

Exhibition of contemporary art as a service

Research on the needs of exhibition recipients at the Centre for Contemporary Art Kronika. Analysis and improvement of design processes influencing the experiences of exhibition visitors.

We think of the visitors to the contemporary art exhibition as people who were attracted by the artist's theme. We think of them as people who came to contemplate the branch of art they were interested in or to get to know the work of a particular artist. They are interested in art – it is the desire to come into contact with it that motivates to visit the gallery, and its reception is a factor influencing whether it was a satisfying experience or not. It is obvious that it is an important factor. But not the only one.

When we think about the participants of institutional cultural life, we often forget that whether their experience in using the services of our institutions will be positive is influenced by many factors, and only one of them is the program of the institutions and the theme of the event itself. The way our guests remember their visit will also depend on whether they were able to reach their destination without any problems. It depends on whether they had the opportunity to meet their friends there. Following this lead, questions begin to arise. What role does participation in culture play in their social life? How did our guests find out about the exhibition? Did they feel well informed or lost on the spot? Finally, did the visit fulfill their expectations? What were these expectations? As it turns out, these questions can be multiplied endlessly. In order to be able to provide visitors to an art gallery with comfort and positive experiences, we need to know the answers to them.

This is a difficult challenge, but one that can be met by cultural institutions that do not usually have the resources for costly research. The following report contains a set of tools that will enable us, to a large extent, among the employees of the institutions, to methodically learn the answers to these questions and better identify the needs of our guests. The report will also be an analysis of design processes.

Methodology and research tools

Effective methods of diagnosing needs are already used in design process. One of them is the methodology of service design, which is often used by the private sector, large corporations and many designers. Knowing the needs and preferences of the recipients of their services and products, they are able to improve quality and, as a result, increase their profits. Maybe this is the reason why this methodology is not common in the sector represented by cultural institutions dealing with contemporary art – in most cases they are not aimed at generating profits.

Thanks to the analysis of research and practices concerning the experiences of the recipients of the activities of cultural institutions, I was able to adapt this methodology to the needs of such institutions. The report contains a description of the methods I proposed. Then it is an exact record of the implementation of these methods in the Centre for Contemporary Art Kronika in Bytom. Finally, I describe the implemented projects based on research findings, such as posters or a system of descriptions of works of art.

Thanks to the fact that I work in the Centre for Contemporary Art Kronika on a daily basis and I am a designer responsible for the prints and all visual materials, I can fully control the discussed processes and implementations.

Possible effects

As we learn from the research – promotional activities of institutions and information about them in traditional media generated approximately less than 20% of visits even before social media became popular¹. The analysis of the impact of various sources of information about exhibitions shows that direct human relations are more effective than media advertisements². Friends are the most reliable source of information, and their encouragement is the most frequent impulse to visit the gallery. On the other hand, the lack of recommendations by people from the environment is the most common reason for not using the services of the institution³. The importance of these processes has increased in the era of common use of social media.

Whether a guest of an art gallery will recommend a visit to his friends will be determined by whether his experience gained in the gallery was positive or not. We can deduce from this a simple conclusion that by working on improving the potential experience of visitors we contribute to the fact that our institution is recommended in the circles of our guests. Thanks to this we can positively influence the increase in attendance.

Innym efektem posługiwania się metodami opisywanymi w raporcie może być zwiększenie skuteczności działania samej instytucji. Wspólna praca, proponowane warsztaty w gronie pracowników mogą zaowocować lepszą koordynacją działań zespołu, oszczędnością czasu i eliminacją niektórych z tych czynników, które sprawiają, że praca przy przygotowaniu wystaw bywa stresująca.

Another effect of using the methods described in the report may be an increase in the effectiveness of the institution itself. Joint work, proposed workshops among employees may result in better coordination of team activities, time savings and elimination of some of the factors that make work on preparing exhibitions stressful.

Who can use the report?

This report can be helpful for many employees of cultural institutions. First of all, for those who manage them, run projects and employees who are in contact with people visiting the institutions. It is also a source of many solutions and recommendations, which may turn out to be extremely useful for designers working in cultural institutions.

In short – if you want to better diagnose the needs of people visiting your institution and improve the operation within it, and you do not necessarily have the resources to hire a research agency or order an audit – this is the book for you.

