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*Museologica Brunensia*. 2022, vol. 11, iss. 1, pp. 4-9

ISSN 1805-4722 (print); ISSN 2464-5362 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/MuB2022-1-1>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.77022>

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Access Date: 28. 11. 2024

Version: 20221205

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## STUDIE/ARTICLES

## THE METAMUSEUM AS THE FUTURE OF THE MUSEUM INSTITUTION?

<https://doi.org/10.5817/MuB2022-1-1>

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## ABSTRACT/ABSTRAKT:

Throughout its history, the museum has undergone a great evolution in the sense that it has shifted its weight from the column of objects to the column of people. Today, museums face many challenges in an increasingly fast-paced and changing society, where the personal, the social, diversity and inclusion are advancing forcefully. Taking into account the necessary adaptation of the museum to social requirements, this article analyzes the situation of the museum institution with foresight for the future to conceptualize the so-called metamuseum, capable of reflecting with itself in real time and with characteristics such as resilience, interdisciplinarity, adaptation, openness, independence and delocalization. This article proposes the metamuseum as a fifth generation of museums, where the interaction with objects is transformed into a successful experience where the needs and expectations of individuals and social groups are fully satisfied.

**Metamuzeum jako budoucnost muzejní instituce?**

V průběhu své historie prošla muzea velkým vývojem, během něhož se ohnisko zájmu postupně přesunulo ze sbírkových předmětů na návštěvníky. Muzea dnes čelí mnoha výzvám ve stále rychleji se rozvíjející a měnící společnosti se silným důrazem na individuální i celospolečenské potřeby, rozmanitost a inkluzi.

S přihlédnutím k nezbytnému přizpůsobení muzea společenským požadavkům tento článek analyzuje současný stav muzejních institucí, nastiňuje výhled do budoucna a představuje koncept tzv. metamuzea, které je schopné reflektovat sebe sama v reálném čase a disponuje vlastnostmi jako je pružnost, interdisciplinarita, přizpůsobivost, otevřenost, nezávislost a delokalizace. Článek prezentuje metamuzeum jako pátou generaci muzeí, kde se interakce s předměty transformuje v úspěšnou zkušenost, která plně uspokojuje potřeby a očekávání jednotlivců i sociálních skupin.

## KEYWORDS/KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA:

*museology – metamuseum – inclusion – resiliency – future museologie – metamuzeum – inkluze – pružnost – budoucnost*

## Introduction

What will be the upcoming of the museum in the future? What will be the conceptualization of the museum of the future or, perhaps it would be better to say, the future of museums? Since the beginning of museology, with the so-called “Cabinets of Wonders”, described in Babylon in the palace of King Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 B.C.),<sup>1</sup> passing through the “Mouseion”, located in Alexandria (200 B.C.), considered the first

museum in history,<sup>2</sup> there have been many changes in the museum institution. These changes have possibly responded to the parallel development of societies, trying to respond to their changing demands. But perhaps there is always the feeling that museums “*are not capable of solving the problems of defining their role in society*”,<sup>3</sup> sometimes showing true identity crises. In a certain way, there is a feeling that museums always lag behind what society demands, and the fear that they will once again become warehouses of old, unused and inaccessible objects does not disappear.<sup>4</sup>

The museum of the future must walk hand in hand with society, it must solve these problems of defining its role in society. For this reason, one way of thinking about the museums of the future is to start from the definition of a museum, to situate this definition as the nuclear foundation on which to base museum conceptualization. The first thing to say if we want to start from the definition of museum is that there are multiple possible definitions. Which one to choose as a starting point? The current

<sup>2</sup> HERNÁNDEZ, Francisca. *Manual de Museología*. Madrid: Síntesis, 1994, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> CAMERON, Duncan F. El museo: un templo o un forum. 1971. In DESVALLÉES, André, Marie-Odile DE BARRY and Françoise WASSERMAN (eds.). *Vagues. Une anthologie de la nouvelle muséologie*. Mâcon: Editions W, M.N.E.S., 1992, pp. 77–85.

