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Regional Museums in Russia: How to solve the accessibility problem? : museum network development strategy

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abstrakt | abstract ▷

In modern Russia the development of new approaches to attracting the museum audience and studying the museum visitors, have become matters of crucial importance. The change in the society's attitude towards cultural heritage allows one not only preserve it as a particular valuable niche in the structural and functional system of the culture, but also to reveal its uniqueness and significance in terms of organizing historical and cultural environment of the region. Museum plays a particular role in the society's familiarization with its cultural heritage. We suggested a set of recommendations that would facilitate the access of the population to the cultural objects.

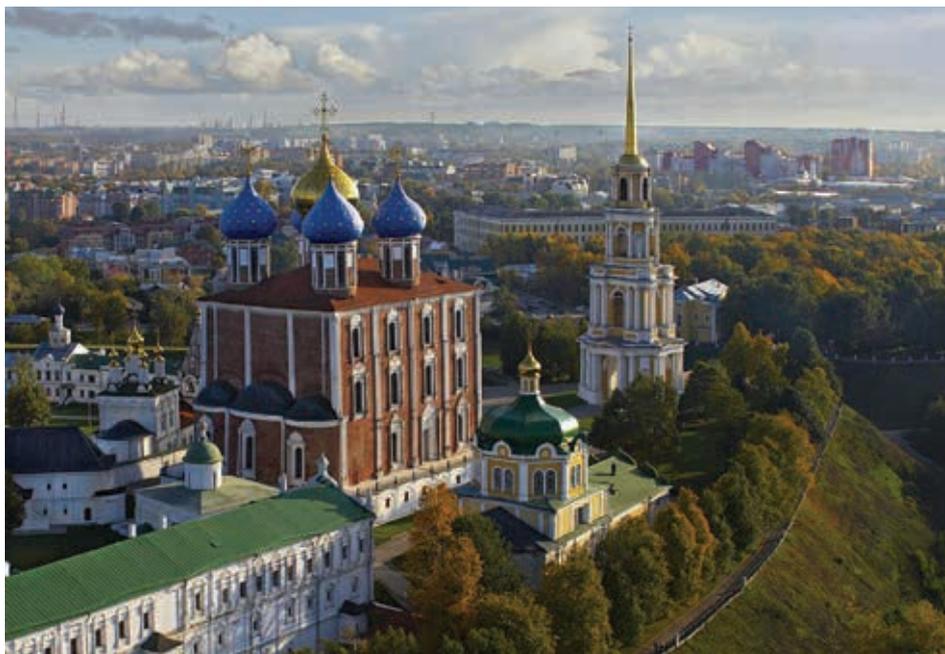
Rozvoj nových přístupů pro přilákání muzejního publika a studování muzejních návštěvníků se v moderním Rusku stávají záležitostmi se zásadním významem. Změna v postoji společnosti vůči kulturnímu dědictví umožňuje nejenom uchovat jej jako konkrétní cennou věc ve strukturálním a funkčním systému kultury, ale také odhalit jeho jedinečnost a význam, pokud jde o organizaci historického a kulturního prostředí v daném regionu. Muzeum hraje specifickou úlohu při seznamování společnosti s jejím kulturním dědictvím. Navrhli jsme soubor doporučení, které usnadní přístup obyvatel ke kulturním statkům.

text a foto: Maria Kaulen, Irina Chuvilova, Olga Cherkaeva

Regional Museums in Russia:

How to Solve the Accessibility Problem?

Museum Network Development Strategy



Ryazan Museum-Reserve (Open Air Museum)

One of the main problems of museum operations in modern Russia is museum **accessibility** for local population, since quite often some districts and settlements do not possess any museum institution. In addition, the nearest museums are situated far from these territories or the latter have insufficient transport connections, especially in rural areas, and suffer from poor road quality.

A typical example is Ryazan region situated in Central Russia, 200 km from Moscow. Its area is 39.6 thousand square km. The population is approximately 1160 thousand people, with 69% living in cities and 31% in rural areas. The region has 2746 settlements, 34 of which are urban municipalities. There are 41 museums and 21 of them are located in the cities and 20, in rural areas. Ryazan region comprises more

than 3 thousand natural, historic, and architecture objects.

