

**PART III – MUSEOGRAPHY****A „DELICIOUS” EXHIBITION: „SPICES, TASTEFUL STORIES”**ANCA TUDOR-ANDREI, FLORIN-CĂTĂLIN TOFAN,  
LĂCRĂMIOARA-GABRIELA ZAHARIA, BOGDAN TOMOZIL, BOGDAN BARABAȘ\***ABSTRACT**

Spices have been cherished and used by people since ancient times. Throughout history they played an important role in the development of human civilization. They were used in economic exchanges being the main cause of the explorations that led to the discovery of the New World. The active substances they contain are recommended in the treatment of various diseases, a fact studied and reconsidered by modern scientific medicine. The reinvention of traditional cuisine brings spices back to the public's attention.

The book with the same title was the basis for the exhibition „Spices, tasteful stories”, opened in the spring of 2019. It includes a number of 28 spices and their varieties, a series of three-dimensional exhibits and an interactive panel where the visitors can identify by smell 9 types of volatile oils. Also during this exhibition, for the first time at the Museum of Natural Sciences in Bacău, an interactive chatbot application was made, using proprietary and open source software.

**Key words:** spices, museum, exhibition, storytelling, chatbot

**Introduction**

The idea of a museum exhibition about spices appeared after the writing and publication, in 2014, at its own publishing house „Ion Borcea”, of the book „Spices, tasteful stories” (ISBN: 978-606-92577-0-8). In the 206 pages of the A5 book, the authors Anca Tudor-Andrei and Florin-Cătălin Tofan tried to capture snippets from the adventurous history of spices, their use in traditional kitchens but also the results of modern research that reconfirms spices as valuable tools in maintaining good health or valuable adjuvants in the treatment of certain diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular or infectious diseases.

The exhibition was opened on 11.04.2019 and presents 28 spices and their varieties and two tools used in their crushing (the grinder and the grinding mortar), as well as a series of three-dimensional decorative elements, cinnamon rolls and star anise, made of polystyrene covered with plaster and painted. As aromatherapy is back in vogue, an interactive olfactory panel offers to the visitors the opportunity to test their ability to recognize 9 types of spices by their flavor. The role of museums in society has changed in recent years, becoming an institution that actively promotes culture and education, curators must face the challenge of communicating with visitors of different ages but also with different levels of education and culture, to find the better ways to spatially arrange objects, signs, images and labels in

an exhibition. The museum exhibition thus becomes a narrative space, in which different elements participate: cinema screenings, theater, workshops, interactive kiosks or, more recently, augmented or virtual reality. But when the information contained is too crowded they tend to absorb much of the visitors' time and thus divert their attention from the exhibits presented at the exhibition.

For the exhibition „Spices, tasteful stories” was made, for the first time at the Museum of Natural Sciences in Bacău, a chatbot application, installed on the two touch screens on the multimedia wall located right next to the exhibition. Thus, the touch screens were actively integrated in the exhibition structure, offering continuity to the documentary material and a good integration of the information in the narrative space. The chatbot or conversational interface as it is also called, is designed to convincingly simulate a conversation partner, being used in many practical applications such as: customer service, providing information in marketing or education. In the exhibition it provides information about the history of spices, curiosities about spices, the top 3 most expensive spices in the world and the game „recognize spice”. The chatbot is also used as a cultural marketing agent, which recommends, as an additional source of information, the book „Spices, tasteful stories”, which can be purchased, for a fee, from the museum shop.

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## Material and method

Through the diversity and novelty of the information offered, the exhibition „Spices, tasteful stories” addresses all categories of visitors, from preschoolers to the elderly.

The classic approach is complemented by the interactive part, through which the visitor is challenged to learn new things or to check their knowledge about the spices presented in the exhibition, using not only the visual sense – through the game recognizes the spice, but also olfactory perception - where they can recognize the spice after its aroma.

Curiosities about spices are also presented to the public, such as the most expensive spices or their antibiotic, antiviral and anti-fungal properties.

The aesthetic aspect of the exhibition was pursued by creating a background containing a model based on hexagonal elements that frame various vintage images: fragments of old navigation maps, ships, spices, various objects and inscriptions, etc. The labels were made in A5 format, using a 36 pt Impress font for the title and an 18 pt Arial font for the content. The exhibits were placed in 5 hexagonal glass showcases. The exhibits spices were placed in glass bowls and were presented both whole and ground - depending on their use.

A poster and a banner were made for the publicity of the exhibition, data about it being posted on the museum website and on its Facebook account. The chatbot was created by own means, based on open source code taken from GitHub and proprietary code.

Interactive exhibits are excellent tools that provide large and complex amounts of information in a visitor-friendly, easy to understand and enjoyable way. They leave it to the visitor to choose how the information can be obtained and give the visitor control over it, resulting in greater satisfaction and a more rewarding experience after visiting the exhibition. On the occasion of the cultural event „Night of Museums”, which took place on May 18, visitors of different ages showed a special interest in the miraculous world of spices.



Fig. 1 – Aspect from the exhibition



Fig. 2 – Aspect from the exhibition



Fig. 3 – Aspect from the exhibition

However, interactive exhibitions do not represent a replacement of traditional exhibition methods, but a complementary side of them, helping to better place the exhibitors in the historical, scientific and cultural context. The exhibition „Spices, tasteful stories” was a good example of this.

## Proposed objectives

The authors set out to achieve the following objectives:

- making a complete exhibition about spices; achieving sensory interactivity, both visual and olfactory;
- active involvement of learners in discovering information;
- dynamizing experience of visiting the museum;
- transmission of new information to the public through classical and modern methods;
- exercising the capacity of analysis, selection, debate and discovery;
- achieving a more efficient cultural marketing.

## Results and discussions

The authors managed to design and create a museum exhibition about spices, based on prior documentation. Using financial resources allocated

by the main authorizing officer within the project, but also resources in open source and proprietary code, it was possible to create a modern exhibition, which addresses a wide range of visitors. Beyond the informative aspect, it also has a practical aspect, with the reinvention of traditional kitchens that appeal to spices and combinations of spices, thus rediscovering the flavors of old dishes.

The use of a chatbot to initiate an open dialogue with the public was a first step for the implementation of a modern cultural strategy based on modern technologies, in order to attract young audiences to the museum and its activities.

### **Conclusions**

The realization of the exhibition „Spices, tasteful stories” was a good experience in creating interactive exhibitions as attractive as possible for the general public.

The museum had the opportunity to exercise its cultural-educational function, the institution also gaining popularity.

### **Rezumat**

The exhibition „Spices, tasteful stories” was conceived, made and opened based on the documentation for the book with the same name published at the publishing house „Ion Borcea” Bacău.

This paper presents the way in which this exhibition was made and the preliminary observations on the impact on the visiting public.

### **References**

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