Museums, Libraries and Cultural Heritage

Democratising Culture, Creating Knowledge and Building Bridges


Edited by Jutta Thinesse-Demel
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UNESCO

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Introduction

Jutta Thinesse-Demel

"The museum can and should address all aspects of social life: it holds the keys to a better understanding of society and its evolution."

- Alpha Oumar Konaré, former President of the International Council of Museums (ICOM)

In this booklet we focus on the cultural dimension of new lifelong learning perspectives, looking at the changing role of cultural institutions, libraries and cultural heritage. They are important agencies in new learning societies; their roles are both educative and educational. If learning environments and the creation of general dispositions to creativity and learning are critical for the participation of people in learning activities throughout life, then the educative role of these cultural organisations is also crucial. Thus the chief aims of this workshop on which this booklet is based were:

- To focus on developments and new dimensions in this domain since 1997;
- To identify emerging trends, challenges and innovative programmes;
- To set down a list of criteria for creating cultural organisations as platforms for lifelong learning to be published as a follow-up to CONFINTÉA V; and
- To prepare for CONFINTÉA VI in 2009 by setting concrete, future targets.

A Changing World

The workshop focused on the following three issues: cultural heritage, libraries and cultural institutions as ideal places for lifelong learning. The participants are respected internationally as experts in their fields. Each of the presentations made during the workshop demonstrated the importance of redefining culture as an opportunity for education and lifelong learning.

The world over, learning and education are in a stage of transition. Likewise, enormous changes are taking place outside the field of education. These involve economic organisations, social agencies and cultural institutions. In this booklet the focus will be on the cultural dimension of new lifelong learning perspectives, with special attention paid to the changing role of cultural institutions.

The Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTÉA V) held in Hamburg in 1997 declared that today’s societies would not be able to face the challenges ahead without the active and creative participation of their citizens. These days our societies require us to be active citizens, to be flexible and creative. Many professions demand awareness in order to change and adaptability. Indeed, the present generation has a need for continuous learning in order to acquire new skills constantly. In the words of Paul Bélanger (2004: 17), what is required of the present generation are:
Qualifications, such as a second or third language, basic life skills, the capacity to manage intricate tools, the aptitude to express oneself and take part in dialogue involving value divergence, the capacity to go on learning in an autonomous way, the capacity to transform and to negotiate conflicts at all levels, and the capacity to live creatively in a multi-cultural community.

Results of the Bangkok Workshop

The workshop participants, who came from all over the world, discussed the growing importance of lifelong learning in new learning environments and concluded that cultural institutions are among the most interesting of these environments. The following final statement was presented to the board of the conference:

- Lifelong learning is a basic human right, and culture is a platform for establishing effective communication and building understanding and co-operation between peoples. Respect for individuals, their cultures and their communities, is the foundation for dialogue and confidence building, as well as relevant and sustainable learning and training.
- Lifelong learning reflects a holistic view of education and recognises learning in and from many different environments. It does not mean simply recurrent education within the formal education system.
- Efforts are needed to ensure greater access to and participation in communication media for all cultures and social groups so that all may share their special visions.
- Museums and libraries are important agents in our new learning societies. Their roles are both educative and educational. Learning environments and the creation of general dispositions to creativity and learning are crucial for the participation of people in learning activities throughout life. The role of museums and libraries in the development of lifelong learning is both rich and diverse:
  1. Museums are potential learning places for immigrants (e.g., offering language courses), women returning to employment, young people entering employment (e.g., apprenticeship workshops), and patients undergoing rehabilitation.
  2. Museums and libraries can function as sources of information, guidance and counselling, providing advocacy, facilitating access to learning opportunities and fostering a learning culture.
  3. Museums and libraries can provide learning opportunities, and encourage and support learning communities.
- To achieve further development in lifelong learning, it is necessary to promote cultural democracy. This requires that museums, libraries and heritage and cultural institutions be recognized as places which reflect society in all its complexity and diversity. Museums and libraries are not neutral but play a central role in democracy building.
- We recommend promoting cultural democracy by the following means:
  1. Making it available to every learner as a right;
  2. Developing various kinds of cultural institutions as participatory, pro-active learning environments;
  3. Encouraging greater participation and social inclusion;
  4. Acknowledging the inter-relatedness of culture, learning and participation;
5. Promoting democratic participation, open access to information and freedom of speech;
6. Giving responsibility to each individual for the management of his or her own lifelong learning;
7. Building partnerships between museums and libraries as centres of creativity and agents of change;
8. Developing partnerships with educational systems, policy-makers and other stakeholders;
9. Enabling and mediating in the learning process and supporting learners as partners;
10. Encouraging all media to contribute to adult learning for marginalised groups;
11. Providing training for educators and users to encourage the development and application of appropriate resources for adult learning;
12. Promoting the distribution of cultural learning materials both regionally and worldwide;
13. Protecting cultural diversity and promoting dialogue between different cultures.
The role of public libraries in lifelong learning is a theme that is widely discussed. In this chapter I indicate some of the principal elements in this discussion. Even though discussions in different countries stress different issues, there is general agreement on the important role libraries have to play in lifelong learning.

