

The Future of Art Museums: Reflections on a Young Audience¹

Przemysław Kisiel 

Krakow University of Economics, Poland

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Abstract: Art museums in Poland have been undergoing a very profound transformation over the last decades and have been transformed from institution based on the concept of the object-centered museum to the institution based on the concepts of the client-centered museum and the community-centered museum. This direction of the transformation seems to be very rational and completely justified, as the functions that museum institutions can fulfil are highly dependent on visitor interest. However, these changes may not be fully successful, because art museums have very little interest from young adults, who are a very important segment of the cultural audience, as the future of museum institutions will depend on them. The aim of this article is to analyse – based on the results of a qualitative study carried out – the way in which young adults perceive the institutions of art museums and to identify those directions of change that could cause them to become more attractive. The conclusions formulated based on the study make it possible to define the directions of the desired transformations, and their implementation may induce young adults to take a greater interest in the cultural offer proposed by museums.

Przemysław Kisiel

Associate professor of the Krakow University of Economics. Head of the Department of Sociology and the Director of the Institute of Political Science, Sociology and Philosophy of the Krakow University of Economics.

Member of the Science of Science Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences (2023–2026), co-founder and from 2016–2022 chairman of the Sociology of Art Section of the Polish Sociological Association. Author of more than 80 scientific publications in the field of the sociology of art, the sociology of culture, the sociology of science, the sociology of family and marriage, and the methodology of social research.

e-mail: kisielp@uek.krakow.pl

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Introduction

Art museums in Poland (and elsewhere) have been undergoing a very profound transformation over the past decades. There are probably only a few institutions that have changed so much and still require further changes. Initially, the economic transformation in Poland was the impulse for change in Polish museums (Folga-Januszewska, 2008). Later changes were linked to the realisation of postulates related to the evolving paradigm in museology and to trends resulting from the paradigm of the “new museology”, initiated by Peter Vergo’s book (1989). Now, the impetus for change has been provided by the technological revolution 4.0, the challenges of post-COVID-19 reality, and also generational change (Gurian, 2021). To all these challenges, museum institutions are trying to respond proactively, trying to adapt to ever new social expectations. The scale of only recent efforts is perfectly evidenced by the fact that in the period 2018–2020, as many as 41.3% of Polish museum institutions took steps to change the infrastructure of the museum, and 52.5% made organizational changes. Changes in infrastructure were primarily aimed at educational needs (new rooms, workshop spaces), the purchase of educational materials, and the purchase of equipment to facilitate teaching: projectors, laptops, screens, microphones. Organizational changes, on the other hand, consisted mainly of creating new positions and recruiting new staff to facilitate visits to museum exhibitions, carrying out internal and external training, and establishing cooperation with external entities. An important area of change was also activities related to adapting museums to the requirements of people with disabilities (Kwiatkowski, Nessel-Łukasik, Grzonkowska, 2022).

The common ground for the changes being introduced is, above all, that they are in line with contemporary changes in the social status of the museum (Borusiewicz, 2012) as well as trends in defining the institution of the museum, which are perfectly illustrated by the very latest definition of the museum, approved on 24th August, 2022, by the ICOM General Assembly. It specifies that: “A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing” (ICOM, 2023).

All these activities implement a new philosophy of museum existence, one of the basic foundations of which has become the orientation toward the audience and its needs. This means a clear reorientation of contemporary museum institutions from the concept of the object-centered museum to the concepts of the client-centered museum and the community-centered museum (Gurian, 2010; Macalik, Pluta-Olearnik, 2017; Tołysz, 2020). This can be seen, in particular, in the development and implementation of the principle of differentiating action strategies and profiling museum events according to the age of visitors, with a division into three categories: seniors, adults, and children & teenagers (Kwiatkowski, Nessel-Łukasik, Grzonkowska, 2022). This course of action seems to be very rational and entirely justified, as the functions that museum institutions can perform are highly dependent on the age of their visitors. However, these activities may not be fully satisfactory

if they are not implemented in a consistent and comprehensive manner and if they do not consider the needs of all age groups.

In this context, it should be noted that the great missing in new museum strategies are the young adults (early adults, persons aged 18–30), who belong to the adult segment of Generation Z (also named Gen Z, Zoomers) or the borderline between Gen Z and Gen Y (also named Millennials). This situation may certainly be surprising, as it is precisely this age group that should be regarded as particularly important for the future of cultural institutions. It is young adults who are among the most culturally active segments, are open to experiencing a variety of cultural forms, and are most often only at the stage of defining their cultural preferences and habits. Moreover, it is also worth remembering that young adults are potential decision-makers who, in a perspective of one or two decades, will have a key influence on decisions on the allocation of public funding for cultural institutions. The lack of awareness among them that museums are an important part of the cultural offer may cause huge problems for these institutions in the future.

