



Thinking about the museum's educative role

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It is never too much to restate the museum's educational role. This finding, which is accepted unanimously by the contemporary museology bibliography, presents, in practice, still very distinct. implications

By analyzing the museum's processes and activities in the current scenario, we realize that the educational role, implicit in its nature, is in most cases restricted to the educational departments' initiatives. And even these departments are still often focusing their activities only on the formal education, which implies a reduction of the museum's educational potential.

Thus, it is necessary to explore these two potentials: making the educational conception to permeate other departments than the one specifically destined for it and, on the other hand, expanding, in the latter, the proposals that emerge from the institution's characteristics and perceive as audience not only the school, but the general public, that is, the potential public of the museum.

Institutional guidelines

The ICOM (International Council of Museums) defines the museum as "a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and

intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment¹”, presenting, clearly, the education as one of its main purposes.

Based on that, we could assume that the acquisition, preservation, study, communication and exhibition actions and operations, accomplished by the museums, focus also on contemplating this main goal: the education.

Therefore, it is common to see, in this operational set, a distancing from this purpose in particular, what many times ends up subverting the orders and transforming the operations in the goals themselves. That is, it is not rare to find museums that see as their purposes the actions and operations of acquisition, preservation, study, communication and exhibition, establishing in that way a dynamic of confusing means and ends².

To avoid this situation and promote the articulation of the complex chain of operations carried out by the museums in order to accomplish their main goals, it is necessary to have clearly stated the importance in articulating these activities based on common goals and as interdisciplinary constructions. In that way, the sum of specific experiences and knowledge involved in each of the museum’s operations may result in a productive path to the intended purposes.

This difficult task, however, must be addressed from a solid and consistent institutional orientation, permeating the museum as a whole. In that sense, a key initiative is to establish, as a joint construction, the parameters of the institutional actions. That is, defining its Mission, Vision and Values. Based on the strength of the shared guiding concepts, correspondent initiatives can be planned in the long term. However, the pure

¹ Extracted from the article 2 of the ICOM statutes, adopted by the 16th ICOM General Assembly (Haia, Netherlands, September 5th 1989) and altered by 18th ICOM General Assembly (Stavanger, Norway, July 7th 1995) and by the 20th ICOM General Assembly (Barcelona, Spain, July 6th 2001).

² SANDELL, Richard (ed.). *Museums, society, inequality*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, preface. According to Sandell, “many museums still see the processes of collecting, preserving and exhibiting not as assignments by which the organizations generate social values, but as ends in themselves.”



documentary construction of these concepts is not enough; it is crucial to incorporate them as a determinant axis of daily practices and constantly return to them in case of institutional decision-making.

It is the museum's direction responsibility to promote the reflection, the shared construction and the systematic use of that framework that establishes, in the end, the intentions of the institution, offering clarity to its principles, proposals and decisions.

As a subsidy for this purpose, it is important to always have in mind the institution's profile (already existing or to be created: the motives of its existence, its characteristics, history, kind of collection, localization, etc) as well as the audience's (visitors and non-visitors), once that we are assuming that the museum in itself is the representation of a community/society's culture, not only of those who visit it.

It should also be taken in consideration that the museum's educational nature goes beyond the construction of meaning of its Collection's art objects and assets knowledge, and also includes the development of the individuals and the formation of an audience for culture.

Internal Education

Another essential issue to contemplate the educational nature of the institution is to act internally in the constant and systematic training of the museum's employees, aiming to develop an awareness of the role of each one of them.

Each and every employee of the museum needs to keep in mind that part of his performance is directly related to the institution's educational role and, therefore, must be aware of that and mobilized to achieve this goal with the specific contributions of its work.

Although it may seem obvious, this challenge is often faced internally in the museum. Due to the variety and complexity of professional performances that are part of the

institution, many times it is perceived among the employees themselves an incomprehension of the museum's main goals.

This phenomenon may be caused by a misperception of museum's roles, reinforced by the centuries these institutions operate, often focusing, inside its operational chain, on the actions related to safeguarding, and not to communication, concerned more with their collections than with their public.³

Reversing this situation, pointing to the educational nature of the museum, is a task that requires special and constant attention, and a focal action through internal education process, solidly grounded and promoted by the institutional affirmation. That is, the educational nature of the museum should relate not only to the external public, visitors and potential visitors, but also to the institution itself, preparing the professionals for fulfilling its educational nature.