<sup>4</sup> DESVALLÉES, André. Présentation. 1992. In DESVALLÉES, André, Marie-Odile DE BARRY and Françoise WASSERMAN (eds.). *Vagues. Une anthologie de la nouvelle muséologie*. Mâcon: Editions W, M.N.E.S., 1992, pp. 15–40.

<sup>1</sup> ZUBIAUR, Francisco J. *Curso de museología*. Gijón: TREA, 2004, p. 17.

definition proposed by ICOM 2007 is: *“a museum is a non-profit, permanent institution at the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and recreation”*. However, this definition is currently in need of reformulation, which shows the difficulty of establishing a timeless and definitive definition. The diverse definitions proposed by ICOM condition the current conceptualization of the museum institution. In the case of Spain, article 1 of Royal Decree 620/1987, which approves the museum regulations, defines Museums as *“institutions of permanent character that acquire, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit, in order to communicate and exhibit, for purposes of study, education and contemplation, sets and collections of historical, artistic, scientific and technical value or of any other cultural nature”*.<sup>5</sup> This definition emanates from the one proposed by ICOM. At present, the redefinition of Museum in Spain requires an update to the new times that incorporates in a decisive way the social component. This incorporation of the social component, as it could not be otherwise, must be transferred to the museological and museographic discourses that the Museum makes available to society.

The previous paragraph is only intended to show how the concept of the museum and the functions of the museum institution have changed and is continually changing. This evolution is reflected in the definition and is an indicator that the museum is a living and changing institution. In general

terms, we could summarize these evolutions over the centuries by saying that there are two pillars in museums: objects and people. In this evolution, the focus has shifted from objects, objects that are testimonies of culture or of nature, to people.<sup>6</sup> It should be emphasized that both are needed, but the object has been reinvented, has transcended itself and has been made available to people to develop numerous functions that can affect in an integral way personal and social contexts, that can affect psychological and bodily spheres: emotional, cognitive, spiritual and relational.

But how can this affection for so many spheres and personal and social contexts be understood? Well, because the museum fact is not alien to human beings, it is almost part of their evolutionary development, if we consider the person within the bio-psycho-social model. The human being, generally at an early age of 11 or 12 years, already develops an eagerness to collect.<sup>7</sup> Somehow collecting, having objects becomes a way of relating to the world and to others. The human being is also no stranger to history, history, as a fact inherent to human life as a shaping of culture that is collected in a memorandum. These memoranda are generally collected in the form of objects, which are true traces of human activity and the facts of its historical development. Both tangible and intangible heritage are thus susceptible to being housed by the museum institution and are collected as the human being walks through history.

## Objects and people: a human dialectic for the future

The path outlined in the previous section has led us in recent years, especially as a result of the enormous social development brought about by the industrial revolution, but above all, in the 21st century, and as a result of the development brought about by globalization and the digital world, to the museum institution being faced with several challenges of enormous significance:

a) On the one hand, humanity, as is evident from reading the classical Greek texts, Icelandic sagas, Shakespeare, Cervantes and Eastern philosophers, has been the same. The fundamental needs, bodily and psychological, the passions, their spirituality, the human being as a person and his relationship with his social and natural perspective, is ultimately the same: the search for beauty and truth, for love. Human passions are the same. Nothing has changed. In essence it is the same. We only have to look at the tremendous timeliness of texts written more than XX centuries ago. In this sense, the challenges of human knowledge are the same.

b) On the other hand, the social form is changing, contexts change, ideology changes, politics changes, the world changes, develops, lives better and people establish new conceptions, new ways of living in society, new ways of understanding reality, of advancing in the knowledge of what things are, of what our world is, what the universe is, what we are, what our purpose is. But there are also many other needs related to the sphere of leisure, aimed at contributing to the so-called welfare state, where people can be and live happier, and this situational evolution with specific needs for people in each

<sup>5</sup> HERNÁNDEZ, Francisca. Evolución del concepto de museo. *Revista general de información y documentación*, 1992, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 85–98.