It can be assumed that the lack of the profiling of museum offers for this segment of the museum audience results from an unreflective and false belief that the whole adult museum audience (excluding seniors) is relatively homogenous and has similar expectations from museum institutions. Meanwhile, the specificity of the expectations of young adults is clearly visible, and the lack of an attractive offer for them causes this potential group of recipients to stop perceiving museums as entities that can even potentially satisfy their cultural needs. This is indicated, among others, by data from a report of the 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts according to which only 13.7% of 18–24-year-olds visit museums frequently (National Endowment for the Arts, 2019). Similar signals are found in the results of the NIMOZ/KANTAR survey carried out in Poland in 2019, which shows that the percentage of young people (15–19 years old) visiting a museum once a year is 8.2%; however, only 0.9% visit a museum multiple times a year. For 20–29-year-olds, the figures are 5.4% and 2.1%, respectively (Kwiatkowski, Nessel-Lukasik, Grzonkowska, 2022: 110). It is also worth noting that in the case of schoolchildren, the first visit to a museum is most often organized as part of a school activity, so it is very likely that young people's unwillingness to visit a museum again is due to the museum offer being unattractive to them. This interpretation is also supported by the results of a survey among secondary school students in Kraków, in which only 11.4% of the respondents declared that their expectations regarding contact with works of art during their visit at the museum had been fully satisfied (Kisiel, 2021: 19). A confirmation of the outlined tendencies of young audiences to turn away from the institution of an art museum can also be seen in studies of student culture in Poland, according to which museums are associated as a component of student culture for only 2.1% of the survey participants (Kolasa-Nowak et al., 2020: 25).

At the same time, it is worth noting that the low interest of young adult audiences is not peculiar only to art museums; it can also be observed in the case of television audiences – young adults currently make up only 4.5% of the television audience (*Widownia...*, 2024). In contrast, the situation is quite the opposite in the case of cinema audiences (only 4–7% do not go to the cinema) and, in

addition, young cultural audiences increasingly use streaming music and movie platforms (*Raport Omnichannel...*, 2023). It is also worth noting that young adults present a relatively high level of readership (Chymkowski, Zasacka, 2023).

The arguments cited above suggest that museum institutions should take a better look at the needs of the young generation and start taking the presence of young adults into account when profiling their future strategies. In fact, this problem is already being systematically signaled by researchers, museum organizations, and some museum institutions (Ittelson, 2019; Spainhour, 2019; Voges, 2021; Hester, Geegan, Parker, 2022; Gat, 2023). However, effective action in this area requires in-depth reflection on the cultural specificity of young adults and, above all, on the specific expectations of representatives of this generation toward museum institutions.

The aim of this article is to show, based on the results of a qualitative study, how museum institutions are perceived by young adults and what changes to the museum could make it attractive to them. The theoretical framework for the considerations conducted here is set by the classical concepts of generational divisions (Mannheim, 1952; Garewicz, 1983), which were supplemented by reflections on the theory of generational cycles by Howe and Strauss (1998) as well as the concept of young adults by Arnett (2000). The adopted theoretical framework fully justifies the treatment of the category of young adults as a separate collective subject in the consideration of museum audiences and forms the basis for the concept of the empirical study. The new image of the museum created on the basis of the obtained results should set the directions for the desired transformations and their implementation may induce young adults to take a greater interest in the cultural offer proposed by museums.

The sociocultural specificity of young adults

The generational category of young adults is not unequivocally defined, although it is most often assumed that it begins at the legal adulthood and ends at the age of 26 (Bonnie, Stroud, Breiner, 2015) or 30 (Rindfuss, 1991; Arnett, Žukauskienė, Sugimura, 2014). Depending on the assumed age limits, its population changes, and in the case of the Polish society, it can be estimated at approximately 3.34 million (i.e., approximately 8.8% of Poland's population – in the case of the 18–26-year age bracket), or at approximately 5.14 million (i.e. approximately 13.5% – in the case of the 18–30 year age bracket) (GUS, 2023). Accepting the first variant means that, at this moment, persons defined as young adults are identical with the adult representatives of generation Z (Gen Z, Zoomers – born between 1996 and 2012) (Dimock, 2019). Accepting the second variant means that young adults also include those on the borderline between Gen Z and Millennials. Taking this into account, it is worth noting that the current characteristics of the young adults are extremely close to the characteristics of Gen Z.

However, it is worth underlining that in the case of young adults, it is not the date of birth that is the most important. Definitely more important here is the state of mental development and the connected with it sensitivity to certain changes taking place in the present-day world. Although these changes

affect practically everyone, not for everyone they are the impulse that shapes relevant (at a given time in life) and shared experiences. This is what creates a specific and common perspective for young adults in looking at the surrounding reality. Therefore, the meaning of this concept becomes close to the concept of social generations, as understood by Karl Mannheim (1952), and also takes into account the key elements pointed out by Jan Garewicz (1983).

Jeffrey Arnett identifies five key features that describe well the peculiarity of the state of mental development of young adults. Firstly, individuals falling into this age range are in a period of searching for and constructing their own identity as well as attempting to define their relationship to others. Secondly, the period of entering their adulthood is characterized by instability and susceptibility to change in the sphere of family relationships, social relations, and educational and professional activity. Thirdly, young adults are characterized by self-centeredness, as the process of constructing an identity requires trying out and evaluating different possibilities for the sake of matching one's own needs and aspirations. Fourthly, entering the adult world involves a shift from the world of dependent adolescents to the world of independent adults. This process, however, is gradual and during it young adults feel neither adolescents nor adults – they feel in between. Fifthly, the period of being a young adult is a period of openness to different possibilities in life. Not everything is set in stone yet, choices can still be made flexibly – the future can appear as a potentiality in which there is room to fulfil dreams (Arnett, 2000).

