



Museums as places for intercultural dialogue: selected practices from Europe

Edited by Simona Bodo, Kirsten Gibbs, Margherita Sani

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MAP for ID
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 Edited by Simona Bodo, Kirsten Gibbs, Margherita Sani
 ISBN 978-0-9564752-0-6
 Published by the MAP for ID Group
 © 2009
 Printed by Park Printing Co. Ltd.
 Graphic design: Neil Dowling
 Cover - Art and calligraphy day at the British Museum.
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Table of Contents

Foreword Christina Kreps	04
Introduction Simona Bodo, Kirsten Gibbs, Margherita Sani	06
Museums as spaces of negotiation Elena Delgado	08
Some intercultural issues for museum educators in Europe Jagdish S. Gundara	10
Intercultural dialogue and the British Museum: “a museum for the world” Jo-Anne Sunderland Bowe	14
Thoughtful and respectful engagement: intercultural dialogue and the Chester Beatty Library Jenny Siung	18
The challenge of creating “third spaces”: guidelines for MAP for ID pilot projects Simona Bodo	22
Introduction to pilot projects Simona Bodo	26
Turin’s museums as places for intercultural dialogue Vincenzo Simone	32
City Telling - Turin	34
Tongue to Tongue - a collaborative exhibition	36
Map for Turin	38
The Royal Palace of Venaria: life in motion	40
Whispering Shells: echoes of peoples, cultures, art	42
Culture mixture	44
There’s a garden in every story	46
Introduction to pilot projects in Emilia-Romagna Antonella Salvi	48
City Telling - Bologna	50
Plural Stories. The Guatelli Museum, objects and life histories	52
Mothers	54
Interculture as the portrait of a city	56
Choose the Piece: the city museum as a place for intercultural dialogue	58
Animals in Heaven and Earth: discovering African myths and legends	60
Interculturart: a project of intercultural meditation between museum, school and territory	62
Intercultural dialogue in the Netherlands: Image, Identity and Culture Evelyn Raat	64
Intercultural Fashion	66
Intercultural Monologues	68
Bijlmer Euro	70
Personal Geographies	72
The newcomers’ view: intercultural dialogue and Hungarian museums Anikó Korenchy-Misz	74
Underground of Angyalföld. Graffiti: why and why not?	76
Contact Zone – Intercultural dialogue and co-operation	78
SMILE – the shortest way to a visitor-friendly museum	80
Munkácsy’s audiences and communities	82
Collection of Collections	84
More than life stories - Fates	86
MAP for ID and the Museo de América Elena Delgado	88
Thinking of Fray Ramón Pané: a portrait of modern subjectivity	90
Knowing about their cultures; knowing about our culture	92
Snack Dialogues	94
Dialogues, between nature and culture	96
Itineraries in the Museo de América	98
Museums and Libraries: spaces for intercultural dialogue	100
Good practice from MAP for ID: guidelines and discussion points Kirsten Gibbs, Jenny Siung, Jo-Anne Sunderland Bowe	104
Notes on contributors	106
Partner organisations	108



Tongue to Tongue A Collaborative Exhibition

The history of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the University of Turin is closely connected with the homonymous university department, whose origins date back to 1923. Its collections are organised into Primatological, Paleethnologic and Ethnographic sections. Although the museum has been closed to the public since 1984, it pursues its scientific activity through temporary exhibitions, conferences, seminars and educational workshops.

The Centre for African Studies (CSA) was established in 1983 with a view to fostering cultural relations between Piedmont and Africa, and promoting the knowledge of African history, cultures, languages and arts. In 1996, it launched a project whose main goal is to enhance the African artistic and ethnographic heritage preserved in regional museums.

Process

Tongue to Tongue – a collaborative exhibition was entirely based on a participatory planning process. The “tongue” of the museum (institutional, scientific, didactic) engaged in a dialogue with the mediators’ “tongue” (autobiographical, evocative, emotional), hence the title of the exhibition, from the original title of a song by the group Radiodervish.

