

MUSEUM AS AN OBJECT OF CHANGE

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Abstract

Over the last decades the museum sector has experienced substantial changes. The need for change has been stressed by such well-known museologists and practitioners as Stephen E. Weil, David Flemming and others. Moreover, the change of and within museums has arisen as one of the most important topics of several professional networks and conferences, such as “We Are Museums”, which was created in 2013 as yearly event at the intersection of culture and innovation. Thus, we can speak about paradigm of change in contemporary museums that affects their performance and future strategies.

This paradigm of change in museum sector seems especially interesting if we think about the symbolic role of a museum. Traditionally a museum is an institution that keeps our heritage intact and until recently this task has been perceived as its main function. Not without reason the museum has been used as symbol for standstill, unchangeable in art and literature. Yet now we are asking for museums to change themselves and their public offer.

The aim of the article is to track the development of paradigm of change in museum sector and to outline the most important fields that had been affected by change during past decades. The change of museum sector has been viewed in regional context, marking the most important trends: 1) changes in the models of museum funding; 2) changes in museum's strategic priorities; 3) changes in our perception of a museum. Still, it is important to remember that an organization can never change just one thing – in most cases museums are subjected to more than one of these trends. The results in almost all cases are similar – growing importance of museum management.

Keywords: *museums, change, museum funding, museum management, museum strategies.*

Various changes are almost inevitable in any organization. The Oxford Dictionary defines the noun ‘change’ as an act or process through which something becomes different, turns from one state to another while the subject of change becomes different and, possibly, gains some better qualities [The Oxford Dictionary 2015]. Usually we tend to believe that change will bring something good, therefore, when speaking about the necessity to change, we actually mean that the object of change must be (or will be) improved.

Over the last decades the necessity to change has arose as one as one of the most important topics in museum sector. The need for change has been stressed by such well-known museologists and practitioners as Stephen E. Weil, David Flemming and others. Moreover, the change of and within museum has arose as one of the main themes of several professional networks and conferences, such as “We Are Museums” that was created in 2013 as yearly event at the intersection of culture and innovation. Increasingly visible is museum reaction to such global trends as digitalization, globalization, growing competition and migration and trying to adapt their offer for the new environment. Thus, in a given situation we can speak about paradigm of change in contemporary museums, where change is becoming one of the characteristic traits of a museum. The aim of the article is to track the development of paradigm of change in museum sector and to outline the most important fields that had been affected by change during past decades.

This paradigm of change in museum sector seems especially interesting if we think about the symbolic role of a museum. The opposite of change is standstill that in a way corresponds with one of the most important functions of museums – to preserve the historical heritage unchanged. Museum that in its current form exists more than 200 years, preserves our memory through the selection and preservation of special items that represent the history [Vaidahers 2009: 12]. Thus, we often tend to unconsciously associate a museum with something unchangeable and static. Not without reason J. D. Salinger used a museum as a symbol for standstill of time in *The Catcher in the Rye*: “The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody’d move. You could go there a hundred thousand times, and that Eskimo would still be just finished catching those two fish, the birds would still be on their way south, the deers would still be drinking out of that water hole, with their pretty antlers and they’re pretty, skinny legs, and that squaw with the naked bosom would still be weaving that same blanket. Nobody’s be different. The only thing that would be different would be you” [Salinger 2010: 131].

However, in the museum literature that have been published during the past decades we can see that museums increasingly often are called to change and reborn in new quality. In addition to that, the museums have been asked to become the

agents of Change themselves with slogan “Museums Change Lives!” [Museums Change Lives! 2015]. Thus, it is interesting to take a closer look at the effect that this paradigm of change has caused in museum field.

Over the last two decades the museum practitioners and theorists have named various causes of change, such as globalization, development of public thought, changing cultural policy among others. Yet, no matter which of these causes we choose, their consequences in most cases are similar – change of museum organization, offer and relationships with society that has led to increased meaning of museum management and marketing.

The author states that in museum literature we can distinguish three separate trends of change:

- 1) changes in the models of museum funding;**
- 2) changes in museum’s strategic priorities;**
- 3) changes in our perception of the museum.**

It is important to remember that “an organization can never change just one thing. In most organizations we can see delicate balance and changes in one element will demand an immediate compensation and sometimes cause previously unpredicted changes in others” [Weil 2007: 39]. Thus, in most cases museums are subjected to more than one of aforementioned trends. The results in almost all cases are similar – growing importance of museum management with adaption of change and capability to lead them as some of the most important skills.

