

Pré-rapport du mémoire de M2
Pre-report of the Master's thesis
Édition/Edition (2018—2020)

Étudiant(e)/Student :

Prénom, Nom / First Name, Family Name : Bernardot, Helene
Titre du mémoire M2 / Title of the Master's thesis : Representing Ethnography and History,
Interacting with Heritage. Analysing Museological Practices at the Huron-Wendat Museum

Mobilité / Mobility :

Veillez souligner les établissements ! / Please, underline the institutions !

Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, Budapest (ELTE)

École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales de Paris (EHESS)

Università degli Studi di Catania (UNICT)

Univerzita Karlova, Prague (CUNI)

Université Laval, Québec (UL)

Directeurs de recherche / Supervisors¹ :

Prénom, Nom / First Name, Family Name : Krízová, Markéta
Titre / Title : Prof.
Université/University : Charles University

Évaluation/Evaluation:

Note dans l'établissement / Grade at the institution (Charles University): B
Note dans le 2eme établissement (ELTE) / Grade at the 2nd institution (ELTE): 4
(Note dans le 3eme établissement / Evaluation – grade at the 3rd institution: 78)
Note TEMA+ / TEMA+ grade: bien/good

Pré-rapport / Pre-report :

¹ Le pré-rapport est écrit par le 2eme directeur (ou par le 2eme et 3eme directeurs) qui ne participe pas à la soutenance et inclut des questions à aborder lors de la soutenance. / The pre-report is written by the 2nd supervisor (and in case the 3rd supervisor too), who does not personally take part in the defense and it includes questions to be addressed to the student during the thesis defense.

The theme of the thesis is topical and very important, as the role of museums in contemporary society is crucial – as the author correctly noted, both as (supposedly “objective”) centers of knowledge and education, but also as places of entertainment that contribute in important way into forming the worldviews of visitors, confirming or refuting stereotypes of “us” and “them”. Also the chosen method of work, the “fieldwork in museum”, an effort to create thick description of museum as it is perceived by various actors, both authors of expositions, guides and visitors (even though this was not explicitly stated, and Clifford Geertz was not cited), is original and with a potential to bring new insights into the theme. There is an apparent personal interest, fascination of the author with the transformation of the “temples of science” she had been studying.

All this is thus commendable. However, there are certain problematic aspects of the thesis that need to be highlighted as well, so that the author in her future work might reach even more satisfactory results.

First of all, the research question, the main research problem was not stated explicitly at the beginning of the thesis. The only outline of research is on p. 2: “How culture could be made more accessible to a lay audience and a broader public with inventive solutions?” Further, the idea is developed: “My research deals with the representation of Indigenous culture in the context of the new museology with a postcolonial perspective. In other words, the main goal is to understand the museological practices used to highlight a specific cultural identity and how the public is affected by and receives this discourse.” (also p. 2) However, no specification of the research problem is given, and it is up to the reader to disentangle the narrative and find out that (this is, at least, my own reading) the principal interest of the author is in strengthening of community cohesion, of positive image-making through application of new museology principles in the Huron Wendat Museum, but also an analysis of how museum and cultural heritage are transformed into marketable goods.

The summarization of the history of museums in general and the principles of “new museology” in particular is rather extensive – and it needs to be stressed that the author obviously mastered most of the relevant secondary literature to the topic. However, in spite of the many pages dedicated to the problem, the breath of the topics covered necessarily led to simplifications. F.e. on p. 28, where it is stated that “ethnography developed as a scientific project, a form of praise for diversity and difference, catering for increased interest in Indigenous societies in order to dominate them according to the imperial agenda of European nations.” While there is nothing to dispute in principle, the whole sentence is extremely simplifying the complex problem of the origins of ethnography. A second reading of the thesis after it was written, and certain shortening of this long introduction, bearing in mind what was its core problem, would probably make the argumentation line much clearer.

Also, it is clear that the author distinguishes between “bad” older approaches, between “museums created by Western experts, transmitting a Western discourse on Indigenous Peoples” (p. 2) and the “good” new Museums, created by the indigenous communities themselves. Thus, her evaluation of the HWM is rather a measuring of how the museum fits into the category of “good”, post-colonial museums, even though the author admits herself that WHM “reappropriates Wendat language and culture for political purposes” (p. 67), that there are utilitarian omissions with respect to the obliteration of known facts from Huron-Wendat history (p. 73) etc. Still, however, she accepted the indigenous approach to the “appropriation” of tradition to such a degree that she in the end of the thesis doubts her own “right” to study the theme: “Is it fair for a non-Indigenous person like myself to carry out research on an

Indigenous museum?” (p. 105) This, of course, is in fact contradicting the very idea of a “new museum” as a place of interaction of various worldviews, merely substituting one dominant ideology (Western) for another (indigenous).

