between cultural heritage and innovation. During the 1990s, heritage policy had largely been associated with preventing loss, resolving ownership questions, stabilising institutions, and developing democratic legal frameworks. During the European period, preservation increasingly incorporated digital technologies, scientific research, sophisticated project management, visitor interpretation, educational services, and the adaptive reuse of historic complexes. Innovation in heritage did not mean replacing historical materials with novelty or treating conservation as technological spectacle. It meant applying new methods to improve documentation, analysis, conservation, accessibility, interpretation, and sustainable use while preserving the evidential value of cultural objects and places. The NAKI programme, digital libraries, large IOP projects, UNESCO intangible-heritage mechanisms, and specialised heritage centres all reflected this broader conception. Cultural heritage thus became one of the areas where the title *Implementation of Innovations* acquires its most literal meaning. Innovation was increasingly embedded in the institutional practices through which continuity itself was maintained.

Art and cultural research underwent a related transformation in how innovation was understood. Interdisciplinarity expanded as art historians engaged more actively with visual culture, memory, architecture, museum studies, digital documentation, and transnational approaches, while ethnologists increasingly connected traditional cultural research with identity, migration, and heritage. Theatre and performance research developed alongside new

international production networks, and cultural-policy scholarship began using quantitative data and economic analysis as well as humanities interpretation. Digital tools altered bibliographical research, image access, archival consultation, mapping, and the management of cultural information even before the later emergence of fully developed digital humanities. The distinction between cultural research and cultural administration consequently became more porous. Research could inform policy and conservation, while professional institutions increasingly generated data and methodologies of direct scholarly value. This convergence did not erase disciplinary boundaries, but it created a more interconnected national research environment. The culture sector was becoming a site in which knowledge was not only interpreted but operationalised.

By 2013, the Czech cultural system had therefore moved substantially beyond the institutional reconstruction that characterised its first post-Czechoslovak decade. Its principal organisations remained recognisably Czech and retained deep historical continuities, but their working environment had become European in regulation, funding, mobility, research cooperation, digital standards, and professional expectations. The National Heritage Institute had evolved into a more functionally differentiated nationwide organisation; museums worked within increasingly international ethical and professional frameworks; libraries were building national digital infrastructures; and intangible heritage had acquired a formal system of safeguarding linked to UNESCO. Cultural-policy institutions had incorporated the creative economy and cultural industries into their analytical vocabulary, while NAKI created a new bridge between research and the practical needs of cultural heritage. Major European investments had begun to transform historic sites into educational, methodological, and research centres rather than treating restoration as an end in itself. Czech organisations were not simply receiving European models but were themselves contributing knowledge, digital services, specialist expertise, and policy ideas to international networks. The period can therefore be described as one of transition from European adaptation to increasingly reciprocal European participation.

In summary, the decade from 2004 to 2013 represents the phase in which Czech culture, heritage protection, and art research acquired the institutional characteristics of a mature European cultural system. EU accession replaced the provisional international opening of the 1990s with permanent participation in common legal, financial, professional, and programme structures. International mobility became routine, project cooperation became a standard organisational skill, and cultural institutions learned to operate within networks extending far beyond national borders. Structural Funds enabled a new scale of investment in monuments, museums, libraries, digitisation, and specialist heritage centres, while the Czech Presidency of 2009 demonstrated that the country could help shape rather than merely follow European cultural priorities. The expansion of digital libraries, the National Digital Library project, and participation in Europeana transformed accessibility and created new responsibilities for long-term digital preservation. The ratification of the UNESCO intangible-heritage convention and successive international inscriptions broadened heritage from monuments and collections towards living traditions and community-based safeguarding. NAKI, museological professionalisation, creative-industries mapping, and new research partnerships strengthened the connection between scholarly knowledge and cultural practice. By the end of 2013, Czech cultural development was no longer adequately described as post-socialist reconstruction: it had become a process of specialised European integration built upon

national historical continuity, increasingly sophisticated professional institutions, and a rapidly expanding combination of physical, intellectual, and digital cultural infrastructures.

The Contemporary Stage: 2014–2025 as a Phase of Digitalisation, Participation, Cultural Resilience, and International Visibility

The period from 2014 to 2025 marked a qualitative change in the development of Czech culture, cultural heritage, and the scholarly disciplines concerned with them. The previous decade had created the institutional and financial conditions for deeper European integration, but the contemporary stage was increasingly defined by what institutions were able to do with the infrastructures, networks, and professional capacities that had already been established. Digital technologies moved from the margins of specialised projects towards the centre of collection management, research, interpretation, public access, and artistic production. Museums and heritage organisations gradually ceased to regard visitors simply as recipients of professionally prepared knowledge and began to experiment more systematically with education, participation, accessibility, and community engagement. Cultural and creative industries acquired a clearer place within national and regional development strategies, while research programmes strengthened the connection between the humanities, conservation science, digital technologies, and practical heritage management. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic, the energy crisis, and the consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine demonstrated that cultural systems had to be evaluated not only by the quality of their output but also by their capacity to withstand disruption. International visibility continued to grow through UNESCO, European programmes, research networks, cultural diplomacy, and major public institutions. The defining feature of the period was therefore the transition from institutional modernisation to a more complex model in which access, resilience, participation, innovation, and international relevance increasingly became measures of cultural maturity.

The State Cultural Policy for 2015–2020 provided an important strategic framework for the first half of this stage. Its significance lay less in the introduction of an entirely new philosophy than in the consolidation of themes that had emerged during the previous decade into a more coherent national policy language. Culture was presented not only as a sphere of artistic creation and heritage preservation but also as an element of social development, education, regional identity, tourism, innovation, and the economy. This broader understanding reflected European debates while responding to specifically Czech institutional conditions, where the cultural system remained highly dependent upon cooperation among the state, regions, municipalities, publicly supported organisations, civil society, and increasingly professional creative enterprises. The policy also recognised that accessibility required more than the physical existence of cultural institutions, because economic, geographical, educational, social, and technological barriers could all limit participation. Digital technologies were consequently becoming relevant not simply as tools for preservation but as instruments for widening cultural access. The policy environment increasingly expected institutions to demonstrate public value while retaining professional standards and artistic autonomy. By the middle of the decade, cultural policy had therefore moved beyond the defensive task of

preserving the institutional network and towards the more ambitious question of how that network could operate effectively within a changing society.

The cultural and creative industries became one of the clearest expressions of this expanded conception of culture. The mapping work begun in the preceding period was completed in 2015 and provided a more systematic picture of sectors whose boundaries had previously been dispersed among different administrative and statistical categories. Architecture, design, film, music, publishing, advertising, games, visual arts, performing arts, crafts, cultural heritage, and other activities could now be examined not merely as isolated artistic domains but as parts of interconnected creative economies. This approach did not dissolve the distinction between public culture and commercial cultural production, but it made their interdependence more visible. A theatre festival could stimulate hospitality and tourism, a design studio could cooperate with manufacturing, a museum could contribute to urban attractiveness, and a digital game could combine artistic, technological, narrative, and entrepreneurial competences. Czech policymakers increasingly understood that creative capacity was geographically concentrated but capable of supporting regional development beyond Prague. The resulting strategy work gradually introduced concepts such as creative clusters, incubation, mapping, skills, and cross-sectoral innovation into the language of cultural administration. By 2020, the cultural and creative industries were no longer peripheral to Czech cultural policy but one of the fields through which culture was connected explicitly with economic and innovation policy.

Plzeň's year as European Capital of Culture in 2015 became an especially visible test of this new understanding. The project had been prepared during the preceding Europeanisation phase, but its implementation demonstrated how a Czech regional city could use culture as an instrument of international positioning, civic mobilisation, and urban transformation. Plzeň was known internationally above all through engineering and brewing, and the European Capital of Culture programme sought to broaden this identity without denying the city's industrial history. Cultural projects brought together established institutions, independent organisations, public spaces, artists, local communities, and international partners. The programme also demonstrated the organisational difficulty of translating a European cultural title into sustainable local change, since early preparations had experienced administrative and political tensions. External evaluation nevertheless found that the project was ultimately regarded positively by most stakeholders and strengthened cultural cooperation and local engagement. Its international tourism effect was more modest than some initial ambitions suggested, which provided a useful reminder that cultural branding does not automatically transform visitor economies. The deeper legacy lay in the experience of strategic cultural planning, international partnership, and the recognition that culture could become a long-term component of regional urban policy.

Research in culture and heritage also entered a more stable applied phase during these years. The NAKI programme established earlier had demonstrated that cultural institutions could participate directly in organised research rather than functioning merely as users of academic knowledge. Its successor, NAKI II, approved in 2014 for the period 2016–2022, extended this logic and gave applied research in national and cultural identity a durable institutional framework. Projects brought together universities, Academy institutes, museums, galleries, libraries, archives, the National Heritage Institute, technical specialists, and other organisations around problems that required both scholarly interpretation and practical outputs. The results included methodologies, specialised databases, maps, conservation

procedures, exhibitions, digital resources, diagnostic techniques, and documentary systems alongside conventional academic publications. This encouraged a form of research in which the humanities could interact more intensively with chemistry, materials science, information technology, geoinformatics, engineering, education, and conservation science. Cultural heritage was particularly well suited to this arrangement because preservation problems rarely respect disciplinary boundaries. By the end of NAKI II, applied cultural research had become one of the distinctive features of the Czech research landscape rather than a temporary experiment at the margins of academic humanities.

Digitisation was among the fields in which this interaction became most obvious. By 2014, Czech libraries and several major memory institutions already possessed considerable experience of creating digital content, but long-term preservation remained fragmented and unevenly financed. The problem was no longer simply whether manuscripts, books, photographs, artworks, films, or archival records could be scanned or photographed. Institutions increasingly had to address metadata, interoperability, persistent identification, migration between formats, cybersecurity, storage, copyright, digital preservation, and the quality of online interfaces. This change transformed digitisation from a technical service into an institutional commitment extending across the entire life cycle of digital objects. The distinction between digital access and digital preservation became particularly important because a file visible online today could be unusable within years if its technical environment were not maintained. Czech specialists therefore became increasingly concerned with the architecture behind access rather than with the production of impressive numbers of digital images alone. The contemporary phase began precisely when these problems were becoming central to the long-term credibility of national digital heritage.

The National Heritage Institute's development of the *Památkový katalog* offered one important example of this transition. The catalogue created a digital environment for information concerning cultural monuments, national cultural monuments, protected areas, protection zones, UNESCO properties, and other objects relevant to heritage conservation. It brought together descriptive information, photographic documentation, spatial localisation, and data connected with the Central List of Cultural Monuments. For professionals, such integration improved the capacity to work across records that had previously existed in dispersed documentary forms. For the wider public, the system made information about protected heritage substantially easier to discover without requiring direct access to specialist archives. The project also showed how geographical information had become inseparable from contemporary heritage management, since the legal and historical significance of a building or landscape must often be understood spatially. Digital cataloguing consequently supported research, planning, administration, conservation, and public knowledge simultaneously. Heritage documentation was becoming not merely an archive of expert decisions but a national information infrastructure.

Museums followed a comparable trajectory through the continuing development of the eSbírky portal. The platform gradually became a national aggregator through which museums and galleries could present digitised collection objects beyond the boundaries of their own websites. Its significance lay in its network character, because smaller institutions could contribute to a common environment rather than having to construct complex independent systems with limited resources. The portal also connected Czech museum data to Europeana, placing nationally held collections within a wider European digital ecosystem. By 2023, eSbírky provided access to more than two hundred thousand digitised objects from around two

hundred Czech memory institutions, demonstrating that digital aggregation had become substantial rather than experimental. The development of eSbírky 2.0 during 2023–2025 responded to growing demands for stronger cybersecurity, improved metadata, easier data imports, better design, and greater user accessibility. By the end of 2025, the platform contained almost three hundred thousand objects from more than two hundred institutions while preparations for the new generation of the system were nearing completion. The evolution of eSbírky therefore encapsulated the movement from isolated institutional digitisation towards interoperable national infrastructure.

Libraries remained among the most technically mature parts of this digital environment. Manuscriptorium, Kramerius, digitised periodicals, specialised databases, and systems for works unavailable on the market progressively altered the conditions under which researchers and general readers could gain access to documentary heritage. The National Library, Moravian Library, National Museum Library, Academy institutes, universities, and regional libraries all contributed to an increasingly distributed digital research environment. Scholars of cultural history no longer depended to the same extent upon physical travel simply to establish the existence or basic contents of printed and manuscript materials. Digital access also supported comparative research by allowing Czech sources to be consulted alongside collections in Austria, Germany, Slovakia, Poland, and other countries. Yet increased accessibility created legal and methodological questions concerning copyright, the quality of digital surrogates, metadata consistency, and the relationship between digital consultation and examination of original objects. Czech librarianship therefore increasingly combined traditional collection expertise with information science and digital preservation. By the 2020s, digital libraries had become an ordinary part of humanities research rather than a specialist technological novelty.

Audiovisual heritage underwent a similarly profound transformation. The National Film Archive increasingly combined traditional film conservation with digitisation, digital restoration, archival research, contemporary distribution, and online accessibility. Projects undertaken from the mid-2010s demonstrated that digital restoration was not simply the mechanical removal of scratches or the enhancement of old images. Responsible restoration required research into surviving negatives, prints, sound materials, production records, historical screening conditions, and other sources capable of establishing how a film originally appeared and sounded. The project *Digital Restoration of Czech Film Heritage* made a selection of important Czech films accessible again in formats suitable for contemporary cinemas, television, and home media while preserving the original analogue materials. Later restoration projects continued this work in cooperation with the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, private supporters, technical laboratories, and other partners. Such projects allowed Czech film classics to return to public circulation and international festivals rather than remain physically preserved but culturally inaccessible. Film heritage thus became a particularly vivid example of preservation through technologically mediated renewed use.

The reconstruction of the Historical Building of the National Museum provided a more monumental symbol of the same philosophy. The building had closed for safety reasons in 2011 and underwent a comprehensive reconstruction beginning in 2015 after more than a century without comparable modernisation. The intervention combined restoration of historic architectural elements with contemporary security, climate-control, accessibility, transport, information, and exhibition technologies. When the building reopened on 28 October 2018, the date intentionally connected the bicentenary of the Museum with the centenary of the

establishment of Czechoslovakia. The reopening was therefore both an infrastructural event and an act of public historical interpretation. New exhibition areas and the later underground connection with the neighbouring New Building transformed the institution from a single historic palace into a larger museum complex. Multimedia presentation, educational activity, barrier-free access, and modern visitor services became integral to the reconstructed environment. The project demonstrated how a 19th-century national institution could be technologically modernised without abandoning the historical architecture through which its public identity had been constructed.

Participation was becoming just as important as physical modernisation. The heritage-education programme *Památky nás baví* developed methodologies for children, schools, university students, families, adults, senior citizens, and visitors with special educational needs. Its underlying assumption was that effective heritage protection depends partly upon whether society understands why inherited places and objects matter. The programme therefore treated education not as an optional visitor service added after conservation had been completed, but as a component of conservation itself. Heritage sites became environments for formal, non-formal, and informal learning rather than static monuments to be observed at a respectful distance. Cooperation among the National Heritage Institute, Charles University, Masaryk University, and educational specialists gave the programme a research-based methodological foundation. Its receipt of a Europa Nostra award in 2017 demonstrated that the Czech approach had acquired wider European recognition. The project also reflected a deeper shift towards seeing the public not simply as consumers of heritage but as potential participants in its long-term social reproduction.

Museums and galleries increasingly pursued similar forms of engagement. Educational departments expanded, family programmes became more common, institutions invested in guided activities and interpretation, and exhibitions were more frequently accompanied by lectures, workshops, public discussions, digital content, and programmes for schools. Accessibility also acquired a broader meaning, extending beyond physical access towards language, disability, social inclusion, and different levels of prior cultural knowledge. The traditional authority of the curator did not disappear, but the communication of expertise increasingly required an understanding of how different audiences encounter collections. Museum work therefore began to combine conservation and scholarship with audience research and public programming more systematically than in earlier periods. Some institutions experimented with community projects and forms of co-creation, although the depth of participation differed greatly across the sector. The change was gradual rather than revolutionary, and many museums continued to rely primarily upon conventional exhibition formats. Nevertheless, by the late 2010s the expectation that a museum should be an active civic and educational institution had become substantially stronger.

The European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018 gave this participatory turn a particularly favourable international context. Across Europe, the initiative emphasised engagement, sustainability, protection, innovation, education, and the idea that cultural heritage belongs not only to specialists but to society as a whole. Czech institutions used the year to connect domestic heritage activities with a wider European discussion about shared historical responsibility. The coincidence with the centenary of Czechoslovakia gave heritage unusually high public visibility within the country itself. Museums, heritage sites, archives, schools, cultural organisations, and public authorities could place national anniversaries within a wider European framework rather than treating them solely as celebrations of state history. The

initiative also strengthened themes that were already emerging in Czech professional practice, including heritage education, adaptive reuse, technological research, responsible tourism, and community participation. It reinforced the idea that heritage policy should address future social use as well as physical survival. The year therefore functioned less as an isolated celebration than as a public expression of the more participatory heritage philosophy developing throughout the decade.

International recognition of Czech tangible heritage expanded markedly towards the end of the period. In 2019, the Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří Mining Region was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as a transnational property shared by Czechia and Germany. The same year brought inscription of the Landscape for Breeding and Training of Ceremonial Carriage Horses at Kladruby nad Labem, extending recognition to a highly specialised cultural landscape shaped around horse breeding and courtly ceremonial practice. In 2021, the Great Spa Towns of Europe nomination added Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně, and Františkovy Lázně to a transnational network of historic spa towns across seven European countries. Žatec and the Landscape of Saaz Hops followed in 2023, recognising the interaction of agricultural production, trade, architecture, landscape, and urban development associated with hop cultivation. These inscriptions demonstrated a significant conceptual broadening from individual monuments towards cultural landscapes, economic systems, production traditions, and transnational historical processes. They also required sophisticated comparative research, management planning, documentation, and international negotiation. Czech heritage diplomacy was therefore increasingly based upon the ability to demonstrate why nationally distinctive places possessed significance that could be understood at a global level.

Intangible heritage displayed an even more pronounced expansion. Puppetry in Slovakia and Czechia entered the UNESCO Representative List in 2016, explicitly preserving the cross-border character of a tradition whose development could not be divided neatly by the political separation of 1993. Indigo resist block printing, or *modrotisk*, followed in 2018 through a multinational nomination involving Austria, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, and Slovakia. Handmade production of Christmas tree decorations from blown glass beads was inscribed in 2020, while timber rafting joined the list through another multinational nomination in 2022. In the same year, the Czech programme *Bearers of Folk Craft Tradition* was recognised by UNESCO as a good safeguarding practice, validating not merely an individual tradition but a national mechanism for supporting craft transmission. The knowledge, craft, and skills of handmade glass production were recognised internationally in 2023 as part of a six-country nomination, giving Czech glassmaking a particularly prominent heritage status. Finally, in 2025, amateur theatre acting in Czechia was inscribed as a living community practice sustained through local ensembles, festivals, education, and voluntary participation. By the end of the period, intangible heritage had become one of the clearest fields in which Czech cultural identity was presented internationally as living, participatory, and frequently transnational rather than as a closed collection of national relics.

This widening definition of heritage also influenced the relationship between professionals and communities. The UNESCO model of intangible heritage emphasised bearers, transmission, consent, and community participation, making it increasingly difficult to conceive preservation as something performed exclusively by expert institutions on behalf of passive populations. Craftspeople, amateur performers, local associations, tradition bearers, municipal authorities, museums, ethnologists, and educational institutions could all become

participants in safeguarding processes. This did not eliminate the need for scholarly expertise, because documentation, historical analysis, conservation, and nomination still required specialist knowledge. It did, however, redistribute authority by recognising that living practices cannot be preserved meaningfully without the people who continue to perform them. The same principle gradually affected approaches to local built heritage and museum collections, where public interpretation became increasingly attentive to memory, identity, and community relationships. Cultural heritage was thus moving from a predominantly object-centred model towards a relational model linking objects, places, practices, knowledge, and people. This development strengthened the case for treating heritage as a distinct interdisciplinary field rather than merely as one subdivision of general cultural administration.

The arts experienced a parallel but differently structured internationalisation. Creative Europe, international festivals, residencies, biennials, touring networks, co-productions, and cross-border projects increasingly made international collaboration part of ordinary artistic careers. Czech visual artists, curators, theatre practitioners, musicians, dancers, designers, filmmakers, and cultural managers worked within networks in which nationality remained important but no longer defined the principal boundaries of production. Major public institutions increasingly designed exhibitions and programmes around transnational themes, international loans, and collaborative scholarship. Contemporary art also became more closely linked with questions of ecology, migration, gender, memory, technology, political representation, and changing urban environments. Art research responded accordingly, drawing more extensively upon visual studies, cultural theory, media studies, social history, and interdisciplinary approaches while retaining strong traditions of archival and object-based scholarship. English-language communication became increasingly necessary for international visibility, although Czech, German, Slovak, Polish, and other regional scholarly languages continued to matter greatly for historical research. By the end of the 2010s, Czech art studies were operating much more consistently within international intellectual circuits than at the beginning of the post-communist transformation.

Regional cultural ecosystems also became more sophisticated during this period. Prague remained the country's dominant cultural centre by virtue of its national institutions, universities, creative labour market, international tourism, and concentration of funding, but regional cities increasingly developed their own cultural strategies. Brno combined universities, galleries, museums, design, music, theatre, festivals, creative enterprises, and technological industries within a particularly dense environment. Ostrava increasingly used cultural projects, industrial heritage, festivals, and creative initiatives as part of its transformation from a heavy-industrial city towards a more diversified metropolitan identity. Plzeň attempted to convert the experience of the European Capital of Culture into longer-term institutional capacity, while smaller regional centres explored ways of connecting heritage, tourism, creative work, and local development. Mapping of cultural and creative industries helped local governments identify sectors that conventional statistics had often failed to make visible. This territorial approach challenged the assumption that cultural modernisation was necessarily a process radiating outward from Prague. Contemporary Czech cultural development was becoming more clearly polycentric even though regional inequalities remained considerable.

The period from 2014 to 2019 could therefore appear, retrospectively, as one of increasing confidence. Cultural policy had become more strategic, European integration was routine, research funding was stable enough to support long-term programmes, and major institutions

were completing ambitious reconstruction and digital projects. UNESCO recognition was expanding, regional cultural strategies were becoming more sophisticated, and the language of participation and accessibility had entered professional practice. Yet the cultural system still depended upon a mixture of public subsidy, ticket income, municipal support, project grants, sponsorship, tourism, and often precarious individual labour. Independent artists and commercial cultural organisations were especially exposed to fluctuations in audience demand and lacked many of the stabilising mechanisms available to established public institutions. These vulnerabilities were visible before 2020 but could easily be obscured during a period of growing attendance and international exchange. The COVID-19 pandemic suddenly turned them into the central problem of Czech cultural policy. What followed was the most severe disruption to cultural participation since the creation of the independent republic.

From March 2020, closures and restrictions struck precisely those cultural activities whose value depended upon physical gathering. Theatres, concert halls, clubs, festivals, cinemas, museums, galleries, heritage sites, libraries, and other institutions either closed entirely or operated under severe restrictions for extended periods. Performing artists and technical professionals lost work because cancelled events simultaneously removed ticket revenue and employment opportunities throughout production chains. The cultural sectors most dependent upon audiences proved particularly vulnerable, while public institutions with regular budgets generally possessed greater institutional protection than independent organisations and self-employed workers. Research conducted during the crisis mapped losses across theatre, dance, music, visual art, literature, and audiovisual production, making the structural differences within the cultural economy unusually visible. The pandemic therefore functioned as a large-scale empirical experiment revealing which parts of the cultural system possessed reserves and which depended upon continuous circulation. It also demonstrated that culture could not be analysed adequately through institutions alone, because a substantial share of creative production relied upon freelancers and small enterprises moving between projects. Cultural resilience became a policy question precisely because the crisis exposed the labour structures hidden behind public cultural output.

The state's response also altered the boundaries of cultural policy. The COVID–Kultura programme, developed by the Ministry of Industry and Trade together with the Ministry of Culture, provided emergency support to cultural entrepreneurs and later to self-employed artists and artistic-technical professionals. Successive calls broadened assistance as restrictions persisted, and by the end of 2020 substantial additional resources had been allocated to the programme. Support was later extended to operators of non-state cultural monuments such as castles, châteaux, open-air museums, and archaeological parks whose economic models depended upon visitor income. This was historically significant because commercial and independent parts of the cultural sector that had previously existed largely outside systematic public cultural support suddenly entered direct dialogue with government. Professional associations and informal platforms became active participants in negotiations over compensation, reopening, employment, and the design of support instruments. The crisis therefore increased advocacy capacity and made the economic diversity of the cultural sector much more visible to public administration. Emergency policy was imperfect and frequently contested, but it widened the state's understanding of who actually produces and maintains cultural life.

Digitalisation accelerated dramatically under these conditions. Museums and galleries that had previously treated websites and social media primarily as promotional tools began

producing online exhibitions, streamed tours, lectures, educational materials, podcasts, collection stories, and other forms of digital programming. Performing organisations streamed concerts and theatrical works, sometimes experimenting with payment models and sometimes using free access to retain contact with audiences. Libraries expanded remote services, while digital collections acquired a new relevance when reading rooms and museum buildings could not be entered. The pandemic demonstrated that digitised objects are useful only when institutions possess the curatorial, technological, and communicative capacity to transform them into meaningful public content. It also showed that digital access could extend geographical reach but could not simply reproduce the social and sensory experience of physical cultural participation. After reopening, many institutions reduced the volume of emergency online programming while retaining hybrid practices that had proved genuinely useful. COVID-19 therefore accelerated a digital transition already under way while clarifying the difference between digital substitution and digital complementarity.

The National Cultural Policy for 2021–2025 explicitly absorbed the lessons of this crisis. The document described itself not merely as another sectoral strategy but as a broader change in the understanding of culture, creativity, and the arts. Its objectives combined more traditional priorities—accessibility, cultural heritage, and living arts—with the development of cultural and creative industries, a wider role for culture in society, and transformation of the Ministry itself. The policy was prepared through a more participatory process than earlier strategies, reflecting the stronger networks and advocacy structures that had emerged during the pandemic. Culture was presented increasingly as an intersectoral field connected with business, regional development, education, social policy, health, technology, and innovation. Resilience therefore meant more than restoring attendance figures after lockdowns. It meant reducing structural weaknesses that had made parts of the sector exceptionally vulnerable to sudden interruption. By placing culture within wider social and economic systems, the policy marked one of the most important conceptual shifts in Czech cultural governance since the 1990s.

The Czech National Recovery Plan converted many of these principles into unusually large programmes of investment and reform. Component 4.5 was designed specifically to strengthen the cultural and creative sector after the pandemic while supporting digital transition and closer integration with the national innovation ecosystem. The programme included investment in regional cultural and creative centres, digitalisation, professional skills, creative education, international mobility, creative vouchers, and reforms intended to improve institutional sustainability. At least fifteen cultural and creative centres were envisaged across the regions, explicitly linking recovery with a geographically more balanced cultural infrastructure. Hundreds of millions of Czech crowns were assigned to digitalisation initiatives covering libraries, cultural objects, national cultural monuments, artistic documentation, and audiovisual heritage. Creative vouchers encouraged small and medium-sized enterprises to work with designers and other creative professionals, presenting creativity as a resource for innovation beyond the cultural sector itself. Regional mapping projects sought to provide local authorities with better evidence about their cultural and creative economies. Recovery policy thus became an instrument for reshaping the cultural system rather than simply restoring its pre-pandemic condition.

The position of artists themselves received an unprecedented degree of policy attention. The pandemic had shown that public cultural institutions can survive while the individuals producing artistic work remain economically precarious, particularly when they operate

through short-term contracts or self-employment. Discussions concerning the status of the artist therefore moved from professional advocacy into national legislative reform. Recovery programmes supported research, skills development, internationalisation, creative learning, and other activities associated with the professional position of artists and cultural workers. In 2025, Act No. 79/2025 amended the existing legislation on cultural support and established a formal Register of Artists administered by the Ministry of Culture. The register entered into effect on 1 July 2025 and defined for its purposes a broad category encompassing artistic activity, creative activity of an artistic nature, and work directly associated with artistic creation. The measure did not resolve every problem concerning social security, employment, income instability, or the definition of professional artistic work, but it represented a significant institutional recognition of cultural labour. By the end of the period, the social conditions of artistic production had become a legitimate subject of cultural policy in their own right.

The contemporary meaning of cultural resilience expanded again after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Czechia received a large Ukrainian refugee population, including artists, researchers, cultural professionals, journalists, students, and others whose displacement had an immediate cultural dimension. Czech cultural institutions organised programmes, employment opportunities, educational activities, collections, exhibitions, and forms of public solidarity, while government policy increasingly treated support for Ukrainian culture as part of international cultural responsibility. The threat to museums, archives, monuments, libraries, and historic buildings in Ukraine also gave heritage protection an urgent wartime meaning that had seemed remote from everyday Czech professional practice. In May 2022, the National Museum, acting on behalf of the Ministry of Culture, sent material assistance intended to help protect Ukrainian cultural heritage endangered by war. Czech and Ukrainian cultural officials maintained direct contact concerning the needs of institutions and professionals. The crisis demonstrated that heritage resilience includes emergency preparedness, international assistance, documentation, and the defence of cultural memory against deliberate destruction. Culture was thereby linked explicitly with democratic security and humanitarian solidarity.

The Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2022 provided a platform on which these concerns could be translated into European policy. Czech priorities included preparation of the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026, the position of artists, sustainability, cultural heritage, digitisation, cultural and creative industries, and support for Ukrainian culture. The war required priorities to be adjusted, making cultural solidarity with Ukraine and the protection of its heritage central subjects of political discussion. In November 2022, under the Czech Presidency, EU culture ministers adopted the new Work Plan for Culture for 2023–2026. Its four broad priorities concerned artists and cultural professionals, culture for people, culture for the planet, and culture within co-creative partnerships and external relations. The plan included cultural participation, health and well-being, green and digital transition, libraries, climate change and heritage, quality built environments, working conditions, and Ukraine. The European Heritage Awards ceremony and European Cultural Heritage Summit held in Prague during the Presidency further reinforced the capital's visibility as a meeting place for European heritage policy. Czechia was therefore participating not merely as a recipient of European cultural policy but as an organiser of its future agenda.

Sustainability became increasingly important within this agenda even before the energy crisis sharpened the problem. Heritage institutions confronted the challenge of improving energy performance without damaging historic fabric, while museums and theatres faced questions

concerning heating, cooling, transport, exhibition production, touring, storage, and resource consumption. Climate change also affected the physical preservation of heritage through heat, drought, flooding, storms, biological damage, and changing environmental conditions. These problems encouraged closer cooperation among conservators, architects, scientists, engineers, planners, and policymakers. The New European Bauhaus provided an additional framework connecting sustainability, design, inclusion, architecture, and quality of the built environment. Czech cultural policy increasingly recognised that historical environments should not be positioned outside the transition towards ecological sustainability. On the contrary, adaptive reuse, repair, traditional knowledge, durable materials, and the careful management of existing buildings could themselves contribute to sustainable development. The environmental question thus enlarged the meaning of innovation in culture beyond digital technology.

Applied research entered another stage with the establishment of NAKI III for 2023–2030. The programme was approved as the principal implementation instrument for the Ministry of Culture's concept of applied research in national and cultural identity for the new decade. Its continuation was significant because it demonstrated that dedicated cultural research funding had survived long enough to become an established component of the national research system. The research environment inherited from NAKI and NAKI II had already normalised collaboration among humanities scholars, memory institutions, heritage professionals, laboratories, technology specialists, educators, and information scientists. NAKI III could therefore begin from a substantially more mature foundation than the first programme had possessed in 2011. Digital documentation, conservation technologies, data infrastructures, historical environments, public interpretation, and the application of research results had become familiar rather than exceptional forms of cultural research. The programme also helped reinforce the distinctive Czech model in which museums and heritage institutions operate as active research organisations alongside universities and Academy institutes. By 2025, applied cultural research had become one of the institutional bridges connecting scholarship, preservation, technological innovation, and public use.

International visibility at the end of the period reflected the cumulative effects of these developments. The World Heritage inscriptions of the Krušnohoří mining region, Kladruby landscape, Czech spa towns, and Žatec demonstrated the capacity of Czech specialists to develop sophisticated nominations involving cultural landscapes, economic history, transnational comparison, and long-term management. Intangible-heritage recognition increasingly highlighted practices sustained through communities rather than monumental state institutions. Digital restoration allowed Czech films to circulate again in international festivals and contemporary distribution environments, while digital collection platforms made heritage accessible to researchers and audiences far beyond the country. Czech cultural organisations participated routinely in Creative Europe and other international programmes, and Czech specialists contributed to professional networks in museology, conservation, heritage research, libraries, film preservation, and the arts. The Presidency of the Council of the European Union demonstrated policy visibility, while UNESCO recognition connected local cultural practices with global heritage discourse. The inscription of amateur theatre acting in 2025 was particularly symbolic because it brought international recognition to a form of cultural participation rooted in voluntary local communities rather than elite professional institutions. Internationalisation had therefore become broad enough to include national

institutions, specialist researchers, regional landscapes, craftspeople, amateur performers, and digital collections within the same outward-facing cultural system.

The period nevertheless retained important structural inequalities. Major institutions in Prague and several strong regional centres possessed capacities unavailable to small museums, local associations, independent cultural spaces, or individual artists. Digitalisation required equipment, specialist staff, metadata expertise, server infrastructure, copyright knowledge, and continuous technical maintenance, all of which could reproduce inequalities between institutions even while widening public access. European and national project funding favoured organisations capable of developing complex applications and administering substantial grants. Participation likewise required resources, because genuine community engagement demands time, trained staff, accessibility measures, evaluation, and long-term relationships rather than occasional public events. The pandemic demonstrated that the apparent dynamism of the creative economy could conceal economically fragile employment structures. Heritage institutions faced growing maintenance obligations even as new digital and environmental responsibilities were added to traditional conservation work. The contemporary Czech cultural system was therefore mature but not uniformly strong, and its progress should not be confused with the elimination of long-standing asymmetries.

Nor did digitalisation remove the importance of physical cultural space. The experience of the pandemic showed precisely the opposite, because audiences often valued online access most when it could maintain a relationship with institutions temporarily unavailable in person. Museums, theatres, cinemas, libraries, festivals, monuments, and galleries remained places of encounter whose social functions could not be reproduced fully through screens. The strongest post-pandemic strategies therefore tended towards hybridity rather than technological substitution. Digital collections could prepare or extend a museum visit, streamed material could reach distant audiences, and online databases could support research, but physical objects and shared events retained their own forms of authority and experience. This balance was particularly important in heritage, where material authenticity, spatial context, atmosphere, craft, and landscape cannot be reduced to visual representation. Czech institutions increasingly treated digital tools as a way of multiplying forms of access rather than declaring the end of physical cultural participation. The contemporary stage was thus digital in infrastructure without becoming culturally disembodied.

By 2025, participation had likewise become more than a fashionable supplement to expert work. Heritage education, community-based intangible heritage, museum outreach, creative learning, local cultural strategies, amateur performance, and participatory policy preparation all demonstrated different ways in which citizens could become active participants in cultural processes. This did not imply that professional authority had become unnecessary or that every cultural decision could be made through public consultation. Conservation, historical interpretation, collection care, and research still depended upon specialised knowledge built through education and professional experience. The change lay instead in a greater recognition that expertise requires social legitimacy and communication if cultural institutions are to remain publicly meaningful. Czech heritage practice increasingly combined expert stewardship with attempts to explain decisions and involve communities in understanding inherited environments. Cultural policy similarly became more open to professional associations, independent actors, regions, municipalities, and cross-sectoral partners. Participation therefore functioned as a mechanism linking professional culture with democratic society rather than as an alternative to expertise.

The same period changed the meaning of innovation itself. In the early post-communist years, innovation in culture could easily be understood as organisational liberalisation or the introduction of market mechanisms, while the Europeanisation stage associated it strongly with international cooperation and infrastructure investment. Between 2014 and 2025, innovation became much more multidimensional. It could mean a 3D survey of a monument, a digital film restoration, an interoperable database, a new model of museum education, a creative voucher linking a designer with an industrial firm, a participatory heritage project, or an institutional response to a pandemic. It could also mean developing legal categories capable of recognising precarious cultural labour or designing new forms of regional cultural governance. The common element was no longer novelty for its own sake but the capacity to connect inherited cultural resources with new social, technological, and institutional conditions. This understanding is especially important for cultural heritage, where innovation is valuable only when it strengthens rather than obscures historical evidence and cultural meaning. The Czech experience increasingly demonstrated that preservation and innovation need not be opposing principles.

In summary, the period from 2014 to 2025 should be understood as the stage in which the Czech cultural system acquired a recognisably mature contemporary profile. Digitalisation developed from a collection of specialist projects into a national infrastructural principle affecting museums, libraries, archives, heritage registers, film preservation, artistic documentation, public access, and administrative practice. Participation widened through heritage education, community-based safeguarding, audience development, creative learning, regional cultural strategies, and more consultative forms of cultural policy. Research became more deeply integrated with practice through NAKI II and NAKI III, strengthening cooperation among humanities scholarship, conservation, technology, memory institutions, and public interpretation. UNESCO inscriptions and other international programmes made Czech heritage increasingly visible through cultural landscapes, living traditions, crafts, film, and community practices rather than only through canonical monuments. The COVID-19 crisis exposed severe economic vulnerabilities but also accelerated digital experimentation, professional advocacy, and a broader understanding of the cultural and creative sector. The subsequent National Recovery Plan transformed emergency lessons into programmes for regional infrastructure, digitalisation, skills, creative industries, and institutional reform, while the introduction of the artist register in 2025 acknowledged cultural labour as a distinct policy concern. The war in Ukraine and the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2022 further expanded the concept of cultural resilience towards solidarity, emergency heritage protection, democracy, sustainability, and international responsibility. By 2025, Czech culture, cultural heritage, and art research had therefore moved beyond the paradigms of post-socialist reconstruction and European adaptation into a stage characterised by digital maturity, participatory ambitions, applied research, international visibility, and an increasingly explicit understanding of culture as part of society's long-term capacity to remember, create, adapt, and endure.

The Main Features of the Czech Cultural, Heritage, and Art Research System by 2025

By 2025, the Czech system of research into culture, cultural heritage, and the arts could no longer be described adequately as a collection of humanities disciplines housed primarily in universities and academic institutes. Over three decades, it had developed into a considerably broader research ecology in which universities, the Czech Academy of Sciences, museums, galleries, libraries, archives, heritage institutions, specialist cultural organisations, public authorities, and increasingly digital infrastructures all participated in the production of knowledge. This arrangement was one of the most important outcomes of the period beginning in 1993, because it blurred the older distinction between institutions that supposedly 'studied' culture and those that merely 'preserved' or 'presented' it. The National Museum, National Gallery Prague, National Heritage Institute, National Film Archive, specialist libraries, and other memory institutions had become research organisations in a substantive rather than merely formal sense. Their collections and archives functioned simultaneously as objects of preservation, research infrastructures, sources for scholarly publication, foundations for exhibitions, and resources for public education. Universities and Academy institutes, conversely, increasingly depended upon access to precisely these institutional collections, databases, laboratories, archival fonds, and specialist expertise. The resulting system was therefore characterised not by a rigid hierarchy but by overlapping functions and recurrent collaboration. Its first defining feature was the emergence of a distributed research ecology in which scholarship, preservation, documentation, interpretation, and public communication became mutually dependent components of the same cultural knowledge system.

This research ecology was institutionally polycentric even though Prague retained exceptional weight. The capital concentrated the Ministry of Culture, central offices of major national institutions, the Czech Academy of Sciences, Charles University, the National Museum, National Gallery Prague, National Library, National Film Archive, and numerous specialist archives, galleries, foundations, and cultural organisations. Yet important intellectual and professional centres developed or remained active in Brno, Olomouc, Ostrava, Plzeň, České Budějovice, Pardubice, Hradec Králové, Opava, and other cities. Masaryk University in Brno maintained particularly strong traditions in art history, museology, archaeology, ethnology, musicology, and related humanities fields, while the Moravian Gallery and Moravian Museum provided collection-based research environments of national importance. Palacký University and the Museum of Art Olomouc helped sustain a distinctive research landscape in central Moravia, especially in art history, cultural history, museum studies, and the visual arts. Ostrava increasingly combined industrial heritage, contemporary culture, regional identity, university research, and post-industrial transformation, while Plzeň connected archaeological, historical, artistic, and cultural-policy work with a broader regional cultural infrastructure. Regional museums, galleries, archives, libraries, and NPÚ workplaces contributed highly localised knowledge unavailable to institutions in the capital. Czech cultural research by 2025 was therefore territorially uneven but genuinely polycentric, with regional institutions functioning not simply as provincial distributors of knowledge produced in Prague but as producers of specialised knowledge in their own right.

The Ministry of Culture occupied an unusually important position within this research landscape because it was not merely a cultural-policy authority or funding body. By the middle of the 2020s, a substantial network of research organisations operated within its sphere, and

in the evaluation relating to 2025 the Ministry assessed nineteen such organisations. These institutions included large memory organisations as well as specialised bodies dealing with museums, heritage, libraries, audiovisual culture, performing arts, technical history, regional art, and other domains. Their research was supported partly through institutional funding for long-term conceptual development and partly through competitive programmes and external grants. This created an institutional configuration in which the Ministry of Culture itself became one of the important public providers of research support alongside bodies such as the Czech Science Foundation and other parts of the national research system. The establishment of the National Institute for Culture in 2025 through the merger of the Arts and Theatre Institute and the National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture was especially indicative of this development. It brought together theatre research, documentation, cultural-policy analysis, statistics, information services, cultural participation, and expertise concerning the functioning of cultural organisations within a new research organisation. The Ministry's sphere therefore contained not only the organisations responsible for protecting or exhibiting cultural resources but also an increasingly explicit infrastructure for analysing the cultural sector itself.

The Czech Academy of Sciences formed the second major institutional pillar and gave the cultural and humanities system a different kind of continuity. Its Institute of Art History carried out research in the history and theory of visual art, architecture, aesthetics, and musicology while maintaining extensive documentation, photographic collections, libraries, bibliographies, and long-term projects concerning the artistic heritage of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and Prague. The Institute of Ethnology combined historical ethnographic and ethnomusicological traditions with research into memory, migration, religion, oral culture, landscapes, identity, and contemporary heritage processes. Archaeological institutes in Prague and Brno provided another bridge between humanities scholarship, field research, scientific analysis, heritage protection, and long-term archaeological infrastructures. Other Academy institutes contributed through history, literature, language, philosophy, musicology, social sciences, and digital humanities, making the study of culture inherently interdisciplinary at institutional level. One of the particular strengths of the Academy model was its capacity to sustain long-duration research that could be difficult to organise exclusively through university teaching structures or short competitive projects. Inventories, critical editions, specialist databases, photographic archives, documentary corpora, and systematic historical research often required precisely this institutional continuity. The Academy consequently preserved the importance of basic humanities research within a cultural system increasingly attentive to practical applications and public outputs.

Universities performed a complementary function by combining research with the reproduction of professional and scholarly communities. Charles University, Masaryk University, Palacký University, the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague, the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts, and numerous regional universities provided different combinations of art history, archaeology, ethnology, aesthetics, cultural studies, museology, architecture, design, theatre, film, music, heritage studies, and cultural management. Their importance lay not only in degree programmes but in their capacity to connect research projects with doctoral training, international mobility, conferences, exhibitions, fieldwork, and collaboration with cultural organisations. Departments increasingly functioned through specialised research centres rather than as homogeneous disciplinary units, allowing medieval visual culture, early modern studies, modern art theory, digital humanities, or heritage research to acquire distinct intellectual

profiles. Masaryk University's Department of Art History, for example, organised research through centres concerned with medieval visual cultures, early modern studies, and modern art and theory while maintaining close cooperation with galleries and museums in Czechia and neighbouring countries. Students were therefore introduced to institutional research environments long before completing academic careers of their own. The university system also ensured methodological renewal because successive generations encountered international historiography, new theoretical debates, digital tools, interdisciplinary approaches, and changing understandings of culture. By 2025, universities and research institutes were not competing institutional worlds but overlapping elements of a national scholarly ecology.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the Czech system was the unusually strong research role of memory institutions. The National Museum explicitly operated as an organisation conducting basic research, applied research, and experimental development, and its statutory functions connected collection building directly with scientific investigation and public dissemination. In 2025 alone, it pursued dozens of research projects and a wide range of long-term research areas across natural sciences, history, museology, ethnography, music, non-European cultures, bibliography, and collection protection. The National Gallery Prague similarly defined scientific research as part of its statutory mission and maintained a dedicated research department, scientific council, library, archive, publishing operation, conservation expertise, and a structured programme of long-term research across its collections. Research in such institutions did not occur separately from everyday museum work but was embedded in acquisition, attribution, provenance investigation, conservation, restoration, technical analysis, cataloguing, exhibition preparation, and publishing. This relationship produced a form of scholarship especially attentive to objects and collections as primary evidence. It also meant that public exhibitions could serve as major research outputs rather than simply simplified versions of knowledge produced elsewhere. The Czech cultural research system was therefore strongly collection-based, and this material foundation distinguished it from models in which humanities research is concentrated more narrowly within universities.

Cultural heritage constituted perhaps the clearest reason why the system cannot be understood through cultural studies alone. By 2025, heritage possessed its own legislation, institutions, specialist professions, research programmes, international conventions, information systems, conservation sciences, educational practices, and forms of public administration. The National Heritage Institute was one of the largest and most influential professional organisations in this sphere, combining expert monument care with extensive documentation, research, methodological work, public education, and management of a major portfolio of state heritage properties. Archaeologists, architects, art historians, historians, conservators, restorers, materials scientists, landscape specialists, archivists, geographers, information specialists, and legal experts all contributed to the protection and interpretation of heritage. The field encompassed individual monuments, historic towns, cultural landscapes, archaeological sites, industrial heritage, collections, traditional skills, living cultural practices, and increasingly digital heritage. Such breadth made heritage structurally interdisciplinary while retaining a specific organising principle: the identification, understanding, transmission, and responsible transformation of inherited cultural value. It therefore possessed intellectual questions different from those of cultural sociology or general cultural analysis, even when the fields overlapped. By 2025, cultural heritage had become an

autonomous research and professional domain within the Czech knowledge system rather than an administrative subdivision of the broader category of culture.

The Czech heritage model was particularly notable for the persistence of a nationwide professional infrastructure. The National Heritage Institute maintained territorial workplaces capable of combining local knowledge with national methodology, while specialist centres addressed particular forms of heritage and conservation. This structure allowed a Gothic church in a small municipality, an industrial complex in Ostrava, a baroque landscape in Moravia, and a UNESCO-listed historic centre to be approached within a common professional framework without assuming that their conservation problems were identical. Documentation accumulated over generations gave contemporary specialists access to historical photographs, restoration records, architectural surveys, inventories, archaeological findings, and earlier conservation decisions. Digital systems such as the *Památkový katalog* increasingly integrated these resources with spatial and administrative information. At the same time, the management of castles, châteaux, gardens, and other state-owned monuments provided a direct connection between heritage research and practical decisions concerning maintenance, restoration, interpretation, tourism, and public access. The resulting organisation combined some functions that elsewhere are dispersed among separate government agencies, research institutions, and property-management bodies. This breadth created administrative complexity but also gave Czech heritage conservation an unusually deep institutional memory.

Applied research became a second defining characteristic of the heritage system. Successive NAKI programmes transformed cultural and heritage research into an explicit component of national research policy rather than leaving it dependent solely upon general humanities funding. NAKI III, covering 2023–2030, confirmed that this approach had become permanent enough to survive beyond individual political cycles. The programme encouraged outputs capable of practical application, including certified methodologies, databases, specialised maps, conservation procedures, digital tools, exhibitions, heritage-management systems, and technological solutions. Such expectations favoured collaborations between disciplines that might otherwise have had little institutional contact. An art historian could work with a chemist analysing pigments, an archaeologist with a geoinformatics specialist, a museum curator with a software developer, or a conservator with a materials scientist. This did not eliminate the need for basic research, because successful applied heritage work depends upon reliable historical and scientific knowledge. It did, however, create an institutional bridge through which humanities research could demonstrate practical consequences without being reduced to immediate commercial utility.

The growing importance of conservation science was one result of this convergence. The examination of artworks, archaeological materials, historic buildings, manuscripts, textiles, glass, metals, and other cultural objects increasingly incorporated microscopy, spectroscopy, imaging, chemical analysis, dendrochronology, radiographic techniques, environmental monitoring, and other scientific methods. National Gallery Prague, for example, explicitly included comprehensive analysis of artistic materials among its long-term research fields, demonstrating the extent to which technical investigation had become normal within art-historical and conservation practice. Scientific analysis could reveal underdrawings, later interventions, material degradation, workshop procedures, or the physical histories of objects that written documentation alone could not reconstruct. Heritage buildings likewise required knowledge concerning structural behaviour, moisture, materials, environmental conditions,

and previous repairs. Such methods changed the relationship between the humanities and natural sciences because objects of cultural value became sources of both historical and material evidence. The strongest Czech projects increasingly treated these forms of evidence as complementary rather than competing. The resulting interdisciplinary culture was one of the clearest indicators that heritage research had moved beyond a purely descriptive model by 2025.

Digital infrastructures formed another major characteristic of the system. What had begun in the 1990s and 2000s as a series of digitisation initiatives had developed by 2025 into interconnected environments involving digital libraries, museum collections, heritage registers, archaeological information, film materials, bibliographical resources, photographic archives, and research databases. Manuscriptorium, Kramerius, eSbírky, *Památkový katalog*, institutional repositories, specialised collection databases, and audiovisual platforms represented different parts of this landscape. The significance of these systems lay not merely in the number of objects scanned or records placed online. They changed the spatial organisation of knowledge by allowing researchers in Brno, London, Warsaw, Vienna, or elsewhere to identify and consult Czech cultural resources without beginning every investigation through physical travel. They also created possibilities for computational comparison, large-scale metadata analysis, digital mapping, virtual reconstruction, and new forms of public interpretation. At the same time, they made long-term preservation, interoperability, rights management, data quality, cybersecurity, and technological obsolescence permanent institutional concerns. Digitalisation had therefore become an infrastructure of research rather than a supplementary communication service.

The development of digital humanities reinforced this change inside the academic sector. Text corpora, geographic information systems, network analysis, digital editions, spatial archaeology, image databases, and computational methods increasingly complemented conventional archival and interpretative work. Czech humanities institutions did not abandon close reading, connoisseurship, field observation, source criticism, or archival scholarship, nor would digital methods have made sense without those traditions. Instead, the strongest projects used computational techniques to enlarge the scale at which questions could be asked. Landscape history could incorporate spatial datasets; oral traditions could be mapped across regions; art-historical documentation could be connected through structured metadata; and large textual or bibliographical corpora could reveal patterns difficult to identify manually. By 2025, even institutes with long documentary traditions were explicitly recruiting digital-humanities expertise and designing transdisciplinary projects around complex historical datasets. This development demonstrated that technological modernisation had begun to affect not only access to research materials but also the epistemology of cultural research itself. The digital transformation of Czech humanities was therefore entering a stage of methodological rather than merely infrastructural significance.

Art history retained a particularly strong position within this broader cultural research system. The field was institutionally supported by the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, several major university departments, the National Gallery Prague, regional galleries, museums, archives, and heritage organisations. Its research objects extended from medieval and early modern art to modernism, architecture, photography, design, contemporary art, collection history, patronage, and the institutional history of artistic production. Long-established methods of archival research, formal and stylistic analysis, iconography, architectural history, attribution, and documentary inventory remained

important, but they increasingly interacted with material analysis, visual culture, social history, gender studies, memory studies, transnational history, and digital methods. Major collecting institutions contributed directly to art-historical research through catalogues, exhibitions, technical analysis, provenance studies, archives, and scholarly periodicals. This produced a field in which museum scholarship and university scholarship were unusually closely intertwined. Czech art history by 2025 was therefore neither a traditional antiquarian discipline nor a wholesale adoption of internationally fashionable theory, but a plural field in which deep source expertise coexisted with methodological diversification.

Its increasingly international character was visible in both institutional partnerships and publication practices. The Institute of Art History belonged to the international network of research institutes in art history, while universities and galleries cooperated regularly with institutions in Austria, Germany, Poland, Slovakia, France, Italy, Britain, and beyond. The National Gallery's scientific council itself included scholars and museum professionals from several countries, reflecting an expectation that major institutional research should be judged and discussed within an international professional community. Research exhibitions frequently involved international loans and comparative narratives, requiring cooperation in conservation, insurance, documentation, archival investigation, and publication. Scholarly periodicals increasingly published in English or provided substantial English-language content, even while Czech remained essential for domestic intellectual continuity. German retained particular importance for the history of the Bohemian lands and Central European art, while Slovak and Polish scholarship remained highly relevant to regional comparison. This multilingual environment prevented internationalisation from becoming synonymous with monolingual Anglicisation. Czech art research thus became internationally legible while retaining the linguistic competence required by its historically multilingual subject matter.

The broader study of culture was structurally different because Czechia did not develop one overwhelmingly dominant institutional discipline equivalent to British cultural studies. Research questions concerning culture remained distributed across ethnology, anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy, aesthetics, literary studies, media studies, theatre studies, film studies, musicology, religious studies, memory studies, and cultural-policy research. This dispersion could sometimes make the field appear less institutionally coherent than art history or heritage conservation. Yet it also encouraged interdisciplinarity because problems such as national identity, cultural memory, migration, popular culture, religion, media, everyday life, creative labour, or cultural participation rarely belonged exclusively to one department. The creation of the National Institute for Culture in 2025 added an important institutional centre for cultural-policy, statistical, theatre, arts, and sectoral research without converting this plural research space into a single discipline. Czech cultural research was therefore best understood as an interacting constellation rather than a unified school. Its strength lay precisely in its ability to move between historical interpretation, sociological analysis, artistic practice, institutional data, and policy research according to the nature of the problem being studied.

Ethnology and cultural anthropology illustrated this movement particularly well. Older Czech ethnographic traditions had generated rich archives of folk song, oral narratives, customs, material culture, craft, ritual, and regional life, but contemporary research increasingly placed such materials within questions of memory, identity, migration, religion, political history, landscape transformation, and cultural change. Researchers were less inclined to treat ‘folk culture’ as an isolated remnant of a disappearing rural world and more likely to investigate how traditions were continually reinterpreted by contemporary communities. Heritage itself

became an object of critical analysis, raising questions about who defines what deserves preservation, how communities use the past, and how heritage categories interact with politics, tourism, identity, and social inequality. By the mid-2020s, work within the Institute of Ethnology and universities increasingly reflected these critical heritage approaches alongside more established ethnological and ethnomusicological traditions. This shift did not make archival folklore collections obsolete; rather, it allowed them to be studied through new questions and digital methods. The Czech ethnological system therefore combined exceptionally deep documentary resources with a growing interest in the social processes through which culture becomes heritage.

Museology provided another bridge among cultural theory, research, professional practice, and public communication. Czech and Moravian scholarship possessed a long tradition of theoretical reflection on museums, especially associated with Brno, where museological thinking had acquired international influence during the 20th century. By 2025, museums themselves operated within a much more demanding professional environment involving collection management, provenance, conservation, digitisation, exhibition design, education, accessibility, visitor research, ethics, restitution, security, and community relationships. The museum could no longer be described adequately as a building containing objects selected by experts for public inspection. It had become a complex research and communication institution whose legitimacy depended partly upon how collections were documented, interpreted, contextualised, and made accessible. Digital platforms increased the potential audience while also exposing gaps in documentation and metadata that had previously remained largely internal institutional matters. Debates concerning colonial collections, contested ownership, minority representation, Holocaust-era provenance, and the social responsibilities of museums further enlarged the ethical dimension of professional work. Czech museology by 2025 therefore operated at the intersection of collection science, cultural interpretation, institutional management, heritage ethics, and public participation.

Libraries and archives constituted another essential but sometimes less visible research infrastructure. The National Library, Moravian Library, Academy libraries, university collections, specialist museum libraries, archives, and regional institutions preserved vast textual and documentary resources without which the history of Czech culture could not be reconstructed. Their role changed profoundly as catalogues, digitised books, manuscripts, newspapers, photographs, metadata, and finding aids became remotely searchable. Yet the digital transformation did not reduce the value of physical collections; in many cases it increased scholarly demand by making previously obscure materials discoverable. Librarians and archivists consequently became partners in research design rather than simply custodians who provided requested items. Questions of digital preservation, copyright, born-digital archives, metadata standards, and long-term accessibility required highly specialised knowledge. The documentary infrastructure of cultural research thus became increasingly technical even while its fundamental purpose remained historical continuity. Czech cultural scholarship by 2025 depended upon this largely invisible layer of professional information work as much as upon more visible universities and museums.

Audiovisual heritage further widened the concept of the research archive. The National Film Archive combined preservation of physical film materials with research, restoration, digitisation, publication, education, and renewed circulation of Czech cinema. Digital restoration required collaboration among film historians, archivists, technicians, laboratories, sound specialists, cinematographers, and rights holders, making it one of the clearest

interdisciplinary forms of contemporary heritage work. Film archives also had to address the historical transition from analogue to digital production, which transformed both preservation technologies and the nature of the object being preserved. Similar challenges affected sound archives, photography, television materials, theatre documentation, and other forms of media culture. These materials became increasingly important to 20th- and 21st-century cultural history because they documented not merely artistic production but everyday life, political communication, popular culture, and social memory. The research system therefore expanded beyond traditional manuscript and object collections towards a much broader media ecology. By 2025, audiovisual preservation was firmly established as part of cultural heritage rather than a subsidiary technical service to the entertainment industries.

The international embeddedness of the Czech system was another defining feature. Czech cultural and heritage institutions participated in European research programmes, Creative Europe, international museum and archival networks, UNESCO mechanisms, bilateral projects, professional associations, Erasmus mobility, and transnational exhibitions and conferences. The distinction between ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ research had consequently become less meaningful in many areas. A study of Gothic sculpture in Bohemia might require comparison with Austria and Germany, research on industrial heritage might involve Polish or Slovak regions, and the history of migration or minority cultures could rarely be confined within current Czech borders. Multinational UNESCO nominations concerning glassmaking, indigo printing, timber rafting, falconry, puppetry, or historic spa towns made this transnational logic visible even in public heritage policy. Czech institutions increasingly contributed expertise to such networks rather than participating simply as recipients of Western European models. Internationalisation had therefore moved from the earlier logic of reintegration after isolation towards a more reciprocal exchange of research, methods, data, exhibitions, and professional experience.

UNESCO recognition illustrated both the visibility and the changing intellectual character of Czech heritage. By 2025, Czechia possessed internationally recognised historic towns, monumental architecture, cultural landscapes, industrial and production landscapes, spa heritage, and a growing range of intangible cultural practices. The inscription of amateur theatre acting in 2025 was particularly revealing because the recognised heritage was not an ancient monument or unique masterpiece but a widespread community practice sustained through voluntary participation, local organisations, education, and intergenerational transmission. Such recognition demonstrated that cultural value was increasingly understood through social processes as well as exceptional objects. Multinational nominations similarly challenged purely national interpretations by showing that important traditions developed through historical regions and cultural networks extending across modern borders. UNESCO processes also demanded extensive research, inventories, documentation, management planning, and cooperation between communities and professionals. International heritage recognition was therefore not simply ceremonial prestige but a mechanism capable of reshaping domestic research and safeguarding practices.

Public engagement formed an increasingly important part of this mature system. Museums, galleries, heritage sites, libraries, archives, research institutes, and universities devoted greater attention to educational programmes, public lectures, digital communication, family activities, school partnerships, accessible interpretation, and programmes for audiences with different needs. The heritage-education movement demonstrated especially clearly that preservation ultimately depends upon social understanding rather than professional

regulation alone. Participatory approaches encouraged institutions to consider communities as holders of memory and cultural knowledge rather than merely audiences for expert interpretation. At the same time, the Czech model did not abandon professional authority in favour of unrestricted public preference. Conservation decisions, attribution, archaeological interpretation, collection management, and historical analysis continued to require specialist expertise and evidential discipline. The more significant change was the expectation that expert knowledge should be communicated, debated, and connected with public experience. By 2025, public engagement had become part of the research mission of many cultural institutions rather than an activity delegated exclusively to marketing departments.

Cultural-policy research itself had become considerably more sophisticated by this stage. The development of cultural and creative industries required data on employment, enterprises, regional distribution, economic contribution, audience behaviour, artistic labour, infrastructure, and institutional financing. The former Arts Institute and NIPOS had accumulated complementary forms of expertise in cultural-policy analysis, sectoral mapping, statistics, theatre documentation, participation, and advisory work before being merged into the National Institute for Culture in 2025. This change reflected a broader policy shift towards evidence-informed cultural governance. The Ministry of Culture increasingly required analytical capacity not only to distribute subsidies but also to understand the effects of its programmes, the conditions of creative work, regional inequalities, digitisation, and the interaction of culture with education, business, health, tourism, and social development. The National Cultural Policy 2021–2025 had already articulated culture and creativity as an intersectoral field rather than an isolated administrative sector. Research was consequently becoming part of the machinery through which cultural policy itself was formulated and evaluated. Czech cultural studies in the broadest sense therefore acquired a new applied-policy dimension alongside its traditional humanities and social-science forms.

This intersectoral understanding also changed the relationship between culture and innovation. By 2025, innovation in the Czech cultural system could refer to conservation technologies, digital platforms, metadata systems, new forms of museum interpretation, creative-industries cooperation, regional cultural centres, adaptive reuse, or new models of artistic support. Cultural innovation was not defined solely by the creation of new artistic forms, nor was it synonymous with technological novelty. In heritage, the most valuable innovation might be a diagnostic method that allowed intervention to be minimised or a digital model capable of documenting an object before restoration. In museums, innovation could consist of linking dispersed collection data or creating forms of interpretation accessible to visitors with different disabilities. In cultural policy, it could involve mechanisms connecting designers and creative professionals with businesses outside the cultural sector. The system had therefore acquired a relatively sophisticated understanding of innovation as the application of new knowledge to improve preservation, access, creation, participation, and institutional resilience. This interpretation was especially compatible with the Czech tradition of combining technical expertise with historically grounded cultural scholarship.

The experience of successive crises made resilience another defining characteristic of the system. COVID-19 revealed the vulnerability of cultural labour, independent production, audience-dependent institutions, and organisations without stable public budgets. The recovery period accelerated digital services, sectoral advocacy, new funding instruments, and the recognition of cultural and creative industries as an interconnected labour ecosystem. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine subsequently demonstrated the importance of heritage

emergency response, cultural solidarity, support for displaced artists and researchers, and protection against the deliberate destruction of cultural memory. Energy pressures and climate-related risks introduced further questions concerning the environmental sustainability of museums, theatres, historic buildings, storage facilities, and cultural tourism. These experiences changed the meaning of institutional quality because the capacity to preserve collections or produce performances under normal conditions was no longer sufficient. Institutions increasingly needed contingency planning, digital redundancy, diversified funding, international partnerships, and the ability to adapt rapidly without losing professional standards. Cultural resilience had thus become part of research and policy thinking by 2025 rather than merely a temporary response to exceptional events.

The system's publication culture reflected its combination of national depth and international ambition. Czech remained indispensable because cultural institutions had a responsibility to communicate research concerning national and regional heritage to domestic professional and public audiences. At the same time, English-language publication became increasingly necessary for international scholarly visibility, project cooperation, and comparative research. The *Bulletin of the National Gallery Prague*, for example, positioned collection research, restoration findings, technical analyses, and archival discoveries within a wider international scholarly context. Academy institutes similarly published monographs, journals, editions, and conference volumes intended for both Czech and foreign audiences. German, Slovak, and Polish remained especially relevant because of the linguistic and historical structure of Central European cultural research. Digital open-access publication further changed circulation by making institutional research outputs more accessible beyond specialist libraries. The resulting publication environment was therefore multilingual and increasingly hybrid, connecting scholarly books and journals with databases, online catalogues, digital editions, exhibitions, methodological documents, and public-facing resources.

The Czech system nevertheless remained marked by significant asymmetries. Prague possessed a concentration of institutions, collections, researchers, foreign visitors, funding opportunities, and professional networks that no other Czech city could match. Large national organisations could maintain specialist research departments, laboratories, digital teams, grant administration, and international offices that smaller regional museums or independent cultural organisations could not afford. Competitive project funding often rewarded institutions already possessing the staff required to prepare and administer complex proposals, potentially reinforcing existing differences in capacity. Digitalisation itself could reproduce inequality because creating a digital image was far easier than maintaining interoperable databases, secure storage, professional metadata, and long-term preservation systems. Cultural and heritage organisations also faced recurrent difficulties in attracting and retaining specialists when remuneration lagged behind sectors requiring comparable technical or managerial skills. The existence of a mature research ecology therefore did not mean that resources were evenly distributed across it. One of the central challenges after 2025 would be to prevent institutional excellence at the strongest centres from coexisting with progressive capacity loss elsewhere.

Funding represented another structural tension. The Czech model successfully combined institutional public support, competitive national research grants, European funding, regional and municipal resources, earned income, sponsorship, and project-based financing. Such diversity reduced dependence upon any single source and allowed major investments that would have been impossible through ordinary cultural budgets alone. Yet it also increased

administrative complexity and encouraged institutions to devote substantial professional capacity to grant management and reporting. Project funding was particularly well suited to time-limited research or infrastructure development but much less capable of sustaining routine collection care, preventive conservation, staff development, or long-term maintenance. Heritage institutions faced the further problem that successful restoration often created continuing operating obligations after capital funding had ended. Independent arts organisations and individual professionals remained more exposed to unstable income than large public institutions. The strength of the Czech cultural system therefore rested upon extensive public responsibility, but debates concerning the scale, distribution, and predictability of that responsibility remained unresolved.

A further characteristic was the coexistence of long institutional memory with rapid methodological change. Some Czech museums, libraries, university departments, and research traditions had histories extending for more than a century, and their archives contained evidence accumulated by generations of specialists. This continuity gave contemporary researchers a depth of documentation particularly valuable in art history, ethnology, archaeology, museology, architecture, and heritage conservation. Yet precisely these long-established institutions increasingly adopted digital humanities, scientific imaging, transnational history, critical heritage approaches, audience research, and interdisciplinary project structures. The contemporary Czech system was therefore neither conservative in the simple sense of defending inherited methods nor revolutionary in the sense of discarding them. Its stronger institutions tended instead to add new analytical layers to existing forms of scholarship. Digital databases were constructed from historical inventories, technical analysis supplemented connoisseurship, and community-based heritage approaches were developed alongside archival ethnology. This ability to innovate through accumulated knowledge rather than against it was one of the more distinctive qualities of Czech cultural research by 2025.

What finally emerges is a system whose coherence does not depend upon one dominant discipline or one central intellectual doctrine. Cultural research in Czechia is distributed across several traditions, heritage is organised through its own extensive professional and scientific infrastructure, and art studies combine academic, museum, archival, technical, and curatorial forms of knowledge. These spheres overlap repeatedly but retain different questions, methods, institutions, and professional responsibilities. Their unity lies instead in a common ecology of collections, archives, sites, documentation, public institutions, universities, research programmes, digital infrastructures, international networks, and increasingly participatory forms of knowledge production. The system is therefore best described as institutionally plural but functionally interconnected. This structure provides resilience because the loss or weakness of one centre does not eliminate the entire field, while cooperation allows specialist resources to circulate between organisations. It also explains why Czech cultural scholarship often feels more closely connected to preservation and public institutions than cultural research in academic systems organised predominantly around university departments. By 2025, this interdependence had become not a transitional arrangement inherited from Czechoslovakia but a mature characteristic of the Czech cultural research model.

In summary, the development between 1993 and 2025 produced a Czech cultural, heritage, and art research system that can be characterised as historically grounded, polycentric, institutionally hybrid, research-intensive, increasingly interdisciplinary, digitally connected, internationally embedded, and strongly oriented towards public cultural responsibility. Its

most distinctive institutional feature is the coexistence of universities and Academy institutes with a large group of museums, galleries, libraries, archives, heritage bodies, audiovisual institutions, and cultural-policy organisations that themselves function as research producers. Cultural heritage forms an autonomous pillar within this system because it possesses its own legislation, professions, methodologies, infrastructures, research programmes, and international obligations, while remaining deeply connected with art history, archaeology, ethnology, architecture, conservation science, and digital technologies. Art studies retain particularly strong collection- and source-based traditions but have become more methodologically plural and internationally visible. Cultural research more broadly remains deliberately dispersed across several humanities and social-science fields, a structure that encourages intellectual cross-fertilisation rather than a single dominant Czech school of cultural studies. Programmes such as NAKI and NAKI III have institutionalised applied cultural research, while long-term funding of research organisations protects the continuity needed for collections, inventories, archives, databases, and specialist expertise. Digitalisation has changed both access to cultural resources and the methods through which they are studied, although it has also created substantial technological and financial obligations. International networks and UNESCO recognition have made Czech culture increasingly visible while encouraging transnational interpretations of heritage that extend beyond narrowly national narratives. Participation, education, resilience, and evidence-informed cultural policy have meanwhile broadened the public mission of research institutions. The principal weaknesses remain geographical and institutional inequality, unstable conditions for parts of the cultural workforce, heavy administrative demands, and the difficulty of financing long-term maintenance alongside new projects. Nevertheless, by 2025 Czechia had developed not merely a collection of successful cultural institutions, but a recognisable national model in which research, preservation, artistic interpretation, technological innovation, public access, and international cooperation reinforce one another across an unusually dense cultural landscape.

Part Two

Cultural Studies and the Study of Culture in Contemporary Czechia

General Characteristics of Cultural Studies and Cultural Research after 1993

The development of cultural studies in the Czech Republic after 1993 cannot be reconstructed convincingly by looking for a single discipline bearing the English name *Cultural Studies*. Czech research into culture evolved instead through a constellation of disciplines, institutions, intellectual traditions, and applied research environments that approached culture from different directions. Some of these traditions were much older than the independent Czech Republic, while others emerged directly from the intellectual opening that followed 1989. Ethnology, cultural anthropology, sociology, aesthetics, philosophy, history, literary studies, media studies, theatre and film studies, and the study of cultural policy all claimed parts of the cultural field without any one of them acquiring an exclusive right to define it. For a period, *kulturologie* offered an unusually explicit attempt to create an interdisciplinary science of culture within Charles University, but its institutional history also demonstrated the difficulty of stabilising such a broad synthesis as an autonomous academic discipline. The resulting Czech configuration differed both from the classical anthropological study of culture and from the British tradition associated with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. It was more institutionally dispersed, more strongly connected with historical scholarship, and in several areas more closely tied to museums, public administration, and cultural institutions. The most accurate way to describe Czech cultural research after 1993 is therefore as a plural intellectual field rather than a single school with a universally accepted canon or methodology.

This plurality was itself a consequence of the political and intellectual circumstances in which post-communist cultural research developed. The Velvet Revolution had removed the ideological restrictions that had constrained parts of sociology, anthropology, philosophy, media research, cultural history, and the interpretation of contemporary artistic life. Scholars could again engage directly with intellectual traditions that had been excluded, selectively translated, ideologically criticised, or separated from ordinary academic circulation during the period of normalisation. Structuralism could be reconsidered through its Czech as well as international histories, while anthropology, semiotics, sociology of culture, Western Marxism, post-structuralism, feminism, memory studies, media theory, and other approaches entered teaching and research with much greater freedom. This intellectual opening did not create a vacuum in which foreign theories simply replaced domestic traditions. Czech scholarship possessed its own powerful lineages in aesthetics, structuralism, ethnography, folklore studies, sociology, art history, and philosophy, and these traditions continued to shape the questions scholars considered significant. What changed after 1989 was the possibility of comparing and combining them without the same political requirement to organise knowledge according to a prescribed ideological framework. By 1993, cultural research was therefore entering the new republic with an unusually dense inheritance and an equally strong appetite

for theoretical renewal. The characteristic post-1993 situation was one of simultaneous recovery, importation, reinterpretation, and methodological experimentation.

An especially important part of this history was the Czech project of *kulturologie*, which should not be translated mechanically as though it were identical with Anglo-American Cultural Studies. Its intellectual ambition was closer to the construction of a comprehensive and interdisciplinary science of culture capable of integrating knowledge about human beings, society, symbolic systems, adaptation, and cultural development. The project drew substantially upon cultural and social anthropology and explicitly recognised the importance of Edward B. Tylor's anthropological conception of culture and Leslie White's use of the term *culturology*. It nevertheless developed in a specifically Czech intellectual environment shaped by philosophy, sociology, psychology, ecology, history, and the human sciences more broadly. The aspiration to construct such an interdisciplinary field at Charles University had roots extending back before the period of normalisation, but the political conditions for its renewed development emerged only after 1989. The study programme in culturology was formally accredited in 1991, shortly before the creation of the independent Czech Republic. Its founders understood this programme as a response both to the increasing differentiation of academic knowledge and to the need for a holistic perspective capable of reconnecting specialised studies of humanity and culture. Czech *kulturologie* thus represented one of the clearest institutional attempts in post-communist Central Europe to turn culture itself, rather than one particular cultural form, into the organising centre of a university discipline.

The conceptual breadth of this project explains both its originality and its structural difficulty. Culture could be treated as a symbolic system, a social inheritance, a mechanism of adaptation, an environment of learned behaviour, a field of values, a historically transmitted repertoire, or a domain of creative production. Each of these approaches brought with it different assumptions about evidence and method. Anthropological approaches privileged comparative research, ethnography, and the study of cultural difference, whereas sociology concentrated more readily upon institutions, stratification, lifestyles, participation, and social reproduction. Philosophy and aesthetics examined meaning, value, creativity, and the relationship between human beings and symbolic forms, while psychology introduced questions concerning imagination, identity, perception, and cultural learning. Historical disciplines insisted upon temporal specificity and documentary evidence, and ecological approaches explored interactions among culture, human communities, and environments. A comprehensive science of culture therefore had to operate across conceptual boundaries that were themselves continuously changing. The Czech culturological project treated this difficulty not simply as an obstacle but as evidence that culture required synthesis, although sustaining such synthesis institutionally proved considerably harder than defining it theoretically.

During the 1990s and 2000s, the Charles University environment became the most visible institutional home of this explicit culturological approach. Scholars associated with the field examined subjects ranging from cultural anthropology and human evolution to mass media, cultural diversity, environmental questions, imagination, bodily practices, and theories of culture. The intellectual profile was correspondingly broader than the research agenda usually associated with British Cultural Studies, whose classical development had concentrated particularly upon class, popular culture, ideology, media, representation, and power. Czech culturology often sought instead a more general theory of culture capable of bringing biological, psychological, social, and symbolic dimensions into the same analytical

framework. This difference matters because the term *cultural studies* can otherwise obscure the distinctive history of Czech attempts to conceptualise a general science of culture. Graduates moved into universities, research organisations, media, cultural institutions, and cultural management, indicating that the field combined theoretical ambitions with expectations of professional applicability. The journal *Culturologia*, established during the later phase of this institutional tradition, reflected the same breadth by publishing anthropology, cultural theory, historical studies, and research on contemporary cultural phenomena. The very range of the programme demonstrated, however, the continuing problem of how a field defined by synthesis could establish sufficiently clear institutional and methodological boundaries.

That problem became particularly visible at the beginning of the 2010s. Internal discussion concerning the future of culturology increasingly focused upon generational renewal, research performance, publication, grant activity, and the conditions required for continued accreditation. In 2013, the Academic Senate of the Faculty of Arts at Charles University approved the merger of the independent Department of Culturology with the Institute of Ethnology, and the separate department formally ceased to exist from 1 October of that year. An autonomous culturological unit initially continued within the enlarged ethnological structure, and its proponents presented the merger not as an abandonment of the study of culture but as an opportunity to rethink its disciplinary form. Contemporary commentary explicitly discussed the possibility of developing a revised conception closer to cultural studies while maintaining the anthropological orientation inherited from culturology. The episode is significant because institutional disappearance should not be confused with intellectual disappearance. Many questions that culturology had attempted to integrate continued to be researched within ethnology, anthropology, sociology, media studies, aesthetics, history, and other fields. The 2013 reorganisation therefore marked the end of one organisational experiment but also revealed a more general characteristic of Czech cultural research: the field could remain intellectually vigorous even when it ceased to possess a single department bearing its name.

Indeed, the subsequent development of Czech cultural research suggests that disciplinary dispersal was not necessarily a sign of weakness. Culture became increasingly difficult to confine within one academic framework precisely because it was being studied as language, memory, identity, representation, consumption, communication, heritage, everyday practice, artistic creation, institutional organisation, and economic activity. Each of these objects could demand a different combination of methods and theoretical traditions. Rather than converging upon one national school of cultural studies, Czech scholarship developed a network of partially overlapping research communities. Researchers could participate simultaneously in media studies, sociology, ethnology, memory studies, heritage research, or cultural-policy analysis while addressing problems that clearly belonged to the broader study of culture. Doctoral projects and grant-funded teams further weakened the assumption that the formal name of a department necessarily determined the intellectual field within which research operated. International cooperation reinforced this tendency because European research projects were often organised around problems rather than traditional Czech disciplinary boundaries. By the 2020s, the study of culture in Czechia was therefore more institutionally fragmented than the early culturological project had envisaged, but it was also more methodologically diverse and internationally connected.

Ethnology became one of the strongest continuing pillars of this distributed research environment. Czech ethnology inherited extensive traditions of ethnography, folkloristics, folk-song research, material culture, regional studies, and the documentation of social and ritual practices. After 1989, however, the field increasingly expanded beyond older conceptions of folk culture towards migration, ethnicity, memory, identity, urban life, minority relations, cultural change, and contemporary social practices. Fieldwork retained central importance, giving ethnologists a methodological relationship with lived culture that distinguished them from scholars working primarily with texts or institutional statistics. At Masaryk University, for example, ethnology continued to combine research into traditional Czech culture and Central and South-Eastern European cultural relations with field methods and professional cooperation with museums and heritage institutions. Contemporary curricula also incorporated social anthropology, qualitative-data analysis, UNESCO heritage questions, minority studies, life histories, and the study of contemporary subcultures. This evolution illustrates a wider transition from ethnography understood chiefly as documentation of inherited traditions towards ethnology as analysis of dynamic cultural processes. The field therefore became one of the principal spaces in which older Czech research traditions could interact productively with contemporary cultural theory.

Sociology provided a second major route into the study of culture, but its questions and evidence were different. Czech sociologists increasingly examined cultural participation, lifestyles, social stratification, regional infrastructure, cultural consumption, values, and the institutional conditions under which cultural activity developed. This approach was especially valuable because it challenged assumptions about culture based solely upon expert institutions or canonical artistic production. Representative surveys could ask what citizens themselves regarded as culture, how often they attended cultural institutions, which social characteristics influenced participation, and how patterns differed among regions. Research conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences demonstrated that cultural life could be analysed through the interaction of institutions, settlement structures, education, socioeconomic position, regional conditions, and public attitudes. Such work also strengthened the relationship between cultural research and public policy because findings could be relevant to municipalities, regions, ministries, and cultural organisations. Culture thus became an empirical social phenomenon measurable through participation and institutional distribution as well as a domain of meaning requiring interpretation. The Czech cultural research system consequently developed a productive tension between interpretative humanities approaches and the explanatory ambitions of empirical sociology.

Media studies formed another important component of the field and, significantly, developed institutionally at almost exactly the same moment as the independent Czech Republic. The Department of Media Studies at Charles University's Faculty of Social Sciences dates from 1993, when media studies became part of the newly established institutional structure devoted to communication and journalism. The Centre for Media Studies followed in the middle of the decade and developed research into the role of Czech mass media in broader social and international contexts. This timing was historically appropriate because the Czech media environment was itself undergoing extraordinary transformation through commercialisation, privatisation, changes in broadcasting, new newspapers and magazines, foreign ownership, advertising, and later digital communication. Researchers therefore encountered a cultural field in which the institutions producing public meaning were changing almost as quickly as the society they represented. Media studies combined historical work with

analysis of discourse, audiences, political communication, representation, popular culture, network media, intercultural communication, gender, and later game studies. The field also provided an important bridge between cultural interpretation and contemporary social-science methods. By the 2020s, media research had become one of the clearest Czech examples of cultural analysis operating successfully without being labelled formally as a single overarching discipline of Cultural Studies.

The expansion of media research also altered the range of cultural objects considered academically legitimate. Television, popular journalism, advertising, online communication, games, digital platforms, fan cultures, and other forms of mass-mediated experience could be studied alongside literature, theatre, museums, or recognised artistic traditions. This represented a broader cultural shift in which distinctions between elite culture, popular culture, media culture, and everyday culture became less useful as rigid institutional boundaries. Film studies likewise increasingly examined cinema as industry, medium, social institution, aesthetic form, and historical archive rather than merely as a sequence of canonical works. Research into audiences and reception complicated the assumption that meanings are produced solely by creators or cultural institutions. The proliferation of digital communication made the situation still more complex because ordinary users became producers, distributors, commentators, and archivists of cultural material. Czech researchers therefore participated in the international transition from the analysis of discrete media products towards the study of interconnected media environments. Such developments brought Czech cultural research closer to several concerns traditionally associated with Anglo-American cultural studies, especially representation, mediation, popular culture, and the politics of communication. Yet these themes entered through established Czech departments of communication, film, sociology, and related disciplines rather than through the institutional expansion of one national Cultural Studies programme.

Aesthetics supplied a different route into the contemporary analysis of culture. Czech aesthetics possessed an exceptionally deep intellectual history extending through university philosophy, formalism, structuralism, literary theory, and the Prague Linguistic Circle. After 1989, this tradition could interact much more freely with contemporary philosophy of art, analytic aesthetics, sociology of art, psychology, and theories of European culture. At Masaryk University, the contemporary programme in Aesthetics and Cultural Studies explicitly combines philosophical and historical approaches to art with the study of its social and cultural contexts. Students encounter the history of aesthetics and philosophy of art alongside European culture, psychology of art, contemporary aesthetic theory, and practical experience within cultural institutions. The programme's existence is revealing because it shows that the term *cultural studies* found institutional expression in Czech higher education through combinations with older disciplines rather than necessarily as their replacement. Aesthetics contributes questions concerning judgement, experience, artistic value, representation, and cultural meaning that cannot be reduced to the social-scientific description of institutions or audiences. The study of culture in Czechia therefore includes a philosophical dimension that remains especially important when analysing artistic and symbolic forms.

Historical research meanwhile ensured that Czech cultural studies retained an unusually strong temporal orientation. The political transformation after 1989 opened archives, restored previously marginalised subjects, and encouraged reinterpretation of the 19th and 20th centuries without the constraints imposed by the earlier ideological hierarchy. Cultural history became central to debates about nationalism, religion, the German-speaking population of the

Czech lands, Jewish culture, exile, the Holocaust, the communist period, dissent, everyday life, and the meaning of 1968 and 1989. The dissolution of Czechoslovakia added another layer because the recent past now belonged to two successor states whose national narratives could develop differently while remaining deeply interconnected. Historians increasingly examined cultural processes not simply as reflections of political events but as arenas in which identities and social meanings were created. Literary and artistic sources could be used alongside institutional documents, memoirs, oral histories, photographs, film, architecture, and material culture. This broadened source base brought cultural history closer to anthropology, memory studies, and visual studies. The Czech study of culture after 1993 consequently developed a pronounced historical sensitivity that distinguished it from approaches focused almost exclusively upon contemporary representation.

This historical orientation also shaped research into national and cultural identity, although the concept of identity itself became increasingly contested. The creation of an independent Czech Republic might have encouraged a simple narrative in which cultural scholarship sought to define a stable national character for the new state. In practice, serious research moved increasingly in the opposite direction by questioning the homogeneity of the national past. Czech culture emerged from scholarship as a historically layered Central European formation produced through Czech, German, Jewish, Slovak, Austrian, Romani, religious, regional, and transnational interactions. Ladislav Holý's analysis of Czech national identity during the post-communist transformation became one influential English-language contribution to understanding the symbolic structures through which political change was interpreted. David Sayer similarly demonstrated the value of approaching Czech history through discontinuities, cultural imaginings, and competing representations rather than through a smooth national narrative. Such work contributed to a broader intellectual environment in which identity was understood as historically produced and socially negotiated. The question for cultural research was increasingly not simply what Czech culture *was*, but who defined it, in which historical circumstances, and for what purposes.

Migration and minority research further expanded this critical understanding of culture. The post-1989 Czech Republic became more connected with international migration while simultaneously confronting long-standing questions concerning Roma communities, Slovak residents, German historical memory, Vietnamese migration, refugees, and other forms of cultural difference. Ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and media scholars approached these questions through different methods, but all had to reconsider older assumptions that equated culture straightforwardly with a territorially bounded national community. Concepts such as multiculturalism, ethnicity, integration, social boundaries, otherness, cultural translation, and transnational identity entered research more extensively. Fieldwork and life-history methods gave particular importance to the perspectives of individuals and communities whose experiences could not be reconstructed adequately from official institutions alone. Media research showed how minorities were represented publicly, while sociology examined patterns of inclusion, inequality, and social distance. Cultural analysis thereby became increasingly attentive to power as well as difference. This did not produce one Czech theory of multiculturalism, but it ensured that the study of culture became inseparable from debates about the changing composition of Czech society.

Cultural-policy research constituted another distinctive branch of the Czech field because it linked theoretical reflection directly with the organisation of cultural life. After 1989, the rapid transformation of ownership, funding, public administration, theatres, museums, libraries,

artistic organisations, and cultural industries created an urgent need for analysis that neither classical humanities scholarship nor administrative statistics could satisfy alone. Researchers examined relations between the state and culture, models of public support, decentralisation, regional cultural policy, institutional governance, cultural legislation, and later cultural and creative industries. A substantial comparative study prepared at Charles University during the 1990s considered European models of cultural policy and possible Czech approaches, illustrating the direct relevance of cultural research to governmental decision-making. The Institute of Sociology later investigated cultural infrastructure and policy at national and regional levels, while the Arts and Theatre Institute developed increasingly systematic cultural-policy expertise. Such work changed the object of cultural research because the mechanisms through which culture is financed, administered, and distributed became legitimate subjects of scholarly analysis. Cultural policy was no longer treated merely as an external political framework surrounding authentic cultural activity. It was recognised as one of the forces shaping which institutions survive, which forms of art receive support, and who can gain access to cultural resources.

An important consequence was the gradual empirical turn in parts of Czech cultural research. During the early transformation period, cultural debates often relied heavily upon normative arguments concerning artistic freedom, state responsibility, national tradition, or the proper role of markets. By the 2000s and 2010s, researchers increasingly sought systematic evidence concerning expenditure, institutional distribution, attendance, participation, employment, audiences, regional inequalities, and the organisation of cultural sectors. The collective monograph *Kultura v krajích České republiky* became an especially important example because it combined conceptual discussion, legal and policy analysis, institutional data, regional profiles, and representative survey research. Its contributors examined what citizens understood by culture, the determinants of participation, the distribution of cultural infrastructure, and the relationship between cultural life and territorial development. Such research demonstrated that the availability of culture cannot be inferred simply from the number of nationally prestigious institutions. Settlement patterns, transport, education, income, regional policies, and local organisational capacities all influence cultural participation. Quantitative evidence therefore became an important corrective to cultural narratives based exclusively upon major institutions in Prague. Czech cultural research was increasingly capable of moving between meaning and measurement rather than treating them as mutually exclusive approaches.

The regional dimension became correspondingly important. Czechia is a relatively small country, but its cultural geography is far from uniform, and historical patterns of urbanisation, industrialisation, religious life, linguistic diversity, and regional identity have created substantial differences among territories. Prague possesses a concentration of national institutions incomparable with any other Czech city, while Brno has developed its own powerful academic, artistic, and cultural infrastructure. Ostrava's cultural research has been strongly influenced by industrial and post-industrial transformation, whereas Moravian and Silesian regions preserve traditions and social histories that cannot be interpreted simply as regional versions of Prague culture. Smaller towns and rural regions possess distinctive networks of libraries, museums, festivals, amateur organisations, monuments, and local associations. Sociological research demonstrated that cultural infrastructure and participation should therefore be examined territorially rather than only through national averages. Ethnology likewise retained the ability to investigate highly local cultural practices

within wider European transformations. The regional perspective became one of the mechanisms through which Czech cultural studies resisted an excessively centralised narrative of national culture.

European integration after 2004 accelerated theoretical and methodological internationalisation across virtually all these fields. Participation in European projects exposed Czech researchers to comparative frameworks in which concepts developed within one national tradition had to be made intelligible to partners working elsewhere. Erasmus mobility and international doctoral study changed the intellectual formation of younger scholars, while European grant programmes encouraged multilingual teams and transnational research questions. The boundaries between Central European regional scholarship and wider international academic discourse consequently became more permeable. Czech scholars participated increasingly in debates concerning memory, nationalism, migration, media, cultural industries, heritage, urban culture, digital communication, and participation that had no exclusively national frame. At the same time, Central European historical experience gave Czech researchers perspectives that could complicate theories developed primarily from British, French, German, or North American cases. Post-socialist transformation, the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia, changing relations with Germany and Slovakia, and the reconfiguration of public cultural institutions supplied distinctive empirical material. Internationalisation therefore gradually became reciprocal rather than merely a process of importing Western theories. Czech cultural research entered European scholarship increasingly as a producer of relevant cases, concepts, and comparative knowledge.

This Europeanisation also clarified the relationship between cultural studies and cultural heritage, a distinction that is fundamental to the structure of the present book. Cultural researchers naturally study heritage because monuments, traditions, museums, rituals, commemorations, and collections are among the means through which societies construct and transmit meaning. They may ask why one past is commemorated rather than another, how communities use tradition, how tourism transforms historical places, or how heritage contributes to identity. These are questions about culture as a social and symbolic process. Heritage research and conservation, however, must additionally address the identification, documentation, physical survival, authenticity, restoration, legal protection, management, and transmission of inherited cultural resources. Those responsibilities require specialised professional systems extending beyond cultural theory into archaeology, conservation science, architecture, museology, materials analysis, law, and heritage administration. The two fields therefore overlap extensively but are not synonymous. Czech cultural research after 1993 increasingly recognised heritage as an important social phenomenon, while the heritage sector developed into an autonomous research and professional infrastructure of its own.

Methodological plurality became perhaps the most stable characteristic of the field. Ethnographic observation and interviews remained indispensable for anthropology and ethnology, while sociologists employed representative surveys, statistical analysis, and institutional data. Historians worked with archives and documentary criticism, and scholars of literature, film, and media analysed texts, images, narrative structures, discourse, and reception. Cultural-policy researchers combined legal documents, budgets, institutional analysis, interviews, and comparative policy frameworks. Oral history developed as an especially valuable means of studying 20th-century experience, memory, migration, work, political repression, and everyday life. Spatial and regional research introduced mapping and geographical analysis, while museum and heritage research drew increasingly upon object

histories and collection documentation. The coexistence of these methods meant that Czech cultural research was defined less by one technical procedure than by the nature of the questions it asked. Interdisciplinarity was therefore not simply a rhetorical commitment but an unavoidable response to the complexity of cultural phenomena.

The digital transformation of the 2010s and 2020s added another methodological layer. Digital archives, searchable newspapers, audiovisual repositories, online museum collections, large textual corpora, and geographical information systems changed the practical conditions under which cultural evidence could be located and compared. Researchers gained access to sources distributed across institutions without always beginning with prolonged physical archival reconnaissance. New research centres and projects also addressed digital culture itself, analysing online communication, platforms, participatory media, infrastructures, games, and the changing production of meaning. In 2022, the Culture and Communication Research Centre at Charles University's Faculty of Social Sciences was established within the Centre for Media Studies environment and explicitly framed culture and communication through meaning-generating processes, power relations, technologies, infrastructures, embodied practice, and interdisciplinary cooperation. Such an agenda illustrates how far Czech cultural research had moved from the early ambition to define culture through a single comprehensive science. The field had become comfortable with multiple, situated forms of knowledge and with collaboration extending beyond the boundaries of one academic discipline. Digitalisation thus transformed both the sources of cultural research and the concepts through which contemporary culture was understood.

Another notable development was the increasing proximity between research and public cultural institutions. Museums, libraries, theatres, archives, festivals, heritage organisations, and policy bodies did not merely supply data to academics but increasingly produced analysis themselves. Their staff conducted audience research, created databases, documented cultural practices, published specialist studies, and participated in national and European research projects. This institutional setting gave Czech cultural research a strongly applied dimension without requiring it to abandon theoretical inquiry. Questions concerning participation, access, cultural management, regional development, or museum communication could arise directly from institutional practice and then become subjects of systematic research. Conversely, academic findings could influence exhibition strategies, educational programmes, cultural policies, or the design of public funding. The border between cultural scholarship and cultural practice therefore became increasingly permeable. This process would later support the growth of what can broadly be described as public humanities, even where Czech institutions did not consistently use that English-language label.

Public communication also became more significant because democratic legitimacy required cultural expertise to justify itself outside specialist circles. After 1989, scholars no longer operated within an ideological system that formally guaranteed the cultural authority of certain institutions, but neither could they assume that the market alone would secure public recognition of humanities research. Museums and universities increasingly organised lectures, exhibitions, discussions, educational programmes, festivals, podcasts, digital resources, and public debates. Media scholars contributed to discussions of journalism, disinformation, media literacy, and political communication, while historians and memory researchers intervened in debates concerning anniversaries and contested pasts. Ethnologists collaborated with communities and heritage practitioners, and sociologists provided evidence

about cultural participation and regional inequalities. These activities gradually enlarged the meaning of research impact beyond publication within specialist academic journals. The Czech study of culture became more publicly visible precisely because many of its subjects—identity, media, memory, participation, heritage, and artistic freedom—were also objects of political and social dispute.

The COVID-19 crisis intensified this interaction between research, institutions, and policy. The sudden closure of theatres, museums, galleries, cinemas, music venues, and other cultural spaces made questions concerning cultural participation, creative labour, digital access, and institutional vulnerability immediately practical. Researchers and cultural-policy specialists documented economic losses, changing distribution models, the situation of self-employed artists, and the shift towards digital communication. The crisis demonstrated that cultural research could provide evidence required for emergency decision-making rather than merely retrospective interpretation. It also exposed the limitations of older statistical categories that did not always capture the complex employment structures of the creative sector. Independent artists and cultural workers became more visible as research subjects because institutional survival alone could no longer serve as an adequate measure of cultural resilience. This experience contributed to the broader conception of culture adopted in the National Cultural Policy for 2021–2025, which explicitly presented culture and creativity as an intersectoral field connected with society and the economy. Cultural-policy research thus moved still closer to the centre of Czech cultural studies during the early 2020s.

By the middle of the decade, institutional developments reflected this broader understanding. In 2025, the Arts and Theatre Institute and the National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture were merged to create the National Institute for Culture. The new organisation brought together bodies whose earlier activities had included theatre documentation, arts research, cultural-policy analysis, statistics, information services, amateur art, and professional support. The merger did not create a national department of Cultural Studies in the university sense, nor was that its purpose. It did, however, consolidate an important research and analytical infrastructure concerned with the functioning of culture as a social and institutional field. The Ministry of Culture evaluated the new institute as a research organisation and required a long-term research-development concept for the period beginning in 2025. This institutional step is revealing because it shows that cultural research had acquired a place not only within academic disciplines but within the permanent knowledge infrastructure of cultural governance. The Czech cultural system was increasingly expected to study itself through evidence, analysis, statistics, documentation, and sectoral expertise.

The contemporary field was therefore much broader than the culturological project from which part of its post-1989 history had begun. The attempt of the early 1990s to create a holistic science of culture assumed that disciplinary fragmentation might be overcome through conceptual synthesis. Thirty years later, Czech research had arrived at a different form of integration based more upon collaboration than disciplinary unification. Cultural questions were studied by teams whose members did not necessarily share the same theoretical genealogy, methods, or institutional identities. A project concerning cultural participation could combine sociology, statistics, policy analysis, and regional studies, while research on memory might bring together history, anthropology, media analysis, and museum studies. Digital culture could require communication theory, sociology, computer-assisted methods, and political analysis, whereas studies of cultural institutions might combine economics, public administration, and the humanities. Integration therefore occurred around problems

and research objects rather than under a single disciplinary label. The system had become less conceptually centralised but more capable of assembling specialised expertise.

This model possesses several important strengths. Its disciplinary diversity prevents the concept of culture from being reduced too easily to art, identity, media, or everyday behaviour alone. Strong historical traditions ensure that contemporary cultural processes can be placed within longer temporal contexts, while ethnographic and sociological methods provide access to lived experience and measurable patterns of participation. Media and communication research makes it possible to analyse the technologies through which contemporary meanings circulate, and cultural-policy research links scholarship with the institutional conditions of cultural production. Regional research limits the dominance of Prague-centred perspectives, while international cooperation places Czech cases within comparative frameworks. Memory institutions provide documentary and collection resources of unusual depth, and the Academy and universities sustain basic research that may have no immediate practical application. The resulting system is capable of approaching culture simultaneously as meaning, practice, institution, historical inheritance, communication, and social resource. Its pluralism is therefore not simply a by-product of institutional fragmentation but a genuine intellectual asset.

The same structure, however, also creates weaknesses. Because cultural research is distributed among numerous disciplines, it can be difficult to identify a common theoretical vocabulary or coherent national research agenda. Scholars addressing closely related questions may publish in different disciplinary environments and participate in professional communities that have relatively limited contact with one another. The disappearance of the independent Department of Culturology at Charles University illustrated the organisational vulnerability of extremely broad interdisciplinary programmes when accreditation, personnel, funding, and disciplinary identity all require simultaneous maintenance. Internationalisation can also create asymmetries, since publication in English-language journals may be rewarded more strongly even when Czech-language research remains essential for understanding national cultural institutions and local communities. Project funding encourages interdisciplinary cooperation but can fragment longer research agendas into temporary teams. Applied cultural research can gain political visibility more easily than theoretically ambitious work whose public value is less immediately measurable. The Czech system therefore benefits from disciplinary plurality while continually confronting the problem of how that plurality can remain intellectually connected.

A further tension concerns the concept of culture itself. In different parts of the Czech research system, the word may refer to artistic production, the anthropological way of life of a community, symbolic meanings, cultural institutions, media environments, traditions, values, creative industries, or patterns of participation. These definitions overlap but are not interchangeable. The broad anthropological concept prevents culture from being reduced to the arts, while cultural-policy institutions often require narrower operational categories capable of supporting budgets and statistics. Sociologists may define cultural participation through observable activities, whereas philosophers and historians are more likely to emphasise meaning, interpretation, and historically specific categories. Media scholars study systems of representation whose relation to formal cultural institutions may be indirect, and ethnologists may focus upon practices never produced as professional art. Czech cultural research after 1993 did not solve this conceptual plurality, and it would be misleading to claim

that it did. Its achievement lay rather in developing institutional and methodological mechanisms through which several meanings of culture could coexist productively.

This conceptual flexibility helps explain why the Czech model should not be evaluated simply by asking whether it reproduced British Cultural Studies successfully. The Birmingham tradition made indispensable contributions to research on class, ideology, popular culture, resistance, representation, and media, and these themes subsequently influenced cultural research across Europe. Yet Czech scholarship began from a different disciplinary landscape and a different historical problem. It had to recover humanities disciplines affected by normalisation, reinterpret domestic structuralism and anthropology, reconstruct social-science research, and analyse a society moving simultaneously through democratisation, market transformation, national separation, and European integration. A direct institutional imitation of the British model would therefore have ignored significant domestic intellectual resources. Czech *kulturologie*, ethnology, sociology, aesthetics, media research, and cultural history developed distinct but intersecting responses to this environment. Their subsequent convergence around cultural questions produced a hybrid system rather than a derivative one. The specificity of Czech cultural studies lies precisely in this combination of domestic traditions and selectively internationalised methodologies.

By 2025, the general architecture of cultural research in Czechia could consequently be understood as a layered field with no single institutional centre. Universities provided disciplinary training, theoretical renewal, and doctoral research; Academy institutes sustained long-term research programmes and specialist archives; sociological and communication centres supplied empirical and analytical capacity; and cultural organisations increasingly contributed applied research and documentation. The National Institute for Culture added a stronger institutional basis for cultural-policy, sectoral, statistical, and arts research, while the Ministry of Culture increasingly treated evidence and research as necessary components of cultural governance. Digital infrastructures expanded the sources and objects available for cultural analysis, and international networks ensured continuing methodological circulation. At the same time, Czech remained an essential scholarly language because many research problems concerned cultural phenomena embedded deeply in national and regional contexts. The system was therefore international without becoming intellectually detached from domestic society. Its defining organisational principle was interconnected plurality rather than disciplinary centralisation.

In summary, Czech cultural studies and cultural research between 1993 and 2025 developed through a distinctive movement from an early ambition to construct an autonomous, holistic *science of culture* towards a mature and highly distributed interdisciplinary research environment. The culturological programme accredited at Charles University in 1991 gave the early post-communist period an unusually explicit model of comprehensive cultural inquiry, drawing particularly upon anthropology while seeking to synthesise insights from the broader human sciences. Its institutional reorganisation in 2013 did not end the scholarly study of culture but symbolised a wider transition from disciplinary consolidation towards research conducted across ethnology, sociology, aesthetics, history, media studies, anthropology, cultural policy, and related fields. Empirical sociology expanded knowledge of participation, infrastructure, regional differences, and public attitudes, while media studies opened cultural analysis to representation, popular culture, communication technologies, and digital environments. Ethnology connected deep documentary traditions with fieldwork on contemporary culture, identity, minorities, and social change, and aesthetics retained

philosophical attention to art, value, and cultural meaning. Cultural-policy research brought institutional structures, public funding, regional development, and the creative economy into the scholarly field, while European integration and digitalisation intensified interdisciplinary and international cooperation. Cultural heritage increasingly became an important object of cultural analysis but simultaneously developed a sufficiently distinct scientific, legal, conservation, and institutional structure to require treatment as an autonomous field rather than a subdivision of cultural studies. By 2025, Czech cultural research was therefore best characterised not as one national school but as a polycentric knowledge system whose principal strengths lay in methodological plurality, historical depth, institutional diversity, and the capacity to connect theoretical interpretation with empirical investigation and public cultural practice.

Cultural Identity, Collective Memory, and the Interpretation of Czech Culture

Few areas of Czech cultural research after 1993 developed as rapidly, or became as publicly consequential, as the study of cultural identity and collective memory. The creation of an independent Czech Republic immediately raised questions about how a political community whose recent history had largely been lived within Czechoslovakia should understand itself as a separate state. Yet the problem extended far beyond constitutional separation, because the 20th century had left Czech society with several overlapping and frequently uncomfortable historical inheritances. Nazi occupation, the destruction of Jewish communities, the wartime and post-war displacement of populations, four decades of communist rule, the Prague Spring, Soviet occupation, dissent, exile, the Velvet Revolution, and the dissolution of Czechoslovakia all competed for interpretative attention. None of these experiences possessed a single uncontested meaning, and their significance changed as generations, political circumstances, and institutional frameworks changed. Cultural identity therefore became inseparable from questions about which parts of the past were remembered, which had been marginalised, and which could be incorporated into a democratic understanding of the nation. Researchers increasingly treated national identity not as an inherited essence but as something produced through narratives, symbols, commemorations, institutions, cultural practices, and everyday forms of belonging. The Czech experience after 1993 consequently offered an especially revealing example of how collective memory and cultural identity continually reshape one another.

This approach represented a significant departure from older assumptions that nations possess relatively stable cultural characters transmitted largely unchanged across generations. Scholars influenced by anthropology, sociology, cultural history, and memory studies instead examined the processes through which ideas of Czech distinctiveness were repeatedly produced in public discourse. Ladislav Holý's analysis of Czech national identity became especially influential because it treated apparently familiar national characteristics as symbolic constructions reproduced through stories about history, morality, political behaviour, and collective character. The importance of such an approach was that continuity no longer had to imply cultural immobility. Traditions could remain recognisable precisely because their meanings were adjusted to new political circumstances and retold through

contemporary concerns. A figure such as Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, for example, could signify democratic statehood, moral politics, the First Republic, European orientation, or a contrast with later political leadership depending upon the context in which he was invoked. The same principle applied to historical episodes, monuments, literary works, and civic rituals whose significance changed while their names remained familiar. Cultural identity was therefore increasingly understood as an ongoing practice of interpretation rather than a catalogue of permanent national attributes. This conceptual shift became one of the most important contributions of post-1993 Czech cultural research.

The dissolution of Czechoslovakia made this interpretative character of identity particularly visible. The Czech Republic inherited most federal institutions situated in Prague and much of the international recognition associated with the former common state, yet it could not simply equate Czechoslovak history with an exclusively Czech national narrative. Much of the 20th-century political experience had been shared with Slovaks, from the creation of the republic in 1918 to communist rule and the Velvet Revolution of 1989. Independent statehood therefore required a subtle adjustment in historical language rather than an absolute replacement of one national story by another. Sociological research showed that Czech national identity after the split combined local, regional, national, and European attachments rather than organising belonging around a single territorial level. Researchers also distinguished between cultural or ethnically conceived images of the nation and more civic conceptions centred upon citizenship and the political state. Pride could be attached strongly to cultural achievements without necessarily extending equally to political institutions or state performance. This complexity helps explain why the Czech Republic could develop a stable separate state identity without a dramatic mass nationalist mobilisation accompanying independence. The new state's relative political normality concealed a much more gradual cultural process in which Czechness had to be disentangled from, while still remaining historically connected to, the Czechoslovak experience.

The relationship with Slovakia remained one of the clearest reminders that national identity did not follow the administrative border neatly. Czech and Slovak languages remained mutually comprehensible to a considerable degree, cultural products circulated across the new frontier, and personal and professional networks survived the dissolution of the federation. Television, publishing, music, universities, theatre, and scholarly cooperation all preserved forms of common cultural space even while the two states developed separate institutions and historical narratives. Memory complicated the separation still further because people who had lived through 1948, 1968, or 1989 had experienced those events as citizens of Czechoslovakia rather than of two future successor republics. Oral-history projects repeatedly demonstrated that individual memories seldom conform precisely to later political categories. The remembered Czechoslovak past could therefore serve as a source of nostalgia, comparison, criticism, or shared historical reference without requiring political support for the restoration of the federation. Younger generations increasingly encountered Czechoslovakia as history rather than personal experience, altering the balance between communicative memory and institutionally transmitted cultural memory. Czech identity after 1993 was consequently strengthened by state separation while simultaneously preserving a substantial post-Czechoslovak layer within its cultural memory.

The First Czechoslovak Republic acquired particular importance within this search for usable democratic traditions. After decades in which communist historiography had interpreted the interwar republic through class conflict and the alleged failures of bourgeois democracy, the

period could be reassessed more openly after 1989. Masaryk and Václav Havel were frequently connected symbolically through the idea of morally grounded democratic politics, although the comparison often simplified both political figures. The First Republic became associated in public discourse with parliamentarianism, cultural achievement, international orientation, and a lost tradition of democratic statehood. At the same time, historical research complicated nostalgic representations by examining nationality conflicts, social inequality, political tensions, and the unstable international environment in which the interwar state operated. This coexistence of admiration and critical scholarship is characteristic of mature cultural memory, because symbolic importance does not require historical idealisation. Museums, anniversaries, books, television programmes, and public ceremonies all participated in reintroducing interwar history to broad audiences. The democratic past thus became one of the resources through which the post-communist republic could narrate its own legitimacy without claiming to be a simple restoration of the state created in 1918.

The concept of Europe formed another crucial layer of post-1993 identity. During the early transformation years, political language frequently presented the end of communism as a ‘return to Europe’, implying that Czechoslovakia had been forcibly separated from a cultural and political space to which it historically belonged. Czech accession to NATO in 1999 and the European Union in 2004 gradually transformed this symbolic claim into institutional membership. Yet research showed that European identity did not replace national identity and could coexist with pronounced scepticism towards particular forms of European political integration. Czech citizens could regard their country as historically European while questioning specific EU policies or resisting further transfer of political authority. Culture was often viewed more positively than politics as an area in which European integration produced benefits, because artistic exchange, travel, education, heritage cooperation, and cultural mobility were less threatening to ideas of national autonomy. This distinction helped cultural researchers understand why belonging operates differently across political, territorial, and symbolic levels. Europeanisation also encouraged scholars to reinterpret Czech history through Central European and transnational frameworks rather than exclusively through the narrative of an autonomous national community. By 2025, Czech identity could therefore be simultaneously national, Central European, post-Czechoslovak, and European without those categories necessarily cancelling one another.

No historical question challenged the idea of an ethnically homogeneous Czech past more directly than the history of Czech-German relations. Before 1945, millions of German speakers had formed an integral part of the demographic, economic, intellectual, religious, and cultural history of the Bohemian lands. The Nazi occupation, wartime persecution, collaboration, resistance, and the post-war expulsion of most Germans created a sequence of traumatic events whose interpretation had been heavily politicised under communism. After 1989, the subject returned to political debate, academic research, literature, museums, regional history, and family memory with unprecedented intensity. The Czech-German Declaration of 1997 became a major political milestone because both states acknowledged the need to speak openly about the past while orienting their relationship towards future cooperation. It explicitly supported joint historical research and recognised the importance of preserving the cultural heritage linking Germans and Czechs. This was more than diplomatic language, because it helped legitimise research into aspects of Czech history that had previously been treated as politically dangerous or nationally uncomfortable. Czech cultural identity could increasingly

acknowledge German cultural contributions without interpreting such acknowledgement as a threat to contemporary Czech sovereignty.

The memory of the post-war expulsion nevertheless remained one of the most contested areas of this reassessment. Public discussion had to distinguish among Nazi responsibility for the destruction of Czechoslovakia, wartime German occupation, collective punishment after the war, spontaneous violence, organised population transfers, confiscation of property, and the subsequent demographic transformation of the borderlands. Political debates surrounding the Beneš decrees demonstrated how quickly historical interpretation could become connected with questions of legal continuity and national interest. Academic research gradually moved beyond this polarised language by examining local histories, individual experiences, family memories, population movements, abandoned landscapes, and the cultural consequences of the disappearance of German-speaking communities. Literature and visual culture similarly began to explore the borderlands as spaces marked by absence rather than merely territories successfully incorporated into the post-war Czech state. Such approaches made forgetting itself an object of cultural analysis. Researchers could ask how villages, cemeteries, churches, place names, houses, and landscapes continued to bear traces of populations no longer present. The German past thereby became one of the most important fields in which Czech collective memory moved from a relatively closed national narrative towards a more dialogical and historically layered interpretation.

Local memory proved especially important in this process because national narratives often changed more slowly than the meanings attached to particular places. Anthropological research showed how communities in former German-speaking areas could rediscover uncomfortable local histories when the generation possessing direct communicative memories was itself disappearing. Memorial initiatives sometimes produced intense disputes precisely because they transformed memories preserved within families into visible claims in public space. A plaque or monument to Germans killed after the war could force residents to reconsider familiar distinctions between perpetrators, victims, and legitimate national retribution. The shift from communicative memory to cultural memory was therefore not merely theoretical but material, because memories had to be transferred into archives, monuments, exhibitions, books, or rituals if they were to survive generational change. Local activists, municipal authorities, historians, descendants of expelled Germans, and present-day residents often entered the same commemorative process with very different expectations. Such conflicts could be uncomfortable, yet they also created opportunities for forms of historical dialogue impossible under the earlier political system. Czech research into memory increasingly demonstrated that national reconciliation is often constructed through local and highly specific acts of remembrance. The rediscovery of the German past thus enlarged the moral as well as geographical map of Czech cultural memory.

The Holocaust created a different but equally fundamental challenge to interpretations of national culture. The destruction of Jewish communities during the Nazi occupation represented not only a human catastrophe but the violent removal of a population deeply involved in the economic, intellectual, artistic, religious, and urban history of the Czech lands. Communist public memory had acknowledged Nazi crimes while frequently suppressing or universalising the specifically Jewish dimension of persecution. After 1989, Jewish history and the Shoah could return more fully to scholarly research, education, museums, public commemoration, and local historical narratives. The Jewish Museum in Prague regained institutional independence in 1994 and developed research extending from Jewish material

and religious culture to modern history, provenance, cemeteries, archives, and Holocaust documentation. Its scholarly activity increasingly presented Jewish history not as an external minority appendix to Czech history but as an integral component of the history of Bohemia and Moravia. The journal *Judaica Bohemiae*, international research cooperation, and participation in European Holocaust research infrastructures further strengthened this interpretation. The recovery of Jewish history consequently transformed Czech cultural self-understanding by making visible the communities whose destruction had radically altered the cultural landscape.

The Pinkas Synagogue became one of the most powerful sites through which this transformation of memory could be experienced publicly. The memorial inscribing the names of approximately eighty thousand Jewish victims from Bohemia and Moravia had originally been created in the 1950s but was closed after the Soviet invasion of 1968. Its restoration after the fall of communism and reopening in 1996 returned individual names to a public space from which they had effectively been removed for decades. The significance of the memorial lies precisely in its resistance to abstraction, because the enormous scale of genocide is represented through thousands of identifiable human lives rather than anonymous statistics. The accompanying collection of children's drawings from Terezín further connects historical catastrophe with individual perception and everyday experience. Digital access has subsequently extended the memorial beyond the physical synagogue while preserving the primacy of names, communities, and personal stories. The site demonstrates how memory institutions can combine documentation, mourning, scholarship, education, and cultural interpretation without collapsing those functions into one another. It also illustrates a wider Czech transition from remembering the Second World War primarily through national resistance and liberation towards a more differentiated account of victimhood. Holocaust memory thus became indispensable to any serious post-1993 interpretation of Czech 20th-century culture.

Terezín developed into another central location where research, memory, education, and physical place became inseparable. The former ghetto and prison complex carries overlapping histories of Jewish persecution, Nazi repression, wartime propaganda, imprisonment, death, and post-war commemoration. The Terezín Memorial and associated research institutions progressively expanded educational activities aimed at Czech and international audiences, giving the site an increasingly important role in Holocaust education. The 2009 Prague Holocaust Era Assets Conference and the resulting Terezín Declaration further placed Czechia at the centre of an international discussion about restitution, remembrance, research, education, and memorial sites. The Declaration emphasised the approaching disappearance of eyewitness generations and therefore the growing importance of documentary records and authentic sites of persecution. This problem fundamentally changed the temporal conditions of collective memory. As survivors became fewer, institutions increasingly carried responsibilities once sustained partly through living testimony. Terezín thus demonstrates how memory becomes cultural infrastructure when the social conditions of direct recollection inevitably disappear.

Oral history developed partly as a response to exactly this problem of disappearing witnesses. The Jewish Museum began recording testimonies of Shoah survivors and subsequent generations from 1990, producing one of the country's largest specialised collections of Jewish oral history. Such testimony does not merely provide factual information unavailable from official documents, because memory itself becomes evidence of how individuals interpret

experience across time. Survivors may connect persecution with childhood, family relations, later political events, emigration, silence, or the difficulties of communicating trauma to subsequent generations. Researchers therefore learned to distinguish between oral testimony as a source for reconstructing events and as a source for understanding memory. The growing importance of oral history in Czech contemporary-history research contributed to the methodological sophistication of cultural-memory studies more generally. Interviews made visible experiences that were frequently absent from state archives or represented there only through administrative categories. Personal narratives also challenged the assumption that one historical period produces one corresponding collective memory.

The communist period became the largest and most politically contentious arena in which these methodological questions were applied. Post-1989 Czech society inherited approximately four decades of experiences extending from Stalinist terror and political trials through reform communism, the Prague Spring, Soviet occupation, normalisation, everyday accommodation, dissent, and eventual regime collapse. An early democratic narrative understandably emphasised repression, political prisoners, censorship, collaboration, surveillance, and resistance. Yet historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and oral historians gradually showed that the social history of communism could not be reduced entirely to the opposition between an omnipotent regime and a uniformly victimised society. Most citizens had lived ordinary lives within the system, negotiating employment, family, leisure, consumption, education, private beliefs, and varying degrees of compromise. This did not negate political repression, but it complicated the moral categories through which the past could be understood. By the 2020s, Czech research increasingly examined the relationship between institutional dictatorship and the diverse experiences through which people remember having lived under it. The communist past consequently became a test of whether democratic collective memory could accommodate ambiguity without relativising authoritarian power.

The creation of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes in 2007 institutionalised one influential approach to this past. Established by law, the Institute was charged with research into Nazi occupation and communist rule, particularly the actions of repressive state institutions, persecution, resistance, and the destruction of democratic government. Its partner, the Security Services Archive, provided broad access to records produced by communist security bodies, transforming the evidential conditions under which researchers and citizens could investigate political surveillance and repression. The Institute also developed an extensive educational mission, preparing materials through which schools could teach modern history using archival and audiovisual sources. Its creation was politically debated because memory institutions inevitably participate in defining which historical questions receive public authority and resources. Scholarly criticism sometimes challenged overly binary or moralising interpretations of communism, while supporters emphasised the democratic importance of documenting structures of repression. These debates themselves became part of Czech memory culture. The existence of ÚSTR therefore demonstrates both the institutional importance of coming to terms with dictatorship and the impossibility of separating historical research entirely from contemporary conflicts over public memory.

Civil society created another, more decentralised infrastructure of remembrance through Post Bellum and the Memory of Nations project. Founded by journalists and historians in 2001, Post Bellum developed a large-scale programme for recording witnesses to 20th-century history and making selected testimonies publicly accessible. Memory of Nations, available online

from 2008, grew into one of Europe's largest databases of life stories and incorporated cooperation with Czech Radio, ÚSTR, Czech Television, regional branches, schools, and international partners. Its importance lay partly in scale but equally in the public form given to oral history. Witnesses could be encountered through biographies, recordings, photographs, documents, educational programmes, exhibitions, podcasts, and local commemorative projects rather than remaining exclusively within research archives. The project also decentralised memory by documenting individuals from regions and social backgrounds that national political history might otherwise overlook. Personal testimony became a medium through which large events could be related to ordinary lives. Memory of Nations therefore helped make autobiographical narrative one of the most visible forms of contemporary Czech public history.

The year 1968 developed into a particularly powerful point of convergence between personal memory and national narrative. The Prague Spring could be remembered as an attempt to reform socialism, as a movement towards political freedom, as an episode within Cold War geopolitics, or as the prelude to two decades of normalisation. The Warsaw Pact invasion of August 1968 acquired a much more stable place in public memory than the subsequent long presence of Soviet troops, whose everyday social and spatial consequences were remembered less uniformly. Historical research has shown how the language of ‘occupation’ itself changed after 1989, when experiences previously obscured by official rhetoric could be interpreted openly. Exiles who left after the invasion developed their own cultures of remembrance in Western Europe, connecting 1968 with displacement and the reconstruction of identity abroad. Photographs, radio recordings, films, personal testimonies, and public commemorations made August 1968 one of the most visually recognisable historical moments of 20th-century Czech memory. Yet even here, memory was not identical with historical knowledge, because the symbolic concentration on the invasion could simplify the complex politics of reform communism preceding it. Research into 1968 therefore became an example of how cultural memory selects especially powerful images while scholarship restores complexity around them.

The Velvet Revolution of 1989 became an even more important foundational memory because the legitimacy of the post-communist order was closely connected with it. November 1989 could be narrated as the peaceful victory of civic society, the restoration of democracy, the culmination of dissent, a student revolution, or the collapse of an exhausted regime under broader European pressure. Public anniversaries repeatedly revealed that these interpretations did not form a perfectly unified memory regime. Research into the 20th anniversary showed an important difference between relatively restrained official commemoration and energetic civic initiatives that used the memory of 1989 to criticise contemporary political conditions. Such initiatives treated the revolution not simply as a completed historical victory but as an unfinished democratic obligation. Students and civic groups could therefore invoke the anti-political language of dissent against politicians governing institutions created by the revolution itself. Later anniversaries increasingly combined solemn commemoration with concerts, public gatherings, educational programmes, media retrospectives, and festivals of freedom. The cultural memory of 1989 consequently evolved from immediate political recollection into a recurring civic ritual through which the meaning of democracy itself could be debated.

Václav Havel occupied a special position within this memory because he was simultaneously a historical actor, political leader, playwright, dissident intellectual, and international cultural

symbol. His presidency connected the cultural authority of dissent with the institutions of the new democratic state, making his public image unusually difficult to separate into political and cultural components. After his death in 2011, memorialisation intensified through archives, libraries, publications, exhibitions, films, public events, and the naming of places and institutions. Havel's legacy could be invoked as a defence of human rights, civil society, European orientation, moral responsibility, or a particular conception of politics grounded in individual conscience. Critics could also question the idealisation of the dissident tradition or contrast Havel's symbolic prestige abroad with more ambivalent domestic political memories. Such disagreement illustrates how cultural icons remain active precisely because their meanings are not completely fixed. Havel therefore became one of the principal figures through whom post-1989 Czech society negotiated the relationship between culture and politics. His memorialisation also strengthened the international dimension of Czech collective memory, since his symbolic importance extended far beyond the country's borders.

Political memory after 1989 was never limited to anniversaries and institutions, because monuments and public space became equally important arenas of reinterpretation. The removal, preservation, relocation, or contextualisation of socialist-era monuments raised questions about whether controversial objects should disappear or remain as evidence of historical regimes. Soviet military memorials proved especially contentious because they combined remembrance of the defeat of Nazism with the later experience of Soviet domination. Changes in geopolitical relations further altered their meaning, particularly after Russia's increasingly aggressive foreign policy and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Public controversies demonstrated that monuments do not carry stable historical meanings independently of the societies surrounding them. The same object can move from official symbol to neglected remnant, contested heritage, historical evidence, or political provocation without changing its material form. Czech and Slovak research increasingly analysed precisely these processes of symbolic recoding after 1989. Public space thereby became one of the laboratories in which collective memory could be observed changing in real time.

The memory of Roma and Sinti history exposed one of the most serious limitations of the earlier Czech national narrative. Roma culture had long been marginalised in public institutions, while the wartime persecution and genocide of Roma and Sinti remained far less visible than other aspects of Nazi occupation. The Museum of Romani Culture, established in Brno in 1991 by Romani intellectuals, created an institutional framework through which Roma history could be documented and interpreted from a perspective not wholly dependent upon majority institutions. Its collections, exhibitions, research, publications, and educational work gradually inserted Roma experience more firmly into the cultural history of the Czech lands. The institution's later administration of memorial sites at Hodonín u Kunštátu and Lety u Písku linked museum research directly with landscapes of persecution. Lety became particularly controversial because a large pig farm constructed during the communist period occupied part of the former camp area for decades after 1989. The eventual state purchase and demolition of the farm and the opening of a new Memorial to the Holocaust of Roma and Sinti in Bohemia in 2024 represented the culmination of a prolonged moral and political struggle over recognition. Roma memory therefore demonstrates that inclusion within national collective memory is often achieved through sustained contestation rather than simple scholarly discovery.

The new Lety memorial was significant precisely because it transformed a long-standing absence into a permanent public institution. Its exhibitions combine the history of the camp

with individual testimony and material evidence, emphasising the experiences of those imprisoned rather than allowing debate to remain at the level of political controversy. The memorial also gives physical form to a broader shift in which Czech public culture increasingly recognises the Holocaust of Roma and Sinti as part of the country's own history rather than an external minority issue. This transformation required research, activism, international attention, government decisions, archaeological work, museum expertise, and participation by Roma representatives. The long delay before a dignified memorial was created remains part of the history being interpreted, because it reveals how unequal different groups can be within national cultures of remembrance. Lety therefore functions simultaneously as a site of wartime memory and as evidence of post-1989 struggles over whose suffering receives public recognition. Its history demonstrates the importance of studying omissions as carefully as established commemorative traditions. Czech memory studies increasingly became attentive to precisely these asymmetries of visibility.

Regional identity added another level of complexity to the interpretation of Czech culture. The national framework of the Czech Republic contains historically distinctive territories and regions whose identities cannot be reduced to administrative divisions created after 2000. Bohemia, Moravia, and Czech Silesia possess different historical experiences, settlement structures, dialects, religious patterns, urban networks, artistic traditions, and relationships with neighbouring countries. Moravian identity in particular has remained a meaningful cultural category even when its political expression has fluctuated. Regional museums, ethnological research, folklore traditions, local literature, festivals, architecture, and historical narratives all help sustain forms of belonging operating below the level of the nation. Post-1989 cultural freedom enabled regional identities to be expressed without necessarily being interpreted as challenges to Czech state unity. Research increasingly showed that an individual could identify strongly with a town or region while also expressing Czech and European belonging. The plurality of territorial identity therefore provided further evidence against treating Czech cultural identity as a single homogeneous category.

The transformation of migration after 1989 introduced still newer questions about the boundaries of Czech culture. Vietnamese communities became particularly significant because they developed from earlier socialist-era migration into one of the country's most established post-communist minority populations. Ukrainians, Slovaks, Russians, Poles, and numerous other groups contributed to an increasingly diverse social environment, especially in major cities and economically dynamic regions. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 dramatically accelerated Ukrainian migration and made questions of language, integration, cultural difference, education, and belonging especially visible. Public-opinion research continued to reveal substantial differences in Czech attitudes towards particular national and ethnic groups, demonstrating that cultural inclusion develops unevenly. Such findings prevented cultural researchers from equating legal residence or citizenship automatically with symbolic membership in the national community. They also encouraged investigation of how media representations, everyday encounters, historical stereotypes, and political rhetoric shape perceptions of minorities. By 2025, Czech cultural identity had become an increasingly important site for research into the transition from a relatively ethnically homogeneous self-image towards the realities of a more diverse society.

Museums played a crucial role in translating these changing scholarly interpretations into public narratives. Permanent exhibitions created during the communist period had often organised history according to ideological frameworks that became untenable after 1989. Their

replacement required more than removing political slogans, because entire structures of periodisation, selection, representation, and national significance had to be reconsidered. New exhibitions increasingly integrated everyday life, minority experiences, private documents, audiovisual testimony, and multiple interpretations alongside conventional political chronology. The renovated National Museum and numerous regional institutions exemplified the wider movement towards presenting national history through complex material and social contexts rather than heroic narratives alone. The establishment of the *Museum of Memory of the Twentieth Century* in Prague in 2019 further demonstrated continuing institutional demand for public interpretation of dictatorship, occupation, resistance, and democratic transformation. Museums thus became important intermediaries between academic historiography and social memory. Their exhibitions could stabilise certain narratives while simultaneously opening controversial questions to broader audiences.

Literature, film, theatre, and visual art formed another powerful arena in which collective memory developed outside formal historical scholarship. Post-1989 authors repeatedly returned to the Holocaust, expulsion, Stalinism, normalisation, exile, collaboration, dissent, and family secrets, often approaching the past through characters unable to reconcile inherited narratives with fragmentary personal evidence. Literature about the German expulsion became especially important because fiction could represent uncertainty, silence, guilt, and intergenerational transmission in ways different from conventional historiography. Film and television brought historical themes to vastly larger audiences and sometimes shaped public images of particular periods more powerfully than academic books. Documentary cinema and theatre frequently incorporated personal testimony, archival materials, and autobiographical performance, narrowing the distance between historical evidence and cultural representation. Visual artists intervened in monuments and public spaces, exposing the instability of apparently settled historical meanings. Such creative practices did not simply illustrate scholarly research but generated their own forms of historical inquiry. Czech memory culture therefore developed through continuous interaction among scholarship, institutions, and artistic imagination.

Digital media transformed this relationship still further by changing both the preservation and circulation of memory. Archives such as Memory of Nations enabled users to encounter individual testimony through searchable online platforms rather than solely through published transcripts or specialist collections. The Jewish Museum, museums, libraries, and other institutions likewise digitised documents, photographs, testimonies, and collections, allowing historical memory to circulate beyond the geographical boundaries of commemorative sites. Social media gave anniversaries and historical controversies immediate participatory dimensions, as users shared family photographs, personal recollections, archival discoveries, and political interpretations. This democratisation of circulation expanded access but also weakened the institutional control once exercised by historians, museums, and broadcasters over public narratives. Historical materials could be detached from context, selectively edited, or incorporated into misinformation just as easily as they could support serious education. Digital memory therefore produced new questions concerning authority, authenticity, verification, and the ethics of representation. By the 2020s, Czech collective memory existed simultaneously within physical sites, institutional archives, broadcast media, and rapidly changing networked environments.

The expansion of memory research consequently did not produce a single consensual interpretation of Czech 20th-century history. On the contrary, the greater availability of

archives, testimonies, minority perspectives, and international comparison often multiplied disagreement. Scholars could dispute whether post-communist memory had become excessively dominated by anticommunism, whether ordinary life under socialism received insufficient attention, or whether more socially nuanced approaches risked relativising dictatorship. Public controversies continued around the Beneš decrees, post-war violence, communist collaboration, the interpretation of resistance, Soviet memorials, and the representation of historical minorities. Such disagreements should not automatically be interpreted as evidence that collective memory had failed. A democratic culture of memory is partly distinguished from authoritarian memory precisely by its inability to impose one definitive interpretation on all citizens. What matters is whether disagreement can remain connected to historical evidence and whether previously excluded voices can enter public discussion. Czech memory culture by 2025 was therefore more fragmented than the national narratives of earlier regimes, but it was also considerably more plural.

This plurality increasingly encouraged researchers to distinguish between memory and history without treating them as opposites. Memory is selective, emotionally invested, socially transmitted, and shaped by the needs of the present, whereas historical scholarship seeks to reconstruct the past through critical evaluation of evidence. Yet historians themselves participate in cultural contexts and cannot prevent their work from entering public memory. Conversely, personal memories may preserve experiences and meanings absent from written archives while still requiring critical interpretation. Czech oral historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and historians increasingly developed methods capable of analysing precisely this interaction. The publication in 2025 of Daniel Kunštát's extensive sociological study of Czech experience under communism illustrates the continuing importance of historical consciousness as an empirical research subject. Rather than asking only what happened under the communist regime, such work investigates how people who experienced it construct the period retrospectively and connect it with post-1989 developments. This distinction between the past and its remembered meanings represents one of the most mature achievements of contemporary Czech cultural research.

By 2025, cultural identity itself could therefore no longer plausibly be defined through a single ethnic, political, or historical formula. Czech society retained powerful national symbols, language, institutions, historical myths, and attachments, but these operated alongside regional, European, post-Czechoslovak, minority, professional, generational, and transnational identities. Collective memory contributed to this plurality because different groups inherited different relationships to the same historical events. A Jewish family's memory of the Second World War, a Roma family's memory of persecution, a German-speaking family's memory of expulsion, and a Czech dissident family's memory of normalisation cannot be collapsed into one homogeneous national experience. The task of cultural research was increasingly to examine how such memories coexist, interact, compete, and occasionally become incorporated into broader public narratives. This approach replaced the question of which memory was authentically Czech with the more productive question of how Czech culture itself is constituted through encounters among multiple historical experiences. National culture thereby became less a sealed inheritance than a framework within which difficult histories can be negotiated. The evolution of this interpretative perspective represents one of the most substantial intellectual changes in Czech cultural studies since 1993.

In summary, research into cultural identity and collective memory between 1993 and 2025 profoundly changed the interpretation of Czech culture by replacing relatively homogeneous

national narratives with a layered and increasingly self-critical account of historical belonging. The independent state initially required new ways of distinguishing Czech identity from the former Czechoslovak framework, yet research soon demonstrated that Czech, Slovak, regional, Central European, and European identities could coexist rather than form mutually exclusive alternatives. The recovery of German, Jewish, Romani, exile, dissident, and minority histories revealed how much of the cultural past had been obscured when national history was narrated principally through the experience of the ethnic majority. Institutions such as the Jewish Museum in Prague, the Terezín Memorial, the Museum of Romani Culture, the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Post Bellum, Memory of Nations, and numerous museums and research institutes transformed remembrance into a substantial infrastructure of documentation, scholarship, education, and public debate. Oral history widened the evidential base of cultural research by placing individual experience alongside archival documentation, while literature, film, theatre, monuments, and digital platforms demonstrated that collective memory is created through cultural representation as well as academic historiography. The contested memories of 1945, 1948, 1968, and 1989 showed repeatedly that democratic remembrance does not eliminate conflict but changes the conditions under which competing interpretations can be expressed. By the mid-2020s, Czech cultural identity was therefore increasingly understood as historically constructed, internally plural, and inseparable from debates about memory, exclusion, responsibility, and belonging. The principal achievement of this field was not the discovery of one definitive interpretation of Czech culture, but the creation of a scholarly and institutional environment capable of explaining why several interpretations of the national past can coexist and why that plurality itself has become a defining feature of contemporary Czech culture.

Ethnology, Cultural Anthropology, and the Study of Everyday Culture

Among the humanities and social sciences that changed most visibly in the Czech Republic after 1993, ethnology and social and cultural anthropology occupy a particularly revealing position. Their transformation concerned not merely institutional names or theoretical vocabulary but the very question of what counted as a legitimate object of cultural research. Czech ethnography had historically devoted enormous scholarly energy to folk song, customary culture, traditional technologies, clothing, vernacular architecture, ritual, dance, oral tradition, and the social worlds of rural communities. None of these subjects disappeared after the end of state socialism, nor did the archives accumulated through more than a century of documentation suddenly lose their intellectual value. What changed was the assumption that traditional or rural culture constituted the natural centre of ethnological inquiry and that modern urban life belonged primarily to sociology or other neighbouring disciplines. Researchers increasingly turned towards cities, migration, consumption, family relations, minorities, music scenes, subcultures, memories of socialism, bodily practices, material objects, environmental relations, and the ordinary routines through which social change becomes lived experience. Social and cultural anthropology, meanwhile, developed institutionally as a field explicitly committed to ethnographic fieldwork and comparative analysis of contemporary societies. By 2025, the Czech study of everyday culture had therefore become a remarkably broad domain linking historical ethnology with anthropology of the

present, archival depth with participant observation, and traditional cultural forms with the rapidly changing practices of contemporary life.

