

The concept of small museums from an international and local perspective: starting points for further research in the Czech Republic¹

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The study deals with the question, what is a small museum and what are its specifics compared to other museums. Based on available foreign and local sources, it summarizes the current state of research which is largely focused on searching for the consensus on how to clearly define this type of museums. The study is based on the published results of key research in the past twenty years, it outlines selected approaches to the characteristics of a small museum and summarizes its typical features. Analogously, it looks at the state of research in the Czech museum sphere, where the topic of small museums has been repeatedly opened, examined and debated from different perspectives of professional activities and professions in a small museum. The study raises the question of how to effectively build on this state of research and develop it further within the Czech Republic, where this type of museums seems to be insufficiently mapped so far.

Keywords: small museum; micromuseum; museology; museum pedagogy; museum education; museum exhibitions

Introduction

In the recent period, the long and heatedly debated revision of the international museum definition was successfully completed within the framework of the ICOM organization, and its updated version was adopted at the 2022 general conference in Prague. Debates over its form logically reflected diverse views and different concepts of how to define a museum at the level of individual regions and states. Along with these discussions, some other related issues have been reopened. Space for them was offered, for example, in the monothematic issue 2022/1 of the Czech periodical *Museologica Brunensia*, dedicated to different regional specifics and views on the optimal form of the international museum definition and future perspectives. For all of them, we can name, for example, the concept of the so-called **metamuseum**, which

¹ The article is a result of the project: Ministry of Education, youth and Sports of the Czech Republic, AKTION Czech Republic – Austria 96p7 „Open Round Table of Museology II.“

Fernando Echarri² introduced in his study as the fifth generation of museums, an institution that is interdisciplinary, flexible, adaptable, open, independent, etc., capable of effectively reflecting both individual challenges and challenges in society as a whole and satisfying the needs and expectations of visitors. The updated museum definition can thus also be an impulse to considerations about whether the definition of sub-terms should be revised in a similar way, including the concept of specific types of museums, among which we can also include **small museums**.

The exhibition and education practice of museums is generally influenced not only by the professional focus of the institution and the specialization of its collections, but in the same fundamental manner also by the extent of these collections and the premises in which they are presented to the public, the number of employees the museum has and the environment in which the museum operates. Educational activity in a small museum has its own specifics and cannot simply be understood as a reduced form of the pedagogical activity of larger museums. Sometimes it is small museums that benefit from closer ties with their audience, implement the innovations in education more dynamically and can inspire other museums in a number of ways.

Long-term ongoing debates are held about the question of how to satisfactorily and unambiguously define a small museum, which makes museological research on this topic quite difficult. In addition to the number of employees, the basic criteria by which small museums are usually defined include the founder, position within the museum network, number of collection items, legal form, and in some cases even the annual budget. In a global perspective, however, there is no consensus on how to set up specific values in a quantitative way for the individual criteria mentioned (especially regarding the number of employees, collection items, or the budget). On the contrary, the researchers are united in determining one of the fundamental conditions defining a small museum, namely at least a certain degree of professionalization of the given museum.

In research into their daily practice, small museums are usually associated with phenomena such as accumulation of functions and time burden. The importance or even inevitability of cooperation with other organizations and involvement of volunteers in the activities of the museum is emphasized. Attention is also drawn to the direct impact on the prestige of the museum and its staff, since a small museum – at least in smaller towns – is more “within reach” for its audience. If using its potential, it can be a place fostering the development of personal ties and becomes an integral part of the life of the local community. The Czech musealist Jiří Žalman says about small museums: “*Small museums are definitely not less important museums. They have quality collections, they have their audience and they have options to reach the audience. It is just a matter of how to use these possibilities.*”³

The study therefore focuses on the analysis of what is understood under the term small museum in an international and local context, using the example of museums in the Czech Republic. This basic analysis in a number of cases indicates the ties of small museums to

² ECHARRI, Fernando. The metamuseum as the future of the museum institution? In: *Museologica Brunensia* [online]. 2022, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 4–9 [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <https://digilib.phil.muni.cz/_flysystem/fedora/pdf/MuseologicaBrunensia_2022_1_05.pdf>.

³ ŽALMAN, Jiří. Malá muzea (přednáška na semináři v Plzni). In: *Věstník AMG* [online]. 2007, no. 2, p. 9 [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <https://www.cz-museums.cz/UserFiles/file/vestnik%20AMG/Vestnik_AMG_2_07.pdf>.

the audience as well as the prerequisites for their presentation and education activities, which should be investigated in more detail in the future.

