

**UNDERSTANDING DIDACTIC TEXT FOR A BETTER
STANDATISATION (CASE STUDY: ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MUSEUM OF APOLLONIA)**

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Abstract

The exhibition is the first tool of communication into a museum and in the same time with the public. So a museum can transmit its message by using their objects, in this way they create the discourse. The main scope of this paper will be focused in clarify the museum standards and practices in the archaeological museum of *Apolonia* situated in *Fieri* district (Albania). The reflective paper will survey and study this museum in the didactic panels and their explanatory possibilities as well as the relationship with different tourist inside the museum. Our historic heritage made our museum open for the society but not evolving in contemporary museum studies and this is reflected in today's museum model. To understand better the didactic panel will be given quantitative information made in site which reflects new point or directions for implementing better standards.

Key words: Apollonia museum, didactic text, objects, display, exhibition.

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Introduction

Albanian heritage has becoming an interesting place to visit. Apart others places to admire the archaeological museums are increasing to be interesting places to visit, to attract many visitors as well foreign tourists. This interest can be explained in many directions: studies, pilgrim, and entertainment. Museums preserve and are the well-known places to exhibit heritage, culture and history, so the main scope of museum is being able to satisfy tourist's necessities as well as its audience. The exhibition is the first tool of communication into a museum and in the same time with the public. So, a museum can transmit its message by using their objects, in this way they create the discourse (Falleti&Maggi, 2012) with its audience. The main scope of this paper will be focused in clarify the museum standards and practices which Albanian museums faces. Are our museum standards accomplishing as they should museum code and standard, and what can be improved or adopted from European model? The difficulties can give also a better understanding what museum standards can improve better to accomplish their scope. It's important to highlight since the beginning the role of Albanian museum in its evolving history and its important process in trying to underline its path during the past two decades. The first attempts in collecting the archaeological, ethnographic as history artifacts started in the early 20/th century, but the real impact in raising museum buildings came out after the Second World War. Being a occupation country for about four centuries we couldn't pass the first forms of collections like *Studiolo*, *Kuntskammera*, *Wunckerkammera* so, couldn't be in line with other countries, from this we can deduce to not still have the museum evolving culture due to the historic circumstances. Due to this, we couldn't be involved in the historic changes with *Nouvelle Muséologie* in 1982 (Brizza, 2007). Having only eastern model in understanding the museum practices evolution didn't allow to grow up and approach the real *Museology* or the discipline in museum studies. These difficulties are well reflected in many aspects of museum culture for many decades. As many countries passes from theorizing museum studies into practicing it, and turn it in a real discipline we still suffer from debating it in theoretic approach and not contextualizing into practice. The reflective paper will survey and study the *Apollonia* museum standards in the context of didactic panels' display and their explanatory possibilities as well as the relationship with different tourist inside the museum. This first attempt is also a good possibility to understand what kind of visitors does visit this museum, and also is a first data collector regarding explanatory text panels.

Arguing explanatory panel in *Apollonia* Museum

Museums according to Wittlin (1970), "Museums are not aiming for itself but a tool in the service of humanity", and such their role take a double importance to be on his public service by serving with high rigorously. Museums are considered as places whose testimony undoubtedly belongs to the live cultures and legacies, of which divide us centuries and millennia. For this reason museums can be considered as the gate boundaries between two different realities, namely the world of the unknown, mystic and world curiosity, interest and to explore the unknown inside them. Under this goal are raised up the museums, as an open book whose pages browsed by moving from one object to another. Such is the museum, whose architectural space expects diversity and different types of visitors who tread and cross the threshold of this cultural institution. .

They are raised precisely for such purpose to be open to anyone who shares the interest and capture the knowledge more and in turn to everyone who goes there for the first time or simply to be considered that at least life once visited a museum. But the museums themselves are not just buildings that expose multiple cultures but also places where must exist an effective communication characterized as essential product on which constructed images, convey information and engage visitors by using traditional textual and visual methods (Goulding, 2000).

Relevance and attention to explanatory texts has always been considered as museum base that has accompanied the journey between the works and objects. Since in 1920, Benjamin Ives Gilman responded that "labels, descriptions in catalogs, museum interpretation explanatory not exceed the importance of the work, but are its servants"(Marani&Pavoni, 2006). Archaeological objects because of their nature, they belong to different cultures and periods, and in this context, not everyone that visits them in an exhibition has enough basic information to understand the objects that lies in front of them and understand the meaning or usage of the historical past. Since the genesis of its creation, the Apollonia museum is designed to be raised above itself archaeological park ruins of Apollonia park, a concept that occurs during the first French archaeologist mission directed by Leon Rey in 1926, to be adopted as a museum in situ. This museum in the history of its activity has seen several conceptual changes, made in 1985 (Gjipali

1998) and its recent reopening after scoring an architectural reconstruction on 6 December 2011, in order to merge adopting new criteria and review of internal structures and exhibition fig. 1, fig.2, fig.3..

