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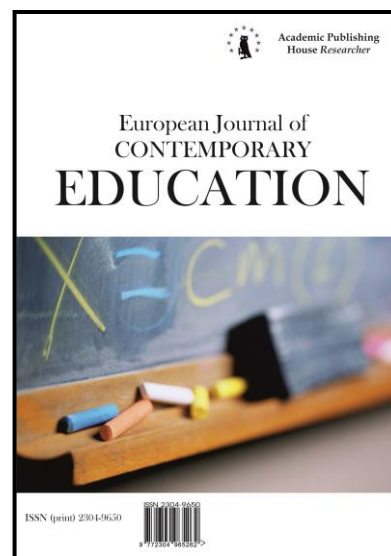
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## Museology as a University Subject in Slovakia: History, Program and Course Design

Pavol Tišliar <sup>a, \*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Comenius University of Bratislava, Slovakia

### Abstract

This paper examines the development of museum studies and museology as a field of scientific inquiry and a university course in Slovakia. First I examine the role of memory institutions in the formation of this field in response to the need for the specialized education of their staff and describe the fundamentals and the development of program and course design and the motivation behind them. I then analyze the current program and course offerings in the field of museology at various institutions in Slovakia and the differences between them, concluding with a number of proposals for improvement and providing a brief forecast for the future development of the field.

**Keywords:** Slovakia, museum studies, cultural heritage, university program and course design, memory institutions.

### 1 Introduction

#### 1. *Prehistory of museum studies in Slovakia*

Owing to their small scale and largely non-professional nature, for a majority of their existence, memory institutions in Slovakia felt no need to either hire professionally trained staff or provide specialized education to their existing staff. This changed with the formation of Czechoslovakia when Slovakia, formerly a part of the Kingdom of Hungary, began a significant transformation of its administration which included a reorganization of the new nation's archives, libraries and museums.

In Slovakia, museums have developed in a unique and idiosyncratic manner which was tied to the social and cultural needs of the region or population segment in question and as such, it often played an important role in the nation's politics. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when museums were often involved in the cultural and ethnic politics of the country and its ruling ethnic group, the idea of creating a national or ethnic museum found much support among the Slovak political

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\* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: [pavol.tisliar@uniba.sk](mailto:pavol.tisliar@uniba.sk) (P. Tišliar)

leadership primarily as a declaration of opposition to the Hungarian majority's official cultural and political aims.

Those aims, however, did not translate to a large-scale creation of memory institutions in Hungary or even any wide support. The cultural landscape of Hungary was therefore dotted with small museums managed by dedicated societies and created for the specific purpose of maintaining their collections. As such, they were financed through membership fees or collections and staffed with volunteers and non-professionals. Even after the formation of Czechoslovakia, most museums continued to be volunteer-run and volunteer-financed and consequently, the demand for professionals in the field of museum studies continued to be low and so did the need for specialized education of persons working or preparing to work in that field. In contrast, other memory institutions such as archives and libraries, which also underwent a significant reorganization after the formation of Czechoslovakia, could draw on the talent provided by the State Archivist School (Státní archivní škola) and the State Librarian School (Státní škola knihovnická) (Tišliar, 2013). These were founded in Prague in 1919 and 1920, respectively, and their first graduation classes included a number of Slovaks. The creation of these educational institutions also provided the first impetus towards the professionalization of these types of memory institutions. For museums, however, no comparable institutions existed and would not for a long time. In Slovakia, the only institution which provided education related to museum studies was the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University in Bratislava which offered an Art History program starting in 1923.

