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Sub-Committee on the Cultural Heritage

The Museum Environment

Conclusions

of the European Museum Forum Workshop
Bertinoro (Italy). University Residential Centre
27-30 October 2005

in association with the Socrates Grundtvig Programme 'LifeLong Learning in Museums'

in co-operation with:

The Istituto Beni Culturali Regione Emilia-Romagna, Bologna
The Cultural Department of the Regione Toscana, Florence
The Museum Office of the Regione Veneto, Venice

The Subject

The shift of focus from the collections to the public, and from curatorial skill to a more comprehensive interpretative and communicative approach to objects and to the museum experience needs to be supported in terms of skills and competencies required of museum staff. This Workshop aimed to offer participants a wide range of innovative examples from all over Europe and from the many different areas of interest, an occasion offering in-depth exchange of ideas and experiences with colleagues with different backgrounds, and the opportunity to develop occasions to network at a European level.

Background to the subject: Museums all over Europe have been reviewing their rôle, adding a new facet to their mission in terms of their relationship with society and the local community and have undertaken significant actions to become agents of social change and social integration, bringing more people back into the *learning cycle.* Nowadays it is largely recognised that most of what we learn is acquired in informal contexts and that *museums are ideal places for learning throughout life*, as they offer free choice learning and can address all age ranges.

In this process the museum environment plays a crucial role.

Its qualities in terms of public understanding, comfort of its visitors, effectiveness in raising the intellectual curiosity of the users as well as in involving him/her in a unique experience rich in cultural and emotional values are essential *to exploit the full potential of a museum as a learning place.*

Since 1977 the European Museum Forum (EMF) has been running the European Museum of the Year Award (EMYA) and the Council of Europe Museum Prize scheme in order to give recognition and visibility to outstanding cases of innovation in the museum field in interpreting the dynamics between museum and the public in different European social and cultural contexts. More than 1500 museums have taken part in this scheme so far, giving EMF a great information asset and unrivalled experience in assessing museums, with special attention to *the qualities of their physical environment*, EMYA being based on a programme of personal visits to every single candidate. This experience is at the heart of this workshop, which will examine *the strengths and weaknesses of the museum environment in relation to its educational mission addressed to adults* bringing to the attention of participants cases of innovative museum environments from all over Europe. In 2005 the EMF Workshop celebrates its 10th edition.

Themes proposed for discussion

The Workshop used the same method which has so far proved so fruitful for previous EMF Workshops: to create a genuine European environment where museum professionals from a variety of museums and from different countries can meet and discuss freely under the guidance of experienced discussion leaders and discussion facilitators. Intensive group discussion has been channelled towards the production of a document which could be used as a platform for further developments in the museum field at a transnational level.

The Conclusions of the EMF Workshop take the form of a document discussed by all participants to be presented to the Sub-Committee on Cultural Heritage of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and will be published on the Council's Internet site. The Conclusions of previous EMF Workshops are also currently available on the same web site http://assembly.coe.int/Museum.

Participants in the 2005 EMF Workshop were asked to approach the general theme from four different angles.

Group One: Planning and Techniques

"Adults also do a great deal of learning on their own. This has implication for museums, which can offer individual learning. One of the definitions of adult education is that it develops the process of inquiry in a mutual, self-directing way. First, interest must be generated in the visitors; second, visitors' needs and experiences must be assessed; third, a program is planned based on interests and needs compiled; fourth, the visitor should proceed in the program by self-discovery.

…Here are five basic concepts for adult education which have implications for museums:

- Adults are self-directing, they want autonomy … they are freer and more independent than children.
- Adult learning is problem-orientated, not subject-orientated
- The third concept is voluntary learning. Adults come into the museum voluntarily
- Adults understand a new idea or concept better when they can relate it to their past experiences
- Readiness is the fifth concept. There are life cycle patterns in which people are 'ready' to learn a particular issue or task. For example, adults in their fifties may be interested in talking about retirement…."

