

THE YOUTH AND MUSEUMS PROJECT

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This project is included in the 2009 action plan of the World Federation of Clubs, Centres and Associations for UNESCO (WFUCA).

Project organiser is ELITE ART Club for UNESCO – a non-governmental organisation based in Bucharest and specialised in Romanian contemporary art and cultural events promotion. ELITE ART Club for UNESCO is active member of the Romanian Federation of Clubs, Centres and Associations for UNESCO.

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As part of the *YOUTH and MUSEUMS* Project, the *European Conference on Youth Education in Museums* was held on May 14-17, 2009 at the “D. Gusti” National

Village Museum in Bucharest under the joint aegis of UNESCO-Paris.

The context that substantiates the present proposal and the problems addressed

Culture is a window on world and on self, a dynamic process involving learning – as a social and transformative process – and sharing.

Cultural education plays a decisive role in constructing the young European generations; it represents the key to the development of a society of communication and tolerance on sustainable basis. At the same time, cultural education enhances the exchange of ideas and values as well as the mutual understanding between young people.

The museum – nucleus of research and reflection, on one side, and space of encounter and dialogue, on the other side – preserves vestiges of material

culture, thus mediating the public access to the non-material dimension of culture. Thereby, artistic, spiritual and identity values are put across society, in particular across the youth.

Along with a good continuation of a wide range of scientific activities, such as study and conservation, the European museums are nowadays called upon challenging the alternative offers extant on the market as well as upon meeting the latest demands made on by a culturally diverse youth.

In this context, we ask ourselves: What should museums do to draw in and hold the attention of the young European generations?

By which means can museums still attract the young audience and how can they keep the interest of this audience alive?

To what extent should high-technology penetrate into the museum sphere?

How far can the educational programmes promoted in museums reach the young audience? In which ways can the respective programmes influence the youngster's lifestyles, enrich their knowledge and stimulate their imagination and creativity?

In which ways can the quality of engagement with the museum be measured?

How could the relationship between big events and focused engagement with the museum be kept in balance?

What has become the museum and what will/should it look like in the future?

The *YOUth and MUSEums* Project brings into focus key-issues regarding cultural youth education in museums and searches for a plurality of answers to the above mentioned questions.

Targets

This project aims to substantially contribute to developing successful youth educational programmes in museums via a series of debates between curators for young people's education. At the same time, this project promotes the exchange of educational methods, strategies and technologies between the participant institutions in order to elaborate youth educational programmes common to museums from several European countries including Romania. Not least, *YOUth and MUSEums* aims at a sustainable development of the European youth sensibility and respect for the values of the intra- and interregional heritage as means of intercultural dialogue as well as of knowledge and preservation of one's cultural identity.

The present project will contribute to consolidating an international network of young audience education and development experts.

YOUth and MUSEums clearly opens perspectives for a sustainable tourism in Europe, in general, and in Romania, in particular, by encouraging the (local) cultural heritage preservation as well as the mobility and intercultural dialogue between the European youngsters.

This project is to be also implemented outside the European continent.

Key activities

The short-, respectively long-term activities to be carried out in order to develop youth educational programmes common to the museums involved in this project are the following:

1. *The European Conference on Youth Education in Museums* (Bucharest, May 14-17, 2009) – a meeting between representatives of UNESCO-Paris, of several well-renowned European museums (such as the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Tate Modern in London, and The Israel Museum in Jerusalem) and of the European Federation of Clubs, Centres and Associations for UNESCO.

2. The *YOUth and MUSEums* virtual forum, that will network several European museums, cultural organisations, schools, colleges and universities from Romania and abroad.

The participation in the forum at issue will be restricted to museum curators for young people's education and to representatives of educational institutions, of UNESCO-Paris, of ELITE ART Club for UNESCO, and of the European Federation of Associations, Centres and Clubs for UNESCO. Nevertheless, the results of the discussions held on the virtual forum will be freely accessed by everybody.

