

## MUSEUM EDUCATION AND REGIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION

### *EDUCAÇÃO MUSEOLÓGICA E FORMAÇÃO DE IDENTIDADE REGIONAL*

### *EDUCACIÓN MUSEÍSTICA Y FORMACIÓN DE IDENTIDAD REGIONAL*

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**ABSTRACT:** Museum education is a specific field dedicated to developing and encouraging non-formal education spaces and institutions such as museums. Its principal purpose is to interest visitors in learning experiences to improve their curiosity and engagement in their objects and collections. General globalization trends cause changes in museum communication strategies. The museum is being considered as a cultural institution, which is becoming anthropocentrically oriented multifunctional cultural center in this global context. Main analysis criteria of modern museum communication are proposed and regional museums typical forms of educational activities are exposed in this article. It also demonstrates their potential for the regional identity formation.

**KEYWORDS:** Museum education. Anthropocentricity. Interactivity. Participation culture. Regional identity.

**RESUMO:** A educação museológica é um campo específico dedicado ao desenvolvimento e incentivo a espaços e instituições de educação não formal, como os museus. Seu objetivo principal é despertar o interesse dos visitantes em experiências de aprendizagem para aumentar sua curiosidade e engajamento em seus objetos e coleções. As tendências gerais de globalização causam mudanças nas estratégias de comunicação do museu. O museu está sendo considerado uma instituição cultural, que está se tornando um centro cultural multifuncional de orientação antropocêntrica neste contexto global. Os principais critérios de análise da comunicação museológica moderna são propostos e as formas típicas de atividades educacionais dos museus regionais são expostas neste artigo. Também demonstra seu potencial para a formação da identidade regional.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Educação museológica. Antropocentricidade. Interatividade. Cultura participativa. Identidade regional.

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**RESUMEN:** *La educación museística es un campo específico dedicado a desarrollar y fomentar espacios e instituciones de educación no formal como los museos. Su objetivo principal es interesar a los visitantes en experiencias de aprendizaje para mejorar su curiosidad y compromiso con sus objetos y colecciones. Las tendencias generales de globalización provocan cambios en las estrategias de comunicación de los museos. El museo está siendo considerado como una institución cultural, que se está convirtiendo en un centro cultural multifuncional de orientación antropocéntrica en este contexto global. Se proponen los principales criterios de análisis de la comunicación museística moderna y en este artículo se exponen las formas típicas de actividades educativas de los museos regionales. También demuestra su potencial para la formación de la identidad regional.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Educación museística. Antropocentricidad. Interactividad. Cultura participativa. Identidad regional.*

## Introduction

Nowadays, Learning is not confined to the classroom. Museums are essential educational environments and give significant learning potential. Collections exhibited in museums supply students with substantial contact with time, places, events, or people and experience the human history and cultural heritage evolution. Learning in museums assists students in understanding the historical importance of things, regard different cultures, and experience multiculturalism (YAKOVLEVA, 2021).

The history of the museum as a social institution is conditioned by general trends in socio-cultural development, on the one hand, and by the development of communications, on the other hand. Researchers today reduce the culturally driven differentiation of the multifaceted functions of the museum to three main ones, highlighting the function of documenting and accumulating material and spiritual heritage, the educational function (awareness building, educative) and recreational being aimed at satisfying cultural and cognitive interests, emotional release (KATKOVA, 2017). Presently, when the task of “social, psychological and cultural rehabilitation of people” (DUKELSKIY, 2010, p. 4) is actualized, the content of all the above-mentioned functions, that provide socially and individually significant needs and are present on the platforms of new media, expands and converges.

General tendencies in socio-cultural development, driven by digitalization as a global trend, are evident in the two effects. First, the resources of the new media are leading to the restructuring of the entire museum management,

information in the sphere of culture is now becoming an object, a means, a tool, a goal and a result of labor. [...] Information processes in the museum permeate all of its structures, and industrial relations become information and

communication, which has a strong influence on the entire activity of the museum and on the entire cultural sphere of a particular region (KOMLEV, 2011).

Second, these general trends provide a more individualized, personality-oriented interaction between the audience and the exposition, which should be understood not only as a collection of artifacts and documents, but above all, as a concept, a kind of sign system that conveys socially and personally significant meanings epitomized in different communication formats. The semiosis of the modern museum concept is attributable to the object environment of museums, which

with its special atmosphere is at the same time a space, a condition and a trigger for communication. One has time here to sink into a reverie, one has plenty to talk about here, it is easier and better to communicate here. Meanwhile, networking events are very slowly consolidating in museums as a separate area of work (DUKELSKIY, 2010, p. 4).

