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Mendelovo muzeum
Augustiniánské opatství na Starém Brně
Mendlovo náměstí 1a, 603 00 Brno
e-mail: info@mendelmuseum.muni.cz
www.mendelmuseum.muni.cz/



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A. A. Sundieva

The Museum World of Russia: Substantiating the Concept

abstrakt | abstract ▷

Tento článek se snaží objasnit koncept „muzejního světa“, představuje argumenty pro zavedení této nové kategorie. Rozvoj muzejního světa již prodělal několik fází, které se shodovaly s fázemi zrodu muzea jako kulturní formy. Jednou z linií rozvoje je rozšíření rozměru muzejního světa protnutím a interakcí s dalšími mimomuzejními kulturními praktikami. Zavedení konceptu „muzejního světa“ nám umožňuje analyzovat a popsat historii muzeí a muzejní praxi v Rusku a zároveň klást důraz na historický a kulturní kontext a instituce související s muzeem, a umožňuje nám identifikovat nový směr výzkumu.

This article attempts to clarify the concept of “museum world”, argues the case for the introduction of this new category. The development of the museum world has passed several stages, which coincided with the stages of the genesis of the museum as a cultural form. One of the lines of development is broadening of the extent of the museum world through the intersection and interaction with other out-of-museum cultural practices. The introduction of the concept of “museum world” enables us to analyze and describe the history of museums and museum practices in Russia, emphasizing the historical and cultural context and institutions related to museums, and allows to identify new research directions.

Cand. Sc. (History) A.A. Sundieva
(*1952)

Anneta Alfredovna Sundieva, Associate Professor and the Head of the Chair of Museology at the Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow, is Candidate of historical sciences and member of ICOM. In 2001 Anneta Sundieva was the leader of the team that carried out a 2-volume “Russian Museum Encyclopaedia”. She has numerous publications on the history and theory of museums, she has also participated in the creation of a number of monographs, textbooks and chrestomathies on museology.

In the museological literature of the beginning of the 21st century there is a figurative notion ‘museum world’. It still has not achieved the level of scientific category, but it is becoming common in professional vocabulary. On the one hand, the use of such terms is due to the overall low elaboration level of the language of museology, on the other hand, it reflects the efforts of experts to create categorical apparatus of the Museum science. In the “Dictionary of actualized museum terms”, which was compiled by museologists and published several years ago in the Russian professional magazine “Музей” («Музей»), there was made the first attempt to give a definition to the notion in question. We can read the following in the dictionary: “the museum world is a historically formed cultural space, covering objects of history, culture, nature, which are recognized as valued by society, and therefore are subject to preservation and transmission to the future generations as a socially significant cultural and historical experience. It also includes the totality of people, knowledge, ideas and institutions that serve this purpose.”¹ This paper offers a correction to the definition. Justification of the introduction of a new category and reflection on the possibilities of the use of the term are carried out through the analysis of the mechanisms of formation of the phenomenon in question.

¹ «Музейный мир, исторически сформировавшееся культурное пространство, охватывающее объекты истории, культуры, природы, признанные обществом ценными и потому подлежащие сохранению и передаче будущим поколениям в качестве социально значимого культурно-исторического опыта. Также включает в себя всю совокупность людей, знаний, идей, учреждений, служащих этой цели». Словарь актуальных терминов// Музей. – 2009. - № 5. - С. 56.

The formation and development of the museum world has passed through several stages, which concurred with the stages in the genesis of the Museum as a cultural form². One of the lines of development, which is reflected in the definition, is the expansion of the extent of the museum world through the intersection and interaction with other non-museum cultural practices. As a result of the development of all its constituents, as well as their interaction with museums, the museum world has been becoming more complex simultaneously and continuously. The extent that the museum world has acquired by the beginning of the 20th century has made it necessary to put it in order, which lead to the structuring of its components, as well as the professionalization of museum work, prompted the need for reflection of museum activity.

Let’s have a closer look at the initial period of museum work in Russia. Museological works devoted to the history of Peter the Great’s Kunstkammer³, the first Russian museum, formed some kind of illusion of its exclusivity and solitude in the cultural landscape of the country. This illusion has arisen due to the isolation of museological research from other directions of Cultural Studies and due to the domination of the institutional approach to museums. Thus, their history was studied apart from what museums were linked to and interacted

² A so called cultural approach influenced by Cultural Studies offers to see museums, libraries, archives, etc. as ‘cultural forms’.

