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COMMITTEE ON CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Sub-Committee on the Cultural Heritage

Access to the European Heritage in Museums

Conclusions

of the European Museum Forum Workshop
held in Monsummano Terme (Italy) (18-20 October 2001)

in co-operation with

the Istituto Beni Culturali, Bologna and
the Cultural Department of the Regione Toscana

Introduction

The Year 2000 European Museum Forum Workshop was focused on the "Spirit of Europe". 50 museum professionals from almost 20 countries discussed intensively the contemporary idea of Europe and the role of museums in the new European scene.

In the Conclusions of this Seminar it was stressed that we all belong to Europe, but the idea of Europe has become a 'dynamic concept' and the status of European citizenship has to be adapted continuously to reflect the changing political, cultural and social situation.

Although the concept of a European culture is hard to define, it is undeniable that there is a common European civilisation with its own specific features which has produced a vast common heritage. On this basis a European Cultural Movement is growing which influences the life of museums. Museums as cultural institutions with a special direct relationship with local communities and with a great variety of stakeholders must play a crucial role in the building of Europe. However, in an era of rapid and deep change, museums as custodians of cultural heritage have to face new challenges and growing requirements by users.

Museums can function as crossroads or gateways, tools to cross borders and to cross cultural and political barriers. It is therefore necessary to reinterpret the social function of museums, to update their cultural mission and their social goals. In this context *access* and *excellence* are two key words for any programme concerning modern museums.

'Museums for the many', 'Musei dalla parte del pubblico', 'Approche du public' are different ways in different languages to stress the same concept: it is a duty of museums to open their doors, to encourage communities to make use of each museum's facilities and resources, to remove any obstacle which prevents people from entering museums and using them. In short: it is the right of the present and future generations of European citizens to have a full access to 'their' museums. It is a specific duty of museum people, and the authorities responsible for cultural services, to create better conditions for the use of museums by all sectors of society.

The Year 2001 EMF Workshop (the sixth of this programme, started in 1996) has dealt with these matters using the well-tried method which has proved very fruitful - to create a genuine European environment where museum professionals from a wide variety of museum types and from a number of countries can meet and discuss a topic under the guidance of discussion leaders, with the final goal of producing a document setting out the conclusions and practical proposals which have found the approval of the majority of the participants and which could find an interested audience within the European museum community.

During the discussions four areas of debate have emerged as key issues in order to fulfil the modern museums' mission effectively :

1. **ACCESS**: WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF A SUCCESSFUL ACCESS POLICY TO EUROPEAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE IN MUSEUMS?

2. **EUROPE IN MUSEUMS**: WHAT DOES 'EUROPE' MEAN IN MUSEUM TERMS?

3. **EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP** AND MUSEUMS: WHAT IS THE POSSIBLE ROLE OF MUSEUMS IN THE DEFINITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF A SENSE OF EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP?

4. **EUROPEAN CORNERS** IN MUSEUMS: IN WHICH TERMS CAN THE IDEA OF **A MUSEUM OF EUROPE** OR THE PROPOSAL OF OTHER TOOLS, SUCH AS THE EUROPEAN CORNERS, BE APPROPRIATE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEAN VALUES IN MUSEUMS?

1. ACCESS: WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF A SUCCESSFUL ACCESS POLICY TO EUROPEAN HERITAGE AND CULTURE IN MUSEUMS?

Conclusions

It is a duty of modern European museums to make themselves accessible to a wide range of possible users/visitors/citizens and to remove obstacles which could prevent people from entering and using them.

The Museum mission must embrace the museum's full commitment to the end-users.

Museums should present themselves as living places, places for participation, places for learning.

Museum should research existing and potential audiences and consider the needs of different target groups.

Museum staff should be supported in developing their awareness and sensitivity of visitor needs.

Museums should develop strategies to reach all sections of the community.

Proposals

In order to support museums in developing an access policy, the following *checklist* has been developed:

1. **The Museum Mission – a core commitment to Access**
   The Museum mission must embrace the museum's full commitment to the end-users.

