**The Association Between Economic, Structural Characteristics and Artistic Aspects in Israeli Art Museums**

**Abstract**

This article examines the tension between economic, structural, and artistic aspects of cultural production in Israel, particularly in the context of art museums. The primary research question concerns whether and how economic and structural characteristics influence the art and artists exhibited in Israeli museums between the years 2000- 2014. This mixed-methods study applies a combination of quantitative and qualitative research tools to address the research question. The data pertain to revenues, socio-demographics about artists, and information on exhibitions from various Israeli museums that receive funding from Israel’s Ministry of Culture. In addition, to broaden understanding of the quantitative findings, 20 interviews were conducted with museum managers, curators, and artists associated with the museums in the sample. The results indicate that economic and managerial concerns have as great a role in determining museums’ artistic repertoire of art as do professional values. Significant differences, in terms of economic and artistic parameters, are found between museums in Israel’s geographic/ population center and those in its peripheral regions. Art museums in the periphery are smaller and adopt different artistic paths from those in the central region, in order to distinguish themselves, given that they cannot compete on economic parameters. The implications of the findings are discussed in terms of museums’ funding sources for artistic activities and the relationship between Israel’s central and peripheral regions regarding various aspects of the field of art.

**Keywords**: Art, Museums, Economic Characteristics, Structural Characteristics, Geographical Area, Cultural Economy

1. **Introduction**

Like all organizations, art museums must consider economic factors when promoting their cultural activities, especially given that publicly-funded budgets are shrinking and museums must turn to commercial or private funding to survive. At the same time, museums operate within a framework of artistic values and cultural norms. Sociological studies of cultural markets have addressed the tension between cultural aspects based on economic rationale and those based on artistic values (Baumol & Bowen, 1966; Frey, 1994; Towse, 2003). In the context of museums, these studies highlight that factors such as revenue sources, size of the museum, supply and demand, and managerial strategies all influence cultural production (Camarero, Garrido & Vicente, 2011; Frey & Meier, 2002; Hughes & Luksetich, 2004). Studies of art quality assessment processes assert that cultural production is a social field, and power relations influence definitions and perceptions of high-quality art products (Becker, 1984; Bourdieu, 1983; Plattner, 1998; Yogev, 2010). Additionally, geography and cultural production have a reciprocal relationship, primarily due to economics and tourism in major centrally-located cities with art institutions (Heilbrun, 1992; Rosett, 1991). The agents of power, knowledge, and finances, as well as art-loving audiences, tend to be concentrated in central areas (Ofrat, 2016; Von Graevenitz, 2007).

This article examines economic, geographic, and social mechanisms in art institutions in order to understand their cultural production in a broad context. It makes two contributions to the literature on cultural economics. First, it advances sociological understanding of how factors other than art influence cultural production in art institutions. Second, this study is pioneering in its integration of economic, geographic, and social aspects of cultural production in the context of art institutions.

1. **Literature Review**

**2.1 Economic Aspects of Museum Activity**

Sources of funding for art institutions are diverse and include public allocations, visitor entrance fees, donations, endowments, foundations, sponsors, and investments (Frey & Meier, 2002; Lindqvist, 2012; Rosett, 1991). In recent decades, there has been a global trend towards the reduction of government support for the arts and culture (Mulcahy, 2006). In the spirit of economic liberalism, governments encourage arts institutions to strive for economic independence (Lindqvist, 2012). Many museums are not eligible to receive substantial state funding if they cannot also show financial justification for receiving it (Skinner, Ekelund, & Jackson, 2009). Israel’s Museums’ Law only grants government support to museums that bring in a minimum of 7500 paying visitors per assessment year (Israel Ministry of Education, 2018). Along with the reduction in public funding, museum managers face challenges such as stiff competition for visitors due to an increase in the number of museums, and the growing diversity of the leisure industry (Everett & Barrett, 2009; Van Aalst & Boogaarts, 2002). These challenges are particularly difficult for art museums because their cultural products appeal to a narrow segment of the market.

Pierre Bourdieu, a sociologist of culture and art, uses the terms ‘cultural capital’ and ‘habitus’ to describe the distinct aesthetic tastes and preferences of art museum audiences. Cultural capital refers to understanding and appreciating tastes perceived as associated with higher culture. Habitus includes an array of social tendencies, habits, skills, cultural knowledge, and tastes instilled in individuals in the process of becoming affiliated with a social group (Bourdieu, 1984). Other researchers agree that, beyond income and the cost of participation, a sense of taste constructed through education and prior experience is a prerequisite for consumption of art (Blaug, 2001; Towse, 2003). Recent studies on the characteristics of museum visitors indicate that people with higher educational, social, and occupational status are more likely to frequently visit art museums and galleries. Highly educated individuals have the skills and motivation required to enjoy museums. Occupational status implies an expectation that a person engages in a high-quality cultural lifestyle (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016).

For the much of the 20th century, museums have been viewed as shrines dedicated to art, and members of the public who are not part of art circles have tended to feel alienated from them. However, today, due to the expansion of the privatization processes, art museums are adopting various strategies to expand their appeal to visitors and to improve their financial leverage (Cohen-Schneiderman, 2014). To this end, they offer a greater number of new exhibitions, and exhibitions for art lovers alongside those with content that is more widely accessible to non-artist audiences, such as those on popular subjects and ‘blockbusters’. In addition, many museums offer activities and cultural and social events (Frey, 2003).

One variable affecting the number of visitors to a museum is location. Art institutions in major cities enjoy many economic benefits over those in peripheral areas (Rosett, 1991). In central locations, there are more people who understand and are interested in the arts and who are frequent museum-goers (Von Graevenitz, 2007). Art institutions and major cities have a mutually beneficial relationship; major cities offer accessibility to museums and a large potential audience, while expansion of a city’s art industry contributes to the local economy (Gronenberg, 2007; Heilbrun, 1992).

