



# Museums and Primary Sources as Opportunities for Introducing Teaching History in the Context of Hungary and Slovakia

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## Abstract

The integration of primary sources in history education is indispensable for the development of students' historical consciousness and critical thinking skills. At the early stages of primary school history teaching, it is of paramount importance that teachers introduce students to the fundamentals of utilizing historical sources, as source interpretation can often be challenging for younger learners. The application of playful learning, particularly through museums as an educational method, offer an effective means of introducing the analysis of historical sources. The aim of this study is to examine the potential of museums as a methodological tool in history education, with a particular focus on the didactic processing of primary sources. The research explores theoretical challenges involved in source analysis, outline the opportunities provided by museums for teaching, and places special emphasis on history education for students in grades 5-8, particularly with regard to teaching source analysis in the context of Hungary and Slovakia. Additionally, the study presents exemplary tasks and application strategies, demonstrating how museums can be incorporated into classroom instruction, how history teachers can approach source analysis from a didactic standpoint, and how these methods can be applied in pedagogical practice. The approach outlined in this study offers a novel perspective on history teaching, facilitating the achievement of cognitive learning objectives and supporting the active learning process of students.

**Keywords:** exemplary tasks, history didactics, history teaching, primary sources, sources analysis

## 1. Introduction

The integration of primary sources in history education is indispensable for the development of students' historical consciousness and critical thinking skills. In early primary school history teaching, teachers must introduce the basics of source analysis, as it can be challenging for young learners. The playful forms of learning, particularly through museums as an educational method, offer an effective means of introducing the analysis of historical sources.

History education, both at the national level (in Hungary and Slovakia) and internationally, emphasizes the use of historical sources, leading to the emergence of a source-based approach to history teaching in academic literature. The use of sources and analysis and their abilities are important because source analysis is compulsory in the Hungarian history school-leaving exams. Therefore, it is crucial for students to develop a thorough understanding of historical sources at the beginning of their history studies.

## **2. Methods**

The aim of this study is to explore the potential of museums as a methodological opportunities for the introducing history education, with a particular focus on the didactic processing of primary sources. The research sought to address the question of whether primary sources exhibited in museums can be integrated into classroom history teaching, whether this method is suitable for introducing history instruction, and what didactically sound tasks can be employed to facilitate this process.

To achieve this, a comprehensive literature review was primarily conducted to gain an understating of early history learning in both international and national contexts, as well as the use of sources and the museum as a methods in the classroom or museum educational aspects. The literature review focused on peer-reviewed studies, educational documents and curriculum frameworks, using keywords such as “museum pedagogy”, “historical thinking”, and “source-based history education”, drawing on both international and local perspectives.

Following the review, we develop theoretical models that outline key steps teachers need to take when planning lessons that incorporate primary sources and museum content, such identifying relevant historical concepts, selecting suitable materials and scaffolding student interpretation.

Furthermore, the study proposes application strategies for integrating museums into the history teaching. These strategies are derived from pedagogical and history didactics literature and, while presented as theoretical models, their practical implementation and empirical validation are yet to be conducted. Emphasis is placed on the use of both physical museum spaces and digital resources to support history education in diverse learning environments.

## **3. Theoretical Framework**

This paper explores ways to introduce young studies to teaching history, making it essential to examine what international literatures says about teaching history to young learners. Publications from developed countries often highlight that history education starts at an early age.

According to international literature, there are several countries in the world, where history is taught from early age. Kyriaki Fardi raised the question of whether should history education begin in kindergarten? Fardi highlights an important point: what do we mean by teaching history? The teaching of history in schools or the understanding of the historical past in kindergarten or primary school (Fardi, 2024). As Kyriaki Fardi also emphasizes, that “in a history class that might be perceived as a memorization of dates and facts and a difficult historical discourse with complex vocabulary, history education is not considered to be appropriate for children in early childhood” (Fardi, 2024). Introducing history to young children depends on the children, the teacher and the educational process (Fardi, 2024). Her results shows that it is possible and beneficial to introduce history education for young children, although are some sceptics (Fardi, 2024).

In 2011, Australia's National curriculum was changed, and the teaching history has been extended to include all levels from kindergarten to year 6. But the new curriculum the specific values and attitudes did not listed or outlined in the history teaching. This gives teachers the opportunity to use different approaches, but it has also presented challenges (Green et al., 2010).

