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# **The museum educator – a professional profile**

Let us start with what may seem a cliché that is yet worth repeating over and over again. The following statement was uttered by Peter Vergo, an editor of *The New Museology*, a publication that was ground-breaking for reflection on contemporary museology: “all exhibitions– even those devised principally as entertainment– are educational, in a wider and more profound sense”. The author justifies his observation in simple terms: each exhibition contributes to a “broadening of our intellectual horizons, a deepening and enriching of our experience– and hence of our education”<sup>1</sup>. In other words, all that has been prepared and presented deliberately, i.e. to provide us with knowledge and aesthetic experience and to change something in us, can be said to have an educational character.

In this context, the need for harmonious coexistence and cooperation between exhibition and education projects is crucial for the achievement of the common goal Gerald Matt writes about. He believes that “the aim of the educational activities carried out in tandem with the exhibition activity is to present the objects and thematic content of the exhibitions in a way that meets the needs of the public and make the concepts of the exhibition more accessible to the public”<sup>2</sup>.

It becomes obvious that it is necessary to direct this preparation and presentation in such a way that the effect meets the expectations of the target group to whom all educational activity is addressed, i.e. the museum audience. This is helped precisely by the art of teaching, which

» 1 P. Vergo, *The Reticent Object*, [in:] *The New Museology*, ed. P. Vergo, Reaktion Books, London 1989, p. 41–59.

» 2 G. Matt, *Muzeum jako przedsiębiorstwo. Łatwo i przystępnie o zarządzaniu instytucją kultury*, trans. A. Wajs, Fundacja Aletheia, Warszawa 2006, p. 146.

taps into centuries of experience and the latest discoveries concerning communication, perception of image and sound, spatial relations or the functioning of the human brain, and the whole range of technological advancements.

The sphere of educational activity is increasingly appreciated by the management of museums, who cannot remain indifferent to its benefits, which include boosting visitor turnout, generating more and more revenue for the museum, or media coverage of educational events. The museum audience can also see the difference between a visit to a museum where they were left to their own devices, where they were left alone, doomed to only a monotonous narrative of a museum guide, and a museum where they feel genuinely appreciated, where the story with the use of activation methods and new technologies relates to their development needs and perception possibilities, where there is room for cooperation and interaction, and where they feel encouraged to ask questions.

An indispensable subject in the whole, well-functioning museum puzzle is an educational employee, nowadays called a museum educator. The place of an educator in museums in Poland is still *in statu nascendi*– still not fully defined– although there are postulates and recommendations for this growing group of employees in the country to be able to sanction and stabilize their status.

A few years ago (2013) Piotr Górajec observed that already “in 2006, when the Forum of Museum Educators was set up, one of the principal demands it raised was the elevation of the role and importance of the museum educator’s profession and the strengthening of his position in the structure of the museum”<sup>3</sup>. Doubts and questions on the status of museum educators and their professional identity resurface: ‘Who is the museum educator and what is his or her role in the work of this institution?’; ‘Is the educator’s work seen as a part of the shared effort of the museum team, or does he or she merely perform certain tasks related to contact with the public for the benefit of the museum?’; ‘How does the educator him- or herself see their work and role in the museum?’<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the recommendations of the *Raport o stanie edukacji muzealnej w Polsce* [Report on the state of the art of museum education in Poland] (2012), concerning the “role and status of museum education and the position of the educator”, include e.g. the drafting of a “fundamental set of duties performed by persons involved in museum education with a view to creating a professional occupational group of educators”<sup>5</sup>.

» 3 P. Górajec, *Edukacja muzealna– czas zmian* [Museum education– time for change], „Biuletyn Programowy NIMOZ” No. 8, Warszawa 2013, p. 9.

» 4 *Ibid.*

» 5 *Rekomendacje. Główne kierunki rozwoju edukacji muzealnej w Polsce* [Recommendations.

