

# MUSEUMS, MARKETING, TOURISM AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT. THE BRITISH MUSEUM – A SUCCESSFUL MODEL FOR ROMANIAN MUSEUMS

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## **Abstract:**

*The continuous growth of cultural influence upon the modern society combined with the increasing role of tourism in the economic life of cities, led to the development of the “emblem museums”. The “emblem museum” usually becomes a touristic attraction objective that must be visited by tourists from a city, and by taking the decision of prolonging their staying in that city, the tourists will increase the amount of money they spend in that location. The “emblem museums” represent a way to develop urban tourism, gain competitive advantage and attract new sources of income for the city’s economy. A recent study showed that 3 out of 10 tourists visited London for its museums. One of them is the British Museum, which, in 2010 was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the top10 world’s most visited museums. This study aims to present the British Museum from the mix marketing perspective, from the visitor’s point of view, and to present some of the good practices this giant is using to attract more visitors and to maintain its competitive advantage, practices which may be used by Romanian museums in order to increase the visitors number and to obtain a better position in the economy life of Romanian cities.*

*Keywords: Museums, marketing, tourism development, cultural development, competitive advantage, marketing mix, visitors, best practices.*

## **1. Introduction. Museums and urban development.**

In recent years, museums have become a key element within urban competition, due to their high potential for raising local incomes and developing local urban economies.

Museums are a very important cultural and economical resource for the cities. As cultural institutions, they are specifically organised, and evolve considering the valuable discoveries from every city. The number of museums from every country reflects the level of cultural achievements and

the level of scientific research that takes place in this specific field in one country. Due to these facts, countries and cities with considerable archaeological or ethnographic resources have a higher number of museums than developing countries (Opriș, 2000, p. 343).

Museums have a great impact on the cultural economy of every country. Studies have shown that the impact of museums may vary from one city to another, from one country to another, at local, regional or national level. Museums` role in the cultural economy is very important, because they sustain cities in promoting themselves as

cultural centres, on the domestic and foreign market (visitors and investors), by fulfilling their demands and expectations. We can say that museums act as “the instruments” for cities in the development process (Deffner et al., 2009, p. 58-59).

Over time, it was considered that museums were created *with the purpose of education, collecting, preservation and research*, but because the society evolved, *the economical role of the museums became increasingly important* (Hoope-Greenhil, 1994, p. 34). Consequently, museums` role became more diverse in the 21st century, and they became key-partners in the tourism industry and the creative industries also. The *recreative function* of the museums started developing in our days (Stephen, 2001, p. 297).

In the decades that followed the industrial decay, the focus for economical stimulation of cities affected by the industrial decay, was to create museums with the purpose to attract tourists from all over the world. After a period of decline, between 1960-1970 museums witnessed a period of deep changes and they were involved in big projects of urban regeneration. In areas that were not attractive and deeply affected by the industry, cultural centres (museums) were built, as major elements of urban development strategies.

Starting with the 70's, the Western Europe faced an “explosion” of new museums. This “explosion” had both quality and quantity (the number of museums that were created is considerable, but the high standards that they had is also recognized). Museums started to compete each other to obtain the control of a limited market and they were forced to “adapt their actions according with the strategies adopted by their competitors and the pressures from the market” (Barbu, 2011, p. 107). Another problem that appeared was that the spare time of the participants to the cultural life was

limited, and the possibilities of spending that spare time were not limited in visiting museums.

Starting with the 80's, in all European cities, in the frame of great programs of urban regeneration initiated by public authorities, a progressive instrumentation of the museum's institution took place. The 80's represented the “cultural decade” and can be considered an important stage in the history of the 20th century museum. It was a period of major changes of the national cultural policies and spectacular developments of innovative projects, rehabilitation and extensions of museums and their activities.

These actions were developed with the hope to increase the number of visitors from other regions or countries, in order to raise the level of the economical urban development.

The growing influence of culture in the modern society together with the continuous growth of the tourism in the basic economy of the post-industrial cities, lead, in the last years at the appearance of the “emblem museums”. This type of museum usually becomes a *mandatory touristic objective* and the reason for which a tourist decides to prolong the time spent in a certain city. By this decision, the amount of money spent in that location increases considerably. If we take a look at the biggest museums in the world, we all must agree that a single day is not enough to visit and admire all the beautiful exhibits which are presented. So, as a tourist, you have to decide to spend more time in that location, decision which benefits the city you are visiting.

The museums are also an important factor for the development of urban tourism. The wish to visit a certain museum will transform the visitors of that museum into tourists for the city where the museum is located and will offer them the possibility to visit other cultural locations. Usually, the persons visiting museums are members

of superior social classes, with higher incomes, a fact which leads to higher expenses during their staying in a certain location. A recent study revealed that 3 out of 10 tourists come to London for its museums.

