

## Pre-conference workshops 2014

Alexandria, Egypt, 09-10-2014

During the CECA 2014 conference in Alexandria two workshops took place at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Alexandria on Thursday October 9, led by **Birte ten Hoopen** (in English) and **Marie-Cécile Bruwier** (in French). Each workshop was presented twice. 32 participants registered for the English workshops and 22 for the French ones.

Directly after the workshops the participants left their evaluation. Both Birte and Marie-Cécile wrote a short reflection and two members participating in the English workshops, Frederike van Ouwerkerk and Jorge Albuja, wrote a personal report. Anne Sophie Grassin was so kind to complete the text about the French workshop. The following text is based on all this input.

### Workshop 1

**“How to translate scientific knowledge to the public without dumbing down?”**

10.00-13.00 and 14.00-17.00 in English, by Birte ten Hoopen, Rijksmuseum, Netherlands

Number of participants: 21 in the morning and 11 in the afternoon. From 14 countries.

#### Short description of the workshop:

The workshop started with the title of the workshop: ‘How to translate scientific knowledge without dumbing down?’ The focus was on translating: mediating scientific knowledge to a wide audience, which led to the main question: ‘*Who are the translators and what are they translating?*’



left: Birte ten Hoopen, middle: postcard collection Rijksmuseum, right: group work Photo's Angela Manders

#### Workshop in steps:

1. Introduction of participants and a short introduction on the steps Birte takes when making a product at the Rijksmuseum.
2. Birte showed pictures of Rijksmuseum objects. She told that you can pose thousands of questions for each object. You know your questions, but how about the others?
  - What would a *child* ask about this object?
  - What would a *professional* ask about this object?
  - What would your *neighbour* ask about this object?
  - What would *you* ask about this object?All participants wrote the answers down on one sticky note for each question.
3. Birte divided the participants into two groups and gave each team the notes of the other team, after hustling them. They were asked to rearrange the notes into the four target groups. Goal: finding out whether they were capable to see the difference between the type of questions. When not? Why?
4. Finally the teams who wrote the notes checked whether their notes have been labelled correctly by the other team.
5. Through step 2-4 the participants got a grasp on the questions of the audience. The next step was taking a look at what the *museum* wants to tell. Birte asked the participants to come up with an object or a product they would like to make. (in teams)
6. Having a grasp of the audience questions and knowing what the museums want, the next step is to find out how the distance between these two is bridged by a ‘translator’. Who is the translator? Is it one person or a team? And if you have a team: who is in it? Do you dare to have a “stranger”



*Assignment with the sticky notes. Photo's left and right: Angela Manders, photo in the centre: Jorge Albuja.*

in your team? Birte stressed the importance of integrating the visitors view in the exhibition team, he/she often has a totally different perspective and poses different questions.

7. These questions were discussed in the teams and they focused on a case/ product/activity
8. Some cases were discussed with the whole group. Birte posed one very important question over and over again: WHY? This is in the end the hard core question when you make a product that is supposed to be a (translated) answer to presumed answers and desires.

*What was the most discussed item?*

Daring to have someone different in your team. An outsider.

*From Birte's reflection*

What do you think the participants took home? : "To have a little bit more guts. Also for the questions they ask themselves when they start to translate. I hope they dare to ask themselves WHY over and over and over again. It helps translating."

Birte needed to be very flexible, because she did not find an 'open space' for her workshop as promised. She had to change her whole workshop at that moment! She had planned a much more hands on, interactive approach (she has a background in theatre), but now it was more 'talking'.

*Impression from the participants feedback*

In spite of the problems Birte met with the room, many participants are positive about the interactivity in her workshop, for example: 'So engaging, hands on, collaborative, intellectually challenging and appropriate for international audience. Nice pace.'

There are positive comments about the pre-conference workshops in general ('I liked the way to work in groups and to speak with other professionals from other countries!!') and about the quality of Birte as a teacher ('I like your way in teaching, thank you. My advice to you: keep going'.). Some liked to learn from a museum like Rijksmuseum.

Under 'improvements' some participants suggest to send more information in advance. Some plea for a paper handed out at the end, with examples to take home. A few more would have liked to see more examples from reality. Some state that a workshop like this one deserves more time. Others join Birte in wishing better space to discuss in small groups. One person missed a coffee break, which Birte simply forgot – she apologises for this.

