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THE ASSESSMENT AND POSSIBILITY OF EXPERIENCE-ORIENTED
AND
INFORMATION-ORIENTED GUIDED TOURS
AT TWO HUNGARIAN MUSEUMS

Doctoral (PhD) theses

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- **The subject of the research and the aim of the thesis**

In the era of online information abundance, the amount of knowledge available to the individual is exponentially growing. At the same time, our thirst for knowledge and our desire to understand the correlations behind the facts remain observably unsatisfied. Consequently, there is an urgent need for means and media which provide guidance in the labyrinth of facts. The above-mentioned media include centuries old institutions, such as museums.

Museums have changed according to the requirements of the era. They are still well-known, recognised and trustworthy sources of slices of knowledge which are easy (or in certain cases more difficult) to acquire. Regarding the current situation in Hungary, the popularity of the national institutional system of museums, which has a history of more than 200 years, is apparent. Since 2012, both the number of visitors and the number of events organised by museums have been increasing nationwide.

In order to maintain the role of museums in society and their importance in imparting knowledge, we should take into account the fact that the majority of student groups, which represent a significant percentage of visitors, get in touch with museums as institutions mainly through guided tours or museum pedagogical classes. The attitudes which such occasions develop towards museums in would-be visitors could have a strong influence on the number of visitors in the future.

In view of the above, providing professionally planned guided tours, which are memorable in the good sense, is crucial in order to maintain the number of visitors and expand the social layers which are involved. This thesis examines the effect of visiting museums, in particular that of guided tours.

After a short overview of professional literature, the thesis aims to explore the effect of traditional guided tours and that of imaginary guided tours enriched with elements of experience invented and suggested by the author, as well as to present the opinion of museum visitors.

Based on research experience, the main goal of the thesis is to make suggestions on the direction of the development of today's guided tours and describe the elements which are required to ensure that visitors leave museums full of experiences.

Our empirical research consists of two parts. On the one hand, we focused on all the visitors belonging to the target group who participated at guided tours at the time of the research. On the other hand, our work was helped by 8-10 visitors who attended focus group discussions after the guided tours.

The questionnaires completed by the visitors aimed to

- examine the willingness and motivation of the participants to visit museums, their experience gained during guided tours and the acceptance of that experience. Our aim is to present guiding methods which are preferred by university students and describe how museums could involve new social layers into their circle of visitors.
- present the features of guided tours which are preferred primarily by university students. Our research seeks to find out whether university students prefer guided tours enriched with elements of experience or traditional, informative guided tours. Or could they achieve their main goal in the framework of other types of guided tours?

The study of the focus group discussion with the participants aims to

- the detailed concepts of a smaller group on guided tours in museums, the guided tour we demonstrated and their opinion about other guided tours they have participated at. We believe that it is essential to deal with this problem if museums seek to attract the highest number of visitors possible. It is important to know what kind of methods are needed to reach the age group examined.

- **Research hypotheses**

Our empirical research served the confirmation of the following two hypotheses:

1. At guided tours led by guides applying the methods of experience-based pedagogy, the participants were more interested than at other guided tours.
2. At guided tours led by guides applying the methods of experience-based pedagogy, the participants were less bored than at other guided tours.

- **Research methodology**

Our empirical research conducted in Hungary covered the analysis of traditional (informative) guided tours and guided tours enriched with experience elements at the Hungarian Natural History Museum and the Hungarian National Gallery. The research described in the thesis was based on guided tours held at the above-mentioned institutions. We used the following three methods to examine the tours:

- questionnaires compiled by the author and completed by the participants of the guided tour,

- focus group discussions prepared and led by the author with the involvement of 8-10 participants who remained in the museum after the guided tour,
- and the author's observation.

In our applied research, we sought to examine the degree of the experience provided by the guided tour. Following the completion of questionnaires, questions raised at focus group discussions proved to be the most suitable for the measurement of the "level of experience". Such questions were based on the measurement of the flow experience. The measurement of the flow experience was worked out by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, a psychology professor of Hungarian origin at the University of Chicago. Only a few researchers have applied this method for the measurement of the degree of experience in Hungary so far. It would have been difficult to find a more obvious, adequate and reliable measurement procedure to describe the "situation for optimal acquisition" and measure the efficiency of the constructive method, which considers adaptivity as a central category. Furthermore, museum pedagogy is fundamentally based on those "quasi" experiences which appear as well-functioning strategies in personality in real life, as well. By means of such strategies, it seeks to trigger changes in understanding. It is no coincidence that it is one of Csíkszentmihályi's basic ideas that throws light on the context of our three research elements most. In our understanding, the state of flow full of experiences is the most adaptive way of creating a higher level of life.

According to Csíkszentmihályi, the person who experiences "flow" is indulged in his/her activity to such an extent that the activity becomes easy and spontaneous, providing the joy of "perfect experience. Therefore, Csíkszentmihályi calls this experience "flow". Based on his research, Csíkszentmihályi states that when the levels of abilities and possibilities are balanced, reducing the level of boredom and anxiety to the minimum, the development of personality becomes the fastest owing to more complex consciousness. The use of the "flow test" enabled the measurability of this experience, ensuring the determination of the levels of boredom and anxiety factors on a scale from 1.00 to 5.00. Our present research applied a version of this "flow test". In the course of our research, we examined the aforementioned two museums, choosing a tour guide from each of them. In the framework of a training, the tour guides (both in their 30s) were taught how to lead information-oriented and experience-oriented tours. Our next task was to organise visitor groups from unknown people, compile the questionnaires and the draft of our focus group discussion. Besides the tour guides trained in advance and the group of participants, the leaders of the research also participated in person at the guided tours, ensuring in-situ observation with their presence. We tried to make the members of the examined research groups complete the questionnaires after each guided tour, irrespective of the fact whether it was based on traditional museum pedagogy or filled with experience elements. As a result, at the level of

university students, the data we collected during focus group discussions and from questionnaires completed after traditional and experience-based museum pedagogical tours were analysed in clusters. Our findings and conclusions drawn from the comparison of the data are presented in Chapter 4. In the process described above, the following research methods can be identified:

- In-situ observations (assessment of exhibitions, observation of the visitors participating at the guided tour)

The personal attendance of the leaders of the research provided an opportunity for in-situ observations at the guided tours, which resulted in the collection of qualitative data. The conclusions and correlations based on such observation are also included in the chapter that presents the findings of our research.