The very core of the work – the analysis of the HWM, its collections, ways of displaying, and also of its self-presentation on social networks and how the museum is seen by the visitors – is relatively outweighed by the theoretical outlines in the first part of the thesis, and in a certain respect hurried and sketchy, with the analysis sometimes skipping back and forth between the self-identification of Huron-Wendat themselves through the museum and its perception by visitors. With respect to how the museum is perceived by visitors, only a limited number of questionnaires was analyzed, and it is a pity that, for example, the image of the HWM in tourist guides and social media was not analyzed more in depth; this partial problem would certainly justify a separate chapter. The author herself admits (p. 104) that also more interviews with Huron-Wendat people would be necessary to understand better the nuances of their own view of the museum. Also, it is not altogether clear sometimes (especially in chap. IV: Interaction) when the author summarizes the conclusions of the secondary literature, when she presents her own opinions, when those of the Huron-Wendat and when the opinions of the visitors of the museum, as expressed in the questionnaires.

Sometimes, the author accepts the rhetoric of the museum and identifies with its goals. Admitting her slight previous knowledge of Huron-Wendat history (p. 104), she accepts almost without asking the alleged mission of the museum as it is presented on its webpage and on the social media, and also the way the Huron-Wendat understand the reactions of the visitors – the image of the museum serving as a tool for communicating the reality of Huron-Wendat culture to (white) visitors, surpassing the traditional “colonialist” view. Completely omitted is the possibility that the visitors continue to exoticize the “natives”, that the illusion of “exploring” the “authentic” world of the Huron-Wendat in the new museum is a mere continuation of the ethnographic shows of the early 20th century. Actually, some doubts – together with mentioning the flaws in the field research - were only expressed by the author in the final part of the thesis (p. 96-103), thus making uncertain the whole line of explanation.

There are some photographs inserted in the text that give a general idea of the museum, its inner organization and the way collections are displayed, but are not explicitly referred to in the text; their potential is thus not adequately exploited, and serve more as illustrations.

In spite of this critique, it needs to be stated that Helen Bernadot realized original research and analysis and brought about well-documented results that could be of use for other researchers. The structure of the thesis is logical and concise; the author resisted the tempting for pursuing diverging paths and partial problems. As far as I was able to evaluate (as a non-native speaker), the text is written in good academic English. The terms are defined and used correctly. The sources and secondary literature are quoted correctly.

I therefore recommend the thesis for the defense, but with the view of the abovementioned critique recommend preliminarily the grade as bien/good (B in Charles University grading).

Questions :

1. Was my intuitive formulation of the research question correct? And if so, can the author of the thesis confirm that this main objective was reached successfully?

2. In which direction could the research be expanded further (either by adding other museums for comparison, or by deepening the analysis of the HWM itself)?
3. Can you comment on the ethical issues (the doubts you expressed with respect to the “right” of European researcher to evaluate indigenous cultural institution)?

June 27, 2020. Markéta Krízová

TEMA+ Grade conversion table

ELTE (Hungarian)	EHESS (French)	UNICT (Italian)	CUNI (Czech)	UL (Canadian)	Notes TEMA+
5	16-20 (pas de 19 et 20)	30 (A, Excellent)	A	95-100 (A+, 4,33) 90-94 (A, 4,00) 85-89 (A-, 3,67)	Très bien/Excellent
4	14-15	27-29 (B, Very Good)	B	80-84 (B+, 3,33) 75-79 (B, 3,00) 70-74 (B-, 2,67)	Bien/Good
3	12-13	23-26 (C, Good)	C	66-69 (C+, 2,33) 63-65 (C, 2,00) 60-62 (C-, 1,67)	Assez bien/ Amply sufficient
2	10-11	21-22 (D, Satisfactory) 18-20 (E, Sufficient)	D, E	55-59 (D+, 1,33) 50-54 (D, 1,00)	Passable/ Satisfactory/ Almost sufficient
1	0-9	1-17 (F, FX)	F	49 et moins (E, 0,00)	Insuffisant/ Insuficient