

History, commemorative spaces and heritage: interpretation of 20th century Hungarian traumas in the 21st century

Worldwide
Hospitality and
Tourism Themes

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Received 9 March 2025

Revised 19 May 2025

7 June 2025

Accepted 10 June 2025

Abstract

Purpose – This research paper examines 20th century memorial sites in Hungary with a variety of themes, which attempt to process historical events at the national and local levels of memory and identity building after the totalitarian regimes. The focus of the study is on the process of heritagization and institutionalisation, so the main analytical aspects of our examination are as follows: what – political, economical, cultural, etc – intents can be discerned in their creation and operation; to what extent have they become the heritage of the local or national community and to what extent are they attractions and whether they operate as a memorial site in terms of new museology.

Design/methodology/approach – Methodology includes cultural statistical data analysis and management interviews.

Findings – The development and ritualisation of political memory after the change of regime can be seen as the most decisive factor in the process of institutionalisation, in which the civil sphere is also active as the guardian of communicative memory. The degree of national embeddedness is high, and in the case of the museums in Budapest, the role of international tourism is prominent. In addition to the emphasis on personal knowledge transfer, some of the institutions use special forms of presentation that are tailored to the specific memory space and require interactivity.

Originality/value – The musealisation, cultural role and interpretational toolkit of the memorial topography of the 20th century's collective traumas is a gap in Hungarian tourism research. Results are expected to contribute to the development of the dark tourism supply in Hungary in a way that involves and sensitizes both the local community and visitors and takes into account sustainable tourism aspects.

Keywords Memory processing, Heritage, Musealization, Interpretation, Dark tourism, Hungary

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The emphasis on memory research and trauma processing in the social sciences, in parallel with the rise of human geography studies within the spatial turn, is leading to new approaches in tourism research. The creation of memory spaces reflecting the perceptual changes in the concept of 20th century traumas as social constructs at national, religious, ethnic and cultural levels, can have a major, often international, tourism appeal (whether spontaneous, local or official memory policy initiatives). The concept of creation and maintenance depends on the interpretation, i.e. the presentation of the message of heritage conservation and musealisation



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Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism
Themes
Vol. 17 No. 4, 2025
pp. 497-510
Emerald Publishing Limited
e-ISSN: 1755-4225
p-ISSN: 1755-4217
DOI 10.1108/WHATT-03-2025-0093

in a way that is tailored to the demand, which is a very sensitive area and an exciting research topic in many respects. This sensitivity arises both from the changing approach to the politics of memory, which sometimes provokes public debate, and from the involvement of individuals, communities and their descendants who have suffered trauma. All these factors make the socio-cultural sustainability aspect of the design and operation of memorial sites of paramount importance, as well as the visitor economy approach, which is based less on traditional interpretations of tourism. The study of this topic is particularly timely and valid for a Central-Eastern European country such as Hungary, which has been strongly affected by the historical cataclysms of the 20th century.

The aim of the present study is to examine memorial sites as attractions in Hungary based on the legacy of 20th century wars, revolutions and totalitarian regimes. The focus of the research is on institutionalisation, the dichotomy of locally embedded attractions, and interpretation according to new museological principles, which can be seen as a research gap in the tourism-oriented interpretation of attractions in the Hungarian literature. Our research questions are:

- RQ1. What factors have influenced the institutionalisation of the memory spaces under study?
- RQ2. What is the role of the memorial spaces in local and national culture and tourism?
- RQ3. To what extent does the interpretation of traumatic heritage reflect the principles and tools of the new museology?