- Data collection by means of questionnaires and focus groups

The data from the participating students were collected by means of the questionnaires included in the annex and the recorded guided thematic focus group discussions, which are described in the annex, as well.

- Collection of assessments of the exhibition based on keywords

The above-mentioned questionnaires allowed the participants to assess the exhibition by means of associations and keywords.

- Assessment of the experience-based guided tour based on one's own experiences

The participants' detailed experience-based assessment took place after the own-experience-based programme.

- Qualitative and quantitative data processing

The quantitative data collected from the completed questionnaires were processed by means of appropriate statistical methods and manual and computer software-assisted cluster analysis. In the case of qualitative focus group discussion, conclusions related to our hypotheses were drawn from the transcript of the sound recording made on the spot. In addition, the most relevant opinions of the participants are anonymously quoted from the transcripts of the recordings.

- Literature review

In order to review Hungarian professional literature on museum pedagogy and guided tours, in addition to the specialised books in our possession, we relied on the widely available Knowledge Base of the Museum Education and Methodology Centre of the Hungarian Open Air Museum. The website of MOKK gives perhaps the most comprehensive summary on the works of Hungarian museum experts. The methodological series "Museum Compass" requires special attention. Furthermore, we used the services of the MATARKA database, using the keywords "museum", "guided tour" and "experience-based pedagogy" in our searches.

Foreign professional literature on museum learning was reviewed by searching for similar headwords in Google Scholar and in full-text databases,

such as JSTOR and Science Direct (“museum”, “museum experience”, “museum learning”). In the light of this, we should draw special attention to the leading international journal “The Journal of Museum Education” as well as to the outstanding, frequently quoted books on museum learning and museum experience by John H. Falk, which have received positive reviews.

In order to review literature on “flow”, we mainly studied the works of Csíkszentmihályi. In addition, as far as Hungarian professional literature is concerned, we studied publications by the employees from the Positive Psychology Laboratory of ELTE, the Hungarian research centre dedicated to “flow” and positive psychology founded by Csíkszentmihályi and Martin E. P. Seligman. Furthermore, we quoted from the recent edition of the study collection of the European Flow Researchers Network – EFRN, the largest common platform of empirical flow research.

- **The test group**

Students, who we had not known before, majoring in different fields, with different qualifications, took part in the research.

Research groups for both the information-oriented and the experience-oriented, experience pedagogy-focused guided tours were collected through online advertisements and registration open to university students. After having processed the applications, we formed groups of no more than 22 members. Altogether 16 groups including all the applicants could participate at the advertised guided tours. The applicants were notified and invited to certain museums to take part in certain types of guided tours. The classification of the applicants took place randomly. Following the selection and notification of the applicants and their acceptance of the invitation to take part in the research, we made them complete a questionnaire in person after the guided tours.

Altogether 170 students attended the tours from the confirmed research groups: 86 people participated at information-oriented guided tours, while 84 people attended experience-oriented guided tours. Based on the above, in total, 170 questionnaires were completed, all of which could be assessed in a quantitative way. Furthermore, 124 students attended the focus group discussions, therefore the 16 discussions could be assessed in a qualitative way.

- **The findings of the research**

In view of the findings of the research, it can be stated that the methods of experience-based pedagogy, the elements of guided tours defined as “experience-oriented” by the research should be part of guided tours and museum pedagogical classes held at exhibitions in Hungarian museums.

This statement is also supported by psychological literature, as based on recent Hungarian and international flow research quoted in the thesis (Magyaródi, van den Hout), the experience-enhancing flow phenomenon appears in social situations as well as during individual activities in the same manner. Csíkszentmihályi himself emphasised the importance of “flow” in museum learning.

At the same time, a false dichotomy can be discovered in the research hypotheses on the basis of the experience gained from investigations and interpreted in the thesis. The most important lesson that can be drawn from the findings described in Chapter 4 of the thesis is that the informative and interactive elements should not be contrasted at guided tours. On the contrary, they should be integrated. Consequently, instead of information-oriented or experience-oriented guided tours, the complex and integrated guiding style blending the elements of the two types of methodology could provide the most intense experience to visitors. Another important lesson to be learnt from the tests is that the personality and gestures of the tour guide fundamentally affect visitor experience, therefore special emphasis shall be put on the training and education of tour guides as well as on the more quantitative assessment of their performance related to visitor experience in future research.

Of course, the question above, the elaboration of the methodology of tour guiding adjusted to domestic circumstances, balancing and integrating informativity and interactivity, as well as the training and education of tour guides in Hungary for the use of new, innovative guiding style require further investigations and research. In the two aforementioned fields, future research will go beyond the framework of this thesis, but, apart from professional literature, its roots are already in the lines of Chapter 1.

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five key words:

- flow
- guided tour
- museum
- information-oriented
- experience-oriented