Which museum is “small”? Reflection on selected foreign research studies

The issues and specifics of small museums have been paid attention to for a relatively long time in museological literature, research and in the museum practice. However, most attention has been paid to this topic in the past twenty years. This is particularly related to the efforts to define a small museum and to the existence of professional associations that have been created for this type of facilities – for example, the *Small Museum Association*⁴ or the *Association of Independent Museums*.⁵ Thanks to them, the employees of these institutions can associate and use a platform for mutual support and sharing of experience. Individual authors or representatives of professional organizations in the museum sphere have also tried to define small museums at various extent and depth and reveal the current state of common practice. The published conclusions can thus provide the basic data for a deeper understanding and serve with their methodology and research conclusions for possible comparison with local research studies.

If we investigate the issue of small museums internationally and in different regional contexts, we can base ourselves on the extensive survey conducted by the *American Association for State and Local History* (AASLH). Within this association, there is a specialized section named *Small Museums Committee*.⁶ This section tried to reach 6,500 respondents from the USA in its own survey from 2007,⁷ and from the returned 455 responses they created a certain “working” definition of a small museum. This was intended to serve as a reference point for the basic distinction between small and other museums. The top three criteria for identifying a small museum generated within the survey include an annual budget of less than \$250,000, the fact that they operate with a small staff with multiple responsibilities, and that they employ volunteers to perform key staff functions. These basic criteria are subsequently supplemented by other more precise criteria from other thematic sources outside the conducted survey, namely the spatial dimensions of the museum, the size and scope of the museum’s collections, etc. According to data provided by the AASLH, most museums in the USA are considered small, including history museums, art museums, various historical monuments and buildings as well as “general” museums, referred to in Czech terminology as regional or national history museums, which mainly have mixed collections. Aware of the complexity of distinguishing in common museum practice, which museum is small and which is not, AASLH ultimately comes to the following key statement: “*If you think you are a small museum, then you are a small museum.*”

⁴ *SMA Small Museum Association* [online]. [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <<https://smallmuseum.org/>>.

⁵ *Association of Independent Museums* [online]. [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <<https://aim-museums.co.uk/>>. On the importance of mapping museum institutions and defining independent museums, see also e.g. CANDLIN, Fiona. *Micromuseology: an analysis of small independent museums*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016, pp. 9–10; CANDLIN, Fiona. Surveying museums: What’s in and what’s out? In: *Mapping Museums Lab* [online]. 13 November 2017 [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <<http://blogs.bbk.ac.uk/mapping-museums/2017/11/13/surveying-museums-whats-whats/>>.

⁶ Small Museums. In: *AASLH American Association for State and Local History* [online]. [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <<https://aaslh.org/communities/smallmuseums/>>.

⁷ What is the definition of a small museum? Survey Results. In: *AASLH – Small Museums Committee* [online]. Atlanta, 2007 [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <<http://download.aaslh.org/small+museums/Small+Museum+Survey+Results.pdf>>.

The Canadian researcher Justine Lyn⁸ also formulates her observations from practice when identifying the difference between the work at a small museum and the situation in large museums. When comparing large and small museums, she perceives three strong distinguishing features, which in her opinion are:

- departmentalisation: individual departments for specific museum activities do not overlap much in a large museum, while in a small museum, in contrast, you have to be a “jack-of-all-trades”;⁹
- education: in small museums, interdisciplinarity is very common – that is, education is more practical and less specific, for a museum educator it is absolutely common to switch from one topic or discipline to another in individual projects (exhibitions, educational programmes);
- scope and extent of the collection: smaller museums are often community museums – that is, they collect local history and relate to the place of their activity rather than to general history, which is, on the contrary, typical of large museums.

Significant contribution to the issue of research and support for the further development of small museums was also made by the *American Alliance of Museums* (AAM),¹⁰ which co-published the six-volume edition of the *Small Museum Toolkit* (2011), compiled by the editorial duo of Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko and Stacy Klingler.¹¹ In individual volumes, it deals methodically with individual prominent spheres of activity in the context of small museums, such as governance, financial management, human resources, relations with the audience, interpretation, and administration of small museums. The survey (2016), which is worth mentioning in connection with AAM, was carried out as a follow-up to the *Small Museum Accreditation Academy* project. It was aimed at connecting the education of the concerned staff of small museums and the examination of the conditions of their working in practice. Participants were offered eight educational modules in the form of webinars. According to the team of authors, the project in its intended form did not work very well and had to be modified due to the extreme workload of its participants. Based on this, Alison Titman as one of the authors adds one more statement about small museums, namely that “*there is little time in small museums*”.¹²

The British author Fiona Candlin brings an incomparably deeper empirical insight into the issue under review in the past decade. Since she published the results of her research in the

⁸ LYN, Justine. The Differences Between Small and Large Museums. In: *University of Toronto, Mississauga* [online]. [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <<https://sites.utm.utoronto.ca/historyinternships/blog/03162020-2304/differences-between-small-and-large-museums/>>.

