



Educational Activities in the Context of Integration and Sustainable Development- Experiences of Provincial and City Museums in Vietnam

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Abstract

Museums are informal educational institutions, but they can influence awareness of all members of society. In museums, public can directly participate in many beneficial activities, having the opportunity to experience, enjoy, reflect on, and share knowledge. Like many countries around the world, there are a large number of provincial and city museums in the Vietnamese museum system, present in all localities. The important task of these museums is to preserve and promote the value of local cultural heritage. In the context of integration and sustainable development, these museums have undertaken many positive activities to meet the public's needs for cultural visits and enjoyment, for the benefit of the community. This article aims to affirm and introduce some typical educational experiences of provincial and city museums in Vietnam today.

Keywords: Educational Activity; Provincial and city Museum; Integration; Sustainable Development, Vietnam

1. Museums are informal educational institutions

1.1. The educational role of museums today

On August 24, 2022, the 26th session of the General Assembly was held in Prague (Czech Republic); the International Council of Museums (ICOM) adopted a new definition of a museum. The content of the new definition is as follows: “A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing” (ICOM). This definition has been well-suited to the changing roles of contemporary museums, acknowledging the importance of inclusiveness, community engagement, and sustainability. The definition has further clarified the educational mission of museums, such as enhancing public accessibility and providing diverse experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing.

Museum education is informal education, differing from formal education in its non-institutional nature. This characteristic gives museum education the potential for widespread and long-term application, as well as the ability to integrate positive measures. According to ICOM, “museum education is a set of values, concepts, knowledge and practices created to ensure the development of visitors; it is a process of cultural transformation through pedagogical methods, as well as the development, refinement and full acquisition of new knowledge” (Desvallées & François, 2021, p. 26). Thus, museum education is understood as the promotion of knowledge originating from museums and aimed at developing and perfecting individuals through the acquisition of knowledge, the development of new awareness and the practice of new experiences.

In its relationship with the public, museum education is not merely a one-way transmission and reception of knowledge. The role of museums is shifting to a more open and friendly cultural intermediary for the audience. Museum objects still hold a crucial position, but are no longer the sole means of visual education. Contemporary museum education is cultural heritage education. Heritage values (tangible and intangible) are integrated into educational content, flexibly conveyed to visitors (UNESCO & EU, 2021, p. 10). Visiting a museum is meaningful as a journey of experiencing heritage to enjoy, reflect on, and share knowledge. This change has also been mentioned by some experts as: museums achieve their educational goals by serving visitors who learn independently (Wang, 2008, p. 459); museums, as spaces for cultural exchange, not only promote the cultural rights of communities but also nurture individuals (Bodo, 2018, p. 517); museums are situated between the past and the present, between cultures and between communities (Basu & Modest, 2014, pp. 170-187).

1.2. Provincial and city museums - informal educational institutions of the locality

Provincial and city museums also have other names such as general museums, local museums, and regional museums. National museums belong to the first generation of modern museums; provincial and city museums belong to the second generation, emerging after bourgeois revolutions, especially after the Industrial Revolution in Europe. This type of museum is common worldwide, resulting from the classification of museums according to territory, including regions, areas, or administrative districts of provinces and cities. From the late 19th century, the American museum administrator George Brown Goode provided a specific and rational definition of local museums as follows: “Local, provincial, or city museums have the task of preserving all that is characteristic of the region. This institution is responsible for caring for/preserving documents and objects that reflect the inherent characteristics of the region's geology, fauna, flora, and archaeology. The museum's collection of historical objects helps to understand the significant events and people of the area” (Goode, 1896, p. 159).



In the 1960s, the International Committee for Regional Museums (ICR) of ICOM was established with the mission of promoting and enhancing the role of regional museums (including local museums). The predecessor of the ICR was the Committee for Local Museums, established in 1953 or 1954 (ICR). In 1962, at the 6th ICOM General Conference in Hague (Netherlands), the Committee was officially renamed and continues to operate to this day. Recently, the ICR has paid more attention to the uniqueness and influence of regional/local museums in community life, especially in the areas of education and public awareness.

