

MUSEUM IN THE PROCESS. SELECTED TENDENCIES IN 20TH-CENTURY MUSEOLOGY

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In 1964, upon the formation of the International Council of Museums, ICOM, the definition of a museum, theoretically meant to be universal, was worked out.¹ Since then museums have faced many challenges, resulting both from global transformations, but also tensions and transformations within the very institution. The museum definition debated on during the 2019 Kyoto ICOM General Conference is one of the consequences of those processes. In order to better understand the discussion and the unrest that stemmed from the text worked out by the ICOM expert team, it is necessary to see a broader picture of the processes occurring in museums over the past century. It is actually hard to pick and describe the most important of them without fearing being accused of oversimplifying the topic. The changes have been occurring on many levels, in different disciplines, at different locations worldwide with different intensity and dynamics.

The present paper is merely an attempt at outlining a certain context which can be helpful for the discussion on the future of museums. Obviously, it is impossible to analyse all those processes and tendencies at the source of the transformations on several pages only. For practical reasons let me limit myself to signalling certain phenomena, merely providing the Reader with references wherever necessary.²

A museum is a *discovery* of an exceptional potential, as said by the American historian Donald Preziosi; in the 19th century, it *became an essential element of a modern bourgeois national state*.³ Its genius consists in describing

the world in compliance with the chronology that helps us order the reality around us through the prism of a contemporary experience.⁴ By this token a museum had on the one hand become a representative of a given culture, space for intellectual discourse of knowledge and the authorities, yet on the other their very practical tool. However, when raising stable structures of a museum it can be easily forgotten that its foundation is to be found in the tangible and intangible heritage, which by its very nature undergoes change. The revolutionary character of the museum concept discovered with time consists in the processual character of the institution.⁵ The changes that take place in museums have to do with both their role within public space, and the solutions (tools) they apply.

Museum entered the previous century as an expansive institution, already well-rooted in the European tradition, of a multi-layer ideological programme which, briefly speaking, combined an aesthetical approach to the amassed collections with participating in 'democratic education' and disciplining society.⁶ The museum model based on this scheme was implemented not only in Europe, but almost in every corner of the world affected by European colonization. Although the institution's scale, character, or operating mode depended to a great degree on local conditionings and their artists. The shaping of the system in the 19th century allowed to observe its weaker points and henceforth related problems, though it is worth emphasizing that the criticism of the Enlightenment museum accompanied the institution ever since its onset.⁷

It seems that in the first half of the 20th century the most interesting changes were taking place within museum education, art, and ethnography. The academic and cognitive function of a museum is inscribed in the essence of the institution which is (continually) based on a hierarchical system: the museum being the source of knowledge, and the public its recipient. Already at the onset of the previous century what began to change was the manner of sharing information, this influenced by e.g. views of John Ruskin, John Dewey, and European reformatory movements in pedagogics, the so-called new education.

The topic was tackled e.g. during the 1903 Mannheim Conference meaningfully titled: *Museums as Key Places of Public Education (Museen als Volksbildungsstätte)*.⁸ The main instigator of the meeting was Alfred Lichtwark, a teacher, Director of the Kunsthalle in Hamburg, one of the creators of museum education in this part of Europe. His recommendation was to forget dry historical lectures for the sake of stirring participants' aesthetical impressions and educating through art, which reflected the claims of the 'new education'. What served the purpose were e.g. guides, catalogues, sectioning out fragments within the display, as well as something that we would today call a 'museum class'.⁹ In Anglo-Saxon countries in which the call for changes harmonized with the already undertaken attempt at the museum reform, the Mannheim Conference received a lot of attention.¹⁰

However, the very transformation process of museum education was neither fast, nor easy. Museums continued one of the elements complementing school education, used to shape the attitude of the young public, marginalizing their individual predispositions or talents. It was also a credible source of knowledge for the grown-up public whose most important target public were 'educated men', obviously 'white'.¹¹ The unquestioned presence of women in museology as addressees, but more and more frequently as its co-creators, could be visible e.g. in the era of education.¹² However, the most essential change was related to the role of the public and their expectations of the museum. More and more frequently, formal education, typical of schools and universities, was opposed by knowledge gained through experience and activity, not directly associated with science. It is not surprising that progress in this respect was visible particularly in North America in the 1930s and 40s. Learning through fun and practice, adjusted to varied needs and knowledge levels, became a hallmark of informal education also in museums.

It was not by coincidence that the gradual introduction of change in the teaching manner coincided with the reform of the museum display following the spirit of the then aesthetics.¹³ This consisting, first of all, in the limitation of the number of the displayed objects and the adjusting of their layout to the visitor's perceptive capacity. The characteristic feature of that solution was the application of a neutral background which was to later develop into the famous *white cube*, as well as the introduction of balanced lighting and precise information on the objects. As a result, next to the most interesting and valuable collection pieces, also other objects that fit well into the museum narrative were displayed. Meanwhile, the resources hidden in storage rooms constituted the basis for academic research

and fuelled the imagination of critics and columnists. The appropriate selection and means of display, as well as conservation of museum collections required specialist knowledge, speeding up the formation of a museum professional.

Furthermore, interesting changes occurred in the field of art collecting. Artistic museums were one of the more important carriers of national identification, not only in the 'century of museums'.¹⁴ The shift of focus from the collections of old art testifying to the taste, wealth, and prestige, to national art was ongoing from the mid-19th century, however the process climaxed in the early 20th century.¹⁵ In the USA the essential turn towards national art occurred during WW II, while in the postcolonial countries the interest in their native artistic production increased along the regaining and structuring of their own identity. The reference made then was not always to contemporary art; more often the identification axis was, and continues to be, art of the ancestors, in European tradition placed within archaeology, antiquity, or ethnography. Nonetheless, it was still in the early 20th century that the process of extending the domain of art with subsequent, previously neglected phenomena, continued.¹⁶ This was contributed to by the searches of the Avant-garde who going well beyond the valid classifications and limits, introduced, if only momentarily, an 'anarchistic' cognitive chaos in the art of the given period.¹⁷