### *1.2. The birth of museum studies in Slovakia*

In early 1950s, the museum landscape of Slovakia began to undergo fundamental changes not only with regard to its organization and other practical matters (transfer to state ownership, new legislative frameworks, etc.), but also with regard to its professionalization. In 1947, the Slovak Union of Librarians (Zváz slovenských knihovníkov) petitioned the State Superintendent of Archives and Libraries, Branislav Varsik, to initiate the creation of a school for the education of “archivists, librarians and even museum curators”, since they were confronted with a lack of adequately trained professionals (Tišliar, 2016; Fircáková, 2016; Tvrdoňová, 2016). However, Varsik responded arguing that there wasn't a wide interest in such a school in Slovakia and if there indeed existed such a need, it was adequately covered by specialized institutions in Prague, easily accessible – so Varsik – to anyone from Slovakia (Tišliar, 2013). Despite his attitude, two new specializations – Archival Studies and Library Studies – were introduced to the 1951 study offerings of the Faculty of Arts at the Comenius University. Museum Studies or Museology, however, could not be offered as a program of study, largely due to the complexity of the subject and a lack of a broad theoretical basis. Museology was thus taught only as a part of the Ethnology and Archeology study programs at the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University, with the first students enrolling in the lectures and seminars in 1951 (Mlynka, 1997; Mlynka, 1999).

1960s saw the first attempts at providing museology with a solid theoretical basis worthy of an independent scholarly discipline. These were directly inspired by the developments in Czech museum studies where at that period, two schools emerged: the Prague School of Museology (1967–1982) lead by Josef Beneš, Jiří Neústupný and Jiří Špét and the Brno School of Museology (1962 and onwards) which is associated with the recently deceased Zbyněk Z. Stránský (Mlynka, 1999). The latter played a fundamental role in the education and development of the Slovak museum profession, as many of its members studied at the graduate school of museology in Brno (Mlynka, 2006). The Brno university also contributed to the growth of museum studies in Central Europe by hosting the Museology Summer School, the 8<sup>th</sup> of which, taking place in 1994, was dedicated to exploring museology as a university subject (Mlynka, 1999).

In addition to the opportunities offered to Slovak students by the Brno graduate school of museology, there were other options available in Prague in the form of a distance course of study in “applied art and museology” (Tišliar, 2016). The National Museum in Prague established, in cooperation with the Museum of Decorative Art and the Department of Art History and Esthetics, a Center of Museology Education which offered a four-semester graduate-level course for employees of museums and similar institutions focusing on decorative art, architecture, interior design, material culture and alike. Approximately a fourth of the lectures was devoted to general museology where in addition to cultural policy, the topics discussed included museum organization, the role of museums in science and research as well museum presentation and

interaction with the public. In terms of museology as an academic discipline, much attention was devoted to collecting, collection management, conservation, presentation and publication of documentation related to collection items. As with any graduate program, acceptance to this one assumed the completion of an undergraduate program in a related field.

As noted above, Slovak museology was in effect created at the university in Brno (currently Masaryk University, previously University of Jan Evangelista Purkyně), where until 1992, most of Slovak museum professionals got their education in the field. The Brno graduate school of museology was a part of the Department of Archeology and Museology and offered a distance course of study aimed primarily at employees of museums and other memory institutions which focused on theoretical and applied museology (Prelovská, Gogová, 2003). With the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1992, the Brno graduate program became much less accessible Slovak students. This provided an impetus for the introduction of museology study programs at Slovak universities which, in turn, necessitated the creation of a solid theoretical and practical foundation for museology as both a scientific discipline and a profession.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1 Institutional and theoretical foundations of museology as a university program in Slovakia

Designing a new university program requires not only detailed knowledge of the society's demand for specialized education in the relevant field, but also an intimate knowledge of the current state of the development of the institutional foundations of the future application of the program. The needs of applied museology and the memory institutions where it is practiced are still closely tied to their perception by the general public which creates a certain natural pressure on the universities to ensure that the field of study be not only theoretically sound, but also that it ensure the practical application of the knowledge and skills the students acquire during their studies. Museology is thus somewhat unique among humanities in that it requires a synergy between the theoretician and the practitioner and this must be taken into account when designing any university-level course in the subject. As such, the foundations of museology as an academic discipline, a profession and a university program must be grounded in: a) deep theoretical knowledge, b) an intimate familiarity with Slovak museum landscape, its history, its current state, its legal framework, its role in Slovak society and especially their relationship to other memory institutions and c) archival research which in the Slovak context provides solid foundations for all of the above.