The European Commission’s Memorandum on Lifelong Learning

“Learning should be based on four ‘pillars’: Learning to live together, learning to know, learning to do and learning to be” (Delors 1996: 97). These words express the core message of the European Commission’s Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (2000) that was drafted in October 2000, following discussions at the European Council meetings in Lisbon and in Stockholm. At the heart of the memorandum are five priorities:

1. Providing basic skills for all, guaranteeing universal and continuing access to learning in order to gain and renew the skills needed for participation in the knowledge society. These include IT skills, foreign languages, and technological, cultural, entrepreneurship and social skills.
2. Raising levels of investment in human resources.
3. Ensuring innovation in teaching and learning, with the objective of developing effective teaching methods and contexts for lifelong learning.
4. Valuing learning, thereby improving the ways in which learning participation and outcomes are understood and appreciated, particularly those of non-formal and informal learning.
5. Rethinking guidance and counselling to ensure that everyone can easily access good quality information and advice about learning opportunities.

It is easy to see a fundamental role for libraries in addressing these five key priorities. However, the memorandum overlooked the fact that libraries are not just service providers but also are active partners offering access to global resources, professional guidance and training in a local setting. Libraries were only mentioned once in the original memorandum as examples of everyday locations where people gather. Other examples included train stations, parks, health centres and workplace canteens. More attention was paid to the role of libraries in the final version.

The European Commission’s subsequent Communication on Lifelong Learning (2001) makes it clear that the European Union recognises that if it is to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, a critical tool in achieving this will be lifelong learning.
Extracts from the Communication

Information, guidance and counselling

This primarily involves facilitating access to learning opportunities, creating a learning culture and partnership working: “ICT based services, in partnership with other local level services, e.g., libraries, may serve as access points” (EC 2001: 17).

Bringing together learners and learning opportunities

This involves encouraging and supporting learning communities, cities and regions and setting up local learning centres: “Member states are invited to use the resources of schools, adult education and higher education institutions, research institutions and other public facilities, such as libraries, as multipurpose centres for lifelong learning” (EC 2001: 21).

European projects to promote adult learning through libraries

With regard to worldwide projects, the following are some examples of European projects that involve libraries as partners in the educational system:

1. The Pulman Project involved 37 European countries. The project is now finished, but a manifesto was approved at the end of the project and is now being disseminated to all EU member states. The manifesto stresses the role of libraries in lifelong learning and may be of use in lobbying politicians on many different areas of library activities.

2. The DERAL project (Distance Education in Rural Areas via Libraries) was funded by the EU’s Telematics Programme and aimed to encourage public libraries to play a greater role in transferring information, knowledge and education to users who experience difficulties in following formal courses of study. The project is co-ordinated by the regional Library of Kalmar, Sweden.

3. The ISTAR network was set up by the EU Directorate for Social Affairs. Based in public libraries, this pilot project set out to promote awareness and provide training and access to ICT and the internet in regions of Europe with poor access to markets and networks; Greece, Northern Ireland and Thuringia in Germany. The project finished in 2000.

4. The EU Commission’s E-learning Initiative seeks to mobilise educational and cultural communities as well as economic and social players in Europe to speed up changes in education and training systems thus helping Europe to become a knowledge-based society.
Library-based adult learning projects in individual countries

Belgium. The University of Antwerp has developed a website on human resource management in libraries.

Bulgaria. The website of the Bulgarian Training Centre for Continuing Education for Librarians has been established.


Chile. The Dirección Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos Gestion Participativa en Bibliotecas Publicas (DIBAM) sees a special role for libraries in the struggle against illiteracy.

The Czech Republic. The Out-of-School Education of Librarians programme trains librarians, including those in small libraries, to provide information services to library users.

Denmark. The Royal School of Library and Information Science develops and runs training courses, distance learning programmes and a Masters degree programme for librarians. The first paragraph of the Danish Library Act states: “The objective of the public libraries is to promote information, education and cultural activity by making available books, periodicals, talking books and other suitable material, such as recorded music and electronic information resources, including Internet and multimedia” (Danish Ministry of Culture 2000, Part 1, §1). VUCi-BIB adult education centres are located in public libraries. Through them the Danish Library Service aims to enhance the provision of adult education in the regions of Vesthimmerland and Northern Jutland.

Finland. The Finnish public libraries have a strong position in the Vision 2005. Finnish libraries have a strong position in society and are used by 80% of the population. Fin ELIB (The National Electronic Library) is a co-operative project between the National Library and Helsinki University Library. ELIP is a website offering support for teaching, learning and research.

France. In 1998 France adopted a plan to enter the information society called “Programme d’Action Gouvernemental pour la Société d’Information”. The City Library of Montpellier has a special department which supports teachers in their professional work.

Germany. The Bertelsmann Foundation has created a method called BIX to help libraries become educational institutions. A federally funded project will soon be established to support a network of lifelong learning institutions. Public libraries will participate in this project as access points. Stuttgart Public Library is working with the German Institute for Adult Education to establish a framework for co-operation between public libraries and other educational institutions.

Hungary. Katona Jozsef County Library in Kecskemet provides formal and informal education to individuals and institutions.

Ireland. In 2000 the *Chomhairle Leabharlanna* (the Library Council of Ireland) published a report entitled *Joining Forces*. In the introduction it reads: “We [libraries] support research and education and enable the individual to learn at a pace that suits their own needs” (The Library Council 2000: 3).

