

Art and Culture Patronage in Lithuania: Impact on Culture, Business, and Society

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Abstract. Art patronage has traditionally been considered a philanthropic act that supports cultural and artistic expression. This paper explores how modern art patronage has evolved into diverse models such as venture philanthropy, crowdfunding, and impact investment, while reflecting broader changes in social values, business interests, and public policies. Using Lithuania as a case study, we analyse historical and emerging patronage practices and their effects on culture, business, and society. The article integrates theoretical and empirical insights and incorporates new perspectives from cultural policy and altruism studies. Particular attention is given to motivations behind giving, the evolving role of the patron, and how strategic patronage can create social value in a time of public funding decline. This research contributes to understanding patronage's potential to balance economic rationality and cultural sustainability.

Keywords: art patronage, cultural policy, social value, business support, altruism.

Introduction

Relevance of the article. Art patronage has evolved from an elite power symbol to a multifaceted practice involving public, private, and civic stakeholders. In Lithuania, where cultural philanthropy is still emerging, patronage is increasingly seen as a tool for social and economic growth. This study traces the history of patronage, contrasts traditional and modern motives, and introduces new models, drawing on frameworks from Khalil (2004), Buchholtz et al. (1999), and Vaidelytė et al. (2016).

Historically, European patronage served political and religious elites, exemplified by the Medici family during the Renaissance. Motivations included power, legacy, and status, not just altruism. By the 19th century, with industrial capitalism and a rising bourgeoisie, art markets and public institutions allowed for more decentralised support and artist autonomy (Buchholtz, Amason, & Rutherford, 1999).

Today, patronage includes state support, corporate sponsorships, and grassroots funding. Modern patrons often act out of a mix of rational, emotional, and ethical motives, reflecting changing ideas of altruism and cultural value (Khalil, 2004).

In Lithuania, patronage is shaped by the post-Soviet transition, weak civic philanthropy, and reliance on public funding. Initiatives like Mecenuoti.lt signal a shift toward more community-driven support, though policy frameworks remain underdeveloped Vaidelytė et al. (2016).

This paper explores patronage's role in Lithuanian cultural development, business engagement, and social impact. As public funding shrinks and expectations rise, patronage becomes a strategic tool for fostering identity, innovation, and resilience in the arts. The study highlights the need for a coherent cultural policy to support this shift and maximise its societal benefits.

Problem investigation level. While global models of cultural patronage have been extensively studied and documented, with substantial literature covering practices in Western Europe, North America, and parts of Asia, the Lithuanian context remains notably under-researched. Existing academic discussions often focus on traditional philanthropic models or established frameworks within well-developed economies, overlooking the unique historical, political, and economic conditions that shape patronage in post-Soviet societies such as Lithuania. Moreover, although examples of contemporary patronage initiatives in Lithuania exist, systematic and comprehensive academic analyses remain scarce. As a result, the understanding of how global trends in art and cultural patronage are being adapted, resisted, or reinterpreted within Lithuania's evolving cultural sector is fragmented. This paper addresses this research gap by providing a nuanced examination of

Lithuania's patronage landscape, offering both theoretical insights and practical implications for the development of more sustainable and inclusive cultural support mechanisms.

Scientific problem. The central scientific problem addressed in this study is the insufficient integration of modern patronage strategies into Lithuania's cultural policy and everyday cultural practice. Although international trends demonstrate the growing importance of diversified funding models, strategic giving, venture philanthropy, and impact investment in sustaining cultural ecosystems, Lithuania's policy frameworks and institutional practices have slowly incorporated these innovations. This lag hinders the ability of cultural organisations to diversify their funding sources, to engage broader stakeholder groups, and to adapt to the changing expectations of donors, audiences, and policymakers. The current reliance on traditional, state-centred cultural financing models fails to leverage the full potential of private and civic sector involvement. Consequently, Lithuania risks losing opportunities to foster a more resilient, innovative, and socially integrated cultural environment. The research presented in this article seeks to diagnose the root causes of this gap and to propose feasible strategies for bridging it.

