SCHOOLS, MUSEUMS, AND YOUNG AUDIENCES: UNDERSTANDING THE EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF MUSEUMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY USING CASE STUDIES FROM GERMANY AND INDIA

H.H. Insaf
Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (GERMANY)

Abstract
Museums, as we know them today, were first conceived in Europe during the late 18th century when eclectic curiosities emerging from a private impulse to collect were granted public access. From the very beginning, museums have been primarily educational institutions that have held the promise of equality of opportunity in learning. Education is the central function of museums and the reason for its existence.

From the time in the early 20th century, when museum education meant fact-laden transfer of information with limited theory to guide its educational efforts, to its re-invention today within a constructivist framework carried out by professional museum educators, museums today are not only aesthetic or scientific research institutions but serve an important educational role as well. However, within the education framework, the role of museums is globally undervalued and overlooked.

This paper examines the educational activities conducted by museums for young school audiences (10-16 years) using a comparative model of study. Using extensive case studies from the two capital and cultural cities of Berlin and Delhi, it will try to define the educational role of museums in the 21st century and suggest effective models of engagement for young visitors and learning for the future.

The paper begins with an overview of museum education in Germany and India followed by a brief comparison of governance structure and funding in the two countries. The paper then outlines the kinds of educational programmes offered, curatorial endeavours, the nature of participation and interaction, and the themes and issues covered in select museums in Berlin and Delhi. Question of accessibility and design have been discussed along with new initiatives in creating engagement and collaboration between schools and museums.

In doing this, the paper provides a framework to recognise, champion and better the role of museums in informal, free choice learning space. Within a broader framework it attempts to define the new role of museums in the 21st century environment as we are confronted by rapidly increasing complexity and fundamental changes in no small measure related to governance, education, globalisation, communication and even core purpose.

Keywords: museums, informal, 21st century, skills, India, Germany, pedagogy, schools, children.

1 INTRODUCTION
Since its inception, museums have been primarily educational institutions that have held the promise of equality of opportunity in learning. Education is the central function of museums and the reason for its existence.

At the beginning of twentieth century, museum education in Germany and in Europe concentrated heavily on school students; few programmes were offered for adults or families. As museums were spearheaded by scientific and philosophical societies, they were seen as the natural choice for schools to take their students to in order to supplement classroom learning. However, the early educational work in German museums was carried out in a haphazard and often unsatisfactory manner with little historical background and limited theory to guide its educational efforts. By the end of the nineteenth century, museum education or museum pedagogik had taken such a negative connotation implying ‘formal, obligatory and fact-laden information transfer’ [1] that the word interpretation or mediation (vermittlung) was used instead. Even today, German museums show a preference for museum interpretation over education to convey informal, free choice learning for all age groups.
The first museum in India was established in 1814 following on the heels of museum-making that had swept Europe in the late 19th century. Though located closely in time, the reception, function and development of museums in India could not have been more different than its European counterpart. While the conception of museums in Europe were a direct outcome of the demands of the people who inspired by the values of the French Revolution saw entrance to museums as a right, not a privilege, museums in India, on the other hand, were colonial undertaking to 'store up in some place the knowledge and material that had been acquired by the investigators working in different parts of the peninsula'.[2] Museums in India were, therefore, grand storehouses of curiosities of its colonial subject. By 1936, when Germany had one thousand seven hundred museums, India had an abysmally low count of hundred and five museums. [3] However, the slow rate of museum making in India was not representative of the museum’s unpopularity among the Indian masses that came to visit them in record breaking numbers. [4]

While museums were seen as tools of embourgeoisement in the West, they were perceived as places of carnivalesque enjoyment in India. [5] While popularity among the subaltern visitors and the under economic class crowds brought large numbers to museums, they were not the museum's ideal visitors. Markham and Hargreaves in their 1936 survey of British museums in India, time and again, problematise the 'illiterate visitor’ who is incapable of fully exploiting the educational function of museums for he or she cannot read the museum label and therefore fails to understand the cultural and artistic importance of that object. It is important to note that the ineffective educational role of Indian museums attributed to the presence of a vast majority of illiterate citizens, had, during this time, fewer success even in the educated Western world. [6]

