

Museums as Theme Parks - A Possible Marketing Approach?

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Abstract. *Museums compete increasingly more with very diverse entertainment providers, such as theme parks, despite the fact that their offer is mainly cultural. Museums have had to be more active and they have had to diversify their offer, in order to be more popular, therefore to better achieve their complex cultural missions. They should be more "market oriented" and aim to develop their programs according with their visitors' needs and desires, as well as with the evolutions in the contemporary society. One answer to this challenge would be the controversial theme parkisation of museums. The paper discusses in what extent the market approach of theme parks could be a viable marketing strategy for museums. It underlines several differences and similarities between the marketing approaches of museums and theme parks, in order to better understand how a museum could preserve its cultural functions, while obtaining economic success. Only the latter would allow it to better develop its cultural activity and thus to better serve its visitors and the community.*

Keywords: *museums, theme parks, museum marketing, visitor experience, authenticity and entertainment, re-enactment, storytelling in museums.*

Introduction

Change is the word that best characterizes modern civilization. In this shifting world, museums have also changed their place within society. The Network of European Museum Organizations (NEMO) considers that museums *preserve and disseminate core values on behalf of society as a whole, using their collections as a basis to achieve reflective and social outcomes. They understand the importance of their role in the creation of knowledge and lifelong learning. Finally, they make a substantial and sometimes underrated contribution to the economic sector* (NEMO, 2015, p.6). According to NEMO, the four fundamental values guiding the activity of a museum are: social, collection, educational and economic.

Considering the current evolutions, on a more operative level, the most prominent role of a museum is education. We speak not of education only in the sense of personal development, but also of engaging different segments of the public and making them active members of their communities. Thus we have in mind cultural, social and civic education in the broadest sense.

Besides seeing museums as educators, an important part of the audience sees museums as entertainers as well. In order to be and maintain themselves as an active element of progress, cultural development and education, museums have to face various challenges, both within and outside their organization.

One of the most important concerns they have is to attract the public. The visitors of a museum could be very different: both young and old persons, both highly educated and people having basic knowledge, both residents and tourists, etc. Attracting visitors has become an important challenge because, despite the free time of the public, museums have more and more competitors (e.g. theme parks, television channels, all sorts of organizations offering educational programs and such). This is why, mainly during the last two-three decades, museums have become active and more responsive to the needs of the community, as well as of each visitor. But museums cannot just transform themselves in pure entertainers; they have to respect their cultural, social and educational missions, to properly manage their collections. They have to transmit their cultural and social message to various publics, in the most effective and attractive ways.

The role of museums has shifted from collecting and preservation, to interpretation and education, and more recently towards engaging the public and communities in a broad social sense. The collections are/should be researched and exhibited in such a way to better serve the public and the community. Any museum has to lead on the path to learning by attracting and entertaining visitors, by arousing a long-term curiosity related to certain topics.

It is no longer enough to present, protect and display cultural heritage. To represent culture nowadays is a challenge since the public expects to understand the cultural background through revealing not only the past, but rather the evolution, what is the present-day contribution to a rich culture (Ault, 2002, p.362). In this context storytelling is an effective tool, being both a form of education and of entertainment. It is hard to say if impersonation / storytelling / interpretative theater has been adopted in museums inspired by its success in theme parks, by trends in theaters or as a completely independent movement of refreshing the museum offer. Probably all of these are valid observations.

The patterns of learning have also changed in contemporary society, mainly in two aspects: the concept of continuous education and the way the information is transmitted and assimilated. Now learning is/should also be entertaining, especially when it is outside specific educational institutions,

in an informal environment. Another important aspect is the trend toward spectacular and play within contemporary society. A certain *theme parkisation* of social life, a privatization and even theme park design of the public space can be observed (Cybriwsky, 1999, pp.223-231). Museums should respond to these developments, they should change the way they present their specific themes, as well as the way many of them still perceive and treat their visitors, the way they interact with their audience(s). They could make use of some techniques characteristic to theme parks, but they have to be careful never to transform themselves in pure entertainers. Museums have primarily the role of educating the public based on their collections (Edson & Dean, 2000, pp.192-200). Nevertheless, they have to take into account the great variety of the audience, in every respect: age, culture, education, interests, economic and social status, etc. (Brown, 1992, pp.3-8) Therefore they have to adapt even to those who are not interested in collections / exhibitions as such, but in the visitor experience while in a museum. A part of the public never visited a museum, considering them boring, but are active consumers of entertainment, including theme parks. Making museums more appealing would attract a wider variety of people. But museums can not simply become entertainers, or theme parks let's say. They also have to manage their collections, to offer cultural and social value, to fulfill their complex mission.

At the present moment, they are not very successful in attracting a wide variety of public, even if the profiles of the museum visitors seem to be increasingly more diverse. Who visits a museums? Of course, the answer varies from country to country and from museum type to museum type. The difficulty of attracting visitors is increased by the declining participation in cultural activities, at least in some regions. This is the case of the European Union, between 2007 and 2013 (EU, 2013, p.9). Here are some figures: In 2007 41% of the Europeans have been to a museum at least once, 37% - to a concert, while 32% to theater. In 2013, the figures were as follows: 37% for museum visits, 35% - concerts and 32% - theater. The decline might be associated with the economic crises of that time. As mentioned before, significant differences are registered among countries – the cultural practice index varies from 43% in Sweden to 5% in Greece (EU, 2013, p.10). As for museum visitors, the figures also vary from country to country. In Sweden, 76% of the citizens visited a museum at least once, while in Greece and Portugal only 17% did (EU, 2013, p.11). The higher the level of education, the more probably is the museum visit (EU, 2013, p.17). The main cause in Europe for not visiting museums is the lack of interest (35%), followed by the lack of time (32%) (EU, 2013, p.21).