2. Literature background

2.1 *The process of manifestation of cultural memory*

In Keszei's words, "Memory as a dynamic process makes the past part of the present"; this appropriate quotation reveals the importance of the topic and the excitement of its constant change, which is always attractive to the researcher (Keszei, 2010, p. 6). The paradigm shifts in memory research in the last decades of the previous century are also decisive in our postmodern era. Nora's (2010) theory and system of lieux de mémoire ("places of memory") understands the process of the development of French national memory as a cultural tradition determined by historical events as opposed to other factors such as geography and economy, as in the Braudelian concept. Since Assmann (2018), we can talk about the different ways of approaching memory as a social, cultural activity, i.e. as a social construction. Communicative memory, which persists for about 80 years as a 'bottom-up' social activity was first formulated by Halbwachs in 1925, and canonicalised into cultural memory, which is indispensable for larger communities in the longer term (Halbwachs, 2018). The former tends to give more room for emotional attachment and identification, but all types of collective memory are characterised by a monolingualism that facilitates transmission and does not insist on authenticity, and is thus inevitably myth-making. The common heritage of the national past is always present-centred and thus serves political ends: it persuades, reinforces, unites and even mobilises. Consequently, it has different mechanisms of operation in closed, hard and soft dictatorships, and in open, democratic states. The need for stability of cultural memory as a system is served by commemorative rituals – which, in the Hofstede model of culture (1994), form the layer closest to the core of culture and usually also have a topographical aspect (memorial sites) (Bertsch, 2011).

2.2 *Challenges of musealisation and interpretation in the case of traumatising heritage*

The new museology has redefined the role of visitors as active users, as co-authors engaged in dialogue, leading to institutional democratisation and wider audience reach (Vergo, 1989). The museum space has become an unprecedented social force, a space of new approaches and new

functions, which the International Council of Museums (ICOM), in its new definition adopted in 2022, defines as an institution that promotes pluralism, is ethical, participatory and reflective (ICOM, 2022). The spontaneous musealisation of sites of collective historical trauma, which can also be interpreted as the rise of the role of Assmannian communicative memory in a field hitherto dominated almost exclusively by cultural memory, can be well placed in this context (György, 2015; Shehata and Mostafa, 2016).

In the 21st century's demand for heritage interpretation, the individual psychological, memory-processing approach is prominent, and collective memory research is also prevalent (Assmann, 2018). Interpretation is an indispensable, even artistically value-added element of heritage interpretation, which helps to fulfil the postmodern experience society's expectations of experience, which is aestheticised, yet somewhat simplified and thus easier to absorb. This is facilitated by interpretive trends in new museology such as active engagement and co-creation, multi-level interpretation and information, multisensory experience and digitalisation (Thynea and Hede, 2016; Eardley *et al.*, 2016; Bodnár, 2020). Tourism demand in itself can have a heritage-enhancing effect on tangible and intangible assets that lose their function with socio-economic change, but the interpretation of authenticity can be compromised both by being taken out of context and by commercialisation for market interests (Husz, 2006; Wang, 2007). The institutionalisation, or musealization, of cultural memory by the current ruling power is hardly questionable, and this is particularly emphasised in the interpretation of the perpetrator-victim roles and the interpretation of the inevitable stance and responsibility that is expected in the context of traumatic events.

2.3 Historical trauma sites and tourism

The 20th century, as an era of world wars and totalitarian regimes, is a rich source of dark tourism, which in our case is a highly complex tourism product linked to human disasters (Foley and Lennon, 1996; Stone, 2006). The subcategories of dark tourism that can be linked to our study are war, Holocaust, prison and cemetery tourism (Fonseca *et al.*, 2016). Among the motives for dark tourism identified in the literature, in addition to sheer curiosity, historical knowledge, remembrance, atonement and trauma processing may be prominent in the attractions we study (Dunkley *et al.*, 2011; Magano *et al.*, 2022, 2023; Tevely and Papp-Váry, 2024). These may be complemented by individual and collective identity seeking, which, in addition to the above, can be considered more as motivations for heritage tourism (Irimiás, 2018). Typology, emotional scale. The potential visitor typology in the desire for knowledge and personal involvement matrix created by Irimiás (2018) typically includes highly motivated and involved types (explorer, identity seeker and pious heritage tourist) who are interested in educational attractions created in authentic locations at the darker end of Stone's (2006) dark tourism spectrum, with an educational purpose. The presentation of death, suffering and human tragedies naturally raises ethical issues, and part of this is to help visitors process the experience alongside the desire to present it objectively (Foley and Lennon, 1997).

3. Methodology

The research was conducted using a complex methodology between January 2024 and January 2025. The study of the musealization process and the compilation of the attractiveness inventory – a survey sample of sites – were derived from online data collection, which was based on the measurability of attractiveness, so that only legally qualified museum institutions that are obliged to provide data were included in the sample. In order to characterise the role of tourism and local community embeddedness, in addition to the website survey, descriptive and comparative analysis of cultural statistics and semi-structured interviews with experts were used to characterise the role of tourism and local community embeddedness: the former manager of Hospital in the Rock Nuclear Bunker Museum – interview A – and a heritage manager – interview B –.