2. **The Museum Image – developing an attractive image**
   The Museum should present itself as:
   - a 'place of life'
   - a place of emotional experiences – through special events and other non-academic activities
   - a place which offers visitors links – to his or her own life, to his or her own past, to his or her own community
   - a place for participation –
     - embracing the involvement and contribution of Friends organisations and community liaison groups, and of children's and young people's membership schemes
     - offering opportunities for workshops and seminars
   - a place for learning, through –
     - enjoyment
     - exploration
     - rediscovery of a greater awareness of collective and individual cultural background

3. Targeting Access – addressing specific audience needs

The museum should research existing and potential audiences, and consider the needs of different target groups, developing appropriate strategies to address:

- physical issues – e.g. disabled access, visual, aural and other impairment
- practical issues – e.g. languages, admission fees, location and transport, opening hours
- intellectual/cultural/social issues – e.g. working with visitors to facilitate their individual understanding, both of the museum and of its contents, through guided tours and other kinds of support

4. Museum Staff Commitment –

Museum staff should be supported in developing their awareness and sensitivity of visitor needs through:

- involving all its staff in direct contact with the public
- exchanging experiences through collaboration and networking with colleagues in other museums

5. Communication and Marketing

The museum should develop strategies to reach all sections of the community, including:

- links with territorial (local and regional, on a voluntary or institutional basis as well as institutional) agencies, including schools
- use of all kinds of media including press, TV, radio
- websites with national and international links
- free admission (subject to financial considerations)

2. EUROPE IN MUSEUMS. WHAT DOES EUROPE MEAN IN MUSEUM TERMS?

Conclusions

Museums are a tool for everyone, people-centred places, to explain and express identity, local, national and European.

A European approach to museums does not mean defining Europe, but developing a dynamic concept which we can construct through working together, through communicating with each other.

A *European approach* to museums means:

1) Inclusive, with no boundaries.

2) Having a responsibility to provide a service to express ways of being European.

3) Finding and sharpening self-identity. Finding connections between what can be experienced in a museum and personal experiences.

4) Celebrating diversity. Presenting the integration issue by taking advantage of 'differences' (social, economic, political).

KEY WORDS EMERGED FROM THE DISCUSSION:

Connecting – Communicating - Open place - Focus on people – Process - New approaches

Proposals

We recommend the Council of Europe to make it possible for the European Museum Forum to launch a programme whereby the projects listed below could be realised. We are willing, able and ready to start and fulfil them.

1. Guest curators

A programme to invite museum people from abroad to 'curate' an exhibition in other European countries.

Outcome
exchange of ideas
new meanings for collections
new perspectives for audiences and museum staff

2. A European eye

To encourage museum people to visit museums elsewhere, to take a second glance and provide a new viewpoint on permanent exhibitions.

Outcome
A return to museum interpretation with new perspectives and reworking.

3. European capsules

An invitation to people in participating countries to provide museums with a capsule of objects that offers their vision of what Europe is. A concrete closed box in the museum.

Outcome
Display of all boxes and objects
Exchange of views on what Europe is
Encourage debate
Travelling exhibitions
Publications

4. European boxes – unifying objects

Thematic boxes of objects with which to discuss Europe. To learn from objects about European issues, with themes such as IDENTITY or IDEAS.
EMF to form a team to produce and to train curators to use these boxes. Local delivery.

5. **European themes**
   Define topics appropriate for EMF actions of support at a transnational level, European museums to dedicate exhibitions and exchange results.

6. **EU and Other European Public Organizations programmes and the EMF work**
   More programmes are needed and more flexible programmes to assist the museum community work all over Europe.

3. EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP AND MUSEUMS: WHAT IS THE POSSIBLE ROLE OF MUSEUMS IN THE DEFINITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF A SENSE OF EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP?

Conclusions

Museums are perfect places (and spaces) to meet the growing expectations of a new breed of European citizens. It is important when we consider issues around citizenship that we adopt a 'dual' approach, that we understand the importance of each citizen maintaining and celebrating his new roots – while also encouraging and developing a global (or European) sensibility. Museums as places of 'difference' in our everyday life are important as reflectors of cultural diversity. They offer possibilities for emotional experience, cultural understanding and lifelong learning.