<sup>6</sup> HERNÁNDEZ, Francisca. *Manual de Museología*. Madrid: Síntesis, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> REMPLEIN, Heinz. *Tratado de psicología evolutiva*. Barcelona: Labor, 1980, p. 458.

era, also brings challenges for the museum institution.

In this context of the universality of the human person diachronic in time and of this context of synchrony with the time we are living in the first half of the 21st century, the museum institution tries to reinvent itself in order to occupy a necessary place for society in a constant reconceptualization, but without forgetting that “*every future plunges into the past*”.<sup>8</sup> But what is the objective of this reconceptualization, of this reinvention? Undoubtedly, it must be to serve people in order to solve their needs and help them in their personal and social development. Ah, yes, needs, but what needs? Well, as many as possible. That is the key to the upcoming of the museum of the future. And if the museum does not do it, someone else will, with the risk of watching impassively as its place is taken by another more necessary equipment.

It would not be strange that in the not too distant future there will be a personalized museum that can respond to all the needs of each person and each social group. It would not be strange that in the not too distant future the museum will be inside the home of each person or each family, or each school, being able to physically or virtually display the objects and collections that meet the specific knowledge needs of the people who are there. The Museum as a teacher. The Museum-robot that helps you learn with exact or scale replicas of objects from museums around the world. The virtual museum in the smartphone, the museum implanted in a chip in the brain. In short, there are many possibilities that the future allows us to suspect.

But let us return to the present. One of the strengths of the museum is that it is shaped as a bearer of values inherent to the human. That is why it must know what its mission is and stay away from manipulative ideologies, but it must also know how to take advantage of ideologies when they become centers of interest for the population. It must be truly inclusive, being accessible and responding to all the needs of all the different people. Very ambitious, yes, but possible. To take advantage of ideologies means to take advantage of the social context, to give response to the needs that the cultural in the temporary present time is demanding. It would be, one could say, to use the trendic topics to mobilize the citizenship towards the museum, trying to fulfill its objectives. It means taking advantage of the centers of interest of each person, starting from their intrinsic motivation, to help them in their training, in their development.

The Museum cannot be something static. It has to be dynamic and not close its own doors, but rather open them wide, and it can even become a means of mass communication, as long as it does not renounce its signs of identity<sup>9</sup>. But what are signs of identity in the future for a museum? Surely its definition will be based on respect for its objects, but putting the focus on people, on respect for human values and possibly on renouncing to some corseted signs of identity and opening up to broader and more inclusive signs of identity, that is, by opening up to other fields that will be assumed by the museum institution, as a social center of first order.

And why do you need the objects? Because they are its essence. It is through them that it presents the testimonies, the meanings, its significant capacity, its programming to open itself to society, to educate the population, to provide an experiential space, where significant life experiences (SLE) are produced.<sup>10</sup> Because without objects it would be something else, it would no longer be a museum. But be careful because objects can be real or virtual, material or immaterial. With objects we may be able to respond to an increasingly important, demanding and diverse educational task. Yes, but the educational task is not the only one, or at least not only the cognitive dimension of the educational task. The affective, relational world is also part of the Museum's work. The Museum is a center of socialization. Emotions must be experienced, and better with people, in order to develop good emotional intelligence. The museum is a center that generates experiences, whether in person or virtually. The museum helps the integral, personal and social development, it teaches to live in community.

What will we see in the future? Even if we dream, it will be very difficult for us to anticipate the enormous changes that are going to take place in the world, perhaps we cannot even anticipate the changes that will occur in the next 20 years. Changes in society and changes in people. That is why it is important that the museum of the future be prepared to incorporate these changes into its museum dynamics. If it does not, it will be out of the game. It will not be able to compete with other physical or virtual equipments.

