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PROMOTING MUSEUM EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN VESZPRÉM COUNTY, HUNGARY

Museums have been regarded as the guardians of our heritages and in order to protect and promote their sustainability. We have to look at the ways in which they further the understanding of those heritages. We focus here on the ways museums market their education programmes. Museum education programmes have a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage, as the participation of visitors provides an opportunity for learning about historical and cultural heritage actively instead of getting information passively. Museum education sessions introduce the exhibits in context, raising attention and are designed to make the learning process enjoyable. The basic aim of these programmes is to bring museums closer to people, but the question arises how the people can be brought closer to museums. This paper investigates how and where the most visited cultural (heritage) attractions in Veszprém County, Hungary communicate these programmes towards the potential visitors.

Keywords: museum education, interpretation, marketing communication

Tourist attractions

Tourist attractions are the number one reason why people visit a certain area, according to Ioannides and Timothy (2010) without attractions there would be no point in tourism. Visitor attractions are defined as sites that appeal to people enough to motivate them to travel there in order to visit them (Holloway, 1994), they are the “*raison d’être* for tourism, they generate the visit, give rise to excursions and create an industry of their own” (Boniface and Cooper, 2001:30).

Attractions can manifest in many forms, and on the basis of that they can be categorised in several ways. Basic classifications are based on the various characters of the attraction, like whether they build on natural or man-made resources, whether they are free or charge for admission, etc. Puczko and Rátz (2000) propose attractions may be categorised according to three key issues:

- the characteristics of the attractions (e.g. natural or man-made, location in the narrow and the wider senses as well),
- visitors experience (e.g. cultural and historic, entertainment or thrill),
- the drawing power of the attraction (e.g. local, regional, national, international or universal).

Successful tourist attractions offer four important elements for visitors (Wanhill, 2008):

- entertainment,
- education,
- escapism,
- aesthetics.

The emphasis of these elements varies among different attractions and depends on the topic of the presentation. However, in general, an attraction focusing solely on education would attract only few visitors as further functions such as entertainment, the experience of aesthetics, or the opportunity for escaping from the daily routine are needed as well to make the attraction more valued. Attraction and visitor management must place emphasis on all four elements in order to be successful.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) illustrate how these elements relate to visitor experience the following way:

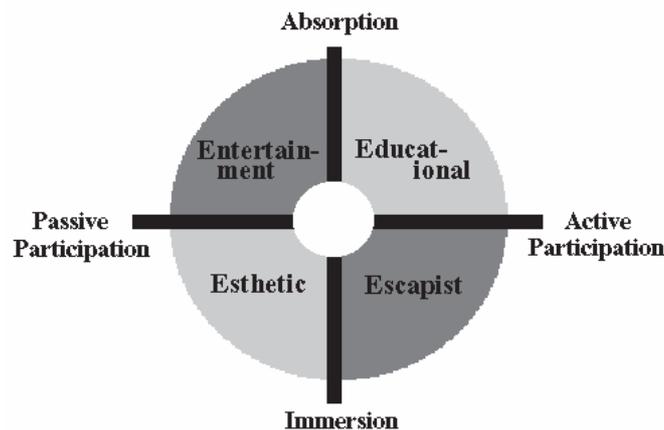


Figure 1: Factors influencing visitor experience
[Source: Pine and Gilmore (1999:46)]

The role of interpretation

Interpretation will allow for active or passive participation while visiting attractions. Visitor experience is affected by the quality of the guided tours and the interpretation in general. Moscardo and Ballantyne (2008: 238) suggest that “interpretation incorporates all the various ways in which attraction managers seek

to communicate with their visitors”. Interpretation is a combination of art, science and technology that are joined in order to represent the attraction more accurately. It is a partially educational activity whose main aim is to reveal and present natural and cultural resources. Interpretation can also be seen as a communication process that presents the contents and importance of these natural and cultural resources with the help of devices, objects and places (Edelheim, 2015). We have to emphasize that interpretation is not only one or more presentation tools, but a process that is itself culturally defined.

