Museum as an element of multicultural space

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Abstract. The purpose of the article is to show that museum having been one of the first establishments for a long time, became a multicultural space. The author describes the main stages of the museum spaces’ development and points out the cultural and social processes that influenced the functional composition throughout the whole history. The comparison of modern museum and proto-museum institutions is given, common features that stay unchanged and perform practically as a core of its’ functioning are highlighted. Moreover, the links between museum typology and ongoing processes in society are demonstrated and grounded. The article stresses out the museum spaces’ multicultural features and the way how urban environment changes in its turn, being influenced by it as a culture-forming establishment.

Introduction
The fast-moving process of globalization leaves its traces in all spheres of society, and especially its cultural component. The modern world is more open due to the communication systems continuous improvement, spatial and informational boundaries lose their rigidity, allowing people from different cultures to interact without limitations. Therefore, the features of one ethnos cease to be clearly attached only to it, partially assimilating in the cultures of other ethnic groups. The emergence of a multicultural society is a characteristic of a highly urbanized environment. Such a society is constantly changing due to the ongoing process of merging different, unique cultures. However, this happens non-violently, naturally, the carriers coexist without conflicts and are free to decide how deep the assimilation process can be. Such a multicultural environment is a characteristic of almost every modern metropolis.

In the same way, architecture can barely avoid responding to such changes, with the system of forward and backward linkages between it and society. The two branches therefore influence each other – serving as an environment for human activity, architecture fulfils its requirements, but at the same time makes its own demands in return. The second kind of influence is considerably less noticeable but still cannot be denied. The results of multicultural tendencies can be pointed out both in large urban scaled spaces and in less spacious point objects. Such a social institution as a museum is, moreover, not exceptional: indeed, it is exactly this kind of establishment that appears to show multicultural features not only in a modern context, but throughout the whole history of its development. Nowadays museums play the role of a multicultural scene creator due to the increased level of its flexibility and a changed social environment. The growing importance of multiculturalism also rises the question of whether a museum really belongs to such a category.

Materials and Methods
The functional paradigm of museum spaces has strongly changed in the last few decades, owing to the evolving demands of modern society. Nowadays museums do not only collect artifacts with the purpose of keeping them but also do research and analyze the opportunities for learning provided to visitors. Moreover, a number of additional functions have appeared in reaction to the consumer society. Also, museums can serve as a platform for such elements of the educational process as lectures, workshops, meetings and film screenings. This multifunctionality is a natural response to the demands of competing cultural levels, coexisting in the modern world. However, all of these are just complementary to the primary multicultural characteristics of such an institution.

Museums’ multicultural features have passed through several different developmental phases. The simple act of collecting had already appeared in the ancient world \([1]\). Such a monument as The Museum at Alexandria is evidence of this: one of the first places where a remarkable collection of manuscripts was gathered. It is worth mentioning too that at that time Alexandria played the role of an important junction of trade routes, creating the perfect environment for cultures to fuse and ‘cross-pollinate’. Being located in such an ideal political and geographical position, The Museum became not just a famous vault for the collection, but a world-renowned science and arts center, where a series of philosophers and scientists worked \([2]\).

The next significant steps in the evolution of museums happen during The Renaissance. The development of civilization, changing mindsets, the Age of Exploration – all of this provided a new impulse in the process of museum establishment by revealing new information about previously unknown places and cultures. Interest in all this new-found knowledge about foreign ways of life served as a basis for a collection-forming process. The first private collections were put together in the most prosperous cities and belonged exclusively to the nobility: such collections may be termed ‘proto-museum institutions’. Mostly they consisted of valuables plundered on foreign campaigns, with the focus later moving to works of art. As a result of the rise of Italian art, the greatest concentration of such spaces was in Italy. They were called ‘studiolo’ or ‘camerino’ \([3]\). The famous Medici collections played a considerable role in the development of museums. Later, they formed the basis of exhibits in one the world’s foremost museums – the Uffizi Gallery \([4]\).

There was, moreover, one other type of exhibition space emerging. Known as ‘Cabinet of Curiosities’, it was more concerned with natural history artifacts, and with collecting different types of anomalies at the first. The renaissance museum’s major point of contrast with the modern variety lay in its rather haphazard approach to museum-curation. Thorough classification by area, epoch or other such distinguishing features appeared later.