The concept of *European Citizenship* still has to be defined – it is a process more than a fixed idea.

As we try to understand how to define a European citizen living in Europe, it is also important to consider Europeans who have been forced, or have chosen, to live outside Europe. They too need spaces in which to confirm their identity.

Identity is a dynamic word used to define each individual for the benefit of the understanding of others. The 'difference' of each individual's life experience, their family background, their birthplace and living place and their education are all factors which affect identity, and these cultural and historical differences may be celebrated within the museum environment.
Identity plays a very important role in the world configuration and in the construction of the feeling of self-worth of a human being. Museums are the places to make it happen, taking the role of churches as social rulers capable of bringing together people with a common need.

Proposals

The **'Empty Box'** is a place where to show (in all European museums or in a Museum about Europe) exhibitions about Europe, about the world, common history and common stories appealing to ordinary people, who can come into the exhibitions and feel life as a place of creativity, to learn even more and have a synchratic, holistic perspective of the world.

The Empty Box has philosophical and practical applications:

a) the philosophical application is to encourage museums directors and staff to adopt flexibility and creativity as a state of mind in their approach to European identity in museums.

b) the practical application is to build up a network of European museums which agree to co-operate and share ideas and spaces for the fulfilment of exhibition, scientific and educational projects.

A form of recognition of excellence in the field of 'identity and European citizenship' should be planned, perhaps by some kind of award scheme to encourage museums to take part in the 'Empty Box' scheme.

The Council of Europe should offer support to EMF in order to launch this initiative.

A Museum for Europe might be in certain respects an extension of the Empty Box project, only significantly this museum has a permanent home. Within this 'home' space, wherever it may be, an annual exhibition would take place which focusses on one country, but always with a European perspective.

This would mean that different countries and cultures would regularly be the subject of the 'focus' exhibition. Where possible these exhibitions would be extended to other venues, either physically or virtually, or in the form of documentation. Although this museum would be a 'physical' reality, virtual Internet projects will be linked to this 'home' project. A possible name for this new museum could be 'At Home in Europe'.

4. EUROPEAN CORNERS IN MUSEUMS: IN WHICH TERMS CAN THE IDEA OF A MUSEUM OF EUROPE OR THE PROPOSAL OF OTHER TOOLS, SUCH AS THE EUROPEAN CORNERS, BE APPROPRIATE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEAN VALUES IN MUSEUMS?

Conclusions

The idea of European Corners in museums has developed in recent times together (and sometimes in contradiction with) the idea of a 'Museum of Europe'. In which terms can the idea of a Museum of Europe be appropriate for the development of European values in museums?

Discussions have come to these points, expressed in the form of Conclusions shared by the Workshop participants:

We consider it to be reasonable and sensible that European museums undertake more joint action to raise topics of European concern and develop awareness of Europe among visitors.

These topics should reflect the specific values of European culture and refer to its diversity, but also its capacity to communicate strongly in order to solve common problems.

We underline the fact that it is essential for European museums to look for special links in terms of exchanging experiences (migration, for example) and providing a way to make comparisons possible.

We consider it important that European topics are linked to people's everyday experiences.

We also think that the discussion on European values (freedom rights and democracy) should be considered in finding general topics to work on together

Proposals

1) Rather than shaping one Museum of Europe today, we consider it would be more helpful to implement a long-term process, including a high degree of networking (twinning schemes) between museums and to apply the new technologies (internet) for exchanging ideas (i.e.internet café) and getting wider access to various exhibitions/activities/collections

2) It would be useful to get EMF, together with the Council of Europe, involved to raise key-subjects with a European dimension. There could be a key-subject every year to which different kinds of contributions could be made by all European museums which are interested in making their European point. These contributions could be:

(a) One major exhibition every year, organised by a joint venture of several museums and curated by different professionals with international experience. These exhibitions should travel to several regions and cities in Europe

(b) All museums to receive funding for smaller contributions (to produce videos, CD-Roms, language-programmes, audio guides), if a programme is related to the key-subject of the year.