The literature indicates that museums dependent on revenue from visitors tend to adopt a business orientation and often provide a market-oriented consumer experience in order to attract as many visitors as possible. Museums that receive a high level of public support are more likely to focus on professional goals (Camarero et al., 2011; Frey & Meier, 2002). Apart from the financial security provided by public funding, art institutions that are regularly supported by government agencies are required to undergo regular quality assessment procedures, which set a standard for these museums and influence private donors’ decisions to invest in museum projects (Skinner et al., 2009).

Private donations are another source of income that may affect the art displayed in museums. Studies examining thousands of exhibitions in major museums show that donors’ tastes are translated into the museum’s mix of exhibitions. They found that wealthy philanthropists tend to support exhibitions featuring canonical works from the world of high art. Many of these philanthropists are also art collectors, and their support of certain exhibitions allows them to raise the symbolic and material value of works in their private collections. Donors such as corporate executives, who see cultural philanthropy as a way to promote corporate public relations, prefer to donate to popular and commercial exhibitions that will have broad exposure among the general public. The literature identifies the tension between curators (the art experts who design the exhibitions) and the economic demands from donors and museum managers, which may limit freedom of expression in the curating of the exhibition (Alexander, 1996a, 1996b).

**2.2 The Social Context of Art Appreciation**

In contemporary art markets, there is a high degree of ambiguity regarding the economic and artistic value of artwork. Art appreciation depends not only on the material aspect of the work, but also on the decision of various stakeholders in positions of power such as curators, museum managers, gallery owners, and art critics. These stakeholders establish relationships and discourses, which determine aesthetic tastes and social models regarding what is more and less appreciated in the art world. This highlights the social nature of value creation. Their decisions affect the chances that given works of art will be exhibited in museums and in the global art market, through a process of canonization (Bourdieu, 1983; Markus, 2008; Yogev, 2010). Nevertheless, there are some parameters that help assess the value of artwork, such as technical quality and technique, design, use of precious materials, content, rarity, circumstances under which it was created, and style (Becker, 1984; Galenson, 2000; Hodgson, 2011; Nahm, 2010; Throsby, 1994; Zorloni, 2014).

Other factors that influence the value of a work of art relate to the characteristics of the artist. For example, an artist’s reputation provides indicators to the market regarding the nature of the artwork. Reputation refers to international recognition of an artist, the number of important exhibitions in which the artist was featured, the status of the galleries and art institutions in which the artist’s work was exhibited, the quantity and quality of awards obtained, and reviews by merchants and art critics (Lang & Lang, 1988; Street, 2005).

The academic literature also attributes importance to an artist’s age. Unlike some other spheres of life, in the art world artists of a wide age range are granted legitimacy. Many artists continue to work after the age of retirement. There are recognized benefits of seniority, such as the accumulation of knowledge, professional experience, and connections (Jeffri, Heckathorn & Spiller, 2011; Lindauer, Orwoll & Kelley, 1997; Throsby, 1994; Ursprung & Wiermann, 2011). It is also relevant whether the artist is still alive, as the prestige of some artists increases after their death (Galenson & Weinberg, 2000; Lindauer et al., 1997).

In terms of gender, it is clear that throughout history women have been discriminated against, and they still are today (Cowen, 1996; Miller, 2016). As early as the nineteenth century, a distinction has been made between women’s art and men’s art, based on the argument that women produce inferior art that does not meet the standards of male artists. There has been a perception that, although women may have refined artistic tastes, their work deals with simple, personal issues while men create art that is important and meaningful (Parker & Pollock, 1981).

Nochlin (2006) notes the historical, social, and institutional environment that stripped women of their status and prevented them from attaining achievement. For example, in the past, women did not have the autonomy to acquire an education or to devote time to personal pursuits. Another example is that, while painting nude models was a crucial practice for artistic training and creating important works of art, it was not considered acceptable for women to paint nude models. Furthermore, societal rules of conduct prohibited women from attending cultural clubs or centers of artistic discourse. This restricted their artistic development. Studies examining gender in the art world show that even in contemporary society, female artists have a harder time getting paid work, they earn less, and the quality of their work is undervalued by critics, audiences, and contributors in comparison to male artists’ work (Dekel, 2014; Markus, 2008).

Markus (2008) asserts that female Israeli artists have been excluded from the discourse of art history. She claims that, contrary to the myth that there were few female artists in Israel, over a hundred female artists were active, many of them starting in the 1950s. The more well-known among them were part of important group exhibitions, and some were active outside of Israel, but unfortunately the Israeli art establishment was predominantly male; curators, critics and historians systematically ignored the history of Israel’s female artists. This exclusion was replicated in museums, where few female artists were able to have solo exhibitions. Thus, the myth was perpetuated that there were few female artists, or that they were not talented enough (Markus, 2008; Nochlin, 2006). Moreover, because sometimes female artists prioritize their home and family life, especially at certain stages in their lives, and produce less or stop creating art for in certain periods, critics and art historians tend to view them as amateurs rather than professionals (Markus, 2015).

Although today female artists are more likely to be recognized as relevant, skilled professionals, barriers still exist, especially in the arenas of “high art”, solo exhibitions, and major awards. Even the most prominent female artists report that they face hurdles stemming from sexist attitudes when exhibiting their work in commercial and institutional spaces (Dekel, 2014; Gilat, 2006).

**2.3 Israel’s Cultural Spaces in the Central and Peripheral Regions**

Cultural life in art institutions in Israel’s peripheral regions differs dramatically from that in the population/geographic center. As physical distance from the center increases, both supply (artwork, artists) and demand (number of visitors to museums) decrease (Weitz & Posner, 1999). Even museums located in smaller “satellite cities” surrounding the major, central cities have difficulty bringing in visitors (Cohen-Schneiderman, 2014; Gur Arie, 2014). In addition, art created in peripheral regions seems to have a stronger identification with and commitment to a specific place, while art created in the central region tends to have a broad view and less of a unique, location-based identity (Fisher-Dixon, 1998).