During the process of interpretation, we are sending messages to the visitors. In this sense, we can differentiate between interpretation based on one-way communication (using passive tools) and two-way communication where interaction between the visitors and the staff, or even amongst the visitors is possible (Puczko and Rätz, 2000). Interpretation may take personal and non-personal form as well. Methods like demonstrations, role plays, storytelling and guided tools require the personal presence of a member of staff of the attraction while the non-personal tools such as various gadgets, touch screens, etc, allow visitors to gain experience by themselves while visiting the attraction.

Effective interpretation provides knowledge, it can enable the visitor to spend time in a pleasant, interesting and amusing way, collect experiences and memorize the most notable pieces of information. These make the visitor stay at the museum for a longer time by adding value to the visitors’ interactions with the collections and exhibitions.

Experiences and the involvement of visitors

Along with the change of consumer habits, the need for experiences has increased, which is even more visible among young people. In today’s world full of stimuli passive presentation is less and less able to hold their attention. Having realised this, cultural attractions and museums, where one of main segments is the young generation (mostly schoolchildren) in Hungary, they have to find out how to present their static collections in a way that is full of experiences. Various museum education sessions are suitable for this purpose and they try to make museum visiting an experience for the young ones (too). Some cultural attractions have the financial means to employ staff dedicated to undertake museum pedagogy tasks only, whereas in some places museologists prepare and provide these sessions alongside their other activities focusing on the preservation of the objects, items, research, etc. Although museum education should not to be narrowed down to the school-age generation only, it is rather typical that museum education sessions (at least in Hungary) concentrate only on the younger generations. Museum education sessions aim to turn children of different ages into museum visiting, and art understanding and appreciating adults.

School target groups

There is a significant importance to the partnerships between schools and museums. Schools are especially motivated in passing on knowledge in new ways and attending various programmes besides using the tools available at the school. Museums have a significant role in this, with the addition that they are essential in lifelong learning as well whereas schools take part in this process for a shorter time. The relationship of schools and museums is important also for museums as the majority of visitors are made up of school groups and getting to know this environment in an early age in the basis of becoming a regular museum visitor. (Vásárhelyi, 2009b)

Marketing communication of museums

More and more museums deal with marketing, which is really needed, as museums have more and more competitors in terms of culture consumption and spending free time. (Vásárhelyi, 2009a)

In order for schools to be informed about museum education programmes, the communication of the museums should be “school friendly”. There is a duality in this, as the programmes are for children, however, communication should target teachers in the first place. This can be done by adding a separate page with information about museum education programmes to their own websites, or appearing on other websites or in professional magazines or journals dealing with museums or pedagogy. (Bárd, 2009) There are more and more museums that publish monthly, seasonal or yearly programme brochures, or send newsletters via e-mail. (Vásárhelyi, 2009b) Besides teachers, children can be targeted with contests and games or with appearance in children’s magazines or websites. (Bárd, 2009)

Cultural (heritage) attractions taking part in the research

We examined the communication of museum education programmes in attractions in Veszprém county that present cultural heritage, have a significant number of visitors (thousands of people on a yearly basis) and offer some kind of museum education programme. The attractions included in this research are the following:

- Laczkó Dezső Museum, Veszprém,
- Szaléziánus Archbishopric Visitor Centre, Veszprém,
- Esterházy Mansion, Pápa (with sessions loosely related to museum education),

- Calvinist Collection of Pápa,
- Count Károly Esterházy Museum, Pápa (Blue Dye Museum),
- Thury Castle, Várpalota,
- Reguly Museum, Zirc,
- Vaszary Villa Gallery, Balatonfüred.

Research approach

In the first step of the research we analysed the websites of attractions. We examined whether museum education as a service appears on the website. If it does, what kind of programmes are offered, for what age groups, and how the museum makes these sessions and the attraction itself attractive with their communication on the website.