The resistance against artistic output that has not as yet passed its 'test' was strong enough to affect the activity of artistic museums. In the majority of cases the documentation of modern art occurred with a substantial delay, this observed by the American collector Gertrude Stein: in her view, museum by definition, cannot be modern. However, as if defiantly, the first museums of modern art had been created still before her famous observation was pronounced.¹⁸

In the first years following the Bolshevik Revolution, representatives of Russian Avant-garde worked out a museum concept: entirely exceptional and not used even at the moment of its creation. Rejecting the formula of the Enlightenment museum, they proposed the establishment of 'laboratories of contemporaneity'. Art Culture Museums were to be the venue for activity and experience extending the sphere of research, changeable, going beyond the limits of art, incorporating it into everyday life. Not only did the concept not coincide with the traditional museum vision of the time, but neither did it match the Communist world vision implemented by the Bolsheviks. It did not take the Communist authorities long to return to the 'traditional' museum concept, strictly subduing it to the ideology.¹⁹ Together with the artists emigrating from the Soviet Union, the ideas of the Russian Avant-garde reached the West. They were known both to Alfred H. Barr Jr (indirectly), the first Director of New York's Museum of Modern Art, MoMa (1929) and to Władysław Strzemiński (directly), initiator of the Collection of Modern Art of the 'a.r.' group deposited at the Julian and Kazimierz Bartoszewicz Municipal Museum of History and Art (1931).

More often, however, the 'traditional' artistic museum formula was applied, which did not prevent the promotion of this institution. Just like previously all museums, modern art museums, too, began to take root in the cityscape of capital cities and larger cities across all the continents.²⁰ The future was to show that the challenge to them was not

so much the topicality of the presented art, but first of all its domain: the sphere that went far beyond well-known painting, sculpture, or graphic art. For a long time the only response of the institution to the art pieces and artistic actions hard to classify, was to ignore them.

The changes occurring in the art of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were related to the growing popularity of artistic output from outside Europe: initially of the Far East, later also Africa and Oceania, the latter called *l'art nègre*, and later defined as primitive art. Ethnographic collections were characterized by a peculiar evolutionism. Classified artifacts were to 'tell stories' of the history of the development of (wild) man pertaining to a given community or geographical region. Noticing in them aesthetical values made the ethnographic objects potentially representatives of a given community and artistic objects as well.²¹ When becoming a testimony to a certain culture, it could no longer be treated equally as a product of nature, which eventually invalidated the traditional viewing of the art of 'primitive peoples'. This approach was reflected e.g. in the International Conference: Museography. Architecture and Management of Art Museums (Conférence internationale d'études sur l'architecture et l'aménagement des musées d'art), held in Madrid in 1934. The artistic value of ethnographic collections which did not negate the valid geographic and social classification, essentially transformed the context of their display. On the one hand the objects were to allow getting to know a given culture, while on the other, they served to 'enlighten exotic peoples'.²²

However, the best example in the shift of the approach to ethnography could be found in the latter's professionalization. Research missions, with the best known 1931 Dakar-Djibouti Mission conducted by French researchers, yielded new discoveries and thousands of objects which required an appropriate place for their studies and presentation. The Paris Trocadéro Ethnographic Museum (Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro) existing from 1878 with its 'archaic' concept could not meet these requirements. Therefore, the decision was made to create a new institution. Inaugurated in 1937, the Museum of Mankind (Musée de l'Homme) was created as if on the ruins of old ethnography.²³ The concept worked out by the ethnologist Paul Rivet combined the display space with research back rooms in the spirit of progressive humanism, above geographical, racial, and political divisions. This tendency was promptly continued also outside France. The Museum made attempts to present all cultures, except for the West European, with tolerance and respect for otherness, at the same time with reverence to aesthetical and scientific values. Thus, according to James Clifford, an American historian, *the Western order was present in the Musée de l'Homme everywhere except for the displays*.²⁴

All the above-mentioned processes, with the exception of the revolutionary, though almost unknown concepts of the Russian Avant-garde, fit well the flexible museum formula. Neither was the latter damaged by the devastation of WW I and II, despite the volume of victims and people's migration, annihilation of nations' and cultures' heritage, coupled with the transfer of museum objects: for their protection, through looting, and later through restoring efforts, yielded a serious reflection on the preservation of nations' tangible

and intangible heritage.²⁵ What definitely increased was the awareness of the ideological potential that can be brought about by museums' activity. The institution has taken such deep root in the reality around us that it would be difficult to imagine culture without museums even when one does not visit them. Theodore Low, an American educator, went as far as to state: *No one can deny that museums have powers which are of the utmost importance in any war of ideologies*.²⁶ These words proved really true during the Cold War when museums became more or less subtle ideological tools.

Despite the war turmoil museums entered the second half of the 20th century as modern institutions, of stable position, and a strong social mandate. It was, among others, the activity of ICOM that helped its further steady development.²⁷ The common platform for sharing knowledge and experience quite quickly demonstrated, however, that expectations were different and challenges facing contemporary museums so multifaceted. Let us enumerate at least some factors the changes are connected with. The first being undoubtedly globalization.²⁸ Although its connection with the democratic transformation continues debatable to researchers, the political transformation did have an essential impact on inspiring national awareness, and in consequence, also on the directions of the development of museums. Liberalization, struggle for equal rights, and the turn towards nature, yielded a wave of criticism of the establishment and the state-connected institutions. At the same time technological progress speeded up globalization processes, widening research and cognitive horizons of societies. Alongside the gradually more aggressive consumerism what could be observed were attempts to adjust standard solutions to the local needs of communities, the awakening nostalgia for the past, or rapture over new technologies.²⁹ The scale and pace at which these phenomena affect museums obviously vary.