The indicated examples of self-reflection of museum educators as a conscious professional group concerning their own position in the structure of the museum do not, so far, go hand in hand with activities aimed at its realization in order to develop an optimal model of functioning of this professional group in the museum reality. Formally, as guaranteed by the Polish *Museum Law* (in chapter 5, entitled “Museum Personnel”, Art. 32), persons involved in museum education belong to the professional group of museum personnel, which now allows for professional advancement according to the established path from an assistant to a certified custodian. It also allows one to perform the prestigious function of an exhibition curator. Perhaps the sense of relative stability and the experience of the social authority vested in museum staff makes it difficult for museum educators to think about creating their own formalised group of employees and building their own professional identity, based on separate professional tasks and the different competences needed to fulfil them, contrary to the case of the traditional and still predominant perception of the tasks and skills of a museum employee.

A formalised description of the tasks is part of the *Classification of professions and specialties*<sup>6</sup>. According to this legislation, from which the “museum educator” is absent, museum staff belong to the same group of specialists as archivists because they share a similar range of professional tasks: “Archivists and museum workers collect, assess and ensure the preservation and conservation of archival collections, artefacts and archives of historical, cultural, administrative and artistic interest, works of art, and other objects; the planning, development, and implementation of systems for the preservation of archives and valuable historical documents and works of art in museums and galleries”.

It is hard not to agree that the tasks performed by the museum employee and the archivist are of a similar nature. We cannot dispute the credibility of the document, since the *Classification of professions and specialties*<sup>7</sup> is made up according to a specific methodology related to occupations by a team of theoreticians and practitioners in a given field, involving gathering information (archival records, legal instruments, websites, literature), analysing data, drafting initial descriptive notes and verifying them via consultations and interviews, and ultimately producing

Main directions of development of museum education in Poland]. M. Szeląg (ed.), [in:] *Edukacja muzealna w Polsce: sytuacja, kontekst, perspektywy rozwoju. Raport o stanie edukacji muzealnej w Polsce*, ed. M. Szeląg, Warszawa 2012, p. 281.

» 6 Regulation of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy of 7 August 2014, published in the “Journal of Laws” of 2014, item 1145.

» 7 Ministry of the Family, Labour and Social Policy runs a register titled *Classification of professions and specialties* <http://psz.praca.gov.pl/rynek-pracy/bazy-danych/klasyfikacja-zawodow-i-specjalnosci> [access: 6.02.2019]

final versions of the descriptions<sup>8</sup>. They are therefore not wishful thinking, but are based on a thorough knowledge of the realities of the labour market and define the practical aspects of its functioning.

The profession of a museum employee is presented there in the following way<sup>9</sup>:

### Museum employee

Summary:	Prepares exhibitions of works of art or historic objects, monitors their conservation and storage, collects, protects, prepares, and distributes works of art, historic objects, and various types of specimens.
Professional duties/job description:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– participation in the organisation of exhibitions of historical objects, works of art, and new acquisitions of a museum or an art gallery,</li> <li>– conducting inventory, documentation and scientific study of collections, supervision over the movement of objects,</li> <li>– supervision over the state of preservation of objects and their proper display, cooperation in this respect with other departments,</li> <li>– giving opinions on works of art offered for purchase,</li> <li>– supervision over the allocated area of the exhibition,</li> <li>– authoring scientific and general interest publications in his or her field of specialisation,</li> </ul>

» 8 <https://psz.praca.gov.pl/documents/10240/54723/Methodologia%20opracowania%20opisow%20zawodow%20specjalnosci%202016%20%2810.05.16%29.pdf/67df3c-be-4a95-43c1-8634-fc3304c0b5e7> [access: 6.02.2019]

