

Inventing the New Art World: On Art Institutions and Their Audience

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Abstract: Howard S. Becker (2005 [1982]) and Vera L. Zolberg (1990) suggested the advent of new audiences to be one of the main common motors of change in artistic practice, where art institutions play an important role in delivering both aesthetic and educational experiences, but can also be criticized for persistent exclusivity and for how they create a participatory environment.

The aim of this article is to examine the present-day relationship of art museums and galleries with their audiences while taking into account the role played by the advent of a *new sociology of art*, *museum sociology*, and the *audience development*, with all of them questioning the role of museums as socio-cultural institutions focused on the democratization of culture. By employing empirical research conducted in selected art institutions in the Czech Republic and Poland, I will examine how young visitors view art institutions in light of their recent quest for becoming the *inclusive platforms of gaining knowledge about art*, which promote and facilitate active participation rather than passive consumption.

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Most sociologists of culture regard art institutions, such as galleries or museums, to be an integral part of an institutionalized cultural system, which has been shaped to cultivate and promote socio-cultural values of a given society. This system has not been randomly designed but, rather, it presents a well-organized network of power structure between the interrelated art world composed of artists, art institutions, and the audience. Growing criticism of this system appeared in the 1980s and came from the sociologists of art, such as, among others, Bourdieu (1984), Zolberg (1981), and

Becker (2008), who equally criticized the ingrained mechanism of art world control in the hands of trustees with money and power, or those who have been appointed by them (Becker 2008). That new shift within the critical approach toward the mechanism of art production, distribution, and consumption – associated with the above-mentioned scholars – was later referenced by Eduardo de la Fuente as the “new sociology of art” (2007). Although it may seem that the issues occupying the precursors of the new sociology of art are remote in some respects, some of the current concerns remained the same, e.g. the role of digital technology in the art museum experience and distribution of art knowledge, or the fundamental need – professed by these scholars – to continuously adopt the existing “art world” to socio-cultural changes in a given society. I would like to argue that what is at the core of critical issues today is how effectively digital technology is used within the art museum context in creating democratic and participatory art experience space for its diverse groups of audience. What is the attitude of the art museum audience toward enhancing their viewing experience with digital technology? Is it more effective at the individual or the collective level? And, lastly, what role does the audience play in constructing the neutral social art space of the museum, where personalized experience can take place? I am using the word “personalized,” as the latest scholarship on museum digitalization praises the ability of digital technology to create more personalized, data-driven experience (Devine and Tarr 2019), where the visitor has transitioned into being an active “user” or, as argued by Ross Parry, an “actant” of a digitally-induced experience (Parry 2019).

The numerous quantitative and qualitative sociological research studies, which followed the course set by Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper (1991), noted

the persistence of a discriminatory character of art institutions in the cultivation of a specific artistic taste, which, being socially conditioned, as argued by Bourdieu (1984), presents a major obstacle in the democratization of art institutions. Introduction of digital technology into the artistic institutional setting can offer a myriad of added values to the audience’s experience (e.g. more information on art works, virtual-reality and augmented-reality experience, interactive games), yet the content of the material provided for the audience and the means of its absorption is still regulated by a given facility. Indeed, more recent studies conducted in Polish art institutions (Warczok and Trembaczowski 2011; Jagodzińska 2017; Kisiel 2018) have been critical of the continuity of institutional captivation regarding the content of distributed art knowledge by timidly hinting the important role that the emergence of a new audience can play in deciding the future course of art institutions, not gatekeepers.¹ My conviction is that we are already witnessing the emergence of a new type of audience: one represented by young visitors demanding truly participatory and engaging role of art institutions which foster learning through interaction – visitors who are familiar with digital technology, as it permeates every aspect of their everyday life. By setting new demands for institutional participation – which is what art institutions must consider in maintaining their status as socio-culturally-oriented institutions – this new audience can bring more hope for institutional change than the willingness of institutions themselves can. These continue to be reluctant, since their fundamental mission – as was well-argued by Zolberg in her

¹ Gatekeepers in the art world represent key individuals – the mediators between artists, their work, and audience – who have power in deciding over who gets an access to high art, which individuals will achieve success as artists, which works can be considered artworks and which will be displayed in art museums, etc.

critique of American art museums (but adequately applies to the case of the Czech Republic) – was “never really designed to be ‘democratic’”; instead, their public mission used to be about legitimizing support from public funds (Zolberg 1984:377).

In this article, I will examine the present-day expectations of one chain of the art world, namely the audience, as it is the one which can most likely force a change of the highly criticized system of cultural knowledge production and distribution, as argued by the precursors of the new sociology movement, i.e. Becker (2008) and Zolberg (1981; 1990). The latter author suggested the advent of new audiences to be one of the main common motors of change in artistic practice, where art institutions play an important role in delivering both aesthetic and educational experiences but can also be criticized for persistent exclusivity and how they create a participatory environment (Zolberg 1990). Similarly, for Becker (2008), the emergence of a new audience commences the beginning of a new art world.

