Forum of Museology

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Article

Interpretation in connection with the use of informational technologies

Generally: add literature and quotes; structure text with headings / subheadings and maybe organize the arguments more consequently and shorten a little bit

Should we use the personal „we" in the texts???,please correct spelling in the text

Introduction

Using modern and informational technologies in museums (and the other cultural institutions as well) is one of the most important and controversial topics nowadays. People like laics, museum profesionals, broad public, management of museums, all of them have different opinions. Mostly we can recognize two groups of opinions – supporters of using informational technologies for interpreting and opponents of using informational technologies for interpretaion.

We are from the generation which has grown up with the informational technologies, we use them on daily basis and samtimes we cannot imagine to be without them. That is why we choose this topic for our discussion during the convention of the museology students held in Graz at the beginning of December 2017.

For starting the discussion the most common usages of the informational technologies in the museums came up. These are:

- using informational technologies fot digitalisation of collections and research,
- presenting collections on modern way and phenomenon of virtual museums,
- using informational technologies for PR of museums and building the brand of the museum.

This year the general topic of the meeting is interpretation (in all context that interpretation might have). Interpretation has a key role in museums. All the nestors of museology agreed that collecting, selection process, researches are important, but especially for museums is the task of displaying objectsfor a widebroad public and additionally: *Interpreting* the collections, giving meanings and informational context, educating thanks to the interpretation. This interpretation process starts during the research of the objects and collections. Thanks to the researches and documentation visitors receive information that helps to understand the real meaning of the subject and interprete it in the way the it was meant. That is exactly where *digitalisation* helps. Using modern technologies for digitalisation and *research* gives us a possibility to share our opinions and research results with experts around the world. It is a well-known fact that „more people know more ". And thanks to informational technologies this museological brainstorming is possible.

„The results of the digitalisation are the platform for methodical, professional discourse, colloqiums, and manuals leading to improve of the quality of work in collecting organisations. "[1]

In connection with sharing information we have to mention that nowadays „society" is faster. than ten years ago. We want things now, accesible in the easiest way. For most people the phenomenom of the virtual museums is thae easiest way for museum experiences.

Google offers over the 160 million links on virtual museums (on the 10th of the January 2018) the most often the possibility of the virtual tour in the most famous and biggest museums (the Louvre Museum, the Smithonian Institute, etc.). Providing the opportunity of online tours (with access to information about the objects) is one of the biggest (and most questioned) PR tools that museums actually have.

Informational technologies in connection with digitalisation offer the possibility of re-creating the damaged, destroyed or lost objects. This recreation empowers the informational network with the „existing" object in the museum exhibition and depositories and give us new information to interprete.

We mentioned that exhibiting and interpreting the collections is a key role of the museum. What we did not mentioned is the individualism which is actually a big thing for today's society. Pierre Bourdie in his book *Distinction* claims that every person has a different social and cultural capital (based on his family backround, education level, personal aspiration, hobbies, life-enviroment, etc.) and this leads to different needs . Informational technologies provide this individualisation. The museum professionals published many articles and manuals about how much text and information should be in the exihibitions to attract visitors and how to present the informations in the most suitable way.

And thanks to informational technologies and their use in the exihibition we finally have the opportunity to ged rid off these articles. We do not have to create the exhibitions for everybody, that provides boring nothing to say information and no interpretation. Informational technologies help us to target the amout of the informations, choose the most suitable way for the visitor. If we have to insist on our individualism, we should admit it and embrace it during the musealisation and interpretation process.

One of the most often mentioned word during this convention was *the story*. People easier accept information included in some kind of story. Stories are touching. Stories are shareable. Stories behind the collections and objects what people want in the museum.

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1   Kolektiv autorů. Rituál múzea v digitálnom veku. Bratislava: Slovenská národná galéria, 2015. ISBN 978-80-8059-190-8. str. 54.

Also, informational technologies helps with the modern trends in museums. Education, hands-on approach, exhibitions and programmes for handicapped people, all these trends are for different target groups, needs a different approach and a different way of interpreting the museum and its collections. As we mentioned before, informational technologies provides different forms of information, approaches and interpretation about one object. You can use tablets and laptos for educational programmes in exhibitions. 3D-printers for creating copies of the objects that can be touched and destroyed. You can build functional models to demonstrate. Use technology to provide the museum experience to deaf, bling of disabled people.

