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## EDUCATION IN THE MUSEUM: BETWEEN THE THEORY AND EXPERIENCE OF CRACOW SALTWORKS MUSEUM WIELICZKA

### Abstract

Museum education is a quickly developing area in the modern museum sector. A growing need for museum education was also noticed by the International Council of Museums. More and more conferences and meetings are devoted to the issue of professional education in museums. Thanks to the fact that the cultural institution turns towards the visitor, the need for professional and attractive activities presenting the knowledge hidden in the collections is also growing. Such a situation may be observed in the Cracow Saltworks Museum Wieliczka.

Educational elements have always been incorporated in museums. Collecting various artefacts was not only aimed at protecting them, but also at expanding human knowledge on various subjects. Initially, not everybody had access to the accumulated collections and knowledge, yet along with social changes, access to culture and science improved. A breakthrough took place at the end of the 18th century, when the museums became commonly accessible institutions for all citizens. Thanks to the opening of museums for the general public, it was necessary to prepare varied offers, which would facilitate the understanding of the presented knowledge hidden in the collections.

The forerunners of museum education are American scientists from the 1970s. Studies on the process of learning were conducted in the United States, and they became a cornerstone for the prepared educational methods. One of the important specialists from the perspective of museum education is George E. Hein, a forerunner of constructivism: "Constructivism especially befits cultural institutions, as it contributes well to their informal and voluntary character and, in particular, the manner of learning in museums. However, its adjustment to the museum education requires taking several major determinants into account." This concept indicates that each recipient may be different and may learn in a different manner. Thanks to this, in its premises, constructivism allows

for applying various methods of work which will stimulate all of the recipients' senses. Simultaneously, the idea makes references to a broader approach to the museum and the display. Constructivism assumes that the process of education is a deep experience for the senses and not only passive acquisition of knowledge. Therefore, it is very important for the process of preparing display to be thoroughly thought-out so that, in effect, the visitors understand the presented content and the personnel is professionally educated.

Museum education is an area which is specified in precise terms and defined in various documents, both Polish and international. Currently, one of the most accurate definitions is to be found in the Report on the State of Museum Education in Poland, which is as follows: "Education (...) consists in conscious activities aimed at increasing the viewer's competences related to his manner of experiencing a museum exhibit, which may be important for the viewer as a type of life experience, influencing the manner of thinking or beliefs." Nowadays, educational activity is a huge challenge for museums. This is related to the determination of the development path of institutions in a globalised world and specifies the manner in which potential recipients may be reached. Keeping balance between being an institution of culture and being accessible for recipients with varied needs and learning potential may be a problem.

Experiences from the educational activity of Cracow Saltworks Museum Wieliczka show that this is an important role of a museum institution. The extended offer of the Museum is addressed to various recipients. Thanks to this, the specific and quite difficult subject matter related to salt is presented in various forms. The Museum, wishing to excite interest among various visitors, possesses a series of programmes addressed to specific groups of recipients. Alfons Długosz, the first director of Cracow Saltworks Museum Wieliczka, was already aware of the Museum's didactic significance. Therefore, a document of 1965 features a note about the existence of an educational division along with brief characteristics of its activities. Together with expansion of the Museum's activities, social changes and technological progress, the didactic division was transformed into the Education and Promotion Division and in 2013 into an independent Education Division. At the present moment, the institution has an extensive educational offer for various groups of recipients, both in the Saltworks Castle and in the display on the 3rd level of the Salt Mine. Growing attendance shows a huge interest in the subject matter presented by the Museum and testifies to the attractiveness of the prepared offer.

The Cracow Saltworks Museum Wieliczka is a research and scientific unit and an educational facility: it collects, prepares, conserves and makes available the artefacts of material culture in the area of salt industry, remnants of history, geological specimens, collections of works of art related to salt mining and the history of the cities of Wieliczka and Bochnia. The operation of Cracow Saltworks Museum Wieliczka was initiated in 1951 by Alfons Długosz. The Museum is a facility that possesses two greatly differing display spaces: the underground one, located on the third level of the Wieliczka Salt Mine (135 m).

The salt mine was entered in the world heritage list of UNESCO in 1978 and in 1994, it received the status of the Monument of History from the President of the Republic of Poland. On the other hand, on the ground level, the Museum is located in the Saltworks Castle, which is partially open for visitors. Visitors may see the exhibitions in the Central Castle, the donjon, the ruins of the saltworks kitchen and the archaeological reserve with the oldest prospecting shaft. The complex of buildings was entered in the UNESCO list in 2013. Two different museum spaces tell a consistent story, presenting the past and its inhabitants.