Within the realms of art institutions in the post-communist countries, the new art world considered here is the new structure of art institutions after the fall of the communist regime in 1989 – one seemingly freed from the shackles of intense political censorship lasting over four decades and challenged by the pressure of the new digital world and digital beings. Although the censorship of artworks has not completely ceased to exist at the institutional level, its nature has changed from political struggle to cultural struggle. Art institutions continue to hold strong control over the content and the context of displayed works of art, and most of the time they give a minimal chance for the audience to take part in their selection. Art institutions frequently use novel technological tools which promise more ac-

tive engagement between the work of art and the visitors, but its efficacy has not been adequately measured.

While these may claim to shape an active rather than passive type of audience and, thus, establish more democratic and participatory space – which I would call the *inclusive platform of gaining knowledge about art* – the empirical research studies conducted in post-communist countries, particularly Poland and the Czech Republic, continue to question the following aspects: the dimension of artistic knowledge and the audience’s understanding of it; the degree of freedom given to the participants in their active engagement; and, most importantly, the socio-cultural value of tools – particularly digital tools – used to effectively enhance the knowledge-gaining process during a visit as well as in creating a democratic space within the walls of art institutions. There are many risks involved in an effective and democratizing use of digital tools if the digital strategy of a given museum had not been well-prepared. These risks have already been noted by museum educators themselves, as expressed in the recent publication by the Museum of Art in Olomouc, in which the authors pointed to the visitors’ reluctance to download an app designed only for one institution (based on the statistics issued by various app stores, such as Google Play); poor interactive app content; limitations in sensory perceptions of taste, smell, and touch; and the lack of interpersonal communication, which can deepen social and digital isolation instead of enabling social interaction (Hudec et al. 2020).

This article seeks to present the analysis of the present-day relationship of art museums and galleries with their audiences while taking into account the role played by the advent of a *new sociology of art, muse-*

um sociology, and the *audience development*, with all of them questioning the role of museums as socio-cultural institutions focused on the democratization of culture. I used a manifold research strategy, one involving literature review, comparative analysis, participant observation, and data collection from field questionnaires composed of five open-ended and eleven closed-ended questions as well as the metrics part with six questions measuring the demographic structure of the sample group: gender, age, mother's education, father's education, city and country of residence, and the financial status. The combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions allowed a better understanding of the expectations of digitally-savvy audiences toward art institutions today. The closed-ended questions and metrics helped to measure correlations between the respondent's age, gender, and socio-economic background with the frequency of visits and the visiting habits (e.g. alone, with somebody, as a group, or with no preference) with regard to art museum/gallery, as well as with the preference to view artworks inside or outside art institutions. Open-ended questions enabled the respondents to provide more in-depth answers and supply them with particular examples. For instance, the respondents were able to list and describe five interesting features offered by the art museum/gallery, describe recommended changes to the art museum/gallery space, or elaborate on the ways in which art institutions should take advantage of the Internet. The comparative analysis focused on tracing similarities and differences between the young audience's expectations in Poland, where a similar research study took place and was explored by Przemysław Kisiel (2018). Indeed, the combination of qualitative research with quantitative data allowed the author of this article to probe deeper into the respondents' answers and establish interesting patterns and contradictions between the expecta-

tions of the visitors and the perspective of the art institutions.

I would like for this article to not only provide a deeper look into the current relationship between art institutions and their audiences, but also to contribute to the scholarship within the inchoative sociological field of *museum sociology*, a relatively young discipline promoted by Volker Kirchberg (2016) as a "middle range" discipline which involves methods from social philosophy and empirical research in the hope of alleviating the self-doubt about the social side of art institutions by strengthening reflection on their activities and taking affirmative steps to change them. Empirical findings and the theoretical discourse offered by sociology when investigating art institutions can form a mutual relationship between museology and sociology in a way which would enable the two to feed each other's interests. In return, this would solidify the social importance of art institutions in society and change their image from an exclusive public space to an inclusive one.

The making of an Art World

When analyzing the changes taking place in the institutional role of art museums within the society, Katarzyna Jagodzińska (2017) points to the 1980s as a period recognized by cultural scholars as the age of "new museology" or "museum age," marked with a clear shift within art institutions toward promoting education, participation, and inclusion within its walls. Among sociologists of art, this period witnesses the formation of a new direction, now known as *the new sociology of art*, which was attributed by Eduardo de la Fuente to the publication of the two texts: Howard S. Becker's *Art Worlds* (2008) and Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984), and which made

a great impact on the work of American and European sociologists who were currently working on the arts (de la Fuente 2007:410). What made Becker and Bourdieu stand out in this regard was the move to abandon a dominant concept in the sociology of art, based on the traditional view of artists and their work, but without focusing on all participants, which Becker described as “the network of cooperation as central to the analysis of art as a social phenomenon” (2008:xi). Both scholars recognized the existence of a controlled space in the world of art, one regulated by a specific mechanism created by its participants. While Bourdieu called this space “the field,” with a limited amount of area where its competitive participants fight over that space, Becker named this metaphorical space “the world” and treated its participants more as collaborators who respond to each other actively, adjust their behavior accordingly, but, more importantly, have the ability to move beyond the confinement of one space by creating “the new world” (Becker 2008). The scholar summarized the existence of an art world as being dependent upon a collective, artistic endeavor:

An art world is born when it brings together people who never cooperated before to produce art based on and using conventions previously unknown or not exploited in that way. Similarly, an art world dies when no one cooperates any longer in its characteristic conventions...To understand the birth of new art worlds, then, we need to understand not the genesis of innovations, but rather the process of mobilizing people to join in a cooperative activity on a regular basis. (Becker 2008:310–311)

The concept of *art worlds*, as noted by David Inglis, is a relatively recent development, dating from the middle of the 19th century and regarded by Kadushin (1976) and Williams (1981) as a “sphere being

made up of networks of cultural production, distribution and consumption” (cited in Inglis 2005:24). The approach of the *new sociologists of art* to this concept has been, however, directed toward more expanded understanding of art worlds in comparison to the classic study on this subject offered by Harrison White and Cynthia White (1965) in their book titled *Convassers and Careers*. Focusing on tracing the occurring changes within the institutional structures of French academies and the resulting emergence of countermovements, especially Impressionism, the authors presented an insightful analysis of the late 19th-century art system as being subjected to the transformation of the existing art world and contributing some factors to it (e.g. the need for alternative exhibition spaces, which were introduced by early Impressionists). Although providing an analysis of a particular art world structure, the book lacks a discussion of the specific inner relations existing among artists outside the realms of the official French academy, as well a discussion of the role played by the artistic institutional audience. The works by Bourdieu and Becker attempted to fill this gap.

Along with the emergence of *new museology* in the 1980s in the field of museum research, sociology has witnessed the emergence of the *new sociology of art*, which also included a specific focus on the social role of art museums and galleries, and their relationship with the visiting audience, who for a long time have been erroneously treated as a universal group (Zolberg 1990). Kirchberg (2016) suggested that this shift in the sociology of art and museum research should be studied under new intermediary discipline which he named *museum sociology*. Among important sociologists of that time whose work represented the canon of the *new sociology of art* one can include Blau (1988), DiMaggio (1987), Halle (1993),

and Zolberg (1990). The work of Zolberg (1981; 1990) has been particularly important in investigating the role played by the audience or, rather, specific groups of audience who constitute a support structure for the arts. Zolberg (1990) criticized the myopic consideration of audiences as a constant social category analyzed from two simplistic perspectives: (1) audience as autonomous actors on the one hand, and (2) audience as the manipulable sheep of mass society on the other. Instead, the author contended that the relationship of the audience to the arts is a complex social process which involves the development of different ways of receiving and using the symbolic culture. She also asserted that audiences have been oriented by historically-grounded processes and traditions, whose traces continue to be felt today (Zolberg 1990:138).

In tracing the shift of art institutions, one characterized by developing greater awareness of the social context in which they are embedded, Kirchberg (2016) recognized two phases. The first phase was marked at the beginning of the 1980s, when more art institutions started to doubt their social legitimization. The second one emerged at the beginning of the 1990s, when art institutions became criticized for their social role as public institutions and opened up to new possibilities in establishing a better inter-relationship with society.

The collection of data on cultural consumption and nascent empirical-based results started to be employed as the most legitimate way to promote the need for changes, starting with the local cultural policy amendments. However, while the idea seems to be applaudable in forming theoretical resolutions, their practical adoption to better address the nurturing problem of the democratization of culture in the art audience discourse continues to

be highly questionable. Steven Hadley (2021) and Robert Hewison (2014) both argued that wider availability of data related to cultural consumption in the United Kingdom since the late 1990s contributed to broadening knowledge on audience development in the country. However, the changes in local cultural policies continue to be problematic when measuring their efficacy in practical application. One of the arguments pointed by Hadley is that “although policies of the democratization of culture are perceived to serve elites, they are nonetheless presented as being of benefit to everyone” (2021:191). On the other hand, Hewison extended his critique over publicly funded cultural institutions, which failed to open up to the wider public, because no access to democratic cultural engagement has been offered (2014:215). For Hadley, the failure of policies regarding the democratization of culture has been rooted in the neglected measurement of demographic shifts in patterns of cultural engagement in the UK. As an example, he cites the *Taking Part* survey (based on three years of longitudinal data) from 2016 – carried out by Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) on cultural participation and its relationship with social stratification – which has been used by the Arts Council to publish a flawed conclusion regarding the overrated engagement with arts of the local adult population (Hadley 2021:191).

