

## MUSEUMS OF TODAY: A ROLE TO PLAY IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Today's cultural institutions are, more than ever before, very difficult to be defined, to be accepted into the classical terms. Each of them is trying to surpass the limits, to become a kind of universal institution: performing arts – cultural memory institution. Probably, those which are devoted to preserve the cultural memory (libraries, archives and museums) are, year after year, coming to a common way of expressing, wiping out the borders between them, as the practical support of the information (on paper documents, on books and on three-dimensional objects) becomes more and more irrelevant, due to the fact that they are collecting and exhibiting, many times, objects that were, usually, common for the others (museums are collecting documents and books, libraries are collecting documents and three-dimensional objects, and archives are collecting books and three-dimensional objects); while the digital content of the information provided by these institutions it's kept on similar formats, the difference that made three different institutions (based on morphological bases) became a 18<sup>th</sup> c. way of dividing between cultural fields. Probably, the 21<sup>st</sup>. c. would mark the end of these three institutions, as we know them, since the last three centuries and the birth of a new one. In a short essay, written for a Romanian cultural magazine, I have tried to name this future institution as *archilibrariummuseum*<sup>1</sup>.

But this is not the only dramatic transformation the museums are witnessing. Simultaneously, they are confronted with two other changes. First of all, as we all know, the famous definition given by ICOM (article 3, section 1 in the Statutes: A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment) is, right now, still a subject of debate, though it was changed not too many years ago. One of the reasons stays in the fact that it is not very clear why a theatre could be a profitable

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\* Ministry of Culture.

1. *Arhibibliomuzeoteca*, in *Observator cultural*, anul III, nr. 125, 16 iulie 2002 – 22 iulie 2002, pp. 16 – 17, București; also, at <http://www.observatorcultural.ro/arhivaarticol.phtml?xid=3659>.

institution and a museum not. The second lays in the three purposes. Nobody would try to eliminate education and study; on the contrary, museums seem to have a more important role, both in the general educational systems and in research, compared with schools, universities and research institutes. However, the general public idea about museums is pondering more and more (at least, in the developed countries) towards the third purpose: enjoyment!

When, about 15 years ago, in UK, museums have started to open small exhibitions in commercial malls, some of the professionals were horrified. But the public liked it. It was a way of bringing the museum closer to a public that prefers to stay a whole Saturday or Sunday in one place, a mall, where there are shops, cinema halls and “museums”, all together. Since many years, a small exhibition room, run by the Rijksmuseum is opened in the Amsterdam airport. The Louvre is, also, opening exhibition halls in unconventional places. In the experiment is spreading all around the developed world. But this is only one way of bringing the heritage closer to the public. The other one is that of diversifying the services provided in the museum’s headquarter, in order to attract more and more visitors. Of course, as the local public has a naturally limited interest in visiting, several times, the same museum, if the displays are not changed, the other, more important target, is the bigger and bigger group of tourists (nationals or foreigners, too). And this is the interest museums have in attracting tourists. But there is an even bigger interest – that of the tourism industry – in attracting museums on their business!

Tourism is now, considered, the third largest economic factor in the world, and it has (both, the domestic and the international one) a global reach. As it was stated at an international conference on cultural tourism, “Tourism has grown at an accelerated pace over the last few decades and forecasts indicate an ever faster rate of growth into the new Millenium, with Asia and the Pacific becoming the second most important tourism destination of the world by 2020. One of the pillars of the tourism industry has been mankind's inherent desire to see and learn about the cultural identity of different parts of the world. In domestic tourism, cultural heritage stimulates national pride in one's history. In international tourism, cultural heritage stimulates a respect and understanding of other cultures and, as a consequence, promotes peace and understanding”<sup>2</sup>. As museums “are responsible for the tangible and intangible natural and cultural heritage”<sup>3</sup>, their connection with cultural tourism comes as natural as possible.