In this context, what should museums do? What approach is more effective in attracting visitors? Is marketing the answer? Is it enough to better promote a museum? The present paper investigates in what extent a museum could adopt theme parks techniques in order to be more attractive. Several studies have investigated in the last decades various relations between theme parks and museums (King, 1991; MacDonald & Alsford, 1995; Sorensen, 2006; Swarbrooke, 2000; Terrell, 1991). The editorial of the December issue of the *Museum Management and Curatorship* in 1991 was dedicated to investigating parallels between these organizations (Cannon-Brookes, 1991). These studies highlight the relevance of a theme-park-inspired approach in designing an exhibition, in approaching the visitors and in dealing the commercial aspects of a museum, but also the great differences between the two types of organizations. Nevertheless by adopting specific theme park approaches, museums would become more accessible from various perspectives: discourse, educational, attractiveness and such (King, 1991). Museums have the potential of becoming stars, of stimulating unique experiences to large numbers of visitors, with a more appealing interpretation of its collections, a more courageous message and increased commercial charm (Swarbrooke, 2000).

Theme parks – a model for museums of successful popular offer?

The theme parks' prototype is Disneyland, opened in 1955, in Anaheim, California. It aims at the middle class, even if it was inspired by the traditional amusement parks that were addressing mainly the lower class. Based on a certain topic, a theme park offers entertainment. The experience is homogenous and controlled in various degrees. In general visitors do not engage and interact with the installations, there is a certain lack of spontaneity. The park controls the behavior of its employees to the smallest details, but also the imagination of the spectators. An artificial environment is created, characterized through idealization, lack of conflict, nostalgia and utopia. They seem to be controlled by four criteria: efficiency, calculability, predictability and control (Bryman, 1996, pp.122-129) through specific means (Cass, 1995). The characteristics of a theme park are (a) *a specific theme that contrasts with everyday life*, (b) *enjoyable visual spectacle*, (c) *live performances*, (d) *utilizes modern technologies*, (e) *exciting rides*, and (f) *the provision of refreshment facilities presented in ways consistent with the theme* (Ryan et al., 2010, p.186). All these aspects should also be considered when designing the marketing strategy of a museum.

Despite being commercial endeavors, theme parks can be included in the contemporary (popular) cultural heritage. They influence and are

influenced by the current tastes and changes within society and cultural representations. The assumed themes have a strong (popular) cultural resonance. Who is not familiar and attracted by Disney's films and characters? Who does not know of Lego and would not enjoy / did not enjoyed this game as a child? Besides the various Disneylands and Universal Studios existing all over the world, other famous theme parks are Islands of Adventure in Florida – the US, Ocean Park in Hong Kong, Everland and Lotterworld in South Korea - which attract more then 6 mil. visitors annually each (TEA, 2013, p.16). All of them have a strong cultural resonance at least at regional if not universal level. Compared to these figure, the most popular museums around the world are the Louvre in Paris – France, the National Museum of Natural History and the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. – the US, and the Metropolitan Museum of Arts in New York – the US with more than 6 mil. visitors each (TEA, 2013, p.57). The top 20 museums around the world count for around 98.5 mil. visitors, while the top 20 theme parks for more than 160 mil. visitors (TEA, 2013, p.16, 57).

It seems that theme parks correspond to contemporary expectations of experiencing (popular) culture. Or this is just a pretext? Do theme park visitors appreciate just an unusual way of spending their free time? No matter what the answer is, what museums should learn from theme parks is how to take advantage of certain cultural backgrounds, interests and expectations, as well as how people prefer to enjoy their free time. Theme parks are models of succesful adaptation to the evolutions in the contemporary society.

Another factor of success is related with the compliance of theme park's offer with the motives and needs of contemporary public. Studies on theme park visitation show the following main reasons of the public: fulfillment, self-esteem and development, relationship building and stimulation (Wong & Cheng, 1999, pp.321-322). Some other identified reasons are related with various social needs, desire of thrilling rides (adventure), escape from daily life, to try something new and fun-vacation (Ryan et al., 2010, p.189). The combination of reasons vary from person to person and with the age and other social characteristics of the visitors (Wong & Cheng, 1999, p.332). The overall experience of a visit in a theme park is also a composite element, consisting of various aspects: the atmosphere, the adventure experiences, degrees of crowding, having places to rest/facilities and reasonable entry price (Ryan *et al.*, 2010). Considering all previously mentioned aspects, museums could also develop an appealing offer and a suitable communication strategy.

The cultural content of a museum does not have to be argued in any way. Museums operate in the same environment as theme parks, they undergo the same impacts, but their reaction is different or at least slower in the case of museums. They are not so successful as theme parks. It seems that theme parks are more effective in attracting visitors and reaching their purposes. This is one of the reasons why museums have adapted specific theme park approaches when designing and organizing their activity.

Of course, when considering the offer of a museum and of a theme park, even when pondering the cultural background in which they operate, many differences are to be observed. Museums create a sense of place and belongingness, while theme parks promote the idea of a global and utopic world even when making references to local traditions and heros. Museums offer, as much as possible, the real thing/authenticity, while theme parks are idealized simulacra. Museums offer knowledge and cultural improvement (through play and entertainment if the case), while theme parks offer play and entertainment through induced sensation of belonging to a certain cultural environment. They stimulate the desire to improve oneself having also fun, while theme parks stimulate the desire to entertain and consume/spend money.

