

USE OF EITHER ORIGINAL OR SURROGATE RECORDS IN MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses a cluster of questions relating to visitors' perceptions of archival materials, specifically records, when they are displayed in museum exhibitions in either their original form of creation or in surrogate form: What kind of interest do these records induce and how is it manifested? Do visitors have an emotional response to them? To what extent can a user's physical interaction with a record be replaced or complemented by a digital one? The paper presents and discusses the results of a pilot study, "Records as Museum Artefacts," that used mixed methods and techniques, including a focus group, visitor surveys and focused observation of visitors. The results suggest that those designing exhibitions should be more attentive, when incorporating records, to how they might both emphasize the materiality of those records and create possibilities for the visitor to achieve an additional meaningful experience by including digital surrogates.

Introduction

In designing both exhibition content and display objects are selected with a purpose. By creating an exhibition where objects are displayed in their original form, the exhibition designer, curator or other professional involved in the design, presumably assessed that museum visitors would derive greater value from a display using original materials than they would from some kind of surrogate. Among other things, museums exist to preserve original, (i.e., in the form in which it was acquired by the museum) material objects and to communicate about them to visitors, thereby enriching the future with the past (even the most immediate past). Today intangible cultural heritage is also a focus of many cultural institutions and projects, although such heritage is often only captured and represented by traditional cultural institutions in some fixed manifestation of its original form (e.g., audio of a song, video of a traditional dance). This paper focuses on records created through government, business, or personal activities that would usually be preserved in an archive but for various reasons, including their value as material culture or cultural heritage, are instead held as part of museum collections and/or are incorporated into museum exhibitions. These might include letters, photographs, maps, engineering schematics, architectural plans, financial and personnel records, and so forth.

Exhibitions in heritage institution have many purposes, from the promotion of collections to the education or entertainment of visitors. This representational form of communication was the prime function of twentieth century museums around the globe. Contemporary museological exhibition practices have passed through various stages of deconstruction and re-conceptualization as museums attempt to respond to increasing demands resulting from unpredictable individual visitor interests. The earlier focus on the objects being displayed has shifted toward a focus on the exhibition experience, referring both to the visitors' cognitive and emotional¹

1 The term "emotional" here is used, as it is within the museum literature, to encompass a range of affective responses that visitors might have to museum exhibitions and their contents. Affect has recently been the subject of increased attention in the archival field also. See for example, Anne J. Gilliland and Marika Cifor, eds. special issue on "Affect and the Archive, Archives and Their Affects," *Archival*

reception of the exhibition and to the exhibition as a product in itself. Indeed, “exhibition” is a complex construct. As Dévallées *et al.* note:

When exhibitions are considered a set of exhibited objects, they include *musealia*, museum objects or « real things », such as substitutes (exact replicas, copies, etc.); all exhibition accessories (elements used for presentation purposes as, for instance, showcases or separation panels), and information elements (texts, films or multimedia) as well as useful signaling.²

They further elaborate on the notion of “real things” in the museum setting:

Within such context no attempt should be made to rebuild a reality that cannot be transferred to museums (a real « thing » in a museum is already a substitute of reality) but instead an attempt should be made to communicate it through such devices.³

These assertions provoke several questions. For example, to what extent can the virtual replace the physical in a museum exhibition? Can records in any form, on any media displayed in exhibitions encourage any emotional reactions? What emotions originate through encounters with digital items? On which aspects are visitors’ preferences based?

Literature Review

In material culture as well as in museum and curatorship studies, there has been extensive research concentrating on visitor behaviour in muse-

Science, 16 (2016).

2 André Desvallées, Martin Schärer and Noémie Drouguet, “Exhibition.” In *Fundamental Concepts of Museology*, eds. FrançoisMairesse, André Desvallées, Bernard Deloche et al. *ICOFOM Study Series, Working Papers Issue*, 38 (2009): 66.

