

# **“Museum Exhibits and Standards: A Look Ahead”**

## **November 28-29, 2016**

**A conference sponsored by the Bi-National Commission for the Preservation of  
Bulgaria’s Cultural Heritage**

## **Abstracts of Presentations**

### **Panel 1: “Best Practices in Designing Events and Educational Programs Dedicated to Cultural Heritage.”**

**Nathalie Ryan, Senior Educator and Manager, Gallery and Studio Learning, National Gallery of  
Art, Washington, DC**

**“Cultivating Curiosity”**

**TBA**

**Maria Karadecheva, Head Curator, Plovdiv Regional History Museum**

**“The Educational Potential of the Plovdiv Regional History Museum: Reality and Perspectives.  
What Do We Mean by the ‘Educational Potential’ of a Museum?”**

The new century has brought museums face-to-face with serious challenges. It is clear that the mission of the museum will transform and will take on new content; however, in the fast-changing world, the museum will nevertheless remain a “refuge” of sorts. The museum’s innate stability in preserving “public memory,” its attachment to traditions and even the silence of museum halls turn it into an antipode to aggressive mass culture.

Since 1998 the Plovdiv Regional History Museum has been seeking and using various museum practices in the sphere of informal learning in the museum. In each of its three exhibitions, the museum has special spaces for conducting educational programs. On the museum’s website [www.historymuseumplodiv.org](http://www.historymuseumplodiv.org) information can be downloaded about educational programs and museum lessons conducted in the various exhibits, different types of programs (those that follow the school curriculum standards or those on free topics) for different age groups, as well as instructions for teachers.

When they participate in a museum lesson or educational program and step over the museum’s threshold, our young visitors can decide on their own route through the exhibits, they can understand the specifics of the artifacts on display, offer their own ideas and undertake various activities. And when they come into contact with the complex and interesting world of the museum, they can try to understand its language and to correctly grasp the stories the specimens “tell.” They can learn to understand and value the significance of objects in the museum, and to treat them carefully and conscientiously. They can form a positive attitude and

respect for history and culture and thus acquire skills in real life by valuing objects with museum significance.

The author remains hopeful that the new exhibitions, the new methodology and the new educational programs will shape the most important thing in the visitor – a personal relationship to history.

**Dr. Donika Georgieva, architect, University of Architecture, Construction and Geodesy, Sofia  
“The City: A Museum without a Closing Time”**

The city is our environment – a complex amalgam of traces of past epochs and brand-new achievements. The museum is a tool developed by man for the preservation, understanding and transmittal of information about our material and immaterial heritage. Every day we cross squares and parks, pass by old and new buildings, go underground and climb up above rooftops. But do we have the tool to see the city as a museum – living, dynamic, and with no closing time?

In Bulgaria the wider public’s conception of cultural heritage is still limited to the individual site or object. The environment itself with its scope, colorful character, spirit and diverse urban spaces, its more ordinary buildings as well as those not accessible to everyone remain ignored. Events such as “The Night of Museums” and “The European Heritage Days” broaden accessibility, but by focusing on narrowing specialized site, they further deepen the problem.

This paper examines the intellectual accessibility to the city – our need to get to know it, to have the sensory instincts to perceive, understand, preserve, develop and transmit it. The significance of the concept of the “Open House” is presented as a tool for the creation of an educated society that is engaged and responsible towards the past and the future of its city.

**Milena Savova, Coordinator School Programs, MUZEIKO Children’s Museum in Sofia  
“Designing Programs for Communicating Cultural Heritage to Children”**

Muzeiko offers hands-on exhibits and interactive installations that provide unforgettable experience for kids. Fully using its unique facility, Muzeiko’s educators have designed an ESL program called “English at the Museum” which aims to communicate science and cultural heritage to children. Developed in three levels, this program incorporates multiple principles of formal and informal learning thus offering to the kids a new educational adventure. An escape from the monotony of lectures and a logical continuance of the classroom are only a part of our new program’s features. Being able to touch, smell, and feel the exhibits, students are deeply involved in the learning process which is additionally reinforced with a follow-up art project. We are proud to present “English at the Museum” - our newest project.

**Lilyana Lipcheva, Head Curator, Learning Museum at Varna History Museum**  
**“Use of So-called Mass Archeological Material in Museum-Educational Programs: A Missed Opportunity.”**

Today, museums face the important challenge of making their exhibitions more attractive to visitors. Digital technologies offer the opportunity for the easy and convenient documenting, archiving and preserving of cultural documents from the past and present, but also present new forms for interactive cultural experiences, especially for the younger audience.

