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МУЗЕЙНОЕ ПРОСТРАНСТВО КАК СРЕДА ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЯ С ПАМЯТЬЮ ИНДИВИДОВ: АНАЛИЗ ПОВЕДЕНИЯ ПОСЕТИТЕЛЕЙ В РАМКАХ ЭКСПОЗИЦИИ «СОВЕТСКАЯ ЭПОХА» МУЗЕЯ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ ИСТОРИИ РОССИИ

Аннотация. Статья посвящена исследованию восприятия музейных экспозиций о советской эпохе посетителями разных возрастных групп. На основе кейса экспозиции «Советская эпоха» в Музее политической истории России в Санкт-Петербурге проведен фрейм-анализ, рассматривающий музейное пространство как социальный контекст, в котором посетители проявляют различные модели поведения. Для этого были использованы методы визуального анализа музейного пространства, контент-анализ нарративов экспозиции и структурированное наблюдение за поведением посетителей. В исследовании выявлено, что младшие возрастные группы (до 40 лет) воспринимают экспозицию без эмоционального вовлечения, в отличие от старших, которые интерпретируют события через призму личного опыта. Также обнаружены расхождения между заложенными в экспозицию нарративами и их восприятием посетителями, что обусловлено внимательностью и маршрутом осмотра экспозиции.

Ключевые слова: музей, поведение посетителей, политика памяти, культурная память, коммуникативная память.

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Introduction

Cultural memory, by definition of Assmann (2008: 117), is a highly formalized and ceremonialized form of memory that keeps, as the author calls it, “mythical history, events in absolute past” (Assmann 2008: 117).

It is more susceptible to state-led policies than communicative memory, which, in turn, is a non-formalized and non-institutionalized, personalized view on the recent past from the perspective of autobiographical recollections (Assmann 2008: 117).

In contemporary politics of most countries, including Russia, there is an actively developing direction of memory politics, i. e. an exploitation of a collective memory for restructuring national identity in order to achieve both external and internal state goals (Malinova 2017). These politics are prominently reflected in the activities of historical museums, especially those financially supported by the state (Gray 2015). Presence of these politics in the Russian context has to be considered, because it could somehow affect the views of Russian citizens and therefore moderate their behaviors.

Due to definitions of cultural and communicative memory, the second half of the 20th century is supposed to be the most resistant era for memory policies. People who carry memories of that era are still alive and pass on their lively memories to younger generations. Memories of particularly distant periods, such as the time of Stalin's rule, are now transitioning into the realm of cultural memory. Hence, nowadays there are very few people who could pass their personal memory of that era left, therefore it could be assumed the communicative memory has almost entirely disappeared.

Thus, the question arises: how might the distance of different age cohorts from an event/period affect their interaction with the memory of that event / period? One can try to answer this question by following the behavior of visitors in historical museums, since museums are institutions where memories are stored in written and objectified form, and people's reactions to them are easier to trace than, for example, in a library. Taking into account all above mentioned criteria, for investigation of the research question, it was decided to conduct the analysis of behavior of different age cohorts within the context of a historical museum exhibition dedicated to the second half of the 20th century.

We can try to answer this question by analyzing the case of an exhibit "Soviet Era" in the Museum of Political History of Russia. This case was chosen, as it is a major state historical museum and it seems to be possible to trace the presence of state influence and understand its commitment to the official historical narrative, particularly through recent news. Besides, exhibit "Soviet Era" in its nowadays form encompasses the period from the World War II until the collapse of the USSR, that gives an ability

to analyze the ratio of representation of certain events in the exposition narrative.

Memory, History and Their Political Use

A distinctive feature of the chosen case is the direct presence of memory that can be visibly traced within the museum space. Moreover, given that the museum in question is political, the politicization of this memory must also be taken into account. Therefore, it is essential to first examine the key concepts in more detail, namely the concepts of memory, historical politics, and memory politics.

French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (Halbwachs 1992), one of the classics of memory studies, elaborates on the concept of collective memory. According to his works, an individual's memory is formed under the influence of his/her interactions with society. That is, Halbwachs defined collective memory as the recollections shared by the members of a certain society, that form a sense of place, time and social differentiation (Halbwachs 1992).

In the conceptual framework of Jan Assmann (Assmann 2008), cultural memory, that emerges with the development of history and culture of a certain society, is presented as not the same, but the sub-level of collective memory. It is transferred via texts, objects, rituals with the help of "specialized carriers of memory", or, in other word, by people with certain occupations, like, for example, poets or scholars.

According to Assmann, cultural memory needs to be differentiated from the communicative memory, that is also a sub-level of collective one, but stands on the social stage and represents the memory of actually living groups of people. It is diffused via daily interactions and communications within representatives of different generations.

Also, these types of memory are differentiated in the time of existence. Thus, cultural memory due to being institutionalized and transmitted hierarchically, could be served for hundreds of years, or even thousands. Meanwhile, communicative memory, according to Assmann, covers only about 80–100 years, i. e. the cycle of memory transmission among three or four generations, which caught the holder of real memory of certain events.

According to Anderson (Anderson 2006), memory can be exploited for political purposes via manipulation with it conducted by educational institutions. That is, as the author elaborates, through the educational process concrete events are shown from a certain angle in order to their

‘remembering’, that is absorbed by minds of young generations and implemented in the history they have direct relation to, e.g. their family’s history. Meanwhile, some other events and facts are ‘screened’ by those being shown. This framing of historical events makes history a plastic tool for manipulations with citizens’ minds (Anderson 2006).

Gray (2015) notes that museums are subject to influence and are compelled to adapt their actions to national policies within which they operate (Gray 2015). Given that the Museum observed is dedicated to the political history of the state, it inevitably adopts a politicized approach to the use of memory, particularly addressing the relationship between citizens and the state. Such a politicized use of memory is called memory politics. Malinova (Malinova 2017) defines memory politics as “the activity of the state and other actors aimed at asserting certain views of collective past and forming supporting cultural infrastructure, educational policies, and in some cases — legislative regulation” (Malinova 2017).