Indeed, individual governments and the objectives set in their national cultural policy are key components in stimulating a dialog on the democratization of arts. The Czech Republic has not been immune to the call set by the European Commission during the conference titled ‘European Audiences: 2020 and Beyond’, held in October 2012, which called all EU members to focus more on the “audience development” – a wholistic approach to greater engagement

of a broader public with cultural works by integrating cultural, economic, and social dimensions (2012).²

The Czech Republic has already been focused on implementing changes to its cultural landscape under the auspice of the Czech Ministry of Culture, which brought to life the National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture (NIPOS) to monitor the cultural development of the country. The NIPOS was established just over a year from the fall of the communist regime, on January 1st, 1991, with the mission to collect essential data on local and regional cultural institutions in order to strengthen cultural development in the new, post-communist republic. The statistics collected by the institution encompass a perfunctory data, such as the number of cultural institutions and their visitors, number of publications, finances, etc. However, as has been the case with DCMS's *Taking Part* survey discussed by Hadley, what is missing is a more in-depth analysis of the drivers behind the increased or decreased number of visitors to specific art institutions, and their demographics. The summary report of the thirty years of cultural statistics gathered between 1989 and 2018 reported a marked increase in the number of art institutions and their visitors since 1989. The number of museums increased from 200 in 1990 to 477 in 2019, while the number of visitors grew from 13.8 million in 1989 to 14.3 million in 2018 (Novak 2019:11).³ Yet, the closer reading of secondary data and the analysis of tourism in the Czech Republic unveils that the increase in the number of visitors to the local art institutions stems from a surge of foreign tourists,

² The European Commission was inspired by the concept of "audience development," introduced by the Arts Council England in 2006.

³ Novak pointed out that the compound annual average growth of visitors to art institutions since 1989 was only 0.1% or 3.6% for the entire period. For more information, see https://www.statistikakultury.cz/wpcontent/uploads/2020/09/Tricet_let_objektu_kulturniho_dedictvi_2019.pdf.

not from the heightened interest of local residents. In fact, the supplement for the Working Study on National Cultural Policy from 2009–2014, published by the Philosophical Faculty of the Charles University for the Czech Ministry of Culture (2014), listed several weak points in the country's cultural development, including a slow process of digitalization and a long-term absence of cultural policy:

The cultural development in connection to utilization of information and communication technologies is also considered a weak point by subjects active in the field of the Czech culture. In this respect an out-of-date technical equipment is often mentioned together with slowly progressing digitization and low level of modernization that do not enable to fast reaction to new users' requirements. Another weak point is also a long-term absence of cultural policy and a support of the main priorities on both the state and regional levels and the missing evaluation system. (p. 21)

The latest, third policy document on the culture, published by the Ministry of Culture and encompassing the activity set for 2015–2020, did include more focused agenda on the need for the country's cultural digitalization by means of the introduction of the eCulture program, which, as the document states, "combines digitalization as an important means to ensure equal access of specialists and non-specialists to the cultural content and to its use" (The Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic 2016:46). However, what the third policy document also emphasizes more than its first two predecessors is the need to re-think the cross-generational approach to instilling cultural values when paying attention to the young generation:

To stimulate the development of cultural habits already in the young generation is of key importance; without

them the continuity of the national culture cannot be preserved. At the same time, productive and post-productive segments of the population often seem to be indifferent both to the safeguarded and the newly created cultural values, lose their bearings in the information deluge and yield to the pressures of globalization. (The Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic 2016:11)

In response to the changing needs of the new type of audience, the recognition of the necessity to adopt digital technology by art institutions on a broader scale – acknowledged in the policy document – should be praised, yet no specific recommendations have been given on the most effective methods and tools which would adequately answer cross-generational needs, particularly that of young adults. This lack stems from a rather scarce availability of qualitative and quantitative research on the audiences' expectations.

By relating to the empirical research findings of different social contexts, one can measure how successful art institutions have been in their cathartic path to serve the public. In the following part, I will use the case study of the audience to art institutions in the Czech Republic and in Poland, focusing particularly on young visitors who demand participatory art museum/gallery engagement and, as I would argue, represent the utterly important voice in setting the direction that cultural policy across countries should take in order to be continuously gaining cultural participants.

The research concept – visitors' participation and expectations in art institutions

Open accessibility of art to a wider audience has been one of the main issues among sociologists of