The working out of shared standards of preservation, conservation, and displaying museum objects was one of the first tasks undertaken by ICOM. What served as the basis for that was first of all the experience of museologists from Europe and America. The international network of museums enabled sharing the defined standards, but also receiving feedback. The latter evidently demonstrated that in some parts of the world certain claims were difficult to implement, e.g. due to the conditions of cultural, social, political, or economic nature, as well as to the climate peculiarity of a given region. Just to give one instance: tropical climate accelerated destructive processes of museum objects, while economic conditions hampered the introduction of technological solutions appropriate for the collection preservation.³⁰ What also differed was the understanding of the authenticity of an object.³¹

Introducing into the decision-making processes representatives of museum-related circles from outside Europe or North America was thus connected with a multifaceted attitude to cultural heritage and required a change in the until-then applied approach. Debates on ICOM reform were undertaken on numerous occasions, accumulating in 1968, with the most tumultuous sessions between representatives of the conservative approach and the reformers taking place three years later, during the 9th General Conference

in France.³² The symptom of the change was the adoption of the resolution stating that museums have to accept the fact that societies undergo constant change, while one of the basic responsibilities of every such institution is to create solutions designed with society in mind as well as with the environment in which a given institution happens to be operating.

One of the most interesting responses to that claim is the 'New Museology', defined also as an 'ecomuseum'. What serves as its grounds is the conviction that a museum should not focus exclusively on the collections and building, but on consolidating identity through strengthening cooperation with the local community. Criticism was voiced of the concept of museums as an authority in culture, promoted by e.g. curators' activities, this possibly consolidating the split into the elitist and mass public, the civilizing and the civilized.³⁴ Additionally, museum exhibitions were analysed; they are the place of tensions and choices, not merely of aesthetical nature, but also political and ideological, which has an essential impact on the interpretation of the past and future.³⁵ As pointed to by Andrzej Szczerski, the radical claims of the 'New Museology' could not become an alternative to state institutions.³⁶ Reflection on the social and political role of museums led to shifting the balance in the relations between the institution and its public so as to strengthen the position of the latter thanks to the public's commitment to the process of creating the first. Thus, from the perspective of the 'New Museology' a museum can become a representative of varied groups of the public not so much imposing their vision of the world, but interpreting and explaining it. The basis of an 'ecomuseum' is to be found in care for the local heritage, also natural, and contribution of the community to shaping museum policy, this contribution based on the most important features of the 'traditional' museum understood as space for education, place to collect, preserve, and make available tangible and intangible heritage.

An example of such can be seen in the Écomusée du fier monde in Montreal.³⁷ Its first display dedicated to the heritage of the city district was launched in 1981, and received great feedback from its residents who shared their memories of and information on the Centre-Sud. The collections gathered owing to this commitment encompassed tangible heritage (objects, photographs, documents) and intangible heritage (information acquired from memories, know-how, and tradition). Thanks to this it was possible to create the narrative which in a broader context included stories close and known to public members from their own experience. The shortening of the distance between the museum and the community that created it was based on the invitation extended to those groups which had remained marginalized in the district's cultural activity; the change was also observed in the language of the displays (information in the first person). Thanks to this the activity of the museum became more flexible and sensitive to the needs of the local community.³⁸

Apart from France and Canada, the 'New Museology' is also powerful in the countries of Iberian roots, this particularly visible in South America.³⁹ For example, since 2005 Brasilia's town of Ouro Preto has been implementing the space 'musealization' project meant to allow to re-interpret

the heritage of the city and region in the social context.⁴⁰ In this particular case, the 'ecomuseum' means many spots within the city space important for the local community, e.g. churches, parks, squares, the gold mine, archaeological and natural zones. They are places of social, artistic, and cultural activities aimed at restoring knowledge of their impact and creators, understanding the role they play in the contemporary city, as well as at consolidating the identity through the knowledge of and respect for the past. The transfer of museums from the function of the 'culture lord' to the role of one of many institutions co-responsible for shaping the cultural heritage of a region constitutes an element essential for creating space for the exchange of knowledge and cooperation in the spirit of the 'New Museology'.

Similar assumptions could be found at the basis of the participatory museum context. Its proponent Nina Simon points to the role museums play in society: this is both presenting high-quality contents and the possibility to co-create them by the public. *The success of the participatory model is designing the co-participation in the way that allows to both effectively and attractively present the content created by the public. This is where the fundamental change lies.*⁴² The idea has been successfully implemented in the e.g. Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History in California, US, Simon has been running since 2011. The essential policy shift of the Museum consisted in adjusting standard solutions, e.g. visual information, display space, educational proposals, to the needs and expectations of the public, and in emphasizing their participation in raising the institution and identification with the museum. The 'Anything Goes' Museum Project run by the National Museums in Warsaw (2016) curated by 62 children falls perfectly within the trend. The mounting of the Exhibition demonstrated *how big a role in establishing the museum-visitor relation should be played by creating space facilitating the establishing of a personal emotional bond with the work.*⁴³ It goes without saying that the deepening of the institution-public relation provides an opportunity to enrich the experience, boosts satisfaction and capacity to assimilate the knowledge the museum conveys, this working for both the public and the institution's staff. Such activities are not possible without a deeper reflection on the museum essence, not merely on a global scale, but also, or maybe first of all, on a local and individual one.⁴⁴

The late 1960s were decisive also for artistic museums. One of the greatest protests against institutional practices was connected with New York's prestigious Museum of Modern Art. Established in 1969, the movement called Art Workers' Coalition (AWC) demanded, first of all, change in the display policy, pointing to the need to align collecting practices with artistic realities, pointing to minority discrimination and to favouring mainstream artists, as well as to the unsettled copyright of the works in the Museum's collections.⁴⁵ Analogical problems pestered the majority of the institutions, regardless of whether they operated in capitalist or communist countries. The latter zone, for obvious reasons, was characterized by an essentially different dynamics of the reforms.⁴⁶

It was already then that one of the most important reflection areas on the activity of art museums were curators' and display practices, crucial for shaping the image

and strategy of art museums, criticized within the context of the 'New Museology'.⁴⁷ Opening the discourse by museums and making it more flexible consisted in the inclusion in the display process of artists (e.g. through curator projects, artists in residence) and the public, and also going outside the institution's walls (open museum).⁴⁸ The changes in an art museums are determined also by a certain transgression of contemporary artistic activities occurring in all: social, political, and technological contexts. Thanks to this museum of art, particularly of contemporary art, within certain areas of their activity approximate 'museum laboratories' and the venue of events proposed by the Soviet Avant-garde.⁴⁹

