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INFLUENCE OF A MULTI-METHOD STYLE OF NARRATION STYLE ON STIMULATING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS IN A MUSEUM

WPLYW NARRACJI POLIMETODYCZNEJ NA PRZEKAZ EDUKACYJNY W MUZEUM

Abstract

In this paper, an analysis of the impact of interactive technologies on stimulating learning experiences in a museum is presented. For research purposes, the Family Home of John Paul II Museum in Wadowice was chosen as a case study. The exhibition of the Museum in Wadowice uses a multi-method style of narration with its visitors. The museum utilizes the traditional method of exhibiting artifacts however, due to the demands of the contemporary visitor who is accustomed to life in a world of moving images, interactivity and mobile media, the exhibit proposes an enriched form of communication.

Keywords: museum, transdisciplinary, John Paul II, communication, exhibition

Streszczenie

W artykule przeanalizowano wpływ interaktywnych technologii multimedialnych na ludzkie procesy poznawcze w muzeum. Jako przykład autorzy wybrali Muzeum Dom Rodzinny Jana Pawła II w Wadowicach. Ekspozycja opisanego muzeum używa do komunikowania z odbiorcą narracji polimetodycznej. Muzeum wykorzystuje tradycyjną metodę ekspozycji pamiątek. Jednakże ze względu na zapotrzebowanie odbiorcy żyjącego w epoce ruchomych obrazów, interaktywności i mobilności mediów proponuje się w ekspozycji ubogacenie przekazu.

Słowa kluczowe: muzeum, transdyscyplinarność, Jan Paweł II, komunikacja, wystawa

1. Introduction

Nowadays, increasing the number of visitors is an important task for every museum operator [1]. Due to the extent to which information technology (IT) has enhanced human learning [2], designers of museum exhibitions have many opportunities to create friendly learning environments. Consequently, it is possible to design modern museum exhibitions in a more multifaceted fashion, while combining different types of IT tools into a cohesive entity [3, 4]. This research aims at analyzing the impact of a multi-method style of narration on stimulating learning environments in a museum. For purpose of this research, the Family Home of John Paul II Museum in Wadowice was chosen as a case study [5–7].

2. Experiential design of a museum space

One of the major shifts in museum and exhibit design in the last decade has been a focus on visitor experience. Experience design is not driven by a single design discipline. Instead, it requires a transdisciplinary perspective that considers multiple aspects. For every museum, the human-exhibition interaction (HEI) is one of the most important issues to be studied during an exhibition design process [8]. In general, the HEI relates to the behavior data (BD), the interactive communication among exhibition design factors (EDFs) and audience experience factors (AEFs). In Fig. 1, the framework of human-exhibition interaction (HEI) as a communication process is presented [8].

The main factor which determines the architecture of a museum is the final location of the exhibition (cityside, park, or inside a building). This context has to be used for assembling the museum space despite the fact that it also imposes certain limitations on designers. The architecture of the museum is expressed in its various parts, i.e. the architecture also contributes to the museum as a whole. The process of museum design often mirrors the architectural process or schedule, moving from a conceptual plan, through schematic design, design development, contracting process, to fabrication and installation. The first stages establish a thematic direction and improve creative and appropriate design keys to realize the interpretive and communication goals of the exhibition. The final stages employ technical expertise in translating the visual language of the designs into detailed documents that provide all the specifications required to fabricate and install an exhibit.

Taking into consideration the structural as well as architectural points of view, there are two basic cases for this type of projects, i.e. the exhibition space which is located in a historical building, and the exhibition space which is part of a newly-created building. However, for both cases, the process of developing an exhibit (from a concept, to a physical, three dimensional exhibition) has to be solved. The main goal of this process is to assemble a communicative environment that ‘tells a story’ in a three dimensional architectural space.