Theme parks are a form of mass-mediated culture. Museums also target a broad audience but they offer individual approaches. Museums could borrow theme park techniques but should adapt them in order to more effectively and widely educate the public. A museum starts from representing the reality, past, present and even future as they are perceived today, and it gives nuances and hints for various interpretations. Museum visitors involve themselves mainly mentally. Both museums and theme parks transmit certain cultural information, they select and present various heritage elements. Theme parks change and idealize a lot the inheritance and the present as well, in order to attract more visitors (including many adults) and to obtain bigger financial profits. Museums have a much stronger cultural consciousness than theme parks, so they do not / should not accept any compromise regarding their mission. However when regarding some aspects and techniques, theme parks could be a model to museums.

Some of the achievements of theme parks are: excellent visitor services, homogenous and attractive environment, multi-sensory experiences, freedom and relaxation while learning new things, repeated visits, fundraising, commercial success. These are also important aims for museums, which unfortunately still face problems in reaching them. Museums have adopted at least three strategies (Braun & Soskin, 1999, pp.439-442)

specific to theme parks: increasing share of business from repeated visitors, price stability, attraction of new segments by means of new activities, services or presentation. Most of these aspects are related with how to better promote a museum. It does not so much affect the core of the museum offer. Could exhibition themselves be designed in the manner of a theme park at least when considering the interaction with their public and the experiences they offer?

Authenticity and entertainment. Museum challenges and marketing implications

Authenticity is an extremely important issue a museum has to face in the process of transmitting knowledge. It can be easily affected in a theme park style exhibition, which focuses not on the objects but on the reactions of the public, in order to entertain and to ensure its engagement. It is very hard to say what authenticity is. When we refer to the meaning of various objects in a museum collection, we observe that it also changes in time. Mainly it is a cultural choice characterized in the eyes of the audience through value, uniqueness, genuineness, actuality of meaning, untouchability. Authenticity depends on the interpretation given to the objects, both by a museum and its visitors/community.

The focal point of the educational process in a museum is authenticity. It is the element that has to be understood and transmitted; its image has to be “sold” to the public. The commodification of the authenticity is a difficult task, achieved mainly by staging the heritage (Halewood & Hannam, 2001, pp.566-570). Heritage staging is a common technique to museums, theme parks, heritage centers, village reconstructions and even seasonal trading fairs and markets. The purposes and the degree of authenticity vary from situation to situation. In the case of museums authenticity has to be the leading criteria.

A common technique for museums, especially the historical ones, has become the *period theme park*. It is an explicit construction, a selected series of synchronous pasts, interpreted by context. In order to be successful, taking into account the way visitors experience and learn from the exhibitions and displays, three levels of commodification of the authenticity have to be aimed by a period theme park: reinforced assimilation, cognitive perception and retroactive association (McIntosh & Prentice, 1999, pp.591-609). Through reinforced assimilation visitors incorporate new ideas, insights or emotions with their existing background knowledge, in a personal manner by comparing the past and the present,

the way they represent and understand them. The cognitive perception is a second level, which involves the critical engagement of the visitor. It represents improved comprehension and enlargement of knowledge as a result of the experience gained during the visit. Through reinforced assimilation a new experience is made familiar, so the new qualitative and quantitative information could be consolidated and transformed in long-term knowledge. A period theme park should have meaning both to present and future generations, insight and importance for each visitor, as well as the local community. This approach has to be extended when considering the entire museum's offer, not just the period exhibitions.

A technique used more and more frequently is the museum theater, in various forms, more or less formal. It provides the audience various opportunities of learning and enjoyment, of involvement, both mentally and physically (Hughes, 1998, p.11). Theme parks, for different reasons, have used these practices for a long time now and the museums could benefit from their experience.

The impersonation of characters is increasingly more popular in museums. History museums are "populated" by historical figures; a memorial house or a castle is "inhabited" by a personality who welcomes the visitors and presents the house, his/her activity; art museums are "visited" by famous artists who present their own works and the epoch in which they created, etc. Such initiatives are a direct consequence of the fact that museums want to animate their space with living characters so to make them more appealing and to determine a memorable visit.

An example of such an approach is the Tower of London. If a visitor chooses a guided tour, a Beefeater assumes the role of presenting the castle, as well as the lives of those who lived and died there (Ault, 2002, p.364). In the Museum of the Armenians in Dumbrăveni, Romania, an Armenian young woman introduces her community and traditions to the museum visitors. At Dalkey Castle & Heritage Centre in Ireland, *professional actors bring history to life with a fun theatre performance as part of the guided tour*, as written on the museum's website (www.dalkeycastle.ie). An archer, a cook and a travelling barber-surgeon guide visitors, tell their stories, show their belongings, explain their work and involve visitors in using their instruments. The museum also offer personalized interactive tours for families, entitles "Family fun living history tours".

Increasingly more popular are the re-enactments (a wide variety of such events) which are proposed by different organizations: historical and other nonprofit associations, municipalities, companies and, of course, museums.

The degree of authenticity may vary greatly in such endeavors. Sometimes original artefacts are used, but in most situations replicas of various qualities.