In 2017, Yngve Skjæveland's research explored what young children know about history. It shows that even at the age five or six, children already have some basic historical understanding, although it is still limited. However, teaching history at an early ages can help lay the foundation for historical consciousness and its later development (Skjæveland, 2017).

It is important to see how history education is structured in Hungary and Slovakia, in addition to understanding the international perspective. History education in Slovakia and Hungary begins in elementary school, starting in the 5th grade, around age 10. What is the difference between the two countries, In Hungary, students study history for 4 years, while in Slovakia, it is taught for 5 years (Vajda, 2019). There are some differences at the high school level. In Hungary, the grade numbering continues from elementary school (grades 9-12), with history being taught every year, for a total of 4 years. In Slovakia, however high school grade numbering starts anew from 1. History is taught for three years in gymnasium, but in the final year, students have the option to take history as a seminar course. In other types of secondary schools, history education is much more limited (Vajda, 2019).

Another differences is the number of history lessons per week. In both countries, history is taught on a weekly basis, with fixed number of lessons per week. Currently, elementary students in both countries receive two history lessons per week, with the exception of Slovak 9th grader, who have three lessons. In Slovakia, gymnasium students receive fewer history lessons per week, because In Hungary, history is a compulsory school-leaving exam subject, while in Slovakia, it is an elective subject (Vajda, 2019).

In 2015, Imre Knausz made a statement about key concepts that is generally applicable to the teaching of Hungarian history and can be linked to the introduction of primary historical sources in history education. In Hungary and Slovakia, chronological history teaching begins at the age of 10, although pupils may be exposed to various historical readings before this age. However, it is during early adolescence that they develop the ability to perform formal operations and move beyond concrete-sensory content, meaning that logical thinking begins to emerge, which is not yet characteristic of younger children (Knausz, 2015, p. 50)

Educational science, within the context of teacher training, provides a comprehensive overview of the process of instructional planning, which encompasses multiple levels. These include short-term planning, such as lesson planning. Additionally, it provides general guidelines, specifying the factors that teachers must consider when preparing for instructional activities (Kotschy Andrásné, 2013; Tóth & Horváth, 2021).

### **3.1 Museums and Sources in Teaching History**

Historical sources are abundant in our environment, and museums play a crucial role in preserving many of these artifacts. Both history as a discipline and history education leverage these sources for various educational purposes.

Museums and museum pedagogy have significant changes in recent decades. According George E. Hein, the modern museum is not merely a collection of objects, but also embodies a statement regarding education. The museum serves society and its development. The museums now also have an educational purpose (Hein, 2007).

Museum education has been defined in many ways over the years, and there is no single agreed definition. According to one of the most recent publications, the *“museum education refers to the intentional use of museum resources, collections, and environments to facilitate learning and personal development for diverse audiences. It encompasses a variety of formal and informal educational practices aimed at engaging visitors in active, inquiry-based learning. This includes guided tours, hands-on activities, workshops, and interactive exhibits that encourage critical thinking, emotional engagement, and the co-creation of knowledge.”* (Todino & Campitiello, 2025, p. 1).

Both museum education and history education use the following teaching methods: demonstration, discussion explanation, and effective worksheets (Schlichter-Takács – Csimáné Pozsegovics 2020; Vajda 2018). Museum pedagogy also uses sources and sources processing tasks that participants engage with during the session, but in a non-classroom setting and in a relatively freer manner. It is essential to conduct research that investigates the specific history education objectives present in museum pedagogy session.

In present day, the digital world is rapidly evolving, positioning digital museums and digital museum education at the forefront as innovative and effective solutions for the museum sector (Ringert, 2022). The digital museum is not new, it was already used by Ben Davis in 1994 (Ringert, 2022).

The term “virtual” has gained prominence in the context of new digital technologies, including virtual exhibitions, virtual tours and virtual museums. Virtual reality, in addition to utilizing ICT tools, also offers real interactive experience opportunities (Ringert, 2022).

The concept of digital museum education was defined by Csaba Ringert (2022) as follows: *“digital museum education is an experiential museum session that takes place in a specifically real or virtual museum environment with use of ICT tools, it has a direct impact on the development of participants’ ICT literacy and facilitate the transfer of knowledge related to the cultural domains connected to the museum collection”* (own translated from Hungarian to English, Ringert, 2022, p. 108).

