MUSEUM EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY: GLOBAL CONTEXT AND TRANSFORMATIONS

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Dear organizers, dear participants , dear friends ,

First, congratulations for the interesting topic you have chosen for your conference!

During my recents trips in Uzbekistan, I have noticed how your country is currently experiencing a remarkable transformation in its cultural and museum landscape, thanks to the initiative of President Shavkat Mirzyoyev.

Over the past few years, the country has launched a series of ambitious projects aimed at preserving its exceptional historical heritage while developing new forms of museum culture, contemporary art, cultural education, and international cooperation.

This transformation reflects a broader ambition: to position Uzbekistan not only as a country of exceptional historical heritage, associated with the great cities of Samarkand, my beloved city! Bukhara and Tachkent but also as an active participant in the international cultural and contemporary art scene.

New museums in Tashkent

One of the most significant projects is of course the **Centre for Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan**, located within the historic Hazrat Imam complex in Tashkent.

The centre which reminds me of the monumental Timurid architecture is conceived on an exceptional scale. Its purpose extends well beyond that of a conventional museum. It combines exhibition spaces, research, education, libraries, conservation and restoration facilities, digital preservation laboratories and spaces for international cooperation.

The museum presents the history and cultural heritage of Uzbekistan within the broader history of Islamic civilization and emphasizes the contribution of Central Asian scholars, scientists, philosophers and artists to world civilization. I am a little bit chauvinist but I am glad to see the importance of the Timurid section !

This is the perfect tool for education and transmission to the young generation .

An important feature of the project is the integration of modern museum technologies. The center includes facilities for the digital preservation of manuscripts and heritage objects, while its future development includes further use of digital technologies, international research and the enrichment of its collections.

The Centre therefore illustrates an important evolution in Uzbek museography: the museum is conceived simultaneously as a place of **heritage preservation, research, education, digital innovation and international cultural dialogue**.

Another symbol of the country's new cultural direction is the **Centre for Contemporary Arts Tashkent**, which opened in September 2026.

It is the first permanent state institution in Uzbekistan dedicated specifically to contemporary art and has been conceived as a multidisciplinary center bringing together exhibitions, research, education, artists, performances, film and public programmes.

The architectural aspect of the project is particularly interesting from a French perspective.

The center is located in a historic industrial building dating from 1912, originally constructed as a tram depot and subsequently used as a diesel power station. Rather than demolishing the building, the project has transformed and preserved its industrial character while adapting it to the requirements of a contemporary cultural institution.

The architectural concept for this transformation was developed by the French architectural practice Studio KO, based in Paris. The project therefore provides an interesting example of cooperation between Uzbekistan and French architectural expertise.

The approach is particularly significant because it combines **industrial heritage, contemporary architecture and contemporary art** rather than treating historical architecture and modern culture as separate worlds.

The centre also includes a research library, educational spaces, public areas and artist-oriented programmes. Its first major exhibition brings together Uzbek and international artists, establishing the institution as a platform for cultural exchange between Uzbekistan and the international contemporary art world.

I could mention many other museums I know pretty well, the Museum of Timurids, completely transformed, the Museum of Arts and the Afrasiab Archeological Museum in Samarkand, all these examples are an important indication of the changing role of museums in Uzbekistan: the museum is increasingly conceived not simply as a place for displaying objects, but as a research center educational institution, international platform and cultural meeting place.

From Heritage Preservation to Contemporary Cultural Production

Another important development is the emergence of new platforms for contemporary artistic production.

The **Bukhara Biennial**, launched in 2025, brought contemporary art and international artists into direct dialogue with the historic environment and traditional crafts of Bukhara. It represents another dimension of Uzbekistan's cultural transformation: rather than separating contemporary culture from historical heritage, the country is increasingly experimenting with ways of making the two interact.

This approach is particularly relevant to museography because it changes the visitor's experience. Historical buildings, traditional craftsmanship, contemporary art, digital technologies and new forms of cultural mediation can become parts of the same cultural system.

A New Approach to Museum Design

Taken together, these projects demonstrate several important trends in Uzbekistan.

First, there is a movement from the **traditional museum towards the cultural institution**. Museums increasingly combine exhibitions with education, research, conservation, digital technologies, public programmes and international cooperation.

Second, Uzbekistan is making extensive use of **international architectural and museographic expertise**. French, Japanese, German and other international specialists are participating in major projects, creating opportunities for the exchange of expertise and professional training.

Finally, technology is becoming an increasingly important component of the museum environment. Digital preservation, interactive interpretation, multimedia, research platforms and new forms of visitor engagement are gradually becoming integral to the development of Uzbek museums.

Towards a New Generation of Museums: opportunities for cooperation with France

Uzbekistan is therefore moving towards a new generation of museums in which **heritage, architecture, technology, education, research and contemporary creativity are closely interconnected**.

The country's ambition is not simply to build larger museums. It is to create institutions capable of presenting Uzbek history and culture to new generations while establishing connections with international cultural networks.

From this perspective, the current transformation of Uzbekistan offers particularly interesting opportunities for cooperation with France. French expertise in **museography, exhibition design, cultural mediation, conservation, digital technologies, museum architecture and professional training** could significantly contribute to the development of this new generation of cultural institutions.

France has extensive experience in these fields. Its museum expertise is based not only on the design of exhibitions, but on an integrated approach bringing together collections, scientific research, conservation, architecture, cultural mediation, education, digital technologies and visitor experience.

The current development of Uzbekistan therefore offers an opportunity to move from occasional cultural exchanges towards **structured and long-term professional cooperation**.

- Museum Training and Professional Development

One of the most important areas for cooperation could be the training of Uzbek museum professionals.

