

Report from ICOM Milan for ICOM-NL, by Roeland Paardekooper Monday 4 July 2016

On Monday, July 4th, I attended the first session of ICOM MPR (the committee for PR & Communication: <http://network.icom.museum/mpr/> www.facebook.com/ICOMMPR). Secretary is Meghan Curran: mcurran@sheddaquarium.org. Jan Sas & Björn Stenvers are the Dutch Board members. The session counted 90 participants at the beginning, 30 towards the end.

The keynote speech was given by Clare Hughes, www.reimaginemuseums.com, clarehughes@fcbstudios.com.

Clare gave best practice examples like the Exploratorium in San Francisco and the museum at WTC in New York. She believes museums can help people changing their lives and can help changing society. We see too often exhibitions made for curators among themselves, that is the old-fashioned way. Museums should be active in approaching their visitors, should be a community museum, which raises awareness. The three success factors of such a museum are:

1. The physical space
2. How the story is layered
3. Personal contact / who tells the story to the visitor

It is important to make the visitor immerse and let him/her become a participant. Storytelling is a way to capture people. You can see it in the British EU referendum: the team with the best story wins – and that story changes lives.

A museum must make an emotional connection – but when is that manipulation? Clare clearly explained that at such impressive stories like at the WTC, it is important to not just go down into emotion, but come out of it at the other end with a call for action: “the reason we are telling you this is...”

The second lecture was by Ms Polic from Slovenia who explained about a cross border exhibition on fashion in Slovenia and Italy. She made clear that a narrative alone is no storytelling. Although the exhibition looked like a nice theatre performance with many side activities for students, contact was a one-way street only.

Elles Kamphuis (Rijksmuseum) then followed with the success story about the Rembrandt pictures Marten & Oopjen. Her task was to create human interest about paintings people had never heard about. The main story was not so much the qualities of the paintings, but the story, the buzz, around the paintings. She managed to reach the two most important target groups of the museum: families with children and potential visitors by using a popular children’s TV show (Klokhuis), an insert in the most popular Dutch newspaper (Telegraaf) and a two-minute TV commercial.

Her definition of storytelling?

- A narrative with principal characters
- A development as a result of a dilemma or conflict
- Emotional development with the recipient

Better than many others, the Rijksmuseum was not stuck in stage 1.

Ms Karhunsaaari from Finland then explained the refurbishment of the Lenin Museum in Tampere. Instead of the old days when the story of Lenin was explained here, nowadays they seek relevance with the bigger picture of the USSR and the independence of Finland. With the Soviet nostalgia and a humorous touch, this has become a cult place to visit for all those coming to Tampere. They keep the link with the Finish public through social media, like telling Soviet jokes on Facebook. The museum re-opened mid-June 2016 – now we see if it catches on!

Mr Karafotias from Greece (presently Qatar) explained dark tourism by example of Sarajevo. Dark tourism means visitors visiting sites or buildings where death, disaster or atrocities took place. The Historical Museum in Sarajevo is not successful enough in their dark tourism

approach although they should be one of the major players in town. The museum already has the content and could be the leading institution in the field of reconciliation. There is no common narrative (people disagree about the story that needs to be told) and no good preservation leading to the interpretation of the sites associated with the Sarajevo siege left in the hands of tourism agents. Karafotias came with an action plan how to improve the Historical Museum in its branding and approach to this theme, but this has not been implemented yet.

Mr Xiaoling and Mr Hongbin each gave a presentation on a Chinese subject, one about the Beijing Culture Museum, the other about the Palace, the Forbidden City Museum. The latter presentation was given in Chinese and then read in English, not exactly perfect. The examples made again clear that having a narrative is just the first step towards storytelling and even if good stories capture your visitors and communicate well, more than that is needed.

The last paper of the first day was given by Ms Juračková from the Czech www.npu.cz. Her paper was exactly about the birth of that website. They had decided that instead of a top-down approach, which the old websites had, they would identify their users and make a website they could more easily navigate through. They identified eight target groups and now have 150 editors. The websites have all been joined under one portal. The producers of the website visualized the user groups by making personas, like Vladimir, the owner of a historic monument, 47 years old, does not use a smart phone... et cetera. Very important was that they did not start with the technique or the design, but with developing a new structure for all information.

Tip: check the venues at <https://www.npu.cz/cs/planujete-vylet/tipy-na-vylet>

Tuesday 5 July 2016

On Tuesday 5 July, MPR continued. There were about 150 people in the room.

