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MUSEUM: A TIMELESS EDUCATOR

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Abstract

This article gives a philosophical overview of the educational role of museums throughout a human history. Museums are analyzed as social institutions. Author studies the historical forms of museums (Temple of Muses, Mouseion, Cabinets of Curiosities, Classic museums, Modern Museums) to investigate how the educational function of a museum progressed while the museum went through evolution. In conclusion it would appear that regardless of the historical form a museum serves people's needs in information, aesthetics, and communication. Museum educated people throughout the history of a human. In this article museum is characterized as a global humanitarian project. This characteristics seems extremely important in the context of globalization – a process that signifies a movement of integration of a planetary scale in many areas of human life. Considering museum as a project it should be emphasized that unlike modern projects with limited implementation line, a project of a museum began in antiquity and continues to this day. In this sense the museum is a humanitarian project of mankind. A museum can be called a humanitarian project in the meaning related to person's rights and interests. Museum is a global project whose activity extends through distance and time, is available for everyone and is related to the whole world.

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Keywords: Informal education museum, learning in museums, lifelong learning, museum as a global humanitarian project.



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1. Introduction

Depending on research context, a museum can be characterized differently. Museums may be seen as a form of a culture, a social instrument (Low, 1942), a category of thinking (Findlen, 1989), a form of a historical memory, a social institution, etc. Modern museum becomes an international network, a platform which involves representatives from different social groups in a common space. It evolves into a center of communication within a city as it was in a Greek polis. Today the influence of museums is growing.

Museum serves social needs and reflects those in a form of expositions, programs and events. At the same time, museums can shape the values of a society and influence changes in the value structure of a certain society. It is not purely an institution which stores and displays the cultural objects. In a broad sense, museum as an urban center plays the role of educator and communicator between the future and the past.

For the purpose of this article museum will be viewed as a global humanitarian project. It seems that this characteristic emphasizes the timeless educational potential of a museum in the best possible way.

2. Problem Statement

Museum serves various social needs. Throughout the history of a museum as a social institution it has played a crucial role in the unification of society and preservations of the heritage and culture. The article proposes to analyze educational role of a museum while defining a museum as a global humanitarian project.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions are posed:

- How does a museum maintain its educational potential throughout the history?
- Can a museum be “an educator” without being a public museum as we know it?
- How did the forms of education change within a museum?

4. Purpose of the Study

This study is conducted to analyze the philosophical role of a museum as a timeless educator.

5. Research Methods

A considerable amount of museology literature has been published on a social meaning of a museum. A large body of such literature has been investigated to investigate the routes of museum development. Museology works published in the middle of 20th century were analyzed along with more modern findings. The article, therefore, mainly uses the method of philosophical analysis.

6. Findings

A museum was created within society. The historical forms of a museum (the ancient temples of Muses, Mouseion - the library of Alexandria, the galleries, the cabinets of curiosities, first academic museums by universities, classic museums, and modern museums) entirely depend on the set of values of a particular society. The existence of a museum can only be imagined within the society, where a museum as a social institution continues its development. This leads to our understanding of a museum as global humanitarian project.

Referring to the most fundamental concepts of this study, 'global' is seen as 'covering the entire world', 'worldwide'. In addition, it can be considered 'related to global problems'. In some cases, references will be made to such meaning of 'global' as 'unlimited', 'without borders'. The term 'humanitarian' in the context of this study should be understood as 'addressed to the human, their rights and interests'.

Museum can be characterized as a global humanitarian project since:

- it serves people's needs for education, aesthetics, self-expression, understanding, friendship with those like-minded;
- has to do with people's personality, their rights and interests;
- is related to the global community and to humanity as a whole;
- is not physically limited, spatially open;
- is called upon to solve global problems such as lack of education, low literacy, inequality, global warming, pollution, etc. (Koreneva, 2017).

Analysis of any historical form of museum shows that despite the physical form, museums have always existed in a system of relations and united society. A timeless nature of museum makes it a global humanitarian project of humankind. Overall, a museum seems to be an educator, a keeper, an entertainer and advertiser at the same time.

Looking closer at the educational function that museums have played, it can be seen that regardless of the form, a museum tended to be the center of a public life. Its social functions evolved together with the institution of a museum. Dana in 1917 highlights the social evolution of museums depending on social needs. Osborne lists two main societal needs related to a museum visit – education and entertainment.

Temples of Muses in Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome gathered people for religious needs, but as well for many important public events (agon-contests). Temples of Muses united people. The library in Alexandria, called Mouseion united well-known scientists (Euclid, Aristarchus of Samos), providing them with necessary conditions to help them execute their research. The Mouseion was the first academia. Erskine (1995) calls it the prototype of university, the first academic community.

Despite the fact that 'cabinets of curiosities' were private, they fulfilled an educational function, demonstrating rare exhibits to certain people. The first museum was opened to the public in 1793. Porshnev considers the fact of inclusion libraries into museums (Porshnev, 2012). This tendency continued further with the advent of the first public museums. It is a well-known fact that the British Museum from its

foundation included the National Library, and only in 1973 those institutions were separated. The Russian State Library was originally part of the Rumyantsev Museum.

Classic museums (opened in 18th century and existing further on) discovered the importance of learning in museums. Linear approach to exhibiting space went in line with the attempts to conceptualize the world around in the form of encyclopedias. The most popular learning form within classic museums was an excursion.

‘Museum pedagogy’ as a term appears in 20th century in Germany. Later on this term will be widely used in museology works published in the Soviet Union. Milovanov (2014) sees museum pedagogy as a part of pedagogy, which is aimed at psychological and educational aspects of museum work. Museum pedagogy covers a wide range of aspects – educational practice of museum in general, and cooperation of museum and schools in particular (Ivanova, 2014).

The modern museum (a 21st century museum) can be also interpreted as a form of global humanitarian project. It may unite society, serving it and solving global problems. The difference between the previous museum forms is that the modern museum can serve public digitally, through distances, remotely. Online museums are one of the examples of modern museum.

Modern museums offer a diverse environment for learning, considering all kinds of audiences. In the article ‘Museum as a non-formal education and lifelong learning institution’ it was explained how a museum provides the society with informal education and lifelong learning and, in particular, the characteristics of informal education in museum, which are:

- interactivity;
- contextual approach to the information assimilation;
- personal interest ;
- intrapersonal interaction;
- work in groups (Koreneva, 2015).

Each target audience can be reached by different activities, so museums must offer an inclusive environment (Dodd & Sandell, 2001). Andre, Durksen, and Volman, (2017) study the «most promising strategies» used in museum environment that target children, whereas Svedlow (1997) focuses on adult learning situations in museums. Museums as a social work actor are able to help visitors struggle with personal issues, as well as with social injustices (Silverman, 2010). An effective educational policy and effective decision making (Sorina, 2009) on a museum management level may be able to strengthen mutual understanding between people, and help to establish intercultural communication.

Interestingly, modern museums are not only providing the access to education to all, but they also underline the most important social issues and questions, drag public’s attention to them. Museum itself by its mission can solve global issues (for example, Canadian Museum for Human Rights).

The question arises how exactly the modern museum visitor differs from a museum visitor in the past? The linear way of exhibiting objects, excursions as only available form of perceiving information in the museum reflected the nature of the visitor, who listened but not communicated with the museum. Today the visitor is an active member of polylogue between a museum, society, and artefacts. Modern visitor

creates meaning him or herself. Nowadays museums care not only about the relation “museum guide-visitor”, but also “visitor – another visitor”, creating new formats of group communication such as lectures, clubs, and dinners at the museum. A 21st-century visitors has high expectations towards museums, expecting those to be places of education and entertainment at the same time.

Infotainment (information+entertainment) is a new paradigm for the museum to exist. This adjustment reflects the ways of presenting the information: rather fragmentarily, than in a linear way of exhibition, changing of the setting, actions, striving for interactivity. At a certain point, the visitor becomes a child whose concentration is limited and requires constant attractions. The intensity of communication is associated with the density of transmitting and processing the information by the museum to other social institutions.

7. Conclusion

The major goal of this study was to underline the educational role of a museum regardless of its historical form. Any museum of any epoch may be characterized as a global humanitarian project. Temples of muses united people for common religious activities, which were inseparable from acquiring the knowledge. Mouseion in Alexandria served as a place of scientific research and was a platform of scientific communication, the prototype of the university. Cabinets of Curiosities served the desire to organize the knowledge about the world around. First classic museums started a tradition of museum learning as we know it. Modern museum provides all members of society with access to education in many forms – offline and online.

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