⁹ Some of the aspects encountered in a small museum, e.g. the necessity of being prepared to work on a wide range of different activities, are also demonstrated by examples of reflective practice, e.g. in an article by Lindsey Steward. See, STEWARD, Lindsey. Reaction: The Value of Small Museums. In: *Medium* [online]. [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <<https://medium.com/@steward.lindsey/reaction-the-value-of-small-museums-fbeac606e678>>.

¹⁰ Cf. Operating practices of small museums. In: *RelicRecord* [online]. [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <<https://relicrecord.com/blog/operating-practices-of-small-museums/>>.

¹¹ Individual volumes of the publication deal with the following professional activities of small museums: 1) Leadership, Mission, and Governance, 2) Financial Resource Development and Management, 3) Organizational Management, 4) Reaching and Responding to the Audience, 5) Interpretation: Education, Programs, and Exhibits, 6) Stewardship: Collections and Historic Preservation. For more details, see CATLIN-LEGUTKO, Cinnamon, KLINGLER, Stacy (eds.). *Small Museum Toolkit*. Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2011.

¹² TITMAN, Alison. What Small Museums Need (& Don't). In: *American Alliance of Museums* [online]. 20 June 2018 [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <<https://www.aam-us.org/2018/06/20/what-small-museums-need-dont/>>.

form of a comprehensive monograph, we can look at this issue in much more detail, including a methodological grasp of this research and a more profound interpretation of the data and their placement in a wider context.¹³ This remarkable work and its results are worth to be paid more attention.

In her publication, she confirms that there is no terminological uniformity and agreement on what to consider a small museum, let alone what kind of museum is “mid-sized” or “large”. Even when defining a small museum according to the number of paid employees,¹⁴ she compares the different opinions of individual researchers or professional organizations. According to them, a small museum has fewer than ten (Kenneth Hudson), or fifteen or fewer employees, and a **very small museum** has only one or two employees (Museum Association, UK). Alternatively, another approach suggests that only the museums which employ solely volunteers should be considered small museums (Armita Neal). For Fiona Candlin, small museums combine low incomes, a small number of employees and relatively limited spatial capacity.¹⁵ Based on her qualitative survey from 2015, she investigated approximately 60 small museums, located in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, for which she uses the specific term **micromuseum**. She formulated this term as a reaction to the discussion on the concept of **mini-museums** (Raphael Samuel) and also as an allusion to the limited spatial possibilities they usually have.¹⁶

When defining her research focus, she bases herself on the situation in the 1970s and 1980s, when not only in the United Kingdom, but in Europe and North America as a whole, there was a trend of numerous newly emerging “museum-like” organizations that had some common features. They were considered small in the sense that they had less than ten paid employees, were independent organizations, and were interested in topics or fields that did not fall within the area of interest of academic disciplines. Their name usually included the word ‘museum’, although their concept showed a number of differences from traditional museums. Fiona Candlin therefore focused her attention on investigating this specific phenomenon – small independent museums with one object of activity (monothematic museums),¹⁷ which she named micromuseums.¹⁸ The decision to investigate these organizations was supported not only by the fact that these museums have greatly transformed the existing “museum sector”, but also that they have so far attracted very little attention from the scientific community. The author states that if researchers have already paid attention to this cultural phenomenon, then it was rather in connection with the search for the causes of the growing number of such smaller museums, no

¹³ CANDLIN, *Micromuseology: an analysis...*

¹⁴ In this way, we could further investigate the diverse approaches of researchers to other criteria on the basis of which small museums can be defined, namely according to the size of the audience (i.e. the annual visitor numbers), the amount of income (the annual budget of the organization), spatial dimensions (e.g. the total area in m² available to the museum), and the extent of the collections (total number of collection items).

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

¹⁷ Thus, she does not include museums oriented to local history in her survey – these museums are “general” and not narrowly focused on one specific subject or field of human activity. Also not included were museums established by corporations, which are very often quite well funded and professionally managed and usually in practice also adhere to normal standards of museum work. *Ibidem*, p. 13.