The Cork County Development Board’s *Equal Skills Initiative* (2000), which was launched in September 2001 and which aims to allow as many people as possible to experience computers and the internet through a network of local
access points throughout Ireland, has established a pilot adult guidance service. It will provide telephone hotlines, as well as information society technologies (IST), at information points in libraries.

Italy. The City Council of Rome promotes IST training courses targeting librarians.

Lithuania. Klaipeda City Library has developed a digital literacy programme. Plunge Public Library has various projects for formal and informal learning in cooperation with local authorities, adult education organisations, schools and NGOs. Telsai Public Library had a project entitled "Strong Community-Educated Community", which included lectures on future vision, cultural life and crime prevention. Utena Public Library offers computers and internet connection to users through the main library and eleven branch libraries. Zarasai Public Library offers language courses to the community free of charge.

The Netherlands. NBLC (The Dutch Library Association) and the Ministry of Education are running a project to create a digital network for education institutions and libraries. Twenty public libraries participate in the project. Amsterdam Library branches in Bijlmeer and Kinkerbuurt, two neighbouring towns of Amsterdam, cater to many nationalities and minority groups. The library offers courses introducing users to adult education. Many of the people who use the libraries have little previous experience of libraries and are illiterate. The town of Apeldoorn offers various courses to its residents. Course topics include journalism, public speaking, psychology, foreign languages and bird-watching.

Norway. Hordaland County Library has a project entitled NELL (Network for Lifelong Learning). The aim of this project is to create regional networks and to enable adults to follow a course of further education at different levels in a variety of fields close to their place of residence. In the district of Nord Trøndelag, the regional library runs two projects: "New Roads to Education" and "Libraries and Adult Learning". These projects aim to explore how libraries can develop their role as places for learning and provide informal classrooms for distant studies and lifelong learning.

Scotland. The National Grid for Learning in Scotland followed the aim to "provide all who teach, study or work in schools, colleges and public libraries with easy access to information appropriate to their need" (NGIL/IL n.d.). The goal was to connect all schools and libraries by 2002 and to provide all teachers and pupils, as well as public libraries, with email addresses. Sunderland has established six 'electronic village halls' and learning centres which offer free internet access, word processing and access to lifelong learning facilities.

Poland. The public library in Olsztyn has arranged computer training lessons for library users, library staff, teachers and representatives of local government.

Romania. The British Council has established IST courses targeting librarians.

Slovenia. Oton Zupanicic Public Library offers the following services in the context of lifelong learning: a reading exchange centre, a learning exchange, centres for independent learning, and an employment information service.

Sweden. On a national level, the Council of Cultural Affairs and the National Agency for Education have publicly declared their intention to develop libraries as platforms for lifelong learning. On a local level, a number of contracts have
been signed between local public libraries and local schools to co-operate in the provision of lifelong learning. The Adult Education Initiative (AEI) is primarily aimed at adults who are unemployed and lack full upper secondary school qualifications. The experience from this initiative is that libraries can play a major role in guaranteeing the provision of quality information and as centres for study. The initiative has encouraged libraries to strengthen their role in lifelong learning. United Kingdom. The British Library Association (now CILIP) has developed a strategy to identify key areas for its activity in libraries and lifelong learning. The Norfolk Lifelong Learning Group promotes co-operation between libraries, museums and archives in lifelong learning. Shropshire Access to Information for Learning is another co-operative project in the ALM field (archives, libraries, museums). Libraries have a natural role in the system of lifelong learning within the UK. United States of America. Beverly Sheppard, Acting Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, writes in The 21st Century Learner: “The profound changes of the 21st century are transforming America into what must become a learning society” (Sheppard 2001: 2). “We must become a nation of learners—individuals, families and communities engaged in learning in our schools, colleges, libraries, museums, archives, workplaces, places of worship and our own living rooms” (p. 3).

Conclusion

In all documents referred to in the foregoing, there is a common trend: Partnership is the name of the game. All countries in the world should be invited to take part in tomorrow’s worldwide learning society. An internationally inclusive strategy is necessary for economic, social and, not least, democratic reasons. Co-operation is also needed among a number of actors at national, regional and local levels.

At each of these levels, libraries have a key role to play. If they are to play their part effectively, however, a great deal of political lobbying will be needed to create awareness that libraries are not exclusive but inclusive; libraries can build bridges between individuals at the local level and the global world of knowledge; and libraries can help in the transition from traditional educational systems to systems of lifelong learning all over the world.
In 1988, at the opening of an exhibition about the Mangueira Samba School in the São Cristóvão room of the Museu do Primeiro Reinado, a pastora from the Samba School commented while waiting in the lobby of the museum for the exhibition to open that it was very beautiful. I asked her if she had been there before, and when she replied that she had not, I asked a colleague to guide her around. When she returned from her tour delighted, she asked me whether the people from Mangueira who went to the exhibition about Mangueira could visit the rest of the museum, too.

This question forces one to reflect on concepts of belonging and cultural heritage. The Mangueira Samba School belongs to the people who created it, take part in the parade, work the whole year to prepare Carnival, and support it with passion. Thus the lady, a member of the Samba School, did not doubt for one moment whether the people from Mangueira could visit the exhibition, even though it was inside a museum. After all, Mangueira belongs to them. Yet when it was a case of visiting the museum per se, she was unsure. Even though the museum lies within the same district and is open to the public, even though the entrance fee is extremely accessible and is free on Sundays, she felt it did not belong to her. Worse still, she did not know whether it could be visited by the residents of its local community.