Changes in the models of museum funding

The museum funding has been described as diminishing or threatened in almost all professional literature that has been written in past two decades. This is a global trend that can be tied to several factors: increasing number of new museums, decreasing of public funding to culture, the growing complexity of museum practice and extension of museum size. The famous museologist, honorary professor of Smithsonian Institute Stephen E. Weil has pointed out that the results have been similar in the entire world – with decreasing public funding and accordingly the increasing proportion of means that must be found elsewhere, the main source of museum funding must change [Weil 2007: 29]. He stresses that museums almost everywhere have switched from selling to marketing, thus replacing the persuasion of public to buy their traditional offer with researching and meeting the needs of their visitors [Weil 2007: 32].

Although the museum experts have almost unanimously agreed that museums are in financial danger, quite rarely we can read about the causes of this situation. In case of the museums that receive the public funding some of the most important causes are changing trends in the cultural policy that can be observed at global,

regional and national level. For example, museologist Patrick Boylan has described three main regional trends that have influenced museum management on European scale.

As the first trend he mentions the legal systems and arrangements in countries such as France, the United Kingdom, and Canada used to virtually prohibit any form of income-generating activities on the part of publicly owned museums. He points out that as a reaction to this situation from the late 1970s, in a growing number of European countries the arts and heritage sector has been calling for their national governments to match U.S. practice in terms of tax and other incentives to encourage private giving and corporate sponsorship, that has resulted as active promotion of private and corporate financial support for charitable foundations, trusts and associations [Boylan 2006: 202].

The second trend is the exempt of culture and cultural heritage institutions and their services from direct governmental control and financial responsibility through processes of devolution, decentralization or privatization [Boylan 2006: 203]. Devolution or decentralization in this case can be understood as the transfer of power from a central government to sub-national (e.g., state, regional, or local) authorities [Devolution 2015]. Accordingly, destatization and privatization are connected with the decline in the role of the state [Destatization 2015] and transfer of its services or assets to the private sector [Privatization 2015].

The third major trend according to Boylan is movement towards the internal devolution and decentralization of management within heritage and cultural bodies, that typically involve shaking off the frequently restrictive rules and procedures of the public service, and empowering not only directors and other top managers but the whole of the staff in relation to the development and implementation of policy and objectives [Boylan 2006: 204]. Although this practice is not common we can find examples not only in European countries. Characteristic example is The Glenbow Museum, Art Collection, Archives and Library in Canada that split of the local government while implementing wider organizational changes [Privatization (politics) 2015].

In order to fully understand the reasons for the decrease in public funding that are mentioned in museum literature so often, we must take a closer look not only at regional cultural policy trends, but also at political processes at individual countries. The United Kingdom where during several decades museums have experienced completely opposite stances in cultural-policy is one of the most well-known examples. For example, if the 1970s were characterized by expansion of expenditure and by considerable debate about what forms of arts and culture should be subsidized, the 1980s were a decade when political and economic pressures led to a fundamental reappraisal of the funding and management of the arts and

culture. While remaining committed to the principle of public sector support, the government of Margaret Thatcher required arts and culture organizations to look for new sources of revenue to supplement their income [Fisher, Ormston 2011]. At this moment when we can spot the national efforts to promote the private funding that were mentioned by Boylan. In case of the United Kingdom that resulted in the establishment of the Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme in 1984, which for the first time matched funds from business with a government grant, administered by Arts & Business to encourage new sponsorship from the private sector [Fisher, Ormston 2011].

With the reduction of public funding, museums had to seek for additional sources of funding that accordingly increased the meaning of museum marketing. In practice, this trend is confirmed by relatively large number of educational literature about the museum marketing and management that has been published in past few years. As important sources of funding at this time appears donation and sponsorship, that in many countries have been stimulated at national level and whose importance has been highlighted by many museum managers. However, the orientation towards the private funding has also met criticism. Thus, the cultural commentator Dragan Klaić has noted that sponsorship has often be treated as only possible escape in case of insufficient public funding, yet after more than 20 years since we have business sponsorship in art and culture it has not become a noteworthy alternative to public funding [Klaičs 2008:105]. Museum experts have also mentioned the possibility that need for private funding can lead to the engagement with the activities that are inadequate to museum field. The director of Maritime Museum of Denmark Ulla Tofte has described this problem sharply – the premises of the museum function as a backdrop to everything from fashion shows to Christmas parties [Tofte 2015: 1]. The ethics of relationship between museums and their private partners are sensitive and rarely spoken about. As one of the most recent examples we can mention the British Museum that last year were accused in breaking their code of ethics in the way they dealt with one of their commercial sponsors, British Petroleum [Macalister 2016]. The museum ethics can be offended also on smaller scale through inadequate usage of its premises. These threats are important also in Latvian museums – in almost every one of them we can not only celebrate the birthday, but also rent premises for private events. If we think about the necessity to earn as the main priority, the museum's premises can be used for the aims that are opposite to its mission, such as the case of Latvian War Museum that experienced the public interpretation of its exhibitions in quite opposite way to its own purposes [Ciganovs 2015].