The state of mental development also correlates closely with the sociocultural context in which everyone functions. The face of contemporary young adults is, therefore, also the result of several events and processes that are the quintessence of contemporary political, economic, social, cultural, and technological changes. Among the most important factors which have a significant impact on the peculiarity of contemporary young adults is undoubtedly the fact that the whole period of their adolescence takes place in the conditions of actual political integration into European structures, which is connected, among other things, with their participation in EU programmes for the integration of the inhabitants of the continent (e.g., the ERASMUS+ program). Moreover, not only Europe, but practically the whole world is open to young adults, where they can travel or study or work anywhere. This kind of globalized perspective is linked to the simultaneous discovery of locality, the recreation of the meaning of “small homelands”. This is what makes contemporary young adults feel that they are citizens of the world, but with a clearly defined local identity, which they are not ashamed to admit and can even be proud of, because locality is not a source of complexes for them. Also important in this context is the fact that Polish young adults are maturing under similar economic conditions as their peers in selected other European countries. This means that they can, without any complexes, compare, and their openness to the world does not have to be limited by economic considerations. This opportunity was not available to previous generations living in communist Poland.

Participation in the global space, however, also means vulnerability to global sociocultural processes. Young adults are digital natives – the first generation to have grown up with permanent access to the Internet and mobile digital technologies (Turner, 2015). This means that, from their perspective, the real

and virtual worlds are fully integrated and form an inseparable whole. There are, therefore, not two realities (as for the older generations), but one reality in which the real and virtual worlds intermingle. This also applies to the space of social relations – physical and virtual contact become equivalent and socialization means participation in the network, and it is mostly realized through online presence (Jingjing, 2018). Anyway, for them, the network is not only the relations with acquaintances and friends; it is also a place where they find acceptance and support in difficult moments (Vogels, Gelles-Watnick, 2023). It is also a space where they can develop their creativity and have real-time access to information, opinions, and recommendations, also from strangers. The network space thus becomes a handy source of knowledge, ongoing advice and suggestions, and sometimes even takes on a role of authority. However, to function effectively in this real-virtual world, it is necessary to be able to work in a multitasking environment (Taylor, 2019).

A feature of digital natives is also an orientation toward digital modernity that is part of the rules of a culture of update. This means, on the one hand, accepting the conviction of the superiority of each novelty over the previous version and, at the same time, fully accepting the situation in which every tool used can (and even should) be updated and sometimes changed to such an extent that it requires completely different procedures. In this world, everyone must be ready to adapt to a new and obviously better version of what they own or use. On the other hand, all this also causes the world to be seen by them as a system operating according to the rules of post-modern fluidity, in which the future is unpredictable, although it will certainly be different from the present. As a result, future planning and setting life priorities takes up a long time and is a source of stress, occurring far more frequently than in older generations (*Cigna 360...*, 2022).

In social relations, young adults are strongly oriented toward social values, physical and virtual relationships with others, their own personal development, and the achievement of individual goals. This is strongly correlated with an orientation toward acquiring skills that are indeed useful in life (rational pragmatism) and skills that can make a person feel needed. They also place great emphasis on sustainability and ecology, and professional work should above all be a source of rewarding income and should flexibly integrate rather than dominate other forms of individual activity (Katz et al., 2021).

The generational characteristics of young adults clearly indicate the existence of significant differences from the older generations, which implies a different way of functioning in contemporary world. However, given the context of the phenomena and processes which have resulted in the observed differences and the fact that they are a reaction to a permanently changing reality, it can be assumed that these differences will persist and even increase in the future. This means that young adults will continue to remain distinct from generation X, baby boomers, or millennials in the future, and for this reason it is worth observing them. At the same time, it is worth remembering that over time, in the next decade, young adults will no longer have the face of generation Z, but of generation Alpha (born after 2012).

Empirical research

The previously observed, relatively small representation of young adults among museum audiences prompts an in-depth reflection on the reasons for this phenomenon. Considering the audience attendance data as a premise from which it can be concluded that the way of regarding the museum institution by young adults is not favorable, reflection on this problem should be linked to two basic questions: 1) How is the art museum perceived by representatives of young adults? 2) What changes should be made to the art museum institution from the perspective of young adults? At the same time, it can be expected that the answer to the first question will make it possible to identify the image flaws of the institution, from young adults' point of view, while the answer to the second question will make it possible to identify desirable courses of action and areas in need of change.

Obtaining information to answer the above questions required the implementation of an empirical survey. This research was carried out between February and April 2023 and had the character of an exploratory qualitative study (Babbie, 2016). The empirical material consisted of free-written statements of the respondents, and the stimulating element for their statements was the question: "Imagine you were appointed the Director of the Museum (the National Museum in Kraków / the Museum of Opole Silesia) – what would you change in this museum to increase the interest of students and secondary school pupils in it?". At the same time, the respondents participating in the survey were asked to visit the exhibitions containing the art collections of one of the indicated museums (the National Museum in Kraków and the Opole Silesia Museum in Opole) beforehand and only after becoming familiar with it to formulate, in any written form (essay, note, set of reflections, etc.), a proposal for changes and its brief justification, as well as to specify the expected effects.

The sample selection was purposive – students of two different degree programs in social sciences, studying at the Krakow University of Economics (KUE) and at the University of Opole (UO), were invited to participate in the study. These were 22–24-year-olds who, according to the characteristics of young adults referred to earlier, can be considered to represent this category. One of the study groups consisted of students of the faculty assigned to the discipline of sociological sciences (UO), while the other group consisted of students of the faculty assigned to the discipline of political science and administration (KUE). The participants in the study were not required to have previously experienced intensive cultural activity or interest in museum institutions. The collection of empirical material was coordinated by Nieroba (study conducted in Opole) and the author of the article (study conducted in Kraków).