This is a good illustration of the ideological symbol the museum represents for certain classes of society: a place for some, not all; for ‘cultivated’ individuals. What are the causes and devices that exclude several segments of our society from our museums? One clue might come from Nestor Garcia Canclini (1994), when he says that cultural heritage serves as a resource to produce differences between social groups and the hegemony of those that enjoy special access to the production and distribution of these assets. The ruling groups not only define which artefacts are superior and worthwhile for conservation, but they also have at their disposal the economic and intellectual means, and the work and leisure time, to lend them greater quality and refinement.

This being the case, “it is not enough to want to democratise access to the heritage that is established as bearer of the symbolic values of the nation; one must take it further” (Chagas 2001).
The social function of cultural heritage

To take this further means, in my opinion, that the museum recognises it has a social function to fulfil. The museum’s social function was discussed for the first time in Latin America during the Round Table of Santiago de Chile in 1972, which was requested by UNESCO and organised by the International Council of Museums (ICOM).

Most of the participants in the Santiago seminar could not implement the resolutions adopted. It should also be remembered that, at the time, the Latin American delegates might not have been able to implement resolutions because Latin America was engaged in a struggle to institutionalise democracy, a political change that constituted a prerequisite for overcoming its deep social and economic crisis.

In Caracas, Venezuela, 20 years later in 1992, again on the initiative of UNESCO, the 23-day seminar entitled "The Mission of the Museum in Latin America Today: New Challenges" was held. It brought together delegates from 11 Latin American countries, professionals with renowned competence holding leading positions in the field, to reflect on the mission of the museum as one of the main agents for integrated development in the region.

The principles established and points raised at the Santiago seminar were taken as the starting point for the discussion of the central theme, along with the assumption that there was a need to update the concepts formulated 20 years earlier, to renew the commitments made at that time, to reconsider the scenario in Latin America and its accelerated process of change, and to take into consideration the coming twenty-first century. This seminar culminated in the Caracas Declaration.

As was the case with the Santiago Declaration, the Caracas Declaration was not transmitted to museum professionals through official channels but was circulated informally among colleagues. The Caracas Declaration came at a time when democratic regimes had already taken root in many Latin American countries. Yet although democracy has been reintroduced, the pre-existing economic and social conditions have yet to change even today, 12 years later.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that Brazil made some advances in the last decade, as shown in the data published by the Brazilian Statistics Agency, the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografía e Estatística (IBGE), in May 2002:

- Infant mortality has fallen by 38%, though the situation in the Northeast is still a cause for concern;
- Of the children aged 7–14, 97% go to school. More children are going to school for longer. The number of children attending preschool has jumped from 37.2% to 71.9%. But once again, interregional inequalities persist: the proportion of people with no schooling or with less than one year of schooling is three times greater in the Northeast than in the South. However, gross inequality persists in Brazil:
  - Brazil is still on the verge of the digital era—just 10.6% of Brazilian households have a computer;
  - 15% of the population of working age are unemployed;

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4 On the initiative of the Oficina Regional de Cultura para América Latina (ORCALC) and the Venezuelan Committee of ICOM, with the support of the Conselho Nacional de Cultura (CONAC) and the Venezuela Fine Arts Foundation Museum.
• 24.5% of the population earn less than or the minimum wage; 51.9% earn up to twice the minimum wage; while 2.6% earn more than 20 times the minimum wage. There is a marked concentration of wealth.

Unfortunately, one must also cite the conclusion drawn in a study by the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB) reported on 24 March 2003 during the institution's annual meeting: The economy of Latin America is not only failing to grow, it is actually declining. According to the IDB, after the period of stagnation in the 1980s—the so-called 'lost decade'—the region is backtracking, losing half the gains it made in the 1990s. The income per capita of Latin Americans is lower today than it was five years ago. Moreover, consumption is paralysed and investments have fallen to their lowest levels in the last ten years.

In 1992 the Caracas Declaration recognised that, at that time, the museum had a mission to fulfil in Latin America. Eleven years later, the mission goes on. The idea that the museum can be a tool for development is now widely accepted and formulated in Brazil in much the same way as the notions of the museum's social function and the museum professional's political responsibility.

What is worrying is the fact that these notions very often continue to be little more than mere notions, and the actual practice is quite different. This may be simply because the ideas are mere rhetoric (and also because museums do not generally discuss their social function, mission and cultural policy), or because it is difficult for many museums to introduce changes since the administrative, political and financial dependencies that form the backbone of most of these institutions continue unaltered. So the obstacles blocking cultural institutions (be they economic, financial, political, cultural, social or physical) and the obstacles faced by society (be they economic, financial, political, cultural, social or physical) do not encourage full interaction between museums and society.

There have been discussions held in some museums in Brazil based on the principles of participation, the relationship between past and present, and the task of really tackling society's problems, thanks to the initiative of a number of professionals who are keen to keep abreast of developments in the field of museology and who, albeit modestly, have initiated such reflections within the museums in which they work. But so far this has nothing to do with the official political initiative.

As regards education within museums, most of the work has been geared towards school groups, and even this has sometimes been greatly hampered by a shortage of human and financial resources. It is necessary to point out that current thinking in Brazil about education in museums has taken great steps forward. Such activities can no longer follow the rote learning model described by Paulo Freire, as was the case until recently in such institutions. Neither, however, can museums take over the role of schools, which would mean ignoring their other unique traits.