3 *Ibid.*, 66.

um settings. Relevant to the pilot study presented here, there are several recent investigations of human responses to objects on display, issues of authenticity, and emotions provoked through encounters with objects in their original and surrogate forms. For example, in 2013 Barry Ardley and Richard Voase investigated how the display of one of the remaining original copies of one of the best known records in the world, Magna Carta, together with other iconic documents that were central to the founding of the United States influenced visitors' reactions and impressions.⁴ They suggest that, "...the key to meeting visitor expectations is to re-imagine the Magna Carta as a 'sacred' rather than a secular document. The practical implication is to present the document in a way to generate *aura*."⁵ These records have the status of iconic documents that assert fundamental human rights and thus their meaning and presence transcend their material carrier.⁶ Such documents might be expected therefore to trigger reactions and evoke feelings in visitors, and possibly even to create the kind of numinous experience that Kiersten Latham describes as:

... ultimately... one whole swirling entity of these things, overlapping and connecting. It is the uniting of all these things—emotion, intellect, feeling, senses, imagination—that results in meaning for the experiencer.⁷

In subsequent studies Latham gives the examples of telegrams used in exhibition to evoke feelings,⁸ and the reproduction of a photograph displayed at Little Round Top, Gettysburg Battlefield.⁹ Displayed objects from the perspectives of the study's participants were conceptualized as a

4 Barry Ardley and Richard Voase, "Magna Carta: Repositioning the Secular as 'Sacred,'" *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 19:4 (2013): 341-352.

5 *Ibid.*, 341.

6 A copy of Magna Carta achieved even greater attention in 2015, the year of its 800th anniversary, when a new vault for its safekeeping and display was built in Lincoln Castle and the document's presentation was redesigned.

7 Kiersten F. Latham, "What is 'the Real Thing' in the Museum? An Interpretative Phenomenological Study," *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 30:1 (2015): 15.

8 Kiersten F. Latham, "Numinous Experiences with Museum Objects," *Visitor Studies*, 16:1 (2013): 11, DOI: 10.1080/10645578.2013.767728.

9 Kiersten F. Latham, "Psychological Flow and the Numinous Museum Experience," *UM Working Papers in Museum Studies*, 11 (2016): 1.

form of direct connections with the past. Therefore, beside their original purpose of their creation, and various subsequent usages, the displayed objects have additional value, interpreted differently by different viewers, but with some similarity in their affect on the viewer.

Other authors examine fetishism as another type of affect connected with displaying originals. In 2000, Helen Wood argued that exhibitions are actually “carefully directed fetishism.”¹⁰ From Wood’s point of view, fetishism of a certain object is “[...] a personal relationship between man and object and the identity of the owner is reflected or imposed onto that object. Fetishism humanizes the object. It takes it out of context, only focuses on part of the whole and can be a form of substitution for something absent.”¹¹

Wood cited several methods frequently used by museums to provoke fetishistic behaviour including “restrictive access and emotive publicity leaflets,”¹² and constructing exhibition design in such a way that, “the object and the viewer are both made ‘special’ by creating a unique atmosphere around them.”¹³ By asserting that “... the dim lighting, glass cases, description labels and physically isolated objects all promote fetishism,”¹⁴ she pointed to exhibition design as an important factor in provoking interest, or maybe even fetishistic behaviour. The list of specific elements which Wood highlights as important exhibition design elements that influence visitors’ behaviour can probably be expanded and researched more through an examination of museum exhibition practices.

But it can be also argued that all the abovementioned elements of exhibition design (low lighting, safe display cases, etc.) are in fact required for the purposes of securing museum contents and exhibiting them in accordance with conservators’ requirements. The reasons why documents are displayed in some kind of glass-protected exhibition case are practical, but this raises the question of how such a mode of display affects visitors’ responses. An exhibition differs from an archive reading or reference room where users

10 Helen Wood, “The Fetish of the Document: An Exploration of Attitudes Towards Archives,” in M. Procter and C.P. Lewis, eds., *New Directions in Archival Research* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Centre for Archive Studies, 2000), 38.

11 *Ibid.*, 24.

12 *Ibid.*, 39.

13 *Ibid.*, 42.

14 Wood, “The Fetish of the Document,” *op. cit.*, 42.

are monitored when they are interacting with documents. The particular use situation or the users' experience with the records in the reading or reference room in an archive or museum is not of primary interest here, but one might suspect that in these cases quite the opposite effect is occurring, especially if the original and any digital surrogates are correlated. In the context of a reading room in an archive (or museum) where originals can be accessed and in the context of a public exhibition where, in most cases, originals are distanced from user or visitor's direct touch, a different dynamic is being created. If in both contexts a user or visitor is offered a choice between an original or any kind of copy (reproduction, digitized copy, etc.) then questions about why the choice has been made, and whether it is related in any way with the notion of affect are pertinent.

Cultural studies scholar Maryanne Dever poses the following question:

As researchers, we remain oblivious to the fact that these documents are so often delivered to us swathed in protective layers of yet more (generally acid-free) paper. But what if we took seriously the thing that is paper by looking at it rather than always overlooking it or looking through it? And what if we asked ourselves what work the paper is doing if it is not simply the neutral platform or container for words?¹⁵

Here Dever is thinking about both the paper record and the additional protective layer of paper around it. The researcher is concentrated on the information contained in the record, and usually overlooks its materiality and what that might represent (e.g., age, evidence of origin, etc.). Anastasia Varnalis-Weigle's recent study deals with similar questions of users' experiences of physical objects and their digital surrogates. Among other artefacts, she used photographs to examine users' relations to the same item in print and digitized form.¹⁶ She found that:

15 Maryanne Dever, "Provocation on the Pleasures of Archived Paper," *Archives and Manuscripts*, 41:3 (2013): 177, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2013.841550>.

16 Anastasia S. Varnalis-Weigle, "A Comparative Study of User Experience between Physical Objects and Their Digital Surrogates," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 3, art.3 (2016), <http://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol3/iss1/3>.

Most participants agreed the digital photographs and buttons were a satisfactory alternative to the physical objects. These participants found no difference between the print and digital photographs. For more complex objects, perception of physical attributes did not always translate well into digital form. Users were surprised at the physical size, weight, or texture of an object when compared to its digital surrogate. This is important to note because some of the unique intrinsic qualities that the physical object contained were lost during digital translation.¹⁷

As an exemplar of a complex material object, Varnalis-Weigle let participants browse through and interact physically with a book, where it could only be apprehended visually, pages had to be turned, and so forth. Such interaction with complex objects raises another question: will digital surrogates of a complex object be able to replace the original, such as a photograph album whose pages also need to be turned in order to examine it thoroughly? Aleksandr Gelfand, argues that the digital experience cannot replace the physical one:

Although there are obvious benefits to viewing exhibits online, no matter how advanced the technology, how well the online exhibit is designed, or how much information is available, nothing will replicate the evocative power or the experience of being in the presence of the original item; seen, created, or used by someone long since gone. Each page of a digitized photo album may be turned back and forth over and over again but it is only when the viewer is in the presence of the leather-bound original that they feel the strongest connection with its creator and his time period. Regardless of future technological advances, online curators will almost certainly fail to achieve this effect.¹⁸

17 Varnalis-Weigle, "Comparative Study," op. cit.,15-16.

18 Aleksandr Gelfand, "If We Build It (and Promote It) They Will Come: History of Analog and Di-

Whether the displayed object be the original or some kind of surrogate, and bearing in mind that the museum object is already “a substitute of reality,”¹⁹ the visitor will, even in contact with an original, have a museologically-steered experience. Curators, designers and all those involved in putting on museum exhibitions are making a construct – the exhibition is a construct and a created experience. This doesn’t necessarily imply that visitor will have the exact experience of exhibition that the museum staff imagined and designed for. But it does imply that users will experience exhibitions in their individual own way shaped by how the exhibition was constructed. The encounter with the object (authentic or not) on display, therefore, is already a construct and a surrogate of the past realities of an item’s existence. Exhibitions are carefully designed with the goal of triggering both cognitive and emotional visitor reactions, then digitized elements participate in an even more removed and more managed, constructed and artificial experience than do original items. However, they necessitate a different kind of engagement and engender an interaction experience that is different from that with an original, but nevertheless authentic in nature – digital surrogates are more than an imitation of the physical original, they represent the transfiguration of the original and they enable different, but always real, experiences. Moreover, while interactivity with the records in the physical world and in the digital world may differ in some aspects some remain basically the same, such as the action of turning pages of photograph album.