4. Results

4.1 *The process of becoming a cultural memory – institutionalisation*

The first level of confrontation with the past, the transformation of cultural memory, can be traced in the first, rite-creating layer of Hofstede’s cultural onion model, the creation of official national days of remembrance and their ceremonies.)

The initiation of the commemoration days, their legal background and rituals are invariably linked to right-wing governmental cycles, the timeline reflecting the expectations of the international political environment, especially in the period before Hungary’s accession to the European Union in 2004 (Table 1). The first step was to canonize the most well-known traumas internationally such as the memory of the Holocaust, the communism, and the 1956 Revolution. The creation of an official national memory institution has also been a right-wing initiative since 2010. It was then that events of rather local importance like the Treaty of Trianon, which resulted in severe territorial and population losses, as well as the historical trials and tribulations of national minorities, became a serious issue. The National Heritage Institute (Nemzeti Örökség Intézete) is in charge of historical memorial sites and memorial gardens, while the National Memory Commission (Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága) is responsible for preserving the state memory of the victims of communism (Nemzeti Örökség Intézete, 2024; Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága, 2024).

Table 1. The national days of remembrance in Hungary related to the traumatic historical events of 20th century

Date	Name	Background for choosing the date	Year of enactment
January 19	The Day of Remembrance of the Deportation and Exile of the Germans in Hungary	The deportation of the German population to forced labour in Russia began on 27 December 1944; the first transport of Germans in Hungary, deprived of their rights, citizenship and property, left Budaörs on 19 January	2012
February 25	Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Communist Dictatorships	Béla Kovács, the General Secretary of the Independent Smallholders’ Party, was arrested on this day and taken to the Soviet Union, where he spent 8 years in forced labour and then in prison for his opposition to the communists	2000
April 16	Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust in Hungary	On this day in 1944, the deportation of Hungarian Jews to ghettos in Transcarpathia (today Ukraine) began	2000
June 4	Day of National Unity	The anniversary of the signing of the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, which ended the First World War and resulted in Hungary losing two thirds of its territory and more than half of its population	2010
June 16	Day of Remembrance of Imre Nagy and his Fellow Martyrs	The re-burial of Imre Nagy, the Prime Minister of the 1956 Revolution, and his companions on 16 June 1989 was one of the most symbolic and influential events of the Hungarian transition from communism to democracy	2010
04/Nov	National Mourning Day	On this day in 1956 the revolution was defeated by the Soviet troops	2001

Source(s): The authors based on Parliamentary Resolution No 58/2000 (VI. 16.), Parliamentary Resolution 237/2001 (XII. 10.), Act XLV of 2010, Government Decision 1137/2010 (VII.1.), Parliamentary Resolution No 41/2012 (V.25.), Parliamentary Resolution 88/2012 (XII. 12.)

The topography of commemoration, i.e. the creation of memorial sites, which is more strongly linked to the second (heroes) and third (symbols) layers of the Hofstedeian cultural model, presents a more complex picture than the creation of rites. The most clearly and therefore most easily communicated and interpreted, almost unified 20th century Hungarian trauma, capable of eliciting a positive domestic and international reception, is the 1956 Revolution. It is no coincidence that the first planned event and its unexpected collective cultural impact after the regime change became truly iconic in the creation of the cultural memory of the young republic. The House of Terror Museum, which was opened in 2002 and the reconstruction of Kossuth Square between 2012 and 14, which will be examined in more detail later, became a collective memorial to the 1956 Revolution, and the central message of the reconstruction of Kossuth Square between 2012 and 14 is also the heroism of the freedom fighters (the peaceful demonstrators were fired upon here by the authorities on 25 October 1956) (House of Terror Museum, 2024; Reconstruction of Kossuth Square, 2024).

