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Práce pojednává o návštěvnících muzea z muzeologického pohledu. K tématu forem a způsobů muzejní komunikace by navíc měla být stejná pozornost věnována také jejímu příjemci. Návštěvníci muzea mohou být klasifikováni na základě různých kritérií. Uspokojení návštěvníka je ovlivněno celou řadou faktorů, především scénografií, možností vybrat si mezi skupinovou nebo individuální návštěvou, přívětivostí výstavy vůči návštěvníkovi atd. Osobnost odborníka daného muzea či průvodce v muzeu mohou mít kritický dopad na (ne) přijetí výstavy návštěvníkem. Účinek, který muzejní expozice má, je nejčastěji hodnocen pozorováním návštěvníků, dotazníky, anketami a rozhovory s návštěvníky.

The paper deals with museum visitors from the museology point of view. In addition to attention given to the forms and ways of museum communication, equal attention should be given to its recipient. Museum visitors can be classified by different criteria. Visitor satisfaction is influenced by a whole range of factors, primarily the scenic design, the possibility to choose between group and individual visits, visitor-friendliness of the exhibition, etc. The personality of museum docent or guide in a museum may have a critical impact on the visitor's (un)acceptance of the exhibition. The effect a museum exhibition has is most often assessed by means of observing its visitors, making focused inquiries, questionnaire surveys and visitor interviews.

Jan Dolák

# Museum Visitor – Our Addressee

In addition to attention given to the forms and ways of museum communication, equal attention should be given to its recipient, i.e. the addressee. Sciences such as pedagogy, psychology or sociology can also help achieve this goal. However, museum communication is not just about education, as some experts in pedagogy might believe. Specific approaches and benefits of the above sciences should be “summed up”, assessed and transposed to a higher level. Something that can only be done by a museologist. Displaying exhibits only makes sense if they have a holistic effect on the viewer. This should be one of the focuses of museum communication, i.e. grasping the principles which determine the effect of the values involved and motivate educational and cultural transformation of the society”.<sup>1</sup>

**Who is the target public for museum events?** Some museum events narrow down their focus on specific target groups (e.g. children, seniors, etc.), but this is not the prevailing strategy. Most of museum activities are designed for the broadest number of visitors possible. As a result, the stress laid on prior defining the target group for an exhibition or an event often comes down to mechanical application of general marketing formulas with an extremely unbalanced effect, often watered down to mere common places.

If we want to empower a visitor, we have to know who (s)he is and what (s)he desires for. Museum visitors can be classified by different criteria (age, sex, domestic or foreign); very often, they are classified by the number of their visits to museums, which is then used for judging on their relation towards museums. **English writing authors on the subject distinguish three groups of museum visitors:**

1. Visitor – occasional visitor.
2. Attender – visitor on a regular basis.
3. User – museum user, a person who needs museums for his or her life.

**This approach corresponds with that of Olga S. Sapanža who divides museum visitors into** „posetitel“ (visitor), „zritel“ (on-looker), „visiter“ (guest) and „partner“ (partner).<sup>2</sup>

**Another classification is proposed by David Dean:**

1. People who quickly go through an exhibition without major interest, often seeking to be seen as someone interested in this type of cultural events, without really enjoying being there.
2. People who show great interest but do not spend much time reading complex and demanding texts, they like direct access to information, welcome visual stimuli and focus on objects – often in galleries.
3. A minority who is deeply interested in the display, wishing and usually able to understand the exhibits, viewing and reading everything, frequent museum goers.

**Josef Beneš divides museum visitors into 4 basic groups:**

1. Motivated visitors – strongly motivated, with a positive appreciation of museums and their communication strategies.
2. Interested visitors – less motivated, their appreciation of museums oscillates between positive and neutral.
3. Informed visitors – even less motivated, their appreciation of museums is rather neutral than positive.
4. Casual visitors – lack motivation, their appreciation of museums oscillates between neutral and negative.<sup>4</sup>

**Otto Čačka proposes a classification of museum visitors based on their psychological (value orientation) profile.**<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Olga S. Sapanža, *Metodologija teoretičeskogo muzevedenija*, Sankt-Peterburk 2008.

<sup>3</sup> David Dean, *Museum exhibition: Theory and practice*, London - New York 1996, pp. 25–26.

<sup>4</sup> Josef Beneš, *Muzejní prezentace*, Praha 1981.

<sup>5</sup> Otto Čačka, „Příspěvek k psychologii muzejní práce“, in: I. Chovančíková, ed., *Muzea a návštěvníci aneb Jsou návštěvníci v muzeích vítáni či na obtíž?*, Hodonín 1996, pp. 33–36.