Object of the article. The object of the article is the phenomenon of art and culture patronage in Lithuania. This includes an exploration of both historical forms of cultural patronage, deeply rooted in the traditions of the nobility and religious institutions, and contemporary developments characterised by emerging private sponsorships, corporate engagement, crowdfunding initiatives, and civic involvement.

Aim of the article. To explore the impact of patronage on cultural, business, and societal development in Lithuania.

Objectives of the article:

1. To analyse the historical evolution and current forms of art patronage, including models such as venture philanthropy, crowdfunding, and impact investment.
2. To investigate the motivations behind cultural patronage, drawing from theories of altruism, cultural value, and strategic giving.
3. To examine the impact of patronage on cultural, business, and social development in the Lithuanian context.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of existing cultural policy frameworks in Lithuania and identify gaps hindering sustainable patronage growth.
5. To propose recommendations for enhancing the patronage ecosystem, focusing on legal, institutional, and educational strategies.

Methods of the article. The study employs a qualitative approach, using literature analysis and case studies.

1. Theoretical perspectives on sponsorship in arts and sports

Sponsorship in the arts and sports operates under different logics, even though both depend on external funding. Arts sponsorship focuses on cultural value and community engagement. Sponsors support events or educational programs to build long-term brand goodwill and contribute to the public good (Boekman Foundation, 2020). In contrast, sports sponsorship is commercially driven. It emphasises brand exposure, media reach, and measurable returns (Settembre Blundo et al., 2020).

The audiences they target also differ. Arts sponsorship appeals to specific cultural groups such as museumgoers or educators. On the other hand, sports sponsorship aims to reach broad, mass-market audiences. While arts sponsors often seek long-term reputational benefits, sports sponsors usually focus on short-term marketing impact (Gray, 2015). Various models of art patronage further illustrate the motivations behind supporting the arts and how these structures differ in their expectations and outcomes, as outlined in the Patronage Model (Table 1).

Table 1

| Patronage model | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Model | Details |
| Purist Model | Altruism is the only motive for this model, where patrons invest in the arts without expecting returns. The inherent value of art is the focus area. |
| Angel Philanthropy | Describes individuals participating in crowdfunding websites or patron networks and forming close connections with artists and projects. |
| Venture Philanthropy | This model involves the application of venture capital techniques, with an emphasis on innovative grants and risk-taking approaches. High involvement from patrons and quantifiable outcomes are its focus areas. |
| Impact Investment Models | These models aim to generate financial returns alongside positive social or environmental impacts. That said, it is worth mentioning that a mere 0.1% of impact investment funds presently allocate funds to the arts. |

Source: TEFAF Art Market Report 2020 – “Trends and Innovation in Art Patronage Models”:

<https://amr.tefaf.com/chapter/trends-and-innovation-in-art-patronage-models>

In Lithuania, most arts organisations rely on public funding and private donors. Corporate sponsorship accounts for only about 5 per cent of arts funding, compared to nearly 69 per cent in sports (Boekman Foundation, 2020). This imbalance highlights the need for more diverse and strategic funding approaches in the cultural sector. Historically, Lithuanian nobility and religious institutions were principal patrons, commissioning religious and cultural works. Soviet-era policies centralised cultural funding under state control, suppressing private patronage.

Historically, Lithuanian nobility and religious institutions played crucial roles as patrons, commissioning religious and cultural works. However, during the Soviet era, private patronage was supplanted mainly by state-directed cultural funding, limiting artist autonomy and narrowing creative expression. Following Lithuania’s independence, the patronage landscape began to diversify. Notable individual contributions, such as those from Dr. Pranas Kiznis to the National Museum – Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania (Valdovų Rūmai, 2023), and corporate support from companies like Akola Group for the MO Museum (MO Museum, 2024) exemplify a blending of cultural responsibility and strategic branding.

Digital platforms such as *Mecenuoti.lt* have expanded cultural patronage by making it easier for a broader public to engage and contribute meaningfully (Swords, 2017). Nevertheless, Lithuania continues to face challenges: regulatory gaps, insufficient tax incentives, and minimal public recognition for patrons impede the sustainable development of the patronage ecosystem (Vaidelytė, & Butkevičienė, 2016).

