

Culture and leisure

State museums and art galleries

The protection and conservation of the national artistic heritage gained importance following Italian unification, and from 1861 ministerial, central and local structures began to be established to perform these functions. In compliance with Royal Decree no. 3164 dated 31st December 1923, the care of archaeological and artistic heritage was entrusted to the General directorate for antiquities and fine arts at the Ministry of National Education, and the Superintendency of antiquities and fine arts, which took over the functions of direction and administration of classical monuments, archaeological sites and museums in the districts for which they were competent.

The first figures on “museums, galleries and art collections” refer to 1927 and were collected by the Central Statistical Institute of the Kingdom of Italy in collaboration with the Ministry of National Education. They are partial and cannot be compared with the results of subsequent surveys. In 1930 the Statistical Institute conducted a second comprehensive survey on “museums, galleries and collections of antiquity and art belonging to the State, in addition to other public bodies”, with reference to 1929.

After a long pause, the survey was repeated in the 1950s by the General directorate for antiquities and fine arts of the Public Education Ministry, which took care of collecting statistical information on antiquity and art institutes “belonging to the State” through its Superintendencies.

In the following years, data on the institutes “belonging to the State” and dependent on the Ministry and Superintendencies were collected on a regular basis by the competent ministerial departments (Public Education, Cultural Heritage from 1974, Cultural and Environmental Heritage, Cultural Heritage and Activities, etc.). They refer to museums and art collections (including national museums, museums of antiquity, archaeology, prehistory, etc.), galleries and art museums, monuments and archaeological sites (castles, palaces, cloistered villas, temples, amphitheatres, archaeological areas, etc.). The statistical reference units were State museum institutions open to the public in the survey years. Data were collected on a monthly basis and included the number of institutions open to the public in the year of reference (broken down by free access and entry fee), the size of the collection, the number of paying and non-paying visitors and the revenue from ticket sales. The institutes closed during the period as unfit for use, for renovation or lack of staff were excluded from the surveys.

Data on paid entrance to institutes were drawn from the number of tickets sold, while those for free institutes were estimated or taken from the attendance register or visitor counting devices. From 2001 the survey was performed through *online* updating of monthly figures by the Superintendency for the area, through the Information system set by the Ministry's Statistics Office (<http://www.sistan.beniculturali.it/>).

In the years 1980, 1993 and 2007, ISTAT performed three census surveys on museums and similar institutes in Italy, collecting statistical data with reference to the years 1979, 1993, and 2006 respectively. A structured questionnaire was used during the surveys, designed to record descriptive details on the museums, including data on their legal position, the type of collections and assets, entrance methods, number of visitors, amount of material collected and the personnel working in each institution, etc.