

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PUPILS: FROM PASSERS-BY IN LIBRARIES AND OTHER CULTURAL HERITAGE INSTITUTIONS TO THEIR END- USERS

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Abstract

In terms of class organization, an important factor for creating the conditions for the teaching process is the venue at which the teaching takes place. School field trips represent a special type of teaching, which involves visits to museums, libraries and other cultural heritage institutions. The aim of this research, conducted in a Croatian elementary school, is to determine how well the pupils remember their visits to these institutions and how motivated they are for such trips. Taking into consideration that the research involved 41 participants who visited a total of 31 museums, libraries and other institutions during the course of 8 years, the total number of possible answers in the survey was 1271 and the participants only provided 239 answers, which means that they remembered only 18.8 percent of institutions visited. The survey also probed the students to see how they prepared for these visits during their school excursions and field trips. Out of 41 participants, 16 reported that their homeroom or class teachers had acquainted them with the institution they would visit; only 4 students obtained the information on their own from online or some alternative sources; and 21 students, more than a half, did not try to obtain any information about the institution they would visit. A way to change this lies in appropriate intellectual and emotional motivation of students, and one of the possible concrete measures is the project “A Backpack Full of Culture”, conducted by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia.

Keywords: Libraries, Cultural Heritage Institutions, Motivation, Backpack Full of Culture.

1. Introduction

The aim of this research, conducted in an elementary school in the Krapinsko-zagorska county in Croatia, was to determine how well the elementary school pupils remember their visits to museums and other cultural heritage institutions and to what extent they are motivated for such visits. The intention was to test the following hypotheses: 1. The eighth grade pupils remember less than one quarter of libraries, museums and other cultural heritage institutions they had visited during their eight years of education; 2. The students were not prepared in schools for their trips to cultural heritage institutions; 3. After their visits to libraries, museums and other cultural heritage institutions, the students did not spend any more time on this topic.

2. Why visits to libraries, museums and other cultural heritage institutions

In terms of class organization, an important factor for creating the conditions for the teaching process is the venue at which the teaching takes place. The modern notion of student-oriented education thus allows the classes to be held not just within the school, which implies both the school premises and the facilities outside it, but also conducting practical education in different institutions and companies. School excursions and field trips represent a special type of classes. The difference between field trips and excursions is that trips are used as a form of psychological and physical recreation of students, while excursions are used to study certain parts of the curriculum in their essential form [1], which is something that cannot be accomplished in the framework of traditional classroom setting.

In accordance with the Primary and Secondary School Education Act and the School Statute, the School Board passes the School Curriculum based on the proposal of the Board of Teachers and a positive review from the Board of Parents. This document defines the syllabi for the elective subjects, extracurricular activities and other educational activities, programs and projects, according to the guidelines of the Croatian National Education Standard. Accordingly, all student excursions and field classes are listed in the School Curriculum of every school.

The Primary and Secondary School Education Act states that the educational activity in the school is based on the autonomy in planning and organization, and freedom of pedagogic and didactic work. This means that the plans for excursions and field classes differ from school to school, but have to be done in accordance with the national curriculum, the national pedagogical standards and the syllabi. The Primary and Secondary School Education Act stipulates that for every excursion and field trip the following aspects need to be listed and described in detail in the School Curriculum: aims, purpose, holders, means of realization, time schedule, detailed list of expenses and means of evaluation.

Within the scope of excursions and field classes, the elementary school students from the first to the eighth grade visit various museums, libraries and other cultural heritage institutions and their goal, that is, the didactic importance of these types of classes, is not just to learn about the cultural heritage at the place of its preservation, in order to enhance the intellectual and emotional experience of the students, but to motivate students for (subsequent) visits to museums, libraries and other cultural heritage institutions.

3. Research methodology

The survey questionnaire contained 14 questions, 13 of which were closed-type questions and only one of which was an open-type question in which the students had to list museums and other cultural heritage institutions that they had visited during the previous eight years of their education. Closed-type questions with multiple answers and answers for level of intensity were used. For the purpose of this research, intentional, convenience sample was used [2], which means that its representativeness and sufficiency should be taken somewhat loosely. The survey questionnaire was

filled out (during their homeroom classes) by 23 students of class 8a and 18 students of class 8b. Since no statistically significant difference in distribution of answers was noted between the two classes, all questionnaires (N = 41) were processed together.

4. Results and discussion

The first question required the students to list the museums, libraries and other cultural heritage institutions that they had visited during their school excursions and field classes during their eight-year education. As a help to remind them what this refers to, the cultural heritage institutions covered by this survey included [3], apart from museums, galleries, libraries, sacral objects, old towns, castles, ethno villages, ethnographic collections, national parks etc., which were also listed in the question for the students.