A very important role museums play is the fact that they can become city symbols (Hamnett & Shoval, 2003, p. 223 -226). Thus the relation between museums and cities may become symbiotic. While museums contribute to the city's cultural and economical life, by creating new jobs and reducing unemployment rate, cities must offer them the possibility to achieve prosperity.

Myerscough (1988, p. 54) highlights the fact that museums, as cultural institutions, lay at the base of the economical development in many cities. Even if the museum's profit cannot be noticed directly, through the financial reports, museums can provide new ways to develop other fields of activity (Westervelt, 2010).

## **2. British Museum – London's emblematic museum**

Undoubtedly, the British Museum can be considered one of London's and United Kingdom's symbols. For more than 250 years, this museum collected treasures from all over the world and it is considered to be the oldest national museum that was opened to the public (since 1753) (Stoica, 2006).

### **2.1. The collections**

The British Museum reunites, in a unique manner, all the world's cultures, and it is not considered an art museum, but a museum that presents the evolution of human society from all over the world. All exhibited objects are testimonials of the people's life. When visiting the museum, you go from Ancient Greece to China, from China to Mesopotamia, México or Australia. Exhibits reflect various religions, structures of social hierarchy, ancient

forgotten traditions and traditions that are still alive.

Collections cover the whole human civilisation. Ancient Egypt presents its greatness through huge statues like the statue of Ramses the 2nd or the head of Amenhotep, the Pharaoh, the famous mummies and jewellery collections. Sudan, the Middle East, Africa, Oceania, America and Europe are represented by a huge number of exhibits, like coins, medals, drawings and engravings.

An essential contribution to the increase of the museum's collections of ethnographical materials was brought by Cook's journeys, between 1768 and 1781, while the beautiful collection of Ancient Greek vassels collected by Sir William Hamilton and the sculptures collected from Rome by Charles Townley revived the classical world. There were a lot of paintings also, which, due to the constant growth of the number of exhibits, were transferred to the National Gallery, in 1824. The Natural Science collections were also transferred to the Natural Science Museum (Stoica, 2006).

The British Museum permanently enriched and expanded its collections, reaching nowadays over 8 millions exhibits, grouped in 10 departments: Africa, Oceania and Northern and Southern America, Ancient Egypt and Sudan, Asia, Coins and Medals, Science and Preservation Department, Ancient Greece and Rome, Middle East, Antiques and Treasures Department, Prehistory Department and Europe, Drawings Department. All collections can be visited in 61 rooms which cover a 75.000 square meters surface.

### **2.2. The price policy and the museum's financing**

National museums and galleries in UK have no entry taxes. This decision was taken by the British Government in 2001, in order to increase access to culture. The British Museum is financed:

- Mainly from the budget of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS);

- From the incomes the museum collects for borrowing exhibits for temporary exhibitions, for borrowing exhibits to other cultural institutions, from selling goods and objects from the museum's store and from the online store, from renting rooms, from guiding taxes and educational programs;

- From donations and sponsorships. In 2010, Lord John Sainsbury donated to the British Museum 25,000,000 Pounds; his gesture was considered to be the greatest donation made for art in the last 25 years. Besides donations made by public persons, any person from all over the world can donate any amount of money using **online donations**. There is a special section for online donations on the British Museum's website, where it can be specified the amount of money and the direction the donation must follow: preservation, museum departments, education and research.

### **2.3. The distribution policy**

The distribution policy is an important variable for the marketing mix, because distribution is the condition for achieving cultural creation (Moldoveanu & Ioan-Frânc, 1997, p.172). The distribution consists in expanding the right of access to culture for all market segments. Although some patrimonial offers address specific public categories, the distribution process must be conceived so that the product becomes accessible at least partially, to all market segments. The way distribution takes place impacts on the efficiency of all the organization's activities.

The distribution of the exhibits from the British Museum patrimony takes place at **its headquarters** from Great

Russel Street, which is also the main distribution network of the museum. It is possible to arrive there by subway (3 different subway stations) or by bus (22 bus lines). In order to help visitors, on its website there is a "Journey Planner" which shows the fastest way to get to the museum, depending on the location of the tourist. The museum is open every day, from 10 A.M. to 5:30 P.M., and closes only on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January and between 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of December. On Friday, many galleries are open until 8:30 P.M.

**National Exhibitions.** Every year more than 3 million people admire the exhibits of the British Museum in different locations from the United Kingdom. This way, in 2009/2010, 2300 objects from the patrimony could be admired in other locations than Great Russel Street headquarters (The British Museum, 2011a).