Understanding the structural relationship between center and periphery in cultural spaces reveals the power relations in the Israeli art scene. Most resources, galleries, museums, and collections of information are located in the center, as are most artists and visitors. Additionally, the majority of stakeholders (curators, directors of galleries and museums, visitors), who dictate local art discourse and influence prevailing fashion and tastes, are in the center. These stakeholders have the ability to promote certain artists and exclude others. The ongoing migration of artists to the central region and their adoption of its norms contribute to the canonization of art that is legitimized by a hegemonic artistic discourse (Yogev, 2004).

Art in Israel’s peripheral regions, however, does not imitate that of the center; it offers an alternative. It is more open to experimental projects, emerging artists, and art that has been marginalized (Bar-Or, 1998; Littman-Cohen, 2001; Litman, 2015).

“The center” in Israel refers to the cities of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. These cities are also the center of the Israeli art world, due to links between art and business, information resources, and power channels (Ofrat, 2016). In particular, Tel Aviv’s reputation as a modern city connected with the larger world gives it the status of Israel’s cultural center (Azaria, 2007). Tel Aviv’s centrality in the art field is also noticeable in terms of the significant artistic activities taking place there and the extensive press coverage it receives in the art field (Yogev, 2004). Jerusalem has numerous national, religious, historic, and cultural treasures (art and architecture), and is a major tourist destination (Maitland & Ritchie, 2007).

1. **Quantitative Methods**

This mixed-methods study combines quantitative and qualitative research tools. Quantitative methods were used to analyze Israeli art museums that receive public funding, examining the impact of economic factors, such as amount of income and its sources, on museums’ artistic repertoire over a period of 15 years. The source of the quantitative data is annual reports published by the Pilat Center for Information and Cultural Studies on behalf of Israel’s Ministry of Culture for the years 2000-2014. This large database provides overviews of the organizational traits and economic activity of cultural institutions in Israel. The “museum” category contains detailed information on income from public and private sources, exhibitions, museum collections, information on artists, and more.

The sample includes data from the years 2000-2014 for 11 art museums in Israel’s central and peripheral regions, all of which receive a combination of public allocations and revenue from private sources.[[1]](#footnote-1) The sample also includes artists who exhibited at these museums during the designated time span.

**3.1 Study Variables**

**Dependent variables.** The dependent variables in the study pertain to the art repertoire. These variables include the number of new exhibitions in each museum, and socio-demographic characteristics of the artists such as gender, age, and exhibition ranking.

The data structure necessitated reducing the artist-level variables (*N* = 1274) to one observation for each year in each museum (*N* = 155) so the museum-level data is not multiplied by the number of artists who have exhibited in it.[[2]](#footnote-2) Therefore, for each year, the distribution (in percentages) of artists of each type that were exhibited in the museum was calculated.

*Gender.*A variable was constructed in which the percentage of women exhibiting annually in each museum in the sample was calculated.

*Artists’ Age.* In order to differentiate between artists by age, the criterion that was used was the retirement age in Israel (65), since many artists continue to work after retirement and their work may be displayed in museums even after they are no longer alive. Accordingly, a variable was constructed indicating the percentage of relatively young artists (up to the age of 65) whose work was displayed annually at each museum.

*Artist Exhibition Ranking* refers to the international recognition of the artist. It is measured by a variable measuring the yearly percentages of artists exhibiting in each museum whose work has only been exhibited in Israel versus artists whose work has been exhibited both in Israel and internationally.

**Independent Variables.** The independent variables include the economic characteristics of the museum and its geographical location.

*Economic characteristics* are measured according to the budget from the local authority, revenue paid by visitors, private donations, and the total museum revenue.

*Geographical location* refers to whether the museum is in Israel’s center or the periphery in terms of cultural space. The cultural center is located in major and capital cities, where there is a higher level of domestic and foreign tourism, access to information, access to channels of commerce, power and money, and prestigious national and symbolic characteristics (Maitland & Ritchie, 2007; Von Graevenitz, 2007). In Israel, the cultural center is identified as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem (Ofrat, 2016; Zafran-Gani, 2007). Accordingly, the museums in the sample that are located in the center are the Tel Aviv Museum of Art and the Israel Museum (which is in Jerusalem). All the other Israeli art museums in the sample are defined as being in the periphery.

**3.2 Research Hypotheses**

This study examines whether and how economic and structural characteristics of Israeli art museums influenced the exhibited art and the characteristics of the artists exhibiting in the museum in the years 2000-2014. Two issues are examined: The first is the impact of a museum’s economic characteristics on its repertoire of art. The second is whether there are differences in economic characteristics and the art repertoire between art museums in the center and the periphery.

Based on the literature, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

H1: A museum’s self-generated income will have a positive impact on the number of new exhibitions.

This hypothesis is based on museums’ motivation, in light of privatization processes, to increase self-generated revenue from visitors (among other sources of income) by increasing the number of exhibitions (Alexander, 1996b; Frey & Meier, 2002).

In addition, since internationally acclaimed art is highly valued in art markets (Litman, 2015; Throsby, 1994), it is hypothesized that:

H2: A museum’s revenue will have a positive impact on the display of art by international artists.

Regarding the location of the museum, we predict that museums in the center will have greater revenue and, as a result, will offer a larger number of exhibitions and present more exhibitions by international artists. This reflects their economic capability and the greater number of foreign tourists and art appreciators in the cities in the center (Littman-Cohen, 2001; Rosett, 1991; Von Graevenitz, 2007).

H3: A museum’s location in the center will have a positive impact on the level of self-generated income, donations, and budget from the local authority.[[3]](#footnote-3)

H4: A museum’s location in the center will have a positive impact on the display of works by international artists.

H5: A museum’s location in the center will have a positive impact on the number of new exhibitions.