Dudley notes that another notion of importance is that experience – physical and virtual – is dependent on context:

Our experience of the material world is dependent upon our location, our movement and our interpretations of the data we receive from our senses. And of course, the interpretations we make of what we see, hear, smell, touch or taste are strongly influenced by our cultural and personal experiences and by pre-existing knowledge we may have about a particular object.²⁰

gital Exhibits in Archival Repositories,” *Journal of Archival Organization*, 11:1-2 (2013): 76, DOI: 10.1080/15332748.2013.882160.

19 Desvallées et al., “Exhibition,” op. cit., 66.

20 Sandra Dudley, “Materiality Matters: Experiencing the Displayed Object,” *UM Working Papers in Mu-*

“Records as Museum Artefacts” – A Pilot Study

In museums worldwide there are iconic documents on display²¹ – documents that have a higher meaning and whose content transcends a literal contemplation of their text and becomes or invokes an important social idea. Many documents, including Magna Carta can be categorized as records,²² and were specifically created as such many, but could secondarily be conceptualized also as artefacts. Also displayed are records whose creator was famous or important for some community in some way (for example, letters of an artist whose content would be better examined in a reading room, but when they are incorporated into an exhibition these letters serve as a connection to the person who has written them and as a connection and companion to the displayed artwork). Usually, exhibited documents could provide additional contextualization of the exhibition's theme or even present a piece of evidence of past events. Such records are situated in a liminal space between archival material and museum object in terms of their role in visitors' experiences of the exhibition and its overarching theme. Their mode of display will also affect the visitors' reception. What, therefore, is the best mode of display in order to trigger visitors' interest when using them in a museum exhibition? What modes of display might enhance or hinder that interest?

This research study sought to understand visitors' reactions toward archival railway records that were included in a museum display. These objects were placed in a sealed glass case and were of railway provenance

seum Studies, 8 (2012): 1.

- 21 Another original copy of Magna Carta exhibited in Salisbury Cathedral is advertised on the Cathedral's website as follows: “The exhibition aims to deepen visitor understanding of this globally significant document and challenges visitors to think afresh about what Magna Carta's legacy of justice and freedom means to them in these modern times.” See Salisbury Cathedral Magna Carta Exhibition, <http://www.salisburycathedral.org.uk/visit-what-see/magna-carta-exhibition>. The idea of what Magna Carta represents was reinforced in popular culture in 2013 when the music album entitled “Magna Carta...Holy Grail” by American rapper JayZ was launched at Salisbury. See <http://www.salisburycathedral.org.uk/magna-carta/magna-carta-and-jay-z>.
- 22 Records can be defined from many perspectives and the terms “document” and “record” are sometimes used simultaneously or interchangeably. In this research records are conceptualized as “persistent representations of activities or other occurrences, created by participants or observers of those occurrences or by their proxies; or sets of such representations representing particular occurrences” as defined by Geoffrey Yeo, in “Concepts of Record (2): Prototypes and Boundary Objects,” *The American Archivist*, 71:1 (2008): 136.

with significance to the overarching themes of exhibitions. The chosen study objects were of a routine nature and had no special “grand” societal meaning and were not connected to any particular publicly known person or specific community. The documents were displayed behind glass that made touching impossible within display cases placed in proximity to other exhibited artifacts. The study was conducted during three exhibitions organized or co-organized by the Croatian Railway Museum: *The First World War Line / Ogulin – Plaški – Vrhovine* (in 2014), *Railway Stations in Croatia* (in 2014/2015) and *Traveling Through Timetables* (in 2016). In line with Macdonald’s observation that “Different media ‘afford’ different kinds of audience relations and may also carry particular connotations,”²³ while preparing the online version of the *First World War Line* exhibition, issues arose regarding the originality, authenticity, visitors’ experience and digital delivery of content on a computer screen versus in physical space. The initial research intent was to analyse visitors’ interest in and reaction to documents displayed in their original form and presented digitally with the aid of digital technologies. Since the necessary technology was not available in all three exhibitions, the research plan was adjusted in such a way that later research could build on the findings of this study. Since the situations where documents were presented in various forms were not synchronized throughout, the outcomes of this research should be understood to be indicative only with further research needed in these aspects.

