

## Public Relations versus Visitor Rates: Slovak Museums Case Study

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### ABSTRACT

The economic crisis during period of years 2009-2010 has affected the museums and galleries in Slovakia by two factors. The first one referred to the visitors' rate decrease; the second one represented reduced contributions of these institutions' founders (the state, regional municipalities and towns) to their activities. The article analyzes this situation through the example of the Slovak museums, evaluating effectiveness of their cooperation with the media and establishment of public relations aimed to increase the visitor rate.

**Key words:** heritage tourism, marketing, museums, promotion, public relations.

### INTRODUCTION

The economic crisis affected the Slovak museums and galleries in Slovakia by two factors - the visitors' rate decrease (Tab. 1, Tab. 2.) and the decline in own income and contributions of these institutions' founders (the state, regional municipalities and towns) to their activities due to the public sector spending reduction. According to the published annual reports, the average annual contribution of the museum founders to the activities in 2010 decreased to € 211 793 compared to average museums founders' contributions to each museum in 2009 in amount € 224 338.

As stated by Kesner (2005), limiting the traditional income sources (mainly the state and private support in the European countries) upon concurrent continuous leisure formulas change and competition increase in the leisure sector, the cultural organizations such as museums and monuments removed certainties from the traditional support sources and made them to compete for limited resources and visitors with other leisure forms, the media and among themselves. Taking into account the marketing tools, we have focused on

evaluation of the public relations and advertising use by individual subjects with different variability; making attempts to determine whether or not the subjects actively using these tools to gain awareness of the museum and its name, new exhibitions, forthcoming events, have reached better visitors' response. The limited budgets of these subjects disallow for huge investments in the advertisement, therefore PR activities are (in the form of published reports in the media) often the only suitable instrument of the visitors' rate increase.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Public relations are best developed with the marketing plan and support the strategic direction, audience-segmentation decision, market position, and creative plan. Also known as publicity, public relations will reinforce all of the marketing work and is part of the promotion effort (Aageson, 1999).

Capriotti (2010) presents how museums in a medium-sized city communicate with their local community, analysing how people

**Tab. 1** Visitors of museums (thous.) in the years 2001-2010, **Source:** Statistical Office of the Slovak republic

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
3 541	3 882	3 887	3 694	3 880	4 184	4 223	4 227	3 560	3 314

**Tab. 2** Visitors of galleries (thous.) in the years 2001-2010, **Source:** Statistical Office of the Slovak republic

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
369	432	430	515	390	399	420	428	375	414

evaluate and inform themselves about the museums in their city, and studying how museums identify their specific publics within the local community and communicate with them.

Banning and Schoen (2007) show member perceptions of the museum–public relationship differentiated members likely to continue their membership from those likely to discontinue their membership with the museum.

Gürel and Kavak (2010) present a conceptual model for public relations specific to museums. The model offers the market orientation level of the management and the interest level of the publics as the major factors that influence the effectiveness of the public relations programs in museums. Caldwell (2000) urges museum marketers to consider the various dimensions of how their institutions act as brands. Gil and Ritchie (2009) developed and tested an integrated model of the museum image formation process.

Davies and Prentice (1995) consider the existing literature on consumer decision making to be inadequate in its application to museums and other heritage attractions and especially in terms of latent demand.

The following theses (Kawashima, 1999; Lehman, 2009; Tufts & Milne 1999; Kotler, 1999; Mclean, 1994; JansenVerbeke & VanRekom, 1996; Chhabra, 2009) were dedicated to the museums in the terms of marketing, various components of marketing activities and responses to changed visitors' behavior.

However, the museum marketing tools use has been rarely subject to the analysis in the conditions of the Central European

countries. In the Czech Republic the monograph "Marketing and Management of Museums and Monuments" - Kesner (2005) was published. The author dedicated the monograph to the marketing of museums and monuments in the conditions that are historically and institutionally different from those in the United States. "Marketing of Cultural Heritage and the Art" (Johnova, 2005) is the second monograph dedicated to the art marketing in the conditions of the Central European countries.