The depth of the older tradition is essential for understanding why this transition did not amount to a simple replacement of ethnology by anthropology. Institutional ethnological research in the Czech lands can be traced through the early 20th-century project *Das Volkslied in Österreich*, the State Institute for Folk Song established after the creation of Czechoslovakia, and the later Academy structures devoted to folk song, ethnography, and folklore. In 1954, the Cabinet for Folk Song and the Cabinet for Ethnography were joined within the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences as the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore Studies. These institutions accumulated recordings, manuscripts, photographs, correspondence, song collections, descriptions of customs, documentation of traditional technologies, and extensive regional field materials. Their work reflected the Central European *Volkskunde* and *národopis* traditions, in which the culture of 'the people' was often approached through historically rooted regional communities and manifestations regarded as traditional. Socialist scholarship modified this inheritance through Marxist interpretative frameworks, yet considerable documentary and specialist expertise survived within the institutional system. After 1989, Czech ethnologists inherited both this scholarly capital and the methodological limitations associated with an older conception of their discipline. The post-1993 transformation consequently required them to decide not whether tradition should be abandoned, but how an exceptionally rich documentary tradition could be connected with new questions about contemporary society.

The renaming of the Academy's Institute of Ethnography and Folklore Studies as the Institute of Ethnology in 1999 symbolised this shift towards a broader conception of the field. The change did not erase folkloristics or the study of traditional culture, which continued to occupy an important place in research, archives, publishing, and specialist expertise. It did, however, indicate that the institution no longer understood its mission primarily through the older division between ethnography and folklore. The Institute increasingly investigated ways of life, social relations, identities, mobility, memory, musical practices, and cultural transformations in historical as well as contemporary perspective. Its later structure makes the scale of this change especially visible: research units dealing with memory, mobility and migration, ecological anthropology, ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology stood alongside work on cultural heritage and long-established documentary collections. Such a structure would have been difficult to imagine within the narrower institutional vocabulary of mid-20th-century *národopis*. The Institute nevertheless continued to preserve and digitise historical collections, allowing new research questions to be asked of evidence created by much earlier generations of ethnographers. Czech ethnology thus modernised partly by expanding the interpretative possibilities of its inherited archives rather than severing its relationship with them.

The rise of social and cultural anthropology followed a different institutional trajectory. Around 1990, sociocultural anthropology in the Anglo-American sense scarcely existed as an established university discipline in Czechoslovakia, even though individual anthropological theories were known and some scholars had maintained international intellectual contacts. The collapse of ideological restrictions opened Czech universities to traditions associated with British social anthropology, American cultural anthropology, European anthropology, and contemporary ethnographic theory. The first strong institutional initiatives appeared significantly outside Prague, particularly in Plzeň and Pardubice, demonstrating that disciplinary innovation did not always originate in the capital. Programmes in social and

cultural anthropology emphasised comparative perspectives, qualitative field research, participant observation, cultural relativism, and the interpretation of contemporary complex societies. Their curricula gradually introduced students to kinship, religion, politics, economic anthropology, migration, ethnicity, identity, and other themes that treated everyday social relations as anthropological problems. West Bohemian University explicitly developed anthropology in relation to international, particularly British and American, disciplinary standards, while other universities constructed their own combinations of anthropology, ethnology, sociology, and cultural studies. Within little more than a decade, a field that had been institutionally marginal at the beginning of the 1990s acquired departments, journals, professional networks, degree programmes, and a recognisable academic community.

This expansion produced significant tension with established ethnology because the two fields appeared to claim overlapping territory while defining legitimate scholarship differently. Czech debates during the 1990s and 2000s repeatedly asked whether ethnology and sociocultural anthropology were partners, rivals, alternative names for related activities, or representatives of fundamentally different epistemological traditions. Some anthropologists criticised older ethnology for excessive attachment to national culture, descriptive documentation, folklore, and historically bounded regional communities. Some ethnologists, in turn, regarded newly imported anthropological vocabularies as unnecessarily dismissive of domestic scholarship or insufficiently aware of the depth of Central European research traditions. The disagreement was intensified by institutional competition for students, university positions, research funding, and disciplinary authority. The debate over the anthropological treatment of Roma became particularly revealing because apparently neutral concepts of culture could reproduce essentialised representations of minority communities when detached from questions of inequality and power. By 2007, the *Czech Sociological Review* could devote a substantial discussion to whether social anthropology and *národopis* should be understood as partners or rivals, demonstrating that the dispute had become intellectually productive enough to sustain open methodological argument. Rather than producing a decisive victory for either side, these controversies gradually forced both traditions to clarify their assumptions and expand their analytical range.

The resulting convergence was neither complete nor undesirable. Ethnology retained greater institutional continuity with historical documentation, folklore studies, traditional culture, regional research, and the study of transformations across long periods. Social and cultural anthropology generally placed stronger emphasis upon prolonged fieldwork, contemporary social processes, comparative theory, reflexivity, and the relationships between local practices and wider structures of power. Yet these distinctions became increasingly porous as ethnologists adopted anthropological field methods and anthropologists worked with historical archives, museums, and Central European ethnological literature. By the 2010s, universities could offer programmes explicitly combining ethnology and anthropology, while researchers moved between departments whose titles would once have implied sharply different intellectual identities. The Czech Association for Social Anthropology and the journal *Cargo* provided additional professional environments in which contemporary anthropology could develop its own disciplinary conversation without requiring the disappearance of ethnology. Collections such as *Rethinking Ethnography in Central Europe* further demonstrated that postsocialist societies could become sites for theoretically ambitious ethnography rather than merely territories to which theories developed elsewhere were

applied. Czech cultural research thereby moved towards a partnership in which historical depth and contemporary ethnography increasingly reinforced one another.

Fieldwork became one of the most important methodological agents of this transformation. Participant observation requires the researcher to remain within a social environment long enough to encounter not merely what people say about their lives but the routines, relationships, contradictions, silences, and practical constraints through which those lives are organised. Interviews remain important, but they acquire different meanings when interpreted alongside observation of homes, workplaces, streets, religious gatherings, shops, festivals, music scenes, offices, neighbourhoods, or informal networks. Such methods shifted the emphasis away from treating cultural groups as fixed containers of customs and towards examining how culture is negotiated in concrete social situations. Researchers increasingly reflected upon their own position within the field, recognising that ethnographic knowledge is produced through relationships rather than collected as though cultural facts existed independently of interaction. Ethical questions concerning consent, anonymity, vulnerability, representation, and unequal power between researcher and participant accordingly became more explicit. Long-term ethnographic engagement also revealed differences between formal rules and actual practice, a distinction particularly important in societies undergoing rapid institutional transformation. Everyday life thus became scientifically valuable precisely because it showed how abstract political, economic, and cultural changes were translated into practical action.

The concept of everyday culture consequently acquired much greater analytical depth than a simple catalogue of domestic customs. Everyday life is the level at which large historical transformations become habits, inconveniences, aspirations, compromises, anxieties, and new forms of normality. The introduction of market capitalism, new consumer goods, private entrepreneurship, international travel, unemployment, changing property regimes, and political freedom after 1989 did not affect people only through legislation or economic statistics. They altered how families planned futures, how individuals understood success, how homes were furnished, how bodies were presented, how workplaces operated, and how social differences became visible. Ethnographic inquiry could observe these transformations without assuming that people experienced them according to the categories used by policymakers or economists. The everyday perspective was therefore particularly well suited to the study of postsocialism because it revealed the uneven and contradictory consequences of systemic change. It also challenged the idea that 1989 created an instantaneous cultural break, since routines, moral expectations, informal networks, and material environments often persisted long after political institutions changed. Czech and Central European anthropology increasingly treated the ordinary not as trivial background but as the place where historical transformation acquires social reality.

Consumption provided one of the most visible examples of this transformation. Under state socialism, access to goods had been shaped by shortage, informal exchange, state distribution, foreign-currency shops, travel restrictions, and distinctive practices of repair and self-provisioning. The market economy expanded consumer choice enormously, but new possibilities of consumption also became markers of inequality, aspiration, cultural competence, and belonging to the imagined ‘new Europe’. Homes, clothing, cars, travel, food, leisure, and bodily presentation could all become means through which individuals expressed success or negotiated the insecurity produced by rapid social differentiation. Anthropological research in postsocialist Central Europe demonstrated that consumer choice was never

simply an economic response to greater supply. It carried moral judgements about taste, modernity, thrift, excess, respectability, and what constituted a good life. The emergence of new middle-class lifestyles therefore offered researchers a lens through which to examine changes in both material conditions and cultural values. Everyday consumption became one of the places where European integration and postsocialist transformation could literally be worn, eaten, displayed, or incorporated into domestic space.

Research into everyday life under socialism developed in parallel, producing an important reversal of temporal perspective. The society that Czech ethnologists and anthropologists were observing after 1989 was increasingly interested in how ordinary people had actually lived before the political transition. Oral history, biographical interviews, family photographs, private collections, diaries, material objects, and local archives made it possible to reconstruct experiences absent from political histories of the communist regime. Scholars studied housing estates, holidays, workplace cultures, family routines, leisure, festive practices, scarcity, consumption, gender relations, humour, informal exchange, and strategies for navigating bureaucratic institutions. This work complicated any assumption that the history of socialism could be explained entirely through the actions of the Communist Party and state security structures. Everyday life involved accommodation, private ambitions, tactical compliance, friendship, resistance, indifference, and pleasures that did not map neatly onto political categories. Comparative Czech and Slovak scholarship was particularly important in showing how memories of socialism changed after the collapse of the system itself. Ethnology of everyday life therefore became both a history of ordinary practices and a study of how those practices were subsequently remembered.

Memory studies grew naturally from this interest in lived history. Within the Institute of Ethnology, the development of a dedicated Department of Memory Studies reflected the increasing importance of oral history, family memory, intergenerational transmission, public commemorative culture, and the relationship between remembering and forgetting. Researchers examined not only the content of memories but also the media through which memories circulate, from conversation and handwritten documents to photographs, mass media, and online communication. Everyday life under socialism could therefore be reconstructed as both past experience and contemporary narrative. Studies of Brno, for example, connected individual biographies and neighbourhood memories with the larger histories of war, socialism, population change, and urban development. Research on German-speaking inhabitants and forced displacement similarly demonstrated how family memory can preserve alternative histories long after demographic transformations have removed the communities from particular places. The biographical method allowed national events to be understood through the scale of households, streets, friendships, employment, and domestic possessions. Memory research thus brought historical ethnology into direct conversation with contemporary anthropology by showing that the past remains socially active in ordinary life.

The city became another major ethnographic laboratory. Traditional ethnography had often privileged the village as a relatively bounded community in which social relations, customs, architecture, and economic practices appeared especially visible to the researcher. Post-1993 ethnology and anthropology increasingly recognised that modern urban environments were no less culturally structured, even if their social worlds were more mobile and internally differentiated. Prague and Brno became particularly important sites for studying migration, neighbourhood change, memory, tourism, music, religion, public space, and minority life. Urban ethnography examined how people claim, avoid, reinterpret, and move through spaces

rather than treating the city merely as an architectural background. Transport systems, markets, clubs, parks, shopping centres, housing estates, migrant businesses, and public squares could all become field sites. Researchers also studied the ways in which urban identities are produced through memories of districts, symbolic boundaries, and ideas about respectable or marginal places. The expansion of urban ethnology therefore represented a decisive move away from equating authentic cultural life with the persistence of rural tradition.

Ethnomusicology illustrates particularly clearly how such a shift could transform a discipline grounded in older folk-song scholarship. The Czech institutional tradition contained exceptionally rich archives of folk music, song collecting, and dance documentation, yet contemporary researchers increasingly approached music as social action rather than only as an object to be collected and classified. Zuzana Jurková's work on Prague musical worlds offered one of the clearest examples of this approach. Contemporary Prague could be studied through an opera performance at the National Theatre, a punk concert, electronic dance music, minority festivals, Hare Krishna processions, tourist music, and other apparently incompatible musical environments. The anthropological question was not simply what the music sounded like but who produced it, who listened, where the performance occurred, which identities were expressed, and how relationships were organised through musical activity. Such research moved ethnomusicology directly into the study of urban everyday life, religion, migration, subculture, commerce, and public space. Later work connecting music, memory, minorities, archives, and activism further demonstrated that inherited musical documentation and contemporary ethnography could belong to the same research field. Czech ethnomusicology thus preserved its historical expertise while radically expanding the social worlds in which music was considered meaningful.

Youth cultures and bodily practices provided another striking indication that the ethnographic object had changed. Researchers such as Martin Heřmanský examined youth subcultures, body modification, the Czech emo scene, post-rural identities, and relationships among subcultural groups in postsocialist society. These subjects would once have seemed far removed from the canonical concerns of national ethnography, yet they address classic anthropological questions about belonging, symbolic boundaries, ritualised appearance, social status, and the production of group identity. Tattoos, piercings, hairstyles, clothing, music, and online communication can function as socially readable signs through which young people construct both similarity and difference. Subcultures also demonstrate that cultural practices are rarely isolated from global circulation, since styles developed in one country may be reworked within specifically Czech environments. Their study therefore requires attention to international media and consumer culture as well as local histories and peer networks. The body itself becomes a cultural surface through which individuals negotiate autonomy, gender, conformity, distinction, and generational change. Anthropology of youth consequently widened Czech research into everyday culture towards practices that are temporary, commercial, transnational, and intensely personal at the same time.

Migration became one of the most substantial new fields of Czech ethnological and anthropological research. Communist Czechoslovakia had experienced migration, exile, minority movement, labour mobility, and population transfers, but the political opening after 1989 changed both the volume and forms of cross-border movement. Czechia increasingly became a country of immigration as well as emigration and return migration, while EU membership further normalised mobility within Europe. The Institute of Ethnology gradually developed migration research into a major programme combining ethnographic fieldwork with

questions of identity, transnationalism, integration, language, welfare, citizenship, race, gender, violence, and public policy. Participant observation and interviews were particularly valuable because official categories such as ‘foreigner’, ‘refugee’, or ‘economic migrant’ often conceal very different biographies and family strategies. Researchers also examined how institutions themselves shape migration through residence regulations, social services, schools, labour markets, and integration policies. The everyday experience of migration could therefore be analysed simultaneously as intimate family life and as an encounter with the administrative state. By 2025, mobility and migration had become sufficiently important to constitute one of the Institute's major research departments.

The Vietnamese population became one of the most important cases through which this new anthropology of migration developed. Vietnamese migration to Czechoslovakia had roots in socialist international cooperation, but its transformation after 1989 created new forms of entrepreneurship, family migration, transnational networks, education, and community life. Early post-communist public discourse frequently reduced Vietnamese residents to visible commercial activities, particularly markets and small shops, obscuring the diversity of social positions and generational experiences within the population. Ethnographic and migration research gradually replaced this flattened image with more complex accounts of social networks, family strategies, transnational obligations, adaptation, and relationships between Czech and Vietnamese environments. Tereza Freidingerová's research, for example, combined fieldwork in Czechia and Vietnam with analysis of the economic and political contexts shaping migration decisions. Other ethnographic studies examined Vietnamese entrepreneurs as actors operating through connections that crossed national borders rather than as members of an isolated ethnic enclave. Children raised or educated in Czechia further complicated simple distinctions between migrant and host culture. The Vietnamese case therefore became a particularly productive site for understanding how everyday belonging is created across families, languages, businesses, schools, and transnational social worlds.

Research concerning Roma communities exposed still more fundamental methodological and ethical problems. Czech ethnography possessed a long history of documenting Roma culture, family structures, music, mobility, and social organisation, but post-1989 anthropology increasingly questioned approaches that treated ‘Roma culture’ as a self-contained explanation for poverty or marginalisation. Academic disputes demonstrated how cultural categories could reproduce public stereotypes when inequalities created by housing, education, labour markets, discrimination, and state policy were interpreted primarily as characteristics of an ethnic group. Researchers consequently paid greater attention to racialisation, anti-Roma racism, migration, welfare systems, citizenship, political representation, family strategies, and the diversity of Roma communities themselves. Studies by Eva Davidová, Zdeněk Uherek, and later generations of scholars preserved valuable historical and ethnographic knowledge while also documenting transformations extending across Czechoslovak and Czech society. Contemporary research increasingly situates Roma experience within wider European and transnational contexts, including migration to Western Europe and North America. Anthropology therefore moved from asking mainly how Roma culture differs from majority culture towards examining how cultural difference is produced and governed within unequal social relations. This reflexive transformation became one of the most important tests of the discipline's capacity to reconsider its own inherited categories.

Family and kinship research underwent a corresponding renewal. Classical anthropology had always treated kinship as one of its central analytical domains, but contemporary Czech

research increasingly studied families under conditions of migration, divorce, changing gender roles, ageing, labour mobility, and transnational separation. The household became a useful scale for understanding how structural transformation is translated into care, money, inheritance, employment decisions, and relationships between generations. Migrant families demonstrated especially clearly that social membership can extend across borders, with remittances, digital communication, travel, education, and obligations connecting households located in several countries. Studies of Roma families challenged simplistic assumptions about kinship by placing household organisation within histories of state intervention and socioeconomic exclusion. Research into remigration likewise showed that 'returning home' can produce new tensions when migrants and relatives have developed different expectations during years of separation. Gender analysis added further questions about invisible domestic labour and unequal distributions of care within apparently private relationships. Everyday family life thus became a point where anthropology could connect intimate experience with large-scale economic, demographic, and political change.

Religion and spirituality offered another field in which everyday culture became more visible after communism. State socialism had attempted to marginalise organised religion publicly, although religious belief, ritual, and institutional communities had never disappeared from Czech society. After 1989, established churches regained freedoms and property claims while new religious movements, alternative spiritualities, global devotional practices, and individualised forms of belief became more publicly visible. Anthropological research approached this environment not simply through the statistical question of whether Czech society was 'religious' or 'secular'. It examined how belief becomes embodied in everyday routines, communities, music, pilgrimage, healing, morality, architecture, family life, and public space. Urban ethnomusicology could encounter Hare Krishna devotees through street processions, while other researchers investigated forms of alternative spirituality that crossed conventional boundaries between religion, lifestyle, health, and self-development. Such work complicated the widely repeated description of Czechia as one of Europe's most secular societies. Low formal affiliation did not necessarily imply the absence of ritual, transcendence, spiritual experimentation, or culturally inherited religious meanings.

Material culture likewise acquired new theoretical significance. Older ethnology had treated tools, furniture, clothing, vernacular buildings, agricultural equipment, and craft objects as essential sources for reconstructing traditional ways of life. Contemporary anthropology retained this attention to things but asked different questions about how objects circulate, acquire value, mediate relationships, and participate in social worlds. A household object may express family memory, a car may signal aspiration or become a resource after being declared waste, and second-hand goods may move through networks that challenge conventional distinctions between consumption and disposal. Materiality therefore connects cultural meaning with economic practice and physical environments. Researchers became interested in repair, reuse, informal economies, infrastructures, and the biographies of objects rather than treating material culture only as a record of disappearing tradition. This approach also created dialogue with archaeology, science and technology studies, economic anthropology, and environmental humanities. Czech ethnology's historical familiarity with material evidence provided a strong foundation for this contemporary anthropological turn towards the social life of things.

The growth of ecological anthropology pushed this development still further by questioning the very boundary between cultural and natural worlds. The Institute of Ethnology's Department of

Ecological Anthropology studies human life as embedded within relationships involving animals, landscapes, materials, infrastructures, resources, health, and environmental change. Its research draws upon economic anthropology, science and technology studies, critical geography, medical anthropology, multispecies studies, and environmental humanities. Subjects such as hunting, veterinary practice, waste management, biosecurity, food systems, and relations between humans and animals would have fitted awkwardly within an older conception of ethnology organised around ethnic or folk culture. Yet they are deeply cultural because they reveal how societies classify life, assign value, organise care, and decide what may be consumed, protected, discarded, or killed. Long-term ethnographic fieldwork allows these processes to be studied at the level of practical interaction rather than abstract environmental attitudes alone. The emergence of such research demonstrates that Czech anthropology by the 2020s was engaging directly with the intellectual consequences of the Anthropocene. Everyday culture had expanded from the social routines of human communities towards the more-than-human relations that make those routines possible.

Waste became an especially productive object within this ecological and material turn. Ordinary societies usually define waste as something that has lost value and should disappear from attention, yet anthropological investigation reveals that discarded objects continue to circulate through labour, regulation, repair, recycling, and informal exchange. Czech researchers including Daniel Sosna and Pavel Mašek have examined waste economies and environments in which apparently useless materials acquire renewed economic or social value. Auto-salvage yards, for example, can be interpreted not merely as peripheral industrial spaces but as places where environmental regulation, technical skill, thrift, market exchange, and informal practice intersect. Such research also complicates narratives of ecological modernisation by showing that forms of reuse may occur quietly through longstanding practices rather than through explicit environmental ideology. Waste therefore becomes a lens through which anthropology can investigate morality, inequality, bureaucracy, sustainability, and the relationship between formal systems and everyday improvisation. The topic represents an extraordinary distance from the folk-costume collections associated with older stereotypes of ethnography, yet it retains the ethnological commitment to careful observation of material practice. In this sense, the anthropology of waste illustrates how dramatically the meaning of everyday culture had expanded by 2025.

Food and household provisioning provide a related example. Czech households possess strong traditions of gardening, allotment cultivation, mushroom gathering, preserving food, repairing goods, exchanging produce, and other practices that do not fit neatly into a simple contrast between market consumption and subsistence. Some of these activities survived socialism, market transformation, and rising prosperity without disappearing as supposedly obsolete residues of scarcity. Researchers have therefore examined self-provisioning and thrift as cultural practices connected with social relationships, competence, pleasure, memory, environmental effects, and ideas about good household management. The environmental consequences can be unexpectedly significant because modest routines of reuse or home production may reduce resource consumption without participants identifying themselves as environmental activists. Such findings challenge policy models that assume sustainable behaviour begins only when individuals consciously adopt ecological identities. They also demonstrate why ethnographic observation matters, since household practices are often poorly captured by surveys based on declared attitudes. Everyday sustainability emerges from habits whose meanings may be economic, moral, familial, aesthetic, or simply practical.

Czech ecological anthropology thereby connects intimate domestic routines with global questions of resource use and environmental change.

Rural culture itself was consequently reinterpreted rather than abandoned. Czech ethnology retained a sophisticated knowledge of vernacular architecture, agriculture, customary practices, regional dress, craft traditions, festivities, and village social organisation, but contemporary researchers increasingly rejected the image of the village as an isolated repository of timeless tradition. Rural communities participate in commuting, tourism, digital communication, global markets, suburbanisation, property development, and changing patterns of leisure just as urban populations do. Some villages have become commuter settlements, others tourist destinations, and still others locations in which declining services coexist with highly active civic associations or revived traditions. Researchers such as those studying post-rurality therefore examine how rural identities are constructed precisely under conditions in which agriculture is no longer the principal basis of community life. Traditional practices may acquire new meanings as performances of local identity, tourism resources, leisure activities, or deliberate acts of cultural revival. The analytical task is not to decide whether such practices remain ‘authentic’ in some pure historical sense but to understand how and why people continue to use them. Contemporary Czech ethnology thus approaches rural tradition as a dynamic social resource rather than the surviving fragment of an earlier national culture.

This perspective also transformed the study of folklore and festivities. Folk festivals, dance ensembles, costumes, carnival practices, seasonal rituals, and local celebrations are not simply passive continuations of inherited customs. They are organised, rehearsed, funded, photographed, publicised, taught, and repeatedly interpreted by participants who select what should be retained and what can be changed. The concept of *folklorism* became useful for analysing the conscious reproduction of traditional forms outside the social conditions in which they originally developed. Post-1993 researchers increasingly studied the folklore movement itself as a historical and political phenomenon, including its relationship with socialist cultural policy and its subsequent reinterpretation within democratic society. Oral-history research can reveal how ensemble members remember participation differently across generations, while ethnomusicology can examine what happens when archived song materials return to contemporary performance. Such questions overlap with cultural heritage but remain analytically distinct from the professional systems responsible for safeguarding heritage resources. Ethnology is principally concerned here with how people live, perform, negotiate, and transform traditions, whereas heritage administration must additionally determine how recognised cultural values are formally documented and protected.

Digital communication introduced a further layer to this changing everyday world. Family relationships, political discussion, music, migration networks, subcultural identities, memories, rituals, and local communities increasingly operate through online environments as well as face-to-face interaction. Ethnologists and anthropologists therefore had to reconsider the assumption that the field site is necessarily a geographically bounded place in which the researcher is physically present. Online communication can extend a community across cities and countries while leaving digital traces that differ fundamentally from traditional interview or archival materials. Memory Studies at the Institute of Ethnology explicitly includes online communication among the environments in which narratives of the past are produced and transmitted. Migrants maintain transnational family and community relationships through messaging platforms, while youth cultures may develop their most

intensive exchanges through social media before meeting physically. Digital ethnography consequently became less a specialised study of ‘virtual culture’ than another method required for understanding everyday social life. By 2025, the distinction between online and offline culture had become too rigid to describe how many Czech social worlds actually functioned.

Mobility also encouraged ethnologists to study Czech culture beyond the territorial borders of the Czech Republic. Historical Czech communities in the Balkans, Volhynia, Kazakhstan, and other regions provided opportunities to examine how language, identity, kinship, and cultural practices change when communities live for generations outside the national territory. Post-1989 return migration further complicated the concept of homeland because people officially described as returning Czechs could experience Czech society as culturally unfamiliar after decades abroad. Research into Czech remigrants demonstrated that migration transforms the people who leave as well as the societies to which they later return. Sarah Scholl-Schneider's study of Czech remigrants after 1989 showed how returnees acted as cultural intermediaries while confronting suspicions that their experiences in the West had distanced them from those who remained at home. Zdeněk Uherek and colleagues similarly examined Czech communities abroad, diaspora, return migration, and the transnational fields linking dispersed populations. These studies moved ethnology decisively beyond the older equation between nation, territory, and culture. Czech identity became an empirical question about practices and relationships rather than a predetermined characteristic of people living within state borders.

The increasing public role of anthropology represented another major development. Migration policy, minority integration, social exclusion, heritage, urban planning, health, education, and environmental change all produce questions for which ethnographic knowledge can be useful outside universities. The Institute of Ethnology's migration researchers have undertaken work relevant to government bodies, municipalities, non-governmental organisations, and legislative institutions while retaining basic scholarly research. Such engagement requires caution because anthropology loses analytical independence if it becomes merely a provider of administrative categories or policy confirmation. At its best, however, applied ethnography can reveal why programmes designed from above function differently in the social worlds where they are implemented. Participant observation may identify mistrust, informal rules, family obligations, or institutional misunderstandings invisible within official statistics. Public anthropology also communicates research through exhibitions, media, schools, community projects, and accessible publications rather than limiting its audience to specialist journals. The Czech field increasingly recognised that rigorous critique and practical relevance need not be mutually exclusive.

Professionalisation supported this public role. The journal *Cargo*, first emerging at the end of the 1990s and later associated with the Czech Association for Social Anthropology, provided a specialised platform for theoretical, methodological, and ethnographic discussion. Its development marked the consolidation of sociocultural anthropology as a recognisable professional field rather than a loose collection of scholars trained elsewhere. University programmes in Plzeň, Prague, Brno, Pardubice, and other centres expanded the number of researchers for whom ethnographic fieldwork formed a central component of professional identity. Courses increasingly addressed qualitative methods, ethics, contemporary social theory, migration, urban life, religion, kinship, economy, and other internationally established anthropological domains. International study and research mobility reduced the intellectual

distance between Czech scholars and colleagues in other European anthropological communities. At the same time, publications in *Český lid*, *Národopisná revue*, *Cargo*, the *Czech Sociological Review*, and international journals preserved dialogue between ethnology and anthropology rather than producing completely separate publication cultures. The field that emerged was therefore more professionally differentiated than in 1993 but also more interconnected.

This internationalisation encouraged a deeper reconsideration of Central Europe's position within anthropology itself. During the early post-communist decades, Western scholars sometimes approached Czechia and neighbouring countries primarily as societies 'in transition', implicitly measuring them against an assumed Western endpoint. Central European anthropologists increasingly criticised this asymmetry and argued that postsocialist societies should be treated as places from which anthropological theory could be produced rather than merely empirical laboratories for concepts created elsewhere. The volume *Rethinking Ethnography in Central Europe* explicitly placed migration, activism, expertise, entrepreneurship, and postsocialist modernity within this more cosmopolitan intellectual framework. Polish scholarship on neoliberal postsocialism similarly emphasised how inequality and power are reproduced in ordinary practices rather than attributing every social conflict to cultural difference. Czech researchers participated in this regional conversation while also joining broader European and global anthropological networks. Everyday culture thereby became a scale at which relations between local experience and global political economy could be examined. The 'periphery' itself became an object of critical reflection rather than a neutral geographical description.

A reflexive and increasingly decolonial turn extended this critique to the history of anthropology. Czech scholars had often described their 20th-century intellectual experience principally through political restriction under communism and therefore understood themselves as victims of Soviet domination rather than participants in wider histories of European colonial knowledge. Ema Hrešanová has challenged this assumption by examining claims of Czech 'colonial innocence' and asking how scholarship produced in a country without a large overseas empire could nevertheless participate in European hierarchies of representation. Such questions require researchers to reconsider ethnographic museums, collecting histories, fieldwork traditions, racial categories, and the geographical directions in which anthropological authority historically travelled. Contemporary projects examining the decolonisation of ethnographic museums in Central Europe indicate that this debate had moved from abstract theory into institutional research by the mid-2020s. Reflexivity also concerns the present, because fieldworkers must ask who benefits from research, who controls representation, and how academic categories affect the people being described. This development represents a substantial intellectual distance from older ethnography in which the authority of the scholarly observer was rarely subjected to equally systematic scrutiny.

The transformation from *národopis* to a plural field of ethnology and anthropology did not, however, render historical collections obsolete. On the contrary, digitisation and renewed archival research have increased the accessibility and interpretative possibilities of folk-song manuscripts, correspondence, photographs, audiovisual recordings, chapbooks, documentation of traditional technologies, and materials relating to Czech communities abroad. A song collected for one purpose at the beginning of the 20th century may now be examined through questions of gender, nationalism, performance, mobility, archival practice, or cultural revival that its original collector never anticipated. Historical photographs can be

compared with contemporary landscapes, and recordings can return to communities whose grandparents or great-grandparents participated in their creation. Digitisation also allows dispersed materials to be connected across institutions and makes specialist resources available to international researchers. Yet the archives themselves remain products of historical selection: what earlier ethnographers chose not to record can be as revealing as what they preserved. Contemporary scholarship therefore approaches inherited collections both as evidence about cultural life and as evidence about the intellectual history of ethnology itself. The archive has become a field site in its own right.

By 2025, the institutional configuration of the Institute of Ethnology offered perhaps the clearest condensed image of the field's transformation. Research into memory addressed family narratives, socialism, public commemoration, rituals, landscape, and online communication. Mobility and migration research examined transnationalism, refugees, borders, Roma experiences, welfare, racialisation, language, gender, and the changing institutions through which movement is governed. Ecological anthropology investigated resources, food systems, waste, human-animal relations, biosecurity, hunting, care, and environmental infrastructures. Ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology connected deep archival traditions with contemporary urban music, minorities, performance, memory, and social life. Alongside these areas, research into cultural heritage linked older ethnological expertise with debates about the social production and transformation of inherited cultural values. This institutional map bears little resemblance to the narrow stereotype of ethnology as the study of costumes, songs, and disappearing village customs. Yet those older materials continue to provide part of the historical foundation from which the contemporary field derives its unusual chronological depth.

The Czech case therefore demonstrates that disciplinary modernisation need not depend upon the rejection of scholarly inheritance. The strongest developments after 1993 occurred where older documentary traditions were exposed to new anthropological questions and where imported theoretical approaches were tested against local historical knowledge rather than adopted mechanically. Social anthropology forced Czech ethnology to confront contemporary complexity, fieldwork reflexivity, power, migration, and the limitations of nationally bounded concepts of culture. Ethnology, in return, provided anthropology with archives, regional knowledge, historical perspective, linguistic competence, and a reminder that the apparent novelty of contemporary cultural practices often has deeper genealogies. Ethnomusicology showed how folk-song scholarship could develop into anthropology of urban sound; memory studies linked oral tradition with 20th-century political history; and ecological anthropology extended material-culture research into waste, resources, and multispecies relations. This reciprocity distinguishes productive interdisciplinarity from the simple rebranding of an older field. Czech ethnology and anthropology became stronger when their differences generated new questions rather than battles over institutional territory alone.

The study of everyday culture was the principal beneficiary of this convergence. By 2025, ‘everyday life’ in Czech cultural research could encompass household provisioning, internet communication, migration bureaucracy, music-making, subcultural dress, gardening, family memory, religious practice, waste sorting, public transport, minority businesses, body modification, workplace relations, rural revival, or human-animal interaction. The analytical unity of these subjects does not lie in their content but in the scale at which culture is observed as practice. Everyday research asks how people actually inhabit social structures rather than assuming that institutions, laws, or ideologies function exactly as their formal descriptions

suggest. It is particularly attentive to tacit knowledge, informal rules, material constraints, repetition, improvisation, and the gap between declared values and practical action. This perspective has allowed Czech scholars to reinterpret both socialism and postsocialism without reducing either period to its political institutions. It has also provided methods for studying cultural change that do not presume in advance where meaningful culture will be found. The ordinary has consequently become one of the most theoretically productive objects of contemporary Czech cultural research.

In summary, the development of Czech ethnology, cultural anthropology, and the study of everyday culture between 1993 and 2025 was characterised by expansion rather than disciplinary replacement. Czech ethnology preserved an unusually deep tradition of folk-culture documentation, ethnomusicology, regional research, archival collecting, and historical analysis, but progressively widened its attention towards the cultural processes of contemporary society. Social and cultural anthropology established itself after 1989 through new university programmes, professional organisations, journals, international exchange, and an explicit commitment to ethnographic fieldwork and reflexive methodology. Early rivalry between anthropology and *národopis* gradually gave way to productive forms of convergence, although differences in intellectual genealogy and method remained important. The object of research shifted from a privileged focus on traditional rural communities towards cities, migration, minorities, family life, consumption, memory, youth cultures, religion, music, materiality, digital communication, environmental relations, and the more-than-human world. Oral history and biographical methods made the everyday experience of socialism and historical displacement accessible as cultural evidence, while migration research revealed the inadequacy of territorially fixed concepts of culture. Studies of Vietnamese and Roma communities encouraged increasingly critical approaches to ethnicity, integration, racialisation, social inequality, and the politics of representation. Ecological anthropology pushed the study of everyday practice into questions of waste, resources, food systems, animals, sustainability, and infrastructures, demonstrating how far contemporary ethnology had travelled beyond the conventional boundaries of folk culture. At the same time, digitised historical collections and revived archival research ensured that innovation did not require the abandonment of the documentary foundations accumulated by earlier generations. By 2025, the principal achievement of the Czech field was therefore a distinctive synthesis of archive and fieldwork, historical continuity and contemporary critique, local knowledge and international theory, through which everyday life itself became one of the most powerful lenses for understanding cultural change.

Cultural Policy and the Transformation of Cultural Institutions

The transformation of Czech cultural institutions after 1993 cannot be understood simply as a sequence of administrative reforms imposed upon an otherwise stable cultural sphere. Cultural policy became one of the principal mechanisms through which the Czech Republic renegotiated the relationship among the state, public institutions, municipalities, regions, civil society, markets, artists, and citizens. Under state socialism, cultural organisations had operated within a system in which public ownership, central planning, ideological supervision, and institutional subsidy were closely intertwined, even though the degree of control varied considerably among sectors and historical periods. The democratic transformation therefore

required more than the removal of censorship, because the institutional architecture through which culture was financed, governed, and distributed also had to be reconsidered. Some organisations could move relatively rapidly towards private or mixed economic models, whereas national museums, public libraries, municipal theatres, galleries, archives, and many heritage institutions remained dependent upon long-term public responsibility. Czech cultural policy gradually abandoned the assumption that democratisation necessarily required the withdrawal of public authority from culture. Instead, the central problem became how public support could be maintained while political control over artistic and intellectual content was reduced, institutional autonomy increased, and multiple forms of ownership and initiative were allowed to coexist. Between 1993 and 2025, cultural policy consequently developed from a largely reactive process of post-socialist institutional restructuring into a more strategic, evidence-informed, decentralised, and increasingly intersectoral form of cultural governance.

The first years of this transformation were shaped by a powerful demand for what was often described as the de-statification or disestablishment of culture. This language expressed an understandable rejection of the previous regime, in which the state had claimed extensive authority over the production, distribution, and interpretation of cultural goods. Private publishers, galleries, production companies, cinemas, music enterprises, and other cultural businesses developed rapidly once ideological and economic restrictions were removed. Civic associations, foundations, independent artistic groups, and newly established non-profit organisations likewise occupied spaces that had previously been controlled or heavily regulated by state structures. The expansion of these actors created an institutional plurality that had been largely absent from the official cultural system before 1989. Yet the process soon revealed that reducing ideological control and reducing public responsibility were not the same undertaking. Many cultural activities generated forms of social and symbolic value that could not be sustained reliably through commercial revenues alone. The transformation of Czech cultural policy therefore began with a liberal expectation of institutional withdrawal but gradually produced a mixed system in which public, private, civic, and hybrid organisations assumed different functions.

This distinction became particularly important because the cultural sector itself was never economically homogeneous. Publishing, advertising, commercial film distribution, parts of audiovisual production, architecture, and later digital media could function extensively through market mechanisms, although even these sectors remained affected by copyright, tax policy, regulation, and public incentives. Museums, regional galleries, public libraries, heritage organisations, orchestras, opera companies, repertory theatres, and many specialised cultural institutions faced fundamentally different economic conditions. Their collections, buildings, ensembles, professional staffs, archives, and conservation responsibilities required continuity that annual commercial demand could not guarantee. Public support therefore survived the political transition not merely because institutional habits were difficult to change but because many cultural services exhibited characteristics that made full market financing unrealistic. Czech cultural policy gradually became more explicit about these differences rather than expecting one organisational model to fit the entire sector. The resulting system was heterogeneous by design, combining organisations maintained directly by public authorities with independent non-profit bodies, commercial enterprises, foundations, associations, and project-based initiatives. This institutional diversity became one of the defining characteristics of contemporary Czech cultural governance.

The Ministry of Culture remained the central state authority within this new arrangement, but its role changed substantially. It inherited responsibility for major national cultural institutions, monument care, museums and galleries, libraries, the arts, copyright, religious affairs, and other areas, yet it could no longer function as a central directorate prescribing the cultural life of the country. Its post-1993 role increasingly involved legislation, strategic planning, grant programmes, international representation, institutional supervision, research support, and the coordination of sectors whose actual cultural activity was generated by thousands of organisations outside direct ministerial control. This transition required a change in administrative culture as well as formal competence. A ministry accustomed to dealing mainly with subordinate institutions had to interact increasingly with municipalities, regions, professional associations, independent artists, non-profit organisations, European bodies, private enterprises, and civil-society representatives. The complexity of the cultural field made such coordination difficult, because the interests of a national museum, an independent theatre company, a regional library, a commercial producer, and an individual artist can diverge sharply. Czech cultural policy therefore evolved through negotiation among actors rather than through the straightforward execution of a unified state plan. The Ministry remained institutionally central while becoming progressively less capable, and less expected, to determine culture from the centre.

Decentralisation constituted the most important structural transformation of the public cultural system during the 1990s and early 2000s. Municipalities had already acquired significant property and responsibilities following the collapse of the socialist administrative order, and public-administration reform subsequently created self-governing regions with substantial cultural competences of their own. This process altered the map of cultural responsibility because institutions that had previously depended upon central or district authorities were transferred to territorial self-government. Municipalities became particularly important founders of theatres, libraries, cultural centres, local museums, orchestras, festivals, and other organisations closely connected with urban cultural life. Regions assumed responsibility for institutions whose significance extended beyond individual municipalities, including many important museums, galleries, and libraries. Decentralisation reflected a democratic principle that cultural decisions should often be made closer to the communities affected by them. At the same time, it exposed institutions to differences in local fiscal capacity, political priorities, and managerial expertise. Czech cultural governance consequently became more responsive to territorial circumstances but also more uneven.

The museum and gallery sector demonstrates this redistribution especially clearly. During the transitional 1990s, the Ministry of Culture temporarily acted as the founder of a large number of organisations that had previously belonged to regional administrative structures. The creation of an independent museum and gallery department in 1993 reflected the need to stabilise a sector confronted by restitution, theft, changing ownership, financial uncertainty, and new professional responsibilities. By the end of the decade, however, it had become increasingly clear that direct ministerial management of a wide regional museum network was inconsistent with the broader reform of territorial government. In 2001, the Ministry prepared the transfer of twenty-nine museums and galleries into the competence of the newly established regions. This was not a simple change of accounting responsibility, because the new founders acquired obligations concerning budgets, buildings, staff, collection care, investment, and institutional development. Museums therefore became embedded more deeply within regional cultural policy and could be connected with tourism, education,

identity, and local development strategies. The reform simultaneously preserved a smaller group of institutions whose national importance justified continued direct state responsibility.

Libraries underwent a related transformation but retained a particularly strong network logic. Municipal public libraries had long been among the most geographically dispersed cultural institutions in the country, making them important examples of culture delivered through local public service. The Library Act adopted in 2001 clarified the system of public library and information services at the moment when regional reform and digital transformation were changing the profession simultaneously. Former state scientific libraries were transferred to regional responsibility and became central institutions within regional library systems. Their functions increasingly included methodological assistance, coordination, professional training, interlibrary services, digital access, and support for smaller local libraries. Cultural decentralisation in this field therefore did not mean institutional fragmentation, because network cooperation remained essential to maintaining nationwide standards and access. The library system illustrates a broader feature of Czech cultural policy: decentralised ownership could coexist with nationally coordinated professional infrastructures. Such arrangements allowed local and regional autonomy without abandoning the principle that citizens across the country should have access to a broadly comparable public cultural service.

The persistence of the *příspěvková organizace*, or contributory organisation, became one of the most debated characteristics of Czech cultural institutional life. This legal and administrative form allowed public authorities to establish organisations with their own budgets and management while providing regular public contributions towards operating costs. Critics repeatedly argued that the model retained too much of the institutional logic inherited from socialism and could restrict managerial flexibility, long-term planning, fundraising, or cooperation among several public founders. Supporters, however, emphasised that it provided continuity for organisations whose activities could not be organised responsibly through short-term grants or ordinary commercial company law. Czech theatres, museums, galleries, libraries, orchestras, and other institutions continued to use the form extensively throughout the three decades after 1989. Its durability demonstrated that political transformation had not produced an organisational equivalent capable of replacing it across the cultural sector. Cultural-policy debate therefore increasingly concerned reforming or supplementing public institutional forms rather than abolishing them altogether. The eventual creation of a new legal category of public cultural institution in 2024–2025 represented the culmination of this much longer discussion.

Financing remained inseparable from these institutional questions. Czech public support for culture developed through a combination of state, regional, and municipal expenditure rather than a single central cultural budget. The relative importance of these levels differed sharply by sector, with municipalities playing a particularly large role in theatres and local cultural services, regions supporting important museums, galleries, and libraries, and the state carrying substantial responsibilities for national institutions and heritage. Grant systems supplemented direct institutional contributions by supporting artistic projects, festivals, publications, international activities, and independent organisations. European programmes added another layer after 2004, while sponsorship, foundations, ticket income, commercial services, and household expenditure contributed to a mixed cultural economy. This diversity made the system resilient in certain respects because institutions did not all depend upon one source of finance. It also made cultural governance difficult to analyse, because expenditure was distributed across several public budgets and organisational types. The gradual

development of cultural statistics and the Culture Account was therefore necessary before policymakers could describe the sector with greater precision.

The broader pattern of financing also challenged the expectation that democratisation would lead to a straightforward substitution of private resources for public subsidy. Research into Czech cultural funding demonstrated that the public institutional network survived the transition to a market economy with remarkable persistence. Traditional artistic and heritage sectors continued to depend substantially upon public resources even while commercial branches of the cultural economy generated much higher levels of self-financing. By 2023, for example, the wider culture sector combined very large flows from private businesses and households with public expenditure concentrated particularly in heritage and the performing arts. Theatres remained especially dependent upon contributions, subsidies, and grants, while municipal budgets supplied a large share of their public support. Such figures do not indicate institutional failure, because repertory theatre, orchestral music, museums, and heritage operate according to economic structures different from advertising or commercial audiovisual media. They do, however, demonstrate why cultural-policy decisions cannot be based on the assumption that all cultural organisations should maximise earned-income ratios in the same way. Czech cultural governance increasingly recognised sectoral economic difference as a permanent structural fact rather than a temporary remnant of transition.

The strategic dimension of cultural policy developed more slowly than institutional reform. During the early 1990s, government faced urgent questions of ownership, restitution, decentralisation, legislation, institutional survival, and public finance, leaving relatively little capacity for a comprehensive philosophy of cultural development. Policy was therefore frequently sectoral and reactive, with individual problems addressed through specific laws, programmes, or administrative decisions. By the end of the decade and the beginning of the 21st century, however, this incremental approach was increasingly supplemented by explicit cultural-policy documents. The government and Ministry began defining culture in relation to democratic access, public service, international cooperation, national identity, cultural diversity, and institutional sustainability. Strategies could also coordinate specialised concepts for museums, libraries, living arts, heritage, traditional culture, cinematography, and research. Cultural policy thus began to move from the management of inherited institutions towards the articulation of long-term objectives. This shift was essential because decentralisation had made direct administrative control less important while increasing the need for common strategic frameworks.

The Cultural Policy of the Czech Republic adopted around the beginning of the new century captured this transition particularly clearly. It described the post-2001 stage as one in which the principal process of de-statification initiated in 1990 was largely complete and the redistribution of public cultural responsibilities among the state, municipalities, and regions had reached a substantially new equilibrium. This assessment marked an important conceptual turning point. The central question was no longer how to dismantle a centralised cultural order but how a plural system of public and non-public actors should function coherently. Policy therefore had to address access, funding, legal responsibilities, professional standards, cultural diversity, infrastructure, and the relationship between national and territorial levels of government. It also increasingly confronted the fact that public authorities were simultaneously founders, regulators, grant providers, owners, and strategic planners. These roles could produce conflicts unless institutional autonomy and administrative responsibility were clearly distinguished. The first post-transformation

strategies thus provided the conceptual bridge between structural reform and the more mature cultural governance of the following decades.

European Union membership in 2004 accelerated this strategic professionalisation. Czech cultural institutions entered a policy environment in which mobility, transnational cooperation, cultural diversity, copyright, regional development, digital access, and structural investment were increasingly discussed through European programmes and common frameworks. EU membership did not transfer cultural sovereignty to Brussels, but it multiplied the contexts in which Czech cultural policy had to operate. Ministries and cultural organisations developed expertise in international project management, procurement, reporting, partnership building, and strategic planning. European Structural Funds offered resources capable of financing major cultural infrastructure and heritage projects that ordinary national budgets could rarely support at comparable scale. European cultural programmes rewarded organisations capable of constructing international networks rather than functioning exclusively within domestic institutional hierarchies. Policy language also changed as concepts such as cultural diversity, mobility, audience development, creative industries, and digital heritage became more prominent. Europeanisation therefore altered both the material resources available to Czech cultural institutions and the professional expectations placed upon them.

The National Cultural Policy for 2009–2014 demonstrated how extensively this new vocabulary had entered Czech strategic thinking. Culture was increasingly presented as a factor in economic development, tourism, creativity, education, social cohesion, regional policy, and international representation rather than as an isolated expenditure category. The policy also sought greater coordination among sector-specific strategies, reflecting the growing complexity of a cultural system in which museums, heritage, living arts, libraries, audiovisual media, and creative industries were simultaneously subject to different institutional logics. Czech participation in European policy debates encouraged a more explicit concern with measurable objectives and implementation mechanisms. The country's Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2009 further demonstrated that it was capable of participating in the formulation of European priorities rather than merely adapting to them. Cultural administration consequently acquired greater international confidence and professional competence during this period. The shift did not eliminate chronic financial or organisational problems, but it moved policy discourse decisively beyond the transitional categories of the 1990s.

The National Cultural Policy for 2015–2020, with an outlook to 2025, continued this development while broadening the meaning of culture still further. It explicitly connected culture with the economy, education, wider social development, and the creation of conditions favourable to creativity. Cultural heritage remained a central responsibility, but the policy also recognised cultural and creative sectors as areas capable of contributing to innovation and economic activity. This conceptual expansion reflected international debates without reducing culture to its measurable financial contribution. Rather, policymakers increasingly sought a language capable of defending intrinsic cultural value while also demonstrating social and developmental effects. Digitalisation, participation, cultural tourism, creative industries, internationalisation, and accessibility consequently appeared alongside more traditional objectives concerning preservation and artistic support. The state was expected to create conditions for cultural development rather than determine cultural content directly. This principle represented the mature democratic counterpart to the anti-statist impulses of the early transformation years.

The National Cultural Policy 2021–2025 marked an even more explicit conceptual break. Prepared in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it argued for a broader understanding of culture and creativity as an intersectoral domain integral to both society and the economy. The document identified six major objectives covering accessibility, cultural heritage, living arts, cultural and creative industries, the broader societal role of culture, and the transformation of the Ministry of Culture itself. Equally important was the participatory method through which the strategy was prepared, involving a wider range of cultural-sector actors than earlier top-down administrative planning had generally allowed. The Ministry openly acknowledged that it needed to become a more capable steward of the entire cultural and creative sector rather than primarily a supervisor of selected institutional domains. Culture was increasingly connected with education, health, regional development, business, social policy, technology, and sustainability. This approach reflected the accumulated lesson of three decades: cultural governance could no longer be organised adequately through a collection of separate institutional departments operating in isolation. By the early 2020s, Czech cultural policy had become explicitly systemic.

The development of cultural statistics was crucial to this transformation because strategic governance requires knowledge about the sector it seeks to influence. The National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture, particularly through its Centre for Information and Statistics on Culture, developed extensive statistical monitoring of theatres, museums, galleries, libraries, historic properties, festivals, musical ensembles, publishing, exhibitions, and other cultural activities. Cooperation with the Czech Statistical Office enabled the creation of the Culture Account, which attempted to describe culture as an economic system through data on financing, production, employment, household expenditure, public support, and contribution to gross domestic product. These tools fundamentally altered the evidential basis of cultural policy. Debates that had once depended heavily upon institutional advocacy could increasingly be tested against data concerning attendance, regional distribution, employment, wages, expenditure, or post-pandemic recovery. Statistics could not measure artistic quality or cultural significance directly, and policymakers remained aware of methodological limitations associated with changing reporting units and sectoral definitions. Nevertheless, evidence became an increasingly important component of legitimate cultural administration.

Museums illustrate the consequences of this transition from direct administration towards professional and evidence-based governance. The legal framework created by Act No. 122/2000 established obligations concerning the protection, registration, documentation, and accessibility of museum collections, while the Central Register of Collections created a national informational foundation for collection policy. The Ministry of Culture developed specialised methodological centres associated with particular museum organisations, enabling professional guidance to be distributed beyond institutions directly controlled by the state. Museum development concepts adopted in later years addressed collection care, digitisation, security, education, research, accessibility, and organisational modernisation. Regional and municipal founders retained substantial autonomy, but national professional frameworks ensured that collection stewardship was not determined solely by local political preference. Museums themselves increasingly combined research, education, public communication, conservation, and community functions. Cultural policy thus shifted from telling museums what historical narratives to present towards establishing the institutional and professional conditions under which responsible museum work could occur.

Galleries and visual-art institutions faced similar changes but with additional tensions surrounding artistic autonomy and contemporary programming. Public galleries inherited collections and buildings requiring long-term professional care, yet their curatorial programmes also depended upon intellectual independence and the capacity to respond to changing artistic practice. Their founders could legitimately make decisions concerning budgets, leadership appointments, and institutional mandates without thereby possessing professional competence to determine individual exhibitions or aesthetic priorities. The relationship between political responsibility and curatorial autonomy therefore became one of the recurrent issues of democratic cultural governance. Private galleries and artist-run spaces further diversified the visual-art ecosystem, making the public sector only one component of a wider institutional environment. Grant programmes increasingly supported contemporary projects outside permanent public organisations, although uncertainty about annual funding could make independent activity precarious. The Czech transformation consequently replaced ideological centralisation with a more complex negotiation among public founders, professional expertise, markets, private initiatives, and artistic communities. Institutional freedom increased markedly, but freedom did not remove the need for durable organisational structures.

The performing arts exposed these tensions with particular intensity. Czech theatre had inherited a dense network of permanent ensembles and repertory institutions whose artistic capacity depended upon stable buildings, technical staffs, workshops, orchestras, actors, dancers, and long rehearsal processes. Many major theatres became the responsibility of municipalities, making city budgets central to the survival of professional performing arts outside the small number of national institutions. At the same time, independent theatre, contemporary dance, new circus, festivals, site-specific performance, and interdisciplinary work increasingly operated through grant-based organisations with much less institutional security. Cultural policy therefore had to distribute resources between historically established organisations and newer forms of production whose flexibility was often accompanied by precarious employment. Recurrent debates concerned whether public theatre networks were too expensive, whether grants adequately reflected artistic innovation, and whether organisational form should influence eligibility for support. These conflicts were not anomalies but consequences of maintaining several generations of cultural infrastructure simultaneously. Czech performing-arts policy became an arena in which continuity and experimentation had to be negotiated repeatedly.

Libraries represent a contrasting case in which public legitimacy remained comparatively strong because their functions expanded visibly with social and technological change. Rather than becoming obsolete in the digital age, many Czech libraries broadened their role from book lending towards information services, education, community activities, digital literacy, internet access, cultural programming, and lifelong learning. National and regional policy supported digitisation, library networks, professional development, and the introduction of new services while preserving a geographically extensive local infrastructure. Municipalities continued to play an essential role because libraries often constituted one of the few permanent cultural institutions available in smaller communities. Their relatively high levels of use demonstrated that cultural institutions could remain socially relevant when their functions adapted to changing patterns of communication. Policy increasingly understood libraries as spaces of access and civic infrastructure rather than merely repositories of printed material. Their

transformation also illustrated how institutional continuity could support innovation more effectively than repeated organisational disruption.

Independent and non-profit culture became another increasingly important object of policy. The civic sector that expanded after 1989 created festivals, cultural centres, galleries, theatres, community projects, publications, educational initiatives, and experimental artistic platforms whose organisational structures differed sharply from traditional public institutions. These organisations often possessed considerable flexibility and could respond rapidly to emerging artistic or social questions. Their weakness lay in dependence upon project grants, short-term leases, volunteer labour, and uncertain annual budgets. Public authorities gradually developed grant mechanisms capable of supporting this sector, but the relationship remained structurally unequal because contributory organisations received relatively predictable institutional financing while independent actors repeatedly competed for resources. Cultural-policy research therefore increasingly distinguished between support for organisations and support for activities. The Czech system never resolved this tension completely, but it gradually recognised independent culture as a permanent component of the national cultural ecology rather than a temporary transitional phenomenon.

Municipal cultural policy became especially significant in large cities. Prague, Brno, Ostrava, Plzeň, and other urban centres increasingly developed strategies in which cultural institutions were connected with urban identity, public space, tourism, creative industries, regeneration, education, and international visibility. City governments could support established theatres and museums while simultaneously funding festivals, independent centres, neighbourhood projects, cultural infrastructure, and creative-sector development. Plzeň's preparation for European Capital of Culture 2015 demonstrated particularly clearly how cultural planning could become part of long-term urban strategy. Ostrava used industrial heritage and contemporary cultural activity in attempts to redefine a city historically associated with coal mining and heavy industry. Brno developed a dense cultural ecosystem combining public institutions, universities, festivals, creative professionals, and technology-oriented industries. These examples show that cultural policy increasingly became place-specific rather than merely an implementation of national priorities. Local authorities emerged as policy laboratories capable of experimenting with institutional forms and development strategies.

Regional governments played a different but complementary role. Their cultural responsibilities included museums, galleries, libraries, heritage-related institutions, grant programmes, and support for regional traditions and events. Because regions vary in population, settlement structure, economic capacity, tourism, historical identity, and cultural infrastructure, decentralisation produced substantial differences in strategic emphasis. A region with internationally recognised monuments might place heritage and tourism near the centre of cultural development, while an industrial region could focus more heavily on regeneration and contemporary cultural production. Sociological research into culture in Czech regions demonstrated that infrastructure and participation vary geographically and cannot be understood adequately from national averages. Regional cultural policy therefore became an important subject of cultural research in its own right. The decentralised Czech system requires national coordination precisely because territorial diversity is real rather than merely administrative.

The emergence of cultural and creative industries changed institutional policy again by drawing attention to cultural actors that did not fit comfortably within traditional categories of public

culture. Designers, architects, audiovisual producers, game developers, advertisers, creative technology firms, and many other professionals generated cultural and symbolic value while operating principally within commercial markets. Mapping projects demonstrated that these activities represented substantial employment and economic resources but often fell between ministries and administrative sectors. Cultural policy could no longer concentrate exclusively on subsidised institutions if it sought to understand the entire cultural ecosystem. The resulting approach emphasised cross-sector cooperation, creative clusters, entrepreneurship, innovation, regional mapping, skills, and connections between creative professionals and conventional businesses. This expansion did not mean that museums or theatres should be evaluated as though they were commercial creative firms. Rather, it produced a more differentiated understanding of culture in which market and non-market forms could be analysed within the same broader ecosystem.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed both the strengths and weaknesses of this system more dramatically than any previous crisis after 1989. Institutions with regular public budgets were generally better able to preserve employment and organisational continuity than independent venues, commercial cultural businesses, festivals, and self-employed artists whose incomes depended upon physical audiences and events. Repeated closures demonstrated that the cultural sector consisted of interconnected labour chains extending far beyond visible organisations. Actors, musicians, technicians, designers, promoters, photographers, caterers, production managers, translators, and other professionals could all be affected simultaneously when cultural activity stopped. Emergency measures such as COVID–Kultura expanded public support towards actors who had previously stood outside traditional institutional subsidy systems. The crisis therefore forced cultural administration to recognise the full economic and professional ecology surrounding cultural production. It also accelerated cooperation among professional associations and made cultural-sector advocacy more organised.

The pandemic had equally important consequences for institutional practice. Museums, galleries, theatres, libraries, orchestras, and cultural centres rapidly expanded online communication, streaming, digital exhibitions, remote educational programmes, and social-media engagement. Some of these practices disappeared or declined once physical attendance became possible again, demonstrating that emergency digital substitution could not replace embodied cultural experience indefinitely. Others remained because they improved accessibility, documentation, audience relationships, or educational reach. Cultural managers also became more attentive to crisis planning, digital capacity, diversification of revenue, and the precarious conditions of cultural labour. The concept of institutional resilience thus entered cultural policy alongside older concerns with artistic quality and economic efficiency. Resilience required not simply the ability to survive disruption but the capacity to adapt without destroying the professional knowledge and cultural relationships on which institutions depend. The crisis changed the expectations placed upon cultural governance because future policy could no longer assume uninterrupted operation as a normal condition.

The National Recovery Plan provided an opportunity to convert emergency lessons into structural reform. Investments in cultural and creative centres, digitisation, creative learning, skills, mobility, creative vouchers, and regional development linked cultural recovery with a wider programme of economic and social modernisation. This approach differed from conventional cultural subsidy because it treated infrastructure, professional capacity, digital

transition, and creative-sector development as investments rather than merely operating expenses. The Plan also supported policy reforms whose effects extended beyond individual funded projects. Culture increasingly entered national conversations about innovation, regional competitiveness, sustainability, and economic recovery. Such integration gave the sector new political visibility, although it also required cultural organisations to communicate their value in languages familiar to economic and development policy. The Czech response therefore reflected a broader European shift from cultural policy understood as protection of a specialised sector towards culture as one component of societal resilience and innovation.

One of the most consequential institutional reforms arising at the end of this process was the adoption of Act No. 263/2024 on Public Cultural Institutions, effective from 1 January 2025. The law created a new legal form specifically designed for cultural organisations and addressed their establishment, governance, management, property relations, and financial operation. Its significance lies partly in the fact that the need for such a form had been discussed for many years, particularly in connection with theatres and other organisations whose existing contributory status was often regarded as insufficiently flexible. The public cultural institution offered an alternative rather than an automatic replacement for all existing cultural organisations. Its introduction demonstrated that the organisational questions raised during the transition of the early 1990s had never been fully resolved by simple privatisation or decentralisation. Czech cultural policy had instead arrived, three decades later, at the recognition that some publicly supported cultural organisations required a legal architecture specifically designed for cultural functions. The reform therefore represents both institutional innovation and a mature acknowledgement of the distinct organisational character of public culture.

The creation of the National Institute for Culture in 2025 provided another indication of this new policy environment. The merger of the Arts and Theatre Institute with the National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture brought together two organisations whose activities had developed through different but complementary trajectories. The Arts and Theatre Institute contributed theatre documentation, international cultural cooperation, arts research, cultural-policy analysis, and expertise in creative sectors. NIPOS brought long-standing experience in cultural statistics, advisory services, amateur artistic activities, public culture, and sectoral information. Their consolidation created an institution capable of connecting documentation, statistics, research, cultural participation, professional services, and cultural-policy expertise more systematically. The new organisation was established as a research organisation rather than merely an administrative service body. This institutional design illustrates the growing importance of evidence, analysis, and knowledge infrastructure within contemporary cultural governance. By 2025, the Czech state was not only funding cultural institutions but investing in institutions designed to understand how the cultural system itself functions.

The increasing importance of data did not eliminate political judgement from cultural policy, nor could it do so. Statistical evidence can reveal attendance, employment, expenditure, regional distribution, wages, sources of income, or the economic contribution of cultural sectors, but it cannot determine automatically which artistic experiment deserves support or which collection possesses the greatest cultural importance. Cultural decisions inevitably involve values, historical responsibilities, professional judgement, and competing conceptions of public interest. The growing use of evidence therefore changed the quality of policy debate rather than transforming cultural governance into a purely technical exercise. Data can demonstrate that theatres depend heavily on municipal support or that cultural

participation differs regionally, but elected representatives must still decide how resources should be distributed. The Czech experience increasingly showed that effective cultural policy requires both evidence and normative argument. The professionalisation of governance lies in making these different forms of reasoning explicit rather than pretending that budgets or statistics alone can resolve cultural priorities.

Institutional autonomy remained equally important within this evidence-informed environment. Public support inevitably gives founders legitimate interests in financial accountability, lawful management, accessibility, strategic planning, and the responsible use of public property. Yet artistic, curatorial, scholarly, and editorial decisions require professional independence if institutions are to remain intellectually credible. Tension arises when political authorities attempt to convert founder responsibility into direct influence over programming or interpretation. Czech cultural institutions experienced such controversies periodically at municipal, regional, and national levels, demonstrating that democratic governance does not eliminate the possibility of political pressure. Transparent appointment procedures, professional advisory bodies, multi-year strategies, clear statutes, and diversified funding can help protect autonomy without removing public accountability. The maturation of Czech cultural policy therefore involved a continuing effort to distinguish governance from interference. This distinction is particularly important in museums and galleries whose interpretation of controversial history may itself become politically sensitive.

The relationship between culture and citizenship likewise changed the way institutions justified their public role. Libraries increasingly described themselves as community and educational centres, museums developed participatory programmes, theatres cultivated new audiences, and cultural centres addressed local social as well as artistic needs. Accessibility came to include physical, economic, geographical, linguistic, educational, and digital dimensions rather than merely the formal right to enter an institution. Policies concerning children, senior citizens, people with disabilities, socially disadvantaged communities, and culturally diverse audiences expanded the meaning of public cultural service. Participation became particularly important because public legitimacy could no longer be assumed from institutional tradition alone. Cultural organisations increasingly had to demonstrate how they contributed to contemporary social life without reducing their activities to immediate popularity. The strongest institutions sought a balance between professional expertise and meaningful public engagement.

By the end of 2025, the Czech cultural institutional system therefore differed profoundly from that inherited at the beginning of independence while retaining substantial organisational continuity. The state remained a significant cultural actor, but cultural governance had become decentralised among municipalities, regions, national institutions, independent organisations, businesses, European programmes, and civil society. Publicly supported institutions survived not as unchanged relics of socialism but as organisations repeatedly adapted through legislation, professionalisation, digitalisation, strategic planning, and new expectations of public service. The mixed economy of culture combined market revenues with public contributions and grants, while the relative balance differed dramatically across cultural sectors. National cultural policies gradually evolved from post-transformation coordination documents into broader strategies connecting culture with creativity, education, regional development, social policy, technology, and the economy. The development of cultural statistics made the system increasingly capable of examining itself through evidence, while the National Institute for Culture gave this analytical capacity a stronger institutional

home. The Public Cultural Institutions Act finally introduced a legal alternative tailored specifically to the governance of publicly supported culture.

In summary, cultural policy between 1993 and 2025 transformed the institutional environment of Czech culture through a long movement from centralised state administration towards plural and multi-level governance. The first phase dismantled ideological control, permitted private and civic cultural initiative, and redistributed responsibilities previously concentrated within socialist public administration. Decentralisation transferred substantial institutional authority to municipalities and regions, with the 2001 transfer of twenty-nine museums and galleries providing one of the clearest examples of this territorial restructuring. Public cultural organisations nevertheless remained central because theatres, museums, libraries, galleries, heritage institutions, and other services could not be maintained sustainably through market revenue alone. Cultural funding consequently developed as a mixed system combining state, regional, municipal, European, commercial, household, and non-profit resources rather than following a single economic model. Successive national cultural policies gradually replaced reactive institutional reconstruction with strategic governance, and the policies of 2015–2020 and 2021–2025 increasingly connected culture with the economy, education, creativity, social development, accessibility, and resilience. Cultural statistics and the Culture Account strengthened evidence-based policy, while museums, libraries, theatres, regional institutions, and independent organisations developed increasingly differentiated models of public service. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the vulnerability of cultural labour and accelerated the recognition of culture as an ecosystem rather than a collection of publicly funded institutions. Recovery policy, the Public Cultural Institutions Act, and the creation of the National Institute for Culture in 2025 demonstrated that institutional reform remained active more than three decades after the beginning of the democratic transformation. The defining achievement of Czech cultural policy was therefore not the withdrawal of the state from culture, but the construction of a plural framework in which public responsibility, professional autonomy, territorial self-government, civic initiative, market activity, research, and cultural participation could coexist within an increasingly sophisticated system of governance.

Cultural and Creative Industries

The emergence of cultural and creative industries as a recognised field represents one of the most important changes in the Czech understanding of culture since 1993. During the first years of democratic transformation, culture was usually discussed through categories inherited from cultural administration: the arts, museums, monuments, libraries, publishing, film, broadcasting, and individual artistic professions. Economic transformation certainly affected all these sectors, but they were not yet commonly interpreted as parts of one interconnected creative economy. By the beginning of the 21st century, however, international debates increasingly suggested that artistic creation, media production, design, architecture, advertising, digital games, publishing, film, music, and related activities shared important structural characteristics. Their principal resources included creativity, specialised knowledge, intellectual property, symbolic value, reputation, and the capacity to transform ideas into cultural goods or services. This perspective made it possible to see relationships between traditionally subsidised cultural activities and market-oriented creative enterprises without pretending that their economic models were identical. In Czechia, the concept

developed gradually through research, European policy transfer, local mapping, cultural statistics, and eventually explicit national strategy. By 2025, cultural and creative industries had become not merely an analytical category but a recognised field of public policy, regional development, research, entrepreneurship, innovation, and international economic activity.

The origins of this development lay in the economic and institutional changes of the 1990s, even though the terminology of cultural and creative industries was not yet widely established. The removal of censorship and state monopolies created an extraordinarily dynamic environment for publishing, music, film distribution, advertising, commercial broadcasting, graphic design, architecture, fashion, and other forms of creative enterprise. New private publishers and agencies appeared rapidly, while artists and designers gained far greater freedom to establish companies, work independently, sell services, collaborate internationally, and participate directly in markets. Commercial television and radio transformed media production, advertising expanded with the arrival of foreign and domestic brands, and architecture responded to both restitution and new private investment. The same period also demonstrated that cultural production could no longer be divided neatly into a state-supported artistic sphere and an ordinary commercial economy. A film could simultaneously be a cultural work, an intellectual-property asset, an export product, a source of specialised employment, and a stimulus to tourism or location services. A designer could work for a manufacturing company while remaining part of a wider artistic and visual culture. The economic transformation of the 1990s therefore created the empirical reality that would later be conceptualised as the cultural and creative sector.

This emerging sector did not develop on an empty historical foundation. Czechia possessed internationally recognised traditions in architecture, applied arts, glass, typography, animation, puppetry, photography, film, theatre, music, product design, and book culture long before the language of the creative economy became fashionable. 20th-century Czech functionalism, the interwar avant-garde, the Czechoslovak school of animation, industrial design, glassmaking, and graphic culture had demonstrated repeatedly that artistic and technical creativity could interact productively. The post-1989 economy reopened these traditions to global markets while simultaneously exposing them to international competition. Some inherited industries declined or underwent difficult restructuring, but their specialised knowledge remained available to new designers, studios, entrepreneurs, and cultural organisations. The strong relationship between craft skill and modern design became especially important in fields such as glass, jewellery, furniture, fashion, and applied arts. Czech creative industries therefore developed through both rupture and continuity, combining post-socialist entrepreneurship with much older cultures of making and design. This historical depth distinguishes them from interpretations of the creative economy that treat creativity primarily as a recent consequence of digital technology.

European integration gave these dispersed activities a common conceptual vocabulary. During the 2000s, European institutions increasingly presented culture and creativity as sources of employment, innovation, regional development, social cohesion, and economic competitiveness. International studies of the economy of culture demonstrated that cultural sectors generated substantial economic activity while also producing less easily measurable effects on innovation and territorial attractiveness. The European Commission's 2010 Green Paper on cultural and creative industries further encouraged member states to examine how creative talent could contribute to a knowledge-based economy. Czech policymakers and researchers increasingly encountered concepts such as creative clusters, intellectual

property, cultural entrepreneurship, creative cities, audience development, and cross-sectoral innovation. These ideas did not simply replace established cultural-policy principles, because public support for heritage and the arts continued to rest partly upon values that cannot be reduced to commercial returns. Instead, economic and developmental arguments were added to an existing cultural-policy vocabulary centred upon artistic freedom, preservation, access, and public service. The Czech concept of cultural and creative industries consequently emerged as a hybrid framework in which cultural value and economic activity were treated as related but not interchangeable.

A decisive step towards empirical understanding came through the project *Mapping the Cultural and Creative Industries in the Czech Republic*, implemented by the Arts and Theatre Institute between 2011 and 2015. The project sought to move discussion beyond abstract assertions about the economic importance of creativity by collecting quantitative and qualitative information on individual sectors and their institutional environments. It examined thirteen areas, including visual and performing arts, film, music, books and publishing, architecture, design, digital games, advertising, television and radio, applied arts, monuments, and software-related activities. Researchers analysed economic performance, organisational structures, employment, professional needs, trends, strengths, weaknesses, and possibilities for strategic support. The resulting two-volume mapping document became one of the foundational sources for later Czech policy concerning cultural and creative industries. Equally important was the development of a certified methodology for mapping these activities at local and regional levels. This transformed mapping from a one-off research project into a reproducible policy instrument. Czech cultural policy thereby acquired a framework through which creative activity could be understood spatially, institutionally, and economically rather than through national averages alone.

The mapping project also exposed a conceptual problem that has remained central to the field. The term *industry* can be misleading when applied to artistic practices, heritage organisations, individual creators, or small non-profit institutions that do not resemble industrial production in any conventional sense. Czech terminology initially made extensive use of *kulturní a kreativní průmysly*, literally cultural and creative industries, following common European usage. Later policy increasingly preferred the broader expression *kulturní a kreativní odvětví*, or cultural and creative sectors, which better accommodated activities organised through public, non-profit, freelance, and commercial structures. By the early 2020s, the Ministry of Culture organised the field into three broad layers: a cultural and artistic core, cultural industries, and creative industries. The core included cultural heritage, performing arts, visual arts, and traditional or artistic crafts; cultural industries included publishing, music, film and video, broadcasting, and games; and creative industries included architecture, advertising, and design. This layered approach recognised that the distance from direct market production varies greatly across the field. It also prevented economic terminology from erasing distinctions between a museum collection, a theatre production, an advertising agency, and a video-game studio.

Local mapping became especially important because creative economies are strongly shaped by place. The national project therefore tested its methodology in cities including Brno, Zlín, Pardubice, and Plzeň, each of which possessed a different combination of cultural institutions, educational resources, industrial histories, and creative businesses. Mapping involved more than counting firms because many creative actors operate as freelancers, micro-enterprises, informal networks, or organisations whose official economic classification does not describe their cultural role adequately. Interviews, workshops, institutional analysis, and professional

consultation were therefore required alongside statistical data. This mixed method revealed relationships between cultural infrastructure and the wider urban economy that ordinary business registers could miss. A city with art schools, theatres, festivals, technological universities, architecture studios, and active public cultural institutions may create conditions favourable to creative enterprise even when no single sector dominates local employment. Mapping also demonstrated that creative activity tends to cluster where specialised labour, networks, audiences, education, workspaces, and cultural amenities can interact. The creative city consequently became an empirical rather than merely promotional concept within Czech cultural-policy research.

Brno developed one of the most systematic municipal responses to this new understanding. The city's dense combination of universities, theatres, music, festivals, architecture, design, audiovisual production, technology firms, game development, and independent cultural organisations provided favourable conditions for treating culture and creativity as parts of one urban ecosystem. Municipal strategy increasingly connected artistic life with entrepreneurship, education, innovation, public space, international visibility, and long-term urban development. The Culture and Creative Industries Strategy for 2018–2025 formalised many of these relationships and encouraged participatory dialogue with cultural and creative actors. Institutions such as KUMST developed as environments in which creative professionals could obtain workspace, business support, mentoring, and contact with wider entrepreneurial networks. Brno also cultivated film-related support, gaming events, cultural forums, and cooperation between creative practice and its substantial science and technology sector. These initiatives were not attempts to transform every cultural organisation into a business. Rather, they recognised that creative ecosystems function most effectively when public culture, education, independent practice, technological expertise, and commercial entrepreneurship can interact.

Prague represented an even larger and more complex creative economy. As the capital, it concentrated national cultural institutions, universities, international tourism, film and television production, advertising, architecture, design, publishing, software, galleries, festivals, music, and a substantial freelance creative workforce. Its size produced opportunities for specialisation unavailable elsewhere in Czechia, but it also generated high property costs and competition for suitable studios, rehearsal rooms, offices, and production spaces. Creative Prague emerged as an institutional platform for mapping and supporting this ecosystem and for connecting cultural development with wider urban policy. Its analysis emphasised one of the structural characteristics of cultural and creative industries throughout the country: the exceptional predominance of very small actors. Approximately ninety-five per cent of the actors identified in Prague's mapping were micro-entities with no more than nine employees, many effectively individual professionals. This fragmentation creates flexibility and innovation but makes collective representation, data collection, financing, and long-term investment more difficult. Prague consequently illustrates both the extraordinary concentration of creative capacity and the structural precarity hidden beneath the visible success of a major cultural capital.

Regional development made the creative-industries concept particularly attractive outside Prague. Ostrava, for example, could connect contemporary creativity with the difficult transition from heavy industry towards a more diversified urban economy. Former industrial spaces offered possibilities for cultural reuse, festivals, creative work, education, and public events, while the city's industrial identity itself became a resource for design and cultural

branding. Zlín possessed a different historical advantage through the Bata legacy, architecture, film, design education, and an unusually strong association between industrial modernity and creative practice. Plzeň used the experience of the European Capital of Culture to strengthen cultural networks and development planning, while other regions began mapping creative actors according to their own economic and cultural profiles. These examples demonstrate why a single national policy cannot assume that all creative ecosystems require identical forms of support. Creative development depends upon local educational institutions, available buildings, industrial histories, transport, municipal capacity, labour markets, and existing cultural organisations. Regional cultural and creative policy therefore became increasingly connected with place-based development rather than simple replication of metropolitan models.

The audiovisual sector provides one of the clearest examples of a cultural industry in which artistic production, technical expertise, international investment, and public policy interact directly. Czech filmmaking inherited strong studio traditions, skilled crews, locations, animation expertise, post-production capacity, and the international reputation of Prague as a production centre. Yet these advantages were insufficient by themselves once European countries began competing aggressively for international audiovisual production through financial incentives. Czech production incentives were introduced in 2010 partly to restore international competitiveness and encourage producers to purchase Czech goods and professional services. The system initially provided a twenty per cent rebate on qualifying Czech expenditure and became an important component of the country's production infrastructure. From January 2025, the transformation of the State Cinematography Fund into the Czech Audiovisual Fund broadened the policy framework and increased incentives to twenty-five per cent for most qualifying productions and thirty-five per cent for animation and specified digital production. Support was also expanded towards television, animation, games, and audiovisual infrastructure. The development of audiovisual policy thus illustrates how a cultural sector can require both selective public support for domestic artistic creation and economic instruments designed to attract internationally mobile production.

Film incentives also demonstrate the importance of indirect economic effects within creative industries. An international production shooting in Czechia purchases accommodation, transport, catering, construction, costumes, equipment, post-production, location services, and numerous specialised professional services beyond what appears on the screen. Experienced crews accumulate technical knowledge that can later benefit domestic productions, while international projects connect Czech professionals with global production networks. Historic architecture and urban environments can themselves become audiovisual production assets without being reduced to tourism attractions. The cultural and economic dimensions therefore reinforce each other when policy is well designed, although excessive dependence upon foreign production can create vulnerability when international demand declines. Domestic cinematography also requires support for development, distribution, festivals, artistic experimentation, and culturally significant projects that may never generate large commercial returns. Czech audiovisual policy increasingly recognised these differences instead of treating all film activity as one undifferentiated market. By 2025, the transition towards an Audiovisual Fund reflected the growing convergence of cinema, television, streaming, animation, digital production, and interactive media.

Video-game development became perhaps the most striking example of a creative industry whose economic significance expanded faster than its traditional cultural-policy recognition.

Czech studios built international reputations through titles produced for global markets, while digital distribution allowed even comparatively small companies to reach audiences far beyond the domestic language area. By the early 2020s, the sector included well-known companies such as Bohemia Interactive, SCS Software, Warhorse Studios, and numerous smaller developers. Industry research for 2023 identified roughly 170 development studios and approximately 2,765 workers, with the overwhelming majority of revenue generated abroad. This export intensity is particularly significant for a country whose domestic market is too small to support large game-development budgets alone. Games combine programming, graphic design, music, writing, animation, architecture, historical research, interface design, and narrative development, making them unusually interdisciplinary cultural products. Their growth also challenged older institutional distinctions between technology and culture, because a successful game studio may resemble a software company organisationally while producing fictional worlds and aesthetic experiences. By 2025, the reformed audiovisual framework had begun to recognise games much more explicitly as part of Czech cultural and creative policy.

The games sector also exposed weaknesses in the relationship between creative education and labour demand. Studios repeatedly reported shortages of qualified workers even as universities gradually introduced programmes or courses connected with game design, animation, digital arts, and interactive media. Because production combines artistic and technical skills, conventional educational divisions between art schools and computer science departments can make curriculum development difficult. Companies consequently recruit internationally and often provide substantial training internally. The sector also depends heavily upon English-language communication and global distribution platforms, making international labour mobility part of ordinary professional practice. At the same time, the success of Czech studios demonstrates that small national economies can develop globally competitive creative industries when intellectual property is internationally scalable. Unlike location-based cultural services, a digital game can generate most of its revenue abroad without relocating its principal development team. This combination of domestic ownership and global export made gaming an increasingly important example in arguments that creativity should be treated as part of Czech innovation policy.

Design and architecture occupy a different position because their value frequently appears inside products and environments whose economic statistics are assigned to other sectors. An industrial designer may improve the competitiveness of a manufacturing company even though the resulting revenue is recorded as industrial production rather than as cultural activity. An architect contributes creative value to construction, urban development, tourism, public space, and quality of life while working within regulatory and technical systems extending far beyond the cultural sector. Czech design also draws upon a historically strong relationship with glass, furniture, typography, product engineering, fashion, and applied arts. The creative-industries framework made these cross-sectoral effects easier to recognise and encouraged policymakers to think of design as a form of innovation rather than solely aesthetic embellishment. Architectural competitions, professional chambers, design exhibitions, awards, universities, and specialist media help create an environment in which creative quality can influence both public and private investment. The relationship between cultural capital and industrial capability is particularly visible when Czech firms use design to differentiate products in international markets. Architecture and design therefore demonstrate how

creative expertise can generate value well beyond the institutions traditionally classified as culture.

Traditional and artistic crafts occupy an especially revealing boundary between cultural heritage and the creative economy. Czech glass, ceramics, jewellery, textiles, woodwork, and other crafts may preserve specialised techniques transmitted over generations while simultaneously participating in contemporary design and luxury markets. Their cultural significance can therefore coexist with entrepreneurship, innovation, export, and brand development. Czech glassmaking provides a particularly strong example because historical regional expertise continues to support contemporary studios, manufacturers, designers, artists, and educational institutions. International recognition of handmade glass production as intangible cultural heritage in 2023 highlighted the importance of skills and transmission, while contemporary design demonstrated that preservation need not require the freezing of traditional forms. Creative-industry policy can support such fields through design cooperation, marketing, business development, and international presentation, whereas heritage policy concentrates additionally upon safeguarding knowledge and transmission. The two approaches overlap but remain analytically distinct. Their interaction shows why Czech cultural and creative industries are rooted partly in cultural inheritance rather than only in new digital sectors.

Publishing and the book market represent another field in which cultural and commercial logics coexist uneasily. The extraordinary expansion of publishing after 1989 created a highly diverse market ranging from major publishing groups to small specialist houses, literary publishers, university presses, and independent booksellers. Czech-language publishing operates within a limited linguistic market, which constrains economies of scale while preserving an important cultural infrastructure for literature, scholarship, translation, and public debate. Digital formats altered this environment gradually rather than eliminating print, with e-books and audiobooks becoming increasingly significant while physical books retained a strong position. The difficult economic conditions of 2023 demonstrated the sector's sensitivity to inflation, paper and production costs, household purchasing power, and distribution structures. The introduction of a zero rate of VAT on books from January 2024 represented an important cultural-economic policy intervention, reducing pressure on a sector whose social importance extends beyond ordinary retail activity. Market reports also show continuing movement towards digital formats and the growing importance of reliable metadata and shared information systems. Publishing therefore illustrates why creative industries require policy tools sensitive to both market conditions and linguistic-cultural public value.

Music developed through an equally complicated mixture of creation, intellectual property, live performance, digital distribution, festivals, collecting societies, public institutions, and private enterprises. The collapse of the old recording and distribution system after 1989 was followed by the rapid expansion of commercial labels and international music products, while later digitalisation fundamentally altered revenue structures. Streaming eventually became central to recorded music, reducing the importance of physical formats without eliminating them entirely. Czech industry data for 2024 showed substantial growth in recorded-music revenues, reflecting the broader international recovery of the recording sector under subscription-based digital models. Live music simultaneously developed through clubs, concert promoters, orchestras, festivals, municipal events, and independent scenes whose economic structures differ sharply from those of digital platforms. A successful music ecosystem therefore depends upon venues, rights management, education, technical production, media exposure, and

opportunities for artists to build audiences. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated particularly clearly that recorded and live music cannot be treated as one economic system, because digital consumption continued while live performance experienced severe disruption. Music thus reveals the internal diversity hidden within the apparently unified category of a creative industry.

The event sector similarly gained visibility only gradually within cultural-economic analysis. Festivals, conferences, exhibitions, performances, fairs, and public events depend upon complex supply chains including technical production, staging, lighting, sound, security, catering, transport, graphic design, communication, and venue management. Many of these services operate commercially even when the event itself is supported through cultural grants or organised by a public institution. The pandemic made this hidden infrastructure suddenly visible because the cancellation of events affected numerous professions that conventional cultural statistics had often classified elsewhere. National mapping in the 2020s therefore included the event industry among the fields requiring dedicated socioeconomic analysis. Its inclusion demonstrates the increasing sophistication of the CCI framework, which seeks to understand how cultural experiences are actually produced rather than counting only artists and formal cultural organisations. At the same time, not every commercial event should automatically be interpreted as cultural production merely because it uses creative services. Boundary-setting remains necessary if the category is to retain analytical usefulness. The Czech approach increasingly addressed this challenge through detailed sectoral mapping rather than relying upon one broad statistical label.

Advertising, broadcasting, software, and digital media create even more difficult conceptual boundaries. Advertising is strongly creative and depends upon writing, graphic design, photography, film, strategy, and digital production, but its primary commercial purpose is usually to sell goods and services created elsewhere. Television and radio combine public-service, private-commercial, journalistic, artistic, and entertainment functions within organisations whose cultural outputs cannot be understood solely through their business models. Software presents an even greater problem because only some forms of software production are primarily driven by cultural or creative content, while others belong more properly to general information technology. Early Czech mapping therefore had to decide where to draw operational boundaries around fields whose activities overlap continuously. Such problems are not methodological failures but reflections of an economy in which creativity is increasingly distributed across sectors. The most useful function of the CCI concept is consequently not to classify every creative activity under one ministry, but to reveal flows of knowledge and symbolic production that conventional economic categories often conceal. Czech research gradually moved from searching for one perfect definition towards using several complementary statistical and policy frameworks.

This structural complexity is reinforced by the employment pattern of the sector. Cultural and creative activities are dominated by freelancers, sole traders, micro-enterprises, project-based organisations, and small firms to a degree unusual in many conventional industries. Such organisational forms permit flexibility, rapid collaboration, and relatively low barriers to entry, but they also produce unstable incomes and weak bargaining positions. A graphic designer, actor, translator, illustrator, musician, curator, filmmaker, or game specialist may combine several forms of employment within the same year. Income may come from contracts, copyright, grants, teaching, commissions, performances, self-employment, or part-time work outside the cultural field. Conventional employment statistics therefore often

underestimate both the size of the sector and the insecurity of the people working within it. Prague's mapping, for example, found an overwhelming predominance of micro-actors, while national research repeatedly encountered similar fragmentation. The policy significance of this structure became unmistakable during the pandemic, when many creative professionals did not fit easily into support schemes designed around conventional permanent employment.

The labour structure also helps explain why creative entrepreneurship differs from ordinary start-up discourse. Many artists and cultural professionals do not begin their careers because they identify an expanding commercial market and intend to maximise growth. They may be motivated primarily by artistic practice, professional vocation, cultural expression, or the desire to maintain independent creative control. Business knowledge nevertheless becomes necessary when these practices require contracts, pricing, intellectual-property management, marketing, taxation, budgeting, international sales, or the employment of collaborators. Creative-sector support therefore cannot assume that every participant wants to become a rapidly scaling firm. Some require only enough entrepreneurial competence to sustain long-term professional independence. Others, especially in games, design, audiovisual production, or digital media, may pursue significant international growth and investment. Czech policy increasingly differentiated among these trajectories rather than equating entrepreneurship with one model of corporate expansion.

Education consequently became a central issue within CCI development. Czechia possesses strong artistic academies, conservatoires, design schools, universities, technical institutions, and vocational traditions, yet creative-sector organisations repeatedly identified gaps between specialist education and changing professional practice. Graduates may possess high artistic or technical competence while lacking experience in project management, entrepreneurship, digital distribution, copyright, fundraising, or international collaboration. Conversely, technologically trained professionals may lack design, narrative, or cultural competences increasingly valuable in knowledge-intensive industries. The creative economy therefore encourages interdisciplinary educational environments in which art, technology, business, and social understanding can interact. Initiatives in creative learning also extended the argument beyond professional training by treating creativity as a transferable competence relevant to broader education. National Recovery Plan measures later supported the development of digital skills, financial literacy, management, cultural innovation, and internationalisation among cultural professionals. By 2025, skills policy had become inseparable from discussion of the long-term competitiveness and resilience of cultural and creative industries.

Creative centres, incubators, and shared spaces emerged as one institutional response to the fragmented structure of the sector. Individual freelancers and small firms often cannot afford specialist equipment, meeting spaces, studios, workshops, or professional advisory services independently. Shared environments can lower these barriers while generating informal contact among people working in different creative disciplines. The value of such centres lies therefore partly in physical infrastructure and partly in network formation. KUMST in Brno exemplified a model combining workspace with business development and community building for creative professionals. Other cities and regions developed or proposed centres adapted to local circumstances, often linking culture with the reuse of former industrial, administrative, or otherwise underused buildings. Such projects also reflect a broader European interest in creative hubs as instruments of urban regeneration and innovation. Their effectiveness, however, depends upon long-term programming and professional management

rather than architecture alone, because a renovated building does not automatically create a functioning creative ecosystem.

The economic case for supporting creativity became strongest when policy moved beyond the direct revenues of cultural businesses and considered spillover effects. Design can improve industrial products, audiovisual expertise can support digital communication, creative methods can contribute to tourism, and artistic practices can generate new approaches to education or community development. Architecture influences environmental quality and urban attractiveness, while festivals and cultural institutions can contribute to place branding and local service economies. Such effects are difficult to measure because value frequently appears outside the organisation that generated the original creative input. The CCI concept nevertheless encouraged Czech policymakers to examine creativity as a cross-cutting capacity rather than a benefit restricted to the cultural sector itself. This thinking brought the Ministry of Culture into closer dialogue with economic-development and innovation institutions. It also supported arguments that creative professionals should have access to instruments normally associated with business development, not only traditional cultural grants. The gradual introduction of creative vouchers would become one of the clearest practical expressions of this logic.

The COVID-19 pandemic represented the greatest shock to the Czech cultural and creative sector since the beginning of its systematic policy recognition. Activities dependent upon physical attendance experienced immediate revenue collapse, while restrictions affected venues, events, touring, retail, production schedules, and the networks of freelance labour surrounding them. The crisis demonstrated how misleading it was to imagine the sector simply as a collection of visible cultural institutions. Independent artists, technicians, small companies, promoters, designers, event suppliers, and numerous other creative professionals were affected simultaneously. Some digital industries, particularly games and online media, proved more resilient, revealing sharp differences among branches classified within the same broad sector. Emergency programmes such as COVID–Kultura represented an unprecedented extension of state support towards parts of the creative economy that had previously interacted only weakly with cultural administration. The crisis therefore accelerated the state's recognition that cultural production depends upon labour and enterprise structures extending far beyond publicly founded organisations. It also transformed resilience from an abstract strategic concept into an immediate condition of sectoral survival.

The Strategy for the Development and Support of Cultural and Creative Industries adopted by the government in August 2021 represented the most explicit national institutionalisation of the field. Its vision was to create a functioning system capable of using cultural capital, talent, and creativity while recognising cultural and creative sectors as important to national competitiveness and social innovation. The strategy aimed to construct a systematic environment for development, improve coordination across public administration, establish a more coherent institutional framework, strengthen data collection, and develop appropriate support instruments. The Ministry of Culture had already created a dedicated department for cultural and creative industries in March 2021, later renamed the Department of Cultural and Creative Sectors. This organisational change was significant because responsibility for CCI development was no longer dispersed only among traditional arts and cultural departments. The strategy also reflected cooperation between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Industry and Trade, recognising that the field crossed the conventional administrative border

between cultural policy and economic policy. By this point, creative-sector support had moved from experimental mapping towards an established area of national governance.

The National Cultural Policy 2021–2025 reinforced this change by making development of cultural and creative industries one of its six principal objectives. Its broader philosophy treated culture and creativity as an intersectoral domain connected with society and the economy rather than as a specialised administrative enclave. This was a substantial conceptual shift from the early post-communist period, when the principal policy question had been how to free culture from state control. The state was now expected to create conditions in which creativity could circulate between artistic institutions, businesses, education, regional development, technology, and social innovation. Such an approach also required the Ministry of Culture to cooperate more extensively with other government departments and private-sector organisations. It encouraged a distinction between public support that compensates for structural market limitations and developmental instruments intended to stimulate innovation or business collaboration. The cultural and creative sector thereby became one of the principal areas through which Czech cultural policy itself was becoming more economically and analytically sophisticated.

The Czech National Recovery Plan translated this strategy into investment on a scale unavailable to earlier creative-sector policies. Component 4.5, devoted to development of the cultural and creative sector, explicitly linked post-pandemic recovery with digital transformation and integration into the country's innovation ecosystem. One major initiative allocated resources to regional cultural and creative centres, with the objective of supporting at least fifteen centres and maintaining geographical balance across Czechia. The programme emphasised intersectoral cooperation, innovation capacity, infrastructure sustainability, and forms of cooperative financing. This approach was important because it treated creative infrastructure as part of regional development rather than concentrating investment solely in Prague and Brno. Another major strand supported digitalisation of cultural content and documentation, recognising that creative-sector competitiveness increasingly depends upon digital infrastructures and access. Training and mobility programmes addressed the skills and professional adaptability of cultural workers. Recovery policy therefore became an accelerator through which CCI strategy acquired tangible institutional, technological, and territorial form.

Creative vouchers and Design Credits represented perhaps the clearest attempt to generate spillovers between creative professionals and the wider economy. Between 2022 and 2025, the Ministry of Culture administered a series of calls financed through the National Recovery Plan and directed primarily at small and medium-sized enterprises and registered creative professionals. The central idea was simple: a business that might not normally purchase specialist creative services could receive support to work with designers or other creative experts on products, services, visual communication, websites, branding, or related forms of innovation. Such instruments shift policy attention from subsidising creative supply alone towards stimulating demand for creative expertise. They also test the proposition that design and other creative competences can improve competitiveness outside the cultural sector. The programmes operated across the regions rather than exclusively in the major metropolitan centres, making them part of the wider territorial strategy for creative development. Their success depended upon building trusted directories of creative professionals and ensuring that firms understood creativity as a productive investment rather than decorative expenditure. By 2025, the voucher model had therefore become an important experiment in connecting cultural policy with small-business innovation policy.

The second national mapping cycle, undertaken between 2022 and 2025, demonstrated how much the field had matured since the pioneering project of 2011–2015. All fourteen higher territorial self-governing units participated in regional mapping and strategic work, making the process genuinely nationwide rather than limited to a few pilot cities. The research also incorporated sector-specific socioeconomic analysis covering books and print, music, film and video, television and radio, game development, architecture, advertising, design, and the event industry. Professional associations and universities participated directly, allowing sectoral knowledge to supplement administrative statistics. The resulting methodology recognised that cultural and creative industries contain many economically active entities that are difficult to identify through conventional classification alone. Mapping therefore combined quantitative datasets with sectoral verification and qualitative knowledge. The process created not merely statistical outputs but institutional competence within regions, ministries, professional associations, and research organisations. By 2025, data collection had become a permanent element of creative-sector governance rather than an exceptional research exercise.

The Culture Account provides a complementary perspective because it follows financial flows across the wider cultural economy. Data for 2023 showed total cultural resources of approximately CZK 344 billion, of which business activity represented the largest component, while public expenditure and direct household spending also remained substantial. Cultural activity contributed approximately 1.5 per cent of Czech gross domestic product under the methodology employed by the account, and the wider workforce extended far beyond employees of formal cultural institutions when self-employed workers and other forms of work were included. These figures should be interpreted cautiously because the Culture Account and CCI mapping do not use perfectly identical boundaries. Their value lies precisely in showing that culture cannot be described exclusively either as public expenditure or as private business. Commercial sectors such as advertising, architecture, media, and other creative activities generate substantial market revenues, while performing arts, heritage, and several traditional cultural fields depend much more strongly upon public support. The economic architecture is therefore plural rather than uniform. Data collection increasingly made it possible for Czech policy to recognise this internal diversity instead of applying one model of cultural economics to the entire field.

By 2025, the Czech cultural and creative sector had thus become simultaneously more visible and more difficult to define through traditional administrative boundaries. Its strongest globally oriented branches, particularly games and parts of audiovisual production, demonstrated that Czech creative intellectual property and professional expertise could compete internationally despite the limited size of the domestic market. Architecture, design, glass, crafts, and applied arts connected contemporary innovation with long historical traditions of making and technical competence. Publishing and music showed how digital distribution can transform mature cultural industries without rendering their established forms obsolete. Regional strategies and creative centres demonstrated that CCI development need not be confined to the capital, while mapping revealed significant differences among territorial ecosystems. The growth of policy attention did not remove structural problems such as fragmented employment, weak access to finance, shortages of specialist skills, expensive urban workspaces, unstable income, or limited management capacity among micro-enterprises. Nor should economic visibility become an argument for judging all cultural activity according to market performance. The mature Czech approach increasingly recognised precisely this tension: creative industries

are economically significant because they create value, but their capacity to do so depends upon cultural environments whose importance cannot be expressed only in financial terms.

In summary, the development of cultural and creative industries from 1993 to 2025 transformed the Czech understanding of the relationship between culture and the economy. The liberalisation of the 1990s created the entrepreneurial and institutional diversity from which a creative economy could emerge, but it was only during the 2000s and especially the 2010s that these activities began to be analysed as an interconnected sector. The national mapping project of 2011–2015 supplied the first systematic empirical framework and demonstrated that culture, media, design, architecture, games, crafts, software-related activities, and artistic production interact through shared resources of creativity, knowledge, symbolic value, and intellectual property. Subsequent policy increasingly replaced the narrower expression cultural and creative 'industries' with a broader understanding of cultural and creative 'sectors', allowing publicly supported, non-profit, freelance, and commercial activities to be studied within one differentiated ecosystem. Prague, Brno, Ostrava, Zlín, Plzeň, and other regional centres developed distinctive creative profiles, confirming that creative development depends upon local combinations of education, infrastructure, cultural institutions, business, heritage, and social networks. Film incentives, the expansion of the audiovisual framework, the international success of Czech game development, the renewal of design and craft traditions, and the digital transformation of publishing and music demonstrated several different routes through which cultural creativity can acquire economic scale. The pandemic exposed the precarious labour structures beneath much of this activity but also accelerated the political recognition of the sector. The 2021 national CCI strategy, the National Cultural Policy 2021–2025, regional creative centres, creative vouchers, Design Credits, digitalisation programmes, and nationwide mapping between 2022 and 2025 converted that recognition into a more coherent policy architecture. By 2025, cultural and creative industries had consequently become one of the clearest areas in which Czech cultural policy connected historical cultural capital with entrepreneurship, technology, regional development, research, and innovation without abandoning the principle that cultural value ultimately exceeds its measurable economic return.

Digital Culture, Public Humanities, and New Forms of Cultural Communication

The digital transformation of Czech culture after 1993 changed considerably more than the technical means through which cultural institutions stored information or communicated with visitors. It altered the forms in which culture was created, circulated, interpreted, researched, and publicly discussed. During the 1990s, computers and the internet initially appeared largely as new instruments added to existing institutional practices, but over the following three decades the distinction between 'digital' and 'non-digital' cultural life became progressively more difficult to maintain. Libraries created digital collections, museums developed online catalogues, archives made documentary resources searchable, and cultural organisations adopted websites and later social media as ordinary channels of communication. Artists simultaneously began treating software, networks, interactive environments, games, digital images, and algorithmic processes as cultural media in their own right. Humanities

researchers acquired new possibilities for processing large textual, visual, spatial, and relational datasets, while the public gained direct access to sources once available only inside specialist institutions. Cultural communication consequently shifted from a predominantly one-directional model towards an environment in which users could search, comment, share, reinterpret, and sometimes contribute cultural materials themselves. By 2025, digitalisation had therefore become not simply one branch of cultural policy but one of the fundamental conditions under which Czech culture and cultural research operated.

The origins of this transformation can be traced to the first decade after the fall of communism, when Czech society entered the rapidly expanding global environment of personal computing and internet communication. The early web changed access to foreign cultural information particularly dramatically because it reduced the intellectual and geographical isolation inherited from the previous political system. Universities, libraries, media organisations, publishers, and cultural institutions gradually established websites through which information could circulate without the costs and delays associated with print. Electronic discussion groups and specialist online communities created new spaces for communication among researchers, artists, students, and enthusiasts. The transformation was uneven because access to computers, connections, and digital skills differed substantially among institutions and social groups. Nevertheless, digital communication gradually became an expected component of professional cultural life rather than an experimental supplement. The internet also made visible forms of cultural production that did not depend upon established publishing houses, broadcasters, galleries, or other traditional intermediaries. This early digital opening prepared the environment in which later Czech new-media studies, digital humanities, online collections, and participatory cultural platforms could develop.

New-media studies provided one of the first institutional frameworks through which this changing cultural environment could itself become an academic object. The programme developed at Charles University at the intersection of information science, media research, humanities, technology, and cultural analysis. Its intellectual significance lay in treating computers and networks not merely as neutral tools but as media capable of changing communication, memory, identity, artistic practice, and social behaviour. Game studies, digital humanities, cyberculture, social-network analysis, digital art, and the relationship between technology and society consequently became connected within a common teaching and research environment. Researchers could study a computer game as a technical system, cultural text, social practice, educational medium, and commercial product at the same time. This interdisciplinary structure was particularly suitable for a period in which conventional distinctions among culture, media, technology, and information were becoming increasingly unstable. Czech new-media studies therefore created an important bridge between the earlier study of mass communication and the later computational turn within the humanities. It also helped establish the idea that digital culture should be analysed critically rather than celebrated automatically as technological progress.

Digital culture itself became an increasingly legitimate subject of historical and cultural research. The objects concerned ranged from computer games and internet communities to digital art, social networks, online religious practices, virtual identities, memes, and new forms of audiovisual production. Researchers gradually recognised that global digital phenomena are always experienced through particular languages, institutions, infrastructures, and local histories. Czech digital culture could therefore not be understood simply by importing universal narratives about the internet or Silicon Valley technology. Local game development,

digital artistic communities, transformations in media ownership, Czech-language online communication, and the adaptation of global platforms all created historically specific cultural environments. Recent research into local digital art and culture has explicitly sought to reconstruct these Czech developments historiographically rather than treating digital culture as a permanently present and ahistorical sphere. Such work is especially important because digital cultural objects are often fragile, dependent upon obsolete hardware, software, platforms, and formats. The history of digital culture must therefore be documented while many of its original technical environments are still recoverable. By the mid-2020s, digital culture had become both a contemporary social reality and an increasingly urgent object of cultural history.

Digitisation of existing cultural materials followed a different logic from the study of born-digital culture, although the two processes increasingly interacted. Czech libraries were among the earliest institutions to develop large-scale digital access to documentary heritage. Manuscriptorium created an international environment for manuscripts, incunabula, early printed books, maps, and other historical documents, while Kramerius developed access to books and periodicals predominantly from the 19th century onwards. These systems progressively changed the spatial organisation of research because scholars no longer needed to begin every investigation by travelling to the institution holding a physical original. Manuscriptorium eventually aggregated materials from numerous institutions in Czechia and abroad and became connected with Europeana as a specialised aggregator of written heritage. Digital access also reduced unnecessary handling of rare or physically vulnerable originals while enabling detailed visual consultation of high-quality reproductions. Yet the transformation was more significant than simple convenience because searchable metadata and aggregated collections allowed researchers to discover relationships among materials dispersed across different libraries. The digital library thus became an active research environment rather than merely an electronic reproduction service.

The National Digital Library further expanded this infrastructural approach by moving from selective digitisation towards mass processing and long-term preservation. Large quantities of printed materials could be digitised, described, stored, searched, and made accessible according to copyright conditions. Such scale required workflow standardisation, quality control, metadata standards, persistent identifiers, storage systems, and preservation planning that individual digitisation projects had often treated only partially. The resulting infrastructure connected librarianship increasingly closely with information technology and digital preservation. A digitised book could no longer be regarded simply as a set of scanned images, because its usefulness depended upon text recognition, metadata, search functionality, legal status, interface design, and continued technical accessibility. The concept of cultural access consequently became inseparable from information architecture. Czech librarianship became one of the fields in which cultural preservation and digital infrastructure were most clearly integrated. This experience would later provide models and technical competence relevant to museums, archives, and other memory institutions.

Museums and galleries gradually developed a comparable national digital environment through eSbírky. The portal enabled participating memory institutions to publish digital representations and metadata concerning objects from their collections within a common interface. Its importance lay particularly in aggregation because hundreds of individual museums cannot all sustain digital platforms of equivalent technological quality independently. Smaller regional institutions could contribute collection information to a

national environment while retaining responsibility for the original objects and professional documentation. eSbírky also served as a Czech museum-domain aggregator towards Europeana, connecting nationally held collections with a continental digital cultural infrastructure. The development of eSbírky 2.0 during the mid-2020s demonstrated that digital infrastructure itself requires periodic renewal because security standards, data volumes, user expectations, and technical architectures change rapidly. Preservation of digital cultural access is therefore not achieved once and permanently. A functioning national aggregator must itself become an object of continuing institutional care.

Digital museum communication developed much more unevenly than collection digitisation. Research conducted among Czech museums during the 2010s showed that websites and social media had become widespread, while sophisticated new-media installations and highly interactive presentation methods were distributed far less evenly. Institutional size mattered substantially because many Czech museums employ only small professional teams with limited technical and financial capacity. A large national museum may maintain specialist digital, education, marketing, and information-technology departments, whereas a local museum may expect a few employees to combine collection care, exhibitions, administration, education, and online communication. Technology therefore did not eliminate institutional inequality and could sometimes reinforce it. Studies between 2015 and 2020 nevertheless demonstrated a clear increase in the use of new media within museum exhibitions and visitor engagement. Czech museums were gradually becoming more technologically active even before the pandemic forced them to accelerate online communication dramatically. The digital transformation of museums should therefore be understood as a cumulative process rather than an abrupt consequence of COVID-19 alone.

Audiovisual heritage produced another distinctive form of digital cultural communication. The National Film Archive developed programmes through which Czech films could be digitised and, in selected cases, digitally restored for contemporary exhibition and distribution. Digital restoration required much more than improving image sharpness or removing visible damage. Specialists had to reconstruct the historical appearance and sound of films through research into negatives, prints, production documents, earlier versions, and technological conditions. The objective was therefore to make works accessible within contemporary digital environments without replacing historical evidence with anachronistic visual perfection. Digitally restored films could return to cinemas, festivals, educational contexts, and home viewing, giving preservation a direct communicative function. This relationship between research and renewed circulation distinguished digital restoration from simple archival storage. Czech film heritage consequently became one of the clearest examples of digital technology reconnecting historical cultural objects with contemporary audiences.

The rise of digital humanities extended the technological transformation from access and preservation into research methodology itself. Digital humanities does not designate one method or discipline but a family of approaches in which computational tools, structured data, and digital infrastructures become part of humanities research. Text analysis, network analysis, visualisation, geographic information systems, digital editions, corpus methods, image analysis, database research, and large-scale bibliographical analysis all became increasingly visible within Czech scholarship. Such approaches did not make conventional historical interpretation, archival criticism, close reading, or object analysis obsolete. Their value lay in allowing researchers to ask questions at scales or across relationships difficult to manage manually. A literary scholar could analyse large textual corpora, a historian could

reconstruct correspondence networks, and an archaeologist could examine spatial patterns through geographic information systems. Digital humanities therefore expanded the methodological repertoire available to researchers rather than creating a universal technological replacement for humanities reasoning. The Czech digital turn became especially significant once these methods were supported by stable research infrastructures rather than isolated individual experiments.

Masaryk University developed one of the most visible Czech environments for this methodological expansion. Its digital-humanities activities encompass text analysis, network analysis, spatial research, data visualisation, digital editions, image analysis, and the creation and curation of databases. The breadth of these activities demonstrates that digital humanities emerged horizontally across traditional disciplines rather than through the replacement of those disciplines by a new department. Historians, philologists, archaeologists, art researchers, information scientists, and other specialists can use different computational methods while retaining distinct research questions. Teaching developed alongside research, enabling students to acquire practical skills in data cleaning, metadata, text processing, geospatial analysis, network analysis, visualisation, publication, and archival storage. The 2022 collective volume *Digitální obrat v českých humanitních a sociálních vědách* provided the first broad mapping of how computational methods were already changing Czech humanities and social-science research. Its significance lay in documenting a field that had moved beyond isolated enthusiasm and acquired enough methodological variety to require systematic reflection. Czech digital humanities were therefore becoming self-conscious as a research community rather than remaining a loose collection of technical practices.

Charles University followed a related path through several existing programmes and, in 2022, the establishment of a formal Centre for Digital Humanities at the Faculty of Arts. The Centre was designed to coordinate teaching, research, data creation, methodological development, project preparation, and outreach across disciplines. Its creation reflected the recognition that digital research generates institutional problems no individual scholar can solve efficiently alone. Researchers need support with data structures, storage, interoperability, digital publication, long-term preservation, licensing, and specialised software. The Centre also drew attention to the problem of research evaluation because digital datasets, tools, editions, and infrastructures do not always fit assessment systems designed primarily for books and journal articles. This institutional development therefore concerned the sociology of scholarship as much as technology itself. Digital humanities required universities to recognise new categories of scholarly labour and research output. By the mid-2020s, Czech universities were increasingly adapting organisational structures to those demands.

The LINDAT/CLARIAH-CZ infrastructure gave this development a national and European scale. It connects leading Czech organisations working in language technologies, humanities, arts, archives, libraries, visual culture, film, history, philosophy, archaeology, ethnology, and related fields. Its purpose is to archive, manage, process, and make accessible research data, resources, tools, and digital platforms while linking Czech researchers with European CLARIN and DARIAH infrastructures. This distributed model is particularly suitable for humanities research because relevant resources are themselves distributed among universities, Academy institutes, libraries, galleries, archives, and film institutions. The infrastructure encourages common standards without requiring all resources to be physically concentrated within one organisation. It also makes long-term digital curation a collective research problem rather than an afterthought left to individual project teams after grant funding ends. The participation of

cultural institutions alongside universities demonstrates how closely Czech digital humanities have become connected with memory organisations. Digital research infrastructure consequently reinforces the broader Czech model in which cultural scholarship is produced across several institutional sectors.

Bibliography offers an instructive example of how an old humanities practice can be transformed rather than displaced by digital methods. The Czech Literary Bibliography continues a scholarly tradition of systematic bibliographical documentation, but its databases are now available as structured digital resources and downloadable machine-readable datasets. Researchers can work with retrospective bibliography, contemporary literary scholarship, samizdat, exile literature, translations, and web-based literary materials through linked datasets rather than only printed reference volumes. This change allows bibliography to become material for computational analysis in addition to serving its traditional function of locating publications. Patterns of authorship, translation, periodical activity, intellectual networks, or chronological change can potentially be studied across large bodies of structured records. Open data also enables external researchers to develop new questions that the original database creators did not anticipate. The transformation illustrates a broader principle of digital humanities: long-term documentary scholarship acquires new analytical possibilities when its accumulated information is formalised as reusable data. Czech humanities digitalisation is therefore strongest where new methods build upon, rather than ignore, older traditions of systematic documentation.

The meaning of *public humanities* requires greater caution in the Czech context. Unlike *digital humanities*, the English expression did not become a universally established institutional label across Czech universities and cultural organisations by 2025. Nevertheless, many practices associated internationally with public humanities developed vigorously under other names, including public history, museum education, popularisation, cultural mediation, historical education, citizen participation, and public-facing digital scholarship. The important phenomenon is therefore not the frequency of a particular English term but the growing expectation that humanities knowledge should circulate beyond specialist academic communities. Researchers increasingly collaborated with schools, museums, libraries, civic associations, journalists, cultural organisations, and local communities. Digital platforms made such collaboration easier because research materials and interpretative tools could be placed directly in public environments. Public communication also became increasingly interactive, forcing humanities scholars to confront interpretations produced outside professional academia. Czech public-oriented humanities developed primarily as a set of practices before becoming a clearly named unified field.

Public history became the most explicit Czech institutional manifestation of this wider development. A dedicated 2018 issue of *Historie – Otázky – Problémy* examined history in public space, digital sites of memory, museum interpretation, education, and the multiple environments in which society uses the past. By 2024, Kamil Činátl and Václav Sixta could publish a university textbook entitled *Public history: Praktiky, média, instituce*, indicating that the concept had acquired sufficient intellectual stability for systematic teaching. Their approach emphasised the ubiquity of representations of the past and the fact that historical meaning is produced not only in academic books but through museums, media, popular culture, tourism, commemorations, activism, and digital platforms. This perspective shifted the scholar's role from that of an exclusive producer of legitimate historical narratives towards critical analysis of a much broader culture of history. It also permitted historians and memory

institutions to intervene actively in public uses of the past rather than merely criticise them from outside. Digital media became especially important because they accelerate circulation, remixing, commentary, and competition among historical interpretations. Public history thus provides one of the clearest bridges between Czech cultural research and public humanities in the wider international sense.

HistoryLab demonstrates how that bridge could be translated into a concrete digital environment. Developed through cooperation among historians, educators, and technology specialists, the platform uses digitised historical sources to encourage inquiry rather than passive reception of a completed narrative. Pupils can analyse photographs, documents, maps, or other materials through structured exercises designed to develop historical literacy. The important innovation lies not simply in putting sources on a screen but in designing a sequence of actions that makes interpretation itself visible as a process. Users must compare evidence, formulate observations, contextualise materials, and recognise uncertainty rather than memorise one authoritative answer. Research accompanying the project analysed its pedagogical use and later its performance during pandemic distance learning. HistoryLab consequently became an example of digital public humanities in which scholarship, technology, education, and public historical culture intersect directly. Its success also demonstrated that digital tools are most valuable when they embody a clear intellectual and educational methodology rather than when technological novelty becomes an end in itself.

Memory of Nations developed another model of digitally mediated public humanities through oral history and civic documentation. The project, publicly accessible online since 2008, gradually became one of Europe's largest collections of eyewitness testimony concerning 20th-century history. Audio and video recordings are accompanied by biographies, photographs, archival materials, transcripts or selected passages, thematic categorisation, and contextual information. The online format enables users to search individual lives through historical periods and subjects rather than encounter testimony only in specialist archives. Registered researchers can access fuller documentation through an electronic research environment, while selected stories circulate more broadly through articles, exhibitions, education, radio, podcasts, and other public formats. Citizens can also suggest witnesses for documentation, introducing a participatory element into the continuing expansion of the archive. The platform therefore exists simultaneously as a research resource, civic memory project, educational environment, and cultural communication system. Its development exemplifies how digital infrastructure can connect scholarly documentation with large-scale public storytelling without making the two functions identical.

Digital memory also creates analytical problems that public humanities must confront critically. Once a historical place, testimony, photograph, or event enters online platforms, its meaning is influenced by interface design, search rankings, visual conventions, user contributions, and platform algorithms. Čeněk Pýcha's research into sites of memory in digital environments demonstrated that apparently global and participatory platforms do not automatically dissolve national narratives. Users may reproduce familiar historical interpretations even within technically international digital spaces. The internet therefore does not simply democratise historical memory in a neutral fashion. It creates new intermediaries whose technological structure affects visibility and interpretation, often without users recognising them as curatorial forces. This challenges historians and cultural researchers to analyse digital platforms themselves as cultural institutions. A tourist application, social

network, video platform, or search engine can participate in the production of historical meaning just as a museum exhibition does, although through very different mechanisms.

Social media transformed ordinary communication by cultural institutions in a related way. Museums, galleries, theatres, libraries, archives, festivals, and research organisations increasingly used Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and other platforms to advertise programmes, present collection objects, explain research, stream discussions, and develop more informal institutional voices. This altered the temporal rhythm of communication because an institution could address audiences continuously rather than mainly through exhibitions, press releases, catalogues, or periodic publications. Short-form digital content also encouraged curators, educators, and researchers to translate specialised knowledge into highly compressed formats. The resulting communication could widen access but also reward simplification and visual immediacy. Institutional staff had to acquire skills in photography, video, writing for different platforms, analytics, moderation, and digital community management that had not traditionally formed part of museum or humanities training. Communication departments consequently became more deeply connected with curatorial and educational work. Cultural institutions were no longer merely represented online; they increasingly existed as continuous communicative actors within platform environments.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transition with exceptional speed. When Czech museums and galleries closed physically in 2020, digital communication ceased to be optional for institutions wishing to maintain meaningful contact with audiences. National Gallery Prague redirected substantial activity towards social media, virtual tours, online workshops, livestreams, recorded discussions, collection videos, and three-dimensional exhibition experiences. Programmes such as *Do You Have a Minute?* translated individual works from the Gallery's collections into short digital formats suitable for Instagram and related platforms. Curators and educators appeared more directly before remote audiences, while videos about conservation made normally invisible professional work publicly accessible. Other institutions experimented with podcasts, streamed performances, digital exhibitions, remote education, and virtual tours under similarly urgent conditions. The crisis therefore compressed several years of digital experimentation into a remarkably short period. It also forced cultural organisations to discover which forms of online communication genuinely created public value and which merely imitated physical experiences inadequately.

The post-pandemic period demonstrated that the strongest digital innovations were generally hybrid rather than substitutive. Virtual access could enable participation by geographically distant audiences, people with mobility limitations, researchers unable to travel, or individuals seeking preparatory information before a visit. Recorded lectures and digital exhibitions could remain accessible long after a physical event had ended, extending the temporal life of cultural programming. Online catalogues could deepen physical visits by providing information too extensive for exhibition labels, while social media could maintain relationships with audiences between visits. Yet the return of visitors also confirmed that digital representations cannot replace every dimension of embodied cultural experience. Scale, materiality, architectural space, live performance, social gathering, and direct encounter with original objects retain forms of significance that screens reproduce only partially. Czech institutions therefore increasingly moved towards combinations of physical and digital communication rather than imagining a permanent transition to virtual culture. The pandemic became less a victory of online culture over traditional institutions than a catalyst for a more complex hybrid cultural ecology.

Participation within this ecology remained uneven and conceptually ambiguous. A user who clicks, shares, or comments on museum content is technically interacting with an institution, but such behaviour does not necessarily amount to substantive participation in cultural interpretation. More ambitious participatory projects invite communities to contribute knowledge, memories, metadata, photographs, testimony, or locally held materials. Oral-history initiatives and community archives can therefore transform audiences into contributors to cultural documentation. At the same time, professional institutions retain responsibilities for verification, ethical use, preservation, cataloguing, and historical context. Digital participation does not eliminate expertise but changes the relationship between expert and public knowledge. Czech public humanities increasingly developed around this negotiation, especially where local memories or personal collections supplement institutional archives. The central challenge is to broaden the production of cultural knowledge without confusing openness with the absence of standards.

Digital culture also transformed relationships between education and memory institutions. Libraries, museums, galleries, archives, and heritage organisations increasingly developed digital materials designed specifically for schools, teachers, families, and lifelong learning. Digitised collections can support source-based teaching because students encounter historical evidence rather than relying exclusively upon textbook summaries. Virtual exhibitions and multimedia narratives make it possible to combine text, image, sound, maps, and audiovisual testimony within one educational environment. Libraries have explored how digital-humanities resources can connect formal school education with their own non-formal educational activities. HistoryLab represents the most methodologically explicit example, but the broader tendency includes museum worksheets, online collection interpretation, interactive maps, and digital storytelling. Such resources shift the educational role of cultural institutions from the provision of supplementary information towards the development of critical cultural and historical literacy. Public humanities thereby becomes partly a question of how institutions teach users to work with cultural evidence rather than merely consume conclusions.

The digital turn also changed scholarly publication and access to research. Institutional repositories, open-access journals, datasets, digital editions, and research platforms make humanities outputs available beyond the readerships reached by conventional printed academic publishing. Czech Literary Bibliography provides machine-readable datasets under open licences, while university repositories increasingly preserve theses, articles, books, and educational materials. Digital editions can integrate transcriptions, images, commentary, variants, metadata, and links in ways difficult to reproduce within a printed volume. Open access is particularly important for publicly funded cultural research because it reduces barriers between academic production and teachers, cultural professionals, independent researchers, and interested citizens. Yet openness creates its own requirements regarding licensing, metadata quality, persistent identifiers, privacy, and intellectual property. A resource that is technically online but poorly documented or legally unusable may have little practical research value. Digital public scholarship therefore depends upon careful infrastructure as much as willingness to make materials visible.

Copyright remained one of the principal constraints shaping digital cultural access. Many historical materials can be digitised technically even when they cannot legally be made freely available online. Libraries consequently developed access models distinguishing public-domain materials from works subject to continuing copyright protection. The development of

services for works unavailable on the market sought to widen legitimate digital access within this legal environment. Museums and galleries confront additional rights issues involving photography, artists' estates, reproductions, donor conditions, and commercial use. Audiovisual heritage is especially complex because multiple rights may attach to one work. These legal problems demonstrate that digitisation is never purely technological. Cultural communication in digital environments depends upon an institutional balance among preservation, public access, authors' rights, privacy, and legitimate reuse.

The National Recovery Plan moved digitalisation to an unprecedented scale of public investment during the early 2020s. Component 4.5 devoted substantial resources to the digital transformation of the cultural and creative sector and set targets for dozens of digitisation projects. Calls supported libraries, national cultural assets, visual art and architecture documentation, audiovisual heritage, music, theatre, dance, literature, and book culture. The programme also encouraged shared equipment and capacities, addressing the inefficiency that would result if every small institution attempted to construct expensive specialist infrastructure independently. Methodological guidance for the digitisation of cultural content was developed to improve consistency and professional practice across participating organisations. Investment therefore targeted both objects and institutional capability. This approach marked a transition from digitisation understood as a sequence of isolated projects towards a more systematic national cultural infrastructure.

Such infrastructure creates long-term obligations that can easily be underestimated. Digital files require storage, duplication, migration, cybersecurity, metadata maintenance, software support, and organisational responsibility long after the original grant has ended. Platforms may become obsolete even when their underlying data remain valuable, as the need to rebuild eSbírky demonstrated clearly. Digital research projects face similar risks when bespoke websites or software lose technical support after project teams disband. The LINDAT/CLARIAH-CZ infrastructure has therefore placed increasing emphasis upon digital curation and the preservation of research environments as well as individual datasets. Sustainable digital culture requires decisions about which systems should be maintained centrally, which data should follow open standards, and how resources can be transferred when technologies change. The problem is institutional rather than merely technical because preservation ultimately depends upon organisations accepting responsibility over long periods. Czech digital humanities increasingly recognised sustainability as one of the central scholarly questions of digital knowledge production.

Cybersecurity and authenticity became correspondingly important cultural issues. A compromised collection database or inaccessible digital archive can threaten cultural access even when physical objects remain unharmed. Digital manipulation also makes it increasingly difficult for audiences to distinguish documentary evidence from altered or decontextualised material. Museums, archives, and public-history projects therefore need not only secure systems but transparent information about provenance, metadata, and the status of digital representations. Historical photographs and audiovisual recordings circulate easily outside the contexts in which memory institutions originally presented them. Social media can amplify emotionally powerful materials more rapidly than institutions can correct misleading interpretations. Digital literacy thus becomes part of cultural literacy because users must understand not only what a source represents but how it has been selected, edited, circulated, and technologically mediated. Czech public humanities at the end of the period increasingly operated in an environment where source criticism had to include platform criticism.

Artificial intelligence introduced a further set of questions during the final years of the period under consideration. Machine learning already had practical applications in optical character recognition, handwritten-text recognition, image processing, automatic transcription, recommendation, and the analysis of large datasets before generative AI became widely accessible. For humanities research, these technologies can accelerate work with collections too extensive for manual processing alone. They may assist transcription of archival documents, identification of textual patterns, classification of images, or retrieval across large digital corpora. Yet automated outputs remain dependent upon training data, modelling choices, language coverage, and technical assumptions that can reproduce errors at scale. Generative systems also create questions concerning authorship, copyright, authenticity, and the distinction between cultural evidence and synthetically produced content. Czech institutions were only beginning to formulate systematic responses to these problems by 2025. Artificial intelligence therefore belongs to the concluding edge of this period rather than to a fully consolidated Czech cultural model.

Digital inequality remained an equally important limitation. Online access can reduce geographical barriers, but it presupposes devices, connectivity, digital skills, accessible interface design, and confidence in navigating complex information environments. Older users, socially disadvantaged groups, people with disabilities, and residents of differently connected regions may encounter distinct barriers. Cultural institutions therefore cannot treat an online resource as automatically accessible simply because it is technically public. User experience, language, readability, search design, alternative formats, and digital education all determine whether access is meaningful. The same inequality exists among institutions, because small regional organisations may lack dedicated digital specialists and stable budgets for infrastructure maintenance. National platforms and shared services partly address these disparities by allowing smaller institutions to participate in systems they could not build independently. Digital cultural policy is consequently inseparable from broader questions of inclusion and institutional capacity.

The relationship between digital research and public communication also requires careful protection of scholarly complexity. Digital environments reward speed, brevity, visual clarity, and easily shareable narratives, whereas humanities research often depends upon ambiguity, contextualisation, conflicting evidence, and long argument. An institution communicating on social media can therefore face pressure to simplify precisely those historical or cultural problems that research reveals as complex. Public humanities should not solve this tension by reproducing academic prose unchanged for general audiences, because specialist language can itself exclude participation. The more demanding task is to develop forms capable of remaining intellectually responsible while becoming publicly intelligible. Czech projects such as HistoryLab, public-history publications, digital exhibitions, and Memory of Nations demonstrate several different solutions to this problem. Each selects and structures evidence but also attempts to preserve visible relationships between interpretation and source material. The quality of digital cultural communication ultimately depends upon this balance between accessibility and epistemic responsibility.

By 2025, digital culture had therefore altered the institutional geography of Czech humanities research. The researcher no longer moved only among university departments, libraries, archives, and physical collections but also among repositories, databases, aggregators, digital editions, software tools, GIS environments, social platforms, and computational infrastructures. Cultural institutions themselves became data producers whose cataloguing

and digitisation choices affected what scholars could discover and analyse. Universities increasingly required specialists capable of combining humanities expertise with information technology, while memory institutions needed professionals who understood both collections and digital systems. Collaboration among researchers, librarians, archivists, curators, developers, data specialists, designers, and educators became increasingly normal. This professional hybridity is one of the most important institutional results of the Czech digital turn. Digital humanities were no longer simply humanities conducted with computers but an environment in which knowledge production depended upon new forms of collective expertise.

The same process changed the position of audiences. Cultural communication before the internet had certainly never been wholly passive, but institutions possessed much greater control over the channels through which collections, research, and cultural programmes reached the public. Digital environments substantially reduced that monopoly. A visitor can now encounter a painting through Instagram before entering the gallery, find an archival photograph through a search engine, listen to an eyewitness testimony at home, or debate a historical interpretation without any institutional mediation. Users can also juxtapose official museum content with personal memories, commercial media, activist narratives, and misinformation within the same screen environment. Cultural authority therefore becomes comparative and negotiated rather than simply institutionally granted. The response of Czech cultural organisations has increasingly been to participate actively in these environments rather than insist that serious cultural knowledge exists only inside physical institutions. Public humanities emerges precisely from this need to combine scholarly authority with open communication.

In summary, digital culture and public-facing humanities transformed Czech cultural research between 1993 and 2025 at the levels of infrastructure, method, communication, education, and institutional identity. The first phase brought internet access and digital cataloguing into cultural organisations, while libraries developed major systems such as Manuscriptorium and Kramerius that gradually became international research environments. Museums followed through national aggregation in eSbírky, while the National Film Archive demonstrated how digital restoration could reconnect historical audiovisual works with contemporary circulation. Digital humanities expanded these developments from access to methodology through text analysis, GIS, network research, digital editions, visualisation, and structured datasets, supported increasingly by university centres and the distributed LINDAT/CLARIAH-CZ infrastructure. Public humanities in the Czech context developed less through one unified institutional label than through public history, museum education, Memory of Nations, HistoryLab, digital collections, public scholarship, and new forms of cultural mediation. Social media and online programming transformed institutions into continuous communicative actors, and the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this change by forcing museums, galleries, theatres, and other organisations to experiment rapidly with remote access. The subsequent return to physical cultural life did not reverse digitalisation but produced a more mature hybrid model combining material encounter with online access and extended interpretation. National Recovery Plan investment between 2022 and 2025 further moved digitalisation towards shared national infrastructure rather than isolated technical projects. At the same time, copyright, cybersecurity, long-term preservation, platform power, digital inequality, and emerging artificial intelligence made clear that digital communication creates new responsibilities as quickly as it removes old barriers. By 2025, the principal innovation was therefore not that Czech culture had become ‘online’, but that digital environments had become integral to how

cultural knowledge is produced, preserved, interpreted, contested, taught, and shared with society.

The Major Achievements of Czech Cultural Studies and Cultural Research, 1993–2025

The principal achievements of Czech cultural studies between 1993 and 2025 are difficult to reduce to the emergence of one influential theoretical school or a single institution capable of representing the entire field. Their significance lies instead in the construction of a plural research environment capable of analysing culture historically, sociologically, anthropologically, institutionally, economically, and digitally. In little more than three decades, Czech cultural research moved from the intellectual and organisational uncertainties of the post-communist transformation towards an internationally connected system with established research centres, journals, datasets, policy institutions, interdisciplinary projects, and public-facing infrastructures. Questions once dispersed among ethnography, aesthetics, history, sociology, media research, philosophy, and cultural administration increasingly became part of shared conversations about identity, memory, cultural participation, everyday life, creative production, and the public role of culture. The field also became much more empirical, acquiring representative surveys, regional cultural data, economic accounts, sectoral mapping, oral-history archives, digital corpora, and computational research infrastructures. At the same time, interpretative humanities traditions remained strong and prevented cultural research from being reduced to statistical or economic measurement. Czech cultural studies therefore achieved maturity not through disciplinary unification but through the ability to sustain several complementary ways of knowing culture. This institutional and methodological pluralism represents the first major achievement of the post-1993 period. It created the intellectual conditions within which Czech culture could be studied as a changing social process rather than as a fixed national inheritance.

A second achievement was the successful removal of ideological monopoly without replacing it by another compulsory theoretical orthodoxy. The transformation after 1989 reopened cultural scholarship to intellectual traditions that had been suppressed, restricted, selectively interpreted, or institutionally marginalised during the communist period. Scholars regained access to international anthropology, sociology, semiotics, cultural history, media theory, memory studies, feminist scholarship, post-structuralism, and numerous other approaches while simultaneously reconsidering Czech structuralism, aesthetics, ethnology, and social thought. This resulted neither in the complete rejection of domestic traditions nor in a mechanical adoption of theories developed in Western Europe or North America. Czech researchers increasingly learned to use international concepts selectively and to test them against specific historical experiences of the Czech lands and post-socialist society. Methodological pluralism became normal across universities and Academy institutes, allowing one research problem to be approached through archives, interviews, fieldwork, statistical surveys, discourse analysis, or digital methods. Generational change reinforced this transformation as students educated after 1989 entered academic careers without having experienced ideological restriction as the ordinary condition of scholarship. By the 2010s, disagreement among theoretical perspectives had become a standard feature of academic life

rather than a politically dangerous departure from an authorised line. The restoration of such intellectual pluralism is one of the most fundamental achievements underlying every more specialised success considered in this chapter.

The Czech project of *kulturologie* constitutes a third, more specifically national contribution. The programme developed at Charles University attempted to construct a synthetic science of culture capable of integrating anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, history, and the broader human sciences. Its ambition differed from the classical Birmingham model of Cultural Studies and demonstrated that the Czech search for an interdisciplinary theory of culture possessed its own intellectual genealogy. The independent Department of Culturology eventually ceased to exist in 2013 when it was merged with the Institute of Ethnology, illustrating the organisational difficulty of sustaining a discipline defined by such conceptual breadth. Yet this institutional outcome should not obscure the programme's importance as an experiment in treating culture itself as the principal object around which several human sciences could be brought together. Culturology helped train scholars capable of moving between disciplinary languages and encouraged systematic reflection on how culture might be defined beyond narrow artistic or administrative categories. Many of the questions associated with it subsequently continued within anthropology, ethnology, aesthetics, media studies, cultural policy, and other fields. Its most lasting achievement was therefore not the establishment of a permanent disciplinary empire but the normalisation of interdisciplinary cultural inquiry. The history of Czech culturology demonstrates that even a discontinued institutional experiment can leave a substantial conceptual legacy.

One of the strongest substantive achievements of the post-1993 field was the transformation of research into Czech cultural identity. Scholars increasingly moved away from attempts to identify a stable national character and instead examined the narratives, symbols, memories, social practices, and historical circumstances through which national belonging is produced. Research demonstrated that Czech identity could coexist with Moravian, regional, Czechoslovak, Central European, and European affiliations rather than requiring their disappearance. It also showed that the apparently homogeneous Czech nation was historically connected with German-speaking communities, Jews, Roma, Slovaks, migrants, religious minorities, and other groups whose experiences complicated older national narratives. Such work substantially enriched understanding of the Bohemian lands as a historically multilingual and culturally interconnected Central European space. The peaceful division of Czechoslovakia provided researchers with an unusual case in which state separation did not require the cultural destruction of shared historical memory. European integration subsequently added new questions concerning the relationship between national sovereignty and wider political and cultural belonging. By 2025, Czech cultural identity was widely treated in serious scholarship as a historical and relational construction rather than a self-evident cultural essence. This represents an important intellectual achievement because it allowed national culture to be studied critically without denying the continuing social importance of national attachment.

Collective-memory research developed into another area of particular strength. The opening of archives and the disappearance of ideological censorship allowed scholars to investigate the Holocaust, post-war expulsions, Stalinism, political repression, the Prague Spring, normalisation, dissent, exile, and the Velvet Revolution through evidence and perspectives previously difficult to address openly. Oral history became especially important because personal testimony made it possible to investigate how individuals remembered events whose

official interpretations had changed repeatedly. Czech researchers increasingly distinguished between the reconstruction of what happened and the study of how later generations interpret what happened, allowing memory itself to become a legitimate object of cultural analysis. The Institute of Ethnology's specialised research on memory, projects within contemporary history, museums, memorial institutions, and university centres gradually created a dense interdisciplinary environment. Memory came to be examined through family narratives, commemorations, landscapes, monuments, photographs, media, literature, digital communication, and institutional practice. This broadened the evidential foundations of 20th-century cultural history well beyond official political documentation. It also connected Czech scholarship with one of the most influential international research fields of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. By the middle of the 2020s, memory studies had become one of the areas in which Czech researchers participated most naturally in transnational and comparative scholarship.