The study was conducted within an interpretive framework of directed behavioural studies which “...investigate specific aspects of visitor behaviour in exhibition, often, although not always, from a social psychological perspective.”²⁴ The main focus of the study was to investigate and analyse visitors’ reactions toward the displayed documents in order to understand how documents in their original form are perceived, what kind of exhibition design might trigger more powerful reactions, and whether experiences of the physical item might be replaced, complemented or enhanced by the use of surrogates. Other questions of interest were the following:

23 Sharon Macdonald, “Interconnecting: Museum Visiting and Exhibition Design,” *CoDesign*, 3, supp. 1 (2007): 154.

24 Macdonald, “Interconnecting,” op. cit., 151.

Do the documents in their original form of creation trigger any fetishistic reaction? What kinds of documents have that capability? What kind of presentation might influence visitor experience?

The methodology used in the study can be characterized as an applied ethnomethodological approach combined with quantitative inputs. The study applied a mixed methods approach involving a focus group, observations of visitors' behaviour during an exhibition, and questionnaires completed by visitors at the exhibition.

As an exploratory technique, a focus group was conducted in 2014 with 6 participants. The focus group was held in the museum and centred on documents (which later were displayed in the exhibition) in three formats – their original paper form, print or photographic reproductions of the same records, and digitized copies. The benefit of this semi-structured interview setting was that it was possible to observe the reactions of participants and their body language.²⁵ The focus group data was analysed immediately afterwards. Each participant's verbal statements were examined together with their non-verbal and actual behaviour towards the objects. The analysis then involved grouping basic thematic units into overarching themes. The findings²⁶ were used as guidelines to structure the next stage of the research: questionnaires given to the visitors in the three above-mentioned exhibition settings, with questions that could be answered in just three to five minutes. The reason behind this timing was the assumption that a visitor, after seeing the exhibits, would respond more intuitively in the few moments immediately following their exhibition experience. The questions were organized around issues of exhibiting originals and surrogates; preferences between the original, a quality physical reproduction and a digital surrogate; and the possibility of a virtual instead of a physical exhibition (see Appendix 1).

Having in mind that exhibitions are also social events that can turn an

25 Kirsty Williamson, "Questionnaires, Individual Interviews and Focus Group Interviews," in *Research Methods: Information, Systems and Contexts*, Kirsty Williamson and Graeme Johanson, eds. (Prahan: Tilde University Press, 2013), 364, <https://www.york.ac.uk/media/sociology/interconnecting.pdf>.

26 The preliminary findings of the first stage of this study were presented at the Archival Education and Research Institute (AERI2014) at the University of Pittsburgh School of Information Sciences, July 14-18, 2014.

attraction to the displayed objects into socializing among their audience,²⁷ the behaviour of visitors who were asked to fill in questionnaires was observed prior to conducting the survey. The main focus of the observation was directed toward visitors' behaviour in front of display cases. Ten seconds of *looking at* displayed items was determined as the timeframe needed for a visitor to even start the process of exploring the item. In total 98 visitors were surveyed, accompanied with short focused observations.

Some important contextual factors of this research are also indicators of the limitations of generalizability of the study results. All exhibited records, and those used in the focus group, were connected to the railway system in the past (created through the business processes of the railway companies or somehow thematically related to railway history). They had no overt artistic or aesthetic purpose or value, and some of them addressed specific technical processes. The population that is interested in such a specific theme tends to be somewhat limited within the greater population of museum goers.

In the next section, results of data collected in the focus group and questionnaires accompanied with observation will be presented consecutively, since the findings from the focus group were indicative and incorporated in the second part of the research.