» 9 [http://psz.praca.gov.pl/rynek-pracy/bazy-danych/klasyfikacja-zawodow-i-specjalnosci/wyszukiwarka-opisow-zawodow/-/klasyfikacja\\_zawodow/zawod/262102?\\_jobclassificationportlet\\_WAR\\_nnkportlet\\_backUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fpsz.praca.gov.pl%2Frynek-pracy%2Fbazy-danych%2Fklasyfikacja-zawodow-i-specjalnosci%2Fwyszukiwarka-opisow-zawodow%2F%3Fp\\_p\\_id%3Djobclassificationportlet\\_WAR\\_nnkportlet%26p\\_p\\_lifecycle%3D0%26p\\_p\\_state%3Dnormal%26p\\_p\\_mode%3Dview%26p\\_p\\_col\\_id%3Dcolumn-1%26p\\_p\\_col\\_count%3D1%26\\_jobclassificationportlet\\_WAR\\_nnkportlet\\_query%3Dmuzealniki](http://psz.praca.gov.pl/rynek-pracy/bazy-danych/klasyfikacja-zawodow-i-specjalnosci/wyszukiwarka-opisow-zawodow/-/klasyfikacja_zawodow/zawod/262102?_jobclassificationportlet_WAR_nnkportlet_backUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fpsz.praca.gov.pl%2Frynek-pracy%2Fbazy-danych%2Fklasyfikacja-zawodow-i-specjalnosci%2Fwyszukiwarka-opisow-zawodow%2F%3Fp_p_id%3Djobclassificationportlet_WAR_nnkportlet%26p_p_lifecycle%3D0%26p_p_state%3Dnormal%26p_p_mode%3Dview%26p_p_col_id%3Dcolumn-1%26p_p_col_count%3D1%26_jobclassificationportlet_WAR_nnkportlet_query%3Dmuzealniki) [access: 15.02.2019]

<p>Additional professional duties:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– carrying out all reconstruction work, in particular preparing and concluding, in accordance with the current procedure, contracts for reconstruction, supervising the execution of reconstruction work and assembly in accordance with the design and arrangements of the museum commission, preparing acceptance protocols which are the basis for financial settlements,</li> <li>– participation in the preparation of exhibitions organized by or in the museum, keeping scientific catalogue cards and, if necessary, material records,</li> <li>– participation in meetings of museum committees, participation in the training of museum guides,</li> <li>– in special cases, acting as a guide (my emphasis – G. Ž.)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– drafting expert opinions in his or her field of specialisation (in galleries and museums),– developing and conducting museum lessons (my emphasis – G. Ž.)</li> </ul>
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It transpires from the above that people working as museum staff treat educational and promotional activities only marginally. They focus on the preparation of exhibitions, inventory, documentation, and scientific development of museum collections. They clearly distance themselves from the educational activity of the museum. Such a formulation of the job description of a museum employee practically excludes from this occupational group persons engaged in museum education as their main activity. While a museum employee and an archivist are linked by a similar type of professional activity, this cannot be so decisively said about the museologist and museum educator professions.

Although, as I mentioned before, *The Museum Law* includes persons working in the museum and carrying out tasks related to the educational activity in the professional group of museum staff, it is the museum educators who perform work of a nature more similar to the profession of culture animator or teacher. They convey knowledge about the collections held in the museum and their historical and cultural context, and shape

the skills and attitudes of those people (mainly children and young people) who participate in educational museum activities. This means that they should have different skills than those employees who focus their professional activity on museums as such.

Societal changes that empower the public imply employing people for whom the museum visitor will be a permanent and most important point of reference. Marcin Szeląg, when presenting study programmes for people involved in museum education in the Netherlands and Great Britain, points out that their authors propose “the development of skills in the work aimed at museum audiences and their needs” instead of those “focused on the objects in the collections and their scientific description, exposition, security, and protection”<sup>10</sup>. The traditional understanding of the place and role of a museum employee is evolving and leads to the emergence of a new professional group, as has already taken place in many countries of Western Europe and North America.

As early as 1990, The American Association of Museums published results of studies in US museums which helped to determine the spectrum of skills of museum educators. First of all, they are mediators between the museum public and the holdings on display in the museum, which means that they “help the visitors see, understand and communicate with the objects included in the museum collection”. Such assistance becomes possible thanks to the intellectually, aesthetically, and emotionally active attitude of both educators and those who use their help and mediation. In stimulating this activity, creative encouragement to interact with artefacts is the main task of a museum educator. To fulfil this task, the educator needs knowledge from at least two areas in which he or she operates on a daily basis: one related to visitors (developmental psychology, philosophy of education, educational theory, and theory of education), but also one concerning the specific museum collection<sup>11</sup>.

