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**MODERNIZATION OF OBJECTIVE-SPATIAL ENVIRONMENT
OF REGIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY MUSEUMS**

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Abstract

This article studies the role of regional ethnography museums in villages of one ethnic minority of Ural, Nagaybaks, having their own long history and unique culture. Village museums of folk history, founded in the 80s of the previous century, preserve the collective memory of nations. However, recently museums have been losing their popularity, especially among youngsters. Co-operation with the university has enabled not only to reveal causes of this trend, but find solutions of this problem.

The research has been carried out by teachers and students and comprises a few stages. The first step involves surveying visitors and museum staff. Modernization of objective-spatial museum environment has become the key factor in solving the problem, which has started with revising the number of exhibits and digitizing the most valuable ones. The second stage has resulted with the recommendations, concerning the reforming of the majority of exhibition space. Incorporating as part of display some digital installations and virtual expositions has given museums more dynamics and attraction.

The studies have been concluded with methodological recommendations for revitalization of village museums of local history, which account for the specific functioning features of small museums of ethnic minorities, as well as values of visitors, most of whom are donors of exhibits and descendants of national heroes. As a result of research, students, performing the project tasks, have acquainted with the little known original culture of Nagaybaks, expanded their awareness of their country and become involved in the collective memory of these people.

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1. Introduction

Regional historical and cultural memory – is an important factor of preserving the cultural identity of small ethnic communities in Russia, and museums of regional ethnography – represent a vital condition for preservation, reproduction and transfer of this memory to younger generations at every level of Russian society.

«An eternal crossroad of nations» is the name often applied to Ural. Several ethnicities and nations inhabit this land. Recent decades have not yielded the examples of minorities, seeking to use their constitutional right to secede or alter the boundaries, established during the Soviet period. The great majority of communities insist on the completion of other clauses of the Declaration on the rights of national or ethnic minorities, above all, concerning the preservation of national or ethnic distinctness and creating conditions for its development.

The organization issues, regarding the activities of regional museums, which remain the critical factor for protecting the wealth and diversity of culture and history of Russian ethnical minorities, as well as opposing the modern trends such as globalization and standardization, continue to be in the focus of discussions and publications (Imennova, 2011; Kalabikova, 2013; Dubov, 2000; Pavlova & Pechnikov, 2016; Poidina, 2017).

Nagaybaks, whose population at present is 8148 people, successfully coexist with larger nations of Ural. Their history presents a typical example, reflecting all the twists and turns of the Ural region, though the interest to almost half a century's old regional ethnography museums of Nagaybaks has recently declined. The number of visitors is decreasing.

This situation has impelled museum staff to seek assistance from regional universities. This query has been answered not only by historians and regional ethnographers, but artists and designers. A complex study has revealed that there are numerous reasons for declining interest to museums.

Every group of experts works within their field. Teachers of the design department have immediately pointed that some visitors and museum staff make comments about the drawbacks of exposition, including the antiquated look and uncomfortable viewing which has been confirmed upon first visiting the museum to inspect its objective-spatial environment. It has been assumed that decrease in the number of visitors is partially caused by the loss of appeal as museums are seen as «a storage of old things».

Implementation of digital technologies in the objective-spatial environment of museums enables to refill museum rooms with visitors and to display exhibits in a new perspective. Museum staff can benefit from the opportunity to demonstrate the maximum number of artefacts, to provide more insight into the local history. Added elements of virtual exposition make museums more mobile and increasingly attractive.

2. Problem Statement

Most people rarely go to museums, only outstanding treasure-houses of historical artefacts and works of art continue to attract visitors. Even though most exhibits and small museums can only be fully explored and appreciated after several lengthy visits. To encourage visitors to pay another visit can be done in a number of ways, some of them are related with information accessibility and advertisement, others – with travelling displays and renovating expositions. Our research solves the problem by searching for possible ways to revive visitors' interest with the help of reforming the objective-spatial environment and

display of museums. Renovating museums can recur continuously, as most of artefacts collect dust for years in museum storage and the question how to make them accessible remains relevant.

