

Sociomuseological practices in school context: the potential of plural dialogue as an ally to learning



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Summary

This text brings reflections about the transforming potential at the context of school's communities, analyzing exhibitions potential, designed and performed in a participatory way, as a mechanism for opening a plurilateral dialogue.

Guided by Sociomuseological concepts, we will discuss possibilities of actions application of a participatory museology developed in school environment. Also looks to clarify how learning it is organized in these communities when they intend to appropriate the museum social function.

Keywords: Community School Museums; Sociomuseology; Education.

1. Introduction

Based on practical examples that took place in different times and contexts, the following results are tied to each other: the wide space of dialogue for contact with the other's reality, multiple learning and the exercise of citizenship; This article proposes a reflection on practical social museology in the school context and the museum's social function.

For the construction of this course, to be clear, we will start with a look at the theoretical contextualization, outlining the supports of this discussion and also indicating possible complementary readings to those interested in deepening the theme, such as the 'Recommendation on Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity and Their Role in Society', validated in 2015 by UNESCO, as well as other leading documents such as the Santiago de Chile Roundtable in 1972 and the Quebec Declaration of 1984. Examples selected to elucidate the development of museological actions within the scope of education spaces are also listed from experiences evidenced by theorists of the area.

We also discuss the concerns of an action designed from the perspective of a museology that encompasses multiculturalism and interculturalism and relate other models of institutions to reflect expographic issues as a resource for plural learning, such as the aspirations of the COSMUS European Project.

2. Theoretical contextualization

More than one might think at first, because they are institutions that are often dedicated, in a certain perspective, to conserve and preserve aspects of the past, museology has in its development a long trajectory of search for new perspectives and for a profound questioning of its own conception and the broad facets of its execution. Those involved in museum making are often grappling with questions about their own work and the ways in which seeking to do so means more than storing and safekeeping objects. Thus, museology is a field that is constantly changing, and in which different ways of understanding and exercising its inherent trades coexist, sometimes within the same institution or even the professional himself.

Thus, before seeking to understand or build museological performance within schools, it is necessary to have defined which type of museology we are referring to, which museums we are talking about. This discussion, within the scope of museology, has for some time been receiving great attention, at least from professionals, concerned with, rather than advancing in the forms and techniques of the field, questioning the validity and the opportunity of the area itself, seeing in museology other possibilities than those which had hitherto been recognized, accompanying, in this sense, broader processes, most times encompassing the discussions in the field of the humanities.

In the late 1960s, many processes of contestation, in various fields, advocated the search for new interpretations that surpassed old conceptions that no longer found resonance in society. These movements were spread over various domains, ranging from politics to science, from ethics to the arts. Taking as one of its main symbols what became known as the French May 68, these new interpretations that emerged - though perhaps is more accurate to speak of old interpretations that were refuted - would bring in the next decade new forms of face the dynamics and processes in our society. As various studies point out, new ways of understanding

museums and museology also emerged at that time. (Chagas, 1994; Moutinho, 2007; Santos, 2002; Varine-Bohan, 1995). New concerns came to complicate the activities of these institutions, while expanding their possibilities.

Since the 1970s, new practices developed in museums have prioritized respect for cultural diversity, the integration of museums with diverse local realities and the defense of the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities and disadvantaged peoples. More than that, museums have changed the daily relationship between museum professionals, exhibitions and the public. [...] The narratives produced have become themes of debate that are part of the contemporary political agenda. (Santos, 2002, p. 58)

Gradually, over the decades, more spaces dedicated to museology were incorporating the designs that were developed. Important theoretical frameworks were being erected, largely as a result of meetings and collective discussions, such as the referred Santiago de Chile Roundtable of 1972 and the Quebec Declaration in 1984. The development of the museum field represented, at the same time, the emergence of new conceptions that would greatly complex the performance of museums, leaving them with new responsibilities and a myriad of new possibilities. Although, if we look at the set of museological institutions and practices, they are far from representing a hegemonic vision, but this expansion of possibilities and responsibilities of the museum seems to have reached new spaces. One of the most recent, and most important, signs of this spread is the 'Recommendation on the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity and Their Role in Society', adopted by UNESCO in November 2015. The document states 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. Museums should be places that are open to all and committed to physical and cultural access to all, including disadvantaged groups. They can constitute spaces for reflection and debate on historical, social, cultural and scientific issues. (UNESCO, 2015, pp. 7–8)

