

Community School Museums as a tool for education

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Abstract

Community Schools Museums (COSMUS) is an initiative that has been developing an approach to school education from a perspective of multi-dimensional diversity, creativity and community involvement under the Erasmus+ programme in six different countries (Portugal, Greece, Italy, Romania, Poland and Turkey) and in different kinds of schools (arts, music, primary school, high school, VET). This initiative, relies on different educational and multicultural principles, such as the European Youth Charter on Inclusion and Diversity in Education or the European Education Area, and uses a combination of three dimensions that compose the new concept of Community School Museum. The first dimension refers to the local community in which each of the schools is located. This not only enhances concepts such as local traditions, society, or sense of belonging, but also connects with them and involves them in the school activity and curricula content. The second dimension is the school, where education curricula and physical space interact to support those types of knowledge that are essential to sustaining human development, using critical thinking, using creativity or cooperation to promote multicultural meanings. The third dimension is the museum, understood as a flexible tool acting as a communication channel (bi-directional), with elements that act as significance bearers. It uses the approach of learning by doing in order to learn to be, one of the four pillars of learning. It also employs the recommendations of the International Committee for Education and Cultural Action and applies the seven areas of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. Results of the Community School Museum projects show a sound diversity of approaches, which points to the success of the methodology, given that diverse educational, social and cultural contexts give rise to diverse museum contents and designs. One of these results focuses on vernacular heritage.

Keywords: Community School Museums, Education, SDG, Multiculturality, Involvement.

1. Introduction

The project Community School Museums Cosmus, funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, explored school education from a perspective of multi-dimensional diversity, creativity and community involvement principles. The axis to develop this perspective is creating a museum in the school, using the creation process –conceptualization, design, realization, management– to include the principles aforementioned in the education

programme. Consequently, the first task of the Cosmus project was to define a new concept, the Community School Museum. The process of definition was open until the end of the project, in 2022, and ran in parallel with the museums' development.

The museums were created in six different partner countries: Portugal, Greece, Italy, Romania, Poland and Turkey. There were different kinds of educational centres developing the museums: schools of arts in Greece and

Romania, including music, dancing or design; primary and secondary schools in Portugal and Turkey, and a professional education group in Italy with different locations and courses.

The great variety of pilot cases was not only challenging, but also provided valuable input to the Community School Museum definition, as it enhances its applicability to a wide variety of contexts, both educational and socio-cultural. This work shows the results obtained in the process of defining a Community School Museum (CSM), concluding with a proposal of the definition and the process developed by six schools. Finally, it describes a case developed in one of the schools approaching cultural diversity through the vernacular heritage.

2. Conceptual framework of CSM: Principles

The exploration of the Community School Museums concept started with the idea that they are conceived as an educational tool and are created within a certain social and cultural context. With this core idea in mind, the approach to the definition addressed the three main words that compose CSM: the school (space, subjects, curricula and learning methodologies based on 'learning by doing'), the school community (culture, history, knowledge, etc.), and the museum, with multiculturalism being the transversal focus.

In order to identify the principles that will inspire the museum creation, and thus, pursuing the CSM concept, a framework was designed using the three words that compose this concept: community, school, museum. Hence, some core ideas and concepts are approached within this frame.

2.1. Museums and their social role

Museums, from the largest institutions to the smallest initiatives, must have at every stage of their design and construction the desire to seek the active participation of communities (Moutinho, 2022).

According to the ICOM (International Council of Museums) Statutes (Declaration of Vienna, 2007), the current definition of museum is as follows: "*A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment*".

Since the last decade of the 20th century museums have placed education as one of their main missions (Antas, *in press*). The use of the terminology that defines museum education as non-formal education was established in a UNESCO document, called "Learning to be - The Fauré Report" (1972), which sets the goals for education to lifelong education and the learning society.

