SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) – SCIENTIFIC REPORT

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Multimodal Storytelling in Museums
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PURPOSE OF THE STSM/

Multimodal Storytelling in Museums was an STSM conducted at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria, and it dealt with different aspects of *KHM Stories*, a digital app for networked mobile devices that can be used as an interpretive/educational resource both within and outside museum galleries. It provides valuable opportunities for individual use and informal learning about art. This is particularly important for children for whom museum programmes usually include a person who guides them or organises group activities.

The purpose of the research was to explore two stories on the app that have been developed for use by children, ways of use their use by seven and eight-year-olds – speakers of ex-Yugoslav language(s) - and effects this digital resource has on their museum experience as part of their individual visit. Individual visit here refers to individual or family visits and excludes organised groups such as school classes. Museum experience is taken to mean free-choice learning and an interactive experience that is formed by personal, physical and social contexts.[1] The personal context relates to individual characteristics of museum visitors (motivation, interest, knowledge, age, cultural background). The physical context includes among other things a wide range of media and modes of communication (museum objects and interpretive media). The social context relates to the people with whom individuals visit the museum or the people with whom they interact in the museum space (other visitors of museum professionals). For that reason, the research was concerned with the KHM Stories app from within these three contexts, and their overlaps with two main goals. The first goal was to analyse the two app stories intended for the use by children as part of the physical context and to explore reasons and circumstances of its development. The analysis also includes ways its content is conceived in reference to the real, tangible space of the museum. The second goal was to explore how the children interact with the app (and the artworks interpreted by it) during the visit within particular

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[1] John Falk and Lynn Dierking. 2000. Learning from Museums. Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning. Walnut Creek, CA : AltaMira Press

social contexts (i.e. in the company of parents/guardians, siblings, friends). Also explored was the impact on and interrelationship between children's/parents' experience of digital technologies/contents and the museum as a cultural institution. The social context in individual visits of adults can be reduced to minimum (since they can come alone), but in the case of children, it is of considerable significance. It is mainly because (in most cases) children come to the museum with one or more adults who is/are present the entire duration of the visit and whose views and experiences are very much tied to those of their children.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

The work carried out at the museum included research methodology associated with multimodal (narrative) design analysis and social semiotics (including ethnographic research such as participant observation and interviews as data gathering methods).

Multimodal design analysis was applied to two children's stories on the app - *How to Look for Monsters* and *Super Power* through their active use in the space of the museum (by the researcher). This entailed going from one object to another, following the instructions that appeared on the screen and choosing various types of information/content related in different ways to the displayed objects.

Visitor research was conducted by the method of participant observation and interviews. The aim of participant observation was to gain insight into ways the app was used in the physical museum space by children and/or their parents. Generally, the purpose of a participant researcher is to engage in activities that are considered appropriate to a certain situation and "observe the activities, people and physical aspects of the situation"[2]. Through moderate participation, which entailed accompanying the participants during the entire visit and occasional use of the app by the researcher, data were gathered through observation and conversation on the behaviours of the participants. Those included but were not limited to children's interaction with the mobile device and the digital content on the app from the moment they entered into the museum space to the end of a chosen tour, children's reactions to particular types of content, contents that were skipped and reasons for that, parents' interaction with the app and their children while using/not using the app. Ten 7/8 year-old children in total participated in the research. They visited the museum in different social formations. Eight children were accompanied with one parent (mother or father), one child came with both parents and two children were accompanied with a parent and an older sibling. Interactions were audio-recorded, and the recordings were transcribed and supplemented with field notes based on observations. After the visit, the families were interviewed with the aim of finding out their everyday use of digital technology (primarily focusing on the children's habitual behaviour with and around digital contents such as frequency and type of contents with which they interact the most), their previous experience with the museum, reflections on the experience they just had, advantages/disadvantages of the app, best stories etc.). Interview questions were mainly directed at the parents, though the children were present and could (some of them did) participate actively in the conversation. Interviews were also held with the museum staff

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[2] James P. Spradley. 1980. Participant Observation. Fort Worth [et al.]: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, pp.33, 60

responsible for the creation of the app about the motivation behind the app's creation and implementation, the educational/interpretative concept and arguments in favour of such a design.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

Research results have been interpreted from the perspective of instructional (or communicative) design in informal learning contexts that concerns with the underlying organization of the semiotic resources of the app stories. An analysis was carried out based on three frameworks of meanings - representational (discourse of multimodal texts), organisational (accessibility and readability of multimodal texts) and interactional (the roles and relations constructed by an institution)[3]. The stories were developed as cultural history accounts around several objects displayed at the permanent exhibition and used either in or outside the physical space of the museum. When analysed in use within the museum space, there are two spheres (digital and physical) that support and complement each other. Representational, organisational and interactional frameworks therefore need to be defined by taking into consideration these two spheres in their complex interrelationships. Children using the app constantly compare (and contrast) features of the digital content and the physical space. It is an experience that merges the world of monsters, fairy tales and heroes with the world of authenticity, originality and factuality that stem from professional discourses of curators.

The (*virtual –cum- physical*) user goes from one object to another and stories about the objects appear with every new "page". No matter what object is selected, the user is guided to it through the space and when reached the object can be explored through different cultural and historical contexts and in different modes. Meaning-making is made easy and accessible through comprehensive organisation of multimodal content. Short and easily readable texts that can either be read or listened to, or skipped altogether. The narrative sub-genre makes possible for users (both children and adults) to combine presented history with stories and memories of the past and their relation to the present through associations. Additionally, the use of narratives in cinematographic, visual and spatial modes helps bring meanings and significance of art and artistic heritage closer to everyday mediated experiences of visitors. Choosing purposeful and quality texts is important for any learning experience. With their interactivity and multimodality, the stories supports and contribute to multiple literacies development, in addition to the visual one, which is the core educational project for any art museum. At the second level of the research, the results were obtained from the interpretation of the qualitative data (gathered through observation and interviews) within the social semiotic framework[4]. The social and cultural context of the museum was the place where meanings and experiences of the visitors using the app, primarily those of the seven and eight-year-olds, were brought into connection with their relationship to their parents in the museum and their joint relationship to the museum as an institution of cultural authority. The gathered data were coded and the following categories obtained – *independent*, *in charge* and *recognised*. They describe the characteristics of participants that the use of the app shaped and helped contribute to their empowerment as museum visitors.

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[3] Louise Ravelli. 2006. Museum Texts - Communication Frameworks. London: New York: Routledge
[4] Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress. 1988. Social Semiotics. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS

This STSM was a great opportunity to meet the people from the institution whose activities are related to the creation of digital content for children (and adults) and who can be excellent partners for practical and research-based collaboration in the future. The knowledge and experience that was built into the app, which as was mentioned before, is a rare example of an interpretive digital resource for children in art museums should be shared in both professional and academic communities (museum professionals and students of information and communications sciences). Future collaboration has been proposed in the shape of the following activities:

- Participation in the 10th Conference of Museum Educators "Boundaries and Visions" organised by the Croatian Museum Association on 07.-10.11.2018. (app development team presenting the creation of the app, researcher presenting research results within the STSM)

- lectures to students of museum studies at the Department of Information and Communication Sciences, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb (courses in Museum Education, Virtual Museum)

- possible collaboration with (individual) members of the museum's Education (Mediation) Department on the project Museum in Digital Exchange (project proposal to be submitted for funding within the Creative Europe Programme in Autumn 2018)