The management of the *YOUth and MUSEums* Project is made out

of Romania. The team of ELITE ART Club for UNESCO is in charge with the coordination of the main activities related to the maintenance and upgrade of the web-site.

3. The electronic archive *YOUth and MUSEums*. This archive will collect updated articles, resources and links regarding cultural youth education in museums, that will be thematically, geographically and chronologically listed.

Focus will go on information issued from the education departments of the European museums participating in the *YOUth and MUSEums* Project. Thereby, the departments at issue will be networked and the wide range of their electronic resources concerning the topic under discussion interlinked. Once the electronic archive set up, a common ground for upcoming debates on youth museum education in museums will be thus established.

4. The *Guide of Good Practices in Cultural Youth Education in Museums*, that will gather the most efficient and creative youth educational programmes developed in the European museums participating in this project.

What has been achieved up to present

The European Conference on Youth Education in Museums took place on May 14-17, 2009 at the "D. Gusti" National Village Museum in Bucharest.

The Conference Schedule was structured around the following core themes:

Types and Goals of Youth Educational Programmes in Museums, Art Galleries and Cultural Organisations

Youth Educational Methods, Strategies and Technologies in Museums – Past, Present and Future. Thinking Outside the Box: Ways of Informal Teaching and of Young Audience Development

The European *YOUTH and MUSEums* Network

Along with 40 paper presentations, several panel discussions were held on the following topics:

Whats and Hows of Youth Education in Museums, Art Galleries and Cultural Organisations: Dos and Dont's, Problems and Antidotes, Burning Tasks for the Future

Ways to develop the European *YOUTH and MUSEums* Network

YOUTH and MUSEums Partnership Building

What should museums do in order to draw in and hold the attention of the young European generations?

Fourty experts in cultural youth education in museums and a group of young people representing several clubs, centres and associations for UNESCO issued

from 15 European countries have delivered highly inspiring papers on the given topic. The diversity of cultural backgrounds displayed throughout the conference turned the meeting into an exciting experience for all the participants.

Papers by curators for young people's education either dealt with youth educational programmes in general, or focused on a particular educational programme developed in a certain European museum.

Papers by young representatives of several European clubs, centres and associations for UNESCO pooled the results of a youth survey carried out as follows.

A series of open ended questions were asked to middle and high school children and to students to obtain statistically useful information about their relationship to museums.

Questions were formulated by the ELITE ART Club for UNESCO team.

In the end, a data analysis was requested.

The young representatives of the clubs, centres and associations for UNESCO comprehended the results yielded by their survey and presented the respective results at the conference in Bucharest.

Panel discussions reprised major points addressed in the paper presentations and raised questions regarding museum identity and development. They concluded that an appropriated way to draw in and to hold the attention of the young

European generations to museums is to strengthen and further develop the social and communicative nature of museums.

Touching young people's minds and hearts, promoting pleasurable or satisfying leisure activities, involving all of the senses in a variety of experiences including the young public's total immersion into a newly recreated culturally

specific framework, promoting big events along with personalised learning opportunities that could enable learners to feel valued as individuals, developing a network of peer leaders ready to mentor constitute successful ways of reaching both a high rate of young / (return) visitors as well as a high quality of the young audience's engagement with the museum.

Bibliographical references

BENNETT T., *The birth of the museum: history, theory, politics* (Routledge, 1995).

HOOPER-GREENHILL E. (ed.), *The educational role of the museum* (Routledge, 1999), 2nd Edition.

LANG C., REEVE J., WOOLLARD V. (eds.), *The Responsive Museum: Working With Audiences in the Twenty-first Century* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006).

Electronic resources

www.europa.eu/index_en.htm
(Europa Gateway to the European Union)
www.nfer.ac.uk/research-areas/arts-education/
(National Foundation for Educational Research, United Kingdom)

www.intime.uni.edu/multiculture/index.htm
(Integrating New Technologies into the Methods of Education)

www.edchange.org/multicultural/initial.html
(EdChange Multicultural Pavilion, Working Definition of Multicultural Education).