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How to research the concept of national identity with child respondents in museum research

ABSTRACT

Museums have been closely linked to national identity since the 19th century. Currently, museums have to cope with the ways they present themselves to visitors properly. Therefore, national identity in a museum has become the centre of research attention. Children are a large group of visitors who come into contact with the national narrative in museums. Involving children in the research of the concept of national identity constructed in the museum can bring many interesting findings. However, research with children is difficult. Especially for beginning researchers or museum staff, who do not have in-depth experience with qualitative research. Thus, the aim of the study is to present possible ways of researching national identity with children. Attention will be drawn to the discussion of which variables and which data collection techniques are possible to examine national identity and it's concept with children.

Keywords: national identity, children as respondents, museum research, photo-elicitation techniques

Słowa kluczowe: tożsamość narodowa, dzieci jako respondenci, badania muzealne, techniki photo-elicitation

Thanks to the emergence of nationalism in the 19th century, a number of national museums began to emerge. By their nature, museums as institutions of cultural memory became places that constructed and presented this identity in an effort to build and strengthen it among the inhabitants. Although the role of contemporary museums has changed to some extent, national identity remains one of the important components. Presenting the

concept of national identity is not an easy task for postmodern museums though. The phenomenon of national identity is changing, as are the scientific and inexpert attitudes towards it. Nowadays, museums are facing more social pressure than ever to update their exhibits to an intercultural approach. Many museums, thus, have to deal with the question of how to present the current view of national identity appropriately. This is accompanied by an inevitable need to examine the form of the presented national narratives and the impact the exhibits have on visitors who perceive, interpret and respond to them.

The questions researchers who are involved in museum research ask themselves are related to topics such as how museums (re)construct and present national identity, and through what educational processes national identity is acquired. They are also interested in how national identity and the process of its construction can be examined not only in the context of the analysis of the exhibition itself, but also in relation to its impact on visitors. The aim is to expand audience research to this topic. Current public research includes not only of a quantitative description of visitors, but also includes a deeper interest in visitors through qualitative research techniques. Qualitative research realized that museum visitors are not passive recipients of museum messages, but that they themselves are actively involved in the process of creating meanings. The learning process in the museum is influenced not only by the form of the exhibition and the work of museum staff, but also by the entire experience of visitors, their previous knowledge and attitudes. To understand the feeling that visitors experience in the museum and the meaning that they create and attach to the exhibition and its narrative, it is no longer possible to just observe what the visitors in the museum do. Rather, it is necessary to study their interpretive strategies and repertoires in depth.[1]

A large percentage of museum visitors are children who come to the museum with their families or schools. There are therefore children's respondents who can provide researchers with interesting information, not only in relation to the museum and its goals, but also in an effort to examine the social processes and social discourses themselves. Researching national identity with children is a challenge for researchers, especially for beginners. Indeed, child respondents require a specific approach, which is all the more complicated when examining a national identity that is still developing. Nevertheless, and also just because of it researches with them can be helpful because observing the concept of national identity in relation to respondents who are just adopting this concept and this identity can provide inspiring findings. The aim of the study is to give readers (especially beginning researchers and museum staff) a basic insight into this issue in an effort to present possible tools of examining the concept of national identity with children in the context of the museum environment. An integral part of the issue is also the definition of the target group of respondents. It is important to determine how old children can conduct research on national identity.

The presented study first briefly deals with what is national identity and when do children first acquire it. At the same time, it raises the question of which age group of children is credible to work with when researching national identity. Subsequently, the study presents the basic characteristics of child respondents, and which of these characteristics

[1] *Cf.* E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Studying visitors* [in:] *A Companion to museum studies*, ed. S. Macdonald, Malden–Oxford 2006, pp. 362–376.

are good for the researchers to know and take into account. At the same time, the study considers how to examine children's national identities constructed and presented by museums, as well as how to examine the national identity acquired by children and what means of data collection can be effective in this context.

National identity and child visitors

According to Carey,[2] national identity can be understood as a collective social identity through which people classify themselves, and others, on the basis of belonging to a nation. This identity creates a sense of belonging to a nation and a country, as well as fostering a positive attitude towards them. It is an identity which is socially constructed and constantly reproduced through a socially shared understanding of one's own group, i.e., one's own nation and its values, symbols, traditions, shared experience and memories.[3]

Like other components of identity, one identifies a sense of national identity during the whole life through a process of national enculturation. National enculturation can be understood as a multifactorial developmental process through which children acquire a subjective sense of national identity. It is a process that is associated not only with building a relationship with one's own nation, its history, traditions and symbols, but also with the acquisition of desirable behaviours typical of a given culture. According to Barrett,[4] the process of national enculturation is influenced by a number of endogenous and exogenous factors, in which many actors are involved. Dominant factors are the family, school, peers, media and also cultural institutions such as museums. The influence of the neighbourhood, the place of residence, as well as the culture of the country cannot be overlooked either. In examining national identity, the researcher must take into account not only the personality and psychological characteristics of the child and its cognitive abilities, but also the entire socio-cultural context in which the child lives, and in which environment national enculturation takes place. It is precisely this environment that museums often represent, at least at the state, regional or city level, as they reflect the dominant discourse concerning national identity in a given society.

Leading sociologists dealing with national identity[5] agree that the concept of national identity begins to shape in childhood, and this fact has also been confirmed by some

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[2] S. Carey, *Undivided loyalties: Is national identity an obstacle to European integration?*, "European Union Politics" 2002, No. 3 (4), 387–413.

