



**EUROVISION – MUSEUMS EXHIBITING EUROPE (EMEE)**

## **BRIDGING THE GAP**

ACTIVATION, PARTICIPATION  
AND ROLE MODIFICATION

**A MANUAL BY**

CINZIA ANGELINI  
Introduction by EMMA NARDI



# TOOLKIT N°3 BRIDGING THE GAP

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



EuroVision  
**Museums  
Exhibiting  
Europe**

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The International Council of Museums' (ICOM) definition of 'museum', which is held throughout the world, obliges museums to act in the service of society. Besides its mandate to preserve the material and immaterial cultural heritage, this, above all, includes the historical and cultural mediacy of the past.

In contrast to other educational institutions, museums are uniquely characterized by processing and promoting information, knowledge as well as insight through historical, cultural and natural-history objects and collections. Especially since the objects, in addition to their material value, become sign bearers through interpretation and presentation, they have potential for far-reaching meaning. They are supposed to help stimulate discussion, allow the evaluation of historical and societal developments and reflect important topics of the past on a higher level of abstraction. Ultimately, the museums and therewith also cultural policy want to achieve the strengthening of identities in this way and improve the people's understanding of the present so as to be able to shape the future.

Museums today want to work inclusively in order to reach a broad audience; they want to be a forum for societal dialogues so as to meet different experiences and perspectives; they want to be places of enlightenment and reconciliation. Their work is supposed to have sustainable effects and thereby embed societal values among the population.

However, do museums manage to reach people in a technologically and socially rapidly changing world? Are the exhibition topics, exhibition designs and ways of mediacy on offer already everywhere developed in a way which brings about the desired success?

Museums and their staff seek the dialogue among each other – in our increasingly globalised world also internationally; they need support, suggestions, and exchange.

Thankfully, the European Union provides programmes for the international dialogue of museums and universities so that applications can be developed that are meant to help the cultural institutions to be able to carry out their societal task.

The project 'EuroVision – Museums Exhibiting Europe' is a milestone in this development; the Toolkits are of valuable assistance on the way to meet the challenges of educational policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Prof. Dr. Hans-Martin Hinz, Berlin  
*President of the International Council of Museums (ICOM)*

This manual was developed in the scope of the internationally oriented project EuroVision – Museums Exhibiting Europe (EMEE). The project, which runs for four years and is funded by the Culture Programme of the European Union, was initiated by the Chair of History Didactics of Augsburg University. It is implemented by eight interdisciplinary project partners from seven European countries.<sup>1</sup> The aim of the project is to advance the modernization of museums by re-interpreting museum objects and topics from a trans-regional European perspective as well as by innovative mediating approaches. Thereby, especially national and regional museums shall be encouraged to try out new ideas and concepts through which a timely orientation of the institution ‘museum’ in today’s intercultural, heterogeneous society can be furthered.

1. Project members: Augsburg University, Germany (Coordinator); ATELIER BRÜCKNER, Germany; National Museum of History, Bulgaria; University Paris-Est Créteil, France; Roma Tre University, Italy; National Museum of Archaeology, Portugal; National Museum of Contemporary History, Slovenia; Kunstverein monochrom, Austria.

## THE CONCEPT OF CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE

The basic concept of the EMEE project exists of three aspired Changes of Perspectives the first Change of Perspective refers to the new interpretation of museum objects from a trans-regional European perspective. Objects shall no longer be presented in one-dimensional contexts of meaning, but perceived in a differentiated way through multi-perspectively conveying several levels of meaning that are demonstrated in a parallel way. The second Change of Perspective refers to a change in the relation between museum experts and

visitors. In reflecting on the museum's traditional role as scientifically interpreting authority and in inviting visitors to participate by means of different approaches old patterns of thought can be overcome and new, contemporary forms of museum work can be developed. From a trans-regional European perspective this can, for instance, mean that visitors with a migration background can contribute their view on objects. By expanding the scope of interpretation the objects can at the same time become more interesting to a wider circle of visitors. The suggested activities in line with the 'bridging-the-gap' approach (bridge cultural and social divides) can thus also contribute to audience development. The third Change of Perspective aspires the broadening of the view by internationalization: only in an internationally comparative perspective new, changed interpretations of objects become possible. Moreover, establishing international networks facilitates cooperation between museums of different countries.

## THE FIVE EMEE TOOLKITS

So as to process the concept Change of Perspective for practical implementation, especially the first and the second Change of Perspective, five so-called EMEE Toolkits were developed in the scope of the project. These application-oriented manuals aim at mediating between theory and practice and offer all interested museums instructions for innovative and creative concepts by which the modernization and internationalization of museum work can be advanced. The five manuals thereby thematically focus on different topics as the following overview shows:

### TOOLKIT 1: MAKING EUROPE VISIBLE

- The Toolkit deals with the re-interpretation of objects showing ways to re-interpret collections with a trans-regional and multi-perspective approach.

### TOOLKIT 2: INTEGRATING MULTICULTURAL EUROPE (SOCIAL ARENA)

- The Toolkit provides an idea of the museum as a public, non-commercial space that offers possibilities for people to meet, to discuss and to get in touch with the cultural heritage.
- It shows how these enhanced functions of museums can be used for presenting and discussing trans-regional and European topics especially regarding current issues and present-day problems. In that way, it contributes to integrating multicultural Europe.

### TOOLKIT 3: BRIDGING-THE-GAP (ACTIVATION, PARTICIPATION AND ROLE MODIFICATION)

- The Toolkit deals with the development of different levels of the participation and activation of the visitor (for example hands-on, minds-on, user-generated exhibitions, guided tours conceptualized in the form of a dialogue, participation of different focus groups in the museum work, etc.).
- It develops programmes to encourage non-visitor groups to get to know the museum's world.
- It provides best practice examples with a focus on trans-regional/European topics.



#### **TOOLKIT 4: SYNAESTHETIC TRANSLATION OF PERSPECTIVES. SCENOGRAPHY – A SKETCHBOOK**

- The Toolkit is about scenography and its potential for a synaesthetic translation of perspectives.
- The first part introduces the basic parameters and tools of Scenography as well as some strategies of staging museum objects.
- The second part is more practical in nature. It presents scenographic design concepts for staging trans-regional museum objects in a European context. They are visualized by sketches and show how to apply the parameters, tools and strategies to generate a Change of Perspective.

#### **TOOLKIT 5: SOCIAL WEB AND INTERACTION**

- The Toolkit shows that the social web can be used not only for public relations but also for interaction (museum with visitors, museum with non-visitors, visitors among themselves, museum with other institutions).
- With this Toolkit, visitors and other interested persons will be given a possibility to get involved

with the museum's topics, to discuss, to exchange ideas, to reflect on exhibitions, etc.

- It offers ideas how to integrate the possibilities of web 2.0 in exhibitions in order to promote more visitor participation.

The EMEE Toolkits also present best practice examples for the various topics and therefore partially refer to the preceding Mapping Process, which was carried out in the first phase of the project.<sup>2</sup> In future project steps the ideas and concepts of the EMEE Toolkits will be tested by practical implementation in various formats such as workshops and practice modules which will be accompanied by an evaluation process. Moreover, so-called Exemplary units, which will be published on the EMEE website in the further course of the project, provide additional suggestions for the implementation of the contents of the five EMEE Toolkits.

The EMEE Team

2. EMEE – Museums Exhibiting Europe. Mapping Process, <http://www.museums-exhibiting-europe.de/mappingprocess/>, Accessed 20 December 2015.

» *Le succès d'un musée ne se mesure pas au nombre de visiteurs qu'il reçoit, mais au nombre de visiteurs auxquels il a enseigné quelque chose. Il ne se mesure pas au nombre d'objets qu'il montre mais au nombre d'objets qui ont pu être perçus par les visiteurs dans leur environnement humain. Il ne se mesure pas à son étendue mais à la quantité d'espace que le public aura pu raisonnablement parcourir pour en tirer un véritable profit. C'est cela le musée. Sinon, ce n'est qu'une espèce d'abattoir culturel*«<sup>1</sup>

Georges-Henri Rivière's revolutionary idea puts the visitors at the core of any museum concern. He states that:

- the number of visitors is not, in itself, the real mark of success. The real purpose of the museum is to *teach* something;
- the number of the exposed objects, that curators often consider in an arithmetical way (more objects, more value) is to be carefully considered, because an overwhelming museum confuses visitors giving them a number of stimuli they cannot process;
- the square metres a museum asks the visitors to pace are not, again, just a quantitative measure. There are limits beyond which the fatigue of endless corridors and rooms becomes a hindering element to visitors.

This analysis brings us to consider that the quantitative approach is only one of the possible keys to interpreting visitors' behaviour. The activation of visitors can be possible if the museum does not scare them with too many objects and a space that is only accessible in physical terms (everybody can enter it), but not in psychological ones.

This does not mean, of course, that museums must literally get rid of their objects or reduce their surface. It means that they have to be aware of the problem and to invent suitable strategies to allow visitors to feel at ease in their premises and *learn* something, where 'learn' is not to be literally interpreted, in its main cognitive aspects. It means that visitors should *learn* to overcome their negative feelings toward

1. Georges-Henri Rivière (1897-1985), créateur du Musée National des Arts et Traditions populaires.

museums and begin considering them as democratic, welcoming places.

When museums were first established in Europe, they were conceived as institutions with two main roles:

- allow experts to study and learn
- allow the public to appreciate their content.

Two examples can better explain these purposes, the British Museum and the Louvre.

The British Museum was founded in 1753 by Sir Hans Sloane who offered his astonishing collection of natural sciences and his library to the State. It was meant as a place where scholars could meet and work together in order to foster the development of the growing industrial British economy and only once a week it was open to the public. The scholars themselves accompanied the visitors explaining them the work they were doing. This early educational attention led, at the beginning of the XIX century, to the creation of the first educational department in Europe.

The Louvre was established in 1792, at the very beginning of the republican period, as *Muséum National*. The main idea was to develop citi-

zenship, demonstrating that the royal collections that, before the Revolution, were the privileged possession of the king, were now transformed into collective property besides keeping their role of educational tools for painters and sculptors. The museum schedule was thus organized to fulfil its double mission: three days a week it was reserved to artists who had the chance to work in a quiet environment without being disturbed by outsiders; three days a week it was open to the public; the seventh day it was closed to allow the guardians to clean it.

In the case of the British Museum, the policy towards the public was mainly cognitive; in the case of the Louvre the main purpose was to strengthen the tie with the young democratic country rather than to educate. In both cases the purpose was to make visitors participate. In both cases it was implicit that citizens had nothing to say and that they could just listen and learn from people who had, by definition, a wider knowledge than theirs.

In the following centuries, it often seemed that the stress in the work of museums passed from communication to the public to conservation. Museum directors tended to reduce their interest

towards the public, being mainly worried by research about the objects under their responsibility and preservation of the treasures they had to look after. In this period museums acquired a mainly negative reputation: dusty places, with piles of uninteresting objects that were completely out of reach of laymen's comprehension. The architecture, very often imitating a Greek temple, contributed to this idea of separation from everyday life. The negative idea of the building was reinforced by the fact that a similar architecture was also used to build tribunals and stock exchanges, two other temples of the middle class.

After the Second World War, the need, especially in Europe, to rebuild destroyed museums and try to recover confiscated pieces of art, made the *UNESCO* create an international council that could enhance collaboration among museums. The *International Council of Museums* was thus established. One of its first tasks was to find a general definition of museums that could be shared internationally. In the definition the importance of communication is strongly stated: museums are places where all visitors must not only learn but also enjoy themselves. A new era in museum history was thus launched.

Now museums have become cultural institutions where the content is no longer transmitted in an authoritative and pre-defined way (De Luca, 2007). Rather, visitors are actively involved in a cultural experience where they resort to their personal cognitive and emotional knowledge. Any museum initiative is therefore required to ignite learning processes where communication between visitors and museum operators develops on a circular basis: the visitors' learning

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## MUSEUMS AND THE EU

needs and the learning proposal are tightly intertwined.

Any museum that is willing to adopt this approach is therefore required to re-organise its spaces and contents, favouring those aspects that can make the visitor feel welcome, motivated and ready to live a pleasant learning experience.

### ICOM - DEFINITION OF A MUSEUM

*A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.*

ICOM Statutes art. 3 par.1 -

<http://archives.icom.museum/definition.html>

In the last decades the Council of Europe has several times stressed the importance of two political issues:

- the importance of lifelong learning for all European citizens;
- the need for museums to take a leading role in supporting educational institutions.

These recommendations are the core of a new conception of museums. Some years after the foundation of the EU, Jean Monnet, one of the founding fathers, said a sentence that is universally quoted: 'If we were to start all over again, we would start with culture'. In reality, the EU began with main economic interests; in a second phase the bureaucratic aspects were tackled and just in recent years culture – and therefore museums – has become a core political theme. As Great Britain wanted to provide people with scientific knowledge through the British Museum, the EU wants museums to become a real cultural melting pot not only for Europeans but also for immigrants. As France wanted to transform people into French citizens through the Louvre, the EU hopes to create European citizens through the transformation of the cultural activities hosted in museums.

