

# Audit of the use of funds

## Swiss National Museum

### Key facts

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The Swiss National Museum (SNM) has a mandate under the Museums and Collections Act (MusCA) to preserve and exhibit Swiss cultural heritage. It does this within the framework of its activities of collecting and organising exhibitions. The SNM is made up of the National Museum Zurich, the Château de Prangins, the Forum of Swiss History in Schwyz and the Collection Centre in Affoltern am Albis. Every year, the SNM receives a federal contribution of around CHF 30 million, plus around CHF 20 million for accommodation. The SNM has been a federal institution under public law since 2010. It is supervised by the General Secretariat of the Federal Department of Home Affairs.

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) has conducted an audit of the use of funds at the SNM. It shows that the SNM has developed positively since it became independent. However, the SFAO recommends more comprehensive accountability to the owner regarding the economic use of funds.

#### Positive development of the National Museum in recent years

Both visitor numbers and income from museum operations increased significantly by an average of 7.8% and 15% per year respectively. This is partly due to the renovation of the National Museum Zurich. This is accompanied by an increase in the federal contribution from CHF 25.5 million in 2011 to just under CHF 31 million in 2017 (+21.8%), excluding the contribution for accommodation.

The SFAO compared the SNM's key figures with those of other museums. The National Museum performs well and is operating in the range between average and above-average.

#### Collection concept has potential for Swiss museum sector

The SNM collection consists of some 850,000 objects [REDACTED]. They are the property of the Confederation and have been transferred to the SNM for beneficial use. The SNM has a collection concept which is reviewed annually by the SNM to ensure that it is up to date. The SFAO was able to satisfy itself that the concept is being adhered to. The SNM takes a restrictive approach when acquiring or accepting new objects. Many areas are regarded as largely complete and are only supplemented with individual items.

Each collection is managed by a curator. All objects are registered so that they can be found at any time. The registration rate is around 98%, which is far above the federal government's target. An object database is used as the central working tool. This also forms the interface to the SNM's online collection. Around 60,000 objects are publicly accessible on the museum's website. The SNM has set itself the goal of becoming a point of reference and playing an exemplary role in the field of collection activities in Switzerland.

The collection concept and the online database provide the SNM with the necessary basis for coordinating its collection activities with other museums. Such coordination takes place

informally via the network of individual curators. The SFAO sees potential in digitalisation. If more museums had well-developed collection concepts and publicly accessible online collections, coordination would be simpler and any potential overlaps easier to identify. However, the SNM cannot influence how other museums support their own activities.

### **The economic indicators for active management are missing**

In the SFAO's opinion, the SNM's business management can be improved. The SNM conducts financial controlling of external exhibition costs. This neither takes fixed nor internal personnel costs into account. The same applies to information on the individual locations.

The procedure is in line with the strategic objectives which are very vaguely formulated and are based more on guideline values than on clearly measurable economic indicators. The SFAO recommends defining indicators, preferably per location, and using these for financial management purposes. It also recommends analysing the economic efficiency of individual areas with a view to the future orientation of the museum.

### **Extension of the Collection Centre in Affoltern am Albis still requires justification**

In the coming years, an extension of the Collection Centre in Affoltern am Albis is to be built in order to store all objects centrally in one location. The land adjacent to the centre, which belongs to the federal government, is to be developed for this purpose. For this reason, the option of a compact construction on the current parcel was not examined in depth, although this would make sense from the point of view of spatial planning and possibly from an economic point of view.

The construction costs are estimated at CHF 58 million. The construction costs per square metre are comparable with buildings of a similar purpose. The added value of centralising the Collection Centre is primarily based on qualitative arguments. The economic point of view must also be taken into account and evaluated with figures.

**Original text in German**