In Vietnam, provincial and city museums were established in the latter half of the 20th century. The Hai Phong Museum was the first local museum, founded in 1959. Before the reorganization of provincial-level administrative units in 2025, Vietnam had a total of 203 museums, including 127 public museums and 76 private museums (Department of Cultural Heritage, December 2024, p. 10). Currently, this number is 175 museums, including 95 public museums and 80 private museums (Department of Cultural Heritage, November 2025, p. 8). Provincial and city museums operate in all localities nationwide. This type is “Public museum of a province or centrally-administered city, where valuable and representative collections of local objects are preserved and displayed” (National Standard, 2024, p. 10). These provincial and city museums all play an informal educational role locally, making a positive contribution to bringing the public's understanding of the local land and local people.

The content of provincial and city museums is linked to the administrative boundaries of each province and city. Therefore, local education can be considered a strength of provincial and city museums. According to Decision 208/2014/QĐ-TTg approving the Project on Promoting Lifelong Learning Activities in Libraries, Museums, Cultural Centers, and Clubs, the task of provincial-level museums (including provincial/city museums/local museums and thematic museums) has been defined as education on local history and culture (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2014, p. 2). With Decision 1520/2022/QĐ-TTg approving the Program to Promote Lifelong Learning Activities in Libraries, Museums, and Cultural Centers until 2030, the task of museums in general is defined as building and implementing educational programs on history, culture, science, and art for all citizens, focusing on students and young people, linked to a framework of appropriate knowledge and life skills, and enhancing forms of service for people to visit, share, and learn (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2022, p. 2). Based on the specific content and scope of activities, provincial and city museums are an extracurricular educational environment in each locality, combining learning and entertainment, capable of influencing individuals and communities.



2. The implementation of educational activities by provincial and city museums in Vietnam

2.1. Subject and Content

Provincial and city museums are public museums that welcome and serve all audiences, primarily local residents, regardless of social class, age, gender, occupation, or educational level. However, young public, including students (especially local students), are always a focus for these museums. According to statistics from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 2020, 48 out of 63 provinces and cities have signed cooperation agreements between the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Department of Education and Training on cultural heritage education for students (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2020, p. 14). In addition, domestic and international tourists are also a significant part of the visitor base for provincial and city museums, particularly in areas with developed tourism such as Quang Ninh, Da Nang, Dak Lak, Ho Chi Minh City, and Can Tho.

Exhibition is considered the “distinctive language” and educational tool of the museum. In Vietnamese provincial and city museums, the permanent exhibition system is typically structured into three parts: natural conditions, socio-history, and cultural characteristics. In serving the public, these museums have focused more on displaying and introducing collections of objects that reflect the distinctive features of local history and culture; and enhancing content about the lives of the ethnic communities living in the area. In addition, the presentation of typical intangible cultural heritage of the locality is also carried out with the direct participation of traditional bearers. As a result, the living heritage of the locality is presented more vividly and concretely in the activities of provincial and city museums. Based on museum exhibitions, intangible cultural performances, and educational activities, provincial and city museums carry out activities that provide the public with valuable insights into the local area.

2.2. Methods and Forms

Through visual methods, visitors can “personally see” typical local objects/heritages at provincial and city museums in a tangible/vivid state. From this, their understanding/awareness of the locality is supplemented/enhanced according to the cognitive process: “Museum objects help to move awareness from sensory to abstract and from abstract thinking to practical reality” (Thin, N., 2001, p. 34). In addition, interpretive and constructive methods are increasingly used to enhance visitors' understanding of the locality, helping provincial and city museums continuously improve their ability to serve as cultural interpreters. Objects/heritages and knowledge are displayed and explained in a “single language” that visitors can easily access. Messages about local nature, history, and culture will be presented to visitors from these museums through various interpretive channels/forms



such as exhibition complexes, documents, audiovisual equipment, guided tours, and activity programs. Based on this interpretation, local content is conveyed to visitors through educational activities that construct awareness. This is a friendly and positive process of sharing knowledge through a journey of discovery and experience of typical local heritages in an interactive manner. From this, knowledge about the locality becomes more open and accessible; fostering and encouraging a spirit of learning as well as developing the life experiences of each individual.

Active learning methods are well-suited to the informal educational environment of provincial and city museums, which do not require mandatory assessments. These museums are open regularly, offering services either free or for a fee, primarily utilizing the public's free time and relying on the voluntary and cooperative attitudes of visitors. All visitors can find convenience, suitability, and inspiration in accessing, learning about, and acquiring knowledge about their local area at these museums. Therefore, lifelong learning at these museums is feasible and practically meaningful, contributing to enriching the public's understanding of the local area.