Authenticity issues of re-enactments in museums may arise not only related with the possibility to use artefacts from the "relived" period, or with proper conservation concerns. Some issues are determined by the expectations of the public or the re-enactors who are many times members of re-enactment associations independent from museums. For instance, most Europeans would expect a medieval re-enactment to feature knights, castellans and princesses. Yet these characters are not appropriate, let's say, for medieval South-Eastern Europe. Nevertheless the medieval festivals organized by many Romanian museums present Western-style warriors and noblemen and they almost completely forget about local medieval realities and/or lower social segments of the population. Another aspect to be considered: in some cases, the historical information is incomplete or there are several theories related with the past. Therefore, re-enactments are hardly accurate because of lack of precise and incomplete knowledge. Another sensitive issue: museums can not completely control re-enactments developed by associations of re-enactors. Some of them are trained historians, others are just passionate about history. They all want to "re-live" the past, a certain period, an event, a battle etc. Many of them have their own vision on that past, and are influenced by historic/epic movies, by TV documentaries and such which present various degrees of correctness and in depth coverage. Their vision of the past is not always accurate, or is partial. Therefore the re-enactments they stage are biased / inaccurate in some aspects, even stereotypical or simplifying. Their artefacts, their costumes and various props used are not, in most cases, authentic or even not exact copies of those in the re-enacted period. Nevertheless, not the authenticity and accuracy are the factors positively influencing the museum's public, but the spectacular, the way they can interact with the re-enactors or even the state of mind created by the show. These latest aspects might also be more convincing when used in marketing communication campaigns. Also, they question the importance of authenticity when developing stimulating visitor experiences.

From various considerations museums propose their visitors re-enactments more as an entertainment offer, than a social, educational and cultural one; re-enactment is used to animate the space and attract the public more than to valorize the collection and to do research (Comis, 2014). Still, considering the wider public and especially children, an educational added value occurs inevitably. Another advantage of re-enactment is that it attracts media attention and contributes to the development of the image of those

museums as creative, dynamic and authentic organizations. Even more, re-enactment has become part of the mainstream culture (Groot, 2011, p.588), therefore it is increasingly more appealing to the wider public.

The popularity of re-enactment is probably not primarily related with museums. It could be generated by the increased popularity of historic and adventure movies such as *Gladiator*, *Troy* or the *Indiana Jones* series. It might also be related to the increased popularity of theme parks where impersonation and small-scale enactments are common practices. It could also be related with the popularity of TV history documentaries which increasingly use re-enactments to illustrate past events and more convincingly present historical characters. Museums are more likely beneficiaries if they take advantage of this situation and consider this interest of the public when designing their offer and when communicating it. Their marketing strategies could consider even "product placement" – meaning to "hire" objects for various shows and movies. By this strategy, they could better connect with their public, draw attention on museums and even increase interest in their themes and collections. They could ultimately create the opportunity for the public to learn something new and/or attract more visitors. It would be interesting to evaluate if the cooperation between the Tank Museum from Bovington with the movie "*Fury*" (starring Brad Pitt and hugely advertised) increased the attendance to the museum, as suggested by local media (Lea, 2015).

Telling authentic stories in museums brings several benefits. Visitors learn in a stimulating and captivating way and the rate of information remembrance increases. Storytelling could be combined with various educational programs during which visitors could develop skills and further deepen the understanding of the topic approached. It could also stimulate their curiosity and make the public explore the topic after visiting a museum. Storytelling could also stimulate public engagement in various ways (Soerjoatmodjo, 2015). Some museums use it extensively, while others only occasionally, related with some public programs. For instance, in Ireland – a country with a strong and appealing storytelling tradition – at the National Leprechaun Museum the guides are storytellers, who familiarize visitors with Irish folklore and mythology. The museum's promise is: *You'll explore spaces that reflect these stories, or recreates experiences typically associated with leprechauns. The result is a series of captivating, interactive experiences - from the first ever sighting back in the eighth century, through to modern day representations of the leprechaun in film and popular culture - and plenty of adventures in between* (www.leprechaunmuseum.ie). The exhibition is tightly related with the

story told, or – more accurately – the visitors enters the story. The public can participate to storytelling classes, which are quite popular.

There are limits to animating museums (impersonations, re-enactments, storytelling). For instance, re-enactments could bring the following benefits: gaining some information on historical events and characters, entertainment, developing some skills, testing some hypothesis or another (Agnew, 2002). Although it gives occasion to reflection, re-enactments are limited in giving insights and understanding of complex historical processes and for the wider public the entertainment aspects are the most attractive. Limits of living history approaches, such as impersonations and re-enactments are also discussed by Koch (2014), who stresses the educational impact in a museum setting. Storytelling also has its concerns as the accuracy of the stories, simplification of the facts/messages and such. At the first sight, animating a museum is not a difficult endeavor: an actor, or even one of the museum's employees, has to dress and act like a certain historical personage. In reality, the effort is more complex. In order to preserve the authenticity of the message transmitted to the public, the museum should make sure that: the costumes used are precisely reflecting the times, the place and the status of the person impersonated; the script and the scenario used are correct from a historical perspective; and the actor has profound knowledge of the character, his/her history and the times when the character lived.

Therefore an interdisciplinary team should work for setting up and implementing such a project and reversals are necessary. For the impersonator, we would recommend to cooperate with a professional actor. Nevertheless, various risks might arise. The actor might not be familiar with all the aspects related with the life and epoch of the personage s/he represents and might not correctly respond to the public's questions. S/he might improvise too much, thus losing the authenticity of the message transmitted. It is also possible that an actor would consider the historical conformity as something optional and less important than ensuring entertainment for visitors. The risks of nonconformity are real, since some actors tend to see the museum as a stage for their own performances, and not fully accept the interference of a museum's representative in their acting (Zbucnea et al., 2009). Another option for museums is to cooperate with members of re-enactment associations. They have more knowledge on the topic, could already have the necessary costumes, could be accustomed to presenting the public that subject and such. This approach is also not perfect. For instance, the re-enactor might be biased, or s/he might be not so convincing and talented to interpret the character compared to a professional actor.