art and culture, who criticize the failing role of particularly public institutions in creating easy access to experiencing art (DiMaggio and Useem 1978; Zolberg 1990; Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper 1991; Becker 2008). While DiMaggio and Useem (1978) believed that inequalities concerning public access to art constituted an important structural component in the reproduction of the class hierarchy in modern capitalist society, Zolberg (1990) was concerned with the elitist practices in exhibiting art, which render art institutions ineffective in serving the public. In her book titled *Constructing a Sociology of the Arts*, Zolberg proposed three interrelated sources with the strongest potential to bring changes to the social role of museums: the advent of a new audience (as first mentioned by Harrison White and Cynthia White in 1965), political transformation, and professional pressure. If one analyzes the outcome of the political transformation in the post-communist Czech Republic and Poland at the structural level of art institutions, with its gatekeepers represented by art professionals, one can view the two sources of hope for a change – namely political transformation and professional pressure as proposed by Zolberg back in 1990 – to be the weakest in their manifestation. In the case of the Czech Republic and Poland alike, some changes were sparked by the opening of the private sector of artistic institutional ownership after the fall of the communist regime in 1989, which enabled the emergence of new private museums and galleries. However, the new forms of institutional ownership did not necessarily change the elitist character of art institutions. Indeed, the advent of a new audience, which was also suggested by Becker, brings more hope for a change, as it feasibly threatens the collapse of the system if the audience ceases to exist. In this respect, I would propose that increased attention is being paid by sociologists of art to the studying of the audience and the vital

role it plays in forming or breaking the structure of the *art world*.

To understand the role which the audience plays in the art world's construction, it is necessary to investigate its nature in a specific cultural context. For this reason, I carried out field research in the Czech Republic, while data with regard to Poland has been solicited from the research conducted by Przemysław Kisiel. I admit that this comparison of the museum–audience relationship in post-communist countries is limited to only two countries; however, it is a unique one in its geographical comparison. In fact, the empirical research in Prague's institutions ran concurrently with that in Poland under the direction of Kisiel, where a similar survey was used to measure the participation and expectations of the visitors to art institutions.⁴

My empirical research was conducted between 2016 and 2018 in eight art institutions in the Czech Republic (mainly in Prague) and as such was vital in forming a critical argument as to whether art institutions facilitate (or not) the unbiased reception of artworks in the realms of the post-communist decade. The distribution of on-site surveys in the form of questionnaires took place from September 2016 to May 2018. There were 281 complete questionnaires collected from eight art institutions, more specifically museums and galleries, which were randomly selected to obtain the most representative sample. The

⁴ The study of Przemysław Kisiel took place in only one museum, namely the National Museum in Cracow (between 2017 and 2018), and focused on a specific group of young visitors aged between 15–19 (sample size included 132 respondents). The greater majority of similar questions was used in the surveys in both countries. In the Czech Republic, the survey did not focus on a specific age group, but was distributed to all visitors regardless of their age. Each visitor was asked to write his/her age, thus the cluster age group segregation took place *post factum*.

selected art institutions included five state-owned museums/galleries (Kinsky Palace, Rudolfinum, Stone Bell House, National Museum, and Trade Fair Palace) and three private ones (DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, Museum Kampa, and Meet Factory). The choice of the most popular art institutions in the Prague's art scene rather than small art galleries was driven by the need to collect responses from the most diverse groups of audience, which can be challenging in the case of small art galleries, as these often tend to be 'more visible' to selected groups of audience, predominantly those composed of actively engaged art professionals or connoisseurs of the local art scene.

The collection process of questionnaires took place during different days and times in order to reach a broad range of visitors. The questionnaires were available in Czech, Polish, and English, as the composition of visitors consisted of Czechs, foreigners living in Prague, and tourists. The questionnaire was composed of 16 questions: five open-ended ones, eleven closed-ended ones, and the metrics part, which asked respondents to provide information pertaining to their profile (age, gender, city and country of residence, education level of parents, and economic status based on the income). For the purpose of this article, I will mainly focus on the analysis of selected answers concerning the visitors' expectations.

An important factor involved participation in the local culture, and my argument regarding the emergence of a new audience is age. For the measurement of the age of visitors, I had to use distribution within the controlled group, as no other data is available on the large scale. The National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture (NIPOS) provides statistics on the number of visitors to selected museums

and galleries in the Czech Republic. However, the data supplied by the NIPOS does not provide the breakdown of the specific age or age groups of visitors. I acknowledge that my own data represents a relatively small sample of visitors attending Czech art institutions, yet it can be used for the purpose of generally understanding their expectations, since the sample derives from eight different institutional settings. The collection of data in each art museum/gallery took place during two annual intervals (four in total for the entire research period), which made it possible to reach the respondents attending different temporary exhibitions.

The aesthetic experience and visual culture both play a very important role in the life of Czech young visitors, who declare they visit art institutions due to their interest in art (82%). At the same time, significantly lower satisfaction is expressed with visiting art institutions involved in the study (46%), which reveals interesting parallels. These, however, were possible to measure by implementing the qualitative research approach of asking open-ended questions. First, a much lower 'liking' in visiting art institutions was measured as a sign of displeasure with the setting where an encounter with art and aesthetic experience took place. This setting relates to the organization of exhibition space, display of art works, and tools (such as new technology, guides, educational workshops, etc.) provided by the institution to enhance the museum/gallery experience. The assessment was based on the responses to the three open-ended questions included in the questionnaire, namely: 1) In your opinion, what could improve the conditions of visiting the museum/art gallery?; 2) If you had a chance to introduce new changes to the museum/gallery space, what would they be?; and 3) In your opinion, how museums/art galleries should take advantage of the Internet? The