In the classroom history teaching, students encounter sources in history textbooks, exercise books, worksheets. In history education, it is of fundamental importance that source analysis is conducted in a didactically prepared manner (Vajda, 2018). This means that the teacher carries out purposefully selected and didactically prepared tasks with the students (Vajda, 2018, p. 38).

Barnabás Vajda, in his 2018 book, which provides a comprehensive overview of the methodology and didactics of history, defined four steps and phases of sources processing: pre-analytical phase, analytical phase, synthetic phase and post-synthetic phase (Vajda, 2018, p. 138).

Attila Herber (2023) specifically focused on the educational use and methodological processing of visual sources, outlining the steps involved in the proper development of such tasks. Herber writes – citing Kjeldsen, 2018 – that *“an image is capable of eliciting emotional responses similar to those triggered in real life situation. Moreover, drawing on Freud’s concept of ‘dreamwork’, it may also function as a form of ‘thought condensation’.”* (Herber, 2023, p. 103). Barnabás Vajda states that the analysis of visual sources involves both explicit and implicit components (Vajda, 2020), whereas Attila Herber outlined the process of visual source analysis as consisting of the following stages: contextualisation, pattern recognition, guides independent analysis, more advanced independent analysis, and the presentation of findings (Herber, 2023).

## **4. Results**

In this section, we present theoretical models that outline the necessary steps teachers need to take in lesson preparation and propose application strategies for using museums and primary sources in the introduction of teaching history.

It is my belief that museums, along with the historical sources and interiors they feature, and the other historical sources, can be invaluable for teaching history within the classroom setting. However, the question remains: how can we effectively integrate the museum into the classroom environment? This can be achieved through the use of photographs or virtual tours, which are increasingly accessible via numerous museum websites.

When the history teacher begins to prepare for the lesson, they must take certain steps, which is referred to as operationalization (Vajda, 2018). This process allows their pedagogical work to be thoughtful and thorough. In lesson preparation, the teacher must first verify the upcoming topic for the specific class and based on this design an appropriate lesson plan. We firmly believe – along with many experts in history didactics – that the use of historical sources is indispensable in history introduction. It is teacher's responsibility to select relevant sources that are aligned with the subject matter, the lesson objectives and the students' cognitive abilities.

It is important to recognize that, while preparing for a lesson and creating didactically prepared worksheets, the teacher must also engage in a thorough analysis of the sources. The sources must be critically examined prior to being presented to students. This step is crucial, as pre-analyzing the sources enables the teacher to more effectively guide and support students throughout their learning process. Therefore, a teacher's role involves both selection and planning. All of these steps signify the commencement of the didactic processing of historical material. Students are not simply presented with raw, unprocessed sources – particularly when they are just starting to learn how to engage with and analyze them. The history teacher must meticulously structure the way sources are introduced and utilized in the classroom.

In the following, we present the steps that the history teacher must take, specifically step by step, in order to effectively use museums and historical sources for the introduction of history teaching. This theoretical model is one that we have developed.

When the teacher is aware of the upcoming topic, they must consider whether it is a subject that a museum also addresses and whether they know of a museum suitable for the topic. Following this, the teacher should visit the museum in person or explore digital museum options available online. In the museum, they select relevant sources, those appropriate to the topic, the learning objectives and the students, either through a personal visit or by use a virtual tour from home.

One of the most crucial yet challenging aspects of history teaching is that the teacher must consider the learning process from the students' perspective. This includes understanding what it means for students to begin working with historical sources. Accordingly, the teacher must design the tasks and structure the lesson in a way that facilitates this learning process. Based on this, they didactize the material, meaning they give pedagogical value to the sources by adapting the lesson content to the students. As a result, classroom activities and tasks are developed. If necessary, the teacher also prepare supplementary materials.

While this summary of the step-by-step teacher preparation process may appear somewhat general, we consider it essential to articulate it comprehensively in one place and present it in clear and accessible manner, particularly in relation to how history teachers should introduce sources to young students.

In this part of this paper, we aim to demonstrate an example of how historical sources and museums can be utilized in the introduction of history teaching within the classroom. It is essential to clarify from the outset that the steps outlined below do not represent a traditional 45 minute lesson plan, but rather the procedural a procedural framework for implementing the task.