Turning to the particular case of adult education, the current picture is not en-

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5 Rote learning, according to Paulo Freire (1987: 58), occurs when "education is the act of depositing and transferring values and knowledge from those who know to those who do not know . . . where the only action open to those being educated is to receive what is deposited, store it and file it."
encouraging. The work being done and programmes developed encounter the same problems of resources, both human and financial, which end up restricting any initiatives. Activities directed to adult education, such as courses, speeches and guided visits, have been realised. There is more widespread action in training teachers how to teach their pupils about museums and cultural heritage, be it within the museum or in the classroom. Such work has had good results.

Bearing in mind Brazilian society's social-economic and cultural differences, the number of marginalised adults, and also the goal of social-cultural inclusion, there are but a few Brazilian museums that work in this area, developing programmes for disadvantaged and excluded social groups, such as the elderly, street children, family groups and sex workers (prostitutes).

The Museu de Ciências Morfológicas da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (Morphologic Sciences Museum of the Federal University of Minas Gerais) is one such case. Its main area of work is in promoting knowledge of the human body as a basis for health education and life preservation. Among its social projects is one entitled “Quality of Life Has No Age” (a multidisciplinary course offered to the elderly and those who look after them) and another called “Be Aware of Your Body, Don’t Spoil It” (offered to young drug addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes and community associations that provide support to these groups).

Another museum that offers social programmes is the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo (São Paulo State Pinakothek), an art museum. In January 2002 it decided to adopt educational action as one of its core activities. In addition to giving continuity to its existing actions in this area (mainly school visits), it aims to enhance their quality (by enriching the visits and providing training courses for teachers). It has also set up the Social-Cultural Inclusion Programme, which aims to increase accessibility for certain social groups that suffer exclusion, such as sex workers, the homeless and young children in risk situations.

The activities in this programme have been developed together with the professionals who work directly with the marginalised groups, which allows for the museum team's educational knowledge to be adapted to and combined with knowledge about the target-group and its specificities, thus creating activities that have meaning for these groups. Through contact with the museum and art, quality changes have been promoted in the daily life of the marginalised groups.

Brazilian cultural heritage and the future

On May 18, 2003, the International Day of Museums, the Ministry of Culture launched the government's National Policy for Museums, which articulates the museum's social function. It contains seven core themes:

- Management and organisation in the area of museology;
- Democratisation and access to cultural heritage;
- Training and education of human resources;
- Computerisation of museums;
- Modernisation of museum infrastructures;
- Financing and funding for museums;
- Acquisition and management of cultural collections.

In harmony with the government's de-
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dclared intention of engaging in participative policy-making, this document was drawn up after considerable collaboration with the museum community (secretaries of culture, directors of institutions, professionals both attached to institutions and not) and other stakeholders. Everybody was invited to contribute, mostly via e-mail.

The most important aspect of the document was that it was not created as a fait accompli. Committees were set up to initiate discussions on how to develop each core theme, with the intention of including professionals from every region of the country. We should not forget that Brazil is a country of continental dimensions and that it contains multiple realities. The committees had to go through the process of consulting relevant professionals and other stakeholders and discussing the suggestions raised; this led in turn to the formulation of specific guidelines and proposals. The feedback collected was filed and sent on to the Ministry of Culture, thus providing a source of knowledge for future policy-making.

The issue of adult learning will be widely discussed, for cultural education is the right of all, if we consider that all of us—children, youths and adults are social individuals, historical subjects, citizens who have our own rights within society and who are produced in culture and are producers of culture. (Kramer and Leite 1996)

While museums alone will not change society, they can contribute to change if they perform their role of critical player, supplying the basic tools for the exercise of citizenship. The complexity of social functions and responsibilities that the museum must take on in this new century requires the museum professional constantly to attend to and reflect on the changes brought about in the environment in which we live, as well as the interests and needs of the public. These are the traits of the professional who believes deeply in quality and development.
Museums as Ideal Places for Lifelong Learning

Jutta Thinesse-Demel

This chapter focuses on three Socrates projects—AEM, MUSAEM and EUROEDULT. Each approaches museums as ideal places for lifelong learning in a different but complementary way. Before discussing these projects, however, we shall set the stage by sketching the educational and political relevance of cultural institutions.

Preconditions

Focus 1: Education in cultural institutions

Having been discovered as new “places for lifelong learning” that play a crucial role in the “knowledge society”, museums have to become places for stimulation of interest. The traditional places for learning (family, neighbourhood, school system, etc.) can no longer guarantee the necessary transfer of knowledge essential for the survival of societies. A new and broader structure for interest stimulation through lifelong learning among all generations has become essential. The “megatrends of Asia” (Naisbitt 1996) together with the danger of a “clash of civilisations” (Huntington 1996) and growing economic global competition are forcing us to develop a new lifelong learning initiative, of which museums should become strong promotors.