most common shortcomings shared by the local visitors related to the navigation through the museum space, more information on individual artists, free entrance, more informative videos, as well as more digital and interactive contents. Second, the exhibited art objects did not fulfil the visitors' expectations about the aesthetic kind of experience. Last, little encouragement to visit art institutions came from these visitors' teachers (only 4% declared to have received a recommendation from their teachers), indicating poor involvement of school educators in forming art competence of young visitors, but much better one in the case of the social environment, i.e. friends and family (21%). The last parallel reflects the findings of Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper (1991), who argued that one's art literacy is strongly linked to his/her rich cultural capital gained from friends and family who provided greater contact with culture, rather than associated with formal school education.

For a comparative analysis in Poland, I will use the research findings of Kisiel, generated from the collection of open-ended survey which took place in the National Museum in Cracow between 2017 and 2018, and involved 132 high-school students. By using a functionalist perspective, Kisiel analyzed the perception of art museum institutions by young visitors aged 17–19. This particular age group, which I have also followed in my own research, was based on the categorization used by the PEW Research Center. In his survey, Kisiel focused on issues such as content (preferences in the style of visiting particular museum exhibitions), presentation (opinions of the visitors about the organization of the visited exhibition), new technology, and the experience of the museum space (along with proposed changes for the improvement). The timeline of research in the Czech Republic represents a data collection stretched over two years and gathered from eight

institutions, while in Poland it covered only one museum within the period of one year. However, the lower institutional count in Poland still enabled to outline general views of the respondents at the cross-geographical level.

The young visitors researched in Kisiel's study displayed a higher level of cultural activity when compared to older generations (e.g. Millennials and Generation X), and expected modifications regarding the museum's visiting, taking into account the possibility of using new technologies.⁵ They expect art museums to maintain the traditional patterns of viewing art objects in the museum setting as well as they underline the presence of art institutions as being very important for the society. The need to have video presentations explaining viewed works was expressed by 46% (n=132) of the respondents, indicating that young visitors expect museums to provide education (Table 1). It would be erroneous to think that young visitors in Poland need active on-line presence during their museum visit. Kisiel's study revealed that 72% of the respondents marked the lack of need to listen to music and/or be active on social networking sites. In fact, the active use of the Internet for the museum activity has been recommended by visitors for the museum propagation and education through their website, giving preference to a direct contact with the works of art, as expressed by 55% of the survey participants.

Similar patterns could be observed in the research findings from the Czech Republic, where 77% of visitors (n=281) feel no desire to be active on their mobile devices during their art museum/gallery visit. How-

ever, a much higher number of visitors in the Czech Republic (30%) when compared to Poland (14%) expect the use of new technologies in the exhibition setting. The qualitative measurement in the form of the open-ended questions asked in the Czech questionnaire allowed me to collect more specific examples pertaining to the type of new technologies that the respondents would like to see in art institutions. The examples included interactive boards, audio recordings (which still are not offered in many Czech art institutions), an educational video assisting the exhibition, QR codes, and Virtual Reality. Some examples of new technologies often adopted by museums worldwide include Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), immersive exhibitions, QR codes, and interactive spaces for creativity. These technologies are promoted not only as enhancing the viewing experience, but, more importantly, as those which better aid the visitors' learning process. What is rather worrying is that despite the increased educational efforts and activities introduced by many art institutions to comply with the national cultural policy activities, about 54% of Czech visitors express that art institutions should provide more education with regard to general art history and more information about the displayed art objects (37%). In fact, the need for educational videos assisting the exhibitions was listed most often by 36% of the respondents, while the need for VR was mentioned only by 2% of them. Furthermore, for 46% of the Czech visitors, the main role which art institutions should play in the society today is to provide equal access to contemporary and historical art objects; however, this role does not seem to be fulfilled yet. These findings clearly illustrate that a long-standing and persistent problem in providing equal access to the art world has been rooted in the institutional level (school and art museums/galleries), as already criticized by sociologists conducting research in different countries – name-

⁵ The source of this information is Kisiel's presentation titled "Museum of Art and the Expectations of Young Visitors" and presented at the European Sociological Association (ESA) Conference in 2018 in Malta.

ly Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper (1991), Zolberg (1990), DiMaggio and Useem (1978), and Hanquinet (2016) – who exposed the issue to be universal and not local.

Table 1. Expectations of visitors – comparative answers provided by the visitors of art institutions in Poland and the Czech Republic, based on the study by Kisiel (for Poland) and Grigar (for the Czech Republic)

Expectations of visitors	Poland	Czech Republic
Visitors who do not need to listen to music and/or be active on social networking sites during art museum/gallery visit	72%	77%
Art institutions should provide more education on art history and contemporary art	N/A*	54%
Art institutions should provide equal access to contemporary and historical art objects	N/A*	46%
Art institutions should organize more educational workshops and seminars for visitors	N/A*	42%
Visitors who need more information and/or video provided (next to art objects)	46%	37%
Visitors who expect art institutions to offer greater interactivity and the use of new technologies	14%	30%
Visitors who are satisfied with the way in which art object are displayed	29%	23%
Visitors who would like to have the possibility of touching the art object	7%	12%
Visitors who agree that art institutions should provide more seats inside the gallery space	22%	11%

*Country data is not available.