**International Exhibitions.** Every year, more than 1,700 objects from the British Museum cross borders to become part of temporary exhibitions from all over the world. In 2011, exhibits from the British Museum reached Saudi Arabia, Spain, France, Netherlands, Austria, Korea and Japan (The British Museum, 2011b).

**Publications** (see figure 1) are used for presenting and promoting the museum's products. Through the publications, the wide public comes in contact with different aspects of the research work and become familiar with the museum's reference area (The British Museum, 2011c).

In 1973 the British Museum founded its own publishing house, British Museum Press, which became a world leader in the museum publishing.



Figure 1. The museum's publications

Source: <http://www.britishmuseumshoponline.org/>

A very important way, with great social impact, of knowledge distribution and cultural values dissemination involves organizing **educational programs**, which present a wide range of activities, events, courses, trainings, both at the museum's headquarters and online.

#### 2.4. Promotion policy

The promotion policy contains a complex of activities which aim to inform the public regarding cultural products and services offered on the market. The promotional activities are aimed at increasing public awareness regarding the new offers, attracting new market segments, building confidence

regarding certain exhibits, and building the identity for new services also. The success of promotional activities consists in the provider's capacity to concentrate on the main reason that convinces the potential client to become a regular customer (Moldoveanu & Ioan-Franc, 1997, p. 190).

Although the British Museum is one of the world's most important museums, and its name can be considered a brand (see figure 2), the museum continues to organise intense promoting campaigns, and these campaigns prove to be successful, as the number of visitors continues to grow every year.

THE  
BRITISH  
MUSEUM

Figure 2. British Museum's Logo

Source: <http://www.britishmuseum.org/>

The promotion campaign of the museum is complex and is developed using the following methods:

**A. Mass-media.** All the events that involved the British Museum were announced by press using the specialized services of broadcasting the press releases and with the help of the media partners which the museum had. Each event was intensely promoted both through written and electronic media. Some of the numerous online partners the British Museum has are: VisitLondon, Britannica, Yahoo – travel, London Travel Guide, Tourist

information UK, TripAdvisor, Travel Europe, The Best Travel Destinations, Science Museum, Panoramic Earth, London Online, London Hotels, The British Library etc.

In 2010, an unprecedented promotion partnership was established between *the British Museum and BBC*, proving to be a real success. The program "A history of the world in 100 objects" (see figure 3) involved broadcasting on BBC Radio 4 100 episodes, each lasting 15 minutes, dedicated to a different object from the British Museum collection. Every week

an episode on a different theme was broadcasted. It was intended to cover a chronological period as big as possible.



**Figure 3. CD Set: A History of the World in 100 Objects**

Source: <http://www.britishmuseumshoponline.org>

**B. Online and direct marketing:**

– British Museum's **website** ([www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org)) enjoys a real success, recording 15 million online visitors since 2010. The website provides information about visiting hours, address, public relations, ways of reaching the museum and the themes of the temporary and permanent exhibition.

– **Socializing networks.** The British Museum has also a **Facebook** account (see figure 4) which gathers over 114.180 friends. Using the social network Facebook, the museum is able not only to inform and keep the public in

touch with its latest activities, but also to present visitors objects, themes of the exhibitions to come; in other words, Facebook can be considered a distribution channel (Zbucnea, 2010, p. 17). **Twitter**, due to its limitations, is rather an information instrument for the events that will take place at the museum. Another way of promoting the museum is **YouTube**. The museum uploaded on YouTube a large number of videos containing high-quality presentations of various objects from the British Museum's collections.



**Figure 4. British Museum's Facebook page**

Source: <http://www.facebook.com/britishmuseum>

– Promotion by **guides and brochures**- at the museum's store and few other locations from London various

guides and brochures are available, translated into different languages (see figure 5).



**Figure 5. Guides and brochures (French, Spanish and Japanese)**

Source: <http://www.britishmuseumshoponline.org/>

- Promotion by **posters** of small, medium and large dimensions (see figure 6).



**Figure 6. Promotion posters for the museum’s collections**

Source: <http://www.britishmuseum.org/>

**C. Promotional items.** Every year, hundreds of souvenirs are made and sold at the museum’s headquarters,

by the online store and in other locations of the city (see figure 7).



**Figure 7. Promotional items**

Source: <http://www.britishmuseumshoponline.org/>

**D. Events, conferences and seminars.** Among the most popular events of the museum we can mention the ones that were organised for the opening of the new temporary exhibitions and for the members of the museum. The museum has 2 conference rooms and plenty locations for seminars.

