

Muz., 2017(58): 79-87  
Rocznik, eISSN 2391-4815

received – 09.2017  
reviewed – 09.2017  
accepted – 09.2017  
DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0010.5264

# AUDIENCE OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM

Beata Nessel-Lukasik

The Józef Piłsudski Museum in Sulejów

The immense differentiation of the types of museums in Poland, their surrounding and directions of activity is the reason why in each case one might seek other criteria of success.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the majority of institutions conducting studies on the museum public admit that one of the most important arguments confirming the development of a given institution is the number of museum visitors increasing from year to year.<sup>2</sup> The avalanche-like growth of the public recorded in the course of the last decade, both on a national scale<sup>3</sup> and in statistics kept by particular museums<sup>4</sup> is undoubtedly an asset in activities intent on promoting museums and contributing to their development. In many instances, however, it does not result in knowledge about the increasingly numerous public. Consequently, the answer to the question posed for years among museum curators: whom are museums intended for?

Continues to give rise to numerous controversies.<sup>5</sup>

## Beyond the museum threshold

It is difficult to unambiguously determine who actually comprises the public. Particular authors of publications on this subject propose extremely different categories spanning from the most general, such as: guest, visitor, client, consumer or individual recipient<sup>6</sup> to more profiled descriptions created by taking into account the needs of a given group, distinguished upon the basis of marketing studies concerning the segmentation of the participants of culture.<sup>7</sup> All these factors are the reason for the emergence of increasingly differentiated concepts about persons touring Polish museums. As a rule, attention is drawn to certain dominating groups among museums visitors, such as children, schoolchildren, families, senior citizens or simply adults or else to those types of recipients of the offer proposed by a given institution whose *characteristic feature is a specific lifestyle, interests, and way of spending leisure time*<sup>8</sup>. Nonetheless, despite an increasingly wider spectrum of research dedicated to the museum public – individuals or organized groups<sup>9</sup> – one of the perspectives still remains

outside undertakings realised in this domain. Studies envisaged as a source of knowledge about the public do not take into consideration the potential public, i.e. persons who could have crossed the museum threshold but for various reasons did not do so.

## Not only visitors

The existence of this group was recently recalled by, i.a. Krzysztof Mordyński, who, while analysing the space of the museums as such as well as that of their closest surrounding, declared that *the public is not tantamount to visitors alone*.<sup>10</sup> This observation, which for Mordyński constitutes a pretext to take a look at museums from the viewpoint of their relations with the location and town-planning substance, into which particular institutions have been included, can be recognised as a successive statement provoking a closer examination both of the persons who find themselves in the museum and those who pass it by. Who are the people who prefer other ways of participating in culture (home, domestic, recreation-sport) than institutionalised ones? Does their path towards the museum really include so many barriers that they cannot enter the museum? Perhaps apart from the question of the accessibility of the museum infrastructure or the expenses, time, or lack of education, which allows the development of certain competences and interests, there is something else that constitutes an obstacle for widening the circle of the public by introducing new groups of people, unknown to museum curators? How are museums to be inscribed into something that particular persons experience as “culture”?<sup>11</sup> Perhaps if the museum staff were to go beyond the white cube<sup>12</sup> – an idea popularised in Polish museum studies in recent years within the domain of open air exhibitions and education undertakings – or the possibilities offered by present-day social media and the virtual world were to pertain also to studies intensifying knowledge about the public? Could the correct direction for museums denote that apart from joining efforts aimed at enlarging the number of the participants of culture

they would become increasingly involved in the democratisation of this particular domain of social life?<sup>13</sup>