The tourism industry have always tried to promote the “local attractions”, that would mean something for each specific place, that would individualise each touristic market. Therefore, the cultural heritage, being unique, in each of the cases, by its essence, comes as the first option for promoting a certain place. Museums have the advantage of being able to bring together, in only one building, and in a

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2. *Cultural Heritage and Tourism Development. A Report on the International Conference on Cultural Tourism. Siem Reap, Cambodia, 11 – 13 December 2000*, World Tourism Organization, Madrid, Spain, 2001, p. 1.

3. The first principle in the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, 2006.

very attractive manner, all the knowledge about one region, one country, one culture. Of course, it depends, very much, on the skills of each museum team and curator to create an attractive exhibition, or, to be more precise, an attractive “museum product” – as the cultural products offered by museums are not only the exhibitions, but the whole range of events, activities and artefacts offered (free or on sale) to the visitors (or the customers, as one should say, in the last two decades of evolution). But this is, already, something else. The opportunity is there!

It is not here the place to discuss about the ambivalence of tourism on cultural heritage and on development, but we should stress, on one side, the importance tourism has on sustainable development, and, on the other side, the need for a sustainable cultural tourism. There are, of course, thousands of examples that could be brought on both cases, but, in the first one, an example from Romania is interesting: the Regional Programme on Cultural and Natural Heritage in South East Europe, a programme run by the Council of Europe which, in Romania, in its third component, the Local Development Pilot Projects, have promoted a project of development in the Rupea – Cohalm region (the Braşov county), around a cultural heritage site, the Ensemble of the Evangelic Fortified Church<sup>4</sup>. There, a museum, also (a very much appreciated one, by the professionals), in Rupea, is part of the project and the whole region has the chance of a true, long term and sustainable development, due, mainly to the assets provided by the cultural heritage.

The need for a sustainable cultural tourism was, recently, discussed in different world fora, which concluded with important documents, the most important ones being the *ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter* [sic!] (Mexico, 1999), the *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and Tourism* (Cuba, 2003) and the *Declaration of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the World Federation of Friends of Museums (WFFM) for worldwide Sustainable Cultural Tourism* (December, 2007). The last one is, in fact, build in accordance with a document issued by ICOM in 2000 (*Proposal for a Charter of Principles for Museums and Cultural Tourism - Trujillo, Peru and La Paz, Bolivia, 2000*), which, in my opinion, being, still, valid for the entire world, needs to be known and promoted (I am reproducing it in the annex to this paper).

However, in spite of being a very fragile resource, if it is well managed and if all the necessary conservation measures are taken, any museum could be a unique place for enjoyment for each tourist. This reason makes museums a kind of inexhaustible resource for tourists and, of course, for profit – for the tour operators. Though being not for profit institutions, museums do need revenues, and the tourists are there to provide them. Playing such an important potential role in a local economy, many museums are, unfortunately, still neglected by the local authorities and by the local communities. Many times, these attitudes are the result of a bad museum management, which is not able to attract visitors and, thus, is not visible for the local community and, of course, for the local politicians. As the

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4. *The Ensemble of the Evangelic Fortified Church, Drăușeni, Cața, Romania*, Preliminary Technical Assessment of the Architectural and Archaeological Heritage in South East Europe. Document adopted by the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs on 16 November 2005.

above mention *Declaration* states, “Museums should be integrated increasingly into concepts of tourism, to ensure that they have a measure of influence over economic and governmental decision-makers in planning processes, and to allow them to reach tourists more directly”. However, it would be a mistake to organise all the programmes of the museum only for the tourists’ needs. A wise managerial programme should take into consideration all the categories of the public.

Simultaneously, it would be a mistake for the museum managers, to organise something for the domestic and/or international tourists and simply expect them to come. An aggressive marketing attitude towards the tour operators is necessary, otherwise, some of them, would simply remain ignorant about the opportunities on the market.