## 3. Discussion

### 3.1 Museum studies and museology in present-day Slovakia

In the academic year 1993/1994, the first dedicated university-level program in the field of museology opened at the Department of History of the Faculty of Humanities (today's Faculty of Arts) of the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. This BA program, offered as a distance learning study module, was designed "*for high-school graduates working in museums, galleries and other similar state and local government institutions with the intent of imparting on them fundamental theoretical and methodological knowledge regarding various approaches to tangible cultural heritage, the genesis of its forms, up until the current trends*" (Tišliar, 2016). The program included courses on ethnology and ethno-museology, culture and cultural heritage in general which were supplemented by course in history and archival studies. Graduates of this program had the opportunity to join the graduate school which was and continues to be to this days also a part of the Department of History of the Faculty of Arts.

At the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University, the first course in museology was offered in the 1993/1994 academic year as a six-semester distance BA program at the Department of Archeology (Mlynka, 1997). This program was modelled after the programs at the Brno graduate school of museology and, much as its model, it was aimed at museum professionals who had already obtained their university education. The program was centered around courses in archeology (taught by P. Valachovič), ethnology (L. Mlynka), natural sciences (I. Okáli) and various courses on theoretical and applied museology and practical matters taught by a number of members of the staff of the Slovak National Museum – Museum Information Center led by A. Habovštiak.

Starting in the 1996/1997 academic year, various changes were introduced to this program: first, it was transferred to the auspices of the Department of Ethnology (today's Department of Ethnology and Museology). Second, the Department recruited a number of staff from the Slovak National Museum and the National Center for Monuments and Traditions (today's Monuments Board of the Slovak Republic). In terms of organization, the BA program continued to be implemented as a distance course of study, but with a significantly updated curriculum, compiled by Ladislav Mlynka and Marianna Šáškyová with Ján Michálek acting as the main accreditation sponsor (Mlynka, 1999). This program was intended as a post-tertiary course aimed at those museum professionals who had already obtained their university education and who were employed by museums, but also conservation agencies and various state and local government institutions with responsibilities related to cultural heritage and memory preservation. As a distance course of study, the program was taught in monthly two-day blocks and focused on applied museology as well as monument studies, i.e. the preservation of and care for intangible cultural heritage. The courses taught sought to impart both theoretical and methodological knowledge and skills in the fields of museum management, museology and preservation of cultural heritage with planned additional courses on broader subjects such as library science, art theory and archival studies which, however, were ultimately not offered due to personnel issues. In addition to the primary focus, the program also included courses on fundamentals of applied cultural heritage protection (art history, culture studies cataloguing, documentation, conversation, collection management etc.). The program, however, failed to attract many students: its main target, i.e. museum professionals with university degrees, could not use it for career growth and so their only motivation was their interest in expanding their knowledge of the field under the guidance of seasoned professionals. Applicants with secondary degrees for whom the successful completion of the program would mean a promotion or a higher pay grade, could not enroll in the program.

Even the first drafts of the BA program as a distance course envisioned its transformation into a full-time double-major MA study program. Ladislav Mlynka planned for this transformation to take place in the academic year 1999/2000 by which "we would succeed in providing institutions working in the field of the protection of cultural heritage with specialists, proper museologists, with deep theoretical and methodological knowledge and a full set of versatile skills and experience" (Mlynka, 1999). Ultimately, however, no MA program was introduced while the BA program continued as originally designed. In the academic year 2006/2007, the BA program was transformed into a full-time university-level BA program in museology and cultural heritage aimed at – as is practice in Slovakia – high-school graduates (Mlynka, 2006). The MA program in museology at the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University was accredited in 2012 and first courses were offered in the academic year 2012/2013. This brought with itself some changes to the BA program as well: the BA program shifted its focus to applied disciplines such as history and its auxiliary sciences while the MA program concentrated on matters related to ethnology and material culture. In terms of museum studies and monument studies, this meant the inclusion of courses on protection and management of cultural heritage, specialized museology and management as well as marketing of cultural institutions (Dolák, 2013; Dolák, 2016; Ananiev, 2016). Graduates of the MA program can thus find employment as curators of historical and ethnographic collections (Kačírek, Tišliar, 2012). At the moment, further expansion of the program is being planned by turning it into a double major. The full accreditation has been awarded to the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University in Bratislava by the Ministry of Education for the double-major programs in ethnology and museology, history and museology and library and information science and museology. These programs are designed to provide their graduates with the knowledge and skills that go outside of the scope of museology proper, but are desirable for those intending to work as museum curators in one capacity or another (Pavlikánová, 2015).

