

Communication Matters: How Do Visitors Interact with Ethnographic Open-Air Museums?

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Abstract. Though the concept of an ethnographic open-air museum is not a new one, little is known about the interplay between a visitor and an amalgam museum setting. Ethnographic open-air museums are complex spaces with shared qualities of outdoor sites and indoor museums. Grounded in Gibson's theory of affordances (1979), the article explores how visitors interact within and in relation to the hybrid space of ethnographic open-air museum and how communication shapes their interactions. The analysis is based on a qualitative study of visitors in the Belarusian State Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Lifestyle (Aziartso, Belarus) and the Open-Air Museum of Lithuania (Rumšiškės, Lithuania). The data were collected using participatory observation and semistructured interviews with visitors. The article employs a constructivist approach and conceptualizes an ethnographic museum as a free-choice environment, where behavior patterns are linked to the institutional context and the visitors' ability to perceive the information about the objects and environments that specified the possibilities and constraints for interacting with the museum's space. The study reveals how cultural communication fosters the diversity of visiting scenarios and the perceptions of ethnographic open-air museums as cultural heritage sites, natural parks and stages for entertainment. The implications of this research could be relevant to cultural policymakers and communication specialists in designing the cultural, recreational and educational policies of museums.

Keywords: affordances, communication, ethnographic open-air museums, information.

Komunikacijos esmė: kaip lankytojai sąveikauja su muziejais po atviru dangumi?

Santrauka. Nors etnografinio muziejaus po atviru dangumi idėja nėra nauja, kol kas mažai yra žinoma apie lankytojo sąveiką su mišria muziejaus aplinka. Etnografiniai muziejai po atviru dangumi yra hibridinės erdvės, pasižyminčios bendromis lauko vietovių ir patalpų viduje įrengtų muziejų savybėmis. Remiantis Gibsono (1979) aplinkos galimybių (angl. *affordances*) teorija, straipsnyje nagrinėjama, kaip lankytojai sąveikauja su etnografinių muziejų po atviru dangumi hibridine erdve ir kokiū būdu šis sąveikavimas komunikacijos formuojamas. Analizė paremta

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Baltarusijos valstybinio liaudies architektūros ir buities muziejaus (Aziarco, Baltarusija) ir Lietuvos liaudies buities muziejaus (Rumšiškės, Lietuva) lankytojų kokybinių tyrimu. Duomenys buvo surinkti naudojant dalyvaujamąjį stebėjimą ir pusiau struktūruotus interviu su šių vietovių lankytojais. Straipsnyje taikoma konstruktyvistinė prieiga, o etnografinis muziejus suvokiamas kaip laisvo pasirinkimo aplinka, kurioje elgsenos modeliai susieti su instituciniu kontekstu ir lankytojų gebėjimu suprasti informaciją, kuri apibrėžė galimybes ir apribojimus sąveikai su muziejaus erdve. Tyrimas atskleidžia, kaip kultūrinė komunikacija sukuria lankymo scenarijų įvairovę ir etnografinių muziejų po atviru dangumi kaip kultūros paveldo vietovės, gamtos parko ir pramogų vietos suvokimus. Tyrimo išvados galėtų būti aktualios kultūros strategijos kūrėjams ir komunikacijos specialistams formuojant etnografinių muziejų po atviru dangumi kultūrinę, rekreacinę ir edukacinę politiką.

Raktažodžiai: aplinkos galimybės, komunikacija, etnografiniai muziejai po atviru dangumi, informacija.

Introduction

Contemporary museums, in their capacities as public memory institutions, have been shifting toward expanding their functions from collecting and preserving exhibits to communicating ideas and facilitating conversations with diverse audiences. Ethnographic open-air museums collect, preserve, and display objects of ethnography (artifacts, constructions, and whole settlements), exhibited *in situ* and contextualized using the re-enactments of intangible cultural heritage (Rentzhog 2007). With the intention to disseminate knowledge about the vernacular architecture and lifestyle in pre-industrial times, this museological genre combines the rigor of indoor ethnographic collections and the pliability of natural landscapes, animated using diverse communicative means, including interactive guided tours, staged rituals, and traditional celebrations. Considering this heterogeneity of the institutional context, as well as the ambiguity of communicative channels and tools, little is known about how contemporary visitors engage with the reconstructed spaces that are full of vivid remnants of a disappeared order.

By applying Gibson's Theory of Affordances, and by stating that the perception of the environment inevitably leads to some course of action (Gibson 2014), this article empirically investigates the affordances of ethnographic-open air museums as an inter-referential play between the visitors and the museums' settings, and explicates how communication and information affect the visitor's perceptions of a museum. With this goal in mind, the research questions of the paper are the following: how do visitors frame and interact with the amalgam setting of ethnographic open-air museums? How does communication impact the visitor framings of ethnographic open-air museums?

The discussion is based on participatory observations and interviews with the visitors of the Belarusian State Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Lifestyle (Aziartso, Belarus) and the Open-air Museum of Lithuania (Rumšiškės, Lithuania). The museums have similar backgrounds, methodologies, and the biographies of objects, being established as a response to the rapid urbanization affecting the radical social change of the countryside. The ethnographic open-air museum occupies vast natural landscapes and displays relocated buildings with reconstructed environments, representing rural architecture and daily life in the pre-industrial period (McLoughlin & Cioffi 2011). The buildings are grouped according to the geographical principle, displaying the different ethnographic areas of the country (Young 2006). To demonstrate the objects in the process, ethnographic open-air museums apply third-person interpretations, story-telling, re-enactments (Naumova

2015), and they often hold fairs, festivals and events to introduce visitors to a revitalized vernacular culture.

A recent shift to new museology (Van Mensh et al. 2011) and a visitor-centered approach highlighted the need for studies shifting focus from the objects and the materiality of museums toward more nuanced accounts of visitors' voices, ideas, and behaviors. The present study approaches the topic in line with that argumentation and thereby seeks to contribute to the research field concerned with visitor and communication studies.

The paper begins with the theoretical overview of the approaches to affordances, which constitutes the setting for the visitor interactions. Employing the empirical data, the findings will map the dynamics of visitor perceptions and behavior patterns within the complex context of ethnographic open-air museums. By investigating the museum affordances, the role of cultural communication management in relation to visitor behavior is exemplified.

Literature Review

The concept of affordance was introduced by Gibson in the theory of ecological perception, referring to the physical properties of objects and places and actions that they evoke of the species within the particular settings. Gibson states that "the affordances of the environment are what it offers [...]" (Gibson 2014). The perception of the environment and any forthcoming interaction are crucial to Gibson's concept: actors move through space and perceive objects and behave in relation to the situational needs and demands. It is generally accepted that affordances do not exclusively depend on the perception; however, they are available to be perceived by the actors (Michels 2003).

Norman defines affordances in terms of "a result from the mental interpretation of things" (Norman 1988) based on previous knowledge and experience. Thus, communication plays an important role in fostering knowledge. George Barker (1968) claims that behavioral settings evoke "behavior units," a discrete "bounded pattern in the behavior of men, en masse" (Barker 1968). In other words, behavior units are attached to a particular context, constituted as a combination of different physical, cognitive and communicative domains.

In museological discourse, affordances were explicitly addressed in relation to design constraints of interactive exhibits in science centers (Allen & Gutwill 2004) and different spatial domains in art museums (Tröndle 2014). Wineman & Peponis (2010) argue that the exhibition's layout and the organization of space have intrinsic cognitive functions and implications that can interact with curatorial interventions in alternative ways.

Thus, previous research points toward the institutional context as playing an important role in relation to visitor interaction and the way that behavior is shaped. In relation to open-air museums, previous studies about visitor perceptions and communication are non-existent. Little is known about the nature of the interaction between visitors and the hybrid spaces of an ethnographic open-air museum, and the influence that communication has on the outcome of a visit.

