

## MUZEOLOGIE – ARTĂ – PATRIMONIUL CULTURAL

### A MUSEUM

#### – A SCHOOL AND PLAY AS IT IS SEEN BY STUDENTS OF MUSEOLOGY

A museum is a memory of a nation. A museum is a social phenomenon. It is collecting, protecting and presenting cultural heritage of a nation. Its part in this sense is irreplaceable. However, a public has not often accepted the function and position of museums in society in this way. Rather the opposite, from the point of view of what they are preserving (in the form of collected artefacts) they are often considered to be unnecessary institutions. The institutions that have nothing to offer to recent society, which has been influenced by abundant information every day. A man is selecting, consciously or not, a plenty of information that constantly flood him. In this level then a museum becomes an useless institution. Alas, this is not only an individual opinion of a person – visitor, but in many cases the same point of view is represented by those whose position is decisive for the museum existence.

Social interest in a museum is determined by an amount of information that he has about it. The level of its quantity and quality is various. Relations of society as well as of an individual to this phenomenon are influenced by an amount, availability and way of presentation. A relation of an individual to a museum is determined by information sources (mass media, press) as well as by his personal experience. This experience can decide if he comes back to the museum or not.

A museum has at its disposal several means how to attract a visitor. These are concentrated in **museum communication and presentation**. In the sphere of museum communication, i.e. in the work with a visitor and public, great changes have appeared in last years (in our conditions). Forms and methods of this work are reflected in widening of a range of products offered by museums and in constant searching for new accesses to ways of a museum work presentation. Together with classic forms (expositions and exhibitions) also **non-traditional activities** in museums are applied more and more<sup>1</sup>.

Through their activities museums directly influence a formation of a relation to the museum phenomenon by ways, forms and methods of providing information from them and about them to the public<sup>2</sup>. A museum makes an effort to attract a visitor, permanent one, if possible. A museum offers information, it wants to say something, a visitor wants to be informed. In optimal case these interests meet themselves in a particular theme. However, the success has not always come. A museum would give impulses and stimuli that brought a visitor back again and made him to be interested in this institution. In this sense the communication with a visitor has to leave a **trace – a long lasting sensual percept**. A piece of perception that would matter much in a huge competition of information, which are influencing and forming thinking and standpoints of a child or a grown-up visitor.

A museum has a possibility to provide a visitor with special information, a special percept, by the means of a collection artefact. In particular forms and connections the

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<sup>1</sup> PODUŠELOVÁ, G.: *Introduction*. In: *Museum in society*. Antology of contributions from seminar Banská Bystrica 2002. Bratislava 2002, p. 5.

information can arouse interest in a visitor, broaden his knowledge, be a source of new information, fulfil his aesthetic needs. In the last effect a visitor can find here answers on questions, which can help him to be orientated in our complex and demanding life.

From the point of view of a visitor a museum is **a traditional factor**, with which he is in a contact. A museum is an institution; it has rooms, artefacts in collections, professional workers, it organizes exhibitions, has its expositions or it presents itself by another way.

This relation can be enriched with another factor – **students of museology**. They are not an institution; as a principle, they have not any exhibition rooms and any collections at their<sup>2</sup> disposal. Their device is gradually obtained knowledge on realizing the work in a society and for a society. Universities with faculties of museology are not in every town. There, where they are working, however, are potential museum workers. In their future they will also work with a public. They will also fight with the problem how to attract and keep visitors.

At the Faculty of Museology of the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra museology started to be taught in 1995. The beginnings were modest; the specialization gave to students of fix combinations a possibility to broaden their education in museology. First of all students of the combination of history-archaeology expressed their interest in this form of study. Later on the audience was widened with students of ethnography, ethics, management of culture and tourism. In 1999 the first year of a fix combination of history-museology has been open in its external form. In 2000 the internal form of the combination has begun with its first year. As there was no possibility of combining a scientific specialization with those of teaching ones, this trend could not be followed or widened. This was the reason we have decided to open a specialized study of museology in the school year 2001/2002. Because it was clear that the “pure museology” has not been enough and we have to think of our students future place in practise, we have chosen parallel study of special disciplines: history, archaeology, ethnology, culturology and natural sciences.

In Slovak republic museology as a specialized study has been offered by four universities.