## Participants of culture and museums

In his book: *Nauka czy rozrywka. Nowa muzeologia w europejskich definicjach* museum, Mirosław Borusiewicz wrote: (...) Among all the reasons for not going to a museum one

could include, predominantly, fear of the unknown and of necessary intellectual effort or the inability to successfully tackle the intellectual requirements of a visit, absence of interests exceeding daily existence, and an excessively low level of education. The most frequently declared reasons for not going to a museum include a lack of time, but it seems that this is not the cause of giving museums a wide berth.<sup>14</sup> What other reasons are there that more than 60% of the participants of culture do not go to museums?<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, knowledge about the potential public is still much too small to be able to determine the motive. Museums, which gradually develop methods and instruments of verifying the level of attendance that constitutes a certain instrument of controlling their activity, still restrict their undertakings concerned with a closer acquaintance with the public and limit them mainly to the circle of persons who had visited a given institution, took part in an event organized by it, or benefitted from an offer on the net. But persons who find themselves in the proximity of a museum are not only visitors or users of Internet portals. They comprise also certain communities, which could become interested in the museum not so much as a place for storing, accumulating, and accessing its collections, but also as a space of certain relations. There remains the question: are museums already prepared for this?

## Community of experiences

Studies concerning the practices of participation increasingly firmly stress treating culture as a realm in which *old*



1. Groups of visitors in front of the Castle Museum in Łańcut



2. People enjoying the urban park around the Castle Museum in Pszczyna





3. Audience research by the Józef Piłsudski Museum in Sulejów during an open-air presentation of the "Path to Independence" Exhibition in Olsztyn.

*social relations are cultivated and new ones are built*<sup>16</sup> Museums that co-create the panorama of culture are thus one of those places where, apart from statutory activity, the institution increasingly strongly broadens the educational offer, making it possible – although sometimes this is *only ostensible participation that looks good in statistics but is socially barren* – to create space for something more than *going to museums*.<sup>17</sup> In order for this to happen it would be necessary to expand studies dealing with the museum public. This translation of the idea of the democratization of culture and the openness of institutions to all visitors would call for viewing the museum in a wider context transcending statistics, marketing or education. It would entail museum experts coming out of the museum in order to meet persons who are still not members of the public and with whom they are not as yet acquainted. Certain museums have already decided to pursue this direction.<sup>18</sup> In several cases such a resolution was the outcome of the need for the emerging institutions to get to know their potential public (e.g. the Józef Piłsudski Museum in Sulejów), or around which new public spaces have been established (e.g. the Miasteczko Wilanów residential estate near the King Jan III Palace Museum in Wilanów). In the majority of institutions, however, such an affirmation of a community spirit and an *inclusion of everyone into the space of being among others and with others*<sup>19</sup> does not result in studies on the public and is still limited to widening that public by including, i.a. the participants of such multi-sensual events as the Long Night of Museums, organised in Poland since 2003.

## Development of the audience

Concentrating attention on museum visitors does not signify the absence of possibilities for the introduction of a new perspective for research dedicated to the museum public. Ideas leading to the enhancement of the museum-visitor relations, and developed after becoming grounded in new museology not only in theory but also in museum praxis,<sup>20</sup> are an excellent base for expanding the range of studies. The gradual exploitation of heretofore points of reference concerning non-participation and including, first and foremost, the most popular arguments, such as lack of time, means or knowledge, makes it possible to pose new questions, i.a. those involving the absence of the representation of concrete milieus among the museum public. Thanks to this approach, undertakings aimed at rendering museums accessible to, i.a. groups of the disabled<sup>21</sup> or families with small children<sup>22</sup> have become intensified in the course of recent years. All this, however, does not lead directly to a solution of the fundamental question, namely, that the recorded rise in museum attendance becomes accompanied by an *essential change of socio-professional groups and the level of the visitors' education*.<sup>23</sup>

## New directions

It follows from trial studies dealing with the museum public and conducted by the National Institute for Museums and Public Collections (NIMOZ) by resorting to qualitative