[3] L. Novy, *Britain and Germany imagining the future of Europe: National identity, mass media and the public sphere*, Basingstoke 2013. To the topic of national identity and identity-building role of museums more information *vide* V. Kolaříková, *Nationalism, modernity, museums: Inspiration by the theory of Ernst Gellner*, "UR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences" 2019, No. 3 (12), pp. 117–138.

[4] M. Barrett, *Children's knowledge, beliefs, and feelings about nations and national groups*, New York 2007; *cf.* M. Barrett, L. Oppenheimer, *Findings, theories and methods in the study of children's national identifications and national attitudes*, "European Journal of Developmental Psychology" 2011, No. 8 (1), pp. 5–24.

[5] E.g., Gellner and Smith in: J. Scourfield, B. Dicks, M. Drakeford, A. Davies, *Children, place and identity: Nation and locality in middle childhood*, London–New York 2006, p. 4.

current researchers. Research conducted by Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, and Davies[6] has shown that child respondents demonstrate a strong sense of national identity, and when asked to identify themselves, national identity tends to be part of that identification.

However, determining the age at which children become aware of their national identity is a difficult task. In the past, theories of cognitive development were used in surveys of national identity with children, as they occurred rather sporadically. Piaget[7] argues that a child's ability to think and to deliberate goes through several stages of qualitatively different stages that affect how children work with concepts and objects. The cognitive development of a child also influences the development of the concept of national identity. The ability to work with abstract concepts or to classify objects on the basis of their properties is connected with the process of categorization, which is involved in the process of forming national identity.

Piaget, together with Weil[8], have researched the concept of country, which, according to the authors, develops in three stages. In the first stage (5–7/8 years), children lack spatial and cognitive knowledge. Children understand a country as a geographical unit, just like a city or a region, but they do not understand the relationship between these units. Attitudes towards countries are subjective and idiosyncratic. If children are to give priority to a country, it is usually the country they like the most. In the second stage (up to 10/11), children already understand that cities and regions are part of a country, however, they do not understand that a person can identify with a city, region and a country at the same time. Thus, the child's spatial knowledge is growing, but conceptual understanding is still missing. Children's attitudes towards countries are usually shaped by stereotypes they have heard somewhere. During this period, there is a preference for one's own country over others. Subsequently, the child moves to the third stage, in which spatial and cognitive knowledge is already developed. Children already understand the relationship between the country, the region and the city and understand that one can share all these identities at the same time.

Some authors question the concept of country. According to Jahoda[9] the process of cognitive development is not the same for all children, and the stages of geographical understanding are not so much related to age as to the influence of the social status of the child and its family on the social ladder. Later research has repeatedly confirmed the original results of Piaget and Weil, that as children age, their geographical knowledge also deepens. However, the universal relationship between the concept of country and the age of the child has not been proven. It turns out that when researching children's national identity, it is not possible to only discuss their cognitive abilities and concurrently generalize their stages of development. At the same time, it is not possible to simply generalize their stages of development. Across the data, it is possible to find differences within the same age groups of respondents which are caused by the differences in the socio-cultural conditions in which the children live. Therefore, the socio-cultural context cannot be neglected in research.

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[6] J. Scourfield *et al.*, *op. cit.*

[7] In: R.L. Atkinson *et al.*, *Psychologie*, Praha 2003, p. 76.

[8] In: M. Barrett, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–34.

[9] *Ibidem*, p. 35, 265.

As an alternative to earlier theories which were based on age groups, Barrett and Oppenheimer[10] present the so-called socio-socio-cognitive-motivational theory. This approach distances itself from purely cognitive-developmental theories in an attempt to describe not only the peculiarities of age, but all the influences that contribute to the formation of a child's attitudes concerning its own group and out-groups. The authors believe that the child and its attitudes always develop within a particular society and its historical, geographical, economic and political circumstances. These circumstances define the child's relationship to its own group as well as to out-groups. The child is influenced by the information passed on to it by adults, whether parents, teachers, the media or, in this case, museums. However, specific psychological characteristics and personalities of the children play important roles which form the unique life contexts of children and the opinions, attitudes and identities arising from them.

It is apparent that setting a clear age limit for respondents in which a researcher could examine national identity in relation to a museum and its visitors is a difficult task. The research plans in this paper follow the recommendation that the children forming the research sample should be older than 11. According to an important Czech historian and researcher who focuses on the formation of modern nations, Miroslav Hroch[11], it is only between the ages of 11–13 when children are able to form and work with abstract concepts,[12] including *nation*. The 11-year guideline is important for researchers. It allows them to identify a research sample when they need to work with respondents who are beginning to realize the concepts of nation and national identity. It is no longer decisive whether some respondents become aware of this identity a little earlier or later. It is important that a specific research sample of respondents is formed who are becoming conscious of national identity and can cogitate it for the first time. Thanks to this, the museum exhibition and its narrative can make a strong and specific impression, i.e., it can influence child respondents more than individuals who already have a, more-or-less, firm idea of national identity. Hence, child visitors to the museum can create an interesting research sample. However, researchers should not forget the fact that when working with child respondents, they should not only be interested in the age of the respondents, but also in the socio-cultural context in which the children live and how much it can affect the degree and the formation of their awareness of national identity.

How research national identity with child respondents

Researching national identity in children can be demanding for researchers, as child respondents possess a number of specifics that can complicate research. It is not just a fact that in the polish as well as in the Czech environment the written consent of parents is required for research with children (with respect to their underage). The ethical level of research can be also problematic with regard to the fact, that informed consent should be an obligation in every study. "However, sometimes it is difficult to obtain this directly

[10] M. Barrett, L. Oppenheimer, *op. cit.*

[11] M. Hroch, *Národy nejsou dílem náhody*, Praha 2009.

[12] It can be seen that his statement is consistent with Piaget's cognitive theory.

from the participants, in particular if we want to interview children".[13] There are other and more important variables that make research with children often more difficult for researchers than research with adults.

Child respondents communicate differently depending on the interpersonal context and the specific situation in which the communication takes place. They also respond differently based on the different ways they are encouraged to react and respond. Therefore, researching national identity in children (whether we are interested in the form of national identity that children have adopted or the way and form of their interpretation of museum narratives concerning national identity constructed by a museum exhibition and potential impact of a museum visit on the visitors and theirs identity) should be approached in an interdisciplinary way, using knowledge of psychology and sociology. It is also advised to be aware of the fact that the construction of national identity is conditioned by the actors themselves, their characteristics and actions, as well as any discourses present in society that structure and limit people's actions in certain ways which are socioculturally conditioned.[14]

At the same time, these discourses are mediated to children not only by museums but also by other institutions, such as the school and the media, as well as other social actors led by the family and peers. The influence of these socializing factors, among which it is good to take into account the influence of the region and regional identity, is large and it is difficult to distinguish what role the museum exhibition plays in the process of constructing the national identity in comparison with other factors. This fact places increased demands on researchers. If the researcher wants to delve deeper into the process of constructing national identity in a museum and to find out what impact the exhibition had on a person's identity or perception of national identity, it is appropriate for museum research to have several phases. In the first phase, it is desirable for the researcher to conduct research on the national identity of the respondents before visiting the museum. After visiting the museum, the main research part takes place. Researchers try to find out how the respondents understood the identity presented and constructed by the museum exhibition, which exhibits, narratives and other elements according to them are representing the national identity in the exhibition and with what meanings, etc. At the same time researchers will have baseline data that they can compare with new data. For example they can try to find out whether respondents with a similar perception of national identity noticed in the exhibition same objects and narratives, or whether the perception of national narrative were differed in terms of socio-cultural origin of respondents, etc.

Following the completion of research at the museum, it is possible to add a third phase of research. According to Falk, Dierking, and Adams[15] in the case of qualitative research focused on the experience of the visitor, the research cannot be limited to the visitors currently being in the museum. It is necessary to return to the researched sample over time and find out what effects the visit to the museum had on their future, or to examine how the visitors integrated the knowledge gained in the museum into their lives. In

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[13] U. Flick, *Designing qualitative research*, London 2007, p. 83.

[14] J. Scourfield *et al.*, *op. cit.*

[15] J. Falk, D. Dierking, M. Adams, *Living in a learning society: Museums and free-choice learning* [in:] *A companion to museum studies*, ed. S. Macdonald, Malden–Oxford 2006, pp. 323–339.

their research, the authors found that the museum experience affects 8 main areas, which are knowledge, skills, interests, values, museum literacy, social learning, creativity and awareness. In the context of national identity research, the researchers would return to the same respondents after a chosen period of time and conduct research with them focusing on how the respondents evaluate the museum experience and obtained information retrospectively and how they integrated them into their everyday life.

When researching national identity with child respondents, the researcher asks two basic questions. The first one is what is the researcher actually supposed to research – how to grasp the identity for the research, and thus, what will become the object of his or her research interest and what will be the means of cognition during the process. The second question is, what are the research methods and means to be used in order to obtain the required data. Before that, however, researchers need to anchor their research within a certain paradigm. Paradigm of social constructivism seems to be suitable for research on national identity in a museum.[16] On the one hand, this approach is aware of the broader social context of the researched issues (the influence of dominant social discourses concerning the form of national identity, which affect both the form of national identity acquired by respondents and often the form of museum narratives), but also emphasizes to the active role of social agents, who themselves participate in the form of social reality. In the museum environment, social constructivism assumes that respondents are actively involved in the process of education (using constructivist theories of learning) and the construction of meanings. In research, therefore, researchers following this paradigm pay attention to visitor attitudes, as well as their preconceptions or experiences. Respondents in the research naturally have the opportunity to comment on the observed things and experiences in the museum. However, researchers can also examine their preconceptions and attitudes indirectly and combine methods of data collection as they need.

What specifically to research?

The following passage describes which variables can be used to examine national identity in children. The methods can be used both to research the form of national identity that children have adopted, as well as to the research of the concept of national identity, which is constructed and presented by the museum exhibition and whose national narrative visitors perceive, interpret in some way and incorporate or not incorporate into their national self-concept.

• *Cognitive processes*

Cognitive processes are related to people's thinking, and therefore, to their understanding of certain concepts and phenomena, as well as their identities. As such, cognitive processes are an inevitable intervening variable in national identity research.

[16] More about social constructivism in V. Kolaříková, *Konstruktivistické teorie učení a jejich využití v edukační realitě muzea*, "Pedagogická orientace" 2018, No. 28 (3), pp. 496–540.