Apart from the website, we included other online appearances in the research, mainly information found on the most popular social media sites. We focused on Facebook and YouTube in the first place as these are the most widely used social media sites.

As the third element of the methodology we did interviews with the museum educators who work at the chosen cultural attractions or the leaders of these attractions. We asked them about the museum education sessions, the visitors reached (number, age group, ratio of returning visitors), and the activities and communication channels that popularize the programmes. When selecting the attractions, we were expecting to find museum education programmes for a wider range of audience therefore we were examining various communication channels, not only ones that are predominantly used by one or another segment of potential visitors.

Results

The websites of the attractions involved in the research are rather different in their character. Most of them are static websites, presenting simply the information on museum education programmes as part of the services offered; in some cases photographs taken at previous programmes accompany the information on these programmes. Some of the websites were displaying out-of-date information about and advertisements for events that had taken place two-three years earlier, which made it impossible for the potential visitors to decide whether these programmes are still available or not. The website of the Laczkó Dezső Museum in Veszprém can be highlighted as good practice, as it describes the wide range of museum educational programmes in an eye-catching way and in great detail (distinguishing them

according to age groups and themes). The website of the Reguly Antal Museum and Creative Workshop can also be mentioned among the examples to follow as besides their description this offers a downloadable leaflet about the museum educational programmes. However, it must be noted the website of one of the analysed cultural attractions in Veszprém County does not refer to their museum educational programmes at all even though they offer these as part of their service. As we found out during the interview conducted with the person in charge of visitor management, they had even devised two different activity books for the museum education programmes for two different age groups. They consciously do not promote these programmes on their websites as in their reckoning this platform is not effective enough therefore they do not consider it necessary to display information on this kind of service on the website. Altogether we can conclude that the websites leave room for improvement in terms of the communication of the museum educational programmes, even the respondents were not fully satisfied in this respect with the websites of the attraction they represented, some of them suggested the promotion of these programmes would need more emphasis and should be presented in a more attractive way. However, there was no explanation elaborated as to why they do not address this issue.

The social media presence is even less characteristic of the sites involved in the research, only a few attractions use these communication platforms, and almost solely Facebook is used for sharing photographs of programmes and events that had already taken place. No doubt these photographs draw attention, but this online platform would offer excellent opportunities to promote upcoming programmes, and to create Facebook events for these which would make it possible to get provisional feedback on how many people would participate or how many are interested in the event at all.

The proactive use of social media is not typical at all at the sites we have analysed, we could observe a passive presence with some occasional communication about the events, without evidence of systematic use or strategic planning. This is hardly enough for the attractions to create effective communication with their visitors on Facebook. The Facebook profiles lack regularly updated content, and in general content which would provoke a reaction or would start a conversation, without which the attractions have no solid ground to build a community. Some respondents suggested that they would put more emphasis on their Facebook presence, which is a sign of potential positive changes.

We have not found any evidence for the use of the YouTube channel in any of the cases even though this would provide an excellent platform to display the experience that can be gained during the museum education programmes.

As we have could not have gained sufficient information about the museum education programme from the websites of the attractions, our first interview

questions referred to the types of programmes, their main target groups, how many people they reach on average in a year, and how these activities are perceived by the public, to see whether they achieve their goals or not. Based on the responses we can conclude that the majority of the museum education offer is aimed at primary school pupils, only a few places consider raising the interest of secondary school students; and the oldest age group of the kindergarten children appears to be the secondary target group for these activities. One respondent indicated that their cultural institution is considering a simplistic painting activity for even younger children (attending crèche). Another of the attraction involved in the research offers activities for almost every possible age group; according to their promotion they are expecting people aged 3–99 for their museum educational programmes, but obviously with differentiated content for the different age groups. The wide range of offer allows this attraction to operate with a season ticket system, thereby using another incentive tool to make participation attractive.

Participation in the museum education programmes is not measured accurately at all the sites however, the estimated number of participants varies between 500 and 2600 people (estimation based on the number of student or group tickets sold). The average group size ranged between 15 and 30.