Extending this approach of impersonating/animation to the entire museum, we can talk about living history (even of living museums – Anderson, 1992). So the past could be experienced in a complex way by visitors. Nowadays many museums and cultural centers, especially those in open-air, use this technique both to attract more visitors and to better illustrate the past, therefore hoping to better reach their educational mission. Some successful approaches are to be encountered in Old Sturbridge Village and Colonial Pennslvannia Plantation as some of the oldest examples of living museums (Anderson, 1992), Connor Prairie Living History Museum, the Maritime Museum of San Diego or the Mystic Seaport in the US, Beamish Museum and St. Fagans Natural History Museum in the UK. The high public appreciation of living history might be proved by the increasingly more "re-enactment" events, organized by municipalities, at historical monuments (castles or archaeological sites) or even at famous historical places. An example of animating museums/historic places providing stimulating and unique entertainment as well as educational content is the Warwick Castle (Ault, 2002, p.363). The visitors could choose to visit the Castles Dungeon, which has a typical theme park approach. The proposal is as follows: *This exciting 50 minute walkthrough experience brings together live actors, shows and spectacular special effects that will send chills down your spine. The Castle Dungeon is an interactive, participative experience that should only be visited by the bravest of people and those with the strongest stomachs* (www.warwick-castle.com).

How authentic would be living history approaches? In most cases, it is not the objects used for this re-enactments, which are replicas. Practitioners of living history are more flexible when considering authenticity issues – the simulation is central - *An authentic experience, to be achieved in the practice of living history, is one in which individuals feel themselves to be in touch both with a 'real' world and with their 'real' selves.* (Handler & Saxton, 1988). What is thought to be authentic, therefore, at least in a history museum, is the historical experience, the interaction with the past. The public itself could, as authentically as possible in a certain context, live the past. The second relevant aspect is to create an appropriate stage for education.

By default museums are connected with authenticity and being authentic is at the core of their offer. Nevertheless, being 100% authentic might limit the offer and the possibility of being effective in attracting the public and even in educating it. Museums might consider authenticity in a more nuanced way. They could use impersonation, movies or games to attract people, but also to start discussions on historical, science-related, or art-related issues. They could be the starting point for opening people's minds, for determining them to find out more, to widen their knowledge and have a

good time simultaneously. In this way museums could better achieve their missions and the benefits of the public are multiple. We also stress that being authentic 100% is impossible, authenticity itself being a controversial concept (Theodossopoulos, 2013). More than one version of authenticity exist simultaneously and in many situations there is no agreement on what is authentic, or in what degree an subject is authentic. Even museum objects – being withdrawn from their original contexts – could be considered as not being anymore (100%) authentic.

Another issue to consider is that being authentic generally limits the options of interactions with the public. A less flexible and possibly a less entertaining offer would be presented to the public. Therefore it could be less appealing for part of the audience. Also, for some segments of the public more entertainment generates more attention and an increased opportunity to assimilate and remember information. The museum's public is increasingly more diverse and the patterns of learning are, accordingly, more and more various.

A third approach of a museum exhibition that could be borrowed from a theme park is the "tunnel experience", such as the horror tunnel in theme parks. In this "tunnel experience" visitors move through a closed artificial corridor - either real or imaginary -, have no contact with the present world and are forced to devote their attention only to the objects presented in the corridor. We refer to creating the opportunity for visitors to experience in an unusual and stimulating way past realities, different topics and remote regions. For instance, the visitor enters a space where the time shifts, where the appearance of reality is that of other epoch. The visitors of the German Emigration Center in Bremer Haven (www.dah-bremerhaven.de) become contemporary with the migrants of the 19th century, they experience the same stages to reaching the New World, they have the opportunity to better understand their complex world. The Museo Nazionale del Cinema in Torino, Italy, presents another stimulating approach. The exhibition is a *spectacular presentation that offers visitors continuous and unexpected visual and acoustic stimuli, just like when we watch a film that involves and moves us. The Museum is more than a museum and whoever enters it isn't just a visitor but also an explorer, an author, an actor, a spectator... to whom the Museum offers the emotions of an experience we hope won't be easily forgotten* (www.museocinema.it). In the early 2000s the Historical Museum of Rotterdam (www.museumrotterdam.nl) changed its main exhibition in a "history tunnel". The visitor would enter a dark space, with a one-way path along which various exhibits would be illuminated and voices would tell the history of the city from its beginning to the end of the 20th century. Since no alternative was provided to this rather unilateral history of the city, offering

only one-voice and one-scenario, that approach did not last and the next approach was more diverse and open, keeping only a bit from the more spectacular design of the previous one. This proves that entertainment and spectacular are not the main ingredients a museums should consider for effective exhibitions.

Creating scenarios and setting stages is not authentic, does not necessary make the visitors better understand and/or live past events. For instance, in the Imperial Museum in London they put the visitor in a tunnel to experience the blitz, but nobody really thinks the noises are made by real bombs or that s/he is in danger. Nothing can recreate “authenticity”, except real bombs. Still, some positive outcomes might arise. In the mentioned case, for instance, people could have a sense of the dimension of the phenomenon, the museum fatigue might be challenged by doing something unusual, a more attractive image of the museum could be consolidated or visitors might remember the setting and tell friends about their museum experience.

The inner space of museums changed in the last 20 years. Stephen Greenberg (2006, p.226) considers that *changing audience expectations and an explosion of new technologies and the consequent increased media literacy mean that there has never been a more challenging and a more exciting time in which to be devising creative spaces. These spaces are inevitably becoming more dynamic and experiential, changing and theatrical, rather than monumental and static*. Experience is also facilitated by inner design, by new technologies, by new media, as well as by offering open, creative spaces.