Last, but not least, we disscussed the interpreting museum itself. The free-time activity market is overloaded and cultural organisations, museums included, have to fight for their places. The fight is even harder for them, because for a lot of people museums are still exist in old buildings fullfilled with the sculptures and stuffed animals, with rude custodes and where you have to be quiet all time.

Informational technologies are wonderful to proove the opposite. We have mentioned the virtual museum that can attract people to the „real museum" by showing the digitalised objects.

Informational technologies also provides the opportunity of funny, educational, emotional, supportive online-projects that helps with the interpretation (not only displaying the virtual object, but also provides the context and informational network) and can persuade people to come to the museum and see the rest. These projects are also wonderful PR and marketing tools. We, the authors of this article, have met people who were saying that museums do not need plenty of visitors, but as we declared before – museum collections need to be interpreted and displayed otherwise there is no reason for existence of the museum.

Big opportunity in using informational technologies for interpreting the museum itself is including the IT to promo events, interactive advertisement and guerilla marketing.

We have been mentioning only the positive aspects of using informational technologies for museological purposes but every coin has two sides. Big and most often mentioned disadvantages of informational technologies (virtual museum, online projects, digitalisation, etc.) is that there will be no reason for people to come to the real museum and see the original objects. Most of the younger people live treir lives online and they got used to it. Interactivity is easily accesible at home.

Museums have the biggest advantage concerning the authenticity of the displayed objects. There is a big threat that the digitalisation can and will decrease the aura of objects. It is not the

same feeling to look at the original of the Rodin's Thinker and see it only on the picture. We agreed that this advantage anctually beats the threat and people will always be seeking the authenticity.

Royalties and copyright is also questioned when it comes to informational technologies and cultural heritage, art, etc. Luckily we have ovecome the era when the laws did not cover the online media and copyright on it.

The other threat that will not has a vallue any longer is using informational technologies and the seniors. Very often, museum professionals have to deal with the objection that they cannot use the informational technologies in the exhibition because the seniors do not know how to use them. We think that this is getting better every day and in ten years this objection will not be valid anymore.

Our convention and discussion were based on privare researches of the every student, but we were supposed to work with two books connected with the topic of the interpretation. One of them is the book by Umberto Eco *The Limits of the Interpretation* and the other one is book by Freeman Tilden *Interpreting our Heritage.*

First of all we would like to focus on Eco´s ideas. At the very beginning of the book he mentioned that „*in the moment when the text (in our case object) is out of the object it is placed in the vacuum of the infinite options of the possible interpretations*".[2] These possibilities of interpreting are endless and it is always up to the the interpreteur. But on the other hand there are always limits of what we can interprete. The limits are hidden in common knowledge, collective memory, language and semiotics. „*The interpreation has to speak about something that is possible to find somewhere and respect.*"[3]

Umberto Eco is one the most briliant linguists and semioticians of <mark>our time</mark>. In his work he focuses mostly on text and language but the theories about symbols are valid even for the museum collections. Every symbol has an infinite amount of interpretation but thanks to the positioning the symbol in the system, we choose one special meaning we want to share with the public. In written text we choose this meaning by positioning the symbol in the context of the story and the whole myth. In the museum we choose this meaning by designing the exhibition. It is always up to the story-teller what the message is.

With this on our mind, we have to admit that using informational technologies in the museum can help create different stories for different audiences. But also create more real and

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2   ECO, Umberto. Meze interpretace. Praha: Karolinum, 2004. ISBN 80-246-0740-9. Str. 18.

3   ECO, Umberto. Meze interpretace. Praha: Karolinum, 2004. ISBN 80-246-0740-9. Str. 10.

powerfulstory by adding the more effective symbols (like music, videos, pictures, interactive components, etc.). With the informational technologies we can support the key symbol (which is always the object) and link the interpretation to the message we want to share.

Eco´s book is theoretical, semiotical and has more a philosophical approach to the field of interpretation, especially the museological one. On the other hand Freeman Tilden´s book is focused on the field of cultural heritage and its interpreting.