This investigation is critical in the current context of shrinking public budgets, increasing demands for transparency, and growing expectations for the cultural sector to demonstrate social relevance. As Vaidelytė et al. (2016) emphasise, one of Lithuania's main challenges lies in the absence of a coherent cultural policy that formally recognises and supports patronage. By addressing this gap, the study aims to contribute theoretically and practically to the evolving discourse on cultural patronage and its potential to drive innovation, inclusion, and resilience in the Lithuanian arts sector.

According to Jeannotte (2008), investment in cultural infrastructure yields substantial and measurable social returns, including increased civic pride, a more profound sense of regional identity, and economic revitalisation through cultural tourism and creative industries. Learning from sponsorship strategies in the sports sector, arts organisations in Lithuania could further enhance their appeal by offering sponsors greater visibility, co-branded initiatives, and opportunities for community-centred engagement. Partnerships that combine artistic excellence with strategic visibility can attract a broader range of patrons and secure more stable funding streams.

Furthermore, & Buchholtz et al. (1999) argue that successful corporate philanthropy must align with leadership values and strategic business objectives. This perspective is increasingly relevant for cultural organisations seeking to engage business sponsors who view cultural support not only as charity but as a meaningful investment in social capital, brand development, and community reputation.

In summary, while Lithuania's patronage system remains in a formative stage, there is a clear growth potential. By learning from international models, refining national policy frameworks, and fostering strategic partnerships, Lithuania can build an innovative, inclusive, and resilient patronage ecosystem. A vibrant culture of giving will enrich the nation's artistic life and serve as a foundation for stronger civic participation, social integration, and sustainable economic growth.

2. Building a functional patronage ecosystem in Lithuania: challenges and opportunities

Although cultural patronage in Lithuania is gradually emerging, the lack of a coordinated national strategy continues to limit its effectiveness and sustainability. The analysis conducted by Vaidelytė et al. (2014) identifies persistent structural challenges such as weak legal frameworks, insufficient tax incentives, and the absence of clearly defined roles among cultural stakeholders. These issues have created a fragmented environment that weakens patronage potential as a stable and sustainable source of support for the arts. Without an overarching policy vision, efforts remain scattered, underfunded, and vulnerable to shifting political priorities, making long-term strategic development difficult.

One of the most significant barriers to a thriving patronage ecosystem is the absence of meaningful financial and symbolic incentives for donors. In contrast to the well-established practices in Western Europe and North America, where patrons receive tangible benefits such as tax deductions, social prestige, and formal public recognition, Lithuania offers limited encouragement. Potential private donors and corporate sponsors are often reluctant to invest in cultural initiatives when the returns, whether social, financial, or reputational, are minimal or uncertain. Furthermore, the economic burden of supporting cultural initiatives without sufficient tax relief is a deterrent, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses that might otherwise engage in the cultural sector.

Additionally, a lack of coordination among cultural institutions, government agencies, municipalities, and private sector actors exacerbates fragmentation. Public bodies, NGOs, and private donors often operate independently, with limited communication, shared objectives, or coordinated funding strategies. This siloed approach results in redundant projects, inefficient resource allocation, and diminished collective impact. Lithuania's patronage sector struggles to achieve the critical mass necessary for systemic change or international competitiveness without a unified strategy or common platforms for cooperation.

International models offer practical guidance that Lithuania could adapt to its local context. For example, Canada's integrated cultural policy seamlessly combines government funding, strategic tax incentives, and investments in cultural infrastructure, supporting both creative development and broader societal goals such as civic participation and community well-being (Jeannotte, 2008). The Canadian model highlights the importance of linking cultural policy with national identity formation and economic development. Similarly, the Netherlands employs innovative strategies like matched funding, in which government agencies match private donations to cultural projects, and simplified grant administration processes to reduce bureaucratic barriers and encourage long-term donor engagement (Boekman Foundation, 2020). These international examples demonstrate that comprehensive, flexible frameworks are essential for aligning cultural patronage with broader social, economic, and civic development agendas.

