
Luis Marcelo Mendes
Cultivia, Rio de Janeiro
luismarcelomendes@gmail.com

Gordana Viljetić
Ethnographic Museum, Zagreb
gviljetic@emz.hr

DOI
<https://doi.org/10.32458/ei.28.8>
UDK
069(497.584)::75Bukovac, V.
303.62:069-052
Professional paper
Received: 31 July 2023
Accepted: 15 September 2023

The House Bukovac Experience –

The 2022 Visitor Survey Results as a Starting Point of
the Institutional Screening and Potential Policy Changes
at the Museums and Galleries of Konavle

As a part of an in-depth institutional screening and an over a month-long consulting process, during the summer of 2022, at the Museums and Galleries of Konavle (MiGK), a survey was conducted among the visitors of one of the four MiGK units, House Bukovac (Kuća Bukovac) in Cavtat. The survey included an in-person conversation with each visitor, formed around five questions (for domestic and foreign visitors), either close-ended or semi-open, with none of the categories requiring more than two minutes to answer. To gather information on how the same institution has been seen by the locals, an online survey, with a modified set of three multiple-choice questions, was additionally conducted via the MiGK's mailing list. The tool used for the two models was the online service Typeform with the survey structure and content created exclusively for House Bukovac research. On this occasion, we are revealing the results of both, providing a triple visitor perspective - local, domestic and foreign.

Keywords: Museums and Galleries of Konavle, House Bukovac, visitor survey, audience development, heritage, local community

INTRODUCTION

The key to creating memorable museum experiences is to understand what our visitors want and expect. From general questions of demography and overall view of the institution (e.g. who comes to our museum, how often and on what purpose, how is our museum seen, how are the exhibitions perceived, etc.), over marketing strategies (how did the visitors find out about the museum/exhibition/event) to practical, yet crucial, issues of availability and infrastructure. In other words, can the visitors (of different ages, of physical and psychological needs and ability criteria) easily access the museum facility and their opinion about the side content (in-house cafeteria, souvenir shops, restrooms, etc.), not to mention the power of the general impression every visitor is left with after the visit, to which something as simple as an open door or a welcoming smile at the entrance (or the absence of both) can make a significant change.

Museum surveys help us provide essential information about the visitors' perception of the museum, the exhibits and the overall visit experience. As a result, we can measure visitor satisfaction and detect what can be improved to deliver remarkable experiences and attract more visitors (cf. Dawer 2023). Better yet, we can ask them how to do it.

On the other hand, one of the central questions for the institutional diagnosis of a museum is to detect the perceptions of the staff concerning the services they offer, expectations of the institution's programming, and a picture of their motivation (cf. Mendes 2022). Usually, both perspectives (staff and audience development) are essential parts of consulting processes.

“In the new global context, every museum is precious, provided it is able to create a dialogue between its vocation for conservation and the constantly changing languages of the international community.” (Art Consulting 1999). Under conditions of constant change, a museum cannot simply be a static container. To truly be at the core of cultural renewal, at honest disposal of local communities and a powerful magnet for national and international tourism, a museum must offer itself as a generator of events, it must continue to change and reinvent its functions / restyle itself over time.

The initiative for this consulting project came from the Museums and Galleries of Konavle (MiGK) Director, Antonia Rusković Radonić, wishing to *obtain a fresh, independent view* (cf. Paine 2006: 1) in order to better understand the hidden curriculum behind the walls of four united, yet very different, museum units, as well as to improve the overall image of the institution, especially when it comes to keeping and perfecting or further establishing, the connection with the local community.

A residency with an in-depth institutional screening and an over a month-long consulting process, during the summer of 2022 at the MiGK, was led by an international consultant on branding and culture, Luis Marcelo Mendes (Cultivia), also an ICOM MPR board member, based in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The survey itself was co-created, conducted and interpreted by the project assistant Gordana Vilječić, a senior curator at the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, who was involved in this project on a volunteer basis.

Originally written in English – the main language of the project – this paper derived from the interpretation of the survey results, performed as a part of the final project presentation and MiGK staff gathering at House Bukovac, held on the 12th of August 2022. In addition to audience development issues, a significant part of the discussed matters was focused on MiGK staff

work-related motivation and satisfaction, as well as the programme management and branding. Nevertheless, due to the nature of business and personal confidentiality, only the results of the public opinion provided anonymously will be presented on this occasion.

THE MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES OF KONAVLE (MiGK)

The Museums and Galleries of Konavle (MiGK) define themselves as “a public cultural institution engaged in the exploration, processing, presentation, and preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the Konavle region” (Muzeji i galerije Konavala).

The institution operates in three units and at one site:

- Konavle County Museum, an ethnographic museum founded in 1974 in the village of Čilipi;
- Archaeological Museum, located in the west wing of the 15th century Saint Blaise Franciscan Monastery in the village of Pridvorje;
- House Bukovac, the birthplace and the museum of the famous Croatian artist Vlaho Bukovac (Cavtat 1855 – Prague 1922) situated in Cavtat, and
- Mausoleum of the Račić family, work of the Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović, built in 1922, also in Cavtat.

As stated on the museum website, “in partnership with the local community and various scientific and educational societies, we produce programmes and engage enthusiasts in local issues. Dispersed amongst our museums and sites, we try to develop an understanding of the local history and diversity of its elements involved in the contemporary life of the Konavle people” (Muzeji i galerije Konavala).