Focus Group Results

The nature of the focus group interviews was broadly delineated in advance and intended to explore general responses to the exhibition overall as well as the visiting habits and more specific experiences of visitors; the role of records displayed as museum objects and their surrogates; and reflections on visitor preferences between originals, reproductions and presentation in some kind of digital form. More specific follow-up questions were asked in the focus groups as appropriate or relevant. Participants were recruited using snowball sampling and comprised a heterogeneous group, with each participant having different visiting habits and levels of

27 Kevin Coffee, "Audience Research and the Museum Experience as Social Practice," *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 22:4 (2007): 377-389, DOI: 10.1080/09647770701757732, 377.

interest in attending exhibitions. During the group session, after the questions had been asked, a free-flowing conversation developed. As the conversation evolved, major themes emerged and there was even agreement among the whole group around these themes. Notes were taken of both the participants' responses and also on their observed behaviour.

Responses (Verbal)

- both original and copies (reproductions, facsimiles and digitized surrogates) are equally appreciated but their presentation is very important
- how documents are presented is understood to be a result of the creation process and the creative expression of the curator and exhibition designer
- digitized objects are seen as interesting only if presented in an interactive manner and when they have additional educational characteristics (e.g., ability to learn more, ability to play), and are contextualized
- exhibiting originals: it is interesting to see the original format (participants considered that digitized items are unable to represent the original format well)
- emotional aspects: "atmosphere cannot be achieved with digitized material," "the digitized item is more for the archive and historians"
- including records in exhibitions – only if they contribute to the story of exhibition, "as additional contribution to artefacts"
- If the original that is displayed has high cultural value then it cannot be replaced with a surrogate of any kind.

The overarching themes that emerged were the importance of presentation, ability to play, and ability to touch. All of these aspects could influence visitors' perceptions and reactions in the exhibition while aspiring to create and guide experience. Without careful consideration of these aspects, textual records are unlikely to arouse cognitive or emotional interest. There are two exceptions, however: records that have a *grand aura*

attached to them (as in a case of Magna Carta as record with iconic status) and personally relevant records (as with a family photo archive that many people keep at home). Although records used as samples in this research were not specific in this respect, and the topics of the records weren't of great interest to any of the participants, it was very indicative that each participant examined the records and wanted to hold them in their hands, even though some details would have been more visually accessible in digitized form where there was the possibility to enlarge and zoom into details.

Observed Behaviours (Non-verbal)

Each participant had an opportunity to look at the records that were used as examples for discussion. However, they did not express any wish to do so until they were offered the chance to hold them. Each participant wanted to hold and examine them. They looked at details on the front and the back of items, or browsed through the pages of an album and a manuscript. No one approached the screen to examine digitized items.