Fig. 1 The reopening of Apollonia Museum, ©Photo by D. Xh. Subashi



Fig. 2 View from inside of Apollonia Museum, © Photo by D. Xh.Subashi



Fig.3 Didactic text ©Photo by D. Xh. Subashi

The museum is lifted over a territory rich in archaeological and historical heritage and is a combination of historic architecture on the building where he raised himself but also gives the opportunity of an antiquity archaeological journey through the ruins in situ in this area gathered together.

In this paper our main aim reflects understanding and finding possible ways of interpreting text panels for archaeological museum that should be more suitable for the public who tread any threshold of a museum and exhibition. According to Herreman (2004), the exhibition itself plays an important role in the different approaches that it appears for the public. It takes different ways of defining it like: “to show, to make apparent to the eye or the mind”, as “to present to view, to display” or “An exhibition is a means of communication aiming at large groups of the public with the purpose of conveying information, ideas and emotions relating to the material evidence of man and his surroundings with the aid of chiefly visual and dimensional methods”. So as we can analyze the exhibitions does have multiple functions to keep closer his visitors but not only, it does also have to play an important role to achieve the best possible interpretation when we stay in front of objects and admire them. Using Herreman context (2004), the objects do not communicate by themselves, {that’s why they need to have the best interpretative model inside the museum, in order to} be understood from a larger group of people, most of whom will not probably be specialist in the subject, and being able to understand and appreciate them. The importance of communication is argued as effective mean to create a better communication raising creativity by caring for explanatory panels, but also other virtual methods or audiovisual methods to develop the imagination and curiosity of the audience inside museum

Understanding didactic panels

The museums are large deposits of cultural heritage, where the objects might be considered as signs or evidence and the main task of the museum is the communication approach according to their content, sifting the facilities in public domain belong to the recipient of the message in the sense that it belongs to all visitors (Antinucci 2004:) in order to interact (Malagugini, 2008) the object and the receiver which is the visitor. But museums are also public domain spaces that we encounter with diverse approaches like: Mindful or Mindless visitors (Xheraj-Subashi, 2013), (Moscardo, 1996). As a public open space the museum doesn’t have only the responsibility of

welcoming tourist and visitors but also being prepared for different types of visitors and their different knowledge's. The museum curator has also to consider that who enters in a museum cannot know absolutely anything about the argument Molfino&Govi (2004), and in the same time he can be found before two alternatives of explanatory panels, that of being incomprehensible or being exhaustive (Brizza,2006). This argument implies the amount of knowledge and information that museum has to offer to the visitors, such the content and the quantity that textual panel have to contain. Using Ekarv observation, the explanatory panel's importance lies in selected words, taking to account even the two sets of visitors inside the cultural building(Xheraj-Subashi, 2013:277), (Moscardo, 1996). The important of these phrases should contain essential elements to be focused there where the visitor will stay to admire (Molfino&Govi, 2004). The words must be well chosen and precise and each phrase must be concrete and clear to enable the reader to absorb it rapidly. Another point to be considered is the advocating the diverse forms of interpretation of the relevant period (Ekarv). Such request is noted since 1933 where National Research Council in Italy, determined exhibition criteria that must accompany the explanatory panels and edited standards drafted for not overcome 250 words for each text panel (last visit 18.07.2014).

Final observation gathered by the visitors.

On September-October 2012 was made a survey inside Apollonia museum, for better understand entirety of didactic materials used since the last reconstruction of this archaeological museum in 2011. The entire data collection is completed using quantitative information in order to understand the communication approaches used by museum with its visitors. Obviously, the questions were for different categories and interests, but among 12 in total at least five open questions were related to the perception of textual panels that visitors respond freely their opinion after visiting the exhibition.

The quantitative and qualitative information were made on September-October 2012, were divided in 12 different questions to be filled in three languages: Albanian, Italian and English.