The social role of museums was highlighted by the Declaration of Santiago de Chile (1972), implying that museums are vital public spaces that should address all of society and can therefore play an important role in the development of social ties and cohesion, building citizenship, and reflecting on collective identities. They can constitute spaces for reflection and debate on historical, social, cultural and scientific issues (UNESCO, 2016). What characterizes the so-called Sociomuseology is not so much the nature of its goals, as is the case with other areas of knowledge, but the interdisciplinary focus which makes it draw on consolidated areas of knowledge and relate them with museology itself. Sociomuseology is not a technique, it is part of social sciences (Moutinho, 2021).

2.2. Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The United Nations urge us all to take action in 17 Goals, through different actions. Among the SDG's most relevant to Community School Museums are Quality Education and Sustainable Communities.

Nevertheless, all of them will be of relevance throughout the development of the museum, from SDG1 No Poverty, when talking about social contexts or economic issues, to SDG17 Partnerships, when working on cross border topics or disseminating CSM activities e.g. with the town hall or organising visits with local associations.

The UNESCO framework on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is based on the conviction that it empowers learners of all ages with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to address the interconnected global challenges we are facing, including climate change, environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, poverty and inequality.

This is more than linked to the SDGs, because it is not only recognized as an inherent element of SDG4 on Quality Education but also a key enabler of all the other SDGs (UN, 2020). Thus, building an effective global approach to SGD and ESD needs to address respecting, protecting and maintaining the cultural diversity of the world now and in the future. Particularly, Cultural diversity exerts strong influence on ESD in that (UNESCO, 2022):

- All ESD must be locally relevant and culturally appropriate;
- Culture influences what this generation chooses to teach the next generation including what knowledge, skills, ethics, languages and worldviews are valued;
- ESD requires intercultural understanding if people are to live together peacefully, tolerating and accepting differences amongst cultural and ethnic groups.

2.3. Diversity

The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001) provides a useful description of Cultural Diversity, in which cultural diversity rises to the level of “the common heritage of humanity”, “as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature” and makes its defence an ethical imperative inseparable from respect

for the dignity of the individual. The Declaration is structured on four principles (Identity, Diversity and Pluralism; Human rights; Creativity; and International solidarity), and proposes 20 lines of action for the implementation. Among the actions, those more connected with CSM are the following four (Fig.1).

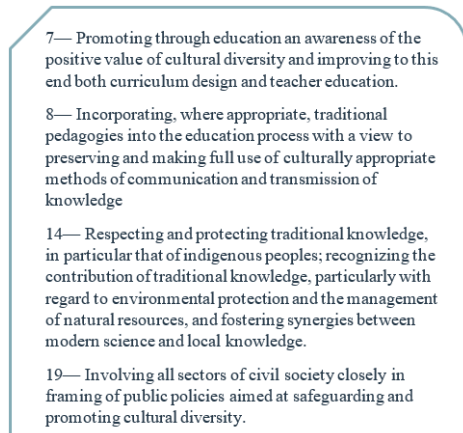


Fig. 1. Lines of actions for the implementation of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity at CSM (Source: UNESCO, 2001).

Later, the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions adopted in 2005 by UNESCO, stated that “Cultural Diversity” refers to the varied ways in which the cultures of groups and societies find expression. Additionally, it is manifested through diverse modes of artistic creation, production, dissemination, distribution and enjoyment, whatever the means and technologies used.

It also refers to “Interculturality” as the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect.

Among the rights and obligations of Parties in this 2005 Declaration, the following are of interest for CSM:

—Art.11 Participation of Civil Society. Parties acknowledge the fundamental role of civil society in protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions (...)

—Art.10 Education and Public Awareness. Parties shall encourage and promote this Convention through educational and greater public awareness programmes; (...) and to encourage creativity by setting up educational, training and exchange programmes.

There are many ways to reveal the diversity that exists in the community and its different dimensions in the museum. A useful one, quite extended in the education in diversity is using one or more dimensions that forge our personality to explore and explain it (Fig. 2).