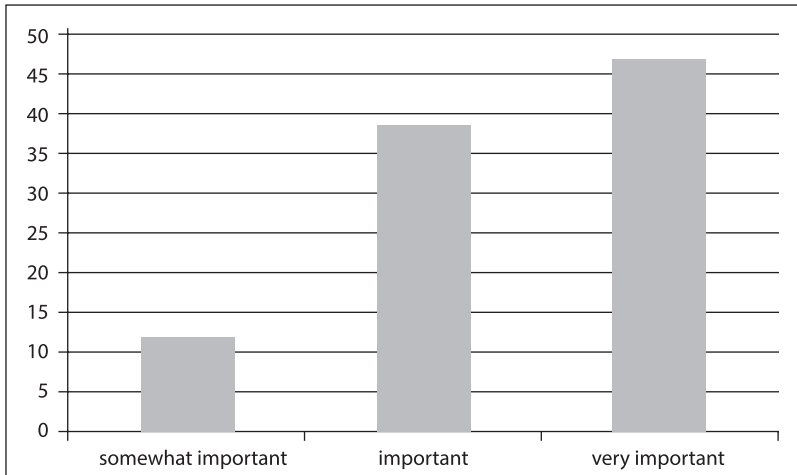
Survey Results

The results of the 98 visitors surveyed in the exhibition settings indicated discrepancies between visitors' rationalizations, verbal expressions, and actual behaviour (Table 1). 47 visitors stated that exhibiting originals is very important, 39 considered it to be important and 12 somewhat important. No one answered that exhibiting an original has no importance. On the question, "If the original is not available for exhibition, do you prefer a surrogate in the form of a replica or in a digitized form?" 76 visitors answered that a replica is more suitable and 22 stated they would prefer to view a digitized image presented using contemporary digital technology. In the specific case of exhibiting photographs and documents, 71 answered that they would prefer the original, 19 would prefer a quality print reproduction, and only 5 would prefer a digitized version. Finally, to the question, "Can an online exhibition replace a physical exhibition?" 26 vis-

itors answered affirmatively, 51 answered negatively and 21 considered it possible in some respect.

Because of the techniques employed in this study and its overall technical operationalization, the reasons why a visitor prefers one over another could not have been researched in depth. More insight was gained by observing visitor's behaviour, however.

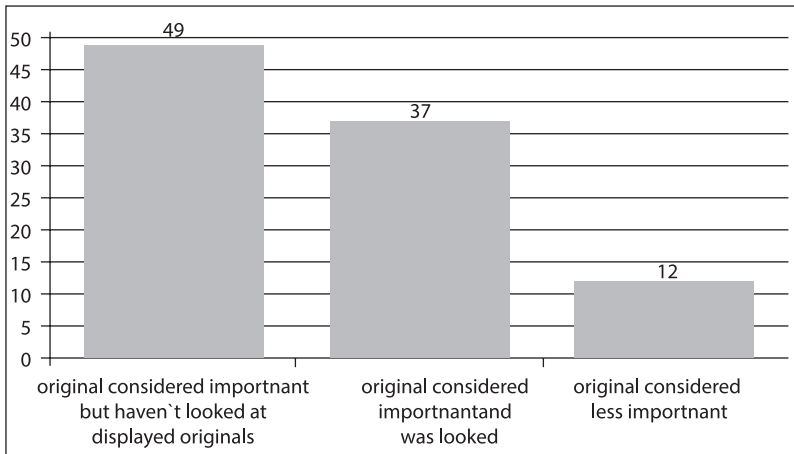
TABLE 1 "Is it important to exhibit originals at the exhibition?" N=98



Results of visitor observation

The primary importance of exhibiting originals is questioned by the results that emerged from focused observation of visitors' behaviour. Within the designated 10 seconds of looking at displayed items, only half of those visitors who answered that exhibiting originals is important actually looked at records that were on display. Observation was prolonged in some cases to see whether visitors returned at some other point during the visit to look at the digital items, but there was no evidence of this. The discrepancy between visitors' written statements in the questionnaires and their actual behaviour cannot be explained in depth without more research (Table 2).

TABLE 2 Focused observation: 49 visitors who stated that exhibiting originals is important did not look at the originals on display



Discussion

Why then exhibit records that have no high cultural and historical value, no matter how important they are to the contextualization of the exhibition topic, if they are not looked at all? The comparison of the focus group results with the findings from visitors' behaviour at exhibitions suggest that the central problem is the issue of not being able to touch the items and thereby experience their materiality.

While the participants in the focus group did not verbally declare their interest in the records that were displayed, each touched them, turned them over to see both sides and engaged in some kind of interaction. The visitors in the exhibitions didn't have that opportunity and were only able to have a visual encounter with the items without other kind of possible experiences which would, possibly, stimulate their interest in the displayed items.

The shift from real objects to real experiences in museums started several decades ago with the realization of how important exhibition design is for creating an environment which, while it will always be highly constructed, will allow for interaction, participation and discovery, and will

encourage cognitive and emotional interest. Sandra Dudley reinforces this point when she asks:

If museums seek to reduce this distance between person and thing, if displays and interpretations are constructed in such a way as to facilitate a wider or deeper sensory and emotional engagement with an object, rather than simply to enable intellectual comprehension of a set of facts presented by the museum and illustrated or punctuated by the object, might visitors actually be enabled to appreciate more aspects of the object and its story?²⁸

By criticizing the solely informational over material aspects in the perception of the object, Dudley asserts that objects should act as more than just illustrations to an overarching theme, idea of the exhibition, or illustrators of the story. The two-dimensional form in which most records are created often prevents their materiality being seen to be one of the factors that might influence visitors' perceptions and reactions.