The 20th century changes in the cultural memory of the world wars, which suffered far greater losses than 1956, are much less straightforward. World War I losses were commemorated by law in the 1920s, exemplified by a series of monuments and churches dedicated to the heroic dead and the revision of the Trianon Peace Treaty; but the revisionist ideal was tabooed by the officially internationalist, supranational Stalinist regime after 1948. The losses of the Second World War were preserved as an unhealed wound in communicative memory until the regime change, since the official cultural memory of socialism unilaterally assessed it as a crime of alliance with Nazi Germany, and the fight against fascism was the ideological foundation of the Soviet bloc of the Cold War. Thus, at the turn of the 21st century, an absurd situation arose in Hungary where the memorials of World War II, the Stalinist regime and 1956 were created simultaneously.

Memory necessarily has a spatial dimension, both at the individual and collective level (Nora, 2010). However, this does not necessarily imply authenticity in Wang's (2007) objective sense of the word, that is, in our case, a direct connection to the sites of historical trauma. The genius loci can appear at the level of constructed and subjective (individually experienced in relation to an activity) authenticity in Wang's system, or, using another approach, as a space imagined and experienced as a result of the production of social space in the terminology of Lefebvre's (1991) and Soja's (1996) theory of trialectics. Examples of objective authenticity are former transport collection sites, labour camps, star and sheltered housing [1], ghetto walls, bunkers, prisons, execution sites, cemeteries, former sites of the lives of heroes and victims.

Typically, constructed and subjective authenticity are present in the case of symbolic monuments created in the last thirty years or more in the main squares of Hungarian towns and villages, in the central national memorial sites, in rural synagogues [2], which have been left without worshippers and have become exhibition spaces without religious function, and in the visitor centres that have opened recently.

4.2 Social embeddedness and tourism

As mentioned in section 3, the sample consists of relevant museums as these can be considered absolute examples of institutionalization and becoming part of cultural memory, furthermore, verifiable data is available on these. According to the most recent (2023) museum statistics for Hungary, 8 out of 790 museum units are specifically linked to the historical traumas of the 20th century. The Military History Museum, although its collections go beyond the 20th century, has the largest permanent World War II exhibition in Hungary HM (it is closed for renovation from 21.05.2023, so the data for the last full year of opening for this institution, 2022, is given in the tables below). According to Bodnár *et al.* (2017), the tourist attractiveness of museums is determined by their location, building, theme, and interactivity. In the following, we examine these factors through their indicators, replacing interactivity with a broader concept of interpretation.

As shown in Table 2, half of the sample is located in Budapest, mostly in core tourist areas in international terms, as reflected in the visitor numbers. The location of the rural establishments is

Table 2. Characteristics in terms of tourist attractiveness and maintenance background between 2019 and 2023

Name	Location	Historic building (if related to the exhibition)	Historic interior (if related to the exhibition)	Year of opening	Maintenance background
Museum of Military History	<i>Budapest, I. district</i>	partly (former cannonballs in the wall)	no	1922	Public
Holocaust Documentation Centre and Memorial Collection (Páva u. Synagogue)	Budapest, IX. district	partly (former synagogue)	no	2004	Public (public foundation)
József Mindszenty Visitor Centre	Zala county, Zalaegerszeg	no	no	2022	Local government
Hospital in the Rock Nuclear Bunker Museum	<i>Budapest, I. district</i>	yes	yes	2008	Foundation
Trianon Museum	Veszprém county, Várpalota	no	no	2004	Foundation
House of Terror Museum	<i>Budapest, VI. district</i>	yes	yes	2002	Public (public foundation)
Point of Remembrance	Csongrád-Csanád county, Hódmezővásárhely	no	no	2006	Local government

Source(s): The authors based on [Museum of Military History \(2024\)](#), [Holocaust Documentation Centre and Memorial Collection \(2024\)](#), [József Mindszenty Visitor Centre \(2024\)](#), [Hospital in the Rock Nuclear Bunker Museum \(2024\)](#), [Trianon Museum \(2024\)](#), [House of Terror Museum \(2024\)](#), [Point of Remembrance \(2024\)](#), [Hungarian Tragedy 1944 \(2024\)](#), [National Museum Statistics Database \(NMSD\) \(2019, 2022, 2023\)](#). The core tourist areas are in italics

