

**Title:** Museum communication as a way to tackling unemployment, freedom and human rights

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### Introduction

Museums are facing increasing challenges, especially smaller museums with modest or low budgets. Thus, I will present the various effects of museum communication when tackling the topical issues in the case of the National Museum of Contemporary History (Slovenia), through my double role of the curator and the head of the PR department.

### Aims

Two recent and very different examples of museum communication work with (non-)visitors will be introduced. The first case presents the use of museum speed dating with the young adults and museum curators as a promotional, marketing and accessibility tool, transforming the museum into a cultural hub in the process of dealing with the unemployment and empowerment of the young people. Second encompasses an example of the use of Instagram and the social web in the multiple role: addressing, integrating and promoting the issue of freedom. The latter opened the door to discussing human rights, migration, refugees, poverty, democracy... Through this, the talk aims to present various possibilities for museum communication in addressing preferentially the young: in a smaller number, creating a cultural hub; and in a larger number in order to include the international aspect, however both promoting participation and visitor-engagement.

### Conclusion

The presentation of both cases tends to demonstrate rich options museums have when reaching out to audiences or non-audiences and the interconnection of the curator and communication work – both aiming at museums being the cultural institutions for their public.

Talk details for presentation:

### Slide 1

Well, on a world countries scale, imagining the countries as a pack of dogs that would be us on the right, the Chihuahua-sized country. See, I come from this lovely tiny, pocket version of a country, with a total of 2 million of inhabitants. In addition, my museum is based in again lovely, tiny, pocket version of a European capital, called Ljubljana, with 300.000 inhabitants.

## Slide 2

Therefore, you can imagine, my museum is not mega-sized, such as MET, or British Museum. It is based in a lovely baroque mansion, right in the middle of a city park. And accordingly, also our budget is tiny and not so lovely. Especially for the PR department. Why is all this relevant? Because it explains a big part of why we are working as we do, and why we work very hard to be successful on European projects, co-funded by the EU, since they enable us in doing that extra work that should not be called extra work.

## Slide 3

Today, I will briefly present just a few bits and pieces of our approaches with focus on public relations as an example, what can be done with as low budget as possible. Since I work as a curator, being a head of PR and Marketing department and international projects manager, my views will be a mixture of these three fields. Nevertheless, I will try to give strong emphasis on PR.

## Slide 4

I will really briefly present two recent and completely different examples of museum communication work with non-visitors, unemployed and the young, where different tools were used in order to raise the visitor number and transfer the museum into a cultural hub, where important social issues were addressed and discussed.

## Slide 5

The first project EMEE: EuroVision – Museums Exhibiting Europe gave us wings during the financial crisis. It was an international museology project, with 8 different partners. Co-financed by the European Union.

## Slide 6

It was an experimental museology project, aiming at equipping the small museums with low or very limited budget in order to become more open, and social arena oriented. We developed a completely self-sufficient workshop system and a set of toolkits, which are all downloadable on the EMEE webpage – if you might want to give it a go:

<https://www.museums-exhibiting-europe.de/downloads/>.

What is more important for today was the work we did with the people. One of the most important tasks was, to draw the attention of the ones, who usually do not visit our museums. The non-visitors – even though this expression is referred to today as outdated, for us it was relevant back then. In our case, those were the young adults, aged between 18 and 35, the ones, who do not have their own families yet and are freed of the compulsory visit of the museum (forced by the school, university). This was also a population highly exposed to unemployment in the time of crisis. Therefore, our goal was to attract them to the project and to the exhibition making within this project and to offer them something in return, offering them professional training, museum as a platform, where they can establish themselves, and curatorial experiences. And we needed museum professionals to provide us with the knowledge exchange and museum objects – we didn't want to derive just from our

museum, but to make it wider. We knew what we wanted to have and what elements we wanted to include, but we did not know how to reach them. We were setting into unknown. The idea was to draw bonds with the young, to set the ground for the exhibition to be visited by young adults and to provoke them to be active, and transform them into our messengers by giving them the voice. For the bridge building, we needed both groups – the young and museum professionals from various museums – to work together, creating a cultural hub and a long-term connection.