## METHODOLOGY

The Annual Activity Reports 2010 of the museums in Slovakia stored in the Museums Cabinet of the Slovak National Museum represented the analysis baseline. The material contains detail statistical data of 86 of total 92 museums entered in the Register of Museums and Galleries of the Slovak Ministry of Culture as of Dec 31, 2010 (plus 18 specialized museums of the Slovak National Museum). The Museums Cabinet of the Slovak National Museum acquired the data from the questionnaires filled in by individual museums (<http://old.snm.sk/vykazy/>). Regarding the structure of the museums' founders performing in the Slovak Republic as of Dec 31, 2010, the towns and municipalities were founders of 19 museums, higher territorial units were founders of 20 museums, the Ministry of Culture founded 26 museums and other subjects founded 37 museums.

In 2010, the following museums failed to fill in the questionnaires: The Janova

Lehota Museum, the Museum of Nations and Cultures in Nitra, the Museum of Trade in Bratislava, The Hontianske Museum and Gallery of L. Simonyi in Sahy, the Slovak Red Cross Museum in Martin, The Universal Museum Nizna Mysla and the Slovak Museum of Glass Lednicke Rovne. In the analysis we did not take the Directorate of the Slovak National Museum into account as a whole, but evaluated 18 specialized museums included therein.

Through the questionnaires, we investigated the relationship between the market position (expressed in museums visitor headcount) and the number of published reports on the museum activities (total PR and advertising), their activities, planned and organized events in the print media, radio, television, Internet portals, or in the form of external advertising, followed and statistically monitored and recorded by the museums in 2010. We described the relationship between the market position expressed by visitor rates and use of public relations and advertising as a marketing tool, applying the correlation and regression analysis. The analysis does not include museums such as the Historical Museum in Bratislava and the Museum of Slovak National Councils in Myjava because of inaccurate recording of published reports. Comparison of years 2009 and 2010 is impossible due to changes in the used methodology for preparation of the Museum Annual Activity Reports in those years.

Activities of the museum friends clubs or groups that already perform at certain subjects represented the second monitoring tool of the public relations. We analyzed the relationship between the visitor rates and the existence of such museum clubs through the Two-Sample t-test at significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ , making out the following hypotheses:

$H_0$ : There is no difference between the museums visitor rates with and without founded "Museum Friends Club".

$H_A$ : Museums visitor rate with the "club of friends" is higher than of those without friends' clubs.

## RESULTS

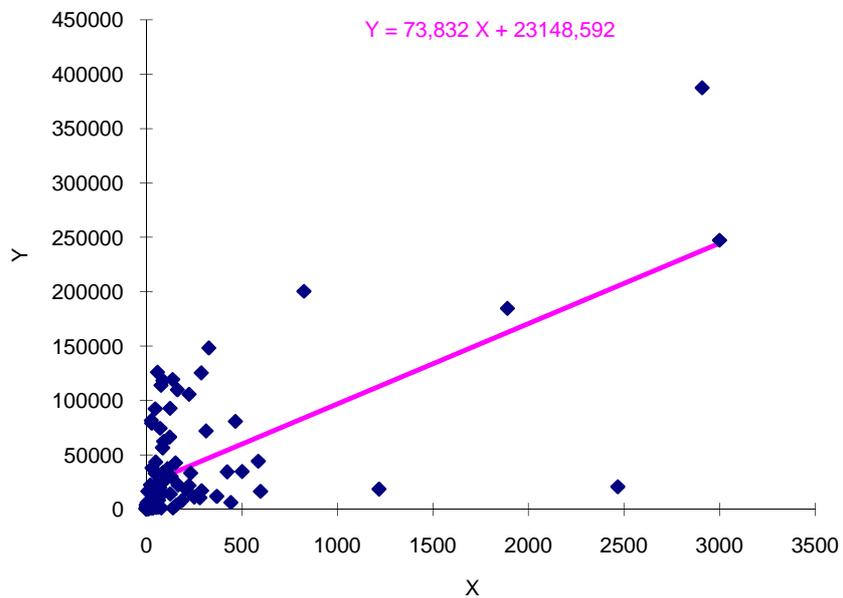
Applying the regression analysis, we examined the relationship between two quantitative variables - the number of PR reports published on the existing subject (X) and the visitors' headcount (Y). Figure 1 shows the relationship between these variables and Tab. No. 3 shows resulting values of the correlation coefficient 0.657 and the determination coefficient  $R^2 = 0.4317$ . These values can be interpreted so that 43.17% of the total visitor rate variability is determined by the marketing tool, thus the subjects reaching higher visitor rate use this marketing tool and develop the public relations in much higher extent.