This movement points, among other concerns, to an appreciation of the social function of museums and museum institutions, expanding their activities beyond the storage and conservation of objects. In essence, the museum removes from the object the exclusive protagonism of its performance, turning its efforts to the construction of a space that has relevance to the different communities where they are inserted. It ceases to be a complex attempt to keep a time capsule, with the conservation of the past, and seeks to facilitate dialogue and the preservation of a desired social memory. Their conservation effort thus becomes mediated by social concerns and the pursuit of social participation by the different communities involved. It is no longer an object-centered museum, but subject-oriented.

The past loses prominence, although not importance, and the action and trajectory of communities emerges as one of the main points of interest, including from the perspective of overcoming difficulties and practical actions, in the sense of seeking welfare, justice or better development of economic or social conditions. That is, the museum abandons its depositary function, which often points these institutions to irrelevance, and assumes itself as a possible tool for the society in which it operates, seeking a leading role in its community and proposing itself as a place for discussion and increasing living conditions, both in combating the negative

social, economic or political aspects of that community and in valuing and celebrating the positive aspects .

In this sense, it is important to understand each community in its singularities, its trajectories, its possibilities and its challenges. The social, in human experience, is always plural, full of origins, identities and historically constructed meanings, which must be understood in its broad spectrum, in its intricate relations, because it is precisely in this complexity that resides its power, its capacity to bring possibilities together.

"From this contemporary perspective, communities must be thought, not as a sum of individual possessions, but from a prevalence of differences. It is from the production of bonds between differences that the commonality emerges." (Coelho, 2019, pp. 57–58)

In the school context that interests us here, these possibilities built around the museum can be of great value. It is necessary to point out that the conviviality in the school environment, which puts in permanent contact individuals who otherwise might never have established such close relationships, also brings with it important possibilities of establishing bonds between populations of different habits and origins, which becomes even more relevant if we consider that many of these individuals are still young. In any case, it is necessary to point to the creation of bonds that can establish a 'us' from the different collectivities. The concept of identity - which goes beyond an ethnic or national origin, religion, economic conditions or belonging - as a multiplicity of conditions here assumes importance, because it is in this fluidity of experiences that possibilities for approximation between different individuals can be constructed. Thus, it is not a question of pointing to belong where, but of valuing diversity. And the museum making, built here through a community school museum effort, can be one of the tools to help in this regard.

3. Implications to this Project and/or to the implementation in your school

This expansion of the scope and possibilities of museology, as we have mentioned, accompanies an expansion that occurs also in other nearby fields. There are few cases where this relationship is as close as between museology and education. From the focus of its attention on the subject, and not on the object, museology is characterized as an important tool of dialogue, being able to be with the schools as a partner in the discussions necessary to value their diversity and the acceptance of different groups as pillars of inclusive and committed action. In the recent trajectory of museum making, there is a commitment to work with other institutions in order to enhance initiatives.

In the context of the first short- term joint staff training event of COSMUS (Community School Museums) European Project, which took place in March 2019 in the city of Almada and Lisbon, Portugal, were caused and reflected situations that may be applied in the development of the school museums that are involved in the project (from Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Turkey). During this meeting of the partners for formation and exchange of ideas, took place several workshops, cultural visits, work projects and partner's presentations. The activity that we will mention in particular is the "Serão Museológico", a multilingual conversation proposed by Professor Mário Moutinho, director of the Department of Museum Studies at the Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias, and a member of the Advisory Council COSMUS. The proposed

activity aimed at the project partners who could find within their linguistic and social diversity a creative access to the dialogue of the themes raised by COSMUS. The open debate took place around the scheme that the Professor had proposed days before, in his speech at the Lisbon National Archaeological Museum, about the basic concepts of Sociomuseology.