All the previous approaches help museums better interact with their visitors, make the museum experience more appealing. Valdecasas *et al.* (2006) stress that museums have lost their attraction because they are no longer spaces of wonder and dialogue. They refer to natural history museums, but their observation could be extended to other museum sectors. In this context they recommend to reintroduce “wonder and extended inquiry” (Valdecasas *et al.*, 2006, p.37). They propose to use displays and new technologies, but also guides or parallel lines of representations and reasoning. We would also suggest the previous mentioned tactics: living history / arts, the “tunnel experience” etc. Even in natural history museums accommodating tactics could be adopted. For instance the persons impersonated could be famous biologists and explorers, adventurers who contributed to the better understanding of nature or who enriched the collections of the museum. All the previous

tactics are based on storytelling, which has increasingly become a successful approach of museum exhibitions.

Considering authenticity issues, museums are not generally competing with theme parks which do not even pretend to present a historic reality. Some people might consider to visit either a theme park or a museum, but a museum marketing campaign could help them decide in the favor of that museum considering that it could be not just entertaining, but also educational and intellectually stimulating.

Not only museums, but also other organizations provide heritage experiences. A famous and appealing example is Lascaux 2 (Cannon-Brookes, 1991, pp.357-359). Near the famous painted cave a replica has been opened for the general public with extreme success. Even more, most visitors do not even sense any difference from visiting the real cave, therefore their experience could be considered genuine – identical with that of visiting the original cave. Other examples are the Jorvik Viking Centre in York, Wigan Pier, the Black Country World (Dudley), White Cliffs Experience (Dover) – to mention only a few which attract hundreds of thousands visitors annually, being more appealing than many museums in those regions (Ault, 2002, p.363). They could be considered culture-based theme parks, assuming responsibility towards their public in a way theme parks do not do, but museums do. Therefore the competition for museums in terms of authenticity and entertainment has increased. All sorts of heritage centers, which are mostly not collection-based, are offered around the world. All these organization consider that traditions and heritage should and could be enjoyed, in the same time preserving the sense of accuracy and cultural integrity. Four approaches are recommended: multiple stories have to be told, provide a context, make it relevant to contemporary audiences, and make it entertaining (Ault, 2002, pp.363-364). These principles are also valid for museums.

Last, but not least, we mention historic theme parks, considered the forerunners of heritage centers or even some living museums (Sorensen, 2006). The most famous examples of living museums are Colonial Williamsburg in the US (www.colonialwilliamsburg.com) and Blists Hill Victorian Town Ironbridge in the UK. Visitors to these places have the chance to experience a part of history, have the impression of actually walking in other times. Some of them even manage collections. Compared to other theme parks their role is mainly educational. They also stimulate the popular imagination, in a cultural way. They are even perceived as museums and might also be promoted as such by their marketers if this

would make them more appealing. The increasing popularity of such endeavors indicates the tastes and interests of contemporary audiences.

Marketing for museums in a shifting environment. Theme-park-inspired practices

Museums face increased competition from heritage-based organizations, culture-based theme parks, as well as all sorts of educational or entertainment organizations. Society is also changing and is re-evaluating the role museums have. Therefore, being effective in reaching their missions is increasingly more difficult for museums around the world.

The key to the successful accomplishment of its role and to attracting a various public is the marketing policy a museum has. Museum marketing is a complex strategy, since it could strongly support the development of the museum offer. Marketing is not only related to attracting resources and visitors, as many might consider, but also marketing is tightly related to designing a rewarding and educational experience and to accomplishing the complex museum mission (Zbucnea, 2014).

The scope of the museum marketing is to guarantee the full achievement of its mission, but it also has other aims such as: attracting visitors, fundraising, better organization of exhibits, promotion etc. Marketing is more and more necessary, taking into account the increasing complexity of the contemporary society. Marketing activities are diverse. Some of the most relevant are: contribution to the definition of the museum's mission, resources and collection development, objectives' decision and description, evaluation of various museum activities and departments, exhibition projection, fundraising, lobbying for the museum within community, promotion of the museum and certain exhibitions, design of suitable services to better satisfy the public (e.g. gift-shop). Museum marketing aims at the orientation and organization of the museum's entire activity towards visitors and community. It ensures profitable relationships with various publics. Through marketing, visitors and other segments of the audience are involved in various activities, so to benefit from the value added by the museum (Kotler, Kotler & Kotler, 2008, pp.34-35).

It was long ago stated by marketers that a museum has to focus on the visitors' experience instead of collecting (Kotler, 1999). Nowadays audiences appreciate the visit in a museum according to the quality of their experience. Each museum should know which are its public's criteria regarding a satisfying, high quality visit. For some visitors, high quality

would be mainly related to entertainment. The best way to know them is the visitors' research, another responsibility of museum marketing. In order to be successful and effective in terms of achieving its mission, a museum should build its audience (Kotler & Kotler, 1998, pp.38-45).

Each visitor has a personal experience when visiting a museum, according with various factors: socio-cultural (cultural identification, continuity of theme and story, conversation and story building, variation of stimulus, social interaction), cognitive (the creation of mindful activity, involvement and engagement, inner reflection and imagination, variation of stimulus to create a meaningful whole, perceived authenticity), psychological orientation (scene setters, routing and mapping), physical and environmental (crowding, seats, noise) (Goulding, 2000, pp.272-273). The individual short- and long-term reactions depend on emotions (joy, acceptance, surprise, sadness, anger, expectancy, etc.) and mood, being also a matter of balance between the person's skills and the challenges emanating from the museum's exhibitions.