A particular case of memory politics that historical politics. According to Miller’s (Miller 2012) definition, it is the systematic manipulation of history, demonstrating it from the angle advantageous for the incumbent government, through the mobilization of the administrative and financial resources of the state (Miller 2012: 8). Malinova (Malinova 2015, 2019) argues that although the final official historical narrative is formed by historians, officials take active part in history interpretation and possess the resources to create an “infrastructure” of cultural memory, i.e. making changes to the calendar of holidays and memorable dates, establishing state symbols and awards, regulating official ceremonies, etc. (Malinova 2015; Malinova 2019).

All these concepts related to memory and politics are closely intertwined. Altogether, they are manifested in museums dedicated to Soviet history. Hence, Morozov and Sleptsova (2020) analyzed in their research more than 50 such Russian and foreign museums for the representation of the Soviet past via narratives constructed by the museum exhibition. It is noteworthy that the majority of museums examined in Morozov and Sleptsova’s study cover the same time period as the exhibition we are analyzing in its current state — from the Great Patriotic War or the immediate post-war period to the collapse of the USSR. Hence, they argue that the representation of the Soviet past in museums is highly dichotomous, which can be clearly divided into two main directions. The first direction views Soviet history as a process of destroying pre-revolutionary achievements and European values. These exhibitions focus on negative aspects such as collectivization, industrialization, repression, and the significant human toll. Another direction

represents an official discourse that concentrates more on the achievements of the Soviet era. As Morozov and Sleptsova note, such museums often receive government support and likely aim to showcase the diversity and grandeur of the Soviet experience. At the same time, such museums typically avoid mentioning ideological persecution and political repression (Morozov, Sleptsova 2020).

Museum Space and its Visitors

Although there is a great variety of studies investigating museum visitors' behavior, most of them were conducted in marketing or museological fields. Meanwhile, among the limited number of studies whose research field aligns with that of the present research, we observe a variety of approaches to studying the topic. Typically, as will be confirmed by the studies mentioned below, a comprehensive set of methods is used to explore museums as sites of memory and their visitors.

Zhang et al. (Zhang et al. 2018) used two post-colonial historical museums in Hong Kong and Macau as cases to explore the (re)construction of national identity based on the museum memory-making. The main methodology of the study was the critical discourse analysis (CDA), which implies the scrutinizing of speech on the presence of power relations and hidden meanings within a certain social context. Within this research framework, authors implemented several methods for analysis of the museums as text: they looked through promotional texts, museum artifacts and their placement within the exhibitions, analyzed and compared museum narratives in English and Chinese, and collected online reviews. They also conducted a covert observation of visitors' behavior, emphasizing on their engagement into guided tours, reactions on the perceived information, interactions with museum content and conversations, observing both tour guides and visitors. Observations indicated that visitors actively engage with the museum content, interpreting and negotiating their own identities in relation to the exhibits. The interactions between visitors and tour guides played a significant role in shaping these experiences (Zhang et al. 2018).

Tchouikina (Tchouikina 2019) looked at how the perception of the First World War constructed within the framework of historical policy is reflected in exhibitions dedicated to the event, and how those exhibitions in turn interact with the audience. She implemented visual analyses of exhibitions and interviews with their visitors, as well as analyzing visitors' feedback on websites and in feedback books. The author generally suggests that the

war is not reinterpreted in the discourse of contemporary authorities, but is used through inclusion in the current historical memory and the creation of emotional connections to create a certain image of Russia for its citizens and to construct a collective opinion on contemporary events, which corresponds to the general style of historical politics in Russia (Tchouikina 2019).

Leinhardt et al. (Leinhardt et al. 2003) examined how conversations in the museum space reflect identities and construct experiences of the visitors. According to the findings of the study, conversations demonstrate visitors' connection to the content presented. Moreover, they ensure visitor engagement, because it was observed that people who did not come alone and led the discussion, especially if it was a cohesive group like friends or relatives, engaged more and took more knowledge out of the exposition (Leinhardt 2003).

Although there is only one article that could be actual to the present research, the results achieved in them could have a great contribution to case exploration. Research conducted by Kravtsova and Omelchenko (Kravtsova, Omelchenko 2023), explores the perception of museums displaying the memory of GULAG within the urban space. They consider several historical Russian museums, including the Museum of Political History of Russia. The main objective of the study was to assess visitors' perceptions of museum narratives about Soviet repressions and the Gulag. In addition to the study of narratives themselves, the authors conducted focus groups in two age cohorts: young people (18–25, 30–35 years old) and older people (45–50 and 60+ years old). Thus, younger participants often noted a lack of knowledge about the history of Soviet political repression and the Gulag and an inability to form their personal attitudes to those events because of this. They also assume that most museums do not generate sufficient engagement to form emotional involvement and understanding of the tragic events. Older visitors, on the contrary, tend to have a deeper understanding of the history of repression due to their life experience and information available in the era of publicity. Moreover, they are more aware of local history than youth (Kravtsova, Omelchenko 2023).

Methodology and methods

So, as mentioned earlier, this study poses the following research question: *How do representatives of different age cohorts behave within the framework of the historical museum exhibition dedicated to the second half of the 20th century?*

Thus, this study analyzed social frames that exist within the museum space under consideration. According to the Goffman's (Goffman 1976) classical definition, social frames are schemes for interpreting events shaped by human actions and social contexts, that determine the ways in which individuals react and function within those contexts. In contemporary sociology, frame analysis is applied not only to social interactions among individuals but also to the functioning of institutions. The concept lacks a precise operationalization due to the wide variety of social situations it encompasses. Therefore, frame analysis provides a broad and flexible field for examining various contexts.

For a present research the methodology of frame analysis was chosen as this perspective frames the museum space as a particular social context for which individuals are expected to behave in a particular way. Here, the frame was understood as a specific social context formed within the space of the exhibition "Soviet Era" in actual time with certain memory and historical politics implemented in Russian society and with special position of memory about the second half of the 20th century with different degrees of presence of communicative memory about different periods in terms of remoteness from the present.