Museums (Alma S. Wittlin)	Community School Museums
Museums are man-made institutions in the service of men;	
They are not ends in themselves. Suggestions.	
What can museums do with regard to unmet needs of people?	
Museums are not islands in space; they have to be considered in the context of life outside their walls.	
Exhibitions are not enough; displays not necessary results in learning, stimulation and critical thinking	

Table 1: Scheme showed by Professor Mario Moutinho on March, 04th, 2019, in explanation about Sociomuseology on panel "What is a Museum", at First short-term joint staff training event do COSMUS European Project. On it the Professor use a text of Alma S. Wittlin in 'Museums: In Search of a Usable Future' (1970), instigating the presents to reflect about how to apply to the Community School Museums reality.

The idea was not to present a formula, but to plant doubts and suggest ways that could guide the joint construction of the concept that we are all looking for within the COSMUS European Project.



Photo 1: Register of "Serão Museológico", that happened at Casa das Artes, town of Cacilhas, Portugal, on March, 06th, 2019, as part of the First short-term joint staff training event program of COSMUS European Project. Personal archive.

This action exemplifies a practice that can be applied in museums, in schools, in life: facilitating access to others through breaking down barriers to diversity, encouraging experimentation with dialogue for bonding, rapprochement.

In the "Serão Museológico", examples of Museological practices in school communities were also presented, such as the exhibitions that took place in Portugal in the 1990s at the São João do Estoril School and 2 + 3 Miraflares School in Pedreira dos Húngaros. Pedreira dos Húngaros, located in Oeiras, in Lisbon's metropolitan region, was an informal urban settlement, a reality lacking in socio-economic resources and occupied by migrants, many of whom returned to Portugal from former colonies.

The barriers caused by the economic situation, non-peaceful coexistence with cultural diversity, among other issues, were brought by students to the school context and undermined their relationship and learning. The work done in the context of the local school community allowed the young people involved to have the opportunity to look at themselves in a moment of discovery and identification of value, to present to other participants in this context what is important to them.

That is, the proposal to interact with what is relevant to each other.

In photographic records students present themselves next to the objects chosen by them, belonging to their own collections that each one gathered and take care of, to represent them in an exercise of citizenship, occupying with some identity a space that was truly opened to them within the school.



Photos 2 and 3: Students of São João do Estoril School and 2+3 Miraflares School in Pedreira dos Húngaros posing with the objects selected by themselves to represent them at the photograph exhibition. 1990. Professor Mario Moutinho's personal archive.

In another initiative, the creation of an installation using chairs and tables was proposed by the students from the damaged furniture of the school as a way to protest, reflect and open the problems of living and relationship present in this same context. But, in fact, besides the denunciation that the installation reveals, perhaps the most relevant is the right to affirm their understanding of a set of aspects, concerning the school space, the responsibility of each one and the right to challenge the school community. From passive student, the facility allows their passage to socially responsible student, aware of the operation of the institution where he spends most of his time over months and years.



Photos 4 and 5: Students from São João do Estoril School and 2+3 Miraflares School in Pedreira dos Húngaros making exhibitions to School Museums and installation realized by them with school's furniture that were damaged. 1990. Professor Mario Moutinho's personal archive.

It is also noted that both presentations created by the school museum, not restricted or reduced the process of creation of "exhibitions". In both cases there have been months or years of creation of collections, months or years of presence of disregard for the material resources. There was also the dialogue process, within the family or in the circle of friends, it was handled the passage of a solitary collection, for its transfiguration into speech, personality statement, sensitivity, creativity. More than the actual presentation of the "photo exhibition/ installation", was the possibility of sharing, dialogue and affirmation which reveal themselves as true learning processes.

It is therefore important to think everything that happens during the process of design and curatorship, which in the final analysis, represent the most relevant value that is created during the processes and times that were built dialogically autonomously (power of each young person to decide) and as citizens.