If we assume that an exhibition in a museum is a communication space, it must contain at least three elements: the sender, the recipient, and the message. The sender is the exhibition curator who represents the museum (the author of the work); he or she uses the message, i.e. the collection of exhibits ordered according to his or her own rules (the exhibition), and the recipient is the audience visiting the exhibition. The position of the educator, who also represents the museum, is that of an inter-

» 10 M. Szeląg, *Zawód edukator – w stronę profesjonalizacji profesji* [The educator profession – towards the professionalisation of the profession], [in:], *idem, Raport o stanie edukacji muzealnej: suplement*, part 2, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych UNIVERSITAS, Kraków 2014, p. 65.

» 11 *American Association of Museums. Standards: A hallmark in the evolution of museum education*, *Museum News*, 69 (1), 1990, p. 78–80; quoted after: *Wstęp*, [in:] *Edukacja muzealna. Antologia tłumaczeń*, ed. M. Szeląg, J. Skutnik, Poznań 2010, p. 56–57.

preter— one who presents the historical context, the history of the object itself and its meaning and place in the collection. The museum educator mediates between the message and its recipient. He or she is the one who helps to **understand** (for which they need to have knowledge about the exhibition) and **experience** (for which they need to have knowledge of the art of teaching and be familiar with the recipient) what is on display.

More generally, a museum educator is a mediator between a museum understood as a cultural institution together with its collections, displayed permanently or temporarily in the form of exhibitions, and the public, i.e. people who come to the museum to experience something. A visit to a museum becomes an experience which, in its complex nature, provides visitors with information and experience that potentially impact an individual's life and personal history.

In a rather original way, the authors of a vacant position ad from the Royal Łazienki Museum Education Centre wrote about the intermediary role and place of the museum educator in the structure of the museum:

*The museum educator's task is to talk in an innovative manner about the collections, place them in time, involve the group in creative activities, and stimulate interest in the history enchanted in the collection and within the space of the museum*<sup>12</sup>.

As Renata Pater postulates, museums contain exhibits to which an educator should direct the attention of the participants of an event, using a wide range of skills. All the educator's activity is to lead to the essence, i.e. to "relations established within the exhibition space"<sup>13</sup>. The author, using the term "museum education animator" to describe this profession, is convinced that his or her competences are similar to those expected from a culture animator. In terms of knowledge, he or she should demonstrate expertise in pedagogical, psychological, sociological, cultural and museum-related issues as well as those related to the fields of science represented in museum collections (e.g. history, art history, archaeology, ethnography, etc.). According to the author, it is also important to know economic issues, including the management of staff and cultural institutions, as well as the basics of designing educational and cultural activities. She moreover attaches great importance to the skills needed to work in this position. They include, first of all, interpersonal, communication, and organizational skills, and those necessary to diagnose the needs of the audience and to create networks and cooperation, such as insightful obser-

» 12 <http://edukacjamuzealna.blogspot.com/2011/08/zostan-edukatorem.html>  
[access: 15.02.2019]

» 13 R. Pater, *Animatorzy edukacji muzealnej. W poszukiwaniu „jakościowych” innowacji dla dydaktyki akademickiej* [Animators of museum education. In search of 'qualitative' innovations for academic education] [in:] *Kompetencje do prowadzenia edukacji kulturalnej*, ed. B. Głyda, A. Matusiak, K. Olbrycht, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2014, p. 416.



vation of socio-cultural life, analysis, synthesis, and empathy.<sup>14</sup> The very definition of the profession places great demands on its representatives: “It is the task of the animator, as the very name implies, to ‘animate’ the museum environment of artefacts and records by establishing communication with the public”<sup>15</sup>.

The earlier focus on museum objects, which is the main task of curators of collections, curators of exhibitions, and conservators, had to be supplemented by specialists— museum educators who focus their professional mission on the needs of people visiting museums. Opening up to the expectations of a diverse audience required museums to employ people with skills different from those needed to perform the traditional tasks of a museum.

The term “professional profile” signalled in the title of the article is understood as a systematic summary of information on a given profession:

1. occupational tasks formulated as a set of duties,
2. skills which are broadly construed as the “ability to take adequate action”, knowledge, skills and social competences acquired in the course of learning, also known as ‘learning outcomes’, which includes life and work experience, personal predisposition, and aptitudes,<sup>16</sup>
3. a vision of a future within the profession. i.e. setting possible avenues of development of persons training for a job in a given profession and those already working in it.