Learning in this context is simultaneously intimate and collective, private and public. Educational programmes in cultural institutions in general promote a communicative, learning-centred, experiential, self-directed and empowering approach. Museum education is not an “add-on”; rather, it is increasingly coming to have a core function in all aspects of life. David Anderson’s 1997 report, A Common Wealth, reviewed the current activities of museums in the UK as centres for learning, and considered how these might be developed:

It is not acceptable for museums to justify their existence to a significant degree in terms of their educational value in society, and yet to be unable to specify what that value is in concrete and practical terms, and unable to say whether what they do meets generally accepted definitions of quality. Most museum directors, if asked to demonstrate that the museum benefits society, would be unable to do so. No museum should be funded at a time when money is so scarce, unless it is prepared to declare that the main purpose is public education, and to demonstrate that it is working to achieve this. We cannot afford to support bad museums. (Anderson 1999)

Cultural institutions, particularly museums, are important agents for modern citizenship because they

- Create stimulating learning environments;
- Help people to construct their identities;
- Support the reduction of cultural inequalities;
- Enlarge the notion of productivity to include cultural creativity;
- Bring local diversity into a dialogue with European culture;
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- Provide learning experiences for all people.

Focus 2: Political relevance

Making knowledge accessible to both experts and laypeople is the fundamental mission of every cultural institution: the existence and study of collections is only a tool, their conservation only a condition; education, on the other hand, is the cultural institution's most crucial and fundamental task. The developments of the past few years and the results of the above-mentioned projects have proven that museum education is central to all museum activities.

In this connection, the first resolution from the 2002 ICOM-CECA conference in Nairobi is particularly relevant:

In confirming the indispensable role that museums play in formal education and lifelong learning for their communities, we urge all regional and national organisations with funding responsibilities to ensure that vitally important educational programmes in museums are adequately resourced.

If this were not considered we could not fulfil the museum's mission; we would remain in the dark about why museums should exist at all. Indeed, if we do not respect the growing importance of museums as learning environments, we may find that they ultimately disappear altogether.

The European Socrates projects: AEM, MUSAEAM and EUROEDULT

Three Socrates projects—AEM, MUSAEAM and EUROEDULT—were approved by the European Commission and ran for ten years. The participating countries consisted of the 15 pre-enlargement EU member states plus Hungary and Switzerland. The focus of all three projects was to recognise museums as learning environments. In this section we are concerned with all individual project stages and their results—and in particular with the academic debate supporting these developments. Through these projects most medium-sized and large museums have adopted the approaches to learning discussed here. Over the past nine years a re-structuring has taken place which has resulted in museums' finally being recognised as ideal learning environments. Each of the three projects is built on the other two; their interrelationship is best illustrated in form of a house (see the figure below).

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**EU-certification and Assessment**

- Learning project developers
- Development of Domain Units
- Dissemination - Tool conferences in London and Budapest
- Innovative projects new target groups
- Endorsement agency community provider university validator
- Training for trainers tutor system
- Lobbyism - convincing communities, heads of cultural institutions and politicians
- Transfer models New partners beyond leisure time and culture

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Works of art have the power to evoke images from our past, let us share our common roots while inspiring our dreams and aims. In the museum environment we can face change and development with greater ease and energy—without feeling we are being “taught”. In a kind of “super-effect”, learning becomes a holistic process with successful, sustained results which positively impact on our lives and professional development. Learning in this context involves all target groups, regardless of educational backgrounds or areas of interest. This is a basic requirement for lifelong learning.

**AEM**

AEM (Adult Education and the Museum) is a project based on intensive collaboration between adult education institutions and museums in 15 EU member states. Proposed by Jutta Thinesse-Demel, the transnational project was initiated in 1995 in five regions in four EU member states and was led by the IIIZ (Institute for International Collaboration of the German Adult Education Association). The project was mainly concerned with the development of new opportunities for cultural institutions working with adult education, the publication of innovative, target-group- and learner-oriented projects, and the development of targeted and sustained collaborations between museums and educational institutions.

The project was funded through the Socrates and DG XXII programmes of the European Commission. This special sub-programme supports European national and international co-operation in adult education and the creation and dissemination of successful pilot projects. Its aim is to outline the importance of lifelong learning on at European, national, regional and local levels.

AEM arose out of the necessity to develop and improve the agenda of adult education and professional practice in cultural institutions nationally and internationally. Through AEM, a European network for exchange of practices and information was established with 15 participating countries. At the European level, learning strategies were reviewed, exchanged and developed, partnerships formed and agendas established. The rich fabric of innovative projects presented through AEM underlines the vast potential for adult learning in cultural institutions. It was considered important to return to fundamental questions as a basis for discussion throughout the project:

- What is the status of cultural institutions as learning catalysts?
- How can the creative potential in the multi-dimensional relationship between visitors and exhibits be reconsidered?
- Whose story is told by whom in cultural institutions?
- Who owns these stories and how and by whom can they be used?
- Who is excluded?

Museums and galleries have proved to be exciting socio-cultural laboratories for education, communication, cultural exchange and social re-integration. We can confirm that the semiotic environment of familiarity and strangeness found there can, at its best, provide an excellent platform and opportunity for lifelong learning.

“Unorthodox classrooms” developed through AEM, such as “language learning in and with the museum” or workshops for apprentices, have been particularly successful. Programmes have addressed new audiences from a wide variety of
backgrounds, offering services for the social integration of immigrants, courses for the long-term unemployed, courses for senior citizens or for former patients and prisoners.

Aside from the obvious educational benefits, many courses have also been successful in appealing to a wide variety of social groups.