Public-memory infrastructures amplified this scholarly achievement beyond universities. The Jewish Museum in Prague, the Terezín Memorial, the Museum of Romani Culture, the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Post Bellum, Memory of Nations, and numerous regional museums created repositories through which research, documentation, education, and public remembrance could interact. Memory of Nations was particularly significant because oral testimony was transformed from a specialist research source into a digitally accessible public archive capable of reaching schools, families, journalists, and local communities. These institutions also helped correct asymmetries within older national memory by making Jewish, Romani, dissident, exile, minority, and individual experiences considerably more visible. The development of the Lety memorial demonstrated that research into collective memory could influence the moral geography of public commemoration by drawing attention to histories long insufficiently recognised. Public institutions did not eliminate disagreement over the past, nor should that be understood as their purpose. Their achievement was to establish durable spaces in which competing interpretations could be examined against documentary and testimonial evidence. Czech memory culture consequently became more plural at the same time that its research infrastructure became stronger. This combination of scholarly investigation and public accessibility is one of the distinctive accomplishments of Czech cultural research after 1993.

Ethnology underwent an equally important methodological and thematic renewal. The field retained extensive archives documenting folk song, dance, ritual, vernacular culture, crafts, material life, and regional traditions, but it increasingly ceased to define contemporary cultural research primarily through the survival of traditional rural practices. New research addressed migration, urban life, family memory, minorities, music scenes, subcultures, materiality, environmental relationships, and changing forms of identity. The Institute of Ethnology itself came to reflect this transformation through specialised work in memory studies, mobility and migration, ecological anthropology, ethnomusicology, ethnochoreology, and other contemporary areas. Historical collections were not discarded but reinterpreted through new questions and increasingly digitised for wider scholarly use. This allowed Czech ethnology to combine an unusually deep documentary record with methods capable of analysing contemporary social change. The resulting continuity is intellectually significant because modernisation occurred without requiring the denial of the discipline's own history. Traditional culture became one research domain among several rather than the universal definition of ethnological relevance. By 2025, Czech ethnology had therefore transformed from a field

commonly associated with *národopis* into a broad and internationally legible science of cultural practices and social experience.

The institutionalisation of social and cultural anthropology represents a closely related achievement. Around the beginning of the 1990s, anthropology in the Anglo-American sense possessed only a limited organisational presence in Czech academic life. Within the following decades, university programmes, professional associations, journals, international partnerships, and specialist research teams established it as a recognised field. Its development brought stronger emphasis upon participant observation, reflexive ethnography, cultural comparison, migration, kinship, ethnicity, inequality, political economy, religion, and contemporary social processes. Early tensions between anthropologists and established ethnologists gradually produced productive methodological debate rather than permanent disciplinary separation. Czech anthropology also increasingly questioned its own inherited categories, particularly when analysing Roma, minorities, migration, and claims of national or Central European 'colonial innocence'. This reflexive turn strengthened awareness that researchers themselves participate in systems of representation and that descriptions of cultural difference can reproduce unequal power relationships. Anthropological work therefore became simultaneously more internationally connected and more critical of the assumptions carried by international disciplinary traditions. The establishment of such reflexive field-based research is one of the major methodological achievements of Czech cultural scholarship.

The recognition of everyday culture as an important object of scholarly investigation followed from this transformation. Everyday life provided a scale at which the consequences of socialism, market transformation, Europeanisation, migration, consumer change, and technological development could be observed outside formal political institutions. Czech and neighbouring Central European researchers investigated housing, household provisioning, consumption, gardening, leisure, music, workplaces, family relationships, informal exchange, body practices, waste, and numerous other routines through which social systems become lived realities. Such research made it possible to reconstruct socialism without reducing it entirely to the actions of political elites or security institutions. It similarly complicated triumphalist narratives of postsocialist modernisation by showing that economic liberalisation produced insecurity and uneven adjustment alongside expanded freedom and consumption. Material objects, domestic practices, and personal memories became evidence capable of revealing cultural changes invisible within macroeconomic indicators. The ordinary therefore acquired analytical significance precisely because it mediated between institutions and personal experience. Czech cultural research became much better equipped to explain how structural change enters daily life. This widening of scholarly attention from extraordinary events towards ordinary practices substantially enriched the social history of the post-1989 period.

Research into migration and mobility created another major area of contemporary competence. Czechia changed from a country often imagined primarily through emigration and ethnic homogeneity into a society characterised increasingly by immigration, labour mobility, international families, refugees, and transnational networks. Ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and other scholars developed increasingly sophisticated research into Vietnamese communities, Ukrainian migration, Roma mobility, return migration, expatriate communities, borders, integration, language, racialisation, welfare, and citizenship. Ethnographic fieldwork demonstrated that administrative categories such as foreigner,

refugee, or migrant frequently obscure highly different life trajectories and social positions. The growth of specialised mobility and migration research also helped connect Czech cultural analysis with pressing European debates. Research became socially relevant to municipalities, government agencies, civil-society organisations, and communities while retaining critical independence. The refugee movements following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine further demonstrated the need for such expertise in the early 2020s. By 2025, migration could no longer be treated as an exceptional theme outside mainstream cultural research. Its institutionalisation represents a significant achievement in adapting Czech scholarship to the changing demographic and cultural realities of the country.

Ecological anthropology provides perhaps the clearest example of how far Czech ethnological and anthropological research expanded beyond older disciplinary expectations. Researchers increasingly examined food systems, waste, human-animal relationships, hunting, veterinary practices, biosecurity, infrastructures, resources, sustainability, and environmental care through ethnographic methods. These subjects connected everyday culture with global challenges associated with climate change, the Anthropocene, resource use, and changing relationships between human and non-human worlds. The field also created productive connections with science and technology studies, political ecology, critical geography, medical anthropology, and economic anthropology. Czech researchers working on waste, household sustainability, animal disease, and human-animal relations gained international visibility through comparative projects and publications. Such work demonstrated that culture cannot be separated analytically from material environments and ecological systems. It also expanded cultural research beyond symbolic representation towards infrastructures, technologies, and practical relations of care and provision. The establishment of ecological anthropology as a recognisable institutional research direction therefore represents an important sign of the field's theoretical maturity. A discipline historically associated with documenting human traditions became capable of addressing some of the most urgent socio-environmental questions of the 21st century.

Cultural sociology produced another important achievement by making participation itself measurable. Research conducted through the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences moved beyond abstract claims about public access to culture and investigated who actually participates, under which conditions, and with what regional differences. Representative surveys provided evidence concerning cultural preferences, attendance, perceptions of culture, social stratification, and determinants of participation. The monograph *Kultura v krajích České republiky* brought legislation, public policy, infrastructure, financing, regional analysis, and survey research into one integrated investigation. Its contribution was methodological as much as descriptive because it demonstrated that culture can be studied simultaneously as institutional environment and individual behaviour. Factors such as education, settlement structure, urbanisation, socioeconomic status, and territorial infrastructure could therefore be related empirically to cultural participation. Such work gave policymakers stronger evidence when discussing accessibility and regional inequality. It also challenged cultural institutions to consider audiences beyond assumptions based primarily upon attendance totals. The establishment of empirical cultural sociology consequently gave Czech cultural research an important quantitative dimension alongside its strong interpretative traditions.

Regional research deserves recognition as a separate achievement because it corrected the tendency to identify Czech culture with Prague's national institutions. Studies of cultural

infrastructure and participation demonstrated substantial differences among regions and municipalities in the distribution of libraries, theatres, museums, galleries, cultural organisations, and opportunities for participation. Ethnological and anthropological fieldwork likewise revealed the importance of Moravian, Silesian, borderland, industrial, rural, and urban experiences that cannot be represented adequately through one metropolitan perspective. Regional governments themselves became cultural-policy actors after administrative decentralisation, producing strategies and institutional arrangements capable of being studied comparatively. Brno, Ostrava, Plzeň, Zlín, Olomouc, and other centres developed cultural ecosystems with distinctive relationships among universities, public institutions, industries, festivals, creative sectors, and regional identities. Research increasingly approached these environments as generators of culture rather than secondary recipients of national policy. This territorial perspective also allowed cultural development to be connected with urban transformation, local identity, tourism, education, and quality of life. The result was a more genuinely polycentric understanding of Czech cultural life. Such regionalisation represents a significant correction to earlier cultural narratives organised disproportionately around the capital.

The development of cultural-policy research was another major institutional achievement. In the early 1990s, cultural policy was primarily an urgent practical matter involving restitution, public subsidies, organisational survival, and the redistribution of responsibilities. Over time, the institutional mechanisms through which culture is financed, governed, decentralised, and made accessible became legitimate research objects themselves. Scholars analysed public funding, institutional forms, regional policies, cultural participation, grant systems, Europeanisation, arts management, and the relationship between public and independent culture. The Arts Institute developed a particularly strong analytical role, while sociologists and university researchers added empirical and comparative perspectives. Research increasingly informed strategic documents rather than remaining external commentary on administrative practice. The creation of the National Institute for Culture in 2025 through the merger of the Arts and Theatre Institute and NIPOS brought research, statistics, documentation, professional support, and cultural-policy expertise within one new research organisation. This institutional consolidation demonstrated how far cultural-policy analysis had progressed from the improvised conditions of the early transformation. By 2025, the Czech cultural system had developed a permanent capacity not only to administer culture but also to study its own functioning.

The gradual construction of reliable cultural statistics strengthened this self-reflective capacity. NIPOS and the Czech Statistical Office developed tools capable of describing institutions, attendance, financing, employment, production, and cultural expenditure with increasing detail. The Culture Account represented an especially significant achievement because it made possible a wider economic picture extending across public, household, non-profit, and business resources. Results for 2023, published in 2025, demonstrated both the scale of market-oriented cultural activity and the continuing importance of public expenditure in traditional and artistic sectors. Such data helped correct two opposite simplifications: that culture is mainly a subsidised public expense, or that all cultural activities can be treated as ordinary commercial industries. Employment data also made visible the large number of workers operating through self-employment and non-standard contractual forms. Statistical infrastructures cannot measure artistic quality or historical significance directly, but they substantially improve the quality of debate about cultural conditions. They also make long-

term comparison and international benchmarking more realistic. The development of evidence-based cultural policy is therefore one of the less visible but highly consequential achievements of Czech cultural research.

Research into cultural and creative industries produced an especially clear example of scholarship influencing policy. The five-year mapping project undertaken between 2011 and 2015 systematically described thirteen sectors and developed a conceptual and statistical framework for analysing their performance, needs, and relationships. Its certified methodology allowed local and regional authorities to conduct comparable mapping rather than relying upon promotional assumptions about creativity. Pilot work in Zlín, Brno, Pardubice, and Plzeň demonstrated that creative activity is territorially clustered and depends upon combinations of institutions, education, businesses, professional networks, and public policy. The project also examined public, non-profit, commercial, research, and educational actors rather than limiting the creative economy to private firms. These findings helped move the Czech debate from the narrower category of cultural and creative *industries* towards the broader concept of cultural and creative *sectors*. By 2021, this research had contributed to a national strategy for development and support of the field and to its inclusion among the principal objectives of national cultural policy. Research thus produced an unusually direct institutional effect. The Czech mapping programme represents one of the strongest examples of applied cultural research shaping a new area of governmental action.

The second major achievement of CCI research was the translation of national concepts into regional development instruments. Mapping showed that Prague's creative concentration could not simply be copied by cities possessing different industrial histories, educational systems, property markets, and cultural resources. Brno developed strategies connecting creative activity with universities, technology, design, music, games, and entrepreneurship, while Ostrava explored relationships among post-industrial transformation, cultural reuse, festivals, and creative production. Zlín could build upon design, architecture, film, and the Bata industrial legacy, whereas Plzeň used the European Capital of Culture experience to deepen local institutional networks. National Recovery Plan measures subsequently supported regional cultural and creative centres, mapping, professional skills, and creative vouchers. These instruments transformed research findings into practical mechanisms linking cultural professionals with municipalities and businesses. They also demonstrated that creativity functions through local ecosystems rather than through isolated individual talent alone. The regionalisation of creative-sector policy can therefore be regarded as one of the clearest applied achievements of Czech cultural studies. It connected cultural analysis with territorial development without reducing culture to an instrument of economic policy.

Media studies became another substantial research success. The establishment of the Department of Media Studies at Charles University in 1993 gave the new Czech Republic a specialised academic environment for analysing a media system undergoing exceptionally rapid transformation. Researchers investigated journalism, commercial broadcasting, audiences, political communication, representation, popular culture, media ownership, gender, digital platforms, games, and intercultural communication. Historical research simultaneously reconstructed the changing role of Czech and Czechoslovak media within earlier political regimes. Media studies widened the concept of legitimate cultural objects beyond canonical arts and institutions to include television, advertising, news, digital communication, online culture, and popular entertainment. This development brought Czech cultural research into direct dialogue with contemporary international cultural and

communication theory. It also became increasingly important to public debates about media literacy, political polarisation, digital platforms, and misinformation. Research centres established later within this environment broadened the agenda further towards relationships among culture, technologies, infrastructures, communication, and power. By 2025, media studies had become one of the most firmly institutionalised contemporary branches of Czech cultural research.

The digital turn constitutes another major achievement because it changed not only research objects but research methods and infrastructures. Czech humanities researchers gradually adopted corpus analysis, geographic information systems, network analysis, structured databases, digital editions, visualisation, and other computational techniques. Universities created specialist centres and courses, while national research infrastructures made it possible to preserve and reuse digital data systematically. LINDAT/CLARIAH-CZ connected universities, Academy institutes, libraries, archives, galleries, and other organisations within a distributed digital research environment linked to European infrastructures. The Czech Literary Bibliography demonstrated how a documentary tradition extending across generations could become an open machine-readable dataset suitable for new forms of analysis. Open data enabled research questions to be developed by scholars who were not involved in the original creation of the collections. Digital humanities therefore strengthened rather than displaced traditional source-based scholarship where implementation was most successful. By 2025, Czech cultural researchers increasingly understood data curation, metadata, licensing, and long-term digital preservation as integral components of scholarship.

A closely connected achievement was the development of public history and other public-facing humanities practices. Czech historians and cultural researchers increasingly recognised that historical and cultural knowledge is produced and circulated not only through academic books but also through museums, memorials, media, education, tourism, activism, digital platforms, and popular culture. The concept of *public history* acquired growing institutional visibility, culminating in specialised publications and systematic university teaching. Projects such as HistoryLab translated source-critical historical reasoning into interactive digital education rather than merely transferring textbook content to a screen. Students could work directly with photographs, maps, documents, sound recordings, and other historical evidence, making interpretation itself part of the learning process. Memory of Nations created a different public model by connecting oral-history documentation with online access, exhibitions, education, podcasts, radio, and local commemorative initiatives. Museums and research organisations expanded lectures, podcasts, online resources, educational programmes, and digital exhibitions directed at wider audiences. Such practices made humanities research substantially more permeable to society. The growth of this public dimension represents one of the most important changes in the social position of Czech cultural scholarship since 1993.

Digital communication also transformed cultural institutions into continuous participants in public cultural discussion. Museums, galleries, libraries, archives, theatres, universities, and research institutes increasingly communicated through websites, social media, online catalogues, streamed events, podcasts, and audiovisual formats. This required scholars and cultural professionals to develop new skills in explanation, visual presentation, community management, and communication with audiences possessing very different levels of prior knowledge. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transformation dramatically when institutions temporarily lost physical access to their publics. Emergency digital programmes

varied in quality, but they demonstrated that research and cultural interpretation could reach audiences far beyond ordinary geographical catchment areas. After reopening, the most valuable digital forms remained as supplements to physical participation rather than disappearing entirely. Hybrid cultural communication consequently became part of the standard institutional environment. The principal achievement was not technological novelty itself but the creation of more numerous routes through which specialist knowledge could circulate publicly.

Another achievement lay in the growing capacity of cultural research to cross the boundary between basic and applied scholarship without abandoning intellectual independence. Cultural-policy analysis, regional mapping, digital education, oral-history documentation, audience research, and creative-sector studies all generated outputs with potential practical use. Ministry of Culture research programmes such as NAKI, NAKI II, and NAKI III reinforced this orientation by creating structured funding for research relating to national and cultural identity. These programmes were particularly broad and extended considerably into heritage research, which is examined separately in the following part of this book, but they also demonstrated the value of cooperation among humanities scholars, cultural institutions, educators, information specialists, and public bodies. Research outputs could include databases, methodologies, exhibitions, maps, educational applications, and other forms in addition to conventional academic publications. This expanded understanding of research output made it easier for cultural scholarship to influence institutions without reducing scholarship to immediate administrative utility. Czech cultural research consequently developed a relatively strong applied dimension while maintaining university and Academy environments dedicated to basic research. The coexistence of these two modes is an important structural achievement.

Internationalisation represents another major success of the period. In the early 1990s, rebuilding connections with foreign scholarship was itself a central task after decades of political restriction. By the 2000s, participation in European projects, international conferences, academic mobility, comparative publications, and multinational research teams had become routine across many cultural disciplines. Czech scholars contributed research on post-socialism, memory, migration, Central European identities, cultural policy, ethnology, and digital humanities to debates whose relevance extended far beyond the Czech Republic. The Czech experience became analytically valuable precisely because it could test concepts often developed from Western European or North American cases. Research on peaceful state separation, postsocialist transformation, the afterlives of communism, forced migration, borderlands, and the coexistence of long documentary traditions with new anthropology offered distinctive comparative material. Central European collaboration with Slovak, Polish, German, Austrian, Hungarian, and other researchers remained particularly important because many cultural processes pre-date contemporary national borders. English became increasingly important as a language of international dissemination without entirely replacing Czech, German, Slovak, or Polish within regionally grounded scholarship. Czech cultural research therefore moved from international reintegration towards more reciprocal intellectual participation.

This internationalisation was accompanied by an important change in scholarly self-positioning. Early postsocialist research was frequently framed internationally through the language of transition, implying movement from an abnormal socialist condition towards a presumed Western European norm. Czech anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and

cultural researchers increasingly questioned that asymmetry and argued that Central European societies should be treated as sites of theory production rather than merely empirical examples of concepts generated elsewhere. Scholarship on postsocialism, neoliberal transformation, migration, cultural identity, memory, and everyday life contributed to this reconsideration. Comparative work demonstrated that social processes regarded initially as peculiar transitional phenomena could illuminate broader questions concerning inequality, state transformation, cultural belonging, or political memory. Czech researchers also became more reflexive about their own disciplinary histories and about the potentially hierarchical relationships embedded in international knowledge production. Debates concerning colonial innocence and the decolonisation of ethnographic institutions represent one recent example of this shift. The growing confidence to criticise imported conceptual frameworks rather than merely adopt them is an important indicator of disciplinary maturity. By 2025, Czech cultural research increasingly participated in international scholarship on more equal intellectual terms.

Institutional diversification itself can also be regarded as an achievement. Cultural research became distributed among Charles University, Masaryk University, Palacký University, the University of West Bohemia, other regional universities, Czech Academy institutes, the National Institute for Culture, museums, archives, libraries, and independent organisations. No single organisation possessed sufficient authority to define the entire field. This prevented the emergence of a rigid national orthodoxy and allowed specialised intellectual centres to develop around different methods and objects. Brno became especially important for ethnology, anthropology, museology, cultural sociology, music research, and the intersection of creativity with technology. Prague retained exceptional institutional density but no longer represented the only plausible centre of innovative cultural research. Plzeň, Pardubice, Olomouc, Ostrava, and other cities contributed through specialised programmes and regional research environments. This polycentric institutional geography made Czech cultural scholarship more resilient and more capable of examining territorially specific cultural processes. It also encouraged cooperation among organisations whose professional missions extended beyond university teaching.

The development of research infrastructures and long-term datasets strengthened this institutional diversity. Cultural research increasingly relied upon resources created over many years rather than projects beginning from zero whenever a new research question emerged. Oral-history collections, ethnological archives, cultural statistics, literary bibliographies, digital corpora, regional cultural datasets, online testimonies, and specialist documentation became reusable scientific infrastructures. Such resources allow researchers to ask new questions of information originally collected for different purposes. They also facilitate interdisciplinary work because structured datasets can often be combined with materials generated through other research traditions. The establishment of open-access and machine-readable resources represents a particularly important improvement in scholarly accessibility. Long-term curation remains expensive and institutionally demanding, but the recognition that data require preservation is itself a sign of research maturity. Czech cultural research by 2025 possessed a considerably stronger infrastructural foundation than it had at the beginning of independence. This cumulative character is one of the reasons its achievements cannot be evaluated solely through individual publications.

The response to the COVID-19 crisis further demonstrated the practical relevance of this mature research environment. Scholars and cultural-policy specialists rapidly investigated the

effects of closures upon cultural institutions, distribution systems, self-employed artists, audiences, and cultural businesses. Their work made visible labour structures that official administrative categories had previously represented inadequately. Research demonstrated the different levels of vulnerability between regularly funded public institutions and independent or audience-dependent cultural actors. Findings contributed to broader debates concerning emergency support, digital communication, cultural resilience, and eventually the social position of artists. The crisis also accelerated cooperation among cultural organisations, professional associations, policymakers, and researchers. Cultural research therefore operated not only retrospectively but as a source of evidence during an unfolding systemic shock. This capacity to diagnose contemporary conditions quickly represents an important applied achievement. It also strengthened the argument that culture should be studied as an interconnected ecosystem rather than a collection of isolated institutions.

A deeper conceptual achievement can be identified beneath all these specialised developments. Czech research increasingly came to understand culture as relational, negotiated, historically layered, and institutionally produced. Culture was no longer treated primarily as a set of prestigious artistic works, an inherited national character, or the traditional customs of ethnically defined communities. It could instead encompass ordinary practice, media representation, symbolic boundaries, identity formation, institutional governance, creative labour, consumption, memory, digital communication, and relations with material environments. Such conceptual expansion allowed researchers to connect apparently distant phenomena without claiming that they were identical. The study of a family memory, an urban music scene, a regional cultural strategy, a digital game, or migration bureaucracy could all contribute to understanding how meanings and social relationships are created. At the same time, the field retained distinctions among disciplines and did not reduce every cultural phenomenon to one theoretical model. Czech cultural research therefore became simultaneously broader and more differentiated. This capacity to enlarge the object of study without dissolving analytical precision is one of its most significant intellectual achievements.

The field also achieved a productive relationship between continuity and innovation. Czech structuralism, ethnology, aesthetics, folklore studies, historical research, and documentary traditions remained important even as new cultural theories and digital methods entered scholarship. Archives created through older scholarly projects became sources for research on memory, gender, nationalism, migration, digital humanities, or cultural revival that their original compilers could not have anticipated. Ethnomusicology developed from extensive folk-song scholarship towards urban soundscapes, minority music, and the anthropology of performance. Bibliographical traditions were converted into reusable digital datasets, while historical source criticism was translated into digital educational environments such as HistoryLab. Cultural-policy institutions developed from administrative documentation towards sophisticated socioeconomic and regional research. Modernisation therefore frequently occurred through reinterpretation of accumulated knowledge rather than the destruction of inherited scholarly infrastructures. This continuity gave Czech cultural research a depth that purely new institutional fields would have lacked.

The absence of a single universally recognised Czech ‘school’ of Cultural Studies should consequently not be interpreted as a failure. A school in the strict intellectual sense requires more than scholars working in the same country; it implies methodological continuity, shared conceptual propositions, institutional reproduction, and a recognisable corpus influencing subsequent research. Czech cultural research after 1993 was generally too plural and

institutionally dispersed to meet those conditions as a whole. Individual traditions such as Czech structuralism or specific ethnological and museological lineages possess much stronger claims to historically defined school status, but contemporary cultural studies operate differently. Their achievement lies in the creation of interacting research clusters rather than one dominant paradigm. This arrangement allows migration scholars, cultural sociologists, media researchers, anthropologists, historians, and policy specialists to cooperate without requiring agreement on a universal definition of culture. It also prevents national intellectual identity from becoming an artificial label imposed upon heterogeneous research. The most accurate description of the Czech achievement is therefore a mature interdisciplinary research ecology rather than a unified national school.

Important limitations nevertheless remained by 2025. Institutional fragmentation could make cooperation difficult and sometimes caused researchers addressing similar problems to remain divided by disciplinary boundaries, funding systems, or publication cultures. Prague retained considerable advantages in institutional density and international visibility despite the development of important regional centres. Project funding encouraged innovation but could weaken continuity when temporary teams disappeared after individual grants ended. English-language internationalisation created opportunities while occasionally reducing incentives for Czech-language publications essential to public and regionally specific cultural research. Digital infrastructures widened access but required skills and resources unavailable equally to all organisations. Cultural statistics improved substantially but still struggled with freelancers, hybrid employment, rapidly changing digital sectors, and activities that resist conventional economic classification. Public-facing research expanded greatly, yet pressures for simplified communication could conflict with the complexity of humanities interpretation. Recognising these limitations is necessary precisely because the field's major achievements have created expectations that future research will need to meet.

By 2025, Czech cultural studies could therefore be characterised through several mutually reinforcing accomplishments rather than through one defining discovery. They had developed a methodologically plural academic environment capable of critical and empirical investigation of cultural processes. They had transformed the study of national identity and collective memory, making Czech culture more historically layered and inclusive of experiences previously marginal to dominant narratives. Ethnology and anthropology had broadened from traditional cultural documentation towards migration, urban life, memory, ecology, materiality, and everyday practice. Sociology had created reliable empirical research on cultural participation and regional inequalities, while cultural-policy research had developed evidence capable of influencing public administration. Cultural and creative industries had been mapped, conceptualised, and translated from research into national and regional policy. Media studies and digital humanities had established durable institutional environments for analysing contemporary communication and using computational methods. Public history and digital cultural communication had created stronger links between professional research and wider society. Taken together, these achievements indicate a research field that matured through connection rather than centralisation.

In summary, the major achievement of Czech cultural research between 1993 and 2025 was the transformation of an intellectually fragmented and politically constrained inheritance into a plural, internationally connected, empirically grounded, digitally capable, and publicly engaged knowledge system. Its development demonstrates that Cultural Studies need not reproduce one imported disciplinary model in order to become intellectually coherent and

socially significant. Czech researchers built upon domestic traditions in ethnology, aesthetics, structuralism, sociology, history, and documentary scholarship while integrating anthropology, memory studies, media research, cultural-policy analysis, digital humanities, and creative-economy research. The field produced influential interpretations of national identity, reconstructed difficult and previously marginalised memories, transformed the study of everyday life, and established migration and ecological anthropology as substantial contemporary directions. It created representative research on participation and regions, systematic mapping of cultural and creative sectors, increasingly sophisticated cultural statistics, and new institutions capable of connecting knowledge with cultural governance. Digital infrastructures made archives, bibliographies, testimonies, and research data more reusable, while public-history and educational projects expanded the audiences and forms of humanities communication. Internationalisation gradually shifted from the importation of Western theories towards reciprocal participation in European and global research, allowing Czech and Central European experience itself to contribute to theory. The absence of one dominant national school ultimately became an advantage because it allowed several traditions to coexist and collaborate around changing cultural problems. By 2025, Czech cultural studies were therefore best defined not by disciplinary uniformity but by their capacity to explain culture as a historical, social, symbolic, institutional, material, economic, and increasingly digital process through which contemporary Czech society understands both itself and the world around it.

Part Three

Cultural Heritage as an Independent Research and Preservation Field

Cultural Heritage in Contemporary Czechia: Concept, Scope, and Institutional Architecture

Cultural heritage occupies a distinctive position within contemporary Czech cultural and research life because it cannot be reduced either to the interpretation of culture or to the administration of historic monuments. By 2025, it had developed into a complex field encompassing identification, documentation, research, legal protection, physical conservation, restoration, safeguarding, management, interpretation, public access, education, digital preservation, and transmission to future generations. These functions were distributed among state authorities, specialised heritage institutions, museums, galleries, archives, libraries, universities, Academy institutes, laboratories, municipalities, regions, religious organisations, private owners, civil society, and communities sustaining living traditions. The resulting system was neither institutionally uniform nor governed by one comprehensive heritage law. Different categories of inherited cultural value were regulated through partially separate legal and professional regimes that had developed at different historical moments. Nevertheless, these regimes were connected by a common concern with the survival, intelligibility, and socially meaningful transmission of culturally significant evidence from the past. Heritage research consequently operated at the intersection of the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, technology, law, public administration, and professional conservation practice. The Czech heritage system should therefore be understood as an autonomous research and preservation field whose internal diversity is a structural characteristic rather than an indication that no coherent field exists.

The very terminology used in Czechia reveals this complexity. The Czech expression *kulturní dědictví* corresponds broadly to cultural heritage and is capable of encompassing tangible, intangible, documentary, digital, movable, immovable, and landscape-related inheritances. The traditional administrative and professional concept of *památková péče*, however, refers more specifically to monument care and possesses a long institutional history centred upon legally protected monuments, conservation areas, archaeological interests, and professional intervention in the historic built environment. A *památka* is therefore not simply the Czech-language equivalent of every possible form of heritage, because the legal and professional monument system covers only part of the broader heritage domain. Museum collections, archives, library holdings, traditional cultural practices, film heritage, and born-digital materials are protected and studied through other institutional arrangements. This distinction is fundamental for understanding the contemporary Czech system because heritage expanded conceptually much faster than the terminology and legislation of classical monument conservation. The broader category of cultural heritage gradually became capable of connecting sectors that remained administratively separate. Contemporary heritage research therefore operates across institutional boundaries that Czech public administration continues to treat through several different legal regimes.

Heritage itself should not be understood as an automatically given collection of all surviving things from the past. Societies inherit immeasurably more material, practices, memories, documents, environments, and cultural forms than can ever be formally preserved or transmitted with equal intensity. Heritage is therefore also a process of selection in which particular objects, places, practices, documents, or forms of knowledge are recognised as possessing values that justify continuing attention. Those values may be historical, artistic, architectural, archaeological, scientific, technological, social, religious, symbolic, documentary, aesthetic, communal, or environmental. They may also change as scholarship develops and as society becomes interested in previously neglected groups, historical periods, technologies, or forms of everyday life. The Czech category of national cultural monuments illustrates this dynamic particularly clearly because official criteria explicitly recognise exceptional artistic, architectural, technological, historical, scientific, identity-related, and documentary significance. The openness of this category acknowledges that understanding of the national heritage stock changes rather than remaining permanently fixed at the moment when the legal system was created. Heritage research is consequently inseparable from processes of evaluation because preservation always presupposes arguments concerning what should be preserved and why.

This problem of value provides an important point of contact with the theoretical framework of klironomy proposed by the author. Beginning with publications in 2019, the author argued that the increasingly differentiated knowledge surrounding cultural-heritage preservation justified consideration of a more integrated scientific field devoted specifically to the preservation and transmission of cultural inheritance. His subsequent work developed klironomy as a proposed complex of theoretical and applied sciences addressing tangible and intangible heritage, cultural value, conservation, restoration, revitalisation, historical continuity, and the methodology of cultural preservation. The 2024 monograph *Klironomy: The Science of Cultural Heritage* systematised these arguments and presented tangible, intangible, and theoretical directions as components of an integrated scientific structure. In later work, the author placed particular emphasis upon the relationship among value, historicity, cultural memory, responsibility, and applied preservation methods. His 2025 methodological study treated klironomy as a bridge between philosophical reflection on heritage and practical analysis required for preservation decisions. The concept is not equivalent to the established Czech administrative system of *památková péče*, nor had klironomy acquired formal recognition as an independent discipline within Czech public research structures by 2025. It is most appropriately treated here as a contemporary theoretical proposal responding to precisely the fragmentation that characterises the wider international and Czech heritage field.

Such theoretical attempts become understandable once the present scope of heritage is examined. Tangible heritage encompasses buildings, archaeological sites, works of art, museum objects, historical technologies, books, documents, monuments, urban ensembles, gardens, industrial structures, and numerous other material forms. Intangible heritage includes practices, knowledge, skills, rituals, oral traditions, performing traditions, craftsmanship, festive cultures, and other living forms sustained through communities and individual bearers. Documentary heritage is preserved through archives, libraries, film collections, photographic archives, sound collections, specialist documentation centres, and increasingly digital repositories. Cultural landscapes combine human intervention and environmental form in ways that make conventional distinctions between cultural and natural heritage insufficient. Digital heritage includes both digitised representations of analogue

objects and cultural resources created originally in digital environments. Contemporary heritage therefore extends from prehistoric archaeological deposits to 20th-century industrial sites and from medieval manuscripts to digital audiovisual records. The institutional architecture required to care for such diversity is necessarily more complex than a system designed exclusively around historic monuments.

The central legal pillar of Czech monument conservation remained Act No. 20/1987 Coll. on State Monument Care throughout the entire period from the establishment of the independent republic to 2025. This continuity is historically remarkable because the legislation was enacted under state socialism and entered into force in 1988, yet it survived the political transformation, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, European Union accession, administrative decentralisation, and several decades of technological and professional change. Numerous amendments progressively adapted it to the democratic constitutional order, new administrative procedures, private ownership, regional government, planning legislation, European requirements, and other changes. The persistence of the Act provided continuity for legal categories and administrative procedures that could not simply disappear during political transition. At the same time, its survival generated repeated debates concerning whether a statute constructed in a different political and administrative environment remained suitable for contemporary heritage practice. Attempts to replace it culminated in a government proposal prepared during the 2010s, but the Chamber of Deputies rejected the proposed new legislation in July 2017. Further drafting followed, yet no comprehensive replacement had entered into force by the end of 2025. Czech monument conservation thus combined remarkable legal continuity with an unresolved debate about legislative modernisation.

The Act provides a hierarchical structure for the legal recognition of immovable and movable cultural monuments. Cultural monuments constitute the fundamental legally protected category, while selected objects of exceptional importance may be declared national cultural monuments by the Government. Protection can also extend beyond individual objects to territorial ensembles through monument reservations and monument zones, recognising the cultural significance of urban, rural, archaeological, or landscape structures rather than isolated buildings alone. Protective zones can further regulate environments surrounding monuments or protected territories when changes outside the protected object itself could affect its cultural values. Archaeological finds and archaeological territories receive additional attention through provisions dealing specifically with archaeological research and discoveries. These legal categories demonstrate that Czech monument care had moved substantially beyond a narrow masterpiece model even though the legislative vocabulary remained historically rooted. Architectural significance, urban structure, archaeology, technological development, cultural landscapes, and the historical character of settlements could all become objects of public protection. The system therefore operates through graduated forms of recognition rather than a simple binary division between protected and unprotected cultural objects.

The administrative architecture of State monument care is deliberately divided between public authorities and professional expert support. The Ministry of Culture occupies the central governmental position and develops legislation, strategies, methodological guidance, international agreements, and decisions falling within its statutory competence. Regional authorities exercise important administrative responsibilities and participate in the protection of especially significant monuments and territorial heritage within their jurisdictions. Municipal authorities of municipalities with extended competence perform a substantial share of

ordinary state monument-care administration, including binding opinions and supervision connected with protected monuments and areas. Municipalities themselves have responsibilities for local cultural monuments and can contribute directly to their renewal and protection. This multi-level administrative structure reflects the broader decentralisation of Czech public administration after 1989. It also means that heritage decisions are rarely the product of one institution acting entirely independently. The system depends upon interaction among administrative authority, professional expertise, owners, planning procedures, and other affected public bodies.

Within this architecture, the National Heritage Institute occupies a unique position. Created in its unified form in 2003, the NPÚ is the principal professional organisation of State monument care and is established by the Ministry of Culture. Its regional offices identify, document, study, and provide professional care for cultural monuments, protected territories, and related heritage resources, while the Directorate General provides national coordination and methodological guidance. The Institute supplies expert opinions used by administrative authorities when they make legally binding decisions concerning monuments and protected environments. It also manages a major portfolio of state-owned castles, châteaux, gardens, monasteries, industrial sites, and other historic properties accessible to the public. This combination of expert advisory work and direct property management makes the NPÚ institutionally unusual because it connects heritage scholarship with daily operational responsibility for culturally significant places. Its documentation, archives, databases, specialist libraries, conservation knowledge, and territorial network constitute a national heritage infrastructure extending far beyond the monuments directly under its management. The NPÚ is therefore not simply a conservation agency but one of the central research and knowledge institutions of Czech cultural heritage.

Its research status is particularly important for understanding heritage as an autonomous scientific field. The NPÚ received the status of a research organisation from the Ministry of Culture in 2009 and subsequently maintained that position within the national research framework. Scientific investigation is officially described by the Institute as an integral basis for the qualified selection, legal protection, and professional care of monuments. Research takes place across its territorial workplaces and spans numerous disciplines rather than being concentrated in one central academic department. Architectural history, archaeology, art history, building research, garden and landscape history, materials research, conservation, restoration, documentation, technological history, and digital methods may all contribute to individual projects. This model differs significantly from one in which universities produce knowledge and administrative bodies merely apply it. The Czech heritage system instead includes a large public conservation organisation that is simultaneously a producer of basic and applied research. Heritage knowledge is thereby generated inside the institutions responsible for using it.

The relationship between heritage protection and ownership constitutes another defining characteristic of the Czech model. A large proportion of culturally significant property is not owned by the state, and protected monuments may belong to municipalities, churches, companies, associations, or private individuals. Democratic restoration of private property rights after 1989 therefore transformed the social setting in which monument protection operated. Ownership normally confers substantial freedom over property, yet legal heritage status establishes public interests that can restrict demolition, alteration, relocation, maintenance procedures, or other forms of intervention. The system consequently depends

upon constant negotiation between private rights and cultural values considered significant beyond the individual owner. Grants and public support can partly compensate for the additional obligations created by monument status, although resources rarely eliminate all conflicts. Heritage conservation is therefore not simply a technical activity performed by specialists but a field of law, economics, ethics, and public legitimacy. The Czech experience demonstrates particularly clearly that inherited cultural value and contemporary property relations cannot be treated as separate domains.

Archaeological heritage introduces a further layer of institutional complexity. The State Monument Care Act contains specific provisions governing archaeological research and discoveries, but archaeological knowledge is produced through organisations extending well beyond the NPÚ. The Institutes of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague and Brno are major research organisations possessing extensive archives, libraries, laboratories, specialist datasets, field experience, and methodological competence. Universities, museums, heritage organisations, and other authorised bodies also conduct archaeological research under the statutory system. Development-led archaeology requires communication between developers and archaeological organisations because construction can destroy archaeological evidence irreversibly once ground is disturbed. The Archaeological Information System of the Czech Republic and related digital archives have progressively strengthened national coordination and access to archaeological documentation. Archaeological heritage thus reveals particularly clearly why research and preservation cannot be separated institutionally. Knowledge often has to be produced at the moment when the physical archaeological context is itself being removed.

Movable cultural heritage is organised through a partly different legal architecture. Act No. 122/2000 Coll. on the Protection of Collections of a Museum Nature established the principal contemporary framework for museum collections and created obligations concerning registration, inventory, management, protection, and public use. The Central Registry of Collections provides a publicly accessible national information system recording collections managed under the Act. Museum collections are therefore protected not merely as aggregates of individually valuable objects but as structured bodies of material whose documentary integrity and systematic management possess public significance. The Ministry of Culture exercises relevant administrative responsibilities and supports specialised methodological workplaces providing guidance to collection owners and administrators. National, regional, municipal, private, university, and other museums operate within this wider professional environment while retaining different institutional forms and research profiles. Museum collections frequently constitute primary research infrastructures for archaeology, ethnology, history, art history, natural sciences, technology, and numerous specialist disciplines. The museum system consequently forms a major branch of the Czech heritage architecture without being subordinated administratively to the legal system governing immovable monuments.

Movable cultural property also extends beyond registered museum collections. Act No. 71/1994 Coll. on the Sale and Export of Objects of Cultural Value developed in response to the need to protect culturally significant objects within an environment of open borders and expanding art and antiques markets. The legislation regulates specified categories of cultural objects and provides procedures connected with their permanent or temporary export. European Union rules concerning the export and return of cultural goods added another supranational layer following Czech accession. Such mechanisms demonstrate that heritage

protection can follow objects as they move rather than operate exclusively through control of fixed sites. Artworks, archaeological material, manuscripts, historical instruments, ethnographic objects, and other cultural items may possess significance independent of the institutions currently holding them. The regulation of their movement therefore connects national heritage policy with customs procedures, international law, provenance research, law-enforcement cooperation, and the art market. Movable heritage is thus both a preservation issue and a problem of circulation.

Written cultural heritage adds still another institutional system. The National Library of the Czech Republic is established by the Ministry of Culture and operates under the Library Act as the central institution of the Czech library system. Its holdings include national archival collections, historical manuscripts, early printed books, modern Bohemica, music materials, specialised historical libraries, and digital resources constituting a substantial part of the national cultural wealth. The institution permanently preserves conservation and historical collections while also undertaking coordination, research, methodological, standardisation, and advisory activities for the wider library network. Its conservation departments perform preventive preservation, restoration, environmental monitoring, disaster planning, and research concerning physical and digital library materials. The National Library is itself a recognised research organisation whose basic and applied research includes the preservation and interpretation of written heritage in both analogue and digital forms. Regional, university, monastic, museum, and specialist libraries add further layers to this documentary environment. Written heritage therefore demonstrates how one category of cultural inheritance can possess an institutional architecture closely connected with heritage preservation while remaining legally and professionally distinct from monument care.

Archives occupy an equally fundamental position but reveal how widely heritage responsibilities are distributed across Czech government. The National Archives is not administered by the Ministry of Culture but directly by the Ministry of the Interior and operates under Act No. 499/2004 Coll. on Archives and Records Management. Its holdings extend from medieval records to documentation created by modern Czech and Czechoslovak state authorities and other record creators. The institution explicitly understands these archival collections as a major component of national cultural heritage, while their value extends simultaneously to historical identity, legal continuity, public administration, and scholarly research. The National Archives has itself held research-organisation status and undertakes basic and applied research in archival science, auxiliary historical sciences, preventive preservation, conservation, restoration, and digital records. A wider system of state regional archives, specialised archives, security archives, municipal archives, and other repositories complements its work. This arrangement demonstrates that the cultural-heritage system extends beyond the organisational boundaries of the Ministry of Culture. Documentary heritage is preserved partly through institutions whose primary administrative rationale also involves legal evidence, state accountability, and records management.

Intangible cultural heritage developed through another distinct institutional mechanism. Czechia became a State Party to the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2009, after which the Ministry of Culture designated the National Institute of Folk Culture as a principal specialist body for implementation. Regional specialised centres, often connected with museums, provide an additional territorial structure for documentation and safeguarding. The Czech system initially organised its national register around the category of intangible elements of traditional folk culture, reflecting the strong ethnological and

folkloristic traditions from which domestic safeguarding practice had emerged. This framework supported research, documentation, inventories, transmission, education, and cooperation with communities and bearers of living traditions. By 2025, however, policymakers and specialists had concluded that the traditional-folk-culture formulation was narrower than the full scope of the UNESCO concept. A ministerial order of September 2025 therefore established a broader List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Czech Republic, continuing the previous list while opening the system more explicitly to the full conceptual breadth of intangible heritage. This change represents an important example of how international heritage concepts can reshape national institutional categories over time.

The 2025 reform of the intangible-heritage list is conceptually significant for another reason. It places stronger emphasis upon active cooperation with communities and individual bearers rather than treating experts or state institutions as the sole authorities capable of identifying cultural value. Living heritage exists only as long as people continue to practise, reinterpret, teach, and recognise it. A dance, craft, ritual, festive practice, oral tradition, or amateur performance cannot be preserved in the same manner as a stone façade or museum object. Documentation may record a practice, but safeguarding requires conditions under which knowledge and participation continue socially. This makes intangible heritage one of the fields in which the older preservation paradigm of protecting an object against physical change becomes least adequate. Czech implementation consequently moved towards a model in which continuity can include transformation rather than demanding exact reproduction of a supposedly original form. The heritage system therefore increasingly had to accommodate different ontologies of preservation within one broad cultural concept.

International conventions form another layer of the Czech institutional architecture. Czechia succeeded to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention on 26 March 1993 and by the end of 2025 possessed seventeen properties on the World Heritage List, sixteen cultural and one natural. The cultural properties range from historic urban centres and individual architectural ensembles to cultural landscapes, industrial and mining heritage, spa towns, modern architecture, and landscapes shaped by specialised agricultural production. These inscriptions require national legislation and institutions to interact with UNESCO procedures concerning nomination, Outstanding Universal Value, management, monitoring, reporting, and state of conservation. World Heritage status therefore does not create a separate Czech conservation system but overlays existing national institutions with additional international responsibilities. Transnational properties such as the Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří Mining Region and the Great Spa Towns of Europe further require long-term cooperation with other states. International heritage protection consequently becomes embedded within ordinary national planning and management rather than remaining a purely diplomatic activity. The Czech system by 2025 was therefore simultaneously national in legal form and international in many of its professional obligations.

Council of Europe conventions and European professional concepts have also influenced this architecture. The Granada Convention strengthened the principle of integrated conservation of architectural heritage and the idea that historic buildings should be considered within planning and development rather than protected only as isolated monuments. The revised European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage associated with Valletta similarly emphasised archaeological heritage as a source of collective European memory and integrated archaeological considerations more closely with spatial planning. The European Landscape Convention expanded attention towards landscapes as lived environments shaped

through interaction between natural and human factors. The Faro Framework Convention introduced an influential European vocabulary concerning the value of cultural heritage for society and the role of heritage communities, even though the extent and timing of national legal engagement with different Council of Europe instruments have varied. European Union law added regulations concerning cultural goods, environmental assessment, procurement, funding, digitisation, and other matters affecting heritage practice indirectly. Czech heritage protection therefore operates within a multilayered normative environment extending far beyond domestic monument legislation. Europeanisation has gradually expanded the vocabulary through which conservation professionals discuss integration, participation, landscape, sustainability, and societal value.

Cultural landscapes illustrate particularly clearly why these expanded concepts matter. A landscape such as Lednice-Valtice cannot be understood as an assemblage of separately protected buildings because its cultural significance resides in the spatial relationship among architecture, gardens, vegetation, water systems, roads, agricultural uses, vistas, and historical patterns of land management. The Kladruby landscape similarly derives significance from the interaction between landscape design, horse breeding, architecture, agricultural organisation, and ceremonial use. Mining regions and the Žatec hop landscape demonstrate that systems of production can shape environments whose historical meaning extends across towns, infrastructure, industrial structures, fields, and social practices. Such examples make a purely architectural conception of heritage inadequate. They require landscape history, ecology, planning, archaeology, economic history, environmental science, and community knowledge to interact with conventional monument care. Czech heritage research therefore increasingly encountered cultural value at territorial scales extending far beyond the individual object. The boundary between cultural heritage and environmental management became correspondingly more porous.

This interdisciplinary expansion was reinforced by the development of dedicated cultural-heritage research funding. The Ministry of Culture's NAKI programme from 2011, NAKI II for 2016–2022, and NAKI III for 2023–2030 created a continuing framework for applied research in national and cultural identity. These programmes enabled cultural institutions themselves to participate as research organisations rather than functioning solely as sites where university-generated knowledge was applied. Heritage projects could produce conservation methodologies, specialised maps, digital databases, analytical tools, exhibitions, technological procedures, documentation systems, and other applied outputs alongside conventional scholarly publications. The programmes encouraged cooperation among the NPÚ, museums, galleries, archives, libraries, universities, Academy institutes, laboratories, and technical organisations. This funding architecture is one of the strongest reasons for regarding Czech cultural heritage as an autonomous research field. The state did not merely finance monument repair or museum operations; it established a dedicated system for producing new knowledge about cultural inheritance and its preservation. By 2025, heritage research had acquired institutional continuity across successive national research programmes lasting almost two decades.

Conservation science became increasingly important within this research environment. The physical preservation of heritage materials requires knowledge extending beyond traditional art-historical or architectural interpretation. Stone, mortar, pigments, wood, metals, paper, parchment, textiles, glass, ceramics, photographic materials, plastics, magnetic media, and digital carriers deteriorate through different chemical, physical, biological, and environmental

processes. Effective intervention may therefore require microscopy, chemical analysis, spectroscopy, imaging, environmental monitoring, structural engineering, microbiology, dendrochronology, materials science, or other specialist methods. Conservation decisions nevertheless remain cultural decisions because technical possibilities have to be evaluated against authenticity, significance, reversibility, legibility, historical evidence, and acceptable degrees of intervention. Heritage science emerges precisely from this combination of scientific analysis with humanities-based understanding of cultural value. Czech memory and conservation institutions increasingly developed laboratories, methodological centres, and research collaborations capable of supporting this interdisciplinary work. By 2025, the scientific basis of preservation had become much stronger than any model treating restoration primarily as skilled craft alone would suggest.

Universities and the Czech Academy of Sciences form another essential layer in this architecture. The Institute of Art History contributes research on architecture, works of art, artistic topography, documentary resources, and the historical interpretation of monuments. The Archaeological Institutes in Prague and Brno combine field archaeology, digital documentation, scientific analysis, archives, and archaeological heritage management. The Institute of Ethnology contributes expertise concerning living traditions, memory, cultural landscapes, communities, music, migration, and the social construction of heritage. Universities train art historians, archaeologists, architects, conservators, restorers, archivists, librarians, museologists, ethnologists, historians, and other professionals whose work enters heritage practice. Technical and natural-science faculties contribute materials analysis, structural diagnostics, geodesy, digital modelling, and environmental knowledge. Art academies and specialised restoration programmes preserve forms of practical expertise that cannot be acquired from theoretical training alone. Czech heritage research therefore has no single disciplinary home because its object requires a network of complementary competences.

This network character is also visible in the relationship between basic and applied research. An art-historical investigation of a medieval church may initially be motivated by questions concerning patronage, style, iconography, or artistic networks without any immediate conservation purpose. The results may later become crucial when the building undergoes restoration or when previously unrecognised elements require legal protection. Materials analysis undertaken for conservation can conversely reveal workshop practices that transform historical understanding of an artwork. Archaeological rescue work generates primary evidence that later supports basic research concerning settlement, economy, technology, and cultural contacts. Museum cataloguing may lead to provenance discoveries with implications for restitution, collection history, or international scholarship. Heritage systems therefore constantly circulate knowledge between practical intervention and theoretically driven research. The Czech research architecture increasingly formalised this circulation rather than maintaining a strict hierarchy in which pure science precedes application.

Digital infrastructure has added a further dimension to this circulation of knowledge. The *Památkový katalog* integrates information concerning protected monuments, territories, and heritage documentation within a publicly accessible digital environment. Archaeological information systems connect field documentation, spatial data, reports, and research records across organisations. Museum collections are increasingly represented through eSbírky and institutional databases, while written heritage appears through Manuscriptorium, Kramerius, library catalogues, and specialised digital repositories. Archives progressively manage

digitised and born-digital records, and film institutions confront the preservation of both analogue and digital audiovisual materials. Three-dimensional documentation, photogrammetry, laser scanning, GIS, remote sensing, and digital reconstruction increasingly support research and conservation decisions. Such technologies do not create heritage value automatically, but they substantially enlarge the capacity to record and analyse cultural resources. Digital heritage infrastructure therefore became one of the elements binding otherwise separate Czech heritage sectors into a more interconnected knowledge environment.

The methodological possibilities created by digital technologies also overlap with the klironomical questions developed in the author's recent work. His studies of digital graphics in cultural-heritage restoration and of future digital, hybrid, and intangible heritage argue that preservation increasingly requires methods capable of addressing cultural resources that cannot be treated as conventional stable material objects. The 2025 work with Anisiia Tomanek on digital graphics considers documentation, reconstruction, and visualisation as increasingly important tools in heritage restoration and research. Another 2025 study develops the concept of ‘future heritage’ by asking how present-day digital and hybrid cultural artefacts may become objects of future preservation and what ethical criteria should guide anticipatory selection. These proposals are particularly relevant to born-digital culture, where preservation decisions often have to be made before historical distance has established a stable canon. They also highlight the temporal problem at the centre of heritage work: preservation always acts in the present on behalf of a future public whose values cannot be known completely. Klironomy thus offers one possible theoretical vocabulary for questions that Czech digital institutions are already confronting operationally, even though the terminology itself remains external to the established Czech administrative classification. Its usefulness in the present study lies therefore in conceptual comparison rather than in claims of formal institutional adoption.

Public participation increasingly complicates the older idea that heritage is identified exclusively through expert authority. Czech monument care retains a strong professional structure because legal protection and conservation intervention require specialised knowledge and accountable procedures. Yet intangible heritage, local history, community museums, civic preservation campaigns, religious heritage, industrial sites, and contested 20th-century monuments repeatedly demonstrate that cultural value is also produced socially. Communities may recognise significance in places or practices that established institutions initially overlook, while experts may identify values that owners or local populations do not immediately perceive. Heritage governance therefore involves negotiation among several forms of knowledge and attachment rather than merely transmission of expert judgement to passive citizens. Educational programmes, museum participation, volunteer activity, local associations, and heritage initiatives increasingly became mechanisms through which such negotiation could occur. International heritage discourse has reinforced this tendency through concepts of community participation and heritage communities. The Czech system by 2025 remained professionally led but was progressively less compatible with a purely paternalistic model of preservation.

Tourism further intensifies this relationship between expert preservation and public use. Many of Czechia's most visible heritage properties are simultaneously major tourist destinations, including Prague, Český Krumlov, Kutná Hora, Karlovy Vary, castles, châteaux, gardens, and UNESCO cultural landscapes. Visitor revenue can support institutions and local economies while increasing public knowledge of historical places. Excessive visitor concentration,

however, can alter housing markets, commercial functions, traffic, public space, and the social environments that contribute to the significance of historic places. Heritage management must therefore balance access with conservation and local quality of life rather than assuming that higher visitor numbers are automatically beneficial. This balance is particularly complicated at living historic centres where monuments cannot be separated from ordinary urban activity. Sustainable tourism consequently became one of the areas in which cultural policy, heritage management, municipal planning, economics, and community interests intersect. Czech heritage thus functions both as a protected inheritance and as an actively used social and economic resource.

The heritage system also operates under conditions of risk that have broadened substantially during the period under consideration. Fire, flooding, structural failure, theft, biological damage, pollution, and ordinary material deterioration remain traditional conservation concerns. Climate change adds increasing risks through temperature extremes, drought, storms, changing moisture regimes, biological activity, and pressures on cultural landscapes. Armed conflict elsewhere in Europe after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 renewed awareness that deliberate destruction, emergency evacuation, documentation, and international assistance are also contemporary heritage issues. Cybersecurity has become relevant as collection databases, digital repositories, and administrative systems acquire greater significance. Energy policy and sustainability create additional challenges for historic buildings that cannot always be adapted through standard construction solutions without damaging cultural values. The concept of heritage protection has therefore expanded from routine maintenance towards resilience and risk preparedness. Preservation increasingly concerns the capacity of institutions to respond to uncertain future conditions as much as their ability to conserve known material deterioration.

One of the structural strengths of Czech heritage architecture is consequently the density of its institutional memory. Professional monument care possesses archives, inventories, photographic collections, restoration records, specialist libraries, and documentation extending across several political regimes. Museums hold collections built over generations, archives preserve records whose provenance reaches back centuries, and libraries maintain historical as well as modern documentary heritage. Archaeological institutes possess long-term site records and datasets, while ethnological institutions preserve recordings and documentation of cultural practices whose original social environments have changed substantially. These cumulative resources allow contemporary researchers to compare the present condition of heritage with evidence created decades earlier. They also reveal how definitions of significance and professional methods have changed over time. Institutional continuity therefore contributes directly to the epistemic quality of heritage preservation. The ability to know what has changed is itself dependent upon previous generations having documented what once existed.

The same historical depth can create institutional rigidity. Heritage organisations often inherit classifications, legal procedures, documentation systems, buildings, staffing structures, and professional boundaries developed for earlier conditions. Digitalisation can expose incompatibilities among datasets created through different institutional traditions. New heritage categories may not fit easily within legislation written around monuments, museum collections, or archival records. The legal framework of State monument care illustrates this tension particularly clearly because Act No. 20/1987 has remained operational through extensive amendment despite repeated recognition that a comprehensive modern

replacement would be desirable. The rejection of the proposed new heritage-protection law in 2017 revealed substantial disagreement not only in Parliament but also among professional stakeholders concerning how reform should be constructed. Continuity therefore has a double character: it protects specialist knowledge but can make systemic reform difficult. Czech heritage governance by 2025 was sophisticated in practice while still carrying significant elements of institutional path dependence.

Another structural challenge is the distribution of heritage responsibilities among several ministries and levels of government. Monument conservation, museums, most libraries, and many cultural research organisations lie principally within the sphere of the Ministry of Culture. Archives and records management fall under the Ministry of the Interior, while environmental authorities are crucial to protected landscapes and natural-cultural relationships. Education and research policy influence universities, Academy institutes, professional training, and research funding structures. Regional and municipal governments maintain museums, galleries, libraries, historic properties, public spaces, and local planning responsibilities. Owners and religious organisations control substantial bodies of culturally important property, while private companies may manage industrial, commercial, or adaptive-reuse heritage. This dispersion makes heritage governance genuinely intersectoral. It also creates risks that no single institution will possess sufficient authority to coordinate problems crossing administrative boundaries.

Yet this institutional fragmentation should not be confused with conceptual incoherence. By 2025, a common professional language increasingly connected otherwise separate sectors through ideas of significance, authenticity, integrity, documentation, preventive care, sustainability, accessibility, participation, and transmission. Research programmes created projects involving several types of memory institution, while digital infrastructures allowed information to circulate between professional communities more easily. International conventions provided shared concepts extending across national administrative categories. Universities trained professionals who later moved among museums, heritage institutes, archives, libraries, research centres, and public administration. Professional associations and specialist conferences further strengthened communication across institutional boundaries. Heritage therefore existed as a field partly because its practitioners increasingly recognised common problems even where legislation continued to divide their organisations. The coherence of contemporary Czech cultural heritage is thus intellectual and functional as much as administrative.

The Czech experience also demonstrates why heritage cannot be treated simply as a subdivision of cultural studies. Cultural studies can analyse how a castle, ritual, museum, industrial site, or national monument functions within identity, memory, representation, tourism, or political discourse. Heritage preservation must additionally decide how physical materials should be stabilised, which archaeological deposits require excavation, how collection inventories should be maintained, how archival data should survive technological change, or how a living practice can be transmitted without transforming it into a museum performance. These questions require specialist scientific, technical, legal, and administrative competences whose logic cannot be derived entirely from cultural interpretation. The heritage field therefore contains normative and practical responsibilities absent from a purely analytical science of culture. At the same time, preservation cannot function responsibly without interpretation because decisions about significance and acceptable change always involve cultural values. The relationship is consequently one of intersection rather than hierarchy.

Cultural heritage is connected with cultural studies but remains sufficiently autonomous in its objects, institutions, methods, and public responsibilities to require separate treatment.

The klironomical framework makes a comparable argument from a different theoretical direction. The author's work criticises the fragmentation of preservation knowledge among restoration, conservation, renovation, revitalisation, reconstruction, heritage studies, and related practices and proposes a more integrated scientific system organised around preservation itself. His later methodological model attempts to connect philosophical categories of value and historicity with applied methods used in decisions about tangible and intangible heritage. This proposal corresponds with an observable problem in Czechia: the heritage system is highly developed but distributed among numerous disciplines and professional sectors without one universally accepted science encompassing them all. At the same time, Czech practice demonstrates why any integrated theory would have to preserve the expertise of established disciplines rather than simply replace them. Archaeology, art history, archival science, conservation science, ethnology, architecture, museology, library science, law, and landscape studies each possess specialised methods that cannot be compressed into a single generic procedure. Klironomy is therefore most productive for the present study when treated as a meta-level attempt to conceptualise their shared preservation problem. The Czech case offers a rich institutional environment against which such theoretical claims can be examined critically.

By the end of 2025, the Czech cultural-heritage system could therefore be described as both mature and unfinished. It possessed an unusually dense network of professional institutions, national and regional expertise, extensive collections, sophisticated documentation, major international recognition, research funding, digital infrastructures, and long-established traditions of conservation. It had expanded from a predominantly monument-centred model towards intangible heritage, cultural landscapes, industrial heritage, digital materials, audiovisual heritage, community participation, and interdisciplinary scientific analysis. Research had become structurally embedded within the NPÚ, museums, archives, libraries, Academy institutes, universities, and Ministry of Culture programmes rather than remaining peripheral to preservation practice. At the same time, the continued dependence of monument conservation upon a heavily amended 1987 statute illustrated limits to institutional renewal. Unequal resources among national, regional, local, public, private, and community actors remained substantial. Digital preservation, climate adaptation, cultural labour, community participation, and the management of newly recognised heritage categories continued to generate questions for which earlier systems had not been designed.

In summary, contemporary Czech cultural heritage is best understood not as a collection of monuments but as a polycentric system through which culturally significant evidence, places, objects, practices, documents, knowledge, and environments are identified, researched, protected, interpreted, and transmitted. Its architecture combines the legal monument-care system centred on Act No. 20/1987, the multi-level administrative authority of the Ministry of Culture, regions, municipalities with extended competence and municipalities, and the professional expertise of the National Heritage Institute. Alongside this structure operate partly autonomous systems for archaeological heritage, museum collections, movable cultural property, libraries, archives, film, intangible cultural heritage, and increasingly digital resources. Universities, Czech Academy institutes, national memory institutions, laboratories, and the successive NAKI programmes connect these preservation structures with basic and applied research. UNESCO and European heritage frameworks add international standards

concerning cultural landscapes, intangible heritage, integrated conservation, participation, and transnational responsibility. The result is not one hierarchical institution but an interconnected heritage ecology held together by shared principles of cultural value, documentation, continuity, responsible intervention, accessibility, and transmission. The works of the author on klironomy provide a contemporary theoretical attempt to systematise precisely this wider preservation problem by proposing cultural heritage preservation as an integrated scientific domain extending across tangible, intangible, theoretical, and increasingly digital forms. Such a proposal remains distinct from the officially institutionalised Czech disciplinary system, yet it is relevant to the broader methodological debate because the Czech case itself demonstrates both the strength and the fragmentation of contemporary heritage knowledge. By 2025, cultural heritage had therefore emerged in Czechia as an autonomous research and preservation field whose coherence derives not from administrative uniformity but from the sustained interaction of law, scholarship, scientific analysis, institutional stewardship, professional practice, community participation, and responsibility towards the future.

Architectural and Built Heritage

Architectural and built heritage forms one of the most visible and institutionally developed components of cultural heritage in the Czech Republic. Its significance derives not merely from the exceptional density of castles, châteaux, churches, monasteries, historic town centres, rural settlements, villas, public buildings, and defensive structures, but from the unusually long historical continuity through which the built environment records political, religious, economic, technological, and social transformation. A medieval church, Renaissance town house, Baroque château, 19th-century industrial city, functionalist villa, or socialist-period public building represents a different architectural response to the conditions of its own time. Preservation therefore involves considerably more than keeping façades visually attractive or preventing physical collapse. Buildings embody construction techniques, spatial organisation, materials, patterns of ownership, social hierarchy, technological innovation, aesthetic ideals, and successive adaptations accumulated over generations. Architectural heritage is consequently both a physical resource and a historical source whose evidential value can be damaged even when a building remains standing. Czech conservation practice increasingly developed methods capable of identifying these layered values before decisions concerning alteration or restoration were made. By 2025, built heritage had therefore become one of the clearest areas in which architectural history, archaeology, engineering, materials research, conservation, planning, and public administration functioned as an integrated research environment.

The historical depth of the Czech architectural landscape creates both exceptional richness and unusual methodological difficulty. Buildings rarely survive in precisely the form in which they were first constructed, and many of the country's most important monuments incorporate several centuries of rebuilding, repair, stylistic alteration, technical modernisation, and changing use. A Romanesque structure may contain Gothic additions, Baroque interiors, 19th-century repairs, and 20th-century services without any one phase exhausting its historical significance. Earlier restoration philosophies sometimes privileged one stylistic period and removed later additions in an attempt to reconstruct an assumed ideal form. Modern

conservation increasingly treats such stratification itself as evidence of historical development. The central question is therefore not automatically how to return a building to its original appearance, because in many cases no single authentic original state ever existed for very long. Conservation instead requires evaluation of which historical layers survive, how they relate to one another, and what would be lost if one phase were privileged over others. This layered understanding is particularly important in Czechia because political, religious, and property changes repeatedly transformed buildings while leaving substantial earlier fabric intact.

The concept of architectural value consequently became broader during the post-1993 period. Artistic and stylistic distinction remained important, but it was increasingly supplemented by historical, technological, typological, urbanistic, documentary, social, and material criteria. A building does not need elaborate decoration or association with a famous architect to possess significant heritage value. An apparently modest structure may be exceptionally important because it preserves a rare construction system, original plan, historical function, settlement relationship, or locally characteristic material practice. The NPÚ methodology for classifying buildings according to heritage value explicitly sought to stabilise value categories without privileging stylistic ornament and emphasised authenticity in relation to building type. Such an approach expands the architectural canon beyond masterpieces and supports comparative evaluation across larger territories. It also creates a more defensible basis for deciding which buildings deserve legal protection when resources do not permit every surviving historical structure to be treated identically. Architectural conservation by 2025 was therefore increasingly grounded in explicit value assessment rather than intuitive judgements based mainly upon age or visual attractiveness.

One of the most distinctive methodological strengths of Czech built-heritage research is the *stavebněhistorický průzkum*, or historical building survey. This method treats the standing building itself as a primary historical document and combines direct examination with archival, cartographic, iconographic, and plan-based research. Investigators analyse masonry, construction joints, roof structures, ceilings, vaults, openings, staircases, surfaces, architectural details, circulation patterns, and spatial relationships in order to reconstruct successive building phases. Written sources and historical images are then compared with material evidence because documentary accounts may be incomplete or may describe projects that were never constructed exactly as planned. The resulting survey normally includes a written historical and architectural analysis, graphic representation of construction development, an assessment of heritage values, and supporting plans and images. Such research can reveal that apparently minor components belong to the earliest surviving phase or that later interventions have themselves acquired historical importance. Its practical significance is considerable because conservation design undertaken before this knowledge is available can destroy evidence that no subsequent archival investigation can recover. The Czech historical building survey therefore represents a particularly mature mechanism linking architectural research directly with responsible intervention.

The method also demonstrates why built heritage cannot be protected adequately through visual inspection alone. A façade may conceal timber structures, earlier windows, blocked openings, historic plaster layers, construction joints, or technical systems that fundamentally alter understanding of the building. Roof structures are especially valuable because they may preserve dated timber, carpentry techniques, assembly marks, and evidence of previous building phases invisible from ordinary public spaces. Cellars and foundations can contain

remains of earlier structures and connect standing architecture with archaeological evidence. Paint stratigraphy and surface investigation may reveal colour schemes or decorative programmes subsequently concealed by later finishes. Structural defects themselves can provide information about earlier alterations, loads, materials, and construction errors. Detailed knowledge of such evidence enables repairs to be targeted rather than based upon unnecessarily extensive replacement. The historical building survey thus converts the principle of minimum loss into a practical research methodology.

The political transformation after 1989 changed the ownership context of architectural conservation as profoundly as it changed its scholarly methods. Restitution returned numerous buildings to private individuals, religious organisations, municipalities, and other former owners or their successors. This restored property rights but also transferred responsibility for structures that had frequently accumulated substantial maintenance deficits during the socialist period. Some owners inherited highly valuable monuments together with repair costs far beyond the ordinary economic capacity of private property. Religious communities regained churches, monasteries, parish buildings, and other properties whose continued maintenance had to be reconciled with demographic changes and limited institutional resources. Municipalities likewise became responsible for historic town halls, houses, fortifications, civic structures, and public spaces while simultaneously financing schools, transport, utilities, and other essential services. Architectural conservation therefore became inseparable from questions of ownership, financing, taxation, subsidies, and public interest. The post-1993 Czech model gradually developed around the recognition that legal protection without financial mechanisms can leave even formally protected monuments vulnerable.

Several national grant programmes consequently became long-term pillars of architectural conservation. The Programme for the Regeneration of Urban Heritage Reservations and Urban Heritage Zones had already been approved in March 1992 and continued after the creation of the Czech Republic as a mechanism linking state support with municipal planning and owner participation. Its structure is significant because financial assistance is conditional upon the municipality preparing its own regeneration programme and contributing alongside the property owner. Conservation is therefore treated not simply as a transaction between the state and one monument owner but as part of coordinated urban policy. The Architectural Heritage Rescue Programme, established by government resolution in February 1995, addressed especially valuable immovable monuments such as castles, châteaux, monasteries, historic gardens, churches, and comparable structures requiring major long-term intervention. The Emergency Programme provided another mechanism for buildings in critical structural condition, particularly damaged roofs and load-bearing systems. Additional programmes supported rural protected areas and other categories of immovable heritage. Together, these funding instruments transformed architectural preservation from episodic rescue towards a more structured system of shared public responsibility.

The urban dimension is particularly important because Czech architectural heritage is preserved not only through individual listings but through protected historic territories. Urban heritage reservations represent exceptionally well-preserved ensembles in which street plans, plots, building volumes, public spaces, gardens, architectural dominants, and the relationships among individual structures form a coherent historical environment. Heritage zones provide another territorial level of protection for areas whose cultural values remain substantial even where integrity is lower or development has been more extensive. This

approach recognises that an individual historic house can lose much of its significance if the urban structure surrounding it is destroyed. Preservation therefore extends to panoramas, roofscapes, street proportions, parcel patterns, spatial hierarchy, and other relationships that cannot be protected through isolated monument designation alone. The same principle applies to squares, fortification systems, gardens, and visual connections among architectural landmarks. Czech urban conservation consequently developed towards protection of morphological structure as well as architecturally distinguished objects.

Historic centres such as Prague, Český Krumlov, Telč, Kutná Hora, Litomyšl, and numerous other towns demonstrate the consequences of this territorial approach. Their significance is produced by accumulated relationships among streets, houses, religious structures, civic buildings, fortifications, topography, and public spaces rather than by one monument considered independently. The regeneration of such environments after 1989 often required extensive repair following decades of inadequate maintenance, while the new market economy simultaneously created strong commercial pressure for conversion and redevelopment. Tourism generated financial resources and encouraged restoration but could also transform housing, retail, signage, interiors, and public space according to visitor demand. New construction created recurring debates about scale, height, materials, roof forms, and architectural language within protected settings. Conservation authorities therefore had to negotiate between preservation and the legitimate continuation of urban life. The objective increasingly became neither architectural freezing nor unrestricted commercial redevelopment, but controlled change capable of preserving historical spatial identity.

The protection of entire historic areas also changed understanding of ordinary buildings. Within an urban reservation, a modest house may contribute significantly to historical character even if it would never qualify individually as a national architectural masterpiece. Repeated replacement of such buildings can gradually destroy an ensemble while leaving its most famous monuments untouched. The Council of Europe's architectural-heritage framework reinforced this recognition by treating groups of buildings and sites as components of architectural heritage alongside individual monuments. Czech regeneration programmes eventually reflected the same logic so strongly that, under specified circumstances, support could address non-listed buildings within protected urban ensembles when their condition affected the heritage value of the whole area. This development demonstrates an important conceptual shift from monument conservation towards management of the historic built environment. The value of architecture increasingly resides in relationships as well as singular objects. Such thinking provides the conceptual foundation for contemporary integrated urban conservation.

Castles and châteaux remain among the most publicly visible forms of Czech architectural heritage, but their preservation presents distinctive technical and institutional problems. These complexes often include fortifications, residential wings, chapels, gardens, service buildings, interiors, collections, archaeological remains, and landscape relationships accumulated through many periods. Their large scale produces extremely high maintenance costs even before major conservation interventions become necessary. Roofs alone can contain enormous surfaces requiring historically appropriate materials and specialist craft knowledge, while stonework, timber structures, drainage, heating, and security all require continuous management. The National Heritage Institute administers a substantial portfolio of state-owned castles, châteaux, and other monuments, creating direct institutional links among conservation research, property management, visitor access, and public

interpretation. This differs from a system in which heritage agencies only regulate buildings owned by others. Czech architectural conservation therefore contains an unusually strong body of practical knowledge generated through long-term management of major historic complexes.

The management of these monuments increasingly moved away from episodic reconstruction towards preventive care. Regular maintenance can be less visually dramatic than comprehensive restoration, but it often preserves more original material and costs less over the long term. Small failures in roofing, gutters, drainage, masonry joints, or timber protection can produce extensive deterioration when left untreated. Preventive monitoring is therefore one of the most important conservation technologies even though it attracts relatively little public attention. Historic properties also require decisions about heating, fire protection, electrical systems, visitor circulation, security, and service facilities that were never part of their original architectural conception. Every technical improvement can potentially damage historical fabric if introduced without careful research. The management of castles and châteaux consequently demonstrates that preservation is best understood as a continuous process rather than a sequence of spectacular restorations.

Religious architecture constitutes another exceptionally large and historically significant category. Churches, monasteries, chapels, synagogues, pilgrimage complexes, parish buildings, cemeteries, and associated structures shaped Czech settlements for centuries and frequently contain architecture and art of exceptional quality. Their preservation after 1989 was strongly affected by restitution and the restoration of religious freedom. Many buildings returned to churches and religious societies after decades of state control, yet congregations often lacked the resources required to maintain monumental complexes constructed for much larger historical communities. Rural churches became especially vulnerable where population decline or secularisation reduced regular use. At the same time, religious buildings cannot always be treated simply as museum objects because many retain active liturgical functions and spiritual meanings. Conservation must therefore accommodate contemporary religious use while protecting architectural, artistic, archaeological, and material values.

The documentation of sacred architecture became correspondingly systematic. NPÚ methodologies developed approaches for recording churches and spatial chapels through architecture, construction history, furnishings, materials, and contextual relationships. Such documentation is particularly important in regions where buildings are endangered by neglect, theft, demographic change, or limited maintenance capacity. Research can identify significant elements before emergency interventions or losses occur. Sacred buildings also reveal the limitations of separating immovable and movable heritage too rigidly because altars, organs, paintings, sculptures, liturgical furnishings, wall paintings, and architecture often form historically integrated ensembles. Alteration of the interior can therefore damage architectural significance even when walls and roofs remain physically intact. Religious heritage consequently requires cooperation between architectural conservation, restoration, art history, theology, archaeology, and collection protection.

Vernacular and rural architecture represents a further major component of the Czech built-heritage landscape. Farmsteads, timber houses, barns, mills, cottages, village greens, gateways, agricultural structures, and locally characteristic settlement forms document ways of life rarely represented adequately by monumental architecture. Their materials and construction methods often respond closely to regional geology, climate, agriculture, forestry,

and social organisation. Timber, earth, stone, brick, thatch, plaster, and mixed construction systems require conservation knowledge substantially different from that used for major masonry monuments. Rural buildings are particularly vulnerable because modern housing expectations can lead to replacement of windows, roofs, floor plans, surfaces, and service systems that cumulatively eliminate historical character. The NPÚ's methodology for documenting folk architecture therefore emphasises historical, architectural, urbanistic, constructional, and authentic features required for meaningful heritage evaluation. Czech protection of village heritage reservations and zones further recognises that the settlement pattern itself may possess significance beyond individual farmhouses.

The survival of vernacular architecture also depends heavily upon continued use. A rural building preserved only as an empty exhibit may retain material form while losing many relationships that originally made it intelligible. Conversely, adaptation for contemporary residence can ensure maintenance but may introduce major changes to openings, insulation, roofs, interiors, extensions, or surrounding plots. The conservation problem is therefore rarely solved by choosing simply between change and non-change. It requires distinguishing alterations necessary for sustainable use from interventions that unnecessarily erase significant material evidence. Traditional craft knowledge can be especially important because historic construction systems often perform poorly when repaired with incompatible modern materials. Cement-rich mortars, impermeable coatings, replacement windows, or inappropriate insulation can create technical as well as aesthetic problems. Vernacular conservation demonstrates particularly clearly that historical building technologies should be understood as functioning systems rather than decorative styles.

Fortified towns such as Terezín and Josefov present built-heritage challenges on an entirely different scale. Their significance lies not only in individual military buildings but in urban plans, bastions, underground systems, ramparts, gates, barracks, hospitals, storage buildings, and the spatial logic of fortification. Once their original military functions disappeared, maintaining such extensive infrastructure became extremely difficult. Josefov's fortification system, for example, contains vast masonry and underground structures whose preservation far exceeds the ordinary financial capacity of its municipality. European and national support eventually enabled more comprehensive rehabilitation of selected sections, while professional research addressed specialised questions concerning historic brickwork, underground systems, earthworks, structural stability, and earlier repair techniques. The Czech Government's 2023 decision to provide special support for endangered structures in Terezín and Josefov acknowledged that ordinary heritage funding mechanisms were insufficient for several critically deteriorated buildings. These fortress towns demonstrate that architectural heritage can become an urban-scale infrastructure problem requiring long-term national intervention.

They also illustrate the relationship between reuse and conservation. Military buildings constructed for highly specialised functions can become extremely difficult to adapt once those functions disappear. Large barracks or hospitals may possess significant architecture but generate operating costs disproportionate to local demand. Leaving them unused accelerates deterioration, yet economically viable new functions can require extensive internal transformation. Successful revitalisation therefore depends upon identifying uses compatible with historically significant spatial structures rather than treating adaptation as unrestricted redevelopment. Public functions, cultural facilities, education, tourism, creative activities, archives, housing, or mixed uses may offer possibilities, but no universal formula exists. The

preservation of fortress architecture consequently depends as much upon economic and urban planning as upon masonry conservation.

Modern architecture increasingly became one of the most important expansions of the Czech heritage canon. Interwar Czechoslovakia had been a major European centre of functionalism and architectural modernism, with internationally significant work in Prague, Brno, Zlín, and other cities. Yet modern buildings pose conservation problems different from those of medieval or Baroque monuments because their significance often lies in experimental materials, technical systems, spatial concepts, industrial components, and precise architectural detailing. Reinforced concrete, steel structures, large glazing systems, specialised mechanical equipment, flat roofs, thin finishes, and factory-made components can deteriorate in ways for which traditional restoration methods provide little guidance. Original technical elements may no longer be manufactured and can conflict with contemporary performance standards. Conservation consequently requires detailed documentary and material research before apparently simple replacement decisions are made. The recognition of modern architecture transformed Czech heritage practice by demonstrating that relatively recent buildings could require conservation as rigorous as much older monuments.

Villa Tugendhat became the most internationally visible example of this principle. Designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and constructed in Brno in 1929–1930, the villa represents a radical synthesis of open space, steel-frame construction, industrial technology, luxurious materials, furniture design, and landscape connection. Its inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2001 confirmed the international significance of Czech interwar architectural modernism. The major restoration undertaken between 2010 and 2012 was based upon extensive research into original materials, construction details, technical equipment, surfaces, and surviving documentation. The objective was not merely to make the building appear visually modern again but to restore an exceptionally integrated architectural conception while preserving surviving original evidence. The project also demonstrated the level of interdisciplinary expertise required by 20th-century conservation, including architectural history, materials analysis, structural research, restoration, technical-history research, and reconstruction of specialised components. Villa Tugendhat therefore became both a restored monument and a methodological reference point for the conservation of modern architecture.

Prague's Müller Villa provides a complementary case. Designed by Adolf Loos and Karel Lhota and constructed in 1928–1930, it represents one of the most complete expressions of Loos's *Raumplan* conception. Nationalisation after 1948 disrupted its original residential context, yet substantial architectural fabric, interiors, and documentation survived. After the political transformation, the City of Prague acquired the villa from the heirs and entrusted it to the City of Prague Museum. Restoration completed in 2000 relied heavily upon surviving photographs, original elements, historical research, furnishings, materials, and evidence preserved by the Müller family. The project showed that conservation of modern residential architecture requires attention to interior space and movable design as much as the external architectural shell. A modern house can therefore function as a total work whose heritage value is dispersed across spatial relationships, surfaces, fixtures, furniture, and technological systems. The Müller Villa's restoration also became symbolic of the broader post-1989 recovery of architectural modernism from the disruptions of nationalisation and ideological reinterpretation.

An even more difficult challenge concerned architecture from the second half of the 20th century. Buildings of the 1960s, 1970s, and later socialist decades often remained too recent to fit traditional public expectations of heritage while simultaneously facing rapid physical alteration or demolition. Their association with the communist period could lead political and public attitudes towards the regime to influence evaluation of architectural value. Yet many structures represent important achievements in engineering, design, public architecture, urban planning, or technological experimentation independent of the political system under which they were created. Ještěd, combining a hotel and television transmitter in a singular architectural and engineering form, is one prominent example of late 20th-century heritage recognised at the highest national level. Numerous other buildings lack comparable public recognition despite substantial architectural significance. Czech conservation therefore had to develop criteria capable of distinguishing historical and architectural value from nostalgia, ideological approval, or simple age.

The 2020 NPÚ methodology for the evaluation and protection of buildings from the second half of the 20th century represents a major step in this process. Its explicit purpose is to support research, identification, documentation, registration, and evaluation of buildings and architectural ensembles, with particular attention to the 1960s and 1970s. The methodology acknowledges that representative protection requires comparison across building types and regions rather than reactive attempts to save isolated structures only after demolition is proposed. This shift is theoretically important because it treats the heritage stock as something that must be constructed prospectively through systematic research. If evaluation begins only when a building is threatened, evidence may already have disappeared and public debate may become polarised around a single controversial case. Systematic identification permits value to be discussed before development pressure becomes immediate. The expanding recognition of socialist-period architecture therefore represents one of the clearest indicators of the maturation of Czech architectural heritage research.

This issue also reveals the subjective dimension of heritage selection. Buildings of the First Republic are often culturally associated with democracy, cosmopolitanism, and modernisation, which can make functionalist heritage relatively easy to celebrate today. Architecture associated with state socialism can evoke very different political memories, even when particular buildings demonstrate considerable formal, technical, or urbanistic quality. Heritage evaluation must therefore distinguish historical association from aesthetic or architectural value without pretending that the two can be completely separated. A building may simultaneously represent technical innovation and an authoritarian political system, or social ambition and coercive urban transformation. Preservation does not require admiration for every historical context embodied in architecture. It requires recognition that material evidence of difficult periods can possess historical significance precisely because those periods remain contested.

The development of objective comparative methodologies became particularly important under these circumstances. The 2015 NPÚ methodology for classifying buildings according to heritage value proposed a systematic approach based upon authenticity and typological significance rather than style or decorative richness alone. A related methodology addressed the identification and classification of areas possessing urbanistic values according to integrity and architectural authenticity. These instruments emerged from NAKI research concerned with culturally and historically valuable areas as components of Czech national and cultural identity. Their importance lies in translating theoretical debates about value into procedures

usable by researchers, planners, conservation authorities, and public administration. They also improve transparency because protection decisions can be explained through criteria rather than defended solely through expert authority. Methodological formalisation does not remove professional judgement, but it makes that judgement more open to comparison and criticism.

The repair of historic structural systems provides another area in which Czech architectural conservation became increasingly research-based. Historic walls, vaults, timber floors, roofs, foundations, and structural connections were generally created as integrated systems rather than collections of standardised replaceable components. Their behaviour depends upon materials, geometry, moisture, previous alterations, and interactions among individual elements. Modern strengthening techniques can stabilise one component while transferring stress or moisture problems elsewhere if the building is treated as a conventional contemporary structure. NPÚ methodology on repairs to load-bearing structures therefore emphasises surveys, diagnosis of damage causes, interdisciplinary coordination, and understanding of the historic building as a whole. Compatible repair may preserve substantial original material while achieving adequate structural safety. This approach replaces the assumption that new construction technology is automatically superior to historical building practice.

Material authenticity occupies a central position within such interventions. Historic timber, stone, brick, lime mortars, renders, roofing materials, metalwork, and joinery carry information about construction methods, craft processes, local resources, and successive repair histories. Replacing them indiscriminately can make a building appear visually renewed while destroying much of its historical evidence. Windows provide a particularly instructive example because original frames, glazing patterns, fittings, timber sections, shopfronts, and surface finishes strongly influence architectural character. NPÚ methodologies devoted specifically to windows and shopfronts emerged partly because historically valuable components were being lost through routine replacement with standard modern units. Conservation increasingly favours repair when technically feasible and encourages new interventions to respond to the material and architectural logic of the historic structure. Authenticity in this sense resides not merely in outward resemblance but in the survival of meaningful material substance and workmanship.

At the same time, architectural conservation cannot be reduced to absolute preservation of every existing component. Buildings must remain structurally safe and, in most cases, usable if they are to survive over long periods. Materials sometimes become too deteriorated to perform their functions, and later alterations may themselves have damaged significant earlier fabric. Decisions therefore require a hierarchy of values, clear documentation, and careful distinction between necessary replacement and unnecessary renewal. Good conservation practice seeks to retain as much significant historical material as reasonably possible while allowing interventions required by safety, use, and long-term survival. The aim is not to create buildings that look old but to preserve authentic historical information within functioning structures. This balance is inherently case-specific and cannot be reduced to one universal restoration recipe.

Adaptive reuse consequently occupies a crucial position between preservation and abandonment. Many historic buildings lose the social, economic, or institutional functions for which they were created long before their architectural significance disappears. Monasteries,

schools, hospitals, residences, factories, military buildings, and public facilities may all require new functions if they are to remain maintained. Reuse can provide the economic and social basis for preservation, but inappropriate adaptation may destroy the very spatial qualities that justified conservation. Large open halls may be subdivided excessively, historic circulation may be disrupted, new technical cores may remove important fabric, and external additions can alter architectural composition. Successful adaptive reuse therefore begins with heritage assessment rather than treating conservation as a decorative stage added after a commercial programme has already been fixed. The most sustainable new use is generally one that can coexist with the building's significant spatial and material characteristics.

The author's work on revitalisation is particularly relevant to this problem. His 2023 study argues for a scientific and educational complex capable of preparing specialists specifically for revitalisation of cultural-heritage objects and urban environments. The importance of this proposal lies in treating revitalisation as more than construction repair or economic redevelopment. A revitalisation specialist would require knowledge of heritage value, historical context, urban relationships, restoration, social function, and the future integration of an inherited object into a changing environment. This logic corresponds closely with the difficulties encountered in Czech adaptive-reuse projects, where conservation, architectural design, investment, legislation, and community needs have to be reconciled. The author’s klironomical framework additionally distinguishes revitalisation from restoration, conservation, renovation, and reconstruction, allowing the intended type of intervention to be considered conceptually rather than treating all forms of renewal as equivalent. Although this terminology is not formally embedded in Czech monument legislation, it provides a useful analytical language for discussing the different objectives that architectural interventions may pursue.

Revitalisation also raises the question of whether heritage preservation should privilege physical continuity or functional continuity. A church that becomes a cultural centre, a factory converted into a museum, or a military building adapted for education survives materially but no longer performs its original purpose. In some cases, new use may protect the building more effectively than an attempt to recreate a function that contemporary society no longer needs. In others, loss of original use can remove intangible relationships essential to understanding the architecture. The appropriate balance depends upon the significance of function within the heritage value of the particular building. Czech conservation practice increasingly recognises that sustainable preservation often requires transformation while insisting that transformation should remain informed by research. This approach moves architectural heritage away from a simple opposition between untouched monument and unrestricted redevelopment.

Accessibility introduces a related set of challenges. Historic buildings were rarely designed according to contemporary expectations regarding barrier-free access, fire evacuation, sanitary provision, visitor capacity, or occupational safety. Public use may therefore require ramps, lifts, handrails, new exits, technical installations, or modifications to circulation. Such interventions can conflict with historic staircases, floor levels, façades, interiors, and spatial sequences. Absolute refusal to adapt can exclude parts of society and undermine the public purpose of heritage institutions. Conversely, poorly planned accessibility works can cause irreversible damage disproportionate to their benefit. The strongest solutions therefore depend upon early interdisciplinary planning rather than treating accessibility as a technical requirement introduced after conservation design is complete. Contemporary heritage

management increasingly regards inclusive access as part of responsible use rather than a threat inherently opposed to preservation.

Energy performance became an equally significant issue during the 2010s and 2020s. Historic windows, walls, roofs, heating systems, and ventilation strategies frequently fail to meet contemporary standards developed for new construction, yet standard retrofit packages can be destructive when applied mechanically to old buildings. External insulation can erase façades and architectural details, impermeable materials can trap moisture, replacement windows can alter both appearance and ventilation, and poorly designed internal insulation can create condensation or damage historic surfaces. Energy conservation therefore requires a building-specific understanding of material behaviour and architectural significance. Traditional buildings sometimes possess environmental strategies, including massive walls, shutters, natural ventilation, or zoned use, that can be improved without wholesale replacement. The challenge is to reduce energy consumption while avoiding interventions whose cultural and material costs exceed their benefits. Architectural heritage thus became an important testing ground for forms of sustainability that cannot be reduced to conventional new-build metrics.

Climate change adds another dimension to this problem. More intense rainfall, drought, heat, storms, changing freeze-thaw cycles, biological growth, and shifting groundwater conditions can alter the deterioration patterns of historic materials. Roof drainage and moisture management become more important under extreme precipitation, while timber structures may experience new biological risks as environmental conditions change. Historic gardens and building-landscape relationships can also be affected by drought and vegetation stress, although landscape heritage is examined separately in the following chapters. Conservation planning increasingly requires risk assessment extending beyond damage already visible at the moment of inspection. Preventive maintenance, monitoring, disaster planning, and documentation acquire greater importance because climate-related effects may accelerate in unpredictable ways. The architectural monument of the 21st century must therefore be managed within environmental conditions different from those under which much of the existing conservation system developed.

Digital technologies increasingly assist this research and risk-management process. Photogrammetry, laser scanning, three-dimensional modelling, geographic information systems, high-resolution photography, drone survey, and digital drawing make it possible to document buildings at levels of precision difficult to achieve through conventional manual recording alone. Three-dimensional models can preserve spatial information about endangered elements, support structural analysis, compare deformation over time, and assist planning of complex interventions. Digital reconstructions can test hypotheses about lost phases without physically reconstructing uncertain architectural features. They also improve communication among architects, historians, engineers, conservators, owners, and the public by making complex spatial relationships visible. The greatest value of such technologies lies not in producing impressive visualisations but in integrating measurable evidence with historical interpretation. Digital documentation therefore becomes most powerful when connected with building surveys, archival research, materials analysis, and clearly stated conservation questions.

The work of the author and Anisiia Tomanek on digital graphics in cultural-heritage restoration is directly relevant here. Their 2025 study treats two- and three-dimensional graphics software

as instruments for documentation, reconstruction, analysis, and visualisation rather than merely presentation. The authors place digital methods within a wider preservation cycle in which archaeological, architectural, historical, and technological evidence must be integrated before intervention. This approach corresponds with the increasingly research-intensive Czech practice of using digital models to record architectural states and evaluate alternative reconstruction scenarios. From a klironomical perspective, digital representation is valuable precisely because it can preserve information without requiring every hypothesis to be materialised physically. It can therefore reduce the risk that uncertain historical reconstructions become irreversible changes to authentic fabric. Digital technology is most consistent with heritage preservation when it increases knowledge before physical intervention rather than functioning as a substitute for such knowledge.

Applied research programmes played an important role in institutionalising these methodological advances. NAKI and subsequent NAKI II and NAKI III projects supported research into historical settlements, building classification, vernacular architecture, sacred buildings, modern architecture, construction technologies, digitisation, materials, documentation, and other aspects of built heritage. Certified methodologies transformed research results into professional instruments available to conservation authorities, designers, owners, and other specialists. This is particularly significant because architectural conservation requires the continuous translation of scholarly knowledge into practical decisions. A monograph may improve historical understanding, but a methodology can also standardise documentation or provide criteria for repeated decisions across hundreds of sites. The Czech NAKI framework therefore contributed to the emergence of an unusually extensive methodological literature connecting architectural research with applied heritage practice. By 2025, built-heritage conservation had become one of the strongest examples of applied humanities and interdisciplinary research within the Ministry of Culture's research system.

European frameworks reinforced this development. The Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe, adopted in Granada in 1985 and incorporated into the Czech legal environment after the democratic transformation, promotes integrated conservation rather than treatment of monuments in isolation from planning and social use. Its broad definition includes monuments, groups of buildings, and sites, providing an international foundation for protection of architectural ensembles and historic settlements. European funding after 2004 enabled restoration and adaptive-reuse projects on scales frequently beyond ordinary municipal or owner resources. International professional networks also exposed Czech specialists to debates concerning authenticity, modern architecture, preventive conservation, sustainable use, 20th-century heritage, and public participation. Czech architectural preservation did not simply import these principles, because its own monument-care traditions were already highly developed. European integration nevertheless increased comparative evaluation and encouraged conservation to operate within broader planning, environmental, tourism, and development contexts.

UNESCO recognition supplied particularly visible international validation of Czech architectural heritage, although its significance extends beyond prestige. Properties such as Prague, Český Krumlov, Telč, Kutná Hora, Litomyšl Castle, the Pilgrimage Church of St John of Nepomuk at Zelená Hora, and Villa Tugendhat represent very different architectural periods and conservation problems. World Heritage status requires attention to authenticity, integrity, management, buffer zones, development pressures, and long-term monitoring. It can therefore influence urban planning and conservation far beyond the boundaries of individual

monuments. At the same time, international recognition can intensify visitor pressure and commercial development, creating management problems precisely because heritage visibility increases. The Czech experience demonstrates that inscription is not the conclusion of architectural conservation but the beginning of an additional layer of responsibility. Detailed treatment of this international heritage architecture belongs to a later chapter, but its effect upon built-heritage practice is already unmistakable.

Despite these achievements, major structural problems remained at the end of 2025. The cost of maintaining historic buildings substantially exceeds the resources available to many owners, especially where structures are large, economically marginal, or located in shrinking communities. Skilled craftspeople capable of working with historic carpentry, masonry, plaster, roofing, metalwork, stone, and specialist finishes are not always available in sufficient numbers. Development pressure in successful cities can encourage demolition behind façades, rooftop additions, changes to historic plots, and conversion of residential areas towards tourism or investment. In other regions, the problem is the opposite: weak property demand leaves buildings vacant and deteriorating because economically viable new uses are difficult to identify. Energy requirements, accessibility standards, fire protection, and climate adaptation introduce new technical pressures that earlier conservation systems were not designed to address. Modern and socialist-period architecture remains particularly vulnerable because public consensus concerning its value is weaker than for medieval or Baroque monuments. Architectural heritage policy therefore continues to require both research innovation and political commitment.

The deepest challenge concerns the relationship between preservation and change. Architecture differs from many museum objects because buildings normally remain embedded in active settlements and must coexist with contemporary life. Absolute physical stasis is therefore neither possible nor necessarily desirable. Every intervention, including the decision to do nothing, changes the future condition of a building. The appropriate objective is consequently informed continuity: allowing necessary adaptation while ensuring that significant material, spatial, historical, and architectural evidence is not destroyed without compelling reason. This principle requires research before design, documentation before irreversible intervention, and evaluation of long-term consequences rather than concentration only upon immediate appearance. Czech built-heritage practice increasingly moved towards this more sophisticated understanding during the period from 1993 to 2025.

In this respect, the conceptual distinction developed in klironomy among conservation, restoration, renovation, reconstruction, and revitalisation has analytical relevance to Czech architectural practice. These interventions pursue different relationships with inherited form and should not be treated as interchangeable synonyms for improvement. Conservation prioritises stabilisation and survival, restoration seeks recovery of culturally significant characteristics, reconstruction recreates lost elements to varying degrees of evidential certainty, renovation renews condition or performance, and revitalisation attempts to return an object or environment to meaningful contemporary life. Real projects often combine several of these approaches, which makes explicit identification of objectives particularly important. The author’s broader argument that preservation decisions should connect value, historicity, cultural continuity, and responsibility towards the future provides a useful theoretical framework for examining why a technically successful intervention can nevertheless be culturally unsuccessful. The Czech evidence, in turn, demonstrates that such theory must remain grounded in highly specialised architectural, historical, structural, and materials

knowledge. Klironomy is therefore most useful here as a conceptual integrator rather than a replacement for established conservation disciplines.

In summary, architectural and built heritage became one of the most methodologically advanced components of Czech cultural-heritage research between 1993 and 2025. Its institutional strength rests upon the interaction of legal protection, the territorial expertise of the National Heritage Institute, specialised public funding, university and Academy research, professional architectural practice, municipal planning, and the responsibilities of public, religious, private, and civic owners. The Czech tradition of historical building surveys provides an especially powerful mechanism for treating structures as stratified historical documents whose value must be understood before intervention. Territorial protection through urban and village heritage reservations and zones extends conservation beyond individual monuments towards historic morphology, public space, panoramas, and coherent architectural ensembles. Long-term grant programmes introduced from the early 1990s created mechanisms for regeneration, emergency repair, and rescue of particularly significant architectural monuments. Castles, châteaux, churches, vernacular buildings, fortress towns, historic urban houses, and other inherited structures consequently became components of a differentiated preservation system rather than one homogeneous architectural category. The conservation of Villa Tugendhat, Müller Villa, and other modern buildings demonstrated that 20th-century materials, technologies, interiors, and spatial concepts require research as rigorous as that applied to much older monuments. The development of systematic criteria for the architecture of the second half of the 20th century further expanded the national heritage canon beyond periods already legitimised by historical distance. Materials research, structural diagnostics, preventive maintenance, adaptive reuse, digital documentation, energy performance, accessibility, and climate resilience gradually made built-heritage conservation increasingly interdisciplinary. NAKI-supported methodologies strengthened the connection between scientific investigation and practical conservation, while European and international frameworks reinforced integrated approaches to historic areas. The work of the author on revitalisation, klironomical methods, and digital tools provides a complementary theoretical perspective in which architectural preservation is understood through differentiated forms of intervention and responsibility for historical continuity. By 2025, Czech architectural heritage protection could therefore be characterised not as an attempt to prevent buildings from changing, but as a sophisticated system for deciding which forms of change can occur without destroying the material and cultural evidence through which architecture connects past, present, and future.

Archaeological Heritage and the Preservation of Historical Landscapes

Archaeological heritage occupies a distinctive position within the Czech system of cultural preservation because much of its evidential value remains invisible until it is investigated and can be destroyed by the very process through which it becomes known. Unlike a standing building or museum object, an archaeological site may survive beneath fields, streets, forests, industrial areas, reservoirs, or modern settlements without any visible indication of its existence. Its significance therefore lies not only in artefacts but in stratigraphy, spatial relationships, environmental evidence, deposits, structures, soils, and the context in which individual finds occur. Once those relationships are removed through construction, erosion,

looting, or excavation, they cannot be recreated physically in their original form. Archaeological preservation consequently requires a different understanding of authenticity from that normally applied to architecture or movable collections. The fundamental resource is contextual information embodied in a site and its relationship with the surrounding landscape. Modern Czech archaeology increasingly recognised that the landscape itself represents a cumulative record of human activity rather than an empty surface containing isolated archaeological points. Between 1993 and 2025, the protection of archaeological heritage therefore evolved towards an integrated system combining legal regulation, rescue archaeology, landscape research, non-destructive survey, environmental science, digital data management, and public interpretation.

The legal basis for this system remained Part Three of Act No. 20/1987 Coll. on State Monument Care, which regulates archaeological research and archaeological finds. The legislation gives the Institutes of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences a specific statutory position while permitting the Ministry of Culture, under defined conditions, to authorise universities, museums, other organisations, and qualified entities to conduct archaeological research. Organisations authorised to excavate are required to possess professional qualifications and the facilities necessary for scientific investigation, documentation, temporary storage, and proper treatment of archaeological finds. They must notify the relevant Archaeological Institute when research begins and submit information concerning its results. The Act also defines an archaeological find as material evidence or a surviving trace of human life and activity from earlier periods that has generally survived below ground. Accidental discoveries must be reported and left unchanged for the period necessary for professional inspection and emergency protection. Movable archaeological finds enter a regulated system of public ownership and are normally deposited in museums according to the institutional status of the excavating organisation and the relevant territorial authority. Archaeology is consequently embedded legally within heritage protection rather than treated simply as unrestricted academic fieldwork.

The Czech accession to the revised European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage strengthened this protective philosophy substantially. The Valletta Convention entered into force for the Czech Republic on 23 September 2000 and defined archaeological heritage as a source of European collective memory and an instrument of historical and scientific study. Its importance lies especially in the principle that archaeological preservation should be integrated into planning and development rather than activated only after remains have already been damaged. The Convention also encourages the use of non-destructive research methods whenever feasible and treats excavation as an intervention requiring scientific justification and professional control. This represents a fundamental shift from the older image of archaeology as a discipline whose success is measured principally by the quantity of material excavated. In contemporary heritage practice, leaving a well-understood site undisturbed may constitute a more responsible preservation decision than excavating it merely because excavation is technically possible. Archaeological knowledge must therefore be balanced against the irreversible consumption of the archaeological resource. Czech practice after 2000 increasingly operated within this preventive European framework while retaining the institutional structures established under national legislation.

The institutional architecture of Czech archaeology is unusually dense and decentralised. The Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague performs major research, archival, methodological, and heritage-management functions for Bohemia, while the Institute

of Archaeology in Brno performs corresponding roles for Moravia and Czech Silesia. Universities, museums, the National Heritage Institute, regional institutions, municipal organisations, and other authorised workplaces form an extensive network capable of undertaking archaeological investigations. Authorisation is not simply an administrative formality, because archaeological excavation destroys the context it records and therefore requires demonstrable professional competence. Regional Archaeological Committees coordinate research and rescue responsibilities among authorised organisations in individual territories. This system combines central standards with geographically distributed capacity, an important advantage in a country where construction and archaeological discoveries occur continuously across many regions. It also allows regional museums and universities to maintain close relationships with archaeological landscapes they have studied for decades. Czech archaeological heritage management consequently operates through coordinated professional plurality rather than through one national excavation service.

Development-led rescue archaeology represents the most extensive point of contact between this professional network and ordinary economic activity. Under Section 22 of the State Monument Care Act, developers planning construction in a territory containing archaeological finds must notify the archaeological authorities during preparation and allow an archaeological institute or authorised organisation to carry out rescue research where necessary. Professional guidance treats practically the whole territory of Czechia as potentially archaeologically relevant because several millennia of occupation have produced an extraordinarily dense and incompletely mapped archaeological record. Roads, housing, utility networks, industrial facilities, pipelines, quarries, commercial developments, and urban reconstruction can therefore all produce archaeological obligations. Where the need for rescue excavation results from the business activity of a legal or entrepreneurial person, the legislation places the costs of that research upon the developer. This model incorporates part of the archaeological cost into development rather than leaving society to finance the documentation of heritage destroyed by private investment. The system can create practical conflicts concerning time, cost, and project scheduling, but it also makes archaeology a normal component of responsible land development. By 2025, preventive and rescue archaeology had become deeply embedded within Czech planning practice.

This rescue system contains a fundamental paradox because excavation simultaneously preserves knowledge and destroys the physical context from which that knowledge is obtained. Once a settlement feature, grave, production structure, or stratigraphic sequence has been excavated, the original deposit no longer exists as an archaeological site. What remains are artefacts, environmental samples, photographs, drawings, measurements, databases, spatial records, reports, and the interpretations constructed from them. The quality of archaeological heritage preservation therefore depends upon the quality of documentation as much as upon the quality of physical excavation. Poorly documented excavation can amount to irreversible information loss even when all movable objects are retained. Conversely, systematic excavation supported by modern recording can convert an unavoidable physical loss into a durable scientific resource. Czech archaeology increasingly responded to this problem by standardising field records, centralising information, requiring reports, and integrating datasets into national digital systems. Documentation became part of the heritage object itself because it preserves relationships that physical excavation necessarily removes.

The scale of rescue archaeology expanded substantially during the economic and infrastructural transformation following 1989. New motorways, commercial construction, municipal development, utility systems, and urban renewal repeatedly exposed archaeological evidence on scales difficult to achieve through conventional research excavations alone. In Moravia, for example, rescue work associated with motorway construction and redevelopment of historic town centres significantly enlarged knowledge of prehistoric, protohistoric, medieval, and post-medieval settlement. Earlier rescue projects connected with the Nové Mlýny reservoirs had already demonstrated the scientific possibilities created by large infrastructural interventions, but the post-communist construction boom made preventive archaeology an even more continuous component of professional practice. Such excavations frequently generated exceptionally large assemblages that required decades of processing, conservation, publication, and reinterpretation. The challenge therefore shifted from discovering archaeological evidence towards managing the scientific consequences of its rapid accumulation. Institutions had to develop archives, laboratories, storage capacity, databases, and new analytical workflows capable of turning rescue documentation into research knowledge. Czech archaeology consequently became one of the fields in which heritage management and research productivity were most directly interconnected.

The Archaeological Information System of the Czech Republic represents perhaps the most important infrastructural achievement produced by this need for coordination. AIS CR developed as a joint long-term initiative of the archaeological institutes in Prague and Brno and integrates information about fieldwork, archaeological sites, finds, documentation, and related research resources. Since 2016, it has formed part of the Czech national Roadmap of Large Research Infrastructures, giving archaeological data management a level of institutional continuity rarely associated with conventional project databases. Its principal component, the Archaeological Map of the Czech Republic, supports registration of field interventions, reporting of construction activities, recording of excavations and surveys, deposition of documentation, and research access to accumulated data. The system combines current fieldwork with retrospective information reaching back to 19th-century archaeological activity and documentary collections maintained since the foundation of the archaeological institutes. By 2023, the historical excavation-report archives of both institutes had been extensively digitised and released through the infrastructure, while the AMČR itself moved to a fully web-based environment in 2024. Persistent identifiers were introduced increasingly during 2025, strengthening the long-term citability and interoperability of archaeological records. Archaeological preservation therefore acquired a national digital layer capable of surviving beyond individual excavation teams and research projects.

This digital infrastructure has changed the epistemology of archaeological heritage as well as its administration. A national database allows researchers to compare settlement distributions, excavation histories, chronological patterns, and site types across territories far larger than those normally covered by one field project. Geographic information systems connect individual finds with topography, soils, hydrology, historical maps, environmental data, transport routes, and modern development pressures. Structured digital records can reveal areas in which archaeological knowledge is dense and others where apparent absence may simply reflect differences in research intensity. Open-access principles make substantial portions of these data available to researchers, students, heritage authorities, public administration, and interested citizens. At the same time, unrestricted publication of precise

coordinates can expose vulnerable sites to looting or uncontrolled detector use, requiring differentiated levels of access. AIS CR therefore demonstrates that open science and heritage protection can sometimes pull in opposite directions. Responsible archaeological digitalisation must maximise reuse while withholding information whose disclosure could facilitate irreversible damage.

The development of landscape archaeology provided the conceptual framework within which these individual data points could be interpreted as components of larger historical systems. Czech landscape archaeology gained particular prominence through the work of researchers such as Martin Gojda, Martin Kuna, Dagmar Dreslerová, and their colleagues, whose publications and projects placed settlement, land use, environmental change, and spatial organisation at the centre of archaeological inquiry. The landscape approach rejects the assumption that archaeological knowledge consists principally of excavated sites separated from the spaces between them. Fields, routes, forests, water systems, boundaries, production areas, burial zones, abandoned settlements, and zones of resource exploitation all participate in long-term patterns of human activity. Even an area with few visible structures may retain traces of grazing, cultivation, woodland use, extraction, transportation, or repeated seasonal occupation. Historical landscapes therefore emerge through cumulative interaction between human communities and environmental processes. Archaeology can reconstruct those interactions across timescales extending far beyond the documentary record.

Martin Gojda's *Archeologie krajiny* provided one of the major Czech conceptual statements of this perspective at the beginning of the 21st century. It approached cultural landscapes through settlement history, spatial structures, movement, environment, and long-term processes rather than limiting archaeological interpretation to typological classification of artefacts. This perspective was reinforced by research into non-destructive archaeology and remote sensing during the same period. The significance of such work for preservation is substantial because historical landscapes often survive as weak spatial traces rather than monumental structures. An ancient enclosure may appear only through crop marks, a medieval field system through subtle earthworks, and a vanished settlement through concentrations of artefacts and geophysical anomalies. If heritage policy recognises only highly visible ruins, most archaeological landscapes remain effectively unprotected until development exposes them. Landscape archaeology therefore expanded both the intellectual and the protective definition of archaeological heritage.

Aerial archaeology became one of the most productive methods for revealing this hidden record. Martin Gojda and other Czech specialists systematically demonstrated how aerial photography can identify buried ditches, foundations, settlement structures, roads, field systems, and funerary monuments through crop marks, soil marks, shadows, and variations in terrain. Features invisible at ground level can become legible when viewed from altitude under appropriate seasonal, climatic, or lighting conditions. Repeated aerial survey also documents the changing physical condition of sites and provides spatial evidence across extensive areas without excavation. Later integration of historical aerial photography, satellite imagery, drones, and digital mapping greatly increased the analytical potential of this material. The NAKI-supported project *Archaeology from the Sky* further systematised remote-sensing archives from Moravia and Silesia and translated specialist methods into public presentation. Aerial archaeology thus became simultaneously a research technique, a heritage-monitoring instrument, and a means of teaching citizens to perceive archaeological traces within ordinary landscapes.

Remote sensing expanded still further through geophysical methods, airborne laser scanning, photogrammetry, and other forms of non-invasive prospection. Magnetometry can identify buried ditches, hearths, kilns, structures, and other anomalies without physically removing archaeological deposits. Ground-penetrating radar and electrical methods provide different forms of subsurface information where conditions permit, while LiDAR can reveal subtle earthworks beneath vegetation and forest cover. Digital terrain models have been particularly important for recognising archaeological structures in wooded environments where conventional aerial photography is ineffective. Three-dimensional recording allows threatened earthworks and excavation surfaces to be documented precisely before alteration. These techniques do not eliminate the need for excavation because geophysical or remote-sensing anomalies still require archaeological interpretation and sometimes physical verification. Their importance lies instead in enabling archaeologists to formulate better questions and reduce unnecessary destruction.

The Czech tradition of non-destructive archaeology acquired a strong methodological foundation through Martin Kuna and colleagues. The 2004 volume *Nedestruktivní archeologie* systematically addressed theory, research aims, field walking, aerial survey, geophysics, spatial analysis, and other approaches capable of producing archaeological knowledge without conventional large-scale excavation. The development of such methods corresponded closely with the preventive principles embodied in the Valletta Convention. A site can first be mapped and characterised through surface and geophysical evidence, allowing excavation to focus only upon questions that cannot be answered otherwise. Non-destructive surveys are particularly valuable when sites are nationally significant, poorly understood, or intended to remain preserved in situ. They also make repeated monitoring possible because investigators can return to the same landscape without consuming the archaeological deposit through every research cycle. By the 2020s, minimally invasive and non-destructive methods had become ordinary components of sophisticated Czech archaeological research rather than experimental alternatives to ‘real’ excavation.

Environmental archaeology transformed understanding of historical landscapes still further by recovering evidence that conventional artefact-centred archaeology had frequently neglected. Pollen, seeds, charcoal, wood, animal bones, phytoliths, sediments, soils, insects, and other biological or geological traces can reconstruct vegetation, diet, agriculture, animal management, woodland use, climate, and human environmental impact. Researchers such as Dagmar Dreslerová and Radka Kozáková developed explicitly interdisciplinary approaches connecting archaeology with palaeoecology and environmental sciences. Pollen analysis has made it possible to trace changes in vegetation associated with colonisation, agriculture, abandonment, grazing, forestry, and climatic fluctuation. Archaeobotanical and archaeozoological evidence reveals subsistence practices and resource use that architecture or pottery alone cannot explain. Radiocarbon dating increasingly provides chronological structures for such environmental sequences and permits archaeological evidence to be compared with palaeoclimatic data. The landscape thus becomes not merely the physical setting of human history but one of its principal archives.

This environmental perspective has been particularly important in mountain and agriculturally marginal landscapes. Earlier archaeological models often concentrated upon fertile lowlands because permanent settlements and intensive agriculture produced abundant visible evidence there. Research in the Šumava Mountains, Brdy, sandstone regions, and other marginal environments has demonstrated that apparently ‘empty’ areas could contain long

histories of seasonal use, forestry, extraction, grazing, routes, military activity, and small-scale settlement. Pollen records may reveal human intervention where conventional archaeological finds are scarce, while LiDAR can identify paths, terraces, charcoal-production sites, mining traces, abandoned structures, and field boundaries beneath forest cover. Such evidence changes interpretation of supposedly natural landscapes by demonstrating that many have been shaped through centuries or millennia of human activity. Historical landscape preservation therefore requires caution towards simple distinctions between untouched nature and cultural space. Archaeology shows that the two categories frequently overlap so extensively that separating them becomes historically misleading.

Spatial analysis and large archaeological datasets enabled these landscape questions to be addressed at new scales. Settlement archaeology had long compared the distribution of sites, but geographic information systems and national databases made it possible to model relationships among settlements, soils, water, visibility, altitude, communication routes, resources, and chronological change with far greater precision. Researchers can investigate why communities selected particular locations and how networks of centres and hinterlands changed over centuries. Large datasets also permit analysis of settlement density and resilience across environmental or political transformations. Contemporary Czech research increasingly combines archaeological records with palaeoecological models, historical maps, environmental datasets, and computational simulation. Such approaches are especially useful for identifying long-term human-environment interactions rather than reconstructing one individual site in isolation. They also make archaeological heritage relevant to present debates concerning landscape resilience because past societies provide evidence of how land-use systems responded to environmental and social change.

Urban archaeology constitutes a distinctive form of historical-landscape research because centuries of occupation create dense vertical stratigraphies beneath functioning cities. Prague represents the most demanding Czech example, where medieval and early modern deposits survive below streets, houses, courtyards, infrastructure, and nationally significant architectural monuments. Construction can reveal exceptional evidence but often within confined spaces and severe time constraints. The Integrated Information System of Archaeological Sources of Prague and the later Prague Archaeological portal sought to connect scattered documentation and make archaeological knowledge of the city more coherent and accessible. Urban archaeology reconstructs vanished streets, houses, workshops, cemeteries, fortifications, water systems, waste deposits, and everyday material culture that written sources describe only partially. It also demonstrates that a protected historic centre possesses important cultural layers below ground as well as visible architecture above it. Planning within archaeological cities therefore requires simultaneous responsibility towards standing heritage and buried stratigraphy.

Dolní Věstonice–Pavlov represents one of the clearest examples of archaeological heritage whose importance is inseparable from landscape and environmental context. The settlement complex beneath the Pavlov Hills contains evidence of Upper Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer communities of exceptional European significance, including dwellings, burials, art, technologies, faunal remains, and evidence associated with mammoth exploitation. Long-term research extending across several generations of archaeologists transformed the area into one of the internationally recognised centres of Palaeolithic archaeology. In 2010, the Dolní Věstonice–Pavlov Archaeological Site was declared a national cultural monument, giving its archaeological significance the highest level of national recognition. The creation of

Archaeopark Pavlov, opened in 2016, provided a new model for presenting this largely subsurface heritage without attempting to reconstruct a conventional prehistoric village above it. The museum building itself is embedded strongly within the terrain, while original archaeological contexts and research findings form the basis of interpretation. The complex demonstrates how archaeological preservation, specialised research infrastructure, landscape setting, museum communication, and tourism can be integrated without treating excavation as the endpoint of heritage management.

Mikulčice-Valy provides a second major model at the opposite chronological end of early Czech archaeology. The Great Moravian centre developed in the Morava River floodplain as a large fortified and unfortified settlement complex containing churches, cemeteries, elite structures, fortifications, bridges, settlement zones, and evidence of economic activity. Its interpretation depends fundamentally upon reconstructing an earlier riverine landscape whose branches organised communication and settlement but have subsequently changed. Long-term research by the Brno Institute of Archaeology created one of the richest bodies of evidence for ninth-century Central European political and social organisation. The modern Mikulčice-Trapíkov research base combines laboratories, depositories, offices, scholarly facilities, and public functions close to the national cultural monument. Mikulčice is also linked conceptually and geographically with the Church of St Margaret at Kopčany on the Slovak side of the Morava, making the archaeological landscape inherently transboundary. The joint Great Moravian heritage has remained on the UNESCO Tentative List, demonstrating both its international importance and the complexity of preserving and presenting archaeological landscapes extending across contemporary state borders. Archaeology here reconstructs not merely a fortress but an entire social, political, religious, and environmental system.

Mining archaeology demonstrates another way in which buried evidence becomes inseparable from landscape history. Medieval and early modern extraction left shafts, galleries, spoil heaps, processing sites, water-management systems, settlements, roads, and altered landforms whose distribution can cover enormous territories. Many features are physically subtle or dangerous and cannot be understood adequately through individual monument listings. Archaeological investigation therefore combines historical documents, surface survey, LiDAR, geophysics, artefact analysis, technological history, and environmental evidence. Research in areas such as Kutná Hora, the Jeseníky Mountains, and the Ore Mountains has contributed to understanding how extraction reorganised settlement, labour, technology, forests, hydrology, and regional economies. The World Heritage inscription of the Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří Mining Region in 2019 recognised a transboundary landscape profoundly shaped by approximately eight centuries of mining. Although the wider industrial and technical heritage of mining is treated separately in the following chapters, its archaeological component is essential because much of the production system survives only below ground or as landscape morphology. Mining landscapes therefore reveal particularly clearly how archaeology connects material traces with large-scale historical processes.

Medieval and post-medieval rural landscapes present a less spectacular but equally important archaeological resource. Deserted villages, field systems, terraces, trackways, mills, ponds, charcoal-production sites, woodland boundaries, castles, manor centres, and small extractive sites often survive outside conventional monumental centres. Their archaeological value lies partly in relationships among features rather than in the artistic distinction of any single structure. Landscape survey can reconstruct patterns of colonisation, land division, agricultural intensification, abandonment, estate organisation, and environmental adaptation.

Historical maps and written records become especially powerful when combined with archaeological evidence because each source type records different aspects of past land use. Remote sensing increasingly allows entire settlement systems to be examined across forests and agricultural zones rather than through isolated excavations. Preservation of these landscapes does not necessarily require turning every field boundary into a protected monument. It requires recognition that major changes in forestry, agriculture, transport, development, or extraction can erase historically meaningful spatial structures even when no famous archaeological site is visibly destroyed.

This approach has increasingly extended archaeology towards the very recent past. Contemporary archaeology developed rapidly in Czechia during the 2010s and 2020s, applying archaeological and anthropological methods to material evidence from the 20th century. Border fortifications, military landscapes, abandoned villages, sites associated with forced displacement, socialist agriculture, Cold War infrastructure, labour camps, and other politically sensitive environments became legitimate objects of archaeological inquiry. The large interdisciplinary project *The Land Gone Wild* explicitly investigates material changes in landscapes affected by Nazi and communist regimes and connects archaeology with anthropology, history, environmental research, remote sensing, and memory studies. Such research challenges the assumption that archaeology begins only when written documentation becomes scarce. Material evidence can contradict, supplement, or spatially locate memories and archives even for events within living or recently living memory. Archaeological landscapes therefore participate increasingly in Czech debates about 20th-century historical memory as well as ancient settlement.

Threats to archaeological landscapes are correspondingly diverse. Construction remains the most visible source of irreversible disturbance, but intensive agriculture can repeatedly damage shallow deposits through ploughing and erosion. Forestry operations, road building, extraction, utility networks, drainage, reservoirs, and recreational development can alter both sites and their landscape contexts. River erosion and changing water regimes threaten deposits along waterways, while drought and lowering groundwater can endanger organic materials preserved only under waterlogged conditions. Climate change is likely to alter erosion, vegetation, moisture, flooding, and other processes that affect buried evidence in ways still incompletely understood. Illegal excavation and unregulated metal detecting create another danger because an artefact removed without precise contextual information may lose most of its archaeological value even if the object itself survives. Archaeological heritage management must therefore monitor processes operating across whole territories rather than wait until individual protected monuments display visible damage.

Metal detecting has been one of the most contentious issues in Czech archaeological heritage protection. Detector technologies make it possible to recover metal objects rapidly across very large areas, creating both extraordinary research opportunities and severe risks of uncontrolled extraction. Czech law treats deliberate searching for archaeological objects as archaeological research and therefore subjects it to professional regulation. Prohibition alone, however, proved insufficient to address a large and socially diverse amateur detecting community. The AMČR-PAS system, launched in 2021, created a formal framework through which amateur collaborators can undertake agreed surface prospecting in cooperation with authorised archaeological organisations and register individual finds within the national archaeological information infrastructure. Professional archaeologists verify and archive these records, while precise location data may be generalised publicly to protect vulnerable sites.

This citizen-science model attempts to convert an activity capable of destroying context into a source of professionally controlled archaeological information without pretending that all detector use becomes harmless automatically.

The significance of AMČR-PAS extends beyond the objects entered into its database. It represents a change in the social model of archaeological heritage management from a simple division between authorised experts and potentially problematic amateurs towards structured cooperation under professional responsibility. Participants are encouraged to follow defined principles of responsible searching and to maintain contact with archaeological organisations rather than treating finds as privately owned collectibles. The system also creates data from landscapes that professional institutions could never survey exhaustively with their own staff. At the same time, cooperation does not legalise uncontrolled archaeological prospection outside the statutory system, and the distinction between citizen science and illicit searching remains essential. Responsible public participation therefore depends upon clear legal limits, documentation standards, training, and mutual trust. Czech archaeology has become an instructive European example of how digital infrastructure can support such regulated collaboration.

Excavated objects introduce a further preservation chain that connects archaeological heritage with museum and conservation systems. Soil removal may expose metals, wood, leather, textiles, bone, ceramics, glass, and other materials to environmental conditions fundamentally different from those in which they survived underground. Some finds begin deteriorating rapidly after excavation and therefore require immediate stabilisation. Archaeological institutes and museum laboratories increasingly combine preventive conservation with radiography, microscopy, elemental analysis, metallography, and other forms of archaeometric investigation. The Brno Institute's concept of analytical conservation illustrates this integration particularly clearly because treatment is combined with scientific investigation of material composition and production technology. Conservation is therefore not an activity performed only after archaeological interpretation has finished. The way an object is cleaned, sampled, stabilised, and stored can determine which forms of evidence remain available for future research.

Bioarchaeology has similarly expanded the scientific meaning of archaeological finds. Human remains, animal remains, isotopes, ancient DNA, hard-tissue histology, palaeopathology, and related analyses can reconstruct health, mobility, diet, biological relationships, and population histories inaccessible through conventional artefact typology alone. Czech research at major prehistoric and medieval sites increasingly integrates such evidence with stratigraphy and material culture. These methods create exceptional scientific opportunities but also demand careful ethical consideration because human remains cannot be regarded merely as neutral laboratory samples. Questions of destructive sampling, long-term storage, documentation, religious sensitivity, and the social interpretation of past populations require explicit professional judgement. New scientific methods can sometimes extract information from collections excavated decades earlier, making careful preservation of both objects and contextual documentation increasingly important. Archaeological stewardship therefore includes responsibility towards research questions that present investigators cannot yet anticipate.

Public archaeology became another important component of preservation because archaeological sites are difficult to protect if society perceives them merely as obstacles to

construction. The *Archaeological Atlas of Bohemia* represented a major effort to explain archaeological monuments directly through their place within the contemporary landscape. Its selected sites extend from prehistory into the 20th century and encourage readers to understand visible and partly invisible remains through maps, historical reconstruction, field observation, and landscape relationships. AIS CR later developed an online Archaeological Atlas and other public tools enabling citizens to discover archaeological places through digital mapping. Prague Archaeological similarly makes the city's buried historical layers accessible beyond the professional community. Archaeopark Pavlov, the Mikulčice archaeological landscape, and the Mušov Visitors' Centre demonstrate different approaches to on-site interpretation based closely upon active scientific research. Archaeological communication thus increasingly became a preservation instrument because informed visitors can recognise landscapes that would otherwise appear empty.

This public orientation also raises a difficult question concerning reconstruction. Archaeological sites frequently survive as foundations, soil marks, depressions, ditches, or entirely buried features that communicate poorly without interpretation. Reconstructed buildings, models, visualisations, and archaeological parks can make vanished environments comprehensible, but they can also give uncertain hypotheses an appearance of historical certainty. Czech practice has employed several alternatives, including marking lost ground plans at surface level, preserving limited original remains in situ, using virtual reconstruction, presenting models, and constructing interpretative architecture rather than rebuilding complete hypothetical settlements. Mikulčice, for example, largely indicates the footprints of structures while preserving the archaeological landscape, whereas Pavlov uses museum architecture and evidence-based interpretation rather than presenting a wholly reconstructed Palaeolithic village as though its appearance were known precisely. The choice of presentation method is therefore itself a heritage decision. Good archaeological interpretation should distinguish clearly between excavated evidence, scholarly reconstruction, and imaginative illustration.

The methodological framework developed by the author provides a useful complementary perspective on this distinction. His klironomical approach treats preservation as a sequence requiring identification of cultural value, historical reconstruction, diagnosis of condition and context, expert evaluation, and the design of an appropriate preservation strategy. Archaeological heritage makes the importance of this sequence especially clear because investigation can itself remove the physical source being studied. Philosophical reconstruction must therefore remain distinct from material reconstruction, since the first seeks to understand lost historical relationships while the second physically recreates forms that may be only partially supported by evidence. The author's emphasis upon historicity and cultural continuity also corresponds with the landscape-archaeological recognition that heritage exists through relationships among successive temporal layers rather than isolated artefacts. His methodological proposal does not replace excavation methodology, stratigraphic analysis, geoarchaeology, or other established archaeological sciences. Its relevance lies instead at the integrative level where evidence, value, intervention, and future transmission must be considered together.

The work of the author and Anisiia Tomanek on digital graphics in cultural-heritage restoration is more directly applicable to archaeological documentation. Their 2025 study explicitly includes archaeological sites among the areas in which two- and three-dimensional digital technologies can support documentation, reconstruction, analysis, and visualisation.

Archaeology provides an especially strong argument for such technologies because excavated contexts disappear physically as investigation proceeds. Photogrammetry, three-dimensional modelling, digital plans, spatial databases, and virtual reconstruction can preserve measurable relationships and permit later re-analysis of excavated situations. Digital models can also present alternative historical hypotheses without requiring irreversible material reconstruction on the archaeological site itself. This makes digital representation particularly compatible with the preventive principle of minimum physical intervention. Czech infrastructures such as the AIS CR 3D Library demonstrate how comparable technical approaches are increasingly embedded within professional archaeological data management.

Despite the sophistication achieved by 2025, Czech archaeological heritage protection retained substantial structural weaknesses. Its central statutory framework remained embedded within the heavily amended 1987 State Monument Care Act, even though archaeology had changed dramatically through digital technology, developer-funded practice, remote sensing, citizen science, European integration, and new scientific methods. Coordination among a large number of authorised archaeological organisations can produce differences in resources, technical capability, research priorities, and publication speed. Rescue excavation generates enormous volumes of documentation and finds, creating long-term pressures upon museums, archives, laboratories, and storage facilities. Excavation reports may preserve data that never become fully published scholarly analyses, limiting the wider intellectual return from unavoidable destruction. Development deadlines can create tension between research quality and practical construction schedules, while illegal detecting and undisclosed discoveries continue to threaten archaeological contexts. Digital infrastructure reduces fragmentation but itself requires stable long-term financing, cybersecurity, data curation, and continual technical renewal. The mature Czech system therefore faces less a problem of recognising archaeology than of sustaining the immense informational and material consequences of archaeological protection.

The preservation of historical landscapes presents an even broader challenge because such landscapes cannot all be managed as conventional legally listed monuments. Archaeological significance may be distributed across field patterns, buried settlements, route systems, production zones, woodland earthworks, river corridors, military landscapes, and environmental sequences covering extensive areas. Agricultural intensification, afforestation, suburban expansion, renewable-energy infrastructure, transport construction, water management, and climate adaptation can therefore affect archaeological evidence at scales beyond individual site boundaries. Landscape archaeology provides methods for identifying these cumulative values, but their incorporation into planning remains necessarily selective and dependent upon the quality of archaeological information available before development begins. Digital predictive modelling and archaeological risk-assessment studies can improve this relationship by identifying areas where significant evidence is likely to survive. Preservation in situ is most realistic when archaeological knowledge enters planning early rather than after final investment decisions have already been made. Czech archaeological heritage policy consequently moves increasingly towards anticipatory management rather than emergency reaction.

This anticipatory logic is perhaps the most important connection between archaeological heritage and the wider philosophy of preservation. Archaeology deals constantly with evidence whose full significance is unknown because future analytical technologies and research questions cannot be predicted. Deposits preserved today may yield forms of scientific

information unavailable to researchers in 2025, just as ancient DNA, isotope analysis, high-resolution dating, and digital modelling have extracted new knowledge from materials collected by earlier generations. Excavating everything that can presently be excavated would therefore deprive future scholars of contextual evidence to which more advanced methods might be applied. Preservation in situ functions in this sense as a research strategy directed towards the future rather than a refusal to produce knowledge. The concept corresponds closely with klironomical arguments that heritage transmission requires responsibility towards recipients whose cultural and scientific priorities cannot be known fully in advance. Archaeological conservation is consequently an unusually clear example of preservation as an ethical relationship between present knowledge and future possibility.

By 2025, the Czech archaeological landscape had thus become simultaneously a legal category, a research object, a digital data environment, and a field of public cultural experience. Archaeological institutes no longer operated simply as organisations conducting excavations but as centres of information infrastructure, conservation science, spatial analysis, remote sensing, environmental research, methodological development, and public communication. The national Archaeological Information System linked more than a century of documentary accumulation with contemporary fieldwork and open-science principles. Landscape archaeology connected buried sites with long-term environmental and settlement systems, while non-destructive techniques reduced dependence upon excavation as the default route to knowledge. Bioarchaeology and archaeometry expanded the kinds of questions archaeological material can answer, and citizen-science mechanisms created controlled routes for public participation. Archaeoparks, atlases, digital portals, and visitor centres increasingly translated research into forms capable of making invisible heritage socially legible. The Czech model therefore demonstrates that archaeological preservation works most effectively when knowledge, documentation, physical protection, and public interpretation are treated as parts of the same system.

In summary, archaeological heritage research and preservation between 1993 and 2025 developed into one of the most scientifically and technologically integrated areas of Czech cultural heritage. The State Monument Care Act provided legal continuity through its regulation of authorised research, archaeological finds, developer notification, rescue excavation, ownership of movable finds, and territories with archaeological evidence, while the Valletta Convention strengthened the preventive principle and the preference for preservation and non-destructive investigation wherever feasible. The archaeological institutes of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague and Brno became central nodes within a much larger professional network of universities, museums, heritage organisations, regional institutions, and authorised archaeological workplaces. Rescue archaeology incorporated heritage protection into development and generated an enormous body of evidence, but it also demonstrated that excavation is an irreversible transformation whose scientific legitimacy depends upon documentation, conservation, archiving, and subsequent analysis. The Archaeological Information System of the Czech Republic and the Archaeological Map transformed these responsibilities into a national digital research infrastructure, integrating historical and contemporary datasets while moving progressively towards FAIR and open-data principles. Czech landscape archaeology, associated especially with research traditions developed by Martin Gojda, Martin Kuna, Dagmar Dreslerová, and their colleagues, expanded the unit of analysis from individual sites towards settlement systems, environmental relationships, routes, land use, and historical landscapes. Aerial survey, geophysics, LiDAR,

GIS, palaeoecology, bioarchaeology, archaeometry, radiocarbon dating, and other interdisciplinary methods made it increasingly possible to study archaeological landscapes without relying exclusively upon destructive excavation. Dolní Věstonice–Pavlov and Mikulčice demonstrate how internationally significant archaeological landscapes can unite long-term research, national protection, scientific infrastructure, conservation, landscape interpretation, and public presentation. AMČR-PAS illustrates a further innovation by incorporating responsible amateur collaborators and detectorists into a professionally supervised citizen-science framework rather than treating public archaeology only through prohibition or passive education. The klironomical works of the author add a complementary theoretical perspective by emphasising value, historicity, cultural continuity, differentiated preservation strategies, and responsibility towards future knowledge, while his work with Anisiia Tomanek highlights the role of digital documentation and reconstruction for archaeological sites. The defining achievement of Czech archaeological heritage protection by 2025 was therefore the transition from an excavation-centred understanding of archaeology towards a preventive, landscape-based, data-intensive, interdisciplinary, and future-oriented model in which the most responsible archaeological intervention may sometimes be not to excavate a site at all, but to know sufficiently well why and how it should remain preserved.

Museums, Collections, and Movable Cultural Heritage

Museums and their collections occupy a central position within the Czech system of movable cultural heritage because they transform individual objects into organised bodies of evidence capable of supporting research, preservation, education, and cultural memory over long periods. A museum object is not preserved merely because it is old, aesthetically attractive, rare, or economically valuable, but because it participates in a collection whose intellectual structure allows relationships among objects, people, places, technologies, environments, and historical processes to be studied. Collections therefore possess a significance greater than the sum of their individual components. A geological specimen, archaeological vessel, scientific instrument, costume, photograph, painting, musical manuscript, industrial machine, or everyday household object acquires additional research value when its provenance, acquisition context, classification, material characteristics, and relationship to comparable objects are documented systematically. Czech museum practice after 1993 increasingly formalised this understanding through legislation, national registration, methodological standards, research programmes, conservation science, and digital information systems. The resulting system distinguishes the scholarly and public value of collections from the temporary visibility of individual objects in exhibitions. Most collection items remain in depositories for substantial periods, yet their cultural importance does not depend upon permanent display. By 2025, the Czech museum collection had consequently become both a protected cultural asset and a long-term research infrastructure whose preservation requires legal, scientific, technical, and ethical continuity.

The independent Czech Republic inherited an exceptionally dense network of museums and galleries with origins extending through the 19th and 20th centuries. The National Museum, Moravian Museum, Silesian Museum, specialised technical and art museums, regional museums, municipal institutions, university collections, church collections, memorial museums, and numerous local organisations had accumulated vast bodies of material before

1993. Their histories reflected changing concepts of national representation, regional identity, science, art, technology, ethnography, archaeology, and public education. Communist nationalisation and administrative restructuring had transformed ownership and institutional relationships after 1948, while collection growth continued under conditions in which ideological priorities could influence acquisition and presentation. The democratic transition after 1989 therefore inherited not a museum system requiring creation from nothing but a highly developed yet administratively and legally heterogeneous collection environment. Restitution, decentralisation, changing ownership, international mobility, the art market, new security risks, and the need to modernise documentation all created pressures for reform. Czech museum policy gradually responded by shifting attention from institutions considered primarily as exhibition organisations towards collections understood as legally protected public resources. This transition became one of the foundations of the post-1993 architecture of movable cultural heritage.