This fact made our educationalists to think of the study profile. It is aimed at **museum communication, presentation, management and marketing**. For us students the fact is important that here we have to join the theory and practise. According to our syllabus we have to realize two exhibitions, in the third and fifth years of our study. For the first time in Slovakia we, students of museology, became the third factor in the traditional relation of a museum and a visitor<sup>3</sup>.

At the beginning of the third semester we started to prepare the exhibition project within the framework of museum pedagogy and communication. As far as demands and imagines of our teachers are concerned, it has to be **a non-traditional exhibition with non-traditional form of communication and presentation**. There was a challenge standing before us how to use possibilities and means we had at our disposal for attracting of a potentially permanent visitor. First of all we have to define a target group. We have decided to direct our attention at schools:

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<sup>2</sup> PODUŠELOVÁ, G.: *Information in museum about museum – Helper and servant of museum*. In: *Museum in society*. Antology of contributions from seminar Banská Bystrica 2002. Bratislava 2002, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> PRELOVSKÁ, D.: *Some reflection of cooperation different society*. Antology of contributions from seminar Banská Bystrica 2002. Bratislava 2002, p. 74.

**basic schools** – where a museum has its first potential, maybe permanent visitor  
**secondary schools** – where a student will return to a museum and he/she will visit it alone

**universities** – where are future parents, which use to go to a museum and maybe will visit it with their children<sup>4</sup>.



We have specified our target group as pupils of the basic school second stage, the seventh class definitely. From parallel specializations we are studying we have chosen history. The **non-traditional aspect** of our exhibition have to be also in engaging children willing to co-operate in the exhibition realization from the first idea up to its installation.

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<sup>4</sup> *Obid*, p.72.

It practise it meant to **communicate** with **schools**. We have prepared a **form** that was of informative value for both sides. We **students** got known:

- what historical period and particular theme pupils prefer
- if they are willing to co-operate in the exhibition realization from a first idea up to its finish.

**Pupils** got known that:

- there will be a non-traditional exhibition
- we will have got a possibility to see what is "behind the scenes".

Eighteen basic schools in Nitra received one thousand of forms. Then we visited the schools personally. Schools administrations and teachers of history were informed about our idea. The response was quite positive. Alas, we have met also negative opinions when our forms ended in a wastebasket.

Eighty per cents of fulfilled forms returned to us. During their evaluation the period of **prehistory** was preferred. The Middle Ages were on the second place and also themes of the recent history appeared.

Within the prehistorically period the greatest interest has been given to dinosaurs. We have accepted prehistory and rejected dinosaurs. Under these conditions we have defined the theme more precisely. Our semestral work was to prepare a project for an exhibition aimed in prehistory. Our group includes twenty students, what in presentation meant twenty different views, ideas, specified themes. Endless discussions about the period in the prehistory that has to be shown resulted in the **Neolithic**. A labyrinth represented **non-traditional** form of the exhibition. A labyrinth that has to evoke a way through a space and time from the places where first farmers had settled up to Slovakia, to Nitra, to our settlement site. We have got two rooms of Ponitrianske museum - a concert hall and a smaller one - to our disposal. At all costs we wanted to avoid "a show case" exhibition. We also tried to get out of the situation when a visitor comes into the exhibition space and all he has lying open. The labyrinth seemed to be an appropriate form of communication in the sense of consequence of sensual percept and experience. It has to be a dynamizing element, by which we wanted to bring the prehistory nearer to a visitor in particular events. We divided the exhibition into four parts:

**housekeeping**

**production activities**

**spiritual culture**

**architecture**

Beside the labyrinth a visitor's journey through the prehistory was connected with **creative games**. In every room they helped a visitor to acquire in practise knowledge they have heard in a lecture or read on information panels. As in all four parts the comment was simultaneous, children can get through the exhibition step by step. Dividing of children and visitors into groups meant to attract them before the exhibition. Here we have decided to use another game – a **puzzle**. Two groups can jigsaw puzzle pictures presenting moments from the Neolithic life at the same time. Supplementing activity before entering the exhibition included drawing of totems or thinking up of mottos characterising the kins, into which visitors were divided. These works were exhibited, too.