not relevant for domestic tourism, despite their mostly city-centre location; the two lowest visitor numbers are partly explained by seasonal (half-year) opening. A minority of the buildings have an objective authenticity related to the theme of the exhibition, also in historical buildings the interiors are mostly less authentic. The House of Terror Museum is a former Jewish-owned tenement building, nationalised under the Jewish laws before World War II, the headquarters of the Arrow Cross (Hungarian fascist) party that came to power in 1944 and from 1945 the headquarters of the political police, based on the Soviet model. The interior, with the exception of the former prison cells, is characterised by its constructed originality ([House of Terror Museum, 2024](#)). The Hospital in the Rock Nuclear Bunker Museum is a military hospital built in the belly of Castle Hill as a result of the air raids of World War I, used in World War II and the 1956 revolution, and later built as an annex to it, a shelter for use in the event of a nuclear attack, which was secret under socialism. Both have preserved their original furnishings ([Hospital in the Rock Nuclear Bunker Museum, 2024](#)). The Holocaust-themed exhibition sites served as pre-internment collection sites during World War II, and their current interiors are installed (the Budapest site is the national one, the Hódmezővásárhely one is the only one with a rural focus) ([Holocaust Documentation Centre and Memorial Collection, 2024](#); [Hungarian Tragedy 1944, 2024](#)).

The reasons and processes of foundation are related not only to the development of cultural memory but also to the background of those who maintained it. The earliest state initiatives reflect the first canonisation of the memory of communism and the Holocaust through the establishment of central, nationally themed museums. The institutions in Hódmezővásárhely belong to the local public cultural institutions system, and with the professional assistance of the House of Terror, established a unique institution in the country, the Point of Remembrance t, which presents the history of the city through the period 1945–1990. Based on oral history;

this has led to the involvement of the local community and the transformation of communicative memory into cultural memory. The idea of creating the Hospital in the Rock Nuclear Bunker Museum was inspired by the huge interest in the military site, which had previously been closed to the public, expressed during the Night of Museums event (Interview A, 2024; Interview B, 2024). The József Mindszenty Visitor Centre (Mindszentyneum), a major public investment, is the first in the country to present the relationship between the Church and dictatorship in a stand-alone exhibition space, using the example of the outstanding Roman Catholic Church leader of the 20th century in the city where he served as a parish priest for a quarter of a century (József Mindszenty Visitor Centre, 2024).

Compared to the national rate (4.6%), the foundations of the civil sector are significantly over-represented in the institutions surveyed, thus showing a strong interest in communicative memory on topics such as the Trianon Museum and the once-secret military site. This is key for a museum institution operating without public or private support and according to market regulations. In 2023, none of the institutions was able to match the typically increasing number of visitors up to 2019, with a very high rate of decline compared to the national average (−2.2%), averaging between −20% and −40%. In the case of Budapest museums with a high proportion of foreign visitors, this can be explained by the rate of recovery of inbound tourism, while in the case of the Point of Remembrance, which had a drop of 68% in attendance, this can be explained by the reduced opening hours, presumably due to rationalisation of operating costs (Table 3).

Table 3. Real-space and virtual demand characteristics between 2019–23

Name	Annual number of visitors (2019)	Annual number of visitors (2023)	National ranking by number of visitors (2023)	Number of free and discounted visits (2023)	Estimated number of foreign visitors (2023)	Number of visits to social networking sites (2023)
Museum of Military History	70,501	58,369	15	54,256	8,102	Fb: 21931 Yt: 5,290 Inst: 1,623 Spf
Holocaust Documentation Centre and Memorial Collection (Páva u. Synagogue)	30,064	22,786	86	15,519	15,950	Fb: 16,000 Yt: 135 Inst: 978 Tw
József Mindszenty Visitor Centre		15,528	112	11,020	120	Fb: 6,100 Inst: 230
Hospital in the Rock Nuclear Bunker Museum	157,878	107,381	26	53,316	71,777	Fb: 19,000, Inst: 717 Tw
Trianon Museum	7,269	4,375	250	3,861	399	Fb: 7,100
House of Terror Museum	361,973	292,485	9	112,977	227,726	Fb: 28,000 Yt: 779 Inst: 4,495, Spf Tw
Point of Remembrance	2,246	720	480	651	45	Fb: 1,300 Yt: 51
Hungarian Tragedy 1944	2,211	1,515	384	1,515	117	-

