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# **The Progressive Museum vs. Museum Education and Museums in Poland**

*Today, museums of art are built to keep objects of art, and objects of art are bought to be kept in museums. As the objects seem to do their work if they are safely kept, and as museums seem to serve their purpose if they safely keep the objects, the whole thing is as useful in the splendid isolation of a distant park as in the center of the life of the community which possesses it.*

*Tomorrow, objects of art will be bought to give pleasure, to make manners seem more important, to promote skill, to exalt handwork, and to increase the zest of life by adding to it new interests; and these objects being bought for use will be put where the most people can most handily use them: in a museum planned for making the best use of all it contains, and placed where a majority of its community can quickly and easily visit it.<sup>1</sup>*

» 1 J.C. Dana, *The Gloom of the Museum*, [w:] *Reinventing the Museum. The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. G. Anderson, AltaMira Press, Lanham – New York – Toronto – Plymouth, UK 2012, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, p. 17.

## Introduction

The above words were written more than a century ago by John Cotton Dana, considered one of the most outstanding museologists in the history of the United States. This is how he started his article, bearing the very telling title “The Gloom of the Museum”. The text, recognised as a manifesto of his views on museology, came out first in 1913, when Dana had for many years directed a library and for a few years had run the Newark Museum he himself had set up<sup>2</sup>. I begin with the above quote since the vision of the future of museums it contains is as prophetic as it is erroneous. This indicates a frequent discrepancy between what we think we could achieve and what we have at our disposal, especially what terms we use to describe the situation we find ourselves in.

I would like to refer to the issue of museum education and its understanding in the context of the museum as a teaching institution which plays an important role in the development of a democratic society. This issue is particularly important nowadays in the political and cultural situation Poland. Today, more than ever before, we can observe a kind of breakdown, or even a collapse, or at least a clear questioning, of the vision of social and civilisational development dominant since the 1990s. One of the tangible effects of this vision was the unprecedented development of museum infrastructure in Polish history, which, moreover, did not translate into an equally spectacular mental change in terms of understanding what a museum is, what its tasks are and what educational and social functions it might perform. The main assumption of this text will therefore be to draw attention to the current museological tradition, which emphasizes the social responsibility of museums, linking it with educational activity. I treat it as a polemical point of reference for the traditionally understood role and function of museums, which put responsibility for their collections at the forefront. In the tension between them I also see the main threats to the development of museums and museum education in Poland.

Thinking about this issue I will keep in mind the concept of the museum as a special place (where social inclusion activities and educational practice are possible), which automatically brings to mind the concept of a “third place”. But instead of following Ray Oldenburg and Dannis Brissett’s understanding of the term, I am closer to a position that goes beyond this typology, which identifies a “fourth place” as a space that fos-

» 2 N. Maffei, *John Cotton Dana and the Politics of Exhibiting Industrial Art in the US, 1909–1929*, “*Journal of Design History*” 2000, Vol. 13, No. 4, p. 304, downloaded <https://academic.oup.com/jdh/article-abstract/13/4/301/482560> [access: 14.02.2019].

ters networking, cooperation, and exchange of knowledge<sup>3</sup>. However, as far as the museum as a “fourth place” goes, I will be interested mainly in the social space suspended between the requirements of historical policy and the autonomy of institutions, between financial independence and market conditions, between the specific professional interests of museum employees and the expectations of the communities in which museums operate. In such a museum there is a chance for a progressive education in the sense proposed by George E. Hein. This American museologist who specialized in education defined it as citizen oriented, context sensitive, and intentionally using exhibitions and educational programs for “democratic social purposes”. The last feature, in particular, has continuously characterised progressive museum education<sup>4</sup>. For this reason, this trend is worth looking at and being treated as one of the fundamental areas of pedagogical tradition, although not very popular in European tradition<sup>5</sup>. Thanks to this perspective, I hope it will be possible to draw attention to the fact that this is an area of reflection which is related to the museum tradition and constitutes its essential legacy. This emphasis seems important to me, especially in Poland, where discussions on the role of contemporary museums are still dominated by a rather traditionalist approach to the functions and tasks that museums can perform, which stands in contrast to the aforementioned infrastructural development. I will be interested here first of all in the practice and museological views of Dana and his influence on the progressive trend of museum education.