For a long time museum modernization was identified with a more extensive use of new technologies and the change in the display narrative in such a way so as to expose so-called small narratives from within a broader context.⁵⁰ Since the 1990s these solutions have been particularly eagerly used by history museums of clear though developed narrative axis. The instances of such institutions are known well enough, so there is no need to enumerate them. It goes without saying that the popularity of such multimedia displays had been preceded by the success of science museums (centres) which drastically changed the till-then manner of conveying knowledge. However, more and more often the reflection on a museum collection and its display leads to a different look on the objects that create it. It is illustrated by the 'turn towards things', drawing inspiration from 'new materialism' in the humanities.⁵¹

The currently occurring re-interpretation of a museum object unquestionably derives from the experience of ethnographic museums whose richness and burden at the same time are objects acquired beginning as of the 18th century in the course of missions, expeditions, explorations, and also often looting scientific expeditions. In many situations a public display of worshipped objects or specimens of a particular importance for the culture of a given community may contradict the community's system of values, which questions the concept of Western progressive humanism. This may be an appropriate point to mention The Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, created around the collections of the Swedish Academy of Sciences, and later of the ethnographic section of the Museum of Natural History (1900).⁵² The changes occurring in Swedish museology since the 1970s, supported by legislative activities of the state, have been meant to activate and expand the activities of the institution through increased participation of society and a complex documentation of the heritage.⁵³ One of the steps harmonizing with the process of a gradual 'decolonization' of the ethnographic collections was the establishment of The Museum of World Culture (1999) meant to show the heritage in a broader than earlier context, with transparency and with respect for its diversity.⁵⁴ One of the consequences of such a policy was the return in 2006 of the G'psgolox totem pole to the Haisla people; the totem had disappeared from a village in British Columbia in 1929, and remained in the collection of the Swedish museum over that time.⁵⁵ The attempt to re-interpret heritage does not apply only to the post-colonial collections, this testified to, for example, by the activity of The Seweryn Udziela Museum of Ethnography in Cracow, which thanks to the conducted research proposes a new approach to the Siberian collection it owns.⁵⁶

A similarly serious ethical problem is connected with the institutions which boast human and animal specimens in their collection. The following is stated in the Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums adopted in 2013 with regard to human remains: *Where extant representatives of the cultural groups exist, any display, representation, research and /or deaccession must be done in full consultation with the groups involved. Meanwhile: Animal remains should be displayed with respect and dignity regardless of the species or its origins.*⁵⁷ Today museums no longer collect animal skins, and the displayed collections testify to the earlier collecting activity of natural history museums. Simultaneously, it is precisely these taxidermic specimens that are the most vulnerable to destruction, not merely due to biological damage, but their decreasing visual attractiveness or negative interpretation by the public or the museums themselves. The moral dilemma resulting from the means of acquiring the specimens, and, in a larger picture, from the exploitation of natural resources, casts a shadow on the collection evaluation, however undeniably some of the specimens boast exceptional importance for research into rare or extinct species.⁵⁸

The above-mentioned aspects of the changes occurring in contemporary museology, positive in their majority, do not mean that the process is entirely free of negative aspects. In many a case these reflections on museums and transformations are merely superficial, short-term; the participatory aspect is limited merely to running the social media, while political questions prove decisive not only for the direction of a given institution's development, but also for its factual quality. Objections are raised in the case of excessive commercialization, identifying a museum with an entertainment venue, or mercenary fashion of treating national heritage, this best testified to by the bitter comments of the French museologist Jean Clair announcing the crisis of museums.⁵⁹ Justified doubts are raised by new exhibition concepts which often – declaring a multi-threaded and open discourse – propose a distorted image of reality.⁶⁰ What can astound are practices boosting visitors' artificial emotions based on 'universal', yet non-extant 'facts', questioning transparency and the truth that should be the foundation of museums.⁶¹ Mention also has to be made of multimedia displays whose maintenance cost often exceeds the museum's budget, while their scale is in disproportion to the public's needs. Marginal to the debate are also environmental issues of running the institution which, while promoting socially responsible attitudes, leaves a much higher carbon footprint than necessary. All these are obviously merely the tip of the iceberg created by problems and tensions resulting from the introduced changes and those being introduced.⁶² These are challenges far more serious, since they require more than just merely copying of the already existing ideas, and working out such solutions that remain in line with a given museum and the communities that create it.

The above choice of topics related to contemporary museums only signals the multi-layered structure of the problem. A museum is a reflection, but also a fragment of the changing world, and like itself it faces new, often unexpected challenges. In many cases criticism of museums does not do justice to the institution which, having been the tool of colonization, has during its existence been assimilated,

transformed, and is being used as one of the elements of building and consolidating identity. At the same time, it is precisely the resistance to the traditional structure and schemes that allows to expose the multi-aspect character of a museum and the potential to overcome the functions that are imposed on it. The so-far and still valid museum

definition, drawing from the 'European' tradition unquestionably requires reflection. It is worth remembering, though, that a museum is a 'brilliant experiment', a place which thanks to people's curiosity about themselves and the world should tend memory, tangible and intangible heritage, in a varied manner, both traditional and visionary.

Abstract: The debate on the museum definition undertaken at the 2019 Kyoto ICOM General Conference points to the role played contemporarily by museums and the expectations they have to meet. It also results as a consequence of changes happening in museums beginning as of the 19th century until today. Extremely important processes took place in the past century. Initially, the changes covered the museum operating methods, mainly within museum education and display, however, they also had an impact on the status of objects in museum collections in the context of artistic and ethnographic collections. One of the most interesting ideas for museum's redefinition was that proposed in the 1st half of the 20th c. in the formula of Museums of Artistic Culture. However, the departure from the traditionally conceived museum towards a 'laboratory of modernity' proposed by the Russian Avant-garde was still too revolutionary for its times.