3. Research Questions

Nowadays the most perspective is the implementation of digital technologies in museum activities. The analysis of this experience, given in a range of publications (Maksimova, 2013; Nazarenko, Rogulin, Aranovich, & Kozhemiakin, 2011; Shlykova, 2012), describe two aspects of its application.

First, it is related with digitizing the exhibits, currently carried out in large museums of Russia and the world. Digitizing is a relatively new form of preserving the cultural wealth, and, consequently, causes mixed feelings. It is done to achieve two major goals: automation of accounting and upgrading the level of displaying funds.

Most proponents among the museum experts believe that digitizing improves popularization and accessibility of cultural wealth to all levels of society, including people with limited mobility. Digital resources, undoubtedly, have a number of added advantages. Funds of high quality copies enable more precise restoration of artefacts, reprinting and the like. Nonetheless, the opponents among the museum specialists express their reservations, saying that total digitizing preserves only digital copies rather than the real objects of cultural wealth (Maksimova, 2013). Conservation of authentic artefacts remains the major problem of museum staff.

Secondly, creating and using such phenomenon as virtual museums, easily accessible in the Internet, provides the best opportunities for exploring cultural and historical materials, which has certain communication means (feedback of users and etc.). Some of the foreign writers consider it as part of the mainstream development of media culture (Croteau & Hoynes, (2003), Castells, (2009); others – as a separate branch of digital art (Bowen, (2010), Bowen, Bennett, and Johnson (1998), Fürstner, (2006), Giaccardi (2006)).

Among Russian authors, considering the issues of creating virtual museums in their works, there are such groups as Nazarenko, Rogulin, Aranovich, & Kozhemiakin (2011) and individual names as Maksimova (2013); Shlykova (2012) and others.

At the beginning of 2000 it was put forward that virtual museums cannot simply copy traditional ones, instead they need to expand the functional capacities of conventional museums and improve the informativity of museum space (Jonathan P. Bowen, Jim Bennett, and James Johnson; Tom Fürstner, 2006).

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study – researching the possibilities of updating the objective-spatial environment of museums to maintain interest in the collective memory of Nagaybaks as one of the ethnic minorities of Ural.

5. Research Methods

The study comprises a number of stages, using a complex of methods. At the very beginning the first visit to a museum is made to get acquainted with the staff, who describe the current issues. Then, there are the following stages:

1 stage – studying the experience of solving similar problems by largest museums in Russia and the world;

2 stage – examining regional museums and visual perception of exhibits, as well as surveying the interests and preferences of visitors;

3 stage – implementing elements of digital art in the objective-spatial environment of regional museums.

Besides theoretical studies to find solutions of the problem visitors and museum staff are surveyed. The survey mainly concerns teenagers and schoolchildren. The obtained data shows that children are keen to learn the local history, but the museum is called «a warehouse of old junk».

The main focus of survey is on the countryside population where museums are situated as well as visitors from neighbouring regions, because they are often the donors, ex-owners of now museum exhibits. Several artefacts and documents are related with relatives and well-known people, sometimes direct ancestors, blood kin.

Further work involves the long-term observation of museum activities, discussions with museum staff and curators, examining exhibits and their historical value. Only after that the development of proposal project, concerning the upgrading museum expositions and the entire objective-spatial environment, is initiated. From a range of alternative projects the one, that is selected and partially realized, has been the proposal, involving digitizing.

6. Findings

Russia began to turn into a multinational state at the end of the XV century. This process has been increasingly developing, besides, the country followed not the European, but the Asian model. While western multinational empires divide into a mother country and colonies at the periphery, assuming the role of donors. In the East different peoples are included in a common state with one dominating nation, which spread in large countries of the period – Islamic Caliphate, Ottoman Empire. The Russian multinational state has chosen the latter path and has been consolidated around the Russian nation. Common economy, common territory and legislation within the Russian state – all this have established natural conditions for international contacts and communication, exchange and interaction.

Nowadays Nagaybaks – are a small nation with a very long history, which dates back as far as 50s of the XVI century. During the reign of Ivan the Terrible the forced baptism of Tatars was replaced with a voluntary acceptance ritual. The ethnic region of Nagaybaks from 1736 to 1843 was Eastern Trans-Kama, and since 1843 it has been – Southern Trans-Urals (Atnagulov, 2017).

