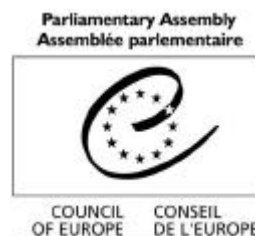


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COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, SCIENCE AND EDUCATION **Sub-Committee on the Cultural Heritage**

THE EUROPEAN DIASPORA

Conclusions
of the European Museum Forum Workshop
Prato (Italy). Museum of Textiles
23-25 October 2003

in co-operation with
the Cultural Department of the Regione Toscana, Florence
the Istituto Beni Culturali Regione Emilia-Romagna, Bologna
the Municipality and the Province of Prato

A. INTRODUCTION

The subject:

The 2003 EMF Workshop focuses on the phenomenon of the cultural implications of the European diaspora, both inside and outside Europe –

Outside Europe: investigating the effects of the displacement of European cultures in other continents as far as European culture and heritage are presented and interpreted in museums.

Inside Europe: with special attention given to the recent re-distribution of communities and national groups abroad for a variety of reasons. These include greater mobility due to a larger labour market, migration due to economic crises in different European areas, and traumatic political events (dissolution of States, ethnic cleansing, armed conflicts). The increasing mobility of tourists, who now often own second homes abroad and exert their influence on local museums, is also examined.

The Workshop deals with such crucial questions as: how is Europe seen from the outside? What is the role played by museums in the process of communication of what Europe means outside Europe? What opportunities are offered to museums in terms of a new social role by cultural re-allocation? What are the main interpretation problems when

presenting European collections to non-Europeans? What are the main features of this kind of public? How can museums help in preserving and communicating the culture of new residents coming from abroad? What are the main aspects of the experience of working in a museum by staff from another continent?

Discussions aim to define some of the main points in the approach to the problems and opportunities of inter-cultural communication in museums. Examples of good practice are identified in planning activities or an interpretative framework for collections presenting the spirit of Europe to non-Europeans or to ethnic groups coming from abroad to live permanently in a European country.

Basic documents for the discussion include recent documents on the subject of the European diaspora, focusing on some of the problems of expatriate communities – of both Europeans and non-Europeans – representing cultures differing from those of the host countries.

The Workshop is addressed to all kinds of museums: those which deal specifically with topics such as museums of emigration and museums of social history, and those which work on different aspects of the European heritage (arts, natural history, ethnography, science).

The EMF Workshop Methodology

The Workshop uses the same method which has so far proved so fruitful for previous 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 discussion leaders experienced in this type of meeting. Short presentations of examples of good practice are essential to the development of the group discussion, which is channelled towards the production of a document related to the one delivered at the end of the 2002 EMF Workshop in Parma (*Museums as crossroads*).

The Conclusions take the form of a document signed by all participants to be presented to the Sub-Committee on Cultural Heritage of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's, 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/e_index.htm).

Diaspora: Some definitions¹

The term originated with the ancient Greeks, who used it to refer to their migration and colonization (dispersion, to scatter). It is best known from the Jewish diaspora, starting with the Babylonian captivity and then the destruction of the Second Temple in A.D. 70 by the Romans and the subsequent dispersal of most Jews from the area of the ancient Jewish state.

¹ This set of definitions was produced by Dineke Stam, Dutch Museum Association, and it is based on the following sources: A review by Mark J. Miller in the *Journal of World History* 10.2 (1999) on *Global diasporas: An Introduction* by Robin Cohen. University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1997. The Introduction to *New Diasporas* by Nicholas van Hear. University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1998.

Although there have been many 'diasporas of terror' or 'diasporas of despair' (in the words of Appandurai) there can also be 'diasporas of hope'.

Some scientists only want to use this word in case of a 'collectively forced dispersion of a religious and/or ethnic group precipitated by a disaster, often of a political nature'. Others say that except for these diasporas of 'victims' (e.g. Armenians, or Africans as a result of the slave trade), there can be 'diasporas of labour' (e.g. Indian contract workers), 'trade' (Lebanese merchants in West Africa), 'imperial' (British population movements to overseas dominions) or 'cultural' (Caribbeans living abroad). Communities in exile can be flowering, positive and beneficial, but often also suffer losses.

Diasporas arise from international migration. Other characteristics:

- dispersal from original centre to two or more peripheral regions
- retention of collective memory of the homeland
- partial alienation from host society

Some scientists also include

- aspiration to return to ancestral homeland
- commitment to maintenance of homeland

Others include:

- enduring presence abroad. Although not necessarily permanent, there may be movement between homeland and host country.
- some kind of exchange (social/economic/political/cultural) between or among the spatially separated populations comprising the diaspora. Another term would be 'transnational community'.