The understanding of the museum space as a special anthropocentrically-oriented environment, stimulating, among other things, reflection and auto-communication, as is the case with the Hermitage Museum, was publicistically pinpointed by its director Mikhail B. Piotrovsky who emphasized that the museum “has always served the building of insightful loneliness of a person” (YAKOVLEVA, 2021).

The outlined context predetermined the goal of the study – to identify a typical communication model of a regional museum against the backdrop of information and technology, contributing to the formation of regional identity. The subject of investigation is the actual communication practices of the museums of the Belgorod region that epitomize socio-historical uniqueness of the region and its individual territories.

## **Materials, Methods, Theoretical Framework**

The empirical basis of the study was the data from the websites of the museums of the Belgorod region and the site of the department of culture of the Belgorod region, as well as the direct experience of visitors for 2018-2021.

The main research method was the descriptive method used to integrate the interpretation of diverse data in accordance with specific research tasks, and the introspection method allowing to systematize the researcher experiences as a museum visitor. The theoretical framework was constituted by the works of Russian and foreign scientists in the field of museology, philosophy of culture, museum communication (GOLOVNIOVA, 2017;

DUKYELSKIY, 2010; EREMINA, 2012; HUDSON, 1987; KOMLEV, 2011; CAMERON, 1971; KORSBÆK, 2014; LEBEDEV, 2010; MASTENITSA, 2015; PAVLOVA, 2010; SAPANZHA, 2009; SIMON, 2010).

## Discussion and Results

The analysis of research concepts provides a means of taking up the position that in a modern museum as a multifunctional cultural institution, restructuring communication is associated with strengthening an anthropological component, commensurate with a person with their dynamic interests and needs. The significance of the anthropologization of museum concepts based on the opposition of scientific and humanitarian knowledge is emphasized by N. Pavlova,

The main drift made by museum communication consists in its movement from the one-dimensional plane of dissecting scientific knowledge based on a narrow-disciplinary scientific approach to the synthetic multidimensionality of humanitarian knowledge based on the most diverse schemes of the mastery of reality studies (PAVLOVA, 2010, p. 84).

The information-oriented approach is contrasted with a reflexive-personal, dialogical approach that actualizes “the ability to see the invisible through such communication channels as intuition, association, sympathy, imagination, empathy ... when each generation looks into another ... gaining a new inner experience” (PAVLOVA, 2010, p. 84). The restructuring of the principles of museum communication was well characterized by V. Y. Dukelsky, “Concrete practices and technologies have appeared to replace the philosophical museology of previous years” (DUKYELSKIY, 2010, p. 4).

These practices and technologies should be considered as the content and means of museum communication, an extended definition of which presupposes a characteristic of the current museological paradigm. Thus, the very concept of museum communication was introduced by D. F. Cameron back in 1968 (CAMERON, 1997) and was treated as an interaction between a museum exhibit and a visitor. Such a dialogue is possible if the code of the sender, the addressant, is available to the addressee, if the semantic “key” that helps to understand both the significance of individual exhibits and the “message” of the exposition on the whole is understandable, interesting and axiologically important to them, nonetheless the conception should allow that visitors may form their own meanings (SIMON, 2010). The very term “museum communication”, as A. Lebedev shows, allows different interpretations, which is, from his perspective, due to different approaches to the subjects of this communication –

visitors per se. The visitor is viewed as a subject who can contact “with the authors of the exposition, and museum items serve as a pretext or means of this dialogue”; the visitor can directly interact with the exhibits; it is also widely believed that museum communication establishes an immediate “connection between the visitor and representatives of other generations or cultures ... each of these statements has a priority of existence.” (LEBEDEV, 2010, p. 77).

It should be remembered at the same time that the very anthropocentric approach as a long-term trend is contingent with the global democratic process – the development of a culture of participation, or, from N. Simon’s perspective, a participatory culture (SIMON, 2010), which is characterized by Y. V. Zinovyeva and Y. Y. Matskevich in relation to the museum practice as follows,

A person of a post-industrial, information society is not just a consumer of cultural services. Their cultural requirements are stemming from the opportunities provided by the multicultural society, the rapidly spreading mass media and the Internet, social networks and the possibility of self-expression in a single information space, the opportunity of active participation in various cultural practices – from posting photo albums to creating virtual museums in networks (ZINOVJEVA; MATSKEVICH, 2015, p. 85).