Mass migration of Nagaybaks occurred as a result of the edict of Nicholas I, due to land conversion and changing boundaries of Orenburg Cossack host. New territories urgently needed to be populated. The main duty of Nagaybak settlers, migrating to new regions, was military service in Cossack regiments, reinforcing and defending the New Frontier Line that stabilized the South-East of Russia.

Some settlements had mixed population. «Nagaybaks lived in villages next to Russians, as well as Kalmyk cossacks. Russians spoke well the Nagaybak and there were friendly relationship. Nagaybaks, in their turn, spoke good Russian. At the same time the contemporaries noted how extremely rare were cases

of intermarrying between Nagaybaks and Russians» (Galiguzov, 2000), as Nagaybaks used to live as a closed ethnic community for a long time.

Now most Nagaybaks live as small communities in villages with really extraordinary names: Kassel, Paris, Ferechampanoise, Ostrolenko, Trebbia, Arsi, Astafievskoye. Nagaybak villages have European names to commemorate their stay in European capital cities as part of Cossack army during the war against Napoleon. According to the imperial decree by Nicholas I they deserved the right to give these names to their new villages, besides, before that their settlements used to be numbered from № 1 to № 32. The village № 1 became Kassel, named in the memory of capturing this city by the Russian troops on 19 September 1813 – that used to be the capital of the Westphalian kingdom.

Political events of the first two decades in the XX century and administrative reforms in the 1920s affected the present life of Nagaybaks. In 1919 the administrative division of Cossack territories was abolished. After several changes of administrative status on 4 December 1927 the Nagaybak region was established within the Troitsky district of Ural.

Nowadays this area is geographically located in the southern part of the Chelyabinsk region. Fortunately, almost all the villages have turned out to be within the same administrative territory which has enabled them to preserve all the national ties.

Later the Soviet state undertook measures to preserve and study the history, traditions, language and culture of this ethnic minority. After having acquired the status of an ethnic minority the villages Kassel, Paris, Ferechampanoise and Ostrolenko opened the museums of regional ethnography. As is already known, museums play a special role in the socio-cultural space which involves preserving the collective memory, transferring it to next generations, raising awareness of culture and educating visitors.

It is believed that village museums of folk history make up the majority of Russian museums (their total number is over 800). There are no analogs of such museums abroad. «Funds of regional museums of local history include all types of museum collections of artefacts – fine art, natural history, archeology, numismatics, ethnography, documents, weapon, household items and etc. Regional museums of folk history, as a rule, have permanent (long-term) exhibition, presenting natural characteristics, the past and present of the region» (Dubov, 2000).

Countryside museums of regional ethnography have their specific features. They preserve individual memory, receiving personal possessions from relatives, as well as collective memory, making exhibitions. Sometimes the value emerges as the individual meaning of an artefact for people of this village and neighbouring areas. These exhibits become the focal point of composition and the pivot of the entire display which facilitates the social and cultural communication of different generations.

In the late 80s of the XX century the foundation of these museums of folk history was sufficiently financed. Back then they served the ideological and aesthetic goals as well as realized the rights of Nagaybaks on the preservation of history and culture. However, subsequent years did not bring prosperity to these museums, and the introduction of partial self-financing schemes in the 90s made the matters even worse.

The problem with raising funds has been solved in an individual way by every museum. The museum of the village Paris has the most advantageous position, as there is a remarkable landmark there – a reduced copy of the Eiffel Tower. It is 5 times smaller than the original one, its height is 50 metres. At

the foot of this Southern Uralic Eiffel tower there is a tablet: «The tower is built to commemorate the glory of the Russian victorious warriors». Today, many tourists come here to see this tower and take a photo with it. Unfortunately, other villages have no such notable monuments of architecture and cannot attract visitors.

