

Alice Bastlová  
Julia Baier  
Marcus Trummer  
Lucie Sušilová  
Lucie Houzarová

**Open round table of museology**

## **Interpretation in museums as a tool for strengthening the social community**

Add: introduction with structure and declaring the topic

Add: Literature

### **1. What is social community and how to strengthen social communities in the museum?**

When we think about social communities, we think first about ethnicity, nationality but there are different age categories, people with different jobs, social backgrounds, education and so on, that also belong to various social communities. They think differently, have different experiences and demands. How can we strengthen these different communities?

Our idea is first to bring them to the museum because there are communities that do not usually go to museums. How to motivate them to visit museums? We think, that it can be useful to hire people from different and specific social communities. Even seeing these people in the museum can motivate someone from the same community to try visiting the museum. We can also use the person from the specific community as a “guide” for us to learn more about the community.

Learning what is specific and important for community can be useful and we can use it to lure people to the museum. For example, we can display an object that is rare and very significant for the people from a specific community or we can organize “festivities” for holidays and special that are important and special for the community.

If we get people from the different social communities into the museum than we can think about how to strengthen them. We can make exhibitions about different social communities.

Showing them examples of different and “better” lives, highlighting their specifics but also similarities to other communities and majority of society.

One of the ways how to bring different people to the museum is to make special programs for them. This can also strengthen the community because it brings the community together and when we combine different communities it can lead to better understanding. This mostly works with groups of different ages (for example with children and seniors).

## **2. Graz Example**

The exhibition 360Graz in the Graz Museum is an excellent example on how to incorporate different social communities into the museum. The exhibition is built around four major themes, two of them being Gender Roles and Diversity. The exhibition follows the development of the city of Graz from the Middle Ages up to the year 2003. The history of the city is presented by artefacts related to the before mentioned four themes. Since two of these topics focus on women and different ethnic groups it is an unusual way of presenting history. Normally historical events are presented through the dominant group of white males. This exhibition showcases how various ethnic groups affected the development of Graz, how they influenced the townscape and how the city gained its diversity. The part about diversity also deals with different religions (Christians, Muslims and Jews) and how they fought and struggled to co-exist in this city. In more recent history the exhibition deals with social issues related to diversity. The exhibition shows the subject of migration and how it affects the city but also the migrating people from different ethnic groups and different social backgrounds. Problems such as poverty and begging are represented within the diversity topic of the exhibition. The Gender Roles theme also acknowledges the topic of homosexuality, which is also a topic that mostly gets overlooked when representing history.

Additional to the exhibition itself, the museum offers special guided tours focusing on the themes of the exhibition. For example, there is a tour regarding the history of migration and another one about gender history.

Therefore, the 360Graz exhibition is a best-practice example on how to integrate different social communities into the museum and showing how they also played part in shaping history.

### **3. What is interpretation in public space from the point of our topic?**

Another way how to engage social community in museum is to use public space. If a museum has some knowledge about social community, it can use their meeting point for happenings or picnics for some special events. Social communities also sometimes have special places for them – for example memorials. We can use these special places for making an exhibition about the topic that is connected to the place and to the community. It is better to use some controversial or very interesting topics, so people would stop and look at the exhibition. These exhibitions and happening can then lead people to the museum.

The museum can also organize markets. It can again focus on one specific social community and present and sell objects that are typically for them. We can show crafts and so on. We can use these markets to educate people that are passing by about social communities and it is also a tool how to bring a social community together.

### **4. Interpreting Our Heritage by Freeman Tilden**

Interpretation is very important thing in museums. We take a topic a we make an exhibition and the interpretation of the topic is on the makers of the exhibition. It is even more important with controversial topics. Freeman Tilden sees interpretation as “a revelation of a larger truth that lies behind statement of fact”. He thinks that we should always stimulate the visitors to think more about the things and to make them curious.

How can we do that? Tilden says that there are six principles of interpretation. We choose some of them that we think can apply to our topic. First the interpretation must always relate to personality or experience of the visitor. We think that this principle can be easily applied to our topic, but we must know something about social community that we are aiming to. Than we can use their own experience, something that they know and apply it to the museum topic.

Another Tilden’s principle can be used in a museum when we think about social communities. He says that the chief aim of interpretation should provoke people and that the interpretation should not be an instruction but a provocation. That means that we should stimulate the visitor to desire to learn more. If we provoke someone to think they can discover things that are behind plain facts and we can motivate them to wanting to know more.

Something provocative can be also controversial and we think we can use this in a museum. By using some controversial topic or an object we can provoke people to go to the museum to learn about this. Like this we can motivate people to go to the museum to wanting to see an exhibition. And we can easily make it specific for some social community.

#### **5. Three questions:**

At the end of our text we present three very hard questions that lead to more thinking about this topic. Some of them we already answered but we think every museum that wants to interest more social communities should think about these:

1. How to motivate social community that usually don't go to museums?
2. How to connect different social communities?
3. What are social communities in the meaning of museums?