<sup>1</sup> Zbyněk Zbyslav Stránský, *Úvod do studia muzeologie*, Brno 1984, pp. 108–109.

**An interesting classification of museum visitors is proposed by the American education theoretician David A. Kolb. He distinguishes between four basic categories of visitors based on their specific styles of learning:**

1. Dreamer – has a rich imagination, learns best through investigation and interaction, searches for and combines different ideas and suggestions.
2. Deliberator – searches for the necessary facts and information for conceptual understanding of the exhibit, focuses on logical links.
3. Decider – tends to proceed from theory to discovery in acquiring new knowledge, searches into the way things work. Their basic question is: How does it work? They concentrate on practical things and enjoy testing different methods.
4. Doer – a man or woman of action, they enjoy doing things their way. The basic issue for them is: What could happen if...? They want to be actively engaged, look for action, and dare to take a risk. They like excitement, crisis, competition and change.

I believe that Kolb's classification is basically correct, but less applicable to museum conditions than to normal teaching process. The first issue is that not every visitor comes to the museum for learning, be it in an informal way. There are more reasons to visit a museum and instruction is not the only benefit of it. The interaction between a visitor and a museum is sometimes designated by an odd word *edutainment*, made up of the English words education and entertainment. It looks like the centuries old principle preached by Jan Amos Comenius "learn by playing" returned to its cradle via foreign research channels.

I also believe that the different categories of visitors seldom or never exist in their crystalline form; they are far more often a mixture of several different types. Any visitor may go through all the four categories outlined above during a visit to a museum; they may come to look for logical links and leave as dreamers. Nevertheless, according to Kolb's theory, each exhibition (at least some of its parts) should provide its visitors with information necessary for understanding the exhibits, with an opportunity for them to try how "the things work", and with space for imagination, interaction, combination and competition. However, this finding is not completely new and cannot be viewed as a breakthrough.

**Ladislav Kesner refers to foreign literature when suggesting that museum visitors differ from general population for the following characteristics:**

1. They have better education.
2. They have higher income.
3. They have higher social status (upper middle class, managers, intellectuals, students).
4. Women's share is higher than men's.
5. Ethnic groups are only marginally represented.<sup>6</sup>

The last point, i.e. the relatively small interest of minorities in museums, deserves a thorough analysis. If museums are defined as centres for documenting the nature and society, then they should reflect the fact that the society is not just the majority. For instance, the English speaking world (USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) has given a lot of attention to documenting and presentation of the indigenous population. Czech Republic is in a different position with a relatively high degree of homogeneity of population on the EU scale. Yet there are a number of minorities, both in terms of nationality (Roma, Slovak, Ukrainian, Polish, etc.), religion and culture (Jewish), and migration (Vietnamese). In spite of it, they are getting only marginal attention in Czech museums.

**Marylin Hood<sup>7</sup> suggests six sets of values which play a role in people's decision making on the way to spend leisure time:**

1. Other people's company.
2. Doing something useful.
3. Feeling fine and relaxed.
4. The chance to live new experiences.
5. The chance to learn.
6. The chance for an active involvement.

Social needs seem to play the principal role. Most museum visitors prefer visiting a museum with their families, friends or with a group, and feeling comfortable is important. Unless lack of comfort is the choice – such as in sports events or assisting the disabled, but this never or only seldom applies in a museum, except for cases like visiting mines as part of a mining museum installation. Yet it should be pointed out that even an efficient visitor orientation system, helpful staff or air conditioning cannot make up for a highly unattractive contents

or language of an installation. In such cases, visitors tend to leave the museum very soon to never come back again.

**The US author Pete Conroy suggests that:**

1. Visitors tend spend more time looking at big and moving exhibits.
2. New or special exhibits attract more attention.
3. Some specific aspects of exhibits stimulate deeper appreciation, such as in dangerous objects, young animals or valuable objects.<sup>8</sup>

**The above trends in people's behaviour were studied by David Dean<sup>9</sup>. According to him, they are shared by most people and are sometimes influenced or modified by cultural and social habits:**

1. When entering an unknown venue, people tend to step forward to the left and walk from left to right along the installation, which may have to do with the fact that the majority of people are right handed.
2. If they have to choose between two doors located side by side, they tend to choose the door on the right.
3. They are most concentrated at the beginning of the installation and less so at its end.
4. The closer to the exit, the less attention visitors give to the installation.
5. People intuitively try to escape from a trap and therefore prefer a visible exit.
6. The part of the installation closest to the exit is the most preferred.
7. Most western cultures apparently tend to arrange furniture along walls, the centre being perceived as the space for things happening, while oriental cultures are oriented more towards the centre.
8. Western cultures prefer spaces with walls joining at a 90 or 45 degree angle.
9. Light is preferred to darkness, light colours to dark ones.
10. Adult visitors are able to maintain maximum concentration for 30 minutes.