The total of 42 respondents participated in the survey. The Opole study involved 25 respondents, while the Kraków study was attended by 17 students. All survey participants were aged between 19 and 22, so they fell within the age range specific to young adults. Most of the written statements obtained in the study took up 1–2 A4 pages, although there were some shorter comments (approximately 1/2 page) and some much longer ones (max. 9 pages). Additionally, some of the materials obtained from the respondents included photographs.

The analysis of the collected statements was carried out based on qualitative methodology and aimed at constructing a typology of the propositions made and the arguments related to them (Rapley, 2007). In this process, the procedure for constructing the typology involved the use of codes that had not been formulated *a priori* but were generated based on the obtained data, in accordance with the tradition of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Three main problem areas on which the respondents' attention was focused were distinguished during the analysis of the empirical material. The first area contains critical opinions and evaluations referring to concrete exhibition solutions encountered by the respondents during their visits to museum institutions. The second area describes themes that form a kind of a diagnosis of the image of museum institutions from the young adults' perspective. The third area, however, focuses on the directions of required modernization measures in the museum.

The comments formulated within the first area were concerned with very practical and sometimes even purely technical issues, such as:

- 1) the way in which objects are displayed and the scope, form, and manner in which information about the objects displayed is provided:

The information on the booklets is limited to the absolute minimum – information on what is under a given number, what age it came from. It is rare to find information on what the item was used for, or in which places it could be found, or which concrete monarch used or admired it. Furthermore, the booklets are old and unkempt. (K-09)²

Another of my comments is the lighting. This problem is particularly noticeable in the room with the paintings. We can see that the light from the lamps is reflected on the paintings hanging on top of the wall. This makes it difficult to view the exhibition. (O-01)

- 2) the manner, in which the works are presented, the monotony and static nature of the museum space:

The rooms I walked through for an hour seemed very static and sterile to me. In my opinion, something should be done with the layout of the rooms, or maybe paint them a different color? (K-11)

- 3) shortcomings and defects in the lighting of the rooms:

First of all, I would brighten up the gallery lighting, because in some rooms it is so dark that you can't even see the black elements. (K-01)

2 The letter 'K' indicates respondents from Kraków and the letter 'O' indicates respondents from Opole.

4) unclear or unintuitive way of organizing the exhibition tour:

[...] in addition, the tour layout should be more clear. I mean, there could simply be arrows saying, 'direction of the tour'. In addition, being at the very entrance I did not know in which direction I should go to the exhibition – I did not notice any sign saying so. (K-03)

5) the lack of trust and an intrusive way of controlling visitors:

During the whole visit I felt terribly watched, every member of staff kept looking at me as if to suggest that I would cause vandalism or steal one of the works. This is the only reason that made me feel uncomfortable. (O-24)

There is no doubt that the situations indicated here could have made a visit to the museum very difficult. However, it is also worth noting that the comments made could have been expressed by any visitor of the exhibition. The criticism concerned phenomena that could make it difficult for any visitor, regardless of age, to get to know museum objects. Although the arguments related to concrete events, they were of a universal nature, independent of generational divisions. For this reason, they will not be analyzed in any depth.

The second problem area on which the respondents' attention was focused is a kind of a diagnosis of the image of museum institutions from the perspective of young adults, and the quoted statements of the respondents can be seen as an illustration of their perception of these institutions. Admittedly, the individual statements of the respondents were stimulated by a previous visit to a particular museum, but they clearly referred to the more general face of this type of institution. Moreover, the image of the museum reconstructed on the basis of the respondents' reflections already contains a very strong component, being a consequence of the respondents' generational affiliation. It is not an image that functions in the consciousness of all visitors, but it contains features that are specific to the way in which museum institutions are perceived by young adults.

The image diagnosis emerging from the obtained empirical material is best synthesized by three statements: Museum – a place known for being unknown; Museum – a site inaccessible to all; Museum – an unmodern and unattractive place.

Museum – a place known for being unknown. This statement is the quintessence of the way museum institutions exist in the consciousness of the young generation. On the one hand, they are all aware that such institutions exist, but on the other hand, these are not part of their everyday reality and do not arouse their interest. They are one big unknown and *terra incognita*, waiting to be discovered. Information about the museum's offer, even if it appears in social media, does not effectively diffuse into the information space of young adults, and does not prompt them to visit.

Before visiting the permanent exhibition of Polish works of art at the National Museum in Kraków, I had no idea what I might find there. I had not heard or seen social media advertisements about the site anywhere, so my first suggestion is that the NMK should be better advertised on sites such as Facebook, Instagram or even TikTok, which is currently one of the most popular social media. (K-11)

If it wasn't for a visit to (the museum) as part of a class, I probably wouldn't have even known about it. [...] A lot of students probably, like me, even if they felt like going to such a place, they don't really know which one to go to. (O-10)

In the opinion of the respondents, to be present in the consciousness of young audiences, museums obviously need to be more efficient in building an effective message about themselves and their offer. To this aim, they need to be more active on the Internet – however, an attractive (according to the criteria of young adults) website is not enough, a daily presence in social media is also necessary, in particular the use of Instagram and TikTok. It is also necessary to create a trend for visiting the museums among young people, which requires the use of influencers and celebrities as well as building a positive and attractive image of the museum in the school and home environment.