Quotations adapted from L. Allen 'Basic concepts and assumptions about adult learners'.

On the basis of these quotations we can see that to build up a museum environment specifically for *adult visitors* requires some specific features. The group had to define the

approach that museum environment planning should adopt in general terms and also had to explore the area of interpretive techniques and display philosophy which seems more suitable for this segment of the museum's public.

Group Two: Criteria for Success

Although theoretical discussion about adult education in museums is the cornerstone of any programme in this area of activity, museum practice is the true test of success. This group was required to examine a series of cases of 'ideas that work', as well as lost opportunities or failures in different European museums. Materials for discussion were based on cases submitted by participants, resources available on the Internet and the introductory speeches made by the Discussion Leaders.

Group Three: Communication and Adult Visitors, Internet and Multimedia

The museum environment is considered a resource for a variety of programmes for adults in the fields of education, entertainment and social history. The number of adult visitors is growing thanks to modern communication techniques. The group defined what the museum can offer specifically to adult users in this respect and debated the potential for such action with special reference to the use of the Internet and multimedia devices both inside and outside the museum building. The group made a selection of subjects based on the experiences of its members.

Group Four: The European Dimension

'Adult visitors and users' is a rather vague definition and includes different sections of the public – retired people, company groups, families, independent visitors, educators and museum professionals as well as creative professionals used to exhibition language. To complicate things further, increased mobility has determined new categories of travellers who move frequently from one country to another, for varying periods. Considering this phenomenon in a European perspective, what does this mean in museum terms? How can we make the museum environment more European?

Conclusions of the Group Discussions

Group 1 : Planning and Techniques

Preamble
After the Lisbon summit in 2000, lifelong learning became one of the priorities of the EU and the issue is perceived as strategic for cultural institutions all over Europe, also beyond the limits of the Union.
Museums are considered a special environment where informal learning can be achieved by all groups of people and particularly by adults: the museum experience can provide benefits for the personal and professional growth of individuals as well as a better understanding of our changing world, both from a social and from an economic point of view.

Statements.
Six main points were identified under which the topic of Planning and Techniques was discussed.

1. **Mission statement**
   Museums should define their clear goals taking into account the geographical and social context they live in (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), and being aware of the fact that the care and preservation of the individual objects that comprise its collections are of prime importance and the reason for the existence of museums. Internal communications are, in this respect especially, extremely important to ensure that all staff are working towards the same goal.

2. **The museum audience**
   Museums must know their visitors. To this end, they should conduct qualitative and quantitative analyses of their audiences to determine who are the existing visitors and what groups are not represented amongst their existing visitor groups.
   Museums should also be aware that adults are not a homogeneous group and in order to meet their needs in the best ways possible, distinct groups of individuals need to be identified.
   Some methods for analysing existing visitor groups are:
   --visitor comment books
   --visitor surveys (in-house and web-based)
   --interviews with visitors (as opposed to completion of survey forms by visitors)
   --'contests' in which the names of those completing survey forms or face-to-face interviews are entered into a draw for a prize from the museum shop (or free tickets for their next visit)
   --observation of visitors in galleries
   --teaching of 'front line staff' to observe visitors and how to report comments
   --analysis of ticket sales (number of tourists versus local visitors)
   --request feed back from tour leaders in return for a discount on future group visits

   At the same time, in order to enlarge the museum's visitor base (potential visitors), other methods/tools can be used:
   --target specific groups, associations, representatives of minority groups etc; assess their needs and interests in conjunction with the group leader and then invite them to visit the museum for a special (perhaps after-hours) first time visit, for a private tour or perhaps planning a special event of interest to them
   -- plan free access days (for the general public or for specific groups)
   --bring-a-friend and get free access for yourself days
   --plan special events (musical events etc) geared towards specific groups

3. Communication and involvement with the visitor

In order to communicate with their audience and allow visitors' involvement, museums can:

--use different methods/tools of promotion/communication

--form networks\partnerships with other organizations in the area (other cultural organizations, adult education institutions etc.)