The interaction between individual processes and the social situation, as well as the level of visitors' participation also vary greatly. The public is encouraged to participate through playful activities, induced discovery experiences, by means of combining objects, exhibits, stimulating environments and even services, although museum visits are in general self-motivated, self-initiated and self-structured. Many visitors aim to accumulate experiences not knowledge. The museum professionals have to also ensure the attainment of the museum's / exhibition's educational goals while satisfying the visitors.

There are several theories regarding the model of visitor's behavior: the familiarity concept, the compensatory concept, and the inversionary behavior (Currie, 1997, pp.884-897). The familiarity concept states that individuals tend to seek activities familiar to them, they undergo actions that continue or develop their routines. They are inclined not to notice what surrounds them and they are satisfied as long as their routine interests and dealings are not disrupted. The compensatory concept is based on the opposite type of visitor: the person who seeks the new, who aims to avoid the routine and boring activities. These models do not take into account the context created in/by the museum exhibitions and the mood of the audience. They are two important factors that, together with the visitor's personality, influence its behavior. The inversionary behavior theory is more complex. It states that individuals seek an escape valve, a reversal of social order during their free time, e.g. visiting a museum or traveling. They want and try to differentiate themselves from everyday life; they seek to

feel and fulfill something special compared to the home & work environment as well as to their peers.

A museum has to know the behavioral pattern of its audiences and offer them what they look and crave for. Content audience might return repeatedly in the museum, but in some cases only with additional stimuli. Visitor satisfaction depends on the total experience in the museum, not only on the quality of the collection displayed. Museums can control and analyze this experience through proper marketing. It has to take into account various factors influencing public's encounter and results of the visit: speed of service delivery, convenience, age waves, range of choice, lifestyle, discounting policy, value adding, customer services, technology, quality (Rowley, 1999, p.303).

To better influence visitor's experience, to provide cultural equity and equal access, a museum should tailor its exhibitions and services to various segments of the audience. Museums address in general an adult and somewhat cultivated audience. There is another extremely important segment of the museum public: children. They perceive and learn differently, so the exhibitions and programs should be specifically adapted (Schiele & Koster, 1998, pp.202-248). What characterizes more and more the audience, regardless the age, is the desire to explore and discover by themselves, at least in a first stage of the encounter with the museum.

Visitors appreciate the museum experience by comparing the anticipated benefits with the outcomes. A good segmentation of the public when designing the exhibitions and programs should take into account these expected benefits: leisure, entertainment, knowledge, play, new and exciting activities, family gathering, social encounters, relaxation, get away from everyday life. Persons or members of the same group could seek the fulfillment of more than one of these benefits.

The attained benefits, the recollections, both experiences and material (e.g. souvenirs) are important for a visitor when returning to a museum. Theme parks take advantage through their strategy of this aspect. In order to pull back the public, a museum also has to be proactive; it has to offer permanently something new. In the last decades museums have evolved a lot from this point of view, even if there is an ongoing tension between creating a pleasant experience, thus attracting more visitors, and properly preserving the collection and being authentic – as previously discussed.

At their origin, museums were synonymous with their collections. Later they started to research the objects they possessed and to present them for

the public education and benefit. Nowadays, museums provide context and various services to a broader public, formed both by its visitors and the local community. Their perspective is very diverse: narrative, fundamental, experiential, esthetic or quantitative.

There are three main axes a museum can approach in order to present its collection: reality, narration, and action (Schiele & Koster, 1998, p.179). The first method is ontological, based on specimens and classification. It targets mainly specialists, being in many situations boring for common visitors. The narrative display uses historical installations. It is based on artifacts and it tells at least a story. It could tell as many stories as the number of visitors. The museum exhibitions based on action use experiences and demonstration in order to induce epistemological learning. A marketing approach recommends the last tactic, being more effective considering the contemporary society. It started in science centers and then extended in other types of museums.

The attitude and taste of the public could also support an approach of the marketing strategies of museums to those of theme parks. In order to facilitate the visit, some tactics found in theme parks could be adapted by museums. For instance, inner transport systems to help people access different parts of the museums – the so called people-mover system (Alsford, 1985). Its scope might not be limited to logistics, but also might incorporate some educational and facilitating aspects. The approaches could vary. For instance at the Museum of Art in Tokyo, while travelling up escalators, visitors are prepared for the next exhibitions through a light and music installation (Alsford, 1985, p.334). Historical vehicles could be used in open-air historical museums, so the visitors would get to be acquainted with them and better understand their functioning, as well as have some direct experience with the past. Such systems could be also set up to bring people/tourists at remote museums, for instance. Of course, when implementing such a system not only its logistic and cultural utility should be considered, but also financial aspects. Another issue to be considered is the public's reaction to such an offer.

Another way to increase the attraction of an exhibition, enhancing in the same time its effectiveness, is to generate shows, films and documentaries or scholarly works, as well as various items to be sold in gift shops. They are businesses on their own in theme parks which ensures substantial funds for those organizations. Similar approaches might help museums in many ways, both financial and educational.

Museums could also use some theme park techniques in order to determine their customers spend more during the visit. In a theme park in every corner there is an attractive offer – a snack to grab, a stimulating activity to undergo, a picture to have, a souvenir to collect and such. Large museums could multiply cafeteria corners, small gift-shops or even more sophisticated and unexpected offers along the visitation path. In this way they as well as visitors might benefit. We will only exemplify with the case of a tired visitor, for whom drinking a glass of wine and eating a cake would be relaxing, will annihilate the museum fatigue, would give time to think at what s/he has seen so far, would boost the desire to see more etc.

