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Characteristics of the organization of the educational process in museums in the context of the psychological mechanisms of "remembering" and "forgetting"

Introduction

The current educational crisis caused by the clash of different approaches and paradigms in the discussion on the criteria of the effectiveness of the educational process and the organization of different contexts of teaching determines the search for new tools, methods, and forms of work with young people. It should be noted that such a search does not always produce the desired and expected results because each new generation is different not only in its way of thinking about and perceiving information, but also in building its own system of ideals and values, and in its understanding of history and relations with other people.

Therefore, first and foremost there is a need to emphasize the relationship between education and culture. This means a shift towards museum practices capable of forming new relations between the values of the past, present-day challenges, and the latest ideas about the future.

The museum as a centre for shaping, presenting, and learning about the past, and thus historical and collective memory, is essential for the organization of effective communication between people. This is especially true for pupils and students, as they learn and interact with others by actively participating in the educational process and enriching themselves with new experiences. It is critical that they constantly bear in mind the socio-cultural issues of the past and present.

These particular problems have been addressed in the research of such authors as U. Altermatt, F. Ankersmit, P. Chatton, M. Halbvaks, L. Imenova, T. Kranz, G. Lebedeva, P. Nora, L. Pratt, P. Ricoeur,

A. Shevtsova, A. Ziębińska-Witek, G. Żuk, and other scholars who have reflected on various aspects of representing historical memory and its mechanisms.

The article aims to indicate the unique characteristics of the educational process in museums in light of the psychological mechanisms of recalling and forgetting information presented in a museum, and the relations between these mechanisms and the social environment.

Museums and the tampering with the policy of memory

We note that the issue of designing the politics of memory within museums is a question of increasing significance. Mainly in museums in the former USSR, the representation of the politics of memory is not neutral by nature but generates conflict. This is because it boils down to either unthinking glamorisation of the past, or to even greater uncritical praise of the present which benefits the interests of certain socio-political groups. On the other hand, conflict in museums attracts the interest of visitors¹.

As a result, some museums become a centre of historical fact-juggling, tearing random fragments of history from the general context, and finally silencing for some reason or diminishing the value of past events.

The problem is so blatantly evident that it demands reflection on the following issues:

- Why did the visitor come to the museum?
- What made him or her visit the museum in the first place?
- What issues of personal significance does the visitor want to discover in the museum?

There is often a discrepancy between the visitor's expectations and what the museum offers. This is especially true when visitors find themselves in an oppressive space filled with ambiguous beliefs that do not take into account their system of values, beliefs, orientations, views, or actual mental state. If a museum, through a designated museum guide or educator, appeals to a specific age, ethnic, or religious group by formulating persuasive rhetorical statements, one should be particularly cautious, or even sceptical and critical.

These measures can be juxtaposed with various museum memory policies when an individual's personal memories are constantly confronted with those of the social group of which he or she is a member. The

» 1 A. A. Shevtsova, I. A. Grinko, *Konflikt v muzeynom prostranstve: mehanika i tendentsii* [Conflict in the museum – mechanics and tendencies], (in:) *Konfliktologiya / nota bene*, 2017, No. 3, p. 67–81.

museum collection is interpreted as a certain figure of memory; museums “resist both the involuntary rejection of the past in everyday life and the deliberate erasure of the past in functional memory”².

In my opinion, quite often during a visit to a museum visitors are subjected to manipulation, which can take the following forms:

- efficiency of the manipulation methods used;
- hiding unwanted information;
- distorting information during its acquisition process;
- creating desirable information and projecting a desirable impression;
- purposeful disinformation of the manipulation target;
- creating information and relying on it³.

Incorrect and untrue information, torn out of context, strengthened by the evocation of different images from the past and confronted with museum exhibits, becomes dangerous in that it attempts to undermine, alter, or suppress the memory of certain events in specific groups of visitors, calling this memory archaic, outmoded or outdated, or by treating it as a kind of taboo⁴.

Such practices draw attention to the existence of an explicit or tacit official presentation of history which is often crafted by public authorities.