Beginning as of the 1960s, next to the reflection on museums' operating modes, there increased the emphasis

on the role they played and the one they should play in modern society. It was phenomena of political, social, or economic character that had a direct impact on the transformation of the shape of museums, these phenomena appearing under the banners of globalization, liberalization, democratization, glocalization. Criticism of museums and their up-to-then praxes drew attention to the essential character of the relation between the institution and its public. The turn towards society allowed for such formats to appear as an ecomuseum, participatory museum, open museum. The solutions derived from the New Museology not only point to the necessity to move the level of the relationship between museum and society, but first and foremost to reflect on museum's activity which is assumed to create an institution maximally transparent and ethical. It is for various reasons that not all the solutions proposed by museums meet the criteria. Museums continue to face numerous challenges, yet they boast potential to face them.

Keywords: museum, new museology, participatory museum, colonialism, museum education, new museum definition.

Endnotes

¹ It read: *The word 'museum' includes all collections open to public, of artistic, technical, scientific, historical or archeological material, including zoos and botanical gardens, but excluding libraries, except in so far as they maintain permanent exhibition rooms*, quoted after: M. Borusiewicz, *Nauka czy rozrywka? Nowa muzeologia w europejskich definicjach muzeum* [Education or Entertainment? The New Museology in the European Museum Definitions], Universitas, Kraków 2012, p. 226. In this publication the author traced and analysed changes in the museum definition in the 20th century. There is also extensive literature on the topic; see also: D. Folga-Januszewska, *Dzieje pojęcia muzeum i problemy współczesne – wprowadzenie do dyskusji nad nową definicją muzeum ICOM* [History of the Museum Concept and Contemporary Challenges: Introduction into the Debate on the New ICOM Museum Definition] published in this issue of the 'Muzealnictwo' Annual; in Annex 2: Evolution of ICOM Museum Definition in 1946–2007 all the ICOM museum definitions from the given period in the English version can be found.

² Naturally, that choice is subjective and does not aspire to setting out primary tendencies. My goal is to expose some crucial points and the intersection of certain tendencies that affect the contemporary museum image.

³ D. Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body. Art, Museum, and the Phantasm of Modernity* (1996), K. Kolenda (przeł.), w: *Display. Strategie wystawiania*, M. Hussakowska, E.M. Tatar (red.), Universitas, Kraków 2012, s. 21.

⁴ Preziosi also emphasizes that the new museum institution has become the place of displaying what one can force the subjects to desire as their patrimony: the place of inspiring, introducing and placing socio-historical longing of all kinds of desires. D. Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body...*

⁵ It is, in turn, the consequence of an open formula of the collection; its shape resulting from the collecting strategy, objects that are in it, the place and context in which it happens to operate. As long as the collection is developed (regardless of the manner and dynamics), it is dynamic and open.

⁶ Regrettably, in Poland the debate on the political commitment of museums in majority of cases is limited merely to the current issues, overlooking the historical causes of this kind of relations. Who knows, maybe a larger social awareness of these relations could help search a (difficult) consensus between museums and politics. The major publications on the topic are as follows: E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, Routledge, London 1992; T. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum. History, Theory, Politics*, Routledge, London, New York 1995.

⁷ Among the researchers two views dominate: the first that points to the ancient beginning of the museum, the second that places its institutional and ideological foundations in the 18th c. The 'Enlightenment museum' refers to the latter.

⁸ In German museology a big role was played by the *Landesmuseum* and *Heimatmuseum* concepts which can be explained in a simplified manner as the 'museum of native land'. It was connected with the nationalism being born in the 19th century, to which also the Mannheim Conference made reference. On *Landesmuseum* see L. Meijer-van Mensch, P. van Mensch, *From Disciplinary Control to Co-creation – Collecting and the Development of Museums as Praxis in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*, in: S. Pettersson, M. Hagedorn-Saupe, T. Jyrkkö, A. Weij, *Encouraging Collections Mobility – a Way Forward for Museums in Europe*, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki 2010, pp. 33-53.