In 2016 the **CHES** project (Cultural-Heritage Experiences through Socio-personal Interactions and Storytelling), which was supported by the EC, was completed. Mobile devices with added reality and geo-localized technologies turned an ordinary walk through the museum into a personalized interactive experience. The entrance of new technologies into museums is an irreversible and constantly developing process, but it also presents museums with new challenges. Museum expositions and exhibits ever more often include “non-objects” – models, reproductions, audio-visual technologies, interactive computer platforms, video recordings, television shots, etc.

How can the balance be preserved between the use of digital technologies which offer a momentary spectacle and the authenticity of museum artifacts? To “run away” from the virtual and to perceive the real with your senses will perhaps be the biggest challenge for museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Exhibits in contemporary museums cannot give up these “non-objects,” but museum educational programs can “break up” those virtual worlds by offering unmediated contact with the authentic through the use of so-called mass material.

The Republic of Bulgaria’s law on cultural heritage gives a formulation of the term “mass archeological material” – on the one hand, it defines it as having cultural value, but on the other hand it is not subject to identification under the system established by the law. Still “it could be included in museums’ scientific-auxiliary collections, if necessary.” The words “could” and “if necessary” leave open the question of its fate.

Bulgarian museums are full of moveable archeological artifacts and a very small portion of them are exhibited in museum display cases. The majority of them disappear into depots (warehouses) unsuitable and unfit for such purposes.

What happens then to this so-called mass material? Must it be kept after scientific processing and can it be discarded to free up space in museum’s storage spaces? What is the most commonly found type of mass archeological material? Could it be put to use in museum education programs? Could we impress visitors with it? What is its educational and emotional value? This paper focuses mainly on the possibility of how such mass archeological material could be utilized in museum educational programs for children, providing examples of such usage.

## **Panel 2: “The Future of Digital Expositions and Mobile Applications for Stimulating Cultural Tourism.”**

**Kristen Jones and Dr. George Bevan, Queen’s University/Balkan Heritage Foundation  
“From Field to Virtual Museum: Methods and Examples of Object- and Site-Level Recording Using Computational Photography”**

Virtual museums offer distinct advantages in promoting the cultural heritage of the Balkans. By obviating physical displays, they have relatively low overhead and can be accessed anywhere, and at any time online. Computational photography techniques such as Object VR and Photogrammetry offer several advantages for generating 3D assets for museums. These techniques are low cost, and are scale independent, i.e. the same equipment and software can be used at the object and site-scales. In addition, these techniques build on existing photographic workflows in archaeology and museum conservation, and are therefore sustainable in the long-run. The Balkan Heritage Foundation has undertaken extensive trials of various computational photographic methods over the last four years. The results from Stobi in Macedonia and Pistiros in Bulgaria show that these methods are extremely effective. Much work, however, remains on the development of robust online platforms for the presentation of 3D data.

**Ilian Uzunov, Ontotext  
“Linked Open Data for Cultural Heritage Institutions: Build Narratives through Connecting Artifacts”**

Throughout the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) sector, there is an issue with complex and varied data. Integrating such data, especially across institutions, is an industry pain point, posing a major challenge. We believe the answer lies in the semantic technologies and linked data, which can solve the complex integration problems of cultural heritage institutions digital transformation journey.

Among the benefits cultural institutions can get from implementing semantic technology driven approaches are:

- Giving access to institutional collections and other data to allow interlinking.
- Using established and interlinked thesauri and references in daily collection maintenance, cataloging, documentation and research.
- Connecting data models and using resources like Wikidata to solve complex issues in cultural heritage.
- Providing cross-collection search, finding links between natural objects of display and artifacts, building narratives, analyzing data and supporting scientific discourses.

These and many issues are faced by scholars, book researchers, museum directors who try to find the underlying connection among varied information sources. Scholars, in particular, continuously emphasize the role of digital humanities and the value of linked data in cultural heritage information systems.

**Dr. Georgia Gene Berryhill, University of Maryland/Fulbright Scholar**  
**“Cultural Preservation and Exhibition Using Digitized Image and Cyber-Technologies for Museum and Educational Institution Collections Including Mobile Applications for the General Public.”**

There is a re-creation in process of historical and traditional visual experiences due to new digital imagery technologies for current and future generations. Blending the old and new, exhibitions are geared for professionals but also towards a rapidly growing digital community made up of the general public.