At least two of the above Dean's statements should be subject to deeper analysis. Much has been written on the "left-to-right orientation" of visitors, some authors even draw a link between this and the magnetic poles

<sup>6</sup> Ladislav Kesner, *Marketing a management muzei a památek*, Praha 2005, p. 99.

<sup>7</sup> Ladislav Kesner, *Marketing a management muzei a památek*, Praha 2005, p. 113.

<sup>8</sup> David Dean, *Museum exhibition: Theory and practice*, London - New York 1996, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> David Dean, *Museum exhibition: Theory and practice*, London - New York 1996, pp. 31–32.

of the earth. This would mean, however, that people on the north hemisphere should walk in the opposite direction than people on the south hemisphere, which is not true. Having observed museum visitors for more than 27 years has led me to different conclusions. It is the scenic design of an installation, i.e. the arrangement of the showcases and of exhibits of greater or lesser interest, visitors' preference for light to darkness, etc., which determine the direction they choose to take. Even a carpet laid across the centre of a room (Regional museum in Jicin, Czech Republic) induces the visitor to set out in the direction outlined by it, that is, across the centre of the room, and the same applies in many chateau installations. If all these elements strike the right balance without "gently" pushing the visitor in a specific direction, then he or she spontaneously chooses to proceed from left to right.

**As a matter of fact, visitors tend to perceive installations as a kind of text and this is what they actually are in the vast majority of cases.** And a text is always read from left to right. If the scenic design of an installation uses showcases (or barely displayed exhibits) in the centre of a room, the visitor proceeds from left to right (i.e. counter clockwise). If the installation is arranged along the walls, the visitors turn their backs to the centre of the room and proceed again from left to right, but this time in the clockwise direction. Dean's statement that oriental cultures are more centre-oriented in designing exhibitions did not prove correct during my working visits to China. Nor my Asian colleagues have confirmed such affirmation.

**According to Tereza Scheiner, exhibitions bring together both people and exhibits, as well as different groups of people** (visitors, writers on exhibitions, etc.)<sup>10</sup>. Tereza Scheiner is certainly right. On the other hand, though, we should bear in mind the tremendous typological variety of museum visitors. The question is whether museum visitors can be defined in other way than just in broad general lines. Greater part of them do not wish to have any personal interactions but rather prefer an individual experience. This might induce to comparing museums with libraries. Czech literature on libraries has dealt with the above issue on quite a frequent basis in the sense that libraries should become a kind of "municipal living room", i.e. a place where people meet, discuss, drink coffee, etc. I believe this approach raises a number of questions

and should be subject to a deeper analysis. Museums and museum workers, similarly to libraries and librarians, do provide visitors with a certain (and often expected) social contact. Yet I believe museums and libraries should not overestimate this part of their mission or concentrate too much on the issues related to it.

Visitors' initial reaction to an installation is rather associative than discursive. Individual visitors should be guided through museum installations in a natural way without even being aware of it, and the varied nature of installation design should provide for a naturally pulsing circulation. **The installation should give visitors a chance to choose, to dwell upon some parts or to pass quickly through others, without losing the necessary context.** Visitors cannot be confronted with feelings of lack of order, coherence or loss of control with respect to the quantity or highly specific nature of what is on display, as if they were in a labyrinth. Visitors should be activated, i.e. induced to reassessing their expectation that they will get everything without an effort. Not all visitors expect to get everything without an effort, though. They can be activated by means of self-service maps, different supplementary materials etc. In some museums, visitors have to open a drawer or a case to see the exhibits (e.g. the Fort Chambly fort near Montreal). Another possibility is to show supplementary films or audiovisual programmes or to use schemes in which visitors have to look up specific data which in their final summary lead to the "discovery" of something (e.g. Regional Museum an Gallery in Jicin). Sometimes the visitors can be guided to the discovery of intentional errors. The most active way is to use specific arrangements that induce visitors to active, often hands-on involvement. Such involvement may consist, for instance, in flint chipping, bow shooting or sorghum grinding (Ngorongo village open-air museum near Mombasa, Kenya), or in examples of the complete processing of a killed bison (Head Smashed, Buffalo Jump, Canada). These activities are not designed for child and young visitors only. If the visitors have a chance to observe the process of making, say, a medieval tool or if they can even have a hands-on experience in it, they become involved in the process much more and in a better way than by means of a guide's exposition, no matter how good it may be, or by means of merely viewing the exhibits. English writing authors on the subject use the term "participatory exhibit" for this kind of approach and if such activities cannot be

performed in a museum on a daily basis, it is only recommendable to organise at least individual workshops from time to time.