Globally, things began to change with the liberal social political movements of the twentieth century, child education research, development of specialised educational activity and personnel in museums. The pedagogy used in museum-learning from and with objects, an emphasis on inquiry, the use of local material and activities, and appeal to the visitors’ interests and prior experiences closely associated with those of the progressive education movement. In the past three decades, a new approach to museum education propelled by a changed relationship with the audience has taken form. Besides labelled displays, interactive exhibits, and tours, the museum seeks active participation from as well as collaboration with the audience in its educational programme. There has been a huge paradigm shift in viewing education in museums from instructor-centred to situating it within the constructivist framework of learning. Learning in a museum is no longer what the museum wishes to teach the visitor; it is also about the meaning the visitor chooses to make of the museum experience.

These global changes have impacted the museum education practice and methodology in India and Germany- two vastly different nations who have until now held extremely conservative attitude towards education in museums. Unlike museums in UK and USA where museums have to either apply for funding or raise money through corporate and philanthropic grants, museums in India and Germany both get funding for merely existing. There is little incentive to be innovative, reach out to non visiting groups and evaluate the impact of their programme. A comparative examination of museums in both these countries is therefore interesting; both grappling with similar challenges and resistances in the process of change.

Two important differences must be noted here - the governance and funding structures, and the relationship of audiences with museums in the two countries. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the Federation provides the basis of cultural policy and is chiefly responsible for cultural policy abroad, the main responsibility of the cultural policy at home lies with the Länder, municipalities and local authorities. It is for this reason that although German federal spending on culture in 2015 was merely €1.5 billion (0.97 % of the total national budget), Germany’s total public sector expenditure on culture amounted to € 10.4 billion. The municipalities, with €4.7 billion (45%), accounted for the largest share of public cultural expenditure while the Länder financed the cultural sector with €4.2 billion (40%). [7] This makes Germany a world leader in state cultural funding. 18 % of the total public cultural expenditure i.e., € 1.9 billion was spent on Museums, Collections and Exhibitions. For its 6771 museums (Institut für Museumsforchung, 2017), Germany’s per museum expenditure is € 2,80,000.

Most public museums in India are directly overlooked by the Ministry of Culture and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) both which come under the Central Government. Other museums are funded and governed by The State Archaeological and Museums Departments. Non - governmental museums are funded by trust, foundations and corporate support as well as occasional grants from the state or central government. Few museums in India come under Private Public Partnership (PPP) model. In 2016, India spent around 0.14 of the national budget (€ 321 million) on culture, a dismal figure compared to 19 % of India’s annual budget allocated for defence. [8] Of the total expenditure on
culture, € 52 million (INR 409 crores) is spent on museums by the Ministry of Culture.[9] Very little information is available in the public domain on budget allocations for state museums. In most public documents these allocations are usually clubbed with allocations of other related departments. The Ministry of Culture’s per museum expenditure is € 52,000 (INR 42 lacs) for an approximate of 1000 museums. [10]

Though Germany spends generously on culture and museums, it has long neglected the educational role of museums; instead focusing on other tasks of museums like collecting, preserving, research and exhibiting. Indian museums in comparison struggles with funding for state of the art storage and exhibition of its collection as well as providing basic facilities for its visitor like toilet and drinking water.

The second difference is closely related to the history of museums in the two countries, as briefly noted in the preceding paragraph. Since the colonial era, museums in India have been frequented by the poor and uneducated and continue to be so even in the present. While segmented data on museum visitors is not available, individual studies based on observations and conversations with museum officials confirm that rural, lower class, uneducated audience comprise at least 50% of the total museum visitors (11). The typical visitor in Germany on the other hand most certainly has a university degree. The museum visitor attendance is rather poor in India with an absence of museum going culture. [12]

Within the scope of this paper, only the educational work directed towards young student visitors is examined. There are two reasons for focussing on student visitors. Young school audiences make up a substantial visitor group and help not only in sustaining high footfalls but a positive and engaging experience can influence a life- long museum visiting habit. Secondly, it provides an excellent opportunity to bring non visitors to museums who may not otherwise come to museums with their families.