**2.5. The additional offer**

It is not enough for a museum to develop one or more specific products. Studies show that although visitors enjoy the time they spend in a museum, are interested in being well informed and guided inside the exhibition area and would like to have some auxiliary/additional services in order to increase their comfort and to establish a more human contact during their visit at

the museum (Kotler & Kotler, 2000, p. 273-274).

The British Museum provides to its visitors a very complex range of auxiliary/additional services.

**The guiding service** is very important for a better understanding of the exhibitions provided by the museum; both the permanent and temporary ones. In order to help all the visitors as much as possible, the British Museum offers the following:

- The **multi-media guiding system**, which provides images and audio comments for more than 200 objects, and is available in 10 languages: English, Korean, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Arab, Russian, Japanese and Mandarin.

The guide also contains an **interactive map** which helps visitors find the way easily to their favourite exhibits and galleries.

- The **guide for children** (recommended for children with ages between 5 and 11 years old), containing audio comments and images from 30 rooms, available in English only. The guide offers children even proposals of activities and interactive games around some objects.

- The **audio guide for blind or visually impaired people** provides an

audio description of more than 220 objects from the museum's collection.

In order to keep its visitors inside the museum as much as possible, the British Museum increase their comfort by creating a wide range of **functional spaces**. Inside the museum there are **1 restaurant, 2 cafeterias, an area for family picnics** (during weekends or holidays), **2 wardrobes, 1 office for lost objects, 1 information office, "info-touch" kiosks, 5 special rooms for mothers and babies.**

Other services provided by the museum to increase visitors' comfort include **bicycle parking; parking for disabled persons; elevators; wheelchairs** (these are available at the museum's entry for persons with travel difficulties, and they can be booked before the visits); for those who are keen on artefacts, the museum is rents **magnifying glasses; museum maps** are offered for free at the entrance; in every gallery there are **benches** that allow visitors to rest.

### 2.6. Visitors

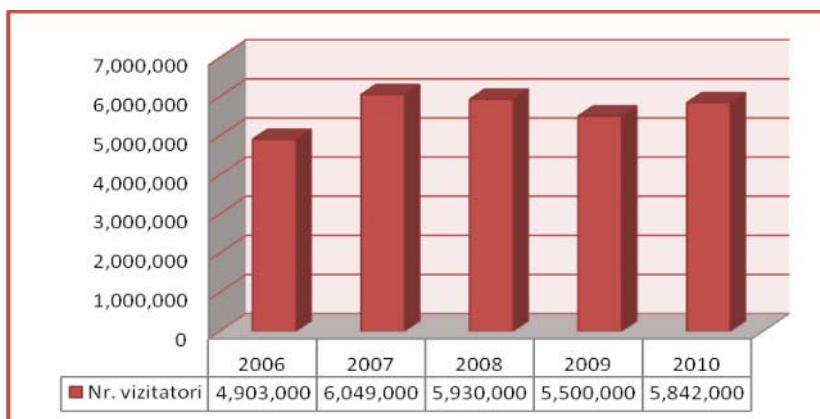
The British Museum is one of the world's most visited museums, and in 2010 ranked on the 2nd place, with **5,842 million visitors**, (see figure 8), after the Louvre Museum in Paris (see table 1).

Table 1

Top 10 of the most visited museums in the world in 2010

Rank	Museum	City	Number of visitors
1.	Louvre	Paris	8.500.000
2.	British Museum	London	5.842.138
3.	Metropolitan Art Museum	New York	5.216.988
4.	Tate Modern	London	5.061.172
5.	National Gallery	London	4.954.914
6.	National Art Gallery	Washington	4.775.114
7.	Modern Art Museum	New York	3.131.238
8.	Pompidou Centre	Paris	3.130.000
9.	National Museum of Korea	Soul	3.067.909
10.	Orsay Museum	Paris	2.985.510

Source: [www.theartnewspaper.com/articles](http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles)



**Figure 8. Number of visitors between 2006 – 2010**

Source: The British Museum (2011d). *British Museum annual reports and accounts for the years 2006-2010*

The number of people visiting the museum’s collections exceeds 15 million, due to the international borrowing of exhibits, partnerships and

website. According to its annual reports The British Museum (2011d), 2 thirds of the visitors are foreigners, and 1 third are residents from London (see table 2).