4. "Craving for beauty", a charity ball on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Association of the Friends of the National Museum in Warsaw

methods applied among employees of 12 institutions representing assorted types of Polish museums,<sup>24</sup> that widening this circle of recipients has become a key topic for the development of the activity of those museums. As a consequence, this might mean that particular institutions have already created space for meetings and joint undertakings aimed at defining not only who are the members of the public of a given museum but also at determining who is absent among that public. More, those several score meetings with museum experts and milieus cooperating with them, held in assorted parts of Poland as part of trial studies conducted from July to September 2017, made it possible to gather sufficient material for formulating conclusions. The latter confirm the need to expand the discussion about the growth of the audience and the necessity of creating and applying new methods enabling the removal of barriers hampering access to the museum. The expansion of research instruments<sup>25</sup> and the objectives of conducting such activity<sup>26</sup> as well as widening the domain in which they are realized, appear to be of key significance for escalating reflections on this topic. In the course of in-depth individual interviews as well as focusing interviews conducted in institutions taking part in the trials, emphasis was placed in particular on the last question, i.e. pertaining to the "potential public" or community existing outside the museum. This is why evoking those two issues appears to fully confirm the need to take into consideration in the course of the development of the museum public not only the rising numbers of persons who crossed the museum threshold but also to widen

the impact exerted by the museum within groups that still remain outside that institution. Then, that which has been already discussed in the case of studies on participation in culture, where certain practices are understood *not so much in the perspective of the consumption of the products and events of the "culture industries" but rather as a series of mutually linked competences: communication with the closest and further circle of acquaintances, the transfer of information, finding and selecting information, the skill of joining an organisation (even on the most fundamental and minimal level such as the negotiation of the forms and purposes of participation)*<sup>27</sup> will be able to find its expression also beyond the museum threshold.

### Theory in practice

Naturally, there arises the question asking how to expand the range of museum studies on the public. Are courses on the methodology of research<sup>28</sup> and the creation for the museum experts of a simple toolbox, whose particular elements could be used by institutions representing assorted types of museums, sufficient? Observing the activity of institutions with different profiles and functioning on a daily basis in extremely diverse environments (large cities, parks, local milieus, etc.) one can say that there already exists a foundation for embarking upon such studies. Nonetheless, in order to be able to develop them and to deepen knowledge gathered upon the basis of statistics and elementary information about the public of a given institution yet





5. Prospective audience research by the Józef Piłsudski Museum in Sulejówek during the Night of Museums on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street in Warsaw



6. Children's room "At King Maciuś I's place" in the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw

another fundamental issue appears to be essential, namely, in-depth reflection about the goals of all those undertakings. Only then, after verifying assorted barriers owing to which the declared openness of museums does not always result in their accessibility for particular potential groups of the public, will it become possible to create a cohesive range of activity within a given museum. It is also then, after testing the degree to which both time<sup>29</sup> and the museum infrastructure<sup>30</sup> or the range of its heretofore activity<sup>31</sup> prove to be an obstacle along the path leading towards the museum, will it be feasible to define the reason why after the removal of barriers of this sort in the case of the, i.a. local community there still emerges the problem of its non-participation in the life of the museum.

### First step

At the end it is worth noticing that apart from the above-described types of barriers that appear between the museum and its public, there exists yet another extremely important criterion – the level of relations linking a given institution with persons crossing its threshold. Visits in more than ten museums taking part in trial studies conducted by NIMOZ confirmed that a highly important role in the life of a given institution engaged in widening its public is played by all those who visit it not only once in a lifetime but who create a milieu of persons who return and in time even become actively engaged in the activity of the institution. They can include both persons interested in the development of their professional (teachers, guides, animators of culture), educational (young people, students, University of the Third Age students) or social competence (volunteers, social activists, collectors) and persons who for many other reasons decided to take an active part in that, what is happening on the other side of the museum threshold, sufficient for a closer and more intensified link to emerge between them and the institution. It is exactly in this way, by means of the close and more frequent cooperation of certain milieus with the museum, that one of the fundamental and often unnoticed barriers for the development of the museum public vanishes. The place of passive consumption and superficial relations is taken by *a conscious and proud introduction of own culture into social circulation*.<sup>32</sup>