We tried to get those questions to be quite easy for anyone and being filled in having in mind their experience inside the museum. We also have to mention that visitors weren't prepared previously for the questionnaires and let them some time to reflect before they answered. In total

they were very satisfy about the architectonic atmosphere created inside the museum, but what they most concern in questionnaires were certainly the lack of information in object labels and didactic text panels. Using the reflections by Le Corbusier in Antinucci (2004), the museum is perceived as a *means of knowledge* predisposed to being able to promote the didactic activity for the good of the public. In this lawful predisposition, museums of different typologies has to fulfill above all the visitors interests, recalling that a Mindful visitor is the one that stops and spends time during the visit inside the museum ready to satisfy his experience and knowledge, so one of his aim is understanding the usage of an object plenty of history and interpretation, previously inexperienced probably. He certainly has to find the *big idea* (Lindauer 2006) to better attract visitor interest and curiosity and in the same time give the better description for objects or certain displays. Only a date description will not help increase knowledge of a visitor who stops and looks at it, furthermore when specific terms are used. Furthermore museum curators if they feel the need to improve their exhibition they have to do it, these will increase their performance. If they have to use an example of reassessment we might look this in the model of Egyptian Museum of Florence. In order to accomplish and being close to the public demand they changed the information of didactic panels and the object label texts. Their reassessment challenge was focused in further explanations of technical/scientific words, by simplifying the language grammar of text panels and text label, ease of readability in text and division of paragraphs (ECCOM, 2011:8).

The entire amount of data collected are divided in different parts according the aim of perspective so we selected only those questions we claimed as important in this case.

1. Did you paid attention of didactic panel text? 1. They are oriented, but they have to be more explanative, especially for a not eye expert.
2. Should have been integrated more foreign explanatory information in French-English-Dutch.
3. More informative panel regarding the aim of use of object in order to contextualize better the archaeological finds.
4. More explanatory panels regarding displaying objects and epigraphy.

2. What do you think about the clarity writing of didactic text? 1. Give indications about provenance of the objects, adding relative maps from discovery context

2. Giving more space to interpretative panels which contextualize the objects.
3. Need a bigger text whiting.
4. More information on usages.
5. Need more text panel, not only one in the entry desk.

3. Exposure mode of the objects. 1. Adding a plan of the area indicating the location where the artifact is found.

2. More detailed informative panel.
3. Few pieces prominently.
4. Some time mistakes.

4. Are quite explanatory the textual panels? 1. Add visual images, or painted wall.

2. Working more for the interpretation.
3. Explain the different stages of civilization.
4. Adding the date of discovery.
5. Difficulties in reading and not always clear what was what.

5. Suggestions! 1. Adding visual movie in different languages that tells the *Apollonia* history and the discoveries history.

2. Develop the audiovisual methods.
3. More presence of museum guide
4. More foreign labels and explanatory panels.
4. Clarifying coherence of the objects

Conclusions

These data collected can be considered as the first attempt undertaken in understanding visitor`s issues inside this museum and also to analyze particular explanatory panel beating out interesting

conclusions, which imply lack of importance given exactly didactic panels and paving the way to study in further improvements.

The diverse questions may have similar notes or may be repeated sometimes, but was necessary to integrate them as important part and also as a reflective problem that visitors or tourists have claimed during the collected data. It is also important to mention that the answers express their own opinion about the different difficulties during the visit inside the museum.

We believe that during this survey we encountered very interesting and Mindful people ready to express their opinion naturally based in their previous experiences of travelling. We had different types of visitors, some of them weren't all English native, but French visitors that even though express the opinion in English. But what we can summaries in this survey is the lack of communication between the object as a narrative patrimony and the visitor as a special guest inside the museum, this disadvantage makes our reflection in considering the urgent need in additional interventions to improve communication between the museum and the public. Some of the problems to underline are:

- Informative and explanations text panel even for those not expert in the field of archeology.
- Contain information with regard to the period of a certain civilization and scope that an object has been used
- Easy interpretive language and understandable panels,
- Archaeological history well contextualize by the didactic panel with data's about the origin of the object itself. Using assertions of Ekarv in (Cataldo&Paraventi, 2007) inappropriate texts or textual editorial form often doesn't favor a clear reading of objects even when they have guests {front} with an acceptable cultural recognition. In this sense, she underlines the collaboration between editor, museum curator and graphic designers "*to give a new dimension to the visual experience*" until *the text becomes an integral part of the entire project exhibitor*".
- Use of large prints of the didactic panel, in the way that can has legibility from a discrete distance even when around it are gathered some visitors

The issues of explanatory texts for being as more effective as possible are a constant challenge to satisfying as well and effectively the different visitors. From the other side, such argument requires didactic museum experts to undertake such initiative, even more when the audience is growing including foreign tourist or *Diaspora* visitors

In this context we are conscious that if the museum will be filled throughout with large explanatory panels will look like a book read on foot, so the length of an explanatory panel shouldn't pass two thousand printed words (Molfino&Govi, 2004), and using lines with about 45 letters, and texts with short paragraphs with four or five the lines (Cataldo&Paraventi, 2007).

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