B. CONCLUSIONS

The seminar's work followed five areas dealing with relevant issues connected with the main subject. The outcomes of the five groups were discussed in a plenary session and the following Conclusions were accepted unanimously.

I. INTERPRETATION OF OBJECTS

Objects mean different things to an audience made up of people with very different cultural backgrounds. What are the main interpretation problems when presenting European collections to non-Europeans or to 'displaced' Europeans?

Preamble

Museums are meeting places: the wider atmosphere of welcome is as important as the interpretation of objects. The overall approach should be inclusive and non-patronising.

Political will is a prerequisite for the representation of cultural diversity

1. There is a wide range of stories around every object.
2. No two individuals look at objects in the same way
3. Objects also have their 'diaspora'. They were traded. They were brought along by migrants. They acquired new uses and meaning in new contexts.

Statements

Strategy of interpretation.

If we define European collections as collections in European museums, we must acknowledge that they originate from all over the world and reflect a spectrum of cultures.

Diverse audiences want to recognise something of themselves and also to be surprised.

Subject matter can be selected which are relevant to a given community (the 'listen and then choose' strategy).

Museum visitors can be classified as:

- Paddlers
- Swimmers
- Divers

If the museum is the water, the surface of the water is ever changing.
Dark and light, smooth, unpredictable.

The concept is well synthesised by the work of *Ohne Titel*, a Jacquard textile by Sonia Weber.

Recommendations.

Here we have 4 key words: **consultation, flexibility, creative partnership, exchange.**

It is recommended :

1. To encourage **consultation** with the diaspora communities, which will inform the programming of the museum.
2. To optimise **flexibility** in terms of presentation, staff attitudes, multiple partnerships, and the museum environment.
3. To collaborate in terms of **creative partnership** with the media, specifically with the diaspora-media.
4. To seek opportunities for the **exchange** of knowledge, skills, people and projects.

Cases

Exchange of museum staff between homelands and host societies. For example, when making the exhibition on Slovenian migration, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum exchanged staff with the Argentine Museum of Immigration.

Events and projects around the social and cultural mores of the diasporas communities, e.g. V & A Shamiana Project with Asian women.

Outreach to local and national communities. For example, The Chester Beatty Library in Dublin sends Indian-Irish and Japanese 'ambassadors' to schools, festivals or community groups.

Conclusion

Openness and sensitivity of museums as part of and towards diaspora communities are key factors in devising policy.

II. MUSEUMS AS FACTORS OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Today in Europe many expatriate communities represent cultures that differ from those of their host countries. How can museums be seen as a factor of social integration? And how can museums avoid running the risk of depriving 'hosted' culture?

Introduction

Museums today are growing demands on the existing fields of expertise. While wishing to embrace new challenges, museums are not and should not be expected to be the only solution.

Museums have to be open to social change and could be an important tool in the process of the evolution and development of the society. A museum can play a role in social integration only if it is a part of a wider project.

Museums can be the place for social discussion and should try to offer possibilities and open doors. There are, of course, museums more ready to play this demanding role and museums that are not easily accessible and are restricted in their field.

Statement

- In keeping with the mission of the Council of Europe museums are agents of social integration.
- Social integration is a tool to promote active citizenship
- Museums can cross borders and cultural and political barriers.

Recommendations

- Active dialogue with all sectors of society
- Ongoing awareness of the changing demographic profile
- Society needs to foster a positive environment in which the potential of museums can flourish.

Keywords

- Opportunities
- Tolerance
- Conflicts
- Share
- Respect
- Promotion
- Benefits
- Values – social/ethical/ benefits and costs
- Citizenship
- Dialogue
- Integration
- Access

Case Studies

1. Germany, Munich and BVV association: Teaching the German language to immigrants in the museum.
2. Portugal, Museu Municipal de Loures – Project Tell Me a Story- for all social levels of the community
3. Italy, Florence, Museo Marino Marini – Workshops with blind and mentally disturbed people and a dialogue between the museum and these groups.

Guidelines- Checklist

- Museums must avoid the risk of neocolonialism and create opportunities
- Museums must encourage an openness and start a dialogue and respect diversity
- Museums need to have a follow-up and a continuation and a constant dialogue
- Museums must recognize and not forget and not neglect their audience (permanent and non permanent)
- Museums must focus on intercultural issues and on diversity.
- Museums are quite able to communicate and must improve their ability to listen. This function will help the process of integration

Conclusion

Museums can offer a wide range of possibilities and can be platforms for social integration. They can exchange values and benefits across society.

III. PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

To cope with the problems of the continuous diaspora of culture (European and non-European) new skills are required in museums. What are the main lines to be followed in order to develop transnational actions in this field?

The European diaspora means that we have many incomers in the communities that museums serve who do not automatically belong to them. Museums cannot wait for them to ask to be involved in museum programmes: rather, museums must reach out to include them, our fellow citizens.

Most museum professionals were trained to care for collections but not to undertake proactive work building new audiences, so there are clear training and recruitment needs for museums to successfully attract and retain new audiences.

Our group has identified four principal areas drawn up as follows;

1. Attitudes
2. Skills and experience
3. Information and knowledge
4. Partnership

1. Attitudes

Changing attitudes among museum people underpins the other three areas for development that we have identified.

Museums must see the public as a co-partner in the interpretation of culture. This shift towards a far more public led approach benefits all our work with incomers, with non-traditional museum users and with our present users.

Museum staff must be flexible in their work and willing to change to meet the needs of our culturally diverse communities.

While museum professionals are very aware of the need to target audience groups we are also aware that museums must avoid pigeon-holing people – putting them into fixed categories. Museum learners are individuals and museums must offer self-directed opportunities.

Recommendation

To enable the profession to achieve this shift towards dialogue with the public, (“new” and “old”) we believe that attitudes still need to be changed at senior levels in the profession, and we recommend that EMF seeks urgently to involve, by proactive recruitment, several such senior directors of museums in its annual Workshop.

2. Skills and Experience

Improving skills and experience among museum professionals is vital.

Equally, bringing in new skills through external contracts and new recruitment to enrich those we have in the profession is essential.

Museums need to recruit from incomer groups to ensure the museum profession, in common with other professions such as policing and teaching, reflects the cultural diversity within our communities.

Language

As museum professionals we need to improve our linguistic skills. We can begin to communicate with each other through the medium of English but ultimately we need to be accustomed to working through more than one language.

We cannot learn all the languages of our communities or of our visitors, but if we are used to using other languages we shall be far better able to understand the requirements of speakers of other languages. This will facilitate working with colleagues, and with new audiences, and will improve the information we provide to all our audiences.

Guideline

Museum professionals should be encouraged to learn to communicate through English and another language.

Learning from objects

Using museum collections to involve new audiences is a core activity of museums. It is an important area for sharing skills and training.

Information and Communication Technology

Museum people must take command of ICT applications to museum work to meet the needs of new audiences. If we do not others will attract and retain the attention of incomers at our expense.

Evaluation and Quality Control

Museums need to set standards, to control the quality of work undertaken with incomers, and to learn how best to evaluate projects and programmes. Evaluation techniques and training in the development of impact studies are an important area for developing skills

Recommendation

The EUROEDULT curriculum (EU Grundtvig programme : www.euroedult.feefi.pt.hu, endorsed by EMF) is a useful framework for developing course units to meet the training needs we have identified. We do however recommend that it is adjusted to enhance the need for and practice of forming partnerships with groups and communities external to museums. (See Partnerships below)

3. Information and Knowledge

Before museums can work with incomers or any target group, they need to collect information. Museum professionals therefore need to undertake or contract out *audience research*.

Museum professionals also need to inform themselves about *current practice and to share experiences*.

Museum professionals additionally need to gain access to the wealth of *published data and research* in the field.

Recommendation

The project *Collect and Share* (www.collectandshare.eu.com), of which EMF is a partner, has the potential to cover some of this ground and we recommend that EMF with its partners monitors and evaluates the results and seeks to design further work as appropriate.

4. Partnership

We have said that we recognise the public as a co-partner in the interpretation of culture. It follows that museum professionals need to forge close collaborations with incomers to develop projects through dialogue. To this end partnership with external bodies, with people and organisations who are experienced in working with incomers, with whom we have not traditionally worked, are urgently required. There are for example many organisations working with incomers who make links with schools, councils, social services and others, but rarely with museums.

Guideline

We believe this to be a core area for the development of training in current practice, and the sharing of experience, and also in the publication of case studies and toolkits.