Today, the creation of extremely diverse communities (volunteers, co-workers or societies of friends of the museum as well as other milieus concentrated around this type of institutions) appears to be very important precisely in view of the striving of museums towards widening the circles of their public. The creation of a milieu of this sort around a museum enables building unusual social relations, which not only exert a positive impact on attendance but, first and foremost, popularise among the potential public the idea of the museum as a meeting place not only for individual visits and not always planned and carefully thought out. Hence, at the end it is worth asking not only who is absent on the threshold of the museum but also with whom among the group of the "uninterested" would it be possible to establish in-depth relations so that he would not only expand the group of the museum public but also become a member of successive milieus concentrated around the museum. For museum curators the construction of such communities





7. Exhibition "Treasures of the Sieradz collectors" in the Regional Museum in Sieradz organised by groups collaborating with the museum



8. Participants of the *Museum meets* project carried out by the Royal Łazienki Museum in Warsaw (1<sup>st</sup> prize in the category of museum educational project, in the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the 2017 *Wierzba* Mazovian Museum Event Competition)

(Photo: 1-3, 5, 6 – B. Nessel-Lukasik; 4 – M. Ozdoba; 7 – K. Antczak; 8 – P. Czarniecki)

would facilitate the creation of a certain network and reaching the potential public, with whom they are still unfamiliar.

Summing up, one could say that thanks to the rising interest of museum curators in the public visiting their institutions work on projects of activity considered increasingly from the point of view of the needs of the museum public as well as on widening the circle of that public by means of

new groups is becoming feasible. Quite possibly, in time it will result not only in winning more profound knowledge about the museum public but, predominantly, in popularising access to museums also in new domains, allowing the establishment of closer relations between the museum and its public.

**Abstract:** Polish museums are increasingly conducting research into their audiences. Results of statistical analyses and evaluations of educational activities help museum professionals to learn more about the people visiting their museums. However, it is essential to broaden the scope of research, to differentiate the methods and tools used, and above all to systematise the work and adapt it to the requirements and reality of how institutions with various profiles function. Therefore, the question arises: how can such research be carried out on a national scale? What is the best way to support museums which function daily in different surroundings so that their audience research translates to the programme they offer, and thus help them broaden the range of their visitors in the future? At the stage of the initial long-term programme for researching museum audiences which the National Institute for Museums and Public Collections conducted in 2017, it was already possible to

gather material which allows for the determination of directions of activities which, in turn, will help answer the above-mentioned questions in the following years. On the basis of this programme, we can conclude that having introduced the idea of a museum which is open and accessible to various groups, it is now time to turn theory into practice. Apart from keeping statistics, museums should broaden their scope of research in terms of their audiences, and look at the audience in a broader perspective, not just in terms of their presence and the diversity of activities. Only then, after they have repeated the question "who constitutes the museum's audience, and who is absent from them?", would it be possible to determine what is indispensable to deepen the relation between a museum and its audience. Nevertheless, it will be clear whether museum professionals opt for such steps and try to learn whom they still have not met in the museum once broader research has been carried out.

**Keywords:** participation in culture, audience research, prospective audience, social relations, democratisation of culture

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> K. Pomian, *Muzeum: Kryteria sukcesu*, "Muzealnictwo" 2009, no. 50, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> This article was written in the course of trial research conducted by NIMOZ in 12 selected museums, with the participants - representatives of assorted institutions and persons cooperating with a given museum (volunteers, guides, collectors, *et al.*) - stressing the significance of statistics in summing up their activity.

<sup>3</sup> According to information published by the Supreme Audit Office (NIK) attendance in Polish museums in 2014 grew by more than 10 mln compared to 2007. Out of a total of 30,6 mln visitors as many as 13,7 mln toured free-of-charge. *Informacja o wynikach kontroli. Budowanie muzeów w latach 2007- 2015*, <https://www.nik.gov.pl/plik/id,11329,vp,13678.pdf> [accessed on: 14 August 2017].

<sup>4</sup> In her Ph.D. dissertation: *(Re)konstrukcje muzeum w kulturze współczesnej. Studium socjopedagogiczne* Aneta Kamińska presented the example of the Lubusz Land Museum, which from 2010 registers a growing number of visitors, <https://repozytorium.amu.edu.pl/bitstream/10593/12882/1/Kami%C5%84ska%20Aneta%20-%20%28Re%29konstrukcje%20muzeum...%20doktorat.pdf> [accessed on: 14 August 2017].