As is already known, past research often expected respondents of a particular age to have a concrete form of cognitive ability regarding their conception of national identity and related knowledge. Over time, however, it has been shown that in addition to the child's age and the associated degree of cognitive development, the data obtained can also be influenced by the social context in which the child lives. Consequently, it is better to follow age specifics only as supporting material which has been put into context with other phenomena, than it is to only proceed from characteristics of age and draw generalized conclusions thereof. The researcher should also pay attention to the social environment of the respondents and ask what discourses are involved in the concept of their national identity.

• *Children's preconceptions*

Children's preconceptions, their initial ideas about the world and phenomena in it, are based on the current, limited knowledge and experience of children, and are, therefore, often distorted and inaccurate (these are so-called misconceptions). Although they are not in accordance with professional knowledge, they make sense to children, and children are convinced of their truth.[17] Therefore, they treat preconceptions as real concepts. They inevitably create them in terms of concepts such as nation and national identity, and in this way, these preconceptions can be reflected in research. Their existence is related to the fact that children's overall knowledge related to the issue of the nation deepens and refines with advancing age, and children gradually find a deeper meaning for the concepts and relationships between them.[18]

• *Knowledge and experience*

Knowledge typically associated with national identity can include geography, history, knowledge of their own – and foreign – cultures, traditions and customs. Furthermore, other types of knowledge can include state symbols, important people and national myths – such as an origin myth or the myth of their Golden Age.[19] In researching national identity, it is advisable to pay attention to child experiences associated with travelling to foreign countries and meeting foreigners, which may include family members or classmates of other nationalities.

As mentioned earlier, research on children's geographical knowledge of their own and foreign countries was conducted by Barrett,[20] who concluded that this knowledge of children is conditioned by their age and the form of information that they can get in concrete age period. Usually, geographical knowledge begins to develop at the age of five or six, when children first begin to learn about the localities and larger cities of a country. Children first acquire and develop knowledge about their own country. It is not until around

[17] P. Gavora, *Naivné teorie dietata a ich pedagogické využitie*, "Pedagogika" 1992, No. 42 (1), pp. 95–102.

[18] *Cf.* M. Barrett, *op. cit.*

[19] *Cf. ibidem*; M. Hroch, *op. cit.*

[20] M. Barrett, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–71.

the age of eight that knowledge about foreign countries begins to build more. Over the years, this knowledge has expanded and deepened and are gradually becoming more abstract. Younger children in this issue describe mainly the natural characteristics of the country or specific places created by man, while older children talk more about the culture of the country, its history, traditions and way of life. At the same time, it turns out[21] that children's geographical knowledge is not only conditioned by their age and that they are influenced not only by school education, mass media and the child's own travel experience, but also by the proximity of a foreign country to the homeland, by the size of the country, by the cultural relations of the homeland with the given foreign country, etc.

• *Attitudes and related biases and stereotypes*

Attitudes towards national identity and the biases and stereotypes associated with them are an interesting object of analysis. However, the question is to what extent the attitudes are internal thoughts and, at the same time, examinable through ordinary conversations. For researchers, the questions arise of whether it is possible to use verbal answers to reliably reach entities that are somewhere deep within the human mind, and whether it is more desirable to focus on their specific manifestations rather than on the verbalized description of this latent.[22] Either way, it is difficult to examine attitudes, which is doubly true for children. Children, in particular, may have difficulty expressing themselves and being aware of their own attitudes. The researcher must choose methods through which attitudes can be grasped, such as metaphors or other creative techniques. An example are cards with certain characteristics ('dirty', 'clean', 'stupid', 'smart', etc.) that children have to assign to groups of people, or the children have to determine on the scale how much they like or dislike a given group of people, or how much they would like to have a member of another nation as a friend.[23] Research of this type shows that descriptions of younger children tend to be more stereotypical than descriptions of older children, who are more aware that not all people who belong to a given nation correspond to its stereotypical descriptions.[24]

• *Emotions*

The way children think is often associated with strong emotions, which may be present before the actual acquisition of factual knowledge. Emotions can influence the educational process in a museum as they can serve as a motivating factor in the process of acquiring knowledge.[25] Therefore, emotions are also something researchers can pay attention to in national identity research. The point of interest is to mainly focus on the emotions of the respondents that are related to members of their own – or a foreign – nation (emotions can be strongly associated with attitudes), or emotions related to the homeland so

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 56.
[22] M. Vávra, *Nesnáze s měřením postojů*, "SDA Info" 2006, No. 8 (1), pp. 9–12.
[23] *Vide* M. Barrett, *op. cit.*, pp. 143–146.
[24] *Ibidem*.
[25] *Ibidem*.

as to examine the national pride associated with them or the degree of self-identification the individual has with the nation.

• *The degree of self-identification of an individual with a nation*

The degree of self-identification of an individual with a nation can be measured by using a scale of the strength of the identification, interviews and questionnaires.[26] It has been proven that the strength of the degree of self-identification with one's own nation cannot be identified with individual age categories, as it is influenced by the socio-cultural contexts of the studied countries and localities.[27] Children are usually able to determine their affiliation with a particular ethnic group as early as the age of six. However, the degree of identification with that grouping varies in different research groups.

• *Narration*

Through their exhibitions, exhibits and other features, museums create narrative lines that are, more or less, legible for visitors. These may be national identity narratives that are presented to visitors and can affect their own view of national culture, or, in the case of representatives of national minorities living in, or visiting, the country, the national culture and identity of the host country.