Methods and Material

The study takes off from a sociocultural approach, which means that visitor perceptions and behavior patterns are understood as socially and culturally constructed (Ehn et al. 2016) and mediated within the particular settings. The way that people deconstruct the affordances of a space influences how they act and feel able to act within a particular context.

The present account utilizes data from visitors to the Belarusian State Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Lifestyle (Aziartso, Belarus) and Open-air Museum of Lithuania (Rumšiškės, Lithuania). The research was conducted as a case study – a commonly used method in exploratory research – based on inductive logic, involving the study of a case within a contemporary and real context (Yin 2009). A qualitative methodology, combined with the participatory observational method, was deemed the most appropriate means to use in order to scrutinize the frameworks of visitor perceptions and visiting scenarios of ethnographic open-air museums.

The participatory observations were carried out in ethnographic open-air museums at the exit. The observations were documented by taking notes in a notebook. A total number of 32 semistructured exit interviews were conducted with different types of visitors. This sample is not exhaustive; however, it serves the purpose of exploratory research of museum communication and visitor perceptions. In the Belarusian State Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Lifestyle (Aziartso, Belarus) the study was carried out during April–August 2016 and August–September 2017, resulting in 15 qualitative interviews. Consequently, the data from 17 semistructured interviews were collected from the Open-air Museum of Lithuania (Rumšiškės, Lithuania) during June–August 2016 and September 2017.

Characteristic		Belarusian State Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Lifestyle [N=15]	Open-air Museum of Lithuania [N=17]
Type of visit	Individual	9	7
	Group	6	10
Gender	Male	5	8
	Female	10	9
Origin	Locals	3	2
	National visitors	7	5
	Foreigners (non-national visitors)	5	10
Guidance	Non-guided	8	7
	Guided	5	6
	Staged (educational programs)	2	4
Previous visit	First time	10	8
	Repeat	7	7

Figure 1. The demographic characteristics of study participants [N=32].

Interviews took place with 16 individuals and 16 participants in small groups. There were 13 males and 19 females participating in the interviews. The majority of the respondents (17 people) were the citizens of the countries where the museums were located compared to 15 who were tourists from Spain, Italy, Bulgaria, the US, and Russia. Most of the participants stated that they participated in a guided tour or an educational program (17 people, among them 6 having participated in educational programs), and 15 visitors explored the museums on their own. Many participants (18 people) mentioned that they visited ethnographic open-air museums for the first time, while 14 were returning visitors. Figure 1 shows the demographics of the sample.

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed by the author and translated. The analysis has been performed through repeated readings of transcripts and field notes. The second stage of the analysis involved an examination of the frames identified in the data working with the conceptual tools of the affordances of ethnographic open-air museums. The framings were identified based on the visitors' descriptions of ethnographic open-air museums, a mapping of how they utilize and explore the sites as well as how their visits were arranged. For reporting purposes, the informants were assigned false names.

The empirical approach has some obvious limitations. The findings are based on a case study of two ethnographic open-air museums, which limits the possibilities of generalizing the expressed views; however, bearing the exploratory aim of the present study to map the visitors' perceptions of ethnographic museum affordances, the possible inability to generalize is not considered to be a major issue.

Findings and Discussion

With the goal to determine the interrelation between visitors and spaces (Achiam et al. 2014), the intent of the data analysis was to frame the visiting scenarios and perceptions of ethnographic open-air museums. The following questions guided the analysis of the material during the identification of frames: why do visitors come to ethnographic open-air museums? How do they interact with the different realms of a museum? What is the role of mediated communication in shaping the perceptions about the museums?

The analysis of the interviews revealed three frameworks and consequent behavior units associated with the affordances of the complex environment: the museum as a learning space with the primary focus on the cultural realm (14 cases), the museum as a natural park (10 cases) with the recreational benefits of the visit, and the museum as a stage for entertainment and socialization (8 cases). The detailed analysis of the empirical data and frameworks will be presented and discussed further.

