Interculturart: a project of intercultural mediation between museum, school and territory

The Zaffiria Centre is a specialist organisation of Rimini's Province, a cultural agency of CET (Territorial Educational Centre of some of Rimini's neighbouring towns) and originator of a national database on mass media education. It runs media education workshops and training courses for teachers and parents. It is member of a European network called Media4me, comprising partners from 10 other countries.

Interculturart was initiated by Zaffiria Centre with a view to helping Emilia Romagna's museums – in this case the Museum of Impressions in Rimini, one of the MAP for ID project partners – become places of dialogue and integration, 'by suggesting a good practice model of audience development for reaching people who don't have enough expertise or opportunities to know and enjoy them, and by conceiving museum exhibits as "instrumental objects" capable of triggering interpersonal exchange.'

Objectives

- To make secondary school students aware of the existence of 'a cultural heritage which allows them to develop new visions on themselves and the surrounding world;'
- To promote the knowledge of local museums in young audiences, particularly those with an immigrant background;
- To encourage reflection and debate on immigration issues, starting from unusual places (the museum) and in an engaging manner;
- To promote a wider understanding and recognition of extra-European cultures;
- To offer young migrants new opportunities for visibility through artistic expression.

Phases

In the project's preliminary phase, the collections of the Museum of Impressions were thoroughly examined so as to identify the more challenging objects – masks – from the point of view of young participants' interests and life experiences (students from a school located in the historic centre of Rimini, with a growing population of immigrant background whose opportunities for cultural participation are severely limited).

The subsequent activities were targeted at each one of the three classes involved:

1. Workshops at the museum to discover and reinterpret the pre-selected masks. The project team opted for a visit as active and participatory as possible, by inviting each student to choose a mask which had particularly struck him or her, and through the identification of objects on display with informal games. Educational materials were also prepared, which are now available to other museum educators for future use;

2. Workshops on new technologies at the Zaffiria Centre, aimed at understanding how contemporary youths use masks for communication purposes, in the light of new and old communication media;

3. Art workshops aimed at questioning the role of masks in the past and present through contemporary art. Under the guidance of two artists (one Italian, one Argentine), participants were challenged to rethink communication through art and to create a mask of their own by using materials of common use (for

example, plastic bottles, yoghurt pots, corks and plastic glasses and cutlery). The choice of materials for assembling the masks was due to the small time available for workshops, their low cost and availability, but also for their adaptability to the shape of faces;

4. Temporary exhibition at the museum, with participants' artworks and the video materials produced throughout the project.

Results
Project outcomes for participants were significant in terms of:

- Recognition and empowerment from a creative point of view;
- An opportunity to experience the museum as "curators" of an exhibition open to the whole city, rather than plain visitors and consumers;
- Satisfaction with the quality of artworks and of the final exhibition.

At institutional level, the most important results were:

- A consolidated partnership between the Zaffiria Centre and the Museum of Impressions;
- The development of skills to respond more fully and effectively to cultural access needs and to promote youth creativity;
- A greater awareness and mastery of the intercultural potential of collections (the masks were conceived not only as something to look at in museum showcases, but first and foremost as objects to renegotiate, by exploring new and more relevant meanings), opening opportunities for future projects.

Critical points:

- The number of participants, higher than expected, required the project team to place group work before individual work;
- There were also some difficulties in involving participants' families.

Institutions
Zaffiria Centre
www.zaffiria.it
Museum of Impressions
www.museicomunalirimini.it/musei/museo_sguardi/

Project coordinators
Alessandra Falconi, Director, Zaffiria Centre, zaffiria@comune.bellaria-igea-marina.rn.it
Maurizio Biordi, Director, Museum of Impressions, maurizio.biordi@comune.rimini.it

Target groups
Italian and immigrant students in three secondary school classes with a high percentage of foreign pupils (71 participants in total)