And, indeed, to any interested outside observer, irrespective of whether they are a museum professional or not, the MiGK already exemplifies, with results big in numbers and words, including the ongoing exhibitions, a rich publishing work, exciting and new ways of local and inter-generational community engagement within the educational work, as well as the museum and heritage-wise co-operation both at a national and international level and, most importantly, the effort to satisfy and balance out different tastes and expectations of its different types of users.

According to its Director, the MiGK “creates new audiences every day by dispelling the myth that museums are only for tourists. We would like to make the museum departments a living room for all our residents, and we are trying to offer an interpretation of the heritage in the entire Konavle region.” (Beželj, Dominik and Rusković Radonić 2020: 4).

As with all the most successful stories, the aim is always to become even better, to provide more for everyone involved, with special attention on achieving a broader set of MiGK users and a higher general informational level concerning the whole range of content provided by all the MiGK units and sites.

Having been recognised as a unit because of its nature, but also its remarkable location and the biggest potential to grow in numbers of visitors, a special audience development emphasis in the project was given to House Bukovac.

HOUSE BUKOVAC¹

House Bukovac stands in the very heart of Cavtat, a little town developed from the prehistoric settlement on a natural peninsula of Rat, on a narrow street up the hill - a typical urban house dating to the turn of the eighteenth century;² a stone structure of two floors with a small garden on the side of the South façade and a spacious back garden to the North. The place is best known as the birthplace and the museum of the Croatian painter Vlaho Bukovac (Cavtat 1855 – Prague 1922), one of the most prominent Croatian artists and the founder of modern Croatian painting. During his cosmopolitan life, spent in the Americas and Europe, Bukovac often returned home, where he left much of his work.

Shortly after Bukovac died in 1922, his daughters transformed the atelier into an exhibition space open to visitors. In the years to come, the place changed management and purpose, to finally become a part of the Museums and Galleries of Konavle, which reopened in 2004 aiming to function as a “contemporary museum space, while the earlier established historical urban design and architectural format and the practice of the *otium* that is linked to it were duly respected” (Puhara and Vuković 2016: 170).

“The museological concept is based on two main principles of that specific space - the family house principle and the museum principle. The house, as a place of a closed unit, filled with emotions and organised according to the individual understanding of the outside world stopped before its walls, inside of which the world gets reinterpreted following the habitus of its residents, against the open, public space of a museum, available to everyone, which then, based on a certain topic – Vlaho Bukovac’s art – enables the infinite individual interpretation to each and every visitor.” (Puhara and Vuković 2016: 170)³

The current permanent exhibition is made of Bukovac’s works from all the stages of his oeuvre, together with a selection of furniture and personal objects. The museum holds more than two hundred paintings, drawings, sketches, private letters, a collection of photographs, as well as the autobiography manuscript „My Life“, written in 1918 - all of these items are invaluable sources of information for scientific research related to Bukovac’s life and work (cf. Muzeji i galerije Konavala).

Notwithstanding its immense historic and artistic value, the survey included in the 2022 MiGK consultancy project strived to go further, to investigate not only the importance of House Bukovac for researchers, artists and art historians, but also to find out what it meant to the locals, as well as what were the post-visit impressions of an average (tourist) visitor, either visiting intentionally or coming in by chance, if nothing, then to find a shelter from the southern summer sun.

Against the backdrop of the Roman heritage of the museum site itself, the idea was to see the existing (and new) possibilities of transferring from *otium* to *negotium*, in an optimal manner.

1 In the latest MiGK publication „Father and Daughters, Notes and Sketches“ (2023) signed as *Vlaho Bukovac House*. As seen in the footnote below, some translators refer to it as *Bukovac House*. The same applies to the plaque in 5 Bukovčeva Street. From the branding point of view, it would be suggested to opt for one translation and keep the title intact wherever possible.

2 “... archaeological research carried out during the excavation of the ground for the building of the museum stores in the back garden of Bukovac House... confirmed the existence of a Roman house, as well as the continuity of life in the place.” (Puhara and Vuković 2016: 170).

3 Translated by Gordana Viljetić.

THE SURVEY

The survey among the visitors of House Bukovac was conducted in addition to the MiGK Staff Survey, answered between the 13th and the 19th of July 2022. The Visitor Survey was performed in two ways, lasting ten days in total – the first model was applied in person and on-site between the 19th and 23rd of July 2022. The second one, performed via the museum mailing list, was first launched on the 1st of August and was open until the 6th of August 2022 - the only condition being at least one in-person visit to House Bukovac. Using this kind of dual system left us with not only the opinions of tourist-visitors (foreign or non-local domestic), the main user population when it comes to House Bukovac during the summer months, but also the opinions of the locals, more prone to visiting the museum programmes in late autumn/wintertime when tourist season (and hence extra work for most of them) subsides.

The tool used for both models was the online service Typeform (museodata.typeform.com), with the survey structure and content created exclusively for this research. The opening question divided the participants into three categories, each of them with a set of 5 (domestic and foreign visitors) or 3 questions (local visitors), either close-ended or semi-open, the latter as an addition to multiple-choice, possible in the last two questions concerning the visitors' emotions upon the visit and their suggestions on the improvement of House Bukovac experience, as well as in all the three questions intended for the locals. None of the categories required more than 2 minutes to answer (approximately, one survey took only 1 minute). The reason was our wish not to overwhelm the visitors or to ruin their impressions of the visit, since all the participants were interviewed after finishing their tour and the usual stop by the Museum Shop, on their way out.