The rapid development of new museums creates a growing need for specialists trained in modern museum practices: curatorship, collections management, preventive conservation, exhibition design, visitor services, cultural mediation, digital technologies and museum administration.

France has a well-established professional training ecosystem in these areas: the École du Louvre, the Institut national du patrimoine and the French Ministry of Culture are among the institutions that contribute to the training and continuing professional development of museum professionals.

A Franco-Uzbek programme could therefore include:

- professional exchanges between French and Uzbek museum teams;
- short-term training programmes in France and Uzbekistan;
- study visits to French museums and cultural institutions;
- workshops led by French specialists;
- joint seminars on museum management and museography;
- professional residencies for Uzbek curators and museum directors;
- and the development of joint training programmes in Uzbekistan.

The objective would not simply be to transfer knowledge, but to create a **network of professionals capable of working together over the long term**.

France already has programmes specifically designed to welcome foreign cultural professionals, which combines professional training, immersion and exchanges with French cultural institutions.

- Museography and Exhibition Design

A second area of cooperation concerns the conception of exhibitions and visitor journeys.

The new generation of Uzbek museums requires new approaches to exhibition design: how to present historical objects, manuscripts, archaeological material, works of art and intangible heritage to increasingly diverse audiences.

French expertise could contribute to the development of:

- permanent exhibition concepts;
- temporary exhibitions;
- scenography and spatial design;
- lighting and graphic design;
- interpretation and storytelling;
- multilingual content;
- interactive and participatory experiences;

This could be particularly relevant for institutions presenting the history of Uzbekistan and Central Asia, where the challenge is to combine the exceptional richness of the collections with contemporary methods of interpretation.

. Digital Technologies and the Museum of the Future

Digital transformation represents another major field of cooperation.French museums have developed considerable experience in the digitisation and online dissemination of collections, digital mediation and the development of tools that provide visitors with additional ways of understanding works and historical contexts. The French Ministry of Culture itself has developed professional training around collection digitisation, information systems and online dissemination.

Possible Franco-Uzbek projects could include:

- digitisation of museum collections;
- digital collection-management systems;
- online collections and virtual exhibitions;
- interactive multimedia installations;
- digital reconstruction of historical environments;
- multilingual digital interpretation;
- and the use of artificial intelligence as an additional research and mediation tool.

The central principle should be that technology **serves the cultural and scientific purpose of the museum**.

- Conservation and Restoration

The preservation of Uzbekistan's extraordinary collections represents another area where internationally recognized French expertise could be valuable.

Uzbek museums hold manuscripts, archaeological objects, textiles, ceramics, metalwork, paintings and other materials requiring highly specialised conservation conditions.

Cooperation could therefore include:

- preventive conservation;
- environmental monitoring;
- storage and collection management;
- conservation laboratories;
- restoration techniques;
- training of specialised conservators.

French heritage institutions have developed a broad range of expertise involving museum curators, conservators, restorers, architects and specialised professionals. The French Ministry of Culture regularly mobilises this multidisciplinary expertise in international cooperation project

6. Visitor Experience, Accessibility and Cultural Mediation

The museum of the future is increasingly designed around the diversity of its visitors.

Cooperation could therefore focus on the development of new forms of cultural mediation aimed at children, families, students, international visitors, people with disabilities and audiences who may not traditionally visit museums.

French expertise could contribute to:

- educational programmes;
- family-oriented museum experiences;
- programmes for schools and universities;
- multilingual interpretation;
- and new approaches to visitor participation.

This is particularly important as Uzbek museums seek to become not only places for preserving heritage but also **places of education, social interaction and cultural dialogue**.

- Research and International Museum Networks

The development of Uzbekistan's major new museums also creates opportunities for scientific cooperation.

French and Uzbek institutions could develop:

- joint research projects;
- scholarly publications;
- joint exhibitions;
- exchanges of researchers and curators;
- archaeological and heritage research;
- and cooperation with international museum networks.

The new National Museum project, for example, is intended to establish relationships with major international museums and cultural institutions. This provides a potential framework in which French institutions could participate in future scholarly and exhibition partnerships.

- Developing a Franco-Uzbek Museum Network

Beyond individual projects, it could be particularly valuable to develop a **Franco-Uzbek Museum Network**.

Such a network could bring together French and Uzbek museums, universities, heritage institutions, architects, scenographers, conservation specialists and digital companies.

It could organise an annual programme of:

training, , professional exchanges, workshops, exhibitions, research , digital projects , institutional partnerships.

This would create continuity 's'sand. allow professional relationships to develop over several years.

The broader bilateral context is favourable to such an approach. France and Uzbekistan Foreign Affairs as one of the important pillars of the relationship.

9. A Possible New Model of Cooperation

The opportunity today is therefore to imagine a model of cooperation that goes beyond the traditional exchange of exhibitions.A contemporary Franco-Uzbek museum partnership could bring together **architecture, museography, conservation, digital innovation, education, research and professional training within the same programme**.

Such cooperation would also be based on a principle of reciprocity. Uzbekistan possesses exceptional historical collections, architectural heritage, craftsmanship and cultural traditions, while France can contribute experience in museum development, cultural policy, conservation, professional training and new forms of cultural mediation.

The objective would consequently not be to reproduce a French museum model in Uzbekistan, but to **develop new solutions together**, adapted to Uzbekistan's history, collections, audiences and cultural ambitions.

Conclusion

Uzbekistan is entering a new phase in the development of its museums and cultural institutions.

For France, this represents an opportunity to establish a **long-term partnership based on knowledge, training and shared innovation**.

The objective would be simple: not to export a French model, but to build together the museums of tomorrow.