

MUSEUM MEDIATORS IN EUROPE: THE PROJECT

Ana Fernambuco and Inês Câmara

Mapa das Ideias / Museum Mediators EU Consortium (www.museummediators.eu)

THE CONTEXT

According to the European Commission Study on “The Impact of Culture on Creativity” (2009): «The impact and value of culture-based creativity on the economy is enormous; it inspires people to learn.»

Even though culture-based creativity plays a pivotal role in the European society in many different dimensions (an increasing share of economic activity; the positive social impact, with huge touristic, identity and territory cohesion value; as a social inclusion agent), the role of the Museum Mediators is too undervalued. It is still not recognised that the relation with Museum and Heritage visitors represents the threshold for institutional survival.

Museum Mediators/Educators are, typically, highly qualified professionals with an unstable and intermittent connection with their employer, developing very different projects each time. They come from the most diversified academic fields. However, most of them have little or none communicational and educational training that is indispensable for their daily activities.

This reality motivated the creation of the 2012-2014 project. Our primary goal was to create training and professional guidelines for Museum Mediators/Educators that represent the institutional and vocational needs of Museums' mediation practitioners in the participating European countries, such as Portugal, Spain, Italy, Denmark and Estonia.

This enabled the comparability of the Museum Educational Services and the upward development of a professional and certified system where professionals can evolve through a career standard and, also, create networks and mobility projects across the European Union.

With the common training framework, created initially by Mapa das Ideias, museum and heritage education professionals can develop their skills within the field of communication, education and management. These themes are designed specifically

within the museum and cultural heritage settings and can also address issues such as intercultural dialogue and social inclusion.

The project also promotes the empowerment of Museum Mediators as a professional and training group, stimulates mobility and the creation of a network and a think tank that involves the project partners and, later on, other countries of the EU.

This course can be consulted on the website: www.museummediators.eu.

PARTNERS

MAPA DAS IDEIAS, PORTUGAL / <http://www.mapadasideias.pt/>

ECCOM, ITALY / <http://www.eccom.it/>

UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA, SPAIN

EESTI RAHVA MUUSEUM, Estonia/ <http://www.erm.ee/>

DANISH CENTRE FOR ARTS & INTERCULTURE, Denmark/ www.cki.de

ASSOCIATED PARTNERS

ICOM-PORTUGAL

INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO DE TOMAR

THE COURSE STRUCTURE

The pilot training courses for Museum Mediator EU project ran in the partners' countries between September 2013 and May 2014. The primary goal was to create a training course for Museum Mediators/ Educators; that addressed the institutional and professional needs of Museums' mediation practitioners in the European countries that participated in the project: Portugal, Spain, Estonia, Denmark and Italy.

The course took into account several sources:

- a) The original version. Mapa das Ideias created a training course for Museum Mediators in 2001, that had 104 hours of lecturing in the first version, focusing on communication, artistic and management skills. This course developed through four editions with a thorough evaluation. In 2008 a new version was released with 48

hours and, in 2011, a European version, in English. This last course is the object of transfer of innovation.

b) When the project started, our first goal was to understand if the original structure accomplished the goals of a training ground for museum educators and mediators across Europe.

It had many risks and challenges: political and administrative structures; museum organisational issues; collections and the vast array of themes, very different academic and professional backgrounds; various demands from the stockholders, community developers and, of course, of each museums' hierarchy and relation with local, regional and national power structures.

c) Thus, it was relevant to develop a research framework in each partner's country. We were focused on the action dimensions of the research, favouring a pragmatic approach linking quantitative and qualitative methods. So, each partner had the responsibility to: apply an on-line survey about museum educators and mediators (background, professional experience, professional aspirations and training needs); to make in-depth interviews with different targets – museum educators and mediators; leading professionals; chair-people from government bodies and professional associations. Each partner selected four to six academic papers about museum education and mediation that are included in this handbook and, also, created case-studies about real museum education and museum practices. So, through this tool, each of us will be able, not only to read, but also to see and hear from other experiences across the countries involved in this project.

So, our aim, as a project team, was not only to transfer the Portuguese course. We wanted to challenge its pre-assumptions, to analyse its strongest features as well as its weaknesses and, through the process, create a strong, valuable training framework that will – in the long run – value the work and the professional aspiration of museum educators and mediators.

COURSE METHODOLOGY

The course comprises 40 hours lecture plan associated with a final 8 hours session regarding museum experiences and visits (on-site learning and interaction). During

the course experience, participants are asked to undertake activities such as readings, creative and analytic tasks regarding their professional endeavours and interact with the group outside of the class more formal environment.

The course was be replicated in all the partners' countries, trying to recreate similar conditions – sessions' content, lecturers' panel, lesson plans and methodologies – while testing different formats.

Each course had a maximum of 25 participants, with specific recruitment criteria: young to mid-career professionals; higher education background; various institutional contexts and work experiences – from freelancers to sector and museum coordinators; geographical representation; different museum and academic backgrounds, collections – art, science, history, technology, ethnography and archaeology – and organizational scale – local, regional or national.

At the end of the project, over 125 museum professionals participated in these training courses, sharing a common ground and, we hope, having the foundations for future collaboration.