In addition to the narrative presented by the museum, narrative frameworks concerning national identity are also of interest. These are also of interest to the visitors themselves. These do not have to be autobiographical analyses which focus on the respondent's life story as this type of analysis is more suitable for adult respondents rather than for children who could have difficulty telling their life story. In the context of national identity, the respondent does not only talk about how he or she experiences his or her nationality in everyday life. When thinking about what it means to be a member of a given nation, the subject inevitably also identifies the dominant national narratives that are established in a given society in the forms of national myths, traditions, values, and/or symbols. These elements are the ones that the researcher can further compare with museum narratives. Through narratives and their qualitative analysis, it is possible to examine children's identity and the related knowledge, experience and attitudes that can be given to the child from external sources – and, therefore, the narratives that the child visitor finds and recognizes in the museum exhibition. Narrative research, thus, seems to be a suitable means of gaining a deeper understanding of how child respondents perceive and construct national identity, what filter they use to see this identity, and how the narratives presented in the museum affect them. The researcher can interact with the narratives the child visitor in the museum recognizes, see how the child interprets them, and even find to what extent these narratives are in accordance with the child's current conception of national identity. Conversely, the researcher can see how this conception is disrupted or complemented by museum narratives.

[26] More in: *ibidem*, p. 245.
[27] *Ibidem*.

• *Social context*

When researching national identity, it is important to remember its social context. It is advisable to pay attention to what discourses related to national identity dominate in a given society and to what extent this discourse corresponds to a given museum exhibition. The researcher may ask to what extent this exhibition replicates and reconstructs these discourses, to what extent it is in line with them. Additionally, the researcher can ask whether the exhibition somehow disrupts the discourse, and how do visitors react to this disruption of dominant ideas. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to the social conditions in which the respondent lives and which affect the macro-environment – represented by the socio-cultural context of the country, which museums usually represent and present, the micro-environment represented by the family and its history, school and its curriculum as well as common everyday school practice. This last point is particularly worth noting as museums frequently participate with educational programs, often specifically tailoring to the needs of schools. All these factors influence what an individual learns in the museum and how the obtained information will be interpreted, what will be experienced in the museum and in daily life, and also, how these things will affect the perception and construction of national identity.

How to collect data?

At the beginning of the research, the researcher must clarify the research topic and the research question. Based on this, it is decided whether the chosen methodology will be of a qualitative, quantitative or mixed type. Consequently, the techniques of data collection and methods of their subsequent analysis will also be established. For the research of national identity with children, it is appropriate to choose qualitative research methods, which in this case bring a deeper knowledge of the researched issues. These make it possible to focus on the subjective experience, knowledge and emotions of child respondents. They also allow for more flexibility in research and help encourage child respondents to communicate.

• *Observation*

The most commonly used research method in conducting research with children is interviews with observation.[28] Observation by itself is not very useful for researching how children understand their national identity because it does not provide enough information. It may, thus, be of a rather complementary nature when the researcher can observe how the child behaves in the exhibition, which parts of the exhibition get the most attention, which exhibits get the most time from the child and how he or she reacts to them. A video study is suitable for this type of research, which uses video data acquired during the research for analysis. The benefits of video studies are evident, for example, when

[28] J. Einarsdóttir, *Research with children: Methodological and ethical challenges*, "European Early Childhood Education Research Journal" 2007, No. 15 (2), pp.197–211.

researching the museum's educational programs.[29] The risk of a video study is that children, knowing that they are being recorded, may start behaving differently and may censor their opinions more. A video study of an educational program that has the potential to excite children is more appropriate than making video recordings of the focus groups or interviews themselves. In addition, a tailor-made educational program can spontaneously ask a number of questions to children and create a variety of situations, thus can also be good source of data for the researcher.

• *Interviews*

Interviews (face-to-face meetings) are more useful for this topic. They allow the researcher to obtain deeper data based on the statements and answers of the respondents themselves, who in this case are most often asked by semi-structured questions. Semi-structured questions aim to obtain information about personal experience of participants.

> In interviews, we can address questions about personal experiences and meaningmaking of personal or more general issues (social problems, political changes, historical events for example). We can address the 'what' and the 'how' in interviews […]. In narrative (parts of) interviews we can ask for how something has begun, developed or changed, but we cannot address the 'why' or attitudes towards something.[30]

It is possible to use narrative interviews to research national identity with adult respondents, "which means asking the interviewees to tell a story (of their lives, or of their illness and the like) instead of expecting them to answer questions".[31] But narrative interviews are not very suitable for child respondents, because it would be difficult for them to tell the story of their lives or their identities.

However, interviews with child respondents are different from those with adults, as children have a limited vocabulary and different ways of using words than adults.[32] Children may not yet have enough language to express their attitudes and feelings. In addition, answering open-ended questions can be cognitively challenging for them.[33] First of all, they have to clarify what the researcher is actually asking them, then remember the necessary information and express it verbally. The fact that preschool children have difficulty understanding hypothetical issues is also a complication. Therefore, it is better to use data collection methods with less structure. Capturing their attention also creates a challenge when conducting research with children.[34] In particular, children under the age of eleven have difficulty keeping attention and tend to forget what the researcher

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[29] It is possible to see an example of the research from an educational program based on a video study in the text: V. Kolaříková, *Vîdeostudie v muzejněpedagogickém výzkumu: Případová studie*, "Museologica Brunensia" 2017, No. 6 (2), pp. 56–67.

[30] U. Flick, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

[31] *Ibidem*, p. 78.

[32] S. Punch, *Research with children: The same or different from research with adults?* "Childhood" 2002, No. 9 (3), pp. 321–341.

