

Monika Govekar-Okoliš\*

# ***Educational role and activities of the Slovenian School Museum***

## ***– Views, experiences and suggestions of university students concerning school lessons from the past in the study years from 2014 to 2018***

*Izobraževalna vloga in dejavnosti Slovenskega šolskega muzeja*

*– Pogledi, izkušnje in predlogi univerzitetnih študentov o učnih urah iz preteklosti v študijskih letih od 2014 do 2018*

### ***Abstract***

*The educational role and activities of museums have a great and unique significance. Museums are open to the public, community, and in particular to individuals, to their needs and interests. They implement new activities in relation to education, not only through exhibitions and lectures, but also through museum simulated school lessons from the past and other activities. The article uses the Slovenian School Museum as an example, and describes the educational activities it offers. The purpose of this study is to determine the views, experiences and suggestions of university students concerning school lessons from the past they had chosen and visited. Diverse museum lessons were evaluated with a questionnaire for university students visiting from four different Faculties at the University of Ljubljana in study years from 2014 to 2018. The survey showed that museum school lessons are effective educational activities since they enable students to be actively involved and to experience the past. The findings are important for improving the quality of museum education in the future.*

### ***Izvleček***

*Izobraževalna vloga in dejavnosti muzejev imajo velik in edinstven pomen. Muzeji so odprti za javnost, skupnost in zlasti za posameznike, njihove potrebe in interese. Izvajajo nove dejavnosti izobraževanja, ne samo z razstavami, predavanji itd., temveč tudi z muzejsko simuliranimi učnimi urami iz preteklosti. Kot primer smo v članku uporabili Slovenski šolski muzej in opisali njegove izobraževalne dejavnosti. Namen raziskave je določiti poglede, izkušnje in predloge univerzitetnih študentov o učnih urah iz preteklosti, ki so jih izbrali in obiskali. Študenti s štirih različnih fakultet z Univerze v Ljubljani so različne učne ure ocenjevali po vprašalniku za obiskovalce v študijskih letih od 2014 do 2018. Raziskava je pokazala, da so učne ure v muzeju učinkovite izobraževalne dejavnosti, saj študentom omogočajo, da se vanje aktivno vključijo in doživijo preteklost. Ugotovitve so pomembne za izboljšanje kakovosti muzejskega izobraževanja v prihodnosti.*

\* Izr. prof. dr. Monika Govekar-Okoliš, PhD, Associate Professor, Oddelek za pedagogiko in andragogiko/ Department of Educational Sciences, Univerza v Ljubljani/ University of Ljubljana, Filozofska fakulteta/ Faculty of arts, e- mail: monika.govekar-okolis@guest.arnes.si

**Key words:** educational activities, Slovenian School Museum, university students, school lessons from the past, views, experiences and suggestions of visitors

**Ključne besede:** izobraževalne dejavnosti, Slovenski šolski muzej, univerzitetni študenti, učne ure iz preteklosti, pogledi, izkušnje in predlogi obiskovalcev

## Introduction

The role of museums is different to what it was in the days when it was considered that they were like “books” through which we can walk, a place of learning.<sup>1</sup> Although opinions about the role of museums are still divided. Nuissl<sup>2</sup> states that museums are primarily cultural and not educational institutions, since education in museums has a secondary role. He says that the notion of education in museums is as old as that of the museum itself. In modern times, the development of museums across Europe has often acknowledged these roots and sought to nurture them.<sup>3</sup> Chadwick<sup>4</sup>, on the other hand, says that the separation of different museums in the cultural and educational sector is organisationally and professionally logical, since they must meet the needs of visitors. For that reason, cross-professional connections are necessary, which primarily serve to support education.

Supporters of the educational role of museums see education as their main goal: i.e., providing educational and aesthetic enrichment<sup>5</sup>. Organisationally speaking, this means that the educational role manifests itself with the development of libraries, school museums, collections being lent, etc., and, above all, in collaboration with adult education institutions. For example, in the UK museum activity has spread to include participation in teacher education.<sup>6</sup>

In the United States, a survey of various museums programmes for older adults showed that they increased their socialisation and improved their sense

1 Ekkehard Nuissl, Germany, *Adult education and the museum*: Final report on the Socrates Project TM-AE-1-95-DE-1 (Ed. Martin, Brian), Bonn 1999, p. 22.

2 Ibid., p. 26.

3 Ekkehard Nuissl, *Adult Education in Museums: Museums as ‘Educational Tools’*. *Museums and Galleries as Learning Places*. Published for the LERNMUSE project of European Commission, December 2004, 84 pages. [https://www.engage.org/downloads/152E2087D\\_ee-1.3-Ekkehard%20Nuissl.pdf](https://www.engage.org/downloads/152E2087D_ee-1.3-Ekkehard%20Nuissl.pdf) (Accessed: July 16, 2018)

4 Alan Chadwick, England, *Adult education and the museum*: Final report on the Socrates Project TM-AE-1-95-DE-1 (Ed. Martin, Brian), Bonn 1999, (pp. 48-101), p. 54.

5 AlmaDís Kristinsdóttir, *Toward Sustainable Museum Education Practices: Confronting Challenges and Uncertainties*, *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 32 2017, No. 5. pp. 424-439. doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2016.1250104 (Accessed: July 23, 2018).

