

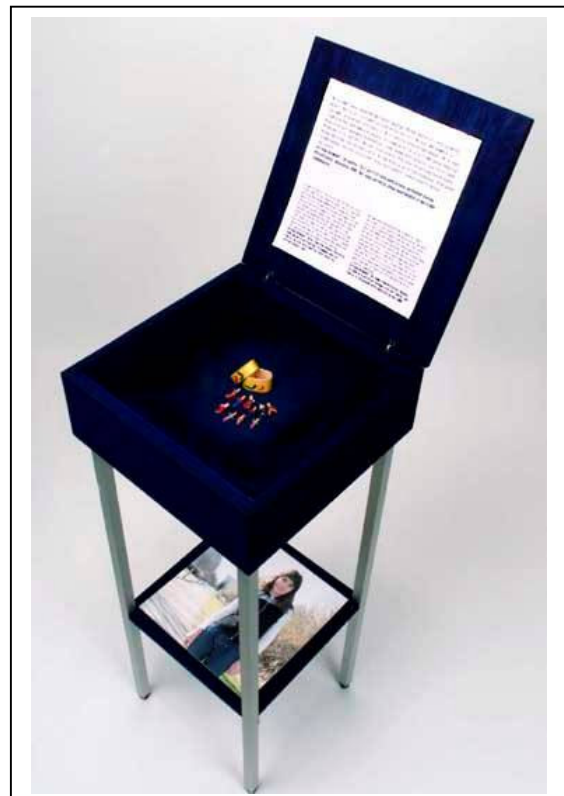
MIME Migrating Memories. - A Case Study from Malmö Museums, Sweden

By
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Just 6 months ago I read about Arlinda in the local newspaper here in Malmö. She and her class mates protested against some measurements being taken at her school. I jumped at her name and the picture, so different from that time, only a few years ago, when she was a participant in the MIME exhibition. She looked confident and happy. In the MIME exhibition Arlinda talked about the worry dolls she had chosen as her most important object.

“We came here because we had to move as there was a war in our country. We were scared. We were only two kilometres away from the war. You could hear the bombs and thought the house would fall. We had no time to take anything. We don’t even know how we got out of the country. We had to hurry up and save our lives. I only have some toys that someone gave me when I came here. I feel sorry for them. They are really tiny. I take them out of the box and tell them it is a pity they have to be in there, so I keep them



One of the blue boxes of memory from the MIME travelling exhibition, featuring the memory objects and text of Arlinda, a young girl from Kosovo, living in Sweden.. Photo: Malmö Museer

in my pocket. I talk to them when I am sad. It feels as if I am talking to a friend or something.”¹

Background

What becomes important when you leave your country for one reason or another?

Which objects, scents or pictures awaken memories?

The purpose of the project Migrating Memories was to engage young immigrants and their teachers in Tampere (Finland), Nottingham (England) and Malmö (Sweden) in realising the importance of safe-keeping memories and make them aware of their role in their new countries . We wanted to provide inspiration through education and co-operation.

For this project the three project partners applied for and received support from the European Union, the Culture 2000 programme.

MIME consisted of four parts:

Workshops with young immigrants about the importance of safe-keeping memories, an **interactive multilingual website**, a dramatised **travelling exhibition**, and a closing **two-day seminar** on the methods and importance of incorporating migration memory and cultural heritage and identity in museums.

In Malmö 30 newly arrived young immigrants, between 16-20 and their 2 teachers were involved in the MIME project.

In Tampere three classes from the Tampere Faculty school worked with 3 teachers and 2 museum curators and in Nottingham 19 recent asylum seekers at the Prima Training Centre worked with their teacher and the City Arts of Nottingham.

The students were encouraged to document their own memories and their most precious objects in the language of their new country. Students of Swedish, Finnish and English in the three partner cities participated in workshops on the role of museums and archives, cultural heritage and memory, on documentation and photography, and on internet work.