Thus, it was essential to first examine the semantic part of the exposition, i.e. the narratives presented, since they are the ones that shape the appropriate behavior for this social situation. This was done via narrative analysis, specifically the extraction of the narratives of the museum exhibition.

Additionally, visual analysis was implemented, which included investigation of the methods of regulating visitors' behavior via general arrangement of the museum space. Firstly, the placement of the different semantic elements of the exhibition on the stands was explored in order to assess which parts of the exhibition were likely to be most quickly and effortlessly grasped by the majority of visitors. Here, the categories of object-based saliency and location-based saliency were applied to the analysis (Krukar 2014). Thus, object-based saliency implies a visual attractiveness of the object, therefore, a particular attention should be paid to large, colorful and attractive objects, as they are more likely to be noticed by a large proportion of visitors. Such objects can include slogans, visual materials (e.g. pictures, posters), as well as material objects and reconstructions of premises, of which there are quite a lot in the considered exposition. Location-based saliency refers to the position of the exhibit in the room with a certain degree of visibility. Here the lighting of the stand and the convenience of viewing it in terms of the visitor's position within the exposition will be taken into

account. It is necessary for understanding the influence on visitors and their reactions.

The structural non-participant observation noted the size of the group, gender and approximate age of its members, the presence of an audio guide and / or belonging to an excursion group. Also, the parts of the exhibition that were approached, the time spent near them and the actions done with them (e.g. just looking, touching, reading) were considered. Hence, we were interested in how visitors engage with the exhibition, how interested they are in the information presented, what attracts their attention the most, and what opinions they express when they come in groups.

Moreover, structural observation included the emphasis on conversations between visitors. Although the analysis was not deep, the way of talking and topics discussed could have significant impact for understanding visitors' relations with exhibition and content presented within it. Due to lack of technical resources, it was not possible to record visitors' discussions, therefore they were briefly noted in the research diary. The codification was based on the research conducted by Leinhardt et al. (Leinhardt et al. 2003), in which authors analyzed recorded conversations of museum visitors, selecting individuals with varying levels of connection to the museum's theme (in that case, glass), the city in which the museum is located, and differing frequencies of museum visits. During the coding of these conversations, three main patterns of discussion were identified: identification; evaluation of quality, aesthetics, etc.; and expansion, or extended interaction with the museum content, which, in turn, includes three categories — analysis, synthesis and exploration.

For this part, the exhibition was sub-divided into 18 parts by the exposing methods and semantic content. Speaking of the themes of the parts extracted, for the parts that are capturing a singular stand, the topics were taken from the descriptions to these stands written on the brochures in English. Otherwise, the themes have been emphasized by relying on the thematic unity and the content presented.

The observations were conducted on Wednesdays, since it is a discount day at the museum and its hours are extended until 8 PM; on this day, the expectation was to see the most representatives of discounted groups, namely schoolchildren, students, and pensioners; on Saturdays, anticipating visits from working adults and families; on Thursdays, because, despite lower overall attendance, the museum attracts the most interested individuals and hosts school tours on these days. Data was collected around January to May 2024. A total of 21 observations were collected, of groups of people who came together or individual visitors, totalling 38 people.

Results

The description of the exhibition

As the ex-director of the Museum Evgeny Artemov states, the Museum of Political History of Russia is purely ideological, the narratives it sends to its visitors affect the moods and opinions existing within the society¹. Therefore, keeping in mind this self-positioning of the museum, understanding the mechanisms, especially political in this case, that influence the cultural memory preserved in the museum is of great importance when examining visitor behavior in such a space.

The exposition in question initially consists of three halls, divided into four eras — Stalin's pre-war rule, his administration of the country during and after the war, as well as the eras of Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's rule. However, the observed exhibition has been partially closed for re-exhibition since 2022. The section dedicated to the pre-war leadership of Stalin has been closed. Therefore, the analysis will focus on the part currently accessible to visitors, regardless of the closed sections.

The exhibition was developed and opened in 2006. Consequently, until 2022, when part of the exhibition was closed, it remained unchanged for 16 years, which is a considerable period for re-exhibition. During this time, it was almost never updated, and the cutting-edge technologies and exhibition methods from 2006 have since become quite outdated. I had the opportunity to speak with several museum employees, and they all named the obsolescence of the exhibition and the need to modernize it, incorporating innovations and contemporary technologies, as the primary reasons for such extensive changes.

The exhibition itself is a blend of official documentation, newspaper clippings, and a large amount of reference information, combined with objects familiar to many people living today — objects or reflections of events they have personally encountered: household items from that era, photographs, posters and drawings, memories and letters of real people, as well as footage from feature films of that time.

Thus, Table 1 shows the manual division of an exhibit into parts by exhibiting methods and thematic unity. Each part is named by a number and a unifying topic. These numbers would be further used for mentioning a certain exhibition's part.

¹ Как Музей политической истории в Петербурге возглавил бывший сотрудник госбезопасности. — 2023. 2 нояб. // ФОНТАНКА.ру — новости Санкт-Петербурга. — URL: <https://www.fontanka.ru/2023/11/02/72875372/> (дата обращения: 31.05.2024).