**MUSAEAM**

After witnessing 15 case studies of innovative learning programmes in museums and galleries across Europe, I successfully applied to continue our quest with the MUSAEAM project. MUSAEAM (Museums and Education Are More), the second Socrates project, was initiated as a sequel, to build on the European network and foundation established during AEM. It was structured in two stages and took place over two years. First, a simultaneous international “Open Day for Adult Learning in the Museums” was organised on 6 June 1999 and then a conference was held at the newly opened Tate Modern in London the following year.

MUSAEAM’s fundamental aims follow the “one hour a day” learning principle declared at UNESCO’S Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V).

Open Days were held at the Neue Pinakothek (Munich), Tate Gallery (London), and at various museums in Genoa, Zurich, Bern, Gothenburgh and Budapest. A range of activities for adult learning in cultural institutions was organised to communicate new ideas and approaches to the public, address new audiences, and test their knowledge of and interest in the programmes on offer.

In some participating cities, questionnaires were distributed and inquiries were made among the visiting public in order to analyse their needs and opinions and to assess our own practice. Overall responses were very positive, and museums were recognised as important catalysts for learning. Many of the strategies applied in adult learning programmes were confirmed. Inevitably, some prejudices had to be discarded, such as the common belief that elderly visitors prefer passive learning strategies while younger audiences favour more active programmes.

The Open Days were followed by an international conference held at the Tate Modern in London. Around 200 experts from 25 countries participated in “Visiting Rights?”, presenting and discussing new tendencies, strategies, experiences and visions based on regional, national and international experiences. The aim was to define new strategies and criteria for qualification and competence in the field of learning and mediation.

Adult learning in museums presents opportunities for interaction with art, collaboration with artists, integration of the able-bodied with the disabled, the unemployed with those in full-time employment, women who want to return to work with women in work, and immigrants with the indigenous populations. Experience of language learning programmes in museums have shown that these teaching methods offer an alternative and very successful way of extending language skills beyond the confines of the conventional classroom.

In addition, these methods help to reduce the anxieties which frequently arise in more formal teaching situations, and encourage confidence and self-expression.
EUROEDULT

EUROEDULT forms the third element in the package of European projects concerned with adult learning in museums and galleries. It addresses very specifically the need to establish a European foundation for the accreditation of cultural education. EUROEDULT offers the opportunity to be trained in learner-oriented projects in museums through a European qualification in the field of cultural mediation.

The role of mediator builds on many aspects and trends identified and analysed during the first two projects, AEM and MUSAEAM. These include increasing cooperation between museums and galleries, libraries and archives; the gradual shift from an institutional to a user's perspective in the development of cultural policy; and the growing importance of information and communication technologies in creating new forms of access to cultural artefacts and in networking information between cultural institutions.

The European curriculum framework

The qualification in cultural mediation provides a framework for a wide spectrum of learning opportunities leading to EU certification. The EUROEDULT curriculum creates a framework for the integration of different teaching and learning units. These units depend on educational contents as well as on local, regional and national priorities within individual countries. As this structure merely provides a framework, it can be easily adapted across Europe.

Emphasis is placed primarily on results and not on processes, on curriculum structure more than on design criteria. The framework is composed of domains, units and learning results. Units consist of a coherent set of learning results and applied assessment criteria. Domains cluster units and offer a general overview on the content of all units. They also present six guidelines on the variety of content and relationships between units, as well as generally clarifying what is required for certification.

Individual institutions are responsible for choosing the units that lead to certification. However, two units of each domain must be passed to achieve European certification. Four domains can be completed in the home country (e.g., supported learning, personal development, project management and communication skills), followed by the completion of two more domains in another European country (e.g., language and European education and culture).

All participating organisations demonstrated a strong interest in cultural education and lifelong learning. The certification was based on a set of key principles developed during EUROEDULT which have relevance across Europe. The certification is based on a framework within which the diversity of provision for adult learners in different European countries can be respected.

The EUROEDULT project was completed in 2003 to coincide with the first round of the European Cultural Mediator qualification. Twenty-one participants from five European countries were awarded the certification at the Louvre. Currently, a second round is underway with 20 participants from four countries. The endorsement of the qualification is intended to support and enhance the quality assurance arrangements of providers and vali-

1 Further information on institutions offering this education and certification programme can be obtained from: thinesse-demel@t-online.de.
Museums as Ideal Places for Lifelong Learning

dating agencies within this framework. It is not intended to replace or compromise the existing authority of those organisations that choose to use this endorsement.

Over time, the certification framework is intended to facilitate both qualitative learning opportunities and the ability of adult learners to gain recognition of their achievements in different European countries.

**Lessons learned from the projects**

*Lessons learned from AEM*

The case studies of AEM testify to a wide range of activity and place adult education in museums in a variety of European contexts. Each context has its own cultural identity and its own policies and structures to support museums on the one hand and adult education on the other, the result of which is a considerable diversity not only in terms of project but also in approaches.

For instance, multiculturalism and the celebration of cultural diversity are themes common to projects in a number of countries, as is work with target groups from minority ethnic communities. A number of the case study projects deal with these themes and target groups in different ways, due not only to the different socio-economic and political climate in each country but also to the different policy imperatives and the different educational and museological approaches adopted. The case studies are therefore best viewed as examples of recent and current practice in their own specific contexts.

