

Comparing Strategic Approaches between National and Private Museums in Athens

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A qualitative research was carried out among people who work in the major national and private museums in the city of Athens. The empirical research and the literature review revealed that there are not only structural differences between public and private museums, but marketing strategies as well. This research study made an attempt to investigate whether museum managers consider modern tools as an implement to fulfil their mission and magnify up-to-date visitors' satisfaction. Most of the museums seem not to adapt contemporary approaches in their operation, although most of the directors believe that those strategies could lead museum institutions into a more desirable level.

Introduction

A qualitative research was carried out among managers and museum staff in the most important public-national (state museums) and private museums in the city of Athens, with a special focus on the National Archaeological Museum since it is the most significant museum in Greece. The research efforts were to find out what kind of strategies the museums follow, how do they communicate and attract their audiences and which media and new technologies they embrace. Also an attempt was done to investigate their operation in our contemporary and globalized world and whether they fulfil their mission as museum institutions concerning the visitor's satisfaction. Since, in Greece most of the museums are public and national museums (state museums), the research findings represent mainly the narratives of National Museums and reflect a comparison between the most important national and private museums. Further research is recommended in museum strategies concept and in the structures of national museums in order to understand and utilize the modern role of national museums in the new era of globalisation.

Literature Review

An extensive literature review was conducted for identifying some critical issues, since in contemporary societies, museums have changed, trying to be more visitors oriented than traditional institutions that mainly gather and exhibit objects. *“Marketing approaches have been used to increase visitor numbers and to encourage, change and expand the museum role from one of custodial emphasis to one of marketing. Hence, museums are developing marketing techniques to help them to become more successful.”*, (Gilmore and Rentschler, 2002: 745). Visitors' needs and demands have become too complicated and difficult to be satisfied by an old-fashioned institution and the requirement for modern marketing strategies has become more important than ever in the competitive world of leisure and tourist attractions. Museums nowadays, need to focus sharply on visitor's satisfaction, as Rowley (1999) mentioned; *“satisfied customers are returning customers”*, (Rowley, 1999: 303).

Museums compete in a leisure market place where funding for existence and providing new programs are a major objective. A successful museum should be the place that attracts people who want to learn and enjoy recreational activities and well-designated museum websites can be alternative pathways to museum experiences beyond museum walls, (N. Kotler, 2001). Museums now operate in a completely different environment compared to the past, there is no doubt about that and that is the reason why they should not be afraid of using entertainment, but embrace it as an implementation for learning and attracting a wider and more variable audience, (McPherson, 2006). Because of the increasing competition for visitors, many museums have invested in improving the visitor's experience and satisfaction and it has become essential for museums to broaden their audience base by reaching out for people who are not frequent visitors.

Although, the use of museum marketing has emerged in order to enlarge audiences and as visitor services have become more important than ever, for many museums there still seems to be only fragmentary knowledge on visitors and visits. This knowledge is one of the most important resources available to museum managers and can help them to understand visitors' needs and fulfill them. A better understanding of visitor profiles and the design of a more analytical research are needed. If curators are too few or too committed to other tasks, like art history, archaeology, and science then marketing researchers may make some contribution towards enlarging the audience, (Kawashima, 1998).

The need of using contemporary and marketing techniques in museums seems to be inevitable. As it was very well mentioned by Goulding (2000), museums have faced increasing pressure to attract wider audiences. Public museums have mainly concentrated

their research on obtaining statistical data, which can be measured and provide demographical profiles, ignoring the nature of the experience itself, (Goulding, 2000). Museums, by educating their staff, must try to imbue their personnel with the idea that they are there to serve the visitors and they must continuously improve the quality of the services offered, (Tobelem, 1998). Only a few museums have persons to be responsible for marketing. Tobelem (1998) mentioned that, most museums do not have a department or even an individual with a special responsibility on marketing and their activity is mainly limited to issuing press releases and making public relations. However, the complicated task for those responsible for marketing lies in combining two basic components, the institution's objectives to be attained and the consumer to be satisfied.

In a number of countries (France, England, and the United States of America) governments have encouraged museums to develop their own resources and to attract sponsors, (Tobelem, 1998). In Greece, only the last years some sponsors appeared in museums. The Greek Ministry of Culture now is trying to allow sponsorships in public museums. However, those in charge of institutions do not always realize the importance of adapting a commercial policy, which policy can be developed according to museums needs thus enhancing their incomes. Digital images and online products with the help of marketing approaches can also help museums to raise their incomes. Interactive websites that offer virtual guide in the museum could improve their image and support their income. However a few museums, have given much thought to the marketing of online images and they might as well raise income from their digital images using a mix of marketing strategies, (Maier, 1999).