Table 1

Coding of the exhibit parts based on their division into semantic parts

Part's №	Name
<i>The hall devoted to the Great Patriotic War and postwar years of Stalin's reign</i>	
1	The reconstruction of a barrack and a kitchen in a communal flat
2	The portrait of Stalin with statements 'for' and 'against' his governing
3	Information stand 'USSR in the World War II and the first years after the war'
4	The object "Winner's overcoat"
5	Information stands 'USSR under Stalin in the post-war years'
6	The computer with materials of the Gulag Museum, created by 'Memorial' (the organization is recognized as a foreign agent on the territory of Russian Federation), 2004
7	The reconstruction of the cabinet of Stalin — "The Cabinet of the Leader"
<i>The hall telling about the Khrushchev's epoch</i>	
8	Information stand about prisoners of concentration camps
9	Information stand about people the people who took advantageous positions during Stalin's governance after the death of the leader — "Stalin's Successors"
10	Information stands 'Khrushchev's rise to power and characterisation of the period'
11	Information stand 'Art in the Thaw'
12	Stands highlighting the soviet people lifestyle and achievements of the national economy with objects and pictures, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 'Rising living standards' b. 'Industry achievements' c. 'Advances in planetary and space exploration' d. 'Increase in imports and rise in consumption level'
<i>The hall of Brezhnev's era</i>	
13	Information stands 'Life under Brezhnev', including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 'Improvement of the quality of life' b. 'Crisis of the social sphere'
14	Stand presenting folk art as a reflection of communist ideology in mass consciousness
15	Information stand 'The crisis of ideology'
16	Interactive stand with information of different epochs
17	Information stand 'Ideological education of children'
18	Information stand 'Hunger and poverty' about the Novocherkassk riot

The main element of the museum space as a frame is the semantic part embedded in different parts of the exposition. When considering the behavior of museum visitors, it is important to consider it at least because people are expected to react to different topics in a certain way. The way and with what topics people interact can speak about their understanding of the social situation they are in and a certain attitude to it.

Being a state museum, the exposition of the Museum of Political History of Russia is apparently subject to governmental influence. However, the museum's specificity lies in its dedication to the political history of the country, making it impossible to completely avoid this topic in its narratives.

It is important to consider that the information from the closed section could have had a significant impact on the perception of the now open part of the exhibition. Having used the guidebook on the exposition in question², it was found out that the closed part of the exposition was devoted to Big Terror and the Gulag, as well as the part telling about ideological dictatorship, propaganda, forced industrialisation and forced collectivisation. All these events are described there as inhumane, causing hunger, poverty and countless deaths. This "detached" portion not only creates a "gap" in the narrative but may also influence the museum's portrayal of the political activities of the ruling elite of that era.

When discussing the narratives, it is essential to mention that the primary goal of the exhibition's creators was to preserve the memory of the recent past, paying attention both to the victims of state repression and to the achievements of several generations of Soviet people. Additionally, they aimed to prompt visitors to reflect on the relationship between the individual and the state³. The exhibition's narrative is built around this central idea.

Thus, Table 2 highlights the main themes of the exhibition, the sections of the exhibition, and the objects that embody these themes. The commentary provides an overview of the intended message conveyed through the mention of each specific theme.

² Советская эпоха: Между утопией и реальностью 1918–1985: Проспект-альбом экспозиции / Авт.-сост. Е. К. Костюшева, А. П. Смирнов, Ю. Б. Соколов; ред. А. М. Кулегин, Н. В. Федорова. — СПб.: Норма, 2014. — 96 с., ил.

³ Когда экспонаты «говорят своим голосом». — 2006. 11 сент. [Сайт музея] // Музей политической истории России. — URL: <https://polithistory.ru/museum-history/history-2006-09-11> (дата обращения: 22.04.2024).

The predominant narratives presented in the majority of museums dedicated to the Soviet Union are as follows: the housing of the Soviet people; the childhood of the Soviet child, including the Pioneer and Komsomol movements; artefacts or items promoting the Soviet ideology; and the Great Patriotic War.

Thus, looking at Table 2, we see that the main narratives prevalent among most museums dedicated to the era are also maintained in the exposition of the Museum of Political History of Russia. This museum similarly uses household items, presents food from the Brezhnev era, and showcases typical living spaces from that time, evoking nostalgia for life in the Soviet Union among people whose childhood and youth occurred during that period. However, this is done without romanticizing the past, presenting a balanced view that shows both the economically prosperous years and the poor times with uncomfortable living conditions.

Due to the museum's specific focus, a significant portion of the exposition is devoted to the state and the political and economic processes of the era. In its reevaluation of the relationship between the state and its citizens through the exhibition narratives, we observe diverse, well-articulated, and reasoned perspectives regarding the political processes of the era under consideration. The creators of the exhibition address both the country's achievements and the repressions and crises that occurred during the times of all three featured state leaders, without imparting a clear emotional tone to the narrative. However, as noted, industrial achievements are highlighted specifically as the accomplishments of the people and workers, rather than being directly attributed to the party or the ruling elite.

Speaking about the presented narratives, it is important to mention separately the representation of Stalin's personality, because his era, firstly, is precisely in the transitional position between communicatively transmitted memory and cultural memory, and secondly, it is itself a controversial era, which can be framed in different ways to achieve different perceptions of him. These characteristics make it possible to use it within the framework of historical politics.

Hence, that epoch is quite often touched upon in his speeches and historical writings by the Russian President Vladimir Putin. According to the President, we should not forget about the horrors of Stalinism, but also "excessive demonisation of Stalin is one of the ways of attacking the Soviet Union and Russia"⁴.

⁴ Путин рассказал о своем отношении к Сталину. — (2017. 16 июня // РИА Новости. — URL: <https://ria.ru/20170616/1496623625.html> (дата обращения: 22.04.2024).

Table 2
Main narratives of the observed exhibition

Topic	Parts of exhibition & specific objects		Comment
	part	description	
Soviet Leaders	2	Positive and negative traits of Stalin as leader from the perspective of his coevals	<p>When it comes to the narrative of the leaders and the time of their reign, a great deal of attention is paid to Stalin. Most likely, the narrative is constructed in this way due to the contradictory nature of his personality and the period of his rule, which is predominantly articulated through the dichotomy of repression and the rapid boost of industry.</p> <p>Here, the preponderance goes in favor of censoring the cruelty of the rulers, since the period of rule of each leader, and of Stalin in particular, is described with mention of all the repressions and cruelties next to the mention of the successes of industry</p>
	7	A neat and discreet office with a portrait of Stalin on the wall and a statue of Lenin on a shelf; books are displayed behind glass in the shelf. At the same time, the description of the reconstruction talks about the lack of electability, bribery and privilege of the ruling elite, and mentions the repression imposed on the ruling elites too	
	9	The stand focuses on the lives of people who gained status under Stalin's bloody regime and how, after the leader's death, some of them had to pay for it	
	10a	The stand is devoted to Khrushchev's rise to power and the dissipation of Stalin's personality cult; brochures of the time are given, where Khrushchev is presented as a folk hero and his report as a feat	
	10b	The stand describes the distinctive features of Khrushchev's rule, focusing mainly on the introduction of a large number of new initiatives, reforms, and the reliance of Khrushchev's discourse on competition with America, e.g. the goal of overtaking the US in terms of food production	