“Lessons About the Past”:

Ethnographic Open-Air Museums as Learning Environments

This frame can be traced as the visitors' primary framework in terms of the organization and perception of ethnographic open-air museums. The majority of the visitors (14 respondents) express their perceptions of museums as cultural heritage sites and learning

environments. Within this framing, the museum as a genre plays an important role, imposing museological norms on the visitors. This section discusses how visitors relate to the vernacular exhibitory content of ethnographic and architectural heritage, non-existent in the contemporary social context.

The cultural realm is predominantly articulated by the first-time visitors, whose visits are often strictly framed by the itinerary of the guided tour, the information being communicated by scholars or teachers. During the interviews, these visitors constructed the narratives around the materiality of the objects and the cultural importance of memory institutions:

It's a good place to know more about the traditions and vernacular lifestyle of the Belarusian people. Lidia, our guide, explained the organization and interiors of the houses; we found out about weaving and even participated in the weaving process. This museum is a good place to explore the past and provides hands-on experience of history (Natalia from Belarus, Aziartso, May 2016).

Natalia emphasized the value of cognitive and physical immersion in the reconstructed environments due to the demonstrations and mediations provided by the guide. Visitors are able to obtain rigor and deeper knowledge when the interaction with and within the museum spaces has a formal orchestrated mode and was previously planned (visitors were morally and mentally prepared for a day-trip):

Since we wanted to get more succinct information about Belarusian history and culture for our guest from Bulgaria, we ordered a private guided tour to explore the museum at our own pace. We walked around the whole museum and visited almost every house. We tried to find similarities in vernacular culture between Belarus and Bulgaria, and our guide assisted a lot (Svetlana and Anna from Belarus, and Bradomir from Bulgaria, Aziartso, May 2017).

These visitors endorse the value of the ethnographic open-air museum as a cultural institution for communicating the credible knowledge and information about vernacular culture and translating the idealized image of a country to foreigners:

Justina: We wanted to demonstrate real Lithuanian culture and hospitality to our guests from Italy. The ethnographic open-air museum does not simply display the static culture but provides the opportunity to participate in educational activities, learn more about the diversity of traditions and customs. (Justina from Lithuania and Paolo from Italy, Rumšiškės, September 2017).

In this case, the ethnographic open-air museum is perceived as an iconic landmark, a sanctuary of pristine "frozen" traditional culture as well as an authorized institution with the mission to spread coherent information and disseminate new knowledge.

On a more interesting note, both the guided and non-guided visitors, and both coming from the country of a museum's origin and foreigners, when talking about their interactions with cultural heritage, draw on their previous experiences (or an absence of such) of living in wooden houses or rural areas. They construct the cognitive connotations and contextualize the information about the wooden constructions into meaningful structures that mentally relocate them back to their memories and trigger nostalgic feelings. For

example, Valentina from Belarus, after a non-guided visit to an ethnographic open-air museum, recalls the time from her childhood spent at her at grandparents' house:

This house reminds me of the one where my grandparents lived. I got a feeling that I'm back in time and visiting my relatives in the Kasuta village... Here in the museum, I was awed by a man, plowing the field next to the house. That was surreal, because we used to plow the soil in the same way... The picture in my head, it's so vivid and bright (Valentina from Belarus, Aziartso, May 2017).

In the case of Valentina, the vernacular aura, co-created by sensorial experiences of the reconstructed village, evokes personal memories and blurs the gap between present and past, authentic and reconstructed environments, public and private spaces:

The houses look different from those in our village, but the yard, the wooden constructions remind me of those in our village... Yes, the interiors of the houses are not the same, but I can feel this special smell of wood and the sound of the creaky floors, and they are from my childhood (Valentina from Belarus, Aziartso, May 2017).

This study shows that previous experiences of the objects in their original environment increases the emotive impact of the visit and fosters the mental appropriation and re-connection on the personal level to the artifacts when the strange, silent objects of the display are revitalized, and their symbolic value co-created on the basis of personal memories.