In the world many museums are sponsored by private investors. In this regard one of the most loyal, though not the wealthiest, for these small museums are universities of Magnitogorsk. Cooperative projects, both scientific and educational, are regular and rewarding. First year students, majoring in different disciplines, come on excursions, get acquainted with the local history, and for some of them this is foreign history, as our students arrive from all over the country as well as neighbouring ones. Especially friendly relationship is established with the institute of humanitarian education, where there are the departments of history and philology, as well as the department of design at the institute of building, architecture and art. While historians and philologists most often convene all-Russian and international conferences (including sections on the rights of ethnic minorities), undergraduate designers reorganize the objective-spatial environment of museums.

The second stage of investigation has taken most of time and efforts. While studying the causes of declining interest the ways of solving this problem have been sketched. At first there was an attempt to get over this issue via one-off exhibitions. This coincided in time with the great anniversaries. In 2012, related with the bicentenary of defeating Napoleon troops, there were a range of displays «Russia-France. Communication of cultures», which toured all the Nagaybak museums of folk culture, which drew considerable attention, but did not resolve the main issue.

We have continued to work with museums staff and visitors and, consequently, everyone involved has realized that there is the necessity to modernize exhibitions with the help of digital technologies. Preliminary considerations for the design of new objective-spatial museum environment have been finalized:

1. to reduce the number of exhibits, to introduce new functional and visual zoning of space.
2. to rank exhibits in order of value, to give preference to the «most valuable», as a pivot of the entire exposition.
3. to develop the new principles of exposition to comply with ergonomic requirements and psychological features of visual perception.
4. to reform the principles of graphic representation of information about exhibits and museum as a whole.
5. to complete the exposition with elements of digital art.

Based on these guidelines, the project proposal has been developed to upgrade the entire exposition. Modern views suggest that museum exposition is – a goal-oriented and scientific evidence-based demonstration of museum artefacts, which has an organized composition, correct annotation, technical and artist outlook and, as a result, creates a characteristic museum showpiece of natural and social phenomenon.

The designed expositions take into account the principles of visual perception and environmental composition. With the assistance of museum staff all exhibits have been reevaluated, among which the most exclusive and valuable have been selected. Thus, belongings, used to be personal possessions of Emelian Pugachev (Russian rebel of the XVIII century, the leader of popular riot) has become the focus of the museum room, where household items of ordinary people of the same epoch are on the display. Now

even without the guidance of a museum employee a visitor can immediately find the spatial dominant and easily orient in the hierarchy and sequence of information.

Also, based on the survey of visitors, the most valuable and meaningful exhibits for a given village and neighbouring areas have been determined. This has required a more impartial representation of historical facts of the revolution and civil war, which were particularly violent in the Volga region and Ural. The echo of the conflict between the «white and red» can still be heard in people's judgements, not only the elderly. This is due to the fact that Nagybaks used to be «service-men», i.e. cossacks. They had to face a hard choice between duty and life, which is recorded in the documents, preserved by families and donated to museums. Such exhibits become the compositional focal point of the entire room and build the social and cultural bridge between different generations.

The number of exhibits per a museum room is somewhat reduced, but most importantly, they become more accessible for visitors. Designing the new objective-spatial environment of museums is based on the optimal conditions for visual perception of expositions. The best practice of museums proves that expositions with clear conceptual meanings are better remembered and perceived. Attention increases when exhibits are united by matching colour and texture of background, are placed on the line, and have an regular internal arrangement.

Every museum has corridors, which serve as passages between rooms. Usually regional ethnography museums fill them with exhibits, as there is a chronic lack of space. Our project proposal leaves them empty. For visitors going on a tour in a museum is an energy-consuming cognitive process, lasting one and a half or two hours, requiring permanent concentration. Passages between rooms – create breaks for rest, attention switch and distraction. Corridors are painted in neutral grey, whereas museums rooms – in the colour, matching expositions.

First attempts of implementing multimedia technologies to meet museum educational requirements date back to the mid-1990s. Museums were eager to use the multimedia as they were motivated to involve their own collections when creating educational and informative programmes.