³ For example: Кабинет Петра Великого. – СПб., 1800; Очерки истории музейного дела в СССР. Вып. 2-7. – М., 1960-1971 (Вып. 2-6 / НИИ музееведения; Вып. 7 / НИИ культуры); Итс Р.Ф. Кунсткамера. - Л., 1989 and others.

with, which as well as museums themselves, was the manifestation and fruit of the culture of the Modern Age. Focusing on the museum as a cultural form and the introduction of the concept of “Museum world” expands the research field of historical museology. It allows to include numerous “proto-museum” bodies dating back to the years around 1700 (for instance, the Armory, which acquired the status of ‘Imperial repository of antiques’ in Peter the Great’s time; monastery sacristies; pharmacy gardens that existed in both capitals, Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and some of which were reorganized into the botanical gardens, etc.). At the same time, the space of the museum world began getting filled with new elements, such as the first civil monuments in Moscow and, later on, the Triumphal Arch in Saint Petersburg. Their erection violated a centuries-old tradition of celebrating memorable events with building a new church. The process of partial secularization of culture turned out to be a mandatory condition for museums to appear in Russia.

The museum world has absorbed the first memorial objects and complexes. In 1723 Peter the Great’s small boat⁴ was transported “for eternal preservation” to Saint Petersburg. That same year the Emperor ordered to erect a protective roofed gallery over the oldest building in Saint Petersburg, which was a small house of Peter the Great built in 1703; today it is the only building remaining from the early days of Saint Petersburg. After the death of the Emperor, his personal belongings, regalia, weapons, tools and collections formed the basis for the establishment of the “Imperial cabinet”, which merged with the Saint Petersburg Kunstkammer in 1729. The tradition of erecting statues and monuments of civil architecture and memorialization of the historical events, which first began in the early 18th century, would be further developed in the 19th century and will be provided with a special impetus in the first third of the 20th century.

We should emphasize that the museum world is not simply a sum of constituent elements, which were gradually being included to it. In a certain way these elements engaged in interaction with each other, gave rise to new forms of cultural behaviour and cultural practices. For example, the images of monuments were reproduced, and they served as a model for others to follow and replicate. The ritual of visiting the Kunstkammer, the Armory

⁴ Seaworthy boat, the national relic, stored in memory of Peter the Great’s navy. Currently stored at the Central Naval Museum in St. Petersburg. См.: Веселого Ф. Ф. Дедушка русского флота, ботик Петра Великого. 1682—1872. СПб., 1872.

and memorial places, was promoting the idea of “eternal preservation”. It was from the times of Peter the Great’s Kunstkammer that museum taxidermy entered the museum world as a new craft, necessary for museums, universities, scientific societies, and collectors.

In the 18th century new cultural forms began to play a prominent role in the cultural life of Russia. These were landscape parks, educational trips, art exhibitions, art market, etc. These forms are not proper to museums, they belong to education, art, economy, private life, but they overlap with the museum practices, they have many points of contact with it. Thus, the formation of the art market has created conditions for the development of collecting. Collecting of the sculptures, for example, is closely linked to the development of landscape art. Private collections (purchased, passed by bequest, and confiscated) served as a source of acquisition of the first museum storages for many decades.

Initially this segment of the cultural space was small, but cultural practices were poorly differentiated, that is why it is difficult to distinguish any specific historical work among them. Secular culture with its new customs, forms of communication and entertainment were in their infancy. The range of people who visited museums and exhibitions at auctions, who travelled, purchased paintings and antiquities and owned private collections were still narrow. Later on, these forms became independent and got their own ways of development. But they always had interaction points with museums, thus forming a cultural space, and there is a reason to name it “museum world”. The foundations of this process were laid in the 18th century.

Rapid growth in number and diversity of museums continued throughout the 19th century⁵. Derived from European culture, the museum turned into a national cultural form, it became an important element in the educational system, science, art and social life of Russia. The concept of “museum world” allows us to identify, understand and describe qualitative changes that took place. The museum world, the space of which is physically expanding due to the emergence of new groups of museum institutions and also museums in the new territories and getting more complicated while interacting with new cultural practices, has emerged as a particular sphere of cultural life of the society. Later on, specialized organizations,

academic societies and art associations appeared to support museum world’s operation and maintenance.