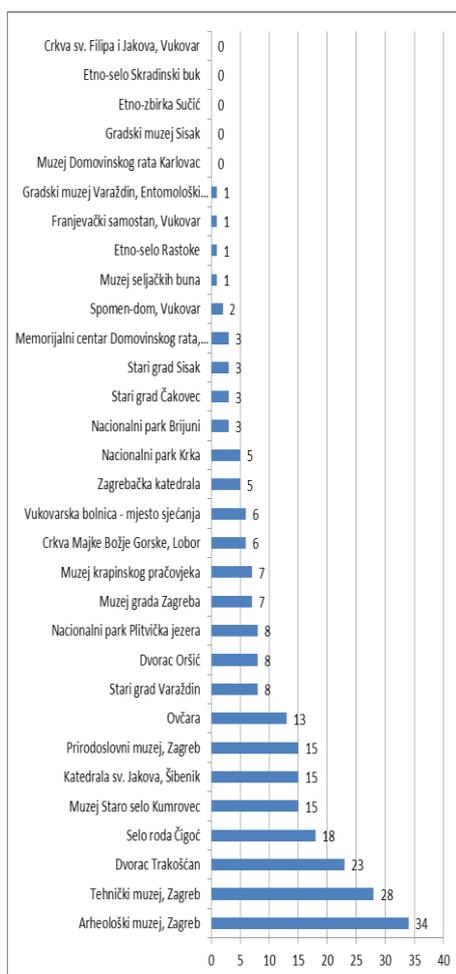


Figure 1. Number of participants that remembered a visit to a particular museum or other cultural heritage institution.

Figure 1 contains the names of all cultural heritage institutions with their original names in Croatian. Their English equivalents are provided here, in order in which they are listed in Figure 1: Church of st. Philip and Jacob, Vukovar; Ethno village Skradinski buk; Sučić Family Ethnological Collection; City Museum, Sisak; Croatian

War Museum, Karlovac; City Museum, Varaždin; Franciscan monastery, Vukovar; Ethno village, Rastoke; Peasants' Revolt Museum; Memorial Home, Vukovar; Homeland War Memorial; Old Town, Sisak; Old Town, Čakovec; National Park Brijuni; National Park Krka; Zagreb Cathedral; Vukovar Hospital Memorial; Vukovar Hospital – Place of Remembrance; The **Church** Of The **Mother** Of God Of Gorje, Lobar; Krapina Neanderthal Museum; Zagreb City Museum; National Park Plitvička jezera; Oršić Castle; Old Town, Varaždin; Ovčara; Croatian National History Museum; St. Jacob's Cathedral, Šibenik; "Staro selo" Museum, Kumrovec; Stork Village, Čigoč; Trakošćan Castle; Technical Museum, Zagreb; Archaeological Museum, Zagreb

As was mentioned, all museums, libraries and other cultural heritage institutions that the students had visited as a part of their excursions and field classes are listed in the School Curriculum. For the purpose of processing the answers provided for this question, the researcher conducted the interview with the homeroom teachers of both classes who taught students from the fifth to the eighth grade, their teachers from the first to the fourth grade and with two eighth-graders to generate a control list which contained all the museums and other cultural heritage institutions that the participants visited during their education, before administering the questionnaire. The list included 31 museums and other cultural heritage institutions.

The chart in Fig. 1 shows the number of participants that remembered and wrote the correct name of each cultural heritage institutions. It is obvious that out of 41 participants, the most (34) remembered the Archaeological museum in Zagreb. Out of 31 cultural heritage institutions visited, five institutions were not remembered by a single participant. These are the church of St. Philip and Jacob in Vukovar, Ethno village Skradinski buk, the Sučić family Ethnological collection, the Sisak Town Museum and the Croatian War Museum in Karlovac. Taking into consideration that the research involved 41 participants who visited a total of 31 museums and other cultural heritage institutions during the course of 8 years, the total number of possible answers in the survey was 1271 and the participants only provided 239 answers, that is, only 18.8 percent. One participant listed 13 institutions, which was the highest figure, while one participant listed only one institution (the Archaeological museum in Zagreb). No participants left this question unanswered. Taking into consideration the number of participants and given answers, the average number of museums and other institutions that the participants were able to name is 5.829 (out of 31), i.e. 18.8 percent of all museums and other cultural heritage institutions that they visited during their elementary school education. When asked how long on average their visits to particular institutions were, 80 percent of participants stated that the visit lasted more than 45 minutes, 33 participants (80 %) thought that this was enough time to see the exhibits, while 8 participants did not share this sentiment. As much as 95 percent of participants said that they always, or in most cases, had a guide during such visits. The questions about the duration of visit and the professional guides for cultural heritage institutions were asked to gain further information about the quality of organization of the visit itself. These were actually control questions as the answers provided were not in correlation with the hypothesis, but they still indirectly indicate that a visit to a cultural heritage institution was organized with the intention of users learning as much as they could during their visit, that is, with the intention of achieving the learning outcomes as defined by Bloom and other taxonomies for individual learning domains. As much as 83 participants reported that they heard the