This was one of the missions of the Culture Programme<sup>2</sup>, a European initiative that ran from 2007 to 2013 to support projects and activities designed to protect and promote cultural diversity and heritage. It is based on the *Resolutions of the Council of 16 November 2007 on a European Agenda for Culture* (2007/C 287/01)<sup>3</sup> which aims at setting the steps towards further cooperation in the cultural field.

2. Culture Programm of the European Commission, [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/tools/culture-programme\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/tools/culture-programme_en.htm), Accessed 20 December 2015.

3. Resolution 2007/C 287/01, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32007G1129%2801%29>, Accessed 20 December 2015.

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## WHY A BRIDGING-THE-GAP MANUAL

The Resolution stresses three strategic objectives:

- the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue;
- the promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy for growth, employment, innovation and competitiveness;
- the promotion of culture as a vital element in the Union's international relations.

These are then developed into a list of specific objectives that includes the following:

- the mobility of artists and other professionals in the culture field;
- the promotion of cultural heritage through the mobility of collections and the improvement of public access to different forms of cultural and linguistic expressions;
- the promotion of intercultural dialogue as a sustainable process contributing to building European identity;
- the creation of synergies between culture and education, in particular by encouraging art education and active participation in cultural activities;
- the enhancement of cooperation between

cultural institutions of EU Member States, in third countries and with their counterparts in those countries;

- the promotion and implementation of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

The Culture Programme has now evolved into the Creative Europe Programme<sup>4</sup>, that is the European Commission's framework programme for support to the culture and media sectors that represent its two sub-programmes. The Culture sub-programme helps cultural and creative organisations operate transnationally and promotes the cross-border circulation of works of culture and the mobility of cultural players. It offers opportunities for:

- cooperation between cultural and creative organisations from different countries;
- initiatives to translate and promote literary works across the European Union;
- networks helping the cultural and creative sector to operate competitively and transnationally;
- initiatives to establish platforms to promote emerging artists and stimulating European programming for cultural and artistic works.

This handbook grows out of EMEE – EuroVision Museums Exhibiting Europe, a four-year European project funded within the framework of the Culture Programme. Following the EU objectives mentioned above, this ambitious project has a great, main goal, the Change of Perspective of museum objects, that is being tackled from different approaches and viewpoints that rely not only on the diverse professional backgrounds of the eight partners, but also on the diversified cultural contexts that characterize such an international partnership. Besides, this manual is the product of contributors who work internationally and have therefore made an effort to draw on their deepest knowledge and experiences within and outside their national borders.

The main focus of this handbook is the *bridging the gap – activation, participation, role modification* concept, involving both visitors and museums. Concerning visitors, the purpose is that of highlighting successful approaches and strategies that have made museums attractive to those people who, for different reasons, are generally classified among the *non-visitors* category; in the case of museums, the focus is on how they have changed their role and invented new ways of communicating themselves in order to open their doors and allow a wide variety of people to enjoy their cultural offer.

Before writing this manual, an attentive and scrupulous work was done to explore significant European initiatives connected with the *bridging the gap* concept, some of which have been used as examples. In this sense, great support was found in the so-called *Best Practice Award*, an initiative launched in 2012 by ICOM CECA

4. Creative Europe Programme, [http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/index_en.htm), Accessed 20 December 2015.

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## LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

President Emma Nardi and still going on. Many projects are sent every year from CECA members from all over the world who wish to take part in the *Award*. The best proposals are usually published in an ad-hoc collection. The first three books, *Best Practice 1. A tool to improve museum education internationally* (2012), edited by Emma Nardi, *Best Practice 2. A tool to improve museum education internationally* (2013), edited by Emma Nardi and Cinzia Angelini, and *Best Practice 3. A tool to improve museum education internationally* (2014), edited by Emma Nardi and Cinzia Angelini are all available on CECA website<sup>5</sup>. These three books were the main sources from which museum experiences were taken.

The Change of Perspective is also the focus of ICOM Education 25, entirely devoted to the main theme of the EMEE project. This, as all the other issues of ICOM Education, is downloadable from CECA website as well.<sup>6</sup>

Hence, this manual is a step in an ongoing process of involvement of an always larger number of museum professionals, who can at the same time benefit from the contents and examples presented and contribute to the further development of the Change of Perspective, with a special focus

on the strategies to *bridge the gap* between museums and non-visitors.

In order to facilitate understanding of the manual contents, we thought it necessary to explain the meaning of the words or expressions that are more frequently used, thus overcoming the difficulties that may arise when addressing readers coming from different social and cultural backgrounds:

- ACTIVATION: borrowed from psychology, where there is a close relation between levels of arousal (activation) and behaviours (Galimberti, 2006). In our case, the concept refers to the active behaviour of visitors in museum activities that try to stimulate their interest and motivation to be involved in such activities. Indeed, as stated by many theorists (e.g.: Gardner, 1983; Kolb, 1984; Knowles, 1980; Csikszentmihalyi, 1991, 1997; Knowles et. al, 2005), learning better takes place when knowledge is put into practice, therefore practical, hands-on experiences that require using new information to make additional discoveries has proven successful in museums (Gunther, 1996). Each individual learns in a unique manner depending on personal experiences, neurological brain responses, learning styles, interests. Hence, a variety of activities can better activate a variety of visitors, encouraging and facilitating learning out of the museum experience and favouring the acquisition of the content of the museum visit;
- BEST PRACTICE IN MUSEUM EDUCATION: a museum programme or project developed according to the guidelines provided in CECA Best Practice document<sup>7</sup> (O’Neill-Dufresne Tassé, 2012);

5. ICOM-CECA website: <http://network.icom.museum/ceca/publications/best-practice/>, Accessed 20 December 2015. For Download of the publications: <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B8yHu7SudP4kSHIETHpCVm1ET1U/edit?pli=1>. Accessed 20 December 2015, and <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9VTRpalcEVLUks0bUdNUjJ2aEk/edit?usp=sharing>. Accessed 20 December 2015.

6. ICOM-CECA, <http://network.icom.museum/ceca/publications/icom-education/>, Accessed 20 December 2015.

7. CECA Best Practice document, <http://network.icom.museum/ceca/publications/best-practice/>, Accessed 20 December 2015.

- BRIDGE THE GAP: make the museum attractive also to those people who, for several reasons, have never or hardly ever visited a museum (be it in the sense of permanent collection or temporary exhibition);
- MUSEUMS: all types of museums, including art galleries;
- NON-VISITORS: people who, for several reasons, have never or hardly ever visited a museum (see BRIDGE THE GAP); in literature they are termed also *non-users, non-goers, non-participants, non-consumers, potential visitors*;
- (NON)-VISITORS: people who, after ad-hoc involvement in museum initiatives, may change their status from *non-visitors* to *visitors*;
- PARTICIPATION: make people actively take part in the museum experience. The museum becomes therefore a place offering a variety of opportunities in which visitors can be involved at different levels, from a low to a high degree of engagement.
- ENGAGEMENT from traditional guided tours where they are invited to give voice to their opinions, to workshops dedicated to practical activities, from focus groups where even user-generated contents may be discussed among visitors, to totally involving activities where they are co-constructors of the whole process, and so on;
- ROLE MODIFICATION: it refers to the transformation of the relationship between museums and their audiences: from a one-dimensional one, where the museum was an uncontested authority, to a multi-dimensional one, where individuals take an active role in contributing to the overall activities of the museum with their backgrounds, experiences, meaning-making processes (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Lang, Reeve, Woollard, 2009; Talboys, 2008). Museums have therefore a central role in multiplying their educational offer to attract different categories of public. In some cases, the programmes are only marginally structured, to allow visitors to take on the responsibility for their whole learning process by selecting the contents and establishing when, what and how to learn. From the museum's side, this new approach is a way to constantly invent new forms of communication and to propose innovative initiatives to stimulate active participation. Therefore, the museum and the visitor always work together in shaping the museum offer and co-constructing its several meanings (see PARTICIPATION above);
- VISITORS: people who visit museums to discover collections or develop personal interests (Desvallées-Mairesse, 2011).

# DEFINING MUSEUM (NON)VISITORS

## VISITORS AND NON-VISITORS RESEARCH RESULTS FROM THE 80s AND 90s

*This chapter will present an overview – though not exhaustive – of international research in the field of museum audience. In particular, it will focus on the non-visitor category, that is on those people who, for several and different reasons, choose not to spend their free or leisure time in museums. Following this literature review, three main areas will be identified covering the main reasons for not going to museums.*

Studies of visitors are much more frequent than studies of non-visitors. The reason for this is not difficult to understand: how to reach people who do not show? However, just as visitors cannot be considered as a single, all-inclusive category, also non-visitors cannot be piled up into the same group: there are quite a few reasons why people decide to visit a museum, just as there are several reasons why people decide *not* to visit a museum.

An interesting and exhaustive overview of the studies of museum audience from the 1980s and 1990s is presented in *Visitors and Non-visitors: approaches and outcomes of audience research in the last decades* by Georgios Alexopoulos, who states that studies on ‘visitors’ and ‘non-visitors’ going further than providing demographic characteristics began about three decades ago. The author outlines some of the most significant outcomes that try to explain why some people

### OVERVIEW

- Visitors and non-visitors: research results from the 80s and 90s
- Research in the last decade: new attempts to define non-visitors
- The importance of cultural life
- Why people don't go to museums
  - Museums as boring or ‘highly educated’ places
  - Museums as places for discovering social identities
  - Museums as hardly accessible places



do not visit museums starting from the results of a research project conducted in 1980-81 in Ohio by Marilyn G. Hood, *Staying away: why people choose not to visit museums* (Hood, 1983). These results showed that non-visitors were 'likely to belong to the upper education, occupation and income groups; younger than the population in general; active in other community and leisure activities' and 'more drawn to leisure activities that emphasised opportunities for social interaction, feeling comfortable and active participation'. Following these results, a categorization was suggested between *frequent participants*, *occasional participants* and *non-participants*. Researchers therefore urged museum professionals to focus on the main features of current and potential visitors, especially on their values, attitudes, perceptions, interests, expectations and satisfactions in order to better reach 'elusive audiences' (occasional participants and non-participants).

Another attempt to study non-visitors is described by David Prince (1990) in *Factors Influencing Museum Visits: An Empirical Evaluation of Audience Selection*. This study was conducted in the county of Lincolnshire, in the United Kingdom, in 1988, and focused on the perception of museums as social

institutions and on the reasons for visiting or not visiting museums. According to Prince, a person decides whether to visit a museum or not depending, to a great extent, on two psychological elements (p. 150): 'a cognitive element of what the place/ visit is' and 'an effective component that assigns value to the understanding of the place/ visit'. Therefore, the perceptual attitude that determines the choice of visiting is influenced, among other things, by the provision of information, by past experience, and by the existing image and perception of the museum. As a result, both visitors and non-visitors to museums or heritage sites tend to demonstrate patterns of behaviour when choosing how to spend their leisure time. And if it is true that socio-demographic factors have an impact on museum visiting patterns, attitudes and life-values are even more relevant. Prince's results also showed that respondents from the salaried middle class were over-represented as museum visitors as opposed to working-class respondents (in turn over-represented as non-visitors): both groups defined themselves as regular and infrequent visitors respectively. The survey also revealed that visitors tended to visit other heritage sites that were perceived to offer similar

conceptual benefits (castles, historic houses etc), something that was not expressed by non-visitors, thus confirming the existence of behavioural patterns.

In the first 90s, another interesting research on non-visitors was conducted in the London area with the aim to identify the physical and psychological barriers that discourage people from visiting museums (Du Bery, 1994). The research revealed that museums were not felt as presenting the past in an interesting and involving way; they were seen as 'boring, musty, gloomy and stuffy. The atmosphere was likened to being in a church or library' (61). This negative image was often created long ago, but since most of the respondents had not been back to museums, the idea had never changed. On the positive side, museums were recognised as having the purpose of preserving and educating people about culture and artefacts, both at national and local levels.

The main factors discouraging visits to museums were the alleged unattractive atmosphere, lack of interesting exhibits, cost and transport difficulties, access barriers inside the buildings for women with children and for the disabled. When respondents were asked to suggest what could turn museums into more attractive places, they proposed to make museums into more lively places with a relaxed, casual climate, and involving exhibitions to change on occasion.

*Famous exhibitions were seen as an attraction, but non-users also wanted exhibitions showing aspects of everyday life in the recent past, as well as in earlier times.*

[...] *Afro-Caribbean and Asian non-users wanted coverage of black and Asian culture to show the contribution made by these cultures and to recognize the part ethnic minority groups had played in the country's history. This was also generally encouraged by white respondents (Du Bery, 1994: 62).*

Always from the British context is a survey conducted in 1992-1993 by Richard Prentice and published in *Perceptual Deterrents to Visiting Museums and Other Heritage Attractions* (1994), which showed that the British public ascribed to museums a predominant educational function.