¹⁸ Micromuseums are defined by Fiona Candlin as follows: “collections that are variously run by trusts, businesses, special interest groups, and private individuals, and are open to the public; that concentrate on types of objects, themes, or individuals, that fall outside of the traditional academic compass, occupy a low level in the hierarchy of traditional academic classificatory tables, or that take a non-scholarly approach to subjects that could be encompassed by academe; and finally, are small insofar as they have relatively low visitor numbers and /or modest incomes and /or occupy a physically limited space.” *Ibidem*, p. 12.

matter if some researchers considered them a product of Thatcher's policy, characterized them as a manifestation of cultural stagnation or as a result of growing historical awareness among people. However, no one has investigated these individual organizations in more depth,¹⁹ although such a shift of research interest from dominant to marginalized organizations could better show the heterogeneity of museums and reassess the current museological debates.²⁰

Due to the location of the survey, it was necessary for the author to define these museums as "independent", which is also interpreted in different ways – for example, as museums that are not directly managed by the state or territorial administrative units. In the 1980s, the *Museums and Galleries Commission on Independent Museums* (UK) defined a typology of **independent museums** (the first three classes included large organizations with professional staff and museums established by local authorities, the other three types were small, community museums run on an amateur basis, then corporate museums, operated by companies in the framework of public relations, and finally privately owned museums). Regardless of size, history or form of governance, this classification system assumed an administrative establishment independent from public authorities.²¹ Since the 1990s, the *Museums Association* has revised the museum definition, introducing the legal term "hold in trust". It implies that the museum is not the owner of the collection, but is responsible to the public for its management – that is, the name museum began to be associated with public ownership and a certain form of management and long-term protection of the collections. This new definition thus meant that museums no longer included entities directly owned by individuals, families or "for-profit" companies, and the category of independence was attributed only to those organizations that had the status of a charitable or some other corresponding organization. Later, some publications introduced the additional designation of "private" or "business" museums. So, strictly speaking, micromuseums, at least at the time of the author's survey, were not among the officially recognized museums, and for this case the useful term **museum-like organization**²² appears in the professional literature. For this reason, many micromuseums may be negatively labelled as poor imitations of traditional museums, although many of them may actually carry out all professional museum activities, ranging from collection, preservation, thesaurisation and interpretation to various forms of presentation of collection items. This analysis of gradual specification of which facility is or is not officially a museum, and how to treat it normatively, is undoubtedly inspiring for the Czech museum environment. Here, specifically these burning questions have already been discussed for several years and a debate is held about a plan to prepare the process of registration and accreditation of museums according to clearly set criteria, and the inclusion of this goal in the medium-term concept of museum development pursued by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic.

Along with the effort to define the micromuseum, Fiona Candlin gradually refined the methodology of her research and also some criteria, filtering the selection of adequate institutions for her survey sample. A critical analysis of professional practice turned out to be completely useless for her, because many micromuseums do not reach even the most basic standards of care for the collections and for exhibition or education activities. Therefore, the

¹⁹ In the opening chapter of the book, the author also reflects on why other researchers before her did not focus on the topic of micromuseums and what difficulties and specific obstacles such research entails, from definition and methodology through to practical aspects, including logistic problems.

²⁰ CANDLIN, *Micromuseology: an analysis...*, pp. 1–5.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 9–10.

author adapted her research design and the methods and techniques used to the fact that micromuseums cannot be investigated using the common methodological procedures. She focused on identifying the specific characteristics of micromuseums.²³ In order to comply with the requirement of the institution's openness towards the public, as a fulfilment of one of the typical features of a micromuseum, the author understands it as the accessibility of micromuseums to "strangers", i.e. not only to friends and acquaintances. And at the same time, she adds the condition of at least a certain degree of publicity, i.e. that the micromuseum makes its existence known (e.g. by a notice board in front of the building, leaflets, websites – ideally through all these forms).²⁴

The survey has yielded a number of very interesting findings reflecting the conditions of practice, which are undoubtedly valid not only in the region in question. The investigated micromuseums are not only located in the town centres and smaller municipalities, but more often on the outskirts or in their vicinity, so they are not easily accessible by public transport. They also have poorly designed or even non-existent websites as well as limited opening hours (e.g. they are only accessible during the summer holidays, only on certain days of the week and specific opening hours, or they are only open by prior arrangement by telephone).