- ⁹ The recommendation was for the number of participants not to exceed 20, only the most interesting objects were spoken of during the tour, while the class level was adjusted to the awareness of the public. Since curators are quite busy with other responsibilities, such classes could also be run by appropriately trained teachers, R. von Erdberg, *Führungen durch Museen*, in: *Die Museen als Volksbildungsstätten*: Ergebnisse der 12. Konferenz der Centralstelle für Arbeiter-Wohlfahrtseinrichtungen, Carl Henmanns Verlag, Berlin 1904, pp. 147-53.
- ¹⁰ The Conference was attended mainly by museologists from the German Empire, Austria-Hungary, the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, the United Kingdom. A report from the Conference was published e.g. in the journals: 'International Studio' (American) and the 'Museums Journal' (British). The Polish circles were informed about the topics tackled at the Conference by Zenon Przesmycki Miriam in a series of articles published in 'Nowa Gazeta' in 1908, later reprinted in the volume Z. Przesmycki Miriam, *Pro arte: uwagi o sztuce i kulturze: nieco z obyczajów, teatry, kabarety, muzyka, literatura, sztuki plastyczne* [Pro Arte: Remarks on Art and Culture. On Customs, Theatres, Cabarets, Music, Literature, Fine Arts], Warszawa 1914, pp. 510-30, 538-45.
- ¹¹ Just to illustrate this point, in the research into display perception the model visitor was an intelligent man with good eye-sight, B.I. Giles, *Museum Fatigue*, 'The Scientific Monthly' 1916, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 62.
- ¹² This phenomenon was particularly pointed to in the United States, see G.E. Hein, *Progressive Education and Museum Education: Anna Billings Gallup and Louise Connolly*, 'The Journal of Museum Education' 2006, Vol. 31, No. 3, *The Professional Relevance of Museum Educators: Perspectives from the Field*, pp. 161-73.
- ¹³ Debates on museum displays started in the second half of the 19th century. Attempts to alter displays were undertaken by German museologists, first of all Wilhelm von Bode, later Hugo von Tschudi: A. Joachimides, *Die Museumsreformbewegung in Deutschland und die Entstehung des modern Museums 1880-1940*, Verlag der Kunst, Dresden 2001. On displays in artistic museums: C. Klonek, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000*, New Heaven, Yale University Press, London 2009; A.M. Staniszewski, *The Power of Display. A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, MIT Press, Cambridge, London 1998. In Polish literature the question has not been sufficiently tackled.
- ¹⁴ This term echoes the book by Germain Bazin, *Le Temps des Musées*, Desoer, Liège 1967, describing the increasing importance of museums in Western Europe in the 19th century.
- ¹⁵ D. Poulot, *Musée, nation, patrimoine, 1789-1815*, Editions Gellimard, Paris 1997.
- ¹⁶ It began with the formation of art history which defined the space, see: F. Haskell, *Rediscoveries in Art: Some Aspects of Taste, Fashion and Collecting in England and France*, Cornell University Press, New York 1976.
- ¹⁷ This obviously is a big simplification; on the change of the paradigm of art in the context of collecting, see: T.F. de Rosset, *Czy kolekcja sztuki musi być artystyczna?* [Can an Art Collection be Artistic?], 'Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Zabytkoznawstwo i Konserwatorstwo' 2012, No. 43, pp. 41-54; *Idem, Kolekcja artystyczna – geneza, rozkwit, kryzys* [An Artistic Collection: Genesis, Heyday, Crisis], 'Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Zabytkoznawstwo i Konserwatorstwo' 2014, No. 45, pp. 253-85.
- ¹⁸ You can be a Museum, or you can be modern, but you can't be both. Quoted after: J.B. Hightower, *Foreword*, in: *Four Americans in Paris: The Collections of Gertrude Stein and Her Family*, I. Gordon (ed.), MoMA, New York 1970, p. 8.
- ¹⁹ On Constructivist museums in Soviet Russia see, e.g. A. Turowski, *Muzea Kultury Artystycznej* [Museums of Artistic Culture], 'Artium Questions' 1983, No. 2, pp. 89-103; *Idem, Muzeum – instytucja awangardy* [Museum: an Avant-garde Institution] (1992), in: *Idem, Awangardowe marginesy* [Avant-garde Margins], IK, Warszawa 1998, pp. 153-66; *Idem, The Contemporary Museum is a Laboratory of Knowledge: The Origins of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Russia*, in: *From Museum Critique to the Critical Museum*, K. Murawska-Muthesius, P. Piotrowski (ed.), Routledge, London, New York 2015, pp. 37-52.
- ²⁰ J. P. Lorente, *Cathedrals of Urban Modernity: The First Museums of Contemporary Art, 1800-1930*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2000; *Idem, The Museums of Contemporary Art: Notion and Development*, Ashgate, Farnham 2011. Another interesting issue is the relation of modern art and public collections with American politics during WW II, see: S. Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art. Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (1983), A. Goldhamer (transl.), University of Chicago Press 1985.
- ²¹ On the relations between ethnography and art, and their impact on ethnographic museums see: J. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*.
- ²² *Museographie: Architecture et Amenagement des Musees d'art. Conference Internationale d'Etudes. Madrid 1934*, Office international des musées, Institut international de coopération intellectuelle, 1935, Vol. 2, pp. 425-426. A set of the most important principles and good practices as for collecting and proper conservation of specimens presented in full light the multi-faceted character of the museum.
- ²³ Actually, the building of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris was raised in the place of the Trocadéro Museum demolished in 1935. Interestingly, the name 'ethnographic museum' underwent its evolution; currently the term 'the museum of world cultures' is more often used.
- ²⁴ J. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture...*, p. 160.
- ²⁵ These topics are not as yet well elaborated. One of the more interesting articles within this domain is the paper by Diana Błońska dedicated to the National Museum in Cracow: D. Błońska, *W obliczu kataklizmu. Zabezpieczenie zbiorów Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie przed pierwszą i drugą wojną światową* [In the Face of Calamity. Protection of the Collections of the National Museum in Cracow before WW I and II], 'Dzieje Najnowsze' 2017, Annual Vol. XLIX, No. 1, pp. 27-53; see also: A. Bertinet, *Évacuer le musée, entre sauvegarde du patrimoine et histoire du goût, 1870-1940*, in: *Modèles et modalités de la transmission culturelle*, J.-P. Garric (dir.), Création Series, 'Arts et Patrimoines' 2019, No. 2, pp. 9-40.
- ²⁶ *No one can deny that museums have powers which are of the utmost importance in any war of ideologies – T. Low, What Is a Museum?* (1942), in: *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, G. Anderson (ed.), AltaMira Press, Lanham 2004, p. 30.
- ²⁷ Its predecessor had been the International Museums Office at the League of Nations founded in 1926; see: D. Folga-Januszewska, *Kongresy muzeów i muzealników* [Congresses of Museums and Museum Professionals], 'Muzealnictwo' 2015, No. 56, pp. 36-40. Initially, ICOM sessions were participated by: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States; the following countries expressed their support for the idea: Argentina, Chile, China, Egypt, Finland, Greece, Haiti, India, Nicaragua, Peru, the Philippines, South Africa, and Turkey. ICOM was founded at the instigation of Chauncey Jerome Hamlin, President of the Board of the Science Museum in Buffalo. On ICOM history see: S.A. Baghli, P. Boylan, Y. Herremans, *History of ICOM (1946-1996)*, International Council of Museums, Paris 1998, https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/History_of_ICOM_1946-1996_-2.pdf [Accessed: 20 April 2020].
- ²⁸ Its beginnings are connected with the first geographical discoveries, then colonization, one of whose effects was the foundation of museums. The third globalization stage occurred after 1945, and had an economic, political, and cultural impact.