The dynamics of development of the museum network in the Ryazan region has been positive during 15 years, which reflects great attention paid to this field by the regional authorities. Thus, in 1996, there were only 16 museums in the Ryazan region, whereas in 2012, their number reached 41. However, one can observe unstable attendance rates: 623 thousand people in 1995; 539,6 thousand people in 2000; 656 thousand (surge of interest) during 2005–2008; and then a decline to 572 thousand visitors during 2011–2013. However, according to the research data, today “the share of museum visits in the leisure activities of the real museum audience in the Ryazan region villages is only 14.3% (35.6% in a small town); many village residents cannot visit

the museums because of geographical remoteness and poor transport infrastructure. There are only 13 museums available for the residents of 2746 villages of the Ryazan region¹.

In this respect, the development of new approaches to attracting the museum audience and, consequently, studying the museum visitors, have become matters of crucial importance. Searching for appropriate solutions to museum problems of the region, Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Ryazan region requested assistance of the Russian Museum Encyclopedia research group. A complex survey was conducted including the analysis of the regional cultural policy, identification of the region's cultural heritage objects to be added to the category of museum objects, and study of the museum audience and its demands.

Studying the current cultural development in the regions and the progress of the legislative practice showed a gradual emergence of an innovative poly subject / regional model of cultural policy. The change in the traditional paradigm creates favorable conditions for autonomous cultural development of the region and use of all the resources of the regional community. Regional specifics and the organization of cultural life differ in terms of local traditions and the characteristics of political, economical, and institutional order. Preservation of cultural heritage and integral regional environment including its nature and culture represents a high-priority of the region's cultural policy².

The recognition of the need to revise one's attitude towards cultural heritage, and the transition from the protective concept to that of the sustainable development of a region which considers heritage as a resource is a first step towards the establishment of a new paradigm for integrating cultural heritage into modern social environment. The change in the society's attitude towards cultural heritage allows one not only preserve it as a particular valuable niche in the structural and functional system of the culture, but also to reveal its uniqueness and significance in terms of organizing historical and cultural environment of the region.

Museum plays a particular role in the society's familiarization with its cultural heritage, so as a result, we suggested a set of recom-

mendations that would facilitate the access of the population to the cultural objects.

It is well known that small municipal, village, departmental, and private museums have the strongest impact on local communities. These museums located in towns, work as historical museums of local lore, and their operation is mainly oriented to the local community. One of the major conclusions: taking into consideration low population density of the vast territory and small number of villages and settlements, it would be inefficient to establish museums in each residential place. Under these circumstances, the following work strategies were recommended:

- 1) **development of the program for optimizing the distribution of museums;**
- 2) **turning artefacts of regional importance into museum objects; musealisation of the environment** (introduction of various museum elements into socio-cultural and every day environment of the settlements);
- 3) better protection of **intangible cultural heritage;** and
- 4) active program of **travelling exhibitions** that would bring objects from regional museum collections.

So, 1) Study, preservation, and actualization of the historical and cultural heritage of the region is closely linked to the problem of optimizing the museum network which is characterized by an uneven distribution of museum institutions, disproportion between different types of museums, etc. First of all, in order to ensure the accessibility of museums, one should develop a **program for optimizing the distribution of museums and museum-type facilities in rural area**. Village museums, especially in remote regions, play a specific role, since they incorporate club and recreation centre and represent a place for constant interactions between local residents.

Small museum sites inseparably linked with the interests of local communities should be located in **junction settlements** connected to surrounding areas by a well-developed road network. These may not necessarily be museums in the proper sense of the word with fund collections and a full range of museum activities: it would be reasonable to focus on creating various museum-type facilities that would combine museums with other cultural and educational institutions (school museum, library museum, ecological path, etc.). Nowadays, this trend is clearly underdeveloped.

In the Ryazan region, several museum-type facilities were created and gradually trans-



Study of museum audience in the Ryazan Museum-Reserve

formed into true museums. Thus, the Historical Center of Local Lore located in the Shatsk district of the Ryazan region will become a fully functional museum in the near future. The Center was created at the initiative of the Department of Culture of the Shatsk Municipal District Administration in 2005 and became a cultural museum complex in the city of Shatsk. It is engaged in elaborating cultural, educational, and tourist programs and publishing various articles dealing with the subject of the local lore. The Center conducts educational activities for children of various ages. Sociological surveys showed that special attention should be paid to working with young people and children. The programs **Shatsk roots** and **Little museum (Muzeyka)** were developed in order to familiarize pupils with traditional culture and the historical and cultural heritage of Shatsk region. All courses are based on studying authentic exhibits. The main principle of the program: hold in hand-try in practice. The museum projects, such as **Let us write our history**, as well as the events **Canvas of victory** and **The whole family to the museum** were implemented and conducted in the region.