The aim was to collect basic demographic and profile data of the visitors of House Bukovac, their impressions of the visit, features that need to be improved in their opinion and according to their visiting experience, as well as their suggestions about the enrichment of the museum offer, including the programme, (open) space and sensory („hands-on“) programmes. In addition to the impressions after a visit to House Bukovac, the local visitors were asked about their view on the museum mission and the input/output that the museum has or could have, when it comes to the local community and vice versa.

In addition to interacting with and interviewing the audience, a substantial amount of time was spent learning about Bukovac's life and work to provide us with context, participating in the scheduled museum activities (lectures, workshops and field trips, to name a few), as well as observing the users during their visit to House Bukovac, which allowed a better comprehension and subsequent interpretation of the survey results. To paraphrase the great artist himself: "You have to learn to observe, the hand will follow obediently once you know how to observe." (Bukovac Javorsky 1976 as cited in Beželj 2023).

PARTICIPANTS IN NUMBERS

In total, we came to 63 on-site/online participants, out of whom 50.8% were local (32 responses), 30.2% were foreign (19 responses) and 19% were domestic (12 responses) visitors (Figure 1).

The number of participants questioned in person equals 25, out of whom 19 were foreign (76%), 5 domestic visitors from Croatia (20%) and 1 local from Konavle/Dubrovnik area (4%).

The number of participants questioned online was 38, with 31 local (82%), 7 domestic (18%) and no foreign visitors.

For reasons of different collecting modes, as well as the different types of visitors and different sets of questions, the data analysis has been divided into two groups (following the residential background) and was subsequently considered all together in the interpretation section in the conclusion of this presentation.

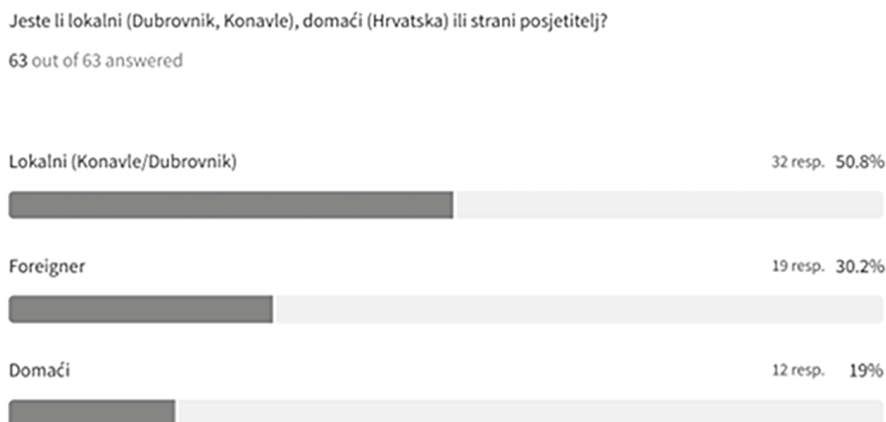


Figure 1. An example of a processed survey question (House Bukovac - Visitor Profile)

TARGET GROUPS 1 AND 2: DOMESTIC VISITORS VS. FOREIGN VISITORS

As expected, based on the museum history and its current daily practice, our largest group of survey participants on-site consisted of foreign visitors (19 responses = 76%), coming from different countries around the world. The nationality was not the subject of our interest in this survey, however, most participants who talked to us in person, mentioned their country of residence voluntarily (e.g., Ireland, Belgium, France, Germany, UK, USA, Finland, Sweden, Poland, Italy, Austria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Netherlands, etc.). As opposed to the large percentage of foreigners interviewed in person, no foreign visitors participated in the online survey, since the museum mailing list primarily targets the local and domestic users/audience of House Bukovac, which leaves us with 30.2% (19 responses) of foreign participants, in total.

Domestic visitors, originating from Croatia (yet not Konavle and Dubrovnik area), hold 20% (5 responses) out of all the participants interviewed *in situ* (House Bukovac), as well as 18% (7 responses) of the participants who were interviewed online, which makes a total of 19% (12 responses) of domestic participants.

Since the questionnaire for these target groups was the same (the only difference being the language - English or Croatian), the results will be presented through a comparative analysis of the two. The reason for using the same set of questions is primarily to be found in our attempt to

separate the tourist interests and preferences from the interests and preferences of the locals, both regarding the same museum visiting experience, but with a strong awareness of complex cultural/experiential differences.⁴

QUESTION 1 – VISITOR PROFILE

When it comes to the visitor profile, we have 33.3% (4 responses) of domestic visitors coming to the museum coupled and 16.7% (2 responses) of them were accompanied by their family members. The percentage for foreign couples is 33.3% (6 responses) and for foreign family visits 11.1% (2 responses). Three visitors from Croatia (25%) visited House Bukovac alone, as opposed to 16.7% (3 responses) of foreign individual visitors.

Visiting places, including museums, in the company of another person/other people comes as no surprise. On this occasion, however, we had no foreign visitors coming in with a friend, and only one (8.3%) domestic participant visited accompanied by (a) friend/s. Furthermore, only two domestic visitors (16.7%) came as a part of an organised visit (group of tourists), which, as expected, changes when it comes to foreign visitors, with 38.9% (7 responses) of them belonging to a group of tourists on a tour.