IV. MAPPING EUROPEAN DIASPORAS

Some diaspora cultures, such as the Armenian, Greek or Jewish are well-known but most of the Council of Europe member states have their own diasporas too. Group IV should produce a first map of these diasporas, possibly together with some examples of museum practices related to these particular problems. Special attention to be given to East European countries.

Historical anthropology provides modern evidence that diaspora began when modern humans started to disperse from Africa to other continents. Multiculturalism, in the same way, is old and not a new phenomenon, and seems to be a characteristic of human cultures.

There were periods in history, when the movements of human populations were more intensive, and they always gave birth to diaspora populations and cultures. Many of them have not disappeared during centuries. Now mankind is facing a 'new migration period'. In our times, too, it is often not people who move but borders, or political formations change, and people find themselves isolated. 'Differences' may be defined from both directions: inside and outside. Diaspora ceases to exist when people feel at home, do not want to live elsewhere, do not feel different and do not have an affinity to their home culture. Melting of diasporas is not necessarily positive, cultural diversity is important for a sustainable future.

Introduction to the results of Group IV

Together with human migration, objects (everyday, cult, valuables) were also carried away and these are now important evidence for contemporary humans. With the appearance of modern collections collected objects also became numerous and – with a nice metaphor – many objects now exist in diaspora. In many cases distant cultures are represented in a European (or other) country by such objects only and not by the people who had or have that culture. In other cases old or new diaspora communities are existing in a country, together with their culture, including the objects of that culture.

The core importance of museums and their objects

Museums, especially European museums, house a series of 'diaspora objects' in one place. Museums are holistic environments for directed and undirected learning (formal and informal teaching). In the new migration period which mankind is facing and participating in, it is essential for museums to deal with diaspora issues, and for the communities (host or diaspora) to involve museums. However, museums are not equally involved, for example ethnography may be more relevant to deal with the issue than a renaissance art collection. In museums people from many cultures and walks of life can listen, enjoy, understand and transform. Multiculturalism and diaspora as well as access should be dealt with in the mission statement of museums. Diasporas are part of our cultural heritage, and cultural heritage action should include them.

Museum professionals as well as objects are mediators in culture.

Objects are the *sine qua non* for museums. Objects in themselves often represent multiculturalism (for example, silk originally from China, processed in Italy and the cloth used by an English resident there). In most European museums the composition of the collection is such that it represents several cultures. Also, the museum profession is highly multicultural.

Diaspora of objects enriches the museum collection just as diaspora cultures enrich the culture of a country. Cultural diversity is important in maintaining the human population on Earth, so diaspora cultures should not be automatically diluted, but praised for their difference. 'Diaspora objects' are often valuable additions to collections. Museums may benefit from the existence of diasporas (for example, donations, information, reflections from far living members of a host community or, on the other side, information on, or interpretation of 'diaspora objects' from members of a diaspora community in the museum's country).

Examples.

Two interesting examples of activity dealing with these problems are offered by the:

Manchester City Art Gallery and the National Gallery, London

Suggestions for interpretation

Museums with multicultural collections or rich in diaspora objects could provide a map for their visitors, showing the origin of their collections (stored or exhibited).

Museums should themselves explore, and should encourage visitors to do so, 'truths' about diaspora objects. Most often there is not just one truth behind an object because an object has, necessarily, several meanings.

Museums, whenever possible, should explain the history (origin, journey, change, use, perception, character) of their diaspora objects, in the same way that they explain or inform about makers and artists.

Objects as they are, are important tools in building understanding of their cultures, and are often neutral means when emotions would interfere with understanding. Museums must, nevertheless, be aware that their audience is composite, with different perceptions and different cultural references.

Museum professionals should have and should build empathy and not sympathy towards diaspora cultures and their representatives (owners).

V. EXCHANGING EXPERIENCES

Collecting and sharing good practice cases is essential for the development of innovative museum programmes in this field. But how should this be done? Group V is asked to define the guidelines for a methodology that every museum can adopt in collecting examples of good practice in its country and/or abroad.

Collect, select and share

How important is it to *collect and share examples of good practice* in the field of museum activities dealing with the subject of migration and mixing of European cultures? And how should we organise this collecting and sharing? These are the basic themes. The discussion group split them up into other questions and discussions, on which for obvious reasons here we report in short and trying to communicate the spirit of the various talks.

First question: why collect and share?

Collecting and sharing good practice is vital in relation to this subject, because the rapidly changing European society demands immediate action by cultural organisations, not tomorrow but now; collecting and sharing saves time and energy in *getting on with it*. A first basis for sharing experiences on the European level is that we all get into the habit of doing so in our own museums, towns, cities, regions and countries. The sharing should involve colleagues, politicians, audiences and related (non-museum) cultural organisations who are active in this field or should be. It will open up partnerships in and outside the museum world. Why is that useful or necessary?