### John Cotton Dana and progressive museology

Although Dana is considered to be one of the most eminent museologists, in fact he is not a well-known figure, and his achievements, especially in Poland, are not cited as an example of the universal museum tradition, or as a reference point for shaping the contemporary character of museums, as opposed to such museologists and museum professionals as Alois Riegl (Museum für angewandte Kunst in Vienna), Germain Bazin (Louvre in Paris), or Wilhelm von Bode (Kaiser Friedrich Museum, now Bode Museum in Berlin). Even in the English-speaking museum culture,

» 3 I apply the term as it was used by A. Morisson, following a discussion by Katarzyna Jagodzińska, see K. Jagodzińska, *Muzeum poza murami w kontekście koncepcji trzeciego miejsca* [A museum outside the walls in the context of the ‘third place’ concept], “Muzealnictwo”, 2018 (59), p. 85–86.

» 4 G. E. Hein, *Progressive Museum Practice. John Dewey and Democracy*, Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, California 2012, p. 132.

» 5 J. Skutnik, *W kręgu myślenia pragmatystycznego i personalistycznego – dwie orientacje w edukacji muzealnej* [Within pragmatic and personalistic thinking - two approaches to museum education], [in:] *Edukacja muzealna w Polsce. Aspekty, konteksty, ujęcia*, ed. W. Wysok, A. Stępnik, Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, Lublin 2013, p. 88.

until Stephen Weil published Dana's museum texts in 1999, he had not been mentioned alongside Alfred Bar (director of the Museum of Modern Art), Sherman Lee (director of the Cleveland Art Museum), Paul J. Sachs (director of the Fogg Museum of Art in Cambridge and creator of museum studies at Harvard University), or Benjamin Ives Gilman (curator and librarian at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston), to confine myself to personalities of art museums. Even today, when his work has become the subject of separate studies, it is more well known among librarians than museum professionals<sup>6</sup>. It is high time we briefly introduced this scholar and his legacy<sup>7</sup>.

John Cotton Dana (1856–1929) began his career working in a library in Denver (Colorado) in 1889, after he had assaulted the education system in the local press, demanding a revision of teaching curricula and methodologies. As Carol Duncan observed, Dana alleged that schools are “sanctuaries of the middle ages”, focused mainly on didactic, moralising preaching. Instead of preparing students for modern life, they require useless knowledge: kids learn about Jove and the Three Graces and do not know how to distinguish a quality newspaper from a tabloid or fresh air from polluted. In the areas of knowledge they really need, they leave school as ignorant – their ability to observe, think, and act impaired<sup>8</sup>. Shortly after he spoke these words, the school superintendent offered Dana the position of director of the Denver Public Library, which was also a school library. As the head of the library, he took every effort to make it an institution that actually serves both students and the general public. The Denver Library was open seven days a week, 12 hours a day, in order to be used by workers. The system of free access to the bookshelves was also applied in a special room for children. The library had a women's reading room and collected fiction as well as specialist books on medicine and entrepreneurship, and constantly expanded the collection of reprints, photographs, and illustrated magazines.

Dana developed his ideas, which were innovative in the late 19th century, in Newark, where he worked from 1902. There he developed the idea of branch libraries and commissioned a collection of books for immigrants in various languages. It was here that in 1909 he founded his museum, placing it on the top floor of the library as part of the complementary union

» 6 N. Maffei, *Carol G. Duncan, “A Matter of Class. John Cotton Dana, Progressive Reform, and the Newark Museum”*, book reviews, p. 137, <http://jhc.oxfordjournals.org/doi:10.1093/jhc/fhr040> [access: 18.02.2019].

» 7 Information on the activity of J. C. Dana is based on: N. Maffei, *John Cotton Dana...*, p. 301 – 317, downloaded from <https://academic.oup.com/jdh/article-abstract/13/4/301/482560>, [access: 14.02.2019], G. E. Hein, *Progressive Museum Practice*, op. cit., p. 74–78.