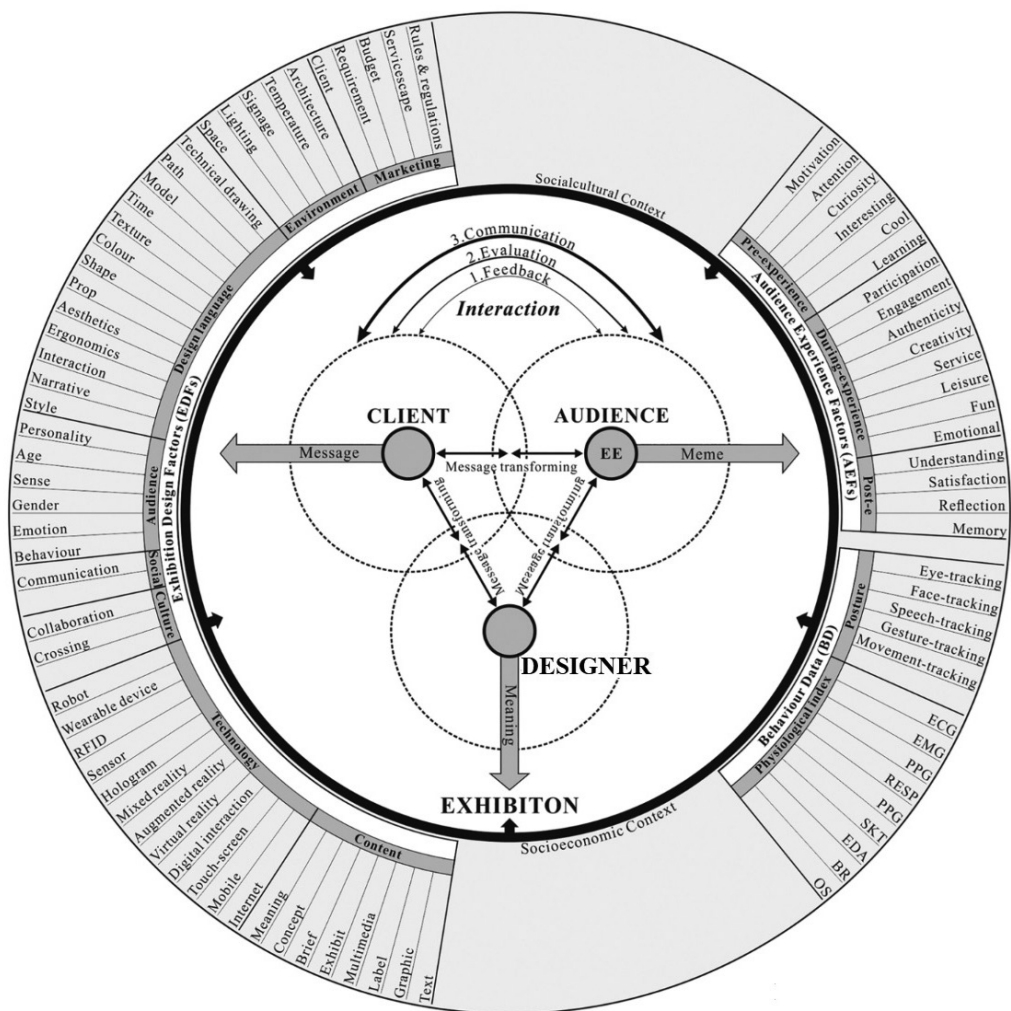


Fig. 1. Framework of HEI with EDFs, AEFs, and BD in exhibition design [8]

3. The new exhibition in the Family Home of John Paul II Museum in Wadowice

The exhibition arranged in the Family Home of John Paul II Museum in Wadowice – a facility reopened in 2014 – uses multi-method narration to communicate with the visitor. The presentation of values that guided the character therefore becomes more attractive and each recipient may find the most suitable methods of acquiring knowledge and discovering the character. Along with polymethodic narration of the exhibition, there can be observed a tendency for designing, building, and creating architectural environments that allow efficient, safe and comfortable, one-way flow of visitors through the maze of artifacts, musical experiences and visual representations. The spatial arrangement of the new museum allows

for a build-up of a dramatic tension, while representing the life of the Polish Pope. At the same time, the museum does not abandon traditional methods of exposing several hundred of collected exhibits. Resignation from traditional methods of exposing may not only seem inconsiderate and hard to understand in terms of showing a historical person to different generations of people, but can also be alien to the museum's methodology, which aims to bring the visitor closer to the original document and the heritage left by former years or centuries. However, due to the demands of society living in times of mobile images, interactivity and media mobility, the exhibition is enriched in the aforementioned way.