The seven elements in the marketing mix for services are: *Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Physical Evidence* and *Process* (7P). These elements should be on the marketing program of all services institutions. "*Ignoring any of them could influence the success or failure of the overall program*", (Cowell, 1984: 71). The Product for museum marketing managers is the exhibitions, the antiquated or contemporary items, everything that attracts visitors to come for and the quality level of the offered service. Price, are the tickets, discounts, allowances and all payment terms that museums have. The Place relates to the distribution channel that the museum has, like the various annexes of Benaki Museum (private museum) and as well as their location and accessibility to the public. Promotion includes the various methods of communicating with the public, advertising, public relations, websites and other direct forms of marketing. People relate to the personnel that contribute to the service of visitors and to the operation of the institution. Their training, their appearance and their behavior are very important. Also, People refer to visitors of the museum, to their behavior and to their satisfaction. It is important to be mentioned that museum managers should embody in their strategy visitor's needs and wants. Physical Evidence includes elements like the physical environment, the tangible cues, the publicity material, the books, the guides, the signs, the maps, the tickets and all the facilitating goods. Finally, the Process relates to the overall museum operation and which policies and procedures adapts. It refers also, to the employee and visitor's involvement and to the flow of activities in the museum.

An attractive museum shop can support financially the institution and besides that can service successfully its visitors. Tobelem (1998) claims that, a number of big museums still lack an attractive museum shop capable of raising museum's income. Marketing activities in museum stores offer momentous opportunities of generating meaningful revenue and whereas the museum store was originally intended only to provide financial support to the institution, it now provides an educational and mission-related opportunity as well, (Mottner and Ford, 2005). In order to increase visitor numbers, some museums tend to adapt an approach defined by the special requirements of cultural tourism. This requires a complete change in the way of operating, better relations with mass media and the development of innovated programmes.

Foreign tourists are an essential factor because they consist a significant proportion of visitor numbers and museum managers should study their specific needs, (Tobelem, 1998).

Until recently, marketing was only associated with the world of private enterprise and the quest for profit, then extended to the sector of non-profit organizations before being applied to the world of culture and today it has widen its field of operations to museums. The enforcement of marketing strategies is justified in the current economical situation of museums as well as in the commands of contemporary communications, (Tobelem, 1998). *“Marketing, however, is broader than simply promotion. Marketing is best able to facilitates a museum’s goals and strategy when marketing staff can participate in and lend their expertise to all museum tasks, including programs and education, facility and interior design, as well as membership and development”*, (Kotler N. and Kotler P, 2000: 286). And as it is very successfully underlined by Kotler N. and Kotler P, (2000), many museum managers are concerned about the competition from the entertainment and cultural sections in cities, cyberspace, restaurants, history and science centers as well as from the growing number of new museums. The challenge for museum managers is to safeguard the museum mission while reaching out to a larger public and offering a richer museum-going experience for visitors. *“Museum managers struggle with the issues of maintaining their museums integrity as a distinctive collecting, conserving, research, exhibiting and educational institution, and, at the same time, making their museums more popular and competitive”*, (Kotler N. and Kotler P, 2000: 271).

Methodology

The qualitative survey was carried out at the beginning of 2007, in the most important museums in the city of Athens. The museums are both public-national (state museums) and private museums (not-for-profit institutions), which they have a director on staff, are wholly or partly funded by the government, have a permanent collection and are open to the public. As departments of the Greek Ministry of Culture, the Greek public museums are state museums and thus represent the state’s cultural policies. Data have been collected through personal interviews and the questions that were asked were the same to public and private museums. Interviews with staff members helped to identify the ways that working practices, discussions, norms and constraints affect the strategies that are followed.

The empirical research involved in-depth interviews with key staff and directors in a non-directive manner. Semi-constructed, broad, open-ended questions were used and discussion centred on the experiences and opinions of directors. All interviews were hand-written and transcripts of each in-depth interview were prepared. Most of the museums were archaeological since public museums are mainly archaeological. The public-national museums that were examined are: The National Archaeological Museum, the Byzantine and Christian Museum, the New Acropolis Museum, the Acropolis Museum and the Archaeological Site of Acropolis, the Ancient Agora Museum and the Archaeological Site of Ancient Agora, the Numismatic Museum and the Hellenic Maritime Museum. The private museums that were examined are: The Benaki Museum, the Museum of Islamic Art, the Benaki Pireos st. Annex, the Foundation of the Hellenic World and the Museum of Cycladic Art. It was interesting identifying whether or not museum directors attempt to make museums more contemporary places, according to the modern multicultural environment, whilst the public-national museums are obligated to follow strictly the same state policies implied by the Greek Ministry of Culture.

Results and Discussions

The empirical research and the literature review revealed that most of the national museums and archaeological sites do not adapt contemporary approaches in their operation.