Learning from these practices, Lithuania needs a bold, multi-dimensional strategy to transform its fragmented patronage environment into a dynamic and resilient ecosystem. To achieve this, the following actions are proposed:

For Lithuania, strengthening patronage requires systemic reform and cross-sector collaboration. Four key actions are proposed:

1. **Reform Legislation:** Legislation should be reformed to create an enabling environment for cultural giving. The introduction of targeted tax incentives designed explicitly for cultural donations would significantly improve private and corporate participation. Legal reforms should delineate the roles and responsibilities of government bodies, cultural organisations, private donors, and intermediary institutions to ensure transparency, accountability, and

mutual trust.

2. **Promote Civic Recognition:** Civic recognition of cultural patronage should be promoted. Public campaigns should be launched to redefine patronage not merely as an elite activity but as an essential civic duty that contributes to national cultural identity and social cohesion. Recognising patrons through awards, media visibility, and honorary titles could help build a culture of appreciation and inspire others to participate. Highlighting success stories and demonstrating the tangible impact of patronage could strengthen public support and normalise the practice within broader society.
3. **Foster Strategic Partnerships:** Strategic partnerships should be fostered by building formal mechanisms for collaboration between cultural institutions, businesses, municipalities, and state bodies. Platforms for joint project development, funding pools, and shared governance structures could help coordinate efforts, align objectives, and optimise resources. Collaborative initiatives could include co-branded cultural events, corporate-endorsed art exhibitions, or municipal-private funding programs for local cultural heritage preservation.
4. **Integrate Education:** Cultural philanthropy should be integrated into the education system. Educational initiatives at various levels, from secondary schools to universities, should emphasise cultural literacy, social responsibility, and philanthropic values. Introducing specialised courses, workshops, or certification programs on cultural management and fundraising could prepare a new generation of cultural leaders and patrons who view philanthropy as an occasional charitable act and a continuous civic engagement.

By addressing these areas, Lithuania can move toward a more coherent and inclusive patronage system. This would diversify funding sources for the arts and position cultural patronage as a pillar of national development and social cohesion.

Cultural patronage plays a profound role in shaping not only the creative industries but also broader societal structures. It directly reinforces national identity by supporting artistic expressions celebrating history, traditions, and collective memory. Through preserving and promoting cultural heritage, patronage fosters community cohesion, strengthens social bonds, and enhances civic engagement. Cultural initiatives supported by patronage provide inclusive spaces for dialogue, creativity, and collective experience, making culture accessible across social, economic, and regional divides.

In addition to its societal value, cultural patronage offers tangible benefits for businesses. As an integral component of corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies, involvement in cultural projects enhances brand reputation, differentiates businesses in competitive markets, and builds stakeholder trust. Companies that engage in meaningful cultural sponsorship are perceived as socially responsible actors, aligning themselves with values such as creativity, innovation, and social impact. This can result in stronger brand loyalty among consumers, improved community relationships, and heightened employee morale and engagement.

According to research by Buchholtz et al. (1999), philanthropy is most effective when aligned with leadership values and strategic business goals. Businesses that successfully integrate cultural patronage into their core strategies often see a reciprocal benefit. Their support strengthens societal wellbeing, nurturing a healthier, more vibrant market environment where businesses can thrive.

However, to realise these benefits fully, transparency and accountability are crucial. In Lithuania, where public trust in governmental and private institutions remains relatively fragile, fostering legitimacy through open and ethical patronage practices is essential. Precise reporting mechanisms, public disclosures of sponsorship activities, and cultural impact evaluation can help build stakeholder trust and ensure that patronage initiatives deliver sustainable and meaningful outcomes.

In summary, cultural patronage is not merely a philanthropic act but a strategic investment in social capital, economic vitality, and national resilience. Strengthening Lithuania's patronage system will require an integrated and collaborative approach that collectively engages government bodies, businesses, cultural organisations, and citizens. By embedding cultural patronage within

national development strategies, Lithuania can create a dynamic cultural sector that serves as a foundation for a stronger and more cohesive society.