**The crucial question is whether visitors should be given the opportunity to view an installation on an individual basis** (the vast majority of cases) **or whether they should be shown through it within a guided group** (the approach mostly used in Czech chateaus and castles). Guided visits provide easier access to information. On the other hand, different visitors may have different needs as to the time they wish to spend on a specific part of the installation. They feel to be "dragged" by guides to leave behind exhibits they find interesting for less attractive parts of the exhibition. In larger groups, the visitors' pace often lags behind the exposition of the guide. Last but not least, the overall impression is often affected by poor standards of guides' performance. Their recruitment and training are often underestimated by museum management, which is a great pity. The guide is often the only person (the only seller of our goods) whom visitors to a museum meet and his or her performance can either enthuse them or torpedo even the best ideas of the scene or installation designers. From this point of view, the system of individual visits is more recommendable.

**Karla Hofmanova proposed the following witty and, sadly enough, reality-based typology of museum guides in the Czech Republic:**

1. Active tracker – always and everywhere after you, beware of going back or even touching something.
2. Active instructor – insists on explaining everything; if you were brought up to be polite, you will end up knowing the whole story of the museum, the community, the district and the guide's family.
3. Passive supervisor – sleeps or reads, not to be bothered by questions.
4. Passive visitor expeller – makes it obvious that the visitor is an unwelcome guest who prevents her from proceeding with her manicure.
5. Active visitor expeller – ready to leave long before the closing hour, reminds you repeatedly that the museum is going to close.<sup>11</sup>

The first two are guides, the last three are guards.

<sup>10</sup> Tereza Scheiner, 'The Exhibition as Presentation of Reality', in: H. K. Vieregg ed., *Museology and Presentation: Original or Virtual*, ICOFOM Study Series 33B, Zagreb 2002, p. 94.

<sup>11</sup> Karla Hofmanová, 'Co si myslí návštěvník muzejních výstav', in: *Muzea a návštěvníci aneb Je výstava zábava či otrava*, Hodonín 1997, pp. 44–46.

**What is better, after all: individual or group visits?** Expert opinions differ and museums have good (operating and economic) reasons to prefer group visits. **Duncan Cameron comes up with quite a distinctive opinion on the matter**<sup>12</sup>. According to him, children should first visit a library in a group, with their class, and be instructed on the way they can use its services. After that, they should go to the library and use its services on their own. Similarly, they should visit a museum at an early age to be instructed as to how the museum should be used and “read”. Cameron justifies his preference to visits on an individual basis by the individual nature of visual, tactile, reading and verbal perception in the environment of an exhibition.

The effect of exhibitions is mostly measured by visitor surveys through targeted enquiries and questionnaires. This method has a weak point however, and it is the capacity of visitors to fill in questionnaires, and different ability to verbalize their feelings. The mood of the visitor at the moment of responding also plays a role. Discussions and interviews with visitors the evaluation of which requires extensive skills in sociology and psychology are another important source of information. The results can be verified by observing visitor behaviour. **Josef Beneš rightly suggests that monitoring the outcomes of exhibitions in varying circumstances is not effective enough**<sup>13</sup> and adds that „*the own resources based strategies used so far have no further potential. Close cooperation of psychologists and sociologists will be necessary in the future in order to elaborate on the quality aspects of surveys...*”<sup>14</sup>

Museums are often criticized for low efficiency, to which they respond by pointing to insufficient funding. Even though there is no argument that the funding of museums is insufficient, they could still do more for visitors with the staff and technical equipment they already have. Museums should strive to convince the public that what they have been doing for their visitors is the maximum that can be done under the conditions at hand. This will only be possible if the museums' relation towards the public is broadly reassessed. Providing information brings trust and satisfaction and, from this point of view, communicating the results of research is to be regarded as one of the cornerstones of the democratization of museums as such.<sup>15</sup> ■

**Klíčová slova:**

muzeologie, muzeum, návštěvník, výstava, komunikace

**Keywords:**

museology, museum, visitor, exhibition, communication

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<sup>12</sup> Duncan Cameron, 'Viewpoint: The museum as a communication system and implications for museum education', *Curator*, 11(1968), No. 1, pp. 33–40.

<sup>13</sup> Josef Beneš, *Muzejní prezentace*, Praha 1981, p. 200.

<sup>14</sup> Josef Beneš, *Muzejní prezentace*, Praha 1981, p. 201.

<sup>15</sup> I thank Mrs. Suzanne Nash for her important comments.