

Museums and Libraries: Spaces for intercultural dialogue

Within the framework of MAP for ID, three projects took place based on the joint activity of a museum and a library. The rationale behind them was that collaboration between libraries and museums can reinforce the aims of both institutions and support a more joined-up approach to reaching potential publics. Each project aimed at promoting different “readings” of museum pieces, supported by texts from the library.

Objectives

These varied among the participating institutions, but generally included:

- “Surprising” library users by offering something unusual and unexpected by locating museum objects in a space that is not traditionally theirs;
- Promoting different interpretations of the objects, from personal experiences to more formal readings, for example by creating connections between objects and contemporary literature, or by analysing the historical, aesthetic and formal aspects of the piece, with bibliographical support;
- Improving the reading and storytelling competencies of participants;
- Providing space to share and to know other cultures, thus promoting intercultural dialogue;
- Gathering opinions from all types of library users;
- Creating a project blog, in order to encourage the active participation and feedback of target groups (all three projects did this);
- Encouraging the participation of non-users by organising attractive activities for all kinds of audiences, including those less accustomed to visiting or using either museums or libraries.

Activities

Project 1: *A Sea of Cultures, a Sea of Readings: The Mediterranean in Classical Antiquity* (Library of Andalucía and Archaeological and Ethnographic Museum of Granada)

This project took the theme of cultures living together in the Mediterranean area during classical antiquity. It began by choosing the museum pieces which were most suitable to its aims. At the same time the coordinators started looking for the main work to be shown in the Library. This “masterpiece” needed to allow multiple readings and the study of the chosen theme both from a diachronic and a synchronic perspective.

A Sea of Cultures, a Sea of Readings was conceived to promote public participation. The coordinators wanted the audience to look at the project with a plural approach, and supported this by programming activities with a range of methodologies and formats (including a music and poetry recital, a film screening and workshops for the school community) appropriate to different publics which visit or could visit the Library.

The activities demonstrated that objects can tell many stories beyond their materiality:

- The Exhibition at the Library of a statue from the Museo Arqueológico y Etnográfico de Granada (MAEG): a reproduction of the Venus Paulenca from Guadix, dated between the second and the fourth century A.D., was exhibited along with a piece from the Library cartographic collection (*Carte de l'Empire romain depuis Constantin jusqu'à la fin du 4e. siècle*, printed in Paris in 1861);

- A music and poetry recital, *Venus in the Garden*, illustrated how authors from the past have treated the theme of Venus. Texts were read in their original languages (Latin, Greek, Italian and Spanish) to draw attention to the authentic sound of the words;
- Workshops for primary school children to present in a clear and didactic manner topics such as trade and navigation through the Mediterranean as way of relationship between cultures in past times;
- Workshops for secondary school students to present in a didactic manner topics including mythology, trade and navigation through the Mediterranean as way of relationship between cultures of the past, with an emphasis on the Iberian Peninsula;
- A screening of Joseph L. Mankiewicz' 1953 film, *Julius Caesar*: chosen in collaboration with the Andalusia Film Archive, the film, based on William Shakespeare's play, is illustrative of some of the different readings and interpretations of the Roman world throughout history. Projecting the film in its original English version emphasised the "other readings" approach.

Project 2: *Different Readings: between Libraries and Museums* (Central Library of Complutense University and Museo de América, Madrid)

The Philology Library and Geography and History Library are located within the university campus and form part of the Central Library of the Complutense University. The aim of this project was to offer common users of the libraries objects from the Museum collection which would encourage multiple readings and catch their interest as new audiences.

Both libraries exhibited a facsimile of the *Codex Trocortesiano*, a masterpiece of the Museo de América, alongside a ritual mask of the Guerrero State in Mexico that had not previously been exhibited in the Museum. The two pre-Hispanic pieces had a ritual component: the dance to which the mask belongs promotes fertility, and the codex is an astrological calendar. Both pieces respond to the universal human need to try to secure a propitious future. During the exhibition, two conferences focused on these objects and their historic and contemporary meanings:

- "Trocortesiano Codex of the Museo de América," by Alfonso Lacadena García-Gallo, a specialist in Mayan society and teacher in the American Anthropology Department at Complutense University;
- "The Dance of the Jaguar and other Ritual Mexican Dances," by Emma Sánchez Montañés, teacher in the American History Department, and Elena Delgado of the Museo de América.

One of the most significant achievements of this project was that it broke down the barriers between academic departments, facilitating communication between researchers and the sharing of knowledge beyond the people enrolled in the different specialities of the faculties. The project also demonstrated successful collaboration between the libraries and university departments.

Project 3. *Museums and Libraries: Spaces for Intercultural Dialogue* (Public Library of Zaragoza and the Archaeological and Ethnographic Museum of Zaragoza)

... *And there was light*, was the title of the exhibition co-produced by the Library of Zaragoza and the Museo Arqueológico y Etnográfico de Zaragoza. The exhibition showed some museum pieces within the public areas of the Library, with the aim of drawing parallels between the process of reading a book and looking at an object. Therefore, the objects were shown to be “read” from different cultural perspectives, from the past and the present, and using different methods. The exhibition displayed pieces from the Roman period, the Middle Ages and the rural background of the 19th and 20th centuries, suggesting some parallels between vital necessities, artefacts and cultural practices.

Concha Martínez Latre, Museo de Zaragoza, selected and documented objects for the exhibition that showed illumination instruments used before electricity, such as oil lamps. Contemplation of these objects invited viewers to a world without light switches, plugs, or electric appliances.

During the International Day of Museums, on 18 May, the regular public of the Library was invited to participate in the conference “The fire and the funeral rituals,” as part of the exhibition. Anthropologists Ángel Gari (Aragón), Elizabeth Pachá (Ecuador), and the missionary of the Consolata, Gordon O’Koch (Kenya), also collaborated with the lecture programme of the exhibition.

The project was completed with the final activity by Moroccan storyteller Ali El Afizun, who recounted “The Perfumed Stories from the Zoco.”

All three projects created their own blog, in order to encourage public participation and improve reading and storytelling competencies.

Outcomes of all three projects

- Mutual strengthening of libraries’ and museums’ goals;
- Diversified and expanded public programmes;
- Audience development;
- New and enhanced opportunities for different ways of looking at the objects, whether or not in relation to intercultural issues.

Institutions & Project coordinators

Biblioteca de Andalucía

www.juntadeandalucia.es/cultura/ba

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Biblioteca de la Universidad Complutense, Madrid

<http://www.ucm.es/BUCM>

Coordinator: Isabel Gutiérrez, librarian, igutierrez@buc.ucm.es

Biblioteca Pública del Estado de Zaragoza

<http://portal.aragon.es/portal/page/portal/libro/bibzaragoza>

Coordinator: Javier Villar, jvillar@aragon.es

Target groups

The community at large (including library users and non-users, university students, local primary and secondary schools)