Probably, one of the most relevant examples in Romania, about the role museums are playing, today, in the museum industry, is that of one of the two Cultural Capitals of Europe, in 2007, the city of Sibiu. The events have attracted, during the whole year, c. 1 million visitors, c. 0,25 millions being tourists, with a total number of 0,7 nights spent in the city’s hotels. The tour operators have increased their revenues, in 2007, compared with 2006, with 13.7%. However, the two national museums in Sibiu (the Brukenthal Museum and the Astra Museum) have almost doubled the number of visitors, during the whole year, and the growing continued in the next two years, though the number of tourists in the city has dropped. It is just one example about how profitable, for both tourism and museums, their cooperation could be. These are good news, especially for the local authorities in the underdeveloped regions, which are trying to find solutions for a sustainable economic growth. Investing the public money in museums is attractive for the tour operators. And tourism brings prosperity for the region. It is a simple equation. Only that it need to be understood by everybody, also, in countries like Romania.

## **ANNEX**

### ***Proposal for a Charter of Principles for Museums and Cultural Tourism***

#### **Introduction**

In accordance with the ICOM Code of Professional Ethics, the duties of a Museum, as a non-profit institution in the service of society and of its development includes among others:

- To encourage the active participation of the communities and serve as educator and cultural mediator to an increasing number of visitors belonging to all levels of the community, locality or social group;
- To play a predominant role in the efforts to stop the degradation of cultural and natural resources, according to principles, standards and objectives of national and international measures for the protection and appreciation of cultural heritage;

- To ensure that the financial resources derived from policies or economic relationships do not compromise the principles, standards and objectives of the museum.

In addition, the museum should ensure that its professionals:

- Provide proper protection for heritage property in general and preserve and carry out research on its own collection in particular;
- Respect the principle by which museums represent a public responsibility whose value for the community is in direct proportion to the quality of its objectives;
- Promote awareness and management of cultural heritage, not only with their colleagues, but also with members of the community concerned, with due tact and respect for the feelings of human dignity held by all peoples.

Cultural tourism ethics require all stakeholders to ensure that the visitor combines creative knowledge with the enjoyment of his free time. He should be encouraged to share a social context which, although unfamiliar, invites him to participate in the life and local wisdom of the host community. In order to accomplish this, training for all staff is important; from those participating in museum activities, to cultural staff and tourism professionals, and especially those concerned with the preservation of cultural heritage, its principles, standards, objectives and requirements.

Cultural tourism is linked to heritage through a collection of contributions of a culture, people or community, displaying the material evidence of its own identity through its cultural expressions. This link is unique and exceptional and constitutes a non renewable resource. Cultural heritage cannot become a consumer product nor can its relationship with the visitor be superficial. If the tourist is able to identify with the heritage, he can appreciate its value and the importance of preserving it and thus become an ally of museums.

Museums are categorised according to the nature of their collections, and the more attractive they are to different audiences, the larger the number of visitors they will be able to attract. Eager to learn about something completely new and original, tourists prefer to go to those museums that are representative of the history, culture and traditions of the host country.

### **Principle No. 1**

Museums constitute an important resource for Cultural Tourism for several reasons: their status as cultural mediators and the diversity of their collections, their category (whether public or private and national, regional or local), and their conditions of multiplicity, uniqueness, freedom, flexibility and creative potentiality.

- Legislation for the promotion of a tourism which includes investments and interventions in areas of heritage value, should ensure that preservation of cultural and natural heritage shall take precedence over economic interests, where there is a risk of irreversible damage.

- Co-operation between museological institutions, tourism sector institutions and the communities should be encouraged and arranged. ·
- Legislative consistency necessary for defending heritage and tourist development should be addressed, taking into consideration the coexistence of the different levels of governmental authority as well as the various social sectors concerned. The participation of representatives from the local communities should be especially encouraged. ·
- Museums shall favour self-management as a way to redistribute socio-economic benefits of cultural tourism to the community, since tourism development represents a proven option for generating resources. If they are properly administrated, these resources can directly benefit heritage institutions, especially museums and the communities where they are located.