**Another non-traditional element** of our exhibition consisted in the fact that it was based mostly on a **spoken word**, on a lecturer's comment. It followed from our effort to make museum a school and game. Hence, the explaining texts were mineralised besides the first, introductory space. Such form is not usual and we realize that it influences ways

of its presentation also on another places, in another museums. These possibilities, however, are fully depending on a time factor that influences us as students.

A **non-traditional traditional** element in our exhibition was also a fact that everybody can touch all exposed artefacts, besides the skeleton of the “chieftain Big Bear,, that was situated in a glass case. We have chosen this element from subjective as well as objective reasons. Objective reasons: accessibility of collection artefacts from the Neolithic period, first of all of pottery and tools made of chipped industry. Subjective reasons: an effort to enable visitors to touch the artefacts of their interest and by this way to strengthen a percept, information.

Our exhibition was not over-filled with exposed artefacts. Professionals from museums could object to their small number. Of course, it is a matter of opinion. From our point of view and according to our aim the exhibition consisted of enough artefacts having relevant information value.

Beside the labyrinth and creative games the exhibition included also another joining element – testing of obtained knowledge in a quiz. In every part of the labyrinth a visitor had to answer some questions. For correct answers he got particular number of letters in an envelope with a sign of a room. It enabled him to keep on passing the labyrinth. Obtaining of all envelopes preconditioned a setting up of the kin motto after finishing the exhibition.

Dividing of visitors into smaller groups, kins, also belonged to the **non-traditional elements** of our exhibition. Even before they entered the first room, children and grown-ups had chosen members of what kin they wanted to be: the kin of raven bear or snake. Every kin had elected its chieftain, who got the kin totem. The totem was accompanying and protecting the kin on his way through the labyrinth. At the same time it had to help him in creative games, solving the quiz tasks and final setting up the kin motto.

Realization of the whole project has been preceded by our **professional preparation**. We have been divided into four groups and from that moment every group worked independently. In practise it means to study literature to the given theme, to prepare texts and comments and to consult it with professionals. We tried hard to attract a visitor’s attention all the time. At the same time we had to watch over high quality of our texts – they had to be explained in a professional, correct and civilized way. This obviously was the most demanding part of our work in realizing the exhibition and it took most of time.

From the very beginning we have to take into account also financial demands of the event. Spaces and panels for creating the labyrinth were provided by Ponitrianske museum.. More over, we needed also various materials for different kinds of activities performed at the exhibition. Preliminary calculations were about 37 000,- Slovak crowns, i.e. 930 Euro. A part of these expenses (15 000,- SK, i.e. 380 Euro) we have got from the Nitra community fund. Wooden material, leathers as well as some reproduction works we had from sponsors. As the biggest room we had at our disposal is arranged in a late 19<sup>th</sup> century decorative style, remarkable amount of money was used for cloth material, which create the labyrinth and was used in dioramas in architecture. Our financial expenses after final countdown were 18 000,- SK, i.e. 450 Euro. Entrance money brought us 1800,- Sk, i.e. 45 Euro. The entrance fee was very low, symbolic, only two crowns for a person. This sum followed from the spiritual culture installation, with dominating statuette of Venus depicted on Slovak two-crowns coin.

From the very first idea, through the scenario and schedule, we took part in providing all material as well as in technical and scenic realization of the exhibition

installation. Practically all - maps, a Venus, reconstruction of a Neolithic house, model of a Neolithic settlement site, the labyrinth, totems, puzzle- we made by our **own hands**. During the installation we sewed and drew dioramas. For every visitor we made a small present – a necklace from leather with a shell. We had to provide pottery replicas for our workshop. Colleagues' archaeologists rendered replicas of Neolithic axes, chipped industry, and grain grinding stones to us. Colleagues' visual artists helped us with decorations. We alone built a Neolithic house. As **lecturers** we communicated with visitors. We sewed contemporary cloths for us. Museum workers helped us with the labyrinth; they rendered a human skeleton and animals symbolizing the kins to us. Of course, the most important were the rooms they kindly lend for our project. Slovak agricultural museum lend us a model of a weaving loom and a model of a Neolithic settlement site in a glass case.