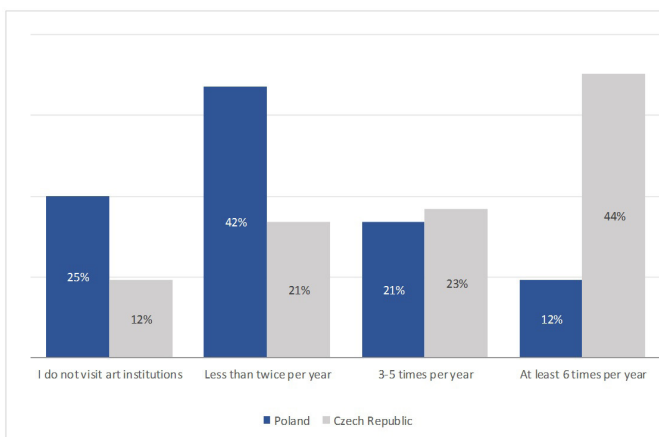
Source: own study based on the research results in the Czech Republic (n=281). Sample size evaluated for Poland (n=132) includes data supplied by Kisiel

While regular visits to art institutions have been seen as strengthening one's cultural capital, the greater majority of Polish visitors (42%) attend them less than twice a year. This contrasts with the data gathered on visitors to art institutions in Prague, where 44% claimed to visit them at least six times a year (Figure 1). Significant factors which contribute to such a disparity and make Czech visitors more active participants in the art world are rooted in the social environment linked directly to their upbringing. First, in comparison to the rest of the Czech Republic, Prague distinguishes itself as a city with the richest art environment (regarding the number and diversity of art institutions) as well as a dense concentration of individuals with strong cultural capital. According to a study conducted by Czech sociologist Daniel Prokop (Prokop et al. 2019), the secured middle class and the emerging cosmopolitan class (combined together, they represent 34% of the country's population) have the highest percentage of the cultural capital among six social classes recognized in the Czech Republic; approximately 34% of the members who represent the secured middle class and 23% of the emerging cosmopolitan class live in Prague. Second, visiting art institutions is regarded by some as a sign of social class status (cultural refinement as a mark of elites), which also explains why 7% of young visitors in the Czech study claimed to visit art institutions out of the social pressure "to show interest in art."

Indeed, the place of one's residence and the presence of cultural institutions in its close vicinity also play an important role in shaping the visitors' cultural capital. This link between cultural capital and geographic space has been a subject of a research study by Laurie Hanquinet (2016). The sociologist's investigation of six art museums in Belgium (the study involved 1900 respondents) tested the configuration

of visitors' cultural capital and their place of residence, suggesting that place should be perceived in relational terms (Hanquinet 2016:77). The example of Prague and Cracow illustrates Hanquinet's argument through a similar correlation in terms of the urban characteristics of each city and the composition of the cultural capital of their visitors.⁶ Thus, the aesthetic competence of audience is not only conditioned by just social, but also geographical space of residence, further solidifying the classic findings of Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper (1991) – and their successors – with regard to the utmost importance of the relationship between one's social origin and his/her aesthetic competence.

Figure 1: Frequency of visits to art institutions in Poland and the Czech Republic



Source: own study based on the research results (n =101). For the Czech Republic, only visitors aged 17–19 were considered for comparable data measurement with Poland

⁶ According to the study issued by Narodowy Instytut Muzealnictwa i Ochrony Zbiorów (NIMOZ) for the year 2018, the percentage of art museums in relation to all museums in Cracow is 4%, while in the capitol city Warsaw (which would be a comparable example to Prague) it is 6.8%.

Concluding remarks

Kenneth Hudson (1975) argued that from the very beginning of their establishment, museums were institutions which were rather less amicable and affected toward the plebeian public. Apart from the accusation that artworks stored in the museum are taken out of their original context and lose their aura (Dewey 1934), the museum's function, as argued by Merleau-Ponty (1952), might not always have a positive character:

The Museum gives us a thieves' conscience. We occasionally sense that these works were not after all intended to end up between these morose walls, for the pleasure of Sunday strollers or Monday "intellectuals." We are well aware that something has been lost and that this meditative necropolis is not the true milieu of art—that so many joys and sorrows, so much anger, and so many labors were not *destined* one day to reflect the Museum's mournful light. (p. 99)

While seemingly over-exaggerated, Merleau-Ponty's morbid view of the museum as a necropolis is not a far cry from the general view of museums as places with sacred aura and museum objects as sacred. Just as religion and its props are accepted and not questioned by most of its religious devotees, objects present in art institutions are accepted by most visitors as art at face value. An institution opening itself to the public translates into it breaking the traditional character and becoming an "autonomous sphere," as observed by Max Weber, who argued that "the more art becomes an autonomous sphere...the more art tends to acquire its own set of constitutive values, which are quite different from those obtaining in the religious and ethical domain" (1978:608).