Using 'PR' and marketing activities to modernize the museum's image, to promote NMK's unique offer can raise awareness and attract quite new visitors [to the museum – author]. In addition to this, cooperation with local media, influential public figures or 'influencers' may be needed to show the museum in a new light, in articles, reviews, social media posts. (K-08)

Museum – a site inaccessible to all. This statement primarily expresses fears about the limited general accessibility of the museum. At the same time, accessibility is regarded in terms of physical barriers as well as economic, social, or cognitive limitations:

Another issue [...] is the lack of accessibility for people with disabilities. Some of the rooms in the museum are not adapted for people with disabilities, what can be frustrating and repulsive. The museum should make every effort to ensure that all visitors, regardless of their physical abilities, can fully enjoy the artefacts. (O-04)

On some days visitors can visit the National Museum in Kraków for free, and usually for a symbolic zloty. It seems interesting that on those days when you have to pay anything, the attendance does not exceed two or three people at most, who usually do not fall into the definition of young people. (K-14)

Huge queues formed at the temporary exhibition of Tamara Łempicka's works, so that visitors had to wait for up to several hours to enter. The museum should introduce tickets for fixed hours so that this type of situation does not happen again. Long queues only cause irritation and fatigue among adults as well as children and young people, so that the reception of the paintings can be overshadowed by negative emotions. (K-04)

Changing the perception of a limited accessibility of museums, in the opinion of the respondents, requires various measures. First of all, the elimination of access restrictions for people with disabilities should be pursued. Furthermore, the functioning of museum facilities should be conducive to reducing organizational barriers and the financial costs of museum admission. It is also very important to build a diversified offer of exhibitions and events, which would be appropriate to the capabilities of each potential visitor, considering the age of visitors as well as their interests, preferences, and limitations. This does not mean, however, decreasing the level of museum activities to the requirements of the most vulnerable, but, for example, building a multi-variant offer.

The museum – an unmodern and unattractive place. This statement is a good illustration of the reason for not only the disinterest, but sometimes also the resistance or even opposition of young people to museums. For many respondents, these institutions are synonymous with an ancient past, and something fundamentally unattractive in times of the cult of novelty and constant change.

The museum is a place that no one visits, because and why, if the same thing has been there for years. (K-14)

For some time, I imagined that the architecture of the building would be fascinating, but to be honest, as soon as I saw the museum, I started to doubt whether I wanted to go inside. I missed the impressive view of the museum itself, as it seemed gloomy and old-fashioned. (K-10)

The Museum of Opole Silesia turned out to be a really magical, interesting place that just needs a little refreshing, which would fill it with young people, charmed by what it is able to offer them and able to become part of a community that cares about its permanence. (O-10)

In the opinion of the respondents, the forms of counteracting such an image of the museum include, above all, highlighting everything that is new and modern, up-to-date, and dynamic in the museum's offer. The museum, through its offer, should become a current and active participant in the public discourse and must be permanently present in social media. It also needs to actively animate interest in what is occurring in the museum by promoting cultural and environmental events, daily posts, reports, trivia, competitions, etc.

The respondents' critical comments on the image of the museum institution clearly illustrate the different way in which young adults view the surrounding reality. It should be emphasized that many of the image features of museums that are perceived strongly negatively by representatives of the young generation, from the perspective of older generations, do not need to be changed and are even sometimes for them a symbol of the positive values of these institutions. This generational difference in the reception of the museum image illustrates the clearly crystallizing intergenerational tension. It demonstrates the complexity of the problem, as the way in which the attractiveness of the image of museum institutions is assessed depends on generational affiliation. Thus, changes in image may mean that if a museum becomes more attractive for younger generations, it may at the same time lose

its attractiveness from the perspective of older visitors. In doing so, however, it is worth underlining that young people are aware (at least partly) of this problem.

Here there would be a need to find a golden mean. Young people love interactivity, which may not necessarily appeal to older people who are not entirely interested in such modes of presentation. (K-16)

It is also worth noting that the signaled differences in the perception of the image of the museum are at the same time part of the process of the transformation of the role and social function of the contemporary museum. According to modern concepts of museology, museums are increasingly ceasing to be mere custodians of cultural heritage and are becoming a place of meetings, discussions, and culture-creating reflection, as well as a place for the active creation of an alive culture.

The third problem area on which the respondents clearly focused was the idea of contemporary modernization processes of the museum institution concept. Indeed, from the comments of the respondents there emerges the concept of a new museum paradigm and also the concept of a new way of the functioning of art museum institutions, which takes into account various aspects of the presence of these institutions in social space. The essence of this way of looking at the contemporary role of the museum is expressed in one of the opinions:

A museum should not just focus on showcasing its output but should make visitors enjoy their time there. (K-07)

It should be clearly realized that the new perspective on the museum presented by Young Adults means negating the current order and introducing fundamental changes and a new logic of operation. According to this view, the value of a museum should not be expressed in what resources it possesses, but in how socially attractive it is and able to express the thought, reflection, or problem behind the event being prepared. The role of the museum is, therefore, not to own and “boast” about its resources, but to be able to create a socially-inspiring message and to use objects, both those it owns and those owned by others, to express it. Questions of their ownership, from the point of view of the value of the exhibition, are not relevant in this case.