Interesting, while young students visitor have traditionally been and continue to be the primary audience of educational work in museums, the exhibition is curated and designed keeping an adult in mind. For a child or a teenager, museums are imposing places that do not allow for the kind of exploration that is characteristic of young visitors conveyed by the ever present security guards, overwhelming architecture, stillness, and artworks and objects displayed at adult height. They are time and again told not to touch, not to talk and not to play.

As museums around the world strengthen their educational work, how can they better respond to the needs, interests and challenges of young audiences who form an important visitor group? This paper, through detailed case studies will evaluate on present approaches in curating, designing and communication to understand how museums can become exciting places for learning, discovery and play.

2 METHODOLOGY

Until now, there has been no thorough research on the educational role of museums in India focussing on educational programmes, curation and exhibition design directed at young student audiences. The lofty task of comparing cultural education work of Germany and India - two culturally, economically and politically different countries- has been done by focussing on the mediation work in select museum of the capital cities of Berlin and Delhi. Both cities brand themselves as the ‘cultural’ cities and were therefore chosen for their comparable urban, diverse and culturally vibrant character.

Four museums in both the cities were selected based not on their collection and audience focus but also for their commitment to educational work with a strong focus on student audiences. A mix of children museums and museum for general audiences, big and small museums, and public as well as private museum was selected for the study.

Jugend Museum and Alice Museum in Berlin are children’s museum in Berlin with a focus on developing and designing exhibitions for young audiences. Located in FEZ-Berlin, Europe's largest non-profit children, youth, and family centre, Alice Museum for children curates, designs and develops at least two new exhibitions each year and is supported by ticket sales and corporate grants. The Jugend museum located in the racially diverse neighbourhood of Schöneberg develops new interactive exhibitions often in collaboration with the community and also has a permanent collection comprising of everyday objects donated by residents of Schöneberg. It is one of the many community museums (Heimat museum) in Berlin supported by the Berlin Senate and charges no entrance fees. Bode museum and Bauhaus- Archiv Museum on the other hand are history and design museums that
does not specifically address young audience. Thus far, the Bauhaus –Archiv did not have a full time museum educator but is currently involved in a 4 year long project to strengthen its education work.

The National Museum and National Children Museum are controlled by the Ministry of Culture. Though the present building of the National Museum was inaugurated in 1955, its collection was first displayed in India at the Rashtrapati Bhavan (President's House) following an earlier successful exhibition at the Burlington House, London. Today it is one of the biggest museums in India with a collection of over 200,000 objects. The National Children’s museum is housed in the National Bal Bhavan (national centres devoted to the creative development of children) is one of the few children’s museums in India. The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art is a private museum with no entrance fees located in a mall in South Delhi. The National Handicrafts and Handloom Museums or the Crafts museum showcases the rich craft and handwork tradition of India and is funded by the Ministry of Textiles. The iconic museum building was designed the Indian architect Charles Correa to reflect the vernacular architecture and the timeless world of the Indian village.

The article is based on semi-structured interviews with senior personnel from museums in Germany and India. Interview subjects were selected on the basis of their positions managing education or children’s programs in these institutions. Analysis of reports from the Culture Ministry and other relevant authorities as well as educational offerings and digital communication through website and social media platform like Instagram and Facebook was considered to understand the culture educational landscape better. Literature review was undertaken to understand the history and reception of museums in the two countries. The writer's profession as a museum consultant in Delhi offered firsthand account in the teaching and learning practices in Delhi museums.