The expert opinions on the financial challenges and the diminishing of private funding have been quite diverse. Interesting assessment has been made by British

researcher Kevin Moore who has said that museums have been pushed into the marketplace, only to find that this market is rapidly changing milieu. Museums have always competed for visitors with each other, and with no other heritage and leisure attractions, even if no charge was made for admission. This competition now has a much keener edge, with the survival of institutions ultimately at stake [Moore 1994: 1]. The submission to the laws of economics makes us re-evaluate also the economic, cultural and social contribution of museums themselves. This situation has been assessed quite differently by museum experts. For example, Serge Renimel, the professor of the University of Sorbonne and international expert of museums and cultural heritage, has predicted the future of museums in pessimistic way, pointing that they are sick with “Baulmol’s cost disease” [Renimel 2006: 18].

However, there is another view of museum as the provider of economic value, that can serve as important factor in the territorial regeneration, development of local economies, rising of the level of employment and fundraising [Ambroz, Krispins 2002: 8–10]. The added value of museum can be associated not only with economics, but it still has to be measurable. Consequently, the museum literature increasingly often touches the topic of social capital that can be created on a basis of museum’s collection. While the business-oriented museums are trying to manage the cultural capital in the market economics, it can gain economic success on a basis of the social capital.

Changes in museum’s strategic priorities

With the changing funding models, the museums have had to justify their existence anew. While looking for this justification, the museums have changed their strategic priorities and gravitated towards promotion of their collections amongst usual functions. Museum strategies have changed and now one of the most important questions is, “What benefits can museum bring to the society?”. This shift of priorities has brought also new topics in research – audience research, individual experience, education and social impact – that have been examined from different angles. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, professor of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, has stated that for too long museums have treated scientific, research and collection functions as primary against the needs of their visitors [Hooper-Greenhill 1994:1]. Thus, contemporary challenges for museums are to maintain these traditional functions and combine them with educational and recreational functions. Furthermore, contemporary museums are already moving further and acting as agents of change in society.

Museologist Theresa McNichol has noted that at the beginning of the 21st century museums have switched their attention from excellence to experience. In 2006 she wrote that in the past decade, museums have been focusing outward on

the community as well as how they impact their visitors' experience. There is a growing expectation for non-profits to both demonstrate the good they bring to their communities, and educate themselves about how they can capture, describe, and measure their impact. Where previously museums focused on institutional outcomes, such as programmatic excellence, attempts are now concentrated on identifying how individuals are changed as a result of a museum experience [McNichol 2006: 75].

There is another trend, beside the museum's role in education. In the professional literature of the 21st century we can increasingly see the museum as an agent of social changes. S. E. Weil's description of this trend is poetically apt: "Over three decades, what the museum might be envisioned as offering to the public has grown from mere refreshment (the museum as carbonated beverage) to education (the museum as a site for informal learning) to nothing short of communal empowerment (the museum as an instrument for social change)" [Weil 2002: 34]. One of the best-known examples of the museum as the agent of social change is the National Museum Liverpool whose director David Fleming has actively promoted that museums must change towards the public gain. Flemming has noted that the priorities (and challenges) of museum management in the 21st century can be expressed through 12 elements: access, commitment, consultation, cultural authority, diversity, education, identity, inclusion, participation, partnership, people and politics [Fleming 2015: 9]. Françoise McClafferty, Policy and international relations officer at the National Museum Liverpool, has described this course of development in a following way: Museums are broadening their missions and identities and have over the last 15 years been extending their public dimension. Learning, social inclusion and public value are central to every museum's activity. They cannot function independently within the social context in which they sit. Museums must keep up with world-wide trends of globalization, technology, consumerism, sustainability and climate change [McClafferty 2006: 212].