The exhibition leads visitors or pilgrims through an educational route presenting various facets of a person's life. Such behavioral setting of the exhibition radically influences the liveliness of the relationship between the character (John Paul II), the sender (the author of the exhibition) and the receiver (visitor). Therefore, besides exposing collected exhibits and artifacts, modern museums of today show a very efficient model of communication derived from the world of theater, cinema or educational games (mazes, for instance). This world of dynamic relationships becomes a new achievement of museum staging. Naturally, the process is supported by the use of digital media, which facilitate intuitive handling of the history, context, background, backdating and recognizing recent biographies of characters. This tendency can already be distinguished in many museums built around the globe. The main idea is to experience a specific kind of catharsis and to get to understand major moral values shared by the character. Emotions, assembly of attractions, interactivity and educational paths all are elements of various exhibitions, from which the museum in Wadowice stands out as the place.

4. The relationship between the exhibition and the architecture of the museum

The emergence of new media, new generations of visitors and a particular trend of popularizing history all have changed the concept of a museum, especially in terms of the approach to how an exhibition is organized. Those factors did influence the architectural design of the museum. The volume of the object has been adapted to create a path of visit, so that the guests can learn about the character's life by accompanying him throughout its various moments. That allowed for the creation of a space that presents a consistent message, while simultaneously creating a friendly, educational environment. In Wadowice, the visitor can see the entire history of John Paul II's life by visiting subsequent floors of the museum. Exhibition on each floor is divided into several thematic zones.

As a result of a cooperation between the exhibition's creator and the architect, an easy-to-follow, one-way path of visit was arranged inside the building. Operating within the existing tissue of the old tenement house, a number of different volumes and spaces were assembled to create a maze-like interior. All consequently connected, yet different spaces make it possible to arrange them in diverse styles to suit numerous functions.

The tour through the museum begins on the ground floor. Starting from the entrance door, the first section of the exhibition is placed in a corridor, chronologically showing

artifacts from the Pope's young years and later allowing guests to experience first signs of his spiritual vocation. At the end of the hallway, a staircase leads the guests to access a balcony on the second floor (Fig. 2a). The Wojtyła Family home accessed from its balcony (which for the convenience of guests is now a part of an interior, glazed-roof atrium) is a significant break between the Pope's life adventures' presentation. As opposed to the previous part that mostly influenced the cognitive activity of the visitor, this part tries to influence the viewer's perception through emotions and the space's complete realism. Meandering through the sequence of artifacts, visitors enter another space. A strong *genius loci* of the sloping ramp, prompts reflection among visitors (Fig. 2b). Hanging banners prepared by pilgrims for the series of the Pope's pilgrimages only strengthen the emotions during that uphill walk. The main part of the top floor's exhibition is occupied by a darkened corridor, prepared for the interactive display and sound experiences of all 104 pilgrimages undertaken by the Pope. That completely neutral architectural character of the space is only interrupted by an illuminated floor path leading to the most important artifact in the room: the revers of the original image of God's Mercy with John Paul II's handwriting, exposed at the end of the corridor (Fig. 2c). The last part of the exhibition, the basement, is filled with many small rooms, many of which tend to create the atmosphere of meditation. Most significant architectural feature is the