Sharing experience, knowledge and skills will help us overcome practical, managerial and financial difficulties when we initiate any project. In the process of sharing in a European environment we might learn to expose our working methods to professional criticism; a willingness to learn will be an easier thing when we share in a generous, non-competitive, international environment of professional colleagues. Museums as well as the whole sector might gain in terms of image and recognition when they share and thereby improve their (new) social roles. Mutual understanding of museum professionals of different regions and specialisations, brought about through personal encounters, will produce inspiration and exchange of ideas, or even innovations that we individually could (or dared) not think of.

What kept us from sharing so far?

We are so busy. And if we do have time for travelling, we have no money of course. And if we do have the time and means to meet colleagues, we meet the barriers of language and cultural difference between countries, specialisms and disciplines. Or it is rather frightening to open your books for others, others who might steal your bright ideas or criticise them. And if we decide not to meet but use other communication means than real personal meetings ('face-time') we might discover that our information sources are not comprehensive or not very accessible.

What are – actually – cases of 'good practice'? Or: how are they selected and by whom?

There is an obvious answer. EMYA/EMF, as we know, for more than 25 years is not only active in the collection and recognition (and rewarding or recommending) of cases of good practice, it also provides opportunities for sharing, for inspiration, for co-operation. And, fully consistent with whatever can be said about involving new audiences and creating their interaction, right from the beginning we have always stressed the one and only starting point: *the interest of the public*. EMF is one of ten partners of a new initiative 'Collect & Share', to share good practice in lifelong learning in museums and galleries.

This group was not entirely ready with this answer. What – in the light of the theme of European Diaspora – are actually the key factors that help us identify cases of good practice? The group ended up with a few of those, also concluding that they actually are all applicable to any theme in museum work, and – inevitably – not so very new at all. But, as promised in the beginning of this report, some thoughts on this discovery will be given later on. The key factors for cases of good practice can be presented in the form of a check list. For any good museum or gallery project the following should apply:

- Museum objects and their multiple cultural significance and context should play a central role; these significances and contexts will thereby grow and the objects' cultural value will be enriched;
- A research into the cultural backgrounds of target groups should always be made or studied (if already available);
- The project or activity includes the active involvement of the people who form the target groups, right from the beginning, and – equally important – to the very end (evaluation and feedback with audiences and partner-organisations);
- A central aim should be the breaking down of stereotypes and the battle against prejudice;
- Shared focus points of different cultures, tangible or non-tangible (in other words 'recognition of common grounds') are a necessary element for personal involvement; the combination with surprise about so far unknown interpretations will enhance mutual respect;
- There must be a ground for continuation of the activity in some way, a plan for sustainability of the relationship with the targeted audience;

A bonus would be for the activity to be 'transferable' to other situations and places as a result of its intrinsic qualities as well as through a commitment from its inventors to share experience with other museum colleagues.

Conclusions and recommendations

Although undoubtedly more conclusions and recommendations will be possible when further thinking on all this is done, this discussion group reached consensus on the following six:

1. Museums of Europe should be encouraged to embrace and adopt a developed list of criteria (starting with the EMF workshop list and developed with Collect and Share for the qualification of 'cases of good practice'; the European Museum Forum is recommended to do the same, and integrate these criteria in the existing rules for the selection for the European Museum of the Year Award.
2. These criteria should be made well known, not only to the museums and their professional staffs, but also to their audiences and to decision makers on various political levels.
3. The initiatives known under the name 'Collect and Share' should be encouraged; EMF should continue and intensify co-operation with these; (as EMF is one partner of Collect and Share it will obviously be doing this).
4. There is a need for workshops for museum professionals that are a venue for the exchange of 'good practice', but where 'bad practice' can also be discussed; these

workshops should aim at very practical outcomes for the participants and also all their European colleagues.

5. European museum organisations should seek co-operation in the linkage of databases, making the cases of good practice available to all museum professionals of Europe; (again Collect and Share aims to achieve this via its website, www.collectandshare.eu.com)
6. In order to enable the culturally and linguistically extremely diverse European population of museum professionals to communicate more effectively, training will have to be organised, bridging differences and improving mutual understanding; this will have to include the learning of more than one foreign language.

C. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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DF = Discussion facilitator

DL = Discussion leader

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