The next spiral of museum establishment happens during the Age of Enlightenment, when ideas of equality and liberalism have a great impact on culture and society as a whole. The main difference from the previous stage of museum typology was in its opening up to a mass audience. The chief ground-breaker here was the British Museum in London: founded in 1753 and formed from three private collections paid for by the British Parliament, it opened six years later to limited sections of the population \([5]\). Almost the same thing happened in Paris’s Louvre Museum when in 1759 one of its halls opened to the public, its first exhibits being artifacts from the royal collection \([6]\). Following the French Revolution, great contributions were made to the museum by Napoleon Bonaparte who donated items from his various conquests \([3]\). The main difference between the two museums, British and French, was that the former also functioned simultaneously as a library, allowing visitors to work in its space, thus learning about and subsequently passing the culture on. Thus, not only storing items but educating visitors as well, museums became a key element in forming the culture beyond their walls.

In the XIX century museum spaces came to resemble those we see today: a classified series of rooms, where the exhibition is presented to the audience in systematic order. The artifacts, taken from their traditional context, will if accurately examined give detailed information of events, phenomena, and the mindsets of the cultures from which they sprang.

In a separate stage of museum establishment, there appeared the idea of creating the ethnographic variety. In 1891, in Stockholm, Skansen was founded, an open air ethnographic museum and zoo \([7]\).
This type of museum was a direct response to the globalization process; Skansen’s founder Artur Hazelius’s purpose was to conserve the original national Swedish life, embodied by the authentic house and, later, outbuildings, he moved to the grounds of the future museum.

Results
By the 2nd part of the XX century museums have become a totally familiar part of the cultural landscape, understood as a place for displaying artifacts and educating visitors about the distinctiveness of the cultures they define. This kind of typology spreads throughout the world. The Guggenheim Museum, founded in 1997 in Bilbao, also encourages a wave of new museums to open. Key to their popularity is their growing significance on a number of fronts – not only as a source of education but also as a basic agent of tourist-exchange. By the beginning of the XXI century visiting a museum has become as much a part of normal leisure as a way of gaining information about a particular subject. Their original function of conserving and passing on heritage has lost its initial impetus, and a number of functions have been added to the museum space. This is dictated by changes in society but also by access to information through increased use of the internet, as well as the growing transparency of the world’s borders. Commercialization and the profit-motive have also left their stamp on a museum’s function, evidenced by proliferation of shops and cafes as part of a normal museum complex.

Discussion
Considering the different stages of museums’ development into social establishments, we notice their undeniable influence on the cultural context they interact with, how throughout their entire history, they have been an integral part of multicultural dissemination: indeed, they almost define what a ‘multicultural space’ might mean, given that the ancient city had no particularly pronounced features of multiculturalism. Appearing in such environments, museums broke new ground, allowing elements of foreign cultures to interact with the status quo, also developing a prototype for such multicultural spaces in the future.

As history moves forward, the homogeneity of national cultures start fading, multiculturalism subsequently spreading and gaining more validity. The background of human activity thus changes and people, as representatives of culture, distribute it via different material forms, among which is architecture. With this, urban environments change, and features of alternative cultures begin to accumulate. Historical city centers and squares take on new facets throughout their development, each social change leaving its particular trace \(^9\). Now multicultural elements are not only confined to museums: they reach out into the city’s life and become a new cultural context in themselves. New advances in curation have strengthened the multicultural features of museums too, and soaring visitor numbers have only increased their impact on society: the further the process of popularization goes, the larger the audience becomes, and the greater the museums’ potential influence on the context in which they operate. Various additional functions allow users to become effective performers of the culture, interacting within museum spaces and exchanging information during activities held in there: a natural function for the evolution of multicultural space.

Summary
Thus, we can see the important role museums have played in forming a multicultural background, moving from their status as objects, collecting and preserving the elements of different cultures, to becoming meaningful institutions shaping the contexts they inhabit. Even in their most basic functions, they conserve – in modern globalized societies – different national identities, underlining distinctions, educating the participants of culture-blending processes, and making assimilation itself proceed in a softer and more orderly manner. As a part of the modern city, they play a key role in facilitating human encounters and interactions. All of these attributes show the inescapable validity of museums as part of the modern, highly urbanized multicultural space.
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