Source(s): The authors based on [Museum of Military History \(2024\)](#), [Holocaust Documentation Centre and Memorial Collection \(2024\)](#), [József Mindszenty Visitor Centre \(2024\)](#), [Hospital in the Rock Nuclear Bunker Museum \(2024\)](#), [Trianon Museum \(2024\)](#), [House of Terror Museum \(2024\)](#), [Point of Remembrance \(2024\)](#), [Hungarian Tragedy 1944 \(2024\)](#), [NMSD \(2019, 2022, 2023\)](#)

Two of the Budapest institutions are among the 20 most visited museums in the country (Table 3). This is outstanding even when considering the concentration of demand for museums in the capital (in Budapest, only 13% of domestic museums account for over 40% of the national total) (NMSD, 2023). The reasons behind the high number of visitors include the increased interest in the subject, the national collection, the location, the significant discounted and free admission, and the popularity among foreign tourists. The latter two factors contribute differently to increasing visitor numbers for state and municipal museums with mandatory discounts and for foundation museums operating from market revenues, the latter relying more on foreigners visiting Budapest (Interview A, 2024). The proportion of concessionary/reduced-price visitors - typically students, families with young children, pensioners - ranges from 38–100% in the surveyed institutions with an average of 74.7%, indicating the high importance of accessibility and higher than the national average (69.6%) (NMSD, 2023). The estimated number of foreign visitors in the cultural statistics is also evidence of the role of tourism, with 3 museums having more than two-thirds of the total number of visitors (Holocaust Memorial Centre, Hospital in the Rock Nuclear Bunker Museum, House of Terror Museum). 35% of all museum visitors in the capital were foreigners in the year under review, almost double the national rate of 18.7% (NMSD, 2023). The proportion of foreign visitors to these museums also outstrips the classical art and history museums, which lead in absolute visitor numbers, one explanation being the search for off-the-beaten-track exhibitions related to local history rather than the outstanding classical museum offer of competitor Vienna (Schultz, 2020). Low visitor numbers to rural institutions may be a consequence of both low tourist appeal, low visibility and a more local approach to history.

The online presence may be related also to the interpretation explored in the next subsection because of its educational nature in terms of museums, but it counts as an indicator for virtual demand (Table 3). The social media portfolio is particularly broad, with 3 institutions sharing their own video and podcast content, a relatively rare manifestation of educational intent and social responsibility in Hungarian museums (the necessary resources are more available in the case of state-owned, public-funded institutions).

4.3 Characteristics of interpretation

The principles and interpretative expectations and trends of the new museology, alaccessedly briefly presented in the conceptualisation (subsection 2.2), are also reflected in several indicators of cultural statistics. Active engagement can be understood as a museum event (Table 4) and also as a presentation method tailored to the needs of target segments of multilevel interpretation and information (e.g. multilingual live guided tours and self-guided options; differentiation of the approach according to sociographic and other characteristics of the target groups, etc. (Tables 4 and 5). Temporary exhibitions can increase visitor numbers as a means of constantly renewing the offer. The presentation of the collection - often previously stored in a warehouse - with a timely focus on new scientific findings, allows for the polyphony mentioned in the new museum definition, in an interesting way for both returning visitors and new visitor segments (Table 4). Digitalisation and the multisensory experience typically associated with it can only be measured by the existence of smart device applications and virtual exhibitions at present, although the field is expanding (Table 5).

The majority of institutions organised temporary exhibitions in the year under review, similar to the national average (1.6 per institution) (NMSD, 2023). It seems that a permanent exhibition based on the authenticity of the place is rather an attraction in itself for museums dealing with historical traumas.

Visitors to events accounted for 48.2% of all visitors, so their attractiveness is significant, even compared to the national average (43.6%) (cultural statistics include guided tours, which is a significant order of magnitude due to the very popular guided-only institutions, the Rock Hospital and the Atomic Bunker Museum, where it is not a visitor choice). Table 4 illustrates the types of events and demand data for cultural statistics that provide a community experience with personal interaction. It can be assumed that these means of visitor engagement, important in the new definition of museology as well as museums, play a prominent role in the