The perspective formulated here grows primarily out of young adults’ highly critical assessment of the social value of museum institutions:

In my opinion, the Museum [...] sends a signal to young people that it would actually be ‘strange if you were interested in this’. (K-09)

Once a young person leaves the museum, he or she may realize that they have actually taken all the trouble to go to the museum unnecessarily, because nowadays, [...] most if not all of the works presented in the museum can be accessed by a young person via the Internet, sitting in the comfort of his or her room. (K-14)

In today's world, young people really need to feel and see that something is worth their interest. Only individuals will do that on their own. (K-09)

Increasing interest in the National Museum among young adults can be difficult. This is because of the huge dislike this age group feels for all museums. Only a small part sees value in them. (K-06)

Moreover, it is clear from this diagnosis that young adults even feel excluded from the museum audience. This is the result, on the one hand, of the fact that they feel directly discouraged from visiting the museum. On the other hand, they find nothing in this institution's offerings to encourage them to personally visit, because the museum resources, which are not very dynamically changing, are increasingly becoming available on the Internet anyway. Therefore, if museums wish to become attractive to young adults, it is necessary not only to adopt a new logic of action, but at the same time to introduce several changes affecting the creation of a new type of relationship with visitors.

When discussing the catalog of proposals, it is worth starting with the postulate of preparing a multi-variant museum offer.

I suggest organizing themed tours and exhibitions – for example, each day of the week on a different theme that would be repeated each week. [...] Such tours could also be specially selected for different age groups at different visiting times. (K-01)

Undoubtedly, activities considering the age of visitors are already being carried out in many museums, although, as indicated above, they do not consider the distinctiveness of young adults. At the same time, it is worth noting that the process of differentiating a museum's offer need not be linked solely to the age of its audiences, as it can also take other sociocultural variables into account. The most important thing, however, is that the aim of differentiation is to increase the number of audience segments interested in museum events. In this way, a larger group of people with diverse interests will be able to spend time in the museum in an interesting and attractive way. As a result, the number of participants in museum events will increase.

This can also be achieved by creating conditions for multi-sensory learning. For young adults, an art museum is a space that is not necessarily limited to the sense of sight. They are also very open to experiences with other senses, especially if these allow them to experience art in a better, deeper, or more interesting way. Moreover, it is worth emphasizing at the same time that they see the possibility of multi-sensory cognition not only as an opportunity to enrich their own contact with art, but also as a chance to open up the museum to excluded people, e.g., the blind.

In the museum there should also be works of art that can be felt through the senses such as touch, which can also result in greater interest among young people and children. (K-04)

I would limit the so-called dry theory and replace it with various workshops, courses, and interesting lectures, for example on porcelain making. I would like young people to see the production process, then decorate and even try it on miniature objects. I would also introduce things that can be physically touched and limit the glazed display cases as much as possible, because young people in particular can feel uncomfortable staring impassively at the glazed shelves communicating keep your distance. I would sensibly reduce the "Do not touch!" labels. (O-16)

For those who cannot see the small text well or do not want to waste time reading or do not like to read, headphones should be placed around the artifacts so that the text can be listened to. (K-01)

Young people often skip a lot of text and get discouraged when they see that there is a lot of text. I think that this form of listening while viewing would be more enjoyable for young people than alternating between viewing and reading. (O-08)

Music, whose permanent presence in young people's lives is very widespread, can also play an important role in enriching a museum's multi-sensory experiences. Hence, there are calls for music to be introduced into the museum, but it must be pointed out that these are accompanied by the awareness that such proposals may not be acceptable to others. The solution is seen as an option for those concerned.

I would also remove the silence in the museum on certain days. To be honest, I felt very uncomfortable in silence while admiring the paintings. Therefore, I would sometimes offer days where there could be calming music or sounds to get into the dynamics of the paintings or exhibits. Of course, only on selected days, so as not to exclude lovers of spending time in silence. (K-10)

I think it would also be useful to designate 'quiet hours' for autistic people so that they could visit the museum in a comfortable environment. (K-12)

All multimedia and interactive forms can also be used to broaden the scope of the museum experience. Their role is, above all, to significantly enrich the communication of information about particular artifacts and to actually achieve this for the visitor. In this way, the public not only has contact with the work of art but can also learn a lot about the context in which it was created and how it functioned in social space. All this should be realized in the form of an attractive, dynamic, and attention-grabbing message that also illustrates the practical dimension of the objects viewed. As a result, this helps the recipient to better experience the contact with the works of art and enhances their ability to create their own interpretations.

Introduce multimedia demonstrations or lectures that can facilitate understanding and interpretation of artifacts and provide a more interactive educational experience for visitors. [...] Creating interactive exhibits where teenagers can touch, play, experiment or create something with their own hands can make the museum more fascinating and interesting. (K-10)

It would be interesting to include multimedia devices where videos of the practical use of an object or others could be shown, giving a broader context for the ancient times, so that the visitor can get a bit of a feel for the era. (K-05)

It would be worthwhile in a computer-based or verbal way (showing or describing) what these artifacts were used for, who wore them, for what purpose and on what occasions, who could afford them, for what purpose, etc. It is worth betting on practicality even in institutions such as museums, as younger people appreciate this more. (K-02)

A very important element on which a museum's ability to focus the attention of young adults depends is also the topical relevance of the exhibitions. Pure esthetic contemplation or participation in the autotelic process of cultivating the heritage of past generations is far less attractive to young people than participation in a discussion about the future of humanity, the key challenges of contemporary social problems, or the environment. It is these types of problems that young people perceive as interesting and important, and it is these problems that they want to devote their attention to.