Furthermore, several non-guided visitors from Belarus and Lithuania (5 people) expressed their personal attachment to cultural heritage through the geographical anchoring, inasmuch as the museums represent the ethnographic regions of the country:

The museum fascinates by its collections and wooden houses. My favorite section was Samogitia, because I'm originally from that area, I was born and raised in Šiauliai. I felt a particular excitement when we reached the Samogitian sector. I recognized some architectural regional patterns and knew about their origin (Dainius from Lithuania, Rumšiškės, June 2017).

In this framing, visitors utilize ethnographic open-air museums as venues of pristine traditional culture and national landmarks, where visitors can enhance their cultural capital and travel back to their nostalgic memories. To intensify the intellectual and emotional outcomes, the respondents emphasize the necessity of the cultural competences (as was previously discussed in Bourdieu 2013), which was provided through mediated museum communication (guidance and interpretation) by the museum's scholars or derived from any previous personal experience of the objects in real life. Such findings echo Dawson's study (2014), suggesting that staff and information support play a vital role in distributing and fostering knowledge among the visitors with different social and cultural backgrounds.

“A Walk in the Woods”:

Ethnographic Open-Air Museums as Recreational Environments

The second frame is derived from the compositional setting of ethnographic open-air museums to expand the display in the open air and incorporate the natural environment (Noussia 2013). The informants of the second group (10 visitors) conceive the affordances of ethnographic open-air museums as a natural park, emphasizing the recreational scenarios and natural escapism as the primary highlight of the visit.

This framing was revealed among the non-guided returned visitors with previous experience of the sites and clear expectations and ideas about the museum. The visual similarity of the displayed objects (wooden grey constructions) affect the desire to interact with cultural objects, shifting the focus of the visit from the cultural to the natural realms:

To me it is not exactly a museum, it's a park. Old wooden houses look the same... We visited several houses last time, it's enough to visit one house to create the general impression of the site. Today we want to celebrate summer, we are not interested in the houses (Siarhei and Alena from Belarus, Aziartso, May 2016).

In this visitor's view, as with many others in the study, the previous familiarity with the museum's context and the lack of efficient communicative strategies makes the visit more of a routine experience and detracts from the engagement with cultural heritage. Thus, the incorporation of flora and fauna animates displays and landscapes, affording visitors activities usually considered non-standard for the museological genre (for example, horse riding, feeding animals etc.). Vytautas and Irena from Kaunas think of the Lithuanian open-air museum as a place where they can watch and pet domestic animals in their natural habitat:

It's a huge park with pretty houses and beautiful horses. Today we walked around and fed horses with hay. It's not a very common activity for a traditional museum, right? LLBM provides the escape from the city during the summer weekend (Vytautas and Irena from Lithuania, Rumšiškės, August 2016).

The proximity of the museums to urban centers (for example, Minsk and Kaunas) enhances the affordances of a natural escape from daily life. Indeed, experiencing moments of contrast to one's routine environment provides a strong motivation for many forms of experiences and interactions (McIntosh et al. 1995). Thus, for the residents of nearby cities, spending time in the lore of nature in ethnographic open-air museums facilitates moments of tranquility and overall well-being. For example, Agnė recalls the healing effect of the natural environment on the health of her child:

We decided to take our son out because he has just recovered from the fever, and it's beneficial to be in the open-air with the family over the weekend. We just have walked around in the park (Agnė and Jonas from Lithuania, Rumšiškės, August 2016).

This comment suggests that the affordances of natural escapism are observed in cases of non-organized returning visitors, residing in neighboring areas when the proximity of the site diminishes the perception of the museum as a grand heritage site:

Since we live in the nearby village of Rumšiškės, we have visited the museum with a guided tour a long time ago, but attend Christmas and Mardi Gras celebration almost every year. The museum is a good place to walk my dog in the evenings when the houses are closed and there are no tourists. There is a huge forested area with paths and paved ways. We often pick up berries and mushrooms in the summer time on the museum's grounds. It's very comfortable to have this place near our house (Danute from Lithuania, Rumšiškės, August 2016).

Such comment implies that returning visitors from the neighboring areas are likely to utilize ethnographic open-air museums as venues for recreation, summer activities, and natural escapism.