	<p>1 The reconstruction of a barrack presents the arrangement of a cramped and dark room. Of the household items there is a cast iron kettle, a hand sewing machine, a record player, a mirror and a toolbox. A portrait of Stalin hangs above the window. Next to it on the wall there are photos of a large number of people who lived in such conditions</p> <p>The communal kitchen is shrunken with old shabby furniture, the floor is laid with tiles popular in the USSR. There is a toy car on the floor. The window overlooks the St. Petersburg rooftops</p>		<p>When describing Soviet life, the exhibition developers used clear and easily recognizable cultural codes, such as housing and food. All of them are vividly represented by real objects and actually describe life in that era quite objectively, without embellishments, but without pampering</p>
12a	<p>The improvement in the quality of life under Khrushchev is represented here, and the objects that demonstrate this — clothes, suitcases, money — are displayed in the foreground, while posters from that era praising the achievements of industry are shown on the wall</p>		
12d	<p>The stand features a cardboard figure of a Soviet woman sitting on a bench with a large number of packages of Soviet and imported food from the Brezhnev era arranged around her. In the background is a photograph of people reaching out to each other in a queue, probably in order to get their hands on the good stuff</p>		

Home and Life in the Soviet Union

Table 2 (ending)

Topic	Parts of exhibition & specific objects		Comment
	part	description	
Ideology	10a	The upper part of the stand describes the changes in ideology that came with Khrushchev's rise to power, in particular the dissolution of Stalin's cult of personality and the new programme for building communism	This topic is not covered as much as all the others, but it still needs to be mentioned because it exposes the state's manipulation of public consciousness and identity
	17	This stand explains how ideology was spread through education and educational work with children, as well as the Pioneer and Komsomol movements	
Industrial Achievements	5	The reconstruction of the country in the post-war period and the achievements of science and industry are recounted	While we can easily attribute certain achievements to a particular era, there is no attribution of the successes of industry to political figures. The successes in science and industry are presented as primarily the merits of the people and individuals who have made tremendous efforts for the public good
	12b	The stand displays work uniforms, photographs of happy industrial workers, motivational posters and slogans, and letters from people who themselves asked to be employed, for the welfare of the Motherland	
	12c	The stand is dedicated to Yuri Gagarin's space flight; it contains the cosmonaut's personal belongings and documents, which were given to the museum by his family	
Oppression of Soviet Citizens by the State	3	The stand presents extracts from diaries of Gulag prisoners describing their harsh living conditions	We can see that the largest part of the exposition is about the repression of the state and the suffering of the people because of it.

Oppression of Soviet Citizens by the State		The line of oppression from the state stretches through the entire exposition, and in the parts devoted to Brezhnev and Khrushchev, even though repression was indeed less than under Stalin, it is still mentioned. But while Brezhnev and Khrushchev have a few booths, Stalin has references to murder and camps in almost every part of the hall
4	The overcoat belongs to former military man Pavel Sereda, who after the war wrote a letter to Stalin with his views on the political course, for which he was exiled to a camp for 10 years, rehabilitated in 1955	
5	Next to the enumeration of achievements and discoveries, it tells about the scientists shot and repressed by the state, as well as about economical problems, resource constraints, hunger and inequality	
6	Database containing information on victims of political repression and documents on the history of political terror in the USSR	
8	The stand is dedicated to the victims of the Gulag, in particular their rehabilitation. In addition to archival documents, a suitcase with which E. Voznesensky, who was repressed in the "Leningrad Case", returned from the camp, is presented here	
11	The upper part of the stand talks about Khrushchev's "thaw" era, and here it talks about repression directed at artists and censorship	
16	This part of the exposition is an interactive stand with documentary films about life in different eras reviewed in the exposition. Repressions are mentioned there, and there is even a separate film about the Novoherkassk putsch	
18	It is clear from the stand that it talks about famine and popular unrest, posters with demands and caricatures are shown. However, without reading a description of the stand it is not clear that it is about the Novoherkassk strikes, during which people were shot	

In his June 2020 article, Putin also said that although Stalin's policies were full of contradictions, he was a calculating ruler who made balanced decisions for the benefit and preservation of the Soviet Union⁵. The tendency to normalize the image of Stalin in the official narratives was also underlined in previous researches (Ferretti 2002; Arkhina 2021). This is important to consider because such manipulations of collective memory can have an impact on the behavior and reactions of individuals as they interact with the memory of that era.

There is an example in the history of the exposition that could be considered as an indicator of presence of such historical politics leading to a gradual change in public consciousness. The portrait of Stalin, that greets visitors immediately upon entering the exhibition, is surrounded on the one hand by statements from his contemporaries, such as Lenin and Khrushchev, condemning him as a manager, and on the other hand by praise for him, such as those of Roosevelt and Tolstoy. Previously, Stalin's portrait was designed differently: it was placed "behind a bar", which was meant to show the public censure directed at him, as well as responsibility for the crimes that were committed against the Soviet people. Noteworthy, such changes were introduced due to visitors' complaints about the disrespectful representation of the Soviet leader. Comparing these two representations of a Soviet leader, the present one could create a more human image of Stalin.

During the investigation of the narratives, the inconsistency between the information perceived by visitors visually and actual narratives underlying the exhibition was found. The entire exhibition is fundamentally based on the relations between state and its citizens, especially emphasizing the memory of repressions. However, the main message is embedded in the texts and labels accompanying the exhibits, which a visitor who views the exhibition superficially may overlook. In some cases, these texts are even "hidden" in drawers that visitors rarely open. Thus, for example, on the stand dedicated to creativity during the Thaw, the prominent part of the stand shows the lines that catch the visitors' eye; one might assume that it is dedicated specifically to the ideologized creativity of that time, to ridiculing bourgeois creators. But in fact, the main information is contained in the boxes under the stand, which detail the work of the sixties, as well as the censorship and repression imposed on them. Because of this discrepancy, the meaning of the exhibition can change depending on the beholder: their itinerary, attention to detail, and personal views and personal memories.

