"e-challenges" for museum professionals in Portugal

Alexandre Matos and Ana Carvalho – Comissão Nacional Portuguesa do Conselho Internacional de Museus ICOM Portugal, Portugal

There aren't in Portugal, as far as we know, recent studies on the impact of technology in the world of museums regarding the creation of new job profiles or new skills requirements by the introduction of this new factor in museums day-to-day. However, the demands of that impact have been the focus of research and analyses in some international forums, among which stands out the Museums and The Web conference (see http://www.museumsandtheweb.com for more information) or some specific documents like the report published by Museums Association in 2013 (Museum Association, 2013), and some researchers have also published their views on this subject.

It is not strange that this issue is somehow forgotten in museums and remaining cultural sector in Portugal. The Portuguese museums live at the moment, a financial crisis that intensified with the economic crisis that the country has gone through since the request for financial assistance in 2011. This crisis has multiple effects on the activity of museums, because the budget for the culture sector and for the museums and cultural heritage sub-sector has suffered consecutive and significant cuts that affect the daily functioning of institutions and limited the strategic planning capacity of these institutions. This situation is serious and has been felt in many countries, but in the Portuguese case, given the high proportion of museums that depend, directly or indirectly, from the public budget, the situation has major implications that we can already feel and that we are going to experiment, in a large proportion, in a not too distant future with regard to human resources and, consequently, to their training. Therefore, the attention of officials has been facing urgent needs, forgetting, as would be expected, but not desirable, the need to adapt the institutions to the challenges in today's information society when museums are confronted daily with the demands of a more engaged and interested audience.

Nevertheless, we need to address the issues aroused by technology and the first step in order for this to happen is to identify the future needs and create a strategy that allow museums to

cope with them in a medium long term by implementing a plan with the proper evaluation methodology.

We propose to analyse those needs keeping in mind the triangle Collections, Audiences and Technology and its relations with the modern and open museum. For this specific presentation we'll use the framework developed by Collections Trust and the BSI Group in the *Code of practice for cultural collections management* (British Standards Institution, 2009) that includes policies, processes and procedures for collections development activity with a specific focus on audiences and addresses issues divided in four areas: collections development, collections information, collections access and collections care and conservation.

These areas, if we think about the specificity of museums and other memory institutions, as libraries and archives, are currently being challenged with new tools, new hardware, software, media, new technologies every single day. These challenges can simple be a new hardware for measuring environment in a museum storage or they can be as well a new and revolutionary social network with an accentuated growth in a specific audience that the museum needs to be aware of. No matter how specific they are, museums need to be prepared for them and for the fast pace they occur nowadays in those four areas.

Therefore, the first action to consider is to discuss and write a strategy, based on the museum values, mission and policies, which could help the museum and its professionals to be prepared or to prepare themselves for those challenges by writing down the conceptual framework that need to be addressed in every new challenge.

This written document will be essential for the museum or other memory institutions to adapt to chances, but it'll be useful, as well, for other purposes like the development of new courses, for the adaptation of existing training profiles, for the creation of new tools as a response for specific museum needs and even for the continuity of the challenge "system" that we've mentioned above.

Although museums need to focus their attention on the four areas prior referred, in this presentation, we'll only going to explore two of those areas: collections information and collections access. We've chosen these areas because they are directly connected with the

most relevant and public known "e-challenges" that museums face today: the creation of information and its dissemination in accordance with the standards established for museum and heritage documentation.

Maybe it seems easy to do it, but when we have a closer look at the standards landscape in the museum (or more broadly in the cultural heritage) sector, everyone agrees that the task is huge and comprehends a great amount of resources, human and financial. And it's so because museums aren't only looking for their own necessities but they are now "obliged" to do it respecting the sector trends like information reuse (Jacobson, 2009), open data and, more important, linked open data, social networks, engagement, participation, context, etc. sought by audiences hungry for knowledge.

These demands, internal and external, gathered together with the observance for the trends imposed by technology are putting enormous pressure on training in this field. Usually the training courses in museum studies are focused in issues like collections care, mediation, management, collections documentation, museography, etc. These courses are now beginning to adapt themselves to the sector rapid changes and increasing demands, but they are struggling with the rhythm of our time. As a further factor or consideration we can also point that, at least in Portugal, museums studies courses or training are separated from the archives and libraries sector (these are included in the Information Science sector).

Another factor that needs also to be observed in our analysis is the composition of the current museum sector workforce and its necessities regarding training updates. In Portugal, as mentioned above, the financial crisis is preventing museums to renew their teams hiring new professionals when someone, for instance, retires or even when the institution needs someone with new skills for a specific area. So we also need to focus our attention in the training needs of the existing museum staff, so they can learn to cope with the changes in the sector.

A transversal factor to all the mentioned questions is the focus in the acquisition of competences by means of tools and not by concepts. Is a fact that many courses or specific training sessions are focused on a collection management system or on a digital asset management tool, but, as we've mentioned in our presentation at the first Digital Challenges for Museum Experts conference (http://ecultskills-conference.eap.gr), in 2015, museum

professionals need to learn concepts so they can after explore the huge number of tools that every single day have their market debut.

Last but not least, the museum sector and its guardianships need to rethink and redefine their teams and structure to integrate professionals who can respond fully to the needs of the information society and the challenges that those needs entail.

These factors may not be the only ones we should observe in this project, but it seems to us that if we can explore responses to these and look for other important factors, we will certainly be closer to the success we are looking for.

We think that the challenges that museums and their professionals face today are very similar in Portugal, Greece, Italy, Germany or in any other European country. However, we know that some countries have sought answers to these questions earlier. In some cases, we can learn from their success, in others we will certainly learn from failures, but we must always look to add more capacity to an extremely needy sector.

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