QUESTION 2 – VISITING HABITS

The purpose of the question concerning the habit of visiting museums was to further investigate our visitors' profiles – do we primarily attract standard “museum-goers” (who probably carefully planned their visit to House Bukovac) or accidental “place/event drop-ins”? Although the responses of the domestic population happen to be 100% (12 responses) yes, so in favour of people who visit museums on a regular basis (at home, while travelling), we cannot withstand the fact that this kind of question, especially when asked in person, could lead to a fake yes, to paint an image of an educated, engaged person, to avoid awkwardness to which a negative answer might lead or simply not to “let down” the person conducting the survey.

While none of the domestic visitors, interviewed on-site or online, opted for a no, we had one foreign visitor (1 response = 5.6 %) who openly told us no, she was not a museum-goer and was here with her sister who was just the opposite, a true museum fan (maybe this was the very reason to be frank). The remaining foreigners (94.4% = 17 responses) said yes, they do visit museums regularly.

QUESTION 3 – CHANNELING

The question dealing with the ways of finding out about House Bukovac offered several answering options out of which recommendation from a friend/family member (54.5%, 6 responses) prevailed over the Internet/social networks (18.2%, 2 responses) among domestic participants,

4 As Aaker (et.al.) warns: “While conducting surveys for international research, a number of differences between the domestic and the international environment have to be taken into account. Surveys in the international context often involve assistance of translators and interpreters. The correct use of the local language in a research instrument is critical to successful research design. Owing to cross-national variances, the meaning of survey responses may get lost during the translation and interpretation into other languages.” (Aaker et.al. 2019: 200).

while 3 visitors (27.3%) opted for an open answer, pointing out their local family (Cavtat) and place of birth (Dubrovnik) as factors which made visits to House Bukovac a must. One in the group said they came to know about House Bukovac thanks to the media, while none of the domestic visitors mentioned Croatian tourist material as a source on this matter.

On the other hand, Croatian tourist material was the No.1 choice of House Bukovac foreign visitors (36.8% =7 responses), followed by the Internet/social networks (21.1% = 4 responses) and a recommendation from a friend/family member (15.8% = 3 responses). Other sources pointed out by foreign visitors were the Croatian National Radio Television (HRT), the Serbian Orthodox Church of the Holy Annunciation (SPC Sv. Blagovještenja) in Dubrovnik,⁵ and getting to know about House Bukovac through work/job projects.

Responses including the usage of a magazine, as well as finding out about the museum through a recommendation from a tourist guide/waiter/hotel personnel were left out in both groups, maybe suggesting certain marketing opportunities that were missed or could be intensified.

QUESTION 4 – IMPRESSIONS, FEELINGS, AND EMOTIONS

When it comes to the impressions after the museum visit, we offered 10 options (including positive and negative emotions) and additional room for the answer. Multiple choice was possible as well, and most participants (foreign, domestic and local), interviewed in person, gladly went for it. As for the domestic group, the three leading answers were: as if I was travelling in time (50%, 6 responses), peaceful (41.7%, 5 responses) and welcomed (33.3%, 4 responses), followed by feeling inspired and creative (scoring 25% in 3 responses, each) and positively overwhelmed (2 responses = 16.7%). Only one domestic visitor felt proud of House Bukovac (1 response =8.3%), while being fascinated was also added to our list (also 1 response = 8.3%)

Foreign visitors equally went for peaceful (26.3%= 5 responses) and welcomed (26.3% = 5 responses), creative (15.8% = 3 responses) and inspired (15.8% = 3 responses) and like going back in time (5.3% = 1 response). Additional answers (36.8% = 7 responses) included the states of feeling sentimental and (pleasantly) surprised, describing the museum atmosphere as intimate, cosy and friendly, together with participants' satisfaction with the staff ("You made all the difference!") and the care being provided for the visitors and the museum itself.

None of the questioned visitors, from both target groups, left negative comments (bored, disappointed, unwelcome), which, naturally, brings on relief, but needs to be carefully approached for the previously mentioned reasons (e.g. small sample, the (sub)conscious need to please the interviewer, answering before a companion), as confirmed by the changes brought on with the online survey version. In addition, no foreign (and only one domestic) visitor opted for feeling proud, which was an expected choice primarily for the local visitors.

QUESTION 5 – THE “WOW EFFECT” FACTORS

Our final question dealt with the visitors' suggestions on further improvement of a place which already left a good impression on them. Here, there were six options concerning museum

5 The Church Museum holds 18 portraits. Of these, nine were done by Vlaho Bukovac (cf. Radisavljević 2009).

programmes (events), spaces (indoor vs. outdoor) and sensory experience (smell, taste, and touch, besides listening and watching). Conversations and stories about the local culture and the artist's life, already in the offer of House Bukovac (e.g. Thursday lectures on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Vlaho Bukovac's death), received 7 domestic responses (58.3%), followed by a tasting experience of the products coming from the museum garden (tea, liquor, jam) which seemed like a good idea to 6 (50%) of our domestic respondents. Interactive content was suggested by 2 domestic participants (16.7%), same as the option of guided tours around the permanent exhibition/museum exhibitions, as well as music events in the museum garden (e.g. classical and jazz concerts, DJ sessions, traditional Konavle singing and dancing, etc.), getting 2 votes (16.7%) each. The garden movie screenings (e.g. summer doc cinema), however, attracted attention of only one interviewed domestic visitor (8.3%). The additional suggestions (33.3% = 4 responses) included "mini costumed tours" around the house (equivalent to feeling "like going back in time"), as well as a change in the permanent exhibition ("combining photos with paintings, in chronological order", „more paintings, a different display“), together with "interactive storytelling". On the other hand, one domestic participant stated being "impressed by the museum itself, without any additional content needed".