2.3. Activities

Museum tour guide and organized experiential activity

Museum tour guide is considered a traditional and popular educational activity in museum. This is because, “the simplest approach for visitors to understand the content of an exhibition is to introduce information using documents, using language combined with objects” (Edson & Dean, 2001, p. 383). This activity engages visitors in the process of observing and listening, grasping the natural, social, and cultural issues of the locality that the provincial or city museum reflects through its permanent and thematic exhibitions. General guided tour conveys the basic content of the exhibition, providing a comprehensive overview of the locality. Thematic guided tour is linked to a specific part of the exhibition system or temporary exhibition, with more specific and detailed content. Currently, experiential activity is being emphasized, reflecting the development trend of modern museums in general. Because, nowadays, “museums achieve educational goals by serving visitors who learn independently” (Wang, 2008, p. 459). This activity actively enhances museum education from the visitor's perspective. Besides sight and hearing, other senses of visitors such as touch and taste are enhanced, and they can even reenact the activities of traditional bearers. From there, visitors can shift their state from information recipient to participant, from object of perception to subject of discovery regarding typical local objects and heritages. Some typical examples are as follows:

- The exhibition setting on tea cultivation and tea culture has been vividly created in the Tan Cuong Tea Culture Space of the Thai Nguyen Museum. In addition, engaging



experiential education activities have been organized. As a result, visitors have been able to tour the area, drink tea, and learn about tea cultivation and processing. This is a specialty, a typical cultural value of Thai Nguyen province.

- At the Quang Ninh Museum, visitors have been visited permanent exhibitions covering topics such as natural features, biodiversity; local history, the history of the coal industry; and the culture of ethnic groups. They have been explored The Cua Lo transportation area; or visit thematic exhibitions on handicrafts, and learn about The Quang Ninh coal carving craft.

- The Dak Lak Museum has implemented guided tours across three exhibition spaces: Biodiversity, Ethnic Culture, and History. The exhibits and guided tours have been very engaging and accessible. Visitors have been directly interacted with the exhibits, opened small cabinets, explored coffee beans visually, audibly, and tactilely, or experienced sitting on a K'pan chair, reflecting the traditional living room space of the Ede people.

Organizing educational program

Museum educational program can be understood as activities/series of activities aimed at visitors, built, designed, and implemented based on specific defined content, target audience, timeframe, and appropriate implementation methods. Currently, educational programs in provincial and city museums have been organized in many diverse and rich forms, including: lessons, competitions; recreational activities, group activities; practical activities, research, and exploration... based on local themes. Many local traditional bearers have participated in museum activities to showcase living heritages. With museum educational programs, young public are always prioritized with many suitable offline and online activities. However, all visitors can participate in educational programs, experience and acquire knowledge and information about the history of the region and its people, as well as the typical characteristics of the local material and spiritual culture. Some typical examples include:

- The Dak Lak Museum has regularly organized cultural heritage education programs on local themes, such as The Central Highlands Gong Culture, The Traditional brocade weaving of the Ede people, and Ban Me coffee. The museum has also collaborated with other provincial and city museums to organize inter-regional cultural heritage education programs, such as The Convergence of Heritage from the Three Regions: Northern, Central Highlands, and Southwestern Vietnam Program and The Ha Giang - A Meeting Point in the Far North Program. The main practitioners from both within and outside the province have been invited to perform at the museum, contributing to the success of these programs. Furthermore, the Dak Lak Museum has successfully implemented other educational activities (competitions, presentations of objects, historical and cultural relics, and typical heritages of the museum



and Dak Lak province) on popular social media platforms such as its Website, Facebook, Fanpage, YouTube, and Spotify Podcast.

- The Can Tho Museum has organized educational programs in various forms and at multiple locations. These include programs at the museum such as Learning History Through Museum Documents and Objects; educational programs at schools in the area focusing on themes honoring local history, culture, and prominent figures; and online educational programs with themes such as Cai Rang Floating Market, Ninh Kieu Wharf - Can Tho's Beautiful Scenery, and Musician Luu Huu Phuoc - a History Writer Through Music. The “Sac Xuan miet vuon” Program (The Spring Colors of the Orchard Program) has been held annually, featuring performances of folk art, traditional crafts, and cuisine by Kinh, Hoa, and Khmer Master Artists; thereby recreating the atmosphere of welcoming the New Year in the Southwestern region of Vietnam.