» 8 C. G. Duncan, *A Matter of Class. John Cotton Dana, Progressive Reform, and the Newark Museum*, Periscope Publishing, Pittsburgh 2010, quoted after: G. E. Hein, *Ibid.*, p. 74.

of the two institutions. He transferred the library model to the museum, creating a model that was later followed in other cities in the United States. As in the library, he used all available means to make his resources widely available, not however to indicate their artistic, historical, cultural, or scientific value, but above all to strengthen the diversity of the cultures present in the communities in which he worked<sup>9</sup>. He consistently strived to make the institution accessible and useful to the widest possible range of users. Dana created a museum in opposition to what he called a “viewing museum”, such as the Metropolitan of Art in New York and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, which in his opinion served to satisfy the “cultural fetishism” of privileged social classes. Inspired by *The Theory of the Leisure Class* by Thorstein Veblen, Dana treated the collecting and patronage practices of such museums as examples of showing “ostentatious wealth”, which is another method that the rich use to show how they differ from ordinary people<sup>10</sup>. Unlike Benjamin Ives Gilman, associated with the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, who recommended silence and isolation as the prerequisites of the contemplation of art in a museum, Dana stressed that museums are of service when they are actively involved in everyday reality. Rather than buy European works of art for exorbitant sums of money<sup>11</sup>, museums through their acquisitions should be deeply rooted in their communities and meet their unique needs. Instead of “undue reverence for oil paint”<sup>12</sup>, a museum should present objects which have an ordinary and direct reference to the daily reality of the viewers: from shoes to signposts, from kitchen knives to hat pins. He argued that department stores are as useful as museums, preparing provocative presentations of “beautiful” objects of everyday use for less than 50 cents.

At the same time, his practice served to strongly support the industry. At the time, Newark was an industrial power with a huge immigrant workforce. However, Dana was preparing exhibitions for local factories, glorifying the development of environmentally polluting factories. Thus, the museum’s activities consisted of programs and exhibitions that developed and strengthened the cultures and products of immigrant workers, while at the same time promoting the industry of Newark.

What was seen by Dana’s contemporaries as well as later historians as an ambivalence of his views and practices was an expression of the tensions and contradictions to which he was led by both his own social,

» 9 *Ibid.*, p. 75–76.

» 10 J. C. Dana, *The Gloom of the Museum...*, p. 19–20.

» 11 “\$ 10,000 for a piece of tapestry, \$ 100,000 for a painting, \$ 30,000 for a marble statue, \$ 20,000 for a piece of porcelain, and so on”, *Ibid.*, p. 22.

» 12 Quoted after: A. McClellan, *The Art Museum From Boullée to Bilbao*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 2008, p. 31.

political, and philosophical views, and by the pressure related to the functioning of museums, the dominant practices, and beliefs towards these institutions, which he observed and had to struggle with on a daily basis. The ambiguity of the Newark Museum's activities resulted from the fact that, on the one hand, this museum was a severe critic of the exclusiveness of museums, their subordination to and serving the interests of the richest, and on the other hand, it had nothing against engaging in commercial activities supporting enterprises belonging to the richest members of society. In this sense, Dana, as Carol Duncan claims, represented rather the conservative wing of the progressive reform movements of the early twentieth century, not advocating the reduction of the influence of large capital. Rather, he wanted to improve the capitalist system and thus strengthen it. His museum served the public-school education system by preparing exhibitions for schools, promoting modern, mass-produced aesthetics, and presenting items available in shops, but it also offered professional, scientific exhibitions of art and nature. In other words, the pressure he – like many others in similar positions – faced, whether to move towards aesthetic and social isolation or to develop an inclusive and useful institution for the widest possible range of communities (the dilemma of many museum and library directors), led him to merge the two approaches rather than oppose them.