De Klein (Rijksmuseum, NL) explained they did a survey between visitors about creativity. Visitors replied that the Rijksmuseum was too much high-end. They designed a project to activate visitors by asking them to draw on paper instead of making pictures of the art in the museum. The RM used owned media, earned media and very few paid media. The draw-yourself-event attracted 53% new visitors (that is much) and had a huge PR impact. Important lesson: do good research before you start a project.

Günter (DE) discussed virtual museums and how to migrate an existing physical museum into a digital environment. The ten steps include Augmented Reality & Virtual Reality. His important question was if virtual museums are compatible with ICOM standards. They are often interdisciplinary so it is hard to get funding. Check www.know-time.de for more information.

Stenvers (Amsterdam Museums, NL) his story was all about cooperation between museums and the benefits to all. Difficulties are the egos of museum directors and the lack of means for his office: Stenvers is the only employee but he can rely on other museum's staff and interns. He does a lot of lobby work and there are projects worldwide. One success is the Amsterdam City Card. A museum cluster like in Amsterdam has a great impact on the economy. Check www.popline.org for trends.

Curran (Secretary of MPR, US) discussed how to stay connected between visits. It takes time to build affinity: to make sure that visitors feel a link with the museum.

Informed guests are more satisfied: if they know about the fish called Granddad, they will spend more time there than when they do not. Capturing guest information takes time but is worth it, if you intend to follow up. For example, let guests buy their ticket online with discount so they give their email address or offer voucher if information is given. It is important to send email updates, ask your community of guests to become member. They generated stories

around their animals, gave the animals names because people then come for these animals.
Segmentation: make custom mailing lists and do not treat everybody uniformly.

Sekiya (Tokio National Museum) his story was about connections between cultural institutions in the Ueno Park in Tokyo. This has 16 million visitors annually and is home to 11 cultural institutions. Many of them cooperate in the offer of the cultural passport. Soon even the shopping street nearby will be included. Cooperation is a success to all.

Monzavi (Iran) gave a paper about the radio museum. Their priority is to educate. Therefore the radio museum makes broadcasts with stories to connect people. It is remarkable to see how technique developed from the pre-revolution time (1970s) to present day. The radio programs are often about nostalgic themes. His most important bottom line: radio programs are simple and effective.

Laudy (Rijksmuseum, NL): Events at the Rijksmuseum.

In 2015, they had 582 events. The museum employs 8 event managers.

The golden Triangle for events:

1. To connect with people
2. The Collection
3. Cooperation with partners

Every event follows a strict timeline. External events are organised by sponsors, internal events by own staff.

You (China) gave a paper about maritime museums in their landscape. He mentioned three examples:

1. The Maritime Silk Road (including Marco Polo) which is connecting nine maritime museums in China
2. Quanzhou Maritime Museum presenting the history of this large port
3. Zhen He's voyages 1405-1433.

China has 21 maritime museums with more to come.

Wednesday 6 July 2016

On Wednesday 6 July, I attended a morning session by CECA, coordinated by Arja Veldhuizen. About 40 people participated.

Zuccoli & Fredella (IT) explained about a project on three open-air sites including a botanical garden. The project was about valuing the contribution of the visitors and was themed "art – nature – science". An important side effect was the cooperation between the sites. They designed a kit for active visitors including paper & pencil.

Priosti (Brazil) presented in French with a PowerPoint mixed in three languages. She discussed an Ecomuseum approach (A Fazenda de Santa Cruz / The Santa Cruz Farm) where the landscape is a product of the community. The museum explains that.

Fuhr (DE) discussed the idea of finding his public by bringing the museum collection to them. It is a grass root movement between Flensburg (DE) and Sønderborg (DK). Fuhr has a collection of medieval wooden statues from churches on both sides of the border and wants to return these objects to the churches for one summer under the theme "Faith. Place. Art." The rural area is very effectively involved, very positive feedback and the result: a lot of new museum friends.

Tiedink (Enkhuizen, NL) highlighted a new education program where children need to report from a historic flooding in 2016. They receive modern filming equipment and make a short documentary including the museum actors and visitors about this flooding 100 years ago. The museum had help form an external firm to do this www.defrisseblik.nl. The positive side is that children needed to be very active in their work.

De Guichen (FR) is a conservation specialist and explained about how helping museums to clean up and structure their storage can lead to education of visitors and good PR.

He explains how he helps museums with their storage, cleaning it up, structuring it for the future. He then also includes school visits to the storage facilities, makes temporary exhibitions that attract good numbers of visitors and the press. So far a simple cleaning up can be turned into much more.