The third institution in Slovakia that currently offers course on museology is the Faculty of Arts of the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (FiF UKF), starting in the academic year 1995/1996. The program was initially offered by the Department of Archeology as a minor for students majoring in history, but starting in the academic year 1999/2000, FiF UKF began to offer a 5-year long-distance course on museology as a double major with history. In the next academic year, the university's museology portfolio was expanded by a single-major full-time program and a distance program (Lalkovič, 2006) and starting in 2006, all these programs are offered under the auspices of the new Department of Museology. The core of these programs at the BA level



comprises an introduction to museum studies, a museum management course and a course on marketing of cultural regions of Slovakia, while specialized courses focusing on individual aspects of museology (such as selection and collection, museum presentation, legal framework or museum types) are offered as selectives which also included courses on the history of Slovakia and its regions. The final examinations are compiled using material from the following areas: Collection Creation and Management, History of Museums and Artifact Preservation and Cultural Habitus of the European Civilization (Tišliar, 2016). In general terms, the study of museology in Nitra focuses strongly on archeology which is also reflected in the composition of its faculty.

The Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (UMB), founded in 1992, established in 1998 a Department of Ecomuseology as a part of the Faculty of Natural Sciences. The Department, headquartered in Banská Štiavnica and headed by Z.Z. Stránský, focused on ecology and environmental education and offered a number of programs starting in the academic year 1998/1999. A full-time ecology MA course with an ecomuseology specialization was aimed at high-school graduates who intended to pursue careers in museums, while a BA distance ecomuseology program with a museum conservation specialization was aimed at those museum professionals who had already obtained university education and worked as conservators. The core of the BA program imparted theoretical knowledge of the fundamentals of ecomuseology and the scientific principles of museum conservation, as well as practical conservation skills in all types of material areas, including restoration and taxidermy. The distance study program in ecomuseology was aimed at those working in museums and other memory institutions who had already obtained university education in a related field, but wished to specialize in museology. The core of the program comprised the fundamentals of general museology with a focus on current issues in environmental protection, as Z.Z. Stránský intended the program to enable museums to contribute to the solution of humanity's current cultural and environmental crisis as in his understanding, the future of museology lay in environmental protection and conservation (Stránský, 1999a; Okáli, 1998; Stránský, 1999b). Starting in the academic year 2005/2006 when a new round of university program accreditations took effect, the UMB Department of Ecomuseology began to offer new BA and MA programs with a specialization in environmental management of museum institutions (Lalkovič, 2006). In September 2007, the Department was fused with the Department of Environmental Studies and Environmental Education to form a new Department of Environmental Management. The department continues exist to this day, albeit with another name (Department of Environment), and its five core concentrations include the management of preservation, restoration and use of natural, cultural and social heritage (Zelený, 2008).

The Department of Mediamatics and Cultural Heritage at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Žilina is another institution of higher learning which offers courses related to museology. The department (which was split out of the Department of Library and Information Science originally formed in 2004 at the Faculty of Natural Sciences when the Faculty of Humanities was founded in 2010) continues its original fully accredited focus while also working in the fields of digitation and digital humanities. It offers both full-time and distance programs in mediamatics and cultural heritage at BA and MA levels, where students in the former can opt for concentrations in cultural heritage, media management and information technology while MA programs include courses on cultural heritage, visual communication, information management and new media. The department also offers a PhD program focusing on the intersection of cultural heritage and technology, such as digitation, digital archiving, digital humanities, collaborative methods in information and knowledge management and the confrontation of new media with old information sources (Tišliar, 2016; Menkouski et al., 2016).

And finally, museology as a university subject has a long tradition at the Faculty of Natural Sciences of the Comenius University in Bratislava starting with a specialized course taught by a veteran leading member of the Natural Museum of the Slovak National Museum (NM – SNM) Ilja Okáli. This practically-focused course was intended to provide the students with the skills necessary for the work with various types of collections housed at natural science museums. Starting in the academic year 2009/2010, the Systematic Biology / Systematic Biology and Environmental Studies and the Zoology and Anthropology study programs began to offer a selective course on the foundations of museology to freshmen and sophomore students lead by K. Hensel (Biology program) and by J. Kautman of NM – SNM and K. Hensel (Zoology and Anthropology program) (Kačírek & Tišliar, 2012).

#### 4. Results

As we've shown above, even after the last round of accreditations in 2014, the only universities that offer fully accredited museology programs are those in Banská Bystrica (distance BA program only), Nitra (full-time and distance, BA as well as MA programs) and in Bratislava. Those are the only programs satisfy all the conditions of the definition of the Museology study program 2.1.24 pursuant to the complete guidelines for the accreditation of university study programs in Slovakia. These define museology as a sub-branch of history which is motivated by the general need to improve the protection of cultural heritage in museums, galleries and institutions tasked with the protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage; as such, its closest sibling disciplines include ethnology, history, art theory, art history and culture studies (Tišliar, 2016). In formal terms, programs in museology define two types of museum professionals:

Level 1 (equivalent to BA): a practitioner in the field of cultural heritage protection

Level 2 (equivalent to MA): an experienced practitioner in the field of cultural heritage protection

A level 1 museum professional is described as having a basic knowledge of the field of cultural heritage protection, i.e. theoretical and specialized museology, with a focus on applied museum studies, i.e. documentation, presentation and protection. A level 2 museum professional should by the end of their studies acquire a thorough knowledge of museum studies and cultural heritage protection with a focus on theoretical and specialized museology, ethnology and social history. These guidelines adopted by the Slovak Ministry of Education also defined a specific common core which is to make up 3/5 (60 %) of all accredited museology programs in Slovakia while the remaining 40 % should reflect the specialization of the institution offering the course (Kačírek, Tišliar, 2012).

One of the primary challenges facing museology as a university subject is the lack of sufficiently qualified personnel. The older generation and the middle generation of those currently teaching museology have obtained their advanced degrees in related fields (history, archeology, archival studies, ethnology, library science, art history, natural sciences and alike) while only some have practical experience with museums or galleries or have attended the distance courses offered by the Brno university. The future of the field, however, must be built on those with PhDs in the field and at the moment, those cannot be obtained in Slovakia. Those wishing to specialize in museology and go on to teach it must therefore enroll in PhD programs in related disciplines such as history, archeology and ethnology which offers some types of concentration on museum studies and protection of cultural heritage. The same is true of associated and full professorships which in Slovakia require a process similar to obtaining a PhD.

As graduates of accredited museology programs generally go on to find employment in museums and galleries as curators, museum education experts or cataloguers, it is crucial that their education provide them with practical skills – in fact, in questionnaires asking students for their feedback, the necessity of cooperation between the universities and memory institutions is one of the top priorities. Such cooperation shouldn't rely on visiting lecturers only, but should also involve joint projects in which students would be involved during their studies and which would lay foundations for their future work in the field. The adoption of a proposal put forward by the Directorate of the Slovak National Museum which would establish positions of assistant curators staffed by students of the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University as set forth in the 2015 contract between the two institutions would be a major stride in that direction (Díte, 2016).

#### 5. Conclusion

The job prospects of museology graduates in Slovakia would be best served by the creation of a double major with another memory- and sources-focused discipline. The Ministry of Education has currently issued the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University a license and the first such program will be offered in 2018. This will bring Slovak museology in line with that in the Czech Republic where such programs have become the norm (Brno, Opava) while in Slovakia, accredited museology programs are single majors only, each with a specific focus: in Banská Bystrica, the program specializes in the curation of historical collections; in Bratislava, the focus is on the curation of historical and ethnographic collections and the Nitra program concentrates on museum and gallery education and archeology.

As experience from the failed experiments with supplementary distance education in Brno and Bratislava have shown, such programs are unattractive to applicants and ultimately pointless: those with university degrees who have already found work in museums have little incentive to continue their education in the museology as it is neither appreciated, nor reflected in their career development. This sad state of affairs is the direct responsibility of the management of memory institutions and until they take steps to improve it, it falls on the public universities to ensure that those who intent to work in museums, galleries and other similar institutions are well equipped for this task.

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