Educative areas

It is common for museums to, as a way of accomplishing their educational role, constitute departments exclusively for the promotion of educational activities. This initiative, which could be crucial to disseminate and strengthen the specific knowledge related to education to the other areas, has its role often distorted, becoming of their sole responsible the educational processes developed by the institution.

³ “There are those who preserve for nostalgia, there are those who preserve in order to valorize and put assets in evidence in a very subjective and particular scale, and there are those who preserve to keep informative records, because every action needs a previous information. The latter reflects the dynamism of the preservation while museological action (inform to act), reproaches object and men (man and reality), revitalizing the cultural fact.” GUARNIERI, Waldisa Russio Camargo. In: BRUNO, Maria Cristina Oliveira (Org.) . Waldisa Rússio Camargo Guarnieri - textos e contextos de uma trajetória profissional. São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado: Secretaria de Estado da Cultura: Comitê Brasileiro do ICOM, 2010. v. 2. P.156.



As discussed above, it is necessary a steady institutional guideline for the transformation of this scenario. However, the educational departments of the museums also face their own challenges, including clarifying the confusion people make between education and school. Education is a natural human process, developed in the social practices and involving different and varied actors and cultural ways of being, living and acting, required for the coexistence of the social group.⁴ The school, on the other hand, is a type of institution created to regularize and standardize some of these natural processes, proposed there intentionally and with certain goals, and nowadays (unfortunately) it focus mostly on the professional training of the individuals. The education in schools is known as formal education, due to the systems developed to standardize the educational processes, such as the articulation of knowledge in disciplines, for example. The education process, though, is constituted by other players and institutions, which have different systems and formats from the formal education.⁵

Thus, it is essential that the museums' educational departments are aware that their acting areas goes beyond the relationships with schools, although they can and should work with them.

One of the main challenges in this specific relationship is the demand for the training of formal education teachers about the qualified enjoyment of culture. This demand, which arose possibly from the training processes that disregarded the importance of this content, led museums to develop specific initiatives for this purpose, consolidating under its non-formal educational activities a practice that, in principle, possible didn't fit these institutions.

Among the teachers' training initiatives, the more required is the production of supporting materials to the educational practice. These didactic publications aim to help the

⁴ ROBERTS, Lisa C. *From knowledge to narrative: educators and the changing museum*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997, p. 2.

⁵ AIDAR, Gabriela; CHIOVATTO, Milene. Ação educativa em museus (*Educational Initiatives in museums*). In: PARK, Margareth B.; FERNANDES, Renata S.; CARNICEL, Amarildo (Orgs.). *Holambra/Campinas*: Ed. Setembro/Unicamp-CMU, 2007.



construction of knowledge about heritage, culture and specific cultural objects, according to the museum's view, favoring inclusion - in the school curriculum – of such content.

As we said, the museum's audience is not just the school; therefore, its educational proposals can't only be restricted to the public.

Having this in mind, the museums' educative departments should be aware of its different visitors' profiles, but also worry about achieving the public that is still not a museum's visitor, recognizing it as potential audience, and having a clear perception of the educational potentials of the institution in which they operate. Therefore, it is essential to conduct a survey about its public, concerning the profile of its visitors and their expectations, and to expand this research to verify the potential public surrounding the institution, or its scope of representation.

Based on this scenario it will be possible to develop actions specifically designed for each profile that you want to meet, attract, train and/or to incorporate as a museum's visitor.

Currently, in addition to the educational visits - perhaps the best known part of the museum education area - and the teacher training activities, it can be developed actions focusing on special public: groups in situations of social vulnerability, families, children, seniors, teenagers and the internal staff of the museum itself, finally, proposals as varied as the its public.

It is necessary, still, a constant evaluation process in order to verify the implemented initiatives' efficiency, as well as perceiving new opportunities of action.

Finally

The museum's educational nature must be present in its own constitution, ie, the museum should be educational *a priori*. This means that such awareness must pervade all its instances and performances, being a fundamental and constant guideline for the



institution. For such, it is required the consolidation of this perception in conceptual documents that are incorporated into all areas of the institution.

Maybe the best way of doing this is promoting the clear comprehension of the museum as a space of education and knowledge, open for each and all.