Feedback on these activities can be considered even more important than actual visitor numbers. The interviewees were all happy to report very positive feedback on their museum educational programmes, which they had observed both in the form of repeat visits to the programmes and in verbal comments they had received from participants. Several attractions have reported on some schools which take the same year cohort to some activities year by year, furthermore, there are also classes that have participated in various different programmes. Some respondents have mentioned that they are aware of schools that opted for their activities or decided to visit them based on the recommendation of other schools.

During the interviews we have gained information about other communicational tools that the various sites use to reach the potential target groups. All the attractions we analysed have direct contact with the local schools (mostly primary, but in some case with the secondary schools as well), and in many cases also with the local kindergartens. Where the object of the exhibition is permanent, it is usually the teachers of the schools who initiate the contact with the attractions and make appointments for the activities, following the practice of the previous years. Several respondents have told us that due to the cooperation with the teachers going back for year good personal contact had developed between the teachers of the schools and the museums and other kinds of attractions, which certainly helps the flow of information as well as the adjustment of the programmes to the actual needs of the target group.

Some of the attractions design museum educational activities to go with their temporary exhibitions as well. In this case the colleagues of the attractions contact the schools (kindergartens) to inform them about the new offer. It must be noted however, not all the attractions employ a member of staff dedicated to undertake marketing activities solely, in most cases the museologists are responsible for promoting the attraction and their services, including their museum educational offer. Therefore their tasks and time are divided and they may need to focus more on the core of their job rather than the promotional activities.

Proposals

In order to improve the communication of museum education programmes substantially, it would be important to improve online and personal communication at the same time. There are three main areas which should be addressed so that improvement can be made. In online communication, the improvement of websites is such a key action to make along with being present and active in social media. Furthermore, building personal relationships is also of high importance and as we can see from the good practices, it is effective as well and can be recommended to museums.

When developing the website, it is important to keep in mind that with mobile devices being more and more widespread, traditional static websites are not suitable anymore. It is especially true with regards to tourist attractions, as during travelling browsing the internet happens mostly on mobile devices. Websites optimised for viewing on a computer screen are difficult to use on a much smaller screen. Therefore, the only acceptable designs for a new website are responsive ones that fit various screen sizes.

After creating a proper structure for the website, it has to be filled with content. It is not enough to upload the content once, but information has to be continuously updated, especially in case of changes in the programmes offered. It is important to include a separate section in the menu with the detailed description of each programme (what age groups it is recommended for, what areas of knowledge it covers, what kind of activities it includes, length and price of a session). In several cases such information is already available on the website. The task here is to pay attention to continuously updating the information. In addition, the sessions can be more attractive if an introductory video can be found on the website and if there are online exercises available for solving before and after the visit. If there is capacity for it, it is recommended to start a blog on the website, where news and actualities can be presented in a new, more informal and friendly way compared to the traditional, press-release-type news. However, it is more typical that museums have difficulties to find a colleague who has time for carrying out some basic

communication besides their regular tasks and there are few opportunities for hiring new employees. This problem might be solved by setting up a community and involving the engaged museum visitors in communication. The blog for instance can contain articles about the sessions from those who attended. Furthermore, secondary school students can be involved in writing articles as part of the 50-hour community work that they are required to do before their final exams.

Social media is another important channel to use in the communication of museums. There are several tools that can effectively attract the younger generation. First of all, it is important to communicate the events in advance and not only post photos of it after it had happened. Facebook events are useful for letting people know about various programmes, as well as having a rough estimate of the number of people attending. If participants are encouraged to write comments and post photos about the event, these materials can be used for further communication as well.

Besides creating events on Facebook, museums should publish posts more actively, preferably on a daily basis. Posting fun facts, stories, quizzes regarding the exhibits, sometimes even adding some memes that can be related to museum or culture can make the museum's communication interesting and worth to follow. Videos can be also used for making communication more colourful. If there are only a few videos, Facebook is a perfect interface for sharing them. However, if several videos are created, it is recommended to start a YouTube channel. There can be short videos summarising what happened at various events, maybe complete presentations can be uploaded if there are such programmes. Furthermore, one or two minutes can be recorded from each museum education session and shared publicly.