**Table 2**

**Visitors categories 2009-2010**

Visitors categories	2009	2010
Children under 16	724.000	831.000
Persons over 16 from the minorities	242.000	208.000
Disabled persons	73.000	52.000
Children under 16 which were involved in educational programs	219.000	221.000
Children under 16 which were involved in the activities organised by the museum in different locations	1.400	3700
Persons over 16 that were involved in educational programs	232.000	258.000
Persons over 16 that were involved in the activities organised by the museum in different locations	1.800	1.900
Foreign visitors	3.200.000	3.500.000
Website visitors	10.700.000	15.000.000

Source: The British Museum (2011d). *British Museum annual reports and accounts for the years 2006-2010*

In order to increase visitors number, the museum started to implement the Audience Development Strategy, which has new programs, focused on certain target groups: residents, families, schools, ethnic minorities and refugees communities

from London. The museum’s personnel is permanently trying to improve the quality of the services for the clients, working as much as possible to insure that all the visitors are properly treated and supported during their visits. The purpose of these actions is to increase

the number of people repeating their visits at the museum (British Museum, 2007, p. 11).

### 3. The know-how transfer from the British Museum towards the great Romanian museums

It is hard to say what the Romanian museums should use from all the activities developed by the British Museum, because Romanian museums are permanently facing with insufficient funding. The lack of coherent strategies and marketing policies contributes to the lack of financial support for the Romanian museums activities. In the United Kingdom, 5% from the Gross Domestic Product represent incomes generated by the intellectual creation, as a result of producing and selling literature, music, dance, paintings, films, museum's creations etc. In Romania, all cultural institutions are confronted with difficulties in approaching the public towards cultural activities. It is hard to understand why Romanian Museums are completely full with visitors only at the event that takes place in May-the European Night of the Museums. For many people that are generally not interested in visiting museums from Romania (but do visit foreign museums), participating at this event become very fashionable. However, going from one museum to another, all night long, may be a first step towards the promotion of the Romanian museums.

1. The British Museum benefits of substantial funding (coming from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), from its own revenues, donations and sponsorships). Romanian museums can attract additional funding, as British Museum does, by opening **online shops** on their own websites. The investment raises between 500 and 1500 Euro, depending on the desired facilities. Romanian museums websites should offer all details regarding the objects for sale: price, quantity, name, code, the top of

the best-selling products, and shopping chart. Opening online shops for Romanian Museums may lead to the **diversification of the number and type of products offered to the public**. Another useful strategy would be creating the site's **newsletter**; in order to keep informed all friends, potential sponsors and visitors regarding the events taking place in the museum's schedule.

2. Another good practice that should be borrowed from the British Museum is **creating a group of members for each Romanian museum**. In order to become member two ways to join may be available: filling an application form at the museum or online, using internet. To obtain the membership, each person should pay a tax to the museum, that must be affordable for anyone. The money the museum shall gather from members might be used buying new objects or for a better preservation of the existing patrimony. For the tax they pay, members should have some facilities: free entrance for people under 18, discounts for photos and film taxes. In the same manner as the British Museum proceeds, Romanian museums could prepare special rooms or organise parties for its members.

3. Romanian museums may borrow from the British Museum the practice of **preparing special spaces for family picnics**. An access tax may be set for each family. **A space for changing and feeding babies** would be helpful for families with small children.

4. A **successful program** like "A History of the World in 100 objects" may be developed by history and art Romanian museums and broadcasted in partnership with Radio Romania Cultural. The program may be named "A History of Romania in 100 objects".

5. The cheapest method that can be borrowed from the British Museum is **to create accounts for Romanian**

### **museums on socializing networks like Facebook and Twitter.**

6. Another practice that might be borrowed from the British Museum and may prove its efficiency for Romanian Museums is **to create an online donations section** on Romanian museums websites. Charity funding is vital for the successful development of the museum's projects. Educational, research and preservation programs developed by the British Museum are exclusively financed from charity funding.

All these proposals can easily be implemented by Romanian museums, considering that all above mentioned practices do not require major investments, but do promise to increase museums' incomes and local budget revenues of the cities they are located in, helping them to overpass financial hardships and to increase the economic development.

### **Conclusions**

A museum of the world, for the world, as the British Museum is called, is a model to follow for any museum.

With a history which dates back for more than 2 centuries, the British Museum managed to find its successful path and is nowadays considered to be one of the most important museums worldwide.

Its example may be followed by Romanian museums, as most of them are nowadays fighting to survive. Even though Romanian museums do not have financial resources comparable to the ones British Museum benefits, there are a lot of measures that may be applied in order to attract incomes to improve their actual state, without making major investments. Cultural managers from Romanian institutions may capitalize their creative potential by identifying and implementing new ways of promoting their organizations using internet, socializing networks and online advertising. They can also increase their incomes from additional sources (like selling online various specific products that belong to the cultural area of the museum) and by inter-connecting their offers with other cultural offers in order to integrate in touristic itineraries.

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