I will supplement the existing findings in this respect with information from several dozen advertisements offering jobs for museum educators that contain the expectations of future employers towards candidates.

On the basis of the evidence gathered, it can be stated that the museum educator performs professional tasks that cover three main areas: administrative and organizational, conceptual, and substantive activities in the exhibition space.

The first type of professional activity of a museum educator includes tasks related to administrative and organizational matters pertaining to the operation of the department, including, for example

1. coordination of an updated calendar of educational activities,
2. preparation of financial documentation,
3. reporting and documentation of educational activities,

» 14 *Ibid.*, p. 410–411.

» 15 *Ibid.*, p. 417.

» 16 S. Sławiński, *Kompetencje*, [Skills], [in:] *idem*, *Mala encyklopedia zintegrowanego systemu kwalifikacji*, Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych Warszawa 2017, p. 23.

4. promotion of educational events,
5. cooperation with museum partners, such as teachers, schools, educational institutions, cultural institutions, media, sponsors, etc.

Conceptual work, consisting in the creative management of entrusted tasks, covers primarily

1. creating plans, educational programmes, and scenarios of museum activities for various target groups,
2. developing teaching aids and educational materials, e.g. in the form of work cards,
3. preparation of leisure time offers,
4. developing training for volunteers and younger staff,
5. cooperation with curators in creating exhibitions in accordance with the needs and expectations of the audience.

The implementation of substantive tasks usually takes place in the exhibition space and includes:

1. carrying out and evaluating museum lessons and other educational projects dedicated to various groups of recipients, such as school children and youth, students, families, seniors, the disabled,
2. guided tours of permanent and temporary exhibitions,
3. comprehensive management of tourist traffic in the museum (especially in smaller institutions),
4. participation in conferences and training sessions, and conducting training,
5. cooperation in the implementation of other projects carried out by the museum.

Based on the above findings, I propose the following description of the profession of a museum educator:

### **Museum Educator– job description (proposal)**

#### **Summary:**

A museum educator is a museum employee who carries out tasks in the field of educational activity, mediates between the museum (understood as an institution and its collections made available in the form of exhibitions) and its public.

**Professional task/job description:**

1. preparation, implementation and evaluation of various forms of educational activities, including museum lessons, for various audiences,
2. creation of scenarios for educational activities, teaching aids, and educational publications,
3. planning, budgeting, preparation, implementation, evaluation, and documentation of educational activities,
4. cooperation in the development of permanent and temporary exhibition concepts in terms of educational needs,
5. offering guided tours of permanent and temporary exhibitions,
6. participation in conferences and training,
7. providing training for staff, trainees, and volunteers,
8. promoting the educational activities of the museum,
9. cooperation with museum partners: teachers, scientific, educational and cultural institutions, media, and sponsors.

**Additional professional duties:**

1. comprehensive management of tourist traffic in the museum,
2. implementation of other tasks entrusted by museum management.

The prerequisite for the implementation of the above tasks is, of course, that persons employed as museum educators possess appropriate competences (the second key element of the employee's profile): the specific potential with which the candidate comes to work, the skills acquired during school and academic education, as well as those conditioned by the candidate's own experience and personal predispositions.

Employers looking for employees who would like to take up educational activities in museums prefer graduates from the following fields of study: *history, art history, anthropology, culture studies, philosophy, sociology, Polish studies, archaeology, ethnography, culture animation, pedagogy, museology, theatre studies, and arts majors.*

The courses of study listed above are mentioned depending on the profile of the museum and the nature of its collections. The same is true of the other competences that a prospective employee of a museum education department is expected to have. Interpersonal skills seem to be the most important: *ability to work in a group (team); ability to work with a group (recipients); personal culture (the term 'high personal culture' always appears), which comprises politeness, patience and self-control; communication skills.* In particular, a future museum educator is expected to have: *the ability to tell stories; the ability to tell stories in*

*an interesting way; the “gift of the gab”; impeccable / correct speech (enunciation); good rapport with groups of children and youth; fluent, communicative knowledge of English (rarely: German) in speech and writing; fluency in Polish; knowledge of sign language.*