As smart devices have become widespread, it is necessary for museums to think about how they can be used for their purposes. Social media, for example, is not only a channel for communication, but it could be integrated in the programmes as well. By creating Facebook pages or groups for the museum education sessions, museums can get an interface which can be filled with information and tasks for the session that students can access on their smart devices, making the session more interactive. Escape room type of tasks, for instance, are highly enjoyable and tools like QR codes can be integrated very well in the sessions.

So far we have dealt with the online presence of museums. However, there is another aspect of making museum education programmes more attractive. Personal contact between museum educators and teachers is crucial for creating successful long term cooperation between museums and schools. Among the main endeavours of both institutions there is the aim to educate students about culture in an enjoyable and effective way and turn them into people who are engaged in visiting museums and cultural events. In order to achieve this shared goal, a strong cooperation in

needed. We could see from the interviews that word-of-mouth has an important role in attending museum education programmes. Several groups visit a certain museum because the teacher heard about the programme from colleagues. If these recommendations can develop to form a network, there could be a constantly high demand for museum education sessions. Network building can be started by getting in touch with teachers who has already been in the museum with a group. They can be sent newsletters and programme offers. In order to make newsletters really useful, besides the usual news and information, they should contain some activities and materials as well that can be used in class. Those who are especially engaged in taking the students to museums, can be appointed “museum ambassadors” and can be provided with all the necessary materials needed for informing fellow teachers and parents about the educational and free time opportunities at the museum.

Besides teachers, principals should also be approached. They can delegate the task of keeping contact with the museum to the teacher dealing with cultural activities, or if there is no such person at the school, they can just inform every teacher about the opportunities. Furthermore, parent-teacher associations could also be involved in communication. Thus, if museum education programmes cannot be fitted into normal school time, after school activities could be organised by the parents taking part in the work of these associations.

Some museums offer lessons at schools as well, which is very useful if there is no opportunity for the teachers to take the children to the museum. This is also a good way for raising students’ interest towards culture. It is recommended to offer at least one session that can be held at any location, so that everybody can be reached by some kind of educational programme.

Conclusions

This study aimed to give an insight into the promotion of museum education programmes and find the discrepancies in communication that influence the effectiveness of attracting participants to the sessions. Although museums play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage, their efforts cannot be successful if there is only a low number of regular visitors. Museum education programmes help to turn the participants – mostly children – into museumgoers by adding entertainment to the functions of museums. In order to investigate the promotion practices of museums, we studied their presence in the online media including social media sites and conducted interviews with museum educators.

In the research we could identify some bad practices that hinder the effectiveness of promotion. Although museum education sessions are aimed to bring people closer to cultural attractions, most of the attractions involved in our research focus on a narrow segment only, namely primary school children, and hardly make use of the

different communication channels. Most of the museums fail to update their websites regularly and they also show a rather passive attitude towards the use of social media. Some of them are present on such a platform, but proactive use is not typical. On the other hand, we found good practices, such as examples of well-structured, informative websites and effective direct communication with educational institutions. Currently, with the limited use of other channels, cooperation with teachers proves to be the most effective way of attracting groups to attend the sessions. We can conclude that the main issue that lies behind inadequate promotion is usually the lack of resources, such as time and professional marketing staff. Most of the museums try to overcome this hardship and do the communication as effectively as their limits allow. However, we also found example for having no intention to promote museum education programmes online. In this highly digitalised world this is clearly a bad practice that will show its negative effects on a longer term.

Future research may involve other museums throughout the country in the investigation in order to discover further good practices. As some of the museums have been offering these programmes for only a short time, looking at the long-term effectiveness of their promotional strategies in a few years' time could also serve with notable findings that might be utilised in developing the promotion of museum education programmes.

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