The decisive legal change came with Act No. 122/2000 Coll. on the Protection of Collections of a Museum Nature. The Act replaced an older legislative framework and established a contemporary system centred upon the collection itself rather than simply upon the legal status of the institution managing it. It defines a museum-type collection as an organised body significant in its entirety for prehistory, history, art, literature, technology, the natural sciences, or the social sciences. This formulation is important because it recognises scientific integrity and collective meaning rather than treating protected museum property as an accidental aggregation of valuable things. The definition of a collection object is correspondingly broad and can include natural specimens, human-made objects, human or animal remains, and, under specific conditions, immovable items forming part of a collection. The Act also defines museums as institutions that acquire and collect evidence for scientific and study purposes, investigate the environments from which objects originate, create collections, preserve and document them, and make the resulting knowledge accessible to the public. A gallery is legally understood within this framework as a museum specialised in collections of fine art. Czech museum legislation therefore explicitly embeds research, collection building, permanent preservation, documentation, and public access within one institutional concept.

The law further establishes a particularly important connection between collection preservation and public service. Collections owned by the Czech Republic or territorial self-governing units are treated as public goods, and museums administering registered public collections are expected to provide defined public services. Such services include access to collections and knowledge generated through their study by means of exhibitions, programmes, publications, research information, and other forms of communication. This arrangement prevents the protection of collections from becoming an end entirely detached from society. Public ownership imposes obligations not only to prevent physical loss but to ensure that the knowledge embodied in collections can contribute to cultural, educational, scholarly, and informational needs. The legal model thus links stewardship and accessibility rather than treating them as opposing priorities. At the same time, access must be organised in ways compatible with conservation, security, copyright, human remains, sensitive information, and other legitimate restrictions. The museum's task is therefore not unrestricted exposure of every collection item but responsible mediation between preservation and use.

The Central Register of Museum-Type Collections, known by the Czech abbreviation CES, became one of the most important instruments created by the Act. The Ministry of Culture maintains this publicly accessible information system, into which collections owned by the

state, regions, and municipalities are entered compulsorily and other qualifying collections may be entered upon application by their owners. The register records the collection's name, description, subject field, territorial and chronological scope, identifying information concerning collection objects, storage information under legally defined conditions, ownership, administration, and a unique registration number. Its importance lies partly in creating a national overview of publicly significant collections that had previously been dispersed among many institutions and administrative systems. CES does not replace the detailed internal collection records maintained by museums, but it establishes a legal national layer confirming which organised bodies of material are protected as museum collections. It also makes the collection itself administratively visible even when most of its objects remain physically inaccessible to ordinary visitors. Modernisation of the electronic CES subsequently turned the register into a more developed digital information environment. The Czech museum system thereby acquired a mechanism through which legal protection, public accountability, and national knowledge about the collection stock could be connected.

The legal concept of collection integrity has substantial practical consequences. Museums cannot treat registered public collections as ordinary inventories from which inconvenient, unfashionable, or financially attractive objects can simply be removed. Additions and removals must follow regulated procedures, and collection management must preserve the integrity of the collection as registered. This provides protection against arbitrary disposal but also places considerable responsibility upon institutions when deciding what they acquire. Every acquisition potentially creates long-term obligations involving registration, storage, conservation, insurance, research, digitisation, and eventual public use. Responsible collection building therefore requires a defined acquisition policy rather than indiscriminate accumulation. Museums increasingly have to ask whether an object genuinely strengthens an existing collection, fills a documentary gap, represents a significant contemporary phenomenon, or can be preserved more appropriately by another institution. Collection growth is thus an intellectual and ethical decision as much as a logistical one.

This principle transformed acquisition practice after 1993. Democratic society opened access to forms of material culture, private ownership, international markets, personal archives, artistic production, and minority histories that had often been represented unevenly in earlier collections. Museums could reconsider gaps created by ideological selection and document social phenomena whose significance had become visible only after political transformation. Contemporary history, migration, popular music, digital technologies, consumer culture, design, political protest, everyday life, and post-socialist economic change gradually became legitimate areas of collecting alongside traditional archaeological, ethnographic, artistic, technical, and natural-science fields. Yet contemporary collecting poses particular difficulties because historical significance must be evaluated before time has provided clear retrospective distance. An ordinary object can become a unique document when the practices surrounding it disappear, while an object perceived initially as important may prove historically unrepresentative. Acquisition policy therefore requires anticipation and continuous critical revision. The museum participates actively in constructing the archive available to future researchers whenever it decides what to collect and what to leave outside the collection.

Evidence and documentation provide the foundation for this responsibility. Under Act No. 122/2000, owners of registered collections must maintain collection records containing identifying descriptions, materials, dimensions or other relevant characteristics, chronological attribution where known, acquisition date, author or maker where appropriate, provenance,

circumstances of acquisition, condition, and registration numbers. The purpose of such documentation extends far beyond administrative control. An object detached from reliable provenance may lose much of its scientific meaning even if it remains physically intact. A costume without information concerning its wearer, a tool without knowledge of its workplace, a biological specimen without locality data, or an archaeological object without contextual information may retain aesthetic or material interest while becoming a much weaker research source. Documentation therefore preserves relationships that are not contained visibly within the object itself. Czech collection management increasingly treated evidence about objects as an inseparable component of the collection.

Inventory control provides the practical mechanism through which documentary records are tested against physical reality. Registered collections must be inventoried systematically, with museum staff comparing actual objects with their records, checking identification, condition, storage, conservation needs, and environmental circumstances. This process can reveal missing objects, registration errors, deterioration, inappropriate storage, or historical inconsistencies within documentation. Inventory work is laborious and often invisible to the public, yet it is one of the principal safeguards against gradual loss of control over large collections. An institution possessing hundreds of thousands or millions of specimens cannot rely upon the personal memory of individual curators. Staff changes make documentary continuity particularly important because collections are intended to outlive the professional careers of those who currently manage them. The legally prescribed inventory cycle therefore converts the abstract idea of permanent stewardship into repeated institutional verification.

Depositories form the physical counterpart to this information system. The overwhelming majority of museum objects cannot be displayed simultaneously, both because exhibition space is limited and because continuous exposure may increase deterioration. Proper storage therefore represents one of the most consequential forms of museum preservation even though visitors rarely see it. Depositories must address temperature, relative humidity, light exposure, dust, pests, pollutants, mechanical damage, fire, theft, flooding, and risks created by unsuitable packaging or shelving. Different materials require different environmental strategies, and the conditions appropriate for metal, paper, textiles, biological specimens, wood, photographic materials, plastics, or archaeological objects may not be identical. Large mixed collections consequently require zoning, monitoring, regular inspection, and specialised storage systems. Collection preservation is therefore fundamentally an infrastructure problem as well as a conservation problem.

Preventive conservation became increasingly central to Czech museum practice precisely because direct restoration cannot compensate for persistently harmful storage conditions. The purpose of preventive conservation is to reduce the probability and rate of deterioration before visible damage requires expensive treatment. Environmental monitoring, integrated pest management, appropriate handling procedures, safe packaging, disaster preparedness, storage design, exhibition-case specifications, and control of light all belong to this strategy. The Ministry of Culture developed methodological guidance concerning prevention and protection plans for museums and galleries, recognising that emergency preparedness must be integrated into ordinary institutional management. Fire, flood, theft, technical failure, construction work, and extreme weather can damage collections on scales beyond the capacity of routine object-by-object restoration. Preventive planning therefore requires staff responsibilities, priority lists, evacuation procedures, emergency contacts, salvage materials, and knowledge of which collections are most vulnerable. The conceptual shift from repair

towards prevention is one of the major professional developments in movable-heritage preservation.

The Methodological Centre for Conservation at the Technical Museum in Brno became a particularly important institutional expression of this development. It provides methodological support concerning preventive conservation, active conservation, restoration, collection surveys, treatment strategies, training, testing, and development of conservation technologies. Its role is significant because not every Czech museum possesses its own fully equipped conservation laboratory or specialist for every material category. A national methodological centre allows expertise to circulate between large institutions and smaller regional or municipal museums. Training also reduces the risk that collection staff unintentionally cause damage through inappropriate cleaning, handling, storage, or environmental management. The centre therefore functions as part of a distributed preservation infrastructure rather than simply as one museum laboratory. It also demonstrates how conservation knowledge became institutionalised nationally rather than remaining dependent entirely upon local professional traditions.

Conservation science further transformed the treatment of movable cultural heritage. The physical examination of objects increasingly combines the expertise of curator, conservator-restorer, and laboratory scientist. Microscopy, X-radiography, spectroscopy, chromatography, dendrochronology, materials analysis, imaging technologies, and other methods can reveal composition, manufacturing techniques, later interventions, deterioration processes, and concealed structural information. Such evidence can change historical interpretation as well as determine conservation treatment. A pigment analysis may revise attribution or dating, while technical examination can reveal that apparently homogeneous objects contain several phases of modification. Scientific analysis consequently places conservation within the process of knowledge production rather than treating it as a technical service performed after scholarship has concluded. The National Technical Museum explicitly describes collection research as an interdisciplinary process in which the curator, restorer, and scientist cooperate to preserve original historical material while extracting knowledge from it.

The National Technical Museum provides a particularly clear example of the museum as a research organisation built around collections. Its statutory scientific mission includes research into the history of science, technology, and industry in the Czech lands, while its collections are developed systematically through documentation of the environments from which objects originate. Machines, vehicles, scientific instruments, photographic equipment, industrial technologies, architectural records, and technical archives can therefore be studied not simply as isolated inventions but as evidence of wider systems of production, expertise, mobility, infrastructure, and industrial culture. The museum's archives and specialist library further connect three-dimensional objects with drawings, documentation, corporate records, photographs, and technical literature. Its research laboratory supports conservation and restoration through scientific analysis and preventive-conservation expertise. The institution exemplifies a broader Czech principle according to which serious collection care requires research into both the object and the historical environment that gave it meaning. Technical heritage consequently becomes a source for industrial and social history as well as engineering history.

The National Museum represents the largest and most diversified expression of the same model. Its organisational structure brings together natural history, history, music, library

collections, ethnographic and extra-European materials, archaeological evidence, numismatics, palaeontology, zoology, botany, anthropology, and numerous other specialist fields. This breadth makes the institution not simply a museum of national history but a major multidisciplinary research environment. In 2025, its institutional research programme covered twenty-six research areas, while it simultaneously participated in thirty-two externally or internally supported projects and reported more than 290 research outputs. The museum also produced specialised public databases and continued extensive digitisation of collection holdings. These figures are important not principally as measures of productivity but because they demonstrate the scale on which collection-based institutions contribute to national research. Scientific publications, databases, taxonomic studies, archaeological research, historical scholarship, and technological innovation all arise from material held and curated within the museum. The collection therefore functions as scientific infrastructure in a sense comparable to research archives or specialised laboratories.

Natural-history collections make this research function especially evident. Biological, palaeontological, mineralogical, and geological specimens may preserve evidence unavailable anywhere else because the populations, environments, geological exposures, or individual organisms from which they originated can later change or disappear. Historical collecting also makes long-term comparison possible, allowing researchers to study shifts in biodiversity, species distribution, pollution, climate, morphology, or environmental conditions. Type specimens can possess unique taxonomic importance because the scientific definition of a species may be anchored to particular preserved examples. Digitisation increasingly makes specimen metadata and high-resolution imagery available without repeated physical handling, but the digital surrogate cannot replace the original material when microscopic, genetic, chemical, or other future analyses are required. Collection preservation therefore has a strong forward-looking scientific dimension. A specimen gathered a century ago can answer a research question that the original collector could not have anticipated.

Art museums and galleries illustrate a comparable relationship between collection care and scholarship through different types of evidence. The National Gallery Prague explicitly defines responsible collection management as requiring acquisition, physical preservation, conservation, restoration, expert processing, and both basic and applied research. Artworks are studied through attribution, provenance, iconography, artistic networks, materials, techniques, historical ownership, conservation history, and relationships with other collections. Its Department of Conservation and Restoration monitors environmental conditions and object condition while conducting or commissioning laboratory analysis through specialist technical facilities. Conservators contribute directly to research projects and professional publications rather than functioning merely as technical personnel repairing damaged works. The gallery's collection consequently becomes both the object and the source of art-historical and conservation research. Detailed discussion of exhibition interpretation and curatorial art-history practice belongs to Part Four, but the collection-preservation dimension already demonstrates how inseparable art scholarship is from material stewardship.

The Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague provides another important model because its collections connect artistic value with design, craft, industrial production, photography, fashion, typography, book culture, furniture, glass, ceramics, textiles, and other applied fields. The Museum is formally recognised as a research organisation and undertakes basic and applied research concerning Czech and international applied art and design. Its research

projects show how collection work can extend from historical interpretation into preservation methods, databases, interactive maps, technological prototypes, and public-access tools. Applied-art collections are particularly important for understanding relationships among artistic authorship, workshop production, industrial manufacture, materials, consumption, and everyday aesthetics. They also challenge older hierarchies separating fine art from functional objects. The preservation of a chair, poster, textile, piece of glass, camera, or book can therefore contribute to broader understanding of technological and cultural modernity. Czech museum collections increasingly supported this wider interpretation of material culture.

Regional museums perform an equally important function even when their individual research visibility is lower than that of national institutions. Their collections preserve archaeological finds, natural-history specimens, photographs, ethnographic materials, documents of local industry, artworks, crafts, political history, oral testimony, and everyday objects whose significance is inseparable from particular territories. Decentralisation after 2000 transferred responsibility for many formerly state-administered museums to regional governments, embedding collection stewardship more directly within territorial self-government. This created opportunities for stronger regional cultural policy but also produced differences in financial resources, staffing, buildings, and research capacity among institutions. Local knowledge is nevertheless an irreplaceable asset because regional curators may maintain relationships with archaeological sites, communities, private donors, historical organisations, and landscapes over decades. Their collections frequently constitute the only systematic material record of cultural phenomena that would otherwise remain absent from national institutions. The Czech museum network is therefore polycentric in its documentary function even though major research resources remain concentrated in Prague and Brno.

Collection specialisation also makes cooperation among institutions indispensable. No individual museum can acquire every object relevant to Czech history, art, technology, or natural science without creating unsustainable duplication. National, regional, municipal, specialist, university, private, and community collections consequently develop complementary acquisition profiles. Archaeological finds may enter territorially competent museums, technical objects may be most meaningful within specialised institutions, and artworks may belong within gallery collections structured by period or region. Religious objects can remain within active communities or enter museums depending upon ownership, function, condition, and preservation requirements. Collection-building policy therefore has an ecosystem character in which the location of an object matters for future research and stewardship. The strongest museum system is not necessarily the one containing the largest number of objects, but one in which collections are organised coherently and professionally accessible.

The post-1993 museum system also had to confront the historical circumstances through which objects had entered public collections. Provenance research became particularly important in relation to property confiscated during Nazi persecution, wartime occupation, post-war transfers, and communist nationalisation. An accession number establishes current museum registration but does not by itself answer whether the historical chain of ownership was legitimate. Research may require catalogues, inventories, collectors' marks, correspondence, wartime administrative records, auction catalogues, photographs, export documents, and evidence from foreign archives. Provenance therefore brings legal, ethical, and historical research directly into collection management. The passage of Act No. 212/2000

addressing certain property injustices caused by the Holocaust created a specific legal mechanism for the transfer of qualifying state-owned artworks to original owners or their successors. The Ministry of Culture also maintains a database relating to artworks originating from the property of Holocaust victims. Czech collection research thereby became part of a broader European effort to address historical dispossession through documentary transparency.

The Jewish Museum in Prague represents an exceptionally important case because the formation and survival of its collections are inseparable from the Holocaust itself. During the Nazi occupation, the Central Jewish Museum received vast numbers of ritual objects, books, archival records, and other materials confiscated from Jewish communities and individuals. Wartime museum staff documented these materials under conditions in which the people and communities from whom they originated were being deported and murdered. After 1945, some objects and books were restituted, while communist nationalisation from 1950 created another period of institutional disruption and transfer. Following the restoration of the Museum as an independent institution in 1994, systematic provenance research became one of its central scholarly and ethical responsibilities. Since 2001, the Museum has conducted extensive research into the original owners of books, using signatures, ex libris, stamps, marginalia, accession records, and wartime catalogues. The Museum also examines the provenance of visual-art objects and has developed procedures for voluntary transfers to legitimate owners or successors in cases where documentary evidence supports such action.

This case demonstrates why collection documentation can itself become historical evidence. The Jewish Museum's wartime ‘German Catalogue’, comprising around 101,000 catalogue cards, records objects and materials that passed through the museum under extraordinary circumstances of persecution and dispossession. These cards are not merely obsolete administrative tools but sources through which ownership, confiscation, community destruction, restitution, and collection history can be reconstructed. Modern provenance research compares such documentation with surviving objects, transport records, family evidence, and archival sources. The collection thus has a double historical structure: individual objects document Jewish religious and cultural life, while their later movement into the museum documents the mechanisms of the Holocaust and its aftermath. Responsible collection management requires both histories to remain visible. The Czech experience therefore shows that provenance is not an optional supplement to object description but part of the cultural meaning of movable heritage.

Questions of problematic provenance extend beyond Holocaust-era collections. Archaeological objects may have entered museums through older excavations conducted under documentation standards very different from those of the present, while ethnographic or extra-European collections may reflect colonial, missionary, diplomatic, commercial, or unequal collecting relationships. Natural-history specimens can also raise legal or ethical questions relating to endangered species, historical collecting, or human remains. Contemporary museums increasingly reconsider the assumptions under which earlier collectors classified and represented other societies. The Náprstek Museum, for example, preserves extraordinarily important non-European collections whose interpretation now requires attention not only to the objects' cultural origins but to the histories of collecting and knowledge through which they entered a Czech museum environment. By the mid-2020s, Czech research projects were beginning to address colonialism, anti-colonialism, and the intellectual histories surrounding such collections more directly. This emerging reflexive

approach does not automatically invalidate historical collections, but it changes the questions scholars ask about how they were formed.

Human remains require particularly careful ethical treatment. Act No. 122/2000 allows human skeletal remains and other prepared bodily materials to form part of museum collections, reflecting their importance for archaeology, anthropology, medicine, and historical science. Yet legal collection status does not remove ethical questions concerning dignity, origin, consent, descendant communities, religious significance, research sampling, display, and long-term storage. Scientific developments in ancient DNA, isotope analysis, palaeopathology, and other methods have greatly increased the research potential of human remains. They have also increased the possibility of destructive sampling and the sensitivity of conclusions relating to ancestry and identity. Museums consequently need policies that integrate scientific value with ethical responsibility rather than treating human remains exactly like ordinary artefacts. Such issues demonstrate the limits of a purely property-based model of movable heritage.

The circulation of collection objects creates another major area of regulation. Museums lend works and specimens for exhibitions, research, conservation, education, and international cooperation, yet every movement introduces risks of loss, physical damage, climatic instability, inappropriate handling, or legal dispute. Loan decisions therefore require condition assessment, insurance or equivalent guarantees, transport planning, environmental requirements, packing standards, security, couriers where necessary, and precise contractual documentation. International mobility creates additional obligations involving customs procedures and cultural-property law. Registered museum collections and collection objects fall under their own legal regime, while other cultural objects may be governed by Act No. 71/1994 on the Sale and Export of Objects of Cultural Value. This distinction prevents culturally significant objects outside formal museum collections from moving beyond Czech jurisdiction without appropriate assessment where statutory criteria apply. The protection of movable heritage therefore necessarily follows objects beyond museum walls.

Act No. 71/1994 is especially important because it demonstrates the breadth of movable cultural heritage beyond CES-registered collections. Its categories include archaeological objects, sacral and cult objects, artworks, photographic works, applied arts, furniture, numismatic material, historical educational objects, and numerous other types of natural or human-made cultural property subject to age or value thresholds. The law establishes certification procedures for specified permanent or temporary movement or export and was further amended in 2025 to adapt terminology and procedures concerning movement inside and outside the European context. Registered museum collections, cultural monuments, archives, and certain other categories remain subject to their specialised legal regimes rather than simply falling under this general Act. Czech movable-heritage law therefore works through overlapping categories rather than a single universal register of valuable objects. Professional museums play an important role within this wider system because designated specialist institutions provide expert assessment for categories of cultural objects.

Security remains inseparable from preservation because an object that is stolen can be physically intact yet effectively lost from its cultural context. The opening of borders and expansion of art and antiques markets after 1989 increased concern about theft from churches, museums, archaeological sites, private collections, and historical interiors. Museum security consequently developed through physical barriers, alarm systems, access

controls, fire detection, surveillance, object marking, registration, photographic documentation, and cooperation with law-enforcement bodies. Accurate records are essential when stolen objects must be identified internationally, since descriptions written only for internal curatorial use may be insufficient for rapid recovery. Security policy must also address internal risks because large collections are handled by many staff, contractors, researchers, and external borrowers over long periods. Collection protection is therefore an organisational culture rather than a technological system installed once and then forgotten. The Ministry's methodological guidance concerning theft, burglary, fire, and collection protection reflects this systemic approach.

Disaster preparedness became increasingly important as Czech museums experienced or observed major floods, fires, technical failures, and other emergencies. The catastrophic floods of 2002 demonstrated on a national scale how rapidly water can threaten archives, libraries, museum stores, historic buildings, and collection objects. Emergency response requires priorities because not every object can be removed simultaneously when a depository is flooding or a fire is developing. Salvage planning must therefore be prepared before a crisis, identifying critical collections, safe routes, freezing or drying options for wet materials, emergency suppliers, documentation procedures, and staff authority. Climate change adds further uncertainty through extreme precipitation, heat, drought, storms, and environmental instability. The preservation of movable heritage increasingly involves resilience planning as much as routine conservation. Preventive care must therefore consider not only normal museum conditions but low-probability events capable of producing catastrophic losses.

The Czech system of specialised methodological centres is one of its most distinctive responses to uneven institutional capacity. In addition to the conservation centre in Brno, the Centre for Information Technologies in Museology within the Moravian Museum supports collection documentation, information standards, museum software, digital imaging, and communication between museum professionals and information-technology specialists. The Centre for Presentation of Cultural Heritage at the National Museum develops methods for presenting collections, communicating with audiences, applying new technologies, and providing museological education. A methodological centre associated with the National Gallery addresses the specific requirements of fine-art museums, including collection mobility, security, standards, and professional exchange. The Moravian Museum also supports specialised museum-pedagogical work. These centres create a distributed national system in which particular institutions develop expertise on behalf of the wider museum sector. Their existence reduces the dependence of smaller museums upon isolated local solutions.

Information technology has transformed collection management particularly profoundly. Early computerisation often reproduced paper catalogue structures electronically without fundamentally changing how collection information could be linked or reused. More mature systems increasingly employ standardised authority records, structured terminology, digital images, interoperability, and connections among object data, conservation records, bibliography, exhibitions, loans, and provenance. CITeM played an important role in supporting Czech museums during this transition and developing or maintaining widely used museum information systems. The challenge is not merely to scan old catalogue cards but to transform inconsistent historical documentation into reliable structured data while preserving the original evidential record. Terminology can change, identifications can be revised, and historical descriptions may contain outdated or problematic classifications that should not

simply disappear from the documentary history. Digital collection management therefore combines data standardisation with archival responsibility.

The eSbírky platform created an important public-facing layer above these internal collection systems. It allows museums and galleries to make digitised collection objects accessible through a common national environment and has involved more than one hundred cultural-memory institutions. The platform also serves as a national museum-domain aggregator for Europeana, placing Czech collection data within a broader European digital infrastructure. This significantly enlarges research possibilities because users can discover related material across institutions without knowing in advance where individual objects are physically stored. High-quality digital documentation can also reduce unnecessary transport or handling when researchers need visual or descriptive information rather than direct material analysis. The development of eSbírky 2.0 by the mid-2020s reflected the need to modernise technical architecture, security, functionality, and capacity as the volume of collection data increased. Digital access consequently became an infrastructure requiring preservation in its own right.

Digitisation nevertheless does not eliminate the distinction between an object and its representation. A high-resolution image can preserve visual information, but it cannot reproduce weight, texture, material composition, microscopic structure, smell, mechanical function, internal construction, or all spatial characteristics of the physical original. Three-dimensional scanning can add geometric information but remains selective according to the technology and settings used. Scientific analysis may require direct sampling or instrumentation that no digital surrogate can replace. Digital preservation should therefore be understood as an additional layer of documentation and access rather than a justification for reducing physical collection care. The strongest Czech digitisation projects recognise this complementarity by connecting digital data with carefully maintained originals. Museum collections are becoming hybrid research infrastructures in which material objects and digital records support different forms of inquiry.

Public accessibility of collections likewise extends beyond exhibitions. Researchers may require access to depositories, study rooms, databases, archives, specimen records, conservation documentation, or high-resolution digital resources unavailable in ordinary galleries. Act No. 122/2000 explicitly connects registered collections with use for study and scientific purposes, making research accessibility part of statutory collection stewardship. Such access has to be organised according to object condition, security, staff capacity, sensitive information, and legal restrictions. A museum therefore needs procedures for scholarly consultation as well as visitor services. This distinction is particularly important because only a very small portion of large collections can ever be physically exhibited at the same moment. The cultural value of the remaining material depends substantially upon whether it remains intellectually accessible rather than becoming a closed accumulation known only through old inventory numbers.

Research organisations such as the National Museum, National Gallery Prague, National Technical Museum, and Museum of Decorative Arts demonstrate how this access can generate new knowledge continuously. Collection objects can be reclassified when new techniques or historical evidence become available, and discoveries made within old holdings can be as significant as newly excavated or acquired material. The sequencing of the oldest modern human genome associated with Zlatý kůň, for example, illustrates more generally how preserved biological and archaeological material can acquire entirely new scientific

significance through methods unavailable at the time of discovery. Comparable possibilities exist across artistic, technical, ethnographic, and documentary collections. A collection preserved properly is therefore a reserve of potential knowledge rather than a completed archive of answers already known. This future research potential provides one of the strongest arguments for conservation beyond immediate exhibition demand.

Museum collections also participate in cultural continuity by preserving objects whose original functional environments no longer exist. Traditional crafts, obsolete technologies, extinct industrial processes, vanished communities, discontinued forms of dress, political movements, changing domestic practices, and older scientific instruments can all survive materially in collections after disappearing from ordinary life. Yet removing an object from use changes its meaning, and museums must document the social relationships that once surrounded it if they wish to avoid reducing heritage to isolated material form. Contemporary collecting therefore increasingly incorporates photography, oral testimony, audiovisual documentation, technical manuals, digital files, and contextual records alongside physical objects. This approach is particularly relevant to 20th- and 21st-century material culture, where objects often belong to highly complex technological and social systems. The museum becomes not merely a store of things but an institution preserving relationships among material evidence, memory, practice, and knowledge.

This broader approach creates an important point of connection with the author's klironomical framework. His work treats tangible cultural heritage not as a static set of protected objects but as part of a wider system of historical continuity, cultural value, institutional legitimation, and transmission. Such a perspective is especially relevant to museum collections because collecting itself is an act of selection through which contemporary institutions determine which material forms may remain available to future societies. The author's 2025 methodological model emphasises the need to connect value analysis, historical reconstruction, vulnerability assessment, preservation priorities, and institutional support rather than treating conservation as an isolated technical operation. Museum practice provides a concrete environment in which all these stages already interact through acquisition, provenance research, registration, conservation, research, and accessibility. The klironomical approach therefore helps articulate the normative question underlying collection management: why should this particular object or collection be transmitted, and which values justify the resources required to preserve it? It remains a theoretical perspective rather than an officially adopted Czech museum methodology, but it is directly relevant to the intellectual problem of collection formation.

The author's later work on future heritage is particularly pertinent to contemporary collecting. Together with Anisiia Tomanek, he argues that digital, hybrid, and present-day cultural artefacts may need to be identified as potential future heritage before historical distance has established conventional consensus regarding their significance. Museums already confront this problem operationally when deciding whether to collect objects associated with contemporary politics, digital culture, technological change, popular culture, crises, or rapidly disappearing practices. Waiting several generations can make retrospective selection impossible because material, metadata, software, contextual evidence, or personal testimony may already have vanished. Yet indiscriminate anticipatory collecting would overwhelm institutional resources. The concept of anticipatory heritage interpretation therefore captures a genuine contemporary museum dilemma: preservation sometimes has to begin before cultural value becomes historically stable. Czech institutions increasingly encounter this

problem through born-digital records, electronic devices, contemporary design, new media, and documentation of recent social events.

By 2025, the principal challenge facing Czech movable cultural heritage was consequently not simply the physical survival of individual objects. Museums had to sustain vast and continually expanding systems of material storage, legal evidence, provenance information, conservation records, research data, digital representations, loans, public access, and institutional memory. Large national museums possessed substantial laboratories and specialist departments, while smaller institutions often had to perform comparable legal and ethical responsibilities with far more limited staff and infrastructure. Depository capacity remained a persistent problem because responsible collecting generates long-term spatial costs that are rarely visible when new acquisitions are approved. Specialist conservation skills, collection documentation, cybersecurity, digital migration, environmental control, and emergency preparedness all require continuous funding rather than one-time capital investment. The increasing complexity of professional standards therefore raises the threshold of what responsible collection stewardship demands.

The strongest feature of the Czech system is that it progressively recognised these invisible responsibilities as part of museum policy itself. The development concepts for movable cultural heritage in 2003–2008 and 2010–2014 were followed by the first comprehensive Concept for the Development of Museology in the Czech Republic for 2015–2020. The latter sought systematic support for natural, cultural, and technical heritage preserved through museum collections and brought collection care, research, access, institutional development, and professional methodology within one strategic framework. The Integrated System of Conservation of Movable Cultural Heritage likewise emphasised preventive conservation and coordinated protection rather than isolated restoration campaigns. Methodological centres translated national strategy into specialist services accessible to institutions across the country. CES established legal visibility, while eSbírky increasingly created digital public visibility. This progression demonstrates a movement from object protection towards a complete collection-management system.

In summary, museums and movable cultural heritage developed between 1993 and 2025 into one of the most institutionally structured components of Czech heritage preservation. Act No. 122/2000 transformed the legal environment by defining museum-type collections as coherent scientific and cultural entities, establishing the Central Register of Collections, regulating evidence and inventories, imposing conservation and security responsibilities, and connecting collection management with public and scholarly access. CES created a national information layer over collections dispersed among state, regional, municipal, private, and other owners, while detailed institutional records preserved the provenance and physical histories of individual objects. Preventive conservation, environmental monitoring, emergency planning, scientific analysis, and specialist restoration increasingly replaced the older assumption that collection care consists principally of repairing visibly damaged objects. National methodological centres in conservation, information technologies, museum presentation, education, and art-museum practice allowed professional knowledge to circulate through a highly decentralised museum network. The National Museum, National Technical Museum, National Gallery Prague, Museum of Decorative Arts, Moravian Museum, Jewish Museum, regional museums, and numerous other institutions demonstrated that collections function as research infrastructures capable of generating new knowledge across the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, art history, archaeology, and the history of technology. Provenance

research and Holocaust-related restitution revealed that lawful present possession cannot substitute for historical investigation into how objects entered collections, while the Jewish Museum in Prague provided an especially powerful example of collection documentation serving simultaneously as museum evidence and testimony to persecution and dispossession. Act No. 71/1994 extended protection beyond registered collections to a wider category of movable cultural objects whose movement and export can affect the national cultural patrimony. Digitisation, CITeM, CES modernisation, and eSbírky created increasingly connected digital layers without eliminating the irreplaceable scientific value of the physical original. The klironomical works of the author are relevant to this system at the theoretical level because they emphasise value, historical continuity, vulnerability, preservation priorities, and responsibility towards future recipients, while his work on future heritage highlights the increasingly difficult task of selecting contemporary and digital objects before their long-term cultural significance is fully established. By 2025, Czech movable-heritage preservation could therefore be characterised not as the passive accumulation of objects but as a continuous scientific and ethical process of selection, documentation, research, conservation, verification, interpretation, controlled circulation, and transmission through which collections remain capable of producing knowledge long after the societies that created their individual objects have changed.

Intangible Cultural Heritage and Living Traditions

Intangible cultural heritage occupies a distinctive place within the Czech heritage system because its survival depends less upon the physical preservation of objects than upon the continuing actions of people. A song remains living heritage only while it can be performed, learned, varied, and recognised within a social environment, just as a craft remains alive only while knowledge of materials, techniques, tools, and judgement passes between practitioners. Rituals, festive customs, dance, theatre, oral traditions, musical practices, craft knowledge, religious observances, and forms of social organisation cannot therefore be preserved by the same methods used for a building, archaeological deposit, or museum collection. Documentation can record them, but documentation alone does not keep them alive. Their continuity requires practitioners, learners, social occasions, meaningful contexts, and communities willing to reproduce or reinterpret them. This makes intangible heritage inherently processual because continuity frequently includes change rather than exact repetition. Czech safeguarding practice between 1993 and 2025 gradually moved towards this understanding after developing initially from a much older ethnological concern with traditional folk culture. By the end of the period, living traditions had become an autonomous and increasingly sophisticated component of national heritage policy, research, community participation, and international cultural cooperation.

The Czech institutional foundations of this field pre-date both independence and the UNESCO Convention on intangible heritage. Ethnographers, folklorists, musicologists, museums, regional cultural organisations, and specialised institutes had documented songs, dances, rituals, crafts, oral traditions, folk theatre, festive customs, and vernacular practices throughout the 20th century. The National Institute of Folk Culture in Strážnice emerged from this institutional tradition and gradually became the principal specialist organisation concerned with research, documentation, methodological support, and public presentation of

traditional folk culture. Its historical development was closely connected with the Strážnice folklore festival and with efforts to collect and study living traditions rather than simply preserve their material products. By the late socialist period, Czech and Moravian ethnology possessed extensive archives of sound recordings, film, photographs, field notes, musical transcriptions, costumes, objects, and descriptions of customary practices. The democratic transformation therefore inherited considerable documentary and professional expertise even though the political and conceptual framework surrounding it changed substantially. After 1989, the problem was no longer only how to document traditions but how public institutions should support them without reproducing directive cultural administration. This shift from documentation towards safeguarding became one of the defining transformations of the post-1993 period.

The Government's 2003 *Strategy for Improved Care for Traditional Folk Culture in the Czech Republic* represented the decisive national policy step in this direction. Approved by Government Resolution No. 571 on 11 June 2003, the Strategy created a systematic framework before Czechia had formally joined the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Its programme distinguished identification, documentation, preservation, dissemination, presentation, transmission, and international cooperation as related but separate tasks. This structure was important because it recognised that traditional culture could not be protected effectively through recording alone. The state also sought to create institutional mechanisms capable of working with living practitioners across the regions rather than concentrating expertise exclusively in Prague or Strážnice. Regional specialist centres for traditional folk culture were therefore assigned within museums and other cultural institutions across the country. These centres document regional traditions, support nominations, provide methodological expertise, maintain contact with practitioners, and contribute to regional inventories. The Czech safeguarding architecture consequently became polycentric before international UNESCO recognition began to dominate public perceptions of the field.

The terminology used in the 2003 Strategy nevertheless reveals the historical origins and limitations of the Czech system. Its principal category was *tradiční lidová kultura*, or traditional folk culture, reflecting the ethnological and folkloristic traditions from which institutional safeguarding had developed. This category worked especially well for rural rituals, dances, crafts, oral traditions, costumes, music, customary practices, and similar forms long studied by Czech *národopis*. It was less obviously suited to living cultural practices originating in urban, professional, minority, religious, migrant, or contemporary community environments. The later UNESCO concept of intangible cultural heritage was deliberately broader because it focused not upon the supposed folk character or antiquity of a practice but upon communities recognising practices, knowledge, expressions, and skills as part of their cultural heritage. Czech policy therefore entered the international intangible-heritage system through a national conceptual framework narrower than the Convention itself. This difference did not prevent successful safeguarding, but it shaped which traditions were identified most readily during the first two decades. The broadening completed in 2025 should therefore be understood as the culmination of a long conceptual adjustment rather than a sudden administrative renaming.

The national inventory system emerged at precisely this intersection between domestic ethnological practice and international heritage policy. The Ministry of Culture established the List of Intangible Elements of Traditional Folk Culture of the Czech Republic by ministerial order in 2008, creating a formal mechanism for recognising living cultural elements at national level.

Czechia deposited its instrument of accession to the 2003 UNESCO Convention in February 2009 and became a State Party in May of that year. The list consequently developed as both a domestic safeguarding instrument and part of the national implementation of the Convention. Elements were nominated through documentation requiring description of the tradition, its bearers, viability, threats, safeguarding measures, and institutional responsibilities. National inscription was not intended merely as an honorary award but as the beginning of continuing monitoring and safeguarding. The system also created an essential intermediate level between local or regional recognition and possible nomination to UNESCO. By 2024, thirty-three elements had been documented in the national framework, illustrating how much wider Czech living heritage was than the much shorter international UNESCO list.

Regional inventories strengthened this layered structure further. Prague and individual Czech regions created their own lists of intangible elements, usually administered through designated specialist institutions familiar with local communities and practices. Such inventories can recognise traditions whose importance is substantial within a region without requiring a claim to exceptional national or international representativeness. They also provide a mechanism through which communities and regional institutions can gain experience with documentation before pursuing national recognition. The regional system reflects the geographical diversity of Czech living traditions, which cannot be represented adequately through the better-known practices of south-eastern Moravia alone. Bohemian, Moravian, Silesian, urban, rural, religious, occupational, craft, musical, and community traditions possess very different histories and patterns of transmission. Regional institutions are often better placed than national bodies to understand who actually maintains a tradition and whether a nomination corresponds to practitioners' own perceptions. The national intangible-heritage system thus operates through subsidiarity as well as central coordination.

The UNESCO Convention altered the intellectual language of safeguarding by making communities, groups, and individuals central to the definition of intangible heritage. A tradition cannot acquire living-heritage significance solely because scholars classify it as historically important. Its bearers must recognise it as meaningful and participate in its continuation, documentation, or safeguarding. This principle challenges older models in which ethnographers could identify valuable traditions primarily from an external expert perspective. Czech researchers such as Daniel Drápala and Martina Pavlicová have investigated precisely this tension between UNESCO's normative vision and the lived experience of tradition bearers. Their research demonstrates that practitioners do not always interpret heritage status in the same terms as ministries, experts, or international institutions. UNESCO recognition may be experienced as pride, publicity, responsibility, bureaucracy, external interference, or some combination of these meanings. The social life of heritage therefore begins rather than ends when an element enters an inventory.

Slovácko Verbuňk provides the foundational Czech example of this transition. The improvised male recruit dance from south-eastern Moravia had long been documented by ethnologists and maintained within local musical, dance, and festive environments before entering the UNESCO system. It was proclaimed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2005 and was incorporated into the Representative List under the 2003 Convention framework in 2008. Verbuňk is particularly instructive because its continuity depends upon individual performance rather than exact choreographic reproduction. Dancers work within recognised musical and movement conventions but are valued precisely for variation, personal style, physical competence, and improvisational interpretation.

Safeguarding therefore cannot consist of fixing one authoritative sequence and requiring every future dancer to reproduce it. The vitality of the practice lies in maintaining the cultural grammar through which new performances remain recognisable while never becoming identical copies of previous ones. Verbuňk consequently illustrates the fundamental difference between preservation of a physical object and safeguarding of embodied cultural knowledge.

Martina Pavlicová's later research on Verbuňk and the Ride of the Kings demonstrates that heritage recognition can itself become an agent of transformation. Once a tradition is named, inventoried, researched, promoted, and internationally recognised, practitioners become more conscious of the way their activities are observed and represented. Documentation can encourage standardisation by defining expected characteristics, while festivals and public performances may privilege especially visible or photogenic forms. UNESCO status can strengthen local pride and transmission but also alter the social environment within which a tradition develops. This process is commonly described as heritagisation: a living practice becomes explicitly recognised, managed, and discussed as heritage. Heritagisation does not necessarily destroy authenticity because traditions have always changed in response to social conditions. It does, however, introduce new institutional actors and new reasons for performing a tradition. Czech research has therefore increasingly moved beyond celebrating inscription towards analysing what institutional recognition actually does to living cultural forms.

The Ride of the Kings provides an equally important case. The custom is associated with several communities in south-eastern Czechia and involves a ceremonial procession centred upon a young king, traditionally dressed in women's ceremonial clothing and accompanied by mounted participants. Its most famous manifestation at Vlčnov attracts substantial public attention, yet the tradition cannot be reduced to one tourist spectacle or one village. Preparation involves families, riders, clothing, horses, local knowledge, organisational work, and intergenerational participation extending beyond the day of the procession itself. Its inscription on the UNESCO Representative List in 2011 increased international recognition and strengthened its symbolic association with Moravian regional identity. At the same time, increased visibility raises questions concerning tourism, media representation, and the balance between local meanings and external expectations. The Ride of the Kings therefore demonstrates that safeguarding must protect the social process producing a ritual rather than simply ensure that a procession occurs annually.

The Shrovetide door-to-door processions and masks in the villages of the Hlinecko area illustrate a different relationship between ritual continuity and community structure. Inscribed internationally in 2010, the tradition involves masked processions performed within a limited number of communities and follows locally recognised roles, routes, interactions, and symbolic patterns. The material masks and costumes are culturally important, but their significance emerges only through performance, movement, social encounters, humour, and ritual action. Storing costumes in a museum would preserve material evidence while leaving the central heritage process dormant. Safeguarding therefore depends upon local willingness to organise the procession repeatedly and upon younger participants learning both formal roles and tacit social conventions. The practice also demonstrates why small communities can be central heritage institutions even when they possess no professional cultural organisation. In living heritage, knowledge may reside within relationships and repeated participation more than within formal archives.

Puppetry expanded the Czech intangible-heritage framework beyond seasonal ritual into a particularly strong theatrical tradition. Czech and Slovak puppetry was inscribed jointly on the UNESCO Representative List in 2016, recognising both shared historical roots and continuing practices in the two successor states. Puppetry occupies an unusual position because it combines performance, storytelling, manipulation skills, craftsmanship, stage design, music, family traditions, amateur activity, and professional theatre. Its continuity therefore crosses boundaries among folk culture, performing arts, artistic education, craft, and popular entertainment. Recent Czech research into the perceptions of puppeteers themselves has shown that UNESCO status does not produce one uniform response among practitioners. Some value the recognition strongly, while others remain cautious about institutional labelling or emphasise contemporary artistic development over heritage identity. Such findings reinforce the principle that bearers should not be treated as passive custodians of a tradition defined entirely by experts.

Traditional craftsmanship provides another major field in which living knowledge cannot be separated from material results. A finished object can enter a museum collection, but the ability to select materials, prepare tools, judge temperature, pressure, timing, texture, colour, or structural behaviour often remains embodied in the practitioner. Such knowledge may be transmitted through observation and repeated practice rather than fully describable in written instructions. The disappearance of a skilled maker can therefore represent a heritage loss even if thousands of objects produced by that craft survive materially. Czech safeguarding policy recognised this problem unusually early through the *Bearers of Folk Craft Tradition* programme. The programme developed from field research begun by the National Institute of Folk Culture in 1997, which showed that surviving traditional producers often faced weak markets and uncertain continuity. The Ministry of Culture and NULK created the programme in 2000 to document, recognise, promote, and economically support outstanding practitioners and their crafts.

The *Bearers of Folk Craft Tradition* programme is particularly significant because safeguarding extends beyond symbolic recognition. Awarded craftspeople receive public visibility, promotional support, access to grants and professional networks, and use of a special trademark associated with the title. NULK documents working processes through research and film while also collecting representative works and maintaining information concerning individual bearers. The programme therefore connects transmission, economic viability, documentation, public awareness, and institutional support rather than assuming that a title alone will keep a craft alive. UNESCO selected the Czech strategy for its Register of Good Safeguarding Practices in 2022. This recognition differs conceptually from inscription of a particular tradition on the Representative List because UNESCO was recognising the safeguarding mechanism itself as exemplary. Czech intangible-heritage policy thereby contributed not only individual elements but a transferable model of preservation practice to international heritage discussion.

Modrotisk, or resist block printing and indigo dyeing, demonstrates how such craft knowledge can operate simultaneously at national and transnational levels. The tradition involves specialised preparation of cloth, printing with resist paste, indigo dyeing, washing, pattern knowledge, tools, and workshop experience. Czech workshops form part of a broader Central European historical culture shared with practitioners in Austria, Germany, Hungary, and Slovakia. The multinational UNESCO inscription in 2018 recognised this network rather than claiming the practice as the exclusive heritage of any one nation. Such nominations are

particularly valuable because they counter the tendency for heritage to be interpreted competitively as national cultural property. Craft techniques often crossed borders long before contemporary states existed, and their preservation can therefore encourage cooperation grounded in shared historical practice. Transnational safeguarding also makes visible regional cultural continuities obscured by 20th-century political boundaries.

The handmade production of Christmas-tree decorations from blown glass beads provides a contrasting example of highly localised craft knowledge with international visibility. The technique is associated especially with the Poniklá area and requires the production, silvering, colouring, cutting, and assembly of delicate blown-glass beads. Its survival depends upon specialised technical skills and continuity of production rather than upon the preservation of historic examples alone. UNESCO inscription in 2020 drew global attention to a practice whose material products are comparatively small domestic decorative objects. This demonstrates one of the strengths of the intangible-heritage concept: cultural significance does not depend upon monumentality. Household and festive objects can embody complex local knowledge, employment traditions, aesthetics, family memories, and regional identity. Safeguarding consequently reconnects material culture with the human knowledge required to reproduce it.

Handmade glass production broadened this craft dimension dramatically when the knowledge, techniques, and skills of handmade glassmaking were inscribed through a multinational nomination in 2023. Czechia participated alongside Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, and Spain, reflecting the European scale of glassmaking traditions. The Czech contribution draws upon internationally recognised regions and institutions associated with glass blowing, cutting, engraving, kiln techniques, design, technical innovation, and artistic production. Glass heritage is particularly revealing because the same field belongs simultaneously to industrial history, art, design, craft, education, regional identity, and intangible cultural heritage. Furnaces, tools, workshops, historical objects, and factories represent material heritage, but the ability to work molten glass resides fundamentally in human expertise. Apprenticeship and direct observation remain crucial because timing and bodily knowledge cannot be transmitted completely through textbooks. The inscription therefore reinforces the principle that technological skill itself can constitute cultural heritage.

Timber rafting, inscribed through a multinational European nomination in 2022, illustrates how occupational traditions survive after their original economic environment has largely disappeared. Rafting once played an important role in transporting timber and other materials along European rivers, including the Vltava and related waterways. Modern transport systems rendered the historical economic function obsolete, yet knowledge concerning raft construction, navigation, river conditions, terminology, songs, rituals, and occupational identity continued through associations and commemorative activity. The challenge is therefore not simply to maintain a job that no longer exists in its original economic form. Safeguarding involves transforming specialised occupational knowledge into a contemporary community practice without pretending that historical conditions remain unchanged. Czech rafting associations, especially the Vltavan tradition, demonstrate how social organisations can become carriers of occupational memory across generations. This is a particularly clear example of living heritage surviving through functional transformation.

Falconry provides an even broader transnational model. Czech practitioners participate in an international heritage element shared among numerous countries and continually expanded within the UNESCO framework. The practice combines knowledge of birds of prey, training,

breeding, hunting, landscape, animal behaviour, equipment, ethics, and relationships between humans and animals. Its heritage significance lies not in one national historical origin but in a living knowledge system sustained across different cultural environments. Falconry also demonstrates that intangible heritage can interact directly with environmental and animal-welfare regulation. Safeguarding must therefore operate across cultural, ecological, veterinary, and legal domains rather than through cultural administration alone. The 2025 Czech reform explicitly encouraging cooperation with other ministries is particularly relevant to such practices. Living heritage can cross administrative boundaries as easily as it crosses national ones.

Amateur theatre became a particularly significant addition to the international heritage framework in 2025. Czech amateur theatrical activity has deep historical roots in towns and villages and is sustained through voluntary participation by people who write, adapt, rehearse, organise, design, build, direct, and perform productions in their free time. It therefore functions as a cultural practice, social network, educational environment, and form of local civic association simultaneously. UNESCO inscription recognised not one repertory or theatrical style but the social practice of amateur theatre acting in Czechia. This is conceptually important because it moves intangible heritage even further from an older image centred mainly upon rural folklore and craft. Amateur theatre can be highly contemporary, experimental, urban, or locally hybrid while remaining rooted in long traditions of community performance. Its recognition at the end of 2025 symbolically confirms the widening Czech understanding of what living cultural inheritance may include.

Religious and festive practices reveal another dimension of this expanded field. National and regional inventories include traditions associated with pilgrimages, Easter customs, Judas processions, Marian observances, Shrovetide, nativity scenes, and other calendar practices whose meanings combine religion, social belonging, locality, performance, and memory. Communist secularisation and institutional restrictions altered the public environments in which many such traditions survived, but they did not necessarily eliminate them. After 1989, religious freedom created conditions for revival, reinterpretation, or greater public visibility. Researchers therefore have to distinguish uninterrupted transmission from conscious revival and from traditions reconstructed partly through archival knowledge. None of these forms is automatically less authentic simply because the historical pathway differs. Living heritage is produced through contemporary social recognition, not through an impossible requirement of unchanged transmission from an ancient origin.

The relationship between folklore and intangible cultural heritage consequently became an important theoretical debate within Czech ethnology. Martina Pavlicová and Lucie Uhlíková have examined how the term folklore operates both within scholarship and within amateur or public cultural environments and how it relates to the wider heritage category. Folklore remains a legitimate analytical concept for oral, musical, performative, and customary traditions, but intangible heritage includes forms not comfortably contained within older folkloristic classifications. Folklorism adds another layer by describing the deliberate presentation, revival, or stylisation of traditional forms within festivals, ensembles, stage performance, tourism, or modern cultural life. Such recontextualisation does not necessarily mean that a tradition has become false. It does mean that researchers must ask who selects forms for presentation, which features become standardised, and how public performance changes relationships with everyday practice. Czech scholarship has become increasingly

sophisticated in analysing this movement between lived tradition and institutionalised representation.

Festivals are one of the principal environments in which these tensions become visible. The International Folklore Festival in Strážnice has long provided a major stage for folk music, dance, costumes, ensembles, and international exchange. Festivals can support transmission by giving practitioners opportunities to perform, meet, compare practices, and attract younger participants. They can also increase public awareness and contribute economically to local cultural environments. Yet stage requirements may shorten rituals, standardise sequences, separate practices from original locations, or encourage visual spectacle over less visible social meanings. The phenomenon of festivalisation therefore deserves critical analysis rather than automatic celebration. Living traditions may gain vitality through public presentation while simultaneously changing because of that presentation.

Tourism produces a comparable ambiguity. UNESCO inscription or national heritage status can increase visitor interest, media coverage, local pride, and opportunities for cultural entrepreneurship. Additional attention may strengthen the economic conditions required for craft production or festive organisation. At the same time, traditions can become scheduled increasingly around visitor expectations rather than community calendars, and practitioners may feel pressure to reproduce simplified forms readily understandable to outsiders. Commercial products can help sustain a craft but may also encourage standardisation or cheap imitation. The safeguarding objective should therefore not be to isolate traditions from economic life, because many historical practices were themselves deeply connected with markets and exchange. The challenge is to prevent commercial demand from becoming the sole authority determining what survives.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed how dependent intangible heritage remains upon social interaction. Restrictions on gatherings disrupted festivals, rehearsals, processions, performances, craft markets, community meetings, and many other contexts through which knowledge is ordinarily transmitted. Digital communication allowed some communities to remain connected and enabled archives, demonstrations, performances, or educational materials to circulate remotely. Yet a digital video cannot fully substitute for learning a dance through bodily participation, acquiring craft knowledge beside a skilled practitioner, or experiencing a ritual within the social relations that give it meaning. The pandemic therefore demonstrated both the value and the limits of digital safeguarding. Documentation can maintain visibility during disruption, but living heritage ultimately requires renewed social practice.

Digitalisation nevertheless created substantial new possibilities for research and transmission. NULK and regional institutions maintain audiovisual documentation capable of preserving performance styles, techniques, interviews, terminology, and detailed working processes. Historical recordings can be compared with contemporary practice to study change over several generations. Online databases enable dispersed communities and researchers to access materials without travelling to specialist archives, while social media allow practitioners themselves to communicate, teach, and organise beyond conventional institutional channels. Digital records can also assist revival where continuity has weakened by returning older documentation to communities. Such processes raise questions about ownership, interpretation, and whether an archived form should be treated as a prescription

for contemporary practice. Digital heritage and living heritage therefore increasingly interact while remaining conceptually distinct.

Intergenerational transmission remains the decisive test of safeguarding success. An element can attract international attention while remaining vulnerable if younger participants do not acquire the motivation or opportunity to continue it. Transmission often occurs informally through families, neighbourhoods, associations, workshops, ensembles, festivals, clubs, schools, or repeated participation in community events. Formal teaching can support continuity but cannot always reproduce tacit knowledge embedded in social relationships. Craft apprentices need prolonged practical exposure, dancers require bodily familiarity with musical conventions, and performers acquire judgement through repeated interaction with more experienced participants. Safeguarding therefore requires attention to social environments that make learning desirable as well as technically possible. A tradition maintained only through elderly specialists and archival recordings may be well documented but no longer securely living.

Children and young people consequently occupy an important place in Czech safeguarding policy. NULK's educational activities, folklore schools, children's ensembles, workshops, museum programmes, craft demonstrations, and regional initiatives connect heritage with learning outside conventional historical instruction. Such programmes work best when young participants are allowed to become practitioners rather than merely spectators. Transmission also needs room for generational reinterpretation because younger people may not attach exactly the same meanings to a tradition as their predecessors. Requiring perfect replication can make heritage socially unattractive and paradoxically accelerate its disappearance. Living continuity is strongest when communities can recognise change without losing the cultural relationships that make a practice intelligible.

The role of ethnologists within this system is therefore unusually complex. They study traditions as researchers, document them as heritage specialists, assist communities in nominations, evaluate safeguarding plans, contribute to policy, and sometimes participate directly in organisations supporting the traditions under study. Daniel Drápala, Martina Pavlicová, Eva Kuminková, and other scholars have drawn attention to this dual or multiple role. Expertise is necessary because nomination and safeguarding require historical, social, and comparative understanding. Yet researchers must remain aware that institutional recognition can alter the practice they document. The ethnologist therefore cannot assume a position entirely outside the heritage process.

This reflexive approach has led Czech research increasingly towards critical heritage studies. The Masaryk University project on intangible cultural heritage, heritagisation, and lived everyday life explicitly investigates how institutional support changes cultural elements, how communities respond, and how heritage functions under unusual conditions. Such research deliberately avoids limiting scholarship to descriptive inventories of traditions. It asks what happens socially when cultural practice becomes heritage and how concepts developed by UNESCO interact with everyday experience. Themes include gamification, festivalisation, institutional protection, diasporic transmission, and disruption during crises. This represents a significant maturation of Czech scholarship because the safeguarding system itself becomes an object of research.

Community consent is particularly important within this critical framework. UNESCO nomination procedures require evidence that relevant communities have participated and

consent to international inscription. Such consent should not be treated as a bureaucratic signature obtained after experts have already completed the substantive work. Communities may contain disagreement about representation, leadership, appropriate forms of practice, commercialisation, or the desirability of heritage status itself. No living tradition necessarily has one perfectly unified community voice. Responsible safeguarding therefore requires mechanisms capable of recognising internal diversity rather than imagining each heritage element as a homogeneous group speaking through one representative.

Minority and migrant traditions present a further challenge to the Czech system's historical emphasis upon traditional folk culture. Roma, Vietnamese, Ukrainian, Slovak, Jewish, German-derived, and other cultural practices form part of contemporary Czech cultural life, yet the established inventory system emerged largely from ethnographic attention to historically Czech and Moravian rural traditions. The broader 2025 framework creates greater conceptual room for forms that do not fit that genealogy. Whether this potential produces a substantially more diverse national inventory will depend upon future community engagement and institutional practice. The question is not simply how to add more groups to a list, but whether safeguarding procedures can accommodate different ways in which communities understand cultural continuity. The reform therefore represents an opening rather than a completed transformation.

The ministerial reform of 24 September 2025 is consequently one of the most important institutional developments in Czech intangible-heritage policy. Order No. 11/2025 created the *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Czech Republic* and replaced the narrower title referring specifically to intangible elements of traditional folk culture. Existing entries were transferred automatically, preserving continuity while changing the conceptual frame for future nominations. The new methodology explicitly opens the system to the full breadth of intangible cultural heritage envisaged by the UNESCO Convention. It also emphasises active cooperation with communities and individual bearers who wish to participate and greater openness towards cooperation with other governmental sectors. From 2026, new nominations can proceed under these widened rules. The reform therefore marks the end of the period examined here with a transition from a primarily folk-culture safeguarding model towards a more comprehensive living-heritage architecture.

This institutional development corresponds closely with the author's theoretical treatment of intangible heritage within klironomy. His 2025 methodological study argues that intangible cultural heritage requires analysis of value, historicity, cultural memory, social legitimation, continuity mechanisms, vulnerability, and preservation design rather than simply documentary description. The processual character of intangible heritage is central to this argument because cultural continuity cannot be reduced to maintaining an unchanged material object. A tradition exists through repeated social reconstruction and therefore combines inheritance with reinterpretation. The author's model is useful for distinguishing the historical form of a practice from the mechanisms through which contemporary communities continue to recognise it as meaningful. It also draws attention to the normative question of who has authority to define preservation goals.

His concept of cultural heritage as a self-organising system offers an additional perspective upon living traditions. In this framework, heritage is not merely a passive residue selected by institutions but a dynamic cultural system capable of transformation, adaptation, and reproduction. Intangible heritage provides an especially strong empirical case for this

proposition because traditions continually respond to changing social environments without necessarily losing their historical identity. Verbuňk remains identifiable despite improvisation, puppetry can adopt new themes and technologies, and amateur theatre can change repertories while preserving a long practice of community performance. The key analytical question becomes which changes maintain continuity and which disrupt the relationships through which a tradition remains culturally intelligible. This approach is compatible with the Czech experience of safeguarding as long as it is treated as a theoretical contribution rather than an officially adopted national methodology.

The author and Anisiia Tomanek's work on future heritage extends this logic towards practices that have not yet acquired stable historical recognition. Their concept of anticipatory interpretation is relevant to contemporary intangible culture because present-day forms of digital, hybrid, performative, and community creativity may become future heritage even when institutions do not currently classify them as traditional. This poses the same dilemma already encountered in museum collecting: waiting for unquestioned historical legitimacy may allow vulnerable cultural practices to disappear before they can be documented. At the same time, attempting to designate every contemporary cultural phenomenon as future heritage would make meaningful selection impossible. The broader Czech list introduced in 2025 creates an institutional context in which such questions may become increasingly important. Klironomical analysis therefore contributes most usefully by asking how cultural value, continuity, community recognition, and future vulnerability can be evaluated before canonisation has already occurred.

By 2025, Czech intangible-heritage safeguarding had achieved substantial international visibility without abandoning its domestic ethnological foundations. The UNESCO Representative List included Slovácko Verbuňk, Shrovetide processions in the Hlinecko area, falconry, the Ride of the Kings, Czech and Slovak puppetry, modrotisk, blown-glass bead Christmas decorations, timber rafting, handmade glass-production knowledge, and amateur theatre acting. The *Bearers of Folk Craft Tradition* programme had additionally become the first Czech entry in UNESCO's Register of Good Safeguarding Practices. These inscriptions span dance, ritual, performance, animal-related knowledge, craft, occupational tradition, and community theatre, illustrating the widening range of the field. Several are multinational, demonstrating that living cultural heritage often follows historical and professional networks rather than contemporary political borders. International recognition consequently strengthened Czech heritage diplomacy while also placing greater responsibilities upon national and local safeguarding structures.

The deeper achievement, however, lies below the UNESCO level. The national list, regional inventories, NULK, specialist regional workplaces, ethnological research, museums, craft programmes, associations, ensembles, practitioners, and community organisations collectively form the infrastructure through which living traditions can actually continue. UNESCO inscription can raise visibility, but it cannot substitute for a young dancer learning from an experienced performer, a glassmaker teaching a difficult technique, a theatre group rehearsing repeatedly, or a community organising its annual ritual. Intangible heritage ultimately survives through thousands of acts of participation that remain largely invisible to formal institutions. The role of policy is therefore to create conditions in which such transmission remains possible without appropriating the tradition from its practitioners.

This principle also clarifies the relationship between safeguarding and authenticity. Living heritage cannot be assessed by demanding that present practices reproduce an arbitrarily selected historical moment exactly. Communities change, technologies change, participants move, economic circumstances alter, and new social meanings emerge. Authenticity in intangible heritage is therefore less about material sameness than about continuity of recognition, competence, relationships, memory, and practice. Institutional attempts to freeze a tradition can paradoxically transform it into a staged representation detached from ordinary cultural life. Czech research into Verbuňk, the Ride of the Kings, puppetry, and other practices demonstrates that transformation itself must become part of heritage analysis.

In summary, the development of intangible cultural heritage in Czechia between 1993 and 2025 represents a transition from a strong but relatively specialised system for documenting traditional folk culture towards a broader, community-centred concept of living cultural inheritance. The 2003 governmental Strategy for Improved Care for Traditional Folk Culture created the national architecture of identification, documentation, preservation, transmission, presentation, regional cooperation, and international engagement before Czechia formally joined the UNESCO Convention. The National Institute of Folk Culture in Strážnice became the principal specialist institution, supported by regional workplaces capable of maintaining contact with local practitioners and developing regional inventories. The national list established in 2008 created a systematic mechanism through which living practices could be recognised, monitored, and prepared for possible international nomination. UNESCO inscriptions from Verbuňk to amateur theatre demonstrated a steady expansion from highly visible folk traditions towards crafts, occupational knowledge, multinational practices, and broader forms of community cultural activity. The *Bearers of Folk Craft Tradition* programme showed particularly clearly that safeguarding can combine documentation, transmission, economic viability, public recognition, and support for individual practitioners, and its selection for UNESCO's Register of Good Safeguarding Practices in 2022 confirmed its international methodological significance. Czech research simultaneously became more critical, examining heritagisation, festivalisation, tourism, the perceptions of bearers, institutional influence, and the possibility that official protection itself can transform traditions. The 2025 creation of the new *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Czech Republic* completed an important conceptual transition by abandoning the narrower institutional limitation to traditional folk culture and explicitly strengthening cooperation with communities and bearers. The klironomical works of the author provide a complementary theoretical interpretation of this development by presenting intangible heritage as a process of historical continuity, social legitimation, value formation, transformation, and future-oriented preservation rather than a static cultural residue. By the end of 2025, the Czech model could therefore be characterised as a mature system in which the essential object of safeguarding is not the immutable form of a tradition but the cultural capacity of people to continue recognising, practising, transmitting, and responsibly transforming it.

Industrial, Technical, and Modern Heritage

Industrial, technical, and modern heritage occupies a distinctive position within the Czech heritage system because its cultural value derives from processes of production, engineering, infrastructure, technological knowledge, and social organisation as much as from conventional architectural or artistic significance. A factory, mine, railway depot, power station, bridge, water-management system, transmission facility, machine, or industrial settlement cannot be understood adequately if it is evaluated only according to the appearance of its buildings. Its significance may reside in technological continuity, production sequences, spatial organisation, machinery, construction systems, engineering innovation, labour history, infrastructure, or the relationship between industry and the surrounding landscape. Industrial heritage therefore challenges heritage systems historically oriented towards monuments whose value could be identified primarily through age, architecture, authorship, or artistic distinction. The Czech lands provide an especially important environment for this challenge because industrialisation became one of the formative forces shaping their economy, settlements, transport networks, landscapes, and social structure from the 19th century onwards. Bohemia, Moravia, and Czech Silesia developed major traditions in mining, metallurgy, engineering, textiles, glass, sugar production, brewing, transport, electrical engineering, construction, and numerous other technological fields. By 2025, the surviving evidence of these processes had become recognised increasingly as part of cultural heritage rather than simply as obsolete industrial property. Czech industrial heritage research consequently developed at the intersection of architectural history, history of technology, engineering, economic and social history, conservation, urbanism, landscape research, museology, and adaptive reuse.

The distinction between industrial and technical heritage is analytically useful even though the two categories overlap continuously. Industrial heritage concerns the material and social remains of industrial culture, including factories, mines, workshops, processing facilities, energy systems, transport infrastructure, warehouses, workers' housing, administrative buildings, and associated landscapes. Technical heritage is broader in one respect because it includes engineering works and technological systems that may pre-date or lie outside modern industrialisation, such as historic bridges, mills, canals, waterworks, fortifications, surveying systems, scientific instruments, and transport technologies. Modern heritage is broader in another direction because it includes comparatively recent cultural resources whose significance derives from 19th- and 20th-century modernisation, mass production, infrastructure, design, communications, and technological change. These categories overlap in examples such as a 20th-century power plant, which may be simultaneously industrial, technical, architectural, and modern heritage. Their analytical separation nevertheless helps identify the different forms of value embedded in individual sites. Czech heritage practice increasingly developed specialised methodologies precisely because conventional architectural categories could not capture these relationships adequately.

The industrial history of the Czech lands provides an unusually strong basis for such research. 19th-century Bohemia and Moravia belonged among the most industrialised regions of the Habsburg Monarchy and later formed a substantial part of the industrial base of Czechoslovakia. Coal mining and metallurgy transformed Ostrava and the Karviná region, while textile production reshaped Brno, Liberec, Krnov, and numerous other centres. Plzeň developed around engineering and the Škoda Works, Zlín became internationally associated

with the Bata industrial system, and northern Bohemia acquired dense networks of glass, textile, mining, and manufacturing enterprises. Sugar factories, breweries, paper mills, engineering works, railways, electrical plants, waterworks, and food-processing industries changed settlements throughout the country. Industrialisation produced not simply factory buildings but new forms of urban growth, labour organisation, transport, technical education, environmental transformation, and social life. Its surviving material evidence therefore constitutes one of the principal archives through which the transformation of Czech society into a modern industrial society can be reconstructed.

The political and economic changes beginning in 1989 made this industrial heritage dramatically more visible because they also threatened it. Privatisation, restructuring, global competition, technological change, declining heavy industry, mine closures, and the relocation or disappearance of production rapidly emptied numerous industrial complexes. Buildings that had remained maintained while their machinery was economically useful could deteriorate quickly once production stopped. Industrial land simultaneously acquired speculative value, particularly in growing cities where former factories occupied large areas near expanding commercial and residential districts. The early post-socialist period therefore created a paradox in which industrial heritage became historically legible at precisely the moment when much of it became economically redundant. Production systems that had shaped entire communities could disappear within a few years, often before systematic documentation had been undertaken. The 1990s consequently represented both an era of massive industrial loss and the beginning of a more self-conscious Czech movement for the study and preservation of industrial heritage.

Recognition was complicated by the fact that industrial buildings did not always correspond to familiar public expectations of monuments. Castles, medieval churches, and historic town houses were widely accepted as cultural heritage, whereas abandoned factories could appear dirty, dangerous, environmentally contaminated, aesthetically harsh, or associated with unwanted economic decline. Large industrial sites frequently contained repetitive utilitarian structures, later extensions, temporary buildings, pipes, tracks, chimneys, conveyors, storage areas, and machinery whose cultural significance could not be appreciated through conventional stylistic analysis. Their value often depended upon understanding how the production system worked. A blast furnace without its charging systems, energy supply, transport connections, and related processing facilities may survive as an impressive object while losing much of the evidence explaining its historical function. Industrial heritage consequently requires evaluation of systems rather than isolated architectural fragments. Czech research increasingly developed precisely this systemic perspective.

International industrial-heritage theory provided an important conceptual framework for this development. The Nizhny Tagil Charter adopted by TICCIH in 2003 defined industrial heritage broadly through remains of industrial culture possessing historical, technological, social, architectural, or scientific value. The Dublin Principles adopted jointly by ICOMOS and TICCIH in 2011 strengthened the principle that machinery, buildings, infrastructure, landscapes, documentation, skills, and social meanings should be considered together. Such international frameworks were particularly relevant in Czechia because post-industrial transformation was occurring simultaneously with the country's reintegration into European heritage networks. Czech specialists participated actively in TICCIH and drew upon international comparative experience concerning coal mines, textile mills, transport infrastructure, industrial landscapes, and adaptive reuse. International discourse also reinforced the idea that

industrial heritage should not be preserved only as exceptional engineering masterpieces. Representative examples of ordinary production types can be equally important when they document characteristic stages of industrial development.

The creation of the Research Centre for Industrial Heritage at the Czech Technical University in Prague on 1 May 2002 was one of the decisive institutional achievements of the field. From 2010, the Centre operated within the Faculty of Architecture of CTU and combined architectural history, urbanism, monument conservation, research, teaching, and proposals for new uses of industrial structures. Its interdisciplinary orientation was significant because industrial heritage does not fit comfortably within one conventional university discipline. Architectural researchers need technological knowledge to understand factory form, while historians of technology require spatial and architectural analysis to reconstruct how production shaped buildings and settlements. VCPD also linked academic research with professional practice by involving students in projects concerning conversion and sustainable reuse. Industrial heritage consequently entered architectural education not only as a historical subject but as a contemporary design problem.

The Centre also played an important role in establishing the national platform *Industriální stopy*, or *Vestiges of Industry*. Beginning in the early 2000s, the platform brought together researchers, architects, conservation specialists, engineers, artists, local activists, institutions, owners, and members of the public interested in industrial heritage. Its biennials included conferences, exhibitions, performances, publications, site-specific cultural events, and comparative international discussion. This plural format was particularly appropriate because industrial heritage initially required public advocacy as much as academic research. Abandoned industrial spaces could become visible culturally through temporary artistic use even before long-term preservation solutions existed. The platform therefore contributed to changing social perception by presenting factories, depots, mines, and technical landscapes as cultural environments rather than merely derelict property. By the middle of the 2000s, Czech industrial heritage had begun to acquire an identifiable public constituency.

Systematic mapping represented the next stage of institutional maturation. The VCPD project *Industrial Topography of the Czech Republic*, implemented between 2011 and 2014 within the Ministry of Culture's NAKI programme, sought to identify and document industrial heritage across the country rather than focus only upon already famous sites. Its outputs included regional publications and a publicly accessible online map connecting industrial buildings with historical, architectural, technological, and geographical information. The importance of such mapping lies in comparison because heritage value is difficult to assess when individual sites are studied without knowledge of how many comparable examples survive elsewhere. A textile factory may appear ordinary locally yet prove to be the last substantially intact representative of a once widespread building type. Mapping therefore supports both research and heritage selection. The Czech industrial topography transformed dispersed specialist knowledge into a national comparative infrastructure.

The subsequent NAKI II project on industrial architecture between 2016 and 2020 moved beyond inventory towards questions of architectural value and identity of place. Industrial structures were studied simultaneously as technological works, architectural objects, and carriers of local historical identity. This approach challenged a purely functionalist interpretation in which the factory form was treated as an automatic result of production technology. Industrial buildings also embody decisions concerning representation, corporate

identity, working conditions, construction systems, engineering aesthetics, and relationships with the city. Their significance may therefore survive even after production ends. The project further reinforced interest in adaptive reuse because identity can be transmitted through transformed rather than entirely preserved functions.

The establishment of the Methodological Centre for Industrial Heritage within the Ostrava workplace of the National Heritage Institute provided a parallel institutional development inside the national conservation system. The Centre was created specifically to improve research, documentation, evaluation, and protection of technical and industrial monuments associated with production, extraction, transport, communications, and storage. Ostrava was a particularly appropriate location because the city and surrounding region contained some of the country's most extensive industrial transformations following the decline of coal mining and heavy industry. The Centre coordinates terminology, research approaches, conservation proposals, documentation, and specialist consultation across the NPÚ network. This institutional specialisation acknowledges that industrial monuments require forms of expertise different from those needed for castles or medieval churches. By the mid-2020s, the Czech heritage administration therefore possessed an explicit specialised structure for industrial heritage rather than treating it as a marginal subset of architectural conservation.

The 2018 *Methodology for the Evaluation and Protection of Industrial Heritage from the Perspective of Heritage Management* by Miloš Matěj and Michaela Ryšková represents one of the most important methodological syntheses produced by this system. The publication treats industrial heritage as a large and highly specific body of cultural material extending across production, extraction, transport, communications, and storage. Its central problem is selective preservation because the surviving industrial stock is too extensive to protect indiscriminately. Evaluation must therefore identify examples whose typological, technological, architectural, historical, scientific, and social values justify heritage protection. The methodology emphasises comparative research and the need to preserve those elements that make a particular industrial system intelligible. It also addresses new use as a central rather than peripheral problem because complete preservation without viable function is rarely realistic for very large industrial complexes. Czech industrial-heritage methodology thus developed towards informed selection rather than either total preservation or unrestricted redevelopment.

One of its most important principles is technological continuity. Industrial architecture frequently changed whenever machinery, energy sources, production processes, safety regulations, or transport systems changed. Additions, replacements, temporary structures, and technical modifications can therefore represent authentic evidence of industrial development rather than later disturbances that should automatically be removed. An industrial site may be valuable precisely because several stages of technological modernisation remain visible simultaneously. Restoration to one idealised historical date can consequently falsify the processual character of industrial heritage. The conservation objective becomes preservation of legible technological development rather than restoration of stylistic purity. This distinguishes industrial preservation fundamentally from approaches once applied to architecture conceived as a completed artistic composition.

The Lower Vítkovice area in Ostrava provides the most internationally visible Czech example of this systemic industrial heritage. The complex brought coal extraction at the Hlubina Mine directly into connection with coking and blast-furnace iron production, creating an unusually

integrated technological chain. Coal did not simply arrive from a distant mining district but formed part of a spatially concentrated production system whose machinery and architecture expressed the logic of industrial metabolism. Mining ended in the early 1990s and blast-furnace production ceased in 1998, creating a massive post-industrial territory whose future became one of the central Czech heritage debates. Important components received national cultural-monument protection, allowing the technological system to survive long enough for new uses to be developed. The site's industrial silhouette subsequently became one of Ostrava's principal cultural symbols rather than a reminder that the city had failed to escape its heavy-industrial past.

The conversion of Lower Vítkovice also demonstrates the possibilities and controversies of industrial revitalisation. The former gas-holder was transformed into the Gong multifunctional cultural and congress centre and opened in 2012, while a former power station became part of a science and technology environment. Blast Furnace No. 1 was made accessible through a visitor route and later supplemented by the Bolt Tower intervention. These projects enabled large parts of the complex to acquire economic and public functions without disguising their industrial origins. The industrial shell, machinery, pipelines, steel structures, and production logic remain central to the visitor experience. At the same time, interventions raise legitimate heritage questions concerning how much new architecture can be added before industrial authenticity becomes secondary to entertainment or tourism. Lower Vítkovice is therefore important not because it provides a universal conversion formula but because it made the negotiation between preservation, spectacle, education, investment, and urban regeneration exceptionally visible.

Důl Michal offers a deliberately different preservation model. Coal extraction at the mine ended in the early 1990s, and the site was subsequently protected as a national cultural monument and transferred to heritage administration. Its principal significance lies in the exceptional survival of the operational environment associated with the fully electrified mine created through major rebuilding between 1913 and 1915. Offices, machine rooms, equipment, changing facilities, technical systems, and working spaces preserve the logic of an industrial workplace rather than only its external architecture. The interpretation follows the concept of the ‘last working day’, seeking to retain the atmosphere of a mine that has recently ceased operation rather than transforming every room into a conventional exhibition gallery. The contrast with Lower Vítkovice is methodologically productive. One site emphasises large-scale conversion and new cultural use, while the other seeks to preserve operational authenticity with relatively restrained intervention.

The Red Tower of Death at Ostrov reveals a much darker dimension of industrial and technical heritage. The structure formed part of the uranium-processing system associated with the Jáchymov region and the communist forced-labour camps of the early 1950s. Political prisoners processed radioactive uranium ore under extremely dangerous conditions, connecting industrial production directly with political repression and Cold War geopolitics. The site's heritage value therefore cannot be explained solely through mining technology. Its machinery, buildings, labour organisation, radioactive material, prison system, and political context form one inseparable historical narrative. The Red Tower became part of the Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří World Heritage property in 2019 and transferred into the administration of the National Heritage Institute in 2025. Its preservation demonstrates that industrial heritage includes difficult and traumatic histories rather than only narratives of technological progress.

This difficult heritage is especially important because older histories of technology could easily become celebratory. Machines, engineering innovation, production records, and spectacular industrial architecture can encourage narratives in which technical development appears automatically progressive. Industrial heritage research increasingly complicates that view by examining labour conditions, pollution, occupational disease, forced labour, environmental damage, inequality, and the social consequences of industrial restructuring. A mine may simultaneously represent major engineering achievement, regional prosperity, dangerous work, environmental transformation, and later unemployment. Preservation should therefore avoid converting industrial sites into neutral monuments to technological genius stripped of the experiences of workers and communities. Czech examples associated with mining and uranium production make this requirement particularly clear.

The Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří Mining Region expands industrial heritage further from the individual site towards the historical technological landscape. Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2019 as a transboundary German-Czech property, it represents approximately eight centuries of mining and associated scientific, technological, administrative, and social development. Mines, water-management systems, processing sites, settlements, roads, forests, agricultural areas, and mining towns form an integrated landscape rather than a collection of disconnected monuments. The Ore Mountains played a major role in European silver, tin, cobalt, and later uranium production and contributed innovations transferred to other mining regions. Jáchymov also gave the thaler its name, creating a historical connection between mining and monetary systems whose linguistic descendant survives in the word ‘dollar’. The property therefore demonstrates how technical heritage can influence economic, scientific, political, and cultural history far beyond the locality where extraction occurred.

Mining landscapes also illustrate the importance of preserving underground heritage. Shafts, adits, drainage tunnels, extraction chambers, and subterranean transport systems often contain the principal evidence of mining technology even where surface buildings have disappeared. Their physical accessibility can be limited by flooding, instability, contamination, or safety risks, making documentation particularly important. Water-management systems may extend kilometres beyond the mine itself and include ponds, channels, dams, pumping structures, and landscape modifications created to support extraction. Technical heritage therefore frequently requires three-dimensional and landscape-scale research rather than building-centred inventory. The Ore Mountains demonstrate the degree to which industrial activity can reorganise an entire environmental system.

Transport heritage provides another major field within Czech technical preservation. Railways played a formative role in 19th- and 20th-century industrialisation by connecting mines, factories, agricultural regions, cities, ports, and international markets. Surviving heritage includes railway lines, stations, depots, workshops, bridges, tunnels, signalling equipment, rolling stock, warehouses, and workers' infrastructure. The České Budějovice–Linz horse railway preserves evidence of one of the earliest major railway systems in Central Europe, while later steam and electric networks document successive technological transitions. Historic bridges such as the Bechyně bridge demonstrate the integration of engineering, transport, landscape, and modern construction. Freight infrastructure such as Žižkov Freight Station reveals how industrial architecture could become inseparable from mechanised logistics. Railway heritage therefore encompasses both linear systems and individual technical works.

Žižkov Freight Station became one of the most important post-2000 cases of conflict between redevelopment and industrial-heritage recognition. Constructed as a highly integrated functionalist freight complex, the building combined architecture with mechanical systems designed specifically for transhipment and storage. Declining freight functions left a very large site within an increasingly valuable area of Prague, creating strong pressure for redevelopment. Heritage specialists argued that the building represented an exceptional combination of functionalist architecture and technological organisation, while developers questioned the economic viability of preservation. The principal building was eventually declared a cultural monument in 2013. The case demonstrates that industrial heritage conflict frequently concerns opportunity cost rather than physical impossibility of preservation. Former railway land can be among the most valuable urban redevelopment territory precisely because industrial infrastructure originally occupied strategically connected locations.

Technical heritage also includes transport objects whose mobility distinguishes them from buildings and landscapes. The National Technical Museum preserves locomotives, railway carriages, automobiles, aircraft, motorcycles, bicycles, and numerous specialised vehicles documenting the history of mobility. The protected collection of historically important NW and Tatra automobiles and the Slovenská strela railcar demonstrate that movable technical artefacts can acquire the highest categories of cultural significance. Their preservation requires mechanical, material, archival, and sometimes operational expertise very different from that needed for conventional museum objects. Machinery may deteriorate when static, yet regular operation can itself cause wear and loss of original components. Technical museums therefore face a recurring question of whether authenticity is best served by preserving mechanical systems motionless or maintaining controlled functional operation.

The National Technical Museum constitutes the principal Czech institution linking movable technical heritage with the history of science, industry, architecture, engineering, and infrastructure. Founded in 1908, it accumulated major collections long before the emergence of industrial heritage as a contemporary preservation field. Its research mission is formally embedded in the institution and includes systematic study of the environments from which technical objects originate. Archive and library collections connect machinery with drawings, patents, photographs, company records, engineering publications, and documentation of technological development. Its research laboratory supports conservation and restoration through materials analysis and preventive conservation. The museum consequently provides an essential bridge between preservation in situ and the collection of technical objects whose original industrial environments cannot survive intact.

The establishment of an industrial-design collection at the National Technical Museum in 1994 was particularly significant for the widening concept of modern technical heritage. The collection was the first Czech institutional programme devoted specifically to systematic documentation of industrial design across technical fields. It gradually expanded from transport and engineering towards household technology, medical equipment, sports products, plastics, and other domains. Industrial design demonstrates that technical heritage is not solely the history of mechanical efficiency. Form, ergonomics, material innovation, branding, consumer expectations, manufacturing technology, and aesthetic culture all shape technical objects. The post-1993 development of this collection therefore paralleled the wider recognition that modern mass-produced products deserve historical documentation before they disappear through rapid product cycles.

The Centre for Building Heritage in Plasy represents another distinctive approach to technical knowledge. Rather than focusing primarily upon industrial production, it preserves and communicates historical construction techniques, materials, structural systems, building components, and craft knowledge. Its exhibitions connect masonry, timber construction, roofing, heating, water systems, finishes, doors, windows, and other technical elements with the historical development of building practice. The associated Court of Building Crafts makes traditional processes visible through workshops and working facilities rather than only displaying finished components. Such an approach is important because technical heritage includes knowledge embedded in skilled practice as well as surviving machines and buildings. Industrialisation transformed construction, but many earlier craft techniques continued to influence modern building culture and remain necessary for heritage conservation itself.

Functioning technical monuments provide especially valuable forms of evidence because operational continuity preserves relationships difficult to reconstruct after machinery becomes static. The handmade paper mill at Velké Losiny is a prominent example of an industrial-production tradition whose buildings, water system, equipment, and production knowledge remain interconnected. Historic water mills, hammers, sawmills, glassworks, and power stations can similarly preserve the movement of energy and material through machinery rather than merely the appearance of individual devices. Continued operation demonstrates sound, vibration, rhythm, maintenance routines, and tacit knowledge that museums can document only imperfectly after production stops. Yet operational preservation is difficult because safety standards, labour costs, environmental regulation, and market conditions change continuously. Functional continuity therefore represents one of the most valuable but fragile forms of technical authenticity.

Energy and water-management infrastructure constitute another important category. Historic hydroelectric plants, dams, municipal waterworks, sewage-treatment systems, canals, reservoirs, and pumping stations demonstrate how modern society reorganised water and energy at regional and urban scales. The old wastewater-treatment plant at Prague-Bubeneč represents a major engineering achievement associated with the modernisation of the capital's sanitation infrastructure. Hydroelectric plants at Třeština or Poděbrady combine engineering systems with architectural design and in some cases retain significant original equipment. The Les Království dam demonstrates that technical infrastructure could also become a deliberately monumental component of landscape architecture. Such examples complicate the idea that technical structures are aesthetically indifferent. Czech engineering history repeatedly produced works in which technical performance and architectural expression were intentionally integrated.

Communications infrastructure broadens technical heritage still further. Postal systems, telegraphy, telephony, radio, television, broadcasting, and later computing transformed the spatial organisation of modern society while producing buildings and devices whose technological cycles became increasingly short. Telephone exchanges, transmitters, switching systems, radio studios, computing equipment, and communications towers can become obsolete long before conventional heritage institutions recognise their significance. Ještěd is exceptional because its combination of television transmission, hotel function, architecture, and structural engineering received early recognition, but many later communications structures remain much more vulnerable. The research project begun by VCPD in 2023 on industrial architecture of the second half of the 20th century is especially important for these objects. It explicitly addresses a cultural layer that remains under-

researched and frequently undervalued despite representing the technological modernisation of late socialist and early post-socialist society.

The chronological expansion towards the second half of the 20th century marks one of the most important developments in Czech industrial-heritage research. For many years, 19th-century brick factories or interwar functionalist industrial buildings could be appreciated more readily than large concrete complexes from the 1960s to 1980s. The latter were often associated with socialist economic inefficiency, environmental degradation, standardised construction, or politically discredited institutions. Yet chronological distance increasingly revealed substantial differences in architectural quality, structural experimentation, industrial design, engineering, and technological significance. Factories, telecommunications buildings, energy installations, research facilities, warehouses, and transport complexes from the period can represent important stages of Czech modernisation. Heritage assessment therefore has to separate political judgement concerning the former regime from historical evaluation of the material environment it produced.

The current VCPD project *Industrial Architecture of the Second Half of the 20th Century: Extension, Transformation and Identity*, launched in 2023 within NAKI III, formalises this chronological expansion. The project explicitly identifies post-war industrial architecture as one of the most endangered and insufficiently appreciated groups within Czech heritage. It also extends analysis into the transformation period of the 1990s, recognising that post-socialist modifications themselves now form part of industrial-history research. This is a particularly important methodological point. Heritage does not stop automatically at the political rupture of 1989, because industrial sites often contain material evidence of adaptation, privatisation, technological decline, or attempts to survive within new markets. The 1990s are therefore becoming part of modern heritage history rather than remaining merely the contemporary context in which older heritage was threatened.

Adaptive reuse became the principal practical strategy through which many industrial structures survived this transformation. Large factories rarely retain economically viable original production indefinitely, and permanent museum conversion is realistic for only a small proportion of the industrial stock. New uses can include culture, education, housing, offices, retail, creative industries, research, tourism, sports, or mixed urban functions. The conservation problem lies in introducing these programmes without erasing the spatial and material features that make the industrial building historically intelligible. Excessive subdivision can destroy large production spaces, while façade retention alone can reduce industrial heritage to decorative scenery surrounding entirely new construction. Successful reuse therefore requires identification of the essential technological and spatial logic before design begins. Czech architectural research increasingly treats industrial conversion as a process of negotiating old and new layers rather than returning structures to one historical state.

Vaňkovka in Brno became an early major post-socialist example of this negotiation. The former Wannieck engineering complex had been identified as historically significant before the end of socialism and was declared a cultural monument in 1992. During the 1990s, its strategic position near the expanding southern centre of Brno placed it under considerable development pressure. Parts of the former industrial site were eventually integrated into the Galerie Vaňkovka commercial complex opened in 2005, while surviving industrial structures also accommodated cultural and civic functions. The result generated debate because commercial

redevelopment saved some industrial fabric while fundamentally transforming the character of the larger site. Vaňkovka became important less as an uncontested model than as an early Czech demonstration that conversion decisions determine which industrial layers survive and which disappear.

The Automatic Mills in Pardubice provide a more recent example of industrial conversion centred explicitly upon culture and education. Josef Gočár's monumental mill complex, developed from 1909 onwards, possessed both technical and major architectural significance. After the end of industrial use, the complex was gradually transformed through a combination of private initiative, public investment, architectural intervention, gallery functions, educational programmes, and new public space. The first major stage reopened to the public in 2023 with galleries, creative and educational facilities, and a redefined urban setting. The project demonstrates how industrial heritage can become a new cultural centre without disguising the scale and material identity of its former production architecture. It also illustrates the increasing diversity of funding and ownership structures involved in contemporary heritage revitalisation.

Adaptive reuse connects industrial heritage directly with sustainable development. Reusing an existing industrial building can conserve the embodied energy and material already invested in its construction while reducing demolition waste and preserving urban continuity. Large floor areas, robust structures, high ceilings, and open spans can offer considerable flexibility for new programmes. Brownfield regeneration can also limit pressure for development on undeveloped land and reconnect previously inaccessible industrial territories with surrounding cities. Yet sustainability arguments should not be romanticised because contaminated soil, asbestos, structural degradation, energy inefficiency, and complex ownership can make industrial conversion technically and economically demanding. Some structures cannot reasonably be retained in full, and selective removal may be necessary for safe long-term use. The heritage task is therefore to ensure that decisions about demolition or retention are informed by cultural value rather than determined solely by short-term economic convenience.

Environmental contamination is one of the defining complications distinguishing industrial from many other heritage categories. Mines, chemical plants, metallurgical facilities, gasworks, engineering sites, and storage areas may contain hazardous substances within soil, groundwater, structures, or machinery. Environmental remediation can be essential for public safety and future use but may simultaneously remove physical evidence of historical production. Heritage and environmental objectives can therefore conflict directly. The solution requires cooperation among conservation specialists, environmental engineers, industrial historians, owners, planners, and regulators. Czech post-industrial regions such as Ostrava demonstrate particularly clearly that successful regeneration requires dealing with both cultural and environmental consequences of industrialisation.

Industrial heritage also includes social infrastructure produced around factories. Worker housing, company towns, schools, hospitals, baths, canteens, cultural halls, sports grounds, administrative buildings, religious facilities, and transport links reveal how employers organised life beyond the production hall. Vítkovice is especially important because the ironworks influenced not only factories but residential and social development for employees. Zlín similarly demonstrates how the Bata system connected industrial production with housing, education, architecture, welfare, transport, and corporate culture. Such environments show that industrial heritage is fundamentally social heritage. Preserving only

the monumental production building while ignoring the settlement and institutions surrounding it can produce a distorted history focused upon owners and technology rather than the communities whose labour sustained production.

Labour memory therefore represents an important intangible dimension of industrial heritage. Former workers possess knowledge concerning machinery, production routines, informal workplace organisation, accidents, maintenance, terminology, skills, and social relations that cannot always be reconstructed from company archives. Oral history can document how industrial work was experienced physically and socially, including noise, heat, danger, discipline, solidarity, pride, conflict, and occupational identity. Such testimony is particularly urgent when industries close rapidly and experienced workers disperse or age. Technical documentation explains how a machine was intended to work, whereas worker memory may explain how it actually functioned under everyday operating conditions. Industrial heritage research increasingly benefits when material preservation is combined with oral testimony and archival evidence.

Museums play an essential role in preserving technical heritage that cannot remain in situ. The National Technical Museum's collections of machinery, transport, industrial design, photography, electrical engineering, computing, printing, mining equipment, and scientific instruments provide comparative evidence extending across many sectors. Its railway-vehicle depository in Chomutov preserves nearly one hundred vehicles of different types, while plans for a Museum of Railway and Electrical Engineering in the protected former locomotive facilities at Prague's Masaryk Station demonstrate an attempt to reconnect technical collections with authentic industrial architecture. Technical museums can also preserve components removed from demolished sites, although such rescue inevitably sacrifices the original spatial and functional context. The museum and the industrial site should therefore be regarded as complementary rather than competing preservation models.

Documentation becomes especially important when complete preservation is impossible. Industrial complexes may contain hundreds of structures and machines, some of which are repetitive, heavily contaminated, structurally unstable, or incapable of viable reuse. Detailed surveys, measured drawings, photography, archival research, oral history, three-dimensional scanning, and technological analysis can preserve information even where physical retention must be selective. Digital models also make it possible to reconstruct production flows and spatial relationships across complexes whose parts have already disappeared. Such documentation should not become an excuse for demolition, but it can reduce knowledge loss when change is unavoidable. Industrial heritage therefore requires a hierarchy extending from preservation in operation through adaptive reuse and museum conservation to comprehensive recording before loss.

The digital turn strengthens this approach further. Industrial sites are particularly suitable for three-dimensional survey because technological systems contain complex spatial relationships among buildings, machines, pipes, tracks, conveyors, shafts, and infrastructure. Laser scanning and photogrammetry can record these relationships at high precision and support monitoring of inaccessible or endangered structures. Geographic information systems can connect industrial sites with transport, extraction zones, worker settlements, environmental impacts, and landscape transformations. Databases such as the Industrial Topography make this information publicly searchable and support comparative analysis at

national scale. Digital technologies therefore help industrial heritage move from individual-building documentation towards network and system analysis.

The author's klironomical work provides a relevant theoretical framework for precisely this problem of industrial transformation. His distinction among conservation, restoration, renovation, reconstruction, and revitalisation is particularly useful because industrial heritage projects frequently use these terms imprecisely despite pursuing fundamentally different objectives. An abandoned factory may be conserved as material evidence, restored towards an earlier technological state, renovated for contemporary use, reconstructed after major loss, or revitalised through a new function capable of sustaining the site socially and economically. The choice between these approaches should follow evaluation of heritage value rather than precede it. The author's argument for revitalisation as a specialised field requiring its own interdisciplinary training corresponds closely with Czech industrial-heritage practice, where architectural design, engineering, environmental remediation, historical research, investment, law, urbanism, and community needs must interact.

His 2023 proposal for a scientific and educational complex devoted to revitalisation is especially applicable to post-industrial sites. Industrial conversion is frequently handled as a real-estate or architectural problem even though heritage significance may depend upon technology, labour history, landscape, environmental conditions, and social identity. A revitalisation specialist therefore requires a broader analytical framework than ordinary refurbishment practice normally provides. The Czech experience of Lower Vítkovice, Vaňkovka, Automatic Mills, railway sites, mines, and smaller factories demonstrates that new use can preserve industrial heritage only when the essential cultural values of the site are identified before intervention. Revitalisation should consequently be understood as the creation of viable continuity rather than simply the introduction of profitable new functions.

The author's concept of cultural heritage as a self-organising system offers another useful interpretation of industrial change. Industrial sites were never static during their working lives because machinery, buildings, production flows, ownership, labour organisation, and infrastructure changed repeatedly in response to technology and markets. Their heritage therefore consists partly in accumulated transformations rather than one immutable original state. Post-industrial reuse adds a further historical layer to that process. From this perspective, preservation should seek to maintain intelligible continuity among successive states rather than erase all later change in pursuit of an idealised industrial past. This theoretical position corresponds closely with contemporary Czech research emphasising layered industrial architecture and the identity of place.

The concept of future heritage is equally relevant to modern technical culture. Rapid technological turnover means that computers, communications systems, industrial equipment, vehicles, production lines, design products, and digital-industrial systems can become obsolete before museums or heritage institutions decide whether they are culturally significant. Waiting until objects are universally recognised as historic may result in the disappearance of representative examples, technical documentation, software, and specialist knowledge. The industrial-design collection established by the National Technical Museum in 1994 already responds implicitly to this anticipatory problem by collecting recent technical design systematically. The VCPD project addressing the second half of the 20th century extends the same logic to architecture. Modern heritage research increasingly has to select the future archive while the technologies concerned remain within living memory.

By 2025, Czech industrial and technical heritage had therefore developed from a relatively marginal concern into one of the most methodologically distinctive branches of cultural preservation. The National Heritage Institute recognised thousands of technical objects and installations within different categories of monument protection and maintained a specialist methodological centre devoted to their research. CTU's VCPD had created more than two decades of systematic research, mapping, publication, teaching, public advocacy, and adaptive-reuse experimentation. NAKI projects gave the field continuity from national industrial topography through architectural evaluation to the industrial heritage of the later 20th century. The National Technical Museum provided a complementary research and collection infrastructure connecting buildings and sites with movable technological evidence. UNESCO recognition of the Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří Mining Region placed Czech mining heritage within an internationally significant technological landscape. Major transformations in Ostrava, Pardubice, Brno, Prague, and other cities demonstrated that industrial preservation increasingly influences contemporary urban development rather than remaining isolated within specialist museums.

The remaining challenges are nevertheless substantial. Industrial sites are often extremely large, technically complex, polluted, economically difficult, and vulnerable to redevelopment pressure. Complete technological ensembles are much harder to preserve than visually attractive individual buildings, while machinery may be removed or scrapped before architectural protection is established. Post-war structures continue to face limited public recognition, and the accelerated transformation of energy and manufacturing systems will create new categories of threatened heritage during the coming decades. Preservation resources are inevitably selective, requiring transparent criteria capable of distinguishing historically representative examples from repetitive industrial stock. Sustainable reuse must avoid both museumification of entire cities and the reduction of industrial identity to decorative fragments within new commercial development.

In summary, industrial, technical, and modern heritage became a major autonomous component of Czech cultural-heritage research between 1993 and 2025 because the economic transformation that threatened industrial sites simultaneously revealed their historical significance. The field developed from the recognition of individual technical monuments towards a systemic understanding encompassing production chains, machinery, architecture, infrastructure, workers' environments, technological knowledge, landscapes, and social memory. Czech heritage practice increasingly adopted specific criteria such as typological significance, technological continuity, completeness of production systems, engineering innovation, and authenticity of equipment, recognising that industrial value cannot be assessed through architectural aesthetics alone. The establishment of the Research Centre for Industrial Heritage at CTU in 2002, the national *Industriální stopy* platform, the *Industrial Topography of the Czech Republic*, successive NAKI projects, and the NPÚ Methodological Centre for Industrial Heritage transformed the field from specialist advocacy into a stable research infrastructure. Lower Vítkovice demonstrated the possibilities and tensions of large-scale industrial revitalisation, while Důl Michal showed the value of preserving an authentic operational environment with minimal transformation. The Red Tower of Death confirmed that industrial heritage also includes histories of coercion, forced labour, political repression, and technological danger rather than only narratives of progress. The Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří World Heritage property expanded the unit of analysis from individual mines towards a transboundary technological landscape shaped through eight centuries of extraction, water management,

settlement, science, and labour. Railway infrastructure, technical bridges, hydroelectric plants, water systems, communications facilities, functioning mills, technical collections, and industrial design further demonstrate the remarkable breadth of Czech technical heritage. Research into the industrial architecture of the second half of the 20th century has extended the heritage canon towards structures previously considered too recent or politically uncomfortable to preserve. Adaptive reuse increasingly became the principal mechanism capable of linking preservation with urban regeneration and sustainability, provided that technological, spatial, and social values are identified before new functions are imposed. The klironomical works of the author add a complementary theoretical framework by distinguishing forms of preservation, emphasising specialised revitalisation, understanding heritage as a changing system, and drawing attention to anticipatory selection of future technical heritage. By 2025, Czech industrial heritage could therefore no longer be understood as the remains of an economic system that had disappeared; it had become a sophisticated field through which the country investigates how technology, labour, architecture, environment, and modernisation have shaped Czech society and how their material evidence can remain intelligible within a post-industrial future.

Cultural Landscapes and the Relationship between Heritage and Environment

Cultural landscapes represent one of the most conceptually demanding components of Czech cultural heritage because they resist any clear separation between human history and the natural environment. A landscape is never merely a physical background against which historical events occur, nor is it simply an ecological system unaffected by cultural action. Fields, forests, ponds, gardens, avenues, vineyards, hop fields, settlements, pilgrimage routes, mines, roads, battlefields, parks, and water systems have emerged through repeated interactions between environmental conditions and human decisions. Their cultural values may therefore reside not in one protected object but in spatial patterns, visual relationships, land-use traditions, vegetation structures, hydrological systems, place names, memories, and the accumulated consequences of centuries of management. Such values may remain intelligible even where individual buildings have disappeared because the organisation of the wider landscape continues to preserve historical relationships. Conversely, a famous monument can lose part of its significance when the landscape that explains its orientation, views, economy, or symbolic position is transformed radically. Czech heritage research between 1993 and 2025 increasingly responded to this complexity by treating landscape as a cultural-historical source in its own right. By the end of the period, cultural landscape research had become one of the principal fields through which heritage protection and environmental thought intersected.

The Czech landscape is particularly suitable for this type of analysis because almost no part of the country can be understood as historically untouched nature. Agricultural colonisation, medieval settlement, fishpond construction, forestry, mining, aristocratic estate management, industrialisation, military activity, transport, collectivisation, urbanisation, tourism, and environmental protection have successively reorganised the territory. Even forests commonly perceived as natural contain evidence of historical management, species

selection, paths, boundaries, charcoal production, hunting, extraction, or earlier agricultural use. Rivers and wetlands have been regulated, drained, impounded, redirected, or incorporated into artificial pond systems over centuries. Agricultural fields preserve traces of older property divisions and cultivation systems even when 20th-century collectivisation erased many visible boundaries. Landscapes are therefore palimpsests in which different historical phases remain visible simultaneously or can be reconstructed through maps, archaeology, ecology, archives, and field observation. The central problem of cultural-landscape preservation is not how to prevent all further change but how to recognise historically significant structures before new transformations render them unintelligible.

This relational understanding distinguishes cultural landscape heritage from the protection of isolated monuments. A chapel standing alone in an agricultural field can possess architectural significance, but its cultural meaning may depend upon a pilgrimage route, avenues, sightlines, nearby villages, remembered processions, or a larger sacred composition. A château garden cannot be interpreted adequately without the water, woodland, agricultural estate, hunting routes, visual axes, and settlement pattern that surrounded it historically. A battlefield may contain few architecturally distinguished structures yet remain culturally significant through topography, lines of movement, commemorative sites, and collective memory. A mining landscape combines geology, industrial structures, waste heaps, settlements, roads, water systems, and underground workings into one historical system. Cultural landscape research therefore shifts attention from objects towards relationships. This relational character makes the field inherently interdisciplinary because no single method can document all of the relevant historical, ecological, spatial, visual, and social dimensions.

The legal architecture of Czech landscape protection reflects this overlap between culture and environment. Act No. 20/1987 Coll. on State Monument Care enables territorially extensive heritage protection through monument reservations and monument zones, including areas now described professionally as landscape heritage zones. Act No. 114/1992 Coll. on Nature and Landscape Protection approaches the same territory from another direction and defines *landscape character* through the natural, cultural, and historical characteristics of a place or area. It requires interventions potentially affecting landscape character to respect important landscape elements, protected areas, cultural landmarks, harmonious scale, and spatial relationships. The environmental legislation therefore recognises explicitly that cultural and historical characteristics belong to landscape protection even though its principal administrative framework lies outside the Ministry of Culture. Spatial planning legislation adds a further layer because development, infrastructure, energy facilities, and settlement expansion can transform landscape values without directly altering an individually listed monument. Cultural landscapes consequently exist at the intersection of several legal and administrative systems rather than under one exclusive heritage regime.

The European Landscape Convention reinforced this integrated understanding after Czechia signed it on 28 November 2002, ratified it on 3 June 2004, and became bound by it on 1 October 2004. The Convention defines landscape broadly as an area perceived by people whose character results from the action and interaction of natural and human factors. This definition is significant because it applies not only to exceptional or formally protected landscapes but to ordinary, degraded, urban, rural, and everyday environments as well. It also connects landscape protection with management and planning rather than assuming that valuable landscapes should simply be frozen. Public perception and participation form part of the Convention's logic, thereby moving landscape policy beyond expert classification alone.

Czech implementation strengthened the conceptual connection among cultural heritage, environmental protection, spatial planning, and public quality of life. The Convention also encouraged systematic landscape identification and the definition of landscape-quality objectives. Its influence is visible clearly in Czech research methodologies developed during the 2010s.

The category of *krajinná památková zóna*, or landscape heritage zone, provides the most direct instrument of cultural-heritage protection at landscape scale. The first Czech landscape heritage zones date from 1992, immediately before the establishment of the independent republic, and the category developed further during subsequent decades. By 2025, twenty-eight such zones were protected within the national heritage system. They include deliberately composed aristocratic landscapes, pilgrimage environments, agricultural areas, mining landscapes, battlefields, and territories shaped by historically characteristic forms of land use. Their significance therefore does not depend upon exceptional natural quality, although cultural and natural values frequently overlap. What justifies protection is the historical legibility of the landscape and the relationships among its material and spatial components. Landscape heritage zones consequently broaden Czech monument care from individual objects and settlements towards historically meaningful territorial structures.

The diversity of these zones demonstrates the conceptual range of cultural landscape itself. Lednice-Valtice represents an intentionally composed landscape in which architecture, avenues, water, vegetation, gardens, agricultural areas, and distant views were organised according to aesthetic and estate-management principles. Římovsko and Libějovicko-Lomecko preserve pilgrimage and sacred landscape relationships. Zahrádecko contains evidence of settlement, agricultural land use, ponds, estate organisation, and landscape composition. Jáchymov and other Ore Mountains zones preserve mining-related transformations, while Austerlitz and Hradec Králové represent military landscapes whose cultural meanings arise from historical events and later commemoration. Such diversity undermines any attempt to define cultural landscape through one visual style. The common characteristic is that historical human activity has produced spatial relationships whose cultural significance remains legible at territorial scale.

A major research advance occurred through the NAKI project *Protection and Care of the Historic Cultural Landscape through the Institute of Landscape Heritage Zones*, conducted between 2012 and 2015. The project was coordinated by the Silva Tarouca Research Institute for Landscape and Ornamental Gardening and involved the National Heritage Institute, the Czech Technical University in Prague, and Mendel University in Brno. This institutional composition itself reflected the interdisciplinary character of the field, bringing heritage conservation together with landscape research, architecture, planning, and horticultural expertise. The project sought to deepen knowledge of cultural-historical landscape values and strengthen the mechanisms through which landscape heritage zones could be identified, recorded, managed, and monitored. It also analysed the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system and sought methodological consensus across disciplines that had previously used somewhat different concepts of landscape value. The result was not merely academic description but a set of instruments directly applicable to protected territories. Cultural landscape thereby became one of the clearest examples of NAKI research translating interdisciplinary scholarship into heritage-management methodology.

One of the principal results was the standardised record methodology for landscape heritage zones. This methodology specifies the information required to characterise a protected landscape consistently and to integrate its cultural values into professional heritage data systems. It includes natural conditions, historical development, surviving landscape structures, compositional relationships, maps, photographs, and the specific interests of heritage protection. The methodology is significant because landscape values are much more difficult to record than the attributes of a single building. A database field describing one structure can identify address, architect, materials, date, and legal status, whereas a landscape may require representation of paths, visual axes, vegetation, topography, water, settlements, land use, and historical relationships across many square kilometres. Standardisation therefore transforms a complex landscape from a largely descriptive professional concept into something that can be monitored and compared systematically. Such records also improve the ability to evaluate proposed changes before they damage spatial relationships that may not be obvious from individual property documentation.

Monitoring emerged as another essential methodological problem. Cultural landscapes continue to change through vegetation growth, agricultural practice, infrastructure, settlement development, forestry, tourism, and environmental processes even when no deliberate heritage intervention occurs. A protected avenue may disappear gradually through tree mortality, a historical view may close as woodland expands, and agricultural consolidation can erase field divisions without destroying any listed building. Regular monitoring is therefore necessary to identify cumulative changes that become visible only over several years or decades. Historical maps, aerial photography, satellite imagery, GIS, photographic documentation, and field surveys provide complementary sources for this purpose. Monitoring also allows authorities to distinguish temporary alterations from structural changes threatening the defining character of a landscape. Czech heritage research increasingly turned landscape management into a longitudinal rather than episodic process.

A second major NAKI research cycle between 2016 and 2020 expanded attention from already protected zones towards the wider heritage potential of the Czech historical cultural landscape. The project *Identification and Presentation of the Heritage Potential of the Historical Cultural Landscape of the Czech Republic* again brought together the Silva Tarouca institute, the National Heritage Institute, CTU, and Mendel University. Its goal was to identify, document, and present historically valuable landscapes that might not yet possess formal heritage protection. Researchers examined landscapes associated with agriculture, fruit growing, forestry, literature, pilgrimage, industry, military history, mining, designed estates, and other forms of historical activity. Specialised maps were prepared for selected territories, and research explored landscape composition, toponymy, historical maps, GIS, associative values, and possible regeneration strategies. The project therefore shifted landscape heritage policy from a reactive model focused upon existing designations towards anticipatory identification of cultural potential. This is particularly important because formal protection can operate effectively only after significant landscapes have first been recognised.

The national *Typology of the Historical Cultural Landscape of the Czech Republic*, certified in 2020, became one of the most substantial outputs of this research. It defined thirty-four historical cultural-landscape types corresponding to actual Czech conditions. The typology develops the three broad UNESCO categories of designed landscapes, organically evolved landscapes, and associative landscapes into a much more detailed national classification. Individual types include agricultural, viticultural, hop-growing, fruit-growing, fishpond, forest,

mining, military, pilgrimage, commemorative, designed, and other historically distinctive landscapes. This system is valuable because it makes visible forms of heritage that may appear ordinary when considered only locally. A field pattern, orchard, pond system, or forest-management structure can acquire greater significance when researchers understand it as a rare or especially intact representative of a national landscape type. Classification consequently provides an intellectual basis for comparison, protection priorities, and future research.

The accompanying 2020 volume *Historical Cultural Landscapes of the Czech Republic* translated this typology into an extensive empirical survey. The book presented thirty-four landscape types through approximately 120 examples and deliberately focused largely upon areas not already covered by the earlier comprehensive publication on landscape heritage zones. Its significance lies in demonstrating that cultural-landscape value extends far beyond those territories already protected formally. The examples include famous landscapes and places almost unknown outside their immediate regions. Maps and extensive contemporary visual documentation make spatial structures legible that would be difficult to communicate through text alone. The publication therefore functions as both research synthesis and an argument for expanding cultural awareness of landscape heritage. Czech landscape scholarship by 2020 had moved decisively from studying a few iconic estates towards constructing a national cultural geography of historical landscapes.

Designed landscapes remain one of the most visible categories because intentional composition can make historical relationships comparatively easy to perceive. Aristocratic estates often linked residences, parks, agricultural land, forests, hunting areas, avenues, ponds, follies, chapels, and distant views according to carefully controlled spatial principles. These landscapes blurred distinctions between productive estate management and aesthetic design. Agricultural land could provide both economic resources and deliberately framed scenery, while roads and water systems could serve utilitarian and visual purposes simultaneously. Czech landscape research has therefore moved beyond treating historic gardens as bounded ornamental enclosures and increasingly reconstructs their relationships with wider estate territories. This approach is particularly important where later urbanisation, road construction, afforestation, or agricultural change has severed original compositional links. Preservation may require protecting a distant view or avenue located far outside the immediately recognised garden monument.

Lednice-Valtice provides the most extensive and internationally recognised Czech example of such landscape composition. Between the 17th and 20th centuries, the Liechtenstein family transformed a large South Moravian estate into an environment combining castles, parkland, architectural monuments, water, forestry, agriculture, avenues, indigenous vegetation, exotic plantings, and Romantic landscape design. UNESCO recognises it as an outstanding designed cultural landscape whose significance arises from the interaction of architectural, biological, and landscape features rather than from the castles alone. Its integrity depends upon spatial relationships operating across an area far larger than conventional architectural monument boundaries. The landscape also continues to evolve biologically because trees grow, die, require replacement, and respond to changing environmental conditions. Conservation can therefore never reproduce exactly the living material present at one historical date. Lednice-Valtice demonstrates especially clearly that landscape authenticity must accommodate biological continuity and professional renewal rather than demand material immobility.

The property also exposes potential conflict between cultural and ecological approaches. UNESCO documentation has noted tensions where nature-conservation priorities concerning vegetation do not correspond completely with preservation of the historically designed landscape composition. An ecologically valuable woodland succession, for example, may obscure a historically intentional vista, while removal of vegetation required to restore a designed relationship can appear undesirable from a purely conservation-biological perspective. Conversely, heritage managers cannot disregard biodiversity simply because a landscape historically served an aesthetic design. Cultural-landscape management therefore requires negotiation among competing values rather than automatic priority for either cultural or natural authenticity. Lednice-Valtice is important precisely because its value arises from centuries of controlled interaction between human design and living environmental processes. Treating culture and nature as mutually exclusive would misunderstand the heritage itself.

The Gardens and Castle at Kroměříž offer a more concentrated but equally revealing example. The Flower Garden preserves an exceptionally important Baroque formal composition, while the Castle Garden reflects later landscape-park principles and extensive living vegetation. UNESCO recognition in 1998 acknowledges the ensemble as a major contribution to Central European garden design. Restoration therefore involves not only architecture, sculpture, water systems, paths, and garden structures but plant material whose lifespan is inherently limited. Trees and hedges have to be renewed, lawns and flower beds require continuous cultivation, and water-management systems need regular maintenance. Historical authenticity in garden heritage is consequently procedural as much as material. It survives partly through continued horticultural knowledge and through management decisions capable of reproducing historical spatial relationships with living organisms that are never physically identical to their predecessors.

The establishment of the National Heritage Institute's Methodological Centre for Garden Culture in Kroměříž significantly strengthened Czech expertise in this area. The Centre concentrates research and methodological work concerning historic gardens, parks, and related designed landscapes and provides guidance to professionals, owners, managers, and the wider public. Its publications address paths, container plants, wintering structures, lawns, flower meadows, shaped vegetation, restoration of interwar villa gardens, education, and presentation. This breadth is important because garden conservation cannot be reduced to dendrology or architectural history. Soil, hydrology, plant health, horticultural practice, historical iconography, design history, visitor use, biodiversity, and maintenance resources all affect the survival of garden heritage. The Centre therefore represents an institutional bridge between cultural conservation and living environmental management.

Agricultural landscapes provide a different model because their historical form emerged through repeated productive activity rather than artistic design. Field boundaries, terraces, orchards, vineyards, grazing structures, ponds, drainage, farm roads, villages, barns, and processing facilities together preserve evidence of rural economies. Their heritage survival depends heavily upon continued agricultural use, which means that economic viability becomes part of preservation. An abandoned orchard can retain old trees temporarily but will eventually disappear without renewal, while a vineyard loses cultural meaning if vines are replaced permanently by another land use. Agricultural intensification can also destroy inherited spatial structures through field consolidation, removal of hedges, drainage, mechanisation, or replacement of traditional crop systems. Cultural landscape research

consequently has to understand farming as a dynamic heritage process rather than treating agriculture merely as a threat to historical scenery.

The Třeboň Basin demonstrates the extraordinary complexity of such productive landscapes. Its interconnected system of fishponds, channels, dikes, settlements, forests, and agricultural land developed over centuries through deliberate water engineering and fish production. The landscape today possesses simultaneous heritage, ecological, economic, recreational, flood-management, and biodiversity functions. Research into the Třeboň Basin has shown that this multifunctionality is precisely one of the reasons the historical landscape has survived so effectively. Pond systems continue to produce fish while supporting water management, ecological habitats, tourism, and cultural identity. Heritage preservation in such an environment is therefore strengthened rather than weakened when historically derived structures retain multiple contemporary functions. The landscape provides a particularly strong Czech example of cultural heritage contributing actively to sustainable landscape development.

Žatec and the Landscape of Saaz Hops, inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2023, offers another model of continuing agricultural heritage. The property connects rural hop fields and villages with the historic urban centre and 19th-century industrial suburb of Žatec, thereby preserving the full spatial chain of cultivation, processing, certification, trade, and social infrastructure. Hop fields with their distinctive poles and wire structures are not ornamental reconstructions but components of an active productive landscape. Drying kilns, warehouses, transport infrastructure, administrative buildings, and urban morphology make the relationship between agriculture and town visible. UNESCO recognises more than seven centuries of interaction between people, specialised cultivation, technological development, and environmental conditions. The property consequently demonstrates that living economic activity can itself maintain heritage authenticity when present-day production remains connected with historical landscape structures.

Kladruby nad Labem presents perhaps the clearest Czech example of cultural and environmental systems functioning as one living heritage complex. The landscape was shaped over centuries specifically for breeding and training ceremonial carriage horses for the Habsburg court. Pastures, meadows, fields, forests, watercourses, avenues, farmsteads, roads, and designed parkland were organised according to the biological needs, movement, feeding, breeding, and training of the Kladruber horse. UNESCO recognised the landscape in 2019 as a synthesis of an organically evolved living landscape and an intentionally designed one. Its functional authenticity remains exceptional because horse breeding continues within the same broad environmental system for which the landscape was historically created. Kladruby therefore demonstrates that cultural heritage can include an active relationship among human knowledge, domesticated animals, water, soils, vegetation, architecture, and spatial organisation.

This case complicates the conventional distinction between tangible and intangible heritage. The avenues and pastures are tangible landscape structures, but their meaning depends upon breeding knowledge, equestrian practice, animal behaviour, maintenance routines, and a living horse population. The landscape would become historically incomplete if the buildings and fields survived but horse breeding disappeared entirely. Likewise, the Kladruber breed cannot be understood fully without the environmental system developed for its maintenance and training. Cultural landscape therefore often functions as the spatial environment within

which intangible heritage remains possible. This relationship is especially important when heritage policy is divided administratively into separate tangible and intangible categories. Landscape research demonstrates that actual cultural continuity rarely respects such administrative boundaries.

Associative landscapes extend the concept still further because their significance may depend upon memory, literature, religion, or historical events rather than intensive physical transformation. The battlefield of Austerlitz is one Czech example in which topography, movement, historical interpretation, monuments, and collective memory produce a cultural landscape whose importance cannot be reduced to surviving architecture. Research by Markéta Šantrůčková and colleagues combined historical maps, archival material, land-cover analysis, and field investigation to identify military landscape values. Other NAKI work examined landscapes associated with St Procopius, the novelist Karolina Světlá, pilgrimage, cemeteries, and local memory. These studies broaden heritage beyond visible design and demonstrate that association can organise how society interprets apparently ordinary terrain. The landscape becomes cultural because historical meaning is attached to spatial relationships and repeatedly reproduced through memory.

Place names are particularly valuable evidence within such landscapes. Toponyms can preserve information about vanished settlements, land uses, religious associations, ownership, natural resources, routes, or historical events long after physical structures have disappeared. NAKI research used place names alongside maps and field evidence to identify historical cultural landscapes whose boundaries could not be reconstructed through surviving buildings alone. Linguistic evidence can therefore become a landscape-preservation tool. This also demonstrates why cultural landscape requires cooperation among historical geography, linguistics, archaeology, ethnology, cartography, and environmental research. No single source captures the full historical structure.

Historical maps became one of the central methodological resources for Czech landscape research. Stable Cadastre maps, military surveys, estate plans, forest maps, water-management records, cadastral documentation, and later aerial photography enable researchers to compare land use and spatial structure across several centuries. GIS allows these sources to be georeferenced and compared with contemporary conditions, revealing lost roads, field boundaries, ponds, settlement edges, woodland changes, or visual axes. Such comparisons transform landscape change from impression into measurable historical evidence. Researchers can determine not merely that a landscape ‘used to look different’ but which structural components disappeared, survived, or migrated. Digital methods have therefore strengthened the evidential basis of heritage arguments significantly.

Long-term Czech land-use research also shows how profoundly political and economic regimes have transformed the countryside. The 19th-century agricultural and industrial transition altered older land-use systems, while Czechoslovak land reform, wartime displacement, post-war population transfers, socialist collectivisation, industrial agriculture, and post-1989 restitution each produced distinct landscape effects. Collectivisation enlarged fields, removed boundaries, altered farm complexes, and reorganised settlement relationships in many areas. Borderland depopulation after the expulsion of German-speaking populations produced abandonment, afforestation, military use, and the disappearance of villages. Post-1989 suburbanisation, logistics development, road construction, and

commercial expansion introduced new forms of fragmentation around cities. Cultural-landscape heritage therefore preserves evidence of political history in spatial form.

The relationship between heritage and biodiversity became increasingly important during the 2010s and 2020s. Historical land-use practices can create habitats that would disappear if all human intervention ceased. Meadows may require mowing or grazing, orchards require pruning and replanting, fishponds depend upon water management, and open designed landscapes require control of spontaneous succession. Old avenues and veteran trees can simultaneously possess cultural, aesthetic, ecological, and habitat value. Traditional management can therefore support biodiversity even when its original purpose was economic or representational rather than ecological. Heritage preservation and nature conservation are consequently capable of reinforcing one another when management objectives are coordinated.

Conflict nevertheless remains possible because the two fields operate through different temporal and value frameworks. Nature conservation may prioritise spontaneous ecological processes, habitat development, native species, or minimisation of intervention. Heritage conservation may seek to preserve a historically designed species composition, open view, managed meadow, formal avenue, or artificial water system precisely because these features resulted from intensive human control. Neither approach is inherently more legitimate in every cultural landscape. The problem is to identify which values define the particular place and which management actions can sustain them together. The Czech system increasingly requires interdisciplinary decision-making precisely because cultural and environmental objectives can no longer be managed responsibly in isolation.

Landscape character provides one mechanism for addressing these relationships beyond formally listed heritage areas. Section 12 of Act No. 114/1992 protects the natural, cultural, and historical character of places and areas from activities reducing their aesthetic or natural value. The provision explicitly mentions cultural landmarks, harmonious scale, and relationships within the landscape. This enables environmental authorities to consider cultural spatial values even outside landscape heritage zones. It also creates an important connection with development control because new buildings, infrastructure, transmission lines, wind or solar installations, and other interventions can alter landscape character without physically damaging existing monuments. Heritage protection at landscape scale therefore increasingly concerns visual and spatial effects as well as direct material intervention.

The energy transition has made this issue particularly acute. Renewable energy is essential to climate mitigation, yet large solar installations, wind turbines, transmission systems, and associated infrastructure can transform historical landscapes and long-distance views. The National Heritage Institute's methodological position on photovoltaic systems explicitly acknowledges both the societal need to respond to climate change and the obligation to protect cultural values. The challenge is consequently not to reject renewable energy categorically but to identify locations and designs that minimise irreversible heritage damage. Landscape-scale assessment becomes particularly important because an energy installation can remain physically distant from a monument while dominating its historical setting visually. Czech heritage practice is therefore increasingly required to participate constructively in environmental transition rather than defend cultural landscapes through automatic opposition to technological change.

Climate change itself presents an even more fundamental challenge because many cultural landscapes depend upon biological components whose future survival cannot be guaranteed. Drought, heat waves, storms, altered precipitation, bark-beetle outbreaks, changing groundwater, new pests, and species stress can transform historic parks, avenues, forests, gardens, and agricultural landscapes. Replacing a dead historical tree is possible, but repeated mortality can alter composition more rapidly than conventional restoration planning assumes. A species historically essential to a designed landscape may no longer be viable under future climatic conditions. Heritage managers must therefore decide whether authenticity lies primarily in species identity, spatial form, ecological function, or historical design intention. Climate adaptation turns cultural-landscape conservation into a forward-looking science of managing unavoidable change.

Historic gardens have become particularly important laboratories for this problem. Their compositions depend upon living plant material deliberately organised through colour, form, growth rate, scale, and seasonal effect. Climate change can alter flowering periods, water requirements, pest susceptibility, and the survival prospects of historically characteristic species. Irrigation may protect design temporarily while conflicting with water-conservation priorities. Introducing more resilient species can preserve spatial structure but reduce botanical authenticity. Allowing uncontrolled adaptation, however, may destroy the historical composition altogether. Czech and Central European garden-heritage research increasingly treats climate resilience as a heritage-management question rather than an external environmental issue.

Water management creates comparable dilemmas. Historical landscapes often contain ponds, canals, mill races, drainage systems, fountains, irrigation networks, river modifications, and wetland structures created through past engineering. These systems may now possess ecological as well as cultural value and can contribute to contemporary flood retention or drought resilience. Restoration of historical water infrastructure can sometimes therefore support climate adaptation while preserving heritage. The Třeboň pond landscape is a particularly strong example of historically derived water management retaining multiple modern functions. Other situations require greater caution because recreating a historical water regime may conflict with present ecological conditions or settlements that developed subsequently. Heritage knowledge can nevertheless provide evidence concerning how landscapes managed water before 20th-century intensification and channelisation.

Blue-green infrastructure illustrates the increasing convergence of these debates in urban and historic environments. Contemporary planning promotes vegetation, permeable surfaces, water retention, shade, and ecological connectivity as responses to heat and flooding. Within protected landscapes and historic parks, however, such interventions must respect established spatial composition, archaeological evidence, historic materials, and visual relationships. NPÚ methodological guidance on blue-green infrastructure therefore treats environmental adaptation and protection of cultural-historical values as problems requiring coordinated design rather than separate agendas. This is representative of a broader change in Czech heritage practice. Environmental sustainability is increasingly becoming part of preservation methodology rather than an external constraint applied after heritage decisions are made.

Public participation is particularly important because landscape is experienced as everyday living space rather than only as expert heritage. Farmers, foresters, residents,

conservationists, tourists, municipal governments, landowners, heritage professionals, developers, and environmental authorities may value the same landscape for different reasons. One group may emphasise biodiversity, another agricultural production, another historical identity, another tourism, and another property development. The European Landscape Convention explicitly places perception and public participation within landscape policy, recognising that professional experts do not possess exclusive authority over landscape meaning. Czech research on landscape heritage has increasingly incorporated public awareness, education, and stakeholder perspectives into management frameworks. Successful preservation therefore depends partly upon making cultural landscape values intelligible to people whose daily decisions actually shape the territory.

Education can make these often invisible values much easier to recognise. A visitor can understand a castle as heritage immediately, whereas an old field boundary, fishpond system, avenue alignment, pasture structure, or distant designed view may appear unremarkable without explanation. NPÚ educational methodologies concerning historic gardens and parks demonstrate growing attention to active interpretation and public involvement. Maps, field walks, exhibitions, digital visualisations, and comparative historical imagery can teach users to read landscape as accumulated cultural evidence. Such literacy is important because public support for landscape protection depends upon seeing relationships that would otherwise remain specialist knowledge. Cultural landscape preservation ultimately requires society to recognise history within ordinary terrain.

The Czech national typology offers a particularly effective framework for this educational task because it demonstrates that landscape heritage is not confined to celebrated UNESCO properties. Fruit-growing landscapes, forests, vineyards, mining regions, pilgrimage territories, agricultural structures, fishpond systems, designed estates, industrial landscapes, literary landscapes, and military sites can all carry historical value. Such classification makes regional diversity visible without insisting that every example requires formal legal designation. It also allows municipalities and communities to recognise heritage potential before major change occurs. Landscape research thereby contributes to anticipatory cultural policy rather than merely documenting losses retrospectively.

The author's klironomical framework is especially relevant to cultural landscapes because it emphasises historicity, value, continuity, vulnerability, and the transformation of heritage through time. A landscape cannot be preserved through simple material conservation because its components include living organisms, ongoing economic practices, environmental processes, and changing social relationships. The author's distinction among conservation, restoration, reconstruction, renovation, and revitalisation therefore acquires additional complexity at landscape scale. Restoration of a historic landscape may require re-establishing visual or spatial relationships, whereas revitalisation may require renewed social or economic functions capable of sustaining those relationships in the future. Klironomical analysis is useful here precisely because it asks what cultural values must remain continuous even when material and ecological components inevitably change.

The concept of cultural heritage as a self-organising system provides an additional theoretical point of contact. Cultural landscapes are particularly clear examples of systems that emerge through repeated interaction rather than through one completed act of creation. Even deliberately composed estates acquire new ecological relationships as trees mature, species migrate, hydrological conditions change, and communities adapt their use of space.

Organically evolved agricultural landscapes demonstrate this process even more clearly because no single designer created their final historical form. From a klironomical perspective, preservation should therefore distinguish between change that maintains cultural intelligibility and change that destroys the relationships through which historical continuity can still be recognised. This perspective corresponds closely with contemporary landscape research that treats resilience and adaptation as compatible with heritage under carefully defined conditions.

The author's 2023 work on revitalisation is also relevant because it explicitly addresses heritage objects and structures that have lost harmony with changing environments and require reintegration into renewed landscapes and urban contexts. At landscape scale, revitalisation cannot be reduced to repairing one monument. It may require restoring routes, vegetation, water systems, vistas, agricultural uses, social functions, or spatial relationships among several heritage components. Czech projects concerned with designed estates, industrial territories, historic gardens, and neglected rural landscapes demonstrate the need for precisely this broader interdisciplinary competence. The klironomical proposal is therefore most productive as a theoretical framework for integrated decision-making rather than as a replacement for landscape architecture, ecology, geography, planning, or heritage science.

By 2025, cultural landscapes had become one of the strongest examples of research-driven heritage expansion in Czechia. The number of landscape heritage zones had increased from the first designations in 1992 to twenty-eight protected areas representing markedly different historical landscape types. NAKI research transformed this legal category into a much more sophisticated methodological system involving standardised records, monitoring, impact assessment, GIS, historical mapping, landscape typology, and public presentation. The 2020 typology of thirty-four historical cultural-landscape types created a national comparative framework extending far beyond formally protected areas. UNESCO recognition of Lednice-Valtice, Kladruby nad Labem, and Žatec demonstrated internationally three fundamentally different Czech models of cultural landscape: designed estate landscape, specialised animal-breeding landscape, and continuing agricultural-production landscape. Kroměříž further confirmed the international importance of Czech garden art and the preservation of living designed environments.

The principal unresolved challenge lies in governance across sectors. Cultural landscapes are shaped simultaneously by heritage law, nature conservation, spatial planning, agriculture, forestry, water management, transport, energy policy, tourism, property rights, municipal development, and private economic activity. No single institution controls all of these processes, and decisions beneficial within one policy sector can damage values protected by another. Effective landscape preservation consequently requires coordination rather than expansion of one authority over all others. The Czech experience demonstrates both the difficulty and necessity of this approach. The landscape itself integrates processes that public administration often separates institutionally.

In summary, the development of cultural-landscape research between 1993 and 2025 transformed Czech heritage protection from an object-centred model towards a territorial understanding of historical continuity. Cultural landscapes came to be recognised as systems in which settlement, agriculture, water, vegetation, infrastructure, architecture, memory, technology, environmental processes, and social practice interact across time. The landscape heritage zone provided a specifically Czech mechanism for protecting such relationships at

territorial scale, while the European Landscape Convention strengthened the integration of landscape into planning, management, public participation, and environmental policy after its entry into force for Czechia in 2004. NAKI research between 2012 and 2020 supplied the field with standardised documentation, monitoring, landscape-value assessment, specialised mapping, a comprehensive national publication, and a typology of thirty-four historical cultural-landscape types. Lednice-Valtice demonstrated that designed landscapes must be managed simultaneously as architectural compositions and living ecological systems, while Kladruby nad Labem showed that landscape authenticity can depend upon continued interaction among people, animals, water, vegetation, agriculture, and inherited knowledge. Žatec and the Landscape of Saaz Hops confirmed that a functioning productive landscape can preserve cultural continuity through ongoing agriculture rather than through cessation of economic activity, and the Třeboň Basin demonstrated how historical water and fishpond systems can retain ecological, economic, recreational, and resilience functions simultaneously. Czech research increasingly recognised that biodiversity protection and heritage conservation can reinforce one another but may also conflict where spontaneous ecological development threatens historically designed spatial structures. Climate change, drought, storms, pests, changing water regimes, renewable-energy infrastructure, and altered agricultural practices therefore moved environmental adaptation into the centre of landscape heritage management. The works of the author contribute a complementary theoretical perspective by interpreting heritage through value, historicity, continuity, self-organisation, revitalisation, and responsibility towards future states that cannot remain materially identical to the past. By 2025, cultural-landscape preservation in Czechia had consequently become not an attempt to defend historical scenery against environmental change, but an interdisciplinary effort to manage continuing relationships between culture and nature so that the historical intelligibility, ecological viability, and social usefulness of inherited landscapes can survive together.

Conservation Science, Restoration, and Heritage Technologies

Conservation science occupies the point at which cultural interpretation, material knowledge, technological diagnostics, and practical preservation become inseparable. Its object is not simply the damaged heritage artefact but the complete physical system through which cultural value survives materially over time. Researchers investigate what an object or structure is made from, how it was manufactured, which alterations occurred subsequently, which degradation processes are active, and how different interventions may affect its future behaviour. Chemistry, materials science, physics, mechanics, biology, engineering, imaging, information technology, art history, archaeology, and restoration practice therefore interact within the same decision-making process. Czech heritage institutions increasingly adopted this interdisciplinary model between 1993 and 2025, replacing the older assumption that successful restoration depends primarily upon artistic skill or inherited craft knowledge. Traditional skills remained indispensable, but they were increasingly supported by analytical evidence, condition monitoring, experimental testing, digital documentation, and explicit methodological reasoning. The result was not the technological replacement of the conservator-restorer but a substantial expansion of the evidence available before irreversible decisions were made. By 2025, conservation science had become one of the clearest areas in

which Czech cultural-heritage preservation operated simultaneously as humanities research, experimental science, skilled professional practice, and applied technological innovation.

The distinction among preventive conservation, remedial conservation, and restoration provides a useful conceptual starting point for this development. Preventive conservation attempts to reduce future deterioration without necessarily intervening directly in the material structure of the object, for example through environmental management, safe storage, appropriate handling, packaging, monitoring, and risk reduction. Remedial conservation acts directly when deterioration has already occurred or when an object is structurally endangered and requires stabilisation. Restoration goes further by seeking to facilitate understanding, appreciation, or use of culturally significant material whose appearance or function has been altered through damage, loss, ageing, or previous intervention. In practice, individual Czech projects frequently combine all three approaches, but their objectives remain analytically distinct. Cleaning, consolidation, retouching, structural repair, reconstruction, environmental stabilisation, and preventive storage therefore should not be treated as interchangeable activities. The intervention selected must follow diagnosis of the heritage problem rather than a general desire to make the object appear newer, more complete, or visually attractive. Modern Czech conservation practice increasingly developed around this principle that the purpose and degree of intervention must be justified by the material condition and cultural significance of the particular object.

Czech law gives restoration of protected cultural monuments a specific professional status. Act No. 20/1987 Coll. defines restoration of cultural monuments or their components that constitute works of fine art or artistic craftsmanship as a set of specialised artistic, craft, and technical activities respecting the technical and artistic structure of the original. Such work may be undertaken only by appropriately authorised persons under the conditions established by Section 14a and related provisions. The Ministry of Culture issues restoration permits after professional qualifications and competence have been demonstrated for the relevant specialisation. This system reflects the recognition that an inappropriate intervention can destroy historical material even when performed with good intentions and high general craft competence. Restoration documentation also becomes part of the professional accountability surrounding the intervention because future specialists need to know what was found, what was altered, which materials were introduced, and why particular decisions were taken. The Czech model consequently links professional autonomy with state-regulated responsibility where legally protected heritage is concerned. Scientific and technological innovation therefore operates within an ethical and legal framework rather than giving conservators unrestricted licence to apply every technically available method.