When we created the structure and developed the lesson plan, we had an important issue regarding the methodology and learning outcomes. We did not want to create comfort zones through very specific guidelines or “how to do” lists. Learning in a non-formal context is a complex process and, in a Museum setting – where knowledge relates to experience and creativity, it becomes quite challenging!

We defined five themes, which we believe from previous experience and the research results, as relevant for the museum mediator experience.

An important part of the project relies on the quality of the course lecturing staff. We looked for different people from diverse backgrounds, sometimes with antagonistic visions. We were lucky to engage an excellent team of brilliant professionals.

THEME: MAKING MUSEUMS MATTER

Session: "The Social Value of Culture" by Cristina da Milano

During this meeting, the social relevance of the Museum was discussed, focusing on what social inclusion means and the potential of cultural institutions. Cristina da Milano explained the concepts of inclusion and value, using seminal references as well as relevant case-studies.

Session: "Evolving museums in a fast changing world. New trends, opportunities, responsibilities and agendas" by Elisabetta Falchetti

Museums have always evolved and are evolving today, anticipating or following socio-cultural transformations. Museum changes involve management, goals, languages, communication styles and tools, cultural trends and activities, relationship with publics and territories. Elisabetta Falchetti gave us her view about the new agendas and huge demands that challenge Museums and may redefine their future role.

THEME: MUSEUM LEARNING

Session: "Whose voice is heard in planning museum activities?" By Carla Padró and Irene Amengual

In this section, Carla and Irene discussed different theories of teaching and learning that are widely used within museum mediation, to analyse and review some case studies as a basis for showing different theories of learning and their effects in visitors, the museum and the educator.

THEME: MUSEUM MEDIATION

Session: "Intercultural dialogue in Museums" by Simona Bodo

Starting the discussion with the enormous potential that museums hold for the intercultural dialogue and project development, Simona challenged pre-assumptions about the concepts and means related to intercultural policies and plans, changing perspective between museums, communities and stakeholders.

Session: "Mediation Projects and Tools" by Inês Câmara

This session was dedicated to the Museum Experience as a whole. The concepts and dimensions of Education, Communication and Experience, were discussed, leading to the definition of Museum Mediation as a professional field.

Theme: MUSEUM MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION

Session: "Learning museums and active citizenship. The Educational Role of Museums in society" by Ida Brændholt

Different national initiatives and surveys as well as cases studies on how museums can contribute to developing active citizenship competencies, an essential need in the 21st Century globalised and culturally diverse knowledge society. Museums have the potential for self-directed, free-choice learning, respecting diversity, and multiple viewpoints to take full advantage of culture within a democratic society.

Session: "Museum Communications" by Maria Vlachou

Maria Vlachou discusses the potential of thinking "marketing" for Museum professionals as reinforcing the museums' social and political roles. By pinpointing good and bad experiences, Maria thinking concepts, tools and the value of planning in the different levels of museum management, including the museum education sector.

THEME: RESEARCH TOOLS

Session: "The making of meaning: what artworks tell and how their message can be translated" by Valeria Pica

This session focused on case studies depicting tools that museums can exploit to improve their activities and increase the interaction with all types of audience. Some topics are related to research methods, assessment tools, and best practices in museums mediation together with informal education, museums experience, and professional skills.

Session: "Reflection as a tool for development and support of practice" by Alice Semedo

Exploring the tension between the use of evidence-based practice and reflection, Alice Semedo explores the use of individual approaches and perceptions of personal, possibly more creative and visual approaches, as forms of critical reflection and participation in the construction of a new collaborative / creative paradigm to think about mediation in museological context.

PROJECT RESULTS

The project research and main outputs can be found on the website: www.museummediators.eu.

It consists of the following items:

- English Handbook (unabridged version);
- Portuguese, Estonian, Italian, Spanish and Danish Handbooks (abridged version);
- 20 case studies from Portugal, Estonia, Italy and Spain;
- 17 references and papers from outside project sources;
- a video log with 21 videos amongst partners, trainers and participants.

The training course involved ten lecturers, six venues and 100 trainees. Our average trainee would be a woman, with a Master's degree, at the beginning of the career (less than eight years of professional experience).

The overall evaluation of the training experience was excellent when compared with similar experiences.

Besides the relation with the lecturers, they valued tremendously the peer-to-peer interaction and the references compilation.

FUTURE

Some of the project initial goals were not fulfilled, because, at a certain point in did not seem relevant or feasible:

- VET training. The project findings did not support the creation of a mid-level training course for people without a university degree, because of the hard content and the complexity involved in museum mediation.
- The Master was not created in this project and was a part of the new applications, without success.

The informal network that was born among the 150 professionals is not working now, because we lacked the time and the means (staff hours, mainly) to keep it afloat. So, two years after the end of the project, it would be necessary to start from scratch.

In informal settings, meeting participants, we find that the impact of the project in their professional practices is highly valued, from the perspective towards their role

and the visitors' experience, as well the access to more conceptual and reflexive materials.

The consortium is planning new steps, incorporating new practices as, for example, the digital tools through media literacy experiences in culture and heritage.

The professional development is also an important vector.

REFERENCES

Please visit our websites:

www.museummediators.eu

www.mapadasideias.pt