3) Major support for these actions should be given by EMF as a co-ordinator, fund-raiser and political lobby for this project. The whole process should be evaluated and communicated to the national governments as well as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

4) We believe these actions are one major branch of the possible actions towards the presentations of European history and culture in museums, which should stress as much involvement as possible of the small museums all over Europe.

5) Since we are aware that there may be also be a need for a central Museum of Europe we want to suggest for now that it should limit its approach to the 20th century. This means the creation of a house for contemporary, modern history reflecting the necessity of a unified Europe against the background of the experiences of two World Wars. This museum should be dedicated to political education for peace, tolerance and human rights.

6) We strongly support more discussion on these two basic branches towards the presentation of the European cultural heritage in exhibitions, museums and multi-media.

Appendix 1: List of participants

Belgium
Marie-Claire Van der Donckt, Provinciaal Museum t'Ename, Oudenaarde

Croatia
Renate Brezinscak, Croatian Natural History Museum, Zagreb
Vesna Leiner, Museum of the City of Zagreb

Finland
Anna Finnilä, Helsinki City Museum
Sirpa Turpeinen, Jyväskylä Art Museum

Germany
Christine Bäumler, University of Bielefeld
Jorg Werner, Bauernhaus Museum, Bielefeld
Udo Gösswald, Heimatmuseum Neukölln, Berlin
Georg von Wilcken, useumspädagogischer Dienst Berlin

Greece
Elias Spirtounias, Foundation of the Hellenic World, Athens

Italy
Nerina Baldi, Marsh Museum, Argenta
Margherita Sani, Istituto Beni Culturali, Bologna
Graziano Campanini, Museo della Sanità, Bologna
Carlo Muzzi, Fondazione Micheletti, Brescia
Elisa Bellavita, Castello Bambini, Milano
Massimo Negri, EMF Director, Milano
Marco Pierini, Regione Toscana, Museo Diocesano, Pienza
Maria Chiara Favilla, Fondazione Piaggio, Pontedera
Lucia Magneschi, Regione Toscana, Dipartimento della Politiche formative e dei Beni Culturali
Enrico Toti, Regione Toscana
Emanuele Lepri, Regione Toscana, Museo del Tessuto, Prato
Roberto Cerri, Regione Toscana, Sistema museale di San Miniato
Sandra Becucci, Regione Toscana, Museo del Bosco di Orgia, Sovicille
Patrizia Von Eles, Archaeological Museum, Verucchio
Romano Nanni, Regione Toscana, Museo Leonardiano, Vinci
Valerio Cervetti, Musei Civici, Parma

Netherlands
Lex Magielsen, Industrion, Kerkrade
Wim van der Weiden, Naturalis: National Museum of Natural History, Leiden

Portugal
Margarida Ruas dos Santos, Museum of Water, Lisbon

Romania
Liliana Passima, Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest

Slovenia
Peter Pusnik, Coal Mining Museum of Slovenia, Velenje

Sweden
Eva Bergdahl, Norrköping City Museum

United Kingdom
Sylvia Lahav, National Gallery, London
Judi Caton, Museum consultant, London
Christopher Naylor, Engage, London
Ann Nicholls, EMF, Bristol
Samantha Hawkins, Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester

Council of Europe
Gerrit Valk, Netherlands

Appendix 2: Programme

Thursday 18 October:

Arrival in Monsummano. Introductory meeting:
What is the Spirit of Europe and what are the basic European cultural values? Who are our users in a European perspective? What do we know about our audience's perception of Europe?

Friday 19 October:

morning
Group discussion on the following topics: Barriers: which are the main obstacles to a better use of museums by local communities and how to remove them? How can museums help in overcoming cultural barriers? How can they make the best use of volunteers? How can they present the European heritage to the new generations of European citizens?

Definition of the agenda for the final document.

afternoon
Group discussion on the following topics: Excellence and innovation in European museums: which are the main features of progressive museum policies in Europe? Where have we found in individual countries examples of best practices ?
Reports on the conclusions reached by the discussion groups. Definition of the final document.

Saturday 20 October
Definition of the final document and Conclusions.
Half day excursion.

Sunday 21 October
Departure for home.