It is important to exercise caution as the museums selected for the study may not be representative of the larger museum landscape in the country. The paper deliberately focuses on the best or the better museums in the city with a stronger focus on education.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Curating, Themes and Interactivity

In Berlin, the most common offering to school students includes guided tours and workshops. Most guided tours tend to be interactive allowing audiences to ask questions and contributing their own views and information, rather than simply listening. Workshops are organised around a theme and are tightly controlled with activities, content and form pre-defined by the museum. Audiences do not generally influence the form, content and objectives of the workshop or the tour. These workshops and tours are generally centred on the museum’s collection and employ games, stories, and art and craft making activities to engage young audiences. Variations can be observed depending on the age of children, facilitation style of the workshop leader and the format of the workshop. Older students may have more opportunity to participate and influence the workshop while a more guided programme may be offered to younger audiences. Though guided by an educational pedagogy, the interaction style of the facilitator may vary to invite more participation from the audiences or adhere to a more lecture style format of ad ressal. Some workshops and tours may be dependent on the participation of the audience – they are expected to make a choice, touch or set things in motion or try out new costumes as a part of the programme design.

Though many museums offer workshops and tours that complement the taught curriculum at schools, children and family museums in Berlin are increasingly going beyond curriculum topics to explore themes of interest to young visitors. They are increasingly designing programmes and special exhibits around important issues that govern a teenager’s life like body positivity, self-esteem, and peer pressure as well as complex but relevant topics that help young learner gain a better understanding of the world they live in like globalisation, sexuality and freedom. By doing this, museums are playing an important role not only in the learning of concepts but in the well-being and overall grooming of their young visitors.

Jugend Museum’s model project ALL INCLUDED!, now in its fifth year, explores the theme of diversity in Berlin’s living environment and also references the neighbourhood Schöneberg’s – where the museum is situated- queer history. The young visitor is not only introduced to the idea of non-binary identity but remain an active participant in the learning process by interviewing, conceptualising and creating parts of the exhibition. Such a first-hand experience of understanding diversity in sexuality and gender allows the participants to address questions and curiosities often not discussed at school.
or home. Alice museum’s last exhibition in 2018 was a bold, engaging and interactive exploration of the taboo topic of death. Divided thematically into twelve rooms, the journey of life was recreated through a range of topics like life after death, death in fairytales, the concept of immortality and the idea of death across different cultures and across times. As the audiences explored the exhibition, they read Grimm’s fairytale, solved a puzzle, prepared and drank a ‘magic portion’, wrote their recipe for immortality, scribbled messages on the wall for the departed and played a life-size death board game. By foregrounding the less discussed and taboo topics through games, stories and conversations, the museum becomes a place for the orchestration of a powerful experience where kindness and empathy is nurtured.

While the exhibitions mentioned above are specifically curated for young learners, many museums like Bode Museums are not designed with young audiences in mind. The Bode museum is changing its method of engagement through the four year long lab. Bode programme which envisions the museum as a field of experimentation in education design and mediation. Along with special staff hired for the project, nine Berlin partner schools and experts from different disciplines, the museums is developing new themes in the museum collection to make learning more interdisciplinary and nuanced. Going beyond the scholastic framework, topics like Being different, Power and Violence and Let’s Talk about Sex! are being designed for and with primary and high school children of programme partner schools. The final workshops developed after feedback and rounds of iteration are offered as workshops open to registration by all schools.

While workshops, tours and treasure hunts form a substantial offering for young visitors in museums in Delhi as well, the level of participation offered to the audiences is rather limited. Students are often expected to receive information and occasionally respond to a question or two. It is important not to equate reception with passivity: as reception involves the active production of meaning through perception and interpretation.