However, there are several areas in the Ryazan region with no museums at all, which has important consequences for the cultural life of these settlements. Starozhilovsky district with its population of 17 thousand people is a prominent example of this unfortunate phenomenon. However, the district is a homeland of Vasily Golovin (who made two journeys round the world at the beginning of the 19th century, explored the Pacific Coast, and "discovered" Japan for Europe) and could duly present the accomplishments of the explorer. Some places possess significant

¹ См.: Культура Рязанской области в цифрах [Culture of Ryazan region in figures]. 2013. Рязань, 2014.

² Каулен М.Е., Чувилова И.В., Черкаева О.Е. Перспективы внедрения результатов социологического исследования «Музей и посетитель» [Perspectives for implementation of the results of sociological research «Museum and Visitor»] // Новации в музейном мире. Музей как коммуникационный протокол: Сборник научных статей. Отв. ред. И.В. Чувилова, О.Н. Шелегина. Новосибирск, 2013. С. 213.



Historical Center of Local Lore in Shatsk.



Estate of Sergey Khudekov.

resources for developing local areas and expand regional museum network³.

In this respect, **musealisation of the historical-cultural heritage, including the objects of regional importance** becomes very important while solving the problem of museum accessibility for local population. The studies

of the museum audience revealed a clearly pronounced need of population of the appearance of new types of museums and the objects added to the category of musealias (exhibits). Today, museum reserves represent a crucial element in the effective using of historical and cultural objects and preserving the cultural diversity of our country.

Consequently, along with developing a territorial model for distributing museums of various

types and profiles, one should determine potential objects for musealisation using new approaches and forms. This will help not only resolve the problem of reluctance of society when it comes to visiting the museums, but also prevent a threat looming above a considerable part of the heritage that lacks significant historical and cultural value across the entire country or its major regions. This part of the heritage – let us name it the **objects of regional local importance** – represents an exceptional value for local communities, their social adaptation and inculturation.

The study showed that: *It is necessary to develop a program for revealing and adding to the category of museum objects (full, mild, or partial musealisation) the objects of regional significance. The program would include two major objectives:*

- constant diversification of valuable objects exhibited in the museums or considered as the basis for creating independent museums;
- focus on a small-scale regional musealisation related to the objects that cannot always be included in the existing museums or serve as a basis for creating new ones; however, their significance for the local community may be preserved and revealed using the same methods, whereas the objects themselves may be included in other structures. Thus, museum-type facilities and memorial areas and objects may be established⁴.

One of the promising forms of musealisation consists in creating **environmental museums** – one of the most dynamically developing museum forms in both quantitative and conceptual aspects (the environment with the different artefacts is a major musealisation object, the museum being generally built into a real environment of a region and representing its integral part). Today, two major environmental museum models are well known, i.e., a museum on a strictly limited reserve area reflecting the fragments of its historical, cultural, and natural environment (these are, as a rule, museum-reserves based on the unique historical, cultural, and natural areas), and a museum that is “built” into an area, penetrates it, and represents its integral part (those are the dispersed museums as the Novgorod and Vladimir-Suzdal museum-reserves). These museums closely interact with the environment and have a significant impact on it⁵. Such models may be considered

³ См.: Исследование «Музей и посетитель», 2012-2013. Рукопись. [The study «The Museum and the visitor.» The manuscript.]

⁴ Каулен М.Е., Чувилова И.В., Черкаева О.Е. Перспективы внедрения результатов социологического исследования «Музей и посетитель» [Perspectives for implementation of the results of sociological research «Museum and Visitor»] // Новации в музейном мире. Музей как коммуникационный протокол: Сборник научных статей. Отв. ред. И.В. Чувилова, О.Н. Шелегина. Новосибирск, 2013. С. 216-217.
⁵ Каулен М.Е., Чувилова И.В., Черкаева О.Е. Ук.соч. С.218.

as promising with respect to the development of museum demand in the society and integration of museum into socio-cultural space of the region.

In 2007, the Historical Cultural Environmental Museum **Estate of Sergey Khudekov** was created in the Ryazan region. The museum is located in Korablinsky district 30 km from the regional centre of Skopin. Today reconstruction works are being conducted in order to restore the historical outlook of the estate, develop service infrastructure, and preserve and reconstruct a unique local arboretum (botanical garden). The example of this museum speaks for the growing interest of population in new museum institutions and forms of heritage presentation. At a time when the attendance rate was in its decline during 2008–2010, only this museum (along with **Tsiolkovsky Memorial House**) was able to raise this index to 6.2 thousand visitors per year (the population of Korablinsky district being 22.9 thousand people).