At the heart of the project was a training course for Cultural Mediators of Intercultural Heritages, primarily conceived as a process of cultural

empowerment. Trained mediators, recognised as “new interpreters” of the museum’s heritage, were in fact involved in the planning and mounting of a multi-vocal exhibition, in close cooperation with the museum staff and an architect / exhibition planner.

Each mediator was free to choose from the ethnographic collections the objects with which they identified culturally and/or emotionally: objects not necessarily directly related to his/her own cultural background, but holding a particular significance as they revealed sometimes unexpected links with the mediator’s personal history, or with his/her expertise and memories.

The selection of objects from the collection was followed by the planning of “narrative routes,” in which the museum staff also took part. Finally, the objects were displayed in showcases alongside the “subjective heritage” of the mediators (including souvenirs, pictures, books and clothes), thereby creating an impressive range of autobiographical installations.

The exhibition was open to the public upon request from mid-November 2008 to the end of January 2009. The visit consisted of dialogical narrative routes, resulting from the interaction and exchange of knowledge and perspectives between a museum educator and a mediator. Preparatory activities were planned for secondary schools.

Outcomes

The key strengths of the project may be described as follows:

- Participatory planning resulted not only in the development of narrative routes (interpretation), but also in the inclusion of mediators’ voices in display;
- Storytelling was conceived as a mediation tool ‘not so much from a linguistic point of view, as in order to share both individual and institutional knowledge and perspectives, create and / or consolidate the “social value” of the museum for its audiences, and promote the cultural citizenship of migrant communities;’
- The autobiographical approach allowed mediators to incorporate their individual (and migratory) stories in the exhibition spaces and displayed objects;
- The architect took part in all the planning phases, thereby playing the threefold role of exhibition designer, facilitator and “translator” of the mediators’ knowledge and expertise.

Some critical points also emerged:

- The actual opportunity for trained mediators to be involved in future heritage education projects in an intercultural perspective;
- The evaluation of the project’s educational impact on participating schools after the visit was not envisaged.

Impact on the museum and future perspectives:

- Participation in the project strengthened the museum’s expertise in education and intercultural research;
- The re-contextualisation of collections emphasised the evocative and emotional power of objects, thereby disengaging them from the prevailing rationale of “cultural representation;”
- The museum staff developed new skills through participatory planning – which allowed a bi-directional exchange of professional competencies and the reinterpretation of ethnographical collections from an intercultural perspective;
- On the other hand, the legacy of the project is significantly limited by the current location of the museum (open only upon request) and the lack of resources; one of the short to medium-term objectives is to further develop staff training initiatives, also through seminars and conferences.



Institutions

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Target groups

For the training course: a group of cultural mediators from Chad, Italy, Morocco, Congo, Romania and Senegal; education staff of the museum
 For the exhibition: local students attending the last two years of secondary school, general public and non-visitors (e.g. youths, immigrant communities)

MAP for ID Partners

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With the support of the Lifelong Learning
Programme of the European Union.

This project has been funded with support from
the European Commission.

This publication reflects the views only of the
authors, and the Commission cannot be held
responsible for any use which may be made of
the information contained therein.

The partners would like to thank Manuela
Pereira Oliveira for her precious support to the
editing of the book.

The MAP for ID partners would also like to thank
Margaret O'Brien and Bibi Panhuysen for the
important contribution to the start up of the
project.

Partner logos



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Pages 6 - *Roman coin handling session at the British Museum. Part of the Hadrian exhibition events programme*. Photo: Benedict Johnson © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Page 10 - *Materials for Arabic calligraphy demonstration at the British Museum. Part of the Middle East Now season*. Photo: Benedict Johnson © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Page 11, 107 - *Arabic calligraphy demonstration at the British Museum. Part of the Middle East Now season*. Photo: Benedict Johnson © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Page 14 - *Roman world day at the British Museum. Part of the Hadrian exhibition events programme*. Photo: Benedict Johnson © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Page 16 - *Chinese calligraphy demonstration at the British Museum. Part of the First Emperor exhibition events programme*. Photo: Benedict Johnson © The Trustees of the British Museum.