--form business partnerships (e.g. restaurants that promote and sell tickets to the museum)

--consider major events taking place in the city/country and plan exhibitions/events in conjunction with them in order to exploit them for your benefit/take advantage of extra visitors to the city etc.

4. Content of museums' cultural offer

Adults want to participate and to be active and involved.

In order to allow this, museums can use plan activities whose main aim is to connect the objects with local and even global life so that the visitor can better identify with the objects on display and understand how they relate to their own every-day life and how that then relates to the broader global life (in this respect the various layers of meaning inherent in the object must be peeled away).

They can also plan events to give visitors a 'peek' into the behind-the-scenes world of the museum in order to make them feel more involved with 'their' museum (hands-on events, special viewings of material, visits to conservation lab and talks by various museum staff to explain the function of the museum and how exhibitions are prepared).

5. Methods and techniques of presenting the information to the visitor

It is important that museums recognize that people learn in different ways, and a variety of means of presenting the information must therefore be used. Furthermore, it is important to consider that the museum visit is an emotional, social and physical experience for the visitor.

There are many different methods and tools that can be used to provide an effective learning/enriching experience:

a. written texts

--labels, panels, leaflets, books and catalogues (ideally they should offer a hierarchy of information)

b. guides

-human, audio-guides, PDAs, touch-screens and other computer based means

c. temporary exhibitions

d. workshops

f. conferences and lectures that expand upon the information presented in the exhibitions or provide further background information

g. performances (musical and otherwise)

h. hands-on experiences (those that can be carried out in the museum and perhaps those that are carried on off-site in conjunction with other organizations)

i. tours to sites associated with the collections

It is very important to consider the display of the objects as a fundamental form of communication of the informative contents.

6. Evaluation

It is important to consider evaluation both as a short-term and as a long-term activity, as well as a process in which quantitative and qualitative elements have to be taken into account. Long term evaluation concerns whether or not and in what ways being a part of the museum life has made a difference to the visitor's life: it is obviously a core aspect of museums' activity, although we all recognize that it is exceedingly difficult to assess.

Recommendations

We recommend that museums should:

- foster cultural and physical access to all visitors;
- play an active role in engaging with adult audiences, taking into account different needs and expectations of the diverse groups;
- try to develop networks and partnerships with other institutions/organizations in order to provide lifelong learning experiences;
- promote the museum experience as part of the social life of adult groups;
- promote the knowledge of adults needs and expectations within the museum staff;
- carry on a solid evaluation of their programmes and activities in order to asses the achieved results and communicate/disseminate them within the museum community.

Keywords

- Lifelong learning in museums: informal and creative way of learning addressed to adults in order to achieve empowerment and active citizenship
- Access: physical, cultural and economic opportunity of access for all groups
- Adults: an heterogeneous group of people from 18 upwards
- Museum activities/me: different practices for promoting museum knowledge and experience
- Communication: internal and external communication of museums' values and purposes

Conclusions

Museums can play an active and important role in lifelong learning processes: they can provide enrichment of people's lives and become a place of active expression of citizenship. It is important that both museums and communities are aware that museums are a social service and an integral part of society as a whole.

Group 2: Criteria for Success

What are the key factors for success?

In the context of the discussions the museum environment is about what is provided for the general public on the museum's own premises. We should be able to assume

- the general public want to visit museums
- the general public know what to expect in a museum
- the general public should feel comfortable in a museum, physically and intellectually
- the general public should leave a museum feeling better for their experience and better informed

If we museum professionals could feel confident that any of these assumptions are currently true for the majority of museum visits our task would be considerable easier.

Who should our visitors be, and what do they want?