Literature in the field of art notes that throughout history and to the present day, women are at the margins of the art scene, especially when it comes to the world of high art (Dekel, 2014; Markus, 2008; Miller, 2016; Nochlin, 2006). In light of this, it is predicted that in museums in the center, which are viewed as high-status exhibition spaces for the display of mainstream art, there will be fewer exhibitions and works by female artists displayed.

H6: The location of a museum in the center will have a negative impact on the exhibition of works by female artists.

Museums in the periphery can be expected to display more young artists, including those in the early stages of their careers, due to economic considerations and the greater openness of cultural spaces in the periphery to displaying works by young and emerging artists (Littman-Cohen, 2001; Yogev, 2004).

H7: The location of a museum in the periphery will have a positive impact on the presentation of works by young artists.

**3.3 Quantitative Findings**

The method of analysis chosen to test the research hypotheses is mixed-model regression. This method is suitable for analyses that includes dependent variables (St-Pierre, 2001). This model assumes that some of the explained variance in the dependent variable, for each of the examined contexts, is due to the traits of the museum. In the present study, due to repeated measurements of the variables over the years for each museum, a dependency is created between the data derived from the analysis unit of the museum, and the impact on the relationships examined in the research hypotheses. In view of this, tests that take this dependence into account are used; namely, mixed models suitable for testing the research hypotheses. The random effect of the museum is introduced into each model. Defining a random effect in the model enables us to relate to the dependencies between the data from the same museum. Table 1 describes the findings that emerge from examination of the hypotheses.

**Table 1: Mixed Linear Models for Predicting the Association Between Museum Revenue, Museum Location, and Art Repertoire**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Dependent variable** | **Independent variable** | **B** | **S. E.** | **N** |
| Percentage of international artists | Total revenue | 0.003\*\* | 0.001 | 141 |
| Number of new exhibitions | Self-generated income | 0.438\*\* | 0.131 | 147 |
| Income from local authority | Location | 10.285\* | 4.378 | 148 |
| Self-generated income | Location | 20.972\*\*\* | 1.306 | 148 |
| Income from donations | Location | 31.908\*\*\* | 7.152 | 148 |
| Number of new exhibitions | Location | 11.335\* | 5.248 | 152 |
| Percentage of female artists | Location | -0.162\* | 0.071 | 142 |
| Percentage of young artists | Location | -0.189 | 0.163 | 143 |
| Percentage of international artists | Location | 0.249\* | 0.104 | 143 |

\* *p* < 0.05 \*\* *p* < 0.01 *\*\*\* p* < 0.001

Table 1 shows that the economic aspects and geographical location of a museum influence its artistic activity. The data clearly indicate that high-income museums display a greater number of exhibitions by international artists (*p* < 0.01; *t* (129) = 2.98) and more new exhibits (*p* < 0.01; *t* (135) = 3.33).[[4]](#footnote-4)

Regarding the impact of location, the data show that museums in the center of the country have more self-generated revenue from visitors (*p* < 0.001; *t*(137) = 16.06), greater support from donations (*p* < 0.001; *t* (137) = 4.46), and higher financial allocations from the local authority (*p* < 0.05; *t* (140) = 2.35). These findings illustrate the attractiveness of museums in the central region and the importance that the local authority attaches to the presence of an art museum in these cities. Museums in the center also have more new exhibitions (*p* < 0.05 *t* (141) = 2.16,) and more exhibitions by international artists (*p* < 0.05; *t* (132) = 2.38). These findings are in line with the literature describing central locations as having higher revenue and financial support, and greater supply of artistic works.

In contrast, museums in the periphery have a greater number of solo exhibitions of female artists, as compared to those in the center (*p* < 0.05; *t* (131) = -2.26). The small number of exhibitions by female artists in major museums located in the center, where power, influence and funding are concentrated, reveal the power relations in the art world. Unlike the findings of previous research in the field, the current study finds no significant influence of the museum’s location on the display of works by young artists. This issue is further considered in the second phase of the study, during which interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders at the museums in the sample.

1. **Qualitative Methods**

In the second phase of the study, 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with museum managers, curators, and artists whose work was displayed in the museums in the sample. The purpose of the interviews was to deepen understanding of the quantitative findings and place the phenomenon under investigation in a broader context. The sample included eleven museum managers (of whom nine also act as principal curators at the museum), three curators, and six artists. Analysis of the qualitative data is done according to the grounded theory approach, which offers structured and developing analysis from the researcher’s interaction with the interviewee’s world (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This approach offers a rationale for organizing the data set, holistic structuring of the collected information, and understanding its significance as it relates to selected factors outside the field of art that may influence the museum’s activities and cultural products.

**4.1 Qualitative Findings**

**4.1.2 Economic aspects of the art exhibited**

**The link between sources of income and museum activity**

Museums’ sources of revenue include public grants, self-generated income, and donations. In recent years, declining government support for cultural and arts institutions and increasing economic expenses has led to self-generated income playing a greater part in museums’ survival. However, museums cannot depend only upon their ‘natural’ audience (Bourdieu, 1984) for financial survival. This issue was discussed in the interviews: “If I had to rely solely on members of the public who like what is shown here, I would not be a recognized museum because I would not exceed the threshold of 7,000 visitors” (IN 10). Thus, museum managers use various marketing strategies to maximize self-revenue (Frey, 2003). Some of these are reflected in their program of exhibitions:

“What usually brings people in is popular exhibitions. If we do an Agnes Martin exhibition, which is minimalist art, we know in advance that although it is important to present Agnes Martin’s art, we will not have a large audience for it. The museum must do both this and that, because of its reputation for being serious and relating to what is happening in art. There are important artists that the museum must exhibit, even though we know people won’t stand in line around the building [to see them]. In order to balance the budget, the museum has to offer popular exhibitions to bring in a wide audience, a large audience. Otherwise it will not meet its expenses and have enough self-generated revenue.” (IN 3)

Popular exhibitions are of a “different” quality. They do not always reflect the museum’s artistic vision and professional values, but they are attractive, draw an audience, and increase the self-generated revenue the museum needs. Such exhibitions are widely accepted worldwide (Frey & Meier, 2002), and apparently also in Israel.