Evidence of such a policy may include the absence of dates and important events from the past which are inconvenient for the current political regime, or manipulation of the nomenclature of museums. Examples include museums that suddenly change their names; disregarding or diminishing the role of military museums; recognising a period in history as a time of colonisation or occupation; violent interference by the authorities in religious and church matters, etc. Blatant examples of these practices can be found in the renaming of the Museum of the Great Patriotic War in Kiev (Ukraine) to the Museum of the History of Ukraine in World War II, and the corresponding change in the exhibition priorities by which the indisputable glorification of the heroism of the Soviet nation is replaced by the emphasis on *resistance* (board game *2364 ...* for teenagers and adults confronts the visitor with the ambiguous choice of being the “hero” or the “enemy of the people”), *evoking tragedy rather than positive emotions* (the “Torn out roots” exhibit, in which the indisputably

» 2 Quoted after: M. Kudelska, *Kolekcje muzeów sztuki nowoczesnej i współczesnej a problem polityki pamięci* [Collections of museums of modern and contemporary art and the question of the policy of memory] (in: *Zarządzanie w kulturze*, 2018, No. 19, issue 2, p. 188–190.

» 3 V. P. Sheynov, *Manipulirovanie soznaniem*, Harwest, Minsk 2010, p. 295.

» 4 A. Kiridon, *Muzeyi yak institutsiyi pam'yati* [The museum as an institution of memory], (in: *Ukrayina-Evropa-Svit. Mizhnarodniy zbirnik naukovih prats*, ed. L.M. Alexiyevets, Seriya: *Istoriya, mizhnarodni vidnosini*, Ternopil 2015, No. 16(1), p. 196–197.

negative histories of displaced Ukrainians dominate over the success of the unification of Ukraine), *stressing failure instead of victory* (the exhibit titled “(Not) forgotten bulwark”, whose mottos are the words Victory ... Mistake ... Tragedy ... What is it? It is simply the war ... ”)⁵.

The museum and the presentation of history: a shifting approach

Naturally, everything in the presentation of history requires a change of approach, but does not justify a radically distorted interpretation. This phenomenon ignores the fact that people who represent a given time period could sincerely believe in their own ideals, in their future realization, in living according to their principles and beliefs. Therefore, they have a full and inalienable right to relevant memories and personal stories, as well as to their own views.

Examples of collective “amnesia” abound, one of which is the “politics of oblivion” which was practiced in Spain for the 20 years after the fall of General Franco’s dictatorship. Forgetting in some cases can therefore be regarded as “standard”, as “salutary oblivion” which neutralizes many traumatic events of modern history, protecting individuals from the loss of their own identity⁶.

Many museums often try to intensify their informational potential by creating original exhibits dedicated to various historical events. I am thinking in particular of the so-called “new museums”, which design their space by interpreting the past through visual and sometimes auditory mixtures of images, signs, and symbols. Examples of such museums include the Museum of the Warsaw Rising in Warsaw, the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews – Polin in Warsaw, and Porta Posnania ICHOT in Poznań.

Often, we cannot objectively assess these projects because they often have a more or less clearly defined political orientation that corresponds to the current dominant ideology and directions of government policy. They also serve to reduce tensions in society. In this sense, they can be treated as “safety valves” that reduce the temperature of a political dispute.

The search for truth and a return to the past find their expression within museums by references to microhistory, memory, and various au-

» 5 National Museum of the History of w Ukraine during the Second World War – <https://www.warmuseum.kiev.ua/#news> [access: 20.02.2019].

» 6 G.V. Lebedeva, *Pamyat i zabvenie kak fenomenyi kulturyi* [*Remembering and forgetting as cultural phenomena*]: avtoref. dis.... na soiskanie nauch. stepeni kand. filos. nauk: spets. 09.00.13 “Religiovedenie, filosofskaya antropologiya, filosofiya kulturyi”, Ekaterinburg 2006, p. 20–25.

tobiographical projects⁷ that relate to people who lived in a particular time in history and were eyewitnesses to various events. In reality, the history of human life reflects cultural memory to a far greater extent than grand-scale political processes.