To conclude, the natural realm appears to be favored by the non-organized returning visitors, who are reluctant to silent, visually similar vernacular artefacts. Unlikely to the cultural realm, when the outcome of the interaction with ethnographic and architectural heritage requires cultural competence and previous knowledge, the interplay with the natural affordances retain an inclusive status, inviting visitors with different social and cultural backgrounds to reconnect with nature. The spatial organization of ethnographic open-air museums blurs the perception of a traditional indoor museum visit, supporting Alexander's (1983) initial idea of the democratization of the museum environment and inviting alternative activities within the complex spaces.

“Jamming in the Open Air”: Ethnographic Open-Air Museums as Environments for Entertainment and Socialization

The third frame represents the ethnographic open-air environment as a stage for entertainment (8 visitors) and socialization. In these cases, the primary goal of the visit was neither connected to the cultural nor natural realm; instead, visitors were driven to ethnographic open-air museums because of large-scale events (for example, concerts, shows, and performances) or tourist infrastructure.

Nowadays, museums, as much as other cultural institutions, are met with the challenge of “being open to entrepreneurial approaches while continuing to meet their heritage preservation and educational mandates,” since “economic times have compelled museums and heritage sites to explore ways and means to increase attendance levels and self-generated revenues and to control operating expenditures” (Silberberg 1995). The shortage of state financial support promoted the intensification of commercialization of cultural heritage institutions and the development of diverse events and festivals. For example, in 2017, the Lithuanian open-air museum organized 20 events, primarily themed around vernacular culture and rituals. For example, the Shrovetide Festival, The Celebration St. John, and the Day of Assumption; together with that, the museum hosted the international music festival “Granatos Live”, a specialty dog show for the FCI group IV “Dachund Winner” etc. The Belarusian State Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Lifestyle became a venue for 20 events, where 14 were associated with folk culture and seasonal rituals (e.g., the Harvest festival, St. George's Day, St. John's Day) and 6 had a different thematic focus (for example, a school graduation party, Teachers' Day and St. Valentine's Day).

During the interviews, the participants of the music festivals (for example, “Granatos Live” in Lithuania and “Kamianitsa” in Belarus) explicitly articulate their primary interest in the special aura of music festivals, transforming museums into the venues for the celebration of neo-tribal cultures, evidenced by the shared lifestyles and music tastes.

In the interview, Vera and Vlad, a couple from Minsk, associate the visit to Belarusian State Museum of Folk Architecture and Rural Lifestyle with the participation in music festival “Kamianitsa,” and their particular interest in the performance of the Ukrainian band Onuka:

Vlad: We are big fans of the band Onuka, so when we found out about their participation in Kamianitsa 2017, we immediately booked the tickets. We enjoyed the show, even though it was postponed.

Nadzeya: Have you ever been to the museum? Did you walk around the museum?

Vera: It’s our first time in the museum. Unfortunately, we arrived late and didn’t know about the possibility to visit the houses.

Vlad: Yes, this time we came for Onuka, but we would like to come back and explore the museum itself (Vera and Vlad from Belarus, Aziartso, September 2017).

This case demonstrates that music festivals can stimulate the interest in ethnographic open-air museums and generate the flow of participants; however, the initial agenda of the visit, associated with the particular behavior during the music events (for example, dancing, singing, partying) undermines the symbolic value of the museum as a heritage site. Furthermore, the repeated observations demonstrate that participants of the music festivals were not aware of the possibility to explore the exhibition and interact with the scholars or housekeepers of the museum during the concerts:

It’s our third visit to the electronic open-air music festival, we attended it with our friends. It’s our summer tradition... We enjoyed the atmosphere and the rave of the concert! We never visited the houses during the concert, because we thought that they were closed and we didn’t want to disturb the staff (Daiva from Lithuania, Rumšiškės, August 2017).

Such comment illustrates that during the festivals, visitors remain intellectually and emotionally separated from the objects of vernacular culture and the initial agenda of the museums. The participants of the concerts establish strong social bonds with particular events through the socialization and co-creation of a sense of belonging to modern (new-tribal) cultures and modern music, neglecting the symbolic value of the sites. Therefore, ethnographic open-air museums should carefully develop the communicative strategy and themes of large-scale events, which will complement the initial museological agenda.