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## RESEARCH IN THE LAST DECADE NEW ATTEMPTS TO DEFINE NON-VISITORS

In the book *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* (2009), visitor research expert John Falk looks beyond basic demographic categories to see if there are new, more meaningful ways to describe visitors, capture their interests and satisfy their needs. In its identity model of museum visitors, Falks describes five categories:

- **EXPLORERS:** motivated by innate curiosity and desire to find out new things, they make up a very large group. They are likely to move through an exhibition space following their own feelings and tend to avoid more structured visits, such as guided tours and audio guides. For the visitors belonging to this group, learning means fun.
- **FACILITATORS:** their presence in an exhibition space is generally linked to helping their companions visit the space itself. These are mostly parents who take their children to a museum, or friends/ partners who are just visiting a museum their friends/ beloved ones are interested in. Facilitators experience their visit through the eyes and ears of their companions.
- **EXPERIENCE SEEKERS:** they want to feel like they have been there and have seen the masterpiece, like a visitor to the Louvre whose main purpose for being there is to see the Mona Lisa, take a photo of him/ herself and feel happy when this 'must-do' experience has been completed.
- **PROFESSIONALS/ HOBBYISTS:** this is a small but significant group mainly composed of experts (museum professionals, desig-

ners, educators etc.). Being able to evaluate any aspects of the museum experience according to their field of expertise, they are among the most critical types of visitor and are attracted by those special events or behind-the-scenes tours in which they can enjoy experiences in uncrowded spaces.

- RECHARGERS: another small group, made of visitors who are more likely to be seen at Art Galleries, Botanical Gardens, Aquaria and Natural Reserves. These people simply want to enjoy the space, taking time out from their everyday lives. They are more interested in feeling the general ambience than engaging with specific content. Rechargers feel at ease when there are away from the crowd.

An interesting complement to Falk's five identities can be found in the eight *museum perceptual filters* (MPF) by Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert (2009). Five out of these eight MPFs – that somehow resemble Falk's five identities – describe museum visitors and are defined as *professional, art loving, self-exploration, cultural tourism, social visitation*. But even more remarkable is the description of the three

remaining types, in that they refer to non-visitors. These are outlined as follows:

- ROMANTIC: in spite of their positive view of museums, these people decide not to go for a visit because they feel intimidated by the museum or because they do not have any knowledge about art.
- REJECTION: they see the museum in a negative light, as a pretentious or snobbish place, and show a dismissive attitude towards museums in general.
- INDIFFERENCE: they find no connection between museums and their lives.

A more recent research activity concerning non-visitors was developed in Italy. Although this research has not led to outlining types of non-visitors as in the above examples, it has nonetheless provided a useful *non-visitor* portrait (Presta, 2010). The survey involved 653 respondents, 432 of which were classified as non-visitors. The resulting image does not belong to a unique category: mostly (but not solely) included in the 30-45 age group; mainly graduated from high school, though a good percentage also

has a university degree; with no apparent economic difficulty, since they have no concern about the entrance fee. So the problem seems to be with the museum itself<sup>1</sup>: respondents see museums either as boring places or as places they feel unsuitable for because they do not have the necessary knowledge to understand its collections; or they have a general, positive idea about museums (they are interesting and stimulating places), but the museum experience is not lived as positively. As a consequence, non-visitors prefer to spend their leisure time doing something that can more actively involve them and when it comes to arts and cultural activities, they choose to visit cities or archaeological sites rather than museums. This leads directly to another astonishing finding deriving from a quite obvious question asked within this survey: *what is a museum?* The result was that most respondents were unable to provide the right answer: a museum is hardly considered as a learning or cultural environment; it is mainly considered as a sort of silent and boring place exhibiting dusty old objects. Two important aspects of museums seem to be missing from their perception: the museum as a place for educational and entertainment activities and the museum as a place for social identity.

1. 43.29% of the museums mentioned by the respondents are outside Italy (Louvre in Paris, Archaeological Museum in Copenhagen, Hermitage in St. Petersburg were the most visited ones), 48.83% are in Italy (Vatican Museums, Anthropological Museum in Rome, Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Borghese Gallery in Rome were the most visited ones), 2.55% referred to temporary exhibitions in Italy and abroad.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL LIFE

»Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits«<sup>2</sup>

Reasons for non participating in cultural life and activities have been reported also by Unesco in *Measuring Cultural Participation. 2009 UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics Handbook n. 2*<sup>3</sup> where apart from ascertaining that the lack of interest is not always the main obstacle to attending cultural places and events, several other reasons are described. Indeed, barriers to participation can be:

- PHYSICAL: people with physical or mental disabilities, as well as the elderly, may find it hard to reach a venue either because they depend on someone else, or because they do not have the necessary facilities. This can also become a psychological barrier;
- ECONOMIC: this is an obstacle that refers to all the aspects of the cultural experience, from the access cost to expenditures for transports or food, which can become hard to be afforded by people with low income, but also by families with children;

- SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL: these barriers may hinder the participation of specific groups of the population, that can be unaware of the events because they do not have access to information channels, or that can be 'frightened' by the event because they do not feel to have the cultural level that is necessary to understand it;
- PRACTICAL: difficulties that may pertain to opening hours or logistics.

Whatever the reasons, identifying barriers helps cultural institutions pursue their audience development goals, often requiring them to find new ways of presenting and communicating (and perhaps timing and locating) their cultural offer, or even to re-shape it altogether in order to connect it to the human experience of a larger number and range of individuals.

A further point focusing on the reasons for not enjoying museums and cultural events has to

do with a more general concept, that of *cultural participation*, always defined by UNESCO.

Cultural participation is closely related to the definition of culture and, at the same time, to several other issues such as motivation, patterns of behaviour, places of consumption and meanings – they all seem to summarise the key elements that the above-mentioned surveys have used to distinguish visitors from non-visitors.

Brown (2004: 16) has associated cultural participation with a number of values: cognitive, aesthetic, spiritual, physical, political, emotional and socio-cultural, all intervening in identity formation, which is made up of:

- enhanced sense of self – who I am, how I fit in;
- improved self-confidence, direction, focus;
- sense of accomplishment, achievement, pride;
- self-esteem, self-worth, dignity.

Besides, in the 2011 report of the ESSnet (2011: 203), a European Union-wide review, four forms of cultural participation were identified:

- information: to seek, collect and spread information on culture;
- communication and community: to interact with others on cultural issues and to participate in cultural networks;

2. Article 27 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights - United Nations Human Right, 1948.

3. Measuring Cultural Participation. 2009 UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics Handbook N. 2, <http://www.uis.unesco.org/culture/Pages/framework-cultural-statistics.aspx>, Accessed 20 December 2015.

- enjoyment and expression: to enjoy exhibitions, art performances and other forms of cultural expression, to practice the arts for leisure;
- transaction: to buy art and to buy or reserve tickets for shows.

These four kinds of cultural participation all require an active role, where the individual is able, for example, to find advertisements about museum exhibitions, spread the information within his/ her circle of relatives and friends, reserve a ticket (and plan a journey, if necessary) and finally enjoy the cultural experience.

But there is another aspect of cultural participation, sometimes overlooked, on which Unesco has cast attention: it is represented by traditional practices, intended as the intangible heritage understandable by people belonging to the same ethnic community. As defined by Unesco in the *Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore* (1989), traditional culture is

*the totality of tradition-based creations of a cultural community, expressed by a group or individuals and recognized as reflecting the expectations of a community in so far as they*

*reflect its cultural and social identity; its standards and values are transmitted orally, by imitation or by other means. Its forms are, among others, language, literature, music, dance, games, mythology, rituals, customs, handicrafts, architecture and other arts.*<sup>4</sup>

Traditional culture is therefore a form of cultural expression and, as such, is embedded in daily life. Hence, some activities that are regarded as *normal* part of everyday life in certain countries can be considered as *cultural* by other countries, and vice versa; and traditional beliefs such as gender-related specificities or religious creeds can affect the way in which people take part in (or refrain from taking part in) cultural events.

This focus on traditional practices is growing in importance due to the migration flows from developing to developed countries. Indeed, ethnical differences in cultural practices are sometimes seen as cultural diversity. When migrants find themselves in the country of destination, they tend to keep their cultural practices and create ethnical sub-groups identified by their original habits. What is crucial for cultural participation is that ethnic affiliation can affect the way in which these sub-groups can interpret the local culture or benefit from what it offers. When, for example, the culture of the country of destination is regarded as separated and distant from that of the country of origin, this can result in a cultural gap that is, amongst other things, an obstacle to taking advantage of the cultural offer, be it in a museum or in any other educational environment, thus adding migrants to the large group of non-visitors.

4. UNESCO Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore (1989), [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=13141&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13141&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html), Accessed 20 December 2015.

## WHY PEOPLE DON'T GO TO MUSEUMS

So why don't people go to museums? The literary overview presented above has shown a general convergence of the results in research activities conducted over a period covering approximately 30 years and different countries. Actually, there are recurrent issues that make *non-visitors* perceive museums as entities that are distant from their everyday realities, issues that may pertain to educational and social factors, to ethnicity, to physical obstacles.

Following this approach, an attempt has been made to identify three large areas, each of which grouping sets of reasons why people do not go to museums: 1. Museums as boring or 'highly educated places'; 2. Museums as places for discovering social identities; 3. Museums as hardly accessible places. Ad-hoc initiatives in the three areas should allow to make a step towards the population of non-visitors with the purpose of reducing their number and turning them at least into *(non)visitors*. The museum has a fundamental function in this: it has to communicate how and in which way its role has changed; it has to show people that it is no longer the uncontested repository of history and culture; it has to catch the transformations of constantly changing

social realities; it has to be able to capture the several needs that its potential audiences express giving them voice and involving them in shaping the museum offer and constructing its meaning. In other words, it is the museum that has to pave the way for an experience that stimulates the desire, in non-visitors, to return to the museum to take advantage of its opportunities.

### MUSEUMS AS BORING OR 'HIGHLY EDUCATED' PLACES

This area deals with audience in general, therefore it includes broad-spectrum considerations that may in part apply to the other two areas. Indeed, a common issue in the literary review shown in this chapter is that most non-visitors, regardless of their cultural and educational backgrounds, tend to have an anachronistic idea of museums as places where it is impossible to socialise, be active and have fun. In many cases, this negative idea was formed when they first experienced museum visits and they were not inspired to visit a museum again. To involve this kind of audience, museums should plan an effective strategy to convey a new idea of themselves, thus causing sceptical (non)visitors to accept the idea that museums are places where people can learn and entertain themselves at the same time (as stated in Icom's definition of museums), they can be active participants and not simply passive observers, they can express themselves and not just look around silently, they can look at museum objects

through their eyes and interpret them through their own experiences. Museum experts should favour connections between the museum offer and objects of everyday life approaching adult and young visitors differently and adequately. If in the case of adults the main effort is that of 'changing the first impression' so that the negative memory of their first encounter with a museum can be turned into a positive new experience, in the case of younger audiences the challenge is that of avoiding a negative first impression by favouring a positive impact with museums. In this sense, an integrated approach including both the formal education provided by the school and the informal education provided by the museum can lay the foundation for creating interest in museums and thus 'cultivate' this young audience into adult visitors.

### **MUSEUMS AS PLACES FOR DISCOVERING SOCIAL IDENTITIES**

This is a two-fold issue that requires two subsequent steps. The first one is mostly addressed to local people, and especially to those, among them, who see the collections as exhibitions of 'dusty objects': here the effort is to make them understand that each of these 'dusty objects' has a life on its own that has contributed to creating the history and traditions of a population. Hence, visitors should be challenged to actively reflect on simple objects and find the track from the past to the present in search of their historical, cultural and social identity. The second step is addressed to both migrants and local non-visitors: they all should be encouraged to find out differences and similarities between countries of emigration and countries of immigration, as they are transmitted by traditional practices or perceived through museum objects. This should help bridge the gap from the concept of national social identity to that of multiple social identities and give due importance to all cultures and traditions throughout time and space.

### **MUSEUMS AS HARDLY ACCESSIBLE PLACES**

This refers in particular to physical, economic and practical obstacles. Actually, many museums are equipped with facilities that consent easy access to the sub-groups whose attendance may be hindered by this kind of obstacles. So the real problem might be with communication: tell people that in a given museum they will have all the services they need; propose museum programmes appropriately designed by the museum staff together with experts who work with people with special needs and perfectly know their physical and cognitive needs. Or 'move' the museum out of its walls to reach audiences that would otherwise be excluded (e.g. prisons or health care institutions). This should help bridge the gap from non-visiting to visiting by re-moving the 'physical' barriers that keep these people away from museums.

# HOW TO DESIGN A MUSEUM PROGRAMME

## A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO METHODOLOGY

*This chapter is meant to describe a methodological approach to design and implement a museum programme. The contents will move from the general to the particular: the general refers to rules and guidelines that can lead to properly design a programme that includes not only the museum activities promoted and developed with visitors, but also the preliminary study and the final evaluation and communication of the results. The particular refers to the activity that, inside the programme, has been designed to involve visitors and make them participate according to different levels of engagement. The audience-centred approach explained in this second part is introduced by an historical overview of the shift in the communication process illustrating how the role of museums has changed in the last decades.*

Generally speaking, methodology helps define the structure and the approach to be used in a given activity, regardless of the disciplinary domain. A methodological model provides the sequence of stages that lead the activity from the initial idea to the final remarks on the results and the new perspectives deriving from them. In turn, each stage is devoted to given aspects of the project, as shown in the chart on the following page. The first and second stages will deal with the preliminary study concerning the feasibility of the general idea and of its main purposes (**Stage 1**). Once the purposes have been set, it is necessary to focus on the resources in terms of staff, costs, networking, sponsorship and time (**Stage 2**). After establishing what

### OVERVIEW

- A general introduction to methodology
- The Best Practice model: a common procedure to design a museum programme
  - The conception and planning of the programme
  - Carrying out the programme
  - Evaluation and remedial process
- A new communication model
- The museum as a participatory experience
- Levels of participation in a museum experience



## FOUR STAGES TO DESIGN AN APPROPRIATE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH



resources are available, the overall activity can be planned and detailed (*Stage 3*). It is in this stage that the design is finalised: the general purposes established at the outset are turned into specific objectives and decisions are made about how to achieve these objectives and with what kind of tools, how to identify the target audience and get in touch with them. Always in this stage, an appropriate communication strategy should be planned considering both a preliminary campaign to promote the initiative and the final procedure to divulge the results obtained (either quantitative or qualitative, or both). Finally, the activity planned so far is to be accomplished: all the steps envisaged in the previous phases are to be practically developed and, if necessary, modified and adapted along the way (*Stage 4*).