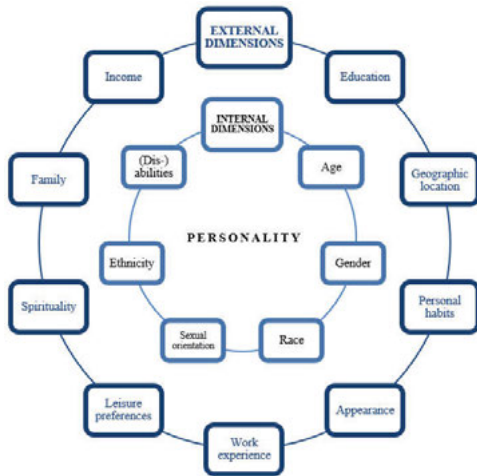


Fig. 2. Dimensions of the personality.

2.4. Creativity

Creativity allows us to express our diversity in the CSM, therefore the museum can be considered as a “communication channel”. Fortunately, creativity provides plenty of means to express our identity in different artistic ways. The approach to the creative fields that aligns well with CSM is the one of UNESCO’s Creative Cities Network. This creative network was started in 2004, and in 2021 it reached 246 cities.

The Creative Cities Network aims to strengthen cooperation with and among cities that have recognized creativity as a strategic factor of sustainable development as regards economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects.

Thus, it is not only a platform for reflection on the role of creativity as a lever for sustainable development but also as a space for action and innovation, notably for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Creative Cities Network covers seven creative fields: Crafts and Folk Arts; Media Arts; Film; Design; Gastronomy; Literature; Music

2.5. Education principles

The European Commission has agreed to achieve the European Education Area by 2025, where it proposes to consolidate ongoing efforts and further develop the European Education Area along six dimensions (Fig.3). Of those six dimensions, the most relevant for CSM are 1, 2 and 4.

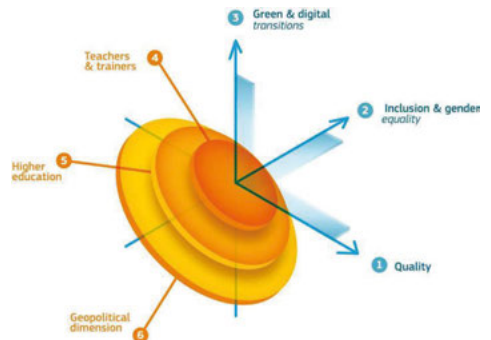


Fig. 3. Dimensions of the European Education Area (Source: EC, 2020).

Regarding dimension 4 (perhaps the least evident among the three considered most relevant to CSM), the OECD’s (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) shows the need to develop competences for teaching students with special needs, the use of digital technologies, and teaching in multilingual and multicultural classrooms.

Beyond the European Education Area, one of the most influential approaches to learning was expressed in the Delors Report (Delors, 1996), that of the four pillars of learning. The report argued that “formal education tends to emphasize certain types of knowledge to the detriment of others that are essential to sustaining human

development". It affirmed that equal attention should be paid, in all organized learning, to each of the four pillars (Fig.4).

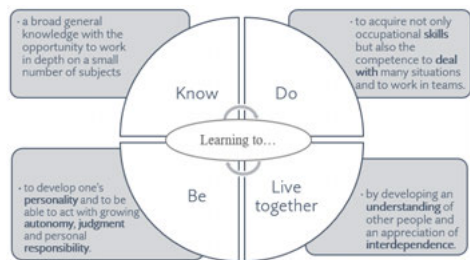


Fig. 4. The four pillars of learning (adapted from Delors, 1996).

To develop these pillars, a more fluid approach to learning is needed. This approach, in which schooling and formal education institutions interact more closely with other less formalized educational experiences from early childhood throughout life, is what CSM aspires to.

Finally, Delors Report also expresses that the right to quality education is the right to meaningful and relevant learning. However, learning needs vary across communities in a diverse world.

This diversity across communities is precisely one of the strengths that CSM wants to enhance, and the official school curriculum is structured perfectly to do so. In education centres, the concepts and contents are organised in different subjects. These subjects and their curricula vary depending on the education level, country, and even region. Moreover, there is a widespread pedagogical body able to connect and enhance the different subjects to build the museum, and Project-Based Learning (PBL) is probably the one that best fits the CSM proposal.