Since interactivity with records in the open space of an exhibition without the kinds of mechanisms used in a reading room for monitoring handling is difficult to achieve, and since the originals displayed in a glass cases (in these exhibitions in which the research was conducted) were not even looked at, the possibility of digital interaction (both in exhibition space and on-line) seems to be the way to achieve the desired *play* moment. Touch, as one of the sensory modes of exploration of an object that enables interaction with an object on one level can produce playful moments. Can these moments be transferred into the digital context?

However, in the moments when participants of the focus group interacted with original records it was the materiality of the items that attracted them. As Dudley notes, these "... material qualities of object – their shape, colour, density, weight, texture, surface, size and so on – define our sensory responses to them."²⁹

The reason why surveyed visitors highlighted the importance of exhibiting originals of photographs and old documents even though most of them paid no attention to them could be because interaction in the form

28 Dudley, "Materiality Matters," op. cit., 3.

29 Ibid., 1.

of touch hadn't be allowed and therefore the materiality of the objects couldn't be experienced in the same way as it had by participants in the focus group. Other reasons might be the lack of interest in the specific kinds of technical documents of railway provenance that were exhibited combined with the desire to experience the playful moments present in the railway imaginary. For example, visitors might prefer to see models of railway vehicles in movable condition on a model railway set with buildings, as opposed to seeing a technical plan of a railway vehicle. As a solution, a museum might create a type of "discovery room" as part of its exhibition, where visitors in a monitored environment similar to an archive reading room could examine documents in their original form of creation. Another approach might be to concentrate not on the original and its authenticity of form, but on interactive moments that are possible in digital systems. Only 5 out of 98 visitors indicated that they would prefer digitized surrogates but this cannot be a conclusive result since there is a need for further research where digitized items would be presented using interactive elements and in a design focused on enhancing the experience. Again, the goals of museum exhibition are multifaceted and nowadays their realisation is mostly oriented toward visitors and their expectations. When Sandra Dudley calls for return to materiality of an object,³⁰ she finds the fullest potential of an object and a visitor's experience to reside in their mutual engagement.

Conclusion

To conclude then, any comparison between originals and surrogates is relative since the experience of the engagement with both media is different. The findings of this research suggest that there is certainly value in exhibiting original records, but only if they are presented in a way that allows some kind of interaction, with the exception of documents of high cultural and historical value that tend to have a life of their own.

30 Ibid., 5.

The phenomenon of declaring interest in displaying original records at exhibition but then not actually looking at them and stating non-interest in specific records yet wishing to examine them by holding them in one's hands rather than wishing to examine them at all in a digitized version deserves more in-depth research that would explain why certain choices are made and what might be possible implications for exhibition practices.

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Appendix 1: Visitors' questionnaire

(Q1) Please select your age:

- 18 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 54
- 55 - 64
- 65 - 74
- 75 and more

(Q2) Displaying original items at museum exhibition is:

- Very important
 - Important
 - Somewhat important
 - Isn't important at all
- Please select one answer

(Q3) If original item is not available I prefer to see:

- Replica of an item
- Digitized item presented through contemporary Information and Communication technologies

Please select one answer

(Q4) Old photographs and documents at exhibition I prefer to see:

- In the original
 - In quality reproduction
 - Digitized and presented through contemporary Information and Communication technologies
- Please select one answer

(Q5) In this case could virtual exhibition replace the one in physical space?

- Yes
- No
- Yes, in some parts (please state which)

IZLAGANJE IZVORNIH ILI ZAMJENSKIH DOKUMENATA NA MUZEJSKIM IZLOŽBAMA STUDIJA SLUČAJA

KLJUČNE RIJEČI:

*izložba, muzej, izvornik,
dokument, reprodukcija*

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