The period after 1993 did not create conservation science in Czechia from nothing, because substantial scientific and restoration traditions had developed earlier. What changed was the scale of interdisciplinary cooperation, access to international research, instrumentation, university education, competitive funding, and methodological exchange. Analytical techniques formerly available mainly within specialised scientific laboratories gradually became accessible to museums, galleries, universities, Academy institutes, and collaborative heritage projects. European integration further increased researcher mobility and facilitated participation in international conservation networks and comparative projects. NAKI and later NAKI II and NAKI III created a particularly important national mechanism through which practical preservation problems could become subjects of sustained applied research. Czech conservation science consequently developed not as a single central institute but as a network

connecting chemical technology, mechanics, art restoration, museum conservation, architecture, archaeology, libraries, archives, and heritage administration. This distributed architecture became one of the field's principal strengths. It allowed highly specialised expertise to develop while preserving the possibility of interdisciplinary teams being assembled around particular heritage problems.

The University of Chemistry and Technology in Prague represents one of the longest and most distinctive institutional traditions within this network. A specialised Laboratory of Chemistry for the Restoration of Works of Art was established there in January 1974 following cooperation between the chemical university and the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague concerning causes of ageing and methods of conservation. After the reorganisation following 1989, the laboratory became the Institute of Chemical Technology of Monument Conservation, combining scientific research with university education. Its work created an unusually direct institutional bridge between chemistry, materials engineering, conservation technology, and art-historical understanding. From 2004, the educational dimension expanded further to include university preparation of conservators and restorers of selected artistic-craft materials alongside technologically oriented specialists. The institute's research covers natural and synthetic polymers, paper, wood, textiles, leather, parchment, stone, mortars, pigments, metals, glass, ceramics, and modern artistic materials. Such breadth is important because cultural objects are rarely composed of one chemically homogeneous substance. Czech conservation science at VŠCHT therefore developed around the principle that treatment requires understanding material structure and degradation before deciding how intervention should proceed.

The institute's research illustrates how deeply material science has entered contemporary restoration. Historical mortars and plasters are investigated in relation to binders, aggregates, soluble salts, porosity, mechanical behaviour, ageing, and compatibility with proposed repair materials. Research on stone addresses weathering, consolidation, surface treatment, and the consequences of introducing new substances into porous historical materials. Pigments and painted layers are studied through their chemical composition, interactions, degradation mechanisms, and response to cleaning or conservation agents. Work on polymers is increasingly important because 20th-century artworks and industrial products may contain plastics whose ageing behaviour differs fundamentally from that of traditional organic or mineral materials. Metal conservation requires knowledge of corrosion mechanisms, atmospheric exposure, alloy composition, and the behaviour of protective coatings. Conservation of paper, photographs, leather, textiles, and other organic materials similarly depends upon understanding chemical ageing, acidity, oxidation, biological attack, and environmental sensitivity. Conservation technology thus becomes a science of material compatibility rather than a catalogue of universally applicable restoration recipes.

University education in Litomyšl created a complementary Czech tradition in which artistic practice, conservation ethics, humanities knowledge, and scientific analysis are deliberately combined. Higher education in restoration developed there from 1993, and the Faculty of Restoration became part of the University of Pardubice in 2005. Its studios specialise in the restoration and conservation of artworks on paper and canvas, paper and bookbinding, stone sculpture and related materials, and wall paintings, sgraffito, and mosaics. The Faculty also contains departments devoted to chemical technology and the humanities, embedding scientific and historical reasoning within practical restoration training. Students therefore learn not only how to perform treatments but how to investigate an object, formulate a restoration concept, evaluate alternative methods, document intervention, and justify

decisions ethically. Actual heritage objects are incorporated into teaching under specialist supervision, connecting university education directly with preservation practice. Research projects extend this environment into such areas as Baroque grottoes, Renaissance sgraffito, stucco, modern public art, cemetery monuments, mosaics, and modern materials. Litomyšl consequently represents one of the principal Czech centres where restoration is treated simultaneously as artistic practice, technical intervention, scientific research, and critical heritage responsibility.

The Academy of Fine Arts in Prague represents another important educational and professional tradition, particularly in the restoration of paintings, polychrome sculpture, and related artistic heritage. Its restoration programme deliberately combines artistic competence with natural-science and humanities education because the conservator-restorer must understand the artwork as both material construction and cultural object. Students work with panel and canvas paintings, wall paintings, polychrome wooden sculpture, historical painting techniques, and specialised restoration documentation. Training emphasises authenticity, ethics, responsibility for cultural heritage, knowledge of traditional procedures, and familiarity with contemporary conservation materials and methods. The Academy's longstanding cooperation with scientific workplaces such as VŠCHT reflects the recognition that artistic judgement alone cannot establish pigment composition, material degradation, or the consequences of introducing new chemicals. At the same time, scientific data cannot determine aesthetic reintegration or the cultural acceptability of reconstruction automatically. Czech restoration education thus preserves a productive tension between empirical measurement and interpretative professional judgement. The collaboration between scientific and artistic institutions is one of the distinctive structural characteristics of the national conservation environment.

The National Gallery Prague demonstrates how this interdisciplinary model functions inside a major collection institution. Its Department of Conservation and Restoration provides continuous care for paintings, panel paintings, sculptures, works on paper, Asian art, and other collection materials rather than restricting activity to occasional spectacular restorations. Conservators monitor the condition of objects and the environmental and technical conditions of galleries and depositories, assess works before exhibitions and loans, and determine requirements for handling and presentation. Direct treatments are supported by a Chemical-Technological Laboratory and, where necessary, by collaboration with external Czech and international specialists. Conservation staff also participate directly in research projects, publications, professional conferences, and teaching. Material investigation can reveal historical painting techniques, earlier restorations, hidden compositions, changes of attribution, or the technological practices of particular workshops. Restoration within the National Gallery is therefore not simply a maintenance activity serving curatorial departments. It forms part of the institution's production of knowledge about the artworks for which it is responsible.

The National Museum developed a similarly integrated but materially broader system. In 2010, the Historical Museum centralised conservators and restorers within a dedicated organisational unit for collection care, and new restoration workshops began operating in the Terezín central depository in 2011. Subsequent reorganisation produced the present Department of Collection Care, incorporating specialist restoration workshops, a radiographic facility, and a chemical-technological laboratory. Eight materially oriented workshops address paper, silicate materials, metals, textiles, paintings, sculpture, furniture, and photographic

materials. The radiographic workplace makes it possible to examine internal structures, hidden repairs, reinforcement, corrosion, cracks, overpainting, and foreign materials without dismantling an object. The chemical-technological laboratory, formally established in 2018, prioritises non-invasive and non-destructive analysis through microscopy, infrared spectroscopy, portable X-ray fluorescence, visible spectroscopy, accelerated ageing, and related methods. Such infrastructure makes the National Museum both a custodian of collections and a laboratory in which material evidence can generate historical and technological knowledge. Conservation research consequently becomes inseparable from the museum's wider research mission.

The Methodological Centre for Conservation at the Technical Museum in Brno provides another national layer because it distributes conservation expertise beyond one institution's own collections. The Centre combines technological laboratories, methodology, teaching, specialist services, experimental work, conservation, and restoration. Its role is particularly important for regional and smaller museums that cannot maintain comprehensive scientific laboratories or employ specialists for every material group independently. Methodological support can address preventive conservation, material identification, treatment selection, storage conditions, risk assessment, practical training, and specialised technological problems. The Centre also participates in the long-running professional Conference of Conservators-Restorers, which helps circulate results and practical experience through the Czech museum community. Such professional exchange limits the fragmentation that might otherwise result from a highly decentralised museum system. National methodological support therefore acts as an infrastructure connecting scientific innovation with institutions operating under very different financial and staffing conditions.

The Institute of Theoretical and Applied Mechanics of the Czech Academy of Sciences added a particularly strong engineering and diagnostic dimension to Czech heritage science. Since 2000, the Institute's cultural-heritage research was strengthened by the European ARCCHIP Centre of Excellence project, which explicitly promoted interdisciplinary research into conservation problems. Later development produced specialised research capacities in Prague and at the Centre of Excellence Telč. The Department of Heritage Science investigates artistic monuments, historical architecture, settlements, materials, and cultural landscapes while developing non-destructive and minimally invasive diagnostic methods. Research addresses provenance, dating, archaeometry, structural behaviour, moisture, weathering, climate effects, biotic deterioration, historical construction technologies, preventive protection, and the management of historic structures. The Department of Materials Research complements this work through analysis of mortars, plasters, stone, bricks, cementitious materials, lime coatings, and consolidants. Czech conservation science thereby incorporates not only chemistry of movable objects but experimental mechanics and building-material research at a sophisticated scientific level.

The development of the Centre of Excellence Telč strengthened the ability to investigate heritage under controlled experimental conditions. Historical structures cannot usually be subjected to destructive testing simply to obtain scientific information, so heritage research needs specially designed experimental facilities and model materials. Laboratory work can test mortars, consolidants, coatings, structural components, environmental cycles, water penetration, and degradation processes before treatments are introduced into valuable originals. Results can then be compared with in-situ monitoring of actual buildings and monuments. Telč also provided a platform for interdisciplinary collaboration among

mechanics, materials science, conservation, architecture, and historical research. This research infrastructure contributed to the emergence of *heritage science* as a recognisable Czech scientific field rather than a loose collection of technical services for restorers. The institutional use of the Czech expression *památkové vědy* reflects precisely this attempt to conceptualise conservation research as a coherent scientific environment.

Diagnosis is the central methodological principle connecting these institutions. Before intervention, conservators need to distinguish symptoms from causes because visually similar damage can result from completely different mechanisms. Flaking paint may reflect binder degradation, moisture movement, salt crystallisation, incompatible previous treatment, mechanical stress, or several interacting processes. Stone disintegration may result from frost, soluble salts, air pollution, water penetration, biological colonisation, structural movement, or unsuitable repair mortars. Timber damage may involve insects, fungi, excessive moisture, mechanical overload, joint failure, or loss of cross-section. Applying a treatment only to the visible symptom can conceal deterioration temporarily while leaving the underlying cause active. Czech conservation science increasingly therefore treats diagnostic investigation as the foundation of intervention design. The restorer becomes responsible not merely for executing a technique but for understanding why that technique is appropriate to the particular material system.

Non-destructive and minimally invasive methods are especially valuable because examination itself should not consume significant heritage material. Visible-light microscopy can document surface morphology, craquelure, tool marks, fibres, corrosion, or pigment particles at different magnifications. Ultraviolet fluorescence and infrared imaging can reveal varnishes, retouching, underdrawing, compositional changes, or material differences invisible under ordinary illumination. X-radiography can expose internal structures, joins, nails, reinforcement, hidden damage, previous repairs, or differences in material density. Computed tomography extends this principle into three-dimensional internal imaging and can be particularly useful for archaeological ceramics, sculpture, wooden objects, and complex composite artefacts. X-ray fluorescence can identify elemental composition without conventional sampling in many applications, while infrared and Raman spectroscopy can assist molecular characterisation of pigments, binders, corrosion products, polymers, and other substances. The growth of portable instruments has been particularly important because large or immovable heritage objects can increasingly be investigated in situ rather than transported to a laboratory.

The NAKI II project implemented by the National Museum, the Institute of Theoretical and Applied Mechanics, and Charles University between 2016 and 2020 illustrates the integration of these methods into a unified documentation strategy. Its objective was to combine computer-assisted imaging and documentation with non-destructive analytical information in order to capture the greatest possible amount of reusable knowledge about cultural artefacts. Digital models could be linked with information concerning internal structure, surface topography, elemental composition, and humanities-based historical interpretation. Methods included three-dimensional modelling, photometric stereo, computer tomography, digital imaging, and non-destructive material analysis. This approach is significant because heritage documentation had traditionally been distributed across photographs, written reports, laboratory records, drawings, and separate databases. Integrating different forms of evidence makes later comparison and re-analysis considerably more powerful. Conservation

technology thus becomes part of a digital information architecture rather than merely a set of instruments used during one restoration campaign.

Material analysis is particularly valuable when earlier treatments are themselves part of the problem. 20th-century restoration introduced waxes, synthetic resins, cements, adhesives, coatings, biocides, consolidants, and other materials whose long-term ageing behaviour was not always understood at the time of application. Some treatments subsequently discoloured, became insoluble, trapped moisture, altered permeability, or created mechanical differences between original and repaired material. Modern conservation therefore frequently has to distinguish original substances from historical repairs and more recent restoration materials before selecting a new intervention. Analytical chemistry helps reconstruct this treatment history, while archival restoration reports can explain when and why particular products were used. Earlier restoration should not automatically be removed because it may itself have acquired historical significance, but its effects have to be evaluated critically. Czech conservation science consequently investigates the history of preservation as part of the material biography of heritage.

Stone, mortar, plaster, and wall painting form one of the strongest areas of Czech materials research. Historic mineral materials are porous systems whose behaviour depends upon pore structure, moisture, soluble salts, binders, aggregates, surface treatments, temperature, and surrounding construction. Repair mortars that are mechanically stronger or less permeable than historical masonry can transfer stress and moisture into original material, causing damage rather than preventing it. Researchers at VŠCHT, ÚTAM, the National Heritage Institute, and the Faculty of Restoration therefore examine compatibility rather than assuming that modern high-performance materials are automatically superior. Lime technologies receive particular attention because understanding historical lime mortars and coatings can support repairs chemically and mechanically closer to original building systems. Injection grouts, consolidants, artificial stone, and protective treatments can be developed and tested experimentally before use. Conservation science thereby revalues historical construction knowledge through contemporary materials analysis rather than opposing tradition and innovation.

Wooden structures present a comparable need for specialised diagnosis. Historic roof trusses, ceilings, floors, timber walls, carved elements, panels, and structural joints can contain evidence of forestry, transport, carpentry, assembly, repair, and building chronology. Dendrochronology can establish felling dates and sometimes provenance, while anatomical analysis assists species identification. Mechanical diagnosis must determine whether biological damage or cracking has actually reduced structural capacity sufficiently to require intervention. The Wood Diagnostics Laboratory at ÚTAM develops methods that seek to minimise unnecessary removal of historical timber while still ensuring structural safety. This is particularly important because visually damaged wood may retain substantial load-bearing capacity, whereas apparently sound timber can conceal internal deterioration. Conservation technology therefore supports the principle that diagnosis should precede replacement, allowing authentic historical material to remain wherever its performance can be demonstrated adequately.

Metal conservation illustrates a different range of degradation processes. Iron, copper alloys, lead, silver, tin, and other metals respond differently to oxygen, moisture, pollutants, salts, burial environments, and contact with dissimilar materials. Corrosion layers may contain

valuable technological information and should not automatically be removed completely during cleaning. Archaeological metals can become unstable after excavation when environmental conditions change suddenly, while outdoor monuments face continuing exposure to rain, atmospheric pollution, temperature cycles, and biological deposits. VŠCHT's research includes corrosion engineering and methodologies for assessing and conserving historically significant metals, including lead. The Technical Museum in Brno adds experimental and practical expertise particularly relevant to technical and industrial objects. Successful treatment therefore requires distinguishing destructive active corrosion from stable surface layers that form part of the historical object.

Paper, parchment, books, photographic materials, and film create another specialised technological environment. Their degradation can involve acidity, oxidation, hydrolysis, light damage, mould, mechanical stress, unstable dyes, adhesives, gelatin, cellulose acetate, nitrate films, or interaction among composite materials. The National Museum Library and other Czech memory institutions therefore combine preventive climate management with specialised conservation laboratories capable of individual treatment. VŠCHT has developed methodologies concerning disinfection of photographic materials with different light-sensitive layers and conservation of other organic heritage materials. The Faculty of Restoration in Litomyšl provides specialised training in paper, bookbinding, archival documents, paintings on paper, and related media. Treatment decisions must preserve both informational content and the physical evidence of historical manufacture, binding, repair, annotation, or use. A book should therefore not be restored simply into a visually perfect object if doing so destroys evidence contained in its binding structure or historical alterations.

Glass, ceramics, and mosaics similarly demonstrate how traditional materials require modern scientific investigation. Historical glass can suffer from chemical instability, surface corrosion, cracking, devitrification, or interactions with burial environments, while archaeological glass may change rapidly after excavation. Mosaics combine glass, stone, mortar, metal supports, and environmental exposure within complex composite systems. Czech research projects between VŠCHT, the Faculty of Restoration, and other institutions have investigated medieval glass, the Last Judgement mosaic, and 20th-century Czech glass-and-stone mosaics. Experimental work can identify original materials, analyse deterioration, test cleaning methods, develop compatible repair mortars, and evaluate protective strategies. Such projects show that restoration of a visually unified artwork may require several different material-science disciplines simultaneously. The conservator must therefore coordinate interventions so that treatment beneficial to one component does not damage another.

Modern and contemporary materials expanded conservation science into fields for which traditional restoration knowledge offered few precedents. 20th-century artists and designers used plastics, synthetic paints, foams, industrial adhesives, composite boards, rubber, photographic emulsions, electronics, and mass-produced components whose expected lifespan could be far shorter than that of stone or oil painting. Manufacturers rarely designed such materials for centuries of preservation, and commercial formulations may have changed without detailed documentation. Plastics can yellow, embrittle, soften, exude additives, shrink, or become sticky in ways that are difficult or impossible to reverse. Replacement of an industrial component may preserve function but compromise material authenticity, while retaining the original may eventually make operation impossible. Czech conservation research increasingly engaged with these challenges through studies of modern public art, 20th-century architecture, synthetic polymers, photography, and industrial design. Heritage technology

consequently had to expand from preserving historically familiar materials towards managing deliberately experimental and rapidly ageing ones.

Preventive conservation became one of the most consequential advances precisely because direct restoration cannot compensate indefinitely for unsuitable environments. Relative humidity, temperature, light, ultraviolet radiation, pollutants, dust, pests, vibration, handling, and storage materials all influence deterioration rates. Historically, museums sometimes pursued narrow environmental set points without sufficient consideration of the actual sensitivity of individual collections or the energy costs required to maintain them. More recent conservation increasingly applies risk-based approaches in which environmental stability, object vulnerability, building characteristics, energy use, and available resources are evaluated together. Continuous sensors can reveal short-term fluctuations and seasonal trends that occasional manual readings miss. Condition surveys help institutions prioritise limited resources towards objects or spaces where the risk of loss is greatest. Preventive conservation therefore shifts professional attention from repairing individual damage towards managing the probability of deterioration across entire collections and buildings.

Disaster and climate risk strengthened this preventive orientation further. The catastrophic Czech floods of 2002 demonstrated how rapidly water can overwhelm libraries, archives, museums, and historic structures, making emergency planning a central component of preservation. Fire, technical failure, theft, mould outbreaks, storms, heat waves, drought, and biological attack create different but similarly systemic risks. Climate change complicates predictions because environmental conditions that supported heritage stability during the 20th century may not continue unchanged. Historic structures may experience new moisture regimes, thermal stresses, wind-driven rain, biological colonisation, and extreme weather. ÚTAM research explicitly examines weathering, moisture propagation, climatic effects, and global risks affecting cultural heritage. Heritage technology therefore increasingly includes monitoring, prediction, preparedness, and resilience rather than only treatment after damage has occurred.

New conservation materials can provide important advantages, but innovation also creates ethical and scientific obligations. Nanomaterials, lime-based nanoparticles, new consolidants, protective coatings, gels, and advanced cleaning systems can penetrate or interact with heritage materials in ways impossible for older treatments. Czech-Austrian cooperation involving the Faculty of Restoration investigated nanomaterials for sustainable conservation of Leitha limestone, while ÚTAM research has explored innovative lime and calcium-carbonate systems for architectural conservation. Such technologies may improve consolidation or compatibility when conventional materials perform poorly. Their long-term behaviour, retreatability, visual impact, transport within porous materials, and interaction with salts or moisture nevertheless require careful evaluation. Heritage objects should not function as uncontrolled experimental substrates simply because a new technology appears promising. Conservation science is strongest when innovation is preceded by laboratory testing, model ageing, pilot application, monitoring, and transparent documentation.

Cleaning technologies illustrate this balance particularly clearly. Mechanical, aqueous, solvent-based, chemical, gel, steam, abrasive, biological, and laser techniques can all remove unwanted material under specific conditions. The same technique can preserve one surface while destroying another because selectivity depends upon material composition, deterioration, thickness, penetration, and previous treatments. Laser cleaning has become

increasingly useful for some stone, metal, and other heritage surfaces because energy parameters can be controlled precisely and physical contact can be reduced. The National Museum's acquisition of specialised laser-cleaning equipment reflects the broader entry of such technologies into Czech institutional practice. Yet a laser does not determine which layer should be removed or where cleaning should stop. Historical interpretation and microscopic examination remain necessary because dirt, patina, coatings, corrosion, and alteration products may have different cultural meanings.

Digital documentation has become almost universal across sophisticated conservation practice. High-resolution photography establishes condition before, during, and after intervention, while calibrated imaging allows changes to be compared more reliably over time. Photogrammetry and laser scanning can create geometrically precise three-dimensional models of buildings, sculptures, archaeological objects, and complex surfaces. Reflectance Transformation Imaging can make shallow relief, inscriptions, tool marks, surface wear, and other features more legible through interactively controlled illumination. Three-dimensional microscopy and profilometry allow microtopography to be measured rather than described only qualitatively. HBIM and related digital models increasingly connect spatial geometry with information concerning materials, construction phases, damage, interventions, and monitoring. Digital documentation therefore changes restoration from a largely narrative report into a potentially reusable research dataset.

The expansion of such tools should not be confused with the creation of a digital substitute for the original. A three-dimensional model can preserve geometry but not the full material, chemical, tactile, mechanical, or historical reality of the heritage object. Imaging technologies are selective because every sensor records particular wavelengths, resolutions, scales, and properties while ignoring others. Digital reconstructions can make hypothetical lost states visually convincing even where the underlying evidence remains uncertain. Conservation professionals therefore need to document not only the model but the methodology, assumptions, accuracy, and evidential distinction between measurement and reconstruction. Czech research increasingly integrates humanities annotation with technological documentation precisely to preserve this interpretative transparency. The value of digital heritage technology lies in extending analysis and recording, not in eliminating the epistemic authority of physical evidence.

NAKI programmes played a central role in converting such scientific possibilities into applied Czech methodologies. NAKI I and NAKI II funded research concerning mosaics, architectural materials, industrial and modern heritage, digital documentation, historical construction, museum objects, archaeological finds, and numerous other conservation problems. NAKI III for 2023–2030 explicitly continues support for technologies of monument care, conservation, artistic craft, and the preservation of heritage threatened by natural and anthropogenic risks. One distinctive feature of these programmes is their emphasis upon applicable outputs rather than academic publication alone. Certified methodologies, specialised maps, databases, technological procedures, software, prototypes, and conservation techniques can become formal research results intended for professional practice. The programmes therefore shorten the institutional distance between laboratory discovery and heritage implementation. Czech conservation science by 2025 had acquired a national funding structure specifically designed to reward the translation of research into preservation practice.

This translation is particularly important because technologies do not become reliable merely through publication. A procedure tested on laboratory samples must still be assessed on real historical materials whose composition, ageing, previous restoration, environmental exposure, and internal heterogeneity may be much more complex. Pilot applications and long-term monitoring therefore remain essential stages between experimental success and widespread professional adoption. Methodologies developed by VŠCHT, ÚTAM, NPÚ, the Faculty of Restoration, museums, and other organisations help define the conditions under which particular treatments are appropriate. They also document limitations and risks, preventing specialists from treating innovative materials as universal products. The growing Czech methodological literature is therefore one of the most important outputs of applied heritage research. It converts individual experimental experience into transferable professional knowledge.

Ethics remains the final authority that determines how this technical knowledge should be used. Conservation science can reveal hidden layers, identify materials, model missing elements, predict structural behaviour, and develop powerful cleaning or reconstruction methods, but it cannot establish cultural priorities automatically. A technically feasible reconstruction may still be historically unjustified when evidence is insufficient, and a perfect cleaning process may be inappropriate if it removes culturally meaningful patina. Minimum intervention remains important because every treatment modifies material that future specialists may wish to investigate differently. Compatibility and retreatability are often more realistic principles than absolute reversibility, since many interventions interact permanently with porous, aged, or chemically altered materials. Detailed documentation becomes an ethical obligation precisely because later generations must be able to distinguish inherited substance from 21st-century intervention. Czech conservation science therefore reaches its highest professional level when technical capability increases restraint rather than encouraging more extensive intervention.

The author's klironomical framework is directly relevant to this relationship between diagnosis and intervention. His methodological work distinguishes cultural-value assessment, historical reconstruction, diagnostics, expertise, preservation design, and other stages through which knowledge should precede practical action. This sequence corresponds closely with the logic of scientific conservation, where analytical evidence is collected before treatment and intervention is selected according to documented value and vulnerability. The author's broader distinction among conservation, restoration, renovation, reconstruction, and revitalisation is also useful because technologically sophisticated heritage projects often blur these objectives in professional and public language. The material techniques appropriate to stabilising an original surface differ fundamentally from those appropriate to recreating a lost component or adapting an object for renewed use. Klironomy therefore contributes an integrative methodological vocabulary capable of connecting technical procedures with the philosophical question of what exactly an intervention is intended to preserve.

The work of the author and Anisiia Tomanek on digital graphics in cultural-heritage restoration is particularly close to the technological developments discussed in this chapter. Their 2025 study treats two- and three-dimensional software as tools for documentation, reconstruction, visualisation, analysis, and decision support across architecture, archaeology, and other tangible heritage. The authors emphasise the ability of digital models to record existing states, test reconstruction hypotheses, and communicate potential interventions before physical work begins. This is important because virtual reconstruction can make competing

interpretations visible without requiring irreversible modification of the original. Their approach corresponds strongly with Czech NAKI research combining imaging, three-dimensional models, non-destructive analytical data, and humanities interpretation. Digital visualisation becomes most responsible when it separates measured evidence from hypothetical completion and preserves the reasoning underlying each reconstructed element. Klironomical digital methodology therefore complements rather than substitutes for material conservation science.

The Czech conservation environment by 2025 was consequently characterised by an unusually strong connection between research, education, and institutional practice. VŠCHT provided advanced chemistry and materials-science competence, while the Faculty of Restoration in Litomyšl combined scientific analysis with intensive studio-based conservation training. The Academy of Fine Arts maintained an artistic-restoration tradition strongly integrated with ethics, art history, and technological research. ÚTAM contributed mechanics, building-material research, non-destructive testing, climate-risk analysis, and a dedicated heritage-science infrastructure. The National Gallery, National Museum, National Technical Museum, National Heritage Institute, libraries, archives, and regional institutions applied these methods within major collections and monuments. NAKI programmes allowed these organisations to form interdisciplinary consortia rather than remaining isolated specialist workplaces. The resulting national model is therefore best understood as a research network rather than one central conservation laboratory.

Important limitations nevertheless remained. Advanced analytical equipment is expensive, requires highly specialised staff, and is distributed unevenly between large national institutions and smaller regional organisations. Scientific analysis can generate more data than institutions possess the capacity to interpret or archive systematically. Digital formats, specialist software, and proprietary instrument systems themselves require long-term preservation if contemporary conservation records are to remain usable. Many heritage problems also require craft knowledge that cannot be replaced by instrumentation and may be endangered when experienced artisans retire without sufficient successors. Climate change and rapidly ageing modern materials continually create new conservation problems faster than established methodologies can be developed. Research funding organised through temporary projects may support innovation without guaranteeing permanent staffing or maintenance of the resulting infrastructure. The long-term challenge is therefore not merely to invent better heritage technologies but to sustain the institutional competence required to use them responsibly.

A further challenge concerns the environmental cost of preservation itself. Climate-controlled depositories, laboratories, transport, digital storage, chemical treatments, and intensive restoration processes all consume energy and materials. Earlier conservation practice often treated maximum environmental control as inherently desirable without examining whether the improvement justified its economic and ecological cost. Contemporary heritage science increasingly seeks proportionate environmental specifications based upon actual material sensitivity and local building performance. Passive environmental control, appropriate storage design, reduced transport, durable repair, preventive maintenance, and targeted monitoring may sometimes provide more sustainable preservation than highly energy-intensive technical systems. Conservation technology therefore needs to evaluate its own environmental footprint as heritage institutions respond to broader sustainability obligations. The most advanced technology is not necessarily the system using the greatest amount of equipment, but the one

achieving sufficient preservation with the lowest unnecessary intervention and resource consumption.

In summary, conservation science, restoration, and heritage technologies developed in Czechia between 1993 and 2025 into a mature interdisciplinary system connecting cultural interpretation with experimental evidence and professional intervention. The field built upon earlier Czech traditions but expanded substantially through post-1989 internationalisation, university education, new scientific instrumentation, European cooperation, dedicated research infrastructure, and successive NAKI programmes. The Institute of Chemical Technology of Monument Conservation at VŠCHT provided a particularly important bridge between chemistry, materials engineering, restoration technology, and heritage practice, while the Faculty of Restoration of the University of Pardubice and the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague integrated scientific and humanities knowledge with intensive practical training. ÚTAM AV ČR developed heritage science through materials research, structural diagnostics, minimally invasive testing, environmental monitoring, and the Centre of Excellence Telč. The National Gallery Prague and National Museum demonstrated how conservation laboratories can operate as research departments within collection institutions, while the Methodological Centre for Conservation in Brno distributed expertise throughout the wider museum system. Advanced methods including radiography, XRF, infrared spectroscopy, microscopy, computer tomography, photometric stereo, three-dimensional modelling, RTI, laser cleaning, accelerated ageing, and environmental sensing progressively enlarged the information available before intervention. Research into mortars, stone, timber, metals, paper, photographs, glass, mosaics, polymers, and modern composite materials established conservation as a science of material behaviour and compatibility rather than a collection of inherited recipes. Preventive conservation and risk management shifted attention from repairing visible damage towards controlling the processes that cause deterioration, while climate change, disaster risk, sustainability, and modern materials expanded the field's responsibilities. Digital documentation increasingly transformed conservation records into reusable research infrastructures, although physical originals retained forms of evidence no digital surrogate can reproduce completely. NAKI-supported certified methodologies and technological procedures strengthened the transfer of research into professional practice and gave Czech conservation science an unusually explicit applied orientation. The works of the author provide a complementary theoretical framework by distinguishing forms of heritage intervention and by connecting diagnostics, value, historical reconstruction, expertise, preservation design, and responsibility towards future cultural continuity, while his work with Anisiia Tomanek demonstrates how digital documentation and virtual reconstruction can reduce unnecessary physical intervention. By 2025, the defining innovation of Czech conservation science was therefore not any single instrument or material but the establishment of a decision-making culture in which scientific analysis, historical understanding, professional skill, technological experimentation, ethical restraint, and long-term monitoring increasingly operate as parts of one preservation process.

Digital Cultural Heritage

Digital cultural heritage constitutes one of the most rapidly expanding domains of contemporary heritage preservation because digital technology has changed both the representation of inherited culture and the types of cultural objects requiring preservation. The term encompasses several related but analytically distinct categories whose preservation needs should not be confused. The first consists of digital surrogates created from manuscripts, books, photographs, museum objects, films, buildings, archaeological sites, maps, sound recordings, artworks, and other analogue originals. The second consists of born-digital cultural objects, including websites, electronic publications, digital films, databases, photographs, audiovisual works, electronic records, software-dependent artworks, and other materials created originally within digital environments. A third category comprises digital documentation produced during research and preservation, such as three-dimensional models, spatial datasets, conservation records, digitised excavation documentation, technical scans, and structured metadata. A fourth consists of the digital infrastructures through which cultural data are aggregated, preserved, related, searched, exchanged, and made accessible. These categories overlap, but their preservation problems are not identical because copying an analogue document into digital form does not solve the preservation of either the analogue original or the resulting digital files. Czech heritage institutions between 1993 and 2025 progressively developed specialised systems for all four categories, transforming digitisation from a largely experimental imaging activity into a national preservation infrastructure.

The Czech Republic entered this field remarkably early. Cooperation between the National Library of the Czech Republic and Albertina icome Praha on the digitisation of rare manuscripts began in 1992, when digital cultural heritage was still an experimental concept internationally. In the same year, the National Library concluded an agreement with UNESCO concerning the preparation of a pilot CD-ROM for the *Memory of the World* programme. The resulting publication was presented in 1993 and became the first CD-ROM produced within that UNESCO programme. Further experimental work during the mid-1990s addressed image capture, data structure, platform independence, description, and methods of access rather than concentrating exclusively upon scanning. Routine digitisation began within the National Library in 1996, and Czech specialists participated actively in international discussions concerning technological standards for documentary heritage. The programme later developed as *Memoriae Mundi Series Bohemica*, connecting national written heritage with the wider UNESCO objective of preserving documentary memory. This early Czech experience established a principle that remained fundamental throughout the following three decades: digitisation is meaningful only when images are combined with structured information, preservation strategy, and sustainable access.

The *Memoriae Mundi Series Bohemica* programme developed this principle into a national mechanism for rare written heritage. Its purpose is not simply to produce attractive digital facsimiles but to protect and provide access to manuscripts, early printed books, rare modern documents, maps, and comparable materials preserved in Czech libraries and other collections. Selection takes account of both the vulnerability of physical documents and the scholarly or public value of wider access. Individual institutions can therefore participate while retaining custody of their originals, enabling digitisation to function through a distributed national collection rather than concentration of rare documents in one institution. The

programme became part of the Public Information Services of Libraries system as VISK 6 and continued operating throughout the period covered by this study. Its long duration is significant because digital heritage programmes frequently fail when technological innovation is funded temporarily without sustained institutional continuity. Czech written-heritage digitisation instead became an established component of national library policy. The resulting digital objects formed the principal content environment from which Manuscriptorium subsequently developed.

Manuscriptorium represents one of the most internationally significant Czech achievements in digital cultural heritage. Operated by the National Library, it functions as an international digital library and virtual research environment for manuscripts, incunabula, early printed books, historical maps, musical materials, and other forms of written heritage. Its importance lies not simply in the digitisation of Czech holdings but in aggregation across institutional and national boundaries. By 2025, materials from Czech regional museums, research libraries, archives, monasteries, specialist collections, and foreign institutions could be accessed within one distributed digital environment. The platform also functions as an authorised domain aggregator for written cultural heritage within Europeana. Individual partner institutions do not need to surrender control of their physical collections or necessarily rebuild their entire digital infrastructure in order to participate. Manuscriptorium therefore demonstrates how digital heritage can create a supra-institutional cultural collection without physically centralising the originals.

This aggregation model has important scholarly consequences. Historical collections were frequently dispersed through war, secularisation, dynastic transfer, collecting, confiscation, sale, migration, and institutional reorganisation. Manuscripts originally created for one monastery or library can now survive in several countries and institutions. Digital aggregation allows researchers to reconstruct relationships among dispersed documents without claiming that their physical separation should be reversed. Virtual collections can bring together related codices, textual traditions, book fragments, illumination schools, scribal networks, or provenance histories for research and teaching. The digital environment therefore creates forms of intellectual reunification impossible within the physical geography of modern collections. Such virtual reconstruction represents a distinct heritage function rather than a substitute for restitution or physical provenance research.

The Czech theoretical discussion surrounding Manuscriptorium also helped move digitisation beyond the notion of image reproduction. Zdeněk Uhlíř emphasised that the digital processing of manuscripts should be connected with codicology, bibliology, manuscript studies, cultural history, and scholarly interpretation rather than understood as a mechanical conversion of pages into image files. A digital image becomes substantially more useful when it is linked with descriptive metadata, structural information, identifiers, scholarly context, and interoperable services. Users need to know whether an image represents a page, binding, fragment, manuscript unit, later addition, or physically composite volume. Searchable relationships among records can support questions that would be impossible to formulate using folders of unstructured scans. Digital cultural heritage therefore becomes a structured research object rather than merely a reproduction. This principle later became fundamental across Czech libraries, museums, archives, and heritage information systems.

The Kramerius programme developed a complementary approach for modern printed heritage. VISK 7 was created as the national programme for microfilming and digital access to

documents endangered particularly by the degradation of acidic paper. 19th- and 20th-century newspapers, periodicals, and books pose a preservation problem very different from medieval manuscripts because they survive in enormous quantities and were often printed upon chemically unstable paper. High-volume digitisation therefore serves both access and protective functions by reducing repeated handling of fragile originals. The Kramerius software environment became the principal Czech platform through which libraries presented such digitised materials. Cooperation among the National Library, Moravian Library, Library of the Czech Academy of Sciences, National Library of Technology, and other institutions encouraged the development of an interoperable rather than purely local ecosystem. By 2012, new digitisation within the National Library increasingly entered the National Digital Library rather than the older Kramerius 3 environment.

The National Digital Library marked an important transition from isolated digitisation projects towards a large-scale preservation and access system. Its collections include books, newspapers, periodicals, maps, sheet music, and other Bohemical materials, especially from the 19th to the 21st centuries. Kramerius provides the user-facing digital-library environment, while preservation workflows operate at a deeper technical level concerned with archival files, metadata, validation, and long-term storage. Full-text searching creates possibilities for research that cannot be reproduced efficiently through analogue consultation alone, particularly across large runs of newspapers and periodicals. Optical character recognition allows individual names, places, concepts, advertisements, and phrases to be traced across millions of pages, although the accuracy of OCR varies according to print quality, typefaces, language, and historical typography. Digital access therefore adds analytical functionality rather than merely remote viewing. At the same time, the physical originals remain part of the preservation system and cannot be discarded simply because digital copies exist.

The Czech Digital Library extends this distributed model across institutions. Rather than storing every participating digital object centrally, it harvests metadata from digital libraries operating through Kramerius and enables users to search them through a unified national portal. The underlying digital documents remain within their source repositories and are displayed according to the access conditions established by the participating institution. The National Library, Moravian Library, and Library of the Czech Academy of Sciences divide responsibilities for content administration, technical operation, and Kramerius development. This structure creates redundancy of expertise and avoids dependence upon one institutional server environment. The Czech Digital Library also acts as a data provider towards Europeana, linking Czech documentary heritage with the European digital cultural space. National aggregation therefore operates as an intermediate layer between local stewardship and European discovery.

Digital preservation, however, begins where ordinary online presentation ends. A digital object remains available only while its files, metadata, formats, storage systems, identifiers, and software dependencies can still be interpreted reliably. Hard disks, optical media, servers, databases, and file formats all have finite technological lifespans, even though copying digital data can create an illusion of permanence. A website that remains visible today can disappear within hours, and an electronic document can survive physically as bits while becoming unreadable because its software environment no longer exists. Long-term preservation therefore requires planned monitoring, replication, integrity checking, migration, format identification, metadata maintenance, and organisational responsibility. Czech National Digital Library methodologies explicitly distinguish long-term preservation from ordinary

backup. Backup protects primarily against immediate data loss, whereas digital preservation seeks to maintain the authenticity, intelligibility, and usability of content across changing technological environments.

The development of national standards was therefore as important as the acquisition of scanners or storage capacity. Czech National Digital Library specifications define the data and metadata expected from digitisation workflows so that files can remain interoperable across institutions and over time. The standards draw upon international schemas including METS for structural information, MODS and Dublin Core for descriptive metadata, PREMIS for preservation metadata, MIX for technical image metadata, ALTO for OCR representation, copyrightMD for rights information, and related standards for particular media. Digitisation outputs distinguish archival master files from access derivatives because the format optimised for web display is not necessarily suitable for preservation. Submission Information Packages reflect the conceptual logic of the OAIS reference model and package files and metadata together for ingestion into long-term preservation systems. Such standardisation limits institutional dependence upon temporary proprietary formats and local cataloguing conventions. By 2025, digital preservation in Czech libraries had therefore become strongly standards-driven.

Metadata constitute the principal bridge between digital files and future intelligibility. Descriptive metadata identify what an object is, who created it, when it originated, and how it relates to collections or bibliographic records. Structural metadata record relationships among pages, volumes, issues, images, chapters, attachments, or components. Technical metadata preserve information concerning file formats, dimensions, colour profiles, compression, capture equipment, checksums, and other characteristics necessary for future processing. Preservation metadata document actions performed upon digital files, including migrations, validation events, software changes, and fixity verification. Rights metadata determine whether users may view, download, reproduce, or reuse the digital content. A digital image without such information may remain visually recognisable yet become scientifically unreliable because its provenance and processing history cannot be reconstructed.

Fixity is one of the most technically simple yet conceptually important elements of this process. Digital repositories calculate checksums or comparable cryptographic values that allow them to determine whether a stored file has changed unexpectedly. Repeated verification can identify corruption caused by storage failure, transfer errors, software problems, or unauthorised alteration. Copies stored in separate locations can reduce the risk that one technical failure destroys the only surviving digital master. Preservation systems also need records of which version constitutes the accepted preservation object and which files are derivatives created for access or processing. Version control becomes particularly important where OCR, metadata, colour correction, or reconstruction is improved later. Digital authenticity therefore depends partly upon maintaining a transparent chain of transformations rather than pretending that digital objects never change.

Born-digital heritage makes these problems substantially more difficult because no analogue original necessarily exists to serve as the ultimate reference source. The Czech Webarchiv provides the clearest early example. The National Library archives Czech and Bohemical web resources because websites change continuously and can disappear completely without leaving any physical residue. Its acquisition model combines broad harvesting of the Czech web with selective archiving of particularly significant resources and thematic collections

relating to major events or subjects. Archived web content is preserved as a component of national cultural heritage rather than treated merely as temporary internet communication. The system must capture not only HTML text but images, stylesheets, scripts, embedded media, links, and other components required for meaningful reconstruction of the historical web environment. Since 2007, Webarchiv has participated in the International Internet Preservation Consortium, placing Czech web preservation within a wider international research network.

Web archiving illustrates particularly clearly why digital preservation is not identical to saving copies. Contemporary websites depend upon external services, databases, dynamic scripts, video platforms, social networks, advertising systems, authentication, and interactive functions that conventional crawlers may capture incompletely. Content visible to one user can differ from content shown to another because of location, cookies, personalisation, or device type. Some pages exist only briefly, while others change many times per day. Social-media platforms restrict automated harvesting and can remove accounts or entire communication environments according to corporate policies beyond Czech heritage institutions' control. The archived web should therefore be understood as a historically constructed representation of the web rather than a perfect copy of every digital interaction. Preservation institutions need to document their selection and harvesting methods just as archaeologists document excavation methodology.

Copyright constitutes a further structural limitation upon access. Webarchiv may preserve resources that cannot legally be made freely available online without permission from rights holders. The complete archive is therefore more accessible within designated National Library environments, while unrestricted remote access applies principally to materials for which the necessary legal arrangements exist. Comparable limitations affect digitised books and periodicals in the National Digital Library. Czech solutions for works unavailable on the market substantially enlarged lawful remote use, but they still distinguish access from ownership and preservation. A document can be preserved successfully even where copyright prevents unrestricted public dissemination. Digital heritage policy must therefore resist equating preservation solely with open online access.

The National Digital Archive addresses another category of born-digital heritage: electronic archival records whose evidential value derives from administrative and institutional processes rather than publication. The Ministry of the Interior and National Archives officially launched the National Digital Archive project in 2011 in response to the increasing production of electronic records and the long-term requirements of Czech archival legislation. Its purpose is to ensure that digital archival records of permanent value remain authentic, accessible, and usable despite technological change. The National Archives contains a dedicated Department of Digital Archives and Digital Services responsible for the operation of the system, professional support, research, digital reproductions, and the National Archival Portal. Unlike digitised manuscripts, these records may never have existed as paper documents. Their preservation therefore requires maintaining evidential relationships, metadata, signatures, formats, provenance, and archival context from the moment of transfer.

This archival infrastructure continued to evolve through successive technological generations. The NDA II project expanded the original architecture to provide sustainable preservation and public accessibility, while the NDA III project initiated a further major modernisation during the mid-2020s. In June 2025, the National Archives signed a contract for a new long-term

preservation information system designed for digital archival records and digital reproductions. The project included storage infrastructure, migration, system integration, and long-term operational support rather than merely acquisition of more disk capacity. National Archives documentation explicitly recognises that long-term digital preservation cannot be solved through technical storage alone. Legal rules, organisational responsibility, metadata structure, archival methodology, access control, and future migration must form part of the same system. This position represents a mature understanding of born-digital heritage as an institutional lifecycle.

Museum collections created another major digital-heritage environment through eSbírky. The portal aggregates digitised collection objects from museums, galleries, and other memory institutions and enables them to be discovered through a common public interface. By 2024, more than one hundred participating institutions were already contributing digital collection content, illustrating the degree to which national aggregation had moved beyond the largest central museums. eSbírky also functions as the Czech museum-domain aggregator towards Europeana. The portal can present photographs of objects, descriptive metadata, related material, virtual exhibitions, and other interpretative resources without transferring ownership of the original collections. Digital aggregation consequently allows regional and specialist collections to become visible alongside national institutions. For research, this can reveal relationships among objects distributed across museums whose physical catalogues were previously difficult to compare.

The development of eSbírky 2.0 in 2024 also demonstrated one of the central lessons of digital heritage: digital infrastructures themselves age. The National Museum explicitly recognised that the existing platform had become increasingly unsustainable because of technical architecture, expanding data volumes, functionality requirements, and cybersecurity needs. Modernisation therefore aimed to preserve existing published data while replacing or substantially renewing the technological environment through which they were managed and presented. This situation is conceptually important because cultural institutions often imagine digitisation as a project completed when objects become visible online. In reality, every successful portal creates a permanent maintenance obligation involving software updates, servers, security, data migration, user interfaces, accessibility, interoperability, and staff expertise. The preservation of digital heritage therefore includes preservation of the infrastructure that gives digital objects meaningful access.

The National Heritage Institute developed a different type of digital environment through its Integrated Information System for Monument Care. The portal links the *Památkový katalog*, Geoportal, archaeological data, documentation resources, specialist libraries, and the Metainformation System containing digital documentation and associated metadata. The *Památkový katalog* provides digital access to information from the Central List of Cultural Monuments, while the Geoportal publishes spatial datasets and map services concerning protected monuments, heritage areas, buffer zones, landscape heritage zones, archaeological territories, and UNESCO properties. This integration is particularly important for immovable heritage because location and territorial relationships are themselves components of heritage information. A monument record without reliable spatial identification is insufficient for planning, conservation, risk assessment, or landscape research. Digital heritage management therefore increasingly depends upon geospatial standards as well as traditional descriptive catalogues.

The NPÚ information environment also demonstrates how digitisation can change public administration itself. Heritage authorities, planners, researchers, owners, and members of the public can access information that previously required consultation of dispersed card indexes, paper maps, specialist archives, or internal databases. Open spatial datasets allow protected territories to be incorporated directly into GIS analysis and planning workflows. INSPIRE-compatible services connect Czech cultural-heritage spatial information with wider European geodata standards. Digital systems consequently reduce the separation between heritage documentation and territorial decision-making. Their accuracy and updating procedures become legally and professionally significant because errors in spatial data can influence planning decisions. Digital heritage data therefore acquire administrative authority in addition to scholarly value.

Archaeological information systems provide a closely related example, although their disciplinary development was considered in Section 15. The Archaeological Information System of the Czech Republic combines fieldwork records, site data, documentation, spatial information, and digital research resources accumulated across different periods and institutions. Its significance for digital heritage lies in the preservation of contextual information that may become the only surviving representation of archaeological situations destroyed through excavation. Three-dimensional documentation, GIS datasets, photographs, plans, geophysical results, laboratory data, and excavation reports increasingly form complex digital archaeological objects rather than simple supporting illustrations. These materials must remain associated with identifiers and provenance if later researchers are to reinterpret them. Digital archaeological preservation therefore demonstrates especially clearly that research data can themselves become cultural heritage.

Three-dimensional documentation has expanded this principle into architecture, sculpture, archaeology, industrial heritage, and museum collections. Photogrammetry, terrestrial laser scanning, structured-light scanning, drone imagery, computed tomography, and related techniques can capture geometry at scales ranging from landscapes to microscopic surfaces. A three-dimensional model can support condition monitoring, structural analysis, virtual reconstruction, measurement, research, education, accessibility, and restoration planning. Repeat surveys allow deformation or material loss to be quantified over time rather than described only visually. Models of inaccessible or endangered sites can retain spatial evidence even when subsequent destruction occurs. Yet digital precision does not automatically guarantee historical accuracy because every model reflects decisions concerning resolution, processing, interpolation, missing data, coordinate systems, and visualisation. Responsible digital heritage therefore requires metadata documenting how a model was created and which parts derive from measurement rather than interpretation.

Virtual reconstruction illustrates the ethical importance of this distinction. Digital technologies make it possible to recreate lost buildings, archaeological phases, interiors, colours, machinery, landscapes, or works of art with extraordinary visual plausibility. Such models can test scholarly hypotheses without physically modifying the surviving original, which makes them powerful tools for conservation and research. Their visual realism, however, can conceal uncertainty if hypothetical components are presented with the same certainty as measured evidence. A reconstruction based upon fragmentary archaeological evidence may appear to the public as a factual photograph of the past. Scholarly digital heritage should therefore distinguish verified geometry, comparative inference, plausible completion, and imaginative

interpretation through documentation or visual conventions. Digital preservation acquires scientific value precisely when it records uncertainty rather than masking it.

Audiovisual heritage presents an especially complex transition between analogue and digital preservation. The National Film Archive preserves Czech film heritage from the earliest films of 1898 through contemporary production and explicitly manages photochemical, analogue video, and digital materials. Its collections contain film reels and digital files together with scripts, photographs, posters, documentation, metadata, and other contextual evidence. Digitisation provides a means of access and, in some cases, a protective measure because fragile originals need not be projected or handled repeatedly. Yet the NFA continues to preserve original photochemical materials after digitisation because future technologies may recover information unavailable from present digital scans. The relationship between analogue and digital therefore remains complementary rather than substitutive. Film heritage illustrates particularly clearly why the creation of a digital copy does not justify disposal of the source.

Digital film restoration further demonstrates the research dimension of digital heritage. The National Film Archive distinguishes routine digitisation from digital restoration because restoration requires extensive investigation into historical film and non-film sources before the digital image and sound are altered. Specialists determine how a film appeared and sounded during its original circulation, select the most appropriate surviving source elements, scan them, and then remove damage or contamination that can be demonstrated not to belong to the historical work. Colour grading, sound work, frame reconstruction, and image cleaning therefore require evidence rather than a general preference for modern visual perfection. Excessive digital cleaning can erase film grain, optical characteristics, photographic instability, or other material properties through which historical cinema is recognised. The digital restoration should make the historical work accessible rather than transform it into the aesthetic appearance of contemporary digital production.

Born-digital cinema creates a different preservation problem because the archival master itself may consist of files, codecs, colour-management data, digital cinema packages, project structures, and other software-dependent components. The National Film Archive therefore preserves contemporary Czech films as digital data as well as older photochemical materials. Legal deposit and systematic acquisition allow new films to enter archival care while their production context remains recoverable. File integrity, format migration, storage redundancy, metadata, and preservation of authorised versions become essential where no film negative exists. Video art and experimental audiovisual works can be still more complicated because playback hardware, software environments, screens, controllers, or interactive components may form part of the work. Digital audiovisual heritage therefore requires preservation of technological behaviour as well as content.

The national digitalisation initiatives implemented through the Czech Recovery Plan greatly increased the scale of this transformation during the early 2020s. Component 4.5 supported the digital development of libraries, museum and gallery collections, national cultural monuments, visual art and architecture, music, theatre, dance, literature, book culture, and audiovisual heritage. Funding could support scanners, photographic systems, three-dimensional technologies, software, storage, specialist services, and mobile digitisation facilities. The objective was not merely to finance individual websites but to enlarge the digital capacity of cultural institutions across sectors. The Ministry of Culture also issued methodological guidance for digitising cultural content in order to promote more consistent

workflows and sustainable outputs. By 2025, digitisation had therefore become a substantial area of national cultural investment rather than a collection of isolated institutional experiments.

This policy shift also revealed the importance of quality control. Large-scale funding can increase the number of digital objects rapidly, but poor technical standards can create files that are unsuitable for long-term preservation or future reuse. Insufficient resolution, uncontrolled colour capture, destructive compression, missing metadata, inconsistent naming, and undocumented post-processing can make repetition of the digitisation necessary later. Re-digitising fragile originals wastes resources and may increase physical handling risks. National methodological guidance therefore emphasises planning the purpose, standards, formats, storage, metadata, and access environment before mass capture begins. Digital preservation should start at the moment a digital object is created rather than after thousands of unsuitable files have accumulated.

Interoperability represents another central requirement. Czech digital heritage is distributed among libraries, museums, galleries, archives, film institutions, archaeological databases, monument-information systems, universities, Academy institutes, religious collections, and local organisations. No realistic national policy can place every type of heritage object inside one universal database without destroying specialist information structures. Interoperability instead allows different systems to exchange metadata and identifiers while retaining domain-specific knowledge. Protocols, open schemas, controlled vocabularies, persistent identifiers, application programming interfaces, IIIF, and European aggregation frameworks can make collections discoverable across institutional boundaries. Manuscriptorium's support for IIIF and its aggregator role towards Europeana provide a particularly clear example of this architecture. Digital cultural heritage therefore becomes increasingly networked rather than centralised.

Europeana has been particularly important in encouraging this networked model. Czech cultural institutions participate through domain aggregators rather than each negotiating independently with a European portal. Manuscriptorium provides aggregation for written cultural heritage, eSbírky for museum and gallery material, and the Czech Digital Library provides another major pathway for digitised library content. Aggregation places Czech heritage within a comparative European environment where a manuscript, painting, map, photograph, or publication can be discovered alongside related objects preserved in another country. This is especially valuable for Czech history because political borders changed repeatedly and culturally related collections are distributed throughout Central Europe. Digital infrastructure can therefore reveal historical continuities that modern institutional geography conceals.

Rights information remains essential within such interoperability. A digitised object may be physically owned by one institution while copyright belongs to another person or has expired entirely. The underlying public-domain work and the digital reproduction may also be subject to different institutional or legal claims depending upon the circumstances of creation and use. Researchers need machine-readable information indicating whether files can be downloaded, reproduced, modified, published, or used commercially. Unclear rights statements reduce reuse even where an institution wishes to encourage access. Czech digital heritage policy therefore increasingly has to treat rights metadata as part of technical infrastructure rather than an external legal note added after digitisation.

Long-term preservation also depends upon file-format strategy. Formats widely used today can become obsolete when operating systems, software vendors, compression technologies, or licensing conditions change. The National Digital Library consequently recommends preservation formats selected partly for documentation, openness, stability, and the likelihood that future systems will be able to interpret them. PDF/A and selected EPUB versions have been identified for electronic publications, while archival imaging workflows commonly rely upon high-quality TIFF or lossless alternatives and structured preservation packages. Format identification tools can determine whether files conform to expected specifications and identify risks within large repositories. Migration may later convert content into new formats when older ones become unsustainable. Such transformations must be documented carefully because digital preservation seeks continuity of significant properties rather than preservation of obsolete bits without usable meaning.

The preservation of software-dependent cultural heritage poses a much harder challenge than ordinary format migration. Digital artworks, interactive publications, databases, multimedia products, websites, games, and born-digital installations may depend upon particular operating systems, browsers, plug-ins, graphics libraries, hardware, network services, or proprietary software. Converting their files into a newer format can destroy behaviour that constitutes part of the cultural object. Emulation may therefore be more appropriate in some cases, reproducing an earlier technological environment so that software can continue functioning. Migration, emulation, documentation, source-code preservation, video capture, and hardware conservation can all become components of one preservation strategy. Czech institutions had begun confronting these issues by 2025, particularly in audiovisual, web, electronic-publication, contemporary-art, and archival environments, but no universal solution existed.

Web heritage makes this fragility visible to society particularly quickly. Election websites, political campaigns, news pages, cultural organisations, online memorials, personal blogs, emergency-information pages, and public discussions can disappear soon after the events that gave them significance. Thematic Webarchiv harvests therefore preserve not only stable institutional pages but temporal layers of public digital culture. A future historian of the COVID-19 pandemic, elections, floods, political crises, or social movements will require digital sources whose survival cannot be assumed simply because they were once publicly visible. Web archiving is therefore comparable in principle to earlier national-library collecting, but the scale and volatility of the source environment are radically greater. The archive must select and capture material while historical events are still unfolding.

Artificial intelligence and advanced computational methods began adding another layer to Czech digital heritage by the early 2020s. OCR systems increasingly improve transcription of historical printed material, while handwriting-recognition technologies can make manuscripts and archival documents searchable at scales previously impossible. Computer vision can assist image classification, similarity search, object recognition, damaged-text recovery, and processing of mass photographic collections. Machine learning can support metadata enrichment or identify patterns within large digitised corpora. These technologies have considerable research value, but automatically generated results should not be confused with authoritative heritage metadata without validation. Historical typefaces, multilingual collections, damaged documents, abbreviations, non-standard handwriting, and culturally specific imagery can produce systematic errors.

Generative artificial intelligence raises even more complex questions. A system can reconstruct missing visual elements, colourise historical images, generate plausible architectural states, restore damaged sound, or create synthetic representations of historical persons and environments. Such outputs may be useful for hypothesis testing and public interpretation, but they can also blur the distinction between documentary evidence and probabilistic invention. Digital heritage therefore requires provenance mechanisms capable of recording whether content derives from original capture, deterministic processing, scholarly reconstruction, or generative synthesis. The more visually persuasive artificial reconstructions become, the greater the need for transparent methodological disclosure. Authenticity in the age of AI increasingly depends upon traceable data lineage.

Cybersecurity became equally fundamental because digital heritage infrastructure constitutes a valuable and vulnerable information resource. Ransomware, unauthorised access, accidental deletion, corrupted databases, compromised credentials, malicious modification, or attacks upon institutional servers can threaten years of digitisation work. Cultural organisations historically concentrated security resources upon physical buildings, collection theft, fire, and environmental risk, but digital preservation requires an additional security culture. Network segmentation, controlled permissions, backups, geographically separated preservation copies, integrity monitoring, software patching, incident response, and staff training become part of heritage stewardship. The eSbírky 2.0 modernisation explicitly identified cybersecurity among the reasons why the earlier technical architecture could no longer remain sustainable. A digital heritage object preserved only on an accessible but insecure platform cannot be considered safely preserved.

Institutional sustainability may ultimately be more difficult than technical preservation. Digital projects often receive investment for scanning equipment, a new portal, or a three-year research programme while long-term staff, server replacement, software development, storage growth, and metadata maintenance remain less visible in budgets. Successful digitisation increases rather than decreases future costs because every new digital object generates a permanent obligation for storage, verification, migration, rights management, user support, and technological renewal. Staff expertise is equally important because complex systems cannot be maintained simply through hardware procurement. Librarians, archivists, museum curators, conservators, IT specialists, developers, data stewards, photographers, metadata experts, cybersecurity personnel, and researchers increasingly work together within digital preservation teams. The sustainability of digital heritage therefore depends upon institutional continuity comparable to that required by physical collections.

The uneven capacity of cultural institutions creates a related structural risk. National organisations can maintain specialised departments, storage infrastructure, laboratories, and software development teams that small municipal museums, archives, libraries, or independent organisations cannot reproduce. If digital preservation depends exclusively upon local capacity, large portions of regional heritage can remain technically disadvantaged. Czech aggregation and methodological systems partly address this problem by allowing institutions to contribute to Manuscriptorium, eSbírky, Kramerius networks, Europeana, and other shared infrastructures. National programmes can also finance equipment or external digitisation services that smaller organisations could not otherwise afford. Shared standards make it easier for locally created content to enter larger preservation systems later. The Czech digital-heritage model is therefore strongest where central methodological infrastructure supports decentralised cultural ownership.

Digital accessibility must also be distinguished from simple web publication. A collection may be technically online yet remain difficult to use because its metadata are incomplete, interfaces are inaccessible, search is weak, images lack alternative descriptions, or specialised terminology excludes non-expert users. Accessibility for users with visual, auditory, motor, or cognitive disabilities requires design choices beyond the digitisation of original material. Language also matters because Czech-only description can limit international use, while exclusively English interfaces can distance local audiences from their own heritage. Sustainable digital heritage therefore requires several layers of access adapted to researchers, educators, communities, and general visitors. Preservation produces cultural value most effectively when future intelligibility includes social as well as technical accessibility.

At the same time, universal openness is not always appropriate. Archaeological coordinates can facilitate looting, personal archival records can contain protected information, sacred or community-sensitive materials may require restricted access, and 20th-century collections can involve privacy or copyright limitations. Human remains and culturally sensitive ethnographic materials raise further ethical concerns when digitisation allows global circulation detached from the original institutional context. Digital access therefore requires graduated permissions rather than an assumption that every preserved file should be publicly downloadable. Czech institutions increasingly operate within this balance among open science, cultural accessibility, personal rights, security, copyright, and professional responsibility. Digital heritage makes these ethical choices more visible because online publication can transform a locally accessible object into globally reproducible data instantly.

The work of Alexander Buychik and Anisiia Tomanek on digital graphics in cultural-heritage restoration is directly relevant to the documentation dimension of this transformation. Their 2025 study treats two-dimensional and three-dimensional digital tools as instruments of non-invasive recording, analytical reconstruction, visualisation, restoration planning, and dissemination. They emphasise that laser scanning, photogrammetry, modelling, and graphic processing can preserve geometrical and visual evidence while reducing unnecessary intervention in fragile originals. Digital models can also test alternative reconstruction scenarios before any physical decision becomes irreversible. This approach corresponds closely with Czech heritage-science practice, archaeological documentation, monument survey, and integrated digital models developed through NAKI research. Its principal methodological importance lies in treating digital graphics as part of a preservation workflow rather than an independent aesthetic product.

Buychik and Tomanek's study of future heritage extends the discussion from digitised heritage towards born-digital culture. Their concept of anticipatory interpretation addresses the problem that some culturally significant digital objects may disappear before institutions acquire the historical distance normally used to determine heritage value. Websites, digital artworks, hybrid performances, online communities, software-dependent artefacts, and other contemporary forms can become technically inaccessible within a much shorter period than conventional buildings or museum objects. Heritage institutions therefore sometimes have to select what to preserve while the cultural process remains active and its long-term significance is uncertain. This problem is already visible in Czech Webarchiv, the National Digital Archive, electronic-publication workflows, contemporary audiovisual preservation, and museum collecting of recent digital culture. Klironomy provides a theoretical vocabulary for

understanding such preservation as responsibility towards possible future value rather than merely conservation of an already established canon.

Buychik's concept of cultural heritage as a self-organising system provides another relevant perspective. Digital heritage changes constantly through migration, aggregation, metadata enrichment, software updates, linked data, user interaction, and reinterpretation while still maintaining a claim to continuity with earlier states. The preservation goal cannot therefore be understood as freezing every technological characteristic indefinitely. A file may have to migrate to a new format, a database to a new platform, or a website to an emulated environment in order for its culturally significant properties to remain intelligible. The central question becomes which properties must remain continuous for the digital object to retain identity and evidential value. Such an approach corresponds closely with professional digital-preservation concepts of significant properties, provenance, authenticity, and documented transformation.

By 2025, the Czech digital cultural-heritage environment had therefore developed into a highly differentiated institutional ecology. The National Library maintained Manuscriptorium, the National Digital Library, Kramerius-based services, Webarchiv, digitisation standards, and long-term-preservation methodologies. The Czech Digital Library connected individual library repositories and served as a national aggregation point, while eSbírky performed a comparable function for museums and galleries. The National Heritage Institute integrated the Central List of Cultural Monuments, spatial data, digital documentation, archaeological resources, and specialist information through IISPP. The National Archives operated the National Digital Archive and continued major technological modernisation for born-digital archival records. The National Film Archive preserved both analogue and digital cinema and developed increasingly systematic digital restoration and preservation practices. Archaeological institutions created data infrastructures whose digital records can outlive the physical contexts removed through excavation.

The National Recovery Plan accelerated this institutional development by funding digitisation hardware, software, workflows, audiovisual heritage, library infrastructure, national cultural monuments, museum collections, and documentation in several artistic and cultural domains. Ministry guidance attempted to ensure that the resulting expansion did not produce incompatible or technically unsustainable data. This combination of capital investment and standardisation was particularly important because digital heritage depends upon interoperability and long-term lifecycle planning. The success of digitisation cannot therefore be evaluated simply through the number of files produced. More meaningful indicators include preservation quality, metadata completeness, discoverability, interoperability, legal clarity, infrastructure sustainability, and the ability of future systems to reuse the data.

The Czech experience also demonstrates that digital heritage does not imply dematerialisation of cultural preservation. Digitised manuscripts still require climate-controlled library storage, scanned museum objects still require physical conservation, and digitally restored films still depend upon carefully preserved source materials. Digital records themselves require physical servers, energy, cooling, networks, storage devices, replacement hardware, and data centres. The apparently immaterial digital environment therefore has a substantial material and environmental footprint. Sustainable preservation increasingly needs to consider storage duplication, energy consumption, hardware lifecycle, data selection, and the long-term value

of retaining very large derivative datasets. More data do not automatically mean more heritage if institutions cannot curate them responsibly.

The final transformation is epistemological. Digital cultural heritage is no longer only a new means of displaying the same historical objects that heritage institutions always preserved. Structured digital collections enable new relationships among objects, large-scale textual analysis, spatial comparison, network reconstruction, automatic image analysis, and forms of distant reading impossible within conventional physical consultation. Persistent identifiers and interoperable metadata can connect a manuscript with its bibliography, a monument with spatial data, a museum object with provenance records, or a film with restoration documentation across institutional systems. The digital object therefore becomes part of a knowledge graph rather than an isolated reproduction. Yet every computational possibility remains dependent upon the quality of the underlying cultural data and the scholarly decisions through which they were created.

In summary, digital cultural heritage in Czechia developed between 1993 and 2025 from pioneering experiments in manuscript digitisation into a mature preservation environment encompassing digitised and born-digital materials, national aggregators, long-term repositories, geospatial heritage data, digital archives, audiovisual preservation, web archiving, three-dimensional documentation, metadata standards, and European interoperability. The early cooperation of the National Library with UNESCO and the *Memory of the World* programme established Czech expertise in digital documentary heritage at an unusually early stage, while *Memoriae Mundi Series Bohemica* provided continuity for the digitisation and protection of rare written collections. Manuscriptorium transformed this experience into an international distributed digital library and Europeana aggregator capable of intellectually reconnecting written heritage dispersed among institutions and countries. Kramerius, the National Digital Library, and the Czech Digital Library extended large-scale digitisation towards modern books and periodicals while developing national standards for structured metadata, preservation packages, OCR, access, and long-term storage. Webarchiv established the Czech web itself as born-digital cultural heritage whose volatility requires active contemporary acquisition, while the National Digital Archive developed the archival infrastructure necessary for permanent preservation of electronic records possessing evidential value. eSbírky made museum and gallery collections discoverable across institutional boundaries and demonstrated through its 2024 modernisation that digital platforms themselves require continual migration, cybersecurity, and reinvestment. The NPÚ's integrated systems connected monument registers, digital documentation, archaeological information, and geospatial datasets, making digital heritage infrastructure directly relevant to conservation and planning. The National Film Archive demonstrated that digitisation and digital restoration should complement rather than replace original film preservation and that born-digital audiovisual heritage requires its own archival lifecycle. National Recovery Plan programmes between 2022 and 2025 substantially enlarged digitisation capacity while strengthening the need for common methodological standards and sustainable workflows. The work of Alexander Buychik and Anisiia Tomanek contributes a complementary klironomical interpretation by presenting digital documentation as an active preservation instrument and by extending heritage theory towards born-digital, hybrid, and anticipatorily selected future heritage. The decisive Czech achievement by 2025 was therefore not that cultural heritage had simply been placed online, but that digital preservation increasingly became recognised as a permanent institutional responsibility requiring authenticity, provenance, standards,

technological migration, legal clarity, cybersecurity, interoperability, and responsibility towards users and technologies that do not yet exist.

UNESCO, European Heritage Networks, and the Internationalisation of Czech Heritage Protection

The internationalisation of Czech heritage protection between 1993 and 2025 involved considerably more than the increasing number of Czech monuments, landscapes, traditions, and documentary collections appearing on prestigious international lists. It represented a gradual transformation in the way cultural significance was evaluated, documented, managed, monitored, communicated, and justified beyond the boundaries of the nation state. UNESCO conventions introduced concepts such as Outstanding Universal Value, authenticity, integrity, safeguarding, community participation, periodic reporting, and international responsibility into Czech professional practice. Council of Europe conventions connected monument conservation with architectural heritage, archaeology, landscape, planning, cultural routes, and common European memory. European Union initiatives added another layer through the European Heritage Label, Creative Europe, structural funding, digitisation, education, cross-border cooperation, and heritage-related research. International professional organisations such as ICOMOS, ICOM, Europa Nostra, and specialist networks created channels through which Czech experts could exchange methodologies and participate in wider debates concerning conservation ethics and heritage governance. Transnational nominations increasingly required Czech institutions to manage culturally significant places and practices together with organisations in neighbouring or more distant countries. International recognition thus became a mechanism of institutional learning rather than simply an instrument of cultural prestige. By 2025, Czech heritage protection had developed into a national system operating continuously inside European and global regimes of expertise, comparison, accountability, and cooperation.

The year 1993 was particularly important because the independent Czech Republic entered this international system through both succession and institutional reconstruction. Czechoslovakia had ratified major international instruments and had already participated actively in UNESCO and other cultural organisations, so the new state did not begin its international heritage relations from zero. The Czech Republic succeeded to the World Heritage Convention on 26 March 1993 and thereby assumed responsibility for cultural properties already inscribed during the final year of the Czechoslovak federation. Prague, Český Krumlov, and Telč had all entered the World Heritage List in 1992 and therefore became the foundational Czech World Heritage portfolio immediately after independence. This inheritance was significant because the new state's international cultural representation began with places already recognised as possessing value beyond national borders. Their continued protection required the Czech authorities to interpret national legislation through obligations arising from an international convention. World Heritage status consequently contributed to institutional continuity across the political rupture of 1993. It also established from the beginning that preservation of selected Czech places would be evaluated through international as well as domestic standards.

The institutional management of these international obligations gradually became more specialised. The Ministry of Culture developed a dedicated agenda for relations with UNESCO and international cultural cooperation, while the Czech Commission for UNESCO served as an advisory body connecting governmental sectors with the wider organisation. Czech interests at UNESCO headquarters were additionally represented through the country's Permanent Delegation in Paris. The National Heritage Institute provided much of the specialist knowledge required for World Heritage nominations, monitoring, documentation, and conservation of cultural properties. The National Institute of Folk Culture later became a principal professional body for implementation of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention. Libraries, archives, museums, universities, municipalities, regions, site-management organisations, and other institutions entered international heritage processes according to the type of heritage concerned. Internationalisation therefore did not create one centralised UNESCO office controlling all heritage activity. Instead, it produced a network in which international obligations were translated through specialised Czech institutions possessing different forms of expertise.

The expansion of the World Heritage portfolio during the first decade of independence illustrates how quickly Czech heritage became internationally visible. The Pilgrimage Church of St John of Nepomuk at Zelená Hora was inscribed in 1994, followed by Kutná Hora in 1995 and the Lednice-Valtice Cultural Landscape in 1996. The Gardens and Castle at Kroměříž and Holašovice Historic Village followed in 1998, Litomyšl Castle in 1999, the Holy Trinity Column in Olomouc in 2000, and Villa Tugendhat in Brno in 2001. The Jewish Quarter and St Procopius' Basilica in Třebíč were added in 2003. Within little more than a decade, the Czech World Heritage portfolio came to encompass medieval urbanism, religious architecture, aristocratic cultural landscapes, vernacular settlement, Renaissance architecture, Baroque monumental art, modernism, and Jewish-Christian urban heritage. This range prevented Czech international representation from being confined to one historical period or one conventional concept of national monumentality. It also required Czech experts to work with different UNESCO criteria and different concepts of authenticity and integrity.

The absence of new Czech cultural inscriptions between 2003 and 2019 is equally significant because it illustrates the increasing methodological demands of the World Heritage system. UNESCO nominations became progressively more dependent upon comparative analysis, clearly formulated Outstanding Universal Value, defensible boundaries and buffer zones, long-term management systems, stakeholder coordination, and proof that national protection could sustain the values claimed internationally. The World Heritage List itself had also become far larger and more geographically and typologically diverse, making arguments based primarily upon national uniqueness less persuasive. Czech nomination practice therefore had to move from demonstrating that a place was exceptionally important within Czech history towards explaining why it represented an outstanding phenomenon at global comparative scale. The preparation of nomination dossiers consequently became a substantial research activity involving architectural history, archaeology, landscape studies, conservation, planning, cartography, environmental analysis, legal expertise, and management design. International heritage recognition thus stimulated domestic professionalisation even where nominations did not immediately result in inscription. The long interval after Třebíč should therefore be interpreted not as a decline of Czech heritage activity but as part of a wider transition towards increasingly rigorous international heritage governance.

The Landscape for Breeding and Training of Ceremonial Carriage Horses at Kladruby nad Labem, inscribed in 2019, demonstrated this new level of conceptual sophistication. The property could not be justified adequately as a collection of attractive historic buildings because its Outstanding Universal Value derives from the relationship among horse breeding, pastures, avenues, forests, fields, water systems, architecture, transport routes, and landscape design. The nomination therefore had to demonstrate that the landscape itself constituted a historically coherent cultural system. Its continued authenticity also depends upon maintaining the Kladruber horse-breeding function rather than merely preserving visible landscape form. International recognition thus reinforced an integrated understanding already developing within Czech cultural-landscape research. Kladruby additionally demonstrated how tangible heritage, living technical knowledge, animal breeding, and environmental management can become mutually dependent within one World Heritage property. UNESCO inscription therefore supported an expansion of the Czech preservation paradigm from buildings towards functioning cultural systems.

The Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří Mining Region, also inscribed in 2019, marked an equally important shift towards transboundary heritage. The property is shared between Czechia and Germany and represents approximately eight centuries of mining, technological innovation, settlement, water management, metallurgy, and landscape transformation across the Ore Mountains. Its Outstanding Universal Value cannot be divided meaningfully according to the modern state border because mining systems, geological resources, technological knowledge, labour mobility, and historical economic networks developed across the region as a whole. Preparation and management therefore required sustained cooperation between Czech and German institutions, municipalities, specialists, and site managers. Transboundary nomination changes the politics of heritage because no participating state can define the historical narrative or management priorities entirely independently. The international border becomes an administrative reality inside a heritage system whose historical coherence often predates it. The Krušnohoří inscription consequently represents one of the strongest Czech examples of heritage internationalisation through shared stewardship rather than parallel national celebration.

The Great Spa Towns of Europe extended this model to a much larger multinational scale when the property was inscribed in 2021. Eleven spa towns in seven countries form the serial property, including Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně, and Františkovy Lázně in Czechia. Their shared significance lies in the European spa phenomenon that developed from the 18th century to the early 20th century through therapeutic mineral waters, urban planning, architecture, gardens, hotels, theatres, casinos, colonnades, transport, medicine, tourism, and elite sociability. No individual Czech spa town alone could represent the entire European system as comprehensively as the multinational series. The nomination therefore required a common comparative narrative, coordinated management principles, international communication, and continuing cooperation among towns governed by different legal systems. Czech heritage institutions became responsible not only for maintaining national components but for contributing to the coherence of a single international property. The World Heritage mechanism consequently transformed historically competitive spa resorts into partners responsible for maintaining a shared European heritage phenomenon.

Žatec and the Landscape of Saaz Hops provides perhaps the clearest Czech example of UNESCO evaluation functioning as an iterative research process. The first nomination, formulated primarily around Žatec as a town of hops, was deferred by the World Heritage

Committee in 2018. The Committee requested deeper research into the historical phenomenon of hop growing and processing and a reconsideration of the property's scope in relation to the wider agricultural landscape. Czech specialists subsequently reworked the nomination around the complete relationship between rural hop cultivation and the urban processing, certification, storage, and commercial system centred upon Žatec. The revised property included traditional hop fields, villages, transport relationships, industrial structures, drying and processing facilities, and the historical town. It was inscribed successfully in 2023 under criteria recognising cultural tradition, architectural and technological ensembles, and continuing interaction between people and environment. The case demonstrates that international evaluation can alter how a country conceptualises its own heritage by forcing research beyond an initially narrow nomination framework. UNESCO inscription was therefore the result of methodological revision rather than diplomatic persistence alone.

By the end of 2025, Czechia possessed seventeen properties on the World Heritage List, sixteen cultural and one natural. The cultural portfolio extended from medieval towns and religious monuments through vernacular architecture, modernism, industrial and agricultural landscapes, spa culture, and living horse-breeding landscapes. The natural component formed part of the transnational Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe. A further Czech Tentative List contained potential future properties such as the industrial complexes of Ostrava, Terezín fortress, Ještěd, the old wastewater-treatment plant in Prague-Bubeneč, and other sites representing increasingly diverse forms of heritage. The Tentative List is important because it creates a research pipeline rather than simply a waiting list for international recognition. Potential nominations require comparative scholarship, documentation, legal protection, management, and stakeholder agreement long before a dossier is submitted. The Czech World Heritage system therefore generates substantial research and planning activity even around sites that have not yet reached inscription.

World Heritage inscription itself does not conclude this process. States Parties undertake to maintain the Outstanding Universal Value for which a property was inscribed and must participate in periodic reporting and, where problems arise, reactive monitoring. Management plans, buffer zones, heritage-impact assessments, development controls, visitor management, environmental monitoring, and institutional coordination can all become part of this continuing responsibility. UNESCO and ICOMOS may request additional documentation or advisory missions where development threatens the attributes supporting Outstanding Universal Value. Czech authorities consequently have to explain major interventions not only through national heritage legislation but through the international logic of the Convention. This creates an additional layer of accountability that can strengthen preservation where domestic planning pressures are intense. It can also create political tension because international heritage expertise may question projects supported by local authorities, investors, or national institutions.

The Historic Centre of Prague illustrates this tension particularly clearly. Its World Heritage status has repeatedly generated international concern regarding high-rise development, planning regulation, visual integrity, management, and the potential effects of major projects upon the city's historic skyline and urban structure. World Heritage Committee decisions and advisory missions have required the Czech state and Prague authorities to demonstrate that proposed developments will not damage Outstanding Universal Value. Heritage Impact Assessment has therefore become increasingly important as a mechanism through which

potential consequences are examined before irreversible development occurs. The international process does not remove the planning powers of the Czech state or city, but it alters the evidential expectations surrounding decisions affecting a globally recognised property. Prague demonstrates that international designation can become a continuing negotiation among heritage protection, metropolitan development, infrastructure, housing, tourism, and architectural change. UNESCO recognition is consequently both an asset and a constraint because the symbolic value of international status generates obligations extending beyond ordinary local planning.

Český Krumlov provides another instructive case of reactive international supervision. UNESCO and ICOMOS have repeatedly examined the revolving theatre located in the castle garden because of concern about its impact upon the historical composition and Outstanding Universal Value of the property. The World Heritage Committee's 2023 decision welcomed the Czech commitment to remove the existing theatre after expiry of the relevant lease and requested Heritage Impact Assessment if a replacement project were pursued in the buffer zone. The case demonstrates that even a popular cultural activity can conflict with preservation when contemporary infrastructure becomes physically or visually dominant within a highly sensitive historical environment. International heritage governance therefore does not automatically privilege tourism or cultural programming simply because both generate public value. It asks whether new functions can be accommodated without damaging the attributes through which the site gained international recognition. Český Krumlov thus illustrates how UNESCO can influence detailed domestic conservation debates decades after inscription.

The internationalisation of Czech heritage expanded beyond tangible World Heritage through the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Czechia became a State Party in 2009, building upon the national policy framework for traditional folk culture established earlier in the decade. The Convention introduced a broader international vocabulary centred upon communities, groups, individual bearers, safeguarding, inventories, transmission, and living cultural processes. Czech nominations subsequently made the domestic safeguarding system increasingly visible internationally. Slovácko Verbuňk, Shrovetide processions in the Hlinecko area, the Ride of the Kings, puppetry, modrotisk, glassmaking, timber rafting, falconry, blown-glass bead Christmas decorations, and amateur theatre collectively demonstrated the diversity of Czech living heritage. International recognition encouraged domestic institutions to articulate safeguarding plans and community participation more explicitly. The Convention therefore shaped national practice even for elements never nominated internationally.

Transnational intangible-heritage nominations are particularly important because they weaken the assumption that cultural traditions belong naturally and exclusively to modern states. Czech and Slovak puppetry reflects a cultural field whose development cannot be understood solely through the separation of Czechoslovakia in 1993. Modrotisk links Czech practitioners with Austrian, German, Hungarian, and Slovak traditions of resist block printing and indigo dyeing. Falconry belongs to a still wider multinational network whose historical and contemporary practices extend far beyond Central Europe. Timber rafting connects communities in several European countries through related occupational knowledge associated with rivers and forestry. Handmade glass production was recognised in 2023 through cooperation among Czechia and several other European states possessing interconnected craft traditions. Such nominations recast national heritage as one regional

expression of a wider cultural practice and create structures through which practitioners and specialists can exchange safeguarding experience across borders.

The inscription of the Czech *Bearers of Folk Craft Tradition* programme in UNESCO's Register of Good Safeguarding Practices in 2022 internationalised Czech expertise in a different way. UNESCO was not recognising one particular craft as representative heritage but a Czech institutional mechanism designed to sustain traditional craft knowledge. The programme combines research, documentation, recognition of individual practitioners, public promotion, economic support, transmission, and collection of representative material. Its international recognition therefore presented Czech safeguarding methodology as potentially useful to other States Parties. This represents an important transition from receiving international recognition to contributing models of professional practice. Czech heritage policy became not merely the object of international evaluation but a source from which international heritage institutions could derive examples. Such recognition is particularly significant for a medium-sized European state whose contribution to global heritage governance depends more upon professional expertise than upon geopolitical influence.

UNESCO's *Memory of the World* programme provides a further international dimension through documentary heritage. By 2025, thirteen Czech or partly Czech documentary collections had entered the international register. They included medieval manuscripts of the Czech Reformation, Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian émigré periodicals, early university theses, Czech and Slovak samizdat periodicals, the archives of Leoš Janáček and Antonín Dvořák, historical cartographic collections, the Kynžvart daguerreotype, and multinational documentary ensembles. Three additional Czech-associated inscriptions were added in 2025, including cartographic material and documentation of Jewish settlement and wartime childhood. Documentary heritage internationalisation differs from World Heritage because the relevant objects are preserved primarily in libraries, archives, museums, and documentary collections rather than spatially defined monumental properties. Nevertheless, the underlying principle is comparable: national collections are interpreted as sources relevant to the cultural memory of humanity. The programme also reinforces preservation, digitisation, scholarly accessibility, and international discoverability.

Internationalisation additionally transformed the legal protection of movable cultural heritage. Czechia became bound by the UNESCO 1970 Convention against illicit import, export, and transfer of ownership of cultural property in 1993. The Convention places emphasis upon inventories, export certificates, control of illicit movement, institutional cooperation, return and restitution, and communication between States Parties. Czech domestic legislation concerning the sale, export, and return of cultural objects developed within this wider international and later European Union framework. The opening of borders after 1989 made such cooperation particularly important because archaeological objects, artworks, religious heritage, historical furnishings, manuscripts, and other cultural goods could move internationally much more easily than under the former political system. Protection could therefore no longer rely upon control inside Czech territory alone. The fight against illicit trafficking transformed movable heritage into an arena where customs authorities, police, museums, ministries, international organisations, art-market participants, and foreign governments all have potential roles.

The protection of cultural heritage in armed conflict provided another international legal and ethical dimension. Czechia became integrated into the system of the 1954 Hague Convention

and ratified the 1999 Second Protocol in 2007, strengthening the relationship between heritage protection and international humanitarian responsibility. For many years this field could appear relatively distant from ordinary Czech conservation practice because the country itself was not experiencing armed conflict. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 changed the practical meaning of this international framework dramatically. The Czech Ministry of Culture coordinated offers of assistance, and the National Museum sent conservation, packing, fire-protection, boarding, power-generation, and other emergency materials to Ukrainian cultural institutions. Czech authorities also cooperated with ICOM and ICOMOS in monitoring needs and possible further assistance. International heritage solidarity consequently became a practical Czech activity rather than an abstract treaty commitment.

The Ukrainian crisis also affected Czech heritage diplomacy during the country's Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2022. Czech cultural authorities raised heritage destruction in bilateral, European, and UNESCO discussions and participated in meetings of Central and Eastern European ministers concerning the protection of Ukrainian culture. The European Cultural Heritage Summit held in Prague in September 2022 addressed the defence of European cultural values directly within the context of Russian aggression. The resulting Prague Manifesto connected cultural heritage with democracy, peace, European solidarity, sustainability, and responsibility towards Ukraine. This episode is significant because internationalisation of heritage ceased to mean only cooperation under conditions of peace and became part of Europe's response to deliberate cultural destruction. Czech institutions thus operated simultaneously as beneficiaries of international heritage frameworks and as contributors to international emergency assistance.

The Council of Europe created a parallel normative architecture alongside UNESCO. Czechia ratified the European Cultural Convention in 1993, the Granada Convention on architectural heritage and the revised Valletta Convention on archaeological heritage in 2000, and the European Landscape Convention in 2004. These instruments strengthened integrated architectural conservation, preventive archaeology, the relationship between heritage and spatial planning, and the recognition of landscapes shaped jointly by natural and human processes. Their importance lies partly in addressing categories and processes that the World Heritage system does not regulate comprehensively at ordinary national scale. The Council of Europe framework encourages states to improve entire systems of conservation rather than concentrating resources solely upon internationally exceptional sites. The HEREIN heritage-policy system additionally provides a mechanism for comparing national legislation, administrative structures, and policies among European countries. One important limitation should nevertheless be noted: by the end of 2025 Czechia had neither signed nor ratified the Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, despite the increasing presence of participation and community-oriented approaches in Czech heritage practice.

The Council of Europe's Cultural Routes programme represents a more network-oriented form of internationalisation. Czech organisations participate in routes concerned with Jewish heritage, historic thermal towns, industrial heritage, the Iron Curtain, liberation, Reformation history, historic cafés, and other transnational cultural themes. Czechia became an observer in the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes in 2022 and a full member in 2023. Particularly significant is the Cyril and Methodius Route, certified as a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe in 2021. Its international carrier organisation is headquartered in Zlín, giving Czechia a coordinating rather than merely participating role within the network. The route connects sites associated with the mission and later cultural legacy of Cyril and Methodius

across Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe. Heritage is therefore interpreted as movement, cultural exchange, pilgrimage, education, and shared historical experience rather than a bounded national asset.

The European Heritage Label introduced another distinctive European scale of heritage recognition. Unlike the UNESCO World Heritage List, its central criterion is not Outstanding Universal Value but significance for European history, European integration, shared values, democracy, cultural exchange, and citizens' understanding of Europe. The first Czech property to receive the label was the Olomouc Premyslid Castle and Archdiocesan Museum in the 2015 selection. Kynžvart Castle was recognised in the 2019 cycle as a place associated with European diplomatic history, while Czech modernist estates in Prague and Brno became part of the transnational Werkbund Estates in Europe label. The 2023 cycle added Cisterscapes, a network of seventeen Cistercian monastic landscapes in five countries that includes Plasy, Velehrad, Vyšší Brod, and Žďár nad Sázavou on the Czech side. These examples are revealing because they interpret Czech sites primarily through their participation in European historical networks rather than through national uniqueness. The European Heritage Label therefore encourages a narrative in which Czech heritage is simultaneously local, national, and European.

Cisterscapes illustrates particularly clearly how this European approach differs from conventional monument designation. Its object is not one monastery but a transnational network of landscapes shaped through related Cistercian approaches to agriculture, water management, settlement, monastic economy, spirituality, and technological exchange. The project connects Czech monastic landscapes with sites in Germany, Austria, Poland, and Slovenia through shared interpretation and educational activity. Long-distance cultural routes and common digital and public programmes make relationships visible that modern national borders had fragmented institutionally. The label therefore acts as an incentive for networking, multilingual interpretation, youth participation, public education, and sustainable tourism rather than simply physical conservation. Such forms of cooperation are particularly important for medieval heritage because religious orders themselves operated historically through trans-European institutional networks. The European framework can consequently restore a historical scale of analysis obscured by later nation-state narratives.

The European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018 intensified this shift towards heritage as a shared European resource. The initiative involved thirty-seven countries and more than twelve million participants across Europe and promoted the principle that inherited culture should connect historical knowledge with contemporary participation and future responsibility. Czech institutions participated within a European environment organised around engagement, sustainability, protection, education, and innovation. The year's legacy extended beyond celebratory events because the European Commission subsequently developed a longer-term European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage. UNESCO and the European Union also developed a joint project encouraging young people and teachers to explore living heritage through education, with Czech and Slovak schools among those participating in follow-up activities. Such programmes influenced heritage internationalisation at a societal rather than purely governmental level. Europe became not only an administrative source of funding but a scale at which heritage education, youth participation, and common cultural responsibility could be conceptualised.

European Union membership additionally widened the financial and research environment in which Czech heritage institutions operated. Structural and cohesion funding supported the renewal and adaptation of monuments, museums, cultural infrastructure, and public spaces, while cross-border programmes facilitated cooperation in border regions. Creative Europe enabled cultural and heritage organisations to participate in multinational projects involving interpretation, digitisation, networks, education, and professional exchange. Horizon programmes increasingly treated heritage as a field for research into materials, climate, digital technologies, social participation, sustainability, and resilience. European funding also encouraged project-management skills and international partnerships that remained useful after individual grants ended. The relationship was not entirely positive because project-oriented funding can favour institutions already possessing administrative capacity and can generate temporary initiatives difficult to sustain permanently. Nevertheless, EU integration substantially increased the ability of Czech heritage organisations to operate within multinational research and development environments.

Europa Nostra provided another important bridge between Czech heritage practice and European civil society. Czech projects have repeatedly received recognition within the European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards, which evaluate conservation, adaptive reuse, research, education, citizen engagement, and professional leadership. The rehabilitation of the Baroque complex and gardens at Kuks received major European recognition in 2017, while the Steam Engine Brewery in Lobeč was recognised in 2023 for a long-term adaptive-reuse project combining heritage conservation with viable contemporary functions. Czech initiatives in education and technological cooperation have also appeared among European award recipients. Castle Jezeří entered Europa Nostra's *7 Most Endangered* programme in 2020, providing international visibility to a monument threatened by long-term deterioration within a heavily transformed mining landscape. These mechanisms demonstrate that European networks can support heritage through professional reputation, public advocacy, comparative expertise, and political attention even where they possess no direct regulatory authority.

Prague's hosting of the European Cultural Heritage Summit and European Heritage Awards ceremony in 2022 symbolised the degree to which Czechia had become part of the institutional centre of European heritage debate. The summit took place during the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union and brought together policymakers, heritage professionals, civil-society organisations, younger specialists, and European institutions. Its agenda connected preservation with climate policy, democracy, peace, social cohesion, education, and the war in Ukraine. This breadth reflects a larger transformation in European heritage thinking during the period examined in this book. Cultural heritage was increasingly presented not only as something requiring specialist conservation but as a resource relevant to sustainability, democratic identity, regional development, social inclusion, and international solidarity. Czech participation in such debates strengthened the connection between domestic heritage practice and wider European policy language. The internationalisation of Czech heritage therefore concerned the objectives of preservation as much as the methods used to achieve them.

Professional organisations produced a more continuous form of international exchange. The Czech National Committee of ICOMOS has unusually deep historical roots, having been founded in 1965 and becoming increasingly independent in professional orientation after 1989. Through ICOMOS, Czech specialists participate in international scientific committees,

heritage doctrine, advisory work, expert missions, and professional debates concerning monuments, historic towns, cultural landscapes, industrial heritage, and conservation methodology. The Czech Committee of ICOM was established in 1994 as the successor to the Czechoslovak committee, preserving a museum-network tradition extending back to the foundation of ICOM in 1946. Czech museum professionals therefore participate in international committees dealing with collections, conservation, documentation, education, ethics, security, archaeology, art museums, and other specialist fields. Such networks internationalise professional practice at the level of individual experts rather than governments. Their importance is especially great because international standards often circulate through specialist communities before they are translated into national policy.

The 26th ICOM General Conference held in Prague in August 2022 represented one of the largest international heritage-professional events ever hosted by Czechia. Thousands of museum professionals participated physically or digitally in a programme focused upon sustainability, digital technology, civil society, community building, leadership, and museum management. For the first time, an ICOM General Conference operated in a hybrid format on this scale, reflecting the post-pandemic transformation of professional exchange. Most significantly, ICOM members adopted a new international definition of the museum in Prague on 24 August 2022. The definition emphasised accessibility, inclusion, diversity, sustainability, ethics, professional participation, and work with communities. Prague therefore became associated not simply with hosting an international meeting but with a major normative change in global museum discourse. This moment also recalled the historically important contribution of Czech and Czechoslovak museology to ICOM through figures such as Jan Jelínek and Zbyněk Zbyslav Stránský.

Internationalisation became increasingly digital as well. Manuscriptorium, eSbírky, the Czech Digital Library, archaeological data systems, and other Czech infrastructures participate in international aggregation, standards, metadata exchange, or European digital environments. Europeana is particularly important because it allows Czech digitised cultural objects to appear within a continental discovery infrastructure without requiring physical centralisation of collections. Digital interoperability changes the meaning of international access because users no longer need to know which Czech institution holds a particular manuscript, photograph, museum object, or publication before beginning research. Common metadata standards also make national collections increasingly comparable and reusable across borders. This produces another form of heritage internationalisation in which technical architecture performs functions once dependent almost entirely upon professional travel and institutional correspondence. The digital environment therefore complements rather than replaces conventional international organisations.

Heritage science underwent a comparable Europeanisation through laboratories, research projects, mobility, shared instruments, and common standards. Czech conservation specialists increasingly participated in international research concerning materials, non-destructive diagnostics, climate risk, preventive conservation, digital modelling, and long-term monitoring. European projects create opportunities to compare historical materials and degradation processes across regions rather than developing treatments only from local examples. The establishment of the European Research Infrastructure for Heritage Science as an ERIC in March 2025 demonstrated the increasing institutionalisation of this continental field through shared access to archives, mobile instrumentation, fixed laboratories, and digital research tools. Czechia was not among the eleven founding members of E-RIHS ERIC in 2025,

so it would be incorrect to present the infrastructure as a Czech national network at that date. Its creation nevertheless indicates the European research environment within which Czech heritage science increasingly operates and identifies a potential direction for deeper future integration. Internationalisation should therefore be evaluated not only through memberships already achieved but through the infrastructures reshaping the professional field around Czech institutions.

The growth of international recognition also created new risks. UNESCO inscription or European labelling can increase tourism, property pressure, branding, and political expectations that may themselves threaten heritage values. Municipalities can begin treating inscription primarily as an economic-development instrument, while complex management obligations become less visible than the international logo. Successful nominations can encourage competitive heritage politics in which inclusion on a list is perceived as confirmation that one region or tradition possesses greater cultural value than another. International criteria can also encourage standardised professional language that does not always correspond perfectly with local understandings of place or community identity. Transnational heritage therefore requires continual negotiation between global or European frameworks and local cultural meaning. Internationalisation is most successful when it strengthens conservation and interpretation rather than replacing locally grounded knowledge with institutional branding.

The concept of Outstanding Universal Value itself illustrates this tension. World Heritage requires States Parties to argue that selected properties transcend national significance, yet those arguments are constructed through national institutions, political priorities, professional expertise, and comparative narratives. Inclusion on the List therefore does not reveal an entirely objective pre-existing hierarchy of the world's most valuable heritage. It results from a formal process of identification, research, nomination, international expert evaluation, and intergovernmental decision-making. Critical heritage scholarship has consequently examined geographic imbalance, representativeness, tourism, diplomatic influence, and the institutional politics surrounding World Heritage. Czech professionals operate inside these global debates and must formulate nominations capable of meeting international criteria without erasing the historical specificity of the sites concerned. The strongest recent Czech nominations, particularly Kladruby and Žatec, demonstrate that internationalisation can stimulate more nuanced national research when comparative requirements are treated seriously.

European heritage frameworks raise comparable questions concerning identity. The European Heritage Label explicitly seeks to strengthen citizens' sense of belonging to Europe by identifying places connected with shared history, values, democracy, cultural exchange, and integration. This objective differs from UNESCO's universalist framework and therefore produces different heritage narratives even when the same physical place might qualify under both systems. Olomouc is interpreted through Christianity, Moravian history, and European cultural connections, Kynžvart through diplomacy, Werkbund estates through modernist social experimentation, and Cisterscapes through medieval trans-European networks and landscapes. European heritage is thus actively constructed by selecting particular historical relationships and explaining their relevance to contemporary citizens. Czech participation in the label places domestic sites inside this wider identity-making process. It also encourages interpretation that moves beyond the nation-state without requiring Czech national identity to disappear.

Alexander Buychik's klironomical research provides a useful theoretical perspective on these processes because it consistently treats cultural heritage as a phenomenon whose value and preservation transcend conventional disciplinary and, potentially, political boundaries. His 2021 work argued that the accumulation of international preservation knowledge had already moved beyond fragmented restoration and conservation practices towards the need for a more integrated scientific understanding of cultural inheritance. The 2025 methodological model further emphasised value, canon formation, historicity, cultural memory, social legitimation, continuity, and responsibility as interconnected components of heritage analysis. These concepts are directly relevant to international designation because UNESCO and European systems are themselves mechanisms through which particular cultural values receive supranational legitimation. International lists can therefore be interpreted klironomically not merely as catalogues of important objects but as institutions participating in the construction and transmission of cultural canons. Such an interpretation also requires critical attention to what remains outside the canon and to the social processes through which international recognition is produced.

Buychik and Anisiia Tomanek's 2023 study of Ukrainian cultural heritage adds a more concrete international dimension to this theoretical position. Their analysis emphasised the vulnerability of heritage under conditions of armed conflict and the need to investigate Ukrainian cultural properties as part of wider European and world cultural heritage. The authors used UNESCO nomination and World Heritage documentation as part of the evidential framework and explicitly related national heritage to international cultural responsibility. The study is especially relevant to the Czech context because it was published in Ostrava during a period when Czech cultural institutions were themselves participating in assistance to Ukraine. It demonstrates how klironomical research can move from general theories of cultural continuity towards situations in which preservation requires international cooperation under conditions of extreme risk. Heritage internationalisation in such circumstances is no longer principally about prestige or tourism. It becomes a mechanism through which destruction affecting one national culture is recognised as a loss affecting a wider cultural community.

By the end of 2025, Czech heritage protection had therefore developed a genuinely multi-level international architecture. UNESCO provided global frameworks for World Heritage, intangible cultural heritage, documentary memory, cultural property, illicit trafficking, and protection in armed conflict. The Council of Europe connected Czech practice with architectural conservation, archaeology, landscape protection, cultural routes, and comparative heritage policy. The European Union added funding, heritage labelling, research, digitisation, educational programmes, cultural networks, and cross-border initiatives. ICOMOS, ICOM, Europa Nostra, universities, research organisations, and professional associations sustained forms of cooperation not dependent upon intergovernmental treaty mechanisms. Transnational World Heritage properties, multinational intangible-heritage elements, European Heritage Label networks, cultural routes, digital aggregators, and professional conferences increasingly made shared management a normal feature of Czech heritage work. The cumulative effect was to move Czech heritage protection away from a model in which the state simply safeguards nationally important objects within its own territory.

In summary, the internationalisation of Czech heritage protection between 1993 and 2025 transformed both the scale and the meaning of preservation. The Czech Republic entered independence already carrying major World Heritage responsibilities and subsequently expanded its UNESCO portfolio to seventeen properties, including sixteen cultural properties

representing an increasingly diverse conception of heritage. The long development from the early urban and architectural inscriptions to Kladruby, the Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří Mining Region, the Great Spa Towns of Europe, and Žatec demonstrates a movement towards cultural landscapes, functioning systems, transboundary properties, and internationally coordinated management. UNESCO monitoring of Prague and Český Krumlov confirmed that inscription creates continuing obligations and external scrutiny rather than functioning simply as a permanent honorary award. The Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention extended international responsibility towards communities and living traditions, while multinational nominations demonstrated that puppetry, crafts, glassmaking, rafting, and other practices cannot be contained convincingly within modern political borders. Recognition of the *Bearers of Folk Craft Tradition* programme transformed Czech safeguarding practice itself into an international example, while the *Memory of the World* register internationalised documentary collections preserved in Czech institutions. Council of Europe conventions, Cultural Routes, the European Heritage Label, Europa Nostra, the European Year of Cultural Heritage, Creative Europe, ICOM, ICOMOS, and European research networks created additional layers through which Czech heritage professionals became participants in common standards and shared cultural narratives. The Prague heritage summit and ICOM General Conference in 2022 demonstrated that Czechia had become capable not only of joining international networks but of hosting debates in which European and global heritage priorities were reformulated. Assistance to Ukrainian cultural institutions after the Russian invasion showed the most consequential dimension of this development by transforming international heritage solidarity into material preservation action. The works of Alexander Buychik contribute a complementary klironomical interpretation in which international recognition can be understood as part of the processes through which cultural value, canon, continuity, responsibility, and transmission acquire supranational legitimacy. By 2025, Czech cultural heritage could therefore no longer be understood adequately as a nationally protected patrimony presented abroad; it had become part of an interconnected European and global heritage system in which preservation increasingly depends upon shared knowledge, comparative evaluation, transnational management, professional networks, and recognition that responsibility for cultural inheritance can extend beyond the society or state in which that inheritance physically survives.

Heritage, Society, Tourism, and Community Participation

Cultural heritage acquires social meaning only when people recognise, use, debate, transmit, finance, inhabit, visit, reinterpret, or contest it. The legal designation of a monument, collection, landscape, or tradition can provide formal protection, but it cannot by itself guarantee long-term legitimacy. Heritage institutions therefore operate within a complex social field involving residents, owners, tourists, municipalities, schools, associations, entrepreneurs, religious communities, volunteers, researchers, and cultural professionals. These groups may value the same heritage for very different reasons and may disagree about acceptable use, restoration, access, commercialisation, or interpretation. A historic centre can be simultaneously a home, a workplace, a tourism destination, an investment market, an architectural monument, and a component of national or international memory. A castle may function as a research site, public museum, employer, destination, educational environment,

and symbol of regional identity. A living tradition may provide community continuity while also attracting visitors, media attention, and commercial opportunities. By 2025, Czech heritage policy increasingly reflected the need to balance these overlapping social functions rather than assume that preservation and public use could be separated easily.

Tourism became one of the most visible arenas in which these relationships were negotiated. Czechia possesses an exceptionally dense concentration of historic towns, castles, châteaux, religious monuments, museums, cultural landscapes, technical sites, and UNESCO properties that form a central part of the national tourism offer. Heritage tourism provides employment, supports hospitality and transport services, generates entrance-fee income, strengthens regional visibility, and can create political incentives for conservation investment. It also allows visitors to encounter historical environments directly rather than only through books, media, or digital representations. For many small towns and rural communities, a major monument can function as the principal reason external visitors enter the local economy at all. Heritage therefore has measurable economic value without becoming reducible to economics. The central policy problem is how to use tourism as a support for preservation without allowing visitor demand to become the sole criterion determining what heritage is maintained or how it is interpreted.

The scale of public engagement with Czech heritage is substantial. NIPOS data for 2023 recorded approximately 13.9 million visits to heritage properties, making monuments one of the most frequently visited cultural sectors in the country. Museums and galleries registered a similarly strong post-pandemic recovery, demonstrating that physical cultural participation remained significant despite the expansion of digital access. Properties managed by the National Heritage Institute alone attracted more than 3.8 million visitors during the first nine months of 2025 and 4.26 million over the full year. Lednice, Český Krumlov, Hluboká nad Vltavou, Karlštejn, Bouzov, and Trosky belonged among the most visited state heritage sites. Such figures demonstrate that monument care is not an isolated specialist activity serving a small scholarly public. Heritage institutions operate within a mass cultural environment in which millions of encounters occur annually.

High visitor numbers nevertheless produce uneven effects. Admission revenue can finance public programming and contribute to operating costs, but heavy visitation also requires more staff, security, cleaning, transport management, toilets, parking, maintenance, interpretation, and physical protection. Floors, staircases, gardens, archaeological surfaces, interiors, and fragile microclimates can be affected directly by visitor pressure. Popularity may also concentrate strongly upon a small group of famous sites while less-known monuments remain economically marginal. Heritage tourism therefore creates both overcrowding and underuse within the same national system. One monument may struggle to protect itself from excessive demand while another faces deterioration because too few visitors support a viable operational model. Tourism management must consequently address distribution as well as growth.

The Czech Tourism Development Strategy 2021–2030 formalised this shift towards sustainability at national level. Approved by the Government in July 2021, the strategy defines tourism through a framework connecting economic competitiveness with environmental, cultural, social, and territorial sustainability. Cultural and natural heritage are presented as fundamental resources of the Czech destination, but the strategy also requires evaluation of tourism impacts upon residents and the environment. It emphasises quality, innovation,

digitalisation, management capacity, research, monitoring, and intersectoral cooperation rather than visitor numbers alone. Ministries responsible for culture, environment, agriculture, education, industry, and regional development participated in the strategy alongside municipalities, regions, professional organisations, businesses, and academic actors. Tourism policy was therefore conceptualised as a governance problem extending far beyond promotion. Heritage protection forms part of this framework because a tourism economy that damages the cultural resource upon which it depends is structurally unsustainable.

Prague provides the clearest Czech example of this problem. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the city had developed one of the highest concentrations of international tourism in Central Europe, with visitor flows heavily concentrated in the historic centre and particularly along the Royal Route connecting Prague Castle, Charles Bridge, and Old Town Square. This concentration generated substantial economic benefits but also crowding, noise, changes in retail structure, pressure upon housing, short-term rentals, souvenir commercialisation, nightlife conflicts, and a growing perception among residents that parts of the centre were being organised primarily for visitors. Research on Prague overtourism found that residents associated intensive tourism with reduced quality of life, crowding, rising living costs, and pressure upon the housing market. Tourism therefore affected heritage not simply through physical wear but through the social composition and everyday functions of the historic city. A historic centre loses part of its cultural authenticity when ordinary residential and civic life is displaced by a monoculture of temporary consumption.

This tension became sufficiently significant for Prague to change its tourism policy explicitly. The city's earlier tourism concept and the 2024–2027 strategy *S respektem k Praze* place quality of life for residents alongside economic benefits as a core objective. The strategy seeks environmental, cultural, social, and economic sustainability while protecting and developing Prague's culture and historical heritage. Measures include dispersing visitors beyond the most congested areas, improving visitor behaviour, reducing visual and advertising pollution, addressing effects of short-term accommodation, developing alternative routes, supporting smart-tourism tools, and improving accessibility. The objective is not to reduce tourism automatically but to change its structure and spatial distribution. Prague thus moved from a conventional destination-marketing paradigm towards destination management in which residents are recognised as principal stakeholders. This is one of the most important changes in Czech urban heritage governance during the period under consideration.

Visitor dispersion is especially important because overtourism often results from concentration rather than total tourist volume alone. Prague contains extensive heritage outside the best-known central route, including modern architecture, industrial areas, parks, neighbourhood centres, cemeteries, technical monuments, museums, and local cultural institutions. Encouraging visitors towards these areas can reduce pressure on the UNESCO core while broadening the economic benefits of tourism geographically. It can also diversify the narratives through which the city is represented internationally. A visitor encountering only Prague Castle, Charles Bridge, Old Town Square, beer, and souvenir shops receives a much narrower cultural image than one exploring functionalism, Žižkov, Holešovice, technical infrastructure, Jewish memory, 20th-century history, or local creative culture. Sustainable tourism therefore becomes partly a question of cultural interpretation. Distribution of visitors can support distribution of attention across a wider heritage canon.

Commercialisation presents another major challenge. Tourism creates demand for restaurants, souvenirs, guided tours, entertainment, accommodation, and branded cultural experiences, but the products responding to this demand may have little relationship with local heritage. Research into souvenir retail along Prague's Royal Route identified extensive circulation of banal, geographically displaced, or falsely authentic products. Such objects can weaken the connection between tourism spending and local cultural production even while appearing superficially traditional. Heritage commercialisation therefore does not automatically sustain heritage economies. A souvenir manufactured elsewhere and marketed through invented local symbolism may generate profit while contributing little to regional crafts, historical knowledge, or cultural continuity.

Authenticity in heritage tourism should consequently be understood socially as well as materially. A restored façade may be physically authentic while the surrounding street becomes culturally homogenised through identical tourist shops, international chains, and short-term accommodation. Conversely, contemporary businesses can contribute to heritage vitality when they maintain local services, crafts, food traditions, cultural production, or resident-oriented activity. The question is therefore not whether economic activity should occur in historic environments but what kind of economic ecology it creates. Heritage centres remain culturally sustainable when tourists and residents can coexist rather than when one group completely displaces the other. Czech urban tourism policy increasingly recognises this distinction, although implementation remains difficult where property markets and private investment respond primarily to short-term returns.

Český Krumlov represents the same problem at a much smaller urban scale. Its exceptionally intact historical centre and major castle complex create visitor demand disproportionate to the resident population and physical dimensions of the town. Large numbers of day visitors can pass through a limited network of streets within short periods, creating congestion without necessarily generating the economic benefits associated with longer stays. Resident attitudes therefore become particularly important because the historic centre is not merely a museum but a functioning town. Research into political preferences in Český Krumlov has demonstrated that perceptions of tourism benefits and costs can influence local electoral behaviour. Residents evaluated both additional income and tax revenue and negative effects such as overcrowding and disruption of everyday life. Tourism thus enters democratic governance rather than remaining a specialist economic sector.

Karlštejn provides another revealing example because the scale of the resident community is very small relative to annual visitor numbers. The internationally famous castle makes the municipality one of the clearest Czech cases in which tourism dominates everyday spatial experience. Research into visitor perceptions has identified overtourism-related pressures even though visitors themselves do not always interpret crowding as negatively as residents do. This difference is important because a tourist experiences the destination for hours, whereas residents experience congestion, parking, noise, commercial change, and infrastructure pressure repeatedly. Sustainable heritage tourism therefore cannot be evaluated solely through visitor satisfaction. A destination can receive excellent reviews while becoming increasingly difficult to inhabit.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this tourism model dramatically. International arrivals collapsed in 2020, heritage sites closed or operated under severe restrictions, cultural institutions lost admission income, and tourism-dependent towns experienced sudden

economic contraction. The crisis revealed how vulnerable cultural heritage can become when public access and revenue structures depend too heavily upon continuous visitor flows. It also demonstrated that heavy tourism pressure is not the only threat to heritage economies; an abrupt absence of visitors can endanger employment, maintenance, cultural programming, and local businesses. Domestic tourism became increasingly important during the recovery, while digital communication allowed heritage institutions to maintain contact with audiences during closures. The post-pandemic period consequently strengthened interest in resilience, diversified markets, longer stays, domestic visitors, and better integration between tourism and local life.

The recovery by 2023–2025 confirmed that cultural heritage retained strong public attraction. Heritage-property attendance approached pre-pandemic levels and state castles and châteaux again received millions of visitors annually. Yet the policy language surrounding that recovery changed substantially compared with the earlier growth-oriented period. National tourism strategy emphasised sustainability, research, monitoring, climate adaptation, and resident impacts, while Prague's 2024 strategy explicitly rejected the idea that maximum visitor numbers should be the principal objective. This represents a deeper change in the relationship between heritage and tourism. Success is increasingly measured through quality, distribution, resident acceptance, cultural benefit, and environmental impact rather than attendance alone.

Community participation extends beyond tourism management. Czech heritage conservation has a long history of local associations, historical societies, religious communities, amateur researchers, owners, volunteer groups, and municipal initiatives contributing to monuments and cultural landscapes. After 1989, civil society regained much greater autonomy and could establish organisations, fundraise, advocate for threatened buildings, organise work camps, conduct local research, reopen sites, and challenge development decisions. Some heritage places survived precisely because local groups recognised value before public authorities were able or willing to intervene. Community action can therefore function as an early-warning system within heritage protection. What appears marginal from a national perspective may possess intense significance for a local population.

Volunteering has become an increasingly explicit component of National Heritage Institute practice as well. Research by Nikola Kassl and Kateřina Dryáková examined cooperation between NPÚ-managed heritage sites, volunteers, and local communities through interviews with castellans and partner organisations. Their study demonstrates that volunteer activity can provide both practical assistance and important social benefits by strengthening relationships between heritage properties and the people living around them. Volunteer work may involve landscape maintenance, cleaning, event organisation, research, visitor services, craft activities, documentation, or support for conservation tasks under professional supervision. Such participation can create a sense that the heritage property belongs socially to the community even where legal ownership remains with the state. The economic value of volunteer labour is relevant but does not capture this relational benefit fully.

Volunteerism nevertheless requires professional organisation. Historic structures and collections are vulnerable, and enthusiasm alone does not provide the knowledge required for restoration, archaeological excavation, conservation treatment, or safe handling. Institutions must therefore distinguish activities suitable for volunteers from work requiring licensed or specialised professionals. Insurance, health and safety, supervision, scheduling, training,

documentation, and continuity create administrative costs that can be substantial. Volunteer programmes work best when institutions treat participants as partners requiring meaningful engagement rather than as free replacement labour. The Czech experience therefore supports a structured model in which civic participation complements professional conservation rather than undermining it.

Heritage education provides another route through which participation can develop before individuals become owners, volunteers, activists, or policymakers. The National Heritage Institute's *Památky nás baví* programme created a national system of educational activities in authentic heritage environments through seven educational centres established from 2012. Programmes were designed for children, students, families, seniors, the general public, specialists, and visitors with specific needs. Participants could investigate architecture, building techniques, gardens, crafts, industrial heritage, historical lifestyles, and restoration through direct activity rather than conventional passive guided tours alone. Some projects involved pupils acting as guides, experimenting with craft techniques, working with models, or participating in simple volunteer tasks. By the time the programme received a Europa Nostra Award in 2017, it had reached approximately 31,000 participants. Heritage education thus became a mechanism for cultivating future social legitimacy for preservation.

Accessibility was an important component of this educational turn. Heritage properties historically present substantial barriers for visitors with limited mobility, visual or hearing impairments, cognitive differences, or other specific needs. Protected architecture cannot always be modified through standard accessibility solutions without damaging significant fabric, yet exclusion from heritage conflicts with its public-service purpose. Czech programmes increasingly explored tactile models, sensory interpretation, adapted educational materials, and differentiated forms of visitor access. The objective is not to pretend that every historical environment can become physically identical in accessibility to a purpose-built contemporary facility. It is to treat access as an interpretative and management responsibility rather than a marginal optional service.

European Heritage Days offer another large-scale participatory mechanism. Czechia has taken part regularly since 1991, and since 1998 the Association of Historical Settlements of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia has served as the principal national organiser. The programme opens monuments, buildings, archaeological sites, museums, libraries, technical structures, and other heritage spaces, including places normally inaccessible to the public. Its purpose extends beyond free entry and includes lectures, walks, workshops, exhibitions, performances, demonstrations, and opportunities to understand conservation processes. Municipalities, institutions, civic groups, owners, volunteers, schools, and local organisations all participate in preparing events. European Heritage Days consequently make heritage visibility a collaborative civic process rather than an activity produced only by national institutions. The 2025 Czech edition focused upon architectural heritage and again linked national and local programming.

Hradozámecká noc performs a comparable function within the castle and château sector. Organised annually by the National Heritage Institute, the event includes not only state-managed properties but monuments belonging to other owners across Czechia. Evening opening, concerts, theatre, special tours, historical programmes, and site-specific activities temporarily change the ordinary relationship between visitors and monumental architecture. In 2025, a record 138 state and non-state properties participated, attracting approximately

30,000 visitors to the evening programme. Such events can broaden the social use of heritage beyond conventional guided-tour schedules. They also create cooperation between public institutions, local performers, volunteers, municipalities, and private owners.

Public recognition programmes further encourage participation by making heritage stewardship socially visible. Since 2014, the National Heritage Institute's *Patrimonium pro futuro* awards have recognised exemplary restoration, discoveries, rescue projects, presentation, management, and individual contributions to heritage care. From 2015, the public has been able to vote independently for the *Památky děkují* award. This mechanism is significant because it acknowledges that heritage quality can be evaluated not only within expert institutions but through public engagement with exemplary projects. Owners, restorers, municipalities, researchers, volunteers, and civic actors become visible as agents of preservation rather than remaining anonymous behind finished monuments. The 2025 awards explicitly highlighted individuals, institutions, and communities whose work combined expert care with openness to the public.

Municipalities play an especially important role because community participation often becomes concrete through local government. Czech towns and villages own monuments, museums, public spaces, cemeteries, historic infrastructure, and cultural landscapes and possess planning powers affecting privately owned heritage. Elected councils therefore mediate between conservation requirements, residents, development interests, tourism, transport, housing, and local budgets. Local government can support festivals, interpretation, visitor infrastructure, grant programmes, heritage education, and adaptive reuse. It can also generate conflict when economic development objectives clash with expert conservation advice. Community participation is therefore not merely voluntary action outside government but also democratic participation through municipal politics.

Historic-town associations strengthen this municipal dimension. The Association of Historical Settlements of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia connects towns concerned with heritage preservation, regeneration, public space, and cultural tourism. Its programmes include European Heritage Days, *Brány památek dokořán*, the Historic Town of the Year competition, and the Monument of the Year award. Such networks allow municipalities to compare regeneration strategies and promote heritage as part of contemporary local development. They also demonstrate that Czech community heritage policy often operates through networks of public authorities rather than only through central government. Local heritage becomes a shared policy field linking urban planning, tourism, cultural programming, and civic identity.

Private owners form another indispensable heritage community. Czech restitution after 1989 returned castles, houses, churches, estates, and other protected properties to individuals, families, religious bodies, and organisations whose financial capacity and preservation motivations vary substantially. Some owners have invested extraordinary personal resources in rescuing deteriorated heritage, while others struggle with legal obligations imposed upon economically difficult properties. Heritage policy therefore depends upon cooperation rather than assuming that state authorities can preserve all significant material directly. Grants, expert advice, public recognition, tourism income, adaptive reuse, and civic support can all influence whether private stewardship becomes sustainable. Conflict arises when public heritage value restricts private development rights without sufficient support for the resulting costs.

Religious heritage illustrates this social complexity particularly clearly. Churches, chapels, synagogues, monasteries, cemeteries, pilgrimage places, and ritual landscapes may be protected monuments, tourist destinations, active sacred spaces, community centres, and carriers of intangible practice simultaneously. Visitors can provide income and increase awareness, but tourism must respect religious use and community ownership of meaning. A church should not become culturally intelligible only through architectural history if worship, pilgrimage, memory, and local identity remain active. Religious communities therefore participate not merely as legal owners but as bearers of living relationships that affect interpretation and preservation priorities. The boundary between tangible and intangible heritage becomes particularly porous in such environments.

Intangible cultural heritage provides the strongest formal model of community participation within Czech heritage policy. UNESCO procedures require free, prior, and informed consent from relevant communities and participation in nomination and safeguarding. Czech national and regional inventory systems increasingly involve practitioners themselves when defining elements, documenting viability, and designing safeguarding measures. Bearers can initiate nominations, and periodic redocumentation includes evaluation of whether traditions remain viable and whether existing measures need adjustment. The 2025 UNESCO inscription of Czech amateur theatre was commended specifically for strong community involvement, including direct participation of associations, actors, and troupe leaders in preparation of the nomination. Living heritage therefore institutionalises a principle that is more difficult to implement in monument care: heritage cannot be defined fully without the people who practise it.

This community model nevertheless should not be idealised. Communities are rarely homogeneous and may contain disagreements concerning who represents a tradition, who benefits economically, how authenticity should be defined, or whether tourism should be encouraged. UNESCO scrutiny of the Czech blown-glass bead Christmas-decoration nomination initially raised concerns about whether one commercial entity might monopolise the practice and restrict broader community participation. The nomination was subsequently refined and eventually inscribed in 2020. The episode demonstrates that community participation is not simply a procedural box to be checked. Heritage institutions must examine internal power relations as well as formal evidence of consent.

Community participation can also produce conflict rather than consensus, and conflict is not necessarily evidence that participation has failed. International research on heritage-tourism planning shows that participatory processes can generate disagreement while still strengthening collective provision for heritage when trust and institutional credibility are present. Czech heritage disputes over development, monuments, public space, tourism, and landscape similarly demonstrate that residents often hold genuinely incompatible values. One group may favour economic use, another strict conservation, another contemporary architecture, and another restoration of an earlier historical appearance. Participatory governance therefore needs procedures capable of managing disagreement rather than assuming that consultation will reveal one authentic community preference.

The same principle applies to contested heritage. Communist monuments, German-Bohemian memory, Roma history, industrial pollution, military sites, Jewish property, 20th-century architecture, and other historically sensitive subjects can generate very different interpretations among local groups. Community participation is especially important here

because expert designation alone may produce resistance if residents perceive heritage interpretation as externally imposed. Yet local opposition cannot automatically determine historical truth or justify exclusion of minority histories. Heritage governance must balance democratic participation with scholarly evidence, legal rights, and ethical responsibility towards groups whose voices may be numerically weak. Social legitimacy therefore differs from simple majority approval.

Tourism can intensify these conflicts by privileging simplified narratives. Visitors frequently have limited time and may prefer recognisable stories, visual symbols, and easily consumable historical themes. Destination marketing can therefore encourage selective presentation of heritage that emphasises picturesque architecture, royalty, romance, food, or craft while marginalising social conflict, labour, displacement, persecution, or environmental damage. Czech heritage interpretation has gradually become more complex, but tourism remains capable of narrowing historical narratives when marketability becomes the dominant criterion. Sustainable heritage tourism should therefore support interpretation that remains intellectually credible even when it is accessible to broad audiences.

Digital participation has opened additional possibilities. Social media, online archives, crowdsourcing, digital maps, virtual exhibitions, citizen-science projects, and online voting can connect heritage institutions with people unable to visit physically. Archaeological citizen science through AMČR-PAS demonstrates how structured public involvement can generate research data under professional supervision. Digital platforms can also collect photographs, memories, identification information, and local knowledge related to museum objects or historical places. Public voting in *Patrimonium pro futuro* shows a simpler form of online participation based upon recognition and awareness. Such tools enlarge participation but do not eliminate inequalities in digital skills, access, institutional influence, or the ability to translate online engagement into formal decisions.

Social media also changes the tourism pressure surrounding heritage. Visually striking places can experience sudden visitor growth after appearing in films, computer games, influencer content, or viral photography. Trosky Castle's substantial 2025 visitor increase following the release of a popular computer game illustrates how digital culture can redirect tourism rapidly towards a heritage site. This type of attention can create valuable new audiences, particularly among younger people, while also placing unexpected operational pressure upon infrastructure designed for lower attendance. Heritage managers increasingly need therefore to monitor cultural trends outside traditional tourism marketing. Visitor demand can now emerge through global digital platforms faster than conventional destination plans can respond.

Economic sustainability remains central to all these relationships. Heritage sectors characteristically combine public subsidy, ticket revenue, grants, donations, commercial services, sponsorship, and volunteer contributions. Recent Czech cultural-account data confirm that cultural heritage has significantly lower income self-sufficiency than many commercially oriented cultural sectors and remains dependent upon public financing. This dependence is not necessarily evidence of inefficiency because the public benefits of heritage cannot be captured entirely through ticket sales. Archaeological protection, conservation research, educational programmes, public space, landscape values, regional identity, and future access all produce social benefits that visitors do not purchase individually. Tourism revenue should therefore complement rather than replace public responsibility.

The concept of carrying capacity is useful in this context but should not be reduced to a fixed maximum number of visitors. Physical capacity concerns how many people a monument can accommodate safely without unacceptable material damage. Environmental capacity concerns waste, water, transport, noise, and ecological pressure. Social capacity concerns the point at which tourism begins to undermine resident quality of life, community acceptance, or local cultural functions. Experiential capacity concerns crowding severe enough to reduce the quality of the visitor's own encounter. Economic capacity concerns dependence upon tourism so strong that other local functions disappear. Sustainable heritage management requires consideration of all these dimensions simultaneously.

Climate and environmental policy further complicate the tourism relationship. Heritage tourism depends heavily upon transport, and high visitor numbers can increase emissions, parking pressure, heat, waste, and water use in sensitive historical environments. At the same time, public transport, pedestrianisation, regional rail, cycling routes, and longer stays can reduce some of these effects while improving access. Climate adaptation may also require changing visitor seasons when extreme summer heat places stress upon historic towns, gardens, landscapes, and visitors themselves. The national Tourism Strategy 2021–2030 explicitly incorporates climate adaptation, demonstrating that tourism management can no longer be separated from environmental resilience. Heritage destinations therefore need to think simultaneously about protecting cultural resources and changing the environmental behaviour of visitation.

Alexander Buychik's klironomical framework is particularly relevant to the social dimension of heritage because his methodology includes cultural value, historical continuity, social legitimation, and responsibility as interdependent elements of preservation. Heritage cannot survive through technical conservation alone if society ceases to recognise the cultural reasons for sustaining it. Social legitimation therefore links scholarly or professional assessment with broader processes through which communities accept, reinterpret, contest, and transmit cultural value. Tourism is one such process because visitation can reinforce recognition but can also transform cultural meaning through commercialisation and selective presentation. Community participation becomes important because it creates a mechanism through which heritage is reproduced socially rather than only administratively. Buychik's model is therefore useful here as an interpretative framework for understanding why preservation must integrate material continuity with cultural recognition.

His concept of cultural heritage as a self-organising system adds another dimension. Heritage systems change as communities, institutions, economic activities, technologies, political priorities, and tourism patterns interact with one another. No central authority controls all of these processes completely, and cultural value can emerge or decline through cumulative social feedback. A formerly neglected industrial building may acquire value through local activism and creative reuse, while an internationally famous historic centre can lose social authenticity if tourism displaces its residents. Preservation therefore requires attention to the feedback loops through which social use either reinforces or destabilises heritage continuity. From this perspective, community participation is not an optional democratic addition to conservation but part of the mechanism through which heritage remains culturally functional.

Buychik's work on revitalisation is also relevant because social use frequently determines whether a heritage site has a viable future. A restored building without meaningful function may return rapidly to deterioration, whereas adaptive reuse can provide economic resources and

renewed community relationships. Revitalisation differs from simple renovation because it seeks reintegration of inherited structures into changing social and urban environments. Czech examples from industrial buildings, water towers, fortifications, mills, monasteries, and local cultural centres show that successful reuse can create libraries, educational spaces, museums, galleries, community facilities, or mixed functions while retaining significant historical evidence. The strongest projects therefore connect preservation with contemporary social utility rather than treating historical fabric as scenery around unrelated commercial development.

The social future of Czech heritage by 2025 consequently depended increasingly upon partnership. National institutions retained essential authority in conservation standards, research, documentation, legal protection, and management of major monuments, but they could not preserve the national heritage stock independently. Municipalities, regions, private owners, communities, schools, tourism organisations, volunteers, NGOs, religious bodies, researchers, businesses, and visitors all participated in different stages of preservation and use. Effective governance requires these actors to understand one another's constraints and responsibilities rather than simply defend separate interests. Heritage participation is therefore less a transfer of authority from professionals to the public than a redistribution of knowledge and responsibility across a wider social network.

The Czech model nevertheless remained incomplete in participatory terms. By the end of 2025, Czechia had not ratified the Faro Convention, whose concept of heritage communities provides one of Europe's most explicit normative frameworks for societal participation in heritage. Community-oriented approaches nevertheless developed through volunteering, intangible heritage, education, local government, tourism policy, civic associations, public awards, European Heritage Days, and individual regeneration projects. This produces an interesting institutional asymmetry. Czech practice was becoming more participatory even without formal adoption of the European convention most closely associated with that paradigm.

In summary, the relationship among heritage, society, tourism, and community participation in Czechia between 1993 and 2025 developed from a predominantly institutional model of public access towards a more complex system of shared use, negotiation, and social responsibility. Heritage tourism became economically important to historic towns, castles, museums, cultural landscapes, and regional destinations, while visitor numbers demonstrated the enormous scale of public engagement with the national heritage stock. At the same time, Prague, Český Krumlov, Karlštejn, and other heavily visited destinations showed that tourism can damage resident quality of life, housing, local services, spatial authenticity, and visitor experience when cultural places become organised primarily around short-term consumption. The Tourism Development Strategy 2021–2030 and Prague's *S respektem k Praze* strategy therefore institutionalised a shift from growth towards sustainability, monitoring, visitor dispersion, quality, and resident interests. National heritage programmes such as *Památky nás baví*, Hradozámecká noc, European Heritage Days, and *Patrimonium pro futuro* expanded public participation through education, access, volunteerism, events, and recognition of exemplary stewardship. Research within the National Heritage Institute demonstrated that volunteers and local communities can contribute materially and socially to heritage properties when their participation is organised professionally. Intangible-heritage policy moved participation even further by making communities and tradition bearers direct participants in nomination, documentation, and

safeguarding. Municipalities, private owners, religious communities, civic associations, and regional networks additionally confirmed that heritage governance in Czechia is fundamentally polycentric. Digital tools and citizen science widened the possibilities of participation while creating new inequalities and management challenges. The works of Alexander Buychik provide a complementary klironomical interpretation by emphasising social legitimation, continuity, value, revitalisation, and the self-organising relationships through which cultural heritage remains socially functional. By 2025, the most sustainable Czech heritage model was therefore no longer one in which experts preserve monuments and tourists consume them, but one in which professional conservation, local life, public participation, responsible visitation, education, and viable contemporary use are treated as mutually dependent components of cultural continuity.

The Major Achievements of Czech Cultural Heritage Research and Preservation, 1993–2025

The principal achievement of Czech cultural heritage research and preservation between 1993 and 2025 was not the rescue of any single monument, collection, landscape, or tradition, but the consolidation of heritage into a mature and increasingly autonomous field of knowledge and public responsibility. The Czech Republic inherited dense institutional, legal, documentary, scholarly, and professional traditions from Czechoslovakia and from earlier Czech lands rather than creating a preservation system after independence from the beginning. What changed during the following three decades was the degree to which these inherited structures were reorganised, specialised, internationalised, digitised, scientifically strengthened, and connected with contemporary public policy. Monument conservation became increasingly intertwined with archaeology, conservation science, museums, archives, libraries, landscape research, digital infrastructures, community participation, tourism management, and international heritage governance. Cultural heritage consequently ceased to be understood adequately as a collection of old objects protected primarily for artistic or historical reasons. It became an interdisciplinary system concerned with material evidence, living traditions, cultural memory, technological knowledge, landscapes, collections, research data, digital objects, and relationships between inherited culture and contemporary society. This conceptual expansion represents one of the most important transformations of the Czech heritage sector after 1993. By the end of 2025, the field possessed sufficient institutional, methodological, and intellectual coherence to justify its treatment as an autonomous domain alongside cultural studies and art history.

A second major achievement was the preservation of institutional continuity through a period of profound political and economic transformation. The democratic transition after 1989, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, restitution, decentralisation, privatisation, market reform, and European integration could easily have fragmented the inherited preservation system more severely than they did. Instead, the Czech Republic retained core national institutions while gradually adapting their purposes to democratic governance, plural ownership, professional autonomy, and international standards. The National Museum, National Gallery, National Library, archaeological institutes, regional museums, archives, conservation institutions, universities, and heritage authorities maintained long-term

collections and professional memory through successive administrative reforms. This continuity was crucial because cultural heritage depends upon knowledge accumulated across generations rather than merely upon legal decisions taken in one political period. Documentation, conservation records, archaeological archives, inventories, object histories, photographic collections, building surveys, and specialist expertise survived institutional changes sufficiently well to remain usable in later research. The Czech model therefore demonstrates that successful heritage reform need not require institutional rupture. Its strength lies instead in combining inherited professional capital with new democratic, scientific, and international frameworks.

The National Heritage Institute became one of the clearest institutional expressions of this continuity and consolidation. The creation of a unified NPÚ in 2003 brought together previously more fragmented heritage structures within a nationwide professional organisation combining territorial expertise, monument documentation, methodological work, research, public advice, and management of major state heritage properties. This structure created a national professional network capable of working across castles, châteaux, churches, vernacular architecture, historical towns, landscapes, archaeological sites, industrial monuments, gardens, and 20th-century heritage. The Institute also developed specialised methodological centres addressing areas such as industrial heritage and garden culture, thereby increasing the disciplinary depth of heritage administration. Its recognition as a research organisation reinforced the principle that monument care is not merely a regulatory activity but a producer of scientific knowledge. Research into buildings, materials, landscapes, archives, historical technologies, and conservation methods could consequently be integrated with decisions concerning actual protected heritage. The NPÚ's development therefore represents one of the strongest achievements of Czech heritage institutionalisation after independence. It created a professional bridge between national policy, regional expertise, scientific research, property management, and public access.

Legal continuity was another achievement, although it simultaneously remained one of the system's major limitations. Act No. 20/1987 Coll. on State Monument Care continued to provide the principal legal framework for immovable monuments, archaeological heritage, restoration, protected territories, and professional responsibilities throughout the entire period. Its survival allowed the Czech state to avoid a legal vacuum during restitution, decentralisation, property transformation, and administrative reform. Repeated amendments adapted significant parts of the legislation to democratic institutions, new ownership conditions, European requirements, and changing professional practice. Specialised legislation complemented it through new frameworks for museum collections, archives, libraries, movable cultural objects, and other heritage categories. The rejection of a comprehensive replacement monument-care bill in 2017 nevertheless demonstrated the difficulty of constructing an entirely new legal model capable of satisfying owners, municipalities, conservation specialists, public authorities, and constitutional requirements simultaneously. By 2025, the heritage system was therefore institutionally far more modern than the date of its central monument law might suggest. The achievement lies in maintaining effective professional continuity despite this legal path dependence, while the unfinished legislative modernisation remains one of the clearest tasks for the future.

Territorial heritage protection expanded significantly beyond the traditional emphasis upon individual monuments. Historic cities, villages, archaeological areas, cultural landscapes, designed estates, battlefields, industrial territories, and settlement structures increasingly

became recognised as systems whose significance depends upon relationships among many components. By the mid-2020s, the Czech heritage system protected more than six hundred territorially defined urban and rural ensembles, including thirty-nine urban heritage reservations, 258 urban heritage zones, sixty-one village heritage reservations, and 216 village heritage zones. The system additionally included twenty-eight landscape heritage zones and nine archaeological reservations, alongside several other specially protected territorial categories. This extensive territorial network demonstrates a mature recognition that individual monument designation is insufficient where cultural value resides in urban morphology, settlement patterns, land use, spatial composition, or historical landscape structure. Research into heritage zones developed increasingly precise criteria for authenticity, integrity, typology, landscape character, monitoring, and comparative assessment. Czech preservation consequently moved from monument protection towards management of inherited environments. This territorial expansion is one of the defining achievements of the period because it brought planning, landscape research, architecture, archaeology, and conservation into a common heritage framework.