The museum should adapt its program to the interests of younger generations. Generation Z and A are undoubtedly interested in contemporary issues such as climate change and environmental issues, social justice and equality, diversity and inclusion, and mental health. It is worth creating events, temporary exhibitions and workshops that explore these themes and allow for intergenerational discussion between participants and artists. [...] It is worth starting by creating a temporary exhibition dedicated to Polish female artists. (K-12)

The final issue raised by the participants in the study concerns the modernity of the form of communication accompanying museum objects. Admittedly, its most important component is the technical dimension, but for the young generation, technical development and the possibilities of using new communication technologies are extremely important, as they symbolically define the difference between the digital generation (to which young adults belong) and the analog generation. As a result, they regard the presence of modern information technologies as a preliminary criterion for identifying those museums that actually have a space dedicated to young audiences.

The form of the message should be updated as much as possible so that it crosses the mind of a young person to devote their time to the art presented in museums. Tablets or VR kits can be installed in museums to bring them into closer contact with art and, for example, in the form of a short video, introduce the visitor to the history of a work of art. It is not even necessary to install such tablets, as it would be sufficient if the QR codes could be read with a phone. In the case of VR kits, it would even be possible to temporarily enter the world of the painting in question. (K-14)

However, it should be clearly emphasized that the postulated presence of modern technologies used to communicate with the visitor is not just a symbolic distinction of particular generations, but actually has its own profound justification. The possibility of using these technologies to enrich communication

in the museum space and with the social environment around the museum can bring enormous real benefits and is practically unlimited. The examples of such proposals reported by the respondents clearly convince us that cyberspace can be a tremendous support for the modern museum; only it needs to be creatively and skilfully adapted to specific needs.

It is interesting to create an interactive guide to the museum. [...]. An interactive guide will allow people to learn about history and art in a more effective and enjoyable way. Such a tool may encourage younger audiences to visit the museum as it will enable them to explore the collection and interpret the artworks themselves. (K-01)

I think it would be possible, for example, for students and pupils to offer an audio guide for free, which could be, for example, an app for their phone. (K-03)

My idea on how to attract the younger generation to the museum is to add integrative programmes for interactive learning. This would include touchscreen computers placed in the museum, games of varying levels of difficulty, quizzes, themed tours, the ability to post their impressions and read comments from other visitors. Of course, with descriptions of the exhibits and searching by collection. (O-13)

Indeed, at the present time it would not be a problem to create an online platform, modeled on a computer game. This would not only give the opportunity to present works of art to a much larger group of young people, as such a platform could be accessed by anyone in the whole of Poland, but, moreover, it would open up many new possibilities, such as the possibility of reinterpreting works of art live, during a visit. In turn, combined with VR goggles, this could provide young people with a much greater sense of immersion than even within a platform designed along the lines of a video game alone. (K-14)

The solutions indicated by the participants in the study are, of course, exemplary. However, it is worth noting that the direction of the postulated changes seems to be clearly and unambiguously defined. There is no doubt that the Fourth Industrial Revolution offers great opportunities for increasing the attractiveness of these cultural institutions to young audiences, as it allows for creating a museum offer that can be perceived by the young as something attractive, modern, and up to date. This can be achieved, on the one hand, by modernizing forms of contact with art and, on the other hand, by updating the museum offer and adjusting it to the expectations of young cultural audiences. This, of course, requires the implementation of a modern formula for the presentation of art that will fit in with the digital perceptive capabilities of the young generation.

At the same time, it is worth remembering that from the perspective of young adults, the museum space is a space in which it becomes possible to implement selected principles of the ideal social order. The museum space should be barrier-free and should not exclude anyone or restrict their access to cultural resources. In this space, all actors should be tolerant and accepting of others'

differences – everyone here has the right to expect acceptance of their individual behavior and preferences, as long as this does not pose a threat to others. Also, everyone is entitled to their own statement, opinion, or individual interpretation. The museum space should, therefore, be an ideal space. If it is not, it becomes similar to everyday space and thus ceases to be important and interesting. After all, what is the use of visiting a museum if there is the sameness that everyone has around him/her every day?

Discussion

Analyzing the collected empirical material in more general terms, we find in it first of all a strong confirmation of the thesis of the emergence of a new segment within the museum audience that should be taken into account in museum strategies. This segment, formed by contemporary young adults and now almost identical to the adult members of Generation Z, presents an expressive and highly critical approach to the institution of the art museum. This makes it, as indicated by attendance statistics and other studies, reluctant to attend events organized by them. The research that has been carried out has shown that among the most important reasons for this situation is the very unfavorable image of these institutions in the eyes of young people. Changing this situation requires a change in the image of the art museum among young adults, and this is also linked to a change in the principles of presenting art in the museum and the way in which they communicate with visitors both during museum visits and externally. The overall conclusions of the realized study are, therefore, consistent with the directions of change suggested, for example, by the American Alliance of Museums (Kluver, 2022). Based on the collected empirical material, the more detailed analyses carried out can prove very helpful in preparing action strategies aimed at increasing interest in the art museum among young people.