- The Ben Tre Museum has built the Coconut House (a house constructed in the style of traditional houses in the Southern countryside, with many household items made from coconut trees), and has carried out educational activities about typical local products, history, culture, and prominent figures. These activities have been conducted in a gentle, subtle, but profound way. Here, President Ho Chi Minh and hero Pham Ngoc Thao have been worshipped, and images and artifacts related to Ben Tre coconut trees during the resistance war and in cultural activities have been displayed. Artisans have performed local folk art, especially traditional Southern Vietnamese folk music and singing, at the Coconut House on the night of the 30th of each month. This program has also included the performance of Reciting the Poems of Van Tien - a type of folk performance characteristic of Ben Tre province, associated with the poet Nguyen Dinh Chieu.

Organizing scientific seminars, workshops, and thematic talks

Organizing seminars, scientific discussions, and thematic talks are activities that provincial and city museums can hold periodically, on holidays/anniversaries/events; or in conjunction with thematic exhibitions. These activities have met the public's needs for enjoyment and enhanced understanding with high quality, thereby maintaining regular museum visits and reaching new audiences. The content and topics of these activities have been relevant to the specific characteristics of each locality and cultural region. The target audience for these seminars, scientific discussions, and thematic talks at provincial and city museums mainly consists of researchers, professional staff, historical witnesses, and students. Provincial and city museums have played the role of a scientific forum, connecting and exchanging ideas, discussing, and enhancing understanding of topics related to the local history and culture. Here are some typical examples:

- The Hanoi Museum organized The exhibition Hanoi - Will and Belief in Victory (April 2025), showcasing documents and objects reflecting the resilience and belief in victory of the people of Hanoi during the resistance wars against France and the United States (1954-1975). Alongside this, a seminar and meeting with historical witnesses was held, allowing visitors to listen to, interact with, and engage with some heroes of the armed forces and soldiers who directly participated in and witnessed important events in the national liberation war.

- Nam Dinh has been a major center for the practice of Mother Goddess worship - especially the Phu Day relic site, and also the birthplace and founding land of the Tran dynasty. Therefore, the Nam Dinh Museum has primarily chosen to explore issues related to religious and ideological heritage associated with the local development process as its main topics of discussion, specifically Research on the practice of Mother Goddess worship and The humanistic military thought of prominent figures and generals of the Tran dynasty.

- The Dak Lak Museum has regularly organized thematic talks commemorating The Victory of Buon Ma Thuot (March 10, 1975). Local historical witnesses who participated in the battle have been invited to the museum to reminisce, share memories, and interact with visitors. These activities have been also combined by the museum with other activities on the same theme, such as organizing The I Love History Contest in the style of VTV3's "Golden Bell" quiz, deploying a set of multiple-choice questions about March 10, 1975 on the museum's Website (under The Knowledge Around Us Section), and posting short films about this battle on the museum's Facebook and Fanpage.

3. Some experiences of provincial and city museums in Vietnam

Museum is considered a social phenomenon. This institution is born, exists, and develops in conjunction with changes in life and aims to meet the needs of the community. Currently, integration is a global trend, and sustainable development is a common goal/demand. Thus, people have placed greater importance on cultural diversity and cultural identity, and have been better prepared for future generations. This context has presented certain challenges for the operation of contemporary museums. As an aspect of interaction between museums and public, museum education activities need to demonstrate their ability to meet the needs of society and its target audience. In reality, provincial and city museums in Vietnam have undergone positive changes, better fulfilling their role as informal educators of the locality. These institutions have focused on clarifying the distinctiveness and portraying the identity of the locality; at the same time, they have laid the foundation for achieving future educational outcomes, by influencing the awareness, attitudes, feelings, and behavior of visitors. From a professional perspective in the field of museum studies, we can affirm some

lessons learned from the practical educational activities of provincial and city museums in Vietnam in the context of integration and sustainable development as follows:

3.1. Issues to be reflected and conveyed: Comprehensive education, honoring the distinctive characteristics of the locality