As resulting from the museums distribution histogram (Y) in the Slovak Republic and their visitor rates (X) in 2010 (Fig. 2), most museums in the Slovak Republic in 2010 reached the visitor rate within the interval (0, 77512). The Museum SNP in Banska Bystrica (387 562 visitors), The Oravske Museum P. O. Hviezdoslava in Dolny Kubin (247 348 visitors), The Spisske Museum in Levoca (200 370 visitors), The Museum Bojnice in Bojnice (184 681 visitors), The Liptovske Museum in Ruzomberok (148 191 visitors), The Museum of Bratislava City (126 058 visitors), The Museum Cerveny Kamen in Casta (125 390 visitors), The Trencianske Museum Trencin (119 335 visitors), The Lubovnianske Museum in Stara Lubovna (118 317 visitors) reached the highest visitor rate in 2010.

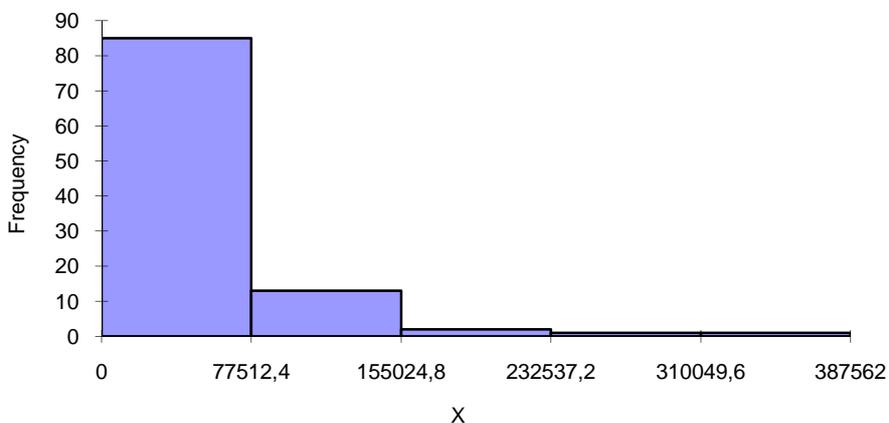
According to the results of Two-sample t test,  $T = 2.5914211 > T_{critical}$  at  $\alpha = 0.05$  and the given degrees of freedom (DF), it had made us to reject the hypothesis  $H_0$  and adopt the alternative hypothesis indicating

**Tab. 3** Correlation analysis outcomes, **Source:** Author

Single-variable	X		Y	Two-variable	
Number	100	Number	100	Number	88
Mean	232,83	Mean	39276	Covariance	2,00E+07
St Dev	525,95	St Dev	58662	Correlation	0,657
Min	0	Min	0	R <sup>2</sup>	0,43169
Max	3001	Max	387562	s	47028,6
Median	71,5	Median	18389		
Summary				Confidence Ints.	
				Level	0,95
		Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper
Slope		73,83161	9,13484	55,6721	91,9911
Constant		23148,59	5516,73	12181,7	34115,5



**Fig. 1** Regression line depending on the visitors' headcount (Y) and the number of published PR reports and advertising contributions (X), **Source:** Author



**Fig. 2** The museums distribution histogram (Y) in the Slovak Republic, according to the visitor rates (X) in 2010, **Source:** Author

that the visitor rate of the museums with the friends' clubs is higher than the visitor rate of the museums without the friends' clubs on the level of significance  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

Let's take the Friends' Club of the Slovak National Museum as an example. The Club provides for the service packages to the individual members, seniors, families, VIPs and institutional members. Supporting any of total 18 museums, a club member receives a membership card enabling him/her to attend all exhibitions, lectures and supporting events at all 18 museums, to obtain actual information on exposed projects, periodicals and program journals, giving the opportunity to use individual collector guidance, etc. Creation of similar visitor packages should be extended to the regions, e.g. to the museums having a single founder, within the partnership of subjects performing in the area of regional cultural tourism (e.g. the project "Kosice – the European Capital of Culture 2013") or the partnership of cultural tourism entities based on the theme routes such as Gothic, Iron and Wine Route.

## CONCLUSION

Marketing orientation of a cultural organization can become a reality rather than just verbally presented objective only if particular institution creates sufficient human and financial capacities. In practice, certain marketing and communication related cost generally represents the first victim of budget cuts in case of unfavorable economic development. The museums' managements face the challenge in difficult economic situation of limited financial resources – restructuring the budget so as the PR agenda is financially secured at least on the level 5% of the organization costs (Kesner, 2005).

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