⁵ Vladimir Putin: The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II [Text]. — 2020. June 18 // The National Interest; The Center for the National Interest. — URL: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/vladimir-putin-real-lessons-75th-anniversary-world-war-ii-162982> (дата обращения: 27.01.2025).

It is worth mentioning that these are narratives presented, importantly, by the museum. However, the viewers, interacting with the exposition in different ways, will of course read them in different ways as well. What is important is that during a superficial inspection of the exhibition, due to the fact that the stands contain a large amount of text that is not visible but important for understanding the idea of the authors of the exposition, the narratives may be read in a different way than they are.

There are some technical aspects in the exhibition design that also could have an impact on the behavior of individuals within the observed frame.

When talking about the museum's regulation of visitors' behavior, it is worth mentioning guided tours, as it is a direct way to regulate individuals' routes. So, if we talk about excursions with an accompanying guide, then the exhibition is covered by only one, overview, tour, which briefly goes through the most popular exhibits. There is no separate tour for this exposition. At the moment, as it turned out during the observation, even the overview tours are passing by the space of the observed exhibition due to the blocking of a part of the route because of the re-exposure. Therefore, there was no ability to analyze them.

On the other hand, the exposition is still supported by audio guides and guides in the *izi.travel* app⁶, the content of which is generally the same. Thus, audio guides touch on exhibits throughout the museum that have the greatest historical value. In the exposition under review, the guides cover food coupons from stand 5, the "Winner's Overcoat" (4), the communal room (1), the leader's office (7), Beria's bust (9), audio recordings on X-rays (11), elephant figurines (12a), personal belongings of Yuri Gagarin (12c).

The arrangement of exhibited objects also plays a role in behavior of visitors within the space and on the perception of the narratives. Starting from the object-based saliency, from this point of view, within the exposition in question, the most noticeable exhibits should be, first of all, parts 1, 4, 7, 9, 12, as these are reconstructions or authentic objects of the time, which should attract the eye in the first place, as most of the stands contain a lot of information that needs to be read. Also, the portrait of Stalin (2) and slogans at eye level should be attractive, such as in the stand dedicated to Khrushchev's activities (10b), or in the stand about art in his era. In other stands, posters and slogans are either too high or have almost no eye-catching elements at all. Also worth noting here are interactive elements 6 and 16, which should have been attractive, but because they provide additional

⁶ Государственный музей политической истории России // IZI Travel. — URL: <https://izi.travel/ru/81ca-gosudarstvennyy-muзей-politicheskoy-istorii-rossii/ru> (дата обращения: 31.05.2024).

historical background, they are likely to be accessed only by those deeply interested in the topic.

Moving on to location-based saliency, we should say what was meant by it in the context of this exposition. First of all, with regard to the illumination of the exposition elements, the problem with it arose at stand 12c, dedicated to Gagarin. Probably, the poor illumination here is an idea of the exhibition designers, as the satellite hanging opposite can be seen in the reflection. However, in view of this and in contrast to other bright stands, this one remains unnoticeable.

Due to the fact that the exposition room is relatively small, all its parts are in plain view and are easy enough to notice as you move through the rooms. Parts 12 b, d, 13 and 14 are particularly easy to see here, as there is an ottoman next to them and they can be viewed sitting down. Stand 15 is not in the most favorable position, as it has a low object-based saliency and is located right next to the exit. Also, now that one of the exits of the exhibition is blocked due to the re-exposure, the exhibition ceases to be a through exhibition and part 1 of exhibit becomes a small separate room that is easy to just pass by.

Additionally, we can infer that the high object-based saliency of certain exhibits can draw attention to neighboring objects. Consequently, in sections of the exhibition where there are no highly attractive objects, exhibits with low object-based saliency will also have lower location-based saliency compared to objects in more advantageous positions. For instance, objects with low object-based saliency such as 3, 5, 6, 13, 14, and 18 are located near attractive objects, whereas sections 8, 10a, 15, 16, and 17 lack such adjacent attractive objects.

Thus, the sections of the exhibition with the highest potential saliency for visitors should be sections 1, 4, 7, 9, 11, and 12a. These sections possess a high level of attractiveness and are highlighted by audio guides, which increases the likelihood of visitor attention. For visitors who come without the accompaniment of an audio guide, sections 2, 10b, 12b, and 12d are also added.

How do visitors behave within the museum space framework?

First of all, most of the visitors of the exposition examine most of the stands rather superficially, paying about 20–30 seconds to many stands. During such an inspection, due to the peculiarities of the methods of exhibiting in this museum, it is very difficult to grasp the main idea laid down by the authors of the exposition, as it is contained not so much in the

objects presented there, and especially not in the visual materials, but in the texts and captions to the stands and exhibits.

Visitors most frequently paid attention to sections 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 12a, 12b, and 12d of the exhibition (with at least 7 interactions from visitors, i.e., $\geq 30\%$). Among these, sections 3 and 5 are not inherently highly attractive, as these stands are entirely composed of texts. However, given that there is a small number of visitors who pay a lot of attention and are deeply involved in the exhibition, it is likely that very few people read the texts, which are important for assimilating the narrative, and most of them paid attention exclusively to the large visual materials (posters, posters, photographs).

Regarding sections with the highest levels of engagement, sections 1, 6, 7, and 12a stand out (with a minimum of 3 observations showing high engagement, or 2 with high and at least 3 with medium engagement). Notably, sections 1 and 12a focus on Soviet daily life, likely sparking significant interest and discussion. Sections 1 and 7 are reconstructions, making them highly attractive and complete systems of easily recognizable codes, which are also easy to perceive. Section 6, however, attracts individuals already interested in the topic, as it contains minimal visual materials, but the main screen clearly indicates the type of information available in the computer materials presented.