Windmill in Shatsk District.

Sergey Khudekov was a journalist, dramatist, and art historian who created two arboreta, one of which is situated in Sochi (1892) and the second one in the **Yerlino village** (1870–80-e). In these gardens, most of the amazing plants are still alive and accessible for visitors (the arboretum 27,5 ha in area with unique rare trees older than 170 years belongs to the 18th—19th centuries). A cascade of 6 ponds 4,5 ha in area embellishes

the garden. A research is being conducted to preserve the unique tree species and create new garden exhibitions. The museum is being gradually restored, which in the end will help create an exceptional platform for cultural and educational tourism and a recreation area for local population⁶.

Therefore, we consider it is possible and even necessary to elaborate the program of discovery and musealisation (full, smooth or partial) of the objects of local importance at the regional level.

2) One of the important aspects of the **environment musealisation** is introducing small “**museum islets**” into a daily life of a community. Small exhibitions, as well as historical corners may be arranged in movie theaters, stores, restaurants, etc. Placing such “museum islets” in the areas to which local population is accustomed will gradually habituate the audience to the presence of heritage in its daily life and nurture the museum demand. There are interesting museum complexes built into

terpiece of the area⁷. However, such “museum islets” are clearly scarce and their further creation is being envisaged.

3) Another important aspect is **working with intangible heritage**. The experience proves that such practice facilitates actualization of the heritage even in the areas where there are no permanent stationary museum exhibitions or only small village museums exist. For example, the museum located in Zhelannoe village organizes and conducts workshops to make traditional toys and master spinning and weaving. The village population (548 people) knows and appreciates the museum which helped to a great extent to consolidate the society and now attracts visitors from the neighboring regions who come over for weekends.

The Museum of Pottery is affiliated with the **Skopino Museum of Local Lore**. Restoring ancient manufacturing techniques used to create pieces of pottery, the museum encouraged the development of the craft that was historically a source of pride for the city. In 2013, the **Fifth International Pottery Festival** was held here⁸.

4) Surely, it is impossible to create museums, even small ones, in each village. Therefore, we should return to **travelling exhibitions**, a popular practice of the 20th century. It would be inefficient to organize permanent exhibitions in small villages, since all residents will visit them within quite a short period of time. Taking into consideration the experience of **Ryazan Architectural Museum Reserve** in organizing the **Theater of Things**, one can recommend conducting similar actions in villages, i.e., present several authentic exhibits in the form of interesting and fascinating theatrical performances using elements of movies, music, and appropriate light. It is advisable to conduct the cycles of exhibitions which would unfold specific subjects (for example, national historical events, certain historical period, genre or style, etc). Such cycles may play a significant role in developing museum demand in rural areas.

A cycle of travelling exhibitions is planned for 2015 when the country will celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War (Second World War). The core of the exhibition will be formed in Ryazan, at the premises of the museum reserve **The Ryazan Kremlin**. The exhibition will travel across the region during one year and will be enriched with local materials (different artifacts

a common life of educational institutions. Thus, the Museum of the philologist Ivan Sreznevsky and the Museum of poet Sergey Esenin, both born in the Ryazan region, operate in the Ryazan State University. The sole remaining windmill located close to an express road in Shatsk district is a remarkable cultural object. It was restored and became a recognizable cen-

⁶ См.: Исследование «Музей и посетитель». Рукопись. [The study «The Museum and the visitor.» The manuscript.]

⁷ См.: Исследование «Музей и посетитель». Рукопись. [The study «The Museum and the visitor.» The manuscript.]

⁸ См.: сайт www.musrzn.ru.



Local History Museum in Zhelannoye village.



A travelling exhibition of the Year of the museums in Ryazan region (2013).

and documents), thus presenting the historical heritage of the entire region.

The exhibitions permit to specifically address a particular group of local population with due consideration of their interests, preferences, age categories, occupations, and other characteristics. Each exhibition may be accompanied with a set of corresponding events, which would enhance its attractiveness for a particular audience.

A study of the museum's audience, we came to the conclusion that different segments

of museum audience will prefer different types and genres of exhibitions and different themes.⁹ So, one has to study deep responses of the audience to various exhibition solutions and thematic propositions, conduct preliminary studies of interests and preferences of various population groups with respect to museum exhibitions using the methods of museum psychology. The exhibition activities of museums of the cities and regions should be consolidated into unified regional programs of museum exhibitions.

