

Authenticity in the House of Terror Museum: Tourism Aspects

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Abstract

The House of Terror Museum in Budapest, established under Hungarian law for the collection, preservation, and exhibition of artifacts from Hungary's totalitarian regimes, serves as both a historical repository and a site of national commemoration. Since its opening in 2002, the museum has become a significant cultural and political landmark, highlighting the atrocities committed during the fascist and communist dictatorships. The museum's authenticity is rooted in its location at 60 Andrassy út, the former headquarters of the State Defence Office, and is enhanced by the preservation of original features such as Gábor Péter's room and the basement's torture chambers.

As a memorial, the House of Terror offers a space for the 'politics of the past,' providing a potent setting for the reinforcement of national identity and political messages. The museum's exterior design, sacralized with symbolic elements like rusted chains and victim photographs, underscores its role in national remembrance and education. Despite the focus on authenticity, the museum also incorporates modern museological practices, including interactive exhibits and temporary exhibitions that attract a wide audience.

The House of Terror's approach to authenticity involves both faithful recreation and authoritative representation, aligning with theories that emphasize the importance of credible and meaningful historical interpretation. The museum's programming strategy balances permanent, didactic displays with dynamic, accessible temporary exhibitions, reflecting a trend towards engaging and educational visitor experiences. This dual focus has made the House of Terror a popular and influential institution in Hungary, blending historical reverence with contemporary appeal.

Keywords: House of Terror Museum; Cooperation; Communication; Motivation; Innovation

Introduction

According to Hungarian law, the House of Terror Museum is responsible for the ongoing collection, recording, preservation and restoration, scientific processing and publication, as well as exhibition and other presentation of the material of the period [1]. The House of Terror opened its doors to the public in 2002, and the museum functions not only as an exhibition but also as a community space and a place of national commemoration. A further aim of its construction was to commemorate the people who were murdered and tortured here and who gave their lives

for freedom. As a memorial site, it offers a rhetorical site for the 'politics of the past' of the 20th century, i.e. the presumed unity of the expectations, prior knowledge and attitudes of the people who come here guides the pens of the speechwriters and the imagination of the orators [2].

Discussion

As stages, memorial sites of national history are, by their authenticity and their charisma, important sites of nation-state

power and are capable of reinforcing the credibility of political messages and politicians [3]. Pilgrimage to these sites thus becomes partly, given certain demands and participants, a secular rite, a rite of national religion [4], which thus turns the sites into national spaces and legitimation scenes, primarily suitable for emphasizing Hungarian national destiny issues.

The exterior of the building has been sacralized, the new design enclosing the museum in a black frame on the outside, the wall of straw surrounding the building cutting it out of the grip of time. The pictures on the outside of the museum commemorate the victims who died, while the rusted chains outside the building are a reminder of the atrocities of tyranny. The brutality of the Communist dictatorship is illustrated by the series of torture chambers (water cells, foxholes, carcasses, etc...) in the basement of the museum. At the end of the corridor, at the lower ground floor, you can walk in the dark to the Hall of Tears, where you can see the names of the victims and the pictures on the wall of the Tettes. Finally, the corridor takes you to the Millennium Metro, which was used to transport the bodies of the condemned to the Danube to dispose of the bodies. The authenticity of the objects on display in the museum lies in the authentic historical setting. The restored buildings, reconstructed events and programmes are attractive not simply because of their authenticity, but because of their complex system of references, their existence as aesthetic entities and their experiential inclusiveness [5]. The building (60 Andrassy út) was formerly the headquarters of the dreaded State Defence Office, and visitors can see Gábor Péter's room and the adjacent interrogation room, known as the 'gym', with its original furniture.

In the typology of authenticity, the first is authentic recreation, the creation of an appearance of authenticity, with which most intermediaries and managers aim to make the heritage site and its role credible and convincing. Smith [6] believes that the primary task of (museum) professionals is to make the site credible to the visiting public. Edson [7] refers to authority or legitimate recognition in addition to authentic representation of the period. In this sense, a site can be authentic if it has a special historical significance that is duly appreciated by a nation or community and if it represents this significance [8]. In the museum, the attractions associated with the fascist and communist dictatorships are presented on the second floor. The Sagittarius Corridor and the Sagittarius Room are memorials to the fascist dictatorship, while the Gulag and the rooms of the 1950s are memorials to communist repression. The horrors of the period display suggest that the country's citizens have still not come to terms with the wounds they suffered in the 20th century. However, the last room in the museum, the Resistance Room, still offers a small hope that even in these difficult times there were those who stood up for the just cause and that the 1956 revolution and freedom struggle ultimately led to the fall of the oppressive regime.

Authentic interpretation in practice is the process of communicating and explaining the meaning of the place that

visitors are visiting. It helps tourists and other visitors to make the best use of the cultural assets [9] offered to them for viewing, to experience a resource or an event in a way that they could not otherwise experience. The café on the ground floor shows that new types of museums cannot be without pseudo-features [10]. The concept of a 'visitor-friendly museum' is not only a material issue, but also a matter of mindset and attitude, which can only work if the whole museum collective masters and embraces them [11].

However, it can also be said that a large and less scientific audience is not so much captivated by the professionalism and authenticity of the House of Terror as by an enjoyable temporary exhibition. Therefore, the emphasis has shifted from research and acquisition, which require patient and persistent work, but only produce spectacular results in the long term, to exhibitions that can be consumed directly. The museum has a very large number of temporary exhibitions in its repertoire, with new exhibitions from Margie Slachta to Heroes of 1956 being presented to the public every quarter. According to L. Dinya [12], different programmes should be offered to visitors from different cultural backgrounds, with the emphasis on the didactic, in-depth and repeatedly visited permanent exhibitions being replaced by more accessible temporary exhibitions. This phenomenon may be condemned, but it is a fact that the public visits museums - or at least returns to museums - because of the events they are offered [13]. Marketing is the activity of identifying and analyzing market needs in production and trade and taking them into account [10].

The following principles are needed in the design of the objectives and the strategies and tools to realize them in the planning of each museum and exhibition strategy:

- i. Value - Preservation and development of the "core cultural and professional values of the museum",
- ii. Innovation - The use of new, original solutions,
- iii. Originality - To strive for uniqueness and distinctiveness,
- iv. Cooperation - Establishing long-term partnerships with strategic partners,
- v. Communication - Conscious relationship management and communication [16],
- vi. Friendliness - Fostering business acumen and an entrepreneurial approach,
- vii. Motivation - Performance-oriented stakeholder management [15],
- viii. Identity - Strengthening internal and external identity [12].

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of presenting exhibitions is to educate the visiting public in science. Schouten [14] argues that interpretation

can turn heritage visits into unique experiences by applying the UNIQUE principle (Uncommon = Uncommon, Novelty = Novelty, Informative = Informative, Quality = Quality, Understanding = Understanding and Emotions = Emotions). The museum achieves these principles through a variety of interactive solutions, from interactive film screenings in each room, to music in each room that reflects the spirit of the place, to voting in the 1947 election with blue ballots. Thanks to authentic temporary exhibitions, the House of Terror has been the most visited museum in Hungary throughout the restoration of the Museum of Fine Arts.

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