It should be stressed in this context that “experiencing” future events in museums nearly always confronts a person with a choice, triggers reflection on different problems of the present day, and begs specific conclusions fostering the learning of tolerance, empathy, and impartiality towards others with a view to avoiding the mistakes of history.

This is why it is important to know and take into account and, if necessary, stress the importance of using the following psychological mechanisms in the course of the interaction of museum education:

- *recalling* (when a society uses commemorative practices that are associated with a positive or negative assessment of a certain time or historical period, of various historical facts and processes);
- *forgetting* (when a certain historical period, which for various reasons is “inconvenient”, incomprehensible, and unnecessary for the current authorities disappears without a trace from political discourse, conditionally and unexpectedly).

The above mechanisms help the museum guide and educator to talk about certain historical phenomena, socio-political processes, and cultural-historical processes in an unbalanced manner, taking into account the needs of different groups of visitors.

However, even here a great deal of caution is recommended. Exclusion, underestimation, or exaggerated highlighting of facts often trigger negative projections and scenarios in people’s imagination. This can create unwanted resonances in public consciousness as a result of manipulation, creating favourable conditions for excessive politicization of historical facts, making provocative statements, and promoting “uncompromising” solutions. As scholars point out, this fact results in delegitimization, i.e. each successive authority can construct its own collective memory⁸.

The patterns of “recalling” and “forgetting” are vital elements which are evident in specific museum exhibitions with various interpretations of their history.

Let us consider, for example, two other Ukrainian museums: the Museum of Partisan Glory (*Nerubayskiye Katakumby*) in Odessa and the Ukrainian Department of Liberation Struggle in Lviv. Both museums present a discourse on liberation, which is understood differently and in

» 7 *Ibid.* p. 20–25.

» 8 M. Kudelska, *Kolekcje muzeów sztuki...*, p. 190.

a variety of ways, even in the same country. The former museum – one of the few in Ukraine that is located underground – glamorises the accomplishments of the Soviet guerrilla movement. The museum includes objects of the guerrillas' everyday life: archival documents, photographs, and personal artefacts. The subterranean part takes up a small, specially designated part of a mine. On the basis of eyewitnesses' testimonies, the museum recreated here a guerrilla headquarters from the Second World War, made up of a bath, kitchen, shooting range, staff room, separate bedrooms for men and women, a common room, and an arsenal⁹. The museum demonstrates the history of guerrilla struggle, highlighting the *recollection* of historical events in the place it was set up in.

The latter museum emphasises mainly the history of the struggle for the liberation of an independent Ukrainian state in the 20th century. The museum demonstrates the history of youth sports organisations *Sokil* and *Sicz*, the documents and weaponry of the soldiers of the Ukrainian Galician Army, the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, the SS Galicia Division, etc. More often than not, this is a glamorising narrative which presents only one point of view. It is a one-sided assessment of ambiguous historical figures, without a deep assessment of the controversial facts, which allows us to speak in some cases about the mechanism of *forgetting*¹⁰.

Designing personal museum space

The nature of a visitor's design of a personal museum space, which may contain further elements, depends on what psychological mechanisms are referred to by the exhibition authors. Elements of this design may include the following:

- *cultural memory* seen as a way of preserving the past in the present, a guarantee of the continuity of the historical process;
- *corporate memory* treated as diverse knowledge about the exquisite wealth and diversity of historical experience, practice, and approach;
- *social memory* as an integral component of contemporary culture, current and future social constructs, socialisation of various generations, groups, and nations;
- *memory of specific events and historical figures*, which may operationalise earlier experience in a new light, taking into account an appropriate historical approach¹¹.

» 9 Museum of Partisan Glory (Nerubayskiye Katakumby) – https://www.tic.in.ua/?page_id=6852&lang=ru [access: 20.02.2019].

» 10 Ukrainian Department of Liberation Struggle – http://www.lhm.lviv.ua/ekspozyciji/muzey_vyzvolnoyi_borotby_ukrayiny.html [access: 20.02.2019].