Most workshops offered in the museums are centred on the theme of making. The National Children’s Museum as well as The National Museum routinely offer making experiences to children like puppet making, traditional fan making, mask making, learning traditional painting style like Tanjore painting etc. While a brief history and usage of the object or painting to be made is offered by the artist or facilitator, it is making that lies at the heart of the experience. This experience of working with one’s hand to make an object or artwork allows the child to think through different materials, problem solve and acquire a deep sense of self efficacy and confidence. At the Crafts Museum, over fifty craftspersons working with wood, clay, glass, textiles and other such materials are invited monthly from different part of the country to the museum to demonstrate their skills to the visitors. Through workshops, students interact with craftspersons and learn a particular craft. Such an opportunity to meet a traditional craftsperson and learn a new craft helps to build empathy, appreciation and respect for handicraft and the craftperson who makes it.

Story telling is another powerful medium to engage young museum audiences. The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, a private contemporary and modern art museum located in a South Delhi Mall introduces young learners to artwork through stories. Through storytelling workshops, children are inspired to narrate their own stories; which then become a starting point to create their own drawings and paintings. Through activities like art and craft making and demonstrations, storytelling, film screenings and performances, the museum is put to the task of being an important locus for aesthetic and literary pursuits for the entire family. The objective is to paint, write, spend time with family, enjoy exhibitions and in the process learn.

While family and children visits to museums are seen in the context of fun, leisurely excursion, schools visits present their own challenges. There is often an excessive focus to connect learning at schools with learning at the museum. This widely held belief that museum learning is supplementary to classroom learning confines the role museums can play in developing skills and knowledge beyond the prescriptions of formal learning. Teaching and learning technique deployed in traditional classroom learning is carried into the informal, free choice museum learning space with fact laden transfer of knowledge, passive participation and shepherding of students in neat rows around display cases. Often a formal learning experience is recreated through the use of worksheets that demands mindless replicating of information at the expense of looking, critical thinking and co-operative team work.

3.2 Accessibility and Design

The exhibition text in museums is often too difficult, distant and uninteresting for younger audiences. Children’s Museums like Jugend museum and Alice Museum have text that is shorter, simpler and
easy to understand; communication is effective and not overtly simplistic. But what about other museums- the non-children's museums? Since they are designed keeping in mind an adult visitor, the text is written in a language that may be difficult for younger audiences to comprehend, often has unfamiliar references and provides information that may not be relevant for younger audiences. At times, museums do not speak to the visitors because they don’t speak their language at all. There is an urgent need to have display texts in at least two languages. Museums in Germany use German and English for communication but ignore languages of other dominant groups like Turkish or Arabic while museums in India have labels in Hindi and English missing out on the local or the state language.

Most museums today have a website (all eight museums under review do) that communicates new exhibitions and programmes, provides basic information about visiting hours and address, as well as collection details. Museums are now also slowly using communication platforms like Instagram and Facebook to help them connect to their audiences better. Since these platforms are dominated by young people, it offers an interesting space to interact and engage with them which the formal physical structure of the museum may not. To fully harness the power of social media communication, dedicated social media communication staff is required. This often poses a hurdle on account of insufficient funding or slow, crippling bureaucratic process that delay the installation of a new post.

Along with conceptual accessibility, physical accessibility is a concern too. While many museums are wheelchair accessible in Germany, they do not address other forms of disability like blindness, hearing and speech loss. The National Museum in Delhi has a tactile gallery which (upon prior booking) offers visually impaired people access to 22 replicas of museum objects along with audio guide and Braille labels. A good initiative, it is however too little and insufficient to make an impact. To attract diversity and promote inclusion, free or affordable entrance to museums and its educational offering is important. 39 % of the total museums in Berlin have no entrance fees, while concession is offered for school students to visit museums that have an entrance fee. Educational programmes like workshops and guided tours come at a cost. Most museums in Delhi offer free entrance to school students or at nominal charges ranging from Re 1 to Rs 10 (€ 0.013 to € 0.13) and workshops and guided tours are offered at no additional cost especially for students.