PBL is an instructional approach developed through learning activities and real tasks that bring challenges for students to solve. It teaches students not just content, but also skills (Stevens, 2010). Some skills that can be trained with PBL are time management, communication, participation and leadership, or critical thinking.

3. Methodology

The applied research, done during the project in order to define and develop Community School Museums, includes the common research approaches such as literature review, manuals, directives or study cases. Moreover, it also included more participative methodologies, such as in-depth interviews with experts from different disciplines (pedagogy, museology, heritage interpretation, museum curating, communication, etc.), focus groups, and short training sessions with professionals (including professionals of heritage management, archaeology, sociology, history, heritage interpretation, non-formal educators, museum guides or culture dynamizers among others) held during the Cosmus project development. The combination of these research methodologies with the research-action perspective resulted in the progressive development of six CSM in six different countries.

4. Community School Museum definition

As a result, the Community School Museum is defined upon its three pillars (Fig.5).



Fig. 5. Pillars of the Community School Museum.

4.1 The three pillars of CSM

I. COMMUNITY

The community linked to the school or education centre can have different meanings, ranging from the education centre itself (students, teaching and administrative staff, families, school services like kitchen or maintenance, etc.), to the neighbourhood, the town, country or even the continent.

The territorial scale of the Community concept can be adapted to the meanings, values, knowledge and approach that will be taken by the museum. Originally, the community concept is devoted to enhancing the nearby culture, history, nature, etc. in the education centre, in order to strengthen the sense of belonging and to promote identity.

Community is also an approach to engage more people and profiles to the museum. They can engage as donors, content creators, curators, visitors, experts, among other roles.

II. SCHOOL or education centre

The core of CSM is the school, and it is meant not only for teaching, but also for educating. The museum is devoted to embracing the educational curricula, but beyond that, to create meaning and develop skills thanks to the elements that are implied in the museum process. Thus, it is intended to promote critical thinking, learning by doing, active participation of the students, co-creation and cooperation among the students and school staff and community. Consequently, the education centre broadens their boundaries and incorporates more tools to the teaching process with a higher number of possible paths for learning.

III. MUSEUM

It is the communication channel, with the peculiarity of being bidirectional, as Community and School co-create and contribute to the contents, which facilitates learning and understanding.

Museums are a significance bearer, that can be interpreted and managed to provide different learning and education. The students actively learn about the past and the present of their cities, and share their views with others, increasing their sense of place and spreading multiculturalism.

4.2 Interaction among pillars and principles

Although planning a CSM is a living process tailored to each school, it is necessary to establish at least a basic and flexible process to guide the process (Fig.6). The general approach to any project usually starts with an idea and finishes with the realisation.

The objective with planning a CSM is to keep in mind that it is a tool, meant to drive a learning process through the exploration of as many topics as each educational centre requires. It is also a tool to open the school to the community and to nourish from/to it.

The general process to plan a CSM (Fig.6) starts with an idea, or a brainstorm of ideas, that get more and more defined, until they reach the point in which they can be physically developed into exhibitions, both through personal and non-personal means, using different creative expressions. These exhibitions are materialised through the construction of the materials and activities which are finally delivered to the audience with an objective and a result that was previously established in the education and interpretation programmes.

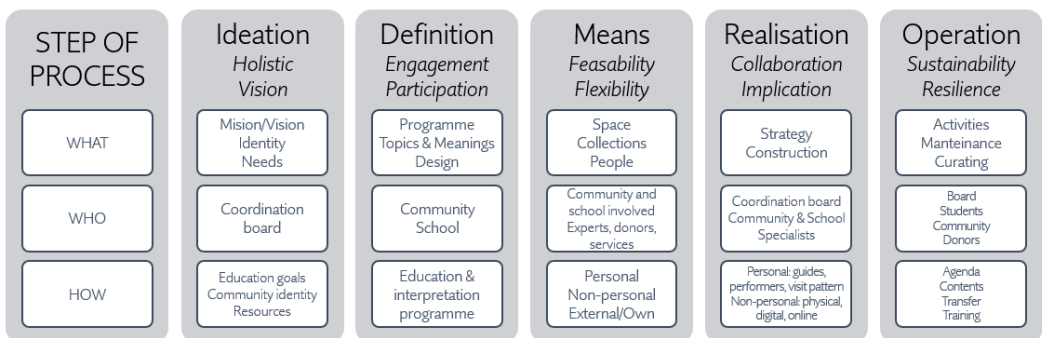


Fig. 6. Process to create and run a Community School Museum.