The answers to these two questions should provide the key to a strategy for creating a successful museum environment. These questions have been answered in many ways by

many museum experts. Sometimes these answers take into account government policy, hearsay or the perceptions of the museum professionals themselves. Sometimes they are based on what is possible, or could be achieved with more technology. Few museums however, appear to have done adequate research on their own potential audiences. Well targeted market research for individual institutions must be one of the key factors for success. Such research must, of course, be part of a well thought out and conceived strategy. It should take into account the desirability of attracting visits from disadvantaged groups in society.

What should we provide for our visitors?

Given that the needs and desires of our potential visitors have been identified, the question inevitably arises of how far we should go to meet them. The answer is clearly dependent on factors like the availability of resources and the political or ethical correctness of the demands. Museums should also understand and persuade their customers of the importance of their collections in any projects they undertake.

Looking after a collection and making it accessible to the public is central to a museum's function. A museum will therefore have access to knowledge and expertise, and will promote research on its collections. A major means of access to these collections will be through exhibitions, either 'temporary' or 'permanent', in the museum's own galleries. Exhibitions that attract and inform their audiences are a key factor for success. Such exhibitions will almost certainly be innovative, and may induce an emotional response. They should be high quality in design. They do not have to please all the people all the time. They can be speculative or deal with difficult matters, but museums should be aware of the limits of interpretation that they can or should put on the collections in their care. They may be supported by catalogues, learning programmes, events, etc.

How should we provide good visitor experience?

Different authorities will impose their own frameworks on how museums develop their strategic plans, but clearly for success, the achievement of good visitor experience is fundamental. A strategic plan that delivers this is likely to be outward looking and characterised by good communication, both internally and with the wider world. It will also understand how to use available resources wisely. Good exhibition proposals will be generated more readily in such an environment.

The successful exhibition demands a considerable amount of work by a variety of specialists, including curators, conservators, designers, educationalists and marketing experts. It is crucial that they understand and help each other to do their jobs to the best of their abilities - that they all work effectively as a team.
Museum directors and governing bodies must value and encourage all their staff, paid or otherwise, and allow them to develop their full potential.

The work in an exhibition, whether temporary or permanent, should not cease when it opens to the public. There should be adequate plans and resources in place to

- undertake an evaluation of the processes involved in developing the project, and in the end result
- adapt and improve the exhibition as required or opportunity allows
- maintain the exhibition
- collect, analyse and respond to visitor comments

Providing visitor satisfaction is an on-going task but absolutely necessary for success.

What responsibilities do we have?

Museums have an obligation to Society. Most museums receive a significant amount of their funding and other resources from national or local government. While direct interference by politicians, national or local, in a museum's exhibition programme cannot normally be considered desirable, museums should recognise that they have an obligation to reflect the ethics and values of the society that supports them, unless, of course, they are manifestly bad, corrupt or full of shortcomings. This is an obligation that is laid on, and accepted by many institutions and businesses.

Funding and support can also be provided by commercial organisations and charities. There are also obligations owed to such bodies. Museums have to respond responsibly and ethically to the development of relationships and partnerships with funders and supporters. The right approach in these circumstances is a key factor for success and will win the hearts and minds of our partners as well as their resources.

Museums can often take their relationship with the wider community a step further by involving it in their work, primarily as volunteers. The use of volunteers provides the only means for many inadequately funded museums to undertake many activities: but museum professionals must understand that successful deployment of volunteers should mean that the volunteers achieve self-respect, fulfilment and recognition of their achievements and skills.

Interacting with the wider community and being aware of the political and social environment in which museums operate are key factors in success. The use of volunteers is a particularly positive approach.

What should we do next?

Whatever the starting point for a museum in developing a strategy for success, the museum must never stand still. It must continue to

- improve its collections and knowledge of them
- expand its resources
- respond to the needs and desires of society and evaluate criticism
- improve its services to the public and identify new audiences

How should we measure success?