<sup>5</sup> D. Folga-Januszewska, *Muzeum: fenomeny i problemy*, Universitas, Kraków 2015, p. 136.

<sup>6</sup> E. Nieroba, *Muzeum empatyczne. O zmieniającej się roli odbiorcy kultury we współczesnym świecie w opinii muzealników*, in: *Muzea w kulturze współczesnej*, A. Ziębińska-Witek, G. Żuk (ed.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu M. Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2015, p. 162.

<sup>7</sup> The effects of such studies devised in 2016 for the following Warsaw museums: the Chopin Museum, the Museum of Polish History or the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, were presented, i.a. at the "Kulturomania" seminar held on 20 January 2017, depicting the museum public as a complex composed of the following groups: folk traditionalists, the aspiring mainstream, the withdrawn, compulsive homesteaders, hunters of knowledge, consumers of institutional culture, the sensual, and proper conformists.

<sup>8</sup> J. Hajduk, Ł. Piekarska-Duraj, P. Idziak, S. Waciga, *Lokalne muzea w globalnym świecie: poradnik praktyczny*, Małopolski Instytut Kultury, Kraków 2013, p. 45.

<sup>9</sup> Among the institutions, which in 2017 took part in the NIMOZ "Museum Statistics" programme as many as 68 admitted that they had conducted such studies in 2016.

<sup>10</sup> K. Mordyński, *Muzeum, gość i przestrzeń. Potrzeby muzealnych gości a funkcje i sposoby kształtowania pozaekspozycyjnej przestrzeni muzealnej*, "Muzealnictwo" 2012, no. 53, p. 102.

<sup>11</sup> *Kierunek kultura. W stronę żywego uczestnictwa w kulturze*, W. Kłosowski (ed.), Mazowiecki Instytut Kultury i Sztuki, Warszawa 2011, p. 43.

<sup>12</sup> The process of perceiving not only the art gallery but also the museum as a "white cube" was recently discussed by J. Byszewski in his article: *Muzeum jako wyzwanie (po konferencji „Muzeum w przestrzeni edukacji otwartej”)*, in: *Muzeum w przestrzeni edukacji otwartej*, "Biuletyn Programowy NIMOZ" 2012, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> E. Cailliet, *Polityka zorientowana na publiczność muzealną*, in: *Edukacja muzealna. Antologia tłumaczeń*, M. Szelaż, J. Skutnik (ed.), National Museum in Poznań, Poznań 2010, p. 275.