In Hungary and Slovakia begin studying history at the age of 10 or 11, these tasks are designed for that age group. The current curriculum for Hungarian primary school students includes the topic “Life in the Castle”, which is covered in the latter half of the 5th grade. This subject is addressed in various museums, such as castle museums, and can be utilized both in physical visits and virtual formats.

1. step: preparations: find the right museum and taking photos in a castle museum or save the website link.
2. step: for the lesson, the photos are either printed or the virtual tour option is projected using a projector.
3. step: in the classroom, students are organized into pairs of two for collaborative work. The pairs must either be shown the images of the castle museum or be given the images to examine.

The task involves a comparative analysis, corresponding to the levels of Bloom’s taxonomy (Vajda, 2018, p. 101). Students will conduct a comparison to examine the differences between an old building (the Castle) and modern structures. If it necessary, we can give a picture of a modern building. Students are assessed according to the following criteria: What makes it appear old? Did it look the same during its time? Was the wall color similar? How about the furnishings?

In another task, elements of role playing and playful methods are employed (see also Jeszenszki, 2024), with focus on the individuals residing in the castle. The curriculum incorporates the social structure as a key component of this topic.

The first two steps are the same as in the previous task.

3. step: the students are organized into smaller groups (the number of which depends on the class size), with each group focusing on a specific social class. The teacher can communicate this to the students either verbally or by providing a written note inside an envelope.
4. step: each group is assigned to analyze a different room of the castle, corresponding to the relevant social class.
5. step: the groups prepare a description of the task they have been assigned.
6. step: the groups share their findings with one another, presenting the assigned social class to their peers. This is achieved when students have effectively immersed themselves in the historical era and social class. The teacher provides corrections and guidance as necessary, particularly in addressing any incorrect responses.

## **5. Conclusions**

According to the title of the research, we have based the use of museums and primary sources as an opportunity for introducing teaching history. In both Hungary and Slovakia, history education begins in the 5th grade, which corresponds to the age of 10 or 11, making the point when history is introduced at a more serious level in students’ studies. As both international and Hungarian literature have shown, students are already exposed to history in their surroundings before the age of 10, meaning it is not entirely unfamiliar to them.

Imre Knausz (2015) argued that at this age, students are more focused on perceiving concrete things, and critical thinking has not yet developed, or will soon begin to develop. It is of

fundamental importance to develop critical and historical thinking in history lessons (Kojanitz, 2021), and we assert that with the presented model tasks and visual historical sources, these skills can begin to be developed at this age, in our country.

In the levels of the aforementioned Bloom's taxonomy, analysis represents a higher cognitive level (Kojanitz, 2021; Vajda, 2018, p. 101); however, with more simply formulated tasks, a student who has not yet engaged in the analysis of complex historical written sources can still accomplish this.

Teaching proper sources analysis is particularly important, as in Hungary, students are required to take a history school leaving exam at the end of the 12th grade, which consists largely of tasks involving source analysis (Kaposi, 2020; Kojanitz, 2023; Tóth, 2023).

These innovative approaches offer multiple advantages – they enhance students engagement and motivation while ensuring the attainment of predefined learning objectives.

We argue that at this stage of development, introducing students to history and conducting analyses can effectively incorporate playful elements (Jeszenszki, 2024). The presented sample tasks also contain such components. Furthermore, we emphasize that these sample tasks serve both as theoretical models, and as exemplary frameworks that can be adapted to various historical topics. Additionally, we find it essential to highlight that pedagogical competencies – rooted in educational sciences – and the didactic structuring of content – pertaining to history didactics – may seem self-evident, yet we deemed it necessary to summarize them in this study.

This study has limitations. While the current research provides valuable theoretical insights, further research, particularly practical investigations, is necessary to assess the effectiveness of the proposed tasks in real world educational settings. The practical application of the models and strategies discussed in this paper needs to be thoroughly tested and evaluated in classroom environments to determine their actual impact on history teaching. Furthermore, it is crucial to review and evaluate existing worksheets and materials related to museum education, assessing their relevance and adaptability for practical use in history teaching within the classroom.

## Acknowledgement

This paper was supported by J. Selye University Grant for young researchers and doctoral students (2025).

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