Another identified feature of micromuseums is a non-standard relationship to academic disciplines. They deal with specific topics that may or may not be the subject of interest of some of the current academic disciplines. Also, micromuseums can take a scientific approach to their collection holdings, but according to the author's findings, this is generally not the case.²⁵

Since the operating costs are largely provided outside of state funding, micromuseums are mainly dependent on income from the sale of tickets or small goods (souvenirs). Considering their usual low attendance, this means that they do not generate significant income and therefore have to manage their operation on a low budget. The practical impact of this situation is, for example, that showcases or display boards and labels are home-made or that various temporary devices are used. Also, they usually cannot afford to hire professionals. They may therefore lack human capacities, professional competences, finances or interest in following various regulations, recommendations and professional standards (safety, hygiene, instructions establishing optimal conditions for storing and exhibiting collection items, developing interpretation strategies, etc.).

In the case of micromuseums, staff can include owners, paid employees as well as unpaid family members and volunteers, practically anyone of whom can be a curator at the same time.

²³ The research data included lengthy field notes and extensive photo documentation of the micromuseums. Thus, one of the main methods used was observation. Attention was paid to the external (surrounding landscape, neighbouring buildings) and internal environment (entrance hall, other interior spaces, way of marking), scope of micromuseums, location of collections, and forms of display (museum showcases, arrangement of exhibited objects, lighting). Observing and interviewing the micromuseum staff also proved essential. It has explored what is the role of employees in museums and how their presence contributes to promoting attendance. The analysed data also comprised, for example, visitor books, online resources or museum guides. CANDLIN, *Micromuseology: an analysis...*, pp. 14–15, 17.

²⁴ The current trend emphasizes the need for museums to be inclusive, open to the public in all its diversity, respecting the principle of equal opportunities for all and also listening to the opinions of communities. At the same time, however, the Museums Association does not recognize the existence of informally operated facilities, thus reserving the desired participation only for authorized environment (i.e. officially recognized museums). This is in direct contradiction to the principle of democratisation, which should, on the contrary, bring openness and recognition to other types of museums as well. *Ibidem*, p. 11.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 6 et seq.

A micromuseum is run by a few people, very often for little or no financial reward. Curators from micromuseums are mostly unable to improve their current practices and – if they do not have professional competences – it seems practically pointless to try to do so at all. We can hardly think of micromuseums as examples of good practice. What can significantly damage their position in the eyes of the general public is the labelling of micromuseum representatives (founders, curators) or collections by journalists as crazy, eccentric or freaky. On the other hand, the great advantage of micromuseums in relation to visitors is that the chance to meet specific employees and curators here in person is significantly higher than at large museums. Micromuseum owners often ask visitors about the reason for their visit, and this identity of the visitor then logically influences the course of the visit; these museums are often looking for enthusiasts to collaborate with. A visit to the micromuseum also takes place directly depending on individual employees – visitors may or may not be greeted upon arrival, shown around the museum or left for an individual tour. The contact with curators or other representatives of the micromuseum thus can be intense or, on the contrary, none at all.²⁶ Among the special features of micromuseums is a somewhat different form of interaction with the public than is customary in other types of museums. Micromuseums tend to be more open to professional dialogue with visitors and equal, two-way communication, even on the basis of collegiality and mutual sharing of expertise. The visitor may be the one who may know some information that the curators of micromuseums do not have, and thus contribute to the interpretation of some collection items (e.g. identification of people in photographs).²⁷

Another essential area in the characterization of micromuseums is their exhibition activity, or micromuseum permanent exhibitions. We meet here with both basic forms of display, namely in situ and in context, sometimes even in the same place. There are therefore both mimetic presentations, using “period rooms”, installations of arranged objects in a reconstructed environment, etc., as well as the concept of exhibiting according to certain classification schemes, based on the natural scientific or technological systemization, or on historical ties. Exhibits can also be contextualised using more extensive captions, audio commentary or textual materials (catalogues, brochures). On the other hand, in some micromuseums, the exhibiting has no specific structure, and we usually do not even come across the modernist style of these displays. Compared to other types of museums, micromuseums are significantly less selective in what they exhibit – in other words, they tend to include (almost) their entire collection holdings in their permanent exhibitions. Micromuseum curators may deliberately hide valuable collection items, usually out of concern for their safety. The number of exhibits can thus make it difficult to perceive the chronological timeline, or the internal structuring of the thematic arrangement. This can give the visitor the impression of overfilling, absence of differentiation, it can be frustrating and making orientation difficult, all the more so if there are no introductory texts or the curator does not attend to the visitor. Micromuseums that are run by individuals or families usually bear the imprint of these people so strongly that the theme of their museum is usually presented from their own perspective – these museums are from someone, from somewhere, about something, and that is what makes them so different. The functioning of micromuseums is also significantly determined by the fact of whether at all and