[33] M. Barett, *op. cit.*

[34] S. Punch, *op. cit.*

has asked them. Therefore, Scott[35] recommends supplementing interviews with visual stimuli that help to solidify the questioned topic when working with younger children (see non-verbal methods for more).

Another risk is related to the specific position of the researcher, whose age creates an assumed position authority and power over the child respondent.[36] The fact that a child respondent and an adult researcher do not have equal status during their interaction in the research may cause children to try to respond according to what they think is desirable or expected at a given time, and, thus, the data obtained may be skewed. Children can adapt their answers to the social context in which they find themselves (where and with whom they talk), and, therefore, they can answer differently to different groups of people (e.g., parents, teachers, researchers, friends). Barrett[37] also draws attention to the issue of the influence of social desirability, under the influence of which children form their answers. Barret adds that the use of specific words in questions may indicate a specific type of answers. The researcher should, therefore, avoid suggestive questions, etc.

For the research to be conducted in the required way, the clarity of the question and its interpretation by the child is important. Indeed, when children do not understand the question, they tend to answer that they do not know, instead of asking or somehow showing a misunderstanding of the question.[38] The complexity of research with children can, thus, be related to the need to provide sufficiently clear and information-rich instructions throughout the research. However, a quality question does not guarantee a quality answer. The second factor contributing to the acquisition of quality data is the willingness and ability of the child to answer the questions clearly.[39] If children lack confidence in their own communicative skills, the whole conversation could slip into something resembling an interrogation, which is not desirable.

Last but not least, children, as well as adult respondents, can lie. Lying most often occurs when children want to please the researcher with the desired answer, when they do not want to talk about some usually painful topics, when they are ashamed of their answers or are afraid to say them.[40] Lying is best prevented when the researcher builds a relationship with respondents based on mutual trust.[41]

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[35] J. Scott, *Children as respondents: The challenge for quantitative methods* [in:] *Research with children: Perspectives and practices*, eds. P. Christensen, A. James, New York–London 2008, pp. 87–108.

[36] *Cf.* J. Scourfield *et al., op. cit.*; J. Einarsdóttir, *op. cit.*

[37] M. Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

[38] J. Scourfield *et al.*, *op. cit*.

[39] A.B. Smith, *Respecting children's rights and agency: Theoretical insights into ethical research procedures* [in:] *Researching young children's perspectives: Debating the ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children*, eds. D. Harcourt, B. Perry, T. Waller, New York 2011, pp. 11–25.

[40] S. Punch, *op. cit.*

[41] *Cf.* M. Cieslik, *Introduction: Contemporary youth research: Issues, controversies and dilemmas* [in:] *Researching youth*, eds. A. Bennett, M. Cieslik, S. Miles, London 2003, pp. 1–10; S. Punch, *op. cit.*

• *Focus groups*

An alternative to interviews are focus groups – research strategies involving intensive discussions and interviews in small groups of people focused on a specific topic or problem.[42] Focus groups can create a more pleasant, friendly and less directive environment in which it can be easier for a child to express his or her views and experiences. A well-run focus group can be a bit of a fun game for children, in which they will be more open to the researcher. In addition, within focus groups, discussions may arise between the children themselves (the synergistic group effect), which may bring other interesting findings or open up new, unexpected but important topics to the researchers. In group interviews, children can help answer questions, stimulate each other and answer spontaneously even more truthfully.[43] But focus groups can be challenging for researchers because the groups can slip into chaos due to poor organization. Therefore, they require certain skills of the researcher to help him or her properly manage the organization and smooth running of the focus groups.

A problem is that the information provided is not anonymous and confidential within focus groups, which may discourage respondents from answering truthfully or in detail, especially on personal topics. As with interviews, the influence of social desire can be exerted within focus groups. Responses can be adapted in an effort to please the researcher and other members of the group from whom individuals may fear condemnation. Under the influence of the conformist effect, which creates pressure to conform to social conventions, individuals may lean towards answers that correspond with the most popular and frequent views in the group. There is also a risk that only the dominant individuals will enter the centre of communication. They will promote their opinions here and, conversely, the answers of other respondents will not be heard. In addition, at the speed of the discussion, there is a risk that respondents will not be able to say everything they want, they could more easily forget some of their ideas, or they may be interrupted by someone. The information obtained may, thus, lack depth and individuality.[44] According to Barbour[45] it is not good idea to use focus groups for measuring attitudes or eliciting narratives – "they are more adequate if you want to study interaction in a group about a specific issue. " We should not forget the ethical level of research either. According to Flick

> […] using the method for vulnerable groups (children, patients) needs extra reflection about the impact of taking part in a focus group on the life situation of the participants, which is a general issue to consider in focus groups. It is important to set up a clear and transparent framework of participation – for example, that participants have the chance to withdraw certain statements and that they know what the whole enterprise is about.[46]

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[42] J. Jandourek, *Sociologický slovník*, Praha 1997, p. 84.

[43] J. Einarsdóttir, *op. cit.*; *cf.* P. Gavora, *Sprievodca metodológiou kvalitatívneho výskumu*, Bratislava 2006.

[44] *Cf.* E.-M. Samfira, G. Raţă, *Assessing education needs at tertiary level: The focus group method*, "Scientific Papers: Animal Science and Biotechnologies" 2015, No. 48 (2), pp. 223–226; I. Acocella, *The focus groups in social research: Advantages and disadvantages*, "Quality & Quantity" 2012, No. 46 (4), pp. 1125–1136.