# THE BEST PRACTICE MODEL A COMMON PROCEDURE TO DESIGN A MUSEUM PROGRAMME

In the field of museum education, thanks to the support of the Committee for Education and Cultural Action (CECA), a common methodological *language* is currently being created, which refers to the *best practice* (BP) model. This model is presented as guidelines on how to design and implement a museum programme and can be seen as a practical translation of the general stages outlined above.

The whole BP activity started in 2011 when two members of the CECA Board, Colette Dufresne-Tassé and Marie-Clarté O'Neill<sup>1</sup>, wrote a first document in which they analysed the BP concept from a scientific and professional perspective, thus meeting the needs expressed by many CECA members to reflect on the aspects that turn a project into a *good* project.

The CECA Board decided to support the BP idea and invest in the BP initiative for many reasons:

- create a common language among CECA members all around the world;
- encourage and facilitate the exchange of professional experiences;

- launch a large and international bottom-up discussion about the BP document in order to constantly improve it;
- favour comparison among the BP projects implemented all over the world in order to allow CECA members to replicate successful examples in different contexts;
- discuss BP projects during CECA annual conferences;
- spread BP projects within the museum community, both within and outside CECA, so that they can become a source of inspiration for others.

From 2011 on, the guidelines have been improved, enlarged and made clearer. An annual competition has been established to award the best BP programmes in museum education with the intent to make the model more and more common and to collect examples of museum programmes designed and implemented according to the BP model. This model is broken down into sections focusing narrowly on the steps to be followed before, during and after the implementation of a museum programme.

## THE CONCEPTION AND PLANNING OF THE PROGRAMME

This is the first section of the guidelines and refers to the development of the programme. Museum workers are conducted step by step in the definition of:

- the origin of the programme (why it was decided to start a given programme);
- the relevance of the programme (why the programme is important in the social environment in which the museum is located);
- collaborations and partners (who is collaborating to the programme and to what ends);
- recipients (to what kind of audience the programme is addressed);
- goals and objectives (what is expected from the programme in terms of general and specific aims);
- resources (how many people, funds and materials are needed to implement the programme);
- content (the theme the programme focuses on);
- mediation tools (how and through what kinds of intervention the content is transmitted);
- expected participation level (which degree of interaction is expected from visitors);

1. Colette Dufresne-Tassé, former CECA President, is now a co-opted member delegated for research; Marie-Clarté O'Neill, former CECA regional coordinator for Europe, is now a co-opted member delegated for CECA Best Practice.

- tools-contents-participation coordination (how the theme, the type of approach and the involvement of visitors are combined);
- management (how the whole programme is managed and by whom);
- communication (how the programme is advertised).

## CARRYING OUT THE PROGRAMME

In this second section, all the practical steps on how to carry out the programme are outlined:

- prepare for the implementation of the programme (organise tools and logistics);
- implementation (fulfilment of all the aspects established in the design);
- changes (modifications and adjustments in the programme development due to the needs arisen during the implementation).

## EVALUATION AND REMEDIAL PROCESS

This is the third and final section and focuses on the evaluation procedure. In the latest version of the BP model, the last step of this phase, the *remedial process*, has become a section on its own. The steps are the following:

- results (evaluation tools used to check the results of the programme);
- reporting (description of the whole programme, with its strengths and weaknesses and the results achieved);
- remedial process (changes to be adopted in the programme to improve it according to what has emerged from the evaluation).

These four sections (the fourth being the *remedial process*) must all be filled in by those who wish to design and implement a programme according to the BP model: this highly structured approach is one of the key elements to enable everyone to make comparisons between the several ways in which the rules described in the BP model are turned into

practice in a large variety of museums, from small to big ones, from local to national ones.

Museum education is the main focus of CECA and of the BP approach. Therefore all the proposals go in the same direction: they describe successful programmes aiming at involving different types of audience, at any level: family groups, school groups, ethnic groups, university students, people with mental or physical disabilities and so on. The underlying intent is that of *bridging the gap* either by finding new ways to attract people to museums, or by educating the youngsters to appreciate the museum offer through new and innovative approaches, or by using art as a way to ‘awaken the senses’ in people with mental or physical disabilities (e.g. special tactile routes for the visually impaired).

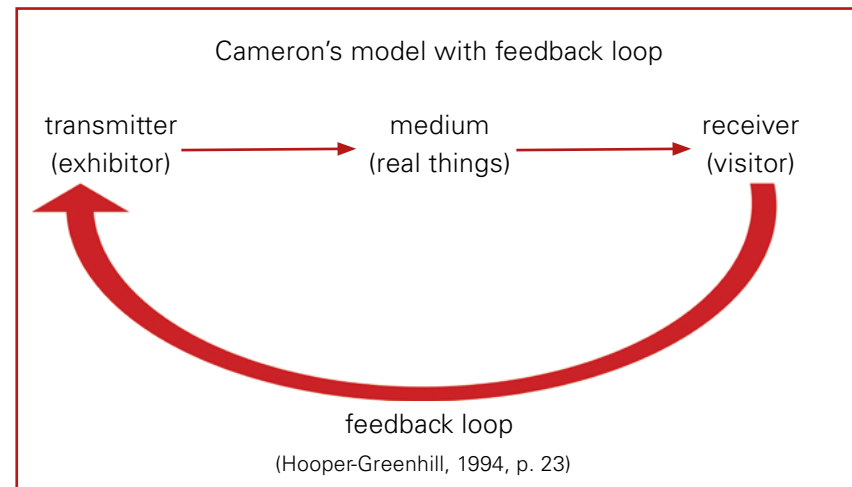
This means that the traditional approach, in which the institution provides the same high quality content for any kind of visitors, regardless of different backgrounds or interests, has now turned into a new approach focusing on the visitor rather than on the contents, which acquire meaning also through the visitor’s experience and interpretation. This audience-centred approach also implies a modification in the role of the institution, that becomes a sort of setting providing opportunities for personal experiences that can be favoured by the museum offer itself, even stimulated, but not piloted since they depend on individual reactions and level of participation and involvement.

## A NEW COMMUNICATION MODEL

This change in the museum's role and its approach to the audience has occurred in the last decades and implies a shift in the communication model adopted by cultural institutions. In Cameron's communication model of 1968 (see Hooper-Greenhill, 1994), the simple model including transmitter, media and receiver drawn from the then contemporary information theory was dismissed in favour of a model composed of a variety of transmitters, media and receivers, to which he added the notion of the *feedback loop*.

The feedback from the receiver (visitor) is meant to enable the transmitter (museum) to modify the transmission or to allow the visitor to compare his understanding with the intended message to check whether it has been received correctly or not.

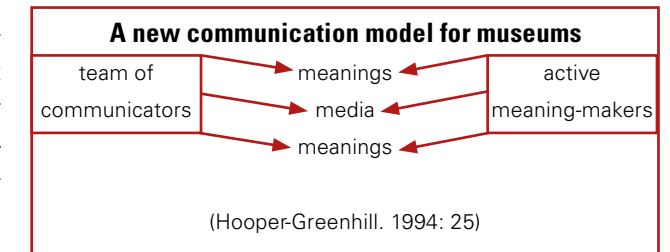
However, one of the major critiques to this model was that when communication is seen as a linear process, it generally means that the transmitter is the curator, who establishes the themes, approaches and processes of the exhibition, with no attention to the interests, desires, needs of visitors and non-visitors.



A new communication model has then become necessary, in which both the expression and the interpretation of the communicative act are in a dynamic relation: for an exhibition to be successful, this means that the effect on the visitor is as relevant as the work of the museum staff who have set it up. Therefore, in this new model the transmitter is replaced by a team including the curator, the designer, the conservator, the audience; the receiver is recognised as an active maker of his or her own meanings based on prior knowledge, experiences, attitudes and values that will inform any interpretation; the medium is reinterpreted as the *middle ground* where the communicators and the receivers meet and constantly exchange, make and remake their meanings. 'This middle ground is never still, but always in flux. Each new interpreter brings a new interpretation to both the intended communication and the potential indices' (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994: 25).

The relationship between the museum and its audience has therefore shifted, from a one-dimensional relation, where the museum staff saw their public as a reflection of themselves, towards a museum recognising that the public is made up

of several groups who wish to express their needs and make their views known, even through choosing not to visit (Reeve-Woollard, 2009).



Visitors bring their own experiences and perceptions to any exhibition, building a variety of personal meanings which can be quite different from the intentions of the organizers. For example, an exhibition about slavery may unintentionally reinforce, rather than counteract, prejudices about the populations that in past centuries underwent slavery. Museums need to understand much more about visitors from different backgrounds if they want to display their collections effectively, interpret diverse themes and find new ways to communicate with the public in equal terms (Lang, 2009: 36). Thereby, the relationship with the audience

## THE MUSEUM AS A PARTICIPATORY EXPERIENCE

becomes an including and collaborative one, and a learning process for the institution. For the visitor, this means the shift from a passive mood to one of engagement, loyalty and repeated involvement. It is a collaborative relationship in the sense of sharing skills, knowledge, values and experiences between the museum and its audience. Museums increasingly recognize that until the message has been received, explored and understood by an audience, it has not been interpreted – nor has any learning occurred. Ultimately, it is the audience that provides an interpretation, not the museum staff (Blackwell-Scaife, 2009).

The importance for museums to structure innovative ways of interacting with a plurality of people has given rise to new and diverse opportunities to invite visitors to voice their experiences and perceptions. From a research conducted with the visitors of 26 museums in the area of Modena, in Northern Italy, Bollo and Gariboldi (2008: 90-91) have grouped the factors that make up the visitor's experience into three dimensions:

- the personal context: prior knowledge, individual experiences, interest in museums, motivations, desires;
- the social context: relationship with other visitors, with the museum staff, but also routes, times and learning processes linked to the museum visit;
- the physical context: the architecture, the environment and the atmosphere inside the museum, but also the objects, the internal communication system and the overall orientation system.

All these factors interact when a person is visiting a museum and must be taken into consideration when addressing any kind of audience in order to provide several layers of interpretation, encourage visitors to construct their meaning out of the stimuli the museum offers, lead visitors through the collections without imposing a unique approach or meaning.

The involvement of visitors in museum activities also depends on how much and how deeply every visitor is willing to participate. In Nina Simon's words, the museum has to serve as a 'platform that connects different users who act as content creators, distributors, consumers, critics, and collaborators'<sup>2</sup>, providing opportunities for co-produced experiences.

Museum professionals tend to focus primarily on just one kind of participation, the creation of user-generated content. Indeed, the people who engage in creating content represent only a very narrow part; others may use user-generated content, comment on it, organise or redistribute it to other consumers. For example, in a 2008 survey by Forrester Research (mentioned in Nina Simon, 2010), six profiles were sketched to describe how online audiences engage with social media:

- CREATORS: they produce content, upload videos, write blogs;
- CRITICS: they submit reviews, rate content, and comment on social media sites;
- COLLECTORS: they organize links and aggregate content for personal or social consumption;
- JOINERS: they maintain accounts on social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn;
- SPECTATORS: they read blogs, watch YouTube videos, visit social sites;
- INACTIVES: they don't visit social sites;

<sup>2</sup> Nina Simon (2010), *The participatory museum*, online-version [www.participatorymuseum.org](http://www.participatorymuseum.org), Accessed 20 December 2015.

Even though the same person can fall into more than one profile, according to the activities s/he likes to perform, the constant aspect is that creators represent a small percentage of the whole population. Activities like watching a video or reading a blog, for example, are much more frequent than making a video or writing a blog. Hence, participatory experiences need to consider all of these different layers of involvement and be appropriately designed to help people feel comfortable when they engage in the activity proposed. Participatory opportunities must be explicitly presented to visitors who are willing to participate, in terms of contribution to both their own needs and the museum project in general. And when it comes to the tools to be used, participants need clear roles and information on how to participate. The tools must also be flexible, so that visitors can decide if and how to take part in the activity.

This goes back to the importance of an audience-centred approach, where the museum staff's first concern must be what visitors want or need, what themes are more attractive and what strategies may be more successful with them.