We are of the opinion that these days the very idea of a culture of participation can be regarded as a tradition since in world practice it has been formed since the 1970s-1980s, which is reflected in the work by K. Hudson *Museums of Influence* (HUDSON, 1987), who viewed the museum as an agent capable of fostering social change. A very formulation of “museum of participation” is associated with N. Simon’s book *Participatory Museum* (SIMON, 2010), which ascribes not a traditional sacral-preserving mission to the museum but, on the contrary, incorporates it into the culture of everyday life. The scholars observe on this approach, saying that “in order to meet the challenges of modernity, the museum should become a socially oriented institution, useful, relevant and popular, like a shopping center or a station hall” (ZINOVJEVA; MATSKEVICH, 2015, p. 85). Such a statement should not be regarded as profanation or vulgarization of museum traditions since in this scenario a certain individualized participant is directly involved in the process of forming value meanings, which means that it increases the degree of awareness and meaningfulness of their own life.

Obviously, this broadest understanding of the museum’s mission requires the characterization of the visitor as a participant in the dialogue in museum space. As an argument, one can cite the position of the director of the Copernicus Science Center in Warsaw, I. Ceslinska, who analyzes the needs of contemporary museum visitors,

First, people look for identity formation here, confirmation of their values and ideals. It is no coincidence that contemporary theorists of museology [...] increasingly view museums as an antidote to globalization. Second, visitors [...] figure on social contacts, social interaction, the availability of some kind of shared experience. Third, [...] they expect to enjoy themselves and ... have a grand and at the same time effective time [...] museum collection is an experience not an artifact (CESLINSKA, 2014).

Thus, the formats of modern museum communication are globally predetermined. At the same time, globalization, which has a dialectical nature, on the one hand, actualizes such a value as the dialogue of cultures, and on the other hand, it makes one remember about the value of preserving identity.

The multidimensional concept of identity is structured and encompasses various aspects. So, E. V. Golovneva considers it “as a figurative, value-based, emotional and behavioral “exploration” by a subject of regional space”, where a figurative is a cognitive component that comprehends “geographical images, that is, fixed spatial representations of the region”; a value-based – “experienced and perceived meanings and values of a particular regional community, accompanied by an assessment of the quality of their own regional otherness”; an emotional component includes “standard stereotypes of the emotional response of the region’s inhabitants to specific situations, the intensity of reactions, the prevailing emotions”; behavioral, regulatory stand for “a proclivity for certain actions, ways of behavior and orientation in the regional space” (GOLOVNIOVA, 2017, p. 185).

The approach, proposed by E. V. Eremina who annotates a number of studies, distinguishes two levels – personal and social; identification is carried out at the personal level through the self-referring of the individual with a certain intellectual, spiritual, emotional and psychological environment, formed in any space; identity is manifested at the social level in the territorial community and the community of cultural and historical memory (EREMINA, 2012). In our opinion, social ties that have developed in a particular regional community are equally important.

The value of identity becomes obvious not only in socio-cultural self-referring, but also in the fact that it is the living environment that is the main subject of modern urban analysis and further social construction, a kind of area for improving the quality of life.

The consolidating role of museums in these processes lies in the fact that “[...] objects of cultural heritage that gain renewed momentum in the museum space” form cultural-historical “social memory” that supports regional identity. It is significant that the idea of consolidating role of the museum goes back to the philosophy of N. F. Fedorov, who saw in the museum “an expression of memory common to all people, like a cathedral of all living, memory, inseparable

from reason, will and action ...” (KATKOVA, 2017, p. 72-73). Thus, it is the museum that is entrusted with a mission of identifying meanings that reveal the cultural and historical role of the region and the value of its local cultural features, the mission of preserving regional identity, as well as the organizer of intercultural dialogue, “The uniqueness of museum semantic space lies in the fact that it allows you to combine external (dialogue of cultures) and internal (... referring to the past) forms of communication” (NIKONOVA, 2010). In this context, the space of the museum becomes a locus for the formation of a regional mentality and awareness of identity, to the extent that they are provided with a connection with the historical past.