Slide 7

For this reason, we have designed an experimental EuroVision Lab. with a simple formula to tame the unknown:

Training of all parties involved separately because the young had different needs from the museum professionals ->

Museum speed dating game as a joint event and as object selection and knowledge exchange for the experimental exhibition ->

Then there was a whole process of exhibition preparation ->

Peak of an iceberg was the opening ceremony and exhibition programme.

In addition, we wanted the exhibition to really be experimental and participatory – to set for the unknown, fully in the hands of the young. They had all the power. I was basically just guiding and steering them.

As a peek of the training for both groups after several months of training, museum speed dating game was a pleasant surprise.

I assume you are all familiar with the speed dating system. Well, we used it for museum purposes, giving each pair (one young person and one curator) the limited time of 3 minutes to talk about the object the curators brought with. Since the final goal was not only for each pair to have a bit of connection, but to get a selection of objects for the exhibition by the young.

Slide 8

Video of Museum speed dating game: <http://bit.ly/2l52dPe> and more detailed description of Museum speed dating: <https://www.museums-exhibiting-europe.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/EMEE-E-book.pdf> and <https://www.museums-exhibiting-europe.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/EuroVision-Lab.-Catalog.pdf>.

Slide 9

Museum speed dating was used as a tool with the young adults and museum curators, firstly as an icebreaking game, since the two groups did not know each other. Secondly, the game was an assurance object presentation would not become boring – imagine listening about 15 museum objects without any time limitation and sparkles– since we all know, how good we are with following the time limitation. For the curators it was important to go out of their

safe space painlessly. It was a personal meeting and bridge building between the two groups, that resulted in selection of top 5 objects for the exhibition. Lastly, it turned out to be a great promotional tool as well, since the videos and all the news about this raised awareness among potential audience in a huge manner through the media and the young and social web.

Museum speed dating game was not by far the end of the experiment. After that, the young prepared an exhibition, with the support of the curators, the catalogue, and the entire exhibition programme – for which they were fully credited. Most of the 15 were unemployed at that time, but are now running their own exhibition and other cultural projects on the base of our work. Some got their jobs as exhibition guides in other museums; some went to study museum pedagogy and aim at positions in museum. They all keep in touch – discussing their ideas on the museum field, or the dilemmas they see, moreover, they claim this experiment gave them the chance to draw attention to themselves professionally. In addition, the exhibition was a success, highly visited by the young due to the snowball effect and higher media coverage. Which had its effect also on our social media that finally experienced a bit of a breakthrough.

#### Slide 10

Second, we were able to relate to the somewhat established social web and work much more on the virtual world. In search of freedom project was all about the student protests – not just in the Europe in the past, but broader. Through 5 partners from 3 countries it dealt with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the student protests and the fight for freedom and democracy. Again, our main target group were the young, who we really wanted to address and activate. However, we had no time for such qualitative engagement.

#### Slide 11

One of the major tasks in order to get the young thinking about the freedom and democracy today was through social media. We have created an Instagram profile @insearchoffreedom1968 with photos of freedom fighters to motivate the users all over the world.

#### Slide 12

We wanted to gather today's reflection of the situation, seen by the young, with the help of Instagram contest. We wanted to start a conversation about these important issues. Among more than 300 entries (being a tiny Chihuahua, that is a great number for us) three winning photos were selected by the international jury and were included into the exhibition. The diversity and the number of the countries, from which Instagrammers participated, warmly surprised us. And again, that was an online promotion already for a travelling exhibition, that was very well visited in Slovenia, Poland and Spain.

#### Slide 13

The second tool of communication for the visitors of the exhibition – particularly the young, was the wall, where they could leave their legit graffiti. We wanted to connect the past with

the present by engaging the visitors. All our fears, that no one would write anything on the wall, were unneeded. By the end of the exhibition, there was not a tiniest space left on the wall and the graffiti were in 90% related to the question: What is freedom to you?

And I will stop here, not to run out of time.

Slide 14

This was my quick walk through my museum's response to the global issues and our effort to be more like a cultural hub and a welcoming participatory institution – using all communication channels we get to make some noise. And the most important lesson we have learned: Even if you are a Chihuahua -sized museum, doing Chihuahua -sized changes, it matters.