To date, the researchers have only studied thoroughly the history of interaction between museums and the fundamental science. These studies are evidence of long and fruitful interaction between the museum world and the world of science. It is well known that museums contributed greatly to a significant breakthrough of sciences in the 19th century, especially in the field of natural science, they also contributed to the separation of such scientific disciplines as archaeology, anthropology, and ethnography. Many museums played an outstanding role in the promotion and dissemination of scientific knowledge, which significantly enhanced the credibility of museums in society. Science museums of the 19th century came to be the base for creation of a new form of academic institutions in the 20th century – the Research Institutes. In their turn, scientific achievements in the fields of biology, chemistry and physics were taken into account when establishing and improving museum equipment and museum technologies, taxidermy, determining the best storage conditions for various kinds of materials such as paper, fabrics, fur, metal, as well as the principles of organization of collections and methods of their exhibition.

The connection between non-museums and museum exhibition practices a system of industrial, agricultural, scientific and artistic exhibitions in the 19th century in Russia developed, which were playing a prominent role in the economic, social and cultural life of the country. Three scientific expos took place in the 19th century; each of them evoked a wide public response. These were the Ethnographic (1867), the Polytechnic (1872), and Anthropological (1879) expos. They developed broad scientific and educational programmes giving rise to the creation of museums of national importance – the Historical, Polytechnic and Ethnographic (Dashkov) museums in Moscow. A number of national and major regional expos gave birth to new museums.

Major art exhibitions of various associations, personal exhibitions, as well as Pushkin exhibitions organized by the society of lovers of Russian literature in 1880 and 1899, and some others became the integral part of the cultural life of the capital. The development of exhibition activity and revival of the art life was influenced greatly by the work of Association of traveling art exhibits (Peredvizhniki) founded in 1871. All these

⁵ Sundieva A.A. Музей// Очерки русской культуры XIX века. Т.3. Культурный потенциал общества. М., 2001. С. 564 – 625.

exhibition activities formed and developed an interest in the public art life. The works exhibited at expos were purchased by private collectors and owners of art galleries and also by private and municipal museums.

In their turn, museums exhibited their collections, models, mechanisms, devices at all-Russian expos. Their organization and realization forms a new profession – a specialist in exhibition art; there was also a search for new methods of exhibiting of various items, mock-ups, models, and collections. Different forms of exhibition catalogues and other ways to describe the exhibits were developed, and standards of exhibition equipment were elaborated.

As mentioned above, there was quite a close relationship between the museum world and private collecting. In the 19th century the collecting developed significantly and became an independent cultural practice. New forms of work and new areas of collecting (for example, the collection of old Russian icons) sprung up in the field of collecting. Thus, accumulation of private collections created the foundation for appearance of professional restoration.

At the end of the century a large part of the art treasures was kept in private collections. The logic of development of private collections led to the emergence of private museums. Collections, dating back to the 18th century were preserved thanks to its inclusion into the museum collections. Later on many of the largest museums of the country emerged from private collections formed in the 19th century (the Romyantsev Museum, the Tretyakov Gallery, the Paleography Museum n.a. N.P. Likhachev). A tendency to democratization of public life started prevailing in the 1860-1870s.

Common grounds between collecting and museum activities are well known and reflected in Russian museological literature. However a more complex and sophisticated relationship between arts patronage, private collecting, leading trends in art and the new museums is barely revealed. Such things as the emergence of private collections of European importance, the impact of the largest collectors on the art culture and the art tradition, and the role of philanthropy in maintaining the stability of the museum world, are other problems that are still waiting to be researched.

In the 19th century the idea of public museum resulted in a need for special museum buildings, capable to accept audiences and to ensure optimal conditions for the stor-

age of collections. During the 19th and 20th centuries museum architecture came to be a special part of civil architecture and a visible component of the museum world. It was in the 19th century that special buildings were erected for the Polytechnical (1877) and the Historical museums in Moscow (1875-1883); Minusinsk museum in Siberia (1889); the Saratov Art Museum in Volga region (1883-1885); the ethnographic department of the Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg (1902-1913), etc. all the mentioned buildings were erected by famous architects of that time. The history of these architectural projects is well known, but there is a need for museological studies, i.e. positioning of the museum architecture as a new item in the museum world that appeared at the intersection of museum and non-museum practices.

At the turn of the millennium, the museum acquired the status of a *cultural norm*. The indication of that were numerous inaugurations of museums in about 25% of the Russian cities and towns. By the beginning of the 20th century in Russia, according to the data that is still not complete, there had been museums in 104 cities⁶. It is notable that in the country, according to the Russian census of 1897, there were only 2 million cities and 5 major cities (with over 100 thousand inhabitants) – Saratov, Kazan, Rostov-on-Don, Astrakhan, Tula. The number of small towns dominated (with less than 20 000 inhabitants), there were 351 towns (82.6%). Back in 1887 P. V. Alabin, the founder of the Samara and Vyatski museums, wrote: “Nowadays the city with good amenities is impossible to imagine without a public museum”⁷. Museums became an important part of cultural life in Russian cities. Many were open to the public (some free of charge) daily or several times a week. They were regularly visited not only by experts, but also by students, and a few visitors were there even on Sundays.

There was an important evidence of the acquisition of the status of *cultural norm* and of the increasing of public attention towards museums and museum world. It was, firstly, the regular appearance of museum topics on the pages of the non-professional periodicals – both national and local newspapers and magazines; secondly, discussions of museum issues at the meetings of municipal government bodies; and thirdly, the inclusion of Museum

subjects in programs of professional congresses and conferences.

The problem of the formation of museum profession had been ignored in museum studies for quite a long time. Other highly disregarded issues were inside-the-storages work and the development of museum special technologies. In the meanwhile, at the turn of the 20th century, the specifics of museum work were more immediately recognized, which required special skills, knowledge, and training. The growing number of museums and their collections required a large number of museum professionals and raised a number of *professional problems* generated by the need to preserve, as well as recording and studying the collections, developing special techniques of presentation to their visitors.

Thus, by the beginning of the 20th century some specific methods of presentation and interpretation of collections of various specialized groups of museum institutions (art, military, natural science, ethnographic and other museums) had developed. The ways of hanging the paintings in art museums were changing, the scientific restoration was emerging, the latter has become an essential component of the museum world and which is now used not only for preserving, but also for studying cultural monuments. There were supposed to appear people and institutions inside the museum world to ensure professionalisation of museum work.

It is notable that professionalisation was manifested in the *inside-museum* scientific work, the one that is invisible to the ordinary visitor. Back in the 19th century there had been invented a perfect form for museum cabinets and showcases. It was an optimal form for the demonstration of systematic collections, natural sciences in particular. Later, firms specialized in the manufacturing of the museum equipment emerged. By the end of the century the museum professionals had developed the basic elements of museum documentation (register books, the books with visitors’ records, various catalogues, directories, etc.), which are a rich material for today’s researchers as the most important sources of information on museums of the last century and the history of their collections. Museums introduced printed catalogues and guidebooks for the convenience of their visitors. The scientific museum work became more complicated, voluminous and differentiated; the foundations for the future museum occupations were laid.

The accessibility of museums for the population of the country should be considered

to be a major achievement of the culture and the sign of acquisition of the status of a “cultural norm”. Most of local museums were initially created as open to public. The largest imperial museums became open to public in the middle of the 19th century. Museums were able to realise their educational function that had been fully developed by the beginning of the 20th century as a result of widely spread practice of museum tours (the so called “educational walks”). The problem of museum accessibility was solved in practical terms after the revolution of 1917. The most radical steps in structuring and institutionalization of the museum field were made in the meantime.

The creation of the first centralized *state control system of museums and monuments* lasted in Russia from 1918 till 1920. The establishment of a single institution to manage museum work in the country was the embodiment of turning the ideas of museum professionals, who offered them before the revolution, into realization. That met the intrinsic logic of the museum world and did not contradict the goals of the new state. The People’s Commissariat for Education (*Narkompros* in Russian), an institution that was created by the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic⁸. It was attended by many artists, museum workers, critics, artists (I.E. Grabar, P.P. Muratov, N.G. Mashkovtsev, V.A. Gorodtsov, etc.). There were departments for supervision of museum work within Narkompros of RSFSR. The control system of museums was developing for many decades after that towards further centralization⁹.

In the meanwhile, for the first time in Russia there was drafted *legislation on museum management and preservation of monuments*, aimed at the transformation of cultural values in the public domain, their registration, protection and use. Legislation providing legal protection of relics and it created a legal basis for the nationalization, which was perceived as a solid guarantee for preservation of items of cultural value and recognition of exceptional value of a monument or a collection by the state.