Dana's Museum and its views did not immediately revolutionize museums in the United States. Before World War II, they primarily influenced the development of education in museums and libraries. This was partly related to the Museology Course in Newark, which had been held there since the 1920s and was attended mainly by women. Luise Connelly was responsible for its implementation. The curriculum of the course focused on teaching in the museum and taking advantage of it. It was radically different from the famous course conducted at the same time by Paul Sachs at Harvard, which prepared students for the profession of a museum specialist – researcher, scientist and connoisseur. The latter course was graduated mainly by men, including later museum directors such as Alfred Barr Jr. However, it was thanks to the employees educated in Newark that the educational activity of American museums was developed, which was noticeable from the 1940s.

In other areas, Dana's impact was more limited due to the unsuccessful attempt to create branches of museums similar to the network of library branches he had developed. His calls for widening access to museums in order to democratize society led to ideas of creating such museums in places where there were many people, for example in department stores and schools. The promotion of this idea in the 1930s was strengthened by analyses made by Paul Marshall Rea, who argued that

from the point of view of efficiency – in terms of accessibility and maintenance costs per visitor – it is more efficient to develop a network of branch museums than large multi-departmental institutions.

One of these museums was established in Philadelphia at the Sixty-ninth Community Centre as a branch of the Pennsylvania Museum of Art. Directed by Philip Youtz, the museum was in operation for two years only. During this time it held 17 exhibitions. Despite its unprecedented attendance success (200,000 visitors), the Great Depression after Black Thursday forced the parent institution to close the branch. Although museums at that time and today carried out many programs outside their principal premises, the idea of museum branches, unlike library branches, never gained popularity<sup>13</sup>.

Still, Dana's views had a significant impact on a special kind of institution, i.e. the Smithsonian Institution Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, which was established after World War Two in 1967<sup>14</sup>. The initiative was a response to growing pressure from the Smithsonian Institution to address neglected areas of Washington and do something for a community that the Institute had ignored. Such a place was found in the Anacostia area in the south of the city, inhabited by African Americans, who also had strong social organizations and enthusiastically approached the opening of the museum. The Smithsonian was looking for a street with a laundromat and not too many bars, in a stable but rundown neighbourhood. In Anacostia there was the Carver Theater, located on the same street as a local school and actually close to a laundry room. The director, John Kinard, was chosen by the local residents. Actually, he had no museum experience, but had made a name for himself as a social worker working with young people and with programmes to combat poverty. With the participation of a small staff, supported by the Smithsonian personnel, with the assistance of many political leaders of the community, and with the help of Anacostia residents, Kinard built a vibrant museum/centre that not only organized exhibitions and educational programs, but also provided them with entertainment. Initially, the Anacostia Museum also ran professional courses for exhibition technicians to give young people the opportunity to get a job. Despite the limited space available, the museum had a space where art and crafts were taught and outreach programs for schools were carried out<sup>15</sup>. The exhibitions offered by the museum dealt with the actual problems of local residents, such as one of the most well-known ones – the rat infestation problem and its eradication. Today,

» 13 *Ibid.*, p. 174–175.

» 14 G. E. Hein, *Progressive Museum Practice...*, p. 163–167.

» 15 *Ibid.*

the museum operates in its own headquarters, although its agenda has not changed and is an example of how Dana's views can be put into practice.

### **Museum and museum education today – the challenges**

I would like to relate these historical examples, whose starting point was Dana's statement quoted in the introduction, to the present day. As I mentioned before, the vision of the future of American museums is as prophetic as it is misguided. The prophecy stemmed from Dana's belief in the predicted increase in the number of museums and in the changes consisting in greater accessibility of museums due to the forms of activity they would carry out. He assumed that the phenomenon of museums as cultural institutions would allow for an uninterrupted process of creating new and diverse institutions. The attractiveness of this model in the 20th century, especially after the Second World War, is evidenced by the fact that, according to Steven Hoelscher, citing the findings of David Lowenthal from the 1990s, 95% of the existing museums were established in the post-war period<sup>16</sup>. From today's perspective, we know that after the year 2000 the process did not abate at all. On the contrary, it gained momentum in countries such as Poland. Newly established museums in the 18th and 19th century often symbolized idealistic places where people could take refuge from daily life, away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Instead, they emerged on the streets and in shopping centres, in old factory buildings, in suburbs inhabited by the poorest, in slums, villages, etc. At the same time, various concepts of museums emerged, which revealed a more utilitarian character, as Dana described it: eco-museums, pop-up museums, community museums, participatory museums. All of the above proves him right.