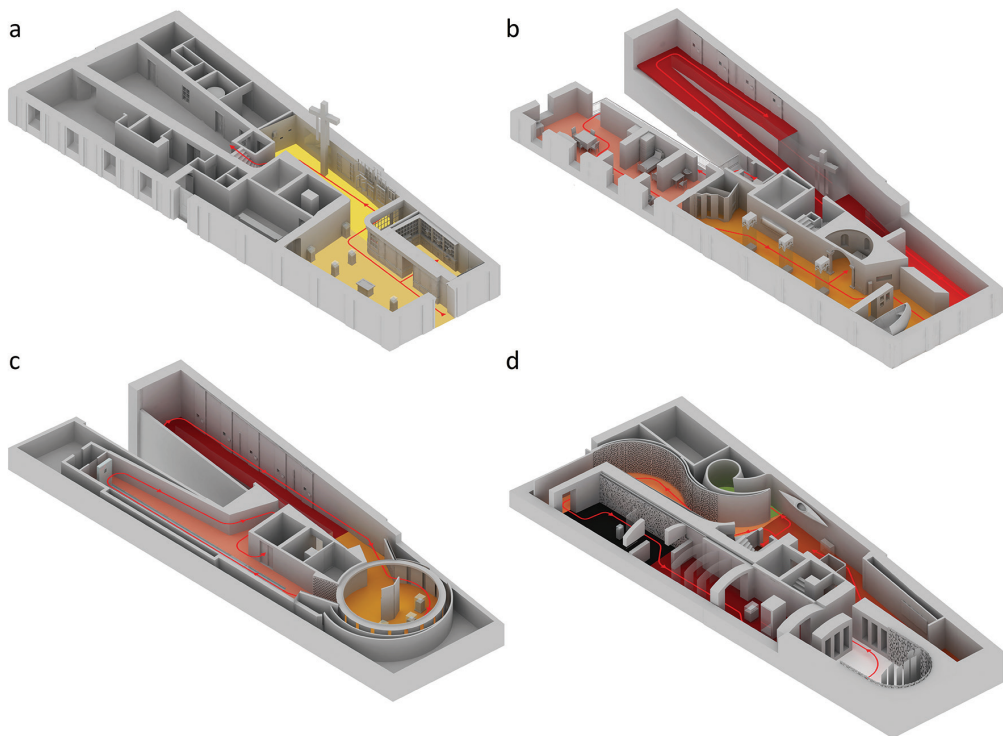


Fig. 2. Architecture of the museum: a) ground floor of the building – exhibition in the hallway (yellow) leading to the staircase; b) the flat of Wojtyła Family (pink) and the sloping ramp (red) prompt reflection among visitors; c) a long, dark room (pink) is set as a neutral background for interactive exhibition; d) curved walls (orange, green) emphasize the importance of the space

curving wall covered with a mosaic showing the Pope with young pilgrims: a very important part of John Paul II's vocation. Going further, the visitor walks into a spiral corridor, ending with a circular room: a place to fall into a deep reverie (Fig. 2d).

The technical capabilities provided by new media techniques, combined with all the artifacts gathered in the museum are presented in consciously designed spaces, which seem to play an equally important role in creating an interesting, completed exhibition.

5. Conclusion

On the basis of the analysis of how a multi-method style of narration stimulates learning environments in the Family Home of John Paul II Museum in Wadowice, the following main conclusions can be drawn from the investigation:

- ▶ A clear understanding of visitor post-purchase decision-making process can contribute to enhancing the number of visitors, which is an important task for every museum operator. Regarding this observations, good cooperation between museum operators, architects as well as communication specialists is necessary;
- ▶ The new trends in museum narration seem to be permanently embedded in the architectural space of cultural institutions. Especially modern IT tools open new possibilities to make museum exhibitions more cohesive as well as more legible. Moreover, because of modern IT tools, it is possible to share the message of the museum's exhibition to a greater number of visitors;
- ▶ Nowadays, the multi-method style of narration is necessary for creating stimulating learning environments. Considering the generational changes and their impact on communication styles as well as learning IT methods, all have great influence on museum spaces and exhibitions. It should be pointed out that IT tools and cohesive architectural space are both very important factors which influence the legibility of museum exhibition. On the other hand, it must be emphasized that artifacts are still irreplaceable when it comes to the museum exhibitions.

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