[45] In: U. Flick, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

[46] *Ibidem*, p. 87.

• *Indirect methods*

Disadvantage of verbal methods is that "they do not give a direct access to processes and practices but provide accounts, reports and narratives about these".[47] Indirect methods can help reveal important, implicit knowledge of children and, if they are added, can additionally help prevent the risks associated with interviews and focus groups.[48] The combination of techniques seems to be beneficial, as it allows important, in-depth and inter-complementary data to be effectively obtained in a pleasant and fun way. By using multiple methods at once, it is possible to prevent data distortion resulting from over-reliance on a single method and achieve mutual data control. The use of participatory methods can, thus, help to increase the validity of research findings.

Indirect methods can be visual approaches like photographs or cards, games, creative tasks, scales,[49] children's diaries,[50] drawing[51] and other participatory techniques such as activity tables or spider diagrams,[52] etc. However, when using these methods, the researcher should take into account that individual methods may favour some children and disadvantage others. For example, drawing tasks will be better for children who like to draw and can draw well. Interviews will be better for children with a developed language code. Another problem is that due to a child's vivid imagination, it can be difficult for a researcher to recognize what is the result of the children's imagination and what is based on their true experience. It can be beneficial to supplement these creative methods with the respondents' comments and, thus, obtain more accurate and richer data, or their interpretation.[53]

• *Photo-elicitation techniques*

For the environment of museums, research stimulated by the use of photographs seems to be effective. "Photo-elicitation techniques are techniques „in which participants are asked to make some photos and then interviewed about them".[54] Photo-elicitation:

> […] involves using photographs to invoke comments, memory and discussion in the course of a semi-structured interview. Specific examples of social relations or cultural form depicted in the photographs can become the basis for a discussion of broader abstractions and generalities; conversely, vague memories can be given sharpness and focus, unleashing a flood of detail.[55]

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[47] U. Flick, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

[48] J. Scourfield *et al., op. cit.*

[49] M. Barrett, *op. cit.*

[50] J. Scott, *op. cit.*

[51] J. Einarsdóttir, *op. cit.*

[52] S. Punch, *op. cit.*

[53] C. O'Kane, *The development of participatory techniques: Facilitating children's views about decisions which affect them* [in:] *Research with children: Perspectives and practices*, eds. P. Christensen, A. James, New York–London 2018, pp. 125–155.

[54] U. Flick, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

[55] M. Banks, *Using visual data in qualitative research*, London 2007, p. 65.

Appropriately chosen photographs, which the researcher utilizes during the interviews with the respondents, can deepen the interview and create room for dialogue and discussion. One of the aims of photo-elicitation is to increase the degree of intimacy between researcher and respondent. Since photographs use a visual image that everyone understands, they help to bridge the world between the researcher (scientist, expert) and the respondent (layman). Photographs can, thus, enrich the interview to gain new, and often, character-specific information, emotions and memories. According to Banks "[…] the photographs effectively exercise agency, causing people to do and think things they had forgotten, or to see things they had always known in a new way".[56] Photographs can also stimulate respondents to a new awareness of their lives and social existence thanks to the fact that they can re-frame their experience and, consequentially, break down their existing concepts. Additionally, photographs can also be used as bridges between culturally different worlds.[57]

Museum research can use different types of photographs. In the context of national identity research with child respondents, these may be photographs capturing exhibits or exhibition locations where the researcher needs to conduct the interview, or they can be photographs the respondent chooses about things that are important to him or her that he or she would like to talk about. Photographs can help children return to the given exhibits and visually perceive them again, so they can better talk about them and think more easily. At the same time, the researcher can also use other types of photographs that capture the researched phenomena. These are photographs that the visitor does not find directly in the exhibition, but which, as a supplement, help the guest to better understand the topics and phenomena presented by the exhibition, to think about them more deeply. They can be anthropological photographs depicting people and their lives within different national cultures, photographs of works of art and scenes from everyday life, photographs associated with the customs and traditions of the nation, etc. Photographs can help children relate to the topic, engage visual imagination, ingenuity and their own memories. The use of photographs in research can also actively engage the respondents. Visitors can be given the task of taking pictures in the exhibition of objects they believe are related to the topic that attracted their attention and are somehow interesting to them. With these photographs, it is possible to conduct an interview and obtain deeper information regarding the knowledge and concept of both their current national identity and the concept of identity that the museum constructs in its exhibitions.

• *Psychosemantic methods*

Another option available to the researcher is the possibility to use psychosemantic methods. These can help especially in the field of examining the attitudes of respondents and their understanding of specific concepts. Psychosemantic methods are characterized by an effort to understand the individual meaning of words, and the meaning that an individual

[56] *Ibidem*, p. 70.

