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Sub-Committee on the Cultural Heritage

European Museum Forum Workshop
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VOLUNTEERS IN CULTURAL HERITAGE AND MUSEUMS: PROMOTING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

in co-operation with:

The Istituto Beni Culturali Regione Emilia-Romagna, Bologna
The Cultural Department of the Regione Toscana, Florence

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CONCLUSIONS

The subject

Europe's cultural heritage represents the material evidence of our past, of our history and of the changes our societies have undergone over the centuries. The conservation and valorisation of cultural assets, however, requires more funds and effort than those that the public sector can provide. In some European countries more than in others these tasks are equally shared between the public and the private sector, i.e. the so-called civic society, usually on a voluntary basis, to ensure that places, monuments, sites, objects of cultural and historical value are passed on unharmed, or rather enhanced, to future generations. What the EMF Workshop 2007 has dealt with is not generosity towards museums in tangible terms through donations, but the donation of an equally precious resource made every day by thousands of women and men who make a free choice on how to use or give their time. The Workshop viewed volunteering from two perspectives: recognising both the important contribution volunteers can make to the running of cultural organisations, heritage attractions and museums, and also the significant impact that such voluntary activity can have on the people involved in terms of personal and professional growth.

The objective was to share experiences and exchange ideas on how to recruit, motivate and manage volunteers in the cultural heritage sector and how to conceive training and development programmes which are beneficial for the individuals involved and contribute to their personal and professional growth. The conclusions of the participants represent the results of three intensive days of keynote presentations, debate and discussion. It is the

hope of the participants that the conclusions will have relevance to cultural professionals and policy-makers throughout Europe. The large amount of material resulting from discussions and study cases has been summarised in the following document structured in 10 Recommendations which is intended to offer a platform for a coherent action in the field of volunteering for cultural heritage in Europe with a special accent on the museum field, where this involvement is felt of strategic value for the growth, if not even for the survival of many institutions.

General Recommendations

1. Volunteers can be an important, inspiring labour and advocacy force for museums, deeply embedded in the European tradition. Volunteers can provide knowledge, experience and inspiration, bring new perspectives on museum collections, and help to develop new audiences. Volunteers can strengthen the museum's relationship with its local or regional environment as ambassadors of the institution.
2. In discussions on the European level about the role of volunteers we must bear in mind the huge differences between regions and countries in the areas of culture, legislation, formal education and social security; these can confuse the exchange of experiences between countries and may even include different meanings of the word 'volunteer'.
3. The position of volunteer work in museums and cultural organisations may be considered within with the whole spectrum of staff requirements and opportunities, including core staff roles, internships, reintegration programmes, education programmes and special projects.
4. In order to optimise the value and position of volunteer work in museums, it should be an explicit and integrated part of policy and human resource management. In order to devise a relevant and workable volunteer programme, the museum must consider its mission as well as operational needs and wishes. It must also achieve the commitment and support of the existing staff.
5. A successful volunteer programme requires the institution to recognise and consider the motivations and needs of the individual volunteer. These will vary from individual to individual, but factors to consider include age, stage of life and social background. