

MeLA: European Museums and Libraries in/of the Age of Migrations

Proposal Abstract

If it is accepted as true that all the places (cities, territories) where different individuals and social groups live and where institutions find their role and forms of social representation, museums and libraries today find themselves in the middle of a process involving the construction of a pluralistic civic community that is capable of expressing the multiplicity and the dynamics of the ever-changing needs of the people as well as the multiplicity of today's transnational culture. The Proposal intends to overturn the traditional idea of museum and libraries as places of consolidation, conservation and transmission of the identity of a dominant social group, as well as the traditional relationship between this institution and the civil society it represents as part of a nation, in order to define new strategies for the multi-inter-transcultural organization of the conservation, exhibition and transmission of knowledge, in ways and forms that are capable of reflecting the conditions posed by the migration of people and ideas in the global world and its influences on the European Union process during last 30 years.

Adapting the concept of *contact zone* formulated by M. L. Pratt, the Proposal reconsiders the identity of Museums and Libraries as a historical theme, tackled on the basis of new cultural productions and new relations. Consequently, considered as 'contact areas', their organizational structure becomes a topical historical, political and moral relation: an exchange of power relations. In a manner that is in some aspects utopian, museums and libraries are being reconsidered as public venues for collaboration, shared control and complex translation; places of power turned into places of cultural integration; places of complex hybrid multi-cultural representation of identity (different layers of identity); places of knowledge; places of conservation; places of meeting and mutual understanding on the free ground of cultural research.

The purpose of MeLA program is to develop basic multi-disciplinary resources necessary for investigating and comparing the major public structure of Museums and Libraries, as created historically and responding to contemporary challenges of globalisation, European integration, and new media.

To fulfil the overall task, the project has been divided into 6 themes and in several actions performed through specific WPs. This should lead both to a better investigation and to stronger networking.

The quality of presented Proposal and its connected results are – as consequence –committed also to an innovative structure for the WPs drafted upon 4 main research actions:

1. 'Think Tank' process

Proposing cross-fertilization between Management and Research: the Think Tank process has been chosen for an in-depth consideration of issues and challenges whose relevance reaches beyond the individual person or programme and the immediate time frame.

2. 'Field Investigations'

Recording and monitoring case studies within and outside the Proposal Network.

3. 'Desk Research'

Traditional secondary research.

4. 'Research by Art'

To spin-off the role of art/artists in understanding/interpreting contemporary society.

Every WP has one or two curatorial Partners, and – in collaboration with Consortium –they are responsible for critical interpretation of collected/produced data and elaboration, for each step, of

dissemination outputs. Following the complete list of work-packages: WP1: Museums & Identity in History; WP2: Is Cultural memory a paradigm? Why preserve it; WP3: EU Transnational Museums and Libraries Network; WP4: Cultural Studies in/for Museum Contexts: Museum Studies; WP5: ICT role in Museums, Libraries and Exhibition Design; WP6: Curatorial and artistic research; WP7: Envisioning Museums & Libraries for the Post-national Society; WP8: Experimental design application; WP9: Dissemination and Exploitation ; WP10: Project Management

The planned actions as a whole will therefore not only focus on “diversities and commonalities as these are reflected in European cultures” but will take into consideration the rising presence of migrants in contemporary Europe and their role in transforming EU Society in terms of culture and in shaping the forthcoming Europe.

Moreover

The expected advancements are related to the specific research topics of the project, focused on increasing the awareness and capabilities of museums and libraries about their roles in promoting the EU citizenship "in the age of migration", and will make converge all the gathered knowledge about museums/libraries studies, social/cultural studies and Cultural heritage enhancement phenomenology.

“A good deal of contemporary museum theory and practice has concerned itself with the ways in which museum and library environments –and the social and symbolic exchanges that take place within them- might be refashioned so as to transform museums into ‘differencing machines’ committed to the promotion of cross-cultural understanding, especially across divisions that have been racialized. The question is whether this aspiration involves a series of collateral changes that, taken together, add up to at more general change in how museums and libraries operate and their situation within the cultural field. To put the point more rhetorically: does the conception of the museum as a “differencing machine” aspire to new forms of dialogism that place earlier notions of exhibition and catalogue into question?

In some respects, museums and libraries now seem self-evidently to be parts of more globalized flows of information, people, and ideas. They reach out not only beyond their own walls but also beyond national boundaries through new practices of Web curation, and their audiences, at least in the case of major metropolitan institutions, tend to be increasingly cosmopolitan, reflecting the growth of cultural tourism. It remains the case, however, that public museums and libraries are largely, and probably entirely, the administrative creations of national, Municipal, or local governments or private organizations.” (Bennet, 2006.)

List of participants

Participant no.	Participant organization name	Country
1 (Coordinator)	Politecnico di Milano	Italy
2	Università degli studi Napoli “L’Orientale”	Italy
3	University of Glasgow	United Kingdom
4	Newcastle University	United Kingdom
5	Museum National d’Histoire Naturelle	France
6	Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design	Denmark
7	Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche	Italy
8	The Royal College of Arts	United Kingdom
9	MACBA	Spain