The interviewees stated that government support was insufficient and that without additional resources, the museums in this sample would not be able to survive. Museums that receive a high level of support from the local authority enjoy an assured financial security that allows them greater artistic freedom in their activities. Studies examining the relationship between cultural institutions’ sources of income and their artistic repertoire indicate that a high level of public support is negatively associated with having a conventional repertoire and is positively associated with greater diversity and choice in artwork (O’Hagan & Neligan, 2005; Pompe, Tamburri & Munn, 2011). Art institutions with a high level of public support tend to exhibit more exhibitions chosen based on artistic values (Alexander, 1996b). These studies show that, cultural institutions that do not depend on entrance fees can offer broader artistic options, new experiences, and can delve deeper into professional content, primarily because they do not have to follow the dictates of the market to make a profit. Similarly, the present study finds that when museums receive financial support from the local authority, and their managers have an affinity for art, that is, they are involved in the curating, then the exhibition programs are not based on audience metrics, but on curatorial interest.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The following are comments by managers of museums located in the periphery and which receive a high level of support from their local authority:

“I am not interested in showing exhibits of butterflies that people will stand in line for from here to Haifa. My interest is making a contribution to society, to culture, to research ... other people want a big audience.” (IN 6)

“To some extent, I work like an artist. I don’t think about the audience because I don’t produce a consumer product. The discussion in museums today is an economic and commercial discussion; people are talking about customers and service. That’s the language now. They ask me how much the admissions brought in. There is not one person here who doesn’t not ask, whether it’s the treasurer or curators from abroad, everyone has to know how much the admissions were. I don’t see it that way. I see the museum as a producer of culture, as an organization with a long-term impact.” (IN 9)

The quantitative findings indicate that none of the museums in the periphery received significant financial donations, and some did not receive any donations at all. In contrast, the museums in the center were able to generate significant income from donations. Most notably and exceptionally, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem raises large donations from abroad, which account for half of its revenues (see Table 3 in the Appendices). These donations allow the museum to put on many prestigious and international exhibitions and projects:

“It does help [the donations] make the museum more enriched, deeper. We can show more works of art because we have money.” (IN 4)

At the same time, it arose that it is customary for this museum to show a specific line of art that suits the tastes of the donors who make the exhibition possible (Litman, 2015). As the senior director of the museum describes: “It is important that the museum is not a state institution, because the concept of the museum’s narrative is determined by us and not by the government’s decisions .... The museum integrates Eastern and Western cultures, various religions and communities, in the context of Jerusalem as a place that has meaning for many communities in Israel and around the world. It is very special.”

All the museums formally declare that receiving donations is not contingent on donor intervention in the art exhibited, although there is an impression that, in reality, this phenomenon does exist. “I will not accept a donation if I am not completely comfortable with it or if it is not ethical” (IN 6).

“No one can say, ‘I have money; exhibit my work in the museum’. Especially because we are a museum with economic hardships, this would open an abyss. All the years I’ve been here, I’ve been fighting temptation and fighting the management.” (IN 11).

These findings describe the tension between the curators who design the museum exhibitions and the financial considerations and requirements of donors, as discussed in the literature (Alexander, 1996a, 1996b).

**International Art**

International art is seen as attractive, prestigious, up-to-date, and high-quality. Most of the museums have an interest in exhibiting international art since it brings the museum into the global art network, introduces contemporary trends from around the world, and is of interest to art lovers and visitors from abroad. “Part of being at the highest level of what we do is to bring art that is shown elsewhere in the world and present it to our local audience” (IN 5).

Although museums in the peripheral regions often display local art, their managers express a desire to have more exhibitions of international artwork. However, they often found this difficult to realize in light of the high costs of producing exhibitions from abroad, in terms of the expenses involved in transporting the artwork and bringing in the artist from abroad. The following quote briefly describes this difficulty:

“This is where we fall short. We have a twofold problem regarding artists from abroad. One problem is our inability to meet the cost of putting on the exhibition. The second is that when I speak with artists from overseas, they are used to receiving expensive terms… Because our struggle as a cultural institution is a daily struggle to survive, my ability, and that of all my colleagues, to bring an exhibition from abroad is very limited. It is not always much easier with Israeli artists. So, many times I don’t start the process.” (IN 10)

According to the interviewees, digital media has made it easier to present international artwork: “I do succeed [in doing this], and it is easier for me to bring exhibitions using new media forms. No need for the artist [to come], the artist sends the specifications. I used to get a disc from Fed Ex. Today it’s through Jumbo Mail. I have the equipment, so I can project it.” (IN 10)

“If I really want to bring artwork from abroad, it’s much easier to receive video artwork from abroad than a shipment of sculptures.”

**4.1.3 Characteristics of the Artists**

**Female Artists in the Israeli Art Scene**

Historical analysis of the Israeli art scene shows that the artist establishment has been predominantly male. Creative women have been excluded from museums’ exhibition spaces, and especially from solo exhibitions (Markus, 2008).

Currently, there is a large number of women working in the Israeli art scene. There are more female curators and museum administrators. However, there is still a clear and disturbing preference for art produced by males. As a senior[[6]](#footnote-6) female artist describes:

“There are a lot of women in the system, but they [curators] always favor men. The things I ask for are reasonable. If it came from a man, it would have been different. You can say it’s the junior and sub-senior realm that is most flooded with women who don’t consider [other] women. There is something about the clichéd image of the male artist, that he is a genius, whose eccentric mannerisms are appealing. For women, eccentric behavior is not appealing. They are not as persuasive as men. It might be the sex appeal a man has for female curators.”