The educational strength of provincial and city museums lies in their comprehensive local content. All information about the local natural environment, society, and culture can be found and shared in these museums in an easily understandable and accessible manner. In particular, the distinctiveness - the local character - is emphasized, reflecting its relationship with the common - the national character - and affirming the locality's contribution to the overall development of the nation. These museums have paid more attention to introducing the outstanding and unique features of the local natural environment, society, culture, and prominent figures to the public. Therefore, lifelong learning at provincial and city museums has practical significance, contributing to the cultivation of civic consciousness, love of homeland, and responsibility to the country in each individual. Each provincial and city museum can be considered an “encyclopedia,” a “house of memory” about the locality. These educational contents have been all interpreted in a lively manner, helping visitors construct awareness through the typical cultural heritage of the locality.

3.2. Target audience selection: Local students

Local students have been given attention and served by provincial and city museums through a combined learning and entertainment approach. Based on the linkage between museums, schools, and families, and the connection between exhibition content and visits/experiences, many offline and online educational activities, both inside and outside the museums, have been organized to help students easily and deeply understand their local area, where they were born and raised. In addition to enjoying the values of heritage, provincial and city museums have also helped students develop an attitude of appreciation and awareness of protecting local heritages. The selection and targeting of the public by provincial and city museums has been rational, yielding sustainable results and preparing young public well for the future by building community awareness and habits of learning and experiencing at museums. In fact, the educational activities of provincial and city museums have received positive feedback from young people, for example: “I feel history, the flow of time. I come to feel love for my homeland and country” (Interview material at Nam Dinh Museum in 2022 - female, 17 years old, student).

3.3. Implementation method: Combining educational and cultural activities

Educational activities at provincial and city museums have been integrated with cultural activities. Cultural activities can be understood as activities that create a closer connection between the cultural and artistic community and the public. These activities are



seen as being related to informal or non-formal learning, such as museum activities. For museums, cultural activities have a positive significance in fulfilling their educational mission and serving visitors; conversely, museums are affirmed as institutions with potential and a suitable context for cultural activities. Provincial and city museums in Vietnam have integrated local educational content into recreational activities, group activities, and cultural events. With activities such as performances and experiences of living heritages, and organizing community cultural activities, the boundary between educational and cultural activities seems to disappear. Through this, provincial and city museums have been able to effectively utilize entertainment in a way that combines it with education, disseminating information about local history and culture to a wide audience.

3.4. The relationship of museums with heritage-owning communities: Cooperation and encouragement of traditional bearers' participation

A symbiotic partnership has been established between provincial and city museums and heritage-owning communities. Provincial and city museums have positively shifted their role in sharing local knowledge, fostering a more connected and friendly relationship with their “partners” - the traditional bearers. They have had good opportunities to become aware of the value of their community's living heritages. They have been encouraged to participate in museum activities, provided with more space to practice their heritage, and expanded their public engagement. Conversely, provincial and city museums have been able to present local content more directly and introduce heritage more vividly through the performances and presentations of these traditional bearers. According to our survey results, many cultural groups have participated in activities of provincial and city museums multiple times. They confirmed their frequent participation in performances “every year” (Interview material at Can Tho Museum in 2022 - male, 56 years old, lion dance performance). This information highlights the close relationship between museums and communities.

3.5. The role and influence of museums in social life: Promoting cultural exchange

In fact, with their friendly and open educational activities, provincial and city museums in Vietnam have not only preserved local heritage but have also truly become spaces for cultural exchange. In localities with diverse ethnic groups (the Kinh and other ethnic groups), this role of provincial and city museums is even more evident. Local people and communities can meet, express their traditional values, listen and engage in dialogue, exchange information, and broaden their understanding within the cultural space of these museums. Furthermore, provincial and city museums have collaborated to organize thematic exhibitions and educational activities. As a result, they have helped visitors diversify their



information and created a channel for intercultural communication between localities and regions across the country.

It can be said that provincial and city museums in Vietnam have shown some experience in educational activities following the trend of innovation, suitable to the context of integration and sustainable development. The important issue is the successful introduction of typical local heritages as well as ensuring future effects. Our discussion does not aim to fully cover all educational experiences of provincial and city museums in Vietnam today, but can be considered basic conclusions. We always warmly await further sharing and evaluation from theory associated with the practical development of museums in their mission of contributing to social education.

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