Examples will be presented of my digital photography work covering an AD 925 German Castle restoration with its active digitized exhibit design which projects over faded/damaged frescoes. Also, I worked on a Calit2 HiPerspace virtual reality project with UC San Diego, which involved the digitization, and cataloging of a large collection of Neolithic Jordanian arrowheads with Dr. Tom Levy created for interactive public use.

Additionally, this presentation will show excerpts from Calit2’s current virtual “Wave” image technology and an example from the Getty Museum’s “Living with Art” interactive exhibit involving public integration using computers and mobile devices.

**Dr. Stavri Nikolov, Digital Spaces Living Lab**  
**“New Mobile Apps and Wearable Devices for Museums and Art Galleries”**

A monthly or perhaps even weekly visit to a favourite local museum or art gallery will soon become ordinary for many people, but at the same time, it will become a much more extraordinary experience. Visitors will be able to explore collections and interact with exhibits, constantly learning new things and having fun while doing so. Museums will become more lively, dynamic and changeable places that are loved and frequented by many more. And in the process of this happening, novel mobile apps and wearable devices will play a crucial role. They provide personalized experiences using visitors’ own devices or such designed and made by the museums and art galleries. Interactive content, games and visualizations for devices and apps will still be created primarily by museum experts but ever more often also by visitors for other visitors. Favourite exhibits, routes and personal stories will be crafted by people to share with family, friends and others in these new digital spaces.

In this presentation, recent large-scale validation trials our living lab carried out with several platforms and devices for creating such interactive stories will be shown, including the Digital Loupe (Waag Society, Amsterdam) and Tag Story (Oslo). A European network on designing new wearable devices that will start in 2017 will also be presented in the context of the capabilities Fab Labs and maker spaces around the world and in Bulgaria now offer museums to design and create themselves novel low-cost interactive exhibits and games.

For more information and films see:

1) The Loupe at the National History Museum

<https://vimeo.com/112942734>

2) Tag Story at the National Museum of Natural History: About Biomimicry

<https://vimeo.com/132100441>

**Dr. Svetla Kazalarska, Assistant Professor, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum.**

**"MUSEUM 2.0 AND THE NEW MUSEOLOGY"**

The paper will outline the horizons opened up for the museum institution by the new technological developments, particularly the Internet, and later on by Web 2.0, in view of the principles of the New Museology – democratizing access to museum collections and exhibitions, encouraging the participation of museum audiences in the museum experience and in the creation of museum content, reconsidering the complex power relationships between curators, museum objects and visitors. The presentation will focus not so much on the technological innovations as such, but rather on the conceptual transformations they make possible in the new museum paradigm. Does Museum 2.0 or the “participatory museum”, however, fundamentally transform the principle of Museum 1.0 with its centralized power structure, for although it promotes participation, Museum 2.0 at the same time controls and sanctions it? What new “museum” forms beyond the conventional ones does the “digital turn” foster thanks to the potential for online collaboration, communication and information exchange among the users, offered by Web 2.0 and the new media?

**Panel 3: “Contemporary Tendencies in Museum Exhibition or How to Impress Visitors of All Ages.”**

**Kara Blond, Director of Exhibitions, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of Natural History**

**"Imagining the Future of Museum Exhibitions"**

Over the past century, science and cultural museum exhibitions have seen significant shifts in tone and approach – augmenting the tradition of labeled specimens with stories, context and relevance. Yet the core of the visitor experience remains unchanged: audiences expect to feel wonder and curiosity as they marvel at amazing objects collected from around the world. That dynamic tension between celebrating iconic objects and giving them relevance is at the heart of imagining the future of museum exhibitions.

We, as an industry, are at a crossroads. We are a 19th century solution reinventing ourselves to address 21st century problems — and relevance to our visitors must become our calling card. As the dual messages of biodiversity conservation and cultural preservation

become ever-more-pressing rallying cries for museums, the content and techniques of exhibits are likely to change to become more obviously relevant to the future of our planet and biodiversity—including us. As our audiences change, becoming younger, more global and more tech-savvy, our thinking about how we present content must also shift toward multi-perspective offerings, more accessible design and the integration of viewpoints from our audiences. As funds become more limited to support exhibitions, our strategies for exhibit development processes, fundraising and partnerships will stretch in new directions as well, becoming more nimble and responsive. And as our audiences' expectations become ever more personal and digitally connected, we must continually reinvent our techniques to meet visitors where they are.