Success comes in many forms. Overall, an improvement in the museum environment is our main goal. Some of the factors that will characterise this are

- more visitors
- visitors from different groups in society
- greater visitor satisfaction
- more resources, including financial returns from ticket sales and selling merchandise
- increased presence in the community

We also believe that it is very important that museums recognise their own success and communicate it to others in their own institution and to the wider world. Success can be infectious.

Summary of key actions for success

- establish who our visitors are and might be
- develop strategic plans that are outward looking, encourage good communication, and use available resources wisely
- mount inspirational and informative high quality exhibitions, sometimes ones that surprise and stimulate debate
- value and encourage all staff and volunteers
- provide visitor satisfaction
- use our collections and resources wisely and ethically
- make use of volunteers
- win the hearts and minds of partners and sponsors as well as their financial support
- play an influential role in society
- never stand still but always strive for perfection
- communicate success

Group 3 : Communication and Adult Visitors, Internet and Multimedia

How can communication techniques both inside and outside the museum support the first time and returning adult visitor? This brief report draws on the direct experiences of the group members to make conclusions about good practice. For the purpose of this paper a distinction between the adult learner *and* adult visitor *in museums is not made, since the learning which takes place in a museum may be accidental, incidental, or even non-existent in the mind of the visitor, and, in any case, the visitor who enjoys him/herself is most likely to 'learn' in the museum*

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1. The Museum Environment: Attracting and retaining the first-time visitor

We begin by considering the museum environment in general and identifying factors of particular relevance to first-time adult visitors, recognising that if adults do not feel welcomed and comfortable on their first visit to a museum they are unlikely to return. All aspects of the environment communicate to the visitor the ethos and purpose of the museum. Factors for a successful first visit include:

- Front-line staff – friendly and welcoming; trained in visitor services
- Physical comfort of the visitor – including lighting, seating, refreshment points and directional information
- Opportunities for visitors to interact creatively with the objects on display – perhaps through multi-sensory interpretation (touch, smell, taste, and sound, as well as sight); workshops or activities, 'learning by doing' – of equal importance for adults as well as children
- The museum as a place of spiritual refreshment – an oasis, a place of beauty
- The museum as a place to build on/extend an existing interest or knowledge of the visitor
- Family-friendly – providing displays and activities of interest to children as well as adults
- Duration of visit – 'museum fatigue' affects adults as well as children, therefore small museums may be ideal for the first-time visitor, where an entire collection or 'idea' may be viewed/experienced in under 2 hours. In a larger museum visitors should not to try to see everything in one day, but to concentrate on one or two aspects of the collection and then return on another occasion to see more

Connecting all of the factors above is the belief that all staff should share the museum's mission – a common vision should connect curatorial, research, education, exhibition, interpretation, visitor services, marketing and other staff to the greater benefit of the public. Small staff numbers and the sharing/overlapping of roles which often occurs may mean that it is easier to achieve this common purpose in smaller to medium-sized museums. On the other hand, larger organisation may have greater budgets for staff training and a more frequent infusion of younger staff open to new ideas and practice, for example taking a more holistic view of the relationship between the museum building/physical space, collection/exhibition, and visitors.

2. Websites and adult museum visitors

Websites not only attract the public to the museum but also spread information about the museum and its collection to a much broader audience. Websites can be a very good way to display information, especially for small museums and for museums which are hard to reach. Websites should be updated regularly, provide links to other institutions and be a resource for other, related, subjects.