- <sup>14</sup> M. Borusiewicz, *Nauka czy rozrywka. Nowa muzeologia w europejskich definicjach muzeum*, Universitas, Kraków 2012, p. 145
- <sup>15</sup> R. Drozdowski, B. Fatyga, M. Filiciak, M. Krajewski, T. Szlendak, *Praktyki kulturalne Polaków*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu M. Kopernika, Toruń 2014, p. 160.
- <sup>16</sup> Such statistical data are presented by T. Szlendak, *Formy aktywności kulturalnej*, in: R. Drozdowski, B. Fatyga, M. Filiciak, M. Krajewski, T. Szlendak, *Praktyki kulturalne...*, pp. 159-160.
- <sup>17</sup> *Kierunek kultura...*, p. 46
- <sup>18</sup> Museums attempting to get to know not only their visitors but also the "potential public" include the King Jan III Sobieski Museum Palace in Wilanów (research from 2012) or the Józef Piłsudski Museum in Sulejów (research from 2014-2017).
- <sup>19</sup> *Obieg kultury na Mazowszu*, [http://www.mazowieckieobserwatorium.pl/media/\\_mik/files/265/raport-mik-02-best.pdf](http://www.mazowieckieobserwatorium.pl/media/_mik/files/265/raport-mik-02-best.pdf) [accessed on: 14 August 2017].
- <sup>20</sup> G. Janus recently wrote about the significance of the second museum revolution, a new museology, which in the 1970s changed the manner of thinking about the museum as no longer a *guard of the collections (...)* but *their administrator, whose task is the popularisation of knowledge*, and increased the importance of museum education while the need to become more closely acquainted with the public became essential, in: *Muzeum i ludzie*, in: *Laboratorium muzeum. Społeczność*, Muzeum Warszawy, Warszawa 2015, p. 13. Today this transformation of the social role of museums appears to be the most prominent point of reference in a discussion about the current and potential public.
- <sup>21</sup> Much has changed from the viewpoint of the museum programme infrastructure and offer; thus not only such institutions as the National Museum in Warsaw, but also lesser ones, such as the Castle Museum in Pszczyna, have prepared a concrete offer addressed to people with special needs resulting from their handicaps.
- <sup>22</sup> In many existing institutions a programme addressed to families with children has become a separate and extremely important category of activity, which resulted both in creating a concrete offer, introducing exposition solutions (e.g. at the Regional Museum in Stalowa Wola or the Emigration Museum in Gdynia), or even outright new types of museums (e.g. the Museum for Children at the State Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw).
- <sup>23</sup> E. Caillet, *Polityka zorientowana...*, p. 277.
- <sup>24</sup> In June 2017 a trial programme of studying the museum public was prepared by NIMOZ and NIK staff members as well as a team of sociologists. Workshops involve the selection of 12 institutions representing different types of museums, in which individual interviews, expanded by conversations with the directors, as well as focused group interviews involving the workers and co-workers of a given institution, were conducted. The analysis of the collected material will become a basis for the creation of a several years long programme of studying the museum public and training intended for museum curators.
- <sup>25</sup> The most frequent and usually the only instrument applied in studies on the museum public is the survey, making it possible to become acquainted with the demographic data of the visitors and the level of their satisfaction with touring a given museum.
- <sup>26</sup> The fundamental purpose of the studies are statistics and marketing undertakings, which often lead to determining channels and forms of communication with the public.
- <sup>27</sup> *Spacerowicze, nomadzi i sieciowi łowcy okazji*, A. Nacher (ed.), Małopolski Instytut Kultury, Kraków 2013, p. 71
- <sup>28</sup> Since 2018 the NIMOZ training offer includes also pertinent workshops.
- <sup>29</sup> In this case time denotes not only opening hours but also the amount of free time at the disposal of the individual visitor.
- <sup>30</sup> Infrastructural barriers may consist of, e.g. the absence of a marked approach to the Museum, a parking site, a driveway for the handicapped, a lift, a place for wheelchairs, etc.
- <sup>31</sup> In this instance the basic obstacle in reaching a museum is the lack of information about its seat and the activity conducted therein or the absence of a suitable offer addressed to a given group, such as a guide speaking a given language or a programme adapted to the needs of, e.g. families with small children.
- <sup>32</sup> *Kierunek kultura...*, p. 46.

## Beata Nessel-Lukasik

Doctorate in sociology, historian of art, scholarship from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage; works at the Józef Piłsudski Museum in Sulejów (from 2013) conducts studies on the public and the *Discover Sulejów* programme; author of projects: *Sensitive Colours*, *Phonoblogue*, courses: *Take-away museum* and *Dog and wolf, or about independence for the youngest*, coordinator of programmes: *About independence for the youngest*, and *Social Archive of Sulejów*; e-mail: b.nessel@muzeumpilsudski.pl

**Word count:** 4 200; **Tables:** –; **Figures:** 8; **References:** 32

**Received:** 06.2017; **Reviewed:** 07.2017; **Accepted:** 08.2017; **Published:** 10.2017

**DOI:** 10.5604/01.3001.0010.5264

**Copyright ©:** 2017 National Institute for Museums and Public Collections. Published by Index Copernicus Sp. z o.o. All rights reserved.

**Competing interests:** Authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

**Cite this article as:** Nessel-Lukasik B.; AUDIENCE OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM. *Muz.*, 2017(58): 79-87

**Table of contents 2017:** <http://muzealnictworocznik.com/resources/html/articlesList?issueId=9587>