Furthermore, we observe a much higher density of interactions, including high engagement, in the first hall (sections 1–7), which is dedicated to the post-war leadership of Stalin. There are slightly fewer interactions in the part of the second hall dedicated to Khrushchev's leadership (sections 8–12a and 12c), and they are almost absent in the section covering the Brezhnev era (sections 12b, 12d–18).

Since the perception of a historical exhibition, particularly one about a recent era, is intertwined with personal memory, the analysis of visitors' behavior takes into account the age groups to which they belong. Thus, 4 age groups were identified for further analysis: adolescents (up to 20 years old), since they were born long after the USSR; youth (20–40 years old), born a few years before and after the collapse of the USSR, who, unlike teenagers, even if they did not catch the USSR era personally, but caught the consequences of its collapse; adults (40–60 years old), who caught the USSR at a fairly conscious age; and elderly (over 60 years old), who associate quite a large part of their lives with the Soviet Union. Groups consisting of representatives from different age cohorts were also specifically examined. Their communication with each other and interaction with the exhibition are of particular interest as examples of the transmission of communicative memory.

Adolescents (aged under 20 years). Teenagers were the smallest group of visitors among those considered. It can be assumed that this is because older generations visit the museum consciously and willingly, whereas teenagers often visit under the guidance of adults, most frequently as part of school trips. As noted earlier, even a general tour of the museum does not currently cover the exhibit in question, as it is undergoing re-exhibition, therefore, teenagers likely visit this exhibit just out of curiosity.

A total of three observations were collected for this group, consisting of two pairs (one boy and one girl each) and one group of four teenagers. Adolescents generally view the exhibit very superficially and do not take many aspects seriously. They focus on visual materials and large captions, while the texts on the displays are rarely read. In terms of thematic content, teenagers paid more attention to those elements of the exposition that were directly related to the personalities of leaders, such as Stalin or Khrushchev, whom they know from their history course. The most attractive elements for the observed teenagers were the reconstructions, stands with eye-catching slogans, and a portrait of Stalin. Each group treated the exhibit more as a novelty, often taking sarcastic photos. They typically spent no more than 30 seconds at each stand, mainly to take pictures. In discussions about the exhibit, which it was possible to observe, teenagers often joked, sometimes upon historical events.

Youth (20–40 years). Regarding the composition of the visitor groups, there were a total of 7 observed groups. That is, there were two groups of two women each, two pairs, each consisting of a male and a female, two single male visitors, and a woman who was accompanied by a man who was just waiting for her.

Despite the fact that apparently easier-to-understand visual materials and reconstructions still have a greater appeal, representatives of this group, unlike the previous one, touch also those containing exclusively written information, which requires a special level of involvement. Those people who viewed the exhibition alone seemed to be less engaged, they were not very involved in the interactions with the exhibits. Thus, they mostly lingered exclusively at easily perceived objects, such as reconstructions, and hardly read the texts near the exhibits.

Regarding visitors that could be considered as engaged, they paid attention to most parts of the exhibition and spent a significant amount of time on certain exhibits. Notably, there was a group of two women who purposefully went to the computer and spent considerable time there, discussing materials about the repressions and searching for information about their relatives. All these engaged groups consisted of pairs of two people who actively discussed what they saw and exchanged known historical facts related to the

exhibition. It is important to note that mostly discussions of engaged visitors were based on theory rather than recollections shared by older relatives as their conversations often included the phrases “I read that...”, or “I heard that...” without reference to their relatives. However, there still were some moments when they mentioned personal or familial connections: for instance, in a group of male and female, a man recalled a flag similar to one his grandmother had, and he shared the story behind it near section 12b. In a group of two females, one of the women remembered how a relative caused a fire in a communal kitchen while observing the kitchen’s reconstruction. Interestingly, these groups also actively interacted with the exhibition’s interactive elements, listening to audio recordings, watching videos, and using the provided databases to search for additional information.

Adults (40–60 years). As for the adult group, there were only 5 observations: a pair consisting of a male and a female, two groups of two females each, and two independent female visitors. Visual objects, particularly reconstructions and items specific to certain eras, received the most attention. Presumably, it is due to the small sample size, but most of the groups engaged with the exhibition rather superficially: they talked on the phone, discussed unrelated topics, or focused more on the setting than on the content of the exhibition. However, even the less interested adults interact with the exhibition in a completely different manner compared to teenagers. They mostly took photographs of some striking and large visual elements, such as reenactments, caricatures, and everyday objects. Additionally, they do not exhibit the same focused attention on the figure of Stalin. Even if they are indifferent, they do not perceive the historical narratives as frivolously as teenagers do.

There was only one group that could be considered as engaged, with two females in it. The women began their exploration of the exhibition with a film about the Novochoerkassk massacre and then discussed state repression for a considerable time. After the film, they explored a database of political repression victims, searching for their relatives. Not finding them, they expressed some frustration, as they already had information about the existence of such relatives. They concluded their interaction with the exhibition by examining products from their childhood, commenting that “things were better before”.

Elderly (60+ years). The observed groups of visitors above 60 years old included two women, two single women, and a pair of male and female. Almost all the participants demonstrate a relatively high level of engagement with the various themes presented in the exhibition. Certainly, here, as in other groups, primary attention is directed towards visual materials and

physical objects. However, the interaction with them by the older people is likely driven more by the memories encapsulated within such objects. Overall, observations of elderly people reveal that they pay particular attention to aspects of the exhibition that are familiar to them and related to their own memories of childhood and youth. For instance, a group of two women spent a considerable amount of time near the reconstruction of a communal kitchen discussing memories associated with living in a communal apartment during their childhood or with household items and furniture. Another couple, a man and a woman, looked at the installation of the kitchen of a communal apartment and discussed for quite a long time the objects they themselves used and which are still lying somewhere in their garage and on the mezzanine. In contrast to the youngest age cohort, and indeed to all younger age groups, elderly people exhibit a special empathy towards the victims of the Stalinist regime and pay more careful attention to the displays dedicated to this topic. Their interest in the subject is also evident in their discussions. Even during solitary visits to the exhibition, there is still a higher level of attention and engagement compared to similar solitary visits by representatives of other ages.