Websites are a tool before or after the museum visit – people don't visit museums to go online. A good website should be visually appealing and easy to navigate. Content should include:

- General information about the institution including opening times, where to find (map), access information – including disability access
- Information about the staff: director, curators, educators, etc., with their roles and contact information (e-mail and phone number)
- Information about the permanent collection and exhibition programme with related links (if detailed, these provide a valuable study resource)
- A few representative images of the museum spaces along with relevant information (for example, letting visitors to a coalmining museum know that they will be underground for some of the visit)
- Information about any practical workshops or activities and how to book for these
- Information on other activities – for example, lectures, projects for special groups, travelling / touring exhibitions, co-operation with other institutions (for example local organisations which may exhibit in the museum)
- Publications that can be ordered on-line
- Evaluation / feedback form

Website accessibility
Websites can play a larger role in attending to the needs of special needs or ability groups. Websites should be kept simple and not use too many distracting features (pop-ups, downloads, graphics).

Museum websites should respect the accessibility standards for special need people, probably adopting the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines for public Administrations. Web Contents Accessibility Guidelines: Web Mondial Consortium www.wrc.org, following the statements of Action Plan Europe 2002 adopted during the European Council of Feira in 2000
http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/2002/action_plan/pdf/actionplan_en.pdf

In Italy
Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica, 1 marzo 2005, n. 75 Regolamento di attuazione della legge 9 gennaio 2004, n. 4 per favorire l'accesso dei soggetti disabili agli strumenti informatici. Pubblicato in G.U. n. 101 del 3 maggio 2005
www.pubbliaccesso.gov.it/normative/regolamento.htm

3. Technology as a tool for interpretation

There is much talk in the museum world of traditional media versus new media as information carriers for museum audiences. New media however will soon be old media. In a few years time, people, young and old, will bring in their own phones and Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) to the museum and connect to a server providing information in spoken or written form. These new developments will however not change the basic questions all museums should ask:

- Who are the museum's visitors and what are their information needs?
- Has the museum taken into account the changes in the makeup of societies including the steadily increasing number of visitors in the 50+ age group?
- Has the museum discerned between cultures, both with tourists and other ethnicities in mind?
- Is information presented in a way which is culturally appropriate to different audiences?
- Are traditional media such as texts, booklets, leaflets and interpretation panels available for those visitors who prefer or need them?

Do not be afraid of the introduction of new media to your museums. PDAs are an excellent way of providing in-depth information in a cost-effective way and are easy to update. Audio tours, with spoken individual information, offer a welcome guide to many collections and buildings. Investments in information for these media will help the museum to provide a better service to many of its visitors. It can also be used to update websites and provide information to virtual visitors.

4. Communication through texts in a museum environment for adult audiences

Principles

- The content of the information the museum provides is always created by somebody in the museum. It is essential to keep this as transparent as possible. Museum texts are always interpretations; they are not the whole truth.
- The content is always primary and the medium, the way it is expressed, that is, printed or digitalized text or something else, is secondary.
- Ideally you can hear many voices instead of one authoritative speaker in the museum texts. Sometimes the information can be given in the form of conversation or dialogue.
- Educators should be responsible for text production in the museum. They do not have to write everything themselves but their role as editors is crucial.

Style

What is essential in communicating through text is to be understandable and clear. It is important to remember that the majority of museum visitors are not experts. On the other hand, it is as important not to underestimate the audience and the knowledge it has. Audiences are many, but everyone needs a basic introduction to the exhibition subject. The backgrounds, and also the curatorial ideas, starting points and basic themes should be opened up in a clear and short way using everyday language, and using readable and large enough text type and a clear lay-out.

Variety

It is important that there is lots of information available in the museum. All texts do not have to be printed and hung on the wall, though. They can be short textual points of view in the form of laminated photocopies to take along, for instance, or they can be read at the museum's website inside or outside the museum. Also, texts can be provided in handheld computers or in audio form. Textual information can also be given in the form of little

booklets or a museum newsletter that you can take away with you for free or at a very low price. Sometimes the best source for adult learning is to make a little comic book out of the exhibition subject. Specially designed activity sheets for adults can sometimes be a good idea, or even a recipe book, if it links with the exhibition. Traditional exhibition catalogues provide lots of information but usually the texts in the catalogues are written by specialists and their approach is mainly scholarly. In addition, catalogues are expensive.

5. Communication to encourage repeat visits

- Printed (mailed) & e-newsletters – visitors register to receive the information they want to receive.
- Experimental use of SMS using the e mail service, to provide short term information about the museum activities. It doesn't replace the traditional media, but is cheap and more effective than e mails (a sort of "last minute memorandum"). SMS is of particular appeal to younger adult visitors, but likely to become more common.
- A low-tech way of encouraging repeat visits is to ask the visitor to retain his/her ticket for a free return visit.

6. Conclusions

Communication with visitors: potential, new, repeat and virtual is key to the success of the museum. The first form of communication for a visitor is with the staff at the reception. All the staff in museum should be involved in the mission of museum. Management should invest in having all of the staff know the contents of the exhibits and the information for the public, including that on the museum's website and the use of new media.

New technologies should be seen as tools for communication and must be regularly reviewed and updated for ease of use, relevance of information, accessibility, and, all too soon, obsolescence. Pay attention to the constant need for update and renewal of the information on a website. The information on the site should be honest and truthful (a small object shouldn't be made to look larger, etc.).
Traditional printed leaflets, guidebooks, catalogues and panels will continue to be central to museum communication with visitors, however with clever design and attention to audience needs these should never become stale.
In most cases, virtual interaction with an object or artwork cannot take the place of contact with the 'real' which is at the heart of the museum experience.

References : Museums discussed include:
Museum of Coalmining, SL
School Museum, HR
Siebold Huis, NL
Art Museum Tennis Palace (Helsinki City Art Museum), FI
Louisiana Museum, DK
Kettle's Yard, UK
Instrumental Music Museum, BE
Exhibition 'Simply Mussels', Museum of Natural History, BE
Museum of Natural History and Archaeology, Montebelluna, IT
Prato Textile Museum, IT

Websites visited and reviewed:

www.rlv.sl/muzej Slovenian Museum of Coalmining • Lots of visuals – leads one through the museum tour / visit	www.hrskolski-muzej.hr Croatian School Museum • Croatian & English • Staff information for ease of contacting

• Map of site – orientation – you will be underground / dark some of the time • Opening times information • Educational Programmes (children) • Shop information – catalogue, but not possible to buy on line • 3 languages – Slovene, German, English • Information about wheelchair access • c. 20% of visitors see website before visit • Not much post-visit information, but site is 6 years old & due to be updated 2006	the right person • Map of museum – colour-coded – guide to exhibits • Picture of every room / exhibits / text about exhibits – familiarise with museum • Workshop 'Playroom' for students, children, adults • Adults become 'teachers' about what they learned in school • Feedback form – send message about the website or museum • General information about opening / cost / map of where to find in city • Catalogues, etc., to order via internet
www.sieboldhuis.org • 3 languages – Dutch, Japanese, English • Links page to other websites – by subject • Excellent as study resource • Links to museum server for many NL museums • General information on collection, who Siebold was, etc.	www.taidemuseo.fi • Website in Finnish, Swedish, English (some) • Intro to 3 spaces, public artworks, Link to Helsinki city site • Simple, clear design – easy to navigate and inviting • Extensive text about exhibitions • Preparatory material for teachers, others to help make the most of the visit

Group 4: The European dimension

One of the characteristics of European culture is its diversity, which has evolved from the continent's natural conditions and through thousands of years of various influences from and interactions between and within herds, tribes, nations, countries, monarchies, empires and now globalisation. This diversity is also seen in museums and other forms of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

The modern museum has its roots in Europe, but the concept spread to other continents. Everywhere it has developed in different ways and to a greater or lesser extent. Now museums are not characterised by their Europeanness, but Europe is still uniquely characterised by its museums and preserved cultural heritage.

Re-designing Europe gives us the opportunity to explore common roots and to re-discover the history shared by European peoples and in this way to discover common ground on which to build our European future. Museums make this .process and its findings accessible to the widest possible audience. In its turn, Europe can also learn from the challenges, failures and developments of museums in other continents - public aspects in America, technology in Asia, for example).