Perhaps, one of the most important factors in creating strong engagement with younger audiences (and even adults) is to create a welcoming space; a place where they feel a sense of belonging. This is communicated not only by the physical space with comfortable seats in and outside the exhibition space to rest, read, look as well as socialise but it is also communicated through the institution’s outlook towards its audiences. The unflattering example of Crafts Museum in Delhi stands out here. While it is important to communicate desirable behaviour and rules to visitors, the frightening set of instructions given on the museum’s website is off putting. For school visits, the museum prescribes a conservative set of must do’s and don’ts like ‘entry and tour through Galleries must be in queue,’ ‘silence must be observed in the Galleries;’ it also clearly states the fines and punishments in case of damage and littering reminding one of stickers pasted on the walls and other public spaces in India warning against trespassing, spitting and the like.

3.3 Towards Change

For a more engaging and long standing relationship between schools and museums, it is important that all the relevant stakeholders play an equal role in decision making. However, often programme designed for young learners maybe interactive but not collaborative in nature. Teachers, parents and young participants are not equal decision makers and exert limited or no influence over the goals, the process and outcomes of the programme.

One way in which this is being changed in Berlin is by initiating long term projects that aim to create a dense network between teachers, students, parents and cultural institutions to build a strong foundation for viable educational activities at museums. An example of one such programme is the ‘Culture Agents for Creative Schools’ started in 2011- 12 in five states including Berlin and funded by Federal Cultural Foundation and Stiftung Mercator. Forty Six Cultural Agents - teachers, artists, cultural professionals - worked with 138 schools for four eight years to jointly search for new ways and possibilities for schools and their cultural partners to promote mutual accessibility and develop model cooperative projects.

Under the four year long Bauhaus Agenten programme, thirty-two partner schools, nine Bauhaus agents and three Bauhaus institutions in Berlin, Dessau and Weimar collaborate to develop and test educational formats, design ideas and educational content in the run up to Bauhaus’ anniversary year.
in 2019. School students collaborate with artists, curators, designers, architects and other experts to develop and test out new models of learning instead of having ready programmes addressed to them. The Bauhaus Agenten programme is unique in the sense that it integrates mediation work into the museum and exhibition design instead of a more traditional practice where education work follows curation and exhibition design.

In Delhi, creating stronger ties between schools and museums is often done by private for profit or not for profit organisations that create age appropriate learning programmes catering to the needs of the school. Delhi based organisation Itihaas works with partner schools to provide heritage and history learning modules and in partnership with museums like the National Museums. The for profit organisation Flow India designs museum learning programmes for school students as well as supports museums to in reaching out to schools and designing age and schools appropriate museum learning modules.

It is however contestable how strong and sustainable these ties created within the time frame of a project or for a specific workshop can be.

4 CONCLUSIONS

For museums are to be relevant for children and young people, it must undergo internal, structural and ideational processes of change. It is unquestioningly clear that museums in both the cities are yet to transform into outstanding models of museums for young audiences. Many more challenges persist – inadequate education staff in museums, lower salaries for museum educators and a complete lack of focus on audience research and evaluation. Education in a museum is still seen as a sub-specialisation with values and objectives different from that of the museum itself.

For museums to become loci of learning, it has to become a good teacher. Like a good teacher, it must reach out to each and every visitor, from a trained art historian to a novice newcomer. Speak to them in a language they are comfortable in. Provide opportunities to express and critique. Check for their understanding. Ask for their preferences.

REFERENCES


[3] Ibid. p.3.


There is no consolidated data on the number of museums in India. An outstanding first of its kind project to map museums all over India has been taken up by the not for profit organisation Sahapedia, an open online resource on art, culture and heritage in 2017. The Museum Mapping project has so far documented around 300 museums across 33 cities. It is likely that there are around a thousand museums in India.


There is no data on total visitors in Indian museums. The Ministry of Culture’s annual report of 2017-18 provides visitor information for eight government museums, and twenty five science centres under the National Council of Science Museums. None of the museums reach the mark of 1 million except Salar Jung museum, Hyderabad with 1.2 million annual visitors and Victoria Memorial Hall, a twentieth century marble edifice built in the memory of Queen Victoria, now converted into a museum, that has over 3.6 million visitors.