*MUSAEAM: Museums as learning space*

MUSAEAM has contributed to a lively debate on tendencies and trends in the new visitor-orientated approach of museums. It has shown examples of good practice at the interface of education, culture and the labour market; has awakened interest in new learning strategies in museums; and has led to the recognition of museums as ideal learning places—and education as an ideal tool for museums.

The following statements represent the first steps towards a continuous working strategy initiated by MUSAEAM:

- Visitors are largely unaware of the work that is required in the restoration and preservation of cultural heritage.
- A number of events and research projects have been organised for special target groups (visitors, scientists and experts).
- The typology of demands on museums as well as the role and function of museums are changing. This is also the case for policy and administrative strategies, which pave the way for new structures of communication with the public.
- Collaboration between museums and educational bodies is increasing.
- Several Departments of Culture are developing and changing their communication strategies with the aim of increasing visitor numbers and improving the quality of communication with the public.
- Joint conferences have been set up by groups of experts to discuss issues surrounding the subject of art education. Such initiatives have led to training opportunities (e.g., leaders of study circles, lecturers at adult education centres).
- As a result of MUSAEAM, museums in France, for example, have intensified their work on the dynamics of visiting, looking and talking about exhibits and museums, and have developed methods to attract visitors from disparate back-
grounds. Culture in this context is used as a means to gain a deeper understanding of one's life situation.

- Politicians and administrators are emphasising the role of cultural institutions.
- Methods of displaying objects and collections express a museological and museographical concept, which can at times be narrow and rigid, and hence fail to communicate with the general public.

**EUROEDULT: The qualification programme**

The next step was to qualify staff working in and with museums and to train them to run learner-oriented projects in museums. This third project enabled us to reach the AEM recommendations to the point of advocating the results to public authorities and launching a lobbying process for policy-makers. Other projects are now active, such as Collect&Share, a Grundtvig IV initiative that is creating a website of case studies of good practice, and some Grundtvig II projects running similar activities concerning museums as learning places. Last but not least, a Grundtvig I application has been put forward to promote museums and libraries as places explicitly suitable for literacy and language training.

AEM and MUSAEAM have helped us to recognise museums as learning places. If education is considered a common right, then museums are places where the public can fully participate. If we understand museums and their activities as agents of change, then we should use them for solving problems and difficulties that we encounter in our societies. Museums in this respect can help us to combat issues such as discrimination, and to support aspects such as social integration of the elderly, immigrants, or people with disabilities.

While the situation is different in every European country, museums always provide a natural learning environment. When visiting a museum, we become visitors and learners at the same time; collections and exhibits are preserved for the public. Lifelong learning in museums is very effective; it ensures that museums are not just revisited but that objects and contexts are understood, that audiences keep in touch and participate in an active way. Consequently, we have a) to consider the effect we could have on programmes, events, initiatives and services, and b) to seek to create spaces useful for didactic activities, conferences and workshops.

Within these two contexts we have to consider three key aspects: education as contact; education as contact with enjoyment; and education as contact of exchange.

The future looks bright, bridges are being built and existing ones stabilised and rebuilt. Culture and education are two aspects of the same thing—lifelong learning. Museums, libraries, galleries and cultural centres are pervaded with the idea of lifelong learning, and in spite of current financial difficulties this surely is a way forward for learning.

Society has a great need for places where people of all ages can meet and learn together and where meaning is created through the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of valuable objects. This kind of learning environment already exists free from the bias created by commerce or politics. In this sense museums must play a leading role as learning environments, and in doing so they will return to what has always distinguished them.
The way forward

The Socrates projects have shown that cultural institutions throughout Europe have become, over the past decades, progressively more open and publicly accessible places. Notwithstanding the occasional tension between curatorial imperatives of collection, conservation and scholarship on the one hand, and the wider public roles of the museum on the other, in most cases museums are becoming more receptive to the possibility of playing a role in the adult education process.

The endeavours made by many cultural institutions throughout Europe to identify and meet the educational needs and demands of particular audiences, and those efforts made by individuals who identify them, deserve recognition. The projects dealt with in this chapter reveal a rich range of imaginative and important work. Nevertheless, systematic educational provision for adults by museums remains in many cases very poor, not only in comparison with other museum functions (i.e., exhibition and conservation) but, more significantly, with other educational provisions by museums.

Equally, in the museums/adult education interface, concepts, methods, approaches and techniques have tended to be modelled on those which are known or believed to work with children (mostly school children) and young people, with little adaptation to the specific requirements of adult learners.

Such studies would facilitate the development of an appropriate, comprehensive and tested theoretical perspective that could enable us to analyse the learning process in museums and to consider how this context differs from other learning contexts or settings. It would help to "ground" the further development of adult education in and through museums in a communicative, learner-centred, experiential, self-directed and empowering approach. This approach would emphasise the learning process over the learned product and create a framework for the utilisation of cultural objects, images and artefacts, cultural expression, and cultural experience as critical contexts of and mediums for learning.

Ultimately, placing adult education closer to the centre of the work of museums will have an impact on their structure, training and the allocation of resources, the delineation of professional areas of interest, and perhaps even the notion of museum professionalism itself. It may also lead to the definition of new roles and all that implies. In some cases, new employment opportunities will have to be created to ensure that museums can adequately address adult education as a core function. The same is equally true for the adult education infrastructure. These points of impact and others must be addressed within a coherent framework of policies and strategies informed by comprehensive and systematic research.


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