As far as our co-operation with schools is concerned, we had eight pupils attending the seventh classes in various basic schools in Nitra that helped us with the form. Originally our aim was to allow them to take part in the exhibition realization. We have met with them during the two months up to the summer vacancies at our university. These meetings resulted in **the exhibition propagation** in the form **entrance tickets, posters and invitation cards** for the opening. This activity, of course, has been preceded by our information about the aim and form of the exhibition we are organizing. Our co-operation was particularly expressed in proposal of the entrance ticket. The idea of the labyrinth was very attractive for the children, too. They proposed a three-parted entrance ticket that can be open. A central part of the ticket inner side includes the labyrinth. Direction of movement is marked with blue arrows. Every room has its own adequate symbol: an **ear of grain** for housekeeping, **pottery** for production activities, a **Venus** for spiritual culture and a **house** for architecture. These symbols are positioned on the left side. Head of animals representing particular kins are on the right side of the card. The backside is meant for sponsors, who had helped us. Closing the right and left sides of the invitation card we will find the name of the exhibition: **Wandering to the prehistory, come with the kins of Bear, Raven and Snake to a first farmers' settlement site**. This part of the card included also information about the place and time of the exhibition. The whole invitation card (with its idea and artistic expression) was made by children. Our co-operation was stopped with the summer vacancies. We were not successful in taking the children into the exhibition installation, i.e. into that "behind the scenes". In every case, however, the children with their skill and creativity in thinking contributed to a successful realization of the exhibition as well as to its propagation. More over, it was a spontaneous expression and sense of co-operation with institutions – a **museum** in a transferred and the **university** in a direct form. The entrance ticket was used also as the invitation card and posters. Some children took part in the opening with their parents or teachers.

The exhibition **propagation** was in our arrangement, too. We have personally distributed the **invitation cards** for the opening to all schools that had took part in the survey. We have informed the city administration as well as departments of education and schools about the event. The Nitra information service helped us to inform public by **posters**. A journalist from local **newspaper** *Nitrianske noviny* was invited, too. Immediately the article covering the exhibition appeared in the newspaper. The exhibition has been promoted also in local television **TV Zobor** and **N-radio**.

Installation of the exhibition took a **week**; the exhibition took two weeks. Considering the fact that the exhibition was an isolated attempt, we were under stress with

the opening, in which we played an active part, too. We were surprised by real and warm reception of the audience; among which were also research workers from the Archaeological Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Nitra.

The opening, however, is only the one thing, but attendance rate and awakening of interest is the other. As the exhibition had its target group, mainly pupils and students attending basic and secondary schools visited it. As a principle it was open from nine o'clock a.m. to five o'clock p.m. The attendance was concentrated to two o'clock a.m. During nine days 1100 children of pre-school and school age and students were visited the exhibition. Number of grown-up persons of various age categories was 250. The exhibition was attended by the means of orders. As classes were divided into three groups and with the activities performed in particular parts of the exhibition, the visit lasted an hour. In the case when unannounced visitors had come, we have a lot of work, but we never refuse them. All of them were willing to wait and enjoy themselves with the activities we had prepared for them before entering the exhibition.

As the mean of communication we have chosen a **dialogue** between a Neolithic farmer and a man living in recent society. In dependence of a room the children or grown ups have been, we gave them questions concerning their everyday life. Their answers as if make us, Neolithic farmers, to show them that not all things, values and customs are products of nowadays or recent historical period, but that they have their roots deeply in the past. Such a light form helped us to come near to the Neolithic man, his everyday life and the atmosphere of the historical period he had lived in. In a principle the dialogue was led in the form you (nowadays people) are doing particular activities in this way, we are thinking in this way, we are living in this way, but we (Neolithic farmers) did it in that way, lived in that way. We were afraid a little, if we could communicate by this way both with children and grown up people. After our first experiences we have found that all categories of visitors are willing and enjoying the exhibition atmosphere. Some groups of older youth asked us to communicate with them in the same way that we did with children. Grown up people, too, liked to return to childhood and with pleasure participated in the activities performed, from games via a quiz up to creating a motto. They elected chieftains and bore totems. For better interaction we asked children in the three rooms (beside the introductory one) to sit down.

Before their entrancing the exhibition, we have informed children, a class as a whole, about the exhibition. The entrance ticket with the labyrinth played an important part here. Every visitor possessed it and it had to enable him to pass the labyrinth with the help of blue arrows. The same arrows were also on the labyrinth walls. Children chose their totem, were divided into kins and their chieftain led them to the first room. When the first kin had left the introductory room, the other one could enter it.