²⁶ CANDLIN, *Micromuseology: an analysis...*, pp. 13–16, 157.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 168.

to what extent they are connected to the place where they operate, or to a group of people, the local community. This distinguishes them greatly from museums that do not have these ties.²⁸

Even though the micromuseums analysed are a specific type of facilities and cannot be understood as synonymous with the definition of small museums, many of the drawn conclusions seem to be valid or very close to the situation of small museums. Thanks to this, it is possible to verify the monitored criteria also at small museums and compare the results with those of the author.

The state of research on the issue of small museums in the Czech Republic

Following the state of research on small museums abroad, we can also look for analogous sources in the field of Czech museology, namely at the level of individual researchers, professional institutions and organizations and their theoretical works as well as practical projects and empirical outputs. More than fifteen years ago, the issue of small museums in the Czech Republic began to receive increased attention from the local professional organization uniting museum workers and museologists, the *Czech Association of Museums and Galleries* (AMG), under the leadership of Jana Hutníková, a member of the executive of this organization.²⁹ She and her team are behind the *Malá muzea* project (Small Museums),³⁰ which was implemented in 2006–2009, with the ambition of investigating local small museums and publishing the information found. The survey among small museums, which AMG understands, based on the initial working definition, as institutions with a maximum of 10 employees, was attempted by the working group in 2007. Out of 150 approached museums – AMG member institutions, only 35 responses were returned, whereupon this data and research results are not further publicly communicated for little return. So we have practically no research data on Czech small museums.

On the other hand, a different situation can be observed in the field of publishing activities, for which the Association uses its own platform, *Věstník AMG*. It is published in printed and electronic versions six times a year and is distributed to all member organizations and individual members. During the period under review, several monothematic issues were published on the topic, namely in 2008 (Small museums), 2019 (Problems of small museums) and 2021 (Presentation of history in small museums).³¹ From the beginning of the project to the present, a number of short articles on the issue of small museums have also been published in other issues of the journal – both more general texts and specific reports from some museums, focused on selected aspects of their activities (e.g. museums based on the work of volunteers, scientific activities of small museums, education without the job position of a museum educator, creation of new exhibitions, merger of museums, etc.).

²⁸ CANDLIN, *Micromuseology: an analysis...*, pp. 169–171, 182.

²⁹ See e.g. HUTNÍKOVÁ, Jana. Téma: malá muzea. In: *Věstník AMG* [online], 2008, No. 2, pp. 12–14 [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <https://www.cz-museums.cz/UserFiles/file/Vestnik/vestnik2_2008.pdf>.

³⁰ Projekt Malá muzea. In: *Asociace muzeí a galerií ČR* [online]. [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <https://www.cz-museums.cz/web/deni_v_oboru/mala-muzea>.

³¹ See *Věstník AMG* [online], 2007, No. 2: Radosti i strasti „malých“ muzeí [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <https://www.cz-museums.cz/UserFiles/file/vestnik%20AMG/Vestnik_AMG_2_07.pdf>; *Věstník AMG* [online], 2019, No. 4: Problematika malých muzeí [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <https://www.cz-museums.cz/UserFiles/file/2019/AMG/4_19_komplet_mensi.pdf>; *Věstník AMG* [online], 2021, No. 3: Prezentace dějin v malých muzeích [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <https://www.cz-museums.cz/UserFiles/file/2021/Vestnik/3_2021_komplet_mensi.pdf>.

If we strive to map small museums with regard to the current state of museum practice, we can primarily rely on data provided by the AMG. Thanks to the mapping of its membership base, it provides quantitative data on the distribution of small museums in the Czech Republic, but attention can also be turned to the activities of some AMG expert commissions. In 2023, the *Committee on Public Relations and Museum Pedagogy*³² organized its conference *Current trends in museum presentation and education* on the topic of *Education in a small museum*. The three-day conference included lecture sessions, workshops and other formats of knowledge exchange. They were devoted to the following thematic areas: education in a small museum – possibilities, research, results; inspiration from abroad; examples from local practice; small museum and community. Attention was focused on the insight into the current educational work of small museums and stimulated discussions on the following questions: What benefits and opportunities can educational work in a small museum bring that, on the contrary, larger museums often do not have or do not use? What spectrum of subjects can the museum cooperate with and which infrastructures can it enter? How is it possible to achieve closer ties and better reach to the audience? What are the pitfalls, but also the benefits, of a small work team in the museum and possible accumulated job positions, which may also include the scope of a museum educator? In 2024, the Committee plans to publish a thematic proceedings volume from this professional meeting as its completely new publication format. Until then, we can therefore only rely on the knowledge gathered on the basis of our own participation in this conference.