» 11 A.V. Karamanov, *Osoblivosti mizhkulturnoyi interpretatsiyi "vazhkih tem" minulogo*

The museum as a socio-cultural institution is undergoing profound changes and difficulties related to new identification due to the complexity of economic, political, and cultural transformations of contemporary society. In this context, in order to be able to survive in the modern world, it is essential that the museum should preserve its socio-cultural uniqueness, its capacity to collect and transmit in a new way the socio-cultural legacy of humanity, nation, and society¹².

In this sense, it is interesting to see a position that considers the museum to be a kind of “contact zone” where cultures meet and “understand” each other in the process of communication in a situation of coercion, inequality, and conflict. At the same time, this approach transforms the museum into an open centre for dialogue and a real space for cooperation between people of different cultures and nationalities¹³. Under this approach, the purpose of a museum visit is defined by the possibility of expressing opinions about the potential of a museum exhibition, expressing a critical assessment of the exhibits presented, looking at the proposed versions of history from different angles, or developing elements of critical thinking, independence and autonomy in the evaluation of past events.

In my opinion, no museum space, especially those directly connected with the “politics of memory”, should trigger thinking in black-and-white terms and generate divisions among visitors; by focusing on the negative aspects of history, they create enemies. Instead, a museum should provide a wide range of possibilities to choose one’s own history, one’s own system of values, to develop multifaceted thinking, to stress the importance of avoiding in the future negative scenarios from the past.

This is particularly important for children and young people who are extremely emotional, sensitive, and opinionable. Otherwise, such museums would be condemned to oblivion and neglect – their exhibitions found unacceptable.

u muzeynomu prostori: pedagogichniy aspekt [Characteristics of a multicultural interpretation of “important topics” in the museum: a pedagogical aspect] [in:] *Muzey – platforma suspilno-go dialogu: materialy Mizhnarod. naukovo-prakt. konf. do 125 richnitsi Lvivskogo Istorichnogo muzeyu*, ed. R. Czmelyk, Lvivskiy Istorichniy muzey, 5 zhovt., Lviv 2018, p. 352–353.

» 12 L.S. Imennova, *Muzey v sotsiokulturnoy sisteme obschestva: missiya, tendentsii, perspektivy* [The museum in the socio-cultural system of society: mission, tendencies, prospects] Avtoref. dis. ... dokt. kulturologii: 24.00.01 / Mosk. gos. un-t kul'tury i iskusstv, Moskva 2011, p. 3–5.

» 13 V. I. Anan'ev, *Kontsept “muzeya kak kontaktnoy zonyi” v sovremennoy zarubezhnoy istoriografii* [The concept of the “museum as a contact zone” in contemporary international historiography] [in:] *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta, Ser. 19, Lingvistika i mezhdunarodnaya kommunikatsiya*, Moskva 2017, nr 1, p. 83–87.

In this regard, an attempt may be made to define the conditions for organising practical activities with students in museums and at memorial sites. According to T. Kranz, the following are essential for this purpose:

- clear definition of the participants' motivation;
- definition of a general objective of the activities;
- selection of a suitable method and form of work with the visitors, combining individual and group work;
- development of critical and creative thinking;
- emphasis on the participants' own work for the sake of developing their own views and beliefs¹⁴.

In order for such activities to be effective, it is necessary to create an emotional state among visitors through internal conflict, to stimulate the experience of this conflict during the museum visit, and then to give the right to choose a meaningful understanding of the exhibition.

The mechanisms of “remembering” and “forgetting” are important museum concepts that enable the individualization of the educational process in the museum, contributing to the shaping of historical and collective memory. At the same time, they may be dangerous due to the possible negative effects of excessive ideologization of museum exhibitions and the deployment of pseudo-patriotic shows of historical processes, facts and phenomena.

This reaffirms the powerful educational potential of museums, which requires more attention and effort each time to update collections, reveal connections, and popularize them to as many recipients as possible. ●

» 14 T. Kranz, *Pedagogika pamięci jako forma edukacji muzealnej*, http://www.majdanek.eu/media/files/education/1/pedagogika_pamieci_jako_forma_edukacji_muzealnej.pdf [access: 20.02.2019].