6 Alan Chadwick, England, *Adult education and the museum*: Final report on the Socrates Project TM-AE-1-95-DE-1 (Ed. Martin, Brian), Bonn 1999, (pp. 48-101), pp. 16-17.

of well-being.<sup>7</sup> In the United States there are college museums, campus museums and student museums, which are a teaching instrument and a foundation for research. The museum has become a learning centre, which offers a special educational experience.<sup>8</sup>

In museums in Germany there are organised education and incidental learning activities<sup>9</sup>, which means that visitors benefit from obtaining a unique experience, a specific impression and new skills. Thinesse-Demel<sup>10</sup> states that the educational role of museums in Germany is carried out in cooperation with related institutions, and that museum curators are aware that a museum is a place of learning, for questioning and promoting creativity in the field of culture. He stresses the importance of dialogue in museums with regard to how to help people in discovering their identity, eliminating cultural inequalities, introducing local diversity into the transnational dialogue and offering solutions to the problems of our times. In addition, it is expected that a modern museum will develop a pedagogical approach, making it a place of leisure and lifelong education.

It is important that education in museums stimulates the visitors' emotions and senses, creating a climate conducive to the recollection of the past and of common roots, and in general offering visitors a good learning experience.<sup>11</sup>

We recognise that the role of museums has changed and expanded. While they continue to be concerned with the preservation of cultural heritage<sup>12</sup> and richness, they are also increasingly process-driven, which means that their essence is in their educational capacity, because through this museums connect with the community and adapt to visitor needs. Today, with the continuously growing information flow, society needs, more than ever before, to get targeted, verified and comprehensible information. Museums, which have been accumulating the records of our civilizations and human experience for centuries, along with universities and scientific and research institutions, represent valuable sources of such information. Education is one of the key activities of museums,

7 Christina Smiraglia, Targeted Museum Programs for Older Adults: A Research and Program Review. *Curator: The Museum Journal*, Vol. 59, 2016, No.1, pp. 39-54.

8 Laurel Bradley, *Curricular Connections: The College/University Art Museum as Site for Teaching and Learning*, 2009, <http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/1309#.V4ouQ8doVQM> (Accessed: July 6, 2018).

9 Ekkehard Nuißl, Germany, *Adult education and the museum*: Final report on the Socrates Project TM-AE-1-95-DE-1 (Ed. Martin, Brian), Bonn 1999, p. 22.

10 Jutta Thinesse-Demel, Museum education as a tool for museums, In: Thinesse-Demel, J. (Ed.), *Museum as a learning place*, Budapest: BVV (Bayerischer Volksch Hochschulverband e.V), 2001, p. 10.

11 Alan Chadwick, *The Role of The Museum and Art Gallery in Community Education*, Nottingham: The Department of Adult Education, University of Nottingham, 1980, pp. 16-17.

12 Nathaniel Prottas, Does Museum Education Have a Canon? *Journal of Museum Education*, Vol. 42, 2017, No. 3, pp. 195-201. [doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2017.1343018](https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2017.1343018) (Accessed: June, 29, 2018).

together with keeping, researching and presenting museum objects<sup>13</sup>. This is especially true of school museums. School museums establish different educational activities and programmes, although one common feature is the use of school lessons from the past, where visitors (acting as pupils) learn about school history. These programmes with school lessons are held in various places, such as the Croatian School Museum in Zagreb<sup>14</sup>, in the UK in the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley<sup>15</sup> and the Ragged School Museum in London<sup>16</sup>, in the USA in the Old Sacramento Schoolhouse Museum in California<sup>17</sup> and in Australia at Sydney Living Museums in Sydney<sup>18</sup>. In Slovenia, school lessons from the past are performed in the Slovenian School Museum in Ljubljana<sup>19</sup>, along with other educational activities.

### Educational activities of the Slovenian School Museum

The Slovenian School Museum in Ljubljana has been focused on its educational role since it was first established. This role further developed in the promotion of school learning through the history of education in Slovenia. The Slovenian School Museum was founded in 1898 by the Union of Slovenian Teachers' Societies, and is one of the oldest national, specialised museums in Slovenia. By collecting teaching aids and presenting their use, the museum's activities initially aimed at the additional training of teachers. Later, the museum started focussing on collecting, preserving, exhibiting and studying museum objects and other non-material, school-related cultural heritage. In recent times, the museum has become best known for its pedagogical activities, and especially for its simulated school lessons from the past.<sup>20</sup>

Every year, visitors from a variety of schools and universities come to the museum, including, as well as children, adults, older adults and foreigners from

- 
- 13 Role of Museums in Education and Cultural Tourism Development, *Policy Brief*, Kyiv 2012. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002201/220143E.pdf> (Accessed: June 9, 2018).
  - 14 Croatian School Museum in Zagreb, 2018, Croatia. [https://www.inyourpocket.com/zagreb/croatian-school-museum\\_4037v](https://www.inyourpocket.com/zagreb/croatian-school-museum_4037v) (Accessed: July 9, 2018).
  - 15 Black Country Living Museum in Dudley, 2018, England. <http://www.bclm.co.uk/activities/have-a-school-lesson/3.htm#.Wi5jDWUcVQM> (Accessed: May 5, 2018).
  - 16 Ragged School Museum in London, 2018, England. <https://www.timeout.com/london/museums/ragged-school-museum> (Accessed: June 9, 2018).
  - 17 Old Sacramento Schoolhouse Museum in California, 2018, USA. <http://oldsacschoolhouse.scoe.net/index.html> (Accessed: May 11, 2018).
  - 18 Sydney Living Museums in Sydney, 2018, Australia. <https://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/education/programs/lessons-past> (Accessed June 21, 2018).
  - 19 Slovenian School Museum in Ljubljana, 2018, Slovenia. [https://www.inyourpocket.com/ljubljana/slovenian-school-museum\\_148056v](https://www.inyourpocket.com/ljubljana/slovenian-school-museum_148056v) (Accessed: June 15, 2018).
  - 20 Stane Okoliš, *Welcome to the Slovenian School Museum*, Ljubljana: Slovenian School Museum, 2012, p. 1.