Synchronous strategies could help museums to fulfil their mission in a better way and to magnify up-to-date visitors' satisfaction and expectations. The qualitative interviews revealed that despite the number of museums in Greece, most of them operate under the public sector following the same obsolete strategies more or less. Even the most important national museums in Greece, try to fulfil their mission under the bureaucratic management of the Greek Ministry of Culture, following the state's approaches, with a few chances of innovation or functioning under new modern strategies and ideas.

All public-national and private museums in Athens collect only a few plain quantitative and not qualitative characteristics for the visitors. They just know the visitors number (of adults and children) from the tickets. They are not used to conduct surveys among visitors. Museum directors have mostly empirical knowledge for their audience. Public museums promote their institutions and their exhibitions with the help of the mass media, with press releases, leaflets and posters but without the use of paid commercials. The Ministry of Culture does not provide money for commercials. A few public museums are having sponsorships, which is something new in Greek museum society. There is not a special department for marketing in the public museums, but there are in some museums one or two persons who are responsible for the educational programs and also for public relations. The Ministry of Culture does not provide special funding for marketing purposes and archaeologists are mainly engaged in marketing issues. Public relations and generally the image making of the public museum depend on the personal interest and care of each director. That is why since all public museums follow the same policies implied by the ministry of culture; some of them are much better organized and more famous compared to others.

The same website is provided by the Ministry of Culture to all public museums in Athens (and in the region). Most of the managers were disappointed by this website-platform, which does not provide chances for virtual guide and interactive approaches to visitors and does not have interesting links. The use of new technologies in public museums finds most of the staff positive, although some elderly directors disagree with touch-screen, multimedia technologies and virtual reality in the rooms of the museum. They believe that: "New technologies are going to degrade the status and beauty of ancient exhibitions", as characteristically was said. It is very encouraging that in the new Acropolis Museum, a multimedia lounge is going to be opened to the public. Also, the Ministry of Culture is going to provide public museums with audio guide, which is essential for museum development and progress.

The public museums follow exactly the same policies implied by the Greek Ministry of Culture. The private museums have the opportunity to make their own strategic plan. That is the main difference between the public and private museums. The private museums are following marketing strategies, so as to enlarge their audiences and they target to the difficult and vital young group of twenty to forty. They have commercials to the mass media and many sponsors. Private museums try to cover and fulfill all visitors' different needs and some of them have separate marketing and human resources department. It is remarkable that in a very important private museum in Athens was said: "We follow word-of-mouth marketing and very good public relations. Our motto is to combine modern technology and culture". It has also club for children members. Private museums have good marketing approaches and they are more sensitive to visitor's need for new technologies and interactive techniques. Their websites are contemporary compared to the publics and they mainly communicate and interact with their visitors through websites. Some offer virtual guide of the exhibitions in their websites and have very interesting links. Printed materials, leaflets and guides are well printed in an interesting and attractive way and they offer many educational programs mostly for children and some of them for adults.

Public museums are interested in being mainly educational and scientific institutions. "Museums role is to exhibit, to educate and to inform visitors," as most of the interviewees

mentioned. Only a few public museums managers underlined their contemporary role to entertain their visitors. It is essential to be mentioned that only two public museums emphasized the visitor's needs to spend leisure in museums. Those museums organize not only educational programs, but also happenings, musical and art events. Most of the public museums do not carry out recreative events and museum staff was negative to such events. Hopefully, in the new public Acropolis Museum events and happenings are planned to be held. Museum's directors from public museums, who try to offer not only education but also recreational and inspiring opportunities to their visitors, are the ones who operate in a competitive way to other museums, theatres, cinemas and cultural places. However, most of the public museum directors believe that they do not face any kind of competition since they consider their exhibitions to be unique in the world.

On the other hand, private museums seem to consider their role closer to society. As a manager of a private museum noticed: "We want visitors leaving our place to feel happy and to have learned about our culture and history in a pleasant way." They carry out many entertainment and musical events, including fashion shows. They dare to adapt a competitive attitude towards other museums and cultural institutions. "We do like antagonism because it helps us to improve." Only one manager of a private museum stated: "We do not want competition in culture." The rest of them try to satisfy visitor's needs for education and also for entertainment according to contemporary and competitive environment. They underlined also the need museums to treat in an antagonistic way not only the other museums and cultural institutions, but also all the places where people of today tend to spend their leisure.

The café-restaurants and the gift shops in private museums, play a significant role in the whole function of the museum. They contribute not just as services, but they also offer serious financial support as a "profit centre" to the museum and in certain cases they operate autonomically at their own time schedule. They give the visitor the chance to spend quality time in an attractive place and to purchase interesting and unique commemorative objects, if he wishes to. At the same time, café and gift shops in public museums belong to the Ministry of Culture and they support financially the museum in an indirect way. The souvenirs that are sold are usually not modern or attractive. Unfortunately in Greece, most of famous public museums do not have a decent café and a challenging museum store. Many museum managers claimed the need for more synchronous souvenirs, games for children and new technological objects to be sold.

