CASE STUDY TEN
Open Museum Program (Programa Museo Aberto)

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A session in Museum with Red impaired people who are cared for at the Red Cross day centre in Ribadavia. Picture by VisualQ for Museo Etnolóxico de Ribadavia.
**Project background**

The project started in 2005, with the objective of creating specific programmes for minority groups and with the idea of taking advantage of the power of collections in keeping social memory alive in order to help patients with Alzheimers.

In the 2007, the person in charge of the programme at the Museum requested the collaboration of an anthropologist. In 2009 to 2011 we ran a joint project with the Museum’s Education Department and the Anthropology Department of the University of Vigo. During this time we intended to work with three communities consecutively and although in previous projects, various subjects were chosen in every community, on this occasion we thought that it would be interesting to work with a wider subject but in greater depth, so that, in each workshop, a different approach could be taken.

**Aims and outcomes**

The Open Museum Program is an initiative by the Museo Etnolóxico de Ribadavia (Ribadavia’s Ethnological Museum) as part of its role as a public museum at the service of society. The aim of the programme is to bring cultural heritage and the functions of the museum closer to groups that do not have easy access to a museum or other cultural activities. The project’s goal was to show the particular visions of three groups, as well as to make known to them the cultural heritage with which the museum works.

Are/were you merely providing access / information or is this a project with mutual aims and outcomes?

The project is carried out through specific workshops with each group. The aim was not simply providing information, but an exchange and an educational experience for all participants including the people carrying out the workshops.

It was an inclusive project, where each institution collaborated with a project that the Museum presented, in a multiple partnership that included the coordination team, the technical team, community collaborators, institutions and other involved agents. This collaboration is possible thanks to a complex and detailed project design and plan that provided an enriching experience to all participants.

How were the aims/outcomes agreed?

Internal and external project evaluations were carried out throughout the workshops, all of them resulting in very satisfactory outcomes, pointing out that the aims set had been met. On the one hand, it was achieved by the fact that the Museum opened itself to becoming an alternative social space, and additionally that the Museum is now positioned as a useful tool for people in need of attention. All of this has been confirmed by different evaluations carried out, both internally and externally.
Who are/were the lead personnel on the project?

Coordinator: Xose C. Sierra, Technical team: Mª Pilar Iglesias, Collaborators: César Llana, Roberto Aneiros, Clara González, Rosa Lamas from the Museum, and Fátima Braña from University of Vigo. It must be noted that all the museum departments took part in the project.

Who are/were you working with (a whole community, a selected group or an Individual)? Please describe:

The programme implemented workshops specifically designed for three groups: inmates from the Pereiro de Aguiar prison, Alzheimer patients who attend the workshops from the AFAOR association, and learning impaired people who are cared for at the Red Cross day centre in Ribadavia.

Each workshop had a limited number of spaces. The selection of participants was done by the institutions, looking for the people who could benefit most from the activity and also taking into account that the activity was in line with the institution’s objectives: integration, reintegration, improvement of the quality of life.

Are you clear about why you are working with this selected group and with their role as representative of others? Please comment:

Thanks to this project, the team verified that cultural heritage can be an extraordinary tool with which to work with these types of groups. The versatility that cultural heritage provides for this kind of project is immense. This means that the museum is a resource that allows us to leave aside its previously elitist and non-social vision. This must now be tapped into further.

In this project, the different processes and methodologies that worked with personal and group identity allowed us to establish a link between the everyday reality of every participant and the presentation of different heritage elements. This link leads to a bidirectional relationship for museum professionals between cultural heritage and people.

We worked with this cultural heritage in different ways in every workshop, and the heritage had particular meaning for the participants, which they commented on throughout the sessions. By recording and analysing every session we added new interpretations to the collections, and provided an authorized voice to people who are typically lacking attention and authority in their everyday lives.

We in museums must take into account that part of the process of exclusion has to do with people being socially relegated, their capabilities ignored. We provide the opportunity to develop people’s capabilities to interpret, judge and act, experiences they can later use in their everyday lives.

Assessment of authority: why are/were you dealing with this individual or group; how are/were they empowered to speak on behalf of a community? Are/were you satisfied with their ‘credentials’?

Provided the profile of our programs, among the participants as users there is not a consolidated leadership, since we are working with groups of people that have a common ground. However, as in any work team leaders arise as in any other social group more as a result rather a starting point.

Partners – who are/were they? (Please provide website addresses if possible):

The Museum carried out the design of the project and looked to the three collaborating institutions to provide the spaces for the workshops’ development, the support staff and their knowledge and expertise. With regards to funding, the autonomous Administration upon which the Museum depends has been the one financing the project costs.

Is/was it a museum-to-museum/ cultural centre project?

The project is carried out by one museum that sets a programme of collaborations with institutions outside the museum, therefore its name: Open Museum. The Museum intends to go beyond its walls in order to collect and to provide a service.
The collaboration is with the University of Vigo through its technical team, and with the institutions involved that provide the spaces for the workshops to take place.

**What are/were the budgets and other resources? (e.g. grant awards, dedicated staff, sponsorship):**

Xunta de Galicia financed the project entirely. In addition, the institutions contributed some of their staff in order to carry out the workshops in each of the institutions, and also provided volunteers at the workshop’s service.

The project was awarded the prize of the Collaborating Organisation for 2011 from the Prison Centre Pereiro de Aguiar, as well as an Honorable Mention by Ibermuseos, who included it in the good practice record. None of them included a monetary prize.

![Workshop with inmates from the Pereiro de Aguiar prison. Picture by VisualQ for Museo Etnolóxico de Ribadavia.](image.png)
What are/were the timescales?

The budgets were different for each yearly project, so the programme duration had to be adjusted to the available resources, from the initial four months to two months by the end of the project. The ideal approach is four months’ duration to produce a dense and deep work.

Ethical considerations – describe what these involved in relation to the project and how they were agreed/adhered to?

The basis of the concept is that all kinds of people are heirs to cultural heritage and therefore audiences of the cultural programmes.

Despite the fact that this has not always been the case, this programme allows us to bring cultural heritage to disadvantaged groups. It also provides social relevance to these groups as well as their appreciation of cultural heritage.

Please also describe any compromises, surprises and how the project may have been transformed through the engagement:

Along with the implementation of the workshops there have been many situations and unforeseen results that have enriched both the project and ourselves personally. The continuous revision of the project, each workshop and each session, has provided us with the opportunity to continually improve, informed by the assessments and approaches of the participants and collaborators.

What things would you consider if embarking on a similar project again?

We understand that it is essential to design a project informed by internal and external evaluation, in order to provide feedback by both the institution and its users. Another fundamental aspect is always taking into account the management of each institution, and appreciating what each individual can value and contribute during the workshops. We would like to encourage other kinds of groups to venture into this area by providing them with the methodology.

What things would you avoid?

We recommend as a first caution to provide a detailed and personal explanation to the participant’s families and the staff. In addition, we also advise not to take external personnel on. We would not consider starting a programme with these elements without engaging with the management or leadership of the collaborating institutions to make them party to the programmed activity. It is also key to adapt each workshop to the characteristics of the group it is aimed for. These cautions are evidence of the ethnological basis of the work.
References to publications relating to project (online/in print):

English:


Spanish:
