

Interculture as the Portrait of a City

The City Museum of Mirandola collects and preserves the history of the city from its foundation to the end of the nineteenth century. Recently relocated in the Pico family castle, it is organised in sections devoted to specific disciplines and themes, from portrait painting to numismatics and archaeology. Particular attention has been devoted to the creation of a flexible space for educational activities, which, in line with the most advanced museological trends, allows younger audiences to approach the museum in a more dynamic and innovative way. The education department's activities started with the project *Interculture as the Portrait of a City*, targeted at local secondary school students and their teachers.

Objectives

- To recognise historical and spiritual roots belonging to all human beings through museum objects;
- To promote in young citizens a critical awareness of models, values and symbols related to their own culture;
- To help them develop an open and critical approach to other cultures;
- To overcome prejudice and stereotype, by resisting the emergence of xenophobic and racist attitudes in pre-adolescent groups;
- To promote group work 'through the acceptance of difference,' thereby breeding in young participants an openness to exchange and a cooperative attitude;
- To help participants "transfer" attitudes and behaviours developed throughout the project in contexts other than the museum.

Process

The project was organised in three main phases:

1. Visit to the museum building and collections. Students and their teachers were guided through exhibition spaces and invited to look at the museum as a mirror of the local community's life and evolution. Particular attention was devoted to the Pico family's picture gallery and portraits.
2. Debate on a variety of themes in the museum space devoted to educational activities. Taking their cue from the portraits seen in the picture gallery, students, teachers and museum staff discussed themes ranging from representation to identity, belonging, journeys as an opportunity for self-development, metamorphosis / change, the family and its evolution over time, stereotypes. The family theme in particular triggered several reflections, concerning for example:
 - the different typologies of family, all representative, in their own way, of contemporary society;
 - the different traditions, cultures, religions and festivities of these families;
 - the way they live together in the same territory;
 - the different ways in which a territory may be perceived and experienced from different perspectives.
3. Workshop activities aimed at the creation of individual and collective artworks connected with the chosen themes. Every student interpreted, individually and visually, the concept of union and collaboration. The collective artwork, on the

other hand, concerned the representation of the city of Mirandola today and the way it is experienced and perceived by its inhabitants.

The final products of this activity were displayed in a temporary exhibition open to the general public.

Results

The main benefits for project participants were the following:

- Students developed a new ability to tell their own stories and to listen to others;
- They developed a greater understanding of diversity;
- They showed a greater openness to dialogue and exchange, as well as a willingness to question their own points of view;
- They approached and explored the local cultural heritage in a new light;
- Students of immigrant background developed a sounder knowledge of local history.

As for the museum, the project initiated a reflection on the social role of heritage and its rethinking from an intercultural perspective; the museum staff developed new skills in working in partnership with other institutions and actors dealing with immigration and integration.

Institution

City Museum of Mirandola

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Target groups

Secondary school students and their teachers (5 classes, 131 students in total).

Following a meeting with City Museum officials during which the project was presented, classes were selected by the teachers themselves on the grounds of each individual group's learning needs and objectives