This is particularly true when dealing with non-visitors. The people belonging to this category share at least one element: they have a negative idea of what a museum is and offers. Hence, a traditional approach made of maps and tours may not be a good starting point to make them understand how an involving museum experience can be. These non-visitors need to see how cultural institutions are relevant and valuable to their own lives, and the easiest way to deliver that is via personalized approaches that speak to people's individual needs and interests. Simple labels or maps don't help them understand what they can see, do, and experience in various places and programmes.

Therefore, museum staff are required to design high-quality experiences for multiple users. Of course, this is no easy task, especially if the same exhibit has to address both pre-defined groups and casual groups of visitors. Providing many individual options with flexible roles and opportunities can be an appropriate solution.

Visitors' participation may be triggered even by using a single museum object as the starting point for a social experience. Every museum has artefacts

that lend themselves naturally to social experiences by raising memories or encouraging people to play cooperatively. Nina Simon describes social objects as:

- PERSONAL: when visitors see an object that they have a personal connection to, they have an immediate story to tell. The same is true for objects that people own, produce, or contribute themselves;
- ACTIVE: objects that directly and physically insert themselves into the spaces between strangers can serve as shared reference points for discussion. For example, living objects, like animals in zoos, frequently motivate conversation when they move or make surprising sounds. Inanimate objects can also exhibit active behaviour;
- PROVOCATIVE: an object that causes visitors to discuss about. Provocation is tricky to predict. If visitors expect to be shocked or provoked by content on display, they may choose to internalize provocation instead of discussing it. To work well, a provocative object must be genuinely surprising to visitors who encounter it;
- RELATIONAL: objects that explicitly invite interpersonal use. For example, many science centres feature exhibits that explicitly state on their labels, 'this exhibit requires two people to use'. One is the player, the other the tracker, or one on the left and the other on the right. These objects are social because they demand interpersonal engagement.

## LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION IN A MUSEUM EXPERIENCE

Simon (2010) also proposes five techniques to activate artefacts as social objects:

1. asking visitors questions: this is the most common technique used to encourage discussion around objects. Questions may be useful to invite visitors to engage with a specific object, to motivate interpersonal dialogue among visitors around a particular object, to collect feedback about the object or the exhibition. Questions must be open to a variety of responses and draw on the visitors' knowledge; they can be personal, and invite people to find connections between personal experiences and the object(s) on display, or they can be speculative, and ask people to describe an imaginary world (what-if questions);
2. providing live interpretations: this is the most reliable way to encourage visitors to have social experiences. When visitors are invited to engage actively as participants, they enhance both the social and the educational value of cultural experiences. Demonstrations that involve visitors allow them to confidently connect with objects in a personal way;
3. provocative programming: a provocative experience can give visitors unique social experiences, such as, for example, creating settings where visitors move in total darkness led around by blind guides. In this kind of projects, outside artists or designers are generally involved;
4. giving visitors clear instructions for social engagement: clear rules give visitors precise instructions on how to engage with each other around the object, whether in a game or a guided experience, whether alone or in a group. Instructions may be written or transmitted orally via the audio guides;
5. making objects shareable: museums can make their objects more shareable either by initiating projects to share objects with visitors or by creating policies that encourage visitors to share objects with each other.

Participation can therefore take place at several levels. The first step in developing a participatory project is to consider the range of ways visitors might participate with institutions.

In a study on the Public Participation in Scientific Research (PPSR) project released in 2008 by the Center for Advancement of Informal Science Education (CAISE)<sup>3</sup>, Rick Bonney defined three broad categories of public participation in scientific research, divided according to the resulting outcomes for the participants: contribution, collaboration and co-creation. In contributory projects, participants collect data in a scientist-controlled process. Scientists design the test questions, steer the data collection, and analyse the results. In collaborative projects, citizens collect data, but they also analyse results and draw conclusions in partnership with the scientists. In co-creative projects, the public develops the test questions, and scientists co-produce scientific programmes to address the community interest.

Simon (2010) has adapted the three categories to museum visitors and has added a new one, hosted. The resulting four-type model is as follows:

- IN CONTRIBUTORY PROJECTS, visitors are solicited to provide limited and specified objects, actions, or ideas to an institutionally controlled process. Comment boards and story-sharing kiosks are both common platforms for contributory activities;
- IN COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS, visitors are invited to serve as active partners in the creation of institutional projects that are originated and ultimately controlled by the institution;

<sup>3</sup> Center for Advancement of Informal Science Education, InformalScience.org, <http://informalscience.org/>, Accessed 20 December 2015.

- IN CO-CREATIVE PROJECTS, community members work together with institutional staff members from the beginning to define the project's goals and to generate the programme or exhibit based on community interests. The staff work with visitors to co-produce exhibits and programmes based on community members' interests and the institution's collections;
- IN HOSTED PROJECTS, the institution turns over a portion of its facilities and/ or resources to present programmes developed and implemented by public groups or casual visitors. This happens in both scientific and cultural institutions. Institutions share space and/ or tools with community groups with a wide range of interests. Hosted projects allow participants to use institutions to satisfy their own needs with minimal institutional involvement.

These participatory models are distinct, but many institutions incorporate elements from each of them moving fluidly from one model to another, using different approaches for different projects and community relationships.



# SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLES OF MUSEUM EXPERIENCES

## INTRODUCTION

*In the first two chapters different theoretical aspects have been tackled. In the third chapter, successful examples of museum programmes will be presented. They will be split into the three areas identified in the first chapter and analysed from the point of view of the methodology outlined in the second chapter. Most of the experiences selected are taken from the Best Practice model. However, since the main focus is the activity museums have developed with visitors, attention will be paid to this aspect rather than to the other phases of planning and design.*

The literary review presented in the first chapter has cast light on the reasons why people decide not to visit museums. The review covered the last decades (research in the field of non-visitors has only recently started) and considered more than one country, but the outcomes were similar, so that it has been possible to group non-visitors into three categories: 1. Museums as boring or 'highly educated' places; 2. Museums as places for discovering social identities; 3. Museums as hardly accessible places.

The next step, tackled in the second chapter, was the definition of a theoretical approach to design museum programmes. The whole life cycle of a programme has been sketched, but the main focus has been on the activity with visitors and on how to implement a programme based on an audience-centred approach.

The third chapter will be an attempt to combine the previous ones with a view to the bridging-the-gap theme: in each of the three areas, successful activities accomplished in different types of museum will be the starting point to reflect on and to suggest how to

### OVERVIEW

- Introduction
- When visitors are afraid of culture
  - The museum meets the people
  - Strengthening literacy skills in a science museum
  - Every visitor has a style
- When museums convey a sense of identity
  - The preservation of intangible cultural heritage
  - Domination vs integration
- When accessibility is the main obstacle
  - The memory of beauty
  - Touch but don't look!
  - A surprising sensory approach

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## WHEN VISITORS ARE AFRAID OF CULTURE

replicate the experience in other museum realities by adapting it to specific requirements.

It is necessary to say that the identification of the three areas is only a strategy to better focus on museum practices, but contents may often and easily overlap. The examples provided in each area can cover aspects and topics that can have been attributed to the other areas as well. Accessibility, for example, with its many facets, is a theme crossing all the areas; so is literacy. The three areas have been established in order to better focus on the aspects that, in every project, we chose to highlight.

The first of the three areas grouping reasons for non visiting museums has been termed 'Museums as boring or 'highly educated' places'. As previously explained, the obstacles identified in this area are not due to the educational qualification *tout court*: the problem cannot be dismissed by simply saying that people with a low educational level do not visit museums. While low literacy skills are, of course, an obstacle to approaching any kind of cultural offer, including museums, research (e.g. Presta, 2010) has shown that also people graduated from high school or from university feel they do not have the necessary knowledge to understand museum collections; they can have a general, positive idea about museums (they are interesting and stimulating places), but in spite of this, museums are described as boring and unattractive.

Stylianou-Lambert (2009) has defined *romantic* those people who, though having a positive view of museums, feel intimidated by them, or even *reject* museums when they perceive them as pretentious or snobbish. And they feel *indifferent* if they find no connection between museums and their lives.

In all of these cases, formal education plays a role, but not a unique role. The first impact with museums is equally important. Du Bery (1994) has listed, among the reasons for non visiting, a negative idea of museums. This negative idea was created after the first museum experience and discouraged respondents from going for another visit, therefore they never had the opportunity to change their minds.

There is a wide gap to be filled in with the non-visitors belonging to this category. Museums have made a step further in changing their role towards a visitor-centred, multi-dimensional approach; the further step is to communicate this change to non-visitors by attracting them and involving them in activities requiring active participation, involvement, even fun.

Bridging-the-gap strategies, therefore, may act at cognitive, affective and practical levels. In the examples below, these levels will be met in various ways: with events designed to stimulate learning (cognitive level), with gadgets given to visitors as gifts at the end of a visit or directly made by them during an activity as a workshop (affective level), with transports organised to bring people to the museum or the museum to the people (practical level).

## THE MUSEUM MEETS THE PEOPLE

*It is 7.30 on a Thursday morning. A fellow-worker of ours, a country schoolteacher, is up on the stand with a microphone, calling to the children and their fathers and their fathers' fathers to come closer, speaking to them in the language of the people, the highly idiomatic language spoken by everybody around here.*<sup>1</sup>

With these words, Ordóñez García begins the description of one of the first experiment of a museum going to the people. It was 1972 when the idea of bringing the museum to the people was put forward, after ICOM General Conference at Grenoble in 1971 had set forth the following points: (a) museums are out of touch with the world of today; (b) museums are obsolete; (c) they are for the elite; (d) they are destined to disappear.

The successive step was the decision to organize a big exhibition at the National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City, for the purpose of illustrating the problems of country and town, peripheral slums, and the population explosion. But how to put on an exhibition in such a big museum never visited by the people living in disadvantaged areas?

For whom should the exhibition have been designed? And so the idea was born to set up the *Casa del Museo* (Museum Home) in the suburb of Tacubaya, on the outskirts of Mexico City, to bring the museum to the 'marginal citizens' who 'look askance at the doors of the museums...and don't come in' (Ordóñez García, 1975: 71).

The *Casa del Museo* was built with no logical arrangement, but with a view to listen, correct and alter according to suggestions and criticisms. It was meant to show visitors that museums are recreational centres providing entertainment and opportunities to create, and to demonstrate them how the past shapes the present and how the museum can be part of their daily life.

Once the initial scepticism was overcome, the *Casa del Museo* became indeed a sort of recreational centre where visitors could benefit from a variety of mediation approaches: accompanied by background music, slides on the history of Mexico, on children's faces, on views of the *Casa del Museo* were shown with no apparent order so as to invite visitors to make their own comments; temporary exhibitions were meant to show the history and culture of the populations that inhabited the area in ancient times, their customs and beliefs, and gave visitors a chance to talk personally with the team of the *Casa* to ask questions and explanations.

The exhibitions (each lasting around five months) were designed to allow visitors to be active by doing things themselves or inventing games (e.g.: pinpoint public buildings or locate their house on

a board representing Mexico City) or touching the exhibits (e.g.: play a drum dating from pre-Hispanic times; with fingers and even tongues, feel the cold texture of a suit of armour).

Campaigns were carried on to get school groups to visit the *Casa* which soon became a meeting place for children, youngsters, and also adults who could find courses, information, and a place where to discuss about the critical problems of the community. Especially people in their twenties were the most drawn to attend art workshops, dancing groups or to help in devising and setting up exhibitions.

Due to shortage of funds and staff, the *Casa del Museo* definitively closed its doors a few years after it had been established, but it remains nonetheless a good example of how museums started to change their role and to move outside usual contexts to bridge the gap to marginalized people.

Many examples of museum practice can be drawn from the *Casa del Museo*. When museums can use empty spaces as in the *Casa*, much can be left to the inventiveness and imagination of visitors. They can produce their content in accordance with their own identity, while museums become sites

where social, cultural, historical and political knowledge is constructed and negotiated. Visitors are interpreters with a right to negotiate this knowledge with other visitors and with the museum itself.

In a practical activity, visitors might be asked to generate their own content in the way they find more suitable. Many think that user-generated contents include only technological products such as videos, whereas also other kinds of products made by visitors can be considered as user-generated: photographs (old or new ones), drawings, sketches and so on. These favour engagement much more than reading labels and information panels: doing something practical implies a much more active response by the visitors, it means that the visitors are not just 'consuming the product' offered by the museum, they are instead involved in the process of creating that product. Here the context is assumed to be more important than the exhibit and knowledge is subject to constant change and re-negotiation.

Interactions on user-generated contents can be on site and/ or on line. In the first case, two possibilities can be suggested: while visitors who freely come to the museum can be invited to make

written comments on what other visitors have produced, pre-defined groups may be asked to bring their 'contents' in a focus group on a given topic where each participant can share and comment on objects and ideas (e.g. pictures of a musical instrument can trigger a discussion on the history of music, on different music genres and their origins, on related activities such as singing and dancing; experts in the field may volunteer to organize a course etc.).

However, interactions can be fostered on line as well. To this end, museums should incorporate user-generated content on their websites and invite visitors to participate in forums and discussions (for the range of opportunities offered by social media refer to Toolkit 5, *Social Web and Interaction*).