4.3 Vernacular heritage exhibition

Six schools developed the applied cases during the Cosmus project. All identified different topics to develop at the museum, with cultural heritage as a central element of diversity and intercultural dialogue. One of them, a vocational education school of arts (from 6 to 19 year old) at Iasi (Romania), teaches artistic fields of visual arts, architecture and industrial design, choreography, musical instruments and classical canto as well as theatre performance.

This school defined three main sections to address in the museum based on three territorial scales: Local, using the history of the school to develop social and cultural evolution in the city through the music, fine arts, but also the stained glass tradition. European, focusing on the Unesco Heritage Sites in different countries as well as on their art of words in the fine arts and music.

And finally at national scale, Romania, the school focused on the multiculturalism topic. They wanted the students to explore the similarities and differences among the Romanian regions, their history and the geography of the country. To do so, teachers decided on the subjects that would be involved in this part of the museum, as well as the education levels participating. They followed a process, limited by the COVID19 situation, and agreed that the communication tool capable of developing the curricula contents, to create meaning but also to transmit to the public all the ideas that arose through the museum creation process was the vernacular architecture, mainly housing (Fig. 7).

They studied the vernacular buildings from different approaches: the reasons for their design (roof, size, distribution, etc.), the origin of the materials, the evolution, but also the uses of the different chambers. The intangible culture was also studied, not only with literature research, but also with some interviews with members of the older generations as well as with guided visits to the museum and city buildings.

The result was an exhibition with 12 models of vernacular housing made by the students themselves during the lock down due to pandemic situation. Later, the students prepared a panel with some information as well as a guided visit for other students or visitors of the CSM.



Fig. 7. Guided visit to the vernacular building section of the CSM of Iasi made by some students to the Cosmus project partners during the transnational meeting.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The Community School Museum is a new concept where museum is conceived as an education tool, capable to educate in diversity, promote creativity but also conceived to open the school to the community, encouraging the permeability of the education centres to and from their social environment.

Defining the concept of CSM started with the exploration of some principles. After four years of Erasmus+ project Cosmus, this work proposes a definition based in those principles and how they connect with the three words that compose CSM.

Beyond, thanks to the definition process and the principles exploration, this work presents a process to create and run the SCM.

This work selects the application of this new concept to vernacular heritage in one of the six schools that participated in the Cosmus project. The implementation of the vernacular housing to

the CSM demonstrated a high education potential. The process of creating this section of the museum resulted in enriched educational practice capable to link different topics in one task (geography, traditions, natural resources, etc.). It also was able to enable different skills in the students and promoted deep learning due to the fact that explaining the concepts to other people using both material and personal means, requires a true understanding of the topic presented, as well as cognitive processes broader than listening at classroom or museums. Finally, the students improved their sense of belonging to the community, because they acquired knowledge about it but also from it, thanks to the research and the interviews and visits. These new links to their community were strengthened with the design of the running phase of the CSM, where different activities take place in the museum, both organised and developed by students and the members of the community.

Obviously, the school implementing the vernacular section of the CSM also found difficulties in the process, not only derived from the COVID-19 situation, but also during the different phases. For instance, initially it was overwhelming the process of creating a museum what resulted in a compulsive gathering of traditional objects. At the latter steps of the CSM creation, the difficulty was mainly to find a physical place to install the house models and to ensure the continuity of the museum next school year. These and other difficulties were faced in the project and the solutions found were added to the methodological proposal of how to create and run a Community School Museum, an open methodology meant to be capable to fit to different education and cultural contexts.

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