Built heritage research developed an especially sophisticated methodological culture. The Czech tradition of *stavebněhistorický průzkum*, or historical building survey, matured into a systematic method integrating archival research with direct examination of masonry, construction joints, roof structures, openings, surfaces, interiors, technical systems, and successive building phases. This approach transformed the building itself into a primary historical source rather than treating it only as an architectural object awaiting restoration. Certified methodologies strengthened consistency in documentation and enabled conservation decisions to be based upon evidence concerning chronology, authenticity, material survival, and historical transformation. The principle that later layers can themselves possess cultural significance increasingly displaced older preferences for reconstructing a supposedly ideal original state. Research also expanded the canon from medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque monuments towards vernacular architecture, modernism, socialist-period buildings, industrial structures, and other comparatively recent heritage. The 2020 methodology for evaluating and protecting architecture of the second half of the 20th century symbolises this chronological expansion particularly clearly. Czech built-heritage research therefore achieved not merely more accurate restoration but a broader and more historically nuanced definition of what constitutes architecturally significant inheritance.

Archaeological heritage underwent an equally significant transformation from excavation-centred practice towards preventive, landscape-based, data-intensive research. Czech legislation embedded rescue archaeology within development processes and required archaeological interests to be considered before construction destroys buried evidence. Universities, museums, the National Heritage Institute, authorised archaeological organisations, and the archaeological institutes of the Czech Academy of Sciences formed a dense professional network capable of responding to archaeological discoveries across the country. Non-destructive methods, aerial archaeology, geophysics, LiDAR, environmental archaeology, bioarchaeology, isotope research, archaeometry, and GIS substantially expanded the kinds of questions that archaeological evidence could answer. Landscape archaeology moved research beyond individual excavation sites towards long-term settlement systems, land use, environmental relationships, communication routes, and human transformation of terrain. This conceptual development reduced the earlier tendency to equate archaeological knowledge with the quantity of excavated material. Preservation in situ

increasingly became understood as a scientifically legitimate strategy because future analytical methods may extract information impossible to recover after complete excavation. Archaeology consequently became one of the strongest Czech examples of heritage preservation operating simultaneously as research, environmental history, digital infrastructure, and preventive planning.

The Archaeological Information System of the Czech Republic represents one of the most important infrastructural achievements arising from this transformation. Developed jointly by the archaeological institutes in Prague and Brno, AIS CR integrates information from field research, archaeological sites, documentation, digital archives, spatial records, and historical excavation data reaching back to the 19th century. Since 2016, it has formed part of the Czech national Roadmap of Large Research Infrastructures and has received continuous multi-year state support. More than one hundred organisations authorised to conduct archaeological research cooperate with the infrastructure, making it a genuinely national rather than institution-specific system. The Archaeological Map of the Czech Republic, digital archives, persistent identifiers, geospatial information, and specialised services allow archaeological data to remain accessible after individual research projects have ended. This is especially important because excavation destroys the original stratigraphic context that it documents. AIS CR therefore converts archaeological documentation itself into a permanently curated component of national heritage. Its creation demonstrates how heritage research can acquire infrastructure comparable in importance to major facilities in the natural sciences.

Museum collections underwent a comparable legal and conceptual modernisation. Act No. 122/2000 Coll. established museum-type collections as coherent entities possessing scientific and cultural significance in their entirety rather than merely as aggregations of valuable individual objects. The Central Register of Museum-Type Collections created a national legal information layer connecting public accountability with collection protection. Inventory obligations, documentation standards, acquisition procedures, security, conservation requirements, and rules governing removal of objects strengthened the long-term integrity of public collections. This legal structure encouraged museums to think systematically about collection policy and future responsibilities rather than equating success with continuous accumulation. Collections became increasingly understood as research infrastructures capable of supporting archaeology, history, art history, ethnology, natural science, technology studies, provenance research, and conservation science. The Czech museum system thereby strengthened the intellectual status of material collections while also formalising the responsibilities attached to their stewardship.

One of the major achievements inside museums was the shift from object repair towards preventive and scientifically informed conservation. Depositories, environmental monitoring, integrated pest management, disaster preparedness, safe handling, documentation, and risk assessment became increasingly important components of collection care. The Methodological Centre for Conservation at the Technical Museum in Brno provided national support extending beyond institutions able to maintain advanced laboratories independently. Other methodological centres supported museum information technologies, presentation, education, and specialised art-museum practice. The National Museum, National Gallery Prague, National Technical Museum, Museum of Decorative Arts, Moravian Museum, and other institutions developed research capacities directly linked with their collections. Conservation and restoration therefore became connected more closely with scientific investigation and scholarly interpretation. The Czech museum system consequently evolved

from an exhibition-centred public image towards a more complete model integrating acquisition, documentation, preventive care, research, conservation, access, and education.

Provenance research represents a further major achievement because it expanded the ethical responsibilities of collection institutions beyond their present legal possession. Research into objects confiscated during Nazi persecution, wartime transfers, post-war redistribution, and communist nationalisation increasingly became part of professional museum and gallery practice. The Jewish Museum in Prague provided an especially important example through systematic investigation of books, ritual objects, artworks, and documentation associated with Jewish communities and individual owners destroyed or dispossessed during the Holocaust. Act No. 212/2000 created an additional mechanism addressing specified property injustices caused by the Holocaust, while national databases and international cooperation strengthened transparency. Provenance work demonstrated that museum cataloguing must include historical chains of ownership and not merely current accession information. It also contributed to a wider European movement linking collection research with restitution, justice, and institutional accountability. Czech heritage preservation thereby developed a stronger ethical dimension concerned not only with saving objects but with understanding the circumstances through which they entered public custody.

Intangible cultural heritage became another major field of institutional innovation. The 2003 national strategy for improved care of traditional folk culture created a coordinated framework for identification, documentation, transmission, regional cooperation, education, presentation, and safeguarding before Czechia formally joined UNESCO's 2003 Convention. The National Institute of Folk Culture in Strážnice and a network of regional specialist centres provided an institutional structure linking national methodology with local practitioners. A national list established from 2008 created systematic recognition of living traditions and provided an intermediate level between local safeguarding and UNESCO nomination. International recognition subsequently expanded through dance, ritual, puppetry, craft, glassmaking, rafting, falconry, and amateur theatre. The *Bearers of Folk Craft Tradition* programme achieved particular international significance when UNESCO entered it in the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices in 2022. The 2025 creation of the broader List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Czech Republic marked an important conceptual transition away from a narrower framework focused specifically upon traditional folk culture. Czech intangible-heritage policy thereby evolved towards a community-centred understanding in which the survival of heritage depends upon bearers, transmission, social use, and controlled cultural transformation rather than documentary preservation alone.

Industrial and technical heritage achieved a similarly important expansion of the national canon. The economic transformation after 1989 initially exposed factories, mines, transport infrastructure, power systems, technical structures, and industrial landscapes to rapid demolition or abandonment. Gradually, research organisations and conservation institutions developed specialised concepts capable of identifying technological, typological, social, architectural, and landscape significance within this previously undervalued material. The Research Centre for Industrial Heritage at the Czech Technical University, established in 2002, became a major research and educational centre linking mapping, architectural analysis, public advocacy, and adaptive reuse. The *Industrial Topography of the Czech Republic* transformed scattered knowledge into a comparative national mapping system. The National Heritage Institute established a specialised Methodological Centre for Industrial Heritage in Ostrava and developed explicit assessment criteria for industrial monuments. Lower Vítkovice,

Důl Michal, the Ore Mountains mining landscape, technical museums, railway heritage, and adaptive-reuse projects demonstrated the diversity of possible preservation strategies. Industrial heritage consequently moved from the periphery of monument care towards a mature field capable of addressing production systems, worker environments, technological landscapes, difficult history, and post-industrial regeneration.

Cultural landscape research represents one of the most conceptually advanced achievements of Czech heritage scholarship. The category of landscape heritage zone expanded protection from individual monuments and settlement centres towards historically formed relationships among agriculture, water, vegetation, infrastructure, architecture, memory, economy, and environment. Successive NAKI research projects between 2012 and 2020 created standardised documentation, monitoring methodologies, historical mapping, GIS tools, typological analysis, and comparative assessment. The resulting national typology identified thirty-four types of historical cultural landscape reflecting specifically Czech historical conditions. This development made it possible to recognise heritage value in fishpond systems, agricultural landscapes, pilgrimage environments, designed estates, mining territories, battlefields, orchards, vineyards, hop fields, and other spaces that conventional architectural protection could not address adequately. The Czech system contained twenty-eight landscape heritage zones by the mid-2020s, demonstrating substantial institutionalisation of this territorial approach. Lednice-Valtice, Kladruby nad Labem, Třeboň, Kroměříž, and Žatec further showed how heritage values can depend upon living biological, agricultural, hydrological, and social processes. Landscape research consequently became one of the main bridges between cultural preservation and environmental governance.

Conservation science constitutes another major Czech achievement because it transformed restoration from a predominantly craft-based activity into an interdisciplinary evidence-driven field without abandoning specialist practical skill. The University of Chemistry and Technology in Prague developed a long-term institutional line connecting chemistry, materials research, conservation technology, and training. The Faculty of Restoration at the University of Pardubice combined studio practice with natural sciences and humanities within specialised university education. The Academy of Fine Arts preserved advanced traditions of painting and sculpture restoration while cooperating with scientific institutions. The Institute of Theoretical and Applied Mechanics of the Czech Academy of Sciences developed a dedicated heritage-science environment addressing structural mechanics, historical materials, moisture, weathering, diagnostics, climate effects, and non-destructive methods. Major museums and galleries built laboratories and conservation departments capable of radiography, microscopy, spectroscopy, material analysis, environmental monitoring, and treatment research. Conservation science therefore became a genuine national research network rather than a technical auxiliary activity.

The maturation of professional education reinforced this achievement. Czech heritage specialists increasingly received university-level preparation combining historical knowledge with scientific, technological, ethical, and practical competence. Conservator-restorers, architects, archaeologists, chemists, materials scientists, landscape specialists, museum professionals, librarians, archivists, digital specialists, and historians could participate in heritage projects from different disciplinary positions. This diversity reduced dependence upon narrowly defined professional roles inherited from earlier periods. Restoration training increasingly required documentation and research before intervention, while architectural conservation relied upon historical building surveys and materials analysis. Museum

conservation incorporated preventive management and scientific examination, and archaeological training integrated digital and environmental methods. The heritage professional of the 2020s consequently operated within a much more interdisciplinary knowledge environment than the specialist of the early 1990s. This professional diversification represents a less visible but foundational achievement because sophisticated preservation systems depend ultimately upon trained people rather than legislation or technology alone.

Perhaps the most structurally important research-policy achievement was the creation of dedicated Ministry of Culture programmes for applied research. The first NAKI programme operated from 2011, followed by NAKI II for 2016–2022 and NAKI III for 2023–2030. These programmes gave heritage research a stable thematic framework linked specifically with national and cultural identity rather than forcing all projects to compete entirely within general research schemes. Cultural heritage formed a major research domain within this funding architecture and generated collaborations among museums, the National Heritage Institute, universities, Academy institutes, libraries, archives, technical institutions, and specialist research organisations. The programmes encouraged outputs extending beyond scholarly articles, including certified methodologies, databases, specialised maps, digital infrastructures, conservation procedures, software, exhibitions, prototypes, and applied heritage technologies. This requirement strengthened the connection between research and professional practice. NAKI therefore represents one of the most distinctive elements of the Czech heritage-research model.

The breadth of the Ministry's research environment confirms that this applied orientation had become institutional rather than exceptional by the end of the period. In its evaluation of research-organisational development for 2025, the Ministry assessed nineteen research organisations operating within its sphere. These institutions cover heritage conservation, museums, galleries, libraries, archives, audiovisual culture, traditional culture, and other cultural domains. Long-term institutional funding exists alongside competitive NAKI programmes, allowing organisations to maintain research agendas not reducible entirely to short project cycles. The combination of institutional and competitive support is important because conservation laboratories, digital platforms, collections, documentary archives, specialist staff, and long-term surveys cannot be sustained through temporary grants alone. Czech heritage policy therefore increasingly recognised cultural institutions as producers of knowledge rather than solely custodians or public-service organisations. This recognition is one of the fundamental achievements distinguishing the mature system of 2025 from the transitional environment of the 1990s.

Digital cultural heritage developed from experimental activity into another major national infrastructure. Czech institutions entered digitisation unusually early, particularly through National Library cooperation associated with UNESCO's *Memory of the World* programme in the early 1990s. Manuscriptorium subsequently developed into an international gateway for written cultural heritage and by the end of 2025 contained hundreds of thousands of records and digital copies contributed by more than two hundred institutions in dozens of countries. The National Digital Library provided access to approximately eighty million pages by the end of 2025, while Webarchiv preserved hundreds of terabytes of Czech web content. eSbírky created a national aggregation environment for digitised museum and gallery collections from more than one hundred institutions. The National Heritage Institute developed integrated information systems linking monument registers, spatial information, documentation, and specialist resources. Digital preservation consequently expanded from scanning objects

towards creating durable systems of metadata, identifiers, long-term storage, access, interoperability, and cyber-resilience.

The treatment of born-digital heritage represents an especially important conceptual achievement within this transformation. Czech institutions increasingly recognised that websites, electronic records, digital publications, contemporary audiovisual works, databases, and other digitally created cultural objects cannot be preserved simply by printing them or assuming that online availability guarantees survival. Webarchiv established systematic preservation of Czech and Bohemical web resources through broad, selective, and thematic harvesting. The National Digital Archive developed dedicated infrastructure for electronic archival records possessing permanent evidential value. The National Film Archive increasingly preserved digital as well as photochemical cinema. Electronic-publication workflows within the National Library incorporated long-term preservation standards, metadata, integrity checking, and migration planning. Digital heritage therefore became a new preservation domain rather than merely a method for reproducing analogue collections.

Czech heritage research also achieved substantial internationalisation. By the end of 2025, Czechia possessed seventeen properties on the UNESCO World Heritage List, of which sixteen were cultural and one natural. The portfolio developed from the historic centres inscribed in 1992 towards modern architecture, cultural landscapes, mining heritage, spa culture, agricultural landscapes, and complex transnational properties. Kladruby, the Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří Mining Region, the Great Spa Towns of Europe, and Žatec demonstrate the increasing conceptual and managerial complexity of recent Czech nominations. Several properties require cooperation across international borders or participation in multinational serial nominations, transforming heritage management from national representation into shared governance. UNESCO monitoring of Prague, Český Krumlov, and other sites also created external professional accountability extending beyond the moment of inscription. Internationalisation consequently became a mechanism for improving comparative research, management planning, impact assessment, and long-term monitoring.

The intangible-heritage portfolio reinforced this international dimension. By the end of 2025, Czechia participated in ten elements on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and in one programme recognised within the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices. Several elements are multinational, including puppetry, modrotisk, falconry, timber rafting, and handmade glass production. Such inscriptions challenge the assumption that cultural heritage corresponds naturally with contemporary national borders. Traditional knowledge often developed through Central European, occupational, religious, riverine, or craft networks extending across several states. Czech participation in multinational safeguarding therefore contributed to a European understanding of heritage as shared cultural practice rather than exclusive national property. The international recognition of the *Bearers of Folk Craft Tradition* programme further demonstrated that Czechia could contribute safeguarding methodology to the international system rather than merely nominate its own traditions for recognition.

European integration broadened this internationalisation beyond UNESCO. Council of Europe conventions strengthened Czech approaches to architectural heritage, archaeology, and landscape protection, while Cultural Routes created transnational interpretative networks. Czechia became a full member of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes in 2023, and the Cyril and Methodius Route provides an example in which a Czech-based organisation

performs an international coordinating role. The European Heritage Label connected Czech sites with narratives of shared European history, diplomacy, modernism, monastic landscapes, and integration. Europa Nostra awards and advocacy networks provided professional recognition for conservation, education, adaptive reuse, and endangered sites. European Union funding supported digitisation, cultural infrastructure, research, cross-border projects, and heritage-related innovation. Internationalisation therefore reshaped Czech heritage not only through prestigious listings but through ordinary professional collaboration, comparative standards, mobility, research networks, and shared funding mechanisms.

Public participation represents another major achievement of the period, although it remains uneven across heritage sectors. The post-1989 revival of civil society enabled local associations, owners, religious communities, volunteers, historical societies, municipalities, and advocacy groups to participate much more actively in preservation. Some endangered monuments and industrial sites survived because local initiatives mobilised public attention before national institutions were able to provide long-term solutions. The National Heritage Institute increasingly incorporated volunteer programmes, educational activities, community cooperation, and public awards into its own work. *Památky nás baví* developed participatory heritage education across a network of specialist centres and gained international Europa Nostra recognition. European Heritage Days, Hradozámecká noc, *Patrimonium pro futuro*, local regeneration programmes, and public consultation expanded the environments in which citizens encounter conservation beyond ordinary tourism. Heritage thereby became increasingly visible as a social practice rather than a field belonging exclusively to professional custodians.

Tourism management also matured significantly. Czech monuments, historic towns, museums, and cultural landscapes became major components of the national visitor economy, generating employment, revenue, regional visibility, and incentives for restoration. At the same time, Prague, Český Krumlov, Karlštejn, and other popular destinations demonstrated the social and material costs of visitor concentration. Housing pressure, short-term rentals, crowding, changing retail structures, infrastructure stress, commercialisation, and resident dissatisfaction made clear that growing visitor numbers cannot serve as the only measure of heritage-tourism success. The national Tourism Development Strategy 2021–2030 incorporated environmental, social, cultural, and territorial sustainability explicitly into tourism governance. Prague's strategy for 2024–2027 moved still further towards visitor dispersion, resident quality of life, responsible behaviour, and protection of historical heritage. Czech policy therefore gradually shifted from heritage promotion towards heritage destination management.

Resilience became another important achievement, developed partly through repeated crises. The floods of 2002 forced museums, libraries, archives, and heritage institutions to confront emergency conservation, drying, evacuation, salvage, and disaster preparedness at unprecedented scale. Later flooding and extreme weather reinforced the need for preventive risk planning. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed financial and operational dependence upon physical audiences while accelerating digital access and forcing institutions to reconsider resilience of public services. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 transformed international heritage solidarity into material assistance, with Czech cultural institutions contributing equipment, expertise, and preservation support. Climate change increasingly brought drought, heat, storms, vegetation stress, water-management problems, and biological risks into heritage planning. Cybersecurity emerged as an additional threat as cultural documentation

and collection systems became digitally dependent. Czech heritage institutions therefore entered the mid-2020s with a much broader conception of risk than had existed at the beginning of the period.

Research into climate and environmental relationships represents an especially important sign of this maturity. Cultural landscapes, gardens, historic buildings, collections, archaeological deposits, timber structures, and industrial sites all respond to environmental change differently. Conservation science increasingly investigates moisture, salts, temperature, biological deterioration, structural behaviour, and material ageing under changing climatic conditions. Landscape researchers examine the tension and potential synergy between cultural-historical values and biodiversity protection. Heritage institutions increasingly consider energy efficiency and renewable-energy adaptation without assuming that conventional retrofit solutions can be applied mechanically to historic fabric. Historical water-management systems and landscape structures are also being re-examined for their potential relevance to present resilience. Heritage preservation thereby became increasingly connected with environmental research rather than treated as a culturally isolated activity.

Another major achievement was the consolidation of heritage as an applied research field capable of producing knowledge useful directly to public decision-making. Certified methodologies developed through NPÚ, NAKI projects, universities, museum laboratories, and Academy institutes address building surveys, monument classification, industrial heritage, landscape zones, modern architecture, conservation materials, digital documentation, archaeological methods, museum preservation, garden culture, and numerous other specialised problems. These methodologies transform research into repeatable professional procedures and increase transparency in decisions that might otherwise depend excessively upon individual expert intuition. Specialised maps and databases allow large territories and collections to be assessed comparatively rather than as isolated cases. Digital repositories preserve research evidence beyond the life of individual projects. Czech heritage scholarship therefore contributes directly to planning, restoration, museum management, archaeology, tourism, and cultural administration. The distinction between academic research and practical heritage work has become increasingly permeable.

The geographical polycentrism of the system represents a further strength. Prague remains dominant in national administration, major museums, central libraries, universities, research institutes, and international visibility, but important specialist capacities developed elsewhere. Brno hosts major museum, university, archaeological, architectural, conservation, and technical institutions. Litomyšl became a national centre for restoration education, Strážnice for intangible heritage, Ostrava for industrial-heritage methodology, Kroměříž for garden culture, Telč for heritage science, and regional museums preserve territorially specific collections and knowledge throughout the country. Archaeological institutes divide major responsibilities between Prague and Brno, while regional authorised organisations contribute field research across all territories. Landscape and industrial research similarly relies upon geographically distributed case studies and professional networks. Czech heritage expertise is therefore centralised institutionally but not intellectually confined to the capital.

This regional structure is particularly important because heritage itself is geographically specific. Knowledge of a local building tradition, dialect, landscape, archaeological sequence, industrial process, ritual, or collection frequently depends upon long-term research within one region. Centralised national standards alone cannot replace such cumulative local expertise.

Czech heritage preservation functions effectively when regional knowledge can be connected with national methodological infrastructure and international research. The interaction of local and central levels therefore represents one of the system's characteristic strengths. It also helps explain why museums, regional branches of NPÚ, municipalities, and specialist centres remain essential even in an era of digital aggregation. Heritage data may become nationally searchable, but the cultural context from which they derive remains spatially grounded.

The broadest intellectual achievement of the period was the transition from an object-centred to a systems-oriented concept of cultural heritage. In the early post-socialist imagination, preservation could still be represented primarily through monuments, historic architecture, museum treasures, and archaeological discoveries. By 2025, Czech heritage research routinely addressed landscapes, technological systems, intangible traditions, collection histories, environmental processes, digital infrastructures, community participation, social memory, and born-digital culture. A heritage object increasingly appears within a network of values, functions, documentation, people, institutions, technologies, and ecological conditions rather than as an isolated artefact. This does not reduce the importance of material authenticity. On the contrary, it places material preservation inside a richer understanding of the relationships that make cultural inheritance intelligible. The expansion from objects towards systems is therefore perhaps the most important conceptual achievement uniting the different sectors examined throughout Part Three.

This development also produced a more explicit future orientation. Preservation is no longer concerned only with preventing immediate loss but with determining what kinds of evidence future societies should still be able to study, experience, and reinterpret. Preventive conservation protects objects before damage becomes visible, archaeological preservation in situ reserves information for future analytical methods, digital preservation plans for technological obsolescence, and contemporary collecting selects objects whose long-term significance cannot yet be known with certainty. Intangible-heritage safeguarding asks whether younger generations will continue to practise inherited knowledge, while landscape conservation considers whether cultural structures can remain legible under future climate conditions. Heritage policy therefore increasingly operates under conditions of uncertainty. Czech research has developed many of the methodological tools required for such anticipatory preservation even though the concept has not been unified under one official theoretical framework.

The achievements of 1993–2025 should nevertheless not be romanticised. Financial resources remain uneven across institutions and regions, and many privately or municipally owned monuments continue to face maintenance deficits. Depository capacity, digital storage, specialist laboratories, skilled craft labour, archaeological processing, and conservation staff require continuous expenditure that is often less politically visible than major restoration projects. The central monument-care legislation remains based upon a 1987 Act whose repeated amendment has not resolved every structural problem associated with contemporary ownership, planning, climate adaptation, or integrated heritage management. Project-based research can produce outstanding methodologies and databases without guaranteeing permanent staffing or technological maintenance after grant funding ends. Digital systems themselves age and require migration, cybersecurity, hardware renewal, and long-term governance. Rapidly changing 20th- and 21st-century heritage remains especially vulnerable because societal consensus about its value frequently develops only after significant loss has already occurred.

Regional inequalities constitute another unresolved weakness. National institutions can maintain highly specialised laboratories, digital departments, researchers, and international partnerships that smaller municipal museums or heritage organisations cannot replicate. Some regions possess dense professional networks and successful tourism economies, while others contain endangered heritage without equivalent financial or visitor support. Rural religious architecture, large industrial complexes, military structures, neglected post-war buildings, and privately owned monuments can be particularly difficult to sustain economically. Professional expertise can also become concentrated in specific institutions and therefore vulnerable when experienced specialists retire. The long-term achievement of the Czech system will depend increasingly upon transferring knowledge between generations and institutions rather than relying upon individual experts. Heritage preservation is ultimately only as durable as the professional communities maintaining it.

The Czech experience also demonstrates that international recognition does not remove domestic management problems. UNESCO inscription can strengthen professional standards and public visibility while simultaneously increasing visitor pressure, branding, development expectations, and political sensitivity. Community participation can strengthen preservation but also reveal genuine conflict over ownership, interpretation, commercialisation, and acceptable change. Climate adaptation may require interventions that challenge established notions of authenticity, while energy transition can bring new infrastructure into sensitive historical landscapes. Digital access can democratise knowledge while creating privacy, copyright, cybersecurity, and long-term sustainability problems. Scientific technologies can improve diagnosis while creating pressure to intervene simply because sophisticated methods are available. Mature heritage policy therefore does not eliminate conflict but develops better procedures for recognising and managing competing values.

Alexander Buychik's work on klironomy is especially relevant at this synthetic level because it attempts to provide an integrated conceptual language for precisely the fragmentation visible across contemporary heritage practice. His 2025 methodological study systematises twenty-five klironomical methods linking value, canon, historicity, cultural memory, social legitimation, diagnostics, expertise, preservation design, and other philosophical and applied dimensions. This framework should not be represented as an officially institutionalised Czech heritage discipline by the end of 2025. Czech monument care, conservation science, archaeology, museology, landscape research, and intangible-heritage safeguarding remained organised through their established professional and scientific traditions. Klironomy is nevertheless relevant as a theoretical proposal because it asks how those specialised practices can be interpreted within one broader science of cultural continuity. The Czech heritage system provides an unusually rich empirical environment against which such a proposal can be examined because it contains highly developed institutions across almost every major heritage category.

Buychik's work on revitalisation contributes a similarly relevant future-oriented dimension. Czech experience repeatedly demonstrates that physical survival alone does not guarantee meaningful continuity when castles, factories, religious structures, technical sites, landscapes, or urban buildings lose viable functions. Revitalisation requires research into cultural value before new use is selected, because adaptation that destroys significant historical relationships can preserve a structure physically while emptying it of heritage meaning. The Czech industrial and urban examples discussed throughout Part Three demonstrate how difficult this balance can become in practice. Buychik's proposal for

specialised interdisciplinary preparation of revitalisation professionals therefore corresponds with a genuine structural need visible in the Czech heritage environment. Its broader relevance lies in connecting architectural, landscape, social, economic, and cultural reasoning before intervention rather than after redevelopment programmes have already been fixed.

Digital klironomical research provides another direct connection with major Czech achievements. Buychik and Anisiia Tomanek's 2025 study of digital graphics in heritage restoration emphasises non-invasive documentation, three-dimensional modelling, reconstruction, visualisation, and the preservation of historical information before physical intervention. These principles correspond closely with Czech developments in archaeological documentation, monument recording, conservation science, digital repositories, museum digitisation, and research infrastructures. Their work on digital, hybrid, and future heritage additionally raises the question of how cultural institutions should preserve objects whose cultural significance emerges before historical distance has stabilised their value. Czech Webarchiv, the National Digital Archive, contemporary museum collecting, audiovisual preservation, and electronic-document workflows already encounter this problem operationally. Klironomy therefore offers a potentially productive theoretical vocabulary for issues Czech institutions are already confronting practically, even though the institutional disciplines themselves remain distinct.

A final major achievement lies in the growing recognition that cultural heritage is not a passive residue of the past but an active component of contemporary knowledge, identity, environment, education, research, and public life. Czech heritage institutions no longer justify preservation solely through reverence for historical monuments. Archaeological data contribute to environmental and population history, historical landscapes inform discussions of water and land management, conservation science advances materials research, museums support scientific analysis, and digital collections enable new forms of computational scholarship. Heritage properties support regional economies and education, while intangible traditions sustain community participation and intergenerational knowledge. International networks position Czech heritage within shared European and global cultural frameworks. Preservation therefore generates new knowledge and social functions rather than merely delaying physical decay.

In summary, the period from 1993 to 2025 transformed Czech cultural heritage preservation from a strong but institutionally inherited monument-care tradition into a broad, interdisciplinary, research-intensive, digitally connected, internationally integrated, and increasingly participatory heritage system. Its principal achievements include the consolidation of the National Heritage Institute, preservation of institutional continuity, modernisation of collection law, strengthening of preventive archaeology, construction of AIS CR as a national research infrastructure, expansion of landscape protection, professional recognition of industrial and modern heritage, creation of specialised conservation-science networks, and development of university-level restoration education. The sequence of NAKI, NAKI II, and NAKI III gave applied heritage research a stable national policy framework and enabled methodologies, databases, maps, technologies, and digital tools to move directly from research into professional practice. Manuscriptorium, the National Digital Library, Webarchiv, eSbírky, IISPP, and the National Digital Archive transformed digitisation into permanent information infrastructure rather than temporary reproduction projects. The UNESCO portfolio expanded to seventeen World Heritage properties by the end of 2025, while intangible heritage, European networks, and transnational nominations increasingly

positioned Czech preservation within international systems of shared responsibility. Community participation, heritage education, volunteering, and sustainable-tourism policy expanded the social base upon which professional conservation depends. Environmental risk, climate change, disaster preparedness, cybersecurity, and born-digital heritage enlarged the field's responsibility towards future conditions that cannot be predicted fully from present experience. Persistent problems remain in legislation, financing, regional inequality, institutional sustainability, professional succession, and the protection of rapidly changing recent heritage, but these weaknesses now exist within a system possessing substantial methodological capacity to identify and analyse them. The klironomical work of Alexander Buychik offers a complementary theoretical interpretation of this development by treating cultural heritage as a process of value formation, historical continuity, social legitimation, preservation design, technological adaptation, and transmission rather than as a static collection of protected objects. The major Czech achievement by 2025 was therefore not simply that more heritage had been preserved, catalogued, restored, digitised, or internationally recognised, but that preservation itself had become a sophisticated knowledge system capable of connecting the material past, living culture, scientific research, environmental change, public responsibility, and the cultural possibilities of the future.

Part Four

Art History and the Study of Arts in Contemporary Czechia

General Characteristics of Czech Art History and Art Studies after 1993

Czech art history after 1993 developed as a historically established discipline undergoing profound methodological, institutional, and international transformation rather than as a newly created field of the independent Czech Republic. Its core remained the scholarly study of visual art, architecture, artistic objects, images, artists, patrons, collections, artistic institutions, and the historical conditions within which visual culture was produced and received. At the same time, the boundaries of what could legitimately constitute an object of art-historical research expanded substantially during the following three decades. Canonical painting, sculpture, architecture, and graphic art remained central, but photography, design, applied arts, exhibition practices, visual media, public monuments, industrial imagery, popular visual culture, and contemporary artistic production became increasingly integrated into scholarly inquiry. The methodological repertoire similarly broadened from attribution, stylistic analysis, iconography, archival research, and formal interpretation towards social history, reception studies, institutional analysis, gender perspectives, visual studies, anthropology of images, political history, media theory, and digital methods. This expansion did not abolish the classical foundations of Czech art history but altered the questions that could be asked of familiar objects. The discipline consequently became more plural while retaining an unusually strong empirical and source-based tradition. By 2025, Czech art history was best understood as a polycentric research field in which traditional historical scholarship coexisted with increasingly interdisciplinary forms of art studies.

The principal intellectual watershed preceded the establishment of the Czech Republic itself. The political changes of November 1989 removed ideological and institutional constraints that had shaped university appointments, publishing, international travel, research agendas, and interpretation of 20th-century artistic culture during the socialist period. Scholars could again engage directly with methodological developments in Western European and North American art history and renew intensive contacts with Austria, Germany, Italy, France, Britain, the United States, and neighbouring Central European countries. Previously marginalised or politically restricted scholars and subjects could return to academic and public discussion, while institutions gained substantially greater freedom in recruitment, teaching, exhibition policy, and international cooperation. The year 1993 nevertheless had major institutional significance because independent Czech cultural and academic organisations now operated within a sovereign national framework and developed their own funding and international strategies. Czech art history therefore experienced 1989 as the primary epistemic opening and 1993 as the consolidation of a transformed institutional environment. This distinction is essential because it avoids portraying independence as a disciplinary year zero. The post-1993 field emerged through the interaction of restored intellectual freedom with much older Czech, Czechoslovak, Viennese, German-speaking, and Central European scholarly traditions.

Those older traditions continued to shape the field strongly. Art history had been institutionalised in the Czech lands during the 19th century and developed in close interaction

with the University of Vienna, the Prague universities, museums, monument care, academies, and learned societies. Scholars such as Jan Erazim Vocel, Karel Chytil, Vojtěch Birnbaum, Antonín Matějček, Max Dvořák, Václav Richter, Albert Kutal, Jan Květ, Jaroslav Pešina, and many others established approaches to style, iconography, medieval art, architecture, monument research, and historical interpretation that remained part of disciplinary memory after 1993. The Vienna School of Art History held particular importance because several generations of Czech and Moravian scholars studied within or responded critically to its methodological environment. Post-1989 scholarship increasingly investigated this inheritance historiographically rather than simply treating it as an unquestioned lineage of authoritative predecessors. Questions concerning nationalism, empire, institutional power, Marxism, structuralism, conservation doctrine, and political pressure became part of the history of the discipline itself. Czech art history thus began to examine not only artworks but also the historical conditions under which knowledge about art had been produced. Historiographical self-reflection became one of the clearest signs of disciplinary maturation.

Methodological pluralisation was therefore one of the defining features of the period from 1993 to 2025. Formal and stylistic analysis remained indispensable where questions concerned chronology, artistic relationships, attribution, workshop practice, or the development of visual form. Iconography and iconology continued to provide essential tools for interpreting religious, mythological, political, and allegorical imagery. Archival research retained exceptional importance because contracts, inventories, correspondence, accounts, catalogues, estate records, institutional files, and conservation documentation frequently allow the social circumstances of art production to be reconstructed with unusual precision. These established methods were increasingly joined by inquiries into patronage, reception, gender, class, cultural identity, memory, ideology, institutional power, visual communication, and the economics of artistic production. The artwork was thus less frequently approached as an autonomous aesthetic object existing outside society. Instead, Czech researchers increasingly examined the relationships among image, material form, producer, commissioner, institution, audience, political environment, and cultural memory. Methodological diversity became normal rather than a temporary correction to one dominant school.

The institutional structure supporting this research is unusually varied. Art history is practised within universities, the Czech Academy of Sciences, art museums, galleries, museums of applied arts, art academies, heritage institutions, archives, libraries, independent research centres, and occasionally organisations oriented towards contemporary cultural practice. These workplaces differ substantially in their primary missions and therefore generate different types of art-historical knowledge. University departments combine research with disciplinary education and the training of future scholars, teachers, curators, and heritage professionals. Academy institutes can sustain long-term fundamental research and documentary projects that extend beyond normal teaching cycles. Galleries and museums work directly with collections and connect scholarship with attribution, provenance, conservation, exhibitions, cataloguing, and public interpretation. Art academies create unusually close contact between art history, theory, criticism, curating, and active artistic production. The Czech field is therefore institutionally plural rather than organised around a single national centre.

The Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences forms the principal specialised non-university research institution within this environment. Its contemporary research remit covers the history and theory of visual arts, aesthetics, architecture, and musicology, while its programmes extend from medieval art to the 21st century. Long-term projects such as the

multivolume history of Czech visual art and systematic inventories of artistic monuments demonstrate the persistence of research programmes whose completion may require decades rather than individual grant cycles. The Institute is organised through specialised research departments and centres addressing chronological periods, art-historical topography, historiography and theory, documentation, photography, epigraphy, sepulchral studies, Rudolfine culture, Baroque ceiling painting, and related subjects. Its researchers cooperate extensively with universities, museums, galleries, conservation institutions, and foreign research centres. Membership in the international Research Institutes in the History of Art network places the Institute within a global community of major specialised art-historical institutions. The Institute consequently combines national documentary responsibilities with internationally oriented fundamental research. Its post-1993 development demonstrates the continuing importance of institutional continuity for Czech art history.

One of the Institute's particular strengths is the integration of research with long-term documentary infrastructure. Its Department of Art-Historical Topography, established in 1993, continued the continental European tradition of studying artistic monuments comprehensively by geographical territory rather than solely by artist, genre, or period. The monumental series devoted to the artistic monuments of Prague and to Moravia and Silesia exemplifies scholarship in which architecture, sculpture, painting, urban development, historical documentation, and field research are combined. The Documentation Department, formally established in its present specialised form in 2006, manages important archival and documentary collections while conducting research into art-historical sources, historiography, conservation history, topography, inscriptions, sepulchral culture, and photography. The Institute's photographic holdings contain more than 140,000 registered items and constitute both documentation of artworks and an object of photographic research in their own right. A Czech Art History Bibliography has been developed institutionally since 1971 and provides another form of disciplinary infrastructure. Such resources demonstrate that art history depends not only upon interpretative innovation but upon sustained preservation, classification, and accessibility of scholarly evidence. Czech art-historical research therefore retains an unusually strong documentary foundation.

Charles University represents the oldest continuously rooted university tradition of art history in the Czech lands. Its Institute of Art History at the Faculty of Arts describes a disciplinary history extending for more than 170 years, but the post-1989 period marked a particularly important institutional renewal. Two decades of marginalisation had brought university teaching close to institutional weakness before the political transition created conditions for rapid reconstruction. Student admissions expanded again, scholars previously unable to participate fully in university teaching joined the faculty, and organisational reform separated art history and aesthetics into distinct workplaces in 1991. On 1 September 1993, the former department became the Institute of Art History, deliberately reconnecting the university workplace with traditions interrupted during the socialist reorganisation of higher education. Doctoral study was opened in 1995, strengthening the Institute's ability to reproduce the discipline academically through successive generations. The later adoption of the Bologna bachelor-master structure altered curricula but did not remove the emphasis upon historical periods, methodology, iconography, sources, architectural research, and direct study of artworks. Charles University thus demonstrates how post-1993 Czech art history combined disciplinary restoration with gradual curricular modernisation.

The contemporary curriculum at Charles University also illustrates the persistence of classical disciplinary methods alongside newer interdisciplinary approaches. Introductory teaching explicitly situates art history in relation to history, aesthetics, philosophy, sociology, psychology, and auxiliary historical disciplines while retaining formal analysis and interpretative methods as basic scholarly competencies. Students continue to study Czech and European art chronologically, but advanced courses address contemporary methodological tendencies, heritage legislation, historical building research, philosophy of art, and interdisciplinary visual questions. By 2025, courses in English and international collaborative modules linked Prague students with universities in Warsaw, Milan, Düsseldorf, Vienna, Amsterdam, Paris, and elsewhere. Subjects such as visual literacy, photography, modern and contemporary art, museum studies, digital manuscripts, fashion, media, and visual communication increasingly crossed departmental boundaries. This curricular architecture demonstrates that disciplinary expansion did not require abandonment of chronological historical training. Instead, classical art history became the methodological core from which interdisciplinary specialisation could develop.

Masaryk University in Brno provides the second major historical university centre of Czech art history. Its Department of Art History was founded in 1927 as the second specialised art-historical university workplace in Czechoslovakia and developed through scholars associated with the Central European and Viennese traditions of the discipline. The Brno environment has long been particularly strong in medieval art, Baroque studies, architecture, collecting, Central European visual culture, and historiography. After 1989, the department became increasingly international in both staffing and research orientation while maintaining strong engagement with Moravian collections and monuments. By the 2020s, its academic community included specialists working on medieval visual cultures, early modern art, modern architecture, nationalism, museum history, design, visual culture, and the historiography of art history. The establishment of specialist centres such as the Centre for Early Modern Studies and RE for medieval visual cultures further strengthened research concentration without fragmenting the department into isolated disciplines. Brno thereby developed into a centre where regional empirical expertise and international theoretical research operate simultaneously. The department's profile demonstrates particularly clearly that Czech art history is not intellectually reducible to Prague.

Palacký University in Olomouc provides a third historically important university centre whose post-socialist development illustrates disciplinary revival outside the two largest Czech cities. The Department of Art History had originally been founded in 1946 by Václav Richter, a major representative of Czech architectural and art-historical thought shaped by the Vienna School tradition. After institutional interruption, the department was renewed in 1990 under Milan Togner. Its geographical environment provides exceptional access to Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, ecclesiastical, architectural, and collection heritage associated with Olomouc and Moravia. The department consequently combines university teaching with direct research upon artworks, monuments, collections, and archival resources located within the region. Its modern development has also included strong international cooperation and engagement with broader methodological approaches. The Olomouc case demonstrates that regional concentration upon a rich historical artistic environment need not imply methodological provincialism. Instead, territorial expertise can provide the empirical basis for scholarship participating in wider Central European debates.

Art academies constitute a distinct element of Czech art studies because they place art historians and theorists in direct institutional contact with practising artists, designers, architects, restorers, and curators. The Academy of Fine Arts in Prague expanded its educational profile substantially during the 1990s through new media, intermedia, drawing, and other fields while retaining theoretical education in art and architectural history. Its Department of Theory and History of Art provides historical, philosophical, aesthetic, media-theoretical, iconographic, architectural, and technological instruction within professional artistic education. The Academy's Art History Research Department developed from research begun at the end of the 1990s and became especially important for the critical documentation and reinterpretation of Czech art after 1945. Its archives, multimedia collections, bibliographical resources, and research projects challenged earlier simplified narratives of post-war art by systematically processing primary sources. The Academy also increasingly incorporated artistic research into doctoral education, further complicating the traditional division between scholarly interpretation and artistic practice. Art history within AVU thus functions not only retrospectively but in continual dialogue with contemporary artistic production.

The Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague provides an equally distinctive environment. Art theory and art history have formed part of its curriculum since the institution's 19th-century origins, but the contemporary Department of Theory and History of Art explicitly connects historical research with design, architecture, applied art, visual communication, contemporary art, aesthetics, and criticism. Since 2005, the school has offered specialised advanced study in the theory and history of design and new media, an area poorly represented within more traditional Czech art-history curricula at the time. Contemporary programmes extend these interests towards modern and contemporary art, digital culture, fashion, design theory, and artistic research. The department's position inside an art and design academy allows historians to interact directly with studio practice and observe how theoretical concepts operate within artistic production. It also makes applied art and design central rather than peripheral objects of historical research. UMPRUM therefore contributed significantly to expanding Czech art history beyond a hierarchy dominated by painting, sculpture, and monumental architecture.

Research museums and galleries form another major pillar of the discipline. The National Gallery Prague defines scientific research as one of its statutory responsibilities and combines collection stewardship with both basic and applied research. Its work spans Old Masters, 19th-century art, classical modernism, modern and contemporary art, prints and drawings, Asian and African art, conservation science, archives, provenance, and collection history. The Gallery's research structure demonstrates that interpretation of artworks cannot be separated from their physical preservation, documentation, attribution, provenance, and exhibition history. Institutional support and competitive grants allow curators and researchers to undertake monographs, catalogues, technical studies, exhibitions, and collaborative projects with universities and Academy institutes. The Gallery's specialised library and archive provide additional research infrastructure, while its publishing house, established in a new form in 2002, created a stable platform for scholarly catalogues, monographs, periodicals, and theoretical works. The National Gallery therefore operates simultaneously as collection institution, laboratory, archive, publisher, exhibition venue, and art-historical research centre.

The Moravian Gallery in Brno demonstrates the importance of a second major gallery tradition outside Prague. Its collections combine fine art, photography, architecture, graphic design,

and applied arts within one institution, creating strong opportunities for research across disciplinary boundaries. The historical merger that produced the Gallery in 1961 already placed painting and applied art within a common institutional framework, while post-1993 research increasingly exploited this breadth. Graphic design, photography, modern and contemporary art, and exhibition practice became particularly visible fields of investigation. The Brno International Biennial of Graphic Design strengthened contacts with international design culture and provided both collections and scholarly material. Experimental approaches to presentation and museum communication also encouraged reflection upon how art-historical narratives are constructed through exhibitions. The Moravian Gallery thus illustrates the way regional collection institutions can influence national methodological development rather than merely present locally held objects.

The Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague broadened the art-historical field in another direction. Recognised as a research organisation, it conducts basic and applied research into Czech and international applied art, design, book culture, photography, fashion, furniture, glass, ceramics, graphic design, and related forms of material culture. These categories historically occupied an ambiguous position between art history, technological history, craft studies, cultural history, and museum collecting. Their stronger institutional treatment after 1993 contributed to weakening the traditional hierarchy between autonomous fine art and functional objects. Research increasingly addressed production, consumption, industry, visual communication, materials, gender, lifestyle, and the relationship between artistic design and everyday life. The museum's exhibitions and publications therefore became important sources not only for the history of decorative art but for broader interpretations of modern Czech visual culture. This expansion prepared the ground for a more comprehensive understanding of design and applied art that will be addressed separately later in this Part.

Collection-based research also strengthened a material turn within Czech art history. Technical examination can identify pigments, binders, wood, textiles, metals, plastics, underdrawings, earlier restorations, and modifications invisible through conventional visual analysis. The National Gallery's Chemical-Technological Laboratory, with documentation reaching back to 1966, demonstrates how scientific examination became integrated into interpretation of artistic technique and object history. Dendrochronology, radiography, spectroscopy, microscopy, conservation reports, and restoration documentation can now contribute to attribution and chronology alongside stylistic comparison and archival evidence. Such methods do not replace historical interpretation, because analytical data cannot determine artistic significance automatically. They do, however, reduce dependence upon connoisseurial judgement when material evidence can test historical hypotheses. Czech art history therefore increasingly combines visual interpretation with the physical biography of the artwork.

Attribution and connoisseurship nevertheless remained important and did not disappear under methodological pluralisation. Czech collections contain enormous numbers of medieval, early modern, 19th-century, and modern works whose authorship, date, workshop relationships, provenance, and original contexts remain partly unresolved. Detailed visual comparison continues to identify hands, workshop conventions, copies, variants, later alterations, and connections between local and foreign artistic centres. Archival discoveries can confirm or challenge stylistic hypotheses, while technical analysis can separate original layers from later additions. The continued relevance of attribution is especially clear in museum and gallery research because collection catalogues require defensible identification of objects. Post-1993

Czech scholarship therefore did not simply replace traditional connoisseurship with cultural theory. Its characteristic development was the combination of refined object-based knowledge with broader historical interpretation.

One major methodological expansion concerned the social history of art. Researchers increasingly asked who financed artworks, how commissions were negotiated, how workshops were organised, where materials came from, how objects circulated, and which audiences encountered them. Patronage studies moved beyond lists of aristocratic or ecclesiastical commissioners towards analysis of social relationships, political representation, confessional identity, economic resources, and cultural competition. Collection history similarly became a field in which ownership, market exchange, taste, status, and institutionalisation could be reconstructed. Studies of 19th- and 20th-century artistic institutions increasingly examined associations, academies, state commissions, galleries, criticism, publishing, exhibition systems, and cultural administration. Art was therefore situated more explicitly within structures of power and social communication. This approach made it possible to analyse artistic production without reducing historical explanation either to formal evolution or to individual artistic genius.

Political interpretation also became substantially more important after 1989. Medieval royal imagery, confessional visual culture, Habsburg representation, 19th-century nationalism, First Republic modernism, fascism, wartime occupation, state socialism, dissident culture, and post-socialist transformation all became subjects through which art could be examined as an agent within political history. The fourth Czech Congress of Art Historians in 2012 explicitly took art and politics as its central theme, demonstrating how normal this relationship had become within disciplinary self-reflection. Research increasingly investigated not only overt propaganda but subtler mechanisms through which visual form contributes to collective identity, legitimacy, ideology, memory, or opposition. This approach also encouraged critical examination of the discipline's own political history. Scholars began asking how earlier art historians had adapted to nationalism, fascism, communism, institutional censorship, or state cultural policy. Czech art history thus became more willing to analyse its own participation in political culture.

The expansion towards visual studies further widened the field beyond objects traditionally classified as high art. Photography, posters, book illustration, magazines, reproductions, advertising, scientific imagery, political images, monuments, film-related visual material, and mass-mediated representations increasingly became legitimate sources for art-historical investigation. The journal *Umění / Art* explicitly defines its contemporary remit broadly enough to include visual studies, philosophy, literature, conservation, and archival research alongside classical art history. Research into photographic reproductions has shown that the history of art itself depended heavily upon technologies through which artworks were photographed, reproduced, published, compared, and circulated among scholars. Photography is therefore both an artistic medium and an infrastructure of disciplinary knowledge. The Institute of Art History's Photography Research Centre and extensive photographic collections make this double status particularly visible. Visual culture studies thus broadened Czech art history while also encouraging reflection upon the media through which art history constructs its own objects.

Gender-oriented research became another important component of this methodological diversification. Traditional canons had frequently privileged male artists, male patrons, and

institutional narratives in which women's artistic production or professional participation appeared marginal. Post-1993 scholarship increasingly examined women artists, designers, photographers, collectors, patrons, critics, educators, and cultural organisers as historical actors. Gender analysis also opened questions concerning representation of bodies, domesticity, sexuality, labour, femininity, masculinity, and institutional access. Scholars such as Martina Pachmanová contributed particularly strongly to the development of feminist art history and analysis of gender within Czech modern culture. Gender became relevant not only because neglected artists could be added to existing narratives but because the categories through which those narratives had been constructed required reconsideration. The result was therefore a methodological challenge to canon formation rather than simply an enlargement of the list of recognised names.

Postcolonial and decolonial questions entered Czech art studies more slowly and remained less institutionally established than in some Western European countries, but they had become increasingly visible by the 2020s. Czech and Czechoslovak culture does not fit easily into models derived from overseas colonial empires, yet the region participated in imperial, Orientalist, missionary, ethnographic, diplomatic, and global networks. Research therefore began to examine relationships between Central European art and colonial knowledge without assuming either that the Czech lands possessed no connection with coloniality or that their experience duplicated that of major maritime empires. Collections of Asian, African, and non-European art created additional questions concerning classification, collecting histories, representation, and asymmetrical cultural exchange. Contemporary art institutions also engaged more directly with migration, race, global inequality, and the politics of representation. These developments remained contested and uneven, but their presence demonstrates the widening geographical and ethical horizon of Czech art studies.

A stronger and more established development was the reorientation of Czech art history towards Central Europe. Earlier national art histories often organised artistic development primarily within the boundaries of modern Czech statehood or narratives of Czech national culture. Post-1993 research increasingly emphasised that artists, architects, patrons, workshops, objects, styles, and institutions moved through territories of the Bohemian Crown, Habsburg Monarchy, Holy Roman Empire, German-speaking Europe, Poland, Hungary, Italy, France, and other regions. Prague, Brno, Olomouc, Vienna, Dresden, Munich, Wrocław, Kraków, Bratislava, Budapest, and other cities can therefore be analysed as interconnected cultural centres rather than representatives of isolated national schools. Multilingual archival research became particularly important because Czech artistic history is documented extensively in German, Latin, Italian, French, and other languages as well as Czech. This Central European perspective weakened simplistic national ownership of artistic phenomena without making regional specificity irrelevant. Czech art history increasingly positioned itself as research into cultural circulation across changing political borders.

Research into Czech-German relationships became central within this process. The artistic culture of the Czech lands before 1945 was linguistically and institutionally heterogeneous, yet 20th-century national conflicts and post-war population transfers had encouraged later narratives in which German-speaking artists and institutions could become marginalised within Czech art history. Post-1989 scholarship progressively reintegrated these actors into accounts of architecture, visual art, design, education, collecting, and cultural institutions. The same process affected research into Jewish artists, patrons, collectors, architects, and cultural organisations disrupted by the Holocaust. Such reintegration changed the meaning of

‘Czech art’ from a primarily ethnic category towards a more territorial, institutional, and relational one. It also made provenance research and histories of displacement increasingly relevant to art-historical scholarship. The national canon thereby became less homogeneous and more historically accurate.

The reinterpretation of art produced under state socialism represents one of the most significant achievements of post-1993 art studies. Immediately after the fall of the communist regime, there was a strong tendency to structure recent artistic history around the opposition between official art and suppressed, unofficial, alternative, or dissident production. This distinction was historically important, but over time researchers increasingly demonstrated that artistic life between 1948 and 1989 was more complex than a simple binary between regime and resistance. Institutions, exhibitions, artistic unions, state commissions, regional networks, semi-official environments, private studios, public monuments, design, architecture, and changing periods of political control created multiple zones of negotiation. The Research Centre at the Academy of Fine Arts became particularly important from the late 1990s through systematic processing of sources and critical reinterpretation of Czech art after 1945. Archival research increasingly replaced moral classification with analysis of how artists actually operated within socialist cultural institutions. This historiographical shift made post-war art one of the most methodologically dynamic areas of Czech art history.

The study of contemporary art required another modification of disciplinary practice. The historian no longer works solely with completed historical periods but may investigate artists, exhibitions, institutions, and debates that remain active. Sources include interviews, digital communication, gallery documentation, criticism, videos, performance records, social media, and ephemeral installations as well as conventional archives and objects. Curators and critics can become both sources and producers of art-historical interpretation. The temporal distance between artistic event and scholarly analysis therefore contracts significantly. Czech art history responded through closer engagement with contemporary galleries, art academies, artist-run spaces, independent criticism, and curatorial research. The distinction between historian, critic, and curator became more permeable without disappearing entirely. This development is examined more fully in the later sections on contemporary art and exhibition practice.

Architecture retained a particularly strong position within Czech art history throughout the post-1993 period. The discipline's historical connections with monument research, the Vienna School, architectural history, and territorial surveys ensured that buildings remained central sources rather than peripheral examples of applied aesthetics. Research extended from Romanesque and Gothic monuments through Renaissance and Baroque architecture to historicism, modernism, socialist architecture, and contemporary building culture. Architectural historians increasingly examined commissioners, institutions, construction processes, urbanism, political representation, education, professional networks, and technologies alongside stylistic development. The participation of art historians in debates about new construction within historic environments also demonstrated the continuing public relevance of architectural expertise. At the same time, design and applied arts gained greater disciplinary independence through institutions such as UMPRUM, the Museum of Decorative Arts, and the Moravian Gallery. Czech art studies therefore developed towards a broader history of designed visual environments rather than a hierarchy in which architecture and decorative art simply supported painting and sculpture.

The relationship between art history and cultural heritage remained close but should not be confused conceptually. Art historians contribute expertise to monument identification, attribution, iconographic analysis, architectural research, museum collections, restoration projects, and conservation decisions. Historical building surveys and collection catalogues can rely heavily upon art-historical methods. Yet the primary question of art history concerns interpretation of artistic objects, visual forms, artistic production, and historical meaning, whereas heritage studies additionally address preservation, legal protection, management, transmission, vulnerability, and public stewardship. The same Gothic sculpture can therefore be studied simultaneously as an artwork and as an object of cultural heritage without the two fields becoming identical. Czech institutions often bring these functions together operationally, particularly within museums, galleries, and the National Heritage Institute. The analytical distinction remains necessary because this Part concerns the production of knowledge about art rather than the complete preservation system examined previously.

Digitalisation began changing art-historical research substantially during the 2000s and 2010s. Digitised archives, collection catalogues, photographic repositories, historical newspapers, exhibition catalogues, auction records, maps, databases, and scanned publications reduced dependence upon physical consultation of every source. High-resolution imaging enabled comparative visual analysis at levels of detail difficult to achieve through traditional reproductions. Databases made it possible to connect artists, works, places, exhibitions, patrons, and bibliographical records more systematically. Digital humanities methods also introduced possibilities for network analysis, spatial mapping, corpus analysis, and large-scale examination of visual or textual sources. Czech art history adopted these methods unevenly, and traditional individual object study remained dominant in many areas. Nevertheless, digital infrastructure changed the practical conditions under which even conventional scholarship could be conducted.

The digital turn also stimulated reflection upon the history of art-historical documentation itself. Photographs, slides, card catalogues, inventories, archive files, and reproductions are no longer understood simply as neutral carriers of information. The Sudek Project at the Institute of Art History, for example, treated Josef Sudek's documentation of artworks as both cultural heritage and a research object revealing how artworks were photographed and represented. Current research into photomechanical reproductions similarly asks how remote visual access shaped the dissemination and interpretation of art during the 20th century. The discipline therefore increasingly studies the media through which earlier scholars saw artworks they could not encounter directly. This historiographical awareness is especially important in the digital age because screens and online databases now mediate a growing proportion of scholarly visual experience. Czech research thereby contributes to a wider international discussion about how reproduction technologies shape art-historical knowledge.

Publishing infrastructure also expanded and diversified after 1993. The Institute of Art History's journal *Umění / Art*, published since 1953, remained the leading Czech specialised art-historical periodical and increasingly positioned Czech research within broader Central European and international discussion. Its scope includes art from the Early Middle Ages to the present together with methodological, visual-studies, conservation, archival, philosophical, and interdisciplinary contributions. From 2024, the journal became openly accessible online, significantly broadening international availability. Masaryk University's *Opuscula historiae artium*, published under that title since 1996 while continuing an older Brno publication tradition, provides another major peer-reviewed platform and has been indexed in international

databases including Scopus and ERIH PLUS. The multilingual international journal *Convivium*, launched in 2014 by Masaryk University, the Institute of Art History CAS, and the University of Lausanne, further strengthened Czech participation in transnational medieval art history. Specialist publication became one of the principal mechanisms through which Czech scholarship moved from national circulation towards sustained international visibility.

The role of English increased substantially in this process, although Czech remained essential to the discipline. Czech-language scholarship is indispensable for detailed work with national collections, local archives, regional heritage, terminology, and communication with domestic professional and public audiences. German retains particular importance because of the history of the Czech lands and the enormous quantity of German-language archival and scholarly material. Italian, French, Latin, and other languages remain necessary within particular chronological and thematic specialisations. English increasingly became the common language of international publication, conferences, European projects, and collaborative university teaching. This multilingual environment is one of the strengths of Czech art history because it encourages scholars to move between national and international research communities. At the same time, pressure to publish internationally can create tension with the continuing scholarly need for substantial Czech-language monographs, catalogues, source editions, and regional studies.

Internationalisation occurred through institutions as well as language. Researchers from Czech universities and the Academy increasingly participated in collaborative projects with Austrian, German, Polish, Slovak, Hungarian, Swiss, Italian, French, British, and other partners. The Institute of Art History joined RIHA and developed specialist lecture programmes regularly hosting international scholars. Masaryk University expanded international staffing and collaborative research concerned explicitly with Central European art and architecture. Charles University integrated international joint courses and research projects into its curriculum, while museum and gallery institutions increasingly co-organised exhibitions and publications across borders. Erasmus and other mobility programmes normalised foreign study and teaching for younger generations of researchers. Czech art history consequently became less isolated from the international methodological centres that had strongly influenced it before 1938 and before the communist closure of many intellectual networks.

Research funding altered disciplinary organisation as well. The Czech Science Foundation supported fundamental projects investigating individual artists, artistic networks, historiography, medieval imagery, architecture, visual culture, and numerous other subjects. Ministry of Culture programmes such as NAKI and NAKI II encouraged art historians to cooperate with conservation scientists, museums, heritage institutions, architects, archivists, and information specialists on applied research. Institutional funding for research organisations gave the National Gallery, Museum of Decorative Arts, and other collection institutions a more explicit research framework. Charles University and other universities developed internal programmes supporting longer-term research and interdisciplinary cooperation. Project funding enabled larger teams and international networks to address questions that exceeded the capacity of individual scholars. It also introduced pressures associated with competition, short funding cycles, quantitative evaluation, and administrative demands.

The professional community became increasingly self-reflective through the activities of the Czech Association of Art Historians and its national congresses. The first Congress of Czech

Art Historians in 2003 explicitly aimed to encourage discussion of common methodological problems, strengthen communication across museums, galleries, heritage care, and universities, and increase public awareness of the discipline. Subsequent congresses addressed transformations in art history, art and politics, authorship, professional identity, institutional change, and other questions extending beyond narrow chronological specialisation. The eighth congress, held at Masaryk University in September 2024, addressed themes including ecological approaches, transformations of art and architectural education, authenticity, exhibitions as media, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, visual culture, and the future of the discipline. The congress tradition demonstrates that Czech art historians increasingly understood methodological debate as a collective professional responsibility. Art history was therefore not merely expanding through individual research projects but also examining its own institutional and epistemological assumptions.

Public engagement became another increasingly important characteristic. Art historians contribute to exhibitions, catalogues, public lectures, heritage debates, media, educational programmes, digital resources, expert opinions, and controversies concerning monuments or new architecture. Museums and galleries require scholarship to be translated into forms accessible to visitors who do not possess specialist disciplinary knowledge. Contemporary debates about public monuments, restitution, provenance, socialist architecture, national identity, gender, or contested memory frequently place art historians within public rather than exclusively academic discussion. This visibility creates opportunities but also demands careful distinction between scholarly evidence, cultural criticism, political advocacy, and personal judgement. The public role of the discipline consequently became broader after 1989 as censorship weakened and cultural institutions acquired greater interpretative autonomy. Czech art history increasingly operates between academic scholarship and public cultural reasoning.

Several structural weaknesses nevertheless remained visible by 2025. Prague continues to concentrate a large proportion of national collections, specialised archives, academic institutions, publishing infrastructure, and employment opportunities, even though Brno, Olomouc, and other centres provide important counterweights. University humanities frequently face limitations in staffing, space, and long-term financing, as illustrated by the persistent infrastructural problems recorded in the institutional history of Charles University's art-history workplace. Project-based research can favour topics capable of attracting competitive funding while long-term cataloguing, source editing, bibliography, and basic documentary work remain less visible. Younger researchers often face uncertain employment despite lengthy specialist training. International publication requirements can also create tension between global visibility and sustained research serving Czech regional collections or local audiences. These problems do not indicate disciplinary weakness but shape which kinds of research can be pursued most easily.

Another unresolved question concerns the relationship between disciplinary expansion and disciplinary identity. If art history includes visual culture, design, architecture, photography, film-related imagery, digital media, museum practices, political iconography, material studies, and artistic research, its boundaries inevitably overlap with aesthetics, cultural studies, media studies, anthropology, history, architecture, design research, and museology. Some scholars welcome this permeability because images and artistic practices rarely correspond neatly to university departmental boundaries. Others emphasise the continuing need for competencies distinctive to art history, including close visual analysis, object knowledge, chronology,

attribution, source criticism, iconography, and familiarity with artistic techniques. Czech practice generally developed through combination rather than replacement. Interdisciplinary methods expanded the field most successfully when they were grounded in precise knowledge of objects, sources, collections, and historical contexts.

The field also became increasingly conscious that artistic canons are historical constructions rather than neutral inventories of the greatest works. Canon formation reflects collection history, exhibition practice, academic curricula, political ideology, gender hierarchies, linguistic communities, regional inequalities, and changing aesthetic values. Post-1993 Czech scholarship gradually reopened artists, movements, media, and cultural communities that had been marginalised by nationalist, socialist, modernist, or medium-specific narratives. German-speaking artistic culture, women artists, design, photography, regional centres, religious production, post-war official art, applied arts, and ephemeral contemporary practices all benefited from this revision to different degrees. Yet expansion of the canon does not mean that every object receives equal historical significance. Art history still requires evaluation, comparison, interpretation, and argument concerning why some objects or phenomena are more consequential for particular research questions than others.

By the 2020s, ecological and technological questions had begun to add another layer to disciplinary reflection. Art historians increasingly considered environmental histories of materials, extractive processes, landscapes, architecture, exhibitions, and artistic responses to climate change. The 2024 Congress of Art Historians explicitly included ecological perspectives among its principal thematic areas. Digitalisation and artificial intelligence simultaneously raised questions concerning image production, archives, reproduction, authorship, authenticity, and the future of visual analysis. These developments show that contemporary Czech art history is not limited to expanding the chronology of its subject matter. It is increasingly required to reconsider the concepts of artwork, author, medium, originality, visual evidence, and historical interpretation themselves.

The most characteristic feature of Czech art studies by 2025 was therefore coexistence rather than methodological succession. Classical connoisseurship did not disappear when social history developed, iconography remained useful after visual studies emerged, and archival research was not made obsolete by digital humanities. Material analysis strengthened rather than eliminated close visual study, while feminist, political, transnational, and postcolonial approaches opened questions that stylistic analysis alone could not answer. Museums and galleries maintained object-based scholarship while contemporary art institutions encouraged theoretical experimentation. Universities preserved chronological teaching while expanding into interdisciplinary research and international collaboration. The result is better described as a layered methodological ecology than as replacement of an old paradigm by a new one.

In summary, Czech art history and art studies between 1993 and 2025 developed through the interaction of deep disciplinary continuity and substantial methodological renewal. The post-1989 restoration of academic freedom reopened international intellectual exchange, while the independent Czech institutional framework after 1993 consolidated universities, Academy institutes, galleries, museums, art schools, and specialist organisations within a plural research environment. The Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences remained the principal specialised fundamental-research centre and combined chronological scholarship with topography, documentation, photography, historiography, theory, bibliographical infrastructure, and international cooperation. Charles University rebuilt and

expanded a university tradition extending back to the 19th century, while Masaryk University and Palacký University strengthened the polycentric geography of art-historical research through internationally oriented work rooted in Moravian artistic environments. The Academy of Fine Arts and UMPRUM created especially productive interfaces among art history, criticism, theory, contemporary practice, design, new media, and artistic research. The National Gallery Prague, Moravian Gallery, Museum of Decorative Arts, and other collection institutions demonstrated that art-historical research is inseparable from collections, provenance, technical analysis, conservation, cataloguing, exhibitions, and public interpretation. Methodologically, the field broadened from formal, stylistic, iconographic, and attributional approaches towards social, political, institutional, gender, transnational, visual, material, and digital histories without abandoning rigorous object-based scholarship. Central Europe increasingly replaced the nation state as the default interpretative frame for many periods, enabling Czech-German, Czech-Slovak, Habsburg, Jewish, Italian, Polish, Austrian, and wider European connections to be incorporated more fully into historical narratives. The re-evaluation of socialist-period art, expansion of contemporary visual studies, increased attention to photography and design, and critique of inherited canons considerably widened the range of legitimate research objects. Journals such as *Umění / Art*, *Opuscula historiae artium*, and *Convivium*, together with international projects, conferences, and the congresses of Czech art historians, provided sustained platforms for disciplinary communication and methodological self-reflection. By 2025, Czech art history could therefore be characterised as a mature Central European discipline distinguished not by one dominant theoretical school but by the productive coexistence of precise historical scholarship, strong institutional memory, extensive collection and documentary infrastructures, methodological pluralism, and growing engagement with the changing visual culture of the contemporary world.

Medieval and Early Modern Art Studies

Medieval and early modern art constitute two of the strongest and most internationally visible areas of Czech art-historical scholarship after 1993. Their importance derives partly from the exceptional density of Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Mannerist, and Baroque monuments and collections preserved in Bohemia, Moravia, and Czech Silesia. It also reflects scholarly traditions extending through several generations of Czech and Czechoslovak art historians whose research remained fundamental after the political transition of 1989. The post-1993 period did not replace these traditions but substantially broadened their intellectual horizons, sources, technologies, and geographical frameworks. Stylistic chronology and attribution continued to matter, yet researchers increasingly investigated function, patronage, liturgy, reception, religious practice, political representation, collecting, materiality, and cultural transfer. Medieval and early modern artworks were consequently studied less frequently as isolated expressions of national stylistic development and more often as participants in interconnected Central European cultural systems. The movement of artists, objects, models, manuscripts, materials, patrons, and ideas across political frontiers became a central explanatory principle. By 2025, Czech scholarship in these periods combined detailed object-based expertise with a strongly contextual and increasingly transnational conception of art history.

The chronological boundary between medieval and early modern art itself became increasingly flexible within this research. Older national narratives tended to organise artistic history into comparatively stable stylistic periods such as Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Mannerism, and Baroque. Contemporary scholarship continues to use these terms where they provide useful analytical orientation, but it treats transitions among them with considerably greater caution. Gothic artistic forms survived well into the 16th century in some environments, while Renaissance elements entered Czech and Moravian visual culture selectively and at different speeds according to region, patronage, artistic medium, and social context. The Reformation and Catholic Reform similarly altered the functions of images without producing one instantaneous stylistic rupture. Research into the period around 1450–1550 has therefore become especially important because it reveals simultaneous continuity and transformation rather than a simple transition from one completed style to another. The study of early modern art likewise increasingly begins from social and institutional processes rather than from the assumption that Renaissance forms automatically inaugurated modernity. Czech researchers have thus contributed to a wider reassessment of historical periodisation as an interpretative instrument rather than an objective structure inherent in the artworks themselves.

The Department of Medieval Art at the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences provides the principal specialised institutional base for fundamental research in the medieval field. Its chronological remit extends from the Christianisation of the Czech lands to the middle of the 16th century and includes architecture as well as the broader visual culture of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. The department's contemporary programme deliberately situates this material within European rather than exclusively national contexts. Its researchers work on architecture, panel painting, sculpture, manuscript illumination, royal representation, religious imagery, funerary monuments, patronage, reception, and the changing functions of works of art. Major projects are frequently collaborative and combine art history with history, archaeology, theology, philology, codicology, conservation research, and digital documentation. This structure allows questions initially focused upon individual objects to be expanded into studies of religious practice, court culture, social memory, political representation, and cultural exchange. The department's post-1993 development consequently illustrates the broader methodological transformation of Czech medieval art history from stylistic classification towards contextual interpretation.

The collective project *Imago, imagines* offers one of the clearest examples of this change. Instead of constructing another chronological survey of medieval Czech artworks, the project examined transformations in the functions of images and artistic objects from the tenth century to the first third of the 16th century. Its two-volume publication therefore brought together questions concerning religious use, representation, memory, devotional practice, political authority, perception, and the changing relationships between images and their audiences. Such an approach treats the medieval artwork not primarily as an autonomous aesthetic object but as an active element within ritual, social, institutional, and communicative environments. A panel painting could function as an altar image, devotional focus, dynastic representation, object of memory, or component of a larger liturgical ensemble, and those functions could change over time. The same object may consequently require several histories rather than one account of stylistic origin and authorship. This functional orientation places Czech medieval scholarship within wider European discussions concerning image theory, anthropology of images, reception, and performativity. It also demonstrates how a strongly

empirical national research tradition could absorb newer theoretical approaches without abandoning close analysis of individual works.

Research into the Přemyslid and Luxembourg periods remained particularly important because these centuries produced some of the most internationally significant artistic environments of the medieval Czech lands. Earlier scholarship had already established the importance of royal and ecclesiastical patronage, Prague Castle, cathedral architecture, monastic foundations, court manuscripts, panel painting, and sculpture. Post-1993 research increasingly reconsidered these phenomena through networks connecting Prague and the Bohemian lands with France, the Empire, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Poland, and other regions. The court of Charles IV received renewed attention not merely as a national golden age but as a multilingual and trans-European political environment in which visual culture contributed to imperial representation, dynastic legitimacy, sacred kingship, and historical memory. Patronage by queens, bishops, monasteries, confraternities, aristocratic families, and urban communities has likewise complicated older narratives centred upon rulers and major male patrons. The growing field of studies concerned with women as donors and patrons demonstrates particularly clearly how social history has expanded the research agenda. Medieval Czech art is consequently interpreted increasingly through systems of commissioning and reception rather than through an isolated sequence of stylistic masterpieces.

Manuscript illumination became one of the most internationally productive areas within this scholarship. Researchers such as Milada Studničková, Lenka Panušková, Kateřina Kubínová, Hana Hlaváčková, and their collaborators have investigated illuminated manuscripts through iconography, codicology, patronage, workshop organisation, textual relationships, political symbolism, and cultural transfer. The study of manuscripts associated with the Luxembourg court has remained important, but research has expanded towards lesser-known books, lay prayer, mass production, Hussite visual culture, and the social functions of illuminated texts. *Art in an Unsettled Time: Bohemian Book Illumination before Gutenberg*, published in 2018, exemplifies this shift by connecting manuscript production between approximately 1375 and 1450 with political, religious, and social transformation rather than describing illumination only through stylistic development. The relationship between text and image becomes particularly important because the meaning of illumination depends upon the textual, liturgical, devotional, or intellectual contexts in which it was encountered. International cooperation with Austrian and other Central European manuscript specialists has further weakened older assumptions that manuscript schools correspond neatly with modern national territories. Czech illuminated-manuscript research thereby became strongly embedded in European codicological and art-historical networks.

The religious transformations of the 15th and 16th centuries generated another major field of research. The Hussite movement and the development of Utraquism have long complicated any simple account in which medieval Czech religious culture appears as an entirely conventional part of Latin Christianity. Post-1993 scholarship increasingly investigated how theological conflict affected the use, rejection, survival, modification, and commissioning of images. Research into public communion, biblical imagery, devotional books, church furnishings, wall painting, and religious iconography has demonstrated that reform did not produce a universal Czech iconoclasm. Instead, attitudes towards images differed among communities, periods, theological positions, and types of object. Utraquist visual culture could appropriate older imagery, reinterpret inherited forms, or create new iconographic

emphases rather than rejecting art categorically. The relationship among art, liturgy, religious identity, and institutional change thus became a productive field in which Czech material contributes directly to broader European Reformation studies.

Research on Jerusalem imagery demonstrates the interdisciplinary potential of this approach especially well. The project culminating in the 2024 volume *Reflecting Jerusalem in the Medieval Czech Lands* brought together art historians with historians, literary scholars, theologians, and specialists in medieval travel and religious culture. Jerusalem was examined not simply as an iconographic motif but as a transferable geographical, theological, political, and imaginative concept. Czech pilgrims, crusading traditions, liturgical representations, manuscript images, wall paintings, Utraquist thought, vernacular literature, and travel narratives all participated in constructing different forms of the Holy City. Such research demonstrates that an image cannot necessarily be interpreted adequately within the boundaries of one artistic medium. Visual forms interact with texts, ritual, memory, travel, theology, and imagined geography. The project therefore represents a mature form of Czech medieval studies in which art history becomes one component of an integrated historical investigation while retaining its distinctive expertise concerning images and objects.

Medieval sculpture remained another major strength, particularly the internationally significant production associated with the Luxembourg period and the so-called Beautiful Style around 1400. The Master of the Michle Madonna, the Krumlov Madonna and related sculptural groups, architectural sculpture, devotional figures, and late Gothic altarpieces have generated extensive research concerning attribution, workshop relationships, chronology, materials, religious function, and cultural transfer. Czech researchers increasingly connect stylistic comparison with technological investigation and the analysis of original polychromy. This combination can reveal whether visually related sculptures emerged from the same workshop environment, were produced through common technical traditions, or acquired their present appearance through later restorations. The concept of a geographically bounded national sculptural school has consequently become more difficult to maintain in simple form. Artistic mobility between Bohemia, Moravia, Austria, Bavaria, Saxony, Silesia, and other neighbouring regions frequently provides a more convincing explanation for stylistic relationships. Medieval sculpture research therefore exemplifies the broader movement from national taxonomy towards Central European networks.

The National Gallery Prague provides the most important collection-based environment for this work. Its Collection of Old Masters contains more than seven thousand objects and includes exceptional groups of Bohemian and Central European works from the 14th to 16th centuries alongside German, Netherlandish, Italian, and other European material. The long-term exhibition *Medieval Art in Bohemia and Central Europe 1200–1550* in the Convent of St Agnes of Bohemia presents more than two hundred works and deliberately situates objects from the Czech lands beside material from the wider Central European region. This curatorial arrangement reflects an important historiographical argument rather than merely an exhibition design choice. Medieval Czech art is presented as participating in exchanges with Franconia, Austria, Saxony, and other neighbouring artistic environments rather than developing within a closed national space. The collection simultaneously provides material for attribution, technical analysis, conservation research, and exhibition-based scholarship. The National Gallery therefore functions as one of the principal laboratories in which Czech medieval art history can connect direct object study with broader historical interpretation.

Collaboration between art history and conservation science became especially productive in medieval studies. The NAKI project devoted to historical technologies and modern research methods investigated medieval panel paintings and sculpture through techniques capable of revealing underdrawing, construction, decorative processes, materials, and concealed stages of production. Infrared examination, radiography, microscopy, computed tomography, and other methods can make visible features that stylistic observation alone cannot identify. Exhibitions such as *For the Eyes to Admire* translated these results into public interpretation by showing punched decoration, stencils, sgraffito, tin relief, and other workshop technologies used between the 14th and 16th centuries. Such research changes understanding of medieval artistic production because the surface image becomes only the final visible stage of a complex material process. Workshop organisation and artistic decision-making can sometimes be reconstructed through the sequence of technical operations preserved inside the object. Czech medieval art studies therefore increasingly treat materiality as historical evidence rather than solely as a concern of conservators.

Architecture constitutes another major field in which disciplinary boundaries have become increasingly permeable. Romanesque monasteries, Gothic churches, castles, royal residences, urban buildings, and ecclesiastical complexes can be analysed through stylistic and architectural history, but they also require archaeology, structural investigation, archival research, dendrochronology, and historical building survey. Czech art historians have long contributed to the interpretation of architectural form and spatial symbolism, while post-1993 research increasingly connects these questions with building phases, patronage, institutional history, liturgy, and construction practice. The architecture of the Luxembourg era remains particularly significant because Prague and the Bohemian Crown became major centres of European architectural innovation during the 14th century. Research into Peter Parler and related architectural environments has consequently moved between questions of individual artistic authorship and broader workshop organisation. The study of medieval architecture demonstrates especially clearly why art history and heritage conservation remain institutionally close while retaining different primary objectives. Historical interpretation can inform preservation, but architectural history is concerned ultimately with understanding buildings as products of specific artistic, political, technical, and social circumstances.

Regional research substantially revised the geography of medieval Czech art after 1993. Major national narratives had understandably concentrated upon Prague and other well-known centres, but systematic regional projects demonstrated how much significant material remained understudied outside them. The NAKI II project *Gothic and Early Renaissance Art in Eastern Bohemia: Research, Interpretation and Presentation*, conducted from 2016 to 2020, represents an outstanding example. The project united Palacký University, the Institute of Art History CAS, the National Heritage Institute, and the Museum of East Bohemia in Hradec Králové. Researchers combined art history, archaeology, architecture, conservation investigation, regional history, and modern imaging techniques in order to reassess a region previously perceived as less important for medieval art. The resulting three-part, 2,702-page publication *In the Centre of the Lands of the Bohemian Crown* presented Eastern Bohemian material within its historical relationships with Silesia and the wider Crown lands. Regional research thus became a means of revising the national canon rather than merely adding local examples to an established hierarchy.

Comparable revision occurred in research on the Ore Mountains. Projects concerning artistic exchange between Gothic and Renaissance culture in the Czech-Saxon Krušnohoří region

examined a historical space whose cultural coherence cannot be understood through the later Czech-German state border. Sculpture, altarpieces, architecture, mining prosperity, religious institutions, workshops, and trade routes connected communities on both sides of the mountains. The 2015 exhibition and publication *Bez hranic: Umění v Krušnohoří mezi gotikou a renesancí* explicitly framed the material through artistic exchange rather than national separation. Subsequent scholarship has continued to examine how economic and cultural mobility shaped this region at the threshold of the early modern period. Such research is particularly important in the Czech context because 20th-century national conflict and population transfer had obscured many of the historical relationships linking Bohemian and Saxon artistic culture. Cross-border medieval and Renaissance studies therefore contribute simultaneously to art history and to a more accurate reconstruction of Central European cultural geography.

Masaryk University in Brno has developed a particularly international model of medieval visual studies. Its Department of Art History currently organises research through specialised centres, including RE, the Center for Medieval Visual Cultures and Research Communication. Rather than limiting medieval scholarship to the Czech lands, the centre works within a much broader Afro-Eurasian framework and engages with Byzantium, the Mediterranean, the Caucasus, Eastern Europe, and the historiography of medieval art. This geographical expansion is important because Central European medieval art developed through contacts extending well beyond the Latin West. It also allows Czech scholars to participate in current international debates concerning centre and periphery, colonial structures within art-historical historiography, cultural transfer, and the modern political construction of medieval traditions. The Brno environment therefore complements the strong Czech tradition of detailed research into domestic monuments with a deliberately comparative and theoretical orientation.

The journal *Convivium: Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean* has become one of the principal international outcomes of this environment. Founded in 2014 through cooperation involving Masaryk University, the Institute of Art History CAS, and the University of Lausanne, it is explicitly organised around exchange and interaction rather than national schools. Contributions examine artistic movement between medieval Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean and are published for an international scholarly audience. The journal has strengthened the visibility of Czech medieval art history while simultaneously preventing Czech scholarship from becoming self-referential. Research produced in Prague or Brno can therefore participate directly in debates concerning objects and regions far beyond the Czech lands. The existence of such an international periodical is one of the clearest indicators that Czech medieval studies by the 2010s had moved from post-1989 reintegration into international scholarship towards active production of transnational research platforms.

Palacký University provides another important centre because Olomouc itself contains an unusually rich concentration of Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque monuments and collections. The Department of Art History was renewed in 1990 under Milan Togner and therefore participated from the beginning in the post-socialist reconstruction of the discipline. Its medieval and early modern teaching remains closely connected with direct study of Moravian architecture, painting, sculpture, and ecclesiastical collections. The Romanesque Bishop's Palace, Gothic churches, the Jesuit complex, Baroque monuments, and the archiepiscopal collections provide material that can be studied within the immediate university environment. Scholars associated with Olomouc have made important

contributions to Gothic and early Renaissance art, Renaissance culture, Baroque painting and architecture, Jesuit visual culture, and regional artistic networks. The university's participation as coordinator of the East Bohemian Gothic and Early Renaissance NAKI II project additionally demonstrates its importance beyond Moravia. Olomouc thus represents a research centre in which regional proximity to monuments supports nationally and internationally relevant scholarship.

The transition from the medieval to the early modern world has become increasingly important precisely because it exposes the limitations of rigid stylistic chronology. Renaissance art in the Czech lands was not simply imported from Italy into a culturally passive environment. Italian architects, stonemasons, painters, and decorative specialists certainly played important roles, but imported forms were transformed through local building traditions, patronage structures, religious conditions, and existing Gothic practices. Aristocratic residences, royal projects, urban buildings, gardens, tombs, portraiture, and decorative programmes provide evidence of selective appropriation rather than wholesale stylistic replacement. Moravia, Prague, western Bohemia, southern Bohemia, and other regions participated differently in these processes. Czech Renaissance studies increasingly therefore examine circulation of artists and models, patronage networks, court culture, humanism, and the adaptation of visual languages to local political and confessional needs. The category of Renaissance remains useful, but its Czech history is interpreted increasingly as a process of cultural translation.

The Department of Early Modern Art at the Institute of Art History CAS provides the central specialised research environment for the 16th through 18th centuries. Its programme covers Renaissance and Baroque visual arts and architecture in the Czech lands while explicitly placing them within broader Central European contexts. The department supports both individual research and collective projects concerned with major themes such as Rudolfine culture, collecting, court art, mural painting, religious orders, architectural patronage, and aristocratic representation. Two specialised centres give particularly strong institutional form to these interests: Studia Rudolphina and the Center for Baroque Ceiling Painting in Central Europe. Their activities include documentation, databases, publications, international conferences, exhibitions, and cooperation with foreign research organisations. The department's structure demonstrates a wider shift away from an undifferentiated history of Renaissance and Baroque styles towards focused research environments built around cultural systems and media. Early modern Czech art history has consequently become one of the most internationally networked parts of the discipline.

Rudolfine art is perhaps the most internationally recognisable Czech contribution to early modern art history. Emperor Rudolf II's decision to make Prague a major residence transformed the city around 1600 into an exceptional centre of courtly collecting, artistic patronage, natural knowledge, craftsmanship, and scientific culture. Artists such as Bartholomeus Spranger, Hans von Aachen, Giuseppe Arcimboldo, Roelant Savery, Joris Hoefnagel, and the sculptor Adriaen de Vries worked within or were closely associated with the imperial environment. Modern research no longer treats this culture simply as an eccentric stylistic episode or a collection of brilliant individual masters. It investigates the relationships among art, imperial representation, collecting, natural history, alchemy, astronomy, antiquarian interests, diplomacy, and courtly knowledge. Prague around 1600 is consequently studied as an intellectual and visual environment situated within European court culture. This has made Rudolfine studies an especially productive field for international collaboration.

The Studia Rudolphina Centre institutionalised this research tradition and became internationally recognised as a specialised platform for the visual culture of Rudolf II's age. Its work focuses upon the emperor as collector and patron, the imperial collections, court artists, and the broader cultural networks associated with Prague and the Habsburg courts. The centre publishes the *Studia Rudolphina* bulletin, which has become an important venue for international research and is indexed in major scholarly databases. Projects have investigated the collection of Archduke Ferdinand II of Tyrol, the Star Summer Palace, the relationship between Prague and Innsbruck, court collecting practices, and the disposition of paintings within Rudolf II's Prague Castle collections. The project *Art for Display* returned directly to historical inventories in order to reconstruct how imperial paintings were collected and spatially arranged around 1600. This emphasis upon inventories illustrates the increasing importance of archival sources for understanding not only ownership but the actual historical experience of collections. Rudolfine studies thereby combine connoisseurship with collection history, spatial reconstruction, and the social history of court culture.

Collecting has become a broader early modern research field extending well beyond the imperial court. Aristocratic collections, ecclesiastical treasuries, libraries, Kunstkammern, picture galleries, antiquities, scientific objects, and later museum collections reveal how objects acquired meaning through classification, display, inheritance, diplomacy, travel, and social status. Inventories and estate records can show which artworks were positioned together, which objects were considered valuable, and how collecting practices changed between generations. Studies of Archduke Ferdinand II of Tyrol are especially important because his cultural patronage connected Prague, Innsbruck, Vienna, Italy, and other European environments. The 2021 collective monograph *Archduke Ferdinand II of Austria: A Second-Born Son in Renaissance Europe* exemplifies this transregional approach. Such research weakens older assumptions that artistic collections can be explained adequately through the later national identity of the territory where they happen to survive. Early modern collection history increasingly reconstructs mobile European cultures of possession and display.

Religion represents another central axis of early modern Czech art research. The 16th and 17th centuries were marked by confessional plurality, the Habsburg consolidation of Catholic rule, the consequences of the Battle of White Mountain, the Catholic Reform, and extensive transformation of churches, monasteries, devotional practices, and religious imagery. Contemporary scholarship treats visual culture as an active component of these processes rather than as a decorative consequence of theological history. Images, architecture, relics, prints, sculptures, altarpieces, pilgrimage sites, and ceremonial installations contributed to shaping confessional identity and collective memory. Research has increasingly examined how older medieval objects were reused, reinterpreted, relocated, or incorporated into new Catholic narratives. Early modern art thereby becomes inseparable from historical memory because religious institutions frequently legitimised contemporary authority through selected representations of the medieval past. Czech scholarship in this area participates directly in broader European debates concerning confessionalisation, Catholic reform, sacred space, and the agency of images.

The study of Jesuit visual culture demonstrates this approach particularly clearly. The Society of Jesus became one of the most important institutional agents of Catholic religious and educational culture in the Czech lands from the 16th century onwards. Research has examined Jesuit colleges, churches, architecture, monumental decoration, devotional prints, saints'

cults, miraculous images, and the order's strategic use of pre-existing local traditions. The 2023 collective volume *Jesuit Art and Czech Lands, 1556–1729: Missionizing through the Arts*, edited by Kateřina Horníčková and Michal Šroněk, synthesised major results of this research for an international audience. Its contributions interpret Jesuit art through the transfer and adaptation of ideas concerning image theology, global mission, institutional self-presentation, and the reconstruction of a usable Catholic past. This moves scholarship beyond a simple stylistic category of 'Jesuit Baroque'. The central question becomes how images and spaces functioned within missionary, devotional, educational, and political strategies.

Baroque wall and ceiling painting represents another field in which Czech scholarship has developed a highly specialised research infrastructure. The Center for Baroque Ceiling Painting in Central Europe brings together internal and external specialists studying monumental painting of the 17th and 18th centuries. Its work combines documentation, attribution, iconographic interpretation, architectural context, patronage, workshop practice, and comparative Central European research. Major projects on the Tencalla family and on wall painting in Benedictine monasteries produced extensive multi-volume catalogues in 2012–2013 and 2016. These works are significant not merely for the number of paintings documented but because they reconstruct networks of patrons, artists, monasteries, artistic models, and regional transfer. Wall paintings are interpreted as components of architectural and institutional programmes rather than detachable images. The centre's international Research Group for Baroque Ceiling Painting in Central Europe further embeds Czech scholarship within a comparative field extending across former Habsburg and neighbouring territories.

Research on 17th-century painting has likewise revised the established canon. Karel Škréta retains a central position in the history of Czech Baroque painting, but recent scholarship increasingly reconstructs the broader Prague environment in which he worked. The 2017 volume *Ve stínu Karla Škréty: Pražští malíři v letech 1635–1680* deliberately shifted attention towards painters who had been obscured by concentration upon one canonical master. Such research asks how workshops, guild structures, patronage, markets, religious commissions, and professional competition shaped artistic production in Prague after the Thirty Years' War. The result is a denser history of artistic labour rather than a sequence of major individual geniuses. Comparable approaches have been applied to sculpture and architecture by examining workshop networks, family traditions, migration, and the institutional conditions of artistic practice. Early modern art history thereby becomes increasingly social and economic without abandoning formal and iconographic analysis.

Baroque architecture and sculpture remain among the most publicly visible components of Czech artistic heritage, and their study has undergone substantial revision since 1993. Major figures such as Christoph and Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer, Jan Blažej Santini-Aichel, Matthias Bernhard Braun, Ferdinand Maximilian Brokoff, and their patrons continue to attract detailed scholarship. Yet contemporary research places their work increasingly within networks of workshop practice, aristocratic and monastic patronage, confessional representation, urban development, material technology, and Central European cultural exchange. Santini's architecture, for example, can be analysed not only through the originality of its geometrical forms but through the institutional worlds of monasteries and patrons that enabled those forms to be realised. Braun's sculptural environments similarly gain additional meaning when interpreted in relation to landscape, patronage, theatricality, devotion, and aristocratic self-representation. The canonical artist therefore remains important but is no longer treated as an

isolated explanatory principle. Czech Baroque studies increasingly situate artistic individuality inside complex systems of commission and reception.

The social history of patronage has consequently become one of the strongest methodological bridges between medieval and early modern studies. Kings, queens, bishops, monasteries, religious orders, confraternities, aristocratic families, municipal institutions, guilds, burghers, and individual donors all commissioned artworks for different purposes. Their choices can reflect devotion, social status, dynastic representation, political loyalty, confessional identity, memorialisation, competition, education, or cultivated taste. Researchers therefore investigate not only who commissioned an object but how the relationship among patron, artist, adviser, institution, and intended audience shaped the result. Patronage studies also make artistic geography more dynamic because commissioners could recruit artists from distant regions or acquire works through international markets and diplomatic networks. The history of art becomes in this model a history of relationships rather than a chronology of autonomous stylistic innovation. Czech scholarship has been especially well positioned for this research because exceptionally rich archival collections frequently preserve contracts, inventories, correspondence, accounts, and testamentary documents.

Epigraphy and sepulchral studies provide another example of how specialised documentary research expanded the field. The Centre of Epigraphic and Sepulchral Studies at the Institute of Art History examines historical inscriptions, tombs, memorials, funerary culture, and their visual and social contexts from the Middle Ages through the early modern period. The work requires cooperation among art history, history, archaeology, classical philology, museology, and digital humanities. Its Historical Inscriptions Database contained more than twenty-three thousand inscription records on more than eighteen thousand carriers by the mid-2020s, including information concerning monuments that no longer survive. Inscriptions can identify patrons, artists, dates, family relationships, religious ideas, social identities, and commemorative strategies that would otherwise remain inaccessible. Tombs similarly combine sculpture, heraldry, architecture, language, ritual, genealogy, and memory. Such research demonstrates the value of fields once considered auxiliary to conventional art history for reconstructing the social functions of artworks.

The material and digital turns have strengthened medieval and early modern research further. High-resolution imaging, infrared reflectography, radiography, computed tomography, three-dimensional modelling, dendrochronology, pigment analysis, and digital databases make it possible to investigate objects at levels inaccessible to earlier generations. Digital reconstruction can test arrangements of altarpieces, manuscript structures, architectural phases, collections, or lost ensembles without presenting every hypothesis as material fact. Geographic information systems can relate artworks to pilgrimage networks, territories, workshops, aristocratic estates, or patterns of cultural transfer. Online databases allow inscriptions, monuments, photographs, bibliography, and archival documentation to be compared across institutional boundaries. These methods are most productive when they answer historical questions rather than functioning as technological displays. Czech medieval and early modern art studies have increasingly adopted precisely this integrated model in which scientific and digital techniques extend rather than displace historical interpretation.

Internationalisation has been equally important. Czech medievalists and early modernists now cooperate routinely with scholars and institutions in Austria, Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Italy, Switzerland, France, Britain, the United States, and other countries. The

historical geography of the Bohemian Crown, Habsburg Monarchy, Holy Roman Empire, and Catholic religious orders makes such cooperation particularly necessary because relevant artworks and documents are distributed widely across modern political borders. Joint exhibitions, manuscript projects, conferences, visiting fellowships, publications in English and German, and internationally indexed journals have substantially increased the visibility of Czech research. Studia Rudolphina, Convivium, the Research Group for Baroque Ceiling Painting in Central Europe, and international projects centred at Masaryk University exemplify this development institutionally. Internationalisation has also altered research questions by encouraging Czech material to be used comparatively rather than treated primarily as evidence of national artistic distinctiveness. The result is a scholarship more securely situated within European art history while retaining exceptional knowledge of the Czech lands.

One of the most important consequences of this development has been a reassessment of the very category of 'Czech art' before the 19th century. Medieval and early modern inhabitants of the Bohemian Crown did not organise cultural identity according to the same national categories that shaped 19th- and 20th-century historiography. Courts, religious orders, dioceses, noble families, towns, workshops, and trading networks routinely operated across linguistic and territorial boundaries. German-speaking, Czech-speaking, Italian, Netherlandish, Austrian, Saxon, Silesian, Polish, and other artists and patrons participated in artistic production within the Czech lands. Modern scholarship increasingly treats this plurality as a normal historical condition rather than an external influence upon an otherwise self-contained Czech tradition. The term Czech art remains useful territorially and institutionally, but it requires careful distinction from ethnic or linguistic interpretations. This methodological change is one of the most important achievements of post-1993 scholarship because it reconnects the artistic history of the Czech lands with the historical structures within which the art was actually produced.

The institutional relationship between universities, the Academy of Sciences, museums, galleries, and heritage organisations has been essential to these achievements. A university scholar may contribute to a National Gallery exhibition, an Academy researcher may teach at Charles University, a conservator may participate in a NAKI project, and a museum object may become the subject of laboratory analysis undertaken by another institution. The East Bohemian Gothic project demonstrated the productivity of such multi-institutional structures particularly clearly by combining university scholarship, Academy research, heritage expertise, museum collections, and technical investigation. Comparable patterns exist in Rudolfine, Baroque, manuscript, architectural, and conservation research. This networked organisation allows evidence to move between archives, monuments, collections, laboratories, classrooms, and exhibitions. It also prevents medieval and early modern art studies from becoming confined entirely within university departments. Czech scholarship in these periods is therefore distinguished by particularly close relationships between academic research and collection- or monument-based investigation.

Important limitations nevertheless remain. Monumental projects and major exhibitions can attract substantial funding, while slow archival cataloguing, source editing, attribution research, and regional documentation may receive less public visibility despite their long-term importance. Internationalisation favours scholars with linguistic mobility and institutional resources, potentially widening inequalities between large centres and smaller regional workplaces. Technical research is expensive and depends upon access to laboratories and conservation infrastructure that is unevenly distributed. Large research projects can produce

enormous catalogues and datasets whose continued maintenance requires resources after project funding ends. Younger researchers also face the broader employment uncertainty characteristic of humanities careers. The future strength of medieval and early modern art studies will therefore depend partly upon sustaining basic documentary scholarship alongside more visible interdisciplinary innovation.

A further challenge concerns balance between contextualisation and the artwork itself. Social, political, theological, gender, economic, and transnational approaches have enormously enriched Czech art history, but an artwork cannot always be reduced to evidence for contexts constructed outside it. Formal decisions, material properties, artistic skill, visual invention, and aesthetic experience remain historically meaningful even when they cannot be translated directly into social explanation. The strongest Czech scholarship generally avoids choosing between connoisseurship and contextual history. It combines close observation, attribution, iconography, technical research, archival evidence, and historical interpretation according to the questions posed by the object. Medieval and early modern studies therefore provide perhaps the clearest example of the layered methodology described in the preceding general section. Their continued vitality depends upon preserving this ability to move between microscopic object analysis and large historical structures.

In summary, Czech medieval and early modern art studies between 1993 and 2025 developed from already strong scholarly traditions into highly interdisciplinary and internationally connected fields. Medieval research retained exceptional expertise in architecture, sculpture, panel painting, manuscript illumination, and religious imagery while increasingly interpreting these objects through function, patronage, reception, liturgy, gender, political representation, and transregional exchange. Projects such as *Imago, imagines*, *Art in an Unsettled Time*, *Reflecting Jerusalem in the Medieval Czech Lands*, and *In the Centre of the Lands of the Bohemian Crown* demonstrate the shift from stylistic classification towards contextual histories of images, objects, and artistic environments. National Gallery research combined one of Europe's important collections of Bohemian and Central European medieval art with conservation science and technical analysis, while regional projects in Eastern Bohemia and the Ore Mountains substantially revised the geography of the national canon. Masaryk University's RE and the journal *Convivium* placed Czech medieval studies within broad international discussions of European, Byzantine, Mediterranean, and Afro-Eurasian visual cultures. Early modern scholarship achieved comparable international visibility through research on Rudolf II, Habsburg court culture, collecting, Renaissance patronage, confessional imagery, Jesuit art, Baroque wall painting, architecture, and sculpture. The Studia Rudolphina Centre and Center for Baroque Ceiling Painting in Central Europe created durable specialised infrastructures through which Czech material could be analysed as part of wider European courtly and artistic networks. Research on patronage, workshops, inventories, inscriptions, funerary culture, and historical technologies transformed the early modern artwork from an autonomous stylistic object into evidence of social relationships, religious practice, cultural memory, and systems of display. Digital and scientific methods added new forms of evidence without replacing the traditional strengths of archival research, iconography, connoisseurship, and close visual analysis. The most important achievement of the period was therefore the replacement of a largely nation-centred narrative by an increasingly relational history in which the Czech lands appear as one of the major crossroads of medieval and early modern Central European visual culture.

19th- and 20th-Century Czech Art

The study of 19th- and 20th-century Czech art underwent one of the most substantial historiographical transformations within Czech art history after 1993. The two centuries contain many of the artistic phenomena through which modern Czech national culture was originally defined, but they also expose the limitations of interpreting artistic production primarily through national narratives. 19th-century painting, sculpture, architecture, photography, exhibition culture, and public monuments developed within the multilingual Habsburg Monarchy rather than within an independent Czech state, while 20th-century artistic production was repeatedly transformed by the creation of Czechoslovakia, Nazi occupation, state socialism, the Prague Spring, normalisation, exile, the democratic transformation after 1989, and the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Post-1993 scholars therefore confronted periods in which artistic categories had been shaped unusually strongly by political history and by earlier attempts to construct national or ideological canons. Research increasingly moved away from linear narratives in which Czech art progressed from National Revival through modernism towards avant-garde freedom, temporarily interrupted by dictatorship. Instead, historians examined competing institutions, linguistic communities, exhibition networks, patrons, markets, political regimes, regional centres, artistic groups, media, and forms of international circulation. This shift made it possible to integrate German-speaking and Jewish artistic cultures, women artists, official socialist production, photography, design, public art, exile, and other phenomena previously positioned outside the central narrative. By 2025, research into 19th- and 20th-century art had become one of the most methodologically diverse areas of Czech art history.

The Department of Art of the 19th to Twenty-First Centuries at the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences provides the principal specialised fundamental-research environment for this broad chronological field. Its declared remit encompasses visual art and architecture in the Czech lands from approximately 1800 to the present while situating that material consistently within international contexts. This framing is significant because it does not define the subject simply as ‘Czech national art’, thereby allowing researchers to investigate artists, institutions, commissioners, exhibitions, and cultural networks whose identities crossed linguistic or political boundaries. The department supports individual monographic research alongside collaborative projects concerned with exhibition history, photography, architecture, cultural memory, reproduction technologies, and the formation of artistic publics. By the mid-2020s, its projects included research into exhibition spaces between the late 18th century and 1918, the circulation of photomechanical reproductions between 1900 and 1950, public commissioners of Central European architecture, and post-war artistic responses to Holocaust memory. These projects reveal how far research has moved beyond traditional sequences of painters and styles. The modern artwork is increasingly analysed within infrastructures determining how it was commissioned, exhibited, reproduced, discussed, collected, and remembered.

The reinterpretation of 19th-century art is particularly important because this period played a foundational role in the construction of Czech national art history itself. Earlier scholarship often organised the century around the National Revival and the gradual emergence of a recognisably Czech artistic school from an environment initially dominated by Austrian, German, or academically international models. Such narratives reflected genuine historical

processes, including the increasing importance of Czech-language institutions, national cultural associations, historical imagery, and political representation. Yet they could also make the century appear to culminate inevitably in national cultural emancipation. Post-1993 research increasingly reconstructed a more complex environment in which Czech-speaking and German-speaking artists, aristocratic collectors, urban elites, imperial institutions, academies, churches, associations, and emerging middle-class publics interacted continuously. National identity became one historical force among several rather than the universal explanation for artistic development. The change from the historiographical expression ‘Czech art’ towards ‘art in the Czech lands’ is therefore more than terminological refinement. It reflects a significant rethinking of how artistic culture functioned before modern national boundaries became dominant.

The publication of *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění III/1–2, 1780–1890* in 2001 represented a major stage in this reassessment. Edited by Taťána Petrasová and Helena Lorenzová, the two volumes offered the first comprehensive treatment of 19th-century visual art and architecture across Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia at this scale. Painting, sculpture, architecture, artistic craft, scenography, and photography were considered within one historical framework rather than separated into independent histories. Moravia received particular attention as a territory whose artistic structures and cultural conditions could not simply be treated as peripheral reflections of Prague. The volumes provided an essential empirical synthesis upon which later methodological revision could develop. They also demonstrated the importance of examining 19th-century art through institutions, public commissions, social environments, and regional differences alongside stylistic categories such as Classicism, Romanticism, Biedermeier, Historicism, and Realism. Subsequent scholarship increasingly built upon this foundation by investigating exhibitions, identity, collecting, photography, cultural publics, and the international circulation of artistic models.

The formation of a modern artistic public has become one of the most important newer research questions. The foundation of the Society of Patriotic Friends of the Arts in Prague in 1796 and the Academy of Fine Arts three years later created institutions through which art could increasingly be encountered, discussed, taught, exhibited, and collected outside aristocratic or ecclesiastical environments alone. During the 19th century, exhibitions, associations, art schools, journals, newspapers, reproductions, museums, public monuments, and commercial structures gradually expanded the social spaces in which artworks acquired meaning. The Institute of Art History's long-term *Space of the Exhibition* project has therefore reconstructed artistic exhibitions in the Czech lands between 1820 and 1950 as a distinct field of historical evidence. The project *Spaces, Objects, Authors and Curators: Building a Cultural Public in the Czech Lands 1790–1918*, begun in 2024, develops this approach by asking how physical display and exhibition practice helped create different publics for art. Art history consequently moves from analysing what artists produced towards examining how modern society learned to look at and classify artistic objects. Exhibition history becomes essential to understanding canon formation because visibility was never distributed equally among artists, media, regions, linguistic communities, or genders.

Research into Josef Mánes illustrates the methodological transformation of 19th-century studies especially clearly. Mánes has long occupied an exceptional position within the Czech national canon as a painter associated with landscape, portraiture, folklore, historical imagery, and the visual formation of national culture. Earlier interpretations could present him principally as a representative of national artistic awakening and as a precursor of later Czech

cultural autonomy. Contemporary research retains the importance of these dimensions while situating his practice within travel, artistic education, European visual culture, patronage, drawing, ethnographic interest, and the social environment of 19th-century artistic production. His work can therefore reveal both the emergence of national iconography and the cosmopolitan conditions through which that iconography was created. Similar revision applies to Antonín Mánes, Quido Mánes, Josef Navrátil, Karel Purkyně, Antonín Chittussi, and other major artists whose work increasingly appears within broader histories of landscape, portraiture, collecting, mobility, and modern visual experience. The 19th-century canon has not been abolished, but canonical figures are now required to answer more complicated historical questions.

Landscape painting provides a particularly productive example of this change. Earlier Czech scholarship often interpreted landscapes partly through their relationship with national territory and the visual discovery of the homeland. That interpretation remains important because mountains, villages, rivers, historical ruins, and rural environments did contribute to 19th-century cultural imagination. Yet recent art history increasingly connects landscape with travel, tourism, geology, estate culture, industrial transformation, environmental perception, plein-air practice, and transnational artistic education. Antonín Mánes's movement between idealised Classicist landscape and direct outdoor study illustrates how artistic representation could oscillate between inherited compositional systems and new empirical attention to nature. Chittussi and later Antonín Slavíček similarly require interpretation through international developments in modern landscape painting rather than through national geography alone. Landscape thus becomes a field where national identity, modern perception, environmental history, and European artistic exchange intersect.

Historical painting and public monumental art have also been reinterpreted more critically. During the 19th century, images of Přemyslid rulers, Hussite history, legendary origins, religious figures, and national heroes participated actively in the creation of collective historical imagination. Josef Václav Myslbek's long development of the monument to Saint Wenceslas demonstrates how sculpture could become a focal point for historical identity, urban space, state representation, and modern monumental culture simultaneously. Research increasingly asks how competitions, commissioners, political expectations, urban planning, public ritual, and audience reception shaped such works. The National Theatre generation provides another especially important example because the building and its artistic decoration became a major symbol of Czech cultural self-organisation. Artists associated with its visual programme were historically canonised not simply because of individual aesthetic achievement but because their work entered a powerful national institutional narrative. Contemporary scholarship therefore analyses the production of national symbolism itself rather than treating its meanings as self-evident.

The development of photography broadened 19th-century research further. Photography entered the Czech lands shortly after its European invention and rapidly became connected with portraiture, aristocratic collections, travel, architecture, science, documentation, and eventually mass visual culture. For many years it occupied an ambiguous position between technical history and art history, but contemporary Czech scholarship increasingly examines it as a central component of 19th-century visuality. Research by specialists at the Institute of Art History has investigated photographic collections, reproduction practices, institutional uses, and connections between Czech material and European photographic centres. Photography also transformed art history itself by allowing distant works to be compared

through reproductions rather than solely through direct travel. The later photomechanical reproduction of artworks expanded this effect dramatically during the early 20th century. Modern art history therefore developed partly through technologies that changed what scholars and wider publics could see.

The 1890s represent one of the most intensively researched transition points between 19th-century artistic culture and modernism. Symbolism, Decadence, Impressionism, Art Nouveau, new approaches to sculpture, psychological portraiture, and changing exhibition institutions disrupted the cultural assumptions of earlier academic and nationalist art. Jan Preisler, František Bílek, Max Švabinský, Antonín Slavíček, Jakub Schikaneder, Stanislav Sucharda, and numerous other artists have consequently been reconsidered as participants in international fin-de-siècle culture rather than merely representatives of a Czech stylistic transition. The Mánes Association of Fine Artists became particularly important as an organisational mechanism through which foreign art, modern exhibition practices, journals, and artistic debates entered Prague cultural life. The relationship with Vienna, Munich, Paris, Berlin, and other European centres became more direct and institutionally visible. The period also complicates linguistic nationalism because German-speaking artists and associations participated actively in the same urban and regional environments. Research after 1993 increasingly recovered this multilingual artistic landscape.

The two-volume *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění IV/1–2, 1890–1938*, published in 1998, became the fundamental post-socialist synthesis for the emergence and consolidation of Czech modernism. Its coverage incorporated painting, sculpture, architecture, photography, scenography, and applied art rather than reducing modernism to painting alone. The volumes examined the generation of the 1890s, Expressionism, Cubism, abstraction, and the avant-garde movements of the interwar decades. Their publication was especially significant because the interpretation of modernism had itself been subject to ideological selection during the socialist period. Formalist experimentation, abstraction, international avant-garde networks, and artists who had emigrated or entered politically problematic contexts could not always be discussed with equal freedom. The 1998 synthesis therefore contributed to restoring a broader history of Czech modern art while providing a foundation for later criticism of the very category of national modernism. Subsequent research increasingly asked how modernity was constructed through institutions, reproduction, design, state patronage, gender, and transnational artistic mobility.

František Kupka occupies a unique position in this reassessment because his career destabilises any straightforward opposition between Czech and international art history. Born in eastern Bohemia, educated partly in Prague and Vienna, and professionally based in Paris for most of his mature career, Kupka became one of the major pioneers of abstraction while maintaining important relationships with Czech cultural institutions. His *Amorpha. Fugue in Two Colours* of 1912 has become one of the canonical works through which early abstraction is discussed internationally. Post-1993 Czech research and exhibitions increasingly reconstructed the entire trajectory of his work rather than treating abstraction as an isolated heroic breakthrough. Symbolist painting, satirical drawing, philosophy, science, colour theory, machinism, and geometric experimentation all contribute to understanding his artistic development. The major retrospective organised by the National Gallery Prague with the Grand Palais, Centre Pompidou, and Ateneum Art Museum in 2018–2019 demonstrated the international scale of contemporary Kupka scholarship. His case exemplifies why national art history increasingly requires transnational institutional cooperation.

Czech Cubism and Expressionism represent another internationally distinctive research field. Bohumil Kubišta, Emil Filla, Josef Čapek, Otto Gutfreund, Vincenc Beneš, Antonín Procházka, and their contemporaries participated in rapid exchanges with French, German, and other European avant-garde movements while developing local intellectual and formal positions. The group *Osma* and subsequently the Group of Fine Artists created institutional environments through which new artistic languages were debated and presented. Czech Cubist architecture and design made the local reception of Cubism particularly unusual because geometrically transformed form extended beyond painting and sculpture into furniture, buildings, decorative art, and typography. Post-1993 scholarship increasingly avoids treating these developments either as derivative copies of Paris or as evidence of a completely autonomous Czech Cubist school. Instead, researchers investigate translation, selective appropriation, artistic networks, theoretical discourse, and the role of collectors and critics such as Vincenc Kramář. Modernism emerges as a process of cultural circulation in which Prague was simultaneously receptive and productive.

The creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 transformed the institutional environment of modern art profoundly. The new republic invested in museums, academies, public architecture, exhibitions, international cultural representation, and a symbolic visual language appropriate to a democratic state. Yet contemporary research increasingly emphasises that First Republic artistic culture was not culturally homogeneous. Czech, Slovak, German-speaking, Jewish, Hungarian, Ruthenian, and internationally mobile artists contributed to its visual environment, while Prague, Brno, Bratislava, Košice, and regional centres developed distinctive artistic networks. The National Gallery's current exhibition *1918–1938: First Czechoslovak Republic* reflects this historiographical development by presenting Czech, Slovak, Czech-German, and Carpathian-Ruthenian artists alongside major works from the French collection acquired by the Czechoslovak state. The celebrated purchase of French art in 1923 also demonstrates the conscious attempt to position the new republic within international modern culture. First Republic art history is therefore increasingly studied through cosmopolitanism, state-building, cultural diplomacy, institutional acquisition, and minority participation rather than as a purely Czech national flowering.

The interwar avant-garde forms one of the strongest areas of Czech 20th-century art studies. Devětsil, Poetism, Constructivism, Artificialism, Surrealism, modern typography, photography, architecture, theatre, and film created unusually intensive connections among artistic media. Karel Teige became central not only as a theorist but as an organiser linking architecture, poetry, graphic design, photography, and international modernist networks. Jindřich Štyrský and Toyen developed Artificialism during their Paris period before becoming leading figures in Czech Surrealism, while Josef Šíma established another important Czech-French artistic connection. Recent scholarship increasingly studies these movements through interdisciplinary and transnational networks rather than separating painting, architecture, photography, and literature into isolated histories. The international reassessment of Toyen is particularly important because gender, sexuality, self-presentation, poetry, eroticism, and political displacement have become central to interpreting an artist once primarily categorised stylistically as a Surrealist. The collaborative Toyen retrospective presented in Prague, Hamburg, and Paris in 2021–2022 demonstrates the degree to which Czech avant-garde research now participates directly in international canon revision.

Surrealism occupies an exceptional position because its Czech history did not end with the conventional interwar chronology. The Surrealist Group in Czechoslovakia was founded in

1934 and maintained intellectual connections with the Paris movement, including André Breton's visit to Prague in 1935. Subsequent political changes forced Surrealist activity repeatedly into conditions of illegality, semi-public existence, or alternative cultural organisation. Nevertheless, Surrealist thinking continued through later generations and became an important component of post-war unofficial visual culture. Contemporary scholarship therefore treats Czech Surrealism as an unusually long-lived intellectual and artistic tradition rather than a short movement confined to the 1930s. This continuity connects Toyen and Štyrský with post-war figures such as Mikuláš Medek and later Surrealist circles. The phenomenon complicates art-historical periodisation because the same intellectual tradition crossed democratic, fascist, Stalinist, reform-socialist, normalisation, and post-socialist political environments.

The period between 1938 and 1948 has undergone substantial reinterpretation after 1993. Nazi occupation destroyed the democratic institutional framework of the First Republic, persecuted Jewish artists and cultural actors, closed Czech universities, transformed exhibition conditions, and imposed new political constraints upon artistic life. Yet artistic production did not simply stop or become culturally uniform. Group 42 investigated the modern city, technology, existential experience, everyday objects, and wartime alienation, while Surrealist and other currents continued under restricted conditions. Art produced in concentration camps and ghettos, previously marginal within conventional art histories, received greater scholarly attention and raised questions concerning testimony, survival, documentation, and the ethical interpretation of images created under extreme coercion. The brief post-war period from 1945 to February 1948 then reopened artistic organisations before communist seizure of power transformed them again. Research increasingly treats these years as a complex sequence of disruption, continuity, radicalisation, and institutional reorganisation rather than as a simple bridge between two totalitarian regimes.

The volume *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění V, 1939–1958*, published in 2005, represented a major scholarly achievement in this reassessment. It placed artistic production under Nazi occupation, the immediate post-war period, and the first Stalinist decade within wider political, philosophical, and social contexts. Official and politically instrumental art was included alongside Surrealism, Group 42, existential tendencies, architectural production, photography, scenography, design, glass, ceramics, typography, and previously neglected material such as art created within Nazi concentration camps. The inclusion of official production was particularly important because post-1989 historiography initially possessed understandable incentives to concentrate upon artists suppressed by communist power. A mature historical account, however, requires examination of artistic institutions supported by the regime as well as those resisting or evading it. The volume thereby contributed to replacing moral selection with historical analysis. This shift became even more pronounced in research on the 1950s and later socialist decades.

Socialist Realism remains one of the most methodologically sensitive subjects within Czech art history. Following the communist takeover in February 1948, artistic organisations, academies, exhibition systems, commissions, criticism, and cultural policy were reorganised according to ideological priorities, and Socialist Realism acquired official normative authority. For decades after 1989, much of this production could be dismissed primarily as political propaganda or aesthetically negligible state art. Contemporary scholarship increasingly examines it instead as a historical system of artistic labour, institutional power, visual ideology, public commissioning, professional negotiation, and audience formation. This approach does

not deny coercion or ideological function, but it avoids assuming that every artist, commission, or work can be explained through identical political mechanisms. Artists adapted, compromised, resisted, withdrew, or used official structures in different ways. Research into official art is therefore essential for understanding the material and institutional history of socialist visual culture rather than merely identifying its opponents.

The political relaxation beginning in the later 1950s and accelerating during the 1960s created another exceptionally productive field of research. Czech and Slovak participation at Expo 58 in Brussels became symbolic of renewed international visibility and of the so-called Brussels style in architecture, exhibition design, glass, applied arts, and visual communication. Informel, abstraction, New Figuration, experimental sculpture, graphic art, photography, and new approaches to materiality developed within a gradually more plural artistic environment. Vladimír Boudník, Mikuláš Medek, Jiří Balcar, Karel Malich, Adriena Šimotová, Stanislav Kolíbal, Karel Nepraš, Aleš Veselý, Eva Kmentová, the Válová sisters, and numerous other artists became central to post-1993 reinterpretations of the decade. The 1960s are no longer understood merely as a heroic return to modernism after Stalinism. Research increasingly examines artistic groups, exhibition opportunities, international contacts, institutional reforms, technological experimentation, and the changing limits of permissible expression. The Prague Spring of 1968 consequently appears as the political culmination of transformations already developing across artistic institutions rather than the single cause of cultural liberalisation.

The Soviet-led invasion of August 1968 and subsequent normalisation created conditions that deeply shaped Czech art through the 1970s and 1980s. Artists excluded from official organisations lost access to major galleries, state commissions, publishing, foreign travel, or professional status, while others continued working within official institutions. Earlier post-1989 narratives often organised this period through a sharp opposition between official art and authentic unofficial culture. The distinction remains historically necessary because political exclusion had real consequences, but contemporary scholarship increasingly identifies a more complicated field containing official institutions, tolerated experimentation, regional galleries, private studios, semi-official networks, underground activities, professional design, public commissions, and what is often described as a grey zone. Artists could occupy different positions at different moments rather than belonging permanently to one of two mutually exclusive camps. The National Gallery's present exhibition *1939–2021: The End of the Black-and-White Era* makes this historiographical revision explicit by refusing to interpret official versus unofficial, abstraction versus figuration, or formal versus socially engaged art as absolute oppositions. Post-1993 research has thus replaced a morally comprehensible binary narrative with a more difficult but historically richer map of artistic life under normalisation.

Action art, performance, body art, conceptual practice, and interventions outside conventional galleries became particularly important in reassessing this period. Their ephemeral nature meant that much of the evidence survived through photographs, written descriptions, correspondence, invitations, film, video, and personal archives rather than through conventional collectible objects. Pavlína Morganová's research into Czech action art was especially influential in establishing this material as a coherent historical field extending from the 1960s into the post-socialist period. Artists such as Milan Knížák, Jiří Kovanda, Petr Štembera, Jan Mlčoch, Karel Miler, and others challenged assumptions about what an artwork had to be and where artistic activity could occur. Their practices also create methodological problems because documentation is not identical with the event it records. Historians

therefore have to reconstruct relationships among action, audience, photographic evidence, memory, later reinterpretation, and institutional acquisition. Research into performance consequently helped move Czech 20th-century art history beyond object-centred methodology.

Post-war art history also underwent major revision through systematic source publication. The VVP Research Centre at the Academy of Fine Arts, founded in 1997, became the first Czech research centre of its kind established within an art university and devoted specifically to critical research into Czech art after 1945. Its first major research programme, *Modern and Post-modern Art after 1945*, collected and interpreted primary documentation while placing domestic artistic developments in relation to political history and international art discourse. The 2001 anthology *Czech Art 1938–1989: Manifestos, Critical Texts, Documents* made major manifestos, theoretical statements, exhibition texts, and political-cultural documents available within a structured chronological framework. This source-based approach was crucial because many narratives of post-war art had previously depended upon fragmentary personal memory, politically selective publication, or materials difficult to access. Bibliobase subsequently created a continuously developing digital bibliography for Czech post-war visual culture. Research infrastructure therefore became a major achievement of post-1993 modern-art scholarship.

The next major VVP programme extended this documentation into the transformation period. *Czech Art in the Period of Post-Communist Transformation 1980–2005* investigated the transition from the late socialist scene into the radically altered cultural environment following 1989. A related project assembled textual and visual documentation on Czech art of the 1980s and 1990s, eventually contributing to the extensive 2011 anthology *Czech Art 1980–2010: Texts and Documents*. These projects challenged the idea that 1989 represented an absolute aesthetic beginning. Postmodern tendencies, institutional critique, new painting, conceptual approaches, alternative exhibition networks, and changing relationships between artists and institutions had already begun transforming artistic culture during the 1980s. Conversely, structures inherited from state socialism did not disappear instantaneously after November 1989. Research therefore increasingly interprets the political revolution as one major accelerator within a longer artistic transformation rather than a perfectly clean chronological boundary.

Gender has provided another important perspective for revising 20th-century art. Women had participated throughout Czech modern and post-war artistic culture, but canonical histories frequently presented them as isolated exceptions within movements dominated by male artists. Post-1993 feminist art history challenged this structure both by recovering neglected artistic careers and by examining the institutional conditions governing education, exhibition access, criticism, professional recognition, and artistic identity. Martina Pachmanová played an especially important role in introducing gender analysis into Czech modern-art historiography, while later research extended the discussion into post-war and contemporary culture. The 2014 exhibition and publication *Někdy v sukni: Umění 90. let* used the work of women artists to reinterpret the transformation of Czech visual culture during the 1990s. Its significance lies not simply in adding female artists to an existing canon but in showing that video, photography, installation, conceptual objects, corporeality, and identity changed the very structure of artistic practice after 1989. Gender research thus became a method for analysing institutions and canon formation rather than only a programme of biographical recovery.

German-speaking and Jewish artistic cultures underwent a comparable historiographical reintegration. The 19th- and early 20th-century Czech lands contained substantial German-speaking communities whose artists, architects, associations, schools, collectors, and critics participated directly in local artistic life. Nationalist historiography and the post-1945 expulsion of much of the German-speaking population contributed to later separation of this history from narratives of Czech art. Jewish artists and collectors were disrupted even more violently through Nazi persecution and the Holocaust, while confiscation and post-war property transfers transformed collections and artistic institutions. Post-1993 research increasingly reconstructs these communities through exhibition histories, provenance research, institutional archives, biographies, and studies of multilingual cultural networks. The result is a more complex understanding of Prague, Brno, Liberec, the spa towns, northern Bohemia, Moravia, and other artistic environments. Modern art in the Czech lands consequently appears as the product of overlapping communities rather than one ethnically unified national culture.

Exile constitutes another essential component of 20th-century Czech art history. Political crises in 1938–1939, 1948, and 1968 drove artists, architects, designers, critics, and intellectuals into foreign cultural environments, while others migrated for professional reasons independently of direct political persecution. František Kupka and Josef Šíma had already demonstrated the difficulty of distinguishing sharply between Czech and foreign artistic contexts before these later waves of exile. Post-war emigrants worked in Western Europe, North America, and elsewhere, frequently becoming separated from Czech institutional narratives for decades. The comprehensive *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění VI/1–2, 1958–2000* therefore included dedicated attention to artists working in exile. Their reintegration after 1989 significantly changed the geographical conception of Czech artistic culture. A national art history could no longer be limited to production physically created within state borders.

The publication of the fifth and sixth parts of *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění* in 2005 and 2007 completed an enormous long-term scholarly undertaking by extending synthetic Czech art history through the year 2000. The sixth part alone, covering 1958–2000, runs to approximately 1,600 pages across two volumes and includes architecture, painting, sculpture, photography, scenography, applied art, and new media. Its chronological structure encompasses the post-Brussels cultural opening, the 1960s, normalisation, unofficial and semi-official environments, political transformation, and the first post-socialist decade. Importantly, the editors organised substantial parts of the account around movements, problems, themes, and political turning points rather than only traditional artistic genres. The project thus embodied the transition from a medium-specific national canon towards a broader history of visual culture. At the same time, its scale exposed the difficulty of producing one definitive narrative of an increasingly diverse artistic field. Later scholarship has therefore treated the volumes both as foundational reference works and as starting points for further historiographical revision.

The 2017 collective synthesis *Art in the Czech Lands 800–2000*, edited by Taťána Petrasová and Rostislav Švácha, represents another important stage in this process. Its very title deliberately replaces ‘Czech art’ with ‘art in the Czech lands’, signalling a shift away from ethnicity as the organising principle of territorial art history. The volume includes Czech-speaking, German-speaking, Jewish, foreign-born, and internationally mobile artists and considers painting, sculpture, architecture, photography, artistic craft, performance, and new media within one framework. Rather than presenting one continuous march of styles, the authors organised the book around small relational groups of artworks connected by patronage, institution, theme,

artistic movement, or other historically meaningful relationships. The modern period therefore appears through intersecting contexts rather than through one teleological national storyline. Although no synthetic methodology can resolve every contradiction inherent in such a broad survey, the publication represents an important historiographical statement about how contemporary Czech scholarship understands its territorial and cultural object. It also demonstrates the degree to which post-1993 art history became self-conscious about the assumptions embedded in national terminology.

Collection-based research at the National Gallery Prague contributed powerfully to the same transformation. The Collection of Modern Art administers more than nine thousand paintings and five thousand sculptures and contains the most comprehensive Czech holdings from the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. The collection combines Classicism, Romanticism, Realism, Symbolism, Impressionism, Art Nouveau, Expressionism, Cubism, abstraction, interwar avant-garde art, and major works by foreign artists active within or influential upon the Czech environment. Particularly important are the holdings of František Kupka, Czech Cubists, interwar modernists, and the French collection substantially enlarged through the state purchase of 1923. Since 2018, the institutional separation of the Collection of Art after 1945 has allowed post-war and contemporary material to be researched through its own historical problems while maintaining continuity with earlier avant-garde traditions. That collection contains more than ten thousand objects and includes Socialist Realism, Surrealism, New Figuration, abstraction, conceptualism, action art, postmodernism, performance, video, installation, and other forms of post-war artistic production. The collection structure itself therefore reflects the historiographical expansion of modern-art studies.

The National Gallery's permanent exhibitions provide especially useful evidence of how scholarly reinterpretation reaches public presentation. *1796–1918: Art of the Long Century* deliberately rejects a conventional recodification of a Czech national 19th-century canon and instead places local and international works in thematic relationships organised around people, the world, and ideas. Josef Mánes can therefore appear in dialogue with international artistic production rather than within a self-contained national succession. The exhibition *1918–1938: First Czechoslovak Republic* similarly presents Czech, Slovak, Czech-German, and Carpathian-Ruthenian artists together with the French collection, foregrounding the cosmopolitan artistic environment of the young state. Most significant historiographically is *1939–2021: The End of the Black-and-White Era*, whose declared purpose is to avoid judging the period in advance through ideological polarities. Official and unofficial, abstract and figurative, formal and socially engaged tendencies are presented as historically entangled rather than as pure opposites. Museum display consequently becomes an explicit form of art-historical argument.

Research into exhibition histories reinforces this development. Exhibitions determine which artists are seen together, what categories are used to describe them, and which works enter public or institutional memory. The Institute of Art History's database of exhibitions in the Czech lands from 1820 to 1950 makes it possible to study long-term transformations in artistic publicity rather than reconstruct them only through famous artists or movements. VVP AVU has similarly examined exhibitions after 1945 and particularly the role of exhibitions in the transformation of Czech art during the 1980s, 1990s, and early 21st century. The 2012 project *Islands of Resistance: Between the First and Second Modernity 1985–2012* treated exhibition practice itself as one of the principal media through which post-socialist artistic culture was

formed. Such research challenges the assumption that art history can be reconstructed exclusively from surviving artworks. Exhibitions, catalogues, reviews, temporary installations, selection procedures, and institutional spaces constitute historical events through which artistic meaning is produced.

Reproduction technologies have become another increasingly important field. Artworks in 19th- and 20th-century Czech culture circulated through engravings, lithographs, photographs, illustrated journals, postcards, exhibition catalogues, books, newspapers, and later digital reproductions. These media affected which works became canonical and how audiences encountered art beyond museums and original sites. The Institute of Art History's project *The Matrix of Photomechanical Reproductions: Histories of Remote Access to Art*, launched in 2023, investigates art journals between 1900 and 1950 precisely from this perspective. Reproduction is treated not as a neutral secondary copy but as a technology shaping art-historical knowledge, public visibility, and comparative perception. This research also turns attention towards photographers, editors, printers, designers, and publishing infrastructures that older artist-centred narratives often ignored. The modern history of art is therefore increasingly understood as a history of mediation.

The study of monuments and cultural memory connects 19th- and 20th-century art with broader questions of public history. Public statues, war memorials, Holocaust monuments, socialist monuments, cemeteries, commemorative architecture, and post-1989 interventions operate within changing political environments where historical meaning can be revised repeatedly. The NAKI III project *Preserving Memory: Post-war Reflection on the Holocaust in Monuments and Fine Art*, begun in 2023, exemplifies this research direction by relating visual representation to specific sites and to changing forms of historical remembrance. Similar methodological questions apply to monuments associated with nationalism, communism, war, expulsion, resistance, or contested political figures. Art historians increasingly study not only why such monuments were created but how their meanings changed through ceremonies, neglect, removal, relocation, vandalism, restoration, or renewed political controversy. 20th-century art history consequently extends into the study of collective memory and the changing social life of public images.

By 2025, the strongest characteristic of Czech research into 19th- and 20th-century art was therefore its movement away from binary narratives. The 19th century is no longer interpreted convincingly through a simple opposition between foreign influence and emerging national art. The interwar period cannot be reduced to a celebration of Czech avant-garde achievement detached from the multilingual and Czechoslovak institutional environment in which it developed. The years after 1948 cannot be divided adequately into state propaganda and authentic resistance, even though political repression and censorship remain fundamental historical realities. Post-1989 artistic culture likewise cannot be explained simply as the arrival of freedom and international contemporary art after decades of isolation. In every case, institutions, markets, commissions, cultural policies, personal networks, media technologies, exhibitions, regional differences, and international connections complicate these schemas. The historiographical achievement lies not in making political history irrelevant but in explaining more precisely how political structures interacted with artistic practice.

The field nevertheless faces substantial research challenges. The enormous volume of 20th-century documentation is dispersed among public archives, gallery records, personal estates, artists' studios, private collections, photographic holdings, correspondence, video archives,

and born-digital sources. Copyright and personal-data restrictions can complicate access to recent material, while important records can disappear when private archives are not transferred into stable institutions. Research remains geographically uneven because Prague institutions possess exceptionally rich collections and documentary resources, while regional artistic environments frequently require additional systematic study. Large areas of official socialist production, public commissions, applied art, regional galleries, artistic labour, and everyday visual culture remain less thoroughly researched than celebrated avant-garde or unofficial movements. The rapid expansion of digital sources adds another challenge because art historians must evaluate online documentation critically rather than treating digital availability as equivalent to evidential completeness.

These difficulties make documentary infrastructures especially important. The VVP AVU archive, library, video holdings, Bibliobase, the National Gallery's collections and archives, Institute of Art History documentation, regional gallery archives, digitised periodicals, and exhibition databases collectively preserve the evidence from which future interpretations can be produced. Their value lies partly in allowing later scholars to reconsider conclusions accepted by the generation that originally created the documentation. Research into 19th- and 20th-century art therefore depends upon preservation of catalogues, photographs, letters, acquisition records, theoretical texts, installation views, oral testimony, and ephemera no less than upon preservation of canonical artworks. The history of modern art is unusually dependent upon such secondary material because artistic movements increasingly defined themselves through manifestos, magazines, exhibitions, criticism, reproduction, and documentation. Institutional investment in archives has consequently become an art-historical achievement in its own right.

In summary, the study of 19th- and 20th-century Czech art between 1993 and 2025 underwent a fundamental transition from national and ideologically polarised narratives towards a more relational history of artistic production in the Czech lands. 19th-century scholarship retained the importance of National Revival, historicism, public monuments, landscape painting, the National Theatre generation, and the formation of national institutions while increasingly embedding these phenomena within multilingual Habsburg society, exhibition culture, photography, patronage, gender, and international artistic circulation. The synthetic volumes devoted to 1780–1890 and 1890–1938 established major empirical foundations for this revision, while more recent research into cultural publics and exhibition history has shifted attention towards the mechanisms through which modern art acquired audiences and institutional authority. Modernist research increasingly presents Kupka, Czech Cubism, Expressionism, Devětsil, Artificialism, and Surrealism not as isolated national achievements but as contributions to trans-European artistic networks. First Republic art has similarly been reinterpreted through the multicultural and cosmopolitan structure of Czechoslovakia and through state collecting and cultural diplomacy. Post-war scholarship achieved perhaps the greatest historiographical revision by moving beyond an opposition between official and unofficial art and reconstructing the complex institutional, political, and social environments of Nazi occupation, Stalinism, the 1960s, normalisation, exile, and post-socialist transformation. The establishment of VVP AVU in 1997, publication of major documentary anthologies for 1938–1989 and 1980–2010, creation of Bibliobase, and systematic collection of post-war archives gave this reinterpretation a durable evidential infrastructure. Gender studies, research into German-speaking and Jewish artistic cultures, studies of exile, exhibition histories, performance documentation, photography, reproduction technologies,

and public memory have further enlarged the canon and questioned assumptions underlying earlier art histories. The National Gallery's exhibitions *Art of the Long Century*, *First Czechoslovak Republic*, and *The End of the Black-and-White Era* demonstrate how these methodological changes have entered national public presentation. By 2025, the principal achievement of Czech scholarship was therefore not simply the recovery of artists previously omitted from the canon, but the replacement of a sequence of closed national and political categories with a much more complex account of how art in the Czech lands was produced through institutions, cultural conflicts, international exchange, changing technologies, social identities, and repeated negotiations between artistic autonomy and political history.