Greek Museums and the Idea of Diversity and Multi-Cultural Society

The idea of diversity and of the threats (past and present) is confronted in the Greek public-national museums only as "a victory against the others". The Greek state became independent, in 1821 and since then the national museums supported the Greek nation to develop its ethnical awareness and national identity. In particular, the National Archaeological Museum, the most significant museum in Greece, it was founded by presidential decree on August 9, 1893 to house and safeguard antiquities from all over Greece and to promote their historical, academic and artistic value to the visitors. The National Archaeological Museum in Athens is also an institution of knowledge, providing the venue for research and study to students, archaeologists, historians and eminent researchers from Greece and all over the world. Since today, our national museum looms the lordliness and the pomp of Greek nation.

From ancient Greece up to the struggle for the Greek independence, the victorious nation is shown mainly in our museums. The Greek national history is the main subject that the Greek National Archaeological Museum, deals with. The "us" and the "others", who used to live in our territory are not confronted in our national museums. My research revealed that the national museums, that were examined, used to play and still play a significant role in the overall history, forming the Greek nation and integration. Our national museum presents a

coherent approach to memory politics and supported the Greek nation to obtain its sovereignty.

The public opinion is still sensitive and to some extent conservative about the ethical, religious and national issues. Interviewing the managerial staff in many museums mentioned that they want to attract people, who live and visit Greece. Only a director, responsible for the new Acropolis Museum, which is not ready yet, underlined the issue of multi-cultural society and globalisation and the need of the museum to attract visitors not only Greeks and tourists, but also immigrants and all the other nationalities, who live and work in Greece. The private museums are likely more to evolve exhibitions concerning the role of the “others” in the Greek society, like the Benaki Museum of Islamic Art (private museum), than the public ones. This is a contemporary challenge to national museums to combine to their concept the idea of the Greek-nation dimension and the diversity. The interplay between the national museum and evolutionary approach of new era is something that might not be embraced so easily from the Greek society yet.

Conclusions

The contemporary role of museums in our era has changed dramatically and a museum is no longer only a stately function of municipal prides, but could be also a generator of ideas. National museums should try to be more discursive and interactive and to use more communicative and participative formats negotiating the idea of diversity, European values and human rights. Although museum directors are sceptical and worry whether attracting a greater number of visitors, works against the quality of the institution services, it can be replied that marketing can be an implement at the operation of the public-national and private museums, intended to allow the institutions to attain their defined mission efficiently. “Marketing is one branch of administration among others and it is the responsibility of the leaders of the institution to determine in which area or areas it is to be applied”, (Tobelem, 1998: 351).

Reputation is very important in the non-profit sector and ethical practices that enhance institutional reputation should put in place, (Wood and Rentschler, 2003). The survey conducted, addressed the issue of the need for contemporary techniques in museums. A well-defined mission can probably prevent any risk of uncontrolled marketing technique and marketing will be a valuable implementation for the museum, (Tobelem, 1998). The use of marketing strategies in museums meets almost every interviewee, from the public and the private sector, together. “Museums engage in goal setting and strategic planning and marketing to achieve greater visibility, enlarge their offerings, develop a broader audience, and raise income”, (Kotler N. and Kotler P, 2000: 272).

A growing number of museums in Europe and North America are hiring marketing experts so as to help them accomplish their goals, which are related to external factors, audiences and the environment. “Having ambitious though realistic goals, relating these to the mission and the desired audience mix, knowing the audience and how to lead it, and finding the strategies and tools most effective in reaching the goals, is the best recipe to put forward for museums grappling with issues of change, innovation, and preserving integrity”, (Kotler N. and Kotler P, 2000: 287). Different ways of pedagogy and of entertaining visitors are essential. Visitors should get more actively involved during their visit to the museum and bring more actively their interests and knowledge in.

Studies of archaeology and museum visits could help not only students but also visitors generally, to comprehend their relation to the past, to conceive the diversity among cultures and apprehend that there are not superior and inferior civilizations. Through that process, people could become more conscious, with tolerance and respect to the difference. The main problem that Greek museum directors worry about is, if the introduction of a modern

evolutional concept jeopardizes their professional standards, their scientific, historic, artistic programs and menaces their national identity. Greek museums, public-national and private, should adapt contemporary strategies in order to fulfill their mission in a more effective way and to become institutions that can inspire their synchronous visitors in the challenging era of globalization and European integration.

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Relevant Websites

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- <http://icom.museum/>