guides well, 12 percent did not hear the guides as they were too far from them and 5 percent said they did not hear the guide well as they were talking too quietly. When asked about their opinion on tour-guided visits to institutions, 71 percent of the participants said they were a good thing as they allowed them to learn more, 24 percent thought they were not a good thing as the guides gave too many information in too little time, while the words that the guides used were too complex and incomprehensible for 5 percent of the participants. The students were also asked how they prepared for these visits to cultural heritage institutions during their school excursions and field trips. Out of 41 participants, 16 reported that their homeroom or class teachers had acquainted them with the institution they would visit; only 4 students obtained the information on their own from online or some alternative sources; and 21 students, more than a half, did not try to obtain any information about the museum or cultural heritage institution they would visit. It is interesting to note that as much as 21 (out of 41) participants did not know that the institutions had guest books in which they could leave their opinions on the visit. The following range of questions wanted to determine whether the students stopped thinking about what they saw in the cultural heritage institutions after leaving their premises. The answers have shown that, just as was the case with the previous question, more than half of students (24 of them, to be precise) stop reading about the cultural heritage institution after their visit. Only four students read about them on websites or through other sources – and these are the same students that look for information before the visit – while 13 students reported that they talked about what they saw in their respective classes. The next question the students were supposed to answer was whether they had to write a school report on what they saw during their visits. Only one student said "yes", 8 students said "sometimes", another 8 students said "rarely", while 24 students, that is more than a half, said they never had to write a report. The one student that does write the reports is the student that covers the visits for the school website and the school newspaper. The websites of many school post photo-galleries from excursions and field classes, which use photos from visits to museums and other cultural heritage institutions. The Internet is obviously the medium that the students visit frequently – and this applies to the school website as well – 14 students said they browse the photos on the school website after a visit to the cultural heritage institution, 13 students reported they browse them occasionally, 8 students rarely browse them, and 6 students never browse them. Another piece of data indicates that the students want to have a memento of the visit. As much as 83 percent of students said they buy souvenirs from the cultural heritage institutions in order to have something to remember their visit by, the remaining students buy them as presents, while only one student covered by this study never buys souvenirs. The last question wanted to check the attitude that the students have towards visiting libraries, museums and other cultural heritage institutions. The results are as follows: for 6 students, these are the most boring parts of visits; 11 students reported that they are not interested for such visits, but they are nonetheless part of their field classes; while 12 students do not regard them as very important. Only 12 students, i.e. 29 percent of participants, states they are very interested in visiting cultural heritage institutions.

5. Conclusion

This study, albeit conducted on a small sample, wanted to investigate whether the students are at all motivated for visiting cultural heritage institutions as a part of their school excursions and field classes during elementary school education and whether the students are the real end-users of these cultural heritage institutions or whether they are mere passers-by in museums, libraries, galleries, churches, nature parks, ethnological villages, national parks etc. simply because someone else decided they should visit them. After all, the author of this paper has on more than one occasion noticed while correcting the student reports for school newspaper and website that the visits to cultural heritage institutions are given the same amount of words in a text as a description of a restaurant where they had lunch that day and/or a McDonald's restaurant, which is an inevitable part of every such field class. The fact is that these outings have to be in line with the school syllabi as their purpose is not, as was already mentioned, primarily recreational. The research has confirmed the first hypothesis. Not only do the eighth-graders remember less than a quarter of the cultural heritage institutions they had visited during their eight years of education, the results are even more disastrous – they were able to name only 18.8 percent of visited museums and other cultural heritage institutions. The remaining two hypotheses have also been confirmed: more than a half (51 percent) of participants did not seek any information about the museum or the cultural heritage institution before the visit; more than a half (59 percent) of participants did not spend any time after the visit to find any information about the institution they had visited recently. As much as 59 percent of students stated that they did not have to write a school report about their visit.

How to change this? Can this really be changed if only 29 percent of students claim that the visits to museums, churches, galleries, ethno villages, ethnographic collections, national parks are very interesting to them?

That things are not necessarily so bleak is reflected in the fact that 83 percent of students buy a souvenir during such visits as they want to have a memory of the cultural heritage institution they had visited, and 85 percent of students always, sometimes or rarely browse the photos from these visits on the school website. The answer lies in the motivation as the school excursions and field classes that involve visits to museums and other cultural heritage institutions need to contain an appropriate motivating factor as it is also necessary that motivation is the introductory part of every class. Here, we should differentiate between intellectual motivation which implies introduction into what is going to be seen in the library, museum, or other cultural heritage institution at the cognitive level – e.g. by asking questions to which the students will find answers during the visit – and emotional motivation, which implies "creating the emotional environment in the class, as well as positive surroundings and incentive for learning" [4]. However, this is not something that can be achieved overnight. An excellent project that could help motivate students to visit museums, libraries and other cultural institutions is "A Backpack Full of Culture" [5]. "A Backpack Full of Culture" is a program that allows the children and youth from places with limited availability art and culture programs to get acquainted with them better. This is a joint program conducted by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports as a supplementary program for kindergarten, elementary and high school curricula. The program's activities are: theatre, film,

music, dance, visual arts, literature, cultural heritage, and programs from students of the art academies. The implementing actors of the program are professional artists and students of the art academies with their professors and (most commonly) librarians acting as mentors. One of the four expected outcomes of this project is to make pupils more aware of arts and culture; in other words, to stop them from being mere passers-by in museums, libraries and cultural heritage institutions and to help them become the real end-users of these institutions.

6. References

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