The view of museums and art institutions as places with embedded traditionalism has prevented many

sociologists of art to look beyond the façade of its power into the fundamental parts that make that system function. The unique perspective offered by Becker on the nature of the art world not only unveils the system's vulnerability, but also points to the power that the audience have in creating the new world and annihilating the old one. For Becker, it is not artworks, artists, or art institutions that decide on their faith, but, rather, the audience. "Audiences select what will occur as an artwork by giving or withholding their participation in an event or their attention to an object, and by attending selectively to what they attend to" (Becker 2008:214). Thus, the audience give meaning to works of art and can ultimately decide on its faith. On the other hand, Becker underlines that what constitutes his idea of the art world is collective action with different actors who participate in the process. As he stated, "[T]he people engaged in collective action might be fighting or intriguing against one another... The nature of these relations between people is not given *a priori*, not something you can establish by definition" (Becker 2008:383).

The latest objective of contemporary art institutions is to transform themselves into educational spaces of active character, yet as the findings of my empirical research unveil, the educational part remains the weakest chain of the latest institutional transformation in the eyes of Czech and Polish visitors, who would like to have more information on art works provided and new technologies used in order to aid learning. Art institutions which fail to accommodate the needs of the new audience face the loss of popularity, visitors, and eventually artists, who would rather display their work elsewhere. One danger which art institutions can soon face comes from alternative venues of art display, particularly the public sphere. When the artwork is produced for a display in the public sphere, it is not directed to an elitist group

of art connoisseurs or individuals with some knowledge of art, but, rather, to a broad range of individuals with varying degrees of cultural capital, who will ultimately decide on the faith of the artwork without the involvement of institutional intermediary, thus shaking and redefining its role in the wholistic process of art production.

Becker's idea of an *art world* presumes that collective activity is equally supported by its all structural pillars – the artist, the art institution, and the audience – while the unequal division of labor can cause the fall of that art world as a new one emerges. Using this postulate, the presented article offers the analysis of the role that art institutions play in the making of the art world by means of questioning a degree of audience engagement, which these institutions are sometimes reluctant to facilitate. The results acquired from empirical research conducted by Kisiel in Poland and myself in the Czech Republic advocate expectations to be considered by art institutional application of audience development initiatives in order to answer the needs of the changing audience of art institutions. As suggested by Kisiel (2018), the new type of cultural recipients is likely to inflict the crisis of the traditional authorities, requiring new models of knowledge distribution along with a new dimension of participation in culture. These factors do not only force changes to the traditional institutional setting – one focused on passive consumption of culture – but they also foster *inclusive platforms of gaining knowledge about art*, as well as active participation. Employed interaction and visitors' active participation will doubtlessly answer the call of the new museology. As a closing remark, I would like to expand Kirchberg's appals (2016:235) that it is not only that "[m]useums can no longer act autonomously and independently from social contexts in which they are imbedded"; the same goes also for the cultural policy writers.

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Tworzenie nowego świata sztuki: o instytucjach sztuki i ich odbiorcach

Abstrakt: Howard S. Becker (1982) i Vera L. Zolberg (1990) wskazali na pojawienie się nowej publiczności jako jednej z głównych sił napędowych zmian w praktyce artystycznej, w której instytucje sztuki odgrywają ważną rolę w zapewnianiu doświadczeń zarówno estetycznych, jak i edukacyjnych, ale mogą też spotkać się z krytyką dotyczącą ekskluzywności i takiegoż budowania środowiska partycypacyjnego.

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zbadanie współczesnych relacji muzeów i galerii sztuki z ich odbiorcami, z uwzględnieniem roli, jaką odegrało pojawienie się nowej socjologii sztuki, socjologii muzeum oraz rozwój publiczności, kwestionujących rolę muzeów jako instytucji społeczno-kulturalnych nastawionych na demokratyzację kultury. Posługując się badaniami empirycznymi, które zrealizowano w wybranych instytucjach sztuki w Czechach i Polsce, poddam namysłowi, jak młodzi zwiedzający postrzegają instytucje sztuki w świetle ich niedawnych dążeń do stania się inkluzywnymi platformami zdobywania wiedzy o sztuce, które promują i ułatwiają aktywne uczestnictwo, a nie bierną konsumpcję.

Słowa kluczowe: nowe muzealnictwo, socjologia muzeum, nowa publiczność, światy sztuki, rozwój publiczności, Becker, Zolberg, instytucje sztuki, Czechy, Polska, inkluzyjne platformy zdobywania wiedzy o sztuce, digitalizacja muzeum