Let us consider the features of the organization of museum communication using the example of the Belgorod region, the regional identity of which is supported primarily by historical memory, where the fundamental concepts are the Belgorod notch line created in the 16th – 17th centuries, which protected the Russian kingdom from the Nogai raids (TRIBUNTSEVA, 2017); the battle of Kursk (1943), the significance of which was embodied in the fixed nomination “Belgorod is the city of the first fireworks”; the memory of the role of certain territories in historically significant processes and events, as well as the memory of the outstanding natives of the Belgorod region. This is reflected in museums of different types and profiles, reflecting the history of a particular location, territorial-professional association, or broad-scale historical events. In general, according to the website of the Department of Culture of the Belgorod Region, as at the beginning of year 2021, the region numbers more than 130 museums, with historical museums prevailing. There are also historical museums of everyday life and museum spaces, local history museums of a complex profile, and museums of fine arts.

Anthropocentrically oriented museum communication comprehends not only the representation of the museum in information space but also the possibility of activating visitors – primarily representatives of the local community (KOMLEV, 2011), the possibility of their direct contact with the exhibits, as well as free, “barrier-free” organization of the exhibition area (MASTENITSA, 2015; SIMON, 2010), which makes it possible to consider the following criteria for its assessment as relevant:

- intentionality and originality of the exposition conveying socially and personally significant meanings, evoking an emotional response and stimulating participation;
- the possibility of digitally direct or mediated contact with exhibits;
- interactive online and offline projects;
- localization of the museum in Internet communications, that is, the presence of a separate information resource focused on information and communication requests of potential visitors, including representation on Wikipedia and social networks;

- the possibility of remote familiarization with the museum collection, the possibility of using the museum as an information resource; availability of resources for persons with disabilities;

- mediometric indicators.

The major historical and largest museum in the region is the *Prokhorovskoye Pole* State Military-Historical Museum-Reserve, the only federal museum in the Belgorod Region and the only museum in the region that has received recognition from the experts of the International Committee of the TQM Total Quality Management System and the QC model • 100 (international prize “Era of Quality” in the category “Gold”).

The museum complex includes a number of objects: The Museum of The Battle for the Weapons of the Great Victory, the Museum of Armored Vehicles, the Museum of The Third Military Field of Russia, the Bell Tower Victory Monument, the tank training area, the library named after N. I. Ryzhkov, as well as an infrastructure component – the hotel complex. Each object of the open-air museum is presented virtually through a link from the main page of the official website with an obligatory virtual tour, providing a detailed information about the content and features of the exposition, which is a convergent subject-audiovisual composition that stimulates interest of a potential visitor. So, in particular, in describing the exposition on the website of the Museum of Armored Vehicles, reference is made to its historical entirety (installations of antique prototypes, a representative tank of Leonardo da Vinci, mock-up tanks of the early 20th century etc.), and to the use of special multimedia technology “dedicated sound”; to such a feature of the architectural concept as the absence of clear boundaries on the exhibition area when the halls are conventionally divided due to the modern navigation that forms the visitor’s route – wall, floor, sound, light. Attention is drawn to a unique feature – multimedia composition that is based on animated shadows consisting of models of medieval equipment specially created for the museum on a scale from 1:10 to 1:2. The museum also uses a modern multimedia installation which includes a “drawing hand” that creates a drawing gradually appearing on the wall, and a 1:1 scale model of a T-34 tank located under the ceiling, which can be viewed from a special observation deck where interactive interaction is provided – control of the touch panel which allows the visitor to reproduce the movement of tank parts and demonstrates historical video chronicles. Then visitors find themselves in the “design bureau” – a scenery with authentic items from the everyday life of military engineers. Here, the reconstructed dialogue of engineers M. Koshkin and N. Kucherenko is projected onto the screen, their biographies are presented. The center of the exposition is a scenery with original machines and mannequins representing the work of a plant that produces armored vehicles



(*Uralmash* is taken as a prototype). The emotional and symbolic point of the conception of this route for visitors is the sculptural composition “Tank landing”, which completes the exposition outside the exhibition area. In addition to the use of various techniques of multimedia content visualization, including the synchronization of animated shadows with motion sensors, the exposition is equipped with audio guides synchronized with the route<sup>5</sup>.

Along with these exhibition opportunities, the site of the Prokhorovskoye Pole Reserve includes sections “Interactive Programs”, “Virtual Lessons”, “Exhibition Activities” (with virtual excursions), “Museum Objects”, which allow the visitor to have a look at any object of interest. The director’s profile page is hosted on the web site, as well in large museums and respected museum magazines. The statistics of virtual visits is also available – on average, more than five hundred per day<sup>6</sup>.