- ²⁹ Obviously this is a far-reaching simplification meant to serve exclusively the emphasis of the scale of the occurring processes. New technology constitutes an essential challenge to contemporary reality, museums included. The issue has been widely debated over, that is why it has not been developed in the present paper. See: R. Kluszczyński, *Nowe media w przestrzeniach muzeum* [New Media in Museum Spaces], in: *Muzeum sztuki. Od Luwru do Bilbao* [Art Museum. From the Louvre to Bilbao], M. Popczyk (ed.), Muzeum Śląskie, Katowice 2006, pp. 59-66; L. Tallon, K. Walker, *Digital Technologies and the Museum Experience: Handheld Guides and Other Media*, AltaMira Press, Lanham 2008; R.I.F. Vaz, P.O. Fernandes, A.C.R. Veiga, *Interactive Technologies in Museums: How Digital Installations and Media Are Enhancing the Visitors' Experience*, in: *Handbook of Research on Technological Developments for Cultural Heritage and eTourism Applications*, J.M.F. Rodrigues, C.M.Q. Ramos, P.J.S. Cardoso, C. Henriques (ed.), IGI Global, Hershey 2018, pp. 30-53.
- ³⁰ It was for the first time in 1953 that the situation in India's museology was discussed at the ICOM Conference; in relation to the decolonization of Africa in later years the problems of museum objects' conservation in tropical countries (1962) and museology there (1965) were discussed.
- ³¹ The issue relates first of all to historic architecture, see: K. Schatt-Babińska, *Europocentryczne i dalekowschodnie spojrzenie na wartość autentyczności zabytku – dokument z Nara jako próba pogodzenia odmiennych poglądów* [Europe-Focused and Far-Eastern View on the Authenticity of a Historic Monument: the Nara Document as an Attempt at Reconciling Different Views], 'Gdańskie Studia Azji Wschodniej' 2016, No. 10, pp. 28-40.
- ³² The discussed issues concerned e.g. the questions of national delegations authorized by state authorities and the status of ICOM members some of whom did not have the right to vote. Granting of the right to vote to all ICOM members and amendments to the Statute were an important step towards further changes in ICOM policy, P. Boylan, Y. Herreman, *History of ICOM...*, pp. 25-6.
- ³³ Hugues de Varine initiated the 'New Museology', and Georges Henri Riviere, one of the participants of the Dakar-Djibouti Mission authored the 'ecomuseum' concept. Both concepts were presented during the ICOM Conference in France in 1971.
- ³⁴ V. McCalla, C. Gray, *Museums and the 'new museology': theory, practice, and organisational change*, 'Museum Management and Curatorship' 2013, Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 2. The text partially available at: <https://evmuseography.wordpress.com/2015/01/24/new-museology-concepts/>
- ³⁵ The issue is tackled in the paper by e.g. Peter Vergo, see: P. Vergo, *The reticent object*, in: *The New Museology*, P. Vergo (ed.), Reaktion Books, London 1989.
- ³⁶ A. Szczepski, *Kontekst, edukacja, publiczność – muzeum z perspektywy „Nowej muzeologii”* [Context, Education, Public: Museum from the Perspective of the 'New Museology'], in: *Muzeum sztuki. Antologia...* [Museum of Art. Anthology...], p. 339. On this note let us recall the claims formulated by the circles of museum professionals from East Central Europe, particularly from the Czech Republic, who pointed to the social dimension of the institution. An interesting example of this kind of activity may be seen in the Lodz 'open museum', see: R. Stanisławski, *Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi – „muzeum otwarte”* [Museum of Art in Lodz: 'Open Museum'] (1971), in: *Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi. Monografia* [Museum of Art in Lodz. Monograph], Vol. 1, A. Jach, K. Słoboda, J. Sokołowska, M. Ziółkowska (ed.), MS, Łódź 2015, pp. 474-6; *Ibid.*, *Muzeum dla społeczeństwa* [Museum for Society] (1974), in: *Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi...*, *ibid.*, pp. 479-81.
- ³⁷ In 1970, in one of the infamous districts of Montreal (Centre-Sud) an organization associating its residents: Les Habitations communautaires du Centre-Sud de Montréal was formed; its goal was to enhance the quality of life of the district's residents and their security. The name of the museum active in the neighbourhood emphasized the institution's positive message, as explained by one of the residents: *we're treated like the third world [tiers monde] but we have our pride (are members of the fier monde)!*, quoted after R. Binette, *The Concept of Ecomuseum Collection*, in: *Ecomuseums and Cultural Landscapes. State of the Art. And Future Prospects*, R. Riva et al. (ed.), Maggioli Editore, Santarcangelo di Romagna 2017, p. 72.
- ³⁸ R. Binette, *The Concept of Ecomuseum...*, pp. 74-7.
- ³⁹ The commitment of the local community allows us to re-interpret the history of places and people, taking into consideration the story of the indigenous peoples, European colonizers, slaves from Africa, economic migrants from Asia and Europe at the turn of the 20th century, as well as the individuals arriving after WW II.
- ⁴⁰ The term 'musealisation' refers to the growing number of museums in Western Europe, the historical policy (Kulturkampf), and the culture of memory and of the past, which has been particularly popular since the 1980s; see: A. Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, Routledge, New York, London 2010, pp. 25-35. In this context it is however the question of the reinterpretation of space in such a way so as to read the values whose carriers are methods applied by e.g. museums.
- ⁴¹ Y. Mattos et al., *Serra de Ouro Preto: Multiple Landscape Designed by Nature, Culture, and Heritage*, in: *Ecomuseums and Cultural Landscapes...*, pp. 89-94.
- ⁴² N. Simon, *Muzeum partycypacyjne* [The Participatory Museum], *Laboratorium muzeum. Społeczność* [Laboratory Museum. Community], A. Banaś, A. Janus (ed.), Muzeum Warszawy, Warszawa 2015, p. 23.
- ⁴³ A. Knapiek, *W Muzeum wszystko wolno, czyli pięć zmysłów partycypacji* [Anything Goes Museum or the Five Senses of Participation], 'Muzealnictwo' 2016, No. 57, pp. 142-3.
- ⁴⁴ Redefinition of the museum profile should take place on the basis of the institution's potential (e.g. collections, building, museum staff), its public (e.g. their commitment, knowledge, varied experience, and prospects), as well as the space in which they function (e.g. history, cultural heritage, nature). See: N. Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, <http://www.participatorymuseum.org>.
- ⁴⁵ On the AWC movement and the claims formulated by the artists, see: M. Elligott, *From the Archives: Faith Ringgold, the Art Workers Coalition, and the Fight for Inclusion at The Museum of Modern Art*, Inside/out, a MoMA/MoMA PS1 blog, https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2016/07/29/from-the-archives-faith-ringgold-the-art-workers-coalition-and-the-fight-for-inclusion-at-the-museum-of-modern-art/, [Accessed: 10 May 2020]. In many cases artistic actions questioning museums used their own tools and schemes, see: J. Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*, Thames & Hudson, New York 2001.
- ⁴⁶ The issue was tackled by Piotr Piotrowski in the context of the National Museum in Warsaw, see: P. Piotrowski, *Muzeum krytyczne* [Critical Museum], Rebis, Poznań 2011.
- ⁴⁷ The reflection on art collecting was much less frequent, limited to expanding the structure with additional sections – photography, new media, design. One of the most interesting concepts for the archiving of artistic activities was the Hungarian Artpool, ob. *Artpool Art Research Center in Budapest and the unrealized concept of the Museum of Current Art* of Jerzy Ludwiński, see *Artpool: the experimental art archive of East-Central Europe; history of an active archive for producing, networking, curating and researching art since 1970*, G. Galántai, J. Klaniczay (ed.), Artpool, Budapest 2013; J. Ludwiński, *The Museum of Current Art in Wrocław* (general concept) (1966), in: *ibid.*, *Epoka blue*, J. Hanusek (ed.), Otwarta Pracownia, Kraków 2003, pp. 89-97; *ibid.*, *Artistic Research Center* (1971), *ibid.*, pp. 146-150.