At the same time, it should be remembered that the aim of the empirical study was not to formulate an objectivised assessment of concrete museum facilities, so the conclusions formulated cannot be treated as a form of the evaluation of the functioning of these institutions. It must be clearly emphasized that the aim of the study was not to evaluate the museum, but to stimulate reflection on possible ways of modifying the operating strategy of a particular type of institution in order to make them able to appear in the consciousness of young adults as valuable cultural institutions and, thus, to be able to generate greater interest among them. The suggestion to the respondents that changes in the museum are necessary stemmed from this research intention. As a result, the respondents visited museums with a suggested critical attitude, which led them to draw attention primarily to shortcomings and to overlook examples of good practice. It is worth noting that the situation is diametrically different for museum visitors. When they go to a museum, they do not come with the intention of criticizing the institution, but, instead, they would like to learn about its collections. What is more, when they enter a museum, they usually assume that the museum has something interesting to offer them. Their attitude toward the museum is, therefore, usually positive. For this reason, the opinions expressed by the respondents cannot be equated with the opinions of museum audiences.

It is worth remembering that the study was an exploratory and not a descriptive one. On its basis we cannot conclude on the scale of the phenomenon; other descriptive studies were used to estimate its scale. On the other hand, the collected empirical material made it possible to identify and describe specific thought patterns that allow us to better understand the motives behind young adults; attitudes toward the art museum institution. This makes it possible to understand the nature and context of young adults; decisions and behavior.

Concluding remarks

The aim of the article was to show, based on the results of a qualitative study carried out, how museum institutions are perceived by young adults and what changes should be made to the museum space to make it more attractive to them. The results made it possible to distinguish three groups of comments and demands for change. The first one contained critical opinions and suggestions for modifying the specific display solutions currently in use, which, in the opinion of the respondents, make it difficult to visit museum exhibitions effectively. In this context, the poor way of displaying and describing museum objects, the monotony and static nature of the museum space, as well as the apparent lack of trust in visitors were pointed out. The second group of comments and demands concerned the demanding change in the image characteristics of museum facilities, which young adults associate with a place that is unfamiliar, inaccessible, unmodern, and unattractive. The third group of postulates concerned the desired and expected directions of change in the museum space. Here, emphasis was placed primarily on an orientation toward meeting the expectations of different groups of museum audiences, reducing accessibility barriers for excluded groups, supporting diversity and inclusion, introducing VR and AR technologies into the museum space, and making greater use of multimedia as well as multi-sensory and immersive messages. Conclusions formulated based on the study may help set directions for desirable transformations, and their implementation may encourage young adults to take a greater interest in the cultural offer offered by museums. At the same time, it is important to note that the empirical results obtained in the study are consistent with the diagnoses largely formulated regarding young adults not only in Europe or the United States, but also in other regions of the world, e.g., Zimbabwe (Chitima, Makola, 2023).

At the same time, it should be clearly emphasized that the results of the survey indicate that, despite the intensive changes in museum institutions to date, further changes as mentioned in the survey are necessary. However, it is worth remembering, that their introduction will only become possible if there is a further infrastructural transformation of museums and, above all, a mental transformation of museum staff – museums must, in the opinion of young adults, build their offer not on the basis of what museum specialists want to show, but on the basis of what potential viewers want to see, what arouses emotions and vivid reactions in the audience (but not in museum staff). Only an authentic and engaged art discourse on current social issues is able to encourage young adults to take an interest in art museums. Achieving this goal does not seem impossible, as the expectations of young adults are fully compatible with the development directions of contemporary art – art that deeply engages

with social problems. The role of the museum in this situation is to create a real and sometimes even virtual space for the audience to meet art. The role of the museum should also be to ensure that the recipients of art have at their disposal the appropriate information resources necessary for effective communication with the creator of the work, which should be available using modern digital techniques. What is very optimistic is that some museums are already operating in this way (e.g., Louvre, Museo del Prado, Musées d'Orsay, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Tate Modern in London, MET New York), although until this activity is not more widespread, the overall image of art museums will not change.

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Cytowanie

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Przyszłość muzeów sztuki. Refleksja nad młodą publicznością

Abstrakt: Muzea sztuki w Polsce na przestrzeni ostatnich dekad przechodzą bardzo głębokie przemiany. Zostały przekształcone z instytucji opartych na koncepcji muzeum skoncentrowanego na obiekcie w instytucje oparte na koncepcjach muzeum skoncentrowanego na kliencie i muzeum skoncentrowanego na społeczności. Ten kierunek przemian wydaje się bardzo racjonalny i całkowicie uzasadniony, gdyż funkcje, jakie mogą wypełniać instytucje muzealne, są w dużym stopniu zależne od zainteresowania odwiedzających. Jednakże działania te mogą nie przynieść w pełni satysfakcjonujących efektów, gdyż muzea sztuki cieszą się bardzo niewielkim zainteresowaniem ze strony młodych dorosłych, którzy są bardzo ważnym segmentem publiczności kulturalnej, gdyż to właśnie od nich będzie zależeć przyszłość instytucji muzealnych.

Celem artykułu jest analiza – na podstawie wyników zrealizowanego badania jakościowego – sposobu postrzegania przez młodych dorosłych instytucji muzeów sztuki oraz identyfikacja kierunków zmian, które mogłyby spowodować, że staną się one dla nich atrakcyjne. Sformułowane na podstawie badania konkluzje pozwalają wyznaczać kierunki pożądanych transformacji, a ich implementacja może skłonić młodych dorosłych do większego zainteresowania proponowaną przez muzea ofertą kulturalną.

Słowa kluczowe: muzea sztuki, młodzi dorośli, przemiany muzeów sztuki, wizerunek muzeów sztuki, publiczność muzealna