When it comes to foreign visitors, the main two choices equally include the need to introduce interactive content to the museum permanent exhibitions, as well as offering visitors the opportunity of tasting experience of the products coming from the museum garden (tea, liquor, jam), which received 31.6% (6 responses) each. Foreigners find music events in the museum garden (21.1% = 4 responses) and movie screenings (10.5% = 2 responses) more interesting than the domestic visitors, while the option of conversations and stories about the local culture and the artist's life attracted attention of only 10.5% (2 responses) of them. In-person guided tours would increase the wow effect for 15.8% (3 responses) of foreign visitors to House Bukovac. Additional answers (47.4% = 9 responses) include the need for more visible textual information/more written material, more content for kids, more programmes and a guidebook for adults in German (a case of a visitor with a hearing device which makes the usage of the audio guide difficult or even non-tolerable), arranging the lights in a different order (especially in the photo exhibition), stronger WI-FI (losing the audio guide due to the lost connection), and air conditioning, as a must (especially requested by elderly visitors, but also as a factor for leaving the museum premises earlier than thought/wanted, due to the heat inside, for visitors of all ages, as mentioned in many off-the-record conversations after the survey, one visitor even blaming the heat for not being in the mood to participate in the survey).⁶ In contrast to the "need for more" presented above, two additional answers confirmed total contentment with how things were at House Bukovac ("Great as it is," "Not adding anything."), followed by both visitors describing themselves, in a post-survey conversation, as somewhat Puritans when it comes to Museums and art.

TARGET GROUP 3: LOCAL VISITORS

During the 5 days of the on-site survey at House Bukovac, no local visitors, except one, visited the museum. Due to the high season (2nd half of July), that did not come as a surprise, however, to be able to spread the survey throughout all three target groups of visitors, secondary actions

6 During the reconstruction of Bukovac House, prior to its reopening in 2004, the newly discovered and restored frescos, done by Vlaho himself, when he was only 16, were the main reason for not including the air conditioning system in the new constructional concept of the Museum (cf. Puhara and Vuković 2016).

needed to be taken. Starting Monday, the 1st August, the same online survey was launched to a number of emails on the MiGK mailing list, targeting, first and foremost, the locals (Konavle/Dubrovnik), but also at disposition to domestic/foreign friends of the museum, who visited or are visiting House Bukovac on a regular basis. Visiting the museum in person (at least once) was noted as a request and certain questions were slightly modified to fit the online, self-answering purpose. The survey was open for 5 days (closing on Saturday, the 6th of August).

QUESTION 1 – IMPRESSIONS, FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS

To begin with, we asked the local users about the impressions House Bukovac leaves/left them with. The same as in the case of the domestic survey participants, the preferred answer was like travelling in time (51.6% = 16 responses), followed by the expected feeling of being proud (41.9% = 13 responses) and, similar to domestic choices: peaceful (29% = 9 responses), inspired (25.8% = 8 responses), welcomed (19.4% = 6 responses), as well as creative and overwhelmed (16.1% = 5 responses each). The biggest turnaround, compared to foreign and domestic target groups, happened regarding the negative emotions, also offered in the selection list: we had three local (online) votes/responses for feeling disappointed (9.7%), one for being bored (3.2%) and another one for not feeling welcomed (3.2%).

QUESTION 2 – THE MISSION

Unlike the other two target groups, based on their organic knowledge and experience of the local life and culture, as well as a deeper connection to the site, our local participants had the opportunity of contemplating and answering the question of the museum mission. In their opinion, House Bukovac should, first and foremost, present the work of this great Croatian artist (65.6% = 21 responses), promote art among children and youth (53.1%, 17 responses) and be(-come) a cultural centre in Cavtat (43.8%, 14 responses). In addition, 31.2% (10 responses) of our local participants think that House Bukovac should present the 19th century Cavtat urban family life, while (surprisingly or not?) only 6.2% (2 responses) of them see it as a place of dialogue, within the local community itself.

QUESTION 3 – WHAT CAN WE DO FOR YOU?

“Not everyone wants to visit a museum. This is in part because of operational issues like cost, location, and schedule, but this is not the whole story. Some do not even reach the point of worrying about logistics, because the mere idea of visiting a museum makes no sense to them. Museums are not a part of their world. Why? Because most museums are neither built by nor for people like them, leaving them systemically and socially excluded from the museum culture. One of the symptoms of this type of social exclusion is the feeling of not belonging to a place or experience. This feeling often receives insufficient attention in museum inclusion work, which tends to focus on staff culture and field-wide attitudes.” (Price and Applebaum 2022).

To end the survey, we asked our local participants what House Bukovac can do for them and their community. The three main answers were as follows: offering a unique art-wise experience to the locals, as well as the domestic and foreign tourists, with a high 75% = 24 responses, serving as a platform for different art collaborations (children and youth, students and the professors of the Academy of Arts, freelance artists, etc.) with 59.4% (19 responses), and – serving

me as a place where I feel welcome and where I can create/participate in different projects and events (43.8%, 14 responses). The fourth choice considered the need to strengthen the feelings of local/national pride (34.4% = 11 responses), while the contribution to the number of tourists in the area came last with 12.5% (4 responses).