Many comments show that Birte managed to communicate her key message:

- 'I learned how to transfer the knowledge I have in a simple way – without losing the scientific information. And how to think about what other people think, to be more interactive with them';
- 'What I am going to use from today's workshop? I think having the opinions of an unrelated person is a good idea in terms of making translations better, I might suggest having an outsider's idea to my own team';
- 'It has also taught me to consider the perspectives of other visitors – even if it is a university museum whose audience is predominantly students or professors';
- 'After the workshop I will build a different type of team for the next product. And think bigger and spend more time in developing!';
- 'More awareness of the importance of the WHY – why it is important to tell and for whom!!!'

### *Impression from the reports by Frederike van Ouwerkerk and Jorge Albuja*

Jorge participated in the morning workshop. In this session the vast majority of the group were Egyptian students, and the others were mostly young educators from developing countries (Lithuania, Ecuador, Mexico and Egypt). He quotes some criteria collected by participants after the activity with the sticky notes: "Is important to know what the visual culture is of our visitors" and "On TV and Internet we can find news ideas to create new pedagogic approaches for our lectures and ways of communicating collections". According to Jorge the following goals were reached:

- Participants agreed to "take the place of the visitor" to develop more feasible and inclusive communication.
- Also to socialize with young adult audience (18-30), being the age of the workshop attendees (generational-interaction) and use this as an opportunity to propose dynamic activities around the collections.
- Within CECA we should use ICOMMUNITY as a space to share lectures of public and collections.



Left: Morning session, photo Jorge Albuja –right: Family Guide, photo Rijksmuseum

Frederike attended the afternoon session, with a mix of museum professionals from all over the world, and she observed that the participants found the workshop as a whole very interactive and inspiring. The assignment with the sticky notes for example lead to a lot of interaction and hilarity. In the discussion afterwards they did not only conclude that every visitor has different questions, but the same persons may also have different questions, depending on their role at that moment. Sometimes a museum professional might have less 'professional' questions than his neighbour who happens to be very fond of 17<sup>th</sup> century art...

In this session also the different needs of families was discussed. Birte showed the Rijksmuseum Family Guide and told about her own process making this guide. Families want quality time: time to share with each other, have fun and learn something at the same time. They want to interact and talk about things that are new to them, and that is exactly what the museum can offer.

Birte uses the following action plan to make a product like the family guide:

1. Which object/theme do you want to cover?
2. What kind of product do you want to make?
3. Who are your 'translators'? Who do you want in your team?
4. For whom are you going to 'translate'?
5. What would this visitor want to do and/or know?
6. How do you know?

This action plan is made of *questions*. Answering them is necessary before developing the product .

The Rijksmuseum uses strict quality criteria for product development. They use the (Dutch) word 'AKPIE' for this. Through these criteria the Rijksmuseum manages to bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and the demands of their general audience.

- A = authenticity
- K = quality
- P = personal
- I = innovative, out of the box
- E = simple

## **Workshop 2**

**'Comment transmettre un message scientifique par le biais d'activités éducatives?'**

**'How to transmit scientific knowledge through museum education practices'**

10.00-13.00 and 14.00-17.00 in French by Marie-Cécile Bruwier, Scientific Director, Royal Museum of Mariemont, Belgium.

Number of participants (on the list): 11 in the morning and 11 in the afternoon.

### *Short description of the workshop:*

In the introduction Marie-Cécile checked the expectations of her participants. The workshop itself was constructed around 5 topics:

Presentation of the domain of Mariemont, historic site, a castle in which a museum had been created in 1970's. Industrial region in the past and green lung of the region today.

A state museum which belongs to Belgium and which have scientific and educational missions.

Chinese, Egyptian collections.