The awareness of the new challenges facing these museums with the onset of the 20th century, as well as the need for sound management of museum work, which was unprecedented in scope after 1917, caused the need for *museology*, as a theoretical understanding

of the museum work for that time. The Provisional Congress of Museum Leaders held in 1912, and then the all-Russian Museum Conference of 1919 clearly showed the level of that kind of reflection. At the beginning of the century there were also the first attempts at organization of *museum education* in the country. Specialized museological institutions have not appeared yet in the early 20th century, that is why other opportunities and other institutions that were part of the museum world were used. The first training course on museology was held in the 1900s by S.K. Kuznetsov in the Moscow Archaeological Institute, before other institutions started paying attention to museological issues. After the October revolution, museology was taught at courses held by Glavnauki¹⁰ (1919) and in some Moscow higher educational establishments: the Moscow State University (1919-1924, by G. Malitsky); a postgraduate school of the Museum of the revolution was opened in the Valery Briusov literary-artistic Institute (1932).

So, the process of the formation of the museum world, the inclusion of people, institutions, organizations, specializing in the museum field, that took place throughout the 18th and 19th centuries and the emergence of museology and the formation of a professional community in the first third of the century was a culmination of it.

Thus, based on the foregoing, we can propose the following definition of the term “museum world”: *Museum world is a cultural space, formed historically at the intersection of different ways of learning styles and understanding of the world of science, art, religion, and economy. It includes objects of history, culture, nature, recognized by the society as valuable; cultural practices, ideas, and institutions that perpetuate these objects and transfer to future generations as a socially significant historical and cultural experiences; all the conditions and features of the museum work, as well as the lessons learned about it.*

The notion “Museum world” correlates with the terms “museality”, “museal space”, used in several European languages but interpreted ambiguously.

In the recently published edition of the *Key Concepts of Museology* we can see several definitions of the term “museality” that exist in the European languages¹¹. In French, “museal” is used as an adjective of the word

“museum”, and as a noun. In English it is applied to define the scope, covering more than the classical notion of “museum”. “Museum space” is understood as an area of reflection on the museum as organisation, its activities and problems.

In the meanwhile, the concept of “museality” introduced by the Czech museologist Z. Stransky, means “a specific attitude to the reality” that gave birth to museums. In my opinion, an active use of the term in the contemporary museological literature, caused by the urge to overcome the institutional approach in museology and unanimous desire of all the museologists to expand the research field of the Museum science, or not to limit it to the museum.

The introduction of the concept of “museum world” meets the same trend. But, since it was born as a category of historical museology, it reflects the idea of the museum as a cultural form and its genesis as a result of centuries of “competition” with numerous proto-museum bodies¹². The concept of “museum world” characterizes not only virtual, but real (or existed at a certain historical stage) space in which museums, museum-like institutions, heritage sites, museums, cultural practices and others interact.

To sum up, it is worth emphasizing once again that the formation of the *museum world* and development of the museum as a *cultural form* are interrelated and interdependent processes. The introduction of the concept of “museum world” enables us to analyze and describe the history of museums and museum practices in Russia, emphasizing the historical and cultural context and the importance of the institutions linked to museums. It also expands the study field of historical research to identify new research directions. In real life, all the elements of the museum world, which are interconnected with each other, provide the stability for museums and collections. ■

Klíčová slova:

museum world, museum, cultural form, museology, cultural norm, non-museum exhibitions, collecting, museum work

Keywords:

muzejní svět, muzeum, kulturní forma, muzeologie, kulturní norma, nemuzejní expozice, sběratelství, muzejní práce

⁶ Ежегодник внешнего образования. Вып.2. СПб., 1904. - С.415.

⁷ «... В наше время благоустроенный город без Публичного музея как бы немислим...», Алабин П.В. Трехвековая годовщина г. Самары.- Самара, 1887. - С.162. О П.В. Алабине см.: Музееведческая мысль в России XVIII – XX веков: Сборник документов и материалов. – М.: Этерна, 2010.

⁸ In Russian Наркомпрос is an acronym for Народный комиссариат просвещения (The People’s Commissariat for Education) – the public authority which controlled education, science, museums and preservation of monuments in the 1920s and 1930s.

⁹ Музей и власть. Государственная политика в области музейного дела (XVIII – XX вв). Ч. 1-2. М., 1991.

¹¹ «Key Concepts of Museology» was first published in 4 languages for the General Assembly of ICOM in 2010, translated into Russian in 2012.

¹² Glavnauka is a Russian acronym for a General Directorate of academic, scientific, art and museum institutions existed within the Narkompros from 1922 until September 1933.

¹³ Сундиева А.А. Протомузейные формы в российской культуре// Обсерватория культуры. - 2005. - № 3. - С.74-77.