However, the misinterpretation of that vision was due to the fact that, in reality, despite all these changes, the concept of an institution which aims primarily at storing and protecting objects bought or otherwise procured, remained dominant. Thus, the concept arose by which the accumulation and safe storage of collections, their scientific development and presentation, i.e. all internal museum procedures, constitutes the essence and purpose of a museum, from which successive functions of the institution originate. In this concept, this goal determines other socially related functions of the museum, which reaches out. In other words, in the museums of the future, according to Dana, acquisition of works of art was not to be treated as the ultimate goal of the museum, but only as a means to achieve another kind of goal, i.e. to enhance the quality of life of the community

» 16 S. Hoelscher, *Heritage*, [in:] *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. S. Macdonald, Blackwell Publishing 2006, p. 201.

to which the museums belong. A hundred years later, the conviction that the holdings are the underlying objective for the existence of museums remains the dominant and fundamental identity premise of the museum community. Although the landscape of museums is changing, and both their numbers and the forms of work and activities they carry out are increasing, this conviction is deeply entrenched and is changing very little, not only in Poland. In our country, however, this process is particularly visible. It is highlighted by the contrast related to making up for the infrastructural negligence of previous years, which results in new museums. They need to take root in communities through the development of inclusive and progressive program practices based on the strengthening of social functions. This applies not only to new institutions, but also to existing ones, especially local ones, where the same dilemmas arise in connection with the tension between the exclusive mission of focusing on collections and the need to be part of community life. As a rule, they implement the latter through efforts aimed at involving the community in the programme of exhibitions, cultural events, and educational activities they offer. Historical experiences show that museums can also enter into these relationships in a different way, by intentionally engaging in everything they do and defining the community they serve. This, of course, requires greater involvement on both sides, i.e. the museum and the community. However, a change of attitude towards traditionally understood functions of museums and museum education seems to be crucial here. In the museological tradition of progressivism and pragmatism, museums not only form the collections, which are assembled, protected, and made available. Museums are first of all the community for which the collections are gathered, developed, protected, and exhibited. A reference to this tradition, even if it is not firmly anchored in Europe, introduces an alternative to the traditional approach to the tasks of museums, represented by the community of museum professionals, who see a threat to the traditionally understood tasks of museums in the ongoing cultural changes. The consequences of this approach have an impact on museum education.

### **Museum education between infrastructure development and museum tradition**

Over the last decade, a huge change in the infrastructure of Polish museums has been accompanied by an equally vigorous development of educational activity in both newly established and long-operating museum institutions. Many museums, especially those created from scratch, began their operation by building teams of educators and preparing educational agendas, which were implemented even if the museums

themselves did not yet have their own premises<sup>17</sup>. This was partly due to the relative ease of starting an agenda with educational activities, and partly due to the fact that this type of activity quite quickly reverberated among the public, thus helping it to take root in the local communities where it was created. Equally significant was the fact that this type of activity, in comparison to other areas of museum activity, in its standard forms (museum lessons, guided tours, workshops for the youngest, etc.) and related to the development of programs for typical recipients of this offer, did not require substantial financial outlays. No less important was the fact that these educational activities were created by young people – often having their first ever job in a museum institution – who also understood that not only the collections, specialist publications, and exhibitions built around them, but also, or perhaps above all, the relations they should establish with their potential users are important for building the institution's social impact.

At the same time, the development of museum education was accompanied by a critical awareness of the actual position of this field of activity in the range of tasks of the museum institution. It was mainly the participation of people who had already had experience of working in museums, in museum education departments – daily bouncing off the “glass ceiling” – which effectively determined the place for the tasks they carried out at the lower levels of the ladder of museum priorities. Like every glass ceiling, it was both a barrier and a protective cover, invisible as well as extensive and effective. The barrier was intractable for the out-of-the-ordinary and atypical activities of museum educators, but at the same time it created a protection over the horizontal development of museum education, expressed by a multiplicity of various forms of work with the public. It blocked any structural change, as evidenced by the key and strategic areas of programmatic activity of museums, related to their exhibition programs, collection policies, and scientific work. The awareness of the position of museum education held by educators with museum experience, combined with the knowledge of how the educational work of museums outside Poland was developed, triggered reflection on the state of museum education. In this context, a need arose to prepare a report on the state of the art of museum education; this need became acute when the museum boom in Poland began.

*Report on the state of museum education [Raport o stanie edukacji muzealnej]*, a grassroots initiative of educators, was an outcome of the

» 17 Examples of such newly-established institutions include Piłsudski Museum in Sulejówek; Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk; Museum of Polish History, Porta Posnania in Poznań; Centrum “Zajezdnia” in Wrocław; Muzeum Pana Tadeusza in Wrocław; Museum of the History of Polish Jews – Polin in Warsaw; Muzeum Podgórze in Krakow.

aforementioned critical self-awareness<sup>18</sup>. It identified deficiencies in program offers, infrastructural shortcomings, but also the mechanisms that positioned education at lower levels of museums' priorities, indicating one of the most important reasons the appropriate skills of employees involved in education in museums and the people with whom they cooperated on a daily basis and in practice determined the width of the margin on which educators could perform their tasks.

The findings and recommendations of the report met with great reserve, and sometimes with an undisguised aversion on the part of the museum educators' community<sup>19</sup>. The report was largely passed over by non-educational museum professionals. However, for the rest, including educators, it confirmed that the limitations of educational activity noticed in the museums' own practice are common<sup>20</sup>. The report moreover identified the ossifying nature of the argument about the good condition of museum education, which was expressed nearly verbatim in the *Report on museums 1989–2009* that was developed for the 2009 Congress of Culture in Krakow<sup>21</sup>.

I refer to the *Report* not because I believe it to be a breakthrough, even though there seemed to be a chance of that, but due to the supplement to the report: the demand for the development of the range of skills of museum professionals<sup>22</sup>. This demand resulted both from conclusions arising from studies and, first and foremost, from the debates within the community of museum professionals (mainly with the participation of educators) that were held after the publication of the report. But it was also strengthened by the aforementioned criticism formulated within the circle of museum educators. The basic argument was that in order to implement the model of a museum institution that responds to contemporary challeng-

» 18 *Edukacja muzealna w Polsce. Sytuacja, kontekst, perspektywy rozwoju. Raport o stanie edukacji muzealnej* [Museum education in Poland. The state of affairs, context, development prospects. Report on the state of museum education], ed. M. Szeląg, Narodowy Instytut Muzealnictwa i Ochrony Zbiorów, Muzeum Pałac w Wilanowie 2012.

» 19 L. Karczewski, *Ucieczka do przodu. Autonomia instytucji muzealnej jako alternatywa edukacji muzealnej* [Forward breakaway. Autonomy of the museum institution as an alternative to museum education], "Biuletyn Programowy NIMOZ" No. 5, 2012, p. 25–34.

» 20 J. Drejer, *Edukacja muzealna w świetle "Raportu o stanie edukacji muzealnej"* [Museum education in the light of the "Report on the state of museum education"], "Biuletyn Programowy NIMOZ" No. 8, p. 12–19.

» 21 D. Folga-Januszewska, *Muzea w Polsce 1989–2008. Stan, zachodzące zmiany i kierunki rozwoju muzeów w Europie oraz rekomendacje dla muzeów polskich* [Museums in Poland 1989–2008. State of the art, ongoing changes and directions of development of museums in Europe and recommendations for Polish museums], Warszawa 2009.

» 22 *Raport o stanie edukacji muzealnej w Polsce. Supplement. Cz. 1* [Report on the state of museum education in Poland. Supplement. Part 1], ed. M. Szeląg, series *Muzeologia*, vol. 8, Universitas, Kraków 2014, M. Szeląg, *Raport o stanie edukacji muzealnej w Polsce. Supplement. Cz. 2* [Report on the state of museum education in Poland. Supplement. Part 2], series *Muzeologia*, vol. 9, Universitas, Kraków 2014.

es by developing its educational functions as a basic area of its connection with the communities in which it operates, it is necessary to enhance such skills among museum workers (not only educators) that will equip them with professional tools to work with the public, and broaden the definition of a museum. At the same time, the work with the public was not understood as providing information on the collection, the subject matter, and the underlying assumptions of exhibitions. Nor was it limited to the implementation of the educational program, but was extended in the recommendation to the sphere of exhibition strategies. Moreover, it was to take into account the diversity of experiences and the individual ways in which the public used museums. At the same time, this demand assumed the necessity of shifting the emphasis in the understanding of what the museum institution is: from an institution whose imperatives are defined by internal museum procedures – such as collecting, safe protection, scientific development and presentation of collections, from which subsequent functions of the museum, including educational ones, originate – towards an organism more closely related to the environment in which it operates. Thus, it was a shift towards a museum where these internal procedures are not the goal but only a means to achieve another kind of goal, i.e. to improve in the most competent way the quality of life of the communities to which museums belong. Hence the proposal in the *Report on the state of museum education* of training museum professionals, which included acquiring skills of interpreting, communication, and the social impact of museums, took into account the theoretical legacy of museum studies in this area, focused on the evaluation of the public, and stressed raising the awareness of what a museum as an institution is. All these issues were related to the museum as an educational institution responding to the challenges of modern times, actively serving the needs of the communities in which they operate, going beyond traditional museum education and turning it towards progressive education and progressive museums.

## Conclusion

The reference to the museum tradition, considered thanks to the research conducted since the 1990s as a universal legacy which shaped the contemporary character of museum culture and museums, allows us to draw attention to the multidimensional nature of this legacy. The inclusiveness of museum practice – strategies of inclusion of marginalized social groups, broadening the field of interest to include regions previously absent from the sphere of research and the exhibition interests of museums, going out into social spaces, working with and for underprivileged audiences, actions to support the school education system – are not an expression

of the pauperization of the meaning and mission of so-called real museums. On the contrary, they are activities that actually make it possible to understand what is nowadays covered by the notion of a museum whose meaning has been shaped by successive generations of museum workers and museologists. Awareness of this is one of the tasks of shaping the competences of museum workers, including educators. This need corresponds to the situation in which museums in Poland find themselves and which is defined by two opposing tendencies.

On the one hand, there is the aforementioned museum boom. As a result of catching up in the field of cultural infrastructure over the last few decades, this has resulted in further new or renovated institutions. It is accompanied by the aforementioned development of anchoring methods through the use of inclusive programme practices and efforts to involve the public in the preparation of exhibitions and cultural events, which takes place mainly through educational activities.

On the other hand, there is a growing and ever more evident tendency to halt these changes and to maintain the *status quo* in an area that has an impact on what is referred to as museum rudiments. In the face of this trend, infrastructural changes – involving a shift in emphasis in the priorities of museums by emphasizing their responsibility towards the community rather than solely towards the collections, in actual practice which is established by the deepest beliefs – are counteracted by the dominant tendency of thinking about museums, the aim of which is primarily to store and protect the objects collected in them<sup>23</sup>.

As a result, these two tendencies lead to a paradoxical situation. There is no denying that the landscape of museums in Poland is changing, not only because of the number of museums, but also due to new forms of work and activities they carry out. Although these initiatives move beyond thinking about a museum as an exclusive place and increasingly see it as an institution that assumes a social role and tries to respond to the changes taking place in its environment, they lack the appropriate language resulting from the development of competences with which they are able to describe and justify their actions. One of the areas where strengthening should take place is paying attention to inclusive, progressive practices rooted in the museological tradition. Awareness of them may help show that the social tasks of museums are not limited to the implementation of historical policy guidelines, to which museology concepts fall prey as they are convinced that the primary task of museums is to ensure the safety of their collections. ●

» 23 The most eloquent manifestation of these views was the programme work and the debates of the 1st Congress of Polish Museum Professionals, which took place in Łódź in 2015. See *I Kongres Muzealników Polskich*, ed. Komitet Programowy I Kongresu Muzealników Polskich pod przewodnictwem Michała Niezabitowskiego, National Culture Centre, Warszawa 2015.