1. The return of the memory of the past. How is this done in ethnographic museums, archeo-sites and experimental archaeology? How fancy can we present the story? Through reconstructions / dioramas and in other ways. Is there a kind of 'Disneyfication' going on? (example of Ethnographical museum of Geneva: staging's of the world in a park which evokes different cultures and heritages. Limits...)  
Speech about the heritage and its interpretation, representations and expectations.  
Heritage builds up by successive approaches: mediation is re-contextualisation, transmission of the lifestyles and knowledge's. Museums are not academies but commemorative sites and bridges between cultures in a multicultural world. Museums exhibits show pieces of art but also ethnographical objects.
2. Teaching heritage: why? With several examples from different exhibitions.
3. The relation between heritage and the objects in their role of witnesses of the sacred. With examples like the ritual of the opening of the eyes and a tea ceremony. How universal is the understanding of relics? Some objects are presented in the exhibits, but most of them are in the depots.
4. The beautiful, the art and the object, with examples from Europe and Africa.  
The work of art or the archaeological object teaches about aesthetics, technics, customs.  
Marie-Cecile Bruwier took various examples of works and asked the participants for their interpretation or understanding. Example: le Sacre de Napoléon at the Louvre.
5. Teaching the core messages about heritage.  
Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Museology (Desvallées, Mairesse, 2011)  
5.1. "The continuing past": what will remain of us in 2000 years? That will future archaeologists tell about our ways of living?  
5.2. When Freud interprets the past: a magnifying glass and a bush, examples of objects collected by Freud and used to support his theory. He was like an archaeologist who worked with objects which could help him to reveal the soul.  
5.3. "Isis Unveiled or the Mona Lisa"  
5.4. Video games and manipulations of the image in the art of antiquity  
5.5. Changing perspectives: multiple 'lives' of heritage works

The workshop continued with a practical exercise based on three objects from the Museum of the Faculty of Arts of Alexandria. Finally Marie-Cécile presented some online educational resources from the Louvre (Paris), the British Museum (London), and others.

### *What was the most discussed item?*

Transfer of ownership and repatriation of work of arts

### *From Marie-Cécile's reflection*

She appreciated leading the workshop. It was the first time for her to address an African audience.

She will stay in contact with the attendees, they will go on sending e-mails with questions.

Marie-Cécile would have appreciated to get more information in advance about the origin of the audience (country, language...). In that case she could have adapted her choice of objects and examples to the cultural background the audience was coming from.

### *Impression from the participants*

The evaluation forms prove that most participants were pleased by the clear explanations offered by Marie-Cécile. She also managed to communicate her key message: 'how to transfer the message from museum to the public'. The participants are much more aware of the importance of museums in preserving and mediating heritage and of the value of museums for the cultural, historical and social consciousness of society.

The only negative feedback is about the length of the workshop: it should have been longer and/or more often. Several participants would appreciate more similar workshops in developing countries.

Some comments reflecting the opinions of the participants:

- Interpretation of the concept is always affected by the biased opinions of curator or visitor.
- There should be new sessions on different locations on topics relating to the cultural heritage. Why not initiate a partnership between cultural heritage professionals, institutions and countries for mutual inspiration?
- Similar workshops at the other African universities.
- Will be more aware of the importance of intangible heritage in the future.
- This type of workshops should be repeated in order to enhance a better understanding of the museum role in society as a whole.
- Due to the large majority of students the tone and the level of the workshop were adapted, which made the session less interesting for professional educators.

### **Concluding remarks from Arja van Veldhuizen**

Due to a relatively long period of uncertainty about the continuation of the conference, there was less time than usual to prepare the pre-conference workshops. In addition it was more difficult to contact the workshop leaders. The workshop leader from Rijksmuseum changed a few weeks before the conference. So as CECA board member responsible for the workshops I had to trust that it would turn out well.

It appeared to be impossible to include subscription for the pre-conference workshops in the conference registration form. So extra promotion for the workshops was needed and subscription was done by emailing directly to me. Until shortly before the conference the number of participants was rather low and we were very happy that finally there were enough applications to continue all four workshops. The evaluations show that the results were worth it.

CECA has been organising pre-conference workshops since 4 years, but this was the first time we could offer workshops in French. This was appreciated, particularly by the students of the Université du Sengor in Alexandria, who come from many different African Francophone countries. Out of the 22 French participants 19 were students of the Université du Sengor. There were also many students in the English morning session (12 Egyptian students, 10 of them from Alexandria Centre for Maritime Archaeology). This large percentage of students is unusual for the CECA pre-conference workshops and can be explained by the connections of the conference organisers to the University of Alexandria and the Université du Sengor.

It was also the first conference organised together with another committee: UMAC. Unfortunately we do not know which participants belonged to which committee, nor whether they were ICOM member or not.

Again the workshops were a great opportunity for colleagues to meet on this very first day of the conference. This is particularly important for members who did not attend conferences before: it helps them to get introduced in a small scale environment and makes them feel at home for the rest of the week.

*Arja van Veldhuizen*

*Co-opted member of the CECA Board delegated for professional development*

*06 04 15*

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