Table 4. Events' supply and demand in 2023

Name	Number of temporary exhibitions and of their visitors	Number of events and of their participants	Number of museum-educational events and of their participants	Number of recreational children and adult events and of their participants	Number of inclusive events and of their participants	Number of community-building events and of their participants
Museum of Military History	3; 58,369	734; 24,885	310; 6,391	6; 170	19; 9,601	15; 267
Holocaust Documentation Centre and Memorial Collection (Páva u. Synagogue)	5; 1,424	315; 7,580	89; 2,254	0	0	0
József Mindszenty Visitor Centre	2; 7,451	393; 6,545	53; 1,299	15; 570	5; 120	9; 350
Hospital in the Rock Nuclear Bunker Museum	0	7,070; 107,381	98; 2,178	0; 0	135; 2,645	0
Trianon Museum	1; 324	97; 1,809	10; 187	2; 150	0	1; 300
House of Terror Museum	2; 22,239	1,250; 93,164	0	0	0	0
Point of Remembrance	1; 720	14; 492	2; 31	2; 139	2; 30	0
Hungarian Tragedy 1944	0	52; 1,267	3; 75	0; 0	3; 155	2; 368

Source(s): The authors based on [NMSD \(2023\)](#)

Table 5. Visitor-friendly services and interpretation tools in 2023 and 2024

Name	Optimised mobile version and/or application	Multilingual subtitles	Audio guides	Catalogue	Booklet	Child booklet
Museum of Military History	no	yes	no	no	no	no
Holocaust Documentation Centre and Memorial Collection (Páva u. Synagogue)	version	yes	no	yes	not	yes
József Mindszenty Visitor Centre	version	yes	no	yes	yes	yes
Hospital in the Rock Nuclear Bunker Museum	version	yes	yes	not	yes	no
Trianon Museum	version	no	no	no data	no data	no
House of Terror Museum	both	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Point of Remembrance	version	no	yes	no	no	no
Hungarian Tragedy 1944	version	no	yes	no	no	no

Source(s): The authors based on [Museum of Military History \(2024\)](#), [Holocaust Documentation Centre and Memorial Collection \(2024\)](#), [József Mindszenty Visitor Centre \(2024\)](#), [Hospital in the Rock Nuclear Bunker Museum \(2024\)](#), [Trianon Museum \(2024\)](#), [House of Terror Museum \(2024\)](#), [Point of Remembrance \(2024\)](#), [Hungarian Tragedy 1944 \(2024\)](#), [NMSD \(2023\)](#). In italics, we indicate the interpretive tools that can only be found in connection with temporary exhibitions

interpretation of historical trauma. The largest proportion of guided tours in all institutions (33.5% of events in Hungarian and 22.6% of participants; 59.5% and 8.7% in foreign languages), with the aforementioned specificity of the Hospital in the Rock Nuclear Bunker Museum being particularly pronounced. In the classical sense of the word, museum education (5.6% of events) and inclusive events (programmes for disadvantaged social groups; 1.6% of events) were the most popular (5.1% each), offering the opportunity for formal institutional education and the widest possible social inclusion in relation to historical trauma. Inclusive community-building events (targeting nationalities other than the local population particularly affected by the traumas and Hungarians living beyond the borders) and leisure events (targeting nationalities other than the local population particularly affected by the traumas and Hungarians living beyond the borders) were not prominent (0.27 and 0.25 of events, 0.52 and 0.42% of participants respectively). Within events, the category of so-called knowledge-transmitting programmes includes on-site multimedia virtual applications; these are more likely to be classified as digitalisation and are therefore not included in [Table 4](#). The only institution with a significant number of users in this area is the House of Terror Museum (78,568 users), which may be due to the difficulty of live guided tours, which are difficult to implement due to the high number of visitors, and may also partly explain the relative lack of events. The only events with a higher share of foreign-language guided tours compared to the national share (9,-4%; 3.4%) were those with a high share of foreign visitors in Budapest ([NMSD, 2023](#)). The share of events in the classical sense of the word is surprisingly low. This may be due to the limiting nature of the physical environment, the prioritisation of digital knowledge transfer, lack of resources or demand motivation, or a combination of these ([Interview A, 2024; Interview B, 2024](#)).