[57] More in: D. Harper, *Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation*, "Visual Studies" 2002, No. 17 (1), pp. 13–26.

attaches to them from his or her own inner world.[58] Within psychosemantic methods it is possible to use methods such as word associations, the test of colour semantic differential, the test of unfinished sentences, or the method of repertory grids, etc. One of the most commonly used methods is semantic differential, which aims to reveal the connotative meaning of terms. Semantic differential is based on the idea that the respondent is to evaluate a concept on a pre-assembled bipolar scale with pairs of adjectives that can be combined into common areas (factors). Different types of scales are also used to measure attitudes, such as the Likert scale, which is a set of attitude items that are compiled in order to map a certain, basic attitude. The respondent must express the degree of agreement or disagreement to a series of presented statements.[59]

• *Triangulace metod*

Triangulation of methods, ie the use of multiple research methods to collect data on a researched phenomenon at once, can help the researcher to better understand the researched issue. By using more research methods, the researcher gains a broader view of the researched issues. Each method views the phenomenon differently, and therefore different methods can deepen the research with additional data. For example, it may be appropriate to support indirect methods through interviews with respondents on a given topic, or together with interviews to examine quantitative data obtained, for example, in a video study conducting observations (e.g. measuring the amount of time spent by visitors at some exhibits, etc.). It is thus possible to implement mixed methodology research, where aim is at combining the strengths of qualitative and quantitative research designs. But it can also be a simpler case – such as a combination of single interviews with focus groups or focus groups with photo-elicitation techniques and so on. At the same time, thanks to the triangulation of methods, the researcher verifies the veracity of data obtained by other methods. Triangulation of methods in qualitative type of research thus increases the validity of research. Triangulation does not have to take place not only through the use of multiple methods, but also through the use of multiple data sources. For example, the visual analysis of the exhibition and its national narrative can be supplemented by interviews with visitors and so on.[60] It is desirable for researchers to promote the validity of qualitative research especially that based on the constructivist paradigm. This type of research often places more emphasis on validity than on reliability, because ensuring that research examines what it has to research is crucial in this case.

Final summary and discussion

Museum research conducted with children can enrich the knowledge of museum practices, as it is children who make up a large percentage of museum visitors. In the context of national identity, child respondents are interesting for researchers precisely because

[58] J. Pelikán, *Základy empirického výzkumu pedagogických jevů*, Praha 2007, p. 143.

[59] *Ibidem*.

[60] *Cf.* P. Gavora, *Úvod do pedagogického výzkumu*, Brno 2000; U. Flick, *op. cit.*

their national identity is only beginning to be formed and realized. The social discourses and narratives associated with national identity presented by the museum affect the children in a very specific way. Incorporating child respondents into national identity research can, thus, contribute to uncovering the basic factors in the process of constructing national identity in the museum environment. It's not just curators who construct the narrative of national identity presented in the exhibition, but also the visitors themselves are involved in this process of construction.

However, research with child respondents can be challenging for the researcher. Interviews with children present difficulties in communication due to the different uses and acquisition of language and the necessary concepts many children do not yet have as developed language and communication skills. Conducting interviews with children on a chosen topic can, thus, be difficult, and the researcher, who is often perceived by children as an authority rather than a discussion partner, is advised to create a safe environment and to supplement the conversation with various non-verbal methods. A useful tool for data collection can be a photo interview, where photographs help children to better understand and communicate about the topic while keeping their attention on the topic. Another possibility is to use focus groups, which, like interviews, struggle with the problem of the effect of social desire, etc. On the other hand, focus groups can create space for discussion and sharing, and if they are supplemented by the use of photographs, they have the potential to create a fun game-like situation. In general, triangulation of methods appears to be useful in this case, as it helps the researcher to obtain deeper data and thus strengthen the validity of the research.

Which methods the researcher connects depends on his research goals. For the research of national identity in the museum, the use of photographs seems to be the key method of complementing interviews and focus groups. In the currently implemented research, which deals with the topic of the construction of national identity in the environment of the selected exhibition, we plan as another phase (following the dispositive analysis of the exhibition) research with children's visitors. Individual interviews will first take place with the children regarding the concept of their own national identity and the understanding of this concept as well. Subsequently, an exhibition tour will take place with the respondents in which respondents will be asked to note the national narrative of the exhibition and its concept. Part of the tour will be a task in which the respondents in the exhibition will photograph those exhibits, places and situations that, in their opinion, are closely related to the national identity. Subsequently, discussions on their interpretations of the national narrative will be held within focus groups, in which the respondents will also present photographs taken in the exhibition and explain why, according to them, the phenomena are connected with given nationality. The focus group will also include a discussion of photographs taken by researchers at the exhibition. These photographs will capture exhibits, narratives and phenomena that proved to be important representatives and constructors of national identity in the previous phase of research, which was a dispositive analysis of the exhibition. The aim of dispositive analysis was to identify the elements of the exhibition with the help of which the national identity in the museum is constructed and reconstructed. The obtained data will then be subjected to qualitative analysis. As a limit of the focus group method, we perceive the fact that within it we do not have to obtain such deep data from all respondents, as could be the

case in individual interviews. However, we hope that this factor will be balanced by the group dynamics of the focus group, which will lead to greater creativity of the respondents and their interest in the discussion and the topic (the opportunity to experience a state of 'flow'). The method will enable mutual discussion within the peer group, from which we promise deeper thinking on the topic, viewing the topic from multiple angles and the opening of a wider range of topics by respondents, than in individual interviews will be held. The photographs taken by the respondents will allow the researcher to pay sufficient attention to the elements that are important for the respondents within the theme of the national identity given exhibition. Photographs taken by the researcher, on the other hand, will allow discussions to be framed, will enable the researcher to stick to the topic and obtain important information and opinions of respondents on those elements of the exhibition that are important for the construction of the national identity of the exhibition in terms of societal discourse and related national narrative. These analytical findings are interesting not only for social scientists dealing with national identities, but also for the museums themselves. The acquired awareness of how children perceive the national narrative in the exhibition and how they generally understand the concept of (own) national identity can be used by postmodern museums in the creation of new exhibitions.

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