Mixed-aged groups. In mixed-generation groups, there were only two observations, but for the aforementioned reasons, they warrant separate consideration. The first group consisted of two women, one around 35 years old and the other around 60, likely a mother and daughter. They toured almost the entire exhibition together, discussing some exhibits with each other. They briefly viewed sections 7, 5, 3, and 10b, spending no more than a minute at each and only looking without any other interactions, indicating a low level of involvement according to our classification. In each section, they notably focused on mundane details; for example, at the “Leader’s Office”, they commented on having a similar lamp at home. Their discussions about the exhibition also revolved around everyday matters, e.g. the mother was telling the daughter that products used to be better in the past.

In another observation, there were two females who appeared to be approximately 30 and 60 years old respectively, and the male who was about 70 years old. A young woman was the first to enter the exposition, and she had a rather cursory look at the reconstructions (1) and the stand devoted to the dispelling of the cult of personality by Khrushchev (10a). She was then approached by an elderly man and woman, and it was clear from their interactions that they were together. The couple also went to look at the reconstructions (1), and they stayed there for quite a while and had a long discussion about life in Soviet times and Soviet politics. At a certain point, near the barrack reconstruction, the male mentioned

that it housed the “builders of the future happy life” with a sarcastic tone. They further discussed the communal kitchen, with one of the elderly women recalling her childhood in a communal flat. She then mentioned visiting a vast communal room on Vasileostrovskaya, remarking that it had identical cabinets to those of her parents. Additionally, she mentioned that a former soldier had lived in such a room, for which the male said that soldier was “rewarded for executing people well”. At this time a young girl was standing nearby on her phone, looking completely disinterested. During their exit from the exhibit, they engaged in a discussion about Soviet repressions. The male asked, “Who wrote 25,000 denunciations against each other? Did Stalin write them?” to which the elderly woman replied, “It’s the same nowadays.”

Discussion and conclusion

Hence, the present research was aimed to explore the people’s behavior within the frame of the exhibition ‘Soviet Era’ in the Museum of Political History of Russia. The methods of structural observation, content analysis and visual analysis were implemented for the analysis of the construction of the museum frame and the visitors’ behavior within it.

It was observed that due to the found inconsistency between real and perceived narratives of the exhibition, the meaning of the exhibition may vary depending on the observer — their route, attention to detail, as well as personal views and memories. For example, for some older visitors, the exhibition about the repressions became more of a showcase of familiar household items, large and conspicuous ones, and they paid little or no attention to the overarching narrative of the exhibition.

We observed that individuals in younger age cohorts mostly approach the exhibition without empathy, viewing it without engaging their personal memories or emotions. Adolescents (below 20), in particular, often take the exhibition lightly, making jokes and taking selfies against the background of historical exhibits. It seems that for teenagers, Soviet history is a meme or a brand. The youth group (20–40) can be conditionally divided into two categories: some engage with the exhibition on a very superficial level, while others delve deeply into the topic, actively utilizing the multimedia materials on display, such as the database of victims of Stalinist repression and documentary films about different periods of the USSR. This differs significantly from the behavior within this exposition of people of older ages, who, even if not very interested exactly in the topics being reprised,

get involved emotionally, show more empathy. Among the group of adults (40–60), people often paid attention to familiar objects, shared memories and facts from their biography, most often household ones. People from the older group (over 60) reacted to the exposition in a similar way. In addition, it was in this group that visitors paid the most attention to the victims of state repressions, demonstrating compassion for the victims, discussing the horrors of terror and war. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Kravtsova and Omelchenko (2023). As reflected in their results, younger generations often lack the knowledge and immersion in the exhibition's context, which manifests differently in their behavior: some try to fill this gap by engaging more deeply, while others, due to a lack of interest, make no effort to absorb new information from the exhibition. Older visitors, on the other hand, heavily rely on their personal memories and experiences, which influences the objects they pay attention to and the topics they discuss in groups.

To summarize, this study reinforces already existing findings in the research field and also makes a contribution to a rather understudied field at the moment. The research is presumed to be just an opportunity to form and test a methodology for investigation of the behavior of museum visitors as a space of interaction with memory. The advantage of the chosen method in particular is its independence from the already reflexive attitudes toward memory that can be developed, for example, in interviewing. A limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size of observed visitors, which may not be representative of all visitors. Moreover, lack of resources has to be considered, that is lack of technical equipment (e.g. for recording visitors' conversations), limited time for observation conduction and lack of manpower for data collection. By expanding on mentioned areas, the study may bring more insights to the field of research related to the interaction of individuals and collective memory, the transmission and dissemination of memory, and working with memory politics.

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**THE MUSEUM SPACE AS A MEDIUM
IN INTERACTION OF PUBLIC WITH MEMORY:
THE ANALYSIS OF VISITORS' BEHAVIOR
OF THE EXHIBITION "SOVIET ERA" IN THE MUSEUM
OF POLITICAL HISTORY OF RUSSIA**

Abstract. The article is devoted to the study of the perception of museum expositions about the Soviet era by visitors of different age groups. Based on the case study of the exhibition "The Soviet Era" at the Museum of Political History of Russia in St. Petersburg, a frame analysis was conducted that considers the museum space as a social context in which visitors exhibit various behaviors. For this purpose, methods of visual analysis of the museum space, content analysis of the narratives of the exposition and structured observation of the behavior of visitors were used. The study revealed that younger age groups (under 40 years old) perceive exposure without emotional involvement, unlike older ones, who interpret events through the prism of personal experience. Discrepancies were also found between the narratives embedded in the exposition and their perception by visitors, which is due to the attentiveness and route of viewing the exposition.

Keywords: museum, visitors' behavior, memory politics, cultural memory, communicative memory.

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