However, the problems of museum communication and the interaction of museums with new visitors are among one of the most vital and though less studied issues. In this respect, it is especially important to investigate how the audience perceives the museum in general and various types of exhibitions and forms of cultural and educational activities. One should also explore the role of museum in modern society, in particular, with respect to nurturing the patriotic approach and tolerance and overcoming national and social distance.

The study showed a considerable variation of preferences depending on age, education, occupation, and sex of the respondents. This fully confirms our suggestion that the museum audience has changed significantly and become much more differentiated. Today the visitor's response to the information and forms of its presentation by the museums varies considerably depending on social and demographic specificities and individual characteristics of the visitors.

The knowledge of the history of one's native land plays an important role in the development of historical conscience. However, the study showed that *such knowledge is insufficient and superficial. At the same time, museum audience demonstrates an interest in national history motivated by the wish to widen one's perspective and find answers to the pressing questions of today's world in the history. Therefore, a major task of museum experts should consist in searching for modern, unusual, and diverse ways to satisfy this need, and especially with respect to young people. Those can be scientifically developed museum programs including the museum courses on local lore and visiting historical objects.*¹⁰

⁹ См.: Исследование музейной аудитории: Методическое пособие [The study of the museum audience: Methodical manual] / М.Е. Каулен, И.В. Чувилова, О.Е. Черкаева, О.А. Ефанова. М., 2013.

¹⁰ Каулен М.Е., Чувилова И.В., Черкаева О.Е. Перспективы внедрения результатов социологического исследования «Музей и посетитель» [Perspectives for implementation of the results of sociological research «Museum and Visitor»] // Новации в музейном мире. Музей как коммуникационный протокол: Сборник научных статей. Отв. ред. И.В. Чувилова, О.Н. Шелегина. Новосибирск, 2013. С. 224.

It is important to mention that a true interest in history is usually passive. This means that, despite a considerable confidence placed in museums, young people tend to refer to movies, publications, and fiction for historical knowledge. Museum, on the other side, proposes an active way of learning historical information and remains on the periphery of educational process.

An important mission of museums in small residential areas is to develop local talents. Participation in museum activities has a positive impact on self-identification and education of people.

In addition, taking into account modern economic situation that requires optimizing the use of material and intellectual resources and efficient management strategies, as well as the transformation of museums into open modern organizations, one should envisage the creation of a regional multitier museum information center. A **multitier museum center** is a module system that allows for developing a unified cultural environment, i.e., a "museum world of the region". The purpose of this institution is to facilitate the development of a unified museum communication and information environment where museums, educational institutions, and other cultural organizations of the region would closely cooperate. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Ryazan region is involved in this project: it created the **Information Analytical and Resource Museum Center** in the region. Its task consists in developing a network partnership of museums in the Ryazan region, implementing and using the most efficient methods and forms of museum activities, and improving professional knowledge. The Center is engaged in the informational and organizational coordination of interactions between museums, implementation of modern technologies into museum activities, and elaboration of educational programs. All these measures will allow visitors to quickly receive the information on the museum events held in the region¹¹. In order to include the museums of the Ryazan region into a unified information environment, a website **Museums of the Ryazan region** was created where each museum has its own page (www.musrzn.ru).

Thus, in order for the museums to become a source of territorial development, we should take into consideration regional specifics and focus museum activities on various segments of local communities. We must determine

¹¹ Исследование музейной аудитории: Методическое пособие [The study of the museum audience: Methodical manual] / М.Е. Каулен, И.В. Чувилова, О.Е. Черкаева, О.А. Ефанова. М., 2013. С. 55.

precise forms of interactions appropriate for a particular region, evaluate their efficiency, and reveal the most promising ones. While developing a museum policy, a special attention should be paid to working with local community, which would reinforce the position of museums in local systems of communication.

The developed model for providing the rural population of Ryazan region with the access to cultural heritage can be used as a reference for other regions of the Russian Federation, with due consideration of their territorial, historical-cultural, and national peculiarities. ■

Keywords:

Historical and cultural environment; the availability of heritage; museums of local lore; museum audience; studying the museum visitors

Klíčová slova:

historické a kulturní prostředí, dostupnost dědictví, muzea místní tradice, muzejní publikum, studování návštěvníků muzea

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