The existence and the use of cultural heritage in museums should support public education through clear strategies built into national curricula, as well as instituting lifelong learning to a much greater extent than now. Lifelong learning is essential in forming and improving the

sense of Europe in citizens living and earning their living in our countries. This may be done in several ways:

- by introducing different European cultures to each other (for example, in the 'European room', see below)
- by helping understanding of and tolerance for other cultures
- by introducing locally-known objects through the eye of scholars or people coming from other cultures (areas)
- by sharing and loaning objects to be interpreted in other locations (cultures)
- by helping hosts and immigrants to share their cultural values and to preserve these at the same time, in this new migration period
- by using a common language (in practical terms, English) while keeping and providing the relevant information also in the mother tongue, which is best adapted to express a certain cultural content
- by sharing best practice in museum education and lifelong learning (best practice being also the most suitable for the local community)
- by encouraging people from all walks of life to visit museums and use their resources to the maximum extent (from promotion through architecture, information, design, etc.)
- by finding ways in which to make the learners part of the story that is told to them.

The museum environment, in its entire complexity, should support these ideas and goals.

Group 4 also discussed pros and cons about the European Room concept.

On the European Room

The essence of the idea is a room in a (local) museum, where the mutual connections and influences of that locality (local history, community, culture) and Europe are shown. Such a room was only established once, in the Castle Museum in Norwich, in the U.K., and was a great success locally.

Several arguments can be put forward against establishing such a room in the museums of Europe:

- each European museum (or locality) is by nature European, thus it is difficult to relate to Europe (and 'which Europe'?).
- Such a room may be very difficult or too sophisticated to develop and build, demanding substantial financial and human resources if one is to show the whole complexity of interrelatedness.
- There are great differences among museum types (academic fields) and museum policies, which may hinder the establishment of such rooms.
- The loans or exchanges of objects and staff - these considerations may even reinforce the issue of restitution within a European context.

Other arguments, however, support the idea, either by eliminating doubts above, or giving new reasons to it:

- There are countries or areas which have been or still are isolated from the heart of Europe (being on an island, coming from behind the Iron Curtain). For obvious reasons, for these to identify and illustrate links with the rest of Europe seems to be more important. Since such countries became recently, or will become soon members of the EU, the interest is mutual.

- If relationships are explained through more simple cases, in a series of temporary exhibitions for complexity, the idea can be illustrated economically and often by the museum's own staff. It may also be better understood by the visitors.
- The concept should not be forced on museums, it would work better on a voluntary basis. Many academic fields, however, allow such interpretations. The special natural conditions of Europe gave a basis for the development of diverse cultures, trade, industry, education, technology, science, religion, art and all other forms of culture, which were mixed and developed under mutual influences. So each museum can find its own place in the scheme.
- The building of such exhibitions would increase co-operation between museums, thus raising their quality.
- The idea fits into the recent discovery of the existence of global networks as well as those on a cultural or community scale. By having such rooms the microcosm can illustrate the European macrocosm in a variety of ways.
- Such rooms could be provocative enough to attract young people and those who do not normally go to museums..

We suggest reconsidering the European Room idea, as we see the 'European museum' as a series or network of museums rather than one individual museum, however large it is. The word 'Room' should, however, be used as a metaphor instead of an actual room, isolated from the rest of the gallery. European relations, mentality and character should appear in the whole museum, in its exhibitions and interpretations, not just in one room. We therefore suggest that a group of museums should carry out a pilot project for developing ideas, methods, background materials and prototypes of such European rooms or contexts, to be supported by the Council of Europe, the European Commission, and other European organisations. If successful, EC and The Council of Europe should invite museums and related institutions, through a grant scheme, to establish a new network for showing the European spirit across the continent.

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