### **Principle No. 2**

The interaction between tourism and museums is a relationship that can affect the preservation of natural and cultural heritage including that of the collections and the values they transmit. Such a relationship should maintain an ethics of preservation in order to ensure the permanence of the objects.

- Cultural heritage property is unique and irreplaceable. Its authenticity has an appraised value and its loss or deterioration represents a loss for universal culture. Responsible and sustainable tourism reduces the impact and the deterioration of cultural property to a minimum. ·
- The characteristics of cultural heritage requires museum professionals, tour operators and visitors to be a morally and ethically responsible. For this reason programmes targeting preventive preservation should take priority. ·
- Evaluating the impact of visitors and regulating tourism use of the museum should take priority when planning for heritage tourism. Such studies should take into account the/an appropriate conceptual and programmatic foundation agreed upon by the sectors involved. With such a foundation, the challenge of using a heritage resource for tourism purposes could be met.

### **Principle No. 3**

In regards to cultural tourism, museums should encourage the active participation of the local communities in the planning of both heritage management and the operations of tourist venues.

- The links between heritage property and the communities where they originated and where they acquired a historic meaning cannot be broken. Museums are called on to promote the identification, appreciation and preservation of such objects, as well as the environment in which they belong. The participation of members of the communities and social sectors involved in these areas is fundamental in this endeavour, and in so doing they exercise and defend both their individual and collective rights.

- The community should take part in the design, planning, execution and monitoring phases of activities likely to use cultural heritage for tourism purposes. In order to accomplish this, both cultural identification and improvement in the quality of life of social groups involved in the cultural event are necessary. ·
- The socio-cultural symbiosis between tourism activity and heritage resources, with the free and democratic participation of many sectors, should ensure the quality of the tourism services, the authenticity of the products offered to the visitor as well as the foundations for the cultural event. ·
- Museums should encourage the communities to manage their cultural heritage, for which they should encourage suitable training.

#### **Principle No. 4**

A harmonious relationship between museums and cultural tourism should address all constituent aspects of the museum such as the infrastructure, quality of the collection, information and communication systems, educational and exhibition activities, the staff and the relationship with its surroundings. ·

- Museums should be designed for everyone and not exclusively for tourists, although this sector represents an important part of its public. In their social function, museums should create enjoyable experiences emphasising education and communication. To this end the information presented should be easily understood, with language barriers reduced to a minimum, facilitating communication and with professional staff for trained both museological duties and visitor assistance. Additionally, museums should provide a collection that is appropriately selected and preserved, using the latest technology available. ·
- Tourism should be a creative use of free time, providing experiences in a time and space away from daily routines. Museums shall create the necessary conditions for their visitors to circulate at their own pace and enjoy their stay. It is important to plan tours using temporary programmes which are restricted to a schedule that satisfies both the leisure periods of the local inhabitants and alternatives for foreign tourists. ·
- Museums and cultural tourism should encourage the interaction between visitors and the host community in a framework of respect towards the values and the hospitality that are offered.

#### **Principle No. 5**

From an economic point of view, commercialisation of cultural tourism based on heritage resources should include profitability in its economic, social and environmental dimensions.

- Planning of cultural projects, from the perspective of the museum and cultural tourism, should reflect marketing strategies consistent with the characteristics of the cultural resources and the host communities. ·

- The preservation of the legacy deposited in museums is a responsibility that transcends all administrative authorities to become a responsibility of the country. This does not exempt museums from developing their own mechanisms to seek alternate sponsors and financing; neither does it preclude them from attempting to become profitable institutions capable of generating resources without making concessions, offering a genuine product whose essential strength lies in being exceptional and a repository of identity.
- Participation of museums in guided tours entails designing and complementing the cultural offering, in addition to being integral elements of the network of tourist attractions at each location. Museums can also be meeting points and points of departure for other itineraries and services, such as places of interest to tourists, restaurants, transportation, handicrafts, etc.