There is much awareness of the issue of discrimination on the basis of gender in the Israeli art scene. However, managers and senior curators at museums where a low percentage of women have their work displayed argue that this is a coincidence, and that their choices are primarily based on professional considerations. For example: “Although we are acutely aware of the subject, we feel that at this time, we should not work according to a desire to achieve a strict balance but by considerations of quality. In reality, we look at each work of art in the wider context of what the museum’s activity looks like” (IN 5).

However, some of the museums made sure to correct this. The Ein Harod Art Museum specializes in addressing aspects not covered in the official history of Israeli art, and the importance of discussion about female artists is part of the museum’s mission, attempting to correct the historical injustice of their exclusion from the discourse (Litman, 2016). In the Negev Museum of Art, there is a high percentage of female artists (45%) compared to the other museums (see Table 2 in the Appendices). The museum’s management explains that presenting women’s work is a criterion for curatorial choices in the museum, a sort of affirmative action:

“As with all kinds of subjects, I put this on the agenda, and when I choose exhibitions it is part of the issue. In 2016, this is even more so. You can go on our website and see it at the level of the works of art as well.”

From the quantitative analysis, it emerges that museums on Israel’s periphery are more likely to exhibit works by female artists as compared to the large museums in the center, where more conventional art is exhibited. The interviewees explain that these differences stem from the fact that Israeli museums in the periphery focus on local art scenes, in which there are many female artists:

“There is no reason for this stemming from an agenda; there is one very simple reason. When you scan the art market in Israel today, the majority are women and some are very good” (IN 8, museum in the periphery).

“Small museums in the periphery can’t afford to bring international art. They don’t have a lot of visitors. They work mostly with local art. Once they display mostly local art, they introduce more women” (IN 2, museum in the center).

The paucity of women’s work exhibited in museums in the center also stems from the fact that they often exhibit canonical art, in which the presence of female artists was low in both the international and local scenes:

“We show more work of canonical and older artists, which brings with it the gender discrimination that existed three or four decades ago .... but if you look at what is displayed in the periphery, you see artists of different ages” (IN 4).

In addition, this museum director’s policy appears to have had a major impact on the presentation of works by female artists: “Wow, that [the percentage of female artists] is really low. I think I’m balancing the picture here today. Although, I have to say, I don’t make a choice based on background or gender” (IN 7).

An interviewee from one major museum explains that the data from 2000-2014 do not accurately reflect the museum’s policy since 2012, which is now geared more towards female artists:

“Since I got to the museum, there really has been an emphasis on female artists. I can only be responsible for the data from the time I got here. This is definitely something that matters to me. I address it, and that is reflected in our programming” (IN 3).

Examination of the Pilat report data on the exhibitions at this particular museum for 2013-2014 (noted as the beginning of their affirmative action policy) reveals that female artists were featured in six out of the 19 solo exhibitions in 2013 and seven out of 21 in 2014.

**Young Artists Displayed in Museums**

The display of young artists in the prestigious spaces of a museum has received significant attention in the Israeli field. There are many aspects to this issue. In general, for an artist, youthfulness is an essential resource. A young artist represents what is contemporary, new, up-and-coming, formative, and therefore is of interest. However, veteran artists have an artistic maturity they developed over time, familiarity with the art world, and are recognized in the field. Artists are usually able to put on solo exhibitions in prestigious museums only after many years of work, if at all. Today, there are more opportunities for young artists and those doing experimental art to be displayed in alternative exhibition spaces:

“A museum is usually the final ‘warehouse’. A vessel for the canon. When there are a lot of museums, a lot of money, various institutes like the *Kunsthalle* or the Panacea movement[[7]](#footnote-7), etc. then there is more space and space for young artists or ambitious projects in general.” (IN 20)

It emerges from the interviews that the decision to show the work of young or veteran artists reflects the museum’s curatorial line and the museum manager’s preferences. For example, during the years considered in this study, 98% of the artists whose work was exhibited in the Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art were young (see Table 2 in the Appendices). However, the new management notes that this trend is changing: “This is distinctive to the previous program. My style is less towards first exposure and more concerned with the subject and what the artist presents.” During the years examined, the Israel Museum emphasized historical-canonical research and retrospective exhibitions. This finding corresponds with the quantitative findings showing that the 67% of the artists exhibited at the Israel Museum were over the age of 65. As one senior artist describes:

“There was a time when the Israel Museum presented contemporary Israeli art, groundbreaking artists. They were always going from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Now, in my opinion, it is in a dormant state. In the past, the Tel Aviv Museum was a conservative, tired museum, which mainly showed large, boring, and outdated exhibitions. It also had some good exhibitions, but not many. Today it has switched; the Tel Aviv Museum is fresh, diverse, full of activity, while the Israel Museum [in Jerusalem] is stagnant.” (IN 15)

At the Janco Dada Museum, 85% of the featured artists were young. Their predominance can be explained by a combination of the museum’s Dadaist style and the personal preferences of the current management:

“It’s very important to me to give exposure to young artists ... and in recent years there has also been a tendency towards [those on] the margins. I’m really looking for these things, not for the mainstream. Encouraging young artists was an issue close to Janco’s heart. It also seems to me to fit with the theme of Dadaism and innovation.”

The current study also finds that presenting veteran or young artists may intersect with marketing strategies and pragmatic aspects. Economic considerations are embodied in both of these aspects:

“I have to convince my target audience, in the best sense of the word, that what’s happening in the museum is worthy of their attention. If I take an artist who graduated yesterday from Bezalel [Academy of Art] and does experimental art, that won’t appeal to the audience. To bring in the public, I have to convince them there is good art here, and good art is usually associated with canonical art.” (IN 9)

“Veteran artists can allow themselves to be choosier. Young artists are less choosy. If I come and offer a young artist, who I think is very talented, an exhibition in the museum, he will answer me more eagerly than an established artist will.” (IN 11)

**4.1.4 Art in the Periphery**

In the Israeli art scene, museums in the periphery refers to those which are geographically distant as well as satellite cities [of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem]. Museums on the artistic periphery, even those close to Tel Aviv, have different economic and intellectual considerations from those in the center. In terms of economics, museums in the periphery face the difficult challenge of limited accessibility to visitors, which affects the museum’s revenue and their cultural activities.