1. Falk, J. H., Dierking, L. D., *The Museum Experience*, [online] <https://books.google.pl/books?id=4a5mDAAAQBAJ&hl>, [access: 15.09.2019], p. 32.

2. Matuchniak-Krasuska, A., *Zarys socjologii sztuki Pierre'a Bourdieu*, Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2010, p. 106.

Falk, J. H., Dierking, L. D., *The Museum Experience Revisited*, [online] <https://books.google.pl/books?id=vK5mDAAAQBAJ&hl>, [access: 15.09.2019], p. 72.

What does it contain and how to use it?

The complexity of the described issues affected the final volume of the publication, which grew to 250 pages. For the convenience of the reader, the content has a clear structure. The first part of the report contains a set of methodologies largely based on suitably adapted methods of service design. **(1.0—Methods – theory)**. I explain in turn what these methods are, what they are for, and how to use them.

In the next chapter **(2.0—Research)** I describe the ways of gaining knowledge about the experiences of the guests of cultural institutions, such as interviews or surveys. We will need this knowledge using the methods described above. Probably the most important part of the report is the record of how particular methods were implemented in the CCA Kronika. **(3.0—Methods – practice)**. This chapter contains a number of visualizations and diagnoses.

Describing subsequent methods used in Kronika, I summarize their effects in the form of diagnosed problems and specific recommendations.

Previously formulated recommendations are the basis for the creation of project assumptions and further implementations in Kronika, which are to improve the experience of our guests. **(4.0—Implementations in Kronika)**. These projects are presented in detail in this chapter. I also present here (where possible) conclusions from the research concerning the experiences of the visitors of the Chronicle in using these new solutions.

Chapters **1.0—Methods – theory, 2.0—Research, 3.0—Methods – practice i 4.0—Implementations in Kronika** are accompanied, written in parallel, by conclusions from research on the described issues in Poland and abroad.

In Poland and around the world we have access to a huge amount of research on the recipients of culture. In this report, I try to translate this research into concrete conclusions, solutions and methods addressed to designers and employees of institutions.

This allows me to adapt quite universal methods of designing services to the specificity of preparing an exhibition of contemporary art. I also confront my conclusions from the research conducted in Kronika with the research on the same issues conducted in the world. Thanks to this, I am able to determine where the needs of the Kronikas visitors coincide with the needs of users of other cultural institutions, and where they are specific only to this place. This is an important element of this report.

The last chapter devoted to the conclusions from the research is a list of recommendations for Kronika (**5.0—Recommendations**), the implementation of which does not fall directly within the competence of the designer. These recommendations may refer to other members of the team, as well as to the general programme of the institution.

In the report I also included materials such as detailed research outlines created for the purpose of surveys and interviews conducted in Kronika. Here you will also find additional information about the CCA Kronika. (**6.0—Appendix**).

What does this form of publication come from?

Originally, the report was to be only a record, documentation of the methods of designing services used in Kronika and implementation of the resulting solutions. The experience of the last two years has led me to change this assumption. During this time I had the opportunity to present some of the methods I developed at the *Potencjał kolekcji i kolekcjonowania. Projektowanie doświadczeń publiczności* – a symposium organized by the State Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw. The symposium was attended by representatives of many leading Polish institutions. For example, representatives of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews POLIN presented a study commissioned by their institution – *Segmentation study of cultural participants*, to which I often refer in my report. It turned out that I was the only speaker who, in addition to reporting on the work on improving the experience of the public in his own institution, presented universal methods that are possible to implement in other institutions. My approach met with great interest. I received similar signals from researchers and employees of cultural institutions during the *Data (for) culture* conference organised by the Katowice Miasto Ogrodów at the end of 2017. Taking part in the workshops “Designing services in practice” organized by the Zamek Cieszyn, I learned from its leader – Marcin Piotrowski (who leads the User Experience Design Play team on a daily basis) that I am the first person connected with the field of art, which he has the pleasure to train.

These experiences have confirmed my conviction that there is a great need in the environment of institutions dedicated to art for activities such as mine. Hence the decision to develop the publication in such a manner that it could be used by others to the greatest possible extent. To take the form of a textbook – a collection of methods and instructions.