Entering the first part of the labyrinth, the visitors were welcomed by big pictures of a bear, raven and snake. Our wandering through the labyrinth of the Neolithic has started with the first arrow and a symbol of the room.

The introductory part, **housekeeping**, depicted the Neolithic as a historical phenomenon. It did not include any exhibited artefacts. The core of it consisted of maps, texts and pictures. The room was aimed in informing a visitor about the theme – it explains the term Neolithic, places it in the time horizon and characterizes important changes that took place in it. **Five information tables** were situated here:

- the first explains changes in this period, a life of a man before them, shows primary centres of the process

- the second informs about changes in this period, in farming, architecture, pottery production, etc.
- the third brings three theories about rise of the Neolithic in Europe
- the fourth informs about plant cultivation and reasons that led to it; why people had stopped gathering and started to grow grain, first kinds of cultivated plants
- the fifth was aimed in domestication of animals; differences among wild and domesticated ones, advantages that a man gained by their domestication: meat, leather, etc.

The information tables were complemented with **three maps**:

- the first was a map of the Fertile half-moon; it informed where the new way of life came to Europe from
- the second showed way of colonization by farmers from this region of Europe and also to us in Slovakia
- on the third original production centres of plants were situated, with their spread all over the world.

Oral and visual information has been complemented by creative games. To make children understand that animals in the Neolithic looked differently, they saw four drawings of one animal species in particular phases of its development up to now. Children had to co-ordinate a correct picture of an animal with the given historical period. In connection with grain growing and animal breeding children tried to choose from the menu a correct food and dishes that could be prepared by a Neolithic man.

In the second part of the exhibition with the name **Production activities** the attention of visitors has been directed to three spheres:

**pottery production** – the essence of its production, pottery shapes and forms, ways of decorating, usage. Children were allowed to take every artefact into their hands.

**chipped industry** – reasons of their production, ways of raw materials obtaining, processing and using, production of stone tools and implements; in connection with architecture we show to visitors how stone axes were made. Also here was a possibility to take exposed artefacts into hands.

**weaving of cloths** – ways and possibilities of obtaining materials for processing fibres, their weaving on a prehistoric loom. In connection with pottery production we had a panel with patterns that were used for decoration. Children could outline patterns typical for their kin's cloths.

The longest path in the labyrinth led visitors to the room of **spiritual culture**. This space had two dominants:

**a story of a life** – the heart was the story about the goddess of harvest named Démer, which has documented that as soon as in the Neolithic people realized flowing of time, changing of the seasons. In this connection children were acquainted with circular enclosures. The altar of Big Mother representing prolific power of earth and female fertility dominated the space.

**a story of a death** – via a tragic conflict of a chieftain with a bear visitors can see what had happened with the dead after his death. A burial of the killed chieftain has symbolized everything that was connected with him. The altar with a bull's skull as a symbol of male strength and fertility dominated the room.

On the both altars key words were written that could help members of the kin to compose a prayer for averting a misery and arranging for an abundant harvest. Effect of the prayers was strengthened with replicas of tortoise rattles. Votive gifts were put on the



altars in zoomorphic or anthropomorphic vessels. Ritual dances accompanied the dead on his last journey. By means of the map with Neolithic burial places on the territory of Nitra children moved in the labyrinth of time and space to Slovakia.

The goal of wandering of first farmers was their settlement site. This was situated in the last room named **Architecture**. Here the attention of children has been concentrated to a Neolithic dwelling:

**a house** – its shapes, building material, way of its obtaining, reconstruction of a house, its parts in connection with activities of its inhabitants. Here children can try to grind grain on a grinding stone.

Heads of a bear, raven and snake has symbolized end of the journey through the labyrinth. Children have at their disposal potato stamps with motifs of pottery ornamentation. We had chosen those that could help children finish the snake's body, wings and the beak of the raven and paws of the bear.

Our exhibition has met with a big interest of children as well as of grown-up visitors, professionals and laymen. Teachers appreciated non-traditional approach to the theme and the fact that children brought a lot of permanent information with themselves.

We succeeded in fulfilling the goal we had given: to do something for children as potential and permanent future visitors. Many of the children came back to the museum in the afternoon with their parents or relatives to show them our exhibition. All of them were interested in the term of a next one.

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