“The museum is very centrally located, in a settlement in the center of the country. But clearly, in relation to the major museums Tel Aviv and Israel, it is a peripheral museum. At the same time, it is not provincial, and maybe that is how this can be defined. This peripherality is connected to everything. What we receive and what we can spend on advertising. It affects every parameter. It is clear that we are working at a different budget level that allows for different activity.” (IN 7)

The artistic spirit of museums in the periphery offers variety and new perspectives, different from those set by the center’s artistic establishment: “In the periphery, you have to be more diverse. You can’t display or promote one certain kind of art. The periphery needs more breathing space” (IN 14).

These activity styles are the product of museum managers’ worldviews, alongside the motivation for museum managers to present a unique program in an environment that cannot compete economically with the center: “Almost all my exhibitions are in some way different from what is shown elsewhere. I try to have exhibitions of a famous artist who is not known here, who is being introduced for the first time to this audience. People came to an exhibition here by [Moshe] Kadishman and discovered works of art they never saw in the general market or the media” (IN 9).

The Ein Harod Art Museum has turned its peripherality into an advantage by choosing to provide a platform for artists who have been ignored or forgotten over the years by the trends of the center. While the artistic canon tends to avoid addressing the conflicts and contradictions at the heart of Israeli society, and thus presents an incomplete picture, the exhibition program at the Ein Harod Art Museum presents additional perspectives that are not bound by the idealistic narrative of the center (Bar-Or, 1998).

This trend enables investigation of the quality of Israeli art outside the canon. Doing so offers a new cultural order, which has become significant and highly valued in many circles of the Israeli art field. The senior curator of a museum in the center bears them no grudge: “Let’s just say Ein Harod is a bit of a different story, with a different kind of agenda. An agenda that is corrective, as if to counter our canon, and it’s wonderful” (IN 4). Other museums in the periphery exhibited a similar trend. For example: “The correction that I make is to give a platform to artists who don’t have one elsewhere, who get their first platform here” (IN 6).

“I try to do all kinds of experimental stuff, do my best to integrate international projects into the exhibitions. Also, to give young artists a chance, and to do justice to artists who have not been featured over the years, or who have been forgotten” (IN 7).

The distinctive trait of art museums in the periphery, in contrast to those in center, is their local focus. For example, the Ramat Gan Museum is a “Museum of Israeli Art”. Museums in Israel’s outlying areas have chosen to make their existence meaningful by emphasizing the local scene. This is done by creating a repertoire that highlights the museum’s physical surroundings and by exhibiting the work of artists from the local area. For example:

“I have declared that this museum exhibits art that is on the border. Both in the physical and metaphorical sense, it is on the borders of art. It should be remembered that museum is 500 meters from the border. It is art on the border. In the entranceway, I allow artists from the north to present their works four times a year, in order to bring in visitors from the north” (IN 13).

Other museums in the periphery emphasize the local connection by focusing on local social content, and through collaborations with the local community: “We constantly have interconnections and interactions with organizations in the community.... It is important to me that artists presenting here are artists who not only engage in internal discourse but also engage with the social, cultural space” (IN 7).

1. **Discussion**

Researchers of cultural economics have looked at the tension between art and commerce in cultural markets (Alexander, 1996b; Frey, 2003; Yogev, 2010). Based on this, the current study examines, over a given time period, the impact of selected museums’ economic characteristics and geographic location on the repertoire of art they present, within the Israeli context. The study uses quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings of this mixed-methods research indicate that there are three mechanisms, external to art, that influence the cultural products of the museum.

The first is related to economics. Research shows that art museums in Israel are sustained by a variety of sources of income. The museum’s total income, the share of which comes from public funding and private sources, and the philanthropic nature of the donors, all have an impact on the art presented. For example, the amount of the museum’s revenue that is self-generated has an impact on its number of exhibitions. These findings support the literature describing the interactions between the number of visitors and the number and variety of exhibitions in museums (Alexander, 1996b; Frey, 1994; Frey & Meier, 2002). In addition, it is found that a high level of public support allows museum managers to focus on an artistic repertoire consistent with their professional vision. This finding supports previous studies indicating that cultural and arts institutions receiving a level of high public subsidies are not constrained by the dictates of the consumer market, and this allows them greater opportunities to focus on professional and community norms, and to exhibit a less conventional artistic repertoire (Camarero et al., 2011; Frey & Meier, 2002; O’Hagan & Neligan, 2005). This study shows that most museums in Israel do not bring in significant donations, and some do not receive any donations at all. The exception is the Israel Museum, which raises significant donations from abroad, enabling it to display a wide range of art and take on expensive projects. The findings of the qualitative research indicate that alongside high-quality professional curatorial activities in this museum, there is also a connection between the source of donations and the artistic approach that the museum takes.

The second mechanism relates to the museum’s location. The findings clearly show that peripherality in Israeli art is not only related to geographical distance from the center. In fact, museums located around Tel Aviv are more similar, in terms of their economic and artistic characteristics, to geographically distant museums than they are to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. The information collected in the two stages of this research shows that the scope of economic and artistic activity in the museums in the center (the Israel Museum and the Tel Aviv Museum of Art) is significantly higher than the other art museums in Israel. This is because of the location of these two museums in tourist centers and their accessibility to visitors. Museums in the center are more attractive to donors, more often exhibit artists who have earned a high reputation in Israel and internationally, show more historical and retrospective exhibitions (particularly the Israel Museum), and are more engaged with the universal and interdisciplinary content of the art.

