

Plural Stories: The Guatelli Museum, objects and life histories

The history of the Guatelli Museum is closely connected with the personal story of its creator, Ettore Guatelli, a primary school teacher born in 1921. Interested in objects as evidence of the history of mankind, Ettore Guatelli was particularly fascinated by the narratives they embody and unfold. These stories were transcribed by Guatelli, and are still preserved in the archives of the Museum Foundation. The collection reflects the lives of peasant workers through the poetry of objects (utensils from rural culture and everyday objects such as boxes, toys, shoes and pottery), evocatively displayed on the museum walls.

The pilot project *Plural Stories* drew inspiration from the museum founder's vision, in that it aimed to collect histories and experiences of participants connected in some way with the collections, and develop them through the language of theatre. Clio '92, an association of teachers / researchers in history teaching, took part in the planning and monitoring of the project.

Objectives

- To initiate intercultural dynamics in a problematic area (the province of Parma) from the point of view of local policies promoting literacy in migrant communities, through the “opening” of the museum to an often excluded audience;
- To promote the heritage awareness of “new citizens” outside formal learning contexts, in order to help them recognise, interpret and conceptualise tangible and intangible elements acquiring a heritage value with respect to both their original culture and the culture of the place where they have settled;
- To help participants (native and migrant women) develop an awareness of their own and others' cultural identity in an inclusive light, and adopt a socially responsible behaviour towards fellow citizens and the local heritage;
- To train participants to act in their respective professional and life contexts as mediators of the museum heritage from an intercultural perspective.

Process

Project participants (ten women, two of whom Italian), identified through contacts with local associations and with the support of two neighbouring local authorities (Collecchio and Fornovo), worked together for five months with weekly meetings of three hours each. Most of these meetings, held at the Guatelli Museum, were aimed at putting theatre workshop activities and intercultural issues into context, collecting expertise and knowledge related to domestic and professional life, and identifying the objects and stories which would then be at the heart of the theatre workshop run by FestinaLente Teatro, one of the museum's partners. This phase of the project was primarily aimed at recovering stories through the interaction between participants, who offered their personal interpretation of the museum collections through the exchange of narratives connected with their respective contexts of origin.

Theatre language enabled a strong interaction between the women involved, who shared gestures and life stories triggered by the museum displays. The past embodied in objects was conceived and explored as a “foreign country,” which helped define a “third space” where participants could share the development of new knowledge, skills and experiences.

The project ended with a theatre performance, *Plural stories: from hand to hand*, in which women gave life to their stories through spoken and body language. The show, which encourages the active involvement of the audience, was highly successful, and is having a long run in other contexts.

Outcomes

- The encounter and interaction between individuals from different backgrounds and realities helped not only the museum, but also migrant women, to develop a new openness towards their territorial context;
- *Plural Stories* was also an important opportunity for the museum to initiate partnerships with new actors (local authorities, Trade Union Headquarters, social and migrant associations, FestinaLente Theatre), which will inform future projects;
- The museum developed a new awareness of the local intercultural dynamics and immigration and integration policies;
- In the short to medium term, the museum is committed to giving continuity to the project, so that the women involved may become museum mediators and be actively involved in the planning of intercultural guided tours addressed to the local community (both migrant and native).

Institutions

Ettore Guatelli Museum Foundation

www.museoguatelli.it

Clio '92 Association

www.clio92.it

In collaboration with

Comune di Collecchio (Assessorato alla Cultura), Comune di Fornovo, Comune di Sala Baganza, Provincia di Parma, Fondazione Monte di Parma, Forum Solidarietà, Festina Lente Teatro, Associazione Le Giraffe, Associazione Vagamonde.

Project Coordinators

- For the Ettore Guatelli Museum Foundation:

Mario Turci, Director, direttore@museoguatelli.it

Jessica Anelli, curator, info@museoguatelli.it

- For Clio '92 Association: Adriana Bortolotti, Mario Calidoni, Silvia Mascheroni and Ivo Mattozzi

Target groups

Native and migrant women (some of them teachers) aged between 18 and 60, selected outside formal learning contexts