So, based on the knowledge obtained, how can we formulate the basic characteristics of a small museum, as it is understood in the environment of the Czech Republic? According to the working group at the AMG, a small museum is difficult to define, but we can define what makes these museums different:

- museum profile, small number of employees (0–10) and accumulation of functions;
- different founders (municipality, region, association, company...);
- collection-building programme (regional, national-historical, municipal, memorial, specialized, and corporate museums);
- position within the network of museums;
- different number of collection items and collection value (from dozens of pieces to hundreds of thousands; common as well as unique collection items);
- different legal forms.³³

Jiří Žalman still adds the necessity to involve volunteers as well as various societies and communal associations in the museum activities. He also points to the indisputable influence of small museums on the community and their contribution to the development of civil society.³⁴ Among other researchers who have published on the issue, we can mention Petr Beránek, who in his article focused on small **regional museums** and their role as community centres. He remarks that when defining a small museum, we must also take into account how the museum is viewed from the public's perspective. The public can even perceive branches of large museums as small museums and regard them as “independent” museums. According to

³² Komise pro práci s veřejností a muzejní pedagogiku AMG. In: *Asociace muzeí a galerií ČR* [online]. [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from [www: <https://www.cz-museums.cz/web/amg/organy-amg/komise/komise-pro-praci-s-verejnosti-a-muzejni-pedagogiku>](https://www.cz-museums.cz/web/amg/organy-amg/komise/komise-pro-praci-s-verejnosti-a-muzejni-pedagogiku).

³³ Projekt Malá muzea. In: *Asociace...*

³⁴ ŽALMAN, Malá muzea..., pp. 8–10.

Beránek, approximately 40 % of Czech museums and museum branches fall within the category of regional museums.³⁵ Jan Lhoták directly connects the designation of small museums with **former district museums**. According to him, the connection to the catchment area rather condemns these museums to the role of information institutions and source of knowledge for the academic environment. He thus indicates their difficult position in the field of scientific work and their limited possibilities of full-fledged professional publishing activities, which must be quite frustrating for the professional staff.³⁶

In addition to organizations that are considered “official” small museums, we can also identify facilities in the Czech environment that largely correspond with the foreign term micromuseums, the numbers of which also significantly increased since the 1990s. In the case of the Czech Republic, this type of facilities is referred to as **mini-museum** or **village museum** or even bears the designation directly in its name. Martina Ščuřková devoted her master’s thesis to their investigation in a selected region of the Czech Republic.³⁷

For a successful planning of further research on small museums, it is essential to know the initial quantified data on their number and distribution. We can currently draw such aggregate data only through the AMG and the analysis of its membership base. Based on the 2022 annual report,³⁸ the AMG had a total of 529 members (combining institutional, individual and honorary members). For the purposes of determining the membership fees, the membership base is further categorized according to the number of employees. From the point of view of defining a small museum, we are interested in category IV of museums with up to 10 employees, which includes a relatively large number of 183 institutions.³⁹ If we would tolerate a higher limit for the number of employees to define a small museum, then we could also use category III of museums with 11–25 employees, which includes another 66 AMG member institutions. Their membership in the AMG can be seen as a certain guarantee that this main professional museum organization in the Czech Republic perceives them as official museums.

So, what are the primary partial conclusions that we can draw from the museum practice in the Czech Republic, verified by individual interviews, joint discussions and the study of various sources?

In the Czech museum practice, not only the category of museum facilities with up to 10 employees is considered small museums. Those with up to 25 employees also consider

³⁵ Petr Beránek defines a regional museum in the Czech environment with the help of three criteria. The museum unit meets at least partially the legislative definition of a museum, i.e. manages a registered collection, or part of it, and at the same time has a maximum number of employees of up to ten people. Added to this is the characteristic of the managed collection, which, with exceptions, includes objects from the place where the museum operates, or from the natural catchment area. BERÁNEK, Petr. Regionální muzeum jako komunitní centrum. Smysl „malých“ muzeí v 21. století. In: *Museologica Brunensia* [online], vol. 8, 2019, No. 2, p. 43 [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <<https://digilib.phil.muni.cz/handle/11222.digilib/141874>>.