The young participants were encouraged to use new technology relating to their personal experiences and did so successfully in their new language. For most participants in the three cities it was the first time learning to work and publish on the Internet. It integrated remembering, writing in a new language, taking pictures and

¹ From the MIME catalogue, 2001

publishing them, producing it for the internet. It also gave them pride to see the fine work they had done and the work of others. As the web address was promoted, many visitors could view the result of their hard work, comment and connect.

Model

For the museums the project proved to be a useful model for work in other projects.

The main question was: What is your most valuable object?

- Interviews
- Own presentations
- Photographs
- Collecting objects and making choices

Results

The students/immigrants and the teachers were able to learn more about each other. By presenting their memories to a worldwide audience on the internet and partly in person, partly in the exhibition, they felt proud and more self-confident in their new surroundings. Between students, teachers and museum workers, a greater understanding for each other as well as new friendships developed. Being part of the historic documentation of their city also raised the students' interest in history.

The workshops became efficient tools for the students in learning to write and speak English/Finnish/Swedish. Teachers appreciated this realistic linguistic learning method. The students/immigrant groups were made aware of the role of the museum as safe keepers of history, present day as well as of historic times, and that their stories were important factors in the history of the cities where they live now.

The MIME project received much attention, on a local as well as on a national and international level. MIME had a powerful effect in linking members of the different arts and education communities – the museums, community groups, education for young and adult, internet arts via university and library. It led to co-operation with schools, artists, students, immigrant groups, archives, libraries, TV-stations, theatres, musicians, EU-specialists.

The initial objectives were to create compassion and understanding and to consolidate individual identity. We aimed at fostering collaboration and community between different cultures and generations and to do so, created real and virtual meeting spaces

By sharing memories and thoughts, visitors to the exhibition, the web site and the seminar meet real people. This evoked memories in themselves and thus made a connection, a human touch.

In all three cities visitors to the exhibition were noticeably moved and touched, reading the stories one by one in concentration. The overall view was that the exhibition dealt with the delicate issues of asylum, migration and refugees in a positive, innovative, sensitive yet challenging manner, which could help counter the effects of the negative myths perpetuated in the media. Visitors felt that by reading the stories they developed a greater understanding of what it might be like to be an immigrant and about the reasons why people seek asylum as well a greater understanding of the issues surrounding migration.

The aim of the MIME project was to present new Europeans and their memories and the importance of preserving the cultural heritage of modern Europeans.

The socially disadvantaged, immigrants and young people whose stories are rarely told in museums were made visible and valuable and became part of the European present day history.

During this project it became obvious that the situation for immigrants differed in the three partner countries. In England, the interviews were done with asylum seekers. My colleague there said:

“Some did not wish to be identified so I had to think of ways of representing them Hands were the best alternative to portraits. Everyone has such unique hands and they also tell the viewer so much about the person and their life. ... The class room environment of the portraits, emphasis the lack of real home, the small and simple everydayness of the object and the limited English illustrated how new all this was to them, how little trust they had in their lives, amongst themselves, towards me and the wider world. I ... came with a feeling of needing to be honest about how vulnerable and scared all the people I worked with are about not knowing the outcome of their decisions, where they will be the following months. The English participants were also the ones who could not part with their few belongings and where substitutes or pictures of the real objects were used. There was the obvious pride and shift in self esteem that took place when the participants arrived for a private view of the exhibition.”

In Finland three groups of newly arrived immigrants participated. My Finnish colleague reported that the question put in MIME, What is your most valuable object, was so hard to answer, but made us all think about the priorities in life. It showed immigrants not as a group but as individual human beings.

To the participants it was a way to honour their memories and to take part in society and in the history of their new cities. For example, many schools are interested in working with the history subject and relate it to the student's personal history as in the MIME-model in order to raise awareness of the importance of keeping memories and understanding history.

As museums aim at working more with documentation and multicultural issues, particularly involving young people, MIME has provided new standards and acted as a role model.

This ambitious project carried out in just a year has given echo in many other countries in Europe.: Norway, Holland, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Switzerland, Spain, Germany, Denmark and other cities in England

The stories based on our memories connect and show that, wherever we live, so do the memories. And museums have an important role to play in safeguarding memories – as every human being in himself is a museum – with objects, memories and a story to tell.

Lena Millinger

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