<sup>8</sup> JOYCE, James. *Ulises*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1922/1984, p. 183.

<sup>9</sup> HERNÁNDEZ, Francisca. Evolución del concepto de museo. *Revista general de información y documentación*, 1992, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 85–98.

<sup>10</sup> TANNER, Thomas. Significant life experiences: a new research area in environmental education. *Journal of Environmental Education*, 1980, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 20–24.

## The metamuseum: concept and main characteristics

What does this current situation of uncertainty and accelerated change lead<sup>11</sup> to in terms of the museum institution? Well, perhaps it could lead to what we could call the *metamuseum*. What do we mean by this term? A museum that reflects on itself. A museum of museums, an archetype of a museum that responds to people's needs, whatever they may be, since it caters to the individual and the social, to all kinds of spheres of the person and to all kinds of intelligences. The metamuseum is constructivist and generates an experiential space, where everything can happen: it is amazing, surprising, silent or noisy, musical, conversational, intimate, popular, social, individual, it is everything. But it is because it can be. Because it has the capacity for it. It is serious and it is fun. It is banal and profound. It is linear or free, it is simple or complex, it is directorial or self-directed, it is modular or holistic. It is local and it is global. It is bounded and it is unbounded. It is just one museum and it is all museums.

What are the keys to the metamuseum? It is to build bridges with the personal and the social, it is to connect, also with networks. These are some of the keys to success, not understood as success in terms of the number of people who visit, but in terms of the meaningful experiences it is able to provide. Walking through a museum does not mean learning, nor does it mean that experiences happen to the person. The key is how to connect with people. I once read that when an old man dies in Africa, they say

a museum disappears.<sup>12</sup> I could not bring to this reflection a more accurate phrase. And I am not only talking about intangible heritage, I also rescue in that old man, in his interior, the museum city and all forms and types of museums. Because that old man or woman is the universal human being, perhaps the hominid who took shelter in a cave and represented on a cold wall a hand, his or her hand and the archetype of the hand. He or she is the one who gives meaning to museums, or rather, they are the museums, because the museum is ultimately in the form of experiences in the souls of all people. Let's help people become living museums, let's help develop individuals and provide them with all kinds of knowledge, relationships and experiences. Let us help to weave the multicolored web of LIVING in museums, so that life is included in the museum and people, in turn, can contribute to bringing museums to life, because museums should be made of people.

Although the present is neither the past nor the future, although the future does not exist, the way in which society is accelerating, with drastic changes that are perhaps too continuous,<sup>13</sup> means that the present is becoming increasingly synonymous with the future. This is why we can say that, more and more, the museum of the present has to be the museum of the future. What will this museum of the future, this metamuseum, be like? Here we propose some of its characteristics:

1. Synchronic-diachronic.  
The museum therefore has

a temporal vision, along with a timeless vision.

2. Resilient. The museum must be resilient and anticipate the future.
3. Independent. The museum is independent of ideologies, but adapts to them
4. Inclusive. It is accessible and inclusive for all types of people.
5. Interdisciplinary. The museum must break down the barriers that constrain it by opening up to the interdisciplinary. It will not make sense to be classified as a science museum, an art museum or any other type of museum. Those barriers will make less and less sense. That is, a museum can house art objects, but work any kind of content within the museum: medicine, nursing, philosophy, architecture, values, emotional intelligence, creative intelligence, whatever, art, dance, theater.... Whatever my audiences need. In this sense, the objects are polysemic, including an interdisciplinary perspective.
6. Interactive. Interactivity rules. The object must provide experiences through interactivity. Non-interactivity is an obstacle to overcome.
7. Personalized. The museum must be personalized, it must respond to the interests and expectations of each person individually and collectively. The more the population is segmented, the easier it will be to cater to the particular interests of each segment. The more you personalize, the easier it is to respond to those needs. The more you get someone to come to a museum, if you

<sup>11</sup> HAN, Byung-Chul. *El aroma del tiempo. Un ensayo filosófico sobre el arte de demorarse*. [The scent of time. A philosophical essay on the art of lingering]. Barcelona: Herder editorial, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> LEE, Y. Una urna para preservar la vida: salvaguardia y legado del patrimonio cultural inmaterial. *Noticias del ICOM*, 2004, vol. 57, no. 4, pp. 5-7.

<sup>13</sup> HAN, Byung-Chul. *El aroma del tiempo. Un ensayo filosófico sobre el arte de demorarse*. [The scent of time. A philosophical essay on the art of lingering]. Barcelona: Herder editorial, 2016.



respond with quality to what they need and expect, the easier it will be for them to come back. In this sense, each person or each group can create their own museum.

8. Constructivist. Learning is constructivist, through experiences that provide “feeling, thinking and action”.<sup>14</sup> The museum should be constructivist, creating an unforgettable experiential space.
9. Multidimensional. It provides multidimensional learning<sup>15</sup> in all types of educational contexts: formal, non-formal and informal, encouraging self-directed and non-linear learning.
10. Work in networks. Networks are one of the keys to success in the future.
11. Real and virtual. The museum must house both the real and the virtual.
12. It teaches to think. If we want to be responsible with museum work, we cannot leave aside the competence of learning to think. We must promote it. This promotes the formation of independent individuals, freer, more autonomous, freer thinkers, more masters of their own lives. The museum should not give up this task.
13. Indefinition. The metamuseum includes a concrete indefinition that will support the complexity

of the world not from an analytical perspective of dissection by parts, but from a holistic and deep analysis that includes the complexity of reality as it is. This lack of definition will provide it with great versatility and adaptability.

14. De-localized. The museum of the future is a delocalized museum. No, we do not mean unlocated, but delocalized. It is a ubiquitous museum. You can call it from everywhere and it comes to you. It promotes the local and the universal.<sup>16</sup> It exists in one geographical location but it is in all geographical locations. The building is just another object in the museum. Sublime, enabling, attractive, motivating, tremendous.
15. Intelligent. It helps to develop multiple intelligences. The integral vision promotes the development of all the intelligences of the human being, including creative, kinesthetic, musical, emotional, transcendent, etc.
16. Open. It functions almost like a supraorganism with a cellular structure, self-sufficient, resilient and ready to interact with people.

In the metamuseum the famous quote by D’Ors: “(...) *to the museum one goes to admire*”,<sup>17</sup> could be formulated as follows: “*to the metamuseum one goes to (or the metamuseum comes to you to) admire, participate and learn, grow, experience, share, include, create, dream*”. In this sense,

the metamuseum belongs to a fifth generation, surpassing the 4th described by Beyer.<sup>18</sup> This fifth generation is already the generation in which people choose the objects and even generate them. The person is the absolute center of interest of the various objects. Objects are adapted to people’s centers of interest and not the other way around. The service of the object reaches its maximum. Objects, virtual or real, existing or created, help in the development of people precisely to the extent that they need it, but not only on an individual level, but also on a social level. And people help objects in their preservation, interrelation and generation of discourses. Objects love people and admire them and talk to them and people listen to what objects have to tell them and talk to them, because it is just of their interest and just what they were looking for, just at the necessary level to understand the discourse, just at the necessary level to learn, just generating the right experience, the experience sought in that walk together that allows the metamuseum.

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<sup>17</sup> D’ORS, Eugenio. Tres horas en el Museo del Prado. 1989. In HERNÁNDEZ, Francisca. *Manual de Museología*. Madrid: Síntesis, 1994, p. 318.

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Fernando Echarri Iribarren vystudoval Biologické vědy (Navarrská univerzita, 1989) a získal titul PhD v oboru Environmentální výchova (Navarrská univerzita, 2009). Je docentem na Katedře environmentální biologie Navarrské univerzity (Pamplona, Španělsko), kde vyučuje programy

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