Contemporary Art and Visual Culture

Contemporary art in Czechia after 1993 developed within a cultural environment fundamentally transformed by the disappearance of socialist cultural administration, the liberalisation of public discourse, the expansion of international mobility, and the gradual construction of new artistic institutions. Although the democratic rupture of 1989 remains the decisive political turning point, the establishment of the independent Czech Republic provided the state, institutional, and funding framework within which the contemporary art scene subsequently evolved. The concept of contemporary art itself became increasingly difficult to define through chronology alone because artistic practice expanded into installation, performance, moving image, digital media, sound, participatory projects, research, social intervention, and hybrid formats alongside painting and sculpture. Art could increasingly take the form of a temporary situation, public action, collaborative process, archive, technological experiment, or long-term engagement with a community rather than a durable autonomous object. This expansion also altered art-historical research because contemporary art generated sources through exhibitions, curatorial statements, interviews, digital communication, performance documentation, institutional archives, and social media as much as through conventional artworks. Czech scholars therefore had to develop methodologies capable of studying practices whose historical boundaries remained open and whose protagonists were frequently still active. By 2025, contemporary art studies in Czechia constituted a field positioned between art history, criticism, curatorial studies, visual culture, media theory, sociology, political thought, artistic research, and institutional analysis. The resulting scene was characterised less by one dominant aesthetic movement than by a plurality of artistic practices organised through an increasingly complex network of public, municipal, independent, private, educational, and transnational institutions.

The early 1990s were marked simultaneously by extraordinary artistic freedom and considerable institutional instability. Artists no longer worked within the previous system of state-controlled unions, ideological censorship, restricted foreign travel, and centrally structured public commissions, but the collapse of that system also removed many of the material frameworks through which artists had previously received studios, commissions, exhibition opportunities, or professional status. New galleries, associations, magazines, commercial initiatives, artist-run spaces, foundations, and informal networks therefore appeared in an environment in which the rules of the post-socialist cultural economy were still being negotiated. Western contemporary art became dramatically more accessible through travel, exhibitions, translated theory, foreign cultural institutes, residencies, and the arrival of

new media and information technologies. Yet the Czech scene did not simply adopt Western artistic models after decades of isolation, because unofficial and semi-official practices of the 1970s and 1980s had already developed conceptual, performative, experimental, and alternative forms outside conventional institutional structures. The early post-socialist generation therefore inherited both local neo-avant-garde traditions and rapidly expanding access to global contemporary culture. Artistic pluralism emerged partly from this collision between previously separated cultural systems. The 1990s consequently became less a period in which Czech art finally entered one pre-existing international mainstream than a period in which artists, curators, critics, and institutions repeatedly redefined what internationalisation itself should mean.

The visual language of the 1990s reflected this plurality. Painting and sculpture continued to develop, but installation, photography, video, conceptual work, performance, found objects, textual practices, site-specific projects, and combinations of several media became increasingly normal components of artistic education and exhibition culture. Artists could work simultaneously with the human body, urban space, everyday commodities, memory, popular culture, domestic environments, electronic images, or institutional structures. The political transformation itself became a subject, but contemporary art was not dominated exclusively by explicit commentary on communism or transition. Consumer culture, individual identity, sexuality, mass media, religion, new technologies, ecological questions, and the changing meaning of public space all entered artistic production. The absence of one compulsory artistic doctrine made contradiction itself characteristic of the period. Postmodern strategies of appropriation, irony, fragmentation, quotation, and hybridisation appeared beside materially intensive painting, conceptual practice, socially oriented work, and renewed interest in craft or traditional media. Czech contemporary art therefore developed through simultaneous rather than sequential tendencies.

The Jindřich Chalupecký Award became one of the most important institutions for identifying and debating emerging artistic practice in this transformed environment. Established in 1990, the Award originated through an initiative involving Jiří Kolář, Theodor Pištěk, Jiří Šetlík, and the patronage of Václav Havel and was named after the critic and theorist who had defended non-conformist Czech art during the normalisation period. Its early purpose was to provide younger artists with recognition, financial support, exhibition opportunities, and direct contact with international art environments at precisely the moment when the domestic institutional system was being reconstructed. The Award rapidly became a recurring public mechanism through which successive generations of Czech contemporary artists could be discussed and compared. Its finalists and laureates include many artists who subsequently became central to Czech and international contemporary art, making the Award's archive an unusually concentrated documentary history of the scene after 1990. The organisation itself gradually reconsidered competition, age limits, institutional power, inclusivity, and the social role of artistic prizes. From 2023, the previous age limitation was removed, and the contemporary model recognises several artists or collectives rather than constructing the process entirely around one victorious individual. The evolution of the Chalupecký Award therefore mirrors wider changes in Czech contemporary art from post-socialist support for emerging individual careers towards more critical reflection on artistic institutions, collective practice, and conditions of cultural labour.

The extensive publication *Mezera: Mladé umění v Česku 1990–2014* demonstrated how the history of contemporary art could be written through this institutional archive without

becoming merely a history of the Award itself. Lenka Lindaurová and the participating authors situated artists connected with the Chalupecký Award within the changing political, social, economic, and cultural conditions of the first twenty-five post-socialist years. This approach was significant because it treated artistic careers as embedded within structural transformations rather than organising the period into a succession of styles. The book connected exhibitions, institutions, criticism, political developments, personal testimony, and individual practices in order to show the incompleteness and instability characteristic of the contemporary scene. The title itself, meaning a gap or interval, was appropriate to a period in which institutional discontinuity and new possibilities existed simultaneously. Such studies demonstrate that contemporary art history requires sources different from those available for 19th-century art. Personal recollections, ephemeral projects, institutional archives, exhibition documentation, criticism, and networks of collaboration become essential evidence. Historiography therefore develops while many of the events under investigation remain within living memory.

The Research Centre of the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague became particularly important for constructing this evidential basis. Its programmes concerning art after 1945 and post-socialist transformation systematically assembled documents, bibliographies, interviews, texts, exhibition records, and theoretical materials that might otherwise have remained dispersed among private archives and temporary institutions. The project devoted to Czech art of the 1980s and 1990s deliberately connected the final socialist decade with post-1989 developments rather than assuming that contemporary Czech art began suddenly with the Velvet Revolution. The anthology *Czech Art 1980–2010: Texts and Documents* provided almost three decades of manifestos, criticism, theoretical writing, institutional material, and artistic statements within one research framework. Projects such as *Islands of Resistance: Between the First and Second Modernity 1985–2012* further examined how transformations begun before 1989 continued into the post-socialist environment. The VVP programme consequently became an important bridge between documentation of contemporary practice and its emerging historical interpretation. Contemporary art could be studied before the period had become fully historicised because its documentary infrastructure was being created deliberately.

The 1990s also became one of the principal periods through which feminist and gender-oriented reinterpretation entered Czech art history. Women artists had always participated in Czech artistic life, but their visibility within post-war narratives, institutional leadership, criticism, and canonical histories remained uneven. The 2014 exhibition and publication *Někdy v sukni: Umění 90. let*, edited by Pavlína Morganová, reconstructed the decade through the work of women artists and simultaneously challenged the assumption that gender could be added to an otherwise unchanged general history. Video, photography, performance, installation, corporeality, sexuality, domestic space, personal memory, and identity emerged as central components of the period. The project demonstrated that changing participation by women coincided with transformations in the media and social functions of art itself. Feminist art history therefore became a method for analysing institutions and cultural authority rather than only a programme for recovering overlooked biographies. By the 2010s and 2020s, gender, feminism, queer perspectives, care, embodiment, and institutional inequality had become established parts of critical contemporary-art discourse.

The expansion of contemporary art media transformed the concept of the artwork particularly profoundly. Performance and action art possessed important Czechoslovak precedents in the

work of Milan Knížák, Jiří Kovanda, Petr Štembera, Jan Mlčoch, Karel Miler, and other artists, but after 1989 these practices could enter public galleries, academic teaching, and international art circuits much more freely. Pavlína Morganová's long-term research and her English-language *Czech Action Art* established these practices as a coherent historical field extending from the 1960s into contemporary participatory and post-conceptual work. Documentation itself became a central theoretical problem because a photograph of a performance is neither identical with the original action nor merely a neutral record of it. Contemporary artists frequently exploit this ambiguity deliberately, producing events whose later existence depends upon images, texts, videos, recollections, or re-performance. The boundary between artwork and documentation consequently became unstable. Czech contemporary art studies increasingly responded by examining artistic process, audience, temporality, and mediation rather than treating the durable object as the necessary centre of art history.

Photography underwent a related transformation from documentary or specialised artistic medium into one component of a broader transmedial visual culture. Contemporary photographers increasingly work with installation, books, archives, found imagery, moving image, digital manipulation, performance, and conceptual strategies rather than defining their practice exclusively through the autonomous photographic print. Artistic education reflects this development, particularly within UMPRUM's photography and transmedia environments. The institution's contemporary approach treats photography as a medium interacting with materiality, spatial installation, time, visual communication, and other technical images. This transformation reflects the broader cultural environment in which photographic images circulate continuously through screens, networks, journalism, advertising, social media, and machine vision. Contemporary art therefore investigates not merely photographs but the social systems through which images are produced and consumed. Visual culture becomes a field in which artistic and non-artistic images cannot always be separated by medium alone.

Video and electronic art provide an especially important Czech connection between historical experimentation and contemporary digital culture. Woody and Steina Vašulka became internationally significant pioneers of electronic and video art after leaving Czechoslovakia, and their work later became an important point of reference for Czech research into moving images, electronic media, sound, and technological experimentation. Vašulka Kitchen Brno opened in 2018 as a specialised centre dedicated to preserving, documenting, digitising, researching, and developing their legacy. Its activities extend from archival work to contemporary exhibitions, performances, residencies, lectures, and new-media projects. The centre explicitly situates video within a broader technological environment involving digital imagery, electronic networks, coding, sound, and performative practice. Such institutionalisation is important because technological art creates preservation problems that conventional painting or sculpture collections do not encounter. Hardware, software, signal formats, playback equipment, interfaces, and technological behaviour may all form part of the work. Contemporary visual-culture research consequently intersects directly with media archaeology and digital preservation.

Digital technologies transformed artistic production far beyond specialist new-media environments. Personal computing, internet access, digital photography, video editing, mobile communication, social media, virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and interactive systems progressively entered ordinary artistic practice between the 1990s and 2025. Artists could use digital technology as a medium, as an infrastructure for producing conventional objects, or as

the social environment being critically examined. Online identities, surveillance, algorithmic decision-making, gaming, virtual spaces, data extraction, digital labour, artificial intelligence, and ecological costs of technology became artistic subjects. The distinction between digital and non-digital art consequently became less meaningful because even painting, sculpture, and installation may now involve digital research, image processing, fabrication, documentation, distribution, or publicity. Czech art education increasingly reflects this condition through studios that treat technology critically rather than simply teaching new software. Contemporary visual culture thus becomes partly a study of technological infrastructures through which society itself increasingly sees and organises the world.

Art academies were major laboratories for this transformation. The Department of Fine Arts at UMPRUM, established in 1990, progressively expanded beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries while maintaining studios associated with painting, sculpture, photography, intermedia, and later technologically oriented practice. Contemporary studio descriptions explicitly connect artistic work with ecology, public space, social processes, technology, research, installation, performance, and media convergence. The former Supermedia Studio and subsequent developments in technologically oriented intermedia practice illustrate the speed with which categories of artistic education have changed. A Visiting Artist Studio established in 2018 additionally brings a different international artist into the institution each semester, exposing students directly to changing global artistic methodologies. Similar processes have occurred at the Academy of Fine Arts and other Czech art schools, where studio teaching increasingly crosses media and emphasises conceptual development rather than strict mastery of one medium. Art schools therefore function not merely as training institutions but as places in which the definition of contemporary artistic practice is continuously renegotiated.

Artistic research represents one of the most significant methodological developments arising from this educational environment. Rather than treating artists exclusively as producers of objects subsequently interpreted by scholars, artistic research considers artistic practice itself capable of generating knowledge. The Academy of Fine Arts increasingly institutionalised this approach within doctoral study and later through specialised structures devoted to investigating how research can be conducted through artistic methods. Its contemporary artistic-research programmes examine the relationship between artistic investigation, scholarly disciplines, public communication, and systems of evaluation. Such work can take the form of installations, performances, publications, experimental situations, sound, moving images, archives, or hybrid research outputs. The development is significant for art studies because it destabilises the conventional division between artist as object of research and art historian as producer of knowledge about that object. Contemporary Czech art increasingly includes practitioners who are simultaneously artists, researchers, curators, writers, and educators.

The National Gallery Prague remained the largest public collection institution through which contemporary art entered the national canon. The Collection of Art after 1945 was established as a separate organisational unit in 2018 after being divided from the earlier Collection of Modern Art of the 20th Century. It contains more than ten thousand works representing institutionalised and independent production from the Second World War to the present. Its holdings include Socialist Realism, Surrealism, new figuration, abstraction, constructivist tendencies, action art, conceptual practice, postmodernism, video, performance documentation, installation, and multimedia art. The collection also contains substantial

works from neighbouring Central European and wider international contexts rather than functioning exclusively as a national inventory. Jiří Valoch's donation of approximately 2,500 works in 2002 significantly expanded its representation of experimental and conceptual practice. The creation of a separate post-1945 collection therefore reflects both the growth of the material and the increasing historiographical complexity of contemporary art.

Collecting contemporary art poses methodological problems different from those associated with older collections. An institution acquiring a painting or sculpture can usually preserve a relatively stable material object, whereas contemporary installations, performances, software works, videos, socially engaged projects, or variable media may require instructions, equipment, digital files, rights agreements, interviews, and documentation of acceptable future reinstallation. The museum may therefore acquire not only an object but a protocol determining how an artwork can continue to exist. Questions of authenticity shift from preservation of original material towards preservation of artistic intention, technological behaviour, spatial relationship, or performative possibility. Czech collection institutions increasingly confront these issues as work from the 1990s and 2000s enters long-term museum custody. Contemporary art history consequently overlaps with conservation science and archival practice even while its primary questions remain interpretative.

The Prague City Gallery provides another important public institutional environment because municipal collecting and exhibition-making connect contemporary art directly with the cultural life of the capital. Its long-term acquisitions encompass painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, conceptual art, video, and installation, while its exhibition spaces allow different generations of Czech and international artists to be presented outside the framework of one national museum. Municipal galleries can respond more flexibly to contemporary urban culture because their mandate is not identical with that of a national collection institution. They also participate in debates concerning public monuments, photography, urban space, and temporary contemporary projects. The existence of several strong public institutions in Prague creates a richer environment but also reinforces the disproportionate concentration of artistic infrastructure in the capital. Contemporary Czech art therefore developed through both institutional density and persistent geographic inequality.

Independent institutions became crucial precisely because public galleries could not represent every experimental practice or institutional model emerging after 1989. MeetFactory provides one of the clearest examples. Founded by David Černý in 2001 and re-established after the 2002 floods in an industrial building in Smíchov, it launched its programme in the reconstructed premises in 2007. Its structure combines visual art, theatre, music, interdisciplinary programming, education, and international residencies within one non-profit institution. Such cross-disciplinary organisation reflects the contemporary weakening of rigid borders among artistic media. MeetFactory also demonstrates how post-industrial architecture could become infrastructure for experimental culture rather than only an object of heritage preservation. Its development shows the importance of non-state institutions in creating spaces where artistic production, presentation, and international exchange can occur simultaneously.

The Artist-in-Residence programme established at MeetFactory in 2007 became particularly important for internationalisation. It developed into the largest studio-based residency programme of its kind in Czechia and hosts visual artists, curators, theorists, and other cultural professionals. Residencies enable foreign practitioners to work within the Czech scene for

sustained periods rather than encounter it only through short exhibitions, while reciprocal partnerships provide opportunities for Czech artists abroad. Such exchange changes artistic networks at a personal level because professional relationships often develop through everyday collaboration rather than formal international representation alone. Residencies also affect curatorial research because participants can develop new projects specifically in response to Prague or to dialogue with local artists. Contemporary internationalisation consequently operates through circulation of people as well as artworks.

DOX Centre for Contemporary Art introduced another institutional model when it opened in Prague in 2008. Created through private initiative in a converted industrial complex in Holešovice, it developed as a non-governmental, non-profit, and non-collecting institution rather than a conventional museum based upon a permanent collection. DOX describes its mission through critical discussion of major contemporary social issues using visual art together with literature, theatre, music, education, film, and public debate. This interdisciplinary model positions contemporary art as a method of asking questions rather than primarily as an object requiring chronological display. The institution's transformation from a kunsthalle-like exhibition space into a broader cultural centre reflects changing expectations concerning the public role of contemporary-art organisations. The later addition of the DOX+ hall and Gulliver Airship expanded this interdisciplinary identity further. By 2025, DOX had become one of the largest independent cultural institutions in Czechia and a significant environment for both Czech and international contemporary art.

The opening of Kunsthalle Praha in February 2022 added another major privately founded institution to the Czech scene. Established by the Pudil Family Foundation in the converted former Zenger transformer station near Klárov, it combines modern and contemporary art with educational and public programmes. The institution explicitly seeks to create dialogue between Czech and international artistic environments, presenting foreign artists in Prague while expanding opportunities for local artists to reach wider audiences. Its emergence demonstrates the increasing role of private philanthropy and collecting within contemporary Czech cultural infrastructure. This development diversifies institutional funding beyond the state and municipalities, but it also raises broader questions concerning the relationship between private capital, cultural authority, collecting, and public access. Contemporary art institutions therefore become objects of institutional analysis as well as venues in which art is shown.

Brno constitutes the most important counterweight to Prague within the contemporary visual-art landscape. The Moravian Gallery has long integrated modern and contemporary art, photography, graphic design, and applied arts within its collection and exhibition structure. The House of Arts of the City of Brno provides another major platform for temporary exhibitions, artist residencies, and experimental contemporary practice. The Faculty of Fine Arts of Brno University of Technology contributes art education and theoretical research, while independent spaces and initiatives create additional institutional diversity. Vašulka Kitchen adds a distinctive specialised environment devoted to electronic and new-media art. These institutions make Brno a production centre rather than a secondary location receiving contemporary art developed in Prague. The city's importance demonstrates that Czech contemporary art has a genuinely polycentric structure even though national visibility remains unevenly distributed.

Ostrava acquired a particularly significant contemporary-art institution through the development of PLATO. The municipal gallery emerged from a temporary platform operating from 2013 and became an independent city organisation in July 2016. Its programme explicitly connects contemporary visual art with interdisciplinarity, social functions, education, research, and discussion concerning the conditions under which artworks are produced and received. PLATO differs from a conventional collecting gallery because it does not maintain a permanent art collection and concentrates instead upon living artistic production, public interaction, and the processes through which art is created. In September 2022, it opened permanently in the reconstructed historical municipal slaughterhouse. This combination of municipal funding, adaptive reuse, experimental programming, and international orientation created one of the most distinctive contemporary-art institutions outside Prague and Brno. PLATO demonstrates that regional cultural policy can generate institutions capable of participating directly in international curatorial debate rather than serving only local cultural representation.

The emergence of tranzit.cz in 2002 created another form of artistic infrastructure based upon transnational networking and critical discourse rather than conventional museum organisation. The Czech initiative belongs to a Central European network connecting autonomous contemporary-art programmes in several countries. Its activities include exhibitions, artistic and curatorial residencies, publications, lectures, discussions, and collaborative projects addressing relationships among art, politics, society, and institutions. Between 2007 and 2017, tranzit.cz participated in the Prague gallery project tranzitdisplay, which became an important environment for experimental curatorial and critical practice. The initiative also translated and published substantial bodies of international critical theory, feminist thought, art theory, philosophy, and political writing, thereby influencing the intellectual vocabulary available within Czech contemporary-art discourse. Contemporary art consequently became increasingly connected with theoretical debates extending far beyond formal aesthetics. The importance of tranzit lies as much in creating discursive networks as in presenting individual exhibitions.

This critical orientation culminated in the establishment of the Biennale Matter of Art in Prague in 2020. Unlike international biennials designed primarily to strengthen city branding or attract cultural tourism, Matter of Art explicitly defined the large-scale exhibition as a potential political and institutional intervention. Its first edition addressed care, empathy, and diverse experiences through more than forty participating artists from Czechia and numerous other countries. Subsequent editions in 2022 and 2024 continued to foreground perspectives perceived as underrepresented within mainstream public discourse. The 2024 edition connected the National Gallery's Trade Fair Palace, the Lidice Gallery, and other locations through themes of resistance, labour, rural transformation, solidarity, and social memory. Free access and extensive discursive programmes formed part of the institutional concept rather than secondary visitor services. The biennale also became part of the East Europe Biennial Alliance, positioning Prague within a network seeking alternatives to dominant Western European biennial models.

Art criticism was transformed alongside these institutions. Printed newspapers and cultural magazines remained important, but online platforms changed the speed, accessibility, and geography of critical discussion. Artalk was established in 2008 specifically to provide a platform for criticism and theoretical debate concerning contemporary visual art in Czechia, Slovakia, and international contexts. Its later Slovak editorial section and membership in East

European magazine networks reinforced the transnational orientation of critical discourse. Reviews, interviews, commentary, institutional criticism, podcasts, and public discussions allow contemporary exhibitions to be debated while they are still open rather than only after entering historical literature. The Věra Jirousová Award, which Artalk has helped organise since 2021, further emphasises art criticism as a professional field requiring institutional support. Contemporary art therefore depends not only upon artists and exhibition venues but upon a critical infrastructure through which artistic and institutional claims can be tested publicly.

Institutional critique increasingly turned towards the internal organisation of the art world itself. Working conditions, gender inequality, unpaid labour, accessibility, environmental responsibility, representation, decision-making, and the distribution of institutional authority became explicit subjects of discussion. In 2017, tranzit.cz initiated the development of the Code of Feminist Art Institutions, which sought to formulate alternatives to hierarchical and exclusionary cultural practices. Organisations such as Display subsequently identified openly with the principles of feminist art institutions and connected exhibition-making with research and collective practice. Such initiatives demonstrate that feminism in Czech contemporary art had moved beyond representation of women in exhibitions towards examination of how cultural organisations themselves operate. The institution ceased to be regarded simply as a neutral container for art. Curatorial structures, employment conditions, budgets, communication, access, and forms of collaboration became part of the ethical and political meaning of exhibition practice.

Socially engaged and participatory practices provide another distinctive characteristic of contemporary Czech art. Artists increasingly work with communities, neighbourhoods, workplaces, social groups, public institutions, or forms of everyday behaviour rather than producing objects for gallery display alone. Kateřina Šedá became internationally recognised for projects in which artistic practice emerges through organised collective actions and investigations of social relationships. Her work frequently questions isolation, routine, community, urban structure, or the effects of tourism by creating situations in which ordinary participants become part of the artistic process. The *UNES-CO* project associated with the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale used Český Krumlov to examine depopulation and the transformation of historic city centres through mass tourism. The project treated ordinary residential life itself as something requiring active reconstruction within an over-touristed heritage environment. Such practices demonstrate the degree to which contemporary art can intersect with sociology, urban studies, heritage, and community research without becoming reducible to any of these fields.

The relationship between art and politics became especially visible in the 2010s and 2020s, but political engagement no longer took one uniform ideological form. Artists and curators addressed nationalism, migration, labour, racism, gender, sexuality, housing, economic inequality, war, borders, historical memory, surveillance, and the changing conditions of democracy. Some works employed direct documentary or activist strategies, while others approached political questions indirectly through fiction, metaphor, humour, speculative narratives, or institutional experimentation. Czech contemporary art increasingly participated in regional Central and Eastern European discussions rather than assuming that political themes entered the scene primarily through Western theoretical importation. Experiences of postsocialist economic transformation, privatisation, uneven regional development, and changing relationships with Western Europe produced their own critical perspectives.

Contemporary art therefore became one arena in which the cultural meaning of postsocialism itself could be reconsidered.

Ecological thinking became equally important by the 2020s. Climate change, extraction, agriculture, non-human life, energy systems, waste, environmental grief, and relations between human and other species entered both artistic production and art-school curricula. UMPRUM studios increasingly describe ecological and environmental questions as components of sculpture, installation, technological practice, and public-space research rather than separate specialist topics. PLATO explicitly connects contemporary art with questions concerning sustainable forms of living and relationships extending beyond human society. Contemporary ecological art often challenges the conventional idea of an autonomous artwork by working with living systems, temporary materials, landscapes, research processes, or long-term collaboration. These approaches also force exhibition institutions to confront the environmental impact of international transport, temporary architecture, energy-intensive digital systems, and frequent exhibition turnover. Ecological art therefore affects not only artistic subject matter but the ethics of cultural production itself.

Decolonial perspectives became more visible during the same period. Czechia does not share the direct overseas imperial history of major Western colonial powers, but contemporary artists and researchers increasingly examine Czechoslovak involvement in global political networks, collecting, development projects, zoological practices, socialist internationalism, racial representation, and relationships with the Global South. Eva Koťátková's project *The Heart of a Giraffe in Captivity Is Twelve Kilos Lighter*, presented in the Czech and Slovak Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale, is particularly important in this respect. The project began from the history of Lenka, a giraffe captured in Kenya in 1954 and transported to Prague Zoo, and connected that history with contemporary ecological and decolonial questions concerning captivity, institutional classification, and relations with non-human life. The work was collaborative rather than organised around the isolated artistic object and deliberately questioned the institutional narratives through which bodies and specimens become objects of display. Its Venice presentation demonstrates that decolonial inquiry in Czech contemporary art can emerge from specific local histories rather than simply reproduce interpretative models developed elsewhere.

Internationalisation remains one of the clearest transformations of the post-1989 scene. The Czech and Slovak Pavilion at the Venice Biennale provides a long historical record of national artistic representation, but the political meaning of participation changed fundamentally after the end of state socialism. The National Gallery describes the period after 1989 as the beginning of a new era in which selection was no longer subordinated directly to the ideological control characteristic of previous regimes. After the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, Czechia and Slovakia developed different models of using the shared pavilion, including alternating and joint presentations. Czech artists participating in Venice entered an international environment in which national pavilions coexist uneasily with global curatorial frameworks that increasingly question the nation as the fundamental unit of artistic culture. Projects by contemporary Czech artists consequently often use the pavilion itself as a subject through which identity, political representation, architecture, or international cultural relations can be examined. The renewed joint Czech-Slovak presentation planned for 2026, selected in 2025, further demonstrated that the post-federal cultural relationship remained capable of being reformulated artistically.

International circulation increasingly occurs outside national representation altogether. Residencies, international galleries, biennials, university exchange, curatorial networks, translated publications, collaborative research, private foundations, and digital communication allow artists to build careers that cannot be mapped through national institutions alone. Figures such as Eva Koťátková, Kateřina Šedá, Dominik Lang, Krištof Kintera, Jiří Kovanda, Magdalena Jetelová, and others participate in international exhibitions while retaining different levels of relationship with the Czech institutional scene. Tomáš Pospiszyl's *An Associative Art History* provides a useful historiographical response to this condition by arguing against a model in which Eastern European art is measured primarily according to similarity with an established Western canon. His comparative approach instead examines the different circumstances through which artistic practices emerge and communicate across political and cultural divisions. This is particularly useful for contemporary Czech art because internationalisation does not require erasing historical asymmetries between artistic centres and peripheries. A mature transnational art history can compare without assuming that one cultural environment supplies the universal standard against which all others must be judged.

The contemporary art market introduced a further institutional layer after 1989. Commercial galleries, private collectors, auctions, corporate collections, art fairs, and private foundations became increasingly important in creating careers and establishing financial value, although the Czech market remained relatively small compared with the largest Western European and American centres. Commercial representation can provide artists with resources and international visibility that public institutions cannot supply, while private collectors can preserve bodies of work that might otherwise remain dispersed. At the same time, market success and historical significance cannot be treated as equivalent categories. Contemporary art research must therefore examine how prices, gallery representation, media visibility, institutional collecting, awards, and international exhibitions interact without assuming that any one mechanism produces a neutral canon. The expansion of private institutions such as Kunsthalle Praha makes relationships among collecting, philanthropy, exhibition-making, and public cultural authority especially relevant to future research.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of this artistic ecosystem. Gallery closures, cancelled exhibitions, restrictions on travel, disrupted residencies, loss of freelance income, and uncertainty concerning public events affected artists and independent organisations particularly severely. Digital exhibitions, online discussions, streaming, social media, virtual studios, and remote collaboration became more important almost immediately. Yet the crisis also demonstrated the limitations of treating online circulation as a substitute for embodied encounters with installation, performance, material objects, or collective events. Artists whose practices depended upon international mobility or temporary commissions faced specific difficulties, while institutions had to reconsider their dependence upon continuous public programming. The pandemic therefore intensified discussion about cultural labour, financial precarity, social care, institutional resilience, and digital access. Many of these questions remained part of contemporary-art discourse after physical venues reopened.

Precarious labour had in fact been a structural issue before the pandemic. Contemporary artists frequently combine artistic work with teaching, design, cultural production, technical work, administration, or unrelated employment because income from artistic production alone is uncertain. Curators, critics, technicians, independent producers, and other cultural workers face similar conditions within project-based funding systems. Grants and institutional commissions can enable ambitious work but may also require substantial unpaid preparation

and administrative labour. Contemporary institutional critique increasingly addresses these material conditions rather than discussing artistic freedom as if it existed independently of economic structures. Feminist and socially engaged institutions have been particularly active in connecting cultural values with labour practices. The study of contemporary art therefore increasingly requires sociology of cultural work alongside analysis of artistic form.

Visual culture provides the broadest methodological frame through which these developments can be understood. Contemporary citizens encounter images continuously through advertising, television, cinema, interfaces, political campaigns, surveillance systems, social networks, memes, scientific visualisation, games, virtual environments, and algorithmically generated media. Art no longer possesses a monopoly on sophisticated image production, if it ever did, and artists frequently appropriate or interrogate images originating outside the art world. The distinction between artwork and visual culture therefore becomes a question of context, intention, institutional framing, circulation, and interpretation rather than medium alone. Czech contemporary art studies increasingly engage with this expanded field through research into photography, media, digital technology, political images, design, archives, and exhibition practices. Visual literacy becomes as important as stylistic identification because the central question is often how images organise knowledge, desire, power, identity, or social behaviour.

Artificial intelligence intensified these questions by 2023–2025. Generative systems could produce images, video, text, sound, and hybrid media from statistical models trained upon enormous datasets containing cultural material of uncertain provenance. For artists, these systems created new possibilities for collaboration, appropriation, procedural image production, and critical experimentation. They simultaneously raised questions concerning authorship, copyright, labour, environmental cost, dataset bias, originality, and the relationship between human artistic intention and automated generation. Art schools and cultural institutions began confronting AI not merely as another production tool but as an infrastructure altering the social meaning of visual creativity. The long art-historical distinction between original and reproduction becomes particularly unstable where images can be synthesised without one identifiable original object. Contemporary visual-culture studies are therefore increasingly required to analyse technological systems rather than only the images these systems produce.

Despite rapid methodological expansion, painting and other traditional media retained strong positions within Czech contemporary art. The emergence of installation, video, conceptual practice, digital art, and socially engaged projects did not produce the disappearance of painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, or glass. Instead, traditional media were repeatedly recontextualised through conceptual strategies, new materials, digital references, expanded installation, and critical reflection upon their own histories. Contemporary painting can respond to internet imagery, photography, political communication, or algorithmic circulation while remaining materially grounded in pigment and surface. Sculpture can extend into environmental systems, performance, architecture, found objects, or public intervention. This coexistence prevents contemporary art from being described accurately through a simple narrative in which each technological innovation replaces an older artistic form. Czech artistic education and exhibitions instead reveal a condition of sustained media pluralism.

One of the most important achievements of the period was therefore the development of an institutional ecology capable of supporting this pluralism. The National Gallery and municipal

galleries preserve and historicise contemporary work; academies educate artists and increasingly support artistic research; the Jindřich Chalupecký Society develops awards, exhibitions, residencies, and public programmes; MeetFactory combines production, exhibition, performance, and international exchange; DOX provides a large independent interdisciplinary platform; tranzit.cz connects Czech practice with Central European critical networks; PLATO demonstrates the capacity of municipal cultural policy outside Prague; Kunsthalle Praha expands private institutional patronage; Artalk provides a sustained critical environment; and specialised initiatives such as Vašulka Kitchen preserve technologically experimental traditions while generating new work. These organisations differ substantially in finance, governance, collection policy, curatorial strategy, and relationship with audiences. Their coexistence is precisely what gives the contemporary scene resilience and intellectual diversity. No single institution can define contemporary Czech art in the manner that a central academy or state union might once have attempted.

The same pluralism creates persistent structural weaknesses. Prague continues to possess a disproportionate concentration of collections, galleries, private capital, media attention, art schools, foreign visitors, and professional opportunities even though Brno, Ostrava, and other cities maintain important independent scenes. Short-term grants can encourage experimentation but also make organisations and artistic workers dependent upon continuous application cycles. International visibility remains uneven, and the Czech scene competes for attention within a global contemporary-art system strongly concentrated around a relatively small number of museums, galleries, biennials, art fairs, and metropolitan centres. Experimental work that is difficult to collect or sell can remain dependent upon institutional subsidy, while regional initiatives may struggle to sustain professional staff. Archives of recent artistic practice are vulnerable because independent organisations frequently lack resources for long-term documentation. Contemporary art can therefore appear institutionally dynamic while remaining economically fragile.

The relationship between contemporary art and its own history presents another unresolved problem. The 1990s have already become subjects of museum retrospectives and scholarly reconstruction, while artists who entered the scene after 1989 may now hold senior academic and institutional positions. Events remembered initially as recent alternatives increasingly enter national collections, textbooks, archives, and historical exhibitions. This process inevitably creates new canons and exclusions. The artists once defined as young or experimental become historical reference points against which newer practices are judged. Contemporary art history must therefore remain attentive to the mechanisms through which yesterday's institutional opposition becomes today's institutional authority.

In summary, contemporary art and visual-culture studies in Czechia between 1993 and 2025 developed through a profound expansion of artistic media, institutional structures, critical methodologies, and international networks. The early post-socialist period replaced ideological cultural administration with artistic freedom but also created an unstable environment in which institutions, markets, funding structures, and professional roles had to be reconstructed. Installation, performance, video, photography, conceptual practice, new media, participatory projects, digital technologies, and interdisciplinary work became normal components of artistic production without eliminating painting, sculpture, drawing, or craft-based media. The Jindřich Chalupecký Award provided one of the earliest durable infrastructures for recognising successive generations, while VVP AVU created the documentary and historiographical resources necessary to analyse post-socialist art as

history. Feminist and gender research revised both the canon and institutional practices, and later feminist-institutional initiatives expanded critique towards labour, representation, care, and organisational power. MeetFactory, DOX, tranzit.cz, PLATO Ostrava, Kunsthalle Praha, Vašulka Kitchen, municipal galleries, independent initiatives, and art schools collectively transformed the Czech scene into a diverse institutional ecology connecting production, exhibition, research, education, residency, criticism, and international exchange. Matter of Art demonstrated that Czech contemporary exhibition culture had become capable of producing its own international biennial model organised around social and institutional questions rather than cultural branding alone. Artistic research further destabilised the separation between artistic production and scholarly knowledge, while visual-culture approaches situated artworks within much wider systems of photographic, digital, political, commercial, and algorithmic imagery. Ecological, feminist, socially engaged, and decolonial approaches increasingly connected contemporary art with questions of environment, inequality, historical memory, institutional responsibility, and relations with non-human life. The 2024 Venice presentation by Eva Koťátková demonstrated particularly clearly how Czech contemporary art could enter global debate through a locally grounded history interpreted within ecological and decolonial frameworks. By 2025, the defining characteristic of Czech contemporary art was therefore not one national style or dominant aesthetic programme, but the capacity of artists and institutions to move between media, disciplines, social contexts, and international networks while continually questioning the conditions under which visual culture itself is produced, displayed, interpreted, and given cultural authority.

Architecture, Design, and Applied Arts

Architecture, design, and applied arts occupy a particularly interconnected position within Czech art studies because all three fields operate between artistic authorship, material production, technology, industry, social use, and the organisation of everyday space. Architecture creates environments in which collective and private life takes place, while design gives material and visual form to objects, communication systems, interiors, clothing, transport, and technological products. Applied arts occupy an intermediate territory in which artistic invention remains inseparable from material, craft, function, and specialised production. Czech scholarship after 1993 increasingly rejected hierarchical models in which architecture was treated as a monumental branch of fine art while glass, ceramics, furniture, textiles, jewellery, and graphic design occupied secondary decorative categories. Instead, researchers examined how architecture and designed objects shape patterns of behaviour, cultural identity, consumption, institutional life, and relationships between people and material environments. This broader interpretation was particularly appropriate in the Czech lands, where modern architecture, industrial production, applied-art education, glassmaking, typography, furniture, ceramics, and exhibition design had developed through unusually close institutional relationships. Post-1989 economic transformation simultaneously disrupted many of these relationships and created new opportunities for independent studios, private manufacturers, international collaboration, and experimental artistic production. By 2025, Czech studies of architecture, design, and applied arts had therefore developed into an interdisciplinary field connecting art history, architectural theory, design history, material

culture, industrial history, technology, sociology, urban studies, heritage, environmental thinking, and contemporary creative practice.

The political transformation of 1989 constitutes the central historical boundary for understanding contemporary Czech architecture. State-socialist architecture had operated within centralised planning, nationalised construction industries, state design institutes, large public commissions, and relatively restricted forms of private building activity. The democratic transition rapidly replaced this system with private property, commercial development, municipal decision-making, market competition, restitution, foreign investment, and a new professional environment for independent architectural practices. These changes created considerable creative freedom but simultaneously weakened the capacity of public institutions to shape architectural development coherently during the 1990s. Commercial buildings, banks, offices, shopping centres, family houses, hotels, and speculative development became prominent new commissions, while the state's direct architectural role diminished significantly. Urban land acquired market value under conditions for which planning institutions were not initially fully prepared, and relationships among developers, municipalities, architects, citizens, and heritage authorities had to be renegotiated. Contemporary architectural history therefore increasingly interprets the 1990s not simply as a period of stylistic liberation but as a transformation in the political economy of the built environment. Architecture after 1989 became an especially useful field through which to analyse the broader conversion of Czech society from centralised state socialism to liberal democracy and a market economy.

Professional institutions were reconstructed almost immediately within this changing environment. The Czech Chamber of Architects was established under Act No. 360/1992 Coll. as a public-law professional body responsible for certification, professional standards, ethical practice, and representation of Czech architects within European and international professional structures. Its creation placed professional autonomy within a statutory framework distinct from the organisational structures through which architectural practice had been administered before 1989. The Society of Architects, whose institutional traditions reach back to the interwar period, was likewise transformed within the newly plural professional environment. In 1993 it established the Grand Prix Architektů, which became an annual national architecture award and an important retrospective record of changing Czech architectural production. International juries from the beginning situated domestic architecture within comparative European and global professional discussion. Competitions, exhibitions, awards, architectural journals, and professional associations therefore became part of a new infrastructure through which architectural quality could be debated outside state planning institutions. This institutional pluralisation was one of the fundamental preconditions for the development of contemporary architectural criticism and historiography after 1993.

Early research into post-socialist architecture attempted to identify whether the new freedom had produced a recognisable Czech architectural character. Petr Kratochvíl and Pavel Halík's *Česká architektura 1989–1999 / Czech Architecture 1989–1999* provided one of the first systematic surveys of buildings and tendencies created during the decade following the Velvet Revolution. Rostislav Švácha's later *Czech Architecture and Its Austerity: Fifty Buildings 1989–2004* proposed the idea of a certain restraint or austerity as a distinctive characteristic of some of the strongest Czech architectural production. The interpretation contrasted thoughtful relationships with place, material, scale, and inherited urban structure with more spectacular forms of internationally circulating architectural imagery. Architects such as Alena Šrámková,

Ladislav Lábus, Josef Pleskot, Emil Přikryl, Martin Rajniš, and other influential practitioners represented substantially different design approaches, making any one stylistic definition necessarily provisional. The value of these early syntheses therefore lies less in establishing a permanent Czech school than in documenting how critics attempted to understand the architectural consequences of political and economic transition. By the 2010s, scholarship increasingly replaced the search for a common national style with thematic analysis of public space, politics, sustainability, housing, regional identity, adaptive reuse, and architectural institutions.

The Dancing House in Prague became the most internationally recognisable symbol of the first post-socialist decade precisely because it concentrated several of these tensions within one project. Designed by Vlado Milunić and Frank Gehry and completed in 1996, it inserted an intentionally unconventional architectural form into a prominent historical urban environment. The building was celebrated internationally as evidence that Prague could participate confidently in contemporary global architecture, while domestic debate questioned the relationship between architectural experimentation and historical context. Its symbolism was strengthened by its emergence only a few years after the Velvet Revolution and by the association of its site and intellectual context with Václav Havel's cultural milieu. Yet the extraordinary visibility of the building could also distort understanding of Czech architecture by suggesting that post-1989 development was characterised mainly by expressive icon buildings. Much of the most influential Czech work of the period was considerably more restrained and concentrated on precise interventions, reconstruction, landscape, domestic architecture, and contextual urban relationships. Architectural scholarship therefore increasingly treated the Dancing House as one important manifestation of post-socialist openness rather than as a representative style for the entire period.

The relationship between architecture and politics became a major scholarly subject in its own right. The five-year UMPRUM research project *Architektura a česká politika v 19.–21. století* examined architecture not merely as a passive representation of political regimes but as an active component in the production of political and social relationships. Its research into the period after 1989 analysed the transformation of state borders and administrative organisation, seats of political authority, municipal structures, housing policy, EU-supported development, civic initiatives, and changing relationships between public and private interests. The resulting 2022 publication *Ztracená vláda věcí tvých se k tobě navrátí: Architektura a česká politika po roce 1989* provided one of the most substantial scholarly examinations of post-socialist Czech architecture. Its 656 pages explicitly connected architectural outcomes with democratisation, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, decentralisation, European integration, and economic liberalisation. Particularly important was the recognition that the retreat of the central state did not mean the disappearance of politics from architecture. Political power became distributed among municipalities, regions, private investors, European programmes, professional organisations, civic groups, and other actors whose interests had to be negotiated through the built environment.

Public space consequently became one of the central concepts through which contemporary architectural research developed. Petr Kratochvíl's studies of urban public space examined the relationship between architecture, urbanism, social communication, commercialisation, mobility, aesthetics, and democratic public life. The post-socialist city inherited large areas planned under state socialism while simultaneously confronting privatisation, suburban development, shopping centres, car dependency, tourism, and new forms of commercial

occupation of public space. Squares, streets, parks, riverbanks, transport spaces, and brownfields therefore became arenas in which public and private interests were negotiated visibly. Contemporary architectural criticism increasingly evaluated buildings not only through their isolated formal qualities but through the effects they produced upon streets, neighbourhoods, pedestrian movement, landscape, and civic accessibility. This perspective also strengthened dialogue between architectural history and sociology, political theory, urban planning, and environmental design. Architecture became understood less as the design of independent buildings and more as one mechanism through which collective urban life is organised.

The establishment of the Center for Architecture and Metropolitan Planning in Prague in 2017 provided an institutional expression of this changing relationship between architecture and the public. CAMP was created by the Prague Institute of Planning and Development specifically to improve public discussion concerning the present and future development of the capital. Its exhibition spaces, large digital projection system, study facilities, debates, lectures, films, workshops, and international programmes made urban planning publicly visible in a form unusual within earlier Czech planning institutions. Architects and planners remained important participants, but residents, municipal districts, NGOs, investors, students, and general visitors were also treated as legitimate audiences for information concerning urban change. CAMP therefore shifted architecture from specialist professional communication towards public cultural discussion. Its emergence corresponds with broader participatory tendencies in Czech municipal planning during the 2010s and 2020s. Architecture increasingly became understood as a matter of public knowledge and civic negotiation rather than exclusively professional expertise.

Architectural awards provided another mechanism through which quality and changing professional values became visible. The Grand Prix Architektů has operated continuously since 1993, documenting three decades of completed architecture through annual juries, exhibitions, and awards. In 2016, the Czech Chamber of Architects established the Czech Architecture Award as an additional nationwide platform emphasising realised buildings and their relationships with social, environmental, technical, and spatial contexts. The first edition attracted almost five hundred submitted projects, demonstrating the breadth of architectural production that had developed by the middle of the 2010s. An international jury provides comparative evaluation, while the programme deliberately presents architecture through different Czech regions rather than concentrating only upon Prague. By its tenth edition in 2025, the award had added a public-voting component and increasingly emphasised social contribution, relationship with surroundings, environmental responsibility, and quality of commissioning alongside formal accomplishment. Architectural evaluation had therefore expanded beyond the autonomous object towards the conditions and consequences of building.

The study of socialist and late-socialist architecture became another major achievement because understanding contemporary architecture required critical reassessment of the material environment inherited from 1948–1989. During the early post-socialist period, prefabricated housing, late-modern public buildings, transport infrastructure, shopping facilities, and large state-designed complexes could be dismissed too easily as aesthetically uniform manifestations of the communist regime. Research by Petr Vorlík and colleagues at the Faculty of Architecture of the Czech Technical University demonstrated instead the considerable variety of post-war architectural practice and the complex ways architects

negotiated centralised construction systems, prefabrication, technological limitations, international influences, and political expectations. Research into architecture of the 1980s proved particularly important because it identified postmodernism, high-tech references, ecological concerns, material experimentation, and contextual approaches developing before the political transition. The multi-year research programme produced publications devoted to unbuilt projects, interviews, improvisation, ambition, and endangered architecture of the decade. By 2025, the same department was investigating the formative early years of Stavoprojekt and the institutional organisation of socialist architectural practice. Czech architectural historiography thereby moved from ideological judgement towards detailed analysis of professional structures, technologies, design processes, and built results.

The NAKI-supported *Paneláci* project similarly transformed understanding of mass housing. Conducted between 2013 and 2017, it studied more than seventy prefabricated housing estates across Czechia using architectural history, urbanism, demography, anthropology, heritage studies, and social research. The project demonstrated that panel housing did not form one uniform architectural type but underwent significant chronological and regional development. Different construction systems, urban compositions, landscape concepts, public facilities, artistic interventions, and planning ideologies produced substantially different residential environments. Post-1989 renovations, insulation systems, private ownership, colour schemes, parking pressure, and commercial development subsequently altered these estates again. Research therefore replaced the stereotype of the anonymous socialist housing estate with a more differentiated history of mass residential modernisation. This reassessment has important implications for contemporary design because millions of Czech residents continue to inhabit these environments.

Sustainability became increasingly central to architectural research during the 2000s and especially the 2010s and 2020s. Earlier discussions often concentrated on technical energy performance, insulation, efficient heating, renewable energy, and environmentally responsible materials. Czech architectural theory increasingly broadened the question towards the cultural and aesthetic dimensions of sustainability, including durability, reuse, adaptability, urban density, public transport, social viability, and the preservation of existing buildings. Petr Kratochvíl and other scholars examined how sustainable architecture can remain architecturally meaningful rather than becoming a collection of technical performance indicators. Adaptive reuse acquired particular significance because the Czech Republic contains extensive industrial, agricultural, military, transport, and modernist building stock whose embodied material can be retained through transformation. Environmental thinking therefore reinforces rather than necessarily opposes historical and contextual architectural approaches. By 2025, sustainability had become one of the principal criteria through which both professional awards and public discussion assessed architectural quality.

The post-1989 transformation of Czech design was equally fundamental. Socialist Czechoslovakia had possessed internationally respected traditions in glass, furniture, industrial products, typography, ceramics, textiles, transport, and exhibition design, but relationships between designers and state-controlled industry were institutionally very different from those emerging after market reform. Privatisation, restructuring, factory closures, foreign ownership, competition, new technologies, and changes in consumer behaviour disrupted many established design systems during the 1990s. Some major manufacturers disappeared or substantially reduced production, while others modernised successfully and developed new relationships with professional designers. Independent

studios and small-scale producers gained freedom to create limited series or experimental objects without depending entirely upon large industrial enterprises. Product design consequently developed simultaneously through industrial collaboration and through forms of studio production approaching contemporary art. The history of Czech design after 1989 cannot therefore be interpreted simply as transition from poor socialist products to a modern market economy. It is more accurately understood as a restructuring of relationships among artistic education, manufacturing, entrepreneurship, technology, consumer culture, and inherited craft traditions.

A decisive scholarly achievement in understanding this history was the publication of *Design v českých zemích 1900–2000: Instituce moderního designu* in 2016. Edited by Iva Knobloch and Radim Vondráček and produced through research centred at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague, the work constituted the first systematic large-scale history of modern design in the Czech lands organised through the institutions that shaped its production. Its approximately 660 pages covered interior and product design, industrial design, graphic communication, fashion, textiles, jewellery, applied photography, and new materials. More than three hundred institutional profiles documented schools, associations, cooperatives, manufacturing enterprises, research institutes, and other organisations whose changing structures influenced design throughout the 20th century. Particularly important was the decision to treat design as a mediator between artistic culture and material everyday life rather than as a minor branch of decorative art. The publication also examined the effects of the post-1989 transformation, connecting contemporary design with the institutional history from which it emerged. Its reception within international design-history scholarship confirmed that Czech design had acquired a mature historiographical infrastructure capable of participating in broader methodological debate.

The 2022 project *Design & Transformation: Stories of Czech Design 1990–2020* moved this research directly into the post-socialist period. Developed through cooperation between UMPRUM and the Moravian Gallery in Brno and presented internationally during the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the project examined design through the changing fortunes of companies and institutions rather than through beautiful objects alone. Its contributors investigated how political transformation, privatisation, market competition, continuity of craft traditions, manufacturing restructuring, and new forms of entrepreneurship shaped design production after 1990. This approach was particularly valuable because the same political transition could produce opposite outcomes in different industries. Some historically significant factories disappeared, while new firms successfully integrated contemporary design into international markets. Others preserved traditional material expertise while radically altering management, branding, or production. The project therefore presented Czech design as an economic and cultural history of transformation rather than a sequence of aesthetic trends. International exhibitions in Brussels further situated these experiences within broader European discussions of design after socialism.

The Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague occupies the central research position in this field. Formally recognised as a research organisation, the museum conducts basic and applied research into Czech and international applied arts, design, photography, book culture, and fashion. Its collections contain approximately half a million objects encompassing glass, ceramics, porcelain, furniture, metalwork, jewellery, clocks, textiles, clothing, toys, graphics, photography, and other forms of designed material culture. Research results appear through exhibitions, scholarly catalogues, monographs, lectures, databases, and conservation

programmes rather than being confined to collection documentation. The contemporary permanent exhibition *ART, LIFE. Art for Life* reflects the museum's conceptual shift from displaying applied arts according to simple hierarchies of material or chronology towards examining how objects participate in human life. Function, bodily experience, ritual, consumption, social behaviour, technology, and symbolic meaning become essential components of interpretation. The exhibition consequently embodies a broader methodological turn in design history from stylistic taxonomy towards material culture and histories of use.

UMPRUM provides the most important educational and research counterpart to this museum infrastructure. The Academy's Department of Theory and History of Art maintains art-historical teaching while supporting specialist research into architecture, design, applied arts, and new media. Since 2005 it has offered a dedicated postgraduate programme in the Theory and History of Design and New Media, an important institutional recognition that design requires specialised scholarly methods rather than simply inclusion within general art history. The contemporary Academy combines studios in industrial design, furniture and interiors, product design, glass, ceramics and porcelain, jewellery and metal, fashion, footwear, textiles, graphic communication, digital technology, and architecture. Its technological workshops allow traditional hand processes to coexist with CNC machining, laser cutting, three-dimensional printing, digital image processing, and contemporary fabrication technologies. Historical and theoretical scholarship therefore develops in daily proximity to experimental production. This environment is particularly valuable for research because design is understood through the conditions of its making as well as through completed objects.

Research into design education itself became increasingly important by the 2020s. The NAKI III project *About Sites of Creativity: Applied Arts Education – Constructing Identities, Saving the Past, and Designing the Future*, conducted at UMPRUM from 2023 to 2027, examines Czech and Czech-German artistic education from the 19th century through the 20th. It asks what concepts, skills, materials, and design principles were transmitted through specialist schools and how graduates subsequently influenced industry, artistic craft, and cultural identity. Such work demonstrates that the history of design cannot be reconstructed adequately from celebrated products alone. Schools create professional languages, workshop traditions, material competencies, and networks connecting designers with manufacturers and cultural institutions. Changes in pedagogy can therefore influence the character of production for decades. Research into education adds another institutional dimension to Czech design history and helps explain the unusual durability of particular material traditions such as glass, ceramics, textiles, and graphic design.

Industrial and product design after 1993 illustrates particularly clearly the changing relationship between creativity and manufacturing. Designers including Jiří Pelcl, Olgoj Chorchoj, Jan Čapek, Maxim Velčovský, Rony Plesl, and later generations worked across furniture, glass, porcelain, packaging, consumer products, interiors, and limited studio production. Companies such as Škoda Auto, Tescoma, Ravak, Egoé, Bomma, Rückl, Lasvit, and others developed very different models of cooperation between designers and industry. Successful design increasingly became connected not only with styling but with ergonomics, manufacturing technology, branding, materials, sustainability, user experience, and export strategy. Smaller studios could meanwhile use limited production to test ideas excluded from large industrial systems. The boundary between industrial design and art design therefore remained deliberately porous within the Czech environment. Research increasingly examines

the organisational and economic conditions that determine whether a successful prototype can become a viable product.

A new design-support infrastructure emerged gradually around this transformed production. Designblok was founded in 1999 and developed from a relatively small presentation initiative into the largest design festival in Central and Eastern Europe, bringing designers, manufacturers, institutions, students, journalists, curators, and the wider public together annually in Prague. CZECHDESIGN began its online activities in 2003 and subsequently developed publishing, exhibitions, consulting, competitions, shops, and public advocacy for Czech design. The Czech Grand Design Awards have been presented annually since 2006 by the Czech Design Academy and provide professional recognition across product design, fashion, graphic design, photography, jewellery, manufacturers, emerging practice, and related categories. These institutions perform functions once undertaken partly through centrally organised design bodies, but they operate through a plural cultural and market environment. Festivals, awards, media platforms, shops, competitions, and exhibitions together create public visibility for design beyond museums and specialist schools. The post-1993 Czech design scene therefore developed a substantial intermediary infrastructure linking creators, production, professional evaluation, markets, and consumers.

Graphic design remained one of the strongest Czech design fields because it combined deep traditions of typography, poster art, book design, illustration, and visual communication with rapid adaptation to digital technologies. Studio Najbrt, Laboratoř, Side2, designers associated with UMPRUM, independent typographers, publishers, and numerous smaller practices reshaped the visual identities of cultural institutions, festivals, companies, books, exhibitions, and public organisations after 1989. The shift from print towards websites, motion graphics, digital interfaces, social media, and variable identities did not remove typography or book culture but expanded the environments in which graphic design operates. UMPRUM established its Graphic Design and New Media Studio in 2005 explicitly as a laboratory combining craft, experiment, technology, and visual communication. Graphic design therefore became increasingly inseparable from information systems and digital culture. Research into this field correspondingly moved beyond stylistic analysis of posters and books towards communication structures, institutional identity, media technologies, and public visual environments.

The International Biennial of Graphic Design Brno provided the most important historical international platform for this field. Founded in the 1960s and organised by the Moravian Gallery, the Biennial connected Czech designers with global graphic culture across very different political periods. The Moravian Gallery's graphic-design collection was strengthened substantially through works associated with successive biennials, creating a unique research archive in which exhibition history and collecting developed together. Its twenty-eighth edition in 2018 brought 169 selected designers from a large international submission pool into a programme that also examined typography, motion design, magazines, product relationships, and urban visual communication. The event increasingly adopted curatorial rather than purely competitive formats, demonstrating broader changes in how graphic design was discussed publicly. After 2018, however, the interruption and subsequent uncertainty surrounding the Biennial generated significant professional debate and international campaigning for its preservation. This controversy revealed that even internationally respected design institutions remain vulnerable to changing organisational priorities. It also demonstrated how deeply the

Biennial had become embedded in professional identity within Czech and international graphic design.

Applied arts constitute perhaps the field in which Czech artistic tradition achieved the most distinctive international continuity across the political rupture of 1989. Glass, ceramics, porcelain, jewellery, textiles, furniture, and other material practices had developed through specialist schools, skilled workshops, manufacturing enterprises, and individual artistic experimentation throughout the 20th century. Their ambiguous position between art and design became increasingly productive after 1993 rather than requiring resolution. An object could be functional yet produced in a limited artistic edition, technically industrial yet conceptually sculptural, or based upon traditional craft while generated through contemporary digital design. Czech researchers therefore increasingly avoid treating *užité umění* merely as decoration applied to useful objects. Material knowledge, process, sensory experience, function, labour, industry, artistic concept, and social use all become legitimate historical questions. This approach corresponds closely with the contemporary UPM interpretation of applied arts as objects actively shaping the practical and symbolic conditions of human life.

Glass remains the internationally strongest example of this material culture. Czechoslovak studio glass had achieved extraordinary international recognition after the Second World War through figures including Stanislav Libenský and Jaroslava Brychtová, René Roubíček, Miluše Roubíčková, Vladimír Kopecký, and other artists who expanded glass from decorative and functional production towards autonomous sculptural practice. Post-1993 Czech glass inherited this artistic prestige while confronting the restructuring and closure of major industrial enterprises. New companies, private workshops, specialised schools, international commissions, and independent studios nevertheless enabled substantial continuity and experimentation. Artists and designers increasingly cross the boundary among studio glass, architecture, lighting, sculpture, limited-edition design, and industrial production. UPM's long-term exhibition *Pleiad of Glass 1946–2019* explicitly interprets post-war Czech glass through its international contribution to the development of autonomous artistic glass and through the technical virtuosity of collaborating glassmakers. Research into glass therefore necessarily combines artistic authorship with furnaces, moulds, optical properties, workshop expertise, chemical composition, and industrial history.

The international revival of Czech glass during the 2000s and 2010s further transformed the field. Companies such as Lasvit, Bomma, and renewed traditional manufacturers developed contemporary lighting, architectural installations, tableware, and technically demanding bespoke production for international markets. Designers including Rony Plesl and younger generations moved between factory collaboration and autonomous artistic production, demonstrating how little explanatory value remains in an absolute opposition between design and fine art. At the same time, historically important companies faced economic vulnerability created by energy prices, global competition, changes of ownership, and the exceptional energy intensity of glass manufacture. Contemporary research consequently increasingly addresses production sustainability and industrial survival alongside aesthetics. The cultural significance of glass depends ultimately upon the continued existence of skilled craftspeople and technological infrastructure capable of translating designs into material form. Czech glass studies therefore offer a particularly clear example of art history becoming inseparable from the history and future of specialised production.

Ceramics and porcelain underwent a comparable redefinition. Historic porcelain and ceramic factories provide one line of continuity, while independent studio practice, artist-designed limited editions, experimental materials, and new forms of tableware or sculptural ceramics provide another. Contemporary UMPRUM teaching explicitly combines craft, concept, and context and encourages designers to question inherited assumptions concerning utility, functionalism, surface, and form. Digital fabrication, new glazes, three-dimensional modelling, additive processes, and experimental firing increasingly coexist with throwing, casting, mould-making, hand-building, and traditional decoration. Designers such as Maxim Velčovský and Daniel Piršč became particularly visible examples of the post-1990s return to porcelain as a medium capable of irony, cultural quotation, conceptual intervention, and renewed functional design. Research therefore interprets ceramic objects simultaneously through material technique, industrial context, symbolic association, domestic use, and artistic concept. The field shows how an apparently traditional medium can become an especially effective instrument for investigating contemporary consumer culture.

Jewellery and metalwork similarly moved beyond the older category of decorative personal adornment. Czech studio jewellery had already developed a strong authorial tradition during the second half of the 20th century, and post-1993 practice expanded towards conceptual approaches, unconventional materials, bodily intervention, object art, and installation. UMPRUM's metal and jewellery environment reflects this wider understanding by connecting object, material, body, space, and meaning rather than restricting education to precious metals or commercial jewellery. Historical collections remain essential because jewellery provides evidence concerning status, identity, gender, ritual, craft, technology, and economic exchange across long periods. Contemporary work adds questions of sustainability, recycling, ethical sourcing, wearable technology, and the changing symbolic functions of the body. Applied-art scholarship therefore increasingly treats jewellery as a form of material and social communication. This methodological expansion parallels the larger visual-cultural turn within Czech art studies.

Fashion and textiles underwent an even more pronounced transformation after 1989. The collapse or restructuring of much Czechoslovak textile and clothing industry radically altered the economic environment within which designers operated, while international fashion markets and imported brands changed consumer expectations. Independent designers and small labels gradually developed forms of authorship impossible within the former centrally organised industrial system. The Czech Grand Design Awards made fashion an established component of professional design recognition from their first edition in 2006, giving designers greater public visibility. UMPRUM studios increasingly connect clothing with performance, bodily identity, media, social role, technology, sustainability, and conceptual artistic practice rather than understanding fashion solely through seasonal commercial collections. Textile research likewise extends from pattern and surface towards material innovation, digital production, recycling, smart fabrics, and environmental impact. Czech fashion studies therefore increasingly occupy the intersection of design history, material culture, gender studies, body theory, industry, and consumer culture.

The distinction between craft and design became progressively less stable across all these fields. Traditional craft knowledge remains essential because glassblowing, ceramics, metalworking, weaving, tailoring, woodwork, bookbinding, printing, and other processes contain tacit skills that cannot be reduced entirely to digital instructions. At the same time, contemporary designers use CNC machining, laser cutting, three-dimensional printing, digital

modelling, robotic production, computational design, and advanced material research alongside hand skills. UMPRUM's technological facilities illustrate this coexistence especially clearly by placing traditional workshops and digital manufacturing within the same educational institution. The resulting objects frequently reveal neither purely handmade nor purely industrial origins. Contemporary design therefore depends upon hybrid production systems in which digital precision can coexist with irregularity, manual finishing, local materials, and specialised craft expertise. Research increasingly focuses upon these production chains because authorship is distributed among designer, technician, craftsperson, software, machine, manufacturer, and material behaviour.

Environmental responsibility became one of the most important new research and design questions during the 2010s and 2020s. Product longevity, repairability, local production, recycled materials, circular systems, energy consumption, transportation, packaging, and the environmental consequences of manufacturing increasingly affect evaluation of design quality. This development is especially consequential for glass, ceramics, and porcelain because high-temperature production requires substantial energy. The 2023 project *Made by Fire*, organised by the Moravian Gallery in cooperation with Designblok, addressed precisely this tension by presenting contemporary Czech glass, porcelain, and ceramics against the background of environmental and social pressures. The project explicitly examined how internationally celebrated material traditions could adapt to the post-digital era without ignoring energy consumption and sustainability. Environmental thinking therefore became a question of industrial and cultural survival rather than a decorative ecological theme. Czech design studies increasingly examine whether inherited production traditions can remain viable under conditions of climate and energy transition.

Architecture faces comparable environmental questions. Demolition and new construction consume large quantities of energy and materials, while Czech towns contain extensive existing building stock capable of adaptation. The growing prestige of conversions, extensions, reconstructions, and careful interventions within recent Czech Architecture Awards reflects this changing professional orientation. Industrial complexes, farm buildings, railway structures, waterworks, warehouses, socialist public buildings, and ordinary residential structures are increasingly treated as resources rather than automatic obstacles to new development. Adaptive reuse connects architectural culture with environmental responsibility while preserving material traces of historical development. It also requires architects to work collaboratively with historians, engineers, conservation specialists, municipalities, and communities. The distinction between contemporary architecture and heritage therefore becomes increasingly relational even though their disciplinary objectives remain different.

Internationalisation constitutes another major feature of both architecture and design after 1993. Czech architects and designers re-entered European professional networks through competitions, exhibitions, schools, professional chambers, biennials, festivals, foreign offices, and international commissions. Architects who had developed substantial careers abroad, including Eva Jiřičná and Jan Kaplický, became important points of connection between domestic architectural culture and wider international practice. Czech studios participated increasingly in foreign competitions and publications, while foreign architects completed prominent commissions within Czechia. Designblok attracted international designers, curators, journalists, manufacturers, and institutions to Prague, while Czech designers appeared increasingly at Milan, London, Brussels, and other international design events. *Design & Transformation* presented Czech design internationally during the 2022

Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union and interpreted post-socialist design through a specifically Central European historical experience. Internationalisation therefore involved not merely exporting attractive objects but explaining the political, industrial, educational, and material conditions from which Czech architecture and design emerged.

Regional institutions remained essential despite the strong concentration of design infrastructure in Prague. The Moravian Gallery in Brno occupies an especially important position because it uniquely combines fine art, photography, architecture, applied arts, and design within one major national collection institution. Its history of the Brno Biennial gave it an international graphic-design profile, while its collections of furniture, glass, ceramics, textiles, fashion, and applied graphics create substantial research possibilities across material and media boundaries. Brno's architectural traditions and university environment further strengthen the relationship among architecture, design, technology, and research. Zlín remains historically significant through its industrial and design traditions associated with Bata and through contemporary design education. Liberec, Plzeň, Ostrava, and other centres likewise contribute particular architectural, industrial, material, or educational histories that challenge a Prague-centred narrative. The Czech field is therefore geographically uneven but substantially polycentric.

The conceptual boundary separating applied arts from fine art became increasingly difficult to sustain by the end of the period. Studio glass can function simultaneously as sculpture and material experiment, conceptual jewellery can operate as body-based art, ceramics can enter installations, fashion can become performance, and furniture can exist as either industrial product or limited artistic object. Conversely, contemporary artists frequently employ traditional crafts and collaborate with specialised workshops historically associated with applied arts. The older hierarchy placing autonomous artistic expression above functional production consequently became less convincing both academically and institutionally. UPM's research and exhibitions, UMPRUM's studio structure, the Moravian Gallery's integrated collections, and Designblok's mixture of industrial and experimental work all reflect this erosion of disciplinary boundaries. Art studies therefore increasingly focus upon intention, production context, material process, circulation, use, and reception rather than attempting to classify every object permanently as art, craft, or design.

The same development has expanded the kinds of source material used by researchers. Design historians study factory archives, prototypes, patents, catalogues, advertisements, technical drawings, photographs, oral histories, corporate records, school documentation, magazines, price lists, and surviving manufactured objects. Architectural historians increasingly use competition entries, planning documentation, political records, investor correspondence, building permits, models, photographs, interviews, and digital project files alongside conventional drawings and completed buildings. Material analysis can identify manufacturing processes or later alterations, while oral testimony can reveal negotiations invisible within official documentation. Digital databases permit comparisons across large collections and institutional histories. Design and architectural history consequently increasingly resemble histories of systems and processes rather than traditional stylistic histories based only upon exemplary finished works.

By 2025, architecture and design were also becoming increasingly important components of public cultural literacy. CAMP made urban planning visible as a subject of civic debate, architecture awards addressed general audiences, Designblok transformed design into a

major public cultural event, and museums increasingly interpreted ordinary objects as evidence concerning social life. CZECHDESIGN and specialist media expanded discussion of products, visual identities, interiors, public competitions, and design quality beyond academic or professional circles. Public interest also increased expectations concerning transparency in architectural competitions, quality of public construction, accessibility, environmental responsibility, and visual communication by state institutions. Design therefore became connected with questions of public service rather than remaining primarily a commercial or aesthetic field. This development is particularly important because every citizen encounters buildings, public space, signage, furniture, transport, interfaces, packaging, and clothing regardless of whether they intentionally visit museums or galleries.

Several structural problems nevertheless remained unresolved. Architecture continued to operate within a development environment where land prices, procurement rules, investment pressures, planning delays, and short political cycles can conflict with long-term spatial quality. Smaller municipalities frequently lack professional planning capacity, while major cities struggle with housing affordability, transport, suburbanisation, and tensions between development and historical environments. Czech design retains strong creative and educational capacity but parts of its manufacturing base remain vulnerable to international competition, energy prices, ownership changes, and the disappearance of specialist craft skills. Independent designers and small studios often operate under economically precarious conditions, while experimental production can be difficult to scale. Major events and awards create visibility, but visibility alone does not guarantee stable industrial collaboration or institutional research support. The interruption of the Brno Biennial after its 2018 edition demonstrated particularly clearly that even internationally established design infrastructures can become institutionally fragile.

The field also faces a continuing historiographical problem concerning recency. Buildings, products, graphic identities, fashion collections, and experimental objects created only a few years earlier may enter museum collections or receive major awards before their historical significance can be evaluated with conventional distance. Market success can be mistaken for cultural importance, while commercially unsuccessful experiments may later prove highly influential. Digital design introduces further difficulties because interfaces, websites, fonts, animations, software-based products, and visual identities can disappear or change rapidly without systematic archiving. Architectural practices increasingly produce born-digital records whose long-term preservation requires specialised strategies. Contemporary design history therefore has to document the present proactively while remaining cautious about canon formation. This anticipatory responsibility makes research infrastructures and institutional archives increasingly important.

In summary, architecture, design, and applied arts in Czechia between 1993 and 2025 developed through a profound restructuring of the relationships among artistic authorship, public institutions, markets, industry, material traditions, technology, and everyday life. Post-socialist architecture emerged from the dissolution of centralised state planning into an environment defined by private investment, municipal autonomy, professional pluralism, international exchange, and contested public interests. The Czech Chamber of Architects, Grand Prix Architektů, Czech Architecture Award, academic research centres, architectural publications, and CAMP created a diversified infrastructure through which architectural quality, urban development, and public space could be investigated and debated. Research by Petr Kratochvíl, Rostislav Švácha, Petr Vorlík, Cyril Říha and their collaborators shifted

architectural history from stylistic description towards analysis of politics, public space, socialism, post-socialist transformation, housing, sustainability, institutional practice, and civic participation. Czech design studies underwent a comparable transformation, culminating in major syntheses such as *Design in the Czech Lands 1900–2000* and *Design & Transformation: Stories of Czech Design 1990–2020*, which interpret designed objects through schools, industries, companies, institutions, markets, and political-economic change. The Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague consolidated applied arts and design as a major research field, while UMPRUM connected scholarship directly with studio practice, material experimentation, industrial cooperation, and new technologies. Designblok, CZECHDESIGN, the Czech Grand Design Awards, the Brno Biennial, and international exhibitions created a public and professional infrastructure through which Czech design could acquire national visibility and international circulation. Glass remained the most internationally distinctive applied-art tradition, but ceramics, porcelain, jewellery, fashion, textiles, furniture, product design, and graphic communication developed equally important new relationships between craft, concept, industry, and technology. Environmental responsibility, digital fabrication, adaptive reuse, sustainability, and the survival of specialised production became increasingly important research questions by the 2020s. The most significant intellectual achievement of the period was therefore the gradual dissolution of rigid hierarchies separating architecture, design, craft, applied art, and fine art in favour of a relational understanding of how material and spatial culture is conceived, produced, used, circulated, and socially valued. By 2025, Czech architecture and design studies had become mature interdisciplinary fields capable of explaining not only the formal qualities of buildings and objects, but the economic, technological, institutional, ecological, and cultural systems through which the designed environment continuously shapes everyday life.

Museology, Curatorial Studies, and Exhibition Practices

Museology, curatorial studies, and exhibition practice form three closely connected but conceptually distinct fields within contemporary Czech art and museum studies. Museology investigates the museum as an institution, cultural phenomenon, knowledge system, collection environment, and specific relationship between society and selected material or intangible evidence. Curatorial studies concentrate more directly upon the processes through which objects, artworks, documents, concepts, and cultural questions are selected, connected, interpreted, spatialised, and communicated to audiences. Exhibition practice constitutes the practical and intellectual environment in which these decisions acquire physical, visual, textual, technological, and performative form. The distinctions matter because a curator may create a temporary exhibition without managing a permanent museum collection, while a museologist may study collecting, museum pedagogy, documentation, institutional history, or museum communication without curating art exhibitions directly. Art museums and galleries bring the three fields especially close together because collection research, art-historical interpretation, curatorial selection, exhibition design, conservation, and public communication frequently occur within one institutional project. After 1993, Czech practice increasingly recognised this complexity and moved away from treating an exhibition as a neutral arrangement of already understood objects. The exhibition itself came to be understood as an interpretative medium capable of constructing historical narratives, artistic

canons, social relationships, and forms of public knowledge. By 2025, Czech museology and curatorial practice therefore operated across a broad spectrum extending from theoretical reflection on the museum to experimental contemporary-art exhibitions and participatory forms of cultural communication.

The principal transformation again began before the establishment of the independent Czech Republic. After 1989, museums and galleries lost the ideological framework through which state socialism had regulated acquisitions, exhibitions, historical interpretation, institutional leadership, and the public presentation of politically sensitive subjects. This liberation did not mean that curatorial practice became politically neutral, because every selection and interpretation continued to organise cultural meaning. Instead, institutions gained substantially greater freedom to reconsider suppressed artistic movements, religious culture, exile, Holocaust memory, German-speaking culture, political repression, modernism, unofficial art, and many other subjects. International exhibitions and professional exchanges became easier, while foreign museum theory and exhibition practice could circulate with fewer institutional restrictions. Private galleries, foundations, artist-run initiatives, and independent exhibition spaces added new organisational models alongside state and municipal museums. Curators increasingly acquired visible authorial responsibility for exhibitions rather than functioning primarily as custodians translating a fixed institutional narrative into display. The post-1989 transition therefore changed both what could be exhibited and who possessed authority to construct the exhibition's argument.

Czech museology nevertheless entered this transformation with an unusually deep theoretical inheritance. University-level museum education in Brno can trace its institutional history to the Lectorate in Museum Studies established at Masaryk University in 1921, while an External Chair of Museology was created in 1963 in close cooperation with the Moravian Museum. The so-called Brno School of Museology became internationally significant through the work of Jan Jelínek, Zbyněk Zbyslav Stránský, and their colleagues. Stránský argued that museology should be developed as an autonomous scientific discipline rather than reduced to a practical handbook for museum administration. His concepts of *museality*, *musealisation*, and the specific human relationship towards selected evidence of reality attempted to identify the theoretical object underlying museums as historically variable institutions. Jelínek connected this intellectual environment with international museum governance and served as President of ICOM from 1971 to 1977. Brno also contributed directly to the development of the International Committee for Museology and, from 1987, to the International Summer School of Museology. Post-1993 Czech museology thus inherited a tradition already recognised internationally for treating the museum itself as a subject of systematic scientific reflection.

The significance of this tradition after 1993 lay not in preserving Stránský's theoretical system unchanged but in subjecting it to historical and methodological reassessment. Contemporary Brno museologists have examined the origins of the school, its terminology, its relationship with socialist institutions, its international reception, and the extent to which its conceptual tools remain useful under different social conditions. Museum practice had changed profoundly through digitalisation, new heritage concepts, participation, identity politics, tourism, marketing, accessibility, and the growing importance of visitor studies. A theoretical system developed partly in response to 20th-century collecting and professionalisation could therefore not simply provide complete answers to 21st-century institutional questions. At the same time, the Brno insistence that museum work requires theoretical foundations retained considerable relevance. The museum remains an institution that selects from reality, assigns

significance, preserves selected evidence, and constructs relationships between objects and society. Contemporary Czech museology therefore tends to treat the Brno School both as an intellectual heritage and as an object of critical historiography.

Masaryk University's present Department of Museology demonstrates this combination of continuity and adaptation. The workplace now forms part of the Department of Archaeology and Museology at the Faculty of Arts and continues to describe itself as one of the oldest centres of museological education in the world. Its teaching combines theory with direct professional training, internships, excursions, exhibition projects, and cooperation with museums and other cultural organisations. The current follow-up Master's programme gives particular emphasis to two areas: museological exhibition-making and museum pedagogy. Exhibition studies include theory and practice of exhibition production, museum architecture, exhibition criticism, and exhibition didactics, while museum pedagogy encompasses psychology, inclusion, educational theory, and presentation methods. General and special museology, museum management, and scientific methodology provide the conceptual foundation connecting these areas. The curriculum therefore illustrates the movement from a predominantly theoretical debate concerning the epistemological status of museology towards an integrated model linking museum theory with communication, visitors, education, and actual exhibition practice.

The creation of *Museologica Brunensia* in 2012 strengthened this renewed academic infrastructure. Published by Masaryk University and later directly administered by the Department of Archaeology and Museology, the journal explicitly presents museology as a modern scientific discipline capable of influencing museum practice. It publishes theoretical research, methodological studies, exhibition criticism, historical museology, museum pedagogy, institutional analyses, and work concerning contemporary museum challenges. The journal consciously continues the intellectual lineage of *Muzeologické sešity*, published in Brno between 1969 and 1986, while operating through an open-access international scholarly model. By the mid-2020s it was indexed in Scopus, DOAJ, and ERIH PLUS, substantially increasing the international circulation of Czech museological scholarship. Its development demonstrates that Brno museology has not survived merely as a historical school remembered through Stránský. It continues to produce a specialised research environment capable of engaging with contemporary international debates. The institutional continuity between an older theoretical tradition and a 21st-century peer-reviewed platform represents one of the distinctive strengths of Czech museology.

A second major centre emerged within the National Museum through the Centre for Presentation of Cultural Heritage. Established on 1 November 2005 at the initiative of the Ministry of Culture, the Centre was intended to strengthen museum communication, presentation of collections, audience work, methodological support, and the application of new approaches to public access. Its activities include methodological publications, professional consultation, training, specialised conferences, virtual presentation, work with visitors with specific needs, and maintenance of a specialist museological library. The eMuzeum portal, operated within this environment since 2006, provides professional information concerning museum developments in Czechia and abroad. The Centre also participates in editing *Muzeum: Muzejní a vlastivědná práce*, the country's oldest continuously published periodical devoted exclusively to museum and museological topics. Its creation is significant because it institutionalised the idea that exhibition communication and audience relationships require specialised research rather than being secondary promotional functions.

Museum presentation thus became a recognised methodological field within the national museum system.

The National Museum itself provides the most consequential recent example of transformation in Czech permanent exhibition practice. The general reconstruction of its Historical Building, undertaken between 2015 and 2018, created the opportunity to reconsider not merely the architecture but the institution's entire permanent presentation. The museum described the subsequent programme of eight permanent exhibition complexes as the largest exhibition project in Czech history. Rather than reconstructing the old disciplinary arrangement room by room, the new project sought to connect natural-science, historical, anthropological, and social themes across the Historical and New Buildings. Architectural design, graphics, multimedia, interactive elements, original collection objects, scenography, and educational interpretation were planned as mutually dependent components. Major sections including *Miracles of Evolution*, *Windows into Prehistory*, *History*, *History of the 20th Century*, and the Children's Museum opened progressively between 2021 and 2023. The project therefore provides an unusually clear case in which museology, collection research, exhibition architecture, scenography, education, and institutional identity were redesigned simultaneously.

The *History of the 20th Century* exhibition illustrates the interpretative implications of this approach. Rather than presenting Czech modern history exclusively through political documents and chronological cases, the exhibition uses scenographically reconstructed environments to situate visitors within trenches, streets, shops, apartments, and other spaces associated with everyday historical experience. Large political turning points remain present, but they are interpreted through the possibilities and limitations encountered by individuals living inside changing political and economic systems. The museum therefore connects macrohistory with everyday material culture and embodied visitor movement through space. This method raises legitimate scholarly questions about the boundary between historical reconstruction and theatricalisation, but it also demonstrates the expanded communicative ambitions of the contemporary historical museum. Objects no longer carry the full interpretative burden independently because spatial design and visitor sequence participate in constructing meaning. Exhibition scenography consequently becomes part of historical argument.

Museum pedagogy developed rapidly alongside these changes. Czech research increasingly understands the museum as a distinctive educational environment in which learning emerges from encounters with original objects, spatial contexts, interpretation, social interaction, and visitor experience. Lucie Jagošová, Vladimír Jůva, Lenka Mrázová, Petra Šobáňová, and other researchers contributed substantially to establishing museum pedagogy as a theoretically articulated field rather than a collection of practical activities for school groups. Šobáňová's 2012 studies placed museum education explicitly within both pedagogical and museological frameworks and analysed its objectives, methods, didactic resources, organisational forms, and relationships with schools. Research into exhibitions as educational media demonstrated that visitors learn more effectively where objects are situated within intelligible contexts and where interpretation provides meaningful relationships rather than only dense factual labels. The educational function of the museum thus became a subject of research in its own right. By 2025, Czech museology treated museum pedagogy as one of its core professional specialisations.

This educational turn altered the internal distribution of authority within museums. Traditional collection museums were organised principally around curators whose disciplinary expertise determined classification and interpretation, while educators often entered only after an exhibition had already been designed. Contemporary exhibition development increasingly benefits from involving educators, designers, accessibility specialists, conservators, digital developers, and visitor-service professionals from the conceptual stage. This collaborative model recognises that scholarly accuracy does not guarantee effective public communication automatically. Curatorial knowledge has to be translated through spatial sequence, language, object selection, graphic hierarchy, sensory experience, and different levels of visitor familiarity with the subject. The museum educator therefore becomes a partner in interpretation rather than simply a guide explaining somebody else's completed curatorial project. Czech professional conferences concerned with museum presentation and education increasingly reflect this collaborative model.

Accessibility expanded this transformation further. Czech museums increasingly confronted the fact that legal public access does not mean meaningful accessibility for visitors with visual, hearing, mobility, cognitive, neurological, or other specific needs. The Centre for Presentation of Cultural Heritage developed training, methodological support, tactile approaches, specialised tours, and partnerships with organisations representing visitors with disabilities. Digital technologies can assist through subtitles, sign-language interpretation, audio description, enlarged visual material, and personalised information, but accessibility frequently also depends upon physical architecture and staff communication. Inclusive design challenges the assumption that every visitor should move through an exhibition, read labels, and encounter objects in the same way. It also affects curatorial decisions because a supposedly universal exhibition narrative may in practice privilege one form of bodily and cognitive experience. Accessibility thus became both a technical and an ethical dimension of contemporary Czech museum practice.

Digitalisation produced another major shift in exhibition communication. Online collection databases, virtual exhibitions, three-dimensional models, multimedia interfaces, projection, augmented information, mobile applications, and digital interactives expanded the environments in which museum content could be encountered. Ladislav Kesner had already addressed the relationship between art museums and digital visual culture in his 2000 study *Muzeum umění v digitální době*, arguing that museums retained particular importance precisely because original objects offer forms of visual and embodied experience distinct from the proliferation of reproduced images. Subsequent Czech practice largely confirmed this complementarity rather than replacing physical exhibitions with digital substitutes. Digital resources can provide contextual depth, comparative images, sound, animation, reconstruction, and accessibility that would be impossible to place physically beside every object. Yet the museum's distinctive cultural authority still rests substantially upon the encounter with material evidence and authentic objects. Contemporary exhibition design therefore increasingly seeks productive relationships between originals and digital mediation rather than assuming that technological novelty is inherently educational.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this digital experimentation abruptly. Museum and gallery closures in 2020 and 2021 forced institutions to communicate through websites, social media, streamed lectures, online exhibitions, digital tours, collection databases, and other remote formats. Institutions that had previously regarded online presentation mainly as supplementary communication suddenly depended upon it for maintaining contact with

audiences. The experience demonstrated both the possibilities and the limits of virtual museums. Digital programmes can reach geographically distant users and provide access for people unable to visit physically, but they cannot reproduce scale, materiality, bodily movement, atmosphere, or many forms of social encounter. Czech museum research after the pandemic increasingly therefore treated digital and physical presentation as complementary parts of a hybrid communication ecology. The crisis accelerated change but did not eliminate the importance of exhibition space.

The Czech relationship with ICOM gives these developments an unusually significant international context. Czechoslovakia had been one of the fourteen founding countries of ICOM in 1946, and Czech museum professionals played major roles in the organisation during the 20th century. Jan Jelínek's presidency from 1971 to 1977 coincided with fundamental reforms that opened ICOM more broadly to museum professionals and strengthened the principle that museums operate in the service of society. The independent Czech and Slovak national committees succeeded the Czechoslovak structure in 1994. Czech museology therefore entered the post-1993 period with both a strong national theoretical tradition and direct historical involvement in international museum governance. This continuity became symbolically important when Prague was selected to host the 26th ICOM General Conference in 2022.

ICOM Prague 2022 became one of the most consequential museum events hosted in Czechia during the entire period. Thousands of museum professionals participated physically and remotely in discussions concerning sustainability, digital technologies, civil society, leadership, community relationships, and the future functions of museums. Most importantly, on 24 August 2022 the Extraordinary General Assembly adopted a new international definition of the museum by a vote of 92.41 per cent. The definition describes museums as permanent non-profit institutions that research, collect, conserve, interpret, and exhibit tangible and intangible heritage while being accessible, inclusive, ethical, sustainable, and participatory. More than five hundred Czech museum, gallery, university, and related professionals had participated in the preceding consultation process within Czechia. Prague thus became associated internationally with a major normative redefinition of the museum. The event also created an unusual historical continuity with the 1974 ICOM definition adopted during the presidency of Jan Jelínek.

The significance of the Prague definition lies in the fact that collection care alone no longer describes the museum's international professional identity adequately. Research and conservation remain fundamental, but accessibility, diversity, sustainability, ethical communication, and participation of communities are now incorporated explicitly within the institution's normative purpose. This has important implications for curatorial work because the authority to interpret cultural objects can no longer be imagined as exclusively internal to a professional institution. Museums increasingly need to consider whose histories are represented, whose terminology is used, who can access exhibitions, how collections were acquired, and which communities possess continuing relationships with particular objects. Participation does not mean abandoning professional evidence or allowing every interpretation equal scholarly status. It means recognising that museum knowledge is produced within social relationships and that curatorial authority carries responsibilities towards those affected by its representations. The new definition therefore provides an international framework through which tendencies already developing in Czech museum pedagogy and public engagement can be evaluated.

Art museums present a distinct version of these problems. Their collections are formed through aesthetic evaluation, art-historical canonisation, acquisitions, donations, political decisions, market conditions, and institutional histories rather than simply through representative sampling of social reality. Curators therefore possess considerable influence over which artists become visible, which works enter collections, which periods receive permanent gallery space, and which historical interpretations are made public. Temporary exhibitions can revise canons rapidly by juxtaposing works in new relationships, while permanent displays stabilise some narratives for longer periods. The art-museum exhibition is therefore simultaneously a scholarly argument and an institutional distribution of cultural authority. Czech curatorial studies after 1989 increasingly made this mechanism explicit. The curator emerged not simply as the specialist caring for one collection but as an author constructing interpretative frameworks through selection, juxtaposition, text, architecture, and public programming.

The 1990s were decisive in establishing this contemporary understanding of curatorship. Jana and Jiří Ševčík became particularly influential because their exhibitions treated curating as a critical and interpretative practice capable of defining generations and diagnosing the condition of contemporary art. Projects such as *To, co zbývá* in 1993, *Zkušební provoz* in 1995, and *Snížený rozpočet* in 1997 did not simply assemble notable artworks but proposed arguments concerning the direction of artistic practice after the collapse of state socialism. Their activities in public institutions, private galleries, academia, and international exhibitions also demonstrated how the curator could move between previously separate institutional spheres. Such authority inevitably created new problems concerning selection and exclusion. Later feminist scholarship has shown, for example, that influential curatorial narratives of the 1980s and 1990s significantly underrepresented women artists. The emergence of the curator as a strong authorial figure therefore simultaneously expanded interpretative possibilities and made curatorial power itself a legitimate subject of criticism.

The exhibition consequently became increasingly understood as a medium in its own right. Works placed together do not remain semantically independent because spatial proximity, chronology, lighting, architecture, texts, sequence, and thematic framing generate relationships among them. A curatorial exhibition can therefore create an argument that no individual artwork expresses by itself. This principle became increasingly important in contemporary-art practice, where exhibitions frequently operate as temporary research propositions rather than as displays of pre-existing categories. Exhibition studies examine these relationships by asking how particular formats emerged historically and how visitors encounter narratives spatially. The Czech field gradually adopted this theoretical vocabulary through international curatorial literature, critical journals, university teaching, and direct experimentation. By the 2000s and 2010s, institutional critique, relational aesthetics, archive-based exhibitions, participatory practices, postcolonial analysis, artistic research, and environmental curating had entered Czech curatorial discourse.

The institutionalisation of Curatorial Studies at the Faculty of Art and Design of Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem represents one of the clearest signs of this professional transformation. Michal Koleček developed the first version of the programme in 2007, and the contemporary two-year follow-up Master's degree explicitly combines theory with practical exhibition production. Students study 20th- and 21st-century art history, curatorial methodology, exhibition studies, institutional operation, criticism, cultural management, the art market, public communication, and legal or organisational aspects of exhibition-making.

Curatorial workshops culminate in public projects through which students have to negotiate the complete process from conceptual formulation and artist communication to production and installation. Current methodological teaching includes institutional critique, participatory art, postcolonialism, post-internet practice, environmental art, artistic research, public art, and activism. The curriculum therefore treats curatorship as both intellectual interpretation and cultural production. It is one of the strongest examples in Czech higher education of curating becoming an autonomous professional field rather than merely an informal competence acquired after art-history study.

Curatorial education also entered more traditional art-history programmes. Masaryk University's Department of Art History includes museum and gallery practice devoted explicitly to the theory and practical preparation of curatorial exhibition projects. Its teaching asks students to evaluate current exhibitions, understand mediation and interpretation, and prepare their own proposals. Courses concerned with the curator as medium analyse the history of curatorial practice, Czech and international institutions, cultural policy, exhibition formats, and post-1989 transformations. Charles University's Institute of Art History similarly incorporates practical exposure to contemporary curatorial work and the everyday functioning of museums and galleries. UMPRUM integrates students of modern and contemporary art history directly into collaborative exhibition activity with artists and designers. Curatorship has consequently moved from the margins of professional training into the formal curriculum of several Czech institutions. The change reflects recognition that many art-history graduates work in environments where research has to be translated into spatial, organisational, and public forms.

The National Gallery Prague provides the most visible environment in which these curatorial methods become national public narratives. Its permanent exhibitions increasingly reject comprehensive chronological display in favour of selective conceptual frameworks connecting Czech and international material. *1796–1918: Art of the Long Century* organises the 19th century through thematic relationships rather than simply repeating a sequence of national masters. *1918–1938: First Czechoslovak Republic* places Czech, Slovak, German-speaking, Carpathian Ruthenian, and international art within the cultural structures of the multinational state. *1939–2021: The End of the Black-and-White Era* explicitly resists simple binary classifications such as official versus unofficial or abstraction versus figuration. Medieval displays similarly situate Bohemian works within Central European contexts rather than presenting them as an isolated national school. Permanent exhibitions thus operate as historiographical propositions through which changing research enters public museum space.

This approach demonstrates why curating cannot be separated from art-historical research. Every chronological boundary, wall text, juxtaposition, omitted artist, room sequence, and category implies an interpretation of artistic history. A permanent display is especially consequential because its arguments may shape public understanding for many years and become normalised through repeated exposure. Temporary exhibitions can challenge such narratives by concentrating upon neglected artists, media, regions, collections, or alternative methodological questions. The relationship between collection and exhibition therefore becomes dialectical: exhibitions reinterpret collections, while gaps in collections limit which histories can be represented materially. Acquisitions can subsequently respond to newly recognised historical absences. Contemporary curatorial practice increasingly treats collecting and exhibition-making as interconnected processes of canon formation.

The Moravian Gallery in Brno offers a particularly important alternative model because of the unusual breadth of its collections across fine art, photography, architecture, graphic design, and applied arts. This institutional structure encourages exhibition formats that challenge traditional distinctions between autonomous art and designed material culture. The permanent exhibition *ART IS HERE* presents modern and post-war art through interpretative relationships rather than as a simple sequence of styles, while newer educational displays experiment with accessibility and visitor orientation. The gallery also operates museums devoted to Josef Hoffmann and Dušan Jurkovič, where buildings, interiors, furniture, design history, and contemporary intervention can be presented together. Its long association with the Brno Biennial further created a curatorial environment in which graphic design itself could become the subject of exhibition experimentation. The Moravian Gallery therefore demonstrates how collection structure can encourage alternative curatorial methods extending beyond conventional fine-art museums.

Contemporary kunsthalle-type and non-collecting institutions broadened exhibition practice still further. Organisations such as DOX, PLATO Ostrava, tranzit.cz, and other contemporary-art platforms are not obliged to construct exhibition programmes primarily from their own permanent collections. Their curators can therefore respond more rapidly to current social questions, commission new works, build research-based exhibitions, invite international artists, and experiment with participation or interdisciplinary formats. The absence of a collection does not eliminate institutional responsibility because exhibition choices still produce visibility, cultural authority, and professional opportunities. Instead, the centre of gravity moves from stewardship towards production and discourse. This model became increasingly influential in Czech contemporary art during the 2000s and 2010s and contributed to the differentiation between museum curatorship and broader independent curatorial practice.

Exhibition architecture and graphic design acquired correspondingly greater importance. The curator's conceptual narrative has to become a physical environment through cooperation with architects, exhibition designers, graphic designers, lighting specialists, multimedia developers, conservators, technicians, and educators. The same objects can produce radically different visitor experiences depending upon spatial density, sightlines, colour, typography, lighting, scale, sound, and movement through rooms. Czech museums increasingly use architectural competitions or specialised exhibition-design teams for major permanent projects rather than treating cases and wall colours as purely technical decisions. The National Museum's reconstructed permanent exhibitions represent the largest-scale example, but similar collaborations occur throughout galleries, regional museums, design exhibitions, and contemporary-art institutions. Exhibition design thus becomes a form of knowledge translation between curatorial concept and embodied visitor experience. Its success should be evaluated not only aesthetically but through clarity, conservation requirements, accessibility, orientation, and the capacity to support rather than overwhelm the objects presented.

The role of the collection remains fundamental despite the increasing emphasis upon exhibition experience. Museum objects possess historical, material, documentary, artistic, and scientific properties that cannot be generated entirely through scenography or digital interpretation. Curatorial practice is strongest when display emerges from close research into objects rather than when objects serve merely as illustrations of an externally imposed narrative. Collection-based institutions therefore face a continuous tension between object-

centred and narrative-centred exhibition models. Too little context can produce rows of visually impressive but intellectually inaccessible objects, whereas excessive scenography can subordinate material evidence to a predetermined story. Czech museological research increasingly addresses precisely this balance. The continuing attraction of authentic objects in an age of unlimited digital reproduction suggests that museums retain a distinctive epistemic role grounded in physical evidence.

Visitor research has become increasingly important for evaluating whether exhibitions actually perform the functions imagined by their creators. The curator's intention cannot be assumed to correspond automatically with the visitor's experience. People differ in age, education, prior knowledge, language, motivation, attention, physical ability, cultural background, and the amount of time available for a visit. Research into Czech museum exhibitions has therefore examined educational effectiveness, readability, emotional engagement, orientation, digital media, and object-based learning. Petra Šobáňová's research identified contextual and narrative approaches as particularly valuable where exhibitions are intended to support learning. More recent National Museum research has examined the emotional and social dimensions of historically oriented exhibitions and the continuing value of direct object encounters in an environment saturated with information technologies. Visitor studies consequently provide empirical correction to purely curator-centred conceptions of exhibition success.

Emotion emerged as an especially important topic because museums communicate through more than factual cognition. Historical objects associated with war, political repression, everyday family life, childhood, migration, death, religion, or national memory can generate powerful emotional responses. Exhibition architecture, lighting, sound, reconstruction, testimony, and personal objects can intensify these effects deliberately. Responsible curating must therefore distinguish between meaningful emotional engagement and manipulative spectacle. The growing Czech discussion of visitor experience reflects a broader museum shift towards recognising that knowledge is produced through embodied, affective, and social processes as well as through reading. Emotional design is not an alternative to scholarly evidence but one dimension through which visitors interpret evidence. Museology increasingly investigates how the two can reinforce rather than undermine one another.

Provenance and institutional self-reflection have added another ethical dimension to exhibition practice. Museums no longer present collections convincingly if they discuss the cultural significance of objects while ignoring the historical processes through which those objects entered institutional custody. Nazi confiscation, wartime displacement, colonial collecting, archaeological extraction, communist nationalisation, private donation, art-market acquisition, and state transfer can all form part of an object's museum history. Czech galleries and museums have increasingly incorporated provenance research into cataloguing and exhibition interpretation, especially concerning Jewish collections and 20th-century property transfers. Contemporary curatorial practice may therefore expose the institution's own historical role rather than maintaining the illusion of a neutral repository. This self-reflexive approach also intersects with debates concerning decolonisation and the representation of non-European collections, particularly within ethnographic and world-culture museums.

Exhibition criticism developed correspondingly as a distinct professional activity. An exhibition can be evaluated through the scholarly quality of its argument, object selection, architecture, labels, visual communication, accessibility, educational dimension, conservation conditions,

and relationship with the institution's broader mission. Czech museology has increasingly treated such criticism as a legitimate research practice rather than a journalistic afterthought. *Museologica Brunensia* includes exhibition-related analysis, while the National Museum's *Muzeum* journal covers exhibition practice and museum presentation explicitly. Contemporary-art criticism through platforms such as Artalk adds another layer, focusing especially upon curatorial concepts, institutional politics, representation, and the contemporary scene. This critical infrastructure is essential because museums and galleries possess significant cultural authority and should not be evaluated only through visitor numbers or promotional visibility. Exhibition criticism converts public display back into an object of scholarly analysis.

Professional museum associations reinforce the circulation of this knowledge. The Czech Association of Museums and Galleries brings together museum professionals through commissions, conferences, methodological exchange, advocacy, and specialist training. Its Commission for Public Relations and Museum Pedagogy has developed a continuing cycle of conferences devoted to current trends in museum presentation and education. Such events provide an important environment where experience from national institutions can be compared with regional and municipal museums operating under very different conditions. Museum innovation is often uneven because large institutions can employ specialist educators, designers, digital developers, and researchers that smaller museums cannot afford independently. Professional networks therefore help distribute methodologies beyond the institutions in which they were originally developed. Czech museology functions not only through university theory but through a dense professional community translating research into everyday museum work.

Sustainability emerged as an increasingly important curatorial problem during the final years of the period. Temporary exhibitions consume construction materials, energy, transport, packaging, printed communication, climate-control resources, and staff labour, while international loans can generate substantial environmental costs. Exhibition design therefore increasingly has to consider reuse, modular systems, local production, transport distances, material life cycles, and the possibility of reducing unnecessary temporary construction. The Prague ICOM definition explicitly includes sustainability among museum responsibilities, giving this concern international normative authority. Environmental sustainability also intersects with financial sustainability because expensive short-term exhibition cycles can create pressure for continuous novelty even where collections themselves remain under-researched. Curatorial innovation in the 2020s increasingly therefore includes reflection upon whether the exhibition economy itself can become more durable.

Community participation represents a related transformation of curatorial authority. Museums increasingly invite local communities, tradition bearers, minority groups, witnesses, artists, or other stakeholders to contribute knowledge and interpretation rather than merely receive completed exhibitions. Such participation can take the form of oral histories, co-curation, community collecting, public workshops, advisory groups, collaborative artistic projects, or participatory programming. These methods are particularly valuable when institutions represent experiences that curatorial staff do not share directly. Participation nevertheless creates methodological challenges because communities are internally diverse and may disagree about interpretation, terminology, or representation. Curators therefore remain responsible for evidential standards while creating transparent processes through which

several perspectives can become visible. The participatory museum is not one without expertise but one in which expertise is understood as potentially distributed.

The growth of curatorial studies also produced increasing reflection upon the labour and ethics of the curator. Contemporary curators negotiate budgets, deadlines, loan agreements, copyright, artists' expectations, institutional policy, transport, insurance, installation, public relations, accessibility, publications, and educational programming alongside historical or theoretical research. The romantic image of the curator as an independent intellectual author therefore obscures a substantial amount of administrative and collaborative labour. Independent curators often operate under project-based and financially precarious conditions, while institutional curators must balance long-term collection responsibilities with highly visible exhibition programming. Conflicts can arise between scholarly research and pressure for attendance, sponsorship, publicity, or short exhibition cycles. Curatorial education increasingly incorporates these practical conditions because conceptual ambition alone cannot produce a viable exhibition. The professionalisation of curating after 1993 therefore involved both intellectual emancipation and exposure to new forms of cultural labour.

The authority of the curator remains contested for another reason: exhibitions inevitably exclude more than they include. Limited space, budgets, conservation conditions, and conceptual coherence require selection, but each selection can reinforce or challenge existing cultural hierarchies. The gender critique of post-1989 Czech curating demonstrates how rapidly new supposedly progressive canons could reproduce older structural inequalities. Similar questions arise concerning regional artists, Roma culture, German-speaking histories, non-European collections, disability, class, and institutions outside Prague. Curatorial practice therefore increasingly has to examine not only whether an exhibition argument is convincing but what institutional mechanisms made that argument possible. Canon formation has become one of the central ethical and historiographical questions connecting curating with art history.

By 2025, museum and curatorial practice in Czechia had consequently become markedly more collaborative than it had been three decades earlier. Major exhibition projects bring together curators, art historians, historians, scientists, educators, conservators, architects, graphic designers, audiovisual specialists, accessibility consultants, technicians, photographers, editors, translators, registrars, and communication teams. Contemporary exhibitions may additionally involve artists, community participants, external researchers, performers, or software developers. The resulting project cannot be attributed intellectually to one curator in the same simple sense as a scholarly article can be attributed to one author. Curatorial authorship remains important because somebody must formulate and defend the interpretative proposition, but exhibition-making is increasingly recognised as collective cultural production. This collaborative reality is reflected directly in contemporary museum education and curatorial-study programmes.

Several structural weaknesses nevertheless remain. Smaller Czech museums frequently have limited resources for visitor research, experimental exhibition design, accessibility, digital infrastructure, international loans, or specialised curatorial development. Grant-funded temporary exhibitions can favour short-term visible outputs while archival processing and collection research remain less publicly apparent. Large institutions may face opposite pressures, including bureaucratic complexity, political attention, expensive building

operations, and expectations for high attendance. Digital technologies require continual replacement and can become obsolete more rapidly than conventional exhibition furniture. Curatorial innovation can also become formulaic when interactive screens, immersive projection, or participatory rhetoric are introduced without a clear relationship to collection evidence. The challenge is therefore not to maximise novelty but to select methods appropriate to the objects, arguments, audiences, and institutional mission.

A further unresolved issue concerns the relationship between museum research and exhibition production. High-quality exhibitions depend upon long-term research, yet institutional schedules often demand that projects be completed within fixed financial and promotional cycles. Exhibition catalogues can produce important scholarship, but their deadlines may precede the full maturation of research. Conversely, substantial academic research can remain inaccessible publicly if museums lack resources for ambitious interpretation. Czech institutions increasingly attempt to connect research projects directly with exhibitions, publications, digital resources, and educational programmes in order to maximise the value of the same scholarly work. The National Museum's status as a research organisation and the research responsibilities of major galleries provide an institutional basis for this approach. Maintaining the connection is essential if exhibitions are to remain forms of knowledge rather than cultural entertainment detached from scholarship.

In summary, museology, curatorial studies, and exhibition practice in Czechia between 1993 and 2025 developed through the convergence of a long-established theoretical tradition and a rapidly transforming post-socialist institutional environment. Brno museology entered the period with an internationally significant intellectual inheritance associated particularly with Jan Jelínek and Zbyněk Zbyslav Stránský, whose work had treated museology as an autonomous discipline and connected Czech museum thought directly with ICOM and ICOFOM. Masaryk University subsequently preserved this tradition while redirecting substantial parts of its curriculum towards exhibition-making, museum pedagogy, inclusion, visitor experience, and professional practice, while *Museologica Brunensia* renewed Brno's role as an international publication centre after 2012. The National Museum's Centre for Presentation of Cultural Heritage, founded in 2005, gave museum communication and visitor-oriented methodology an explicit national institutional base, while the redesign of the National Museum's permanent exhibitions between 2018 and 2023 demonstrated the growing integration of scholarship, scenography, interactive media, architecture, education, and object-based interpretation. Museum pedagogy became a substantial research field through work concerned with learning, visitor experience, original objects, emotions, accessibility, and relationships between museum and school. ICOM Prague 2022 represented the strongest international confirmation of this transformation: the museum definition adopted in Prague explicitly placed accessibility, inclusivity, diversity, sustainability, ethical communication, and community participation alongside research, collecting, conservation, interpretation, and exhibition. Curatorial studies followed a different historical trajectory, emerging after 1989 as the curator became an increasingly visible author of exhibitions and intermediary among artists, institutions, publics, and international networks. Jana and Jiří Ševčík played a decisive role in the 1990s by demonstrating the exhibition's capacity to interpret contemporary artistic change, while subsequent critical research also revealed how strongly curatorial selection participates in canon formation and exclusion. The Curatorial Studies programme established at the Faculty of Art and Design in Ústí nad Labem from 2007 institutionalised curating as a distinct field combining art history, exhibition theory, criticism, cultural management,

production, and direct practical projects, while related training entered art-history programmes in Prague and Brno. The National Gallery Prague and Moravian Gallery demonstrate how permanent exhibitions increasingly function as historiographical arguments rather than neutral arrangements of collections, while independent institutions have broadened Czech curatorial practice beyond collection-centred museum models. Exhibition design, museum architecture, digital mediation, provenance research, visitor studies, sustainability, and participatory methodologies have further transformed the exhibition into a complex interdisciplinary medium. By 2025, the central achievement of Czech museology and curatorial practice was therefore not simply the modernisation of museum display, but the recognition that every exhibition constitutes an active process of knowledge production in which objects, scholarly evidence, spatial design, institutional authority, visitor experience, and social responsibility must be negotiated together.

Musicology and the Study of Musical Culture

Musicology occupies a distinctive position within contemporary Czech art studies because music exists simultaneously as composed structure, performed event, written text, acoustic phenomenon, social practice, institution, recorded medium, and component of cultural memory. Traditional historical musicology remains central to the field, but its subjects and methods expanded considerably between 1993 and 2025. Research continues to investigate composers, musical works, manuscripts, stylistic developments, theory, notation, performance, institutions, and historical reception, while increasingly addressing audiences, musical labour, gender, popular music, media, political contexts, cultural identity, ethnomusicology, and everyday listening. This expansion has altered the meaning of musical history itself because a complete account of musical culture cannot be reconstructed solely from canonical compositions or biographies of celebrated composers. Concert programmes, correspondence, recordings, instruments, institutional archives, newspapers, oral testimony, commercial media, performance traditions, and digital sources have become equally important forms of evidence. Czech musicology consequently developed towards a broader study of musical culture without abandoning musical analysis, source criticism, textual criticism, and detailed knowledge of repertory. Its strongest contemporary research combines these approaches rather than replacing one with another. By 2025, Czech musicology could therefore be described as a historically grounded but methodologically plural field operating between humanities scholarship, performance, cultural studies, archival science, ethnology, media research, and public musical life.

As in the other artistic disciplines considered in this Part, 1989 represents the primary intellectual and institutional rupture, while 1993 consolidated the transformed environment within an independent Czech state. State-socialist musicology possessed substantial scholarly traditions, archival infrastructures, universities, Academy research, and internationally respected specialists, but research agendas and institutional careers remained affected by ideological constraints and political exclusions. After the Velvet Revolution, previously restricted subjects, scholars, publications, foreign contacts, and methodological perspectives could enter university and research life far more freely. Czech researchers regained easier access to international archives, conferences, fellowships, editions, theoretical literature, and collaborative projects. The dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993

subsequently required Czech musicological institutions to redefine national responsibilities within new state structures while preserving long-established Czech-Slovak scholarly connections. The transformation did not create Czech musicology anew because its institutional roots extended deep into the 19th and early 20th centuries. Instead, it reopened the field to international methodological exchange and created conditions for reconsidering the national musical canon inherited from earlier political periods. The history of Czech music after 1993 was therefore increasingly written through continuity, revision, and internationalisation rather than disciplinary reconstruction from zero.

The oldest university tradition is centred at Charles University, where the history of musicological teaching reaches back to 1865. The Prague university environment is associated with figures including August Wilhelm Ambros, Guido Adler, and Paul Nettl and therefore occupies an important place in the formation of Central European musicology. This background is significant because Czech musical scholarship emerged historically within multilingual scholarly networks linking Prague with Vienna, German-speaking academia, and the wider Habsburg intellectual environment. The Institute of Musicology at the Faculty of Arts continues this tradition through Bachelor's, Master's, and doctoral study while maintaining a specialised library and access to international musicological databases. Its contemporary identity is therefore based upon both disciplinary continuity and methodological expansion. Prague musicology after 1989 increasingly reassessed the national historiographical frameworks through which earlier generations had narrated Czech musical history. The institution's longevity does not imply methodological conservatism because its current research addresses historical repertories together with questions of memory, identity, musical culture, and transnational circulation. Charles University consequently represents one of the clearest cases in which a 19th-century musicological tradition has been adapted to the intellectual conditions of the 21st century.

The Institute's current research architecture makes this development explicit. Its scholarly work is organised broadly around music before 1600, music after 1600, and cultural studies of music. The first area combines palaeography, source criticism, medieval and Renaissance repertories, liturgical practice, manuscript studies, and the cultural geography of musical exchange. The second extends from early modern sacred and theatrical music through the 19th and 20th centuries to major Czech and European repertories. Cultural studies allow questions of identity, memory, institutions, reception, social functions, and other contextual problems to be investigated without separating them artificially from musical evidence. Major projects such as *Changing Identities in the Musical Culture of Central Europe in the Late Middle Ages*, *Sound Memories*, and *Old Myths, New Facts* demonstrate the importance of Central European rather than narrowly national research frameworks. These projects reconsider the Czech lands as nodes within networks of manuscripts, repertories, performers, institutions, and cultural memory extending across political boundaries. Prague musicology therefore illustrates a general post-1993 movement from national music history towards relational histories of musical circulation.

Brno represents an equally important but intellectually distinct university tradition. The Department of Musicology at Masaryk University was founded by Vladimír Helfert shortly after the establishment of the university and became one of the principal centres of 20th-century Czech musicological thought. Helfert's scholarship combined detailed historical research with strong interest in musical culture, institutions, criticism, contemporary composition, and the social significance of music. His pupils and successors established what became known as

the Brno musicological school and contributed extensively to historiography, lexicography, aesthetics, music theory, Janáček studies, and Moravian musical research. Post-1993 Brno musicology therefore inherited a tradition in which historical research had never been entirely isolated from broader reflection upon society and musical life. Contemporary scholars have also critically reassessed Helfert's concepts of historical development, periodisation, nationalism, and the social responsibilities of musicology rather than preserving his intellectual legacy unaltered. This reflexive engagement with disciplinary history resembles the historiographical self-criticism visible elsewhere in Czech art studies. Brno remains important precisely because its institutional memory provides a platform for methodological renewal rather than a fixed doctrinal school.

Masaryk University's contemporary institutional structure demonstrates how far the field has expanded. The Department of Musicology maintains conventional historical and theoretical musicological education but is also connected with the Centre for Music Lexicography and the Academy of Early Music. Its teaching and research environment additionally developed programmes in Associated Art Studies, Theory of Interactive Media, Cultural Management, Digital Culture and Creative Industries, and Sound Design and Multimedia Technologies. These fields extend far beyond the traditional study of written concert music while remaining connected with questions of sound, media, artistic production, and cultural institutions. Students can combine historical repertory, musical theory, performance, media, technology, and cultural analysis within one broader arts environment. The institutional development is particularly revealing because it demonstrates that musicology has expanded not by abandoning its historical core but by building adjacent fields around it. Brno consequently provides one of the clearest Czech examples of the transformation from traditional musicology towards a broader study of sound and musical culture.

Palacký University in Olomouc forms the third principal university centre of Czech musicology. Musicological study and research were established there in 1946 through Robert Smetana, a musicologist and folklorist who belonged to the generation reconstructing the university after the Second World War. The contemporary department was reopened in 1992, making its modern development directly connected with the post-socialist renewal of Czech humanities education. Its programmes combine historical and theoretical musicology with aesthetics, acoustics, organology, ethnomusicology, music sociology, music psychology, popular and jazz music, criticism, computer music, and practical musical training. Such breadth makes the Olomouc tradition especially useful for demonstrating how systematic musicology expanded after 1989. The department also maintains doctoral education, conferences, musical activities, and its own scholarly publication infrastructure. Its location outside Prague and Brno strengthens the polycentric geography of Czech musicological research. Olomouc thereby serves as both a regional centre and a participant in national and international musicological debate.

The journal *Musicologica Olomucensia*, established in 1996, provides an important expression of this institutional renewal. It publishes historical, theoretical, and analytical studies by Czech and international scholars and also reports on conferences, publications, and continuing research. Contributions appear in Czech, English, German, and Slovak, reflecting the multilingual environment characteristic of Central European musicology. Its inclusion in international bibliographical and scholarly databases has increased the visibility of research produced outside the two largest Czech academic centres. Since 2023, its open-access model has further reduced barriers to international readership. The journal therefore performs a role

extending beyond publication of local departmental research. It provides another institutional channel through which Czech musicology operates as a polycentric scholarly community.

The Czech Academy of Sciences underwent a particularly significant institutional reorganisation in 2019. Earlier Academy traditions of musicological research had continued through predecessor institutions associated ultimately with the former Institute of Musicology of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and later with music-history structures within the Institute of Ethnology. When these organisational arrangements ended in 2018, a new Department of Musicology was established within the Institute of Art History from 1 January 2019. The location is intellectually significant because it places research into music inside a broader institution devoted to visual art, architecture, aesthetics, and art theory. The new department nevertheless retained specifically musicological expertise and independent research programmes. Its work currently ranges from 17th-century repertories to 21st-century musical culture and examines Czech material in wider European contexts. The reorganisation thus preserved an Academy-level musicological research tradition while bringing it institutionally closer to the other arts disciplines considered in this Part.

The Department's profile also reflects the widening definition of legitimate musicological subjects. Current research includes thematic catalogues and editions of less-known composers, Italian opera, Mozart studies, 19th- and 20th-century aesthetics, women in music, salon culture, Czech operetta, and popular music. A collective project on concert life in the Czech lands is constructing a database of events, venues, performers, and repertories, thereby treating performance infrastructure itself as an object of historical research. This approach moves music history away from a sequence of compositions towards analysis of where, by whom, for whom, and under what institutional conditions music was actually heard. The department also organises conferences on 18th-century Italian opera and recurring Mozart symposia, connecting Czech research with international specialist communities. Public lectures and editorial activity further integrate fundamental research with wider cultural communication. The institutional profile therefore captures the central transformation of Czech musicology especially clearly: the canonical work remains important, but it is increasingly situated within the social systems that allowed it to exist.

Periodical culture provides another indication of disciplinary maturity. *Hudební věda*, founded in 1964 and published by the Institute of Art History CAS since 2019, remains one of the principal Czech specialist journals and appears quarterly. Its remit includes scholarly articles, reviews, documents, and reports relating to musical culture, music theory, and musicological research. *Musicologica Brunensia*, in its present form published by Masaryk University since 2009 while continuing an older series dating to 1966, provides a second internationally indexed platform with a particularly strong Central European orientation. *Musicologica Olomucensia* contributes the perspective of the Olomouc centre, while the Czech Society for Musicology established *Muzikologické fórum* in 2012 to provide another peer-reviewed venue for diverse and interdisciplinary research. Together these journals prevent Czech musicological publication from depending upon one institutional centre. Their multilingual and increasingly open-access character also strengthens international communication.

The Czech Society for Musicology provides the principal professional framework connecting scholars across these workplaces. Its annual conferences bring together researchers from universities, the Academy, museums, conservatories, and related institutions and allow emerging research to be discussed before publication. The renewal of the student research

competition in 2011 created another mechanism for integrating younger scholars into the professional community. The 2025 annual conference devoted its principal theme to systematic musicology while also providing space for independent research and a student section. This breadth is significant because systematic research has sometimes occupied a weaker institutional position in Czech musicology than historical studies. Professional programming therefore helps correct imbalances within the field and encourages dialogue among historical, analytical, theoretical, social, and technological approaches. The Society's activities demonstrate that Czech musicology functions through a professional network extending beyond formal university departments.

Source research remains one of the most characteristic strengths of Czech musicology. Historical musical culture survives through scores, parts, manuscripts, printed editions, libretti, letters, diaries, theoretical treatises, performance documents, instruments, recordings, photographs, programmes, and institutional archives. Every source has to be situated within its history of production and transmission because a later printed score may differ significantly from the composer's manuscript or from the version performed at a historical premiere. Musical textual criticism therefore resembles philology while confronting the additional problem that the edited text is expected to become sound through performance. Czech scholars have maintained strong traditions in cataloguing, editorial method, palaeography, and archival research while integrating newer digital tools. Such work may appear less theoretically dramatic than interpretative cultural studies, yet it provides the evidential infrastructure upon which reliable historical claims depend. The continuing strength of source criticism distinguishes Czech musicology from approaches in which broad cultural interpretation can become detached from musical documents themselves.

The Czech Museum of Music provides the most extensive collection-based research environment for this work. Its holdings comprise more than 700,000 documents of musical history across music manuscripts, printed scores, correspondence, iconography, recordings, instruments, books, programmes, posters, libretti, personal estates, and related materials. The Music History Department alone maintains a score archive of approximately 200,000 items, around 26,000 music-related documents, tens of thousands of iconographical and printed sources, and a major audio collection. These collections document musical life from the medieval period to the present and include sources concerning both Czech musicians and broader European musical culture. The Museum therefore functions simultaneously as an archive, collection institution, research centre, conservation facility, exhibition venue, and public musical space. Research focuses particularly upon historiography, iconography, organology, sources, and the protection and accessibility of musical heritage. Its peer-reviewed bilingual journal *Musicalia* provides another publication platform linking collections with wider musicological research.

The post-1993 institutional history of the Museum is itself revealing. Restitution in the early 1990s required the music collections to leave the Velkopřevorský Palace, forcing a major reconsideration of their future accommodation. In 2001, the former Museum of Czech Music was renamed the Czech Museum of Music, a change reflecting a collecting policy broader than a narrowly national canon. The institution subsequently acquired the former Dominican Church of St Mary Magdalene in Malá Strana, which was extensively reconstructed for exhibitions, storage, research, and public programmes. The new headquarters opened to the public in November 2004. This transformation illustrates how post-socialist property changes could disrupt cultural institutions while also creating opportunities for substantial

modernisation. The Museum emerged with a stronger research and public infrastructure capable of presenting music as material, visual, documentary, and sonic culture.

The establishment of the Centre for the Documentation of Popular Music and New Media within the Czech Museum of Music in 2008 marked an especially important conceptual change. The Centre was created explicitly because popular musical cultures had previously received insufficient attention within classical musicological collecting. Its task is to acquire, preserve, document, and interpret sources connected with popular music and related media. This institutional decision effectively acknowledged that rock, pop, jazz, alternative scenes, recorded media, and other forms of 20th- and 21st-century music form legitimate components of national musical history. Popular music is especially vulnerable to documentary loss because many of its sources remain dispersed among private collectors, performers, clubs, independent labels, journalists, and fans rather than established archives. The Centre therefore performs anticipatory collection work by preserving materials before they disappear. Its creation represents one of the clearest signs that Czech musicology and musical museology had moved beyond a canon organised primarily around composers of art music.

Music sociology contributed theoretically to the same expansion. Mikuláš Bek's *Konzervatoř Evropy? K sociologii české hudebnosti*, published in 2003, was based upon extensive empirical research carried out in 2001 and examined musical preferences and activities in relation to broader social and value orientations. The study shifted attention from questions about which compositions belong to national culture towards questions about what people actually listen to, perform, value, reject, or consider socially meaningful. Classical music appeared as one component within a differentiated musical environment that also included popular, folk, jazz, rock, dance, and other genres. Such research challenges the assumption that the importance of classical music within national cultural representation necessarily corresponds to its position within everyday musical behaviour. Sociology therefore introduces audiences and social differentiation into musicological analysis. Czech musical culture becomes something practised by society rather than simply a repertory inherited from celebrated composers.

Popular music studies subsequently developed through several university and Academy environments rather than one isolated specialist centre. The contemporary Department of Musicology CAS explicitly includes popular music among its research fields, while university programmes increasingly teach popular and jazz music, media, sound, and cultural studies. Research can address production, reception, genre, music industries, political regulation, clubs, festivals, recording, radio, television, youth cultures, subcultures, and changing technologies of listening. The history of popular music under state socialism is particularly significant because censorship, official licensing, informal distribution, foreign broadcasting, underground scenes, and state-controlled recording created distinctive cultural structures. Post-1989 commercialisation created a different set of problems involving global media industries, private broadcasting, music markets, digital distribution, and the decline of physical recordings. Contemporary Czech popular-music research consequently provides a means of analysing political and economic transformation through sound and musical practice. It also prevents the concept of Czech musical culture from being equated automatically with classical composition.

The Moravian Museum in Brno provides another major collection-based research centre. Its Department of the History of Music was founded in 1919 by Vladimír Helfert and became one of the principal institutions for collecting and studying musical sources connected particularly

with Moravia. It remains the second largest music archive in Czechia and contains manuscripts, printed music, instruments, libretti, theoretical writings, correspondence, photographs, sound recordings, and other documentation. The department's collections grew through the work of several generations of prominent musicologists and continue to receive estates of 20th- and 21st-century Moravian composers. The institutional connection between the Moravian Museum and Masaryk University has been particularly productive because source collections can support long-term university research and editorial projects. The department's archival holdings demonstrate the importance of regional research infrastructures within a field often dominated publicly by Prague institutions. Moravian music history consequently possesses a documentary foundation capable of supporting international rather than merely local scholarship.

The Leoš Janáček Archive constitutes the most internationally important component of this Brno environment. It contains almost the entire surviving documentary legacy of Janáček, including autograph compositions, authorised copies, libretti, theoretical and literary texts, notebooks, annotated books, and approximately fifteen thousand items of correspondence. In 2017, the archive was inscribed on UNESCO's Memory of the World International Register in recognition of its exceptional completeness and international significance. The inscription confirms that musicological source collections can themselves constitute documentary heritage of global importance. More importantly for scholarship, the archive enables unusually detailed reconstruction of the relationship among composition, language, speech, Moravian culture, opera, institutions, correspondence, and the composer's intellectual life. Cooperation between the Moravian Museum and Masaryk University supported a long-term project for a complete critical edition of Janáček's correspondence. Janáček studies therefore exemplify how archive, museum, university, critical editing, and international reception can operate as parts of one research system.

Janáček's position in modern Czech musicology has consequently changed substantially. Earlier interpretation frequently stressed his Moravian roots, folk inspiration, originality, and eventual international breakthrough, all of which remain historically significant. Contemporary scholarship investigates these elements more critically through source research, speech-melody studies, opera dramaturgy, performance history, correspondence, nationalism, Moravian identity, and international modernism. Janáček's relationship with folk culture is no longer explained adequately through a simple model in which a composer collected traditional material and transformed it into art music. His practice involved complex processes of listening, notation, linguistic observation, ethnographic interest, and artistic reconstruction. The international success of his operas has additionally generated substantial performance and reception research beyond Czechia. Janáček studies therefore represent one of the strongest areas in which a highly localised musical environment became a subject of global musicological inquiry.

Antonín Dvořák provides a parallel but differently structured field of research. The Antonín Dvořák Museum, part of the Czech Museum of Music, preserves approximately nine thousand collection objects including an exceptional group of autographs and personal documentation. In 2023, the Antonín Dvořák Archive was inscribed on UNESCO's Memory of the World International Register. The recognised collection includes the majority of his surviving musical manuscripts, authorised copies, important first editions, correspondence, personal and official documents, iconographical material, and other records. UNESCO explicitly recognised its significance not only for understanding Dvořák but for documenting musical culture and the

changing position of the artist during the later 19th century. This broader formulation corresponds closely with contemporary musicological methodology. Dvořák's career is increasingly studied through publishing, international travel, performance institutions, nationalism, cosmopolitanism, American experience, reception, and professional musical networks rather than only through analysis of major works.

Such scholarship has helped reconsider the relationship between Czech national music and international circulation. Bedřich Smetana, Dvořák, Janáček, Josef Suk, and Bohuslav Martinů remain central to Czech musical identity, but contemporary research increasingly resists treating them as successive representatives of one self-contained national school. Smetana's career developed through Prague, Gothenburg, German-language musical environments, opera institutions, political nationalism, and wider European Romantic culture. Dvořák's career connected Prague, London, Vienna, the United States, publishers, conductors, performers, and international markets. Janáček's supposedly regional musical language entered complex dialogue with European modernism and became internationally influential largely after the composer's middle age. Martinů spent substantial parts of his creative life outside Czechoslovakia and cannot be interpreted convincingly without Paris, the United States, Switzerland, exile, and transnational modernism. The modern canon therefore survives, but the conceptual framework through which canonical composers are interpreted has become significantly less nationally enclosed.

Critical editions are among the most important scholarly mechanisms supporting this reinterpretation. They require editors to compare manuscripts, first editions, proof copies, revisions, performance materials, correspondence, and other evidence in order to reconstruct the history and authorised forms of a composition. The Bohuslav Martinů Complete Edition represents the most ambitious contemporary Czech example. Initiated through the Bohuslav Martinů Institute and Foundation and published by Bärenreiter Praha, it presents the composer's complete oeuvre through scholarly critical volumes incorporating all relevant versions, arrangements, previously unpublished material, historical commentary, facsimiles, and detailed critical reports. The first volumes appeared in the mid-2010s, and the project is designed as a multi-decade undertaking extending far beyond the normal lifespan of individual research grants. Its editorial principles connect Czech musicology directly with the highest international standards of musical philology. The Edition also demonstrates that source scholarship can serve both researchers and performers because new critical texts change how music is actually played.

Comparable source-editing work surrounds other canonical composers. The Bedřich Smetana Museum has long participated in critical editions of Smetana's compositions and more recently developed a systematic critical edition of his correspondence. The correspondence project reconstructs letters sent and received in their original languages and provides detailed scholarly commentary, indexes, bibliography, and information concerning letters known only indirectly from other evidence. Such editions reveal professional, personal, linguistic, institutional, political, and international dimensions of musical life that scores alone cannot document. Janáček's correspondence project performs a comparable function for an even larger body of surviving letters. Musical biography consequently becomes less dependent upon anecdotal narratives and more firmly grounded in critically established primary sources. Czech musicology's editorial tradition therefore remains one of its most important contributions to international composer research.

Earlier music also underwent substantial reassessment after 1993. Research at Charles University has challenged older assumptions that the Czech lands occupied a peripheral position in medieval European musical development by reconstructing manuscript transmission, repertories, institutional connections, and cultural identities across Central Europe. Projects investigating the 15th century showed that Bohemian and related Central European musical environments participated actively in wider developments rather than merely receiving innovations from western centres. Late-medieval and early-modern musical memory has similarly been investigated through repertory transmission and the reuse of musical pasts. These approaches reduce the explanatory value of modern national boundaries for periods in which political, ecclesiastical, and linguistic structures differed fundamentally from today's state geography. Medieval musicology consequently converges with the transregional methodology already visible in Czech medieval art history. Musical manuscripts become evidence of mobility, institutions, religious practice, identity, and cultural exchange as well as compositions.

Research into 17th- and 18th-century musical culture has developed especially strongly through studies of sacred repertory, opera, court culture, aristocratic patronage, and musical institutions. Prague's participation in Italian opera networks and its relationship with Mozart have long attracted attention, but contemporary scholarship increasingly reconstructs theatres, performers, repertory circulation, patronage, and local audiences rather than treating celebrated composers in isolation. The Department of Musicology CAS organises recurring specialist events devoted to Italian opera and Mozart, while researchers at Charles and Masaryk Universities investigate related Central European repertories and institutions. Moravian collections provide another important source base for sacred, aristocratic, and ecclesiastical music of the period. Such work reveals a musical landscape in which Italian, Austrian, Bohemian, Moravian, German, and other repertories circulated extensively across territorial boundaries. The term Czech music therefore has to be used cautiously for periods when musical life was structurally multilingual and internationally connected. Early modern musicology has consequently participated strongly in the wider Central European turn of Czech arts research.

The 20th century required an equally substantial historiographical revision. Modernism, interwar Czechoslovakia, German-speaking composers, Jewish musical culture, wartime persecution, exile, Socialist Realism, post-war avant-garde composition, jazz, popular music, experimental sound, and unofficial cultural environments all challenge straightforward national chronology. Composers such as Erwin Schulhoff, Viktor Ullmann, Hans Krása, Gideon Klein, and others persecuted by Nazism became increasingly central to research into the multicultural and Jewish musical worlds disrupted by the Holocaust. Post-war histories similarly had to reconsider relationships among official cultural policy, artistic institutions, modernist experimentation, emigration, censorship, and international performance. The history of Czech music under communism can no longer be reconstructed solely through composers who resisted ideological demands or through official institutional narratives. Research increasingly examines the full infrastructure of commissions, festivals, broadcasting, recording, education, unions, critics, performers, and audiences. 20th-century music studies therefore parallel the revision visible in Czech visual-art historiography by moving beyond binary categories of official and unofficial culture.

Gender studies have gradually widened this history further. Women participated in Czech musical culture as composers, performers, patrons, teachers, critics, organisers, salon hosts,

and institutional professionals, but historical narratives disproportionately centred male composers and public institutions. Contemporary research into women in music and 19th-century salon culture demonstrates how private and semi-private environments shaped repertory, performance, social networks, and musical careers. The Department of Musicology CAS explicitly includes women in music among its research areas, signalling institutional acceptance of questions once treated as marginal. Gender analysis also asks how professional opportunities, education, family expectations, institutional authority, and the distinction between public and domestic music affected musical careers differently. Such research changes more than the list of recognised composers. It reveals that the structures through which music was produced and remembered were themselves gendered.

Ethnomusicology provides perhaps the strongest methodological challenge to the traditional hierarchy between composed art music and other musical practices. The Department of Ethnomusicology and Ethnochoreology at the Institute of Ethnology CAS investigates music and dance as forms of social activity, cultural communication, identity, memory, embodiment, and everyday life. The department was re-established in 1991 within an intellectual environment increasingly influenced by international ethnomusicology rather than older models limited principally to collecting and classifying folk songs. Its researchers examine historical song sources together with contemporary performance, revival movements, festivals, migration, Roma music, Czech communities abroad, public space, tourism, commodification, and cultural memory. Music is approached as something people do rather than simply an object preserved in notation. This methodological orientation has important implications for the general study of Czech musical culture. It places village musicians, dancers, amateur performers, migrant communities, and revival movements within the same broad scholarly landscape as institutions of professional art music.

Recent ethnomusicological work also demonstrates the critical reassessment of folklore itself. The 2022–2024 international project concerning folklore revival in post-socialist countries analysed politics, memory, heritagisation, and sustainability in Czech and Slovenian contexts. Its researchers distinguished contemporary participatory uses of traditional music and dance from the highly organised folklore movement developed under socialism. They examined how local identity interacts with global circulation, festivalisation, cultural tourism, hybrid musical forms, and reconstructed tradition. Such research avoids treating folk culture as an unchanged survival from the historical past. Tradition is instead understood as a continually produced cultural process involving selection, performance, memory, and institutional mediation. Czech ethnomusicology therefore intersects directly with the heritage questions considered in Part Three while remaining primarily concerned with musical and social practice.

Performance practice forms another bridge between scholarship and artistic production. Musicological knowledge becomes unusually visible when decisions about notation, instruments, ornamentation, tempo, tuning, articulation, ensemble size, or historical sources affect live performance. The Academy of Early Music associated with Masaryk University's Department of Musicology, operating since 1991, institutionalises this relationship directly. Historical music research can therefore inform performance while practical experimentation can raise questions that purely textual scholarship might not identify. Similar relationships occur through critical editions, instrument research, opera reconstruction, historically informed concerts, and collaboration with orchestras or specialist ensembles. The distinction between scholar and performer is not absolute because some Czech musicologists maintain

substantial practical musical expertise. Performance consequently functions as a form of interpretation rather than merely a later reproduction of an already established scholarly text.

Organology adds an important material dimension to Czech musical studies. The Czech Museum of Music maintains a collection of approximately three thousand musical instruments, including important European examples and objects documenting distinctive Czech instrument-making traditions. These include historical bowed, plucked, wind, keyboard, mechanical, and microtonal instruments as well as specialised examples such as the Rosenberg Capella and instruments connected with Alois Hába. Instruments preserve evidence concerning craftsmanship, acoustics, technological development, performance technique, trade, aesthetic preference, and musical experimentation. Their study therefore requires cooperation among musicologists, instrument makers, conservators, acousticians, historians, and performers. The Museum also operates a Methodological Centre for the Documentation, Conservation, and Restoration of Musical Instruments. Organology consequently shows especially clearly that musicological research can depend upon material objects even though music itself unfolds primarily through sound and time.

Recorded sound created another major source environment during the period under consideration. The Czech Museum of Music's audio holdings extend from early recording technologies to shellac records, vinyl, magnetic tape, cassettes, digital media, film, and video. Historical recordings preserve performance styles, voices, ensembles, improvisations, speech, popular culture, and repertories that cannot be reconstructed fully from notation. They also pose significant preservation problems because carriers deteriorate and playback technologies become obsolete. Ethnomusicological researchers have undertaken comparable work with early recordings of folk music, including digitisation of historical phonographic material. The study of sound recordings therefore requires both historical interpretation and technological preservation. Recorded music also fundamentally changed musical culture itself by allowing repeated listening and separating musical experience from the immediate physical presence of performers.

Digital humanities gradually transformed this documentary infrastructure. The Musicological Library of the Institute of Art History maintains a Czech Musicological Bibliographic Database containing more than twenty-five thousand records and continues both current documentation and retrospective conversion of earlier bibliography. Since 2015, this work has received support through the Academy's Digital Humanities programme, allowing bibliographical production extending back to 1970 to become increasingly searchable electronically. Masaryk University's Centre for Music Lexicography developed the *Czech Music Dictionary of Persons and Institutions*, conceived as a long-term mapping of approximately sixteen thousand significant subjects within the musical culture of the Czech lands. Major printed and electronic outputs have included volumes devoted to authors writing about music, composers, and musical institutions. Databases of correspondence, concerts, collections, archival holdings, and historical sources increasingly allow relationships to be searched systematically rather than reconstructed from isolated printed catalogues. Digitalisation therefore changes the scale of possible musicological inquiry without removing the need for source criticism.

The relationship between musicology and public musical culture became especially visible during major commemorative programmes. The Year of Czech Music has historical roots in the 1924 centenary of Bedřich Smetana and has subsequently recurred around years ending in

four, when anniversaries of numerous Czech composers coincide. The 2024 programme acquired exceptional scale because it marked the bicentenary of Smetana's birth and incorporated the government-supported *Smetana 200* initiative. The Ministry of Culture allocated substantial funding to concerts, operatic productions, exhibitions, educational programmes, international presentations, recordings, and related cultural activities. The Czech Philharmonic, National Theatre, National Museum, Prague Philharmonic Choir, Czech Centres, festivals, and numerous regional institutions participated. Musicological scholarship contributed source expertise, historical interpretation, exhibitions, publications, programme texts, and the broader narratives through which the anniversaries were communicated. The programme therefore demonstrates how historical research can enter cultural diplomacy and public musical memory.