³⁶ LHOTÁK, Jan. Malá muzea a akademické prostředí – poddaný služebník a přehlíživý feudál, anebo vztah s potenciálem plodného partnerství? In: *Muzeum: Muzejní a vlastivědná práce* [online]. 2022, vol. 60, No. 2, pp. 93–97 [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <https://publikace.nm.cz/file/21bbdda5049db62397d8ccfc5dcf8bb6/38160/10_Lhotak.pdf>.

³⁷ ŠČUŘKOVÁ, Martina. *Sonda do vesnických muzeí*. Brno: Masaryk University, Faculty of Arts, Department of Archaeology and Museology, 2016. MA thesis.

³⁸ Výroční zpráva Asociace muzeí a galerií České republiky, z.s. za rok 2022. In: *Asociace muzeí a galerií ČR* [online], 27 April 2023, p. 37 [accessed 2023-10-20]. Available from www: <<https://www.cz-museums.cz/UserFiles/file/2023/AMG/Vyrocní%20zpráva%20AMG%20za%20rok%202022.pdf>>.

³⁹ This number needs to be further revised, because among the AMG members are not only museums, but also, to a small extent, e.g. university departments.

themselves to be small museums. The research also revealed the fact that even employees of small branches of large museums perceive their museums as small. It is a situation where a small branch operates as a detached workplace, often far away from the museum's main building, sometimes even in another municipality. Another common feature is the limited number of employees of a given branch and a significant accumulation of their work activities (e.g. an employee opens the building, sells tickets, guides through an exhibition or implements an educational programme and at the end of the working day in some cases also cleans the premises).

Not all of the examined facilities have museum in their name – this refers to the still missing and therefore not yet resolved issue of future registration and accreditation of museums, which is planned for the long term in the Czech Republic. A number of these examined institutions are not independent entities, but are integrated or inseparably connected with, for example, a community centre, information centre, library or archive.

When examining the professional focus, a wide range of topics and fields of the museums and their collections is revealed. Among them are both dominantly represented regional museums with mixed collections, as well as (monothematically) specialized museums. The following basic spectrum of their thematic profile was identified: science, technology and transport (cars, wagons, roads); heavy industry (mining, metallurgy, iron industry); art (especially fine arts); crafts and various human activities (milling, glassmaking, healthcare, gastronomy); historical events and phenomena (“Iron Curtain”, Czechoslovak fortifications); local personalities (from the fields of literature, painting, music); religious sphere.

Conclusion

Whether we work only with the concept of a small museum or we also reflect on others that are used and closely related to the issue, such as micromuseum, mini-museum, mid-sized museum, metamuseum, museum-like organization, etc., we find certain essential features that distinguish this type of institutions from other museums, whether we call them large, major or traditional. The designations used mainly reflect their operational limits that are given by the premises and staff they have at their disposal. As a typical feature of small museums, the understaffing is often emphasized, together with the usual accumulation of work activities. Small museums are not only limited by the number of up to ten or possibly fifteen employees, but they can also be institutions that have no permanent employees at all, but rely on the work of volunteers. Various other characteristics of this type of museums are also discussed, e.g. ties to its place of operation and to local communities. The researchers unequivocally agree that the requirement for a necessary degree of professionalisation is used to clearly distinguish which of these facilities are to be considered real museums and which are not.

With regard to the terms used in the Czech specialized literature, we can note almost exclusively the designation “small museum”. On the other hand, a look at the practice shows in many cases that facilities corresponding in their type to a micromuseum, as understood by Fiona Candlin, are named mini-museum or village museum. The Czech environment, just as the environment abroad, thus reflects the heterogeneity of the museum sphere and the variety of existing facilities, which are collection-building institutions and represent diverse forms of musealisation phenomena in the present. If we focus strictly on small museums, we perceive them in the Czech environment, according to the prevailing similarities from the specialized literature, as professional organizations with limited human, spatial and financial capacities.

In practice, based on the primary data collected, it is evident that their representatives see a number of common features which influence or limit their daily operations. As it turned out, a more profound, qualitatively conceived analysis of small museums in the Czech Republic is noticeably lacking. We can explain its absence as probably one of the main reasons why this topic has been cyclically reopened in an almost unchanged form of content, but without any noticeable progress. The lack of deeper knowledge of the actual situation can rather lead to simplification and resorting to proclamations of problems and pitfalls, instead of finding ways to support small museums in further development of their potential.

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