The cultural agenda in the periphery differs from that of the center. In museums in the periphery, the scope of new exhibitions is smaller, but more female artists have their work displayed. The small number of female artists in major museums, where the centers of power, influence and finance are concentrated, reveals the power relations in the art world and reinforces the claim of male hegemony and hierarchy in the Israeli art field, even in the present day. The finding is particularly interesting given that the museum in the heart of Tel Aviv, the city considered Israel’s modern and liberal stronghold, has a much lower percentage of female artists exhibited in comparison to museums in other parts of the country.

The findings of the qualitative study indicate that most of the museums in Israel’s artistic periphery are more likely to engage with diverse local forms (physical, social, community) and content that is relevant to the audience of local visitors. There is also more openness in the periphery to present fringe artwork. This can be expressed in showing, for ideological or economic reasons, artists in the early stages of their careers, female artists, artists who have been ignored or forgotten by the mainstream, and providing a platform for experimental art. All these modes of activity are a product of the museums’ worldviews and their motivation to present a distinctive repertoire in order to attract visitors. Additionally, the atmosphere of artistic freedom that is prevalent in the periphery, distant from the norms of the center, allows for a wider range of artistic opportunities.

The third mechanism relates to the management of the museum. The literature discusses two differing patterns of thought and conduct in a museum director’s relationship to the repertoire of art in public museums as opposed to in private museums, arising from economic constraints (Camarero et al., 2011; Frey & Meier, 2002). The current study shows that, beyond economic considerations, a museum’s agenda is influenced by the director’s artistic tendencies and subjective preferences. In all museums in the sample that are located in the periphery, decisions about whether to display more veteran versus young artists, more female artists, canonical versus contemporary art, to offer popular exhibitions, to highlight a specific curatorial style, and to measure success by artistic or quantitative values, generally reflects the museum director’s worldview, operating within the economic and environmental parameters of the museum. This is also true for the large museums, which play multiple roles in the art world. For example, in the Israel Museum, the universal, cultural, and historical style that the museum currently exhibits is different from the curatorial style led by the museum’s previous management, which tended to show more young artists and to address local issues (Litman, 2015).

1. **Recommendations**

The findings of the current study verify those of a series of previous studies on cultural economics that claim economic considerations impact cultural production in art institutions. The study’s unique theoretical contribution is in integrating economic, geographical, and social aspects of the museum. The study shows that public support for art institutions in Israel is important for their survival and for preserving museums’ core objectives to be places dedicated to art. Therefore, it is of great importance to consider granting a higher level of financial support to museums in the periphery, and especially for museums that do not receive strong support from the local authority.

The study shows that art institutions in the periphery are important for several reasons. They offer access to broad audiences and encourage cultural activity, which is integral to the vision and policy of Israel’s Ministry of Culture (Shavit, 2000). Further, they play a role in providing exposure to marginalized artists, in contrast to the exclusionary attitude of museums in the center. In addition, the study shows that the art scene in the periphery, despite its economic constraints, has great symbolic value in strengthening the local cultural infrastructure, since it presents artistic standards that differ from those in the center, thereby enabling artistic pluralism and giving voice to alternative narratives.

The study enriches our knowledge about the decisions made by managers of art institutions with varying economic characteristics, thereby contributing to discussions by researchers of cultural economics regarding the challenges faced by museums in tenuous markets (Everett & Barrett ,2009; Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016).

The findings of the study have practical application, enabling art museums in Israel to take a critical look at their characteristics, operations, and cultural offerings, in comparison to other publicly-funded museums, and especially to museums of similar size. However, the Israeli art world is small, and the cultural center includes only two art museums. These are large and enjoy a high budget in comparison to the other art museums in Israel. For this reason, examination of this phenomenon should be expanded to other art arenas in the world, especially those with larger cultural centers that enable comparison among a higher number of art museums. In addition, it is worth making a comparison with museums that do not receive any public funding. Such additional studies may shed more light on the mechanisms and forces that influence artistic activity in museums.

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1. The museums in the sample comprise virtually all the Israeli art museums recognized by the Ministry of Culture: The Israel Museum; Tel Aviv Museum of Art; The Haifa Museums (a framework of six museums); Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art; the Ein Harod Mishkan Art Museum, Petah Tikva Museum of Art; Ramat Gan Museum of Israeli Art, Bar-David Museum of Art and Judaica, The Negev Museum of Art, Wilfred Israel Museum, and the Janco Dada Museum. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The gap between this (*N* = 155) and the number of years multiples by the number of museums in the sample (15 x 11 = 165) is due to missing data in Pilat’s reports: data for the Negev Museum of Art have only been published since 2002; data for the Petah Tikva Museum of Art and the Ramat Gan Museum of Israeli Art have been published since 2004. In addition, some years data for specific variables were missing. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The budget granted from the local authority is in addition to public appropriations and private income. This budget varies between regions, and the level of support is at the discretion of the local authority. The budget granted to cultural and arts institutions depends primarily on the locale’s economic situation and the ability of local residents to finance consumption of cultural products (Sable-Friedman, 2003, p. 74; Weitz & Posner, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Many new exhibitions were displayed at the Herzliya Museum, although it has almost no self-generated income (see Table 2 in the Appendices). The museum’s curatorial strategy during the years under study was to display many exhibitions of young artists who recently graduated from art school (Buganim, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This phenomenon is prevalent in all urban museums in the periphery except the network of the Haifa Museums, whose artistic management is separate from its economic management, which is business-oriented. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A ‘senior’ artist refers to an award-winning veteran artist who also exhibits abroad. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The *Kunsthalle* or *Kunsthaus* are smaller exhibition spaces, compared to museums. They operate on a different organizational and economic basis from museums. There are dozens scattered in cities throughout Germany. They do not oversee collections and most current and experimental shows by young emerging artists occur in these dynamic spaces. They are always international in nature. They also put on important exhibitions that are historical, themed, and cross-sectional exhibitions, just as major museums do, but have a different structure – exhibits of varying lengths, with rapid turnover of curators, etc. The Panacea is a parallel French method. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)