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Page 18 – *Tell Your Story*, Intercultural Dialogue Project. Chester Beatty Library and Draíocht Arts Centre, 2008.

Page 19 - *Thai Cultural Family Day*, Chester Beatty Library, 2009. Photo: Jenny Siung.

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Pages 44, 45 - Images from the project *Culture Mixture*, Albertina Academy of Fine Arts, Turin.

Pages 48, 60 - *Animals on earth: discovering Africa with Bottego. Animals in Heaven and Earth* project, Museum of Natural History of the University of Parma. Photos: Nicola Franchini.

Page 61 - *Animals in heaven: discovering Googol Planetarium. Animals in Heaven and Earth* project, Museum of Natural History of the University of Parma. Photo: Nicola Franchini.

Page 49 - *Detail of the staircase at the entrance*. Guatelli Museum, Ozzano Taro (Parma). Photo: Mauro Davoli.

Page 50 - *Workshop in the museum. City Telling* project, MAMbo – Museum of Modern Art Bologna, Education Department.

Page 51 - *Performances at Katun Party youth group's venue. City Telling* project, MAMbo, Education Department.

Page 52 – *First meeting of participants. Plural Stories* project, Guatelli Museum. Photo: Gabriella Valente, Giulio Nori, Salvatore Calmieri, "Le Giraffe" Association. Theatre workshop run by FestinaLente Teatro, director Andreina Garella.

Page 53 - *Shoe installation. Plural Stories* project, Guatelli Museum. Photo: Gabriella Valente, Giulio Nori, Salvatore Calmieri, "Le Giraffe" Association. Theatre workshop run by FestinaLente Teatro, director Andreina Garella.

Pages 54, 55 - Images from the project *Mothers*, City Museums of Reggio Emilia.

Pages 56, 57 - Images from the project *Interculture as the portrait of a city*, City Museum of Mirandola.

Pages 62, 63 - Images from the project *Interculturart*, Zaffiria Centre and Museum of Impressions, Rimini. Photos: Ernesto Tuliozi.

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Page 74 - *Impromptu music and dance session by Serb youngsters at the Museum of Trade and Hospitality after the official programme of our Ethnic Tea-house*, Foundation for Museums and Visitors, Budapest. Photo: Anikó Korenchy-Misz.

Page 81 – *English classes for room minders. SMILE* project, Museum of Fine Arts Budapest.

Page 80 - *Walkabout for room minders. SMILE* project, Museum of Fine Arts Budapest.

Page 75 - *The underpass exit at the "Underground of Angyalföld. Graffiti: Why and why not?" exhibition. Underground of Angyalföld* project, Local Historical Museum of Angyalföld, Budapest.

Page 76 - *Guests at the opening ceremony. Bojár, Iván András - the first man in the picture - made the opening speech. Underground of Angyalföld* project, Local Historical Museum of Angyalföld, Budapest. Photo: Balázs Maczó.

Page 77 - *Cheer after the official opening ceremony. Underground of Angyalföld* project, Local Historical Museum of Angyalföld, Budapest.

Page 78 – *Game for community development, using the participants' objects. ContactZone* project, Museum of Ethnography, Budapest. Photo: György Máté.

Page 79 – *Discussing Rusyn culture through artefacts in the museum store. ContactZone* project, Museum of Ethnography, Budapest. Photo: Gábor Wilhelm.

Page 82, 83 - *Images of the Munkácsy Room and the Déri Múzeum. Munkácsy's audiences and communities* project, Déri Múzeum, Debrecen.

Page 84 - *At a flea-market in Graz. Collection of Collections* project, Vas County Museums' Friends Association. Photo: Éva Foki.

Page 85 - *At the Museum of Esterházy Castle. Collection of Collections* project, Vas County Museums' Friends Association. Photo: Kálmán Tóth.

Page 86 - *Opening of the exhibition. More than Life Stories – Fates* project, Baranya County Museums and Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs.

Page 87 - *Women from Baranya County, Hungary* (the photo was taken in the Urals, where they were sent for compulsory labour service, in 1946). *More than Life Stories – Fates* project, Baranya County Museums and Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs.

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