Since all of the abovementioned questions offered an open answer (in addition to multiple choice), we were also able to collect several valuable insights from the locals, in their own words. For example, the (only) local visitor interviewed in person mentioned nostalgia, as the main emotion associated with House Bukovac and, going along the side of suggested answers (local and national pride, art promotion), said that the mission of the museum such as House Bukovac should be built around the questions of identity and that it should serve, primarily, as a source of inspiration for the young Konavle inhabitants.

CONCLUSIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

Although, due to a minor sample, it offered only a glimpse of public opinion, the survey brought on a rather clear set of directions, aiming for optimal institutional performance, a must for a local art house-museum guarding the national treasure of Bukovac legacy and located very near one of the most desirable Adriatic tourist destinations – the city of Dubrovnik.

Leaving the in-depth analysis and broader samples for another occasion, the conclusions we can draw from the data collected via this survey start with the need to plan and program activities according to the demographics of House Bukovac visitors and the dynamics of visits during a year, splitting it into two main seasons (e.g. April to September/October to March).

Based on our on-site survey participants, for July 2022, visitor demographics looked like this: 76% of foreign, 20% of domestic and only 4% of local visitors (Konavle/Dubrovnik).

Besides adapting the programme to visitor demographics, the visitor profile is another major feature to help us with arranging the best content fit. For instance, in our sample, the leading profile (couples) in both dominant demographic groups (33.3% of domestic visitors and 33.3% of foreign visitors) may suggest designing interactive activities for couples, additional content presenting love stories (and intrigues) inspired by the Bukovac family and Vlaho's art itself, promotion of the museum garden as a romantic getaway in Cavtat⁷, as well as a suitable souvenir offer in the Museum Shop.

On the other hand, following coupled visits, individual visits (25% of domestic visitors and 16.7% of foreigners) and family visits (only 16.7% of foreign and 11.1% of domestic visitors) make us rethink the quality and quantity of information a visitor is able to provide for himself/herself on his/her own, family-friendly content, multiple-generation approach (mobility conditions, infrastructure, equipment, etc.), again, inspired by Cavtat family stories, especially the stories of the people who once lived in House Bukovac, a home filled with children's laughter throughout the centuries, as well as the in-person guiding-tours that can add up to the visitor experience more than any kind of audio guide or guidebook, especially when it comes to organised visits or larger tourist groups, the No.1 profile regarding foreign visitors (38.9%), and the third appearing profile for domestic visitors of House Bukovac (16.7%).

7 According to the European Best Destinations site, Cavtat leads as one of the best honeymoon destinations in Europe for the year 2023. To find out more, visit <https://www.europeanbestdestinations.com/best-of-europe/best-honeymoon-destinations-in-europe/> (accessed 20th June 2023).

Among the foreign and domestic visitors, one thing is certain (or at least the visitors told us so) – at House Bukovac, we’re dealing, by far, with museum-goers (people who frequently visit museums). Based on this, we can presume that our visitors carefully plan their visit to a museum, they have a lot of visitor experience behind them, therefore their expectations are higher than people who do not know what to expect from a museum visit, we can use the already existing channels for the promotion of our programmes (e.g. virtual or real groups, forums and societies), it is more likely they will gladly invest in a museum visit or initiative (e.g. the recent “Konavle Weavers” / *Konavoski tkalci* communal acquisition⁸), but their satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) is also more likely to get the word spread around.

And why is this important to know? Getting the word spread around (recommendation), as the data suggests, is the No.1 way (40%) for finding out about the museum, at least when it comes to the domestic visitors of House Bukovac, and the third channelling option (15.8%) for the foreign visitors, who are understandably more likely to find out about House Bukovac while consuming different kinds of Croatian tourist material. For both groups, the Internet and social networks rank second, with a similar percentage (20% for domestic visitors, and 21.1% for foreign). On the other hand, the usage of a magazine, as well as finding out about the museum through a recommendation from a tourist guide/waiter/hotel personnel were left out in both groups, maybe suggesting certain marketing opportunities that were missed out or could be intensified. In any case, knowing where to invest, and where to cut back, can make all the difference when it comes to marketing in museums.

Maybe the most revealing question of this survey was the one dealing with the emotions that visitors of House Bukovac were left with, after visiting it. Knowing how our users feel can help us understand the real effect our place, and our work effort, have on people, instead of projecting an image of the institution that we think we are (or would like to be). It is what it is, and *they* (not us) get to say it – at House Bukovac, visitors (domestic and foreign) feel welcomed (40% for domestic, 26.3% for foreign), peaceful (also, 40% for domestic, 26.3% for foreign) and creative (40% for domestic, 15.8% for foreign). Ranking 4th is the feeling of travelling in time (40% for the domestic) and feeling inspired (15.8% for foreigners). Having this in mind, and building from it, can have a significant influence on the mission and vision of House Bukovac.