Sociomuseological practices in the context of school communities tend to promote plural, inter and multicultural dialogue. We are thinking of encouraging this open conversation to reflect the role of cultural and educational organizations in the inclusion of cultural

diversity. The Deutscher Museumsbund, German National Museum Association, in the context of their manual, ' Museums, Migration and Cultural Diversity : Recommendations for Museums' (2015)¹, describes a possibility of acting in the context of museums, of possible application in the context of schools, on the relevance of promoting intercultural dialogue in these spaces:

By moving away from traditional guided tours to dialogue-based forms of outreach, this intercultural approach can become an elementary part of the educational methods employed by museums. This requires an open-minded attitude and flexibility. Rather than focusing on communicating specific content, the emphasis is on facilitating a dialogue between visitors with their individual expectations and what is being presented in the museum. (Deutscher Museumsbund, 2017, p. 96)

The work to be developed by COSMUS partner schools will provide them with museological resources that facilitate the flexibility of actions and the repositioning of attitudes and educational methods in their communities.

More practical examples of community museological actions and implementations can be found in the work of the international museology consultant, Hugues de Varine. During the International Seminar 'Education Actions in Community Museums', organized by ICOM Portugal, in partnership with ICOM CECA e ICOM Europe², and hosted by the city of Fundão, in the interior of Portugal, in June 2019, Varine spoke of ways of seize memory and heritage to create conditions for the future.

Within this concept, Varine presented a successful example of museological work in the school community, developed in Cachoeira, in the interior of Ceará, Brazil, the Maranguape Ecomuseum. The main objective of the project is the sustainable development of the local community, thinking of training in relation to heritage education as part of the school's formal curriculum, as it was developed in 2012, within the local Municipal School, in order to train 20 young people of this school community trained to manage part of the Ecomuseum's public visitation. Here the museum's social function is directly linked to the school, and with processes that provoke the sustainable and autonomous development of the community in relation to its own heritage, "the community museum as an agent of popular education" (Varine, 2019).

Thus, the museum lends itself to the school and other institutions, in an effort to develop a multidisciplinary, intercultural and intergenerational performance, and that is an agent of changes towards a more inclusive society, which has as one of its points. It is based on the appreciation of its diversity, embracing the differences and particularities of each individual and each social group that make it up. This concern, and this recognition of different identities as socially relevant and as part of their social body, seeks not only to develop their own performance, but also to serve as a tool to facilitate contacts and establish ties that allow them to approach.

In a day-to-day school context, these issues take on even more immediate importance. The museum, in this context, can help indicate points of contact between the various forms of expression. The celebration of different cultures, one of the points where these initiatives can be turned into important approximation tools, is one of the possible ways. In a school museum effort, a guitar, whether gypsy or Portuguese, can become a meeting point, a common expression between individuals of different origins, who reach possibilities for dialogue that can be exercised without the weight of differences that always exist, and are interposed in other situations. That is, the guitar there is not only an object, but can be re-signified as a representation of people's memories, which from this similarity may perhaps seem a little closer than before, making the journey to a common point a trajectory a little less unlikely.

4. Conclusions

The Museums, from the largest institutions to the smallest initiatives, can therefore prioritize the people and not just their collections. More than that, they must have at every stage of its design and construction concern to seek the active participation of communities, as is the valorisation of the key players for the consolidation of an experience that really include the diverse populations.

It is necessary to build not only the building or the exhibition, but the very concept of community museum in schools – with a more determined effort to consolidate the community than in the concern to adapt the idea of a museum. Thus, from the perspective of a social museology, it is the very experience or experiences of the communities involved that will formulate the possibilities and needs of these museological efforts. There is no pre-established recipe beyond embracing the multiculturalism of each and every school and always seeking to value their diversity and the constant participation of all involved, not only in the execution but also in the conception of each step, starting from the recognition that no one more than those individuals know their reality and ways to leverage their initiatives.

We are talking about building access to the media and others, providing platforms and strategies for learning about oneself and others, bringing different and distant experiences closer together, promoting opportunities to exercise citizenship. In this way we urge each of us to draw sketches of what may become a common concept of respect and appreciation of difference. A school community museum, therefore, needs the conceptions of social museology to be a museum and the propositions of education to be school, but it is essential that it has the participation of people to be community.

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