First in theory, then in practice the methodology of creating a virtual museum was developed, as the paper analog existed – typical guides, copying the well-known and then popular guidebook «Around Hermitage without a tour guide». Developing the electronic plan of a museum and 3D representation of rooms was easy, taking into account the advanced level of modern computer technologies. «At this time the sites, called «virtual museums» or «virtual galleries», started to appear, though actually presenting libraries of pictures» (Nazarenko, Rogulin, Aranovich, & Kozhemiakin 2011).

The most labour intensive stage is digitizing the exhibits. It all starts with old photos of the late XIX – early XX centuries, when they were extremely rare and only few of them have survived. Most of them require not only scanning, but cleaning and careful restoration. Then there is the turn of 3-dimensional models of solid exhibits. This work enables to create virtual expositions. Now regional museums, unfortunately, cannot create virtual museums, and this is not due to the lack of valuable artefacts, but insufficient financing, resistance of some museum staff and poor technological infrastructure. For small museums the most optimum way is combining the upgraded real exposition with virtual artefacts, installations, interactive boards, video-mapping.

Virtual exposition is created using the same methods as the real one. The main structure of consistent exposition – typological range of museum exhibits, which shows the evolution of natural processes and human society. In our case this method is used when creating the multimedia component of displays in the rooms of Cossack history, which every museum includes.

In the process of demonstrating virtual exposition it is important to involve the audience in the action, applying interactive technologies, which creates the effect of game, facilitating the perception of information and making this process more exciting. A well-organized demonstration of fragments, additional exhibits of rooms make people ask more questions, increase the cognitive activities of visitors, especially schoolchildren. Virtual exposition provides the opportunity for a visitor to obtain additional information, which only requires a little bit of initiative: to press the button, to touch the screen, to move in space and etc. It enables to study part of artefacts at an optimum pace for every visitor (as perception is highly individual).

Completing the main work of modernizing the objective-spatial environment of museums, university students have added new artefacts to the exposition. They have made a miniature model of the Eiffel Tower, so that visitors can compare these two structures, as the «original» one can be seen from museum windows. They have developed advertising and promotional products (Grigoriev & Zhdanova, 2016), partially completed the exhibition equipment – display cases.

Now many regional museums need upgrading their objective-spatial environment. This is related with reviewing the historical legacy of regions and the antiquated look of display exhibitions. The methodological recommendations for designing the new objective-spatial environment of regional ethnography museums have turned out to be universally applicable. Later on they have been successfully applied in a number of Ural museums.

When it comes to effects of research, it is common to cite various statistics. At present we can also state that after the modernization of 2015 – 2017 the number of visitors almost have tripled. The museum management keep count of sold tickets. Thus, the suggested solution of attracting more visitors is effective.

At the same time, it seems noteworthy to highlight another aspect of this research. Several generations of students not only have got acquainted, but acquired deep insight into collective memory of a small ethnic community – Nagaybaks. Most students have never heard of this nation before, even though they live really close. Collective memory – is not only material (museums), but spiritual – attitude of people, students and teachers, which, in our view, is a more valuable result of cooperation of everyone involved.

7. Conclusion

Our research has revealed the possibilities of using digital technologies as a perspective way of upgrading the objective-spatial environment of regional museums, where now the preservation of collective memory of the ethnic minority of Ural– Nagaybaks is concentrated.

A special feature of modern civilization development of all nations is the combination of two processes: on the one hand, world integration, on the other, – increasing awareness of nations, countries, regions, civilizations of their own originality and uniqueness. «Aspiration of people to preserve themselves as an ethnic group, having specific culture, and to reproduce themselves as a separate social entity is growing, despite ever intensifying processes of internationalization» (Maksimova, 2013).

Modernization process comprises various directions from digitizing historical artefacts to organizing exhibitions, based on visual perception principles. The completed project has confirmed that in the near future more and more historical artefacts will be scanned and digitized. This can prevent their inevitable disappearance and deformation. The obtained digital models are included in virtual exposition. Optimum combination of virtual and real exposition improves its mobility and appeal, most of all, among younger generations.

Modernization of museums of folk history to fit modern requirements can help to preserve historically valuable artefacts of the region, attract visitors to museums and maintain communication of eternal and intertemporal values of every culture.

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