- ⁴⁸ The issues related to contemporary challenges faced by art museums are well illustrated e.g. in the books *Muzeum Sztuki. Antologia* (2006) and *Muzeum sztuki. Od Luwru do Bilbao* (2006). On curatorship praxis in Polish museology see: Zawód: *kurator* [Profession: Curator], A. Czaban, M. Kosińska (ed.), Galeria Miejska Arsenal, Poznań 2014.
- ⁴⁹ As has been justly pointed to by the British art critic and art historian Claire Bishop: *The idea that artists might help us glimpse the contours of a project for rethinking our world is surely one of the reasons why contemporary art, despite its near total imbrication in the market, continues to rouse such passionate interest and concern* – C. Bishop, *Radical Museology or, What's 'Contemporary' in Museums of Contemporary Art?*, Koenig Book, London 2014, p. 23.
- ⁵⁰ The concept of 'small narratives' appeared as early as in the first half of the 20th century in regional and urban museums, boosting their popularity thanks to the so-called narrative museums, e.g. the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC (1993).
- ⁵¹ An example of such an approach can be found in e.g. 'The Things of Warsaw' Exhibition at the Muzeum Warszawy (Museum of Warsaw) (2017), see: *Muzeum rzeczy. Rozmowa z Magdaleną Wróblewską* [Museum of Things. Talking to Magdalena Wróblewska], interview by Adam Mazur, 'Szum', <https://magazynszum.pl/muzeum-rzeczy-rozmowa-z-magdalena-wroblewska/> [Accessed: 11 May 2020].
- ⁵² The collection encompasses objects brought by James Cook from his expeditions, but the core is made up of the collections acquired during evangelical and trade missions to Swedish colonies in Africa, Asia, and Northern America.
- ⁵³ M. Biörnstad, *Swedish museums: a brief history*, 'Museum International' 1988, No. 4, p. 192.
- ⁵⁴ J. Sandahl, *The Interpretation of Cultural Policy, By and For Museums: a museum as an embodiment of cultural policies?*, 'Museum International' 2006, No. 232, p. 30; the Swedish collection, similarly as that of the Musée de l'Homme encompasses exclusively objects representing non-European cultures. The goal of the Museum of World Culture is thus the incorporation of the collected heritage into social space, yet not through its assimilation, but active dialogue. The author of the Museum's programme and Director in 2001-2006 was Jette Sandahl, currently heading the ICOM standing committee for Museum Definition.
- ⁵⁵ The Haisla people who in 1992 requested the return of the totem pole, made its replica for the Swedish collection. On ethnographic museums in the 20th century and the return of museum objects, see: M. Bouquet, *Museums. A Visual Anthropology*, Berg, London, New York 2012.
- ⁵⁶ Ethnographic Museum, Research Projects tab, <https://etnomuzeum.eu/projekty-badawcze/lista> [Accessed: 10 May 2020].
- ⁵⁷ ICOM Code of Ethics for Natural History Museums, Section 1D, Section 2.1.D https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/nathcode_ethics_en.pdf. The text does not apply directly to martyrology museums meant to commemorate crime victims, unequivocally implying respect for their remains.
- ⁵⁸ R. Poliquin, *The matter and meaning of museum taxidermy*, 'Museum and Society' 2008, No. 6(2), pp. 123-34. Reflection on the role of an animal in a museum display covers not only taxidermic specimens, but all the animal-derived exhibits, while in the case of art museums, the use of animals in artistic practices.
- ⁵⁹ *A museum-forum, open museum. So much has been written about those blurred but also generous formulas? Open like a wound susceptible to infection? Like a city occupied by the army?* – J. Clair, *Kryzys muzeów. Globalizacja kultury*, [Museum Crisis. Globalization of Culture, J.M. Kloczowski (transl.), słowo /obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2009, p. 31. The book was written in an act of protest against the deal between the Louvre executives and the Emir of Abu Dhabi to make the French collection available to the Louvre Abu Dhabi.
- ⁶⁰ See: A. Zięba, *Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Historicism and (anti) multimedia*, 'Muzealnictwo' 2016, No. 57, pp. 249-276.
- ⁶¹ An example here can be found in the emotionally stirring 'Daniel's Story' presented at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC: *the story of one boy, fictional but based on extensive research*, L. Bedford, *The Art of Museum Exhibitions: How Story and Imagination Create Aesthetic Experiences*, Routledge, Walnut Creek 2014, pp. 57, 60.
- ⁶² Each museum, apart from the 'universal' challenges, also faces 'its own' difficulties, stemming from its activity profile, location, time, and people who contribute to creating it. It is impossible to enumerate them all, the majority, however, stem from the specificity of the country in which the museum operates, see: J. Sandahl, *Polityka milczenia? Muzea jako autoportrety i zwierciadła społeczeństw* [Reticence Policy? Museums as Society's Self-Portraits and Mirrors], in: *Laboratorium muzeum. Społeczność...*, pp. 39-40.

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