All virtual entities of the site of the museum and reserve and its interactive programs are available at the YouTube video hosting. The museum is featured on Wikipedia, social networks and messengers, including VKontakte, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter.

Let us consider the visitor-oriented representation in the digital space of a military history museum of a different scale – the municipal Velikomikhailovsky museum named after the First Cavalry Army in the village of Velikomikhaylovka, Novooskolsk district, Belgorod region. In addition to official documents, information about the activities, the visitor has access to a virtual museum tour, digitized 3D exhibits (this work has not yet been completed), a gallery, video materials reflecting the organizational and educational activities of the museum – historical reconstructions, contests, festivals, media materials on the activities of the museum. Despite the military and historical profile of the museum, its exposition includes documents and materials that confirm territorial identity: materials about the history of the settlement of Velikomikhailovka, books about the history of the Novooskolsk region, an exposition dedicated to the Heroes of the Soviet Union – the natives of the territory, and also thematic collections – pictorial, graphic, philatelic, numismatic etc. The museum is represented on Wikipedia and on the YouTube video hosting server, and the focus on the local community is also manifested in the fact that, in addition to VKontakte, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, the museum is represented through the social networking websites Odnoklassniki and Moi Mir. Mediametric accounting has been activated but is not in the public domain.

The State Museum of Folk Culture located in Belgorod, combining the features of an ethnographic museum and a historical museum of everyday life, has more than 27 thousand

<sup>5</sup> See more at: <https://прохоровское-поле.рф/muzej-bronetankovoj-tehniki.html>

<sup>6</sup> More info at: <https://прохоровское-поле.рф/>

depository items which also comprehend an archaeological collection of artifacts found in the region, and a collection of ancient weapons referring to the history of the formation of the Belgorod notch line and to an earlier period in the history of the region. An extensive program assumes visitors' offline and online activity and includes video tutorials, 3D tours, and a separate resource for the acoustically challenged. The museum offers a virtual tour and entertainment services, such as the opportunity to rent a museum piece or take a photo in a folk costume. Interaction with the audience is also carried out through a variety of club activities, the activities of a folklore ensemble and a family ethnic studio, art and educational contests and master classes, creative evenings. The interactive programs cover all age categories, ranging from preschoolers. The museum is represented on Wikipedia, on the YouTube video hosting server, in the WhatsApp, Twitter messengers, through the social networking platforms VKontakte, Facebook, Instagram, Odnoklassniki and Moi Mir. Unlike others, this museum is also represented on the Kultura.RF portal, which provides it with a variety of horizontal connections and increases the possibilities of external communication. Medium metric indicators are considered in the work of the museum but are not posted in the public domain.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of resource-based communication of regional museums of various sizes made it possible to identify typical forms of transformation of a traditional regional museum into a participatory museum, influencing the visitors' consciousness of regional identity. These forms are organized into a kind of communication model, which presupposes, first, appealing to the regional community through conveying narratives and meanings that reveal the significance of the territory in the socio-historical process and thus envision a museum space; second, crossing the local limits, getting on global communication platforms – YouTube video hosting server, social networking websites and messengers, Wikipedia; third, engaging visitors into interactive communication, providing them with an individual experience of offline and online communications.

One of the directions for further research in this area can be a structural and informative study of museum narrative in the anthropocentric paradigm with consideration to the multimodal nature of modern museum communication, as well as social research, reflecting the expectations and assessments of regional museum visitors.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** The article has been prepared with the financial support of Belgorod State National Research University, grant "Media Education: Theory and Practice, Challenges and Prospects" (Order dated 14 August 2020 № 826-OD)

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### How to reference this article

USHAKOVA, S. V; BARYSHNIKOVA, V. A.; SRYBNAYA, M. A.; SHABALINA, E. A. Museum education and regional identity formation. **Revista on line de Política e Gestão Educacional**, Araraquara, v. 25, n. esp. 7, p. 3960-3972, Dec. 2021. e-ISSN:1519-9029. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22633/rpge.v25iesp.7.16152>

**Submitted:** 13/03/2021

**Required revisions:** 26/07/2021

**Approved:** 28/11/2021

**Published:** 31/12/2021

**Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação.**  
Correction, formatting, normalization and translation.