This global strategic movement is reflected also in the Statutes of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) that, since adoption, several times has been updated in line with developments in society. According to current version, the 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" [Museum Definition 2015]. The importance of social inclusion is stressed also in one of the most recent ICOM publications – the Recommendation on the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity and their Role in Society that has been commissioned by UNESCO, contributing insight and advocating for

the roles of museums and museum professionals in society. The document is based on the principle that museums share a number of missions, including education and the dissemination of culture, and that they work in favour of justice, liberty and peace, helping to build moral and intellectual solidarity among people and guarantee equal access to education for all [ICOM 2016].

The importance of social work as one of museum's priorities has been impacted not only by global museological thought but also – local tendencies that are connected with cultural politics and entrepreneurship. Good example to the meaning of political trends can be seen in 1970s Germany and “new cultural politics” [Kleins 2008: 136].

The social inclusion is one of the most important priorities of museums in the United Kingdom with the aforementioned National Museum Liverpool as one of the best-known examples. Following the idea that museum must be available to all groups of society the social inclusion is becoming more and more important factor in museums who are designing more and more intricate and specialized offer to particular target groups who previously have been excluded.

The social function of museum is closely linked to museum marketing and work with their audience. The link between these two concepts has been described by museologists Fiona McLean and Mark O'Neill, who have noted that the social inclusion nowadays is not only the answer to the rhetoric of government, but is in fact linked to much longer developmental process, beginnings of which can be found in Victorian museums. However, since the 1980s we can speak also about government's efforts to affect the museum activities towards the public benefit [McLean 2007: 215]. They emphasize the important role of the museum's social orientation on museum marketing that traditionally accents the repeated visits of existing audience as a priority. In case of socially inclusive museum, museums tend to attract all audiences, including those, that traditionally have been excluded or have not wanted to visit museum [McLean 2007: 218–219].

A different approach to the social orientation of museums can be seen at the United States of America, where important factor (next to the global trends) is “non-profit” or “private” sector in economics that puts growing stress on organizational performance and the achieved results. Weil considers that this is the result of two influences, one of which is connected with the organization “The United Way of America”. When we analyse the situation of the United States of America it is important to keep in mind that unlike the cultural policy related incentives that are characteristic to many European countries, the performance of American “third sector” organizations is based mostly on private incentives. “The United Way of America” whose history began in the 19th century as charitable organization created by church leaders is one of such examples. Right now, it is a global organization

with branches in more than 41 countries, that focuses on community problems in such fields as health, income and education. The stress in past years has been put on community problems, and social responsibility in museum strategies according to Weil is connected with social entrepreneurship theorist J. Gregory Dees social enterprise model [Weil 2007: 36].

The defining of social entrepreneurship began at the end of the 1980s in the USA and Europe as a result of efforts to find solution for poverty, social exclusion and other problems. [Lešinska, Litvins, Pīpiķe 2012: 5]. A similar trend has emerged in European social policy since the 1960s in connection with the conception of socially responsible country – growing number of companies have set a goal to offer their goods to meet the needs of society or solve its problems instead of gaining profits [Lešinska, Litvins, Pīpiķe 2012: 11]. The final definition of the term in the USA and Europe we can connect with the 1990s. In the USA the term “social entrepreneur” was defined by various foundations and organizations, recognizing as such someone who is participating in a free market but whose activities are directed towards the solving of the social problems. On the contrary, in Europe the main stress was laid on the collective nature of social enterprise and its associative and cooperative form [Lešinska, Litvins, Pīpiķe 2012: 8]. The Nobel peace prize winner Muhammad Yunus gives seven criteria for social business: 1) business objective is to use market mechanisms to address problems which threaten people and society (e.g. education, health, technology access, environment, etc.); 2) the business is supported by its stakeholders; 3) the business must achieve financial and economic sustainability; 4) investors get back their fair share of investment while the society benefits from positive externalities created by the business; 5) the business is environmentally conscious; 6) workforce gets market wage with better working conditions; 7) working with joy. According to these criteria is clear that a museum in classical sense cannot be called a “social business”, but museums can use some principles that are connected with social responsibility towards society.

Finally, this trend has also met criticism. Ulla Toffte has described the situation in Scandinavian countries, stressing that in a perfect world all museums could be heroic defenders of the freedom of speech, fighters against social injustice and would be critical against power. Yet in the real life, museums are dependent upon commercial partners and blockbuster exhibitions and as a result they are subjected to self-censorship in fear to lose sponsors or even worse – political support [Tofte 2011: 2–3]. Consequently, while we read the enthusiastic expressions of museum theoreticians about museums as the agents of social change, we must keep in mind that in real life the opportunity for museum to act as such agent on its own can be quite limited.