**Vessela Gertcheva, Programs and Exhibits Director, MUZEIKO Children's Museum in Sofia  
"Making Museum Exhibits That Are Interesting for Children"**

Museums are not the institutions they used to be. Besides their research and academic function a social and community role is rapidly emerging. One of the key features of these process is addressing younger public and especially children. Numerous museums worldwide and in Bulgaria have developed special interactive exhibitions and corners and many others have re-worked their entire space to attract and address the needs of children and youth. This session will provide insight in the key principles that make museums interesting for children and young people. It is based on the experience in developing 6 interactive educational corners in traditional Bulgarian museums and the development of Muzeiko, the first in Bulgaria interactive children's center.

**Professor Dr. Nikolay Nenov, Ruse Regional History Museum  
"Oral Histories and Artifacts with Histories – Uses in the Museum Context"**

The sharing of heritage is an important process for society – a process in which the story which effects the transmission turns into a means for understanding the past and the present. As part of contemporary tendencies in museum exhibitions, the emphasis on artifacts with a story focuses on the necessity for museum specialists to seek and discover not only the artifacts, but these stories as well, as part of the overall research process. With the help of such stories, a plot is created which keeps the attention to a greater degree than simply including an object within the topic of the exhibition. Examples from initiatives such as "Our History in 100 Objects" outline the need to bring about a meeting between visual culture and the narratives of history. The topic of oral histories is presented through examples from a specific research study in Bulgaria – as a result of this study and the publication of the oral histories, an exhibit, a catalogue of the exhibit, a museum educational module, an anthology with oral histories, and a website ([www.pametta.com](http://www.pametta.com)) were created. Built on anthropological principles, the exhibit showed themes from the oral histories gathered, which are accessible online, as well as in the anthology. This study brings the whole of museum work into focus – since through field work the stories were gathered, from which followed the research work, the exhibition, meetings

with publics, an educational module for youngsters – everything a contemporary museum does in order to share heritage and to establish itself as media and a place for memory.

**Dr. Todor Petev, My Museum Foundation**

**“Participatory Museum – Strategies for Engagement of Different Publics with Museum Exhibits.”**

From the inclusion of communities in the governance policies in cultural heritage to techniques for engagement of audiences’ “participation” has strategic importance for the mission and work standards of museums and other institutions of cultural heritage. What is meant by “active participation” of the museum publics? What is the relation of that notion to “interactivity” and “social interaction”? And to contemporary approaches in “active learning” at schools and in informal settings? Using a range of examples from the US and Europe, we will try to clarify the key place of that notion in the understanding of museum experience of the public. Following the conclusions of a few international studies, we will define main approaches in engagement of different publics with museum exhibits.

**Ekaterina Djoumalieva, State Expert, Ministry of Culture; Dep. Chairwoman of ICOM**  
**“Temporary Museum Exhibits – Present and Future”**

Bulgarian museums and art galleries face a series of challenges in negotiating and organizing exhibits in their existing exposition spaces. The encounter difficulties related to the lack of sufficient space for temporary exhibits and so that larger exhibition projects can be invited. The often create exhibits with artifacts that are part of the museums’ permanent exhibitions and far more rarely include objects that are stored in their storage facilities due to a lack of funds for conservation and restoration. Some museums do not have the necessary conditions to present exhibits which demand specific lighting, temperature and humidity. They lack modern display cases for temporary exhibits, while rarely do we find suitable scenography, thematic educational program, use of digital applications and innovations. What portion of standards for museum exhibitions are being applied in Bulgaria? The presentation will include the basic strong and weak sides of temporary exhibitions in Bulgarian museums, as well as the priorities of the Ministry of Culture in that sphere, giving examples of potential opportunities and new tendencies.

**Dr. Adam Nilsen, Head of Education and Interpretation Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, UC Berkeley**  
**“Human Exhibits for Human Visitors”**

When developing exhibits and interpreting cultural heritage sites, it is easy to lose sight of the real human beings associated with the histories we tell. Yet these stories of people’s lived experience are crucial to getting visitors interested in and excited about a topic. In this talk, Dr. Adam Nilsen discusses how visitors relate to the people whose lives are represented in

exhibits. For instance, what happens in those moments when visitors step out of their own shoes in order to understand what it would be like to be another person? What happens when they see a photograph of a real person who lived during a historical event? Dr. Nilsen has conducted extensive psychological research on questions such as these and will stimulate a discussion on ways in which museum professionals can use this research to create engaging, memorable, people-focused exhibits that maximize curiosity and learning.