



UNIVERSITY OF TARTU

**University Museums in their University
Context: The Case of Making the New
Permanent Exhibition of the University of Tartu
Natural History Museum**

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How did the university context affect the exhibition curators?

- Setting the goals. **Why** to create the permanent exhibition?
- Envisioning modes to engage the audiences. **How** to engage the audiences?



UT Natural History Museum, founded in 1802

Research profile:

- Collections in geology, zoology, botany and mycology.
- Estonian research infrastructure projects 2011-2015 and 2016-2021.
- Biodiversity cloud database PlutoF.

Educational and cultural profile:

- Exhibitions, educational programmes, events.

The permanent exhibitions from the 1920ies and 1970ies. The focus on university students



The permanent exhibition from 2016. The focus on audiences from outside the university



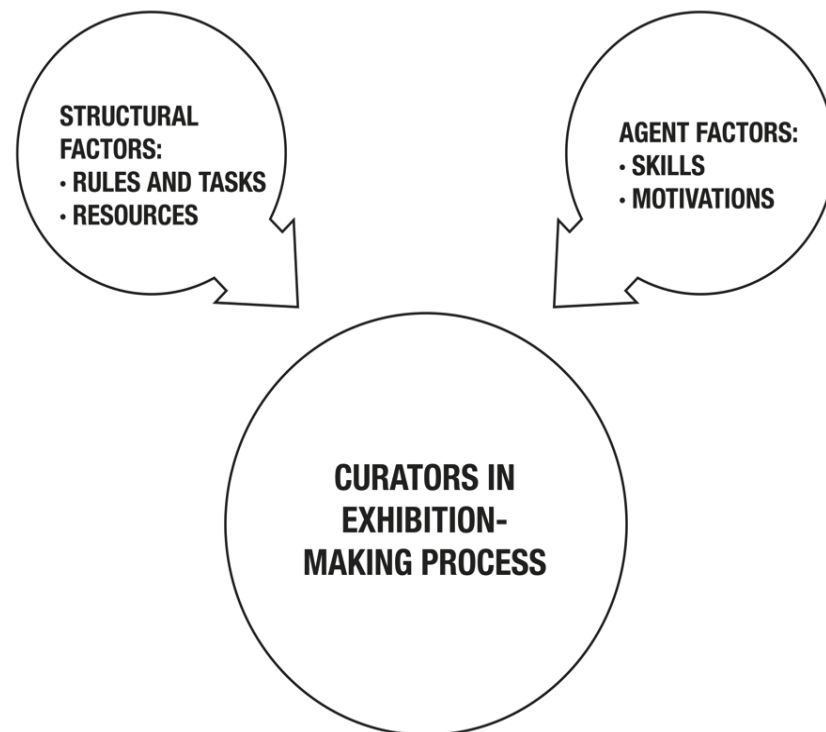
16 semi-structured interviews with exhibition curators

- 6 zoologists, 2 botanists, 4 geologists, 1 historian, 2 semioticians, 1 it-specialist.
- 7 researchers and university teachers, 3 museum teachers.
- 8 people having work experience at the previous exhibition; 8 people without any work experience at the previous exhibition.
- Different roles in the process of exhibition production.

Many thanks to Dr. Krista Lepik for conducting the interviews.

The theoretical approach

The structuration theory by A. Giddens (1984)





Goals of the permanent exhibition

1. To raise awareness about nature and environment protection
2. To make the museum a sustainable and prestigious institution



The envisioned modes to engage the audiences

1. Teaching
2. Attracting attention
3. Collaboration with audiences
4. Serving stakeholders

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Impact of the university context

Structure:

- The project goals and rules set by the agreement between the university and the project's financing agency.
- The task to offer non-formal educational activities;
- The collections as the resource.

Agent:

- The motivation to contribute to science-based society, prestige and visibility of their fields of sciences in society.
- The responsibility to carry on the work of previous generations of museum curators;
- To earn the approval from academic colleagues. The power of experts.



Audiences

- **Demographic features: age; language; origin.**
- Roles: pupils/teachers; teachers; family members; tourists; specialists; lay visitors.
- Motivations (as described by J. Falk, 2011): explorers, facilitators; professionals/hobbyists; experience seekers; rechargers; respectful pilgrims; affinity seekers.



The conclusion

Awareness about the factors affecting the exhibition-making process helps achieving exhibitions that have stronger impact on the audiences.

Exhibition is a process. We can develop and enrich it as a cultural space and contribute to people's self-description related to ecological awareness, so that real interactions will start to take place and reach our common cultural awareness from that material ground that we have created.



A thought from one of the interviews:

Exhibition is a process. We can develop and enrich it as cultural space and contribute to people's self-description in relations to ecological awareness, so that real interactions will start to take place and reach our common cultural awareness from that material ground that we have created.



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Thank you!