## STRENGTHENING LITERACY SKILLS IN A SCIENCE MUSEUM

When an international survey, at the beginning of last decade, demonstrated the obsolescence of literacy skills in the adult population residing in Campania (southern Italy), the Centre for Science Museums at the University of Naples 'Federico II' tried to attract an adult audience with a programme that intended to show how 'dusty' museum objects could have a connection with objects of everyday life. The *PREDIL* project, where *PREDIL* stands for *Prevention and Diagnosis of Illiteracy*, was a large-scale initiative involving 733 adults, all recruited on a voluntary basis (Gallina-Vertecchi, 2004). They were

given the opportunity to join activities organised free of charge in the four museums of the Centre: the Royal Mineralogical Museum, the Museum of Zoology, the Paleontological Museum, the Museum of Anthropology. Private buses, organised by the Centre, took them to the museums, where they were divided into groups and showed around with a guide.

» Museums foster questioning, debate and critical thinking «'

The museum staff tried to raise (non)visitors' interest by asking questions in order to encourage discussion on given objects (Simon, 2010). Hence, six samples of rock salts dating back to 1846 were the starting point for a dialogue among visitors on the salt commonly used when cooking. The opportunity to make a parallel with such a common aspect of everyday life was a way to demolish any kind of inhibition due to cultural or educational barriers. The museum staff played a fundamental role in this, since they were all trained to speak a precise but friendly language and explain in common words all technical terms. They raised questions to invite

visitors to dialogue and contribute opinions and personal experiences to the discussion.

At the end of the tour, the positive experience was consolidated with a gadget the museum offered to the participants: a house-shaped box reproducing the façade of the 'Federico II' University. Inside the box, the four museums were each represented by one of its most typical objects (e.g. the dinosaur for the Paleontological Museum). Four drawers at the base of the box contained information sheets on the museums.

A low level of intervention with specifically trained staff was adopted in the PREDIL project, where visitors followed guided tours appropriately designed for them and participated in discussions led by the guides. This low level of engagement is necessary when dealing either with large numbers of people, or with participants with low literacy skills (as in PREDIL) who may feel anxious if involved in deeper participation, or with new visitors groups.

A similar approach could be integrated with a workshop in which visitors could discover by themselves the properties of the object chosen: they could be asked to bring their own objects and

find answers to stimulating questions raised by the experts (e.g.: *How many different kinds of salt are sold in supermarkets? What are the differences? Can these differences be felt by touching the salt? Can they be understood by observing the rocks the salt is derived from?*) and triggering motivation, learning and understanding. Appropriate training is necessary for the staff, that are to be able to lead the experiment; but also other sources must be available (texts, articles, Internet etc.) through which visitors can get information.

Indeed, science museums may offer a variety of opportunities to engage people of any age in learning and entertaining activities. At NEMO Science Center in Amsterdam<sup>2</sup>, both adults and teenagers can select among several offers. In temporary exhibitions, generally addressed to children, hands-on and mind-on activities are proposed that are in connection with modern and up-to-date subjects: in the *Laboratory*, children are invited to wear a lab coat and safety glasses and turn into scientists, they can make their own experiments and find out the properties of household items, such as the baking powder. In *Water Power*, the power of water to facilitate heavy jobs is shown and then visitors can build a dam, conduct water by using metal pipes and learn how a dam can help create green energy.

In the permanent exhibition, visitors are free to get acquainted with the objects as they prefer and to experiment them. In similar cases, classical mediation tools with a low level of intervention can be appropriate: text panels, info sheets, booklets distributed at the entrance, audio-guides; or, for the technologized ones, a smartphone

1. Museums Association: Museums change lives, 11, <http://www.museumsassociation.org>, Accessed 20 December 2015.
2. NEMO Science Center, <https://www.e-nemo.nl/en/>, Accessed 20 December 2015.

app. Different kinds of media placed in proximity of single objects or rooms can also offer additional information (e.g. how to 'experiment' an earthquake in a room with special effects created to make people experience natural phenomena).

In temporary exhibitions, the approach can be more involving since a more active participation can be required. Workshops on up-to-date topics (e.g. pollution, greenhouse effect, renewable energy) stimulate interest and curiosity and favour learning and understanding of processes (in the example above, how a dam is built). Especially if the workshop is addressed to children, the whole activity can become even more attractive if they can play the role of scientists by wearing the clothes and accessories that are needed when working in a laboratory. If the laboratory activity includes producing an object (e.g. a small dam), visitors (both adults and children) should be allowed to bring this object with them as a souvenir of the experience, thus enriching the hands-on/ mind-on experience with a third element, the heart-on experience (Vomero-Merzagora, 2001).

On a smaller scale, science museums can be a tool to promote the knowledge, among the locals,

of the natural features of a given geographical area. This is the case of *Promoting science: the creation of a scientific observatory to raise awareness on sea biodiversity* (Poce, 2014), a project organised in Sicily (southern Italy) with the purpose to encourage technical-scientific culture in secondary schools by focusing on the biodiversity and geodiversity of the seas surrounding Sicily.

People are involved at several levels and in different kinds of opportunities: from common exhibitions, installations and artistic shows, to science labs in the street where younger audiences can engage in practical activities with their families.

One of the innovative aspects of this initiative is that of having on-the-road activities and on-site activities. In the first, the staff go 'in search of the audience': the science labs in the streets are meant to attract passers-by, catch their attention and show them how the same activity can be practiced inside or outside the museum walls without losing the combination of learning and fun; in the latter, visitors are asked to participate in activities such as measurements of environmental parameters, monitoring of different phenomena, non-destructive analysis of biological and geological samples, etc.

Especially during on-site activities, visitors can co-create their exhibits by sharing videos on marine science; they can be active discussants in forums and debates about the opportunities provided by the local richness of the sea; they can organise courses on innovative and healthy fish cooking.

## EVERY VISITOR HAS A STYLE

An interesting bridging-the-gap strategy is suggested by Angelini (2013), who proposes to design museum activities adapted to different learning styles. This is based on the concept that learning is more successful when learning materials are tailored on the learner's needs and interests (Knowles, 1980).

Kolb (1984) identified four styles that determine four approaches to learning:

- CONVERGENT LEARNING STYLE: they prefer dealing with technical tasks and problems rather than social and interpersonal issues;
- DIVERGENT LEARNING STYLE: they perform better in situations that call for generation of alternative ideas and implications, are interested in people and tend to be imaginative and feeling-oriented;
- ASSIMILATIVE LEARNING STYLE: they are less focused on people and more concerned with ideas and abstract concepts;

— ACCOMMODATIVE LEARNING STYLE: they are best suited for those situations where one must adapt oneself to changing immediate circumstances, tend to solve problems in an intuitive trial-and-error manner.

How to make an exhibition stimulating to each type? Considering that, as stated by Knowles, learning is more effective when learners are practically and actively involved in their processes; and that, as demonstrated by Kolb, experience is fundamental in learning, which can be grouped into four general styles, the idea proposed here is that of choosing an element (a museum object, a science experiment, a technique etc.) and prepare four activities on that. Each activity is supposed to comply with one of Kolb's four styles.

A proposal might be teaching the art of mosaic to decorate floors. After a brief historical explanation, visitors get involved in four different practical activities. To stimulate the *divergent style*, whose learning process is better activated in situations where new or alternative ideas are to be produced by observation or imagination rather than action, questions as the following can be raised: *What is*

*the use of this floor? Why was the floor decorated like this? Can there be alternative usages of this technique?* By using their imagination, visitors are asked to find one or more answers to these questions and to compare them within the group.

The assimilation style, characterised by reasoning and the ability to create abstract concepts that can be turned into precise and accurate models, can be involved with questions as *How are the tesserae combined? Is there a logical organisation of colours, shapes, materials?* Visitors are encouraged to grasp the model behind the design, to understand the relationship between the different sizes and colours of the *tesserae*.

The proper activity for the *convergent style*, where learning is mainly based on the practical application of ideas and technical tasks, is raised by questions as *Can you replicate a small part of the mosaic shown in the picture?* Visitors are provided with small pieces of stones of different sizes, colours and shapes and asked to reproduce a given part of the mosaic.

Finally, the *accommodative style*, where learning is mainly based on doing things, getting involved in new experiences and immediate circumstances,

turning theory into practice gets easily involved by stimuli as *Can you combine tesserae?* Visitors are provided with small pieces of stones of different sizes, colours and shapes and asked to make their own mosaics.

Every activity should be conducted by at least two people, an art historian who gives all the necessary historical and technical information and replies to questions, and an educator who can give support to learning during the exercises. And could be concluded with the presentation of products made by the participants.

## WHEN MUSEUMS CONVEY A SENSE OF IDENTITY

» *The best museums put themselves at the heart of their communities [...]. They work with others in interdependent and mutually beneficial relationships, building partnerships with charities, community groups, children's centres, schools, libraries, art organisations, social services, the NHS and local authorities* «<sup>3</sup>

The research review presented in the first chapter of this manual has shown that among the reasons for non visiting there is a lack of exhibitions devoted to everyday life, in modern times and in recent past. This need, especially expressed by ethnic minorities interested in recognizing the part their groups had played in the country's history, was nonetheless felt by national visitors as well (Du Bery, 1994).

It is generally known that museums are rooted in places, they help shape a sense of identity and contribute to local distinctiveness. They work with communities and represent the collective history and heritage of a place. Their objects are used to construct identities, on both a personal and a national level, objects that can become invested with deeply held feelings (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). But it is also true that due to the population

shifts of the last decades, there is an increasing number of people from backgrounds that are not reflected in the collections.

Some museums are addressing this issue by bringing in communities and individuals as equal partners to shape the future of the museum. Different strategies to bridge the gap see museums playing an active role in fostering knowledge and dialogue between different cultures, in giving to their collections a new social function for the mutual understanding of different audiences with different backgrounds, but also in supporting visitors to shape their own identity through the knowledge of their roots that museums can convey.

## THE PRESERVATION OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

The preservation of folklore and national dialects as a means to preserve national identity among the locals and make it known and understood by ethnic minorities is one of the main themes of *Three apples fell from heaven...* (Khachaturyan, 2013). Organized in Yerevan by the Hovanness Toumanian Museum in cooperation with cultural and educational departments and with the Association of National Minorities, this museum programme was given a festival format open to all volunteers wishing to candidate themselves to take part in the festival.

Hovanness Toumanian (1869-1923), to whom the museum is dedicated, was a popular Armenian fairy-tale writer, therefore it was planned to turn the museum into a big arena for a fairy-tale competition.

In a very innovative way for a museum, a selection cycle was organized in which a jury made of specialists in different areas (e.g. ethnography, linguistics, archaeology and so on) pre-selected candidates either via Skype or by watching video recordings sent by would-be participants with their narration. Therefore, this first phase was all managed at a distance, with almost no costs. The selected ones were then invited to the Toumanian Museum to show their talents of narrating in a certain dialect and to compete with each other.

3. Museums Association: Museums change lives, 9, <http://www.museumsassociation.org>, Accessed 20 December 2015.



Invitation to participate was sent to Armenians living all over the world, and to all the ethnic minorities living in Armenia (Greek, Assyrian, Russian, Georgian, Ukrainian, Polish, etc).

The main code of the project was the *fairy-tale*, and the narrators were given two general tasks: to tell an ethnographic tale peculiar for their birthplace; and to tell it in their native dialect.

The festival was made even more realistic with the accompaniment of traditional costumes, music, household and artisan articles and crafts from regions or ethnic groups represented at the festival. The 'local' winners were given royal titles (e.g. *King's Youngest Son/ Daughter*) and royal prizes, whereas the representatives of different communities competed for the title of the *Neighbour's Best Son/ Daughter-in Law*.

The project has changed not only the view on intangible culture but also the comprehension of the concept of a museum. The museum environment obtains an added value. It turns from a culture-preserving space into a culture-creating environment.

There are several aspects of this project that can be replicated in museum activities and events

and that can be interesting especially for local museums where it can be easy to organize group encounters in a given time span. The festival format could be used as the final event of a longer process in which people of all ages and with different roles contribute to creating the event in all of its aspects. If in the above project the focus was fairy-tale narration, in a similar activity the focus could be on something tangible (e.g. medieval clothes) and participants could take part in the whole process: *Who made clothes in the Middle Ages? With what kind of fabric? Where was the fabric taken from? What were the differences between the clothes for the rich and those for the poor?* These and similar questions could find an answer in practical activities.

In order to 'awaken the senses', participants may also be allowed to touch the natural fibres from which fabric is made (e.g. cotton); media might be used to show a map of the geographical areas where these fibres were grown in the past and are grown now. Media can support the event also in other ways: the event could be live-streamed and distant participants could be given the chance to ask questions in real time. Other experts could support the *mise en scène* (for suggestions

and techniques in this field, refer to Toolkit 4, *Synaesthetic translation of perspectives*.

A deep level of engagement is required in all this. People are learning and co-constructing culture and a setting at the same time, they are exhibiting their talents and sharing them with other people. The variety of activities proposed consent to any individual to feel as part of a community, to develop a sense of belonging to it and to contribute the way s/he feels best suited for in terms of time or product to deliver. Besides, live interpretations are among the most successful ways to encourage participants to have social experiences and to learn from them.

## DOMINATION vs INTEGRATION

The museum practice described above was inspired by cultural issues tightly linked to the place the museum is located (a national fairy-tale writer). The following example, instead, has a broader perspective, since it is rooted in the old history of the Roman conquest. A fundamental Change of Perspective underlies the idea that gave origin to this project: the Romans, known as invaders and dominators, in reality were in favour of a policy of integration of the populations they conquered.