The mission of every museum is its driving force. A local museum such as the MiGK, with House Bukovac as just one of its units, although driven by the idea of collecting, interpreting, and presenting the rich local history, art and culture to the visitors of this highly tourist-oriented area, should not forget (and is not forgetting) its primary users, the inhabitants of Konavle - “The museum is an active participant in the community. Wanting to offer wisdom for the future that is caught by interpreting the past, the museum tries to participate in the present of the community.” (Beželj, Dominik and Rusković Radonić 2020: 132).

The answers local visitors gave us, when asked about House Bukovac’s ideal mission, confirm the recognition of the need for that equilibrium, the only surprising thing being a rather low percentage of seeing the museum as a place of dialogue, within the community itself. Some of the reasons for that could be hidden in rare, but recorded, cases of negative emotional feedback submitted via the online survey.

8 More about the fundraising campaign, a pioneer in its field - public Croatian museum milieu, at <https://konavoski-tkalci.mailchimpsites.com/> (accessed 6th June 2023).

So, what can House Bukovac do for its local community to make this better? According to the community itself, aside from offering a unique art-wise experience to them (as well as the domestic and foreign tourists), the museum can serve in two ways: as a multigenerational platform for art collaborations of different kinds, and as a place where the locals feel welcome, where they can create and participate in different projects and events, strengthening the feelings of local pride along the way.

Finally, if the visitors can tell us who we are, who else can tell us better where to go? What do they suggest we can do better? What does it take to make them go “Wow, that’s amazing!”? According to both, domestic and foreign groups of visitors, there are two things – interactive content (31.6% foreign, 20% domestic), and tasting experiences, for example, of the products coming from the museum garden - tea, liquor, jam (31.6% foreign, 40% domestic). However, it must be pointed out that the No.1 choice for the domestic visitors was the one already in the standard offer of House Bukovac – conversations and stories about the local culture and the artist’s life (e.g. current Thursday lectures on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Vlaho Bukovac’s death), while music events in the museum garden were the 2nd choice (with 1st place divided) of our foreign visitors.

From these last two questions, three possible and easily adaptable actions can be organised. Firstly, reinforcing the unique signature atmosphere (peaceful, welcoming, creative, like travelling in time, etc.) of an urban 19th century family house-museum by additional interactive storytelling (a moment where Vlaho Bukovac’s autobiography “My Life”, yet again, comes in as a convenient source of endless possibilities and inspiration). Secondly, taking the already present multi-sensorial space (open and closed) to another level, offering not only the (Bukovac) content but also the (Bukovac) experience (Figure 2). Thirdly, spreading the mentioned preferred activities throughout the year (conversations and stories during the winter months, garden events during summertime.), with tastings, or other sensory („hands-on“) activities, and interactive content being available throughout the year.⁹

As profane as these actions might seem from the stance of a classical art interpreter: “If we (as museum practitioners, A/N) believe in the power of art and artists to connect with people, it is our job as communicators to take the same risks that artists do, and give people the opportunity to connect, because that is clearly what they are seeking.” (Mitchell and Hoffmann 2012).

In addition, let us not forget all the additional features that could use improvement, the visitors warned us about in this survey (signages, lights, air quality, textual visibility, guides in versatile forms, etc.). Investing in small changes can be of huge importance for a visitor, as can a small survey for a museum.

And last, but not least (on the contrary), keeping the welcoming spirit - it truly is the greatest asset of House Bukovac. It is also what turns a house into a home, and what makes a visitor say - *You made all the difference!*

As for the MiGK spirit beholders, “what matters most to you is what happens after the consultancy. How are you going to take the project forward? It is all too easy, especially during a long

9 The initial doubt is reasonable. “It is not generally encouraged to connect artworks with old stories and aspirations of our own lives; in fact, attempting to do so may be actively discouraged. It is quickly condemned as vulgar, even repugnant, in high culture because it seeks solace, encouragement, enlightenment, or hope... We have a problem with dry humour as a result of our contemporary engagement with culture.” (Simon 2023).



Figure 2. A newly addition to House Bukovac (garden) offer – second year of an overbooked “Art & Wine” workshop, August 2023 (Photo: MiGK)

consultancy, to lose sight of the fundamental purpose of every consultancy, to guide action... Now is the time to review the Action Plan again, ensuring that the key permissions are obtained, the key meetings are fixed, and that the key people will be available to take the project forward.” (Paine 2006: 3).¹⁰

As for the consultancy team, once again, we thank its director and all the MiGK employees, for welcoming and providing us with good will, crucial for our successful collaboration resulting in, hopefully, even more flair, vibrancy, versatility and visits to a museum that already serves as an example of good practice in so many ways, the most admirable one being the awareness of the importance of constant evaluation and improvement.

10 Furthermore, according to many marketing theoreticians, basic factors that influence managers’ determination of using the research results in their decision-making practice are as follows: the perception (not, necessarily, reality) of the quality of the research, accordance with the expectations, clarity of the presentation, as well as a so-called “political” acceptability within the institution itself (cf. Pavičić, Alfirević and Aleksić 2006: 225).

SUMMARY

The text provides an interpretive overview of the results of surveys conducted in-person and online among the visitors of House Bukovac, during ten days of July and August 2022. The visitor survey, as a part of an international consulting project at the Museums and Galleries of Konavle (MiGK), was conducted under the guidance of Luis Marcelo Mendes (Cultivia), assisted by Gordana Viljetić, a senior curator at the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, upon the initiative of the director of the institution, Antonia Rusković Radonić, and in co-operation with the employees of House Bukovac. House Bukovac is one of the four MiGK units, also the only one located on the coast, in Cavtat, the administrative centre of Konavle municipality, close to one of the most desirable European destinations – the city of Dubrovnik. How much is this an advantage and how much a disadvantage to attract (mostly foreign) audiences to get to know one of the most famous Croatian painters of all time, the great Vlaho Bukovac, and how does this museum unit work in terms of co-operation with the local community? According to the opinions of the surveyed visitors/users, divided into three categories - foreign, domestic and local - House Bukovac impresses, informs and is a source of pride, with room for progress in all the three categories. Particularly prominent are the dimensions of elicited emotions (like going back in time) and staff – museum employees, as the strongest asset during the visit. In conclusion, in accordance with the thoughts of its users, strengthened by the current museum guidelines, House Bukovac as a naturally dual space (birthplace and museum) is an ideal hybrid polygon for a multisensory and interdisciplinary approach to local history, culture and art. Upon necessarily a slight improvement of infrastructure and advertising and, most importantly, the shift from cognition towards emotion, from the still strict gallery-study space defined (and simultaneously charmingly broken) within the urban housing unit, it becomes a unique place for creating alternative, experimental programmes in which – here and (already) now – some past and future times of Konavle people and people of the world come together, reminding of Vlaho Bukovac, the local *citizen of the world*.

REFERENCES AND SOURCES

- AAKER, David A., KUMAR, Vineet, LEONE, Robert P. I George S. DAY. 2019. *Marketing Research*. New Delhi: Wiley India Pvt. Ltd.
- Art Consulting. 1999. „Consultancy for Museums: Transform Time into Space“. *Art Consulting*, <https://artconsulting.net/institutions/consultancy-for-museums/> (accessed June 6, 2023).
- BEŽELJ, Jelena, DOMINIK, Petra i Antonia RUSKOVIĆ RADONIĆ. 2020. *Muzeji i galerije Konavala = Museums and Galleries of Konavle*. Gruda: Muzeji i galerije Konavala, https://www.migk.hr/izdavastvo-clanak/item/download/36_49e3a882f5d7f970bfff4c-3c2c44b74c (accessed June 16, 2023).
- BEŽELJ, Jelena. 2023. *Otac i kćeri, bilješke i skice: Kuća Bukovac, 18. travnja 2023. – 16. listopada 2023. = Father and Daughters, Notes and Sketches: Vlaho Bukovac House, April 18, 2023 – October 16, 2023*. Gruda: Muzeji i galerije Konavala.
- DAWER, Nikhil. 2023. „Museum Visitor Surveys - Channels, Survey Types & Questions“. *Zonka Feedback*, ažurirano 4. kolovoza 2023. <https://www.zonkafeedback.com/blog/museum-visitor-surveys> (accessed June 16, 2023).
- MENDES, Luis Marcelo. 2022. „MiGK – Resultados da Pesquisa“. PowerPoint prezentacija. Kuća Bukovac, 11. kolovoza 2022.
- MITCHELL, Kim i Julia HOFFMANN. 2012. „I Went to MOMA“. Reprogram. Communication, Branding and Culture in a New Era of Museums. Luis Marcelo Mendes, ur. [s.l.]: Imã Editorial, str. 61-71, http://www.luismarcelomendes.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/reprogram_vol_1.en_.pdf (accessed June 16, 2023).
- MUZEJI I GALERIJE KONAVALA [s. a.]. „O nama: Kratka povijest – Kuća Bukovac“, <https://www.migk.hr/en/about-us-hb/short-history> (accessed May 27, 2023).
- MUZEJI I GALERIJE KONAVALA [s. a.]. „O nama: Kratka povijest“, <https://www.migk.hr/en/about-us/short-history> (accessed May 27, 2023).
- PAINE, Crispin. 2006. „Using Museum Consultants“. Focus 5, 2. izdanje: 1-4, <https://www.thc.texas.gov/public/upload/preserve/museums/files/Using-museum-consultants.pdf> (accessed June 20, 2023).
- PAVIČIĆ Jurica, ALFIREVIĆ, Nikša i Ljiljana ALEKSIĆ. 2006. *Marketing i menadžment u kulturi i umjetnosti*. Zagreb: Masmedia.
- PRICE, Aaron i Lauren APPLEBAUM. 2022. „A Free Survey to Measure a Sense of Belonging at Museums“. *American Alliance of Museums, Alliance Blog*, objavljeno 30. rujna 2022., <https://www.aam-us.org/2022/09/30/a-free-survey-to-measure-a-sense-of-belonging-at-museums/> (accessed June 6, 2023).
- PUHARA, Helena i Lucija VUKOVIĆ. 2016. „Od rimske kuće do biografskog muzeja Vlaho Bukovca“. *Informatica Museologica* 47: 165-170.
- RADISAVLJEVIĆ, Zoran. 2009. „Obnovljena pravoslavna crkva u Dubrovniku“. *Politika*, 8. lipnja, <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/90462/Obnovljena-pravoslavna-crkva-u-Dubrovniku> (accessed June 15, 2023).
- SIMON. 2023. „Visitor Surveys Help Museums Understand Their Visitors Better“. Arna Bontemps Museum, objavljeno 23. lipnja 2023., <https://www.arnabontempsmuseum.com/visitor-surveys-help-museums-understand-their-visitors-better/> (accessed June 20, 2023).