The data collected in [Table 5](#) illustrate the interpretative tools collected by cultural statistics, in addition to the digital solutions for access. Online content optimised for mobile phones is present in all museums, with a self-guided app only in the case of the House of Terror Museum, which is at the forefront of multimedia content development, as well as virtual exhibits linked to the permanent exhibition (national averages 34% and 10.6% respectively). The lack of multilingual inscriptions in most rural institutions is due to the low number of foreign visitors ([Table 2](#)). Self-guided interpretation tools are offered in roughly similar proportions, higher than the national average, with half of the institutions slightly ahead with audioguides (national average 2.9%; highest for guides, 28.8%) ([NMSD, 2023](#)). In terms of the importance of the role of understanding in both education and trauma in relation to collection themes, the proportion of longer, immersive and age-appropriate, traditional written interpretation tools (catalogues and children's booklets; the latter are only available in temporary exhibitions) is surprisingly low. They can be partially replaced by the historical works and educational booklets usually available in museum shops, but their content is not tailored to the curatorial concept of the exhibition and therefore less helpful in understanding it.

The quality of the interpretation of the traumas presented and the facilitation of their processing also raises serious ethical concerns. This is not the main purpose of this study, but we consider it important to expand the interpretative toolbox in the statistics based on the results of the website survey and empirical research. Holocaust-themed exhibition spaces have museum spaces that provide for individual remembrance and reverence, and facilitate the processing of experiences ([Holocaust Documentation Centre and Memorial Collection, 2024; Hungarian Tragedy 1944, 2024](#)). Mindszentyneum partly uses the tool of gamification with its escape room and has also participated in the creation of a thematic route in Zalaegerszeg ([József Mindszenty Visitor Centre, 2024](#)). Every year, the Hospital in the Rock Nuclear Bunker Museum runs a competition for disadvantaged children living in rural areas to go on a trip to Budapest, including a visit to the museum ([Interview A, 2024](#)). The Trianon Museum organises school competitions and travelling exhibitions ([Trianon Museum, 2024](#)).

5. Summary

Based on the results, the following answers to our research questions can be given:

RQ1. What factors have influenced the institutionalisation of the memory spaces under study?

The canonisation of communicative memory, i.e. the emergence and ritualisation of the politics of memory after the regime change, can be considered the most decisive. The memorial sites of collective trauma that became official in the earlier stages of the process were mostly state and municipal, while later ones were more often founded and maintained by NGOs. Memorial sites cannot be exclusively linked to the topography of wars and dictatorships, so territorial authenticity is not a decisive condition for their creation.

RQ2. What is the role of the memorial spaces in local and national culture and tourism?

A significant number of the institutions examined in the statistics are national collections, whose role in national culture is attested by the high proportion of visitors, mostly from Hungary, who are admitted free of charge or at a discount, and in the case of several museums in Budapest, by the high number of visitors, which is also outstanding nationally. The only indicator of cultural statistics in Budapest museums that can be linked to tourism, the estimated number of foreign visitors, is very high. The less visited, sometimes partially open, exhibitions with a local history focus are particularly well embedded in the local area.

RQ3. To what extent does the interpretation of traumatic heritage reflect the principles and tools of the new museology?

The number of guided tours stands out among the interpretative tools, which can provide an important added value in terms of personal knowledge transfer and interaction at the sites of collective trauma memory. The presence of other museum events and temporary exhibitions is relatively low. Digitisation of amenities and self-management tools varies from institution to institution, but is above the national average. The use of immersive and age-appropriate traditional written interpretation is rare. However, in some of the institutions, specific forms of presentation, tailored to the specific memory space and requiring interactivity, are used. The principles of the new museology are thus implemented in most of the institutions studied, albeit not always in a varied and complete form.

Limitations and practical implications. This research does not cover sites that are not museums, as the data necessary for the examination are not available, so the results cannot be generalised nationally. A further limitation of the research is that we were only able to examine the much broader field of new museology within the framework of cultural statistical indicators. The musealisation of the memorial topography of 20th century collective traumas, its cultural role and the specificity of its interpretation is a field of interest in Hungarian tourism research. It is hoped that our results will contribute to the ethical and socio-culturally sustainable development of dark tourism attractions, aiming at the sensitization of both local population and visitors, through a closer cooperation between the cultural sector and tourism.

Notes

1. During World War II, segregated housing for persecuted Jews marked with a yellow star, and housing for Jews protected by the "Schutzpass" (protection passports) issued by independent countries.
2. The Holocaust mainly affected Jews in rural settlements in Hungary, and there were no organised camp transports from the newly established, shorter-lived ghettos in Budapest.

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