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Self-definition of museum professionals in the perspective of social participation.

An anthropological case study of selected museums in Greater Poland

SUMMARY

In this dissertation I discuss the identity of museum professionals in the context of social participation. My thesis investigates the role of professionals (museologists, curators and others) in the modern museum. It is also an attempt to examine the meaning of changes taking place in museology and the social function of museums. In my work I argue whether participation has become an important element in the functioning of museums.

My dissertation is an anthropological case study of four institutions (museums located in Kalisz, Piła, Szamotuły and Sieraków) based on ethnographic interviews with museum professionals. The thesis contains five chapters, an introduction, conclusion, a bibliography and an annex.

In chapter one I present the state of research in museology, its terminology and theoretical framework. I also elaborate on my methodological inspirations (grounded theory, humanistic coefficient) as well as present methods, techniques and research tools, which have been used in this thesis.

Chapter two is devoted to the history of museums; I discuss ancient, medieval and early modern prototypes of museums, such as musaeums (mouseions) and cabinets of curiosities. The focus is then on museum practice in the 19th century, leading to a discussion of the beginnings and development of museums in Greater Poland.

The third chapter concentrates around the role of the museum in the contemporary world; I focus on the definition of the museum and difficulties arising from changes in museum practice. The chapter begins with Peter Vergo's definition of *new museology* and then discusses the issue of social perception of museum institutions. Then I try to explore the meaning of the new approach to museum practice in the context of social changes. Here I also sketch the view of theories and perspectives in museology (museum as a forum, museum as a third place). In this chapter I argue that audience activation has become an important element of museum practice.

Chapter four explores the relationship between the museum and the audience, the problem of participation and Nina Simon's concept of the participatory museum. I consider

participation in museums as a special form of civic participation in civil society. Furthermore, the chapter presents examples of participation in Polish museums. Then I explain why, in my opinion, these institutions cannot be considered as “participatory museums”, despite the elements of participation in institutional practices. I discuss whether postulates of new museology could be applied to museums in Greater Poland. Moreover, I put forward an argument in favour of reasonable implementation of new methods in practice.

Chapter five focuses on the role and self-perspective of museum professionals. I discuss their identity issues in the time of changes taking place in museums, elaborating on how they perceive their profession and career. The aim of the chapter also encapsulates the exploration of the influence of the assumptions of contemporary museology from the perspective of museum employees. An argument is considered relating to the future of the museum profession and museum itself.

The final part of my dissertation includes some research postulates and conclusions. Discussion centers on whether Polish museums are institutions created by people; both from within (museum professionals) and from the outside (the audience).