Not all museums are suitable to adopting specific theme park techniques. Not everything in the museum can be commodified, and there are specific limits. Not even the gift shop could be completely commercial, the items sold have to maintain their relation with the museum's theme and they should meet particular criteria (Zbucnea, 2014, pp.110-117). We also mention that a certain segment of the public is/would be reticent to broad/aggressive commercialization.

Another strategy museums could adapt from theme parks – and other successful organizations – is to develop an appealing brand. Branding can ensure art galleries a stable place in the cultural landscape, especially if entertainment is part of the scheme (Rentschler & Osborne, 2007). The same is valid for museums, since they experience similar evolutions with art galleries: democratization of the publics, engagement with cultural product, or makes references to ordinary life. The model for branding in the case of museums could come from theme parks rather than from other types of organizations because they combine entertainment with (aspects of popular) culture. The first concepts proves to be an attractive magnet in the context of contemporary society, including in cultural domain (Rentschler & Osborne, 2007).

And museums should be more speculative. As Disneylands are invaded by the most recent and popular characters in their movies, museums could become more appealing by speculating interest trends. For instance, successful historical movies or books determine an increased interest worldwide in specific related topics. Museums could immediately offer a wide range of products to speculated that interest and to make visitors broaden their knowledge on the matter. When *Gladiator* came out, many viewers asked themselves if the characters in the film are historical figures, if the emperors were correctly depicted, what happened in reality, what was the life of gladiators, what was the life of Roman soldiers and many others. People asked for more stories on the Roman empire and civilization.

Who could tell better and more convincingly these stories than museums which have Roman artefacts in their collections?

Conclusions

Despite some common aspects, museums and theme parks have basic different aims. A museum educates and offers added cultural value, it has a symbolic role of giving identity, it provides roots and traditions, meanings and direction. A typical theme park is a pure entertainer and it aims commercial success. The theme park is a much younger establishment, of a completely different origin. Museums could be inspired by some 'marketing practices of theme parks, in order to better adapt the offer to the contemporary audience.

A museum cannot just be transformed into a theme park. They are different types of organizations, with very different missions. A museum is primarily a cultural and educational institution. When designing its space and activity, it has to carefully consider its collection. A museum can apply some techniques, some services, it can look more or less like a theme park in order to have more success, both regarding the appeal to the public and the financial results. From this perspective, some museums could adapt easier. For instance science museum, natural history museums, open-air museums, even history museums could have interactive installations, temporary exhibitions or they could design special programs for various segments of the audience, programs that would be similar in terms of activities undertaken by the participants with those of the theme parks' visitors. Most of all, the marketing approach of theme parks should be adapted by museums.

There are mainly two aspects that could give a museum a theme park appeal: space and activities the visitors can enjoy. The design of the space, in terms of architecture, volumes, lights, as well as the atmosphere it creates is very important in attracting visitors and in inducing them special and pleasant experiences and memories. The way the collection presented to the public is displayed is also very important. The use of advanced, attractive and even intriguing installations is also relevant.

New technologies, also successfully used in theme parks, lead to an increased appeal, especially for young and dynamic persons, they can spread the information regarding cultural heritage and museums much faster and clearer. They also could support various experiments, interactive displays etc. For instance, the existence of TVs or various types of audio-

video "guides", which illustrate and explain the exhibits is a common fact nowadays. Some museum managers have understood that the key to success is to use new technologies and to make special, interactive and original exhibitions. The new technologies have also an important role in a better preservation and conservation of various exhibits and also information about them, as well as a deeper and more complete research on them. Nevertheless, displays and various technologies should be adapted to the specificities of a museum; unconditional transfer of practices from theme parks to museums being unsuitable.

In contemporary society there is a constant crave for events and stimulation through games and images. There is an emphasis on spectacular, immediately accessible and enjoyment. The public loves the shows, but many of them also they want to participate, to be an active part of the experience. The exhibitions and programs designed in museums have to take into account these elements. Theme parks have understood these changes within society long ago, they respond to the public needs and desires, therefore they benefit of great (financial) success. Museums should also adapt their programs to this trend. They have to take into account what their specific public wants and expects (some look for authentic experience, others for entertainment, some others want to relax, etc.). They should adapt each program in order not only to be more appealing but also to reach the settled cultural and educational goals (e.g. transmitting certain information, making people aware of a particular cultural aspect).

A museum should remain an educational, scientific and cultural institution. If the entertainment aspects are too evident and widespread, the visitors could miss exactly the important messages meant to be transmitted; they could overlook the value and significance of the collection and exhibitions. Even historical approaches, if presented in a theme park way, could attract mainly visitors interested in pure entertainment and extravagant displays, who might not resonate with the educational messages. Such fears were, for instance, associated with Madame Tussaud's Scenarama in Amsterdam, which was initially designed to explore Dutch history and culture (Cannon-Brookes, 1991, pp.353-354).

There is no universal recipe. Each museum should consider the benefits, the professional ethics, and what it could loose with a too commercial approach. It also has to carefully consider its collections and the interests of the local communities. The impact on various segments of its audience can vary. In some situations the image of the museum could be negatively influenced. In some others, the public could just crowd in the museum/certain exhibitions.

Last, but not least, we consider that even if theme parks' (marketing) approaches could be models for museums, caution is recommended in adapting and implementing them. Not even all theme parks are successful; some famous ones are facing difficulties, ups and downs and even bankruptcy.

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