Such anniversaries also reveal the continuing power of the national musical canon. Smetana, Dvořák, Janáček, Suk, and Martinů remain unusually visible symbols through which Czech culture is represented internationally. Contemporary musicology does not necessarily seek to remove these composers from their central position but increasingly asks how and why that position was constructed. Canon formation reflects school curricula, concert programming, state anniversaries, recordings, monuments, museums, publishers, orchestras, cultural diplomacy, and repeated scholarly interpretation. The Year of Czech Music therefore constitutes both a celebration of repertory and an object of potential musicological analysis. National musical identity is not simply inherited from composers but continually reproduced through institutions deciding what should be performed, commemorated, recorded, exported, and taught. A reflexive musicology studies these mechanisms alongside the musical works themselves.

Internationalisation has transformed the field more generally. Czech scholars participate in European and global conferences, editorial projects, research networks, and collaborative archival studies, while major composer editions involve foreign scholars and performers. English has become increasingly important for international publication, although Czech, German, Italian, Latin, and other languages remain essential to primary research depending upon subject. The historical position of the Czech lands makes German particularly important because enormous quantities of musical documentation were produced within German-speaking cultural environments. Internationalisation has also encouraged scholars to reconsider concepts such as Czech, German, Austrian, Moravian, Bohemian, Jewish, or Central European music according to historical circumstances rather than modern political boundaries. This methodological change parallels developments throughout Czech art history. Musical culture becomes intelligible through circulation and interaction rather than through the assumption of isolated national traditions.

Despite this expansion, traditional musical analysis remains indispensable. Scores and performances possess formal, harmonic, rhythmic, melodic, timbral, and structural properties that cannot be explained entirely through institutional or social context. A sociology of Dvořák's reception cannot substitute for analysis of the musical procedures through which a symphony produces its formal coherence, just as a study of Janáček's cultural environment cannot replace examination of his distinctive rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, and dramaturgical language. The strongest contemporary musicology therefore avoids a false opposition between internal musical analysis and contextual cultural interpretation. Analytical methods answer some questions, while archival, sociological, ethnographic, material, and media approaches answer others. Czech musicological education continues to retain harmony,

counterpoint, form, theory, and practical musical competencies precisely because contextual analysis requires the ability to understand the musical structures being contextualised.

A continuing challenge concerns the relationship between scholarship and musical institutions. Orchestras, opera companies, festivals, conservatories, broadcasters, publishers, museums, and recording organisations produce enormous amounts of historical evidence but do not necessarily preserve it according to long-term research needs. Administrative records, rehearsal documentation, correspondence, digital recordings, websites, programme databases, and artists' electronic archives can disappear rapidly when institutions change technologies or staff. The transition from paper to born-digital documentation therefore creates a preservation problem comparable to that faced by contemporary visual-art archives. Popular and independent musical scenes are even more vulnerable because clubs, labels, promoters, musicians, and fan communities often lack archival infrastructure. Czech musicology increasingly has to document the present before the historical value of its sources becomes fully visible.

Institutional inequality presents another difficulty. Prague and Brno contain the largest specialised archives, university departments, museums, Academy workplaces, major performance institutions, and publishing resources. Olomouc provides an important third university centre, while regional museums, archives, conservatories, festivals, and local historians preserve essential knowledge elsewhere. Research on regional musical cultures can nevertheless receive less attention than work concerning internationally recognised composers or major metropolitan institutions. Digitisation can reduce geographical barriers to sources but cannot replace expert knowledge accumulated within regions. The long-term vitality of Czech musicology therefore depends upon maintaining relationships among central research institutions and regional collections. A polycentric field requires not only several university departments but sustainable local documentary expertise.

A further challenge concerns disciplinary boundaries. Popular-music studies overlap with media studies and sociology, ethnomusicology with anthropology and heritage studies, sound research with technology and acoustic science, opera with theatre studies, and musical institutions with cultural policy and management. Digital music and sound art can be investigated equally through musicology, new-media studies, contemporary-art history, or performance research. These overlaps create opportunities for interdisciplinary work but can also fragment scholarly communities into increasingly specialised subfields. Czech musicology's future therefore depends partly upon retaining a common disciplinary language while accepting that no single methodology can encompass every form of musical culture. The continued coexistence of source studies, analysis, cultural research, ethnomusicology, performance practice, and media studies is consequently a strength rather than evidence of theoretical inconsistency.

By 2025, the study of musical culture in Czechia had therefore become significantly broader than the disciplinary model inherited at the beginning of the post-socialist period. Historical musicology remained exceptionally strong through archives, source catalogues, composer research, critical editions, and long-standing university traditions. At the same time, music sociology introduced audiences and preferences, ethnomusicology shifted attention towards performance and cultural practice, popular-music studies challenged genre hierarchies, and digital humanities transformed bibliography and source accessibility. Museum and archive research strengthened the material history of sound, instruments, recordings, and musical

institutions. Gender research reconsidered who participated in musical culture and how professional authority was distributed. Transnational methodologies placed the Czech lands within changing European and global musical networks rather than treating the national canon as a closed system.

The institutional ecology supporting this research became correspondingly diversified. Charles University retained the country's longest university tradition and combined medieval, early modern, modern, and cultural approaches to music. Masaryk University preserved the intellectual inheritance of the Brno school while developing lexicography, early-music practice, media studies, digital culture, and sound-oriented programmes. Palacký University provided another broad university environment connecting historical, systematic, sociological, popular, and technological approaches. The Institute of Art History CAS re-established Academy-level musicological research institutionally in 2019 and deliberately incorporated musical culture beyond canonical composition. The Czech Museum of Music and Moravian Museum provided collection infrastructures of international significance, while the Institute of Ethnology sustained ethnomusicological and ethnochoreological research. Professional journals and the Czech Society for Musicology connected these centres through publication, conferences, and training of younger scholars.

The inscription of the Leoš Janáček Archive in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2017 and the Antonín Dvořák Archive in 2023 symbolised the international importance of Czech musical source research particularly clearly. These recognitions do not merely celebrate two famous composers because the archives document wider systems of composition, correspondence, performance, intellectual life, publication, and cultural exchange. The Bohuslav Martinů Complete Edition provides an equally important scholarly achievement by turning dispersed international sources into a multi-generational critical-edition project designed for both research and performance. Smetana correspondence, Janáček correspondence, lexicographical databases, musicological bibliography, and collection catalogues provide less publicly spectacular but equally essential infrastructures. Czech musical scholarship therefore contributes to international culture through the systematic construction of reliable sources as well as through interpretative monographs and articles. Its documentary strength is one of the principal continuities linking 19th- and 20th-century musicology with contemporary research.

In summary, Czech musicology and the study of musical culture between 1993 and 2025 developed through a productive combination of disciplinary continuity and substantial methodological expansion. The post-1989 restoration of intellectual freedom reconnected Czech institutions more fully with international research while allowing national musical historiography, politically sensitive 20th-century subjects, popular music, and previously marginalised cultural actors to be reconsidered. Charles University, Masaryk University, Palacký University, the Czech Academy of Sciences, the National Museum, the Moravian Museum, and the Institute of Ethnology created a polycentric research system combining universities, archives, collections, critical editions, performance practice, and cultural analysis. Source research remained a fundamental strength, visible in the Janáček and Dvořák archives, Smetana correspondence, Martinů Complete Edition, specialised bibliographies, lexicographical projects, and extensive museum collections. At the same time, sociology, ethnomusicology, gender studies, popular-music research, media studies, sound research, and digital humanities expanded the meaning of legitimate musicological inquiry. Czech musical history increasingly became a history not merely of compositions but of

performances, institutions, audiences, recordings, instruments, technologies, identities, cultural memory, and social practice. The national canon remained culturally powerful but was progressively repositioned within multilingual Central European and international networks rather than treated as the natural endpoint of musical history. By 2025, the major achievement of Czech musicology was therefore not the abandonment of its exceptionally strong historical tradition, but its transformation into a broader study of musical culture capable of connecting the close reading of musical works with the social, material, institutional, and technological conditions through which music becomes historically meaningful.

Theatre, Performance, and the Study of Performing Arts

Theatre and performance studies occupy a particularly dynamic position within contemporary Czech art research because their primary objects exist through actions, bodies, voices, spaces, spectators, technologies, and temporal events rather than through permanently stable artefacts alone. A theatrical production can survive through scripts, photographs, recordings, scenographic designs, reviews, correspondence, institutional archives, and personal memory, but none of these sources is identical with the performance experienced by its original audience. The study of performing arts therefore requires methods capable of reconstructing both material evidence and ephemeral relationships among performers, spectators, spaces, texts, sounds, movements, and technologies. Czech theatre research after 1993 retained strong traditions of dramatic analysis, theatre history, acting theory, dramaturgy, directing studies, and scenography while progressively expanding towards performance studies, dance research, puppetry, documentary theatre, devised theatre, contemporary circus, artistic research, and studies of spectatorship and cultural institutions. Theatre increasingly became understood not merely as an interpretation of dramatic literature but as an event produced through interaction among several autonomous stage components. This shift also brought theatre studies into closer contact with anthropology, sociology, media studies, political history, gender studies, disability studies, visual culture, and cultural management. The boundaries between theatre, performance art, dance, circus, sound, installation, and participatory social practice became increasingly porous. By 2025, Czech performing-arts research was therefore best understood as an interdisciplinary field in which historical theatre scholarship coexisted with rapidly changing theories and practices of performativity.

The democratic transition of 1989 again forms the decisive historical watershed, while 1993 marks consolidation of the new institutional environment of the independent Czech Republic. Socialist Czechoslovakia had maintained an extensive network of repertory theatres, professional ensembles, theatre schools, festivals, publishing structures, and specialised research institutions, but artistic production was affected by state cultural policy, censorship, personnel controls, and ideological expectations. The Velvet Revolution removed these restrictions and reopened direct contact with international theatre movements that had been accessible only unevenly before 1989. Directors, actors, dramaturgs, scenographers, dancers, critics, and scholars gained much greater freedom to travel, collaborate internationally, establish independent organisations, and experiment with institutional models outside the state repertory system. The transition nevertheless did not dismantle the public theatre network completely, and many municipal, regional, and national theatres continued operating

within transformed legal and financial frameworks. Czech theatre after 1993 therefore developed through an unusual coexistence of historically strong publicly funded repertory institutions and a rapidly expanding independent performing-arts sector. This combination became one of the defining structural characteristics of the national theatre environment. The study of Czech theatre consequently had to address continuity and transformation simultaneously rather than interpret 1989 as a complete institutional beginning.

Public repertory theatre remained one of the strongest components of Czech performing culture throughout the period. The National Theatre in Prague continued to function as the principal state institution for drama, opera, ballet, and related performing arts, while major municipal theatres in Prague, Brno, Ostrava, Plzeň, Olomouc, České Budějovice, Hradec Králové, Liberec, and other cities sustained permanent ensembles and regular repertories. These institutions preserved professional structures based upon actors, directors, dramaturgs, scenographers, technicians, workshops, administrative departments, and permanent venues, even as their artistic programmes became substantially more plural after 1989. Repertory theatres could produce classical Czech and international drama while simultaneously commissioning contemporary writing, experimental adaptations, documentary projects, or new interpretations of canonical works. Their stability provided employment and production infrastructure unavailable to most independent companies. At the same time, institutional permanence could produce tensions involving organisational hierarchy, audience expectations, political governance, and slower adaptation to experimental forms. Theatre studies increasingly therefore examine repertory institutions not merely through celebrated productions but as complex organisations in which artistic decisions are shaped by economics, municipal politics, labour relations, audience structures, and inherited professional conventions. The theatre building and permanent ensemble became objects of institutional research as well as stages for artistic interpretation.

Directing remained exceptionally important within Czech dramatic theatre after 1993, but the meaning of directing itself changed significantly. The Czech tradition had long treated the director as a major interpretative author capable of transforming dramatic literature into an autonomous stage composition. After 1989, this tradition continued through directors whose productions challenged established readings of classical and modern texts through fragmentation, visual composition, irony, musicality, corporeality, and radical adaptation. Petr Lébl's work at Divadlo Na zábradlí during the 1990s became emblematic of the extraordinary aesthetic intensity of the early post-socialist period, while later directors developed substantially different approaches to text, actors, visuality, and contemporary political experience. Vladimír Morávek, Jan Nebeský, Dušan D. Pařízek, Jan Mikulášek, Daniel Špinar, the directing duo SKUTR, Jiří Havelka, and other artists contributed to a scene in which directorial interpretation remained powerful but could no longer be described through one stylistic school. Some productions radically rewrote dramatic texts, while others used documentary materials, improvisation, collective devising, music, video, or found sources. Research therefore increasingly shifted from identifying a director's signature style towards analysing the processes through which performance meaning emerges from collaboration among several creative agents. Directing studies became inseparable from dramaturgy, acting, scenography, rehearsal process, and institutional context.

Dramaturgy retained an equally distinctive position within Czech and Central European theatre practice. Unlike theatrical systems where dramaturgy may be associated mainly with literary or production advice, Czech repertory theatres often employ professional dramaturgs as

permanent members of artistic teams. Their work can include repertoire planning, textual analysis, translation, adaptation, contextual research, programme preparation, rehearsal participation, communication with directors and actors, and conceptual development of entire theatre seasons. Post-1993 dramaturgy expanded further as performances increasingly originated from documentary material, interviews, archival research, non-dramatic literature, visual sources, or collective improvisation. The dramaturg could therefore become a researcher responsible for organising heterogeneous material rather than only interpreting a pre-existing play. Universities and theatre academies continued to treat dramaturgy as an autonomous field of professional training, reinforcing its importance within Czech theatre culture. Theatre scholarship increasingly examines dramaturgical processes because they reveal how historical, literary, political, and social materials are translated into stage structures. Dramaturgy thus forms one of the principal bridges between scholarly research and practical theatre-making.

The rapid development of independent and alternative theatre after 1989 transformed the performing-arts landscape even more profoundly. Independent ensembles could organise themselves around particular artistic approaches rather than maintaining large permanent repertories and buildings. Small venues, converted industrial spaces, clubs, studios, festivals, galleries, public spaces, and temporary locations created environments in which performance could occur outside conventional proscenium architecture. Artistic teams frequently combined directing, performance, movement, music, visual art, objects, technology, and text without preserving traditional divisions among theatre professions. Project-based production allowed considerable flexibility but also created greater dependence upon grants, short-term funding, touring, and unstable employment. The independent sector therefore became both a laboratory of artistic innovation and a particularly vulnerable component of the cultural economy. Czech theatre studies increasingly recognise that the history of post-1989 performance cannot be reconstructed adequately from established repertory theatres alone. Independent spaces and temporary artistic networks became essential sites through which new forms entered the national stage.

Archa Theatre became one of the most influential institutions of this post-socialist alternative culture. It opened in Prague in June 1994 with a programme involving Min Tanaka and John Cale and subsequently defined itself as a centre for contemporary stage art without regard to conventional genre boundaries. Its programme brought international theatre, dance, music, documentary practice, visual art, and experimental performance into sustained dialogue with Czech artists. Rather than maintaining a conventional repertory ensemble, Archa operated through productions, co-productions, residencies, collaborations, and visiting artists. It became especially significant for documentary and socially engaged theatre under artistic director Ondřej Hrab and director Jana Svobodová. Projects frequently involved non-professional participants, minority communities, international partners, or contemporary political and social subjects. The conclusion of the original Archa Theatre programme at the end of 2023 and transformation of the venue into ARCHA+ from January 2024 symbolised another generational shift in Prague's performing-arts infrastructure. The simultaneous creation of Archa – Centre of Documentary Theatre preserved the documentary-theatre research and production line in a new organisational form.

Documentary theatre became one of the most significant fields through which the relationship between theatre and contemporary society was reconsidered. Instead of constructing performances primarily from fictional dramatic literature, documentary projects use

interviews, testimony, archival documents, biographical materials, field research, legal records, photographs, media sources, and participants' lived experience. This approach raises difficult questions concerning representation because real people and historical events cannot be manipulated with the same ethical freedom as fictional characters. Czech practitioners increasingly explored migration, war, social exclusion, minority experience, local history, political memory, labour, and transnational encounters through documentary methods. The boundary between actor and witness may become unstable when people perform their own experience rather than roles written for them. Research therefore examines authenticity, mediation, ethics, testimony, editing, spectatorship, and the transformation of documentary material into theatrical form. Documentary theatre demonstrates especially clearly why contemporary theatre studies increasingly overlap with oral history, anthropology, sociology, and memory studies.

Devised theatre produced a related transformation in the process of theatrical authorship. A devised production is not necessarily organised around a completed dramatic text written before rehearsals begin, because the performance can emerge through collective experimentation with objects, movement, images, research, improvisation, sound, and spatial situations. Czech alternative theatre has particularly strong historical foundations for this approach through puppetry, avant-garde theatre, authorial performance, small-stage traditions, and collective work developed during the 20th century. Contemporary educational programmes at DAMU explicitly treat devised performance as a major area of training and research. Directing in this environment becomes the organisation of a collaborative creative process rather than the authoritative interpretation of a playwright's work. Dramaturgy may develop simultaneously with rehearsal, while scenography and objects can generate material rather than merely illustrate a completed dramatic concept. Theatre scholarship consequently needs methodologies capable of reconstructing process as well as analysing the final performance.

The Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague became one of the principal institutional environments for this expanded understanding of theatre. DAMU provides professional education in acting, directing, dramaturgy, scenography, theatre theory and criticism, arts management, drama education, authorial creativity, puppetry, and alternative theatre at Bachelor’s, Master’s, and doctoral levels. Its organisational structure reflects the coexistence of dramatic theatre with forms that deliberately question conventional theatrical categories. The Department of Alternative and Puppet Theatre investigates theatre as an open artistic field encompassing puppet and object theatre, performance, physical theatre, dance, documentary theatre, immersive work, participation, site-specific practice, and post-dramatic forms. Research is closely connected with rehearsal and artistic production rather than separated entirely into theoretical departments. The faculty's institutes devoted to scenic creation, authorial acting, and alternative and puppet theatre further institutionalise interaction between scholarly and artistic research. DAMU therefore demonstrates how the contemporary theatre academy has evolved from professional training into a research environment investigating the conditions and boundaries of performance itself.

The Institute for Research into and Study of Authorial Acting provides a particularly distinctive example. Established in 2001 through the initiative of Ivan Vyskočil, it investigates acting, play, creativity, psychosomatic experience, pedagogy, and the conditions under which an individual becomes capable of authorial performance. Vyskočil's concept of Dialogical Acting with the Inner Partner had already developed through experimental pedagogical practice before the

Institute was created, but the new institutional structure enabled sustained research and doctoral work. The approach does not begin from the actor's interpretation of a conventional dramatic role. Instead, it examines voice, body, imagination, dialogue, spontaneity, self-awareness, and the performer's relationship with an internally generated partner. Such research occupies an unusual position between theatre, psychology, pedagogy, philosophy, and artistic practice. It exemplifies the Czech contribution to practice-based theatre research in which knowledge emerges partly through sustained embodied experimentation.

DAMU's research into alternative and puppet theatre developed another distinctive practice-based model. The current Institute for Research and Study of Alternative and Puppet Theatre and Theatre in Special Needs Groups emerged in 2020 through transformation of an earlier KALD research structure. Its research explicitly combines theatre studies, artistic production, technological development, anthropology, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, puppetry, and disability-related theatre practice. Alternative theatre is approached through the interaction of stage components and through forms where performativity and corporeality may take precedence over mimetic representation and dramatic text. Research into theatre with special-needs groups has been developed through practical projects involving people with disabilities and professional artists. The Institute therefore investigates theatre not only as aesthetic production but as a means of communication, self-expression, education, and social participation. This field demonstrates how applied theatre expanded the social scope of Czech performing-arts research.

The Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno provides a second major art-university environment. Its Theatre Faculty resumed independent activity in 1990 and subsequently became an important centre for acting, directing, dramaturgy, musical theatre, scenography, theatre management, physical theatre, radio and television dramaturgy, and related forms of artistic education. Studio Marta and the Theatre on Orlí Street provide performance environments through which teaching is integrated with public artistic production. Doctoral study places increasing emphasis upon artistic research and theoretical reflection on theatre and performing arts. JAMU's Department for Theatre Research coordinates scholarly and artistic research across theatre, audiovisual work, and related border phenomena. Its methodology combines theatre studies with history, sociology, media analysis, anthropology, political inquiry, pedagogy, and research through art. The Brno environment therefore contributes strongly to the convergence between conventional theatre scholarship and artistic research characteristic of the 21st-century performing arts.

The Department for Theatre Research at JAMU is particularly important because it defines theatre research as inherently interdisciplinary. Historical investigation of Czech theatre remains a central concern, but researchers also examine theatre criticism, institutional operation, gender, folklore, political dimensions of performance, dialogue, artistic pedagogy, and the consequences of 20th-century cultural policy. Research into theatre after 1968 has reconstructed the mechanisms through which repertory planning, political approval, regional reviewing, and institutional pressures affected actual production. Such work contributes to the revision of simplified narratives that divide socialist theatre completely into official conformity and artistic resistance. The department also investigates contemporary forms through collaboration with practising artists and students. Artistic research is therefore treated not as an alternative to academic knowledge but as another method through which questions about theatre can be generated and tested. JAMU provides an especially clear example of the integration of creative and scholarly epistemologies within Czech performing-arts education.

University theatre studies outside the art academies provide a complementary analytical perspective. Masaryk University's Department of Theatre Studies supports historical, theoretical, dramaturgical, and interdisciplinary research without being organised primarily around professional artistic training. Its scholarly journal *Theatralia*, published in its present form since 2009, has developed into one of the main Czech platforms for theatre research. The journal deliberately addresses theatre culture through dramatic text, directing, scenography, theatricality, performance, and interdisciplinary approaches. Its themes have included structuralist traditions, puppetry, scenography, performance, theatre history, and international comparative research. The presence of theatre studies within a Faculty of Arts also encourages close relationships with literary studies, history, languages, philosophy, media studies, and other humanities disciplines. Czech performing-arts research therefore benefits from a productive tension between theatre academies, where artistic practice is central, and humanities departments, where historical and theoretical analysis predominates.

The Arts and Theatre Institute has provided the principal national documentary and research infrastructure for Czech theatre throughout the period. Its Theatre Institute contains specialised departments for bibliography, collections and archives, Czech theatre studies, information and documentation, publishing, and library services. Research is therefore integrated directly with documentation, archival collection, bibliography, photography, video, sound, and publishing. The Institute operates one of the largest theatre libraries in Europe and maintains extensive visual and audiovisual holdings documenting professional and alternative performance. Its online Virtual Study connects several databases through a single research interface. The scale of these resources is considerable: the bibliographical database alone contains hundreds of thousands of records concerning Czech theatre and related subjects. The institution thus performs a role analogous to a national research infrastructure for an art form whose original events disappear when performances end.

The Czech Theatre Encyclopaedia has become one of the Theatre Institute's most important long-term scholarly projects. Work has continued systematically since 1997 and maps theatre history through biographical, institutional, repertory, and comparative research. The project deliberately includes not only Czech-language theatre but theatre in other languages produced within the territory of the present Czech Republic. This principle is historiographically important because German-language, Jewish, Italian, and other theatrical cultures formed significant parts of the historical theatre environment. Printed dictionaries have gradually been supplemented by an expandable online encyclopaedia where earlier entries can be updated as new research appears. The project combines lexicography with archival investigation, dramaturgical study, repertoire analysis, and biographical research. Theatre historiography thereby acquires a durable reference infrastructure rather than depending exclusively upon narrative histories published once and rapidly becoming outdated.

Theatre photography and audiovisual documentation have become increasingly important because theatrical performance itself is ephemeral. A stage photograph preserves costumes, bodies, gestures, lighting, architecture, and spatial relations, but it also represents the photographer's selection of a moment and viewpoint. Video provides duration and movement yet similarly cannot reproduce the original relationship among audience, live performers, sound, atmosphere, and space. Czech theatre research increasingly treats photographs and recordings both as documentation and as mediated objects requiring critical interpretation. The Theatre Institute's Czech Theatre Photography project and photographic collections reflect this methodological awareness. The National Theatre maintains a substantial archive and

online resources documenting productions, artists, programmes, music, photographs, and institutional history. Digital access has made comparative research across many decades considerably easier, although the original archival materials remain essential for verification and contextual study.

Specialist journals provide the intellectual infrastructure through which these materials become interpretation. *Divadelní revue*, founded in 1989 and published by the Theatre Institute, remains a principal peer-reviewed journal for Czech theatrology. It is explicitly open to interdisciplinary approaches derived from anthropology, sociology, philosophy, aesthetics, linguistics, and art history and increasingly addresses performativity as well as conventional theatre history. Its inclusion in Scopus from 2012 and transition to open access from 2024 strengthened international accessibility. *Theatralia* provides another major platform through Masaryk University and similarly combines historical research, theory, archival publication, criticism, and methodological debate. Theatre criticism in specialist newspapers, cultural journals, and digital platforms additionally documents productions during the period when they can still be experienced directly. Because no archive can preserve a performance fully, criticism itself becomes a historical source documenting reception, interpretation, and aesthetic judgement.

Scenography represents one of the areas in which Czech performing-arts culture possesses exceptional international visibility. The Czech lands developed powerful 20th-century scenographic traditions associated with artists such as František Tröster and Josef Svoboda, and international recognition of Czechoslovak stage design contributed directly to the creation of the Prague Quadrennial in 1967. The event has been held every four years since then and became the world's major recurring platform devoted to scenography, theatre architecture, and later performance design. After 1993, the Quadrennial became an increasingly important mechanism through which Czech institutions maintained direct engagement with global developments in performance space. National and student exhibitions, workshops, performances, installations, research, and international professional encounters brought artists and theorists from many countries to Prague. PQ therefore functions simultaneously as festival, exhibition, laboratory, archive, research platform, and form of cultural diplomacy. Its continuity across socialist and post-socialist periods gives it a unique value for studying how scenographic concepts themselves have changed.

The transformation of the Prague Quadrennial demonstrates particularly clearly the shift from stage design towards performance design. Until around the turn of the millennium, exhibitions of models, drawings, photographs, costumes, and scenographic objects remained the principal mechanism for presenting international work. From the 2003 edition onwards, performative elements became increasingly important, and spectators were progressively invited to enter, activate, or become participants within designed environments. Contemporary PQ terminology therefore defines scenography broadly as the creation of multisensory environments and performance spaces extending beyond conventional theatre stages. Urban sites, landscapes, industrial spaces, virtual environments, mixed reality, sound, light, architecture, costume, objects, and digital media can all become components of performance design. The Theatre Architecture Exhibition similarly evolved into the Performance Space Exhibition to acknowledge spaces created or adapted outside conventional theatre-building typologies. The 2019 Quadrennial attracted tens of thousands of visitors and thousands of accredited professionals and students from more than one hundred

countries. By 2023, PQ explicitly described itself as a festival rather than only an exhibition, making live experience and participation central to its curatorial model.

Puppetry forms another internationally distinctive component of Czech performing-arts studies. Historical Czech puppetry developed through itinerant performers, family companies, amateur societies, professional theatres, specialist education, and 20th-century experimentation, producing a tradition with unusually strong cultural visibility. The inscription of puppetry in Slovakia and Czechia on UNESCO's Representative List in 2016 increased international attention but did not reduce the field to heritage preservation. Contemporary Czech puppetry includes objects, materials, animation, visual theatre, physical performance, digital technologies, and post-dramatic strategies alongside figurative puppets. DAMU's Department of Alternative and Puppet Theatre deliberately combines this tradition with devised, object, documentary, immersive, participatory, and intermedial performance. Research therefore asks how a puppet operates as object, figure, performer, material agent, and partner within a theatrical event. The field is particularly productive theoretically because it challenges the assumption that human actors are always the central agents of theatrical meaning.

Internationalisation of Czech puppetry also increasingly occurs through educational networks. DAMU has developed an international English-language Master's environment devoted to devised and object theatre and participates in the joint PuppArts programme with theatre academies in Bratislava and Warsaw. This Central European collaboration combines theoretical reflection, practical creation, student mobility, puppetry, object theatre, interdisciplinary methodology, and contemporary performance. The programme recognises puppetry simultaneously as a historically deep regional tradition and as a rapidly changing global performance language. Such education is significant because it prevents preservation of Czech puppetry from becoming a nostalgic replication of inherited forms. Tradition provides technical and conceptual resources from which new theatre can be created rather than a fixed repertory that must be copied. Research and pedagogy therefore become mechanisms of artistic renewal.

Contemporary dance developed after 1989 through a comparably important process of institutional reconstruction. The TANEC PRAHA festival traces its beginnings to the summer of 1989, when contemporary international dance appeared within the Prague Cultural Summer shortly before the political revolution. After November 1989, the festival expanded rapidly and exposed Czech audiences and performers to leading international choreographers and companies previously difficult to encounter directly. An independent Tanec Praha organisation assumed responsibility for the festival from 1992. By the fifth edition in 1993, internationally recognised artists were appearing alongside Czech pioneers of the emerging contemporary-dance scene. The festival therefore played a formative role not merely by presenting finished international work but by establishing a different understanding of what dance could be beyond ballet and established modern-dance structures. Czech dance developed through direct encounter with changing international choreographic languages rather than through isolated domestic evolution.

The subsequent creation of permanent infrastructure was crucial for the field's professionalisation. PONEC – dance venue opened in 2001 and became the principal Prague stage devoted specifically to contemporary dance and movement theatre. Tanec Praha additionally developed the Czech Dance Platform as a professional showcase through which

domestic productions could be presented to international programmers, critics, and curators. The combination of festival, permanent venue, platform, co-production, education, and regional touring created a relatively coherent support system for an art form lacking the large permanent institutions available to dramatic theatre. Contemporary choreographers could develop projects through independent companies and temporary collaborations rather than depending upon classical ballet ensembles. The resulting scene remains financially vulnerable, but its institutional structure considerably increased professional visibility. Dance research consequently became more attentive to production conditions, international mobility, touring, and cultural policy as well as choreography itself.

Contemporary Czech dance increasingly blurred boundaries among choreography, theatre, performance art, music, visual installation, and participatory practice. Movement could function as abstract composition, documentary material, political gesture, social encounter, or research into the body rather than primarily as narrative representation. Artists and companies developed work concerning age, disability, gender, generational identity, public space, memory, ecology, and everyday movement. Collaborative processes often brought choreographers together with musicians, visual artists, dramaturgs, filmmakers, social scientists, or local participants. Site-specific projects moved dance from the theatre into streets, landscapes, industrial buildings, and other non-traditional environments. The 2020 TANEC PRAHA programme demonstrated the adaptability of this field when pandemic restrictions encouraged domestic work and performances across numerous Czech municipalities rather than concentrating activity exclusively in Prague. Dance studies therefore increasingly require methods derived from embodiment, sociology, anthropology, spatial research, and performance theory alongside choreographic analysis.

Contemporary circus represents one of the most visible new performing-arts fields to emerge in Czechia after the turn of the millennium. The production *La Putyka*, premiered in 2009, became the foundation for Cirk La Putyka and demonstrated how acrobatics, acting, dance, music, visual composition, and Czech social references could be combined within a contemporary circus language. The company subsequently developed internationally and contributed significantly to recognition of contemporary circus as an autonomous artistic field rather than commercial entertainment. Jatka78 became its home venue and developed into an international centre combining performance, rehearsal, residency, artistic incubation, training, and interdisciplinary programming. The venue now hosts contemporary circus alongside dance, physical theatre, music, puppetry, drama, and experimental performance. Contemporary circus is particularly significant for performing-arts studies because bodily skill is both technical and dramaturgical: risk, gravity, balance, failure, repetition, and physical virtuosity can generate meaning without reliance upon dramatic dialogue. The field therefore requires analytical tools attentive to corporeality, training, spatial mechanics, and spectators' embodied responses.

Performance art creates another zone in which disciplinary ownership becomes deliberately uncertain. Czech action art had developed strongly from the 1960s onwards and was historically associated more closely with visual art than institutional theatre, yet many contemporary practices use live bodies, spectators, duration, space, repetition, and event structures that are equally relevant to performance studies. After 1993, galleries, theatres, festivals, and art schools increasingly shared such practices rather than maintaining strict institutional separation. Artists trained in visual art may perform in theatrical venues, while theatre-makers use installation, gallery formats, durational practice, or participatory

strategies. Performance studies therefore offers a conceptual framework broader than theatre because it can analyse events that are theatrical without necessarily being produced by theatre institutions. Czech scholarship gradually adopted international performance theory while adapting it to local traditions of happenings, action art, experimental theatre, puppetry, and body-based practice. The resulting field creates important dialogue between the theatre research considered here and contemporary visual culture discussed in Section 28.

Drama education and applied theatre broaden the social dimension of performing arts still further. DAMU maintains a specialised Department of Drama in Education, while theatre academies and pedagogical institutions train practitioners to use dramatic methods in schools, community contexts, and informal education. Applied theatre projects can involve children, senior citizens, socially marginalised groups, people with disabilities, migrants, prisoners, or communities dealing with particular social experiences. The objective may combine artistic quality with education, communication, confidence, social inclusion, or collective reflection. Such practice challenges the assumption that professional theatre exists primarily for paying audiences inside dedicated buildings. It also raises methodological questions concerning how artistic value should be assessed when social processes form part of the intended outcome. Czech research into theatre in special-needs groups demonstrates particularly clearly how theatre anthropology, pedagogy, disability studies, and artistic research can intersect.

Amateur theatre remains another significant component of Czech performing culture and an important reminder that theatre cannot be understood only through professional institutions. Local amateur companies, children's theatre, community ensembles, festivals, and associations maintain dense networks of participation throughout the country. NIPOS and specialised organisations support documentation, methodological work, festivals, education, and professional exchange within this field. Amateur performance contributes to local social life, cultural identity, intergenerational continuity, and practical knowledge of acting, directing, scenography, and collective production. Its importance received exceptional international recognition when amateur theatre acting in Czechia was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2025. From the perspective of theatre studies, however, the significance of amateur theatre extends beyond heritage status because it provides a large social laboratory for investigating why people perform without professional employment being the principal motivation. Theatre therefore appears not only as an artistic industry but as a recurring form of civic and communal activity.

Festival culture became one of the principal mechanisms of internationalisation after 1989. The International Theatre Festival DIVADLO in Plzeň was founded in 1993, and its very first edition took place under the patronage of President Václav Havel. It rapidly developed into an important meeting point where Czech audiences and theatre professionals could encounter leading productions from Central and Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and other regions. Festivals reduce the isolation created by national repertory structures because productions can be compared directly across languages, aesthetic systems, and institutional models. TANEC PRAHA performs a comparable role for contemporary dance, while the Prague Quadrennial establishes Prague as a global meeting point for performance design. Other festivals and regional initiatives further diversify this ecology through puppetry, alternative theatre, new circus, documentary work, student production, and site-specific performance. Internationalisation therefore became embedded in recurring professional infrastructure rather than depending only upon occasional touring.

The transformation of theatre after 1993 was also geographical. Prague remains dominant in national institutions, specialist media, independent venues, foreign touring, and higher artistic education, but Brno, Ostrava, Plzeň, Hradec Králové, Olomouc, Liberec, České Budějovice, and numerous smaller centres sustain substantial professional and independent activity. JAMU gives Brno a particularly strong educational and research infrastructure, while municipal theatres and festivals provide regional production environments. Ostrava combines large repertory institutions with alternative cultural development, and Plzeň's international festival creates sustained contact between local and international theatre. Regional repertory theatres can develop artistic identities significantly different from Prague institutions because their audience relationships, municipal governance, and cultural environments differ. Theatre research increasingly therefore rejects the assumption that Czech theatrical innovation can be mapped adequately through the capital alone. Polycentric geography is essential to understanding both professional production and audience culture.

The economics of performing arts nevertheless remain structurally difficult. Public repertory institutions depend substantially upon state or municipal funding because permanent ensembles, buildings, workshops, technical staff, rehearsal periods, and repertory systems cannot normally be financed through ticket revenue alone. Independent companies face a different form of vulnerability because they depend more heavily upon project grants, short-term contracts, touring, co-production, and freelance labour. Dance, contemporary circus, performance, and experimental theatre frequently require long training and development periods while operating without permanent employment structures. Artists may consequently combine creation with teaching, commercial work, production, cultural administration, or unrelated employment. Theatre studies and cultural-policy research increasingly examine these labour conditions because they shape which artistic forms are practically possible. The aesthetics of the contemporary stage cannot be separated completely from its institutional economy.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed these vulnerabilities particularly sharply. Theatres and dance venues were forced to close or restrict audiences, tours disappeared, festivals were cancelled or reorganised, and freelance performers lost substantial amounts of work. Institutions experimented rapidly with streaming, recorded performances, online readings, digital discussion, and remote artistic collaboration. These solutions maintained contact with audiences but also demonstrated the limits of transferring live performance onto screens. A recorded theatre production becomes a different audiovisual object because camera position, editing, domestic viewing conditions, and absence of collective presence alter the spectator's relationship with performers. The pandemic therefore revived fundamental theoretical questions concerning liveness that performance studies had been debating internationally for decades. Czech artists and researchers experienced those questions not as abstract theory but as immediate institutional reality.

Digital technologies continued influencing performance after theatres reopened. Projection, live video, sensors, sound processing, virtual environments, interactive systems, network communication, motion capture, and artificial intelligence became increasingly available as theatrical materials. Digital media can extend the performer's body, create remote or hybrid spaces, manipulate temporal relationships, or make spectators active participants in technologically mediated environments. Yet technology does not eliminate the defining significance of presence within many performing arts. The tension between physically co-present bodies and technologically generated representation has instead become one of the

field's most productive research problems. Scenography, sound design, dramaturgy, acting, and choreography increasingly incorporate technologies that earlier might have belonged to specialised media art. Performance studies consequently intersects ever more closely with digital culture and media archaeology.

Artistic research provides an intellectual framework for many of these developments. Theatre academies increasingly recognise that rehearsal, acting, directing, scenographic experimentation, choreography, and performance can generate forms of knowledge unavailable through textual analysis alone. JAMU explicitly connects scholarly research with research through art, while DAMU's research institutes organise projects in which artistic practice itself becomes part of the investigative method. A performer may test hypotheses concerning embodiment through repeated practical experiments, while a scenographer can investigate space through prototypes and performative situations. Documentation, reflection, conceptualisation, and public communication then transform artistic process into research capable of entering academic discussion. This does not mean that every artistic production automatically becomes research. Artistic research requires explicit questions, methodological awareness, documentation, reflection, and an attempt to produce transferable knowledge.

Theoretical theatre studies simultaneously continued to draw upon strong Czech and Central European intellectual traditions. Structuralism, semiotics, phenomenology, dramaturgy, acting theory, and theories of scenic creation remained important even as international performance studies introduced anthropology, ritual theory, gender, postdramatic theatre, embodiment, spectatorship, and political performativity. Czech structuralist thinkers such as Otakar Zich and Jiří Veltruský retained international relevance because their analysis of theatrical signs and relationships among stage components anticipated later interdisciplinary theories of performance in important respects. Contemporary scholarship does not simply revive these theories as national classics but reassesses their assumptions in dialogue with later methods. *Theatralia* and other research platforms have contributed directly to this historiographical re-examination. The result is a theoretical environment in which Czech traditions can participate in international discussion rather than existing as isolated national doctrine.

Scenography illustrates particularly well how theoretical boundaries between performing and visual arts have weakened. Contemporary performance design may involve architecture, costume, light, sound, video, digital interfaces, landscape, installation, environmental design, and audience participation within one project. The Prague Quadrennial increasingly treats participants as active components of scenographic space rather than passive observers of stage-design models. This shift changes the status of the scenographer from decorator of a dramatic event towards co-author of the event's perceptual environment. Research therefore addresses multisensory experience, spatial dramaturgy, temporality, materiality, atmosphere, technological mediation, and embodiment. Performance space can exist in a theatre building, abandoned factory, street, forest, virtual environment, or mixed physical-digital setting. Czech scenographic research consequently provides one of the clearest bridges among theatre studies, architecture, design, visual art, and performance theory.

Archival methodology remains indispensable despite this turn towards liveness and artistic process. Theatre performances disappear, artistic companies dissolve, websites are redesigned, digital media become obsolete, and personal memories change over time. Research therefore depends upon continuous documentation of programmes, reviews,

scripts, prompt books, scenographic designs, photographs, video, sound, correspondence, production files, contracts, interviews, and digital communication. The Theatre Institute's collections, Czech Theatre Encyclopaedia, Virtual Study, bibliographical databases, photographic archive, audiovisual holdings, and specialist library together provide an unusually strong national research base. The National Theatre Archive, university collections, regional theatre archives, and personal estates supplement this institutional memory. Digitisation improves discovery and access but cannot replace source criticism because every document records only part of a vanished event. The study of theatre is consequently always partly a reconstruction of absence.

Several structural weaknesses remained visible by 2025. Theatre research continues to rely heavily upon Prague and Brno institutions even though theatrical production is geographically much more dispersed. Independent companies frequently generate important artistic innovation but lack the archival capacity to document their work systematically over several decades. Dance and performance criticism have historically possessed less extensive institutional support than dramatic-theatre criticism, creating gaps in documentation. Project-based funding can encourage rapid production and international mobility while reducing opportunities for long-term artistic development or sustained scholarly observation. Born-digital records pose additional preservation problems because websites, social-media communication, video formats, and online promotional materials can disappear quickly. The study of contemporary performance therefore requires increasingly proactive documentation.

A methodological challenge arises from the continuous expansion of the concept of performance itself. If theatricality and performativity can be applied to political ceremonies, museum interpretation, social interaction, sport, protest, digital identity, ritual, and everyday behaviour, theatre studies risks losing a clearly defined object. Performance studies gains analytical power precisely by crossing disciplinary boundaries, but those crossings require careful distinction between metaphorical theatricality and organised artistic performance. Czech scholarship has generally addressed this tension by preserving specialised knowledge of theatre history and stage practice while engaging with broader theories of performance. The result is not a replacement of theatre studies by performance studies but an enlargement of the questions theatre scholars can ask. Dramatic text, actors, directors, scenography, institutions, audiences, and archival sources remain indispensable even when the field extends far beyond the conventional stage.

The period from 1993 to 2025 therefore produced a profound transformation in both Czech performing arts and the methods used to study them. The public repertory network retained considerable institutional continuity, while independent companies, festivals, dance organisations, contemporary circus venues, documentary-theatre platforms, and interdisciplinary spaces created a much more diversified ecology. DAMU and JAMU progressively connected professional artistic education with scholarly and artistic research, while humanities-based theatre studies developed complementary historical and theoretical analysis. The Theatre Institute constructed extensive documentary, bibliographical, lexicographical, photographic, and digital infrastructures capable of preserving evidence of otherwise ephemeral performances. *Divadelní revue* and *Theatralia* strengthened methodological discussion and international publication, while archives and online databases made increasingly large bodies of evidence accessible to researchers. The Prague Quadrennial transformed from an international scenography exhibition into a global festival and research platform for performance design and space. TANEC PRAHA, PONEC, the Czech Dance

Platform, Archa Theatre, Jatka78, and other organisations gave contemporary dance, documentary theatre, alternative performance, and new circus more stable professional environments.

The intellectual consequences of these institutional developments were equally substantial. Theatre ceased to be studied primarily as dramatic literature realised upon a stage and became increasingly understood as a collaborative event produced through acting, movement, sound, objects, space, technology, spectatorship, and institutional conditions. Documentary and devised theatre made research itself part of artistic creation, while artistic research challenged the division between scholarly observation and practical experimentation. Puppetry demonstrated the agency of objects and materials, dance placed embodiment at the centre of performance analysis, contemporary circus foregrounded risk and physical virtuosity, and performance art weakened boundaries between theatre and visual culture. Drama education, theatre with special-needs groups, and amateur theatre expanded the study of performance towards social participation and pedagogy. Digitalisation and the COVID-19 pandemic forced renewed examination of liveness, mediation, and the cultural meaning of physical co-presence. Contemporary scenography similarly developed into performance design capable of integrating architecture, visual art, technology, and audience participation.

In summary, Czech theatre, performance, and performing-arts studies between 1993 and 2025 evolved from an already sophisticated theatrical culture into an increasingly interdisciplinary system of artistic production, scholarly reflection, documentation, and international exchange. The strongest continuity remained the dense network of professional repertory theatres and the country's established traditions of directing, acting, dramaturgy, puppetry, scenography, and theatre theory. The major post-socialist transformation lay in the rapid development of independent production and in the expansion of theatre beyond text-based dramatic forms towards documentary, devised, object, physical, participatory, immersive, site-specific, and technologically mediated performance. Archa Theatre became emblematic of international, documentary, and cross-disciplinary work from its opening in 1994 until its transformation at the end of 2023, while new organisational forms such as ARCHA+ and the Archa Centre of Documentary Theatre carried different parts of that legacy forward. DAMU and JAMU developed institutional models in which theatre history and theory interact directly with artistic research, rehearsal, pedagogy, and experimental practice. The Theatre Institute's Czech Theatre Encyclopaedia, bibliographies, archives, photographic and audiovisual collections, and Virtual Study created a durable national research infrastructure for an inherently ephemeral art. *Divadelní revue* and *Theatralia* helped broaden Czech theatrology towards performance, anthropology, sociology, media analysis, and interdisciplinarity while preserving rigorous historical research. The Prague Quadrennial maintained Czechia's exceptional international position in scenography and progressively redefined the field as performance design and multisensory spatial practice. TANEC PRAHA and PONEC institutionalised contemporary dance, while Cirk La Putyka and Jatka78 made contemporary circus one of the most visible new Czech performing-arts forms of the 21st century. Puppetry simultaneously retained a deep historical tradition while being transformed through object theatre, devising, interdisciplinary education, and international cooperation. By 2025, the principal achievement of Czech performing-arts research was therefore not the replacement of theatre studies by a newer performance paradigm, but the creation of a layered field capable of studying dramatic theatre, dance, puppetry, circus, scenography, documentary practice, artistic research, and social performance through methods appropriate to their different forms

while understanding all of them as historically situated relationships among bodies, spaces, materials, institutions, technologies, and spectators.

The Major Achievements of Czech Art History and Art Studies, 1993–2025

The principal achievement of Czech art history and art studies between 1993 and 2025 was not the formation of a single dominant school, methodology, or institutional centre, but the construction of a mature scholarly ecology capable of combining continuity with substantial intellectual renewal. Czech researchers entered the independent republic with unusually dense traditions of art-historical scholarship, university teaching, museum research, monument documentation, musicology, theatre studies, architecture, design, and collection-based expertise. The post-1989 transformation removed ideological restrictions and reopened international intellectual exchange, while the establishment of the Czech Republic in 1993 provided a new national framework within which these traditions could be reorganised. During the following three decades, established disciplines preserved their chronological, documentary, philological, visual, and object-based competencies while enlarging the range of questions considered legitimate. Art came increasingly to be examined not only as an aesthetic object but also as a material artefact, social relationship, institution, performance, medium, profession, economic practice, political representation, and component of public memory. The study of arts consequently became broader without simply dissolving older disciplines into an undifferentiated field of cultural research. Art history, musicology, theatre studies, architectural history, design research, museology, and curatorial studies retained recognisable intellectual identities while participating in increasingly frequent interdisciplinary exchange. By 2025, the Czech achievement therefore consisted less in replacing traditional scholarship than in creating conditions under which specialised historical expertise and new forms of art studies could develop together.

Institutional continuity was fundamental to this result. The Czech Republic did not have to create its scholarly infrastructure from the beginning because universities, Academy institutes, museums, galleries, archives, libraries, theatres, conservatoires, art academies, and documentary centres carried professional knowledge across the political changes of 1989 and 1993. The Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences retained the capacity to organise long-term fundamental research that could not easily be contained within ordinary university teaching cycles or short project grants. Charles University, Masaryk University, Palacký University, and other universities reproduced disciplinary knowledge through teaching and doctoral education while gradually widening their methodological and international environments. National Gallery Prague, the Moravian Gallery, the Museum of Decorative Arts, the National Museum, regional galleries, and other collection institutions produced scholarship directly from objects, archival evidence, conservation work, cataloguing, and exhibitions. The Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design, the Academy of Fine Arts, and the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts created a different type of research environment in which artistic practice, theoretical reflection, criticism, historiography, and pedagogy could interact closely. The Arts and Theatre Institute and its successor structures demonstrated the importance of specialised documentation and applied research for artistic forms whose histories cannot be reconstructed from museum collections alone. The durability of this mixed institutional system represents one of the most

consequential Czech achievements because no single organisational model was required to support every type of artistic knowledge.

This institutional plurality also produced a distinctive relationship between fundamental research and cultural practice. Art historians working in universities might investigate questions of iconography, patronage, style, materiality, or historiography whose immediate practical application was limited, yet their work could later transform attribution, museum interpretation, conservation, or exhibition narratives. Researchers based in galleries and museums encountered the opposite relationship because scholarly questions frequently emerged directly from cataloguing, restoration, provenance investigation, acquisition, or the preparation of exhibitions. Architectural historians and design researchers moved between archives, buildings, manufacturers, schools, professional organisations, and contemporary practice. Musicologists combined manuscripts, editions, archival sources, recordings, institutional histories, performance traditions, and sometimes direct engagement with musicians. Theatre scholars confronted an art form whose essential historical evidence often disappears with the performance itself and therefore depended upon systematic documentation as well as interpretation. Curators increasingly became intellectual mediators among scholarship, collections, artists, exhibition space, and audiences rather than merely administrators of objects. The Czech system consequently demonstrated that research in the arts can be distributed across institutions with very different public missions without losing scholarly coherence. Its strength lay precisely in the repeated circulation of knowledge between academic, collection-based, documentary, educational, and artistic environments.

One of the most durable achievements of the period was the preservation and modernisation of documentary infrastructure. Czech art history retained a particularly strong tradition of inventories, bibliographies, photographic collections, archival research, topographical surveys, catalogues, scholarly editions, and systematic documentation of monuments and collections. Such work can appear less innovative than a new theoretical approach, yet it forms the evidential foundation on which later reinterpretation depends. Long-term projects associated with the Institute of Art History demonstrated the continuing value of research programmes extending over decades rather than individual grant cycles. Photographic archives preserved historical states of artworks and buildings while also becoming sources for the history of photography, conservation, collecting, and scholarly practice itself. Bibliographical systems enabled researchers to reconstruct earlier debates, follow changing attributions, and identify relationships among regional, national, and international scholarship. Museum and gallery catalogues similarly changed from relatively descriptive records towards research instruments incorporating provenance, technical examination, bibliography, exhibition histories, conservation evidence, and changing interpretation. Musicological catalogues, critical editions, theatre archives, audiovisual documentation, and design collections expanded the same principle beyond conventional visual art history. By 2025, Czech art studies had therefore preserved an important understanding that intellectual innovation is sustainable only when the sources from which knowledge is produced are themselves systematically documented and made accessible.

This documentary strength helped maintain the empirical discipline of Czech art history during a period of rapid theoretical expansion. Formal analysis, stylistic comparison, chronology, attribution, iconography, archival criticism, and close examination of objects remained indispensable even as social, anthropological, political, gender, media, and institutional approaches gained influence. The most productive scholarship did not treat these

methodological traditions as mutually exclusive alternatives. Questions concerning gender or political representation still required accurate identification of objects, dates, institutions, and sources, while material analysis remained dependent upon historical interpretation if technical data were to acquire cultural meaning. Similarly, visual-culture research became strongest when broad claims about images were connected with specific knowledge of how those images were produced, circulated, displayed, reproduced, and received. Czech scholarship therefore largely avoided a simple opposition between an supposedly conservative object-centred art history and a supposedly progressive interdisciplinary art studies. Instead, disciplinary expansion most often occurred through the addition of new questions to established source-critical practices. This balance gave the field considerable resilience because methodological fashions could change without making older documentary knowledge obsolete. By 2025, the continuing coexistence of close empirical scholarship and conceptual experimentation had become one of the defining strengths of Czech art studies.

A further major achievement was the transformation of the national artistic canon. Earlier histories of art had often been organised around relatively stable narratives of Czech artistic development, national schools, major masters, stylistic periods, and exceptional works preserved in leading collections. After 1989, these narratives could be reconsidered with greater freedom because political exclusions disappeared and access to international scholarship widened dramatically. Researchers increasingly asked how the canon itself had been constructed through museums, university curricula, exhibitions, publishing, collecting, state cultural policy, political ideology, gender hierarchies, and linguistic or regional preferences. Artists who had been marginalised because of exile, religious affiliation, German-speaking backgrounds, Jewish identity, political repression, gender, experimental practice, or incompatibility with official socialist cultural narratives could be reintegrated into scholarship. At the same time, canonical artists were not simply retained unchanged but were placed within richer social, political, institutional, and transnational contexts. This process changed the meaning of revision because the objective was no longer merely to add previously omitted names to an existing sequence. The larger achievement was to recognise that every canon is historically produced and must therefore remain open to criticism, reconstruction, and comparison. Czech art history consequently became less concerned with defending a closed national hierarchy and more capable of explaining how artistic significance itself changes over time.

The growing use of Central Europe as an interpretative framework was particularly important in this transformation. The artistic history of Bohemia, Moravia, and Czech Silesia had never developed within the boundaries of the contemporary Czech state, and post-1993 research increasingly treated this fact as a methodological starting point rather than a complication to be overcome. Medieval artistic networks connected the Czech lands with the Holy Roman Empire, Italy, Poland, Hungary, and wider Christian Europe. Early modern courts, aristocratic families, religious orders, workshops, merchants, and collectors moved artists, objects, materials, and visual models across political frontiers. 19th-century artistic life developed within the Habsburg monarchy and within linguistic environments in which Czech and German institutions interacted competitively and productively. Czechoslovak art belonged simultaneously to national, regional, European, and international histories, while the histories of modernism, exile, socialist culture, and unofficial artistic practice repeatedly crossed state boundaries. Czech-Slovak relationships remained particularly important because the political separation of 1993 could not retrospectively divide seventy-five years of shared institutional

and artistic history. By 2025, the shift from an exclusively national frame towards Central European and transnational interpretation had become one of the most intellectually consequential achievements of Czech art history.

Medieval and early modern studies illustrate especially clearly how this change strengthened rather than weakened detailed historical research. Czech scholars continued to work with iconography, stylistic relationships, workshop organisation, patronage, architecture, manuscript illumination, sculpture, painting, liturgy, and archival documentation. Yet works once explained primarily through their contribution to a national artistic tradition were increasingly placed within networks of courts, ecclesiastical institutions, trade routes, religious practices, artistic mobility, and cross-border patronage. Research into the Luxembourg period, Rudolfine culture, Renaissance and Mannerist courts, the Baroque, religious orders, and aristocratic collecting demonstrated how thoroughly cultural exchange shaped artistic production in the Czech lands. The chronological categories themselves also became more flexible as scholars recognised that Gothic, Renaissance, Mannerist, and Baroque forms did not replace one another uniformly across regions or social environments. International projects and exhibitions strengthened comparative scholarship while advanced imaging, conservation research, manuscript studies, and material analysis expanded the range of evidence available. Medieval and early modern art therefore ceased to function primarily as a repository of national masterpieces and became an increasingly complex field of European social and visual history. This transformation was important because it connected one of the strongest traditional branches of Czech art history with contemporary international research without sacrificing specialist competence. The result was a field able to combine detailed local evidence with questions of broad European significance.

Research into 19th- and 20th-century art underwent an even more visible revision because this period had been especially vulnerable to political reinterpretation. The 19th century could no longer be narrated adequately as a straightforward artistic preparation for the modern Czech nation, because research increasingly revealed multilingual institutions, imperial frameworks, regional differences, international training, artistic markets, and competing cultural identities. The history of modernism similarly became more complicated as Czech avant-garde movements were situated within European networks rather than presented only as expressions of national originality. The First Czechoslovak Republic was reconsidered through institutions, exhibitions, design, architecture, political representation, minority cultures, and the international ambitions of the new state. Research into the Nazi occupation, wartime persecution, exile, confiscation, and the Holocaust connected art history with provenance studies and the ethics of collection history. Socialist-period art underwent one of the most substantial revisions because scholarship increasingly moved beyond the simple opposition between official and unofficial culture. Researchers examined institutions, commissions, exhibition systems, architecture, design, public art, artistic labour, regional production, everyday visuality, and the changing boundaries of permissible experimentation. By 2025, the achievement was therefore not the substitution of one political judgement for another but the creation of a historically more differentiated account of artistic production across several competing political systems.

The study of contemporary art produced another form of disciplinary transformation. After the collapse of socialist cultural administration, artistic production expanded rapidly into institutional and material forms that conventional object-centred art history alone could not explain. Installation, conceptual work, performance, video, sound, photography, digital media,

participatory practice, socially engaged art, ecological art, and research-based projects became increasingly normal components of the Czech scene. Independent galleries, artist-run initiatives, residencies, foundations, municipal institutions, private organisations, art schools, festivals, and international networks created a much more heterogeneous institutional environment. Contemporary art history consequently had to develop sources capable of documenting temporary events, digital communication, curatorial texts, interviews, performance traces, institutional archives, and forms of participation that might leave no stable artistic object. Visual-culture studies further expanded attention towards advertising, political imagery, photographic circulation, online media, popular culture, algorithmic environments, and other images existing beyond the traditional art institution. This development did not make painting, sculpture, drawing, or craft irrelevant, but it removed their former monopoly over what could count as serious visual research. By 2025, Czech contemporary-art scholarship had become a field in which art history, criticism, curating, media studies, sociology, political thought, and artistic research could interact without requiring a single dominant aesthetic programme.

Architecture and design studies achieved a comparable enlargement of their intellectual territory. Architectural research increasingly moved beyond stylistic history towards the analysis of planning, housing, public space, professional institutions, development, political economy, sustainability, adaptive reuse, and civic participation. The post-socialist transformation itself became an important historical problem because the replacement of centralised planning by property markets, municipal autonomy, private development, and international investment fundamentally altered the conditions under which the built environment was produced. Studies of socialist and post-socialist architecture challenged simplistic assumptions that architectural quality could be inferred directly from political regime. Design history similarly expanded from celebrated designers and aesthetic objects towards industries, firms, schools, technologies, manufacturing systems, consumer culture, materials, exhibitions, markets, and everyday use. Applied arts gained renewed scholarly status as glass, ceramics, textiles, jewellery, furniture, fashion, typography, and other fields were analysed through the interaction of artistic invention, craft skill, technological knowledge, and production structures. This made particular sense in the Czech context, where art education and manufacturing traditions had historically connected artistic and industrial practice unusually closely. By the 2020s, environmental impact, digital fabrication, the survival of specialised craft knowledge, and sustainable production had become increasingly significant research questions. The broader achievement was therefore the erosion of rigid hierarchies separating fine art, architecture, design, and craft in favour of a relational understanding of the material environment.

Museology and curatorial studies transformed the interpretation of exhibitions themselves. The Czech museological tradition already possessed substantial theoretical depth, but post-1989 institutional change gave new urgency to questions concerning collection authority, interpretation, education, visitors, communication, and institutional responsibility. Museums and galleries increasingly ceased to present exhibitions as neutral arrangements of objects whose meanings existed independently of display. Selection, sequencing, architecture, lighting, texts, multimedia, scenography, accessibility, and educational design came to be recognised as active components of interpretation. Curators simultaneously acquired greater intellectual visibility as authors responsible for constructing relationships among objects, arguments, institutions, artists, and publics. Permanent exhibitions became historiographical

statements capable of revealing how institutions themselves understand national, artistic, and social history. Temporary exhibitions often functioned as major research outputs in which archival work, conservation research, scholarly essays, artistic interpretation, and spatial design converged. Visitor studies and museum pedagogy added a further dimension by asking how different audiences actually encounter, interpret, remember, and emotionally experience exhibitions. By 2025, one of the major Czech achievements was therefore the recognition of exhibition-making as a form of knowledge production rather than a secondary stage occurring after scholarship had already been completed.

This development also strengthened the relationship between scholarly authority and public communication. Art-historical research had long reached audiences through exhibitions and catalogues, but contemporary institutions became much more conscious of the need to translate specialised knowledge without reducing its complexity excessively. Museums, galleries, universities, and research institutes expanded educational programmes, public lectures, digital resources, podcasts, videos, social media communication, guided interpretation, and collaborative events. Questions of accessibility became increasingly important not only in the physical sense but also in relation to language, prior knowledge, age, disability, educational background, and cultural experience. Public debates over monuments, restitution, contested memory, modern architecture, heritage interventions, cultural identity, gender, and representation repeatedly brought art historians into wider civic discussion. Such visibility could generate tension because public controversy does not always reward the caution, uncertainty, and evidential qualification characteristic of serious scholarship. Nevertheless, the ability to explain specialist reasoning beyond academic circles became an increasingly recognised professional competence. Art history thus moved closer to the broader development of public humanities while retaining its specific dependence upon visual, material, architectural, and performative evidence. The result was a more publicly engaged discipline whose social relevance could no longer be measured only through scholarly publication.

Musicology demonstrates why the achievements of Czech art studies cannot be reduced to the history of visual art. Czech musicology retained strong traditions of composer research, source criticism, musical analysis, notation, repertory studies, critical editions, institutional history, and archival scholarship. During the post-1993 period, however, musical culture came to be understood through a much wider range of evidence and social questions. Performance, recordings, concert life, audiences, musical labour, popular music, gender, media, institutions, everyday listening, cultural politics, and ethnomusicological processes increasingly entered the research agenda. Historical repertory remained central, but it could now be investigated through questions concerning circulation, reception, performance practice, social identity, technology, and the institutions that determine what is heard and preserved. This expansion brought historical musicology into closer conversation with cultural studies, anthropology, media research, sociology, sound studies, and performance studies. At the same time, the survival of specialised source work prevented musicology from becoming merely a sociology of musical consumption. The major achievement was therefore the creation of a broader study of musical culture in which composition, performance, archive, institution, technology, and social experience could be examined as interacting dimensions of musical history.

Theatre and performance studies developed through an equally important widening of scope. The Czech theatrical tradition entered the post-socialist period with strong institutions,

professional ensembles, directing schools, dramaturgical traditions, puppetry, scenography, theatre criticism, and sophisticated historical scholarship. After 1989, independent production expanded rapidly and challenged the assumption that theatre could be defined principally through permanent repertory institutions and dramatic texts. Documentary, devised, physical, participatory, immersive, site-specific, object-based, dance, circus, and technologically mediated forms gained greater visibility. Theatrology consequently moved towards a broader understanding of performance while preserving the historical study of dramatic theatre, directing, acting, repertoire, institutions, and theatrical architecture. National documentation infrastructures became particularly important because performance disappears in time and survives through programmes, photographs, recordings, reviews, scenographic materials, administrative records, testimonies, and other traces. Czech scenography retained exceptional international visibility through the Prague Quadrennial while also developing conceptually towards performance design and multisensory spatial practice. Contemporary dance, new circus, puppetry, and documentary theatre created additional research environments in which artistic experimentation and theoretical reflection interacted closely. By 2025, the principal achievement was the capacity to treat different performing arts as historically and materially distinct practices while understanding them within a wider field of embodied, spatial, institutional, and social performance.

The growth of artistic research represents one of the more recent transformations connecting several of these fields. Traditional academic research generally assumes that knowledge is communicated primarily through scholarly argument supported by verifiable evidence. Artistic research does not abandon such questions of method and accountability, but it asks whether artistic practice itself can also generate knowledge that cannot be produced adequately through discursive analysis alone. Czech art academies and performing-arts institutions provided particularly fertile environments for this development because practice, pedagogy, experimentation, and theoretical reflection already existed within the same organisations. A choreographic process can investigate embodiment, an architectural intervention can test spatial relationships, a visual project can expose institutional structures, and a performance can examine forms of memory or social interaction through procedures unavailable to ordinary historical writing. The challenge lies in distinguishing research from artistic production that merely adopts research vocabulary without demonstrating a clear question, method, reflective process, or transferable insight. Czech debates increasingly addressed this boundary rather than assuming automatically that every creative act constitutes research. The field therefore developed through negotiation between academic standards and forms of practical knowledge specific to artistic disciplines. Its importance by 2025 lay in opening additional routes between universities, academies, cultural institutions, artistic production, and research funding.

Interdisciplinarity more generally became a normal condition of advanced art research. Medieval studies could require theology, archaeology, codicology, conservation science, architectural history, and digital imaging. Modern-art history might depend upon political history, sociology, media research, economic history, gender studies, or the history of institutions. Architecture and design demanded knowledge of technology, production, planning, environmental questions, material culture, and professional practice. Musicology increasingly interacted with ethnology, cultural history, media studies, and performance, while theatre research drew upon anthropology, sociology, spatial theory, and digital documentation. Museology connected objects and collections with education, communication, visitor studies, ethics, conservation, architecture, and information systems.

Such overlap could create uncertainty about disciplinary boundaries, yet Czech experience generally demonstrated that interdisciplinarity works best when participants contribute identifiable specialist competencies rather than abandoning them. A chemist analysing pigment, an archivist reconstructing provenance, an art historian interpreting iconography, and a conservator examining treatment history do not become interchangeable simply because they collaborate. The major achievement was therefore not the disappearance of disciplines but the development of research environments capable of coordinating their different forms of expertise around shared questions.

The growing integration of material and technical analysis provides one of the clearest examples of this collaborative model. Artworks and artistic objects increasingly became sources not only of visual interpretation but also of physical evidence concerning materials, techniques, alterations, workshops, degradation, restoration, and historical technologies. Scientific imaging, microscopy, spectroscopy, radiography, pigment analysis, dendrochronology, material examination, and other techniques could reveal information inaccessible to ordinary observation. Such evidence transformed attribution, dating, conservation planning, workshop studies, and understanding of artistic production. Yet technical results acquired art-historical meaning only when interpreted together with archival, stylistic, iconographic, and contextual evidence. Czech museums, galleries, conservation laboratories, universities, Academy institutions, and heritage organisations developed increasingly productive relationships around this type of research. The convergence of scientific analysis and humanities interpretation also altered public exhibitions because visitors could encounter the process by which knowledge about an object had been reconstructed rather than seeing only a finished attribution. Technical examination thus strengthened rather than displaced the material attentiveness long characteristic of Czech art history. By 2025, the ability to integrate laboratory evidence with historical reasoning had become an important component of professional art research.

Digitalisation produced another structural transformation, although its significance extended far beyond the conversion of analogue images into electronic files. Digital catalogues, databases, photographic archives, collection systems, bibliographies, digitised manuscripts, audiovisual repositories, and online research environments substantially improved access to evidence distributed across institutions and regions. Researchers could compare objects, search archival metadata, examine historical photographs, consult catalogues, or trace exhibition histories without being physically present at every holding institution. Digital photography and high-resolution imaging also changed the scale at which surfaces, inscriptions, materials, and details could be examined. Geographic information systems, network analysis, visualisation, structured datasets, digital editions, and computational methods introduced new possibilities for studying artistic mobility, patronage, exhibitions, collections, architecture, and other relational phenomena. Theatre and performance documentation benefited from audiovisual preservation, while musicology acquired expanding access to digitised sources and recordings. Contemporary art generated an additional challenge because digital media and online environments were not merely documentation tools but increasingly part of the artistic object itself. The digital turn therefore changed research infrastructure, source accessibility, methodology, preservation, and the definition of artistic evidence simultaneously. By 2025, digital competence had become an increasingly ordinary component of art scholarship rather than a specialised activity existing outside the main disciplines.

The real achievement of this digital transformation was nevertheless institutional rather than purely technological. A database has scholarly value only when objects are identified consistently, metadata are reliable, provenance is recorded, terminology can be understood, and the infrastructure remains accessible after the original project has ended. Digitisation consequently forced institutions to reconsider standards, copyright, interoperability, identifiers, long-term storage, data migration, cybersecurity, and the responsibilities associated with digital preservation. Smaller galleries, archives, and independent initiatives often lacked the technical capacity available to national institutions, revealing that digital access can reproduce institutional inequalities rather than automatically eliminate them. The preservation of contemporary digital art created additional questions concerning obsolete software, changing hardware, network dependencies, interactive environments, and the distinction between original functionality and later reconstruction. Artificial intelligence introduced further methodological and ethical issues by the middle of the 2020s, particularly in relation to image classification, research assistance, authenticity, authorship, generated imagery, and evidential reliability. Czech professional discussion increasingly recognised that technological innovation must be evaluated through scholarly and ethical criteria rather than accepted because it is new. This approach closely resembles the wider Czech pattern visible throughout the period, in which modernisation works most effectively when new instruments strengthen rather than replace accumulated professional knowledge. Digitalisation thus became a major achievement precisely because it was gradually understood as a long-term scholarly responsibility rather than a sequence of temporary technical projects.

Internationalisation represents another fundamental accomplishment of the post-1993 period. In the early 1990s, the restoration of scholarly contacts after decades of restricted mobility and ideological division was itself a primary objective. Czech researchers rapidly re-entered professional networks linking Central Europe with Germany, Austria, Italy, France, Britain, the United States, and other international centres of art research. European integration subsequently normalised academic mobility, joint projects, multinational conferences, shared exhibitions, doctoral exchanges, and collaborative publishing. Institutions increasingly participated in networks not merely as representatives of Czech national culture but as partners contributing collections, sources, specialised knowledge, and methodological expertise. Medieval and early modern studies benefited especially from transnational comparison because their objects had been created within historical structures predating modern national borders. Modern and contemporary art research similarly demonstrated that artistic exile, avant-garde networks, socialist cultural relations, exhibitions, design, and media circulation could not be reconstructed convincingly within one country. Musicological and performing-arts research gained from the same widening of comparative geography. By the 2010s and 2020s, internationalisation had therefore changed from a process of catching up with previously inaccessible scholarship into a more reciprocal system in which Czech research itself contributed evidence and interpretation to international debates.

This internationalisation also altered scholarly publication and language. Czech remained essential because art history and related disciplines retain responsibilities towards national collections, regional monuments, local archives, students, cultural professionals, and the broader public. At the same time, English acquired increasing importance for international journals, collaborative projects, conference communication, and the global visibility of Czech research. German remained particularly significant for historical work concerning Central Europe, the Habsburg world, the history of the Czech lands, and older art-historical traditions.

Slovak and Polish continued to matter because geographical proximity, shared histories, linguistic accessibility, and common research problems sustained strong regional exchange. The resulting publication culture became increasingly multilingual rather than simply replacing Czech with English. Bilingual exhibition catalogues, English-language journals and articles, translated syntheses, digital publication, and international book projects expanded the possible audiences for Czech scholarship. This process nevertheless created tensions because internationally rewarded publication formats do not always correspond with the long-term needs of national documentary research or public cultural institutions. The achievement lay in developing international visibility while largely preserving the legitimacy of scholarship addressed to Czech and Central European audiences.

Regional polycentrism represents another significant strength of the system. Prague possesses an unmatched concentration of national institutions, universities, archives, galleries, art academies, research organisations, publishers, and international connections. Yet Czech art research was never intellectually reducible to the capital, and the period after 1993 strengthened several important alternative centres. Brno combined university art history, museology, musicology, architecture, design, the Moravian Gallery, the Moravian Museum, and a dense network of cultural organisations. Olomouc connected a renewed university art-historical tradition with the Museum of Art and strong regional engagement with medieval, early modern, modern, and contemporary visual culture. Ostrava developed an increasingly distinctive relationship among industrial history, architecture, contemporary art, post-industrial transformation, and cultural regeneration. Ústí nad Labem acquired importance for curatorial education and contemporary artistic practice, while other regional universities, galleries, museums, theatres, and archives sustained research agendas grounded in local collections and histories. Regional institutions frequently possess knowledge that cannot be reproduced by metropolitan organisations because it depends upon decades of engagement with particular buildings, collections, artists, workshops, theatres, or communities. The maturation of these centres therefore created a genuinely polycentric intellectual geography even though material resources remained distributed unevenly.

The professionalisation of curating, documentation, conservation, museum education, exhibition design, and other intermediary fields further widened the meaning of art expertise. Earlier institutional models could imply a comparatively simple division between the scholar who produced knowledge, the curator who cared for collections, the designer who arranged display, and the educator who communicated finished results. Contemporary practice increasingly demonstrated that these functions interact continuously. Curatorial selection shapes historical narratives, conservation research can alter attribution, exhibition design affects interpretation, digital interfaces determine discoverability, and educational programmes reveal how audiences understand institutional arguments. Provenance research additionally brought art history into direct contact with law, ethics, restitution, wartime persecution, confiscation, and institutional accountability. Visitor research required museums and galleries to test assumptions about audiences rather than imagining an abstract universal viewer. Accessibility and inclusion expanded the professional responsibilities associated with exhibition-making, while sustainability introduced questions concerning materials, transport, temporary architecture, energy use, and the environmental costs of cultural circulation. Art institutions consequently became laboratories in which several kinds of professional knowledge had to be coordinated. This professional diversification is a major achievement

because the quality of art research increasingly depends upon teams rather than isolated individual expertise.

Czech art history also became considerably more self-reflective as a discipline. Historiographical research examined the intellectual traditions through which earlier generations had classified periods, defined national art, evaluated styles, established museum collections, and constructed relationships between art history and monument preservation. Scholars reconsidered the Vienna School, Czech structuralism, Marxist art history, interwar institutions, socialist academic structures, and the relationship between scholarship and political authority. National congresses of art historians created recurring environments in which professional identity, methodology, institutions, authorship, politics, exhibitions, visual culture, ecology, digitalisation, and the future of the discipline could be discussed collectively. This was important because disciplines often modernise most effectively when they are capable of investigating their own assumptions rather than merely adding new subjects. The history of art history became part of art history itself, revealing that categories such as national school, masterpiece, period, centre, periphery, and artistic quality possess intellectual histories rather than functioning as neutral descriptions. Museums and galleries underwent similar reflection as researchers examined collecting histories, exhibition policies, institutional exclusions, and the political circumstances under which collections had been formed. Such reflexivity did not destroy confidence in specialist knowledge but made its historical conditions more explicit. By 2025, the capacity for disciplinary self-criticism had become one of the clearest indicators of Czech art history's maturity.

Gender research and the wider critique of exclusion produced especially important consequences for canon formation. Feminist scholarship demonstrated that the historical marginalisation of women artists could not be explained adequately by a simple lack of talent or production because access to academies, professional networks, studios, commissions, exhibitions, criticism, and collecting had itself been structured unequally. Research therefore shifted attention from the recovery of individual women artists towards the institutional conditions that determine artistic visibility. Similar questions emerged around German-speaking, Jewish, Romani, exiled, migrant, queer, minority, and regionally marginalised artistic experiences, although these areas developed at different speeds and with unequal institutional support. Contemporary art institutions increasingly engaged with decolonial questions, ecological inequality, labour, representation, care, and relations between cultural authority and social power. These approaches sometimes generated controversy because conceptual frameworks developed in other historical contexts cannot simply be transferred unchanged to Central Europe. Czech scholarship became increasingly capable of addressing this problem by testing international theoretical vocabularies against the specific political, imperial, socialist, post-socialist, and national histories of the Czech lands. The strongest work therefore avoided both rejection of new critical approaches and mechanical importation of concepts without historical adjustment. The broader achievement was the establishment of a research culture in which questions about who has been represented, collected, taught, exhibited, and remembered became legitimate components of art-historical analysis.

The relationship between art history and cultural heritage also became more clearly differentiated during the period. Art historians frequently study objects, buildings, collections, and sites that possess protected heritage status, and their research may directly inform conservation, restoration, attribution, provenance, or heritage management. Yet art history cannot be reduced to heritage studies because its objects include ephemeral performances,

contemporary artistic practices, visual media, unprotected architecture, critical exhibitions, design, artistic theory, and works whose significance is interpretative rather than dependent upon preservation status. Conversely, cultural heritage encompasses archaeological sites, landscapes, intangible traditions, technical systems, archives, environmental processes, and many other domains that exceed the conventional field of art history. The increasing maturity of both fields made this distinction easier to maintain while also encouraging productive cooperation. Art-historical interpretation could contribute to decisions concerning significance and intervention, while conservation science and heritage documentation could provide evidence capable of changing art-historical understanding. Museology formed one of the principal meeting points because collections are simultaneously heritage resources, research infrastructures, and objects of curatorial interpretation. Architecture created another area of overlap because a building can be studied historically, evaluated as heritage, inhabited socially, adapted functionally, and debated as contemporary urban space at the same time. By 2025, Czech practice increasingly demonstrated the value of cooperation without requiring one field to absorb the other.

The relationship between artistic scholarship and cultural policy likewise became more visible. Public funding affects which institutions can maintain collections, employ specialists, produce exhibitions, commission research, support independent artistic production, or preserve documentary archives. Competitive research programmes enabled ambitious interdisciplinary projects and connected universities, museums, galleries, heritage organisations, technical specialists, and international partners. European programmes enlarged mobility and collaborative possibilities, while municipal and regional support became increasingly important for galleries, festivals, independent spaces, and performing arts. At the same time, project financing introduced structural problems because the time horizon of grants does not always correspond with the duration required for cataloguing collections, editing sources, building research databases, or documenting artistic practice systematically. Highly visible projects can attract support more easily than routine scholarly maintenance even when the latter is essential for future research. Administrative requirements may also consume specialist time and favour institutions already possessing professional grant-management capacity. The Czech achievement therefore lies not in having solved the economics of art research but in having constructed a diversified funding environment capable of supporting both institutional continuity and substantial innovation. Its long-term sustainability will depend upon maintaining this balance rather than allowing temporary projects to substitute for permanent scholarly infrastructure.

Several structural inequalities nevertheless remained evident by the end of 2025. Prague continued to concentrate a disproportionate share of national collections, specialised archives, universities, publishers, major exhibitions, international visitors, research employment, and administrative capacity. Brno and several other cities functioned as genuine intellectual centres, but smaller regional institutions could not reproduce the specialist departments available to large national organisations. Salary levels and limited permanent positions created difficulties in retaining younger researchers after lengthy academic and professional training. Collection institutions could face tension between immediate public programming and slower research whose results may require years to become visible. Independent contemporary-art organisations were particularly vulnerable because project dependence made long-term documentation, staff continuity, and archival preservation difficult. Theatre, performance, and other ephemeral practices faced similar risks where

organisations lacked resources to preserve audiovisual and documentary evidence systematically. International publication expectations could make regionally focused work appear less valuable even when it addressed collections or monuments requiring highly specialised Czech-language scholarship. These inequalities do not diminish the major achievements of the period, but they demonstrate that intellectual diversity depends upon material conditions that cannot be taken for granted.

Generational continuity constitutes another important challenge precisely because so much Czech expertise is cumulative. The ability to identify an obscure workshop, read a difficult historical inscription, understand a regional architectural tradition, reconstruct an old theatrical production, interpret musical notation, or recognise the history of a collection often develops over decades. Such knowledge is only partly codifiable in databases or methodological manuals. Universities can transmit general disciplinary training, but many highly specialised competencies depend upon close work with experienced researchers, curators, conservators, archivists, performers, or collection specialists. Institutional restructuring and short-term employment can interrupt these forms of transmission even when formal research outputs remain strong. Digital documentation may preserve information but cannot fully replace tacit professional judgement grounded in repeated encounters with objects and sources. Czech art studies therefore face the paradox that innovation increasingly depends upon specialist traditions whose survival requires forms of continuity sometimes undervalued by project-centred research systems. By 2025, awareness of succession, training, and professional memory had become especially important as several post-1989 generations approached different stages of their careers. The long-term quality of the field will depend not only upon producing new interpretations but upon ensuring that the competencies necessary to test them remain institutionally reproducible.

Environmental questions introduced a further dimension to art research during the final years of the period. Architecture and design confronted sustainability, material use, energy, adaptive reuse, circular production, and the environmental consequences of construction. Museums and galleries increasingly had to reconsider climate control, exhibition transport, storage, temporary architecture, collection loans, and the resource intensity of international cultural circulation. Contemporary artists made ecology, extraction, landscape transformation, species relationships, environmental justice, and climate anxiety important artistic subjects. Art historians consequently encountered environmental history and material ecology not merely as external contexts but as potential methods for reinterpreting artistic production. The history of materials can reveal relationships among art, mining, forestry, trade, industrial production, waste, and technological change. Performance and public-art projects similarly demonstrated how artistic practice can intervene in environmental perception without becoming equivalent to environmental science. Czech scholarship had not consolidated these directions into a single ecological school by 2025, nor would such unification necessarily be desirable. Their significance lies instead in showing that art studies had become capable of responding to problems whose scale exceeds conventional divisions among artistic media.

The emerging role of artificial intelligence symbolised a comparable methodological frontier at the end of the period. Machine-assisted image recognition, transcription, translation, data analysis, search, restoration support, and research organisation offer potentially significant advantages for large collections and documentary corpora. Generative systems simultaneously complicate concepts of authorship, originality, artistic labour, reproduction, and visual evidence. An image that resembles a historical photograph can no longer be

assumed automatically to possess documentary status, while generated text can reproduce plausible but false bibliographical or interpretative claims. Art historians therefore require new forms of digital source criticism analogous to the critical procedures previously developed for manuscripts, archives, photographs, reproductions, and conservation documentation. Museums and art schools face additional questions concerning whether generative outputs should be collected, how training data affect artistic rights, and how computational systems transform professional creative practice. The appearance of artificial intelligence in professional art-historical debate by the mid-2020s demonstrates how rapidly the evidential environment of the discipline is changing. Czech scholarship enters this transformation with useful strengths in documentation, source criticism, collection research, and interdisciplinary cooperation. The principal challenge after 2025 will be to extend those strengths into computational environments without allowing technological convenience to weaken standards of attribution, authenticity, transparency, and scholarly responsibility.

Taken as a whole, the Czech experience between 1993 and 2025 demonstrates that innovation in the study of arts has rarely taken the form of complete disciplinary rupture. The most successful innovations emerged when accumulated expertise was connected with new questions, technologies, institutions, and publics. Historical archives became sources for gender studies, provenance research, exhibition history, digital humanities, and the reconstruction of suppressed artistic networks. Museum collections generated material and scientific research as well as new curatorial narratives. Traditional musicological sources supported broader histories of performance and musical culture, while theatre documentation became the foundation for research extending from dramatic literature towards performance studies. Architectural history expanded into questions of political economy, sustainability, public space, and urban transformation without abandoning knowledge of buildings and historical sources. Digital technologies increased accessibility and analytical capacity most effectively when supported by reliable metadata and professional documentation. Internationalisation strengthened Czech scholarship when exchange became reciprocal rather than when foreign theories were adopted mechanically. The central pattern of the period was therefore innovation through recombination: established competencies were repeatedly reorganised to address artistic forms and social questions that earlier institutional structures had not anticipated.

By 2025, Czech art history and art studies had consequently developed a distinctive balance between disciplinary depth and intellectual permeability. Art history remained capable of precise chronological, visual, archival, iconographic, and material analysis while participating increasingly in social history, gender research, visual culture, media studies, environmental inquiry, and digital methods. Architecture and design research broadened towards the study of material and spatial systems, while museology and curating made the exhibition itself an explicit object and method of knowledge production. Musicology developed from a predominantly composer- and repertory-centred historical discipline towards a wider study of musical culture without abandoning specialised source criticism. Theatre studies expanded into performance research capable of addressing dramatic theatre, dance, puppetry, circus, documentary practice, scenography, and new technological forms. Artistic research created additional relationships between knowledge and creative practice, while galleries, museums, academies, theatres, documentary institutes, and independent organisations became increasingly important research environments in their own right. No single theoretical model united these developments, but they shared an increasing concern with the conditions under

which artistic meaning is produced, transmitted, institutionalised, documented, experienced, and contested. This capacity to remain differentiated while becoming more interconnected represents one of the most important structural achievements of Czech art studies.

Important limitations remain and should form part of any balanced assessment of the period. Institutional concentration in Prague has not disappeared, even though Brno, Olomouc, Ostrava, Ústí nad Labem, and other centres provide substantial intellectual counterweights. Project-based funding can encourage experimentation while undermining the long-term stability required by archives, bibliographies, critical editions, cataloguing, and documentary work. Younger specialists may encounter precarious employment at precisely the stage when institutions need to reproduce rare professional competencies. Internationalisation can increase visibility while creating pressure to privilege topics and publication formats legible to global academic systems over research serving local collections or Czech-speaking publics. Digitalisation expands access but creates permanent expenses associated with storage, migration, software, cybersecurity, metadata, and specialist staff. Independent art organisations can be intellectually influential while remaining financially fragile, and their archives are especially vulnerable when institutional continuity is weak. Methodological expansion can enrich art history but can also dilute disciplinary precision if researchers abandon close knowledge of objects, sources, chronology, and artistic techniques. The significance of Czech achievements is therefore greatest when these remaining tensions are recognised as problems requiring continued institutional attention rather than hidden behind a narrative of uninterrupted success.

The deeper intellectual achievement of the period can ultimately be described as a change in the understanding of what an artwork or artistic phenomenon is. Earlier disciplinary traditions frequently organised analysis around relatively stable objects, authors, styles, periods, and national schools. Contemporary Czech research increasingly treats artistic meaning as something produced through relationships among material form, artistic intention, production process, commissioner, performer, institution, market, exhibition, medium, audience, technology, political environment, and subsequent memory. A medieval altarpiece can therefore be simultaneously a material construction, devotional instrument, workshop product, patronal commission, object of later restoration, museum exhibit, component of national heritage, and subject of contemporary scientific analysis. A modern building can be an architectural design, political statement, technological system, workplace, contested heritage object, urban intervention, and lived environment. A musical work exists through notation but also through repeated performance, recording, institutions, listeners, and changing interpretative conventions. A theatrical production may disappear physically while surviving through documentation, memory, criticism, and influence upon later practice. Contemporary artistic projects may consist less in durable objects than in temporary relationships, processes, data, performances, or institutional interventions. By embracing these relational dimensions without abandoning the specificity of particular forms, Czech art studies developed a considerably richer account of artistic existence.

In summary, the major achievement of Czech art history and art studies between 1993 and 2025 was the transformation of a strong but politically constrained and institutionally inherited scholarly tradition into a plural, internationally connected, methodologically diverse, technologically capable, and publicly engaged system of artistic research. The continuity of universities, Academy institutes, museums, galleries, art academies, documentary organisations, theatres, archives, and regional institutions preserved the expertise required for

serious historical scholarship, while democratic transformation opened these institutions to previously restricted subjects, methods, and international relationships. Long-term inventories, bibliographies, critical editions, catalogues, photographic archives, collection research, and specialist documentation supplied an unusually durable evidential infrastructure upon which new interpretation could develop. The national canon was substantially revised as Central European relationships, German-speaking and Jewish cultural histories, exile, gender, socialist art, contemporary practice, design, photography, performance, and other previously marginalised or insufficiently contextualised fields entered mainstream research. Architecture, design, museology, curatorial studies, musicology, theatre research, visual culture, and artistic research enlarged the study of arts beyond the traditional hierarchy of painting, sculpture, and monumental architecture while preserving the importance of specialist disciplinary knowledge. Digital methods, conservation science, material analysis, audiovisual documentation, and increasingly complex research infrastructures strengthened cooperation among humanities scholars, scientists, information specialists, curators, conservators, artists, and educators. Internationalisation shifted gradually from post-1989 reintegration towards reciprocal participation in European and global research, while regional centres ensured that Czech scholarship remained intellectually more polycentric than the concentration of national institutions in Prague might initially suggest. Public exhibitions, museum education, digital communication, professional congresses, provenance work, critical historiography, and wider cultural debate strengthened the capacity of art scholarship to participate directly in contemporary society. Structural problems remain in financing, regional inequality, employment, professional succession, digital sustainability, and the preservation of long-term documentary work, but they now exist within a field possessing substantial intellectual and institutional resources with which to address them. By the end of 2025, the most important Czech achievement was therefore not the accumulation of isolated discoveries or the prominence of individual scholars, but the creation of a mature art-research ecology in which historical evidence, artistic practice, material knowledge, institutional memory, technological innovation, critical interpretation, and public responsibility can interact without requiring any one of them to dominate the others.

Conclusion

The history of the sciences concerned with culture, cultural heritage, and the arts in the Czech Republic between 1993 and 2025 is best understood as a history of transformation through continuity rather than a history of institutional creation from nothing. The independent Czech Republic inherited universities, Academy institutes, museums, galleries, archives, libraries, theatres, conservation organisations, artistic academies, scholarly traditions, documentary collections, and professional communities whose intellectual foundations had been established during much earlier historical periods. Some of these traditions reached back to the 19th century, others developed within interwar Czechoslovakia, and still others acquired their institutional form during the socialist decades. Political transformation nevertheless changed fundamentally the conditions under which inherited knowledge could be produced, interpreted, transmitted, and criticised. The democratic revolution of 1989 represented the decisive epistemic opening because censorship, ideological control, restrictions upon international cooperation, and politically imposed limits upon research agendas progressively disappeared. The establishment of the Czech Republic in 1993 then consolidated this transformation within a new state and administrative framework. The three decades that followed were therefore characterised by simultaneous preservation and reorganisation: established institutions survived while their functions, methods, international relationships, technological capacities, and public responsibilities changed substantially. This combination of historical depth and institutional adaptability became one of the defining features of the Czech cultural and artistic research environment. The principal result by 2025 was not the replacement of older disciplines by a completely new system, but the creation of a considerably more open, differentiated, interconnected, and self-reflective knowledge structure.

The first post-Czechoslovak decade was necessarily marked by reconstruction and uncertainty. Cultural institutions that had previously operated within a centrally organised socialist system entered an environment shaped by democratic government, restitution, private ownership, market relations, decentralisation, new forms of public administration, and rapidly expanding international contact. Universities and research organisations had to reconsider curricula, recruitment, institutional priorities, and professional relationships that had been distorted by political intervention. Museums, galleries, theatres, and artistic organisations gained substantially greater interpretative and programming freedom but simultaneously encountered new economic pressures and organisational responsibilities. Scholars regained access to intellectual traditions and methodological debates that had previously been restricted, selectively presented, or difficult to obtain. Foreign travel, translated literature, visiting scholars, international exhibitions, academic mobility, and institutional partnerships altered the horizon within which Czech cultural research operated. The 1990s were therefore not simply a period of liberation in which institutions suddenly became modern after the disappearance of political control. They were also a period in which professional communities had to decide what should be retained from earlier Czech and Czechoslovak traditions and what required fundamental revision. The most durable institutions proved to be those capable of preserving accumulated expertise while adapting their structures to democratic and plural conditions. This experience established a pattern that

remained visible throughout the following decades: successful innovation generally occurred through reinterpretation of inherited resources rather than through institutional rupture.

This continuity was especially important because the Czech sciences of culture and art had never formed a single disciplinary system. Research into culture was distributed among ethnology, anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy, aesthetics, literature, media studies, museology, art history, musicology, theatre studies, archaeology, architecture, heritage conservation, cultural policy, and several other fields. The term Cultural Studies, understood in the narrow sense associated with the British intellectual tradition, never became an institutional umbrella capable of encompassing all Czech research into culture. Instead, the Czech environment developed as a constellation of partially overlapping disciplines whose objects and methods intersected without becoming identical. This structure could at times appear fragmented, particularly when compared with academic systems organised around large interdisciplinary cultural-studies departments. Yet the absence of one dominant institutional centre also prevented the study of culture from becoming dependent upon a single theoretical paradigm. Researchers could approach cultural processes through archival interpretation, ethnographic fieldwork, sociological surveys, philosophical analysis, economic mapping, oral history, visual analysis, media research, or digital computation according to the character of the problem being examined. The resulting intellectual pluralism became more stable as younger generations educated after 1989 entered academic and professional life. By the 2010s, methodological disagreement had ceased to be a political danger and became instead a normal characteristic of scholarly development. The Czech sciences of culture thus matured through differentiation rather than unification.

The transformation of research into cultural identity and collective memory provides one of the clearest examples of this intellectual change. Earlier national narratives often organised Czech history around relatively stable concepts of national culture, political struggle, linguistic identity, and historical continuity. After 1989, and especially after the creation of the independent state, these narratives could be reconsidered in a much more critical and plural manner. Researchers increasingly examined the historical construction of national identity rather than assuming it to be an unchanging cultural reality. Czech-German relations, Jewish history, Roma experiences, migration, exile, borderland populations, the Holocaust, communist repression, post-war displacement, and the changing relationship between Czech and Slovak historical memory acquired considerably greater scholarly visibility. Memory itself became an object of study because societies do not simply remember the past but continually select, interpret, ritualise, institutionalise, and contest it. Museums, monuments, anniversaries, school education, public debates, oral testimony, political discourse, literature, film, and digital media all participate in this process. Research therefore moved beyond the collection of historical facts towards investigation of the social mechanisms through which historical meaning is produced. This development made Czech culture appear less homogeneous but historically more intelligible. The expansion of memory studies consequently represented not a weakening of national historical consciousness but its transformation into a more critical understanding of the plurality from which contemporary Czech society emerged.

Ethnology and cultural anthropology underwent a comparable transformation. Czech and Czechoslovak ethnographic traditions had accumulated extensive documentation of folk culture, regional customs, songs, rituals, crafts, material culture, oral traditions, settlement patterns, and forms of rural life. These collections retained enormous scholarly value after

1993, but the questions addressed to them changed substantially. Culture was less frequently approached as a stable system of traditional forms awaiting documentation before disappearance. Researchers increasingly studied migration, urban environments, political memory, religion, identity, consumption, everyday materiality, changing family practices, environmental relationships, tourism, and the contemporary reinvention of tradition. Fieldwork consequently moved from the documentation of cultural survivals towards the analysis of cultural change itself. Older archives could also be reinterpreted through questions that their original collectors had not anticipated, especially when digitisation improved access and comparative analysis. The distinction between traditional and modern culture became less rigid because apparently old practices were shown to be continually reconstructed under new social conditions. Ethnology therefore became one of the principal bridges between historical documentation and contemporary cultural analysis. Its development illustrates the broader Czech pattern in which inherited scholarly resources did not disappear but acquired renewed relevance through methodological change.

Cultural sociology and empirical cultural research added another dimension to this development. During the first post-socialist years, many cultural decisions were necessarily made under conditions in which reliable information about audiences, participation, cultural employment, regional differences, institutional economics, and creative industries remained limited. Over time, statistical systems, surveys, cultural accounts, mapping projects, audience research, and sectoral analysis made it increasingly possible to investigate cultural life as an empirically measurable social field. This did not eliminate the interpretative traditions of the humanities, because the cultural significance of artistic practices cannot be reduced to numerical indicators. It nevertheless changed the evidential basis of cultural policy. Participation rates, demographic differences, territorial inequalities, employment structures, public expenditure, organisational capacity, and the economic contribution of cultural sectors became legitimate objects of systematic research. The growing cultural and creative industries agenda further expanded this empirical orientation by connecting artistic production with design, architecture, audiovisual media, games, publishing, crafts, advertising, and other forms of creative labour. Cultural research therefore moved increasingly between symbolic interpretation and socioeconomic analysis. By 2025, one of the most important achievements of the Czech system was its capacity to treat culture simultaneously as a domain of meanings and as a material network of institutions, workers, audiences, technologies, and economic relationships.

Cultural-policy research developed in parallel with this empirical turn. During the 1990s, policy was concerned primarily with reconstructing governance after the end of centralised socialist cultural administration and with defining appropriate relationships among the state, municipalities, regions, public institutions, private organisations, and civil society. European integration subsequently introduced new requirements relating to professional standards, international cooperation, project management, cultural mobility, regional development, and participation in European programmes. Cultural policy became progressively more dependent upon evidence concerning institutional capacity, employment, cultural consumption, creative industries, regional infrastructure, digitalisation, and audience behaviour. The creation of specialised policy and statistical environments eventually gave Czech public administration access to forms of expertise that extended beyond traditional cultural bureaucracy. The establishment of the National Institute for Culture in 2025 symbolised this maturation by bringing several strands of cultural-sector research into a more integrated institutional

framework. Policy research nevertheless remained closely connected with universities, professional associations, municipalities, cultural organisations, and independent analytical initiatives. The result was not the technocratic replacement of cultural judgement by statistics. Rather, evidence increasingly became one component of decisions whose cultural, social, artistic, and political dimensions could not be resolved through quantitative measurement alone.

The development of cultural and creative industries represents one of the clearest examples of how the meaning of culture itself widened after 1993. During the early transition, marketisation could appear to place commercial cultural production and publicly supported culture in separate institutional worlds. By the 2010s, research increasingly demonstrated that these spheres interact through labour markets, education, intellectual property, technology, urban environments, audiences, professional networks, and shared resources of creativity. Czech game development, audiovisual production, architecture, design, glassmaking, crafts, publishing, music, and other sectors revealed that cultural production can generate significant economic value without becoming reducible to ordinary industrial activity. Mapping also exposed the precarious conditions under which many creative workers operate, including fragmented employment, short contracts, freelance work, limited access to finance, and unstable income. The COVID-19 pandemic made these structural weaknesses especially visible because cultural production dependent upon physical audiences was interrupted almost immediately. Subsequent policy responses strengthened recognition of cultural labour as a distinct area requiring specialised knowledge and instruments. Creative centres, vouchers, regional mapping, digital programmes, and sectoral strategies consequently became part of a more complex innovation environment. The broader significance of this development lies in the recognition that culture is simultaneously symbolic, social, professional, technological, and economic. The sciences of culture therefore had to become capable of analysing these dimensions together rather than maintaining an artificial separation between artistic value and the conditions under which artistic work is produced.

European integration between 2004 and the early 2010s accelerated many of these transformations. Membership of the European Union did not simply provide access to additional funding but placed Czech institutions within a much denser environment of standards, partnerships, mobility programmes, comparative research, professional networks, and transnational policy. Scholars, students, curators, conservators, artists, architects, museum professionals, and cultural managers could participate more regularly in collaborative European structures. Projects increasingly required institutions to formulate research questions within international comparative frameworks and to cooperate across linguistic, disciplinary, and administrative boundaries. Historical subjects were themselves reinterpreted through this wider geography. The artistic and cultural history of the Czech lands could no longer be explained convincingly without sustained attention to Austria, Germany, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Italy, and other regions connected through the Habsburg monarchy, Central Europe, religious networks, trade, migration, and artistic exchange. Europeanisation therefore affected both institutions and historical interpretation. It encouraged Czech research to move beyond the earlier task of reconnecting with Western scholarship towards a more reciprocal participation in European knowledge production. By the end of the period, international cooperation had become ordinary professional infrastructure rather than an exceptional achievement.

At the same time, European integration did not eliminate the importance of specifically Czech and Central European scholarly traditions. Czech structuralism, Brno museology, traditions of monument research, art-historical topography, ethnomusicology, theatre theory, conservation practice, archaeological fieldwork, and other intellectual lineages continued to influence research. Their status nevertheless changed because they could now be reassessed historiographically instead of being treated either as unquestioned national achievements or as outdated remnants requiring replacement by imported theory. Scholars increasingly investigated the political, institutional, and intellectual conditions under which earlier concepts had emerged. Such self-reflection was especially important in disciplines whose histories intersected strongly with nationalism, empire, socialism, and state cultural policy. International theory therefore functioned most productively when it entered dialogue with local intellectual experience rather than being adopted mechanically. The resulting Czech scholarship was neither intellectually isolated nor simply derivative of larger Western academic systems. Its strongest work emerged where detailed knowledge of local sources and institutions could contribute to broader theoretical and comparative questions. This capacity to maintain scholarly specificity while participating internationally became one of the most important indicators of disciplinary maturity.

Cultural heritage developed during the same period from a strong monument-care tradition into a considerably broader and more autonomous research field. In 1993, the Czech Republic inherited extensive legal, professional, documentary, archaeological, museum, architectural, and conservation structures. These systems were already sophisticated, but their historical emphasis had often been concentrated upon monuments, artistic objects, archaeological evidence, and institutionally defined collections. During the following decades, the concept of heritage expanded towards cultural landscapes, industrial and technical systems, 20th-century architecture, living traditions, documentary resources, digital objects, community practices, and relationships between culture and environment. Heritage could therefore no longer be treated merely as the practical application of history or art history. It developed its own legislation, institutions, professions, research programmes, methodologies, information systems, international obligations, conservation sciences, and forms of public governance. The creation of a unified National Heritage Institute in 2003 strengthened this institutional coherence while retaining extensive regional expertise. Research programmes linked preservation directly with universities, museums, Academy institutes, technical disciplines, and digital infrastructures. By 2025, cultural heritage had acquired sufficient conceptual and professional autonomy to be treated as one of the principal pillars of Czech cultural knowledge.

The development of built and archaeological heritage demonstrates how strongly this field moved towards systems thinking. Architectural conservation increasingly relied upon detailed historical building surveys capable of reading a structure as a layered historical source rather than merely as an aesthetic object awaiting restoration. Later additions and alterations could themselves possess historical significance, challenging older assumptions that conservation should recover an ideal original state. Archaeology developed from an excavation-centred model towards preventive, landscape-based, technologically assisted research in which preservation in situ could be as scientifically valuable as excavation. Geographic information systems, aerial research, geophysics, environmental analysis, isotope studies, LiDAR, and digital documentation broadened both the scale and the analytical potential of archaeological evidence. Historical landscapes similarly came to be interpreted through long-term

relationships among settlement, agriculture, water, vegetation, infrastructure, production, memory, and ecology. Industrial heritage required another conceptual expansion because the significance of a factory, mine, railway, or technical landscape may reside in systems of production and labour rather than monumental architectural form alone. These developments gradually weakened an exclusively object-centred conception of heritage. By 2025, Czech preservation increasingly treated cultural inheritance as a network of material, spatial, technological, social, and environmental relationships.

Museums and collections formed another major point at which the sciences of culture, heritage, and art converged. Czech museums had always served scholarly functions, but legislation, professional standards, digitisation, provenance research, conservation science, museum pedagogy, and visitor studies substantially enlarged their research responsibilities after 1993. Collections came to be understood not simply as accumulated valuable objects but as structured research infrastructures requiring documentation, acquisition policies, inventory, preventive care, security, provenance, and long-term interpretation. Museum research could connect archaeology, ethnology, art history, natural science, technology, music, social history, and numerous other disciplines through the material evidence preserved in collections. Provenance investigation added a particularly significant ethical dimension by drawing attention to confiscation, wartime persecution, post-war redistribution, nationalisation, and the historical circumstances through which objects entered institutional custody. Exhibitions increasingly became scholarly arguments rather than neutral arrangements of material. Museum pedagogy and visitor research further demonstrated that knowledge does not become socially effective merely because objects are publicly displayed. By 2025, the Czech museum had evolved into a complex institution in which research, preservation, ethics, communication, education, and public responsibility were inseparable.

Conservation science strengthened this transformation by connecting the humanities with natural sciences and engineering. Restoration could no longer be understood adequately as skilled artistic repair guided mainly by visual judgement and inherited craft knowledge. Chemistry, materials research, microscopy, spectroscopy, imaging, mechanics, biology, environmental monitoring, structural diagnostics, and other scientific methods increasingly supplied evidence before interventions were undertaken. Traditional craft competence remained essential because the physical treatment of historical materials requires practical skill that cannot be replaced by instrumentation. What changed was the evidential environment within which such skill operated. Preventive conservation also expanded attention from visible damage towards environmental conditions, storage, handling, risk management, disaster preparedness, and long-term material behaviour. Collaboration among scientists, conservators, restorers, art historians, architects, archaeologists, and collection specialists became increasingly normal. This interdisciplinarity created one of the clearest examples of innovation that strengthened rather than displaced traditional expertise. Czech conservation science by the 2020s therefore represented a field in which cultural meaning and physical material could be studied as parts of the same preservation problem.

The recognition of intangible cultural heritage produced an equally important conceptual shift. Czech ethnology already possessed deep traditions of documenting songs, dance, ritual, crafts, oral culture, community theatre, and customary practices. What changed during the 21st century was the increasing recognition that such traditions cannot be preserved through documentation alone. A living practice survives because people continue to perform it, transmit knowledge, reinterpret meanings, train younger participants, and consider the activity

culturally significant. UNESCO frameworks strengthened this emphasis upon communities and bearers, but Czech safeguarding developed through national and regional institutions rather than international inscription alone. The widening of the national intangible-heritage framework by 2025 reflected movement away from an exclusively folkloric conception towards a broader understanding of living cultural continuity. This raised difficult questions about authenticity because change is inevitable in traditions sustained by actual communities. Freezing a practice at one historically selected stage can destroy precisely the capacity for adaptation that enabled it to survive. The sciences concerned with intangible heritage therefore increasingly had to analyse processes of transmission, recognition, social legitimation, transformation, and vulnerability rather than merely classify traditional forms.

The increasing autonomy and breadth of cultural heritage also generated a theoretical problem that remains important beyond the Czech context. As conservation, restoration, archaeology, museology, intangible-heritage studies, landscape research, digital preservation, provenance investigation, heritage technologies, tourism management, and community participation become more specialised, knowledge about preservation can fragment across professional boundaries. The klironomical framework developed by the author from 2019 onwards represents one contemporary attempt to respond to this problem by proposing an integrated science concerned with cultural inheritance, its value, continuity, preservation, revitalisation, and transmission. The Czech institutional system had not formally adopted klironomy as an established independent discipline by 2025, and the concept therefore remains a theoretical proposal rather than an official description of national practice. Its relevance within the present study lies in the fact that the empirical development of Czech heritage repeatedly demonstrates the need for connections among philosophical questions of value and highly practical decisions concerning materials, institutions, communities, technologies, and future use. No one specialised discipline can answer all of these questions independently. The growing complexity of heritage therefore makes interdisciplinary synthesis increasingly important even when established professional boundaries remain necessary. The Czech experience offers a particularly rich environment in which such theoretical integration can be tested against mature practical institutions.

Art history followed a related but distinct trajectory. Unlike heritage studies, it entered the post-1993 period as a long-established academic discipline with strong traditions of stylistic analysis, attribution, iconography, archival research, architecture, medieval studies, early modern research, and collection scholarship. Its transformation did not consist in abandoning these methods but in widening the objects and contexts to which they could be applied. Social history, reception, gender, institutional analysis, visual studies, media theory, political interpretation, materiality, and digital methods progressively joined the classical methodological repertoire. Photography, design, public monuments, exhibition histories, popular imagery, industrial visual culture, contemporary media, and other fields acquired greater legitimacy as art-historical subjects. Historiography itself became more important because scholars increasingly examined how previous generations had constructed national schools, periods, hierarchies, and artistic canons. The strongest Czech scholarship consequently preserved detailed empirical knowledge while becoming more self-conscious about the assumptions embedded within that knowledge. By 2025, art history had developed into a methodologically plural discipline capable of participating in a broader field of art studies without losing its specialist historical competencies.

The reinterpretation of the national artistic canon formed one of the most significant results of this development. Art in the Czech lands increasingly appeared not as a closed sequence of national styles but as the product of mobility, multilingual environments, religious networks, imperial structures, markets, institutions, political regimes, and cultural exchange. Central Europe therefore became an especially productive analytical framework. Medieval and early modern scholarship traced movements of artists, patrons, models, manuscripts, materials, and objects across borders that did not correspond with the contemporary Czech state. 19th-century research reassessed the relationship among Czech national culture, German-speaking institutions, the Habsburg monarchy, and changing political identities. Modern art history situated Czech avant-gardes within transnational networks while giving greater attention to Jewish culture, exile, gender, minority experience, and institutional exclusion. Research into socialist art became more differentiated as scholars moved beyond the binary opposition between official conformity and underground resistance towards investigation of institutions, commissions, design, architecture, public space, artistic labour, and negotiated forms of autonomy. The revised canon therefore became both broader and historically more complex. Its importance lies not simply in the recovery of neglected artists but in the recognition that canon formation itself is an historical process requiring continual critical examination.

Contemporary art and visual-culture studies expanded the boundaries of artistic research even further. After 1989, artistic freedom coincided with rapid institutional change and the emergence of galleries, independent spaces, artist-run initiatives, residencies, foundations, international networks, and new forms of cultural funding. Installation, performance, moving image, photography, sound, digital media, participatory projects, social intervention, ecological practice, and research-based art became ordinary components of artistic production. Such work often challenged the assumption that an artwork must be a stable object capable of entering a traditional collection. Temporary situations, collaborations, archives, digital environments, actions, and community processes required new forms of documentation and interpretation. Visual-culture research simultaneously extended beyond recognised art into political imagery, advertising, mass media, online platforms, algorithmic images, and other visual systems shaping contemporary experience. Czech contemporary-art scholarship therefore increasingly operated between art history, criticism, sociology, media studies, political theory, curating, and artistic research. This did not make traditional media obsolete, but it ended their exclusive claim to define the field. By 2025, the study of contemporary visual culture had become one of the principal areas in which disciplinary boundaries were being actively renegotiated.

Architecture, design, and applied arts underwent a similar reassessment. Post-socialist architecture provided a particularly revealing field because the transformation from centralised planning to private development, municipal autonomy, property markets, foreign investment, and professional competition altered not merely architectural style but the entire political economy of the built environment. Architectural history therefore expanded towards planning, public space, housing, civic participation, development, sustainability, institutional structures, and adaptive reuse. Design studies increasingly treated objects through the systems that produce them, including schools, factories, firms, technologies, materials, markets, consumers, exhibitions, and professional organisations. Glass, ceramics, textiles, jewellery, furniture, typography, product design, fashion, and other applied fields could no longer be positioned automatically below painting, sculpture, and monumental architecture

within a fixed hierarchy of artistic importance. Their significance frequently lies precisely in the relationship among artistic creativity, material competence, industrial production, craft traditions, and everyday use. The Czech lands possess unusually strong historical experience in such relationships, making design a particularly productive field for studying continuity between cultural tradition and technological change. Environmental responsibility and digital fabrication added further dimensions by the 2020s. The major conceptual result was the emergence of a more relational understanding of designed environments and objects as components of social life rather than secondary decorative products.

Museology and curatorial studies became increasingly important interfaces between these different sciences of art and culture. Czech museology entered the democratic period with a substantial theoretical tradition, particularly associated with Brno, but changing institutions required new attention to education, audiences, accessibility, communication, ethics, visitor experience, and participation. Curating simultaneously emerged as a more visible intellectual practice because exhibition selection and arrangement were recognised as forms of interpretation rather than neutral technical tasks. Every exhibition necessarily constructs relationships among objects, evidence, space, texts, design, institutional authority, and public experience. The curator therefore became an intermediary among research, collections, artists, institutions, and audiences. Exhibition architecture, multimedia, digital mediation, educational programmes, provenance research, sustainability, and visitor studies further transformed curatorial practice into an interdisciplinary field. The international significance of ICOM Prague 2022 reflected the degree to which questions of inclusion, ethics, diversity, accessibility, sustainability, and community participation had entered contemporary museum thinking. This transformation does not mean that museums abandoned their traditional responsibilities for collecting and preservation. Rather, those responsibilities became situated within a broader understanding of museums as active producers of knowledge and public meaning.

Musicology demonstrates equally clearly why the history of Czech art studies cannot be reduced to visual disciplines. Historical musicology preserved rigorous traditions of source criticism, musical analysis, composer studies, manuscripts, notation, critical editions, repertory, and institutional history. After 1993, however, the field progressively widened towards performance, audiences, recordings, popular music, musical labour, gender, media, identity, ethnomusicology, cultural policy, and everyday listening. Musical history consequently became less dependent upon a sequence of canonical composers and autonomous works. A composition can be understood fully only through the conditions under which it is written, performed, transmitted, recorded, heard, collected, edited, and remembered. Digital access to sources and recordings further transformed research possibilities while creating new questions concerning preservation and metadata. Ethnomusicology connected musical practice with anthropology, living traditions, minority cultures, dance, and social memory. Critical editions and archival research nevertheless remained essential because methodological expansion did not eliminate the need for exact knowledge of sources. Czech musicology therefore followed the broader national pattern of enlarging disciplinary questions while retaining strong specialised foundations.

Theatre and performance studies developed through perhaps the most visible confrontation with ephemerality. A theatrical event disappears when performance ends and therefore survives only through memories, reviews, photographs, video, programmes, scripts, scenographic designs, institutional records, and other incomplete forms of documentation.

Czech theatre research responded by developing extensive documentary, bibliographical, archival, and digital infrastructures capable of preserving traces of dramatic and performative culture. At the same time, the object of theatre research expanded beyond dramatic literature and repertory production. Documentary theatre, devised practice, puppetry, object theatre, contemporary dance, physical theatre, new circus, participatory performance, immersive work, site-specific practice, and performance art required analytical methods attentive to bodies, movement, space, materiality, technology, spectatorship, and collaborative creation. DAMU and JAMU increasingly connected professional artistic education with theoretical and artistic research, while university theatre studies maintained complementary historical and analytical traditions. The Prague Quadrennial demonstrated internationally how scenography could develop into a broader field of performance design combining architecture, visual art, sound, digital technology, objects, and audience experience. By 2025, Czech performing-arts research had therefore become a layered field rather than a narrowly theatrical discipline. Its development exemplifies how artistic research can expand without destroying the historical methodologies upon which serious interpretation depends.

Artistic research itself became one of the more significant epistemological innovations of the contemporary period. Traditional humanities scholarship generally separates the researcher from the artistic process being investigated and communicates knowledge primarily through analytical writing. Artistic research asks whether creative practice can itself function as a method capable of producing knowledge. A choreographer may investigate embodiment through repeated movement experiments, a scenographer may study spatial perception through performative environments, and a visual artist may examine institutional structures through the design of an artistic intervention. Czech artistic academies provided particularly suitable settings for this development because creative practice and theoretical reflection already coexisted within their educational structures. The expansion of artistic research nevertheless raised necessary questions about method, documentation, verification, reflection, and the distinction between artistic production and research. Not every artwork becomes research simply because it involves investigation. The strongest Czech approaches increasingly required explicit questions, methodological awareness, documentation of process, and a capacity to communicate knowledge beyond the immediate artistic event. Artistic research therefore enlarged the possible forms of scholarly inquiry while also forcing institutions to reconsider what counts as evidence and research output.

Digitalisation became perhaps the most pervasive transformation affecting all the fields considered in this book. During the 1990s, digital technologies entered cultural institutions principally through cataloguing, basic databases, internet access, and experimental digitisation. Over time, these activities developed into national and international infrastructures supporting libraries, archives, museums, archaeology, heritage protection, audiovisual preservation, humanities research, and public communication. Manuscriptorium, Kramerius systems, the National Digital Library, Webarchiv, eSbírky, archaeological information systems, digital museum catalogues, theatre databases, photographic archives, and specialised research repositories changed the practical geography of scholarship. Researchers increasingly moved among physical collections and digital environments rather than treating the two as separate domains. Digital humanities introduced methods such as GIS, network analysis, text mining, visualisation, structured datasets, and computational comparison. Cultural organisations simultaneously became data producers whose cataloguing standards determine what future researchers can discover. Digitalisation

therefore transformed infrastructure, method, access, professional roles, and the relationship between institutions and audiences. By 2025, the decisive change was not that culture had simply been copied into digital form, but that digital systems had become permanent components of cultural knowledge production.

This development also demonstrated that technology does not remove the need for institutional responsibility. Digital images without reliable metadata may be visually accessible but scholarly weak. Databases require standards, identifiers, interoperability, long-term financing, software maintenance, migration, security, and professional governance. Born-digital cultural materials create still more difficult preservation problems because websites, software, interactive artworks, digital publications, social-media records, and electronic documents can disappear without leaving a stable analogue original. Copyright and privacy complicate access, while commercial platforms increasingly control channels through which culture is encountered. Cybersecurity adds another risk because cultural institutions now depend upon digital infrastructure for essential documentation and public services. Artificial intelligence has begun to intensify these challenges by making image generation, automated transcription, translation, classification, and synthetic textual production increasingly accessible. The same technologies can substantially improve research efficiency while weakening confidence in authenticity and evidence if used without critical control. The long Czech tradition of source criticism therefore becomes more rather than less important in digital environments. Future innovation will depend upon extending established principles of provenance, attribution, documentation, and transparency into technologies whose outputs can appear convincing without being historically reliable.

Public communication changed as profoundly as research infrastructure. Museums, galleries, libraries, archives, heritage sites, universities, and research institutes increasingly became continuous communicative actors rather than institutions encountered only through physical visits or printed publications. Websites, online catalogues, social media, digital exhibitions, educational platforms, podcasts, video, public lectures, and interactive resources enlarged access to cultural knowledge. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this transformation because physical closure required institutions to experiment rapidly with remote forms of communication. Many emergency solutions were temporary, but the return to ordinary cultural life did not restore the previous distinction between physical and digital participation. A more hybrid environment emerged in which online access can precede, supplement, or extend material encounter. Public humanities developed through this interaction even without becoming a single institutionalised discipline in Czechia. Cultural authority also became more negotiated because institutional interpretations now appear alongside personal memories, activist narratives, commercial platforms, misinformation, and algorithmically selected content. Research institutions therefore face a new responsibility: scholarly authority can no longer depend solely upon institutional status but must also be communicated persuasively, transparently, and accessibly.

Participation consequently became one of the defining features of the mature system. Professional expertise remained essential in conservation, attribution, archaeological interpretation, collection management, historical research, and scientific analysis. Yet cultural institutions increasingly recognised that expertise alone cannot guarantee social legitimacy or cultural continuity. Communities, visitors, volunteers, municipalities, schools, owners, artists, local associations, tradition bearers, and other groups contribute forms of knowledge and responsibility that professional institutions do not possess independently.

Intangible-heritage policy made this especially visible because safeguarding cannot function without the people who continue to practise and transmit traditions. Museums and galleries expanded educational and participatory programmes, while heritage organisations increasingly incorporated volunteering and community cooperation. Cultural-policy research became more attentive to audiences and regional participation. Contemporary artistic practice itself frequently adopted collaborative and participatory methods. The resulting shift should not be interpreted as the replacement of specialists by public preference. It represents instead a redistribution of cultural knowledge in which professional authority must increasingly explain itself, negotiate competing values, and recognise the social environments within which culture remains meaningful.

The crises of the 2010s and 2020s gave the concept of cultural resilience a new importance. Floods had already demonstrated the vulnerability of collections, archives, historic buildings, and cultural infrastructure to environmental disaster. The COVID-19 pandemic then revealed the dependence of many cultural organisations and workers upon physical attendance, short-term income, project funding, and fragile employment structures. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine introduced another dimension by making cultural destruction, emergency preservation, refugee support, solidarity with displaced artists and researchers, and the protection of documentary memory immediate European concerns. Energy pressures and climate change further expanded the meaning of institutional risk. Museums, theatres, archives, historic properties, landscapes, and conservation systems now have to consider heat, drought, storms, biological deterioration, energy consumption, changing water regimes, and environmental sustainability. Cybersecurity represents yet another form of vulnerability created precisely by successful digitalisation. The mature cultural institution therefore needs capacities extending beyond ordinary scholarly or artistic excellence. Resilience increasingly means the ability to adapt under exceptional conditions without losing collections, professional standards, cultural memory, or public purpose.

Climate change also creates questions that cannot be contained within heritage management alone. Cultural landscapes embody long historical relationships among agriculture, water, settlement, vegetation, infrastructure, and human use, making environmental transformation inseparable from cultural transformation. Architecture and design must increasingly address energy, materials, adaptation, reuse, and the ecological consequences of construction. Museums and galleries confront the environmental cost of storage, climate control, transport, temporary exhibitions, and international loans. Contemporary artists make extraction, biodiversity, species relationships, environmental injustice, and climate anxiety subjects of artistic investigation. Historical research can similarly re-examine artistic materials, industries, landscapes, and technologies through ecological perspectives. These developments bring the sciences of culture and art into closer conversation with environmental science while preserving their distinct questions concerning meaning, memory, representation, and value. The relationship between culture and nature therefore appears less clearly separable than earlier institutional classifications often suggested. One of the important tasks after 2025 will be to develop forms of cooperation capable of addressing environmental change without reducing cultural values to ecological variables or treating ecological realities as merely cultural narratives.

Despite three decades of substantial development, significant structural inequalities remain. Prague continues to possess an exceptional concentration of national institutions, specialised collections, academic organisations, publishers, international networks, funding capacity,

and professional employment. Brno, Olomouc, Ostrava, Plzeň, Ústí nad Labem, and other centres provide important counterweights, and regional museums, galleries, universities, archives, and heritage workplaces produce knowledge unavailable in the capital. Nevertheless, access to laboratories, digital teams, international administration, permanent specialist staff, and large-scale funding remains uneven. Project-based research can create highly innovative results while simultaneously weakening continuity if teams disappear once grants end. Younger researchers and cultural professionals often face unstable employment after lengthy specialist training. Long-term activities such as cataloguing, editing sources, maintaining archives, documenting performances, preserving databases, and transferring specialist knowledge between generations can be less visible within evaluation systems favouring new projects and short-term outputs. International publication pressures may also disadvantage Czech-language research serving local collections or regional publics. The sustainability of the system therefore depends upon recognising maintenance and professional succession as forms of innovation infrastructure rather than as administrative costs standing outside research.

The Czech experience also demonstrates that disciplinary expansion creates new problems of identity. When cultural research incorporates sociology, economics, media, digital methods, policy analysis, memory studies, and creative industries, the boundaries of the field become difficult to define. When art history includes visual culture, design, photography, media, architecture, curating, and digital imagery, it overlaps increasingly with cultural studies, anthropology, design research, and media theory. Performance studies can extend from theatre and dance towards ritual, protest, political ceremony, sport, and everyday behaviour. Heritage studies connect with archaeology, architecture, ecology, tourism, law, conservation science, and community research. Such permeability is intellectually productive because cultural phenomena rarely follow university departmental boundaries. Yet interdisciplinarity becomes weak if specialists lose the competencies through which their contribution can be tested. Close reading of sources, visual analysis, fieldwork, statistical method, material diagnosis, attribution, conservation knowledge, archival criticism, musical analysis, or performance expertise cannot simply be replaced by broad theoretical vocabulary. The Czech system developed most successfully where interdisciplinary cooperation was based upon strong disciplines rather than upon their dissolution.

This principle helps explain why the country's institutional plurality became an advantage rather than merely a historical complication. Universities provide education, theoretical renewal, doctoral training, and interaction among successive generations. Academy institutes sustain fundamental research, long-term documentation, specialist archives, editions, bibliographies, and projects extending beyond ordinary teaching cycles. Museums and galleries connect research directly with collections, provenance, conservation, exhibitions, and public interpretation. Heritage organisations combine scholarship with legal, technical, spatial, and management responsibilities. Libraries and archives preserve documentary evidence and increasingly create digital research infrastructures. Art academies connect theory with artistic experimentation, while theatres and performance organisations generate forms of practice that themselves become research material. Cultural-policy institutions add statistical, economic, administrative, and sectoral knowledge. These organisations cannot substitute for one another because their responsibilities and evidential environments differ. Their strength emerges through cooperation, which allows cultural knowledge to circulate among institutions without requiring a single centre to dominate the entire system.

Regional diversity reinforces this distributed model. The cultural history of Bohemia, Moravia, Czech Silesia, border regions, industrial territories, historic towns, rural landscapes, and metropolitan centres cannot be reconstructed adequately from Prague alone. Local institutions often preserve archives, collections, buildings, oral histories, artistic networks, industrial knowledge, theatrical traditions, and community relationships that depend upon long-term regional expertise. Brno developed especially strong combinations of art history, museology, musicology, architecture, design, ethnology, and performing-arts research. Olomouc sustained a distinctive university and museum environment, while Ostrava linked contemporary art, industrial heritage, regional identity, and post-industrial transformation. Other regions contributed through specialised museums, galleries, conservation centres, archaeological organisations, festivals, theatres, and universities. Digital aggregation makes these materials increasingly searchable on a national scale, but it cannot replace the contextual knowledge through which local evidence becomes historically intelligible. A mature national system therefore requires both central infrastructures and territorially grounded expertise. The future quality of Czech cultural research will depend partly upon whether this relationship remains balanced.

Internationalisation likewise has entered a new phase. During the 1990s, international contact often carried the character of reintegration after decades of political separation. By the 2000s and 2010s, Czech institutions became regular participants in European projects, scholarly associations, museum networks, UNESCO mechanisms, exhibitions, artistic residencies, heritage programmes, and professional mobility. By 2025, the distinction between domestic and international research had become difficult to sustain in many fields because the historical objects themselves cross national boundaries. Central European art, multilingual theatre, migration, industrial landscapes, religious networks, musical circulation, shared crafts, and transnational heritage all require comparative research. Czech institutions increasingly contribute expertise rather than merely receive methods developed elsewhere. International recognition is therefore most valuable when it strengthens domestic knowledge, documentation, management, and professional standards rather than functioning only as cultural prestige. Multinational UNESCO nominations and shared European projects make this principle especially visible. The Czech case shows how a relatively small national research environment can acquire international significance through specialised knowledge, strong documentation, historical collections, and durable professional networks.

The concept of innovation acquires a particular meaning when viewed across this entire history. In the early post-socialist period, innovation often meant institutional liberalisation, removal of ideological restrictions, creation of new organisations, or introduction of market mechanisms. During European integration, it became closely associated with professionalisation, mobility, international cooperation, infrastructure, and access to new forms of funding. During the period from 2014 to 2025, innovation became far more multidimensional. It could take the form of a digital repository, a three-dimensional heritage survey, a new museum pedagogy programme, an archaeological database, a conservation technology, a creative-industry mapping project, an artistic-research methodology, a participatory heritage model, or a new approach to documenting performance. Innovation could also consist in revising an inherited canon, reopening a suppressed archive, improving public access, or developing professional procedures capable of responding to climate, pandemic, or cybersecurity risks. Novelty alone therefore provides an inadequate criterion. The most successful Czech innovations were those that connected accumulated cultural and

professional resources with changing social, technological, and institutional conditions without destroying the evidence and knowledge upon which cultural continuity depends.

This understanding allows preservation and innovation to be treated not as opposing principles but as mutually dependent processes. Cultural systems cannot remain socially meaningful if they merely reproduce inherited forms without interpretation or adaptation. At the same time, continuous novelty becomes culturally shallow when it is disconnected from historical memory, documentary evidence, specialist knowledge, and accumulated professional experience. The Czech development from 1993 to 2025 repeatedly demonstrates the productive possibilities of combining these tendencies. Historical collections became the basis for digital research, old archives supported new histories of gender and migration, industrial structures acquired new uses, traditional practices entered contemporary safeguarding frameworks, and classical art-historical methods were applied to new visual phenomena. Museums transformed their exhibitions while retaining collection responsibilities, and musicology widened its social scope while preserving textual criticism. Theatre studies embraced performance without abandoning theatrical history, while conservation science introduced advanced technologies without eliminating craft expertise. Innovation therefore operated most effectively through recombination rather than substitution. This is perhaps the most general principle emerging from the Czech experience.

The period examined in this book also reveals a changing relationship between knowledge and authority. Under the former socialist system, cultural institutions operated within political structures capable of prescribing legitimate interpretations and restricting alternatives. Democratic transformation removed this monopoly but did not make cultural knowledge politically neutral. Museums, monuments, artistic canons, heritage designations, public funding, historical anniversaries, and cultural policies continue to involve decisions about value and representation. Contemporary institutions therefore face the more complex task of maintaining professional standards while recognising that their own authority must remain open to criticism. Provenance research, gender studies, memory studies, minority histories, participatory heritage, visitor research, and critical museology all contribute to this self-examination. Public trust can no longer be sustained simply by presenting institutions as unquestionable guardians of culture. It increasingly depends upon transparent evidence, methodological clarity, ethical responsibility, accessibility, and willingness to explain why particular decisions are made. The maturation of the Czech cultural research system can therefore be measured partly through its increasing capacity to investigate its own institutions and assumptions.

By 2025, the sciences of culture and art in Czechia had consequently developed into a complex ecology rather than a hierarchy. Cultural studies and broader cultural research provide tools for understanding identity, memory, everyday life, participation, institutions, media, creative labour, and policy. Cultural heritage functions as an autonomous preservation and research field concerned with material, intangible, spatial, documentary, digital, and environmental continuity. Art history and the wider art studies investigate visual, material, architectural, musical, performative, curatorial, and contemporary artistic practices through specialised yet increasingly interconnected methods. These spheres overlap continually but should not be collapsed into one another. Their different histories, evidential traditions, professional responsibilities, and institutional structures remain essential to the quality of the knowledge they produce. Their unity lies instead in the shared infrastructures through which cultural evidence is collected, preserved, interpreted, debated, transmitted, and made available to

society. The Czech model is therefore strongest when it combines disciplinary differentiation with functional cooperation.

The principal historical achievement of the period from 1993 to 2025 was thus not the appearance of one revolutionary theory, one dominant institution, or one internationally celebrated school. It was the gradual construction of a cultural knowledge system capable of learning from its own historical depth while remaining open to methodological, technological, and social transformation. Czech scholarship moved from the uncertainties of post-socialist reconstruction through European reintegration towards a stage of mature institutional plurality. It became more empirical without abandoning interpretation, more international without losing regional expertise, more digital without making physical collections obsolete, and more participatory without eliminating professional authority. Heritage research became more scientific while recognising social values and community participation. Art studies became more interdisciplinary while preserving object-, source-, and practice-based competencies. Cultural-policy research became more evidence-oriented while acknowledging that cultural significance cannot be measured economically alone. The resulting system remains uneven, financially demanding, and vulnerable to demographic, technological, environmental, and political pressures. Its maturity lies not in the absence of such problems but in the existence of institutions and methods capable of identifying and addressing them.

The future of this system will depend increasingly upon how well it manages continuity under conditions of rapid change. Artificial intelligence will alter research, artistic production, documentation, attribution, education, and public communication. Climate change will affect buildings, landscapes, collections, materials, cultural tourism, and the economics of cultural infrastructure. Demographic change will influence audiences, professional succession, regional cultural life, and transmission of living traditions. Digital preservation will require permanent investment in systems whose technological forms will repeatedly become obsolete. Global political instability may place renewed pressure upon cultural memory, international cooperation, academic freedom, and emergency protection of heritage. Economic constraints will intensify debates about which institutions, collections, research infrastructures, and artistic practices society is prepared to support. None of these challenges can be solved by one discipline or one organisation. The Czech experience of the previous three decades suggests that resilience will depend upon the same combination that enabled the system to develop after 1993: strong institutions, specialist expertise, intellectual pluralism, cooperation, public responsibility, and the capacity to reinterpret inherited resources without severing their historical continuity.

The history reconstructed in this book therefore leads to a broader conclusion concerning the place of culture within modern society. Culture is not an ornamental sphere that becomes relevant only after economic, political, and technological problems have been solved. It is one of the principal environments through which societies remember, classify experience, create symbolic meaning, negotiate identity, transmit knowledge, imagine alternatives, and interpret change. Cultural heritage preserves evidence through which historical experience remains available to future generations, but preservation itself is an active form of knowledge rather than passive storage. Art does not merely represent society but experiments with perception, language, form, material, space, sound, embodiment, and relationships that may later influence wider cultural practice. Research into these fields therefore performs a social function extending beyond academic specialisation. It allows societies to understand the

historical conditions of their own cultural choices. The Czech development between 1993 and 2025 demonstrates particularly clearly that this capacity becomes stronger when scholarship, preservation, artistic practice, technology, education, and public participation are treated as interacting rather than isolated activities.

In this sense, the Czech Republic entered the period after 1993 with an exceptionally dense cultural inheritance but without a predetermined model for how that inheritance should function under democratic, European, digital, and increasingly global conditions. More than three decades later, the resulting system cannot be described as complete or final. Cultural institutions continue to change, disciplinary boundaries remain open, digital technologies continually generate new forms of evidence, and social debates repeatedly alter the values attached to historical and artistic phenomena. Yet the development examined throughout this book demonstrates a substantial movement from institutional reconstruction towards a mature culture of research and preservation. Czechia has built a system in which universities, the Academy, museums, galleries, archives, libraries, heritage organisations, artistic academies, theatres, cultural-policy institutions, regional organisations, and digital infrastructures participate jointly in the production of cultural knowledge. This system is historically grounded but not confined by the past, nationally organised but internationally embedded, professionally specialised but increasingly interdisciplinary, and institutionally authoritative while progressively open to public participation. Its strongest innovation has been the ability to connect these apparent oppositions rather than resolve them by choosing one side.

The period from 1993 to 2025 may therefore be interpreted as the transition from post-socialist cultural reconstruction to a mature and self-conscious knowledge ecology. The first stage restored intellectual freedom and reorganised institutions. The second connected Czech research and cultural practice more deeply with European professional and scholarly structures. The third transformed digitalisation, participation, resilience, interdisciplinary research, and international cooperation from specialised initiatives into ordinary characteristics of the system. Across all three stages, the most valuable developments were those that allowed continuity to operate dynamically rather than conservatively. Historical knowledge remained useful because it could be questioned; institutions remained durable because they could change; heritage remained socially relevant because it could be interpreted and transmitted rather than simply protected; and artistic disciplines remained intellectually productive because they could enlarge their methods without abandoning the competencies that define them. By 2025, Czech sciences of culture and art therefore no longer stood primarily within the historical problem of transition after communism. They had entered a different stage in which their central task was to manage the consequences of their own maturity.

Thus, the Czech experience cannot be reduced either to a story of successful Westernisation or to one of uninterrupted national continuity. Its distinctive character emerged from the interaction of inherited Central European traditions, Czechoslovak institutional experience, democratic transformation, European integration, technological modernisation, and changing concepts of public cultural responsibility. The result is not a single Czech model that could be transferred mechanically to other countries. It is instead a historically specific example of how a relatively small European state can sustain a dense network of cultural scholarship, heritage expertise, artistic research, memory institutions, and public cultural organisations while repeatedly adapting their purposes. The principal lesson lies in the relationship between

preservation and change. Institutions capable of remembering their own professional history are often better equipped to innovate intelligently, while innovation becomes culturally sustainable when it remains accountable to evidence, value, memory, and social responsibility. The Czech sciences of culture and art developed most successfully wherever these principles were combined. Their history between 1993 and 2025 is therefore ultimately a history of cultural continuity understood not as resistance to change, but as the organised capacity to preserve knowledge, reinterpret inheritance, create new forms, and transmit meaningful cultural resources into futures that cannot yet be fully known.

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Part One

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