*Roma Caput Mundi - A city of domination and integration* (Autore, 2013) was born as an initiative of the Special Division for the

Archaeological Heritage of Rome in cooperation with the University for Foreign Students of Siena, Roma Tre University, the Roman Caritas volunteer organization and *Rete Scuolemigranti*, an organisation for linguistic integration.

The project started with the involvement of the numerous foreign communities living in Rome, with their origins, traditions and cultural levels, who were encouraged to actively participate in the cultural exchange promoted by the initiative. The main element of the project was to offer foreigners the opportunity to experience first-hand the places in Rome, such as the Colosseum and the Roman Forum, where intercultural exchange took place in antiquity. Approximately 800 foreigners were involved, men and women from various continents and social classes, with ages ranging from 18 to 35. Twenty guided tours were organised, each for 40 participants. Each tour had seven stops, each of which illustrating a particular aspect of the Roman customs and how the Romans showed tolerance and respect to the populations they conquered.

The general organisation of the initiative went through several phases and involved different players. The museum staff had to be properly trained to

interact with the foreign communities from both an historical and a linguistic point of view. Those who had to guide the tours were also trained on the content to transmit to the visitors: the texts were all written down beforehand so that all the operators could follow the same script. Each stop was in proximity of a monument representing a peculiar aspect of the Roman expansion and represented the starting point for a reflection on how the customs of the conquered population were tolerated and respected (e.g. religion or language).

The tour was followed by meetings with outstanding people from the foreign communities who presented the project to a large public audience discussing issues regarding social integration and giving expression and voice to the cultures and literature of the immigrants.

The level of involvement required from participants in this first part of the programme was indeed low, with mediation tools (guided tours and public speeches) where they listened and were allowed to ask questions. The final event was more interactive and involving from an affective point of view since it took place inside the Colosseum with a live concert by a famous Jewish musician, live ethnic music, and

ethnic food. The participants felt at ease, exchanged their stories and made the effort to speak Italian rather than their native tongues.

*Roma Caput Mundi* can inspire museum programmes in which visitors can have a more active role, possibly in a smaller context, where instead of simply tasting previously prepared ethnic food, they can cook together and share recipes and information on places where foreign spices can be bought. Food is indeed a theme that can open windows on topics that can be compared on a local, international or global perspective (space), or on changes through the centuries (time), thus inspiring – for instance – a reflection on how eating is intertwined with people's lives and health (e.g. *When were fast-food restaurants invented? Why? Are they common in every country? If not, why? What kind of food do they serve?*).

## WHEN ACCESSIBILITY IS THE MAIN OBSTACLE

» Museums boost people's quality of life and improve mental and physical health «<sup>4</sup>

Accessibility, it is worth repeating, is a cross-sectional, multi-faceted issue that can be found in any reason for not visiting. Indeed, when non visiting is due to knowledge or comprehension difficulties, it means that there are *educational* barriers (hence, we can talk of educational accessibility). In this case, examples have already been provided

4. Museums Association: Museums change lives, 9, <http://www.museumsassociation.org>, Accessed 20 December 2015.

showing how the museum offer can be tailored to specific needs (e.g. by identifying learning styles, by training museum staff to speak a visitor-friendly language and so on).

When accessibility has to do with *identity* matters, then it can be overcome with activities addressed to social groups and minorities.

*Practical* accessibility difficulties such as logistics or opening hours can be tackled by extending the opening hours (e.g. the festival described in *Three apples fell from heaven...* took place late in the afternoon); or by organising transports. When these are free of charge, as in PREDIL, also *economic* accessibility is solved. In experiences as *Roma Caput Mundi* food was also served, so no costs for eating were due.

Therefore, in most of the successful museum practices described in the previous paragraphs, though the main focus was cast on different themes, some aspects of accessibility have always been dealt with.

For this reason, in this paragraph, accessibility will be analysed only from the viewpoint of limited physical access to museums, where *physical* refers to physical or mental disabilities.

## THE MEMORY OF BEAUTY

People with Alzheimer's disease are the target audience of the successful project *The memory of beauty* (De Luca, 2012)<sup>5</sup>.

Here as in other examples, the necessity is proved for museums to interact and cooperate with external institutions that can provide expert support to train staff and to tackle specific visitors groups. *The memory of beauty*, an initiative promoted by the Educational Department of the National Gallery of Modern Art (GNAM) in Rome, was developed in cooperation with the Geriatric Department of the Gemelli hospital in Rome, whose centre for brain ageing has a special department for Alzheimer's patients.

The aim of the programme was to provide patients with a quiet and relaxed setting where they could spend some time together doing a pleasant and helpful activity. The visits at the museum and the contact with art and beauty gave each patient the opportunity to express him/ herself, retrieve personal memories and be part of a group.

During a cycle of three to four visits led by ad-hoc trained operators, small groups of patients

(six to eight) selected by their care institutions and accompanied by their caregivers were encouraged to establish a feeling with the artwork, recalling personal memories through the observation of the artwork itself and exchanging opinions with each other.

Obviously, the level of interaction required from such a peculiar audience was low and depending on single cases, but the overall experience proved successful: medical research showed very positive results in reducing the stress level of patients and of their caregivers, even if there were no remarkable effects on the memory retrieval of the patients.

Attention was paid to the selection of the works of art to be shown in every tour: limited in number, they also had a common theme. They were placed in a room large enough to host the chairs and with no paintings around that could attract the participants and distract their attention from the artwork to be observed. They were big enough to be easily caught by all the participants, but with a 'neutral' subject (not too crowded nor too violent, no intense colours).

Interesting proposals for activities can be drawn from this experience. Engagement levels are always limited because of the mental disease, nonetheless something can be done to make the visit pleasant. As in *The memory of beauty*, accessibility can be granted by ad-hoc transportations and foldable wheel chairs. In order to make the participants feel part of a group, each of them can be given a name card; in order for them to avoid distractions and concentrate on the

5. Another interesting experience with people with Alzheimer's is described in Balzani, I. et al. (2014), 'A più voci – With many voices. The Palazzo Strozzi project for people with Alzheimer's and their caregivers', in Nardi, E., Angelini, C. (eds) Best Practice 2. A tool to improve museum education internationally, 205-214, Roma: Nuova Cultura.

activity, visits give better results if organised when the museum is less crowded (e.g. late in the afternoon).

When sitting in front of the artwork, patients/visitors may be involved in active participation through simple questions on the work they are observing (e.g.: *What do you see? What are the people in the painting doing? Who do you think they are? Is there a prevailing colour? Where is the action taking place? And when?*). At the end, the operator can give information about the artist and the artwork.

Observation and imagination rather than memory and cognitive skills are to be stimulated, in order to make patients experience emotions, use their imagination and their fantasy. In this process art, with its capacity to stir emotions, plays a central role. Participants can also be invited to take part in activities involving their senses of touch, smell or hearing.

The implementation of a project for people with a disease redefines the nature of the museum in an inclusive and participative manner. The museum re-shapes its educational role by addressing a broader audience, promotes the development of new services and facilities to meet the differentiated needs of the public and establishes new

relationships with individuals and institutions, with the community and the territory.

### **TOUCH BUT DON'T LOOK!**

Physical disabilities can prevent people from benefiting from museum opportunities in many ways. *The joy of touching. Peer cultural education for the visually impaired* (Pop, 2013) is a programme that tried to bridge the gap between visually impaired and sighted people. Held at the Maramures County Museum of History and Archaeology in Romania, this programme involved two groups of students, visually impaired and sighted. The museum organised cultural activities for these two groups, inside and outside the museum: tactile tours, mini concerts, gala, and county tours in Maramures. But in order to give both groups equal chances to take advantage of the museum offer, the sighted students went through what, according to Simon (2010), can be defined as a provocative experience: they were asked to wear black masks to fully understand how it is to live in the dark. Students interacted in several ways: the blind ones read from a Braille text

the history of the objects on display, the sighted ones helped them touch the objects described. Socialisation went on through dinner time when, while dinner was being served, students from the Fine Arts High School performed a concert.

Provocative experiences as this can be performed in any kind of museum and activate visitors at different levels. Low mediation tools distributed at the beginning of the tour can be adapted to the needs of the audience, as in this project in which they were also in Braille.

An interesting way to bring sighted visitors into the world of the visually impaired could be partially adopted from this programme, where sighted students wore black masks, and integrated with tours led by the visually impaired who could make the others experiment tactile tours. In this way, a low mediation tool as a guided tour becomes an involving participatory experience touching not only cognitive skills but also emotions and the senses. Besides, the 'blinded' sighted visitors, unused to touch or feel without seeing, would have to rely on their blind guides also to avoid obstacles when moving around. This would imply a deep level of interaction based on mutual reliance.

On the side of the visually impaired, the museums equipped with advanced technology could also provide media stations that give voice to written texts, so that participants can interact with media as well.

Visitors can also be involved in activities that develop over a longer time span. For example, under the guidance of museum experts,

sighted participants could produce replicas and copies of objects, while visually impaired participants could prepare Braille information sheets on the same objects. A final exhibition could be totally organised by the participants and hosted in one of the museum rooms. The museum could also lend itself to host courses to train people who deal with disabilities: from mission-relevant courses as training of the museum staff, to more general subjects such as how to write and read Braille or tactile paths.

### **A SURPRISING SENSORY APPROACH**

At the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo – MAM, in Brazil, an innovative approach was devised and implemented to encourage visitors to perceive the artworks with other senses beyond the visual one and to contribute to an inclusive practice in museum communication and education (Panelli-Sarraf, 2014).

In the exhibition ‘140 Caracteres’ (140 Characters), visitors – especially children – were blindfolded before entering the museum. The blindfolded group came in in a line, guided by the educator

and walked through the galleries to reach the sensorial artworks: a candy machine, a mountain of waste with a pool full of brandy, a clown clothe with a person hidden inside that plays a horn from time to time.

To start the dialogue with the groups, the educators first encourage the visitors to express what they feel and perceive about the artwork without seeing it, thus relying on their other senses. Gradually they use audio-descriptive discourse to help the ‘temporary blind’ visitors to understand the visual aspect of the artwork, since vision is the main sense used to perceive and engage with the cultural heritage.

This experience is like an introduction to the exhibition, an invitation to see the artworks with other perceptions and consider them with various senses and meanings. One of these artworks is made of boxes that serve as machines to sell encapsulate candies. Visitors can pick a candy and fill the empty place inside their mouth with it. However, the first sensation is not pleasant at all because before actually tasting the sweet taste, the mouth is too full. The tongue has no spare room; it stays fastened and unable to move. Only after

the very first minutes the candy starts to melt and the artwork becomes more comfortable inside the visitor.

In this entertaining experience, the museum’s strategy is that of engaging visitors in sensory approaches that enable them to see art with different eyes, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Participants contribute to the success of the initiative by sharing their thoughts and sensations and by actively accepting to join the experience the museum is proposing. When visitors tell how they feel, for example in the very first moments when they taste the candy, the museum operator can check if the experience has succeeded in transmitting a given message, in a circular relationship in which the visitor is an active player and the museum needs the visitor’s participation to make its activity successful or to re-shape it.

Especially in the case of children, entering the museum with blinded eyes is like living an adventure that creates an idea of the museum as a place where learning is fun. They can be made aware of disabilities and learn to accept and respect people who rely on other senses, even by constructing sensory experiences on their own, under the guidance of both the museum staff and science teachers.

# ACTIVATION, PARTICIPATION, ROLE MODIFICATION

## ACTIVATION OF VISITORS

*In this final chapter, we would like to re-interpret the activation and participation of visitors and the modification of the role of the museums in the light of the museum initiatives illustrated in the third chapter. The final part of the chapter opens a window on the functions of museum educators.*

A definition of what we mean by *activation* was provided at the beginning of this manual. In this definition, the term establishes a relationship between the levels of arousal from a psychological viewpoint and the subsequent behaviour, that is supposed to be modified accordingly. If applied to museums, this results in the activation of visitors, who must be involved in stimulating activities.

This step is fundamental especially with those people who refuse to visit museums for social or cultural reasons. The activation of visitors is a necessary step for successful learning, even more so when obstacles to learning rely on negative past experiences.

In the initiatives outlined in the previous chapter, several strategies are described in this sense, covering a wide range of people with differentiated characteristics and reasons for not going for a visit.

A broad general distinction can be made between adult and young audiences. Adults are usually reluctant to accept changes or develop new approaches to reality, unless they find it useful. A good way to attract adult visitors and make them change their approach to museums is to rely on experiential learning and connections with everyday life. This is one of the reasons for the success of PREDIL (*Strengthening literacy skills in a science museum*), for instance, where people's curiosity was easily activated through a

### OVERVIEW

- Activation of visitors
- Participation of visitors
- Modification of the role of the museum
- Museum educators

reflection on how rocks can supply useful items. This was a first Change of Perspective started from a museum object, a Change of Perspective that in that specific case did not encompass a trans-regional, trans-national dimension, which could indeed be envisaged in a similar museum practice, by inducing a comparison with other geographical areas and with how common everyday products are derived from nature or imported and exported from producing countries. Involving adult non-visitors in museums is no easy task; but involving them in free discussions on up-to-date topics is a good starting point to convey the image of an open museum where visitors' opinions are taken in due consideration.