As tourist destinations remotely located from the cities, Belarusian and Lithuanian ethnographic open-air museums include the developed tourist infrastructure (for example, restaurants, café-shops, and hotels), attracting the visitors for socialization and the celebration of different occasions on the premises of the sites. The study reveals several cases when visitors were primarily attracted by the catering facilities. For example, the Tavern restaurant, located on the territory of the Lithuanian museum, is a popular place for family celebrations and gatherings. For example, Mikas and Ingrida, a couple from Alytus, decided to celebrate their wedding anniversary in the restaurant of the museum:

Since the main occasion for us today is our wedding celebration, we arrived straight to the Tavern. We had lunch here two years ago – it's a nice place, children-friendly, full of space and privacy. We enjoyed the Lithuanian food here. It's a good restaurant to visit with a big family during the weekend (Mikas and Ingrida, Rumšiškės, August 2016).

Similar to the framework of the natural affordances, the incorporation of a diverse tourist infrastructure into the museum's setting changes the perception of the museum as a temple of culture, offering serious leisure (Stebbins 2007), expanding the boundaries of the cultural institution and transforming it into a tourist destination or a concert zone. The commercialization of cultural heritage leads to the commodification of museums and the exploitation of the premises as sceneries for entertainment, undermining the cultural value of heritage sites. Open-air music festivals and leisure activities in restaurants can be employed as stimuli for potential visitors and returning visitors, so that they may re-experience the amalgam settings of the museums and be able to experience new, meaningful interactions.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to explore the various ways that ethnographic open-air museums are framed by the visitors as well as how the affordances of hybrid settings and communicative design define the visiting scenarios and activities of the visitors on the sites. It shows that as hybrid spaces, ethnographic open-air museums promote diversity of visitor-museum interactions, resulting into three main frameworks of perception: open-air museums as cultural heritage sites, natural parks and playgrounds for entertainment.

The rationale for the visit, as well as the mediated museum communication (e.g., guided tours and educational orchestrated activities), shape the canvas of visitors' engagement with the hybrid museum space. Grounded on the initial motive and situational demands, visitors design the behavioral units accordingly to the agenda and the physical and communicative affordances of the cultural spaces.

Due to the institutional museological context, ethnographic open-air museums are perceived as learning heritage sites, mediating new knowledge and experiences about the vernacular culture and history, creating the effect of travel in time and triggering nostalgic memories associated with the countryside. The ability to tackle personal memory and identity through temporal and spatial anchoring allows visitors to experience a deep, meaningful attachment to the objects of the disappeared order. The study shows that cultural mediation and communication foster closer engagement with the museum spaces, addressing, in a more explicit way, the interactions between visitors, landscapes and ethnographic objects. The framing of a natural park reveals the affordance of ethnographic open-air museums to accommodate environmental and leisurely demands, offering interactions with natural premises and rural escapism. In this framework, the lack of communication, as well as insufficient entry knowledge for making meanings and cognitive connections to the exhibitions, distanced visitors from the educational or recreational benefits of the visit. The last framework suggests

that the museum is experienced as a playground of enjoyable inquiry when visitors are attracted by large-scale events and entertainment, commonly thematically different from the initial scope of museums.

When visitors conceive their interactions with the cultural and natural environment, it is exactly within the space, which is created using this conjunction of physical setting, communicative design and personal characteristics, that meaning-making can take place. The incorporation of the natural landscape and developed tourist infrastructure expand the affordances of an ethnographic open-air museum, granting visitors new directions for the engagement with the amalgam spaces.

This study demonstrates how genre-specific cultural, natural and communicative realms of ethnographic museums suggest different types of activities to visitors, because they appear in different physical, social or situational settings. In this perspective, the central problem of communicative design becomes the lack of a clear understanding of how the affordances of spaces and objects fit the motivational, cultural and cognitive characteristics of the visitors.

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