

## MUSEUM EDUCATION AS A SOLUTION FOR SAVING THE MISSION OF A SMALL MUSEUM

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*More important than knowledge is imagination.*

A. Einstein

The museums have as essential mission the conservation, research and enhancing the value of the cultural heritage. Valorising the cultural heritage can be done in many ways, with different degrees of attraction and spectacularity. Generally small museums or local ones do not have a rich collection, but even there are some exceptions. However they hold a major advantage in the relation with the local community – their larger degree of representing it. Unfortunately, the national museums have lesser visitors from the local community because of their lack of attractiveness caused by the poorer representation of local cultural values. As for the small museums or the local ones, these are complaining about the reduced number of visitors due to the fact that they do not have a bigger and valuable collection. The question that remains is: which is the solution for attracting or re-attracting the public in a small museum? The answer we can offer is the museum education plan. This answer however implies an objective process of self-evaluation of the real issues, the evaluation of resources (human, financial and heritage ones) and a drop of creativity in

the effort of the enhancing the actual museum collections. We do not want to hide the fact that in the process of identifying the possible museum education activities we cannot ignore the experience and best practices of other similar institutions, which means that mainly a museum can take and adapt the programmes of other museums with much more experience in this field, but it is compulsory for the cultural institution to develop in time its own museum education programmes, focused on its collections.

### Short history

The Museum "Mureseni House" of Brasov was founded in 1968 with a small infrastructure and a limited number of employees – 5 rooms at the second floor of the house from no. 25<sup>th</sup> Piata Sfatului, Brasov, with three employees. The advantage was from the beginning that of the existence of a rich collection of cultural items, about 300 objects and 20.000 historical documents. This situation had changed totally in 1997 when it gained the autonomy from the mother institution, the County History Museum, legally and financially. Through successive acquisitions the museum extended

itself on the entire second floor of the building from no. 25<sup>th</sup> Piata Sfatului. At this, in 2004, was added the donation of Stefan Baci, a duplex apartment situated at no. 9 G. Baiulescu Street, with a collection of 10.000 cultural objects.

The museum has a tradition dating from '80s – a group of high-school students had in their school programme as a discipline the educational research on the documents from the Mureseni archive, under the coordination of the curator Mircea Gherman. This experience was a memorable one, and this fact was confirmed by the personalities from the Romanian cultural life such as Caius Dobrescu and Sorin Matei that were educated there. These, together with their generation colleagues, had direct access to the original documents dated of 19<sup>th</sup> century and to the newspaper of the Mureseni family, *Gazeta Transilvaniei* (Transylvanian Newspaper).

The new team of museum specialists from 2000s, under the coordination of Mrs. Sanda Maria Buta, the director of the museum at that time, had developed a series of museum activities for pupils, based on volunteering and free access to the educational programme called “5 steps to be better”. This package of museum activities, developed also through the cooperation with The Group of Local Initiatives Corona, an NGO coordinated by the sociologist Angela Dobrescu, consisted in five thematic workshops, organised as cultural circles, with weekly meetings (each working day of the week a circle

had a meeting), on the following subjects: history, literature, music, visual art, and theatre. These meetings had taken place for ten weeks, after the structure of a school semester. The first coordinators of the programmes were: Valer Rus and Ovidiu Savu (history), Carmen Andrei and Laura Molnar (literature), Mihai Gorbonov (music), Anca Maria Zamfir (art), Miruna Văju and Silvian Duică (theatre).

The first public proof of the value of the experience acquired during these educational meetings was at “The Days of Brasov”, the city celebration, in which all the museum circles students participated, either as actors, or as street visual artists or volunteers for the epoch costumes parade. The students from the visual art circle had a small exhibition in one of the museum terraces, gaining in this way a moment of public recognition for their artistic activity. Among the students of the museum circles at least two of them became students of History or Art. Moreover, almost all the participants had good results at school. In the end, they all became the real museum friends, coming even nowadays to the museum to enjoy and relax.

### **Professional phase**

Once the museum gained experience in the field of museum education, there was the moment of professionalisation of this activity. Through formal requests of the management team of

the museum but also through the specialized training offered by the Centre of Professional Training in Culture, the educational activity in the museum has been reorganised and repositioned. Now, the museum has six packages of educational programmes: "Play, communication, learning"; "Communication and creativity", "Children conservators", "Let's read the grandparents' newspaper", "The history of clothing styles of the 19<sup>th</sup> century" and "Poetry and communication". These programmes are offered to the elementary schools and high schools from Brasov. The educational activities are taking part in the permanent and temporary exhibitions. Once the educational programmes implemented, the number of visitors increased.

Here are some short descriptions of the educational programmes of the museum:

### **Play, Communication, Learning**

The programme lasts four weeks and it is dedicated to the pupils of elementary school, from the second to the fourth class. First meeting takes place at the museum where there are series of interactive games, presentations of documentary films, legends and myths about Brasov. During the second visit the pupils will be trained in the clay modelling. The third meeting, called *Discover the*

*music*, consists in the description and learning of unconventional musical instruments. During the fourth meeting the pupils go to a short trip in the Brasov Fortress.

### **Children Conservators**

The educator presents to the children the world of the writing and writing devices, printing and book. They will discover the procedures of paper making, what is the difference between handmade paper and the industrial one used today. The documents from the Mureseni archive are taken as an example. The children will learn why the books are covered, how one can keep them, and especially how they are restored. The most attractive part is the practical one, when the children become little restorers. The photocopies made after documents are damaged and then the children are put to restore them. The last meeting is at the Mureseni archive, where children can see how the documents from the museum collections are kept and preserved.

### **Children and Books**

This programme addresses children from the secondary school. It includes presentations of elements from the history of writing and of printing. The children will make their own research plan. They will find out who was Newton, they will learn the Morse code, and they will transfer texts from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin one.

### Let's Read The Grandparents' Newspaper

The children will learn about the using of the Cyrillic alphabet in the Romanian literature of 16<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and about the first political newspaper of the Romanians from Transylvania – *Transylvanian Journal* - that at the beginning had Cyrillic characters. During the workshop the children will be handed out the Cyrillic alphabet and will learn how to transcribe that alphabet into Latin alphabet and into contemporary language. This programme addresses the secondary school children.

### The History of Clothing Styles

There will be three meetings in which the participants will discover the history of 19<sup>th</sup> century: the feminine costumes, the masculine ones, hats, accessories, hair styles, social life. This programme addresses the elementary and secondary school children.

### Communication and Creativity

This programme addresses the elementary school children. The themes are:

1. What is poetry
2. Reading and books
3. Communication and its responsibility
4. Symbols and images. Their role in life and art.