When prospective visitors are still in their school age, a synergy with the institutions providing formal education can prevent them from forming that negative idea of museums that most adults recognise as one of the causes for not visiting. Initiating students to museums at an early stage through the integration of formal and informal education can play a fundamental role in creating the basis for future cultural development. Just to make a few examples, hands-on activities conducted

with both teachers and museum staff can open multi-dimensional perspectives and offer multi-dimensional approaches to school disciplines; technological contents generated by the students themselves and shared on the museum website is a way to tell the students that museums are speaking the language of young people.

Age groups could co-operate in 'sharing' their languages: adults by telling their stories, and youngsters by revealing the secrets of technology. An interesting modern debate could focus on differences and similarities between generation *x* and generation *y*.

Participation cannot be separated from activation. Though participation can take place at different degrees of engagement, it always implies activation as the preceding and inseparable step.

In an audience-centred approach as the one museums are currently adopting, activation and participation of visitors in museum practices are often necessary for the success of the museum itself.

As an example, we can go back to the candy that blindfolded visitors are invited to taste in the Brazilian initiative described in *A surprising sensory approach*. If visitors don't accept to taste the candy, then the proposal fails. It simply remains as an artwork on display. By actively involving visitors in the experience asking them to participate, the museum is sharing with them the responsibility on the experience itself, in a dynamic, circular relationship in which the museum feeds its visitors and is in turn fed by them.

This was already implicit in the pioneer initiative at the *Casa del Museo (The museum meets the people)* in Tacubaya (Mexico City). Side by side with the exhib-its, the *Casa* lent its rooms to the local communities, whose initial reluctance was gradually defeated and the *Casa* became a common space where different groups created their own learning and entertaining (*edutaining*) opportunities, according to age, needs and interests. People were left free to contribute their knowledge and skills either by organising, co-organising and inventing activities, or by simply taking part in them or even by just observing what others had done.

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## MODIFICATION OF THE ROLE OF THE MUSEUM

This philosophy is the key to the success of any initiative. As mentioned in *The museum as a participatory experience*, Simon (2010) specifies that audiences engage at different levels, and co-creators represent only a small percentage. Therefore, any encouragement by the museum staff to play cooperatively in the activities proposed has to respect personal inclinations to be involved.

The museum has anyway to be convincing in promoting its offer. The *Casa del Museo* was successful because it went to the people and invited them to enter its doors. In *Promoting science (Strengthening literacy skills in a science museum)*, people's participation is in part looked for in the streets. Non-visitors would never expect a museum to go in search of them, and when this happens and the museum succeeds, the very first Change of Perspective from the non-visitors' side is on how the museum communicates itself and involves people. It's on the strategy, before being on the contents.

Hence, communication is fundamental in attracting new audiences, activating them and making them participate. As is the use of communication tools. The pre-selection of participants via

Skype organised by the the Hovaness Toumanian Museum (*The preservation of intangible cultural heritage*) is a way to involve as many people as possible and to implicitly say that all are entitled to equal chances to participate. Again, the strategy is successful. Then, the initiative is successful as well because the content and the way it is managed are new and involving: people are invited to share their knowledge and customs in an historical setting that they contribute to set up, wearing costumes and competing to get a final prize. Obviously it is a success. People are amused. They have learned. They have participated in a live experience. They have contributed to constructing this live experience. They have won a prize, and if they haven't, they are eager to compete again. The format is successful, and from a local initiative it can be extended to a bigger one, where local traditions are the starting point to induce a cross-cultural, trans-national reflection. From a local to a European context, where participants bring their national fairy-tales and all the customs, habits and beliefs linked to them, to look at the origins of these fantastic stories and find possible common European sources.

Visitors can be activated and invited to participate only if the museum is able to involve them. This has been repeatedly said and demonstrated throughout this manual.

Therefore, one of the first steps museums have accomplished to move out of their walls is to physically go in the streets.

Second, museums have started *cooperation* with other institutions. Probably the most obvious and consolidated one is with the schools. But in order to attract new audiences, institutions of different kinds have proven useful and necessary. Without connections with health institutions, hospitals and experts, for instance, a museum programme for people with mental or physical disabilities wouldn't be possible (*The memory of beauty*). Just as charities and community groups are a necessary bridge to outreach vulnerable categories as immigrants, ethnic groups or marginalised people.

A recent field of activity concerns cooperation with departments of justice to bring museums into jails and actively engage inmates in organising exhibits within the prison walls addressed to other offenders and to the staff<sup>1</sup>. Here the social impact of the museum in the long term can be strong and effective because offenders are given basic skills that can help them increase their employability once they are out of jail.

Third, they have varied their offer in order to give equal chances to any kind of audience. Offers can be more or less structured, depending on the degree of involvement and cooperation required from visitors. Beside basic mediation tools that can be found in any

1. A pioneer experience in which nine inmates were employed in the whole process of devising and constructing an exhibition is fully described in Knoff, C., Merran, S., Poussou, V. (2014), "Le Voyage", une...!, in Nardi, E., Angelini, C. (ed) Best Practice 3. A Tool to improve museum education internationally, 215-226, Roma: Nuovo Cultura.



museum, contents and activities can be planned and programmed with a view to the needs of target audiences, that can be solicited both practically, cognitively and affectively (hands-on, mind-on, heart-on). In other cases, museums can provide physical or virtual settings where user-generated content can be on display and visitors are free to make their own remarks.

Fourth, they are more and more equipped with technologies, at the benefit of the museum itself and of the most technologized people, and make use of social media to enlarge the range of opportunities for visitors.

## MUSEUM EDUCATORS

These and other innovative aspects that intervene in shaping the contemporary museum depend to a large extent on museum staff. All the museum practices illustrated in the third chapter have been possible only with the support of ad-hoc trained personnel.

As a matter of fact, the modification of the role of the museum has determined a modification

in the role of the staff, whose skills and expertise must comply with several factors. The outcomes of any initiative obviously depend on all of the staff involved, but with the advent of the new educational role of the museum that has been presented here, museum educators have taken on a relevant role. Following Talboys (2008), there are some core areas in which museum educators are deeply engaged.

Museum teaching is one of them: they are expected to teach their audiences, whatever they come to see. Demanding as it may seem, this can be highly satisfying for the opportunity to exercise a wide range of skills and to collect instant feedback about the efficacy of the museum as a learning environment. Related to this area is the possibility to instruct school teachers in the proper educational use of the museum. This can have the advantage to convince teachers that it is worth using museums in their teaching.

Another area of concern is the training of other museum staff about general principles on museum education and in specific situation, when training is directly linked to a given initiative. This was the case, for example, of *Roma Caput Mundi (Strengthening literacy skills in a science museum)*,

where the guides had to be trained on the peculiarities of the groups that were to participate in the tours and on how to turn technical language into a simple discourse that they all could understand.

This goes straight to another core area, the involvement with the wider community that has to be educated about the worth of museums as a value to society and its identity. To this end, museum educators should be involved in planning and designing exhibitions, in which they will give an input on how to display artefacts, write texts, labels and the like, along with ideas on how the whole activity can work better as an educational resource.

Finally, an aspect neglected so far because not in the scope of this manual, but that should always be included in any museum programme as an essential part of the museum educator's job is evaluation. A proper evaluation cycle is one that monitors the whole activity, from the definition and achievement of basic educational and museological aims to more practical information as the number of visitors. However, there are more informal ways to evaluate – asking teachers or students their opinions about a session, concluding a focus group by inviting participants to list strengths and weaknesses of the experience and so on. The information collected is, among other things, an important source for the museum to replicate the initiative as it is, or to modify it according to suggestions. In other terms, is another way to give voice to participants.

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

**This manual was developed in the scope of the project 'EuroVision – Museums Exhibiting Europe (EMEE)'.  
Grant Agreement Number: (2012-1243 | 001)**



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**PUBLISHING HOUSE:**

edition mono/monochrom  
Zentagasse 31/8, 1050 Vienna, Austria  
[edition-mono@monochrom.at](mailto:edition-mono@monochrom.at)

January 2016

**ISBN:** 978-3-902796-31-8

**RECOMMENDED CITATION METHOD:**

Angelini, Cinzia (2016) *EMEE Toolkit 3: Bridging the gap. Activation, participation and role modification*. (EMEE Toolkit series, vol. 3), Wien: edition mono.

**CONCEPT, DESIGN AND LAYOUT OF THE EMEE TOOLKIT**

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**DESIGN OF THE COVERS OF EMEE TOOLKIT SERIES: VOL. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6:** Kerstin Halm, Günther Friesinger, monochrom

**DESIGN OF THE COVER OF EMEE TOOLKIT VOL. 4:**

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**VISUAL IDENTITY OF THE EMEE PROJECT (WEBSITE, PUBLICATIONS, OTHER ITEMS):**

Kerstin Halm, Günther Friesinger, monochrom and Sabine Hibler, Uwe R. Brückner, Linda Greci, ATELIER BRÜCKNER

**EMEE-LOGO:** Kerstin Halm, Günther Friesinger, monochrom

**FINAL ARTWORK:** Eduard Gitt, Università Roma Tre and Kerstin Halm, monochrom

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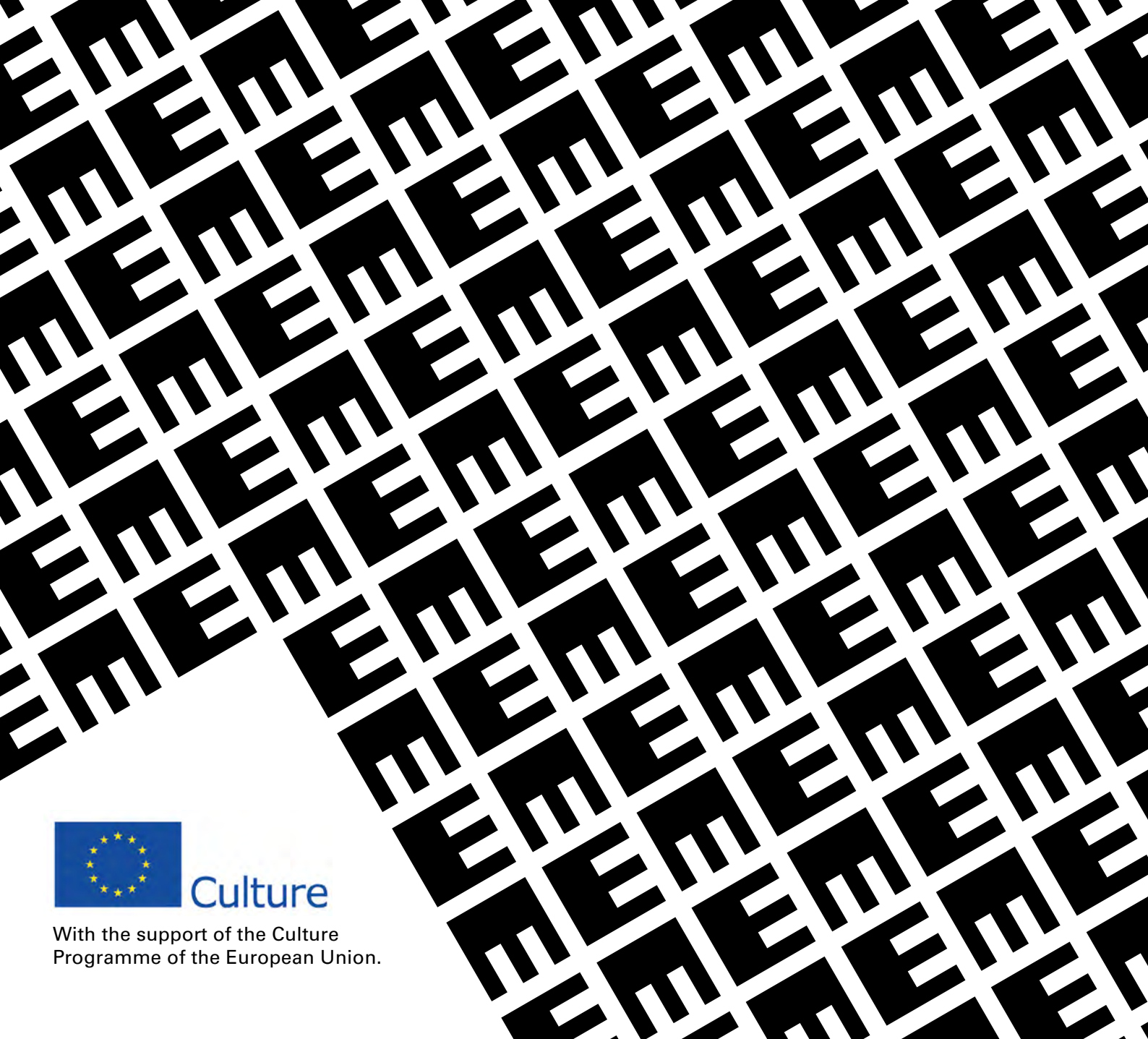
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**SPECIAL THANKS FOR THE SUPPORT OF MONOCHROM:**





Culture

With the support of the Culture  
Programme of the European Union.