Conclusions and recommendations

Art patronage in Lithuania reflects a complex interplay between deep historical roots and the growing influence of modern support models, such as venture philanthropy, crowdfunding, and impact investment. Traditionally shaped by the activities of religious institutions and the nobility, patronage was historically focused on legacy-building, status, and community leadership. In contemporary times, however, the motivations and methods of patronage have evolved considerably. New models emphasise innovation, social engagement, and measurable impact, offering a broader range of avenues for cultural support and fostering more inclusive participation from individuals, corporations, and civic groups.

New approaches are transforming how cultural funding is gathered, shifting beyond traditional public subsidies and elite philanthropy toward more dynamic and decentralised models. Initiatives like Mecenuoti.lt show how technology can democratise cultural support, making it easy for a broader public to contribute and helping to build stronger connections between communities and their cultural institutions. Also, venture philanthropy and impact investing are becoming increasingly important, blending financial returns with social impact objectives and attracting a new generation of strategic donors.

The motivations behind cultural patronage have similarly shifted. While altruism remains a significant driver, contemporary patrons are increasingly motivated by a complex blend of ethical commitments, emotional attachments to cultural heritage, strategic considerations related to visibility and branding, and the pursuit of long-term reputational benefits. Investing in culture has become an essential dimension of corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies for many businesses. Cultural patronage enables companies to align their brands with values such as creativity, innovation, and community engagement, thus enhancing stakeholder trust, employee satisfaction, and public image.

The impact of art patronage in Lithuania is visible across multiple spheres. Culturally, it helps preserve national identity, safeguard intangible heritage, and promote artistic innovation. Socially, patronage strengthens social cohesion, fosters civic pride, and broadens access to cultural experiences for diverse communities. Economically, it contributes to the vitality of the creative industries and enhances the attractiveness of cities and regions as vibrant cultural hubs.

However, despite these promising developments, Lithuania's policy framework remains underdeveloped in terms of supporting sustainable patronage growth. The absence of coherent national strategies, limited financial incentives such as tax benefits, and minimal mechanisms for public recognition significantly constrain patron engagement. Furthermore, institutional fragmentation and a lack of cross-sectoral collaboration inhibit the formation of stable, long-term patronage networks. Without systemic reforms and strategic alignment among cultural institutions, businesses, government bodies, and the public, the potential of cultural patronage to serve as a driver of national development remains unrealised.

To build a resilient and dynamic patronage ecosystem in Lithuania, several key recommendations must be considered:

1. Introduce clear tax incentives and legal frameworks to encourage cultural giving. Establishing well-designed financial benefits, such as tax deductions for individuals and corporations supporting cultural initiatives, would lower the cost of giving and incentivise broader participation across different sectors of society. A clear legal foundation would provide transparency, consistency, and predictability for donors and cultural organisations.
2. Raise public awareness to promote patronage as a civic value. National awareness campaigns should emphasise that cultural patronage is a philanthropic luxury and a civic responsibility that strengthens society. Highlighting successful examples of patronage and its tangible benefits for communities would help normalise the culture of giving and inspire

greater public involvement.

3. Establish stronger cooperation among the government, businesses, and cultural organisations. Formalised partnerships, funding consortia, and joint initiatives can optimise resources, reduce duplication of efforts, and foster stakeholder synergies. Multi-sectoral collaboration would enable more ambitious and impactful cultural projects that reflect shared social goals.
4. Integrate cultural philanthropy into educational programs. Embedding the values of cultural responsibility and philanthropy into school and university curricula would cultivate a new generation of engaged citizens who appreciate the societal importance of supporting the arts. Specialised courses and practical training in fundraising and cultural management could empower future leaders in the cultural and philanthropic sectors.
5. Develop a unified cultural policy that recognises and supports diverse forms of patronage. A comprehensive national strategy should acknowledge traditional and innovative patronage models, setting clear objectives for fostering cultural philanthropy and integrating it into broader national development agendas..

By implementing these recommendations, Lithuania can move toward a more inclusive, sustainable, and strategic patronage system that benefits not only cultural institutions but society as a whole. Strengthening cultural patronage is an investment in the nation's identity, creative potential, and long-term social and economic resilience.

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