Changes in our perception of a museum

The gradual diminishing of the museum funding is one of the reasons to change in the museum field. As already mentioned, the museums can be treated as touched by “Baumol’s disease”, yet the museum can be also used as a means to attract the financing. Bearing in mind the growing number of museums in the past decades, Renimel has stated that it would be naive to think that this fever of creation and recreation of new museums is dictated by governments and local communities of places where these organizations are situated. Instead most of the new and rebuilt museums are acting as important instruments of urban planning, territorial policy, communication and tourism marketing [Renimel 2006: 17].

It is clear that each organization leaves impact on local economics. Well-known museologists Thimoty Ambroise and Crispin Paine have outlined that museums can have an important role to play in economic regeneration in urban or rural areas, meanwhile the economic role of museums in many countries is less well understood than their social and cultural role. Yet, Museums can serve as part of an overall redevelopment programme, contribute to the development of a cultural infrastructure, act as magnets for tourists, create jobs and increase the levels of employment, attract financial support and investment from external agencies [Ambroise, Krispins 2002: 8–9]. Museums have central role in cultural tourism and they are important when we speak about the cultural values and industrial chains. Normally they can also promote other cultural tourism activities that are related with food, clothing, accommodation, transport or religion [Tien 2008: 13].

A characteristic example is the research about the economic impact of museums in Finland at regional and national levels, that was carried by the University of Vaasa. It concludes that “when we know that the share of municipalities of the total funding of museums is about €75 million and the total impact of museum visitors in the regional economies with multiplier effects is between €340 and €500 million, it can be generalized that the museums produce to their locations almost solely as tax revenues the sum the municipalities have invested in them. Furthermore, they improve the employment and income level in the region and create well-being through this in many different ways. This utility is both intellectual and economic and it is linked with impacts related to the image and reputation of the region. From the viewpoint of regional economy, a museum is a good investment solely financially” [Piekkola, Suojanen, Vainio 2014: 48].

In context with the economic value of museums, we can look at another trend – the using of museum’s form in order to gain profits. Serge Renimel has noted that in the past museums’ existence was based upon research, safekeeping and exhibition of objects, but their value as ensurers of recreation and tourism opportunities was treated only as consequences not the driving force of museum. Yet while the world

economic integration is becoming faster and faster, new logics has raised amongst the decision makers who set not only new priorities for museum development and fundraising, but also created a new species of “museums-mutants” [Piekkola, Suojanen, Vainio 2014: 48].

While setting the profits as main priority, a lot of museums are stepping away from traditional tasks – to collect, to research and to keep our heritage intact. If we define an organization as “museum” according to ICOM definition, a question appears: do all organizations that call themselves “museums” really are ones? Aija Lūse from the Latvian Academy of Culture offers to treat the difference from traditional norms as mutation and divides such organizations in four types with economic changes as common cause:

- 1) museum as a central object of regeneration plans;
- 2) museum as an object of commercial business strategy (museum franchising);
- 3) museum as a marketing tool (museum of particular brand);
- 4) the profit-oriented company that positions itself as a museum (or museal institution) [Lūse 2014: 81].

This typology shows us one of the trends of changing museum sector. With introduction of professional management, marketing and entrepreneurial leadership in museums, their traditional role as collectors, safekeepers and promoters of heritage objects could have been replaced with economic gain as priority. This situation can make us re-evaluate the organizations that are called museums and their compliance to museum form.

The trends of change in museum funding, strategic priorities and public perception belong to the paradigm of change that is dominating in contemporary museums. As a result, contemporary museums are seeking new strategies for relationship building with governments, private supporters and general public that are reflected in their organizational structures, public offer and marketing and deserve to be discussed separately. It is also important to remember that each of the trends of change can be viewed not only in global and regional but also national, province or even single case study level. Each of these levels will be impacted by a variety of variables such as local cultural policy, stakeholders and others. Still, the main tendencies in almost all cases are the same.

It is important to remember that an organization can never change just one thing. Thus, in most cases museums are subjected to more than one of aforementioned trends and we can assert that as a result of these trends of change have affected practice of museum management and brought forward as the most important skills of adaptation of change and capability to lead them. In the world that is subjected to increasingly rapid changes in technologies, communication, society and governmental policies, museum managers must be able to react to the change and

to lead them in preferred direction. This means the increased significance also in professional skills that quite recently have been treated as completely unrelated to traditional museum such as change management, change stewardship and change leadership amongst others.

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