Pedagogical competences are also of prime consequence: *pedagogical education; pedagogical and teaching preparation; completed a pedagogical course; completed a youth camp educator course; knowledge of the specifics of teaching children and youth; experience in working with school children and youth / different age groups; experience in conducting museum lessons and workshops; experience in conducting birthday parties; experience in working as an educator and animator.* These skills are to be complemented by *knowledge of the core curriculum and school textbooks in selected subjects and stages of education.*

Employers expect that persons applying to work as museum educators will show creativity, as understood by museum representatives: *an innovative, imaginative approach to professional tasks; ability to search for and initiate new, non-standard solutions; readiness to depart from the patterns characteristic of museum operation; experience in artistic work; experience in the preparation and implementation of music, acting, and photography, directing and producing projects with the participation of children; participation in building a creative team.*

Each work position calls for a specific set of personal predispositions and identity potential which assists efficient work. In the case of a museum educator, the following characteristics are the most sought-after: *good / very good / perfect work organisation; being able to organise one’s work under time pressure; conscientiousness; punctuality; meticulousness; reliability; independence; enthusiasm; vitality; congenial spirit and a smile; resistance to stress; and last but not least, the overarching characteristic of responsibility.*

An employee with these skills will be able to perform the professional tasks entrusted to him/her– the first component of the professional profile of a museum educator. Their conscious and purposeful use of these skills will optimize activity within and outside the museum, enabling the achievement of the intended results.

The third component of the employee’s professional profile, i.e. the vision of the future in the profession, should be created on the basis of professional tasks, as well as the competences needed to perform them. The aim is to plan employees’ development paths in such a way that their activity brings optimal results. This is achieved by means of courses, training, conferences, and post-graduate studies which are aimed at supplementing and updating employees’ knowledge, enriching their ex-

perience, improving their skills, and developing the predispositions and talents inscribed in their personality.

One of the many proposals offered to museum educators is post-graduate studies in museum education, which will be prepared and organised jointly by the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University Institute of Culture Studies in Lublin and the Museum of King John III's Palace in Wilanów. The courses will offer supplementary training and are targeted at employees of museum institutions, mainly those involved in education, and candidates for the position of "museum educator".

The study programme was developed on the basis of the description of the profession of museum educator presented above, its tasks and competences, as well as on the basis of additional information obtained in museums concerning the training needs of employees. Highly recognised theoreticians and practitioners have been invited to take part in the project and will conduct some of the classes in a genuine museum space.

Four modules were distinguished, corresponding to the most important areas that shape the professional competences of a museum educator.

In the area of general knowledge in the field of museum education, the programme includes the following subjects:

- history of museums as education and science centres;
- museums as educational institutions;
- legal aspects of the educational activity of museums;
- economic aspects of the educational activity of museums;

The module of occupational excellence is made up of the following subjects:

- the profession of a museum educator I and II;
- theoretical aspects of museum exhibitions;
- design and organisation of exhibitions– educational aspects;
- digital technologies in museum education;
- promotion of educational activity in museums;
- organisation of the educational activity of museums;
- museum education in cultural tourism;
- museum education in practice– a case study;
- educational staff in museums– prospects for professional development.

Interpersonal skills are developed to help improve activities in the form of exercises:

- communication with the audience– cultural aspects;
- non-verbal communication with the audience.

Pedagogical competences, in turn, are as follows:

- theory of perception and neuroaesthetics in museum education;
- fundamentals of pedagogy– teaching in a museum;
- student and teacher in the museum;
- education of persons with disabilities in the museum;
- axiological aspects of museum education;
- museum educator– professional ethics.

The professional profile of the museum educator outlined in this article should, in my opinion, be the subject of more thorough research and reflection, which will help, among other things, to enter this profession in the aforementioned register of professions and specialities and to adopt standard sets of professional competencies<sup>17</sup>. These activities will no doubt prove helpful in regulating the formal and legal position of this occupational group. ●

» 17 Detailed information on the database of standards of occupational competencies/qualifications: <http://psz.praca.gov.pl/rynek-pracy/bazy-danych/bazy-standardow-kompetencji-kwalifikacji-zawodowych-i-modulowych-programow-szkolen> [access: 15.02.2019]