The biggest focus is on six principles of interpretation which are:

- *"Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.*

- *Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.*

- *Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.*

- *The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.*

- *Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.*

- *Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.* "[4]

Tilden wrote his book in 1977 and that is the reason why he is not working with the idea of using the informational technologies on purpose. But many of his principles are applicable for IT and museum interpretation as well.

We focused on principle four which says that the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation. We think that this is a big thing expecially nowadays. Museum are transforming, from the dusty enemy organisation we mentioned at the very beggining of this paper, to the friendly enhancing place for everybody. Instead of giving the information completed (on the text pannels and through the guided tours) museums are enhancing the critical thinking and provoke the audience to come up with their own ideas and opinions. And what could give the interpreteurs bigger possibilities to provoke than the informational technologies which are especially: Variability

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[4]   TILDEN, Freeman. Interpreting our heritage. 3d ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977. ISBN 0-8078-4016-5. Str. 30.

of usage, interactivity with the audience, variability of the platforms and amout of the informations, that is all whiat predeterminate the informational technologies to take a leading role in a modern museum exibitions.

Based on these two books we have been prepared to go out on the Graz´s streets to try to match our ideas with the reality of the Hauptplatz. The convention took place in the Christmas market season and one of the biggest technical features on the Hauptplatz was a videomapping connected with the markets.

Unfortunatelly this was not a good example of using the informational technologies for interpretating the cultural heritage in the public space. Videomapping was projected on the city hall building, beautiful historical building. But there was no connection. The projection was poorly animated, in the bad technical shape and has nothing to do with the building underneath. All the projected symbols were some christmass stars, David stars, advertisement and hard-to-read quotations.

We tried to find something else and we ended up with the bronze pavement stones memorials to remind the victims of the Second World War in front of their houses. This is only the part of the bigger project that includes the online database of the information about those people and their stories. Unfortunatelly, this project is not well known in the public. The same situation happens in the Czech Republic and its historical online projects that are quite similar. We started to think if there is an efficient connection between the real museum collections and its online projects and if the online projects are effective if they actually never leaves the walls of the museum as well.

The opportunity of using the informational technologies for interpreting the public space and the cultural heritage in the public space is enormous. It did not even need a lot of money. Everybody is familiar with the QR codes and many cities are using them to provide the tourist information about the sights. We can also use the informational technologies to make a copies of the art and place is to the public space. That solve two big questions – How to improve the public space in the cities? And how to present the museum collections outside of the museum? Even the good videomapping can help as a very unusual advertisement. Today society is overwhelmed with information and advertisement. Nobody actually cares about the classic information in the public space. Using the unsual technologies to advertise is a great opportunity and many companies in the private sector are already doing it. It is only up to the museum and the other cultural organisation if they will be able to catch up.

All the informationspresented formed the informational backround for the discussion with our colleagues. We assembled three questions that we would like to present:

- Do the informational technologies really helps with interpretation?
- Is there an efficient connection between online projects and real museums?
- Can we use informational technologies for interpreting without loosing the authenticity? How?

The final disscusion started with these tree questions showing us that even in the young generation of the museologist there are many oldschool professionals that are skeptical about overusing the technology in the museum. The biggest problem is the balance. Informational technologies used as a supportive system for events, advertising and education and ==sice== activities of the museum are ==OK==, but using them directly in the exihibions (and sometimes instead of the original objects) was the thing on which we did not agree.

Most of the argument of the both sides were summarized in the course of this article. The question of the loosing the authenticity was solved, because we think that people will alway appreciate the value of the original. The informational technology on the other hand offers the opportunity to support the hand-on approach. Some of our colleagues had an experience with the people destroying the original objects and never thought about making copies of objects on the case that they are destroyed.

The question concerning aneficient connection is harder. Problem lies within the mind-set of museum professionals. They have great ideas and create a wonderful online supportive project, but without this connection. Because thinking about this connection and about setting-up the measure of the efficiency of these projects is more a management thing. Until we start to employe the cultural managers and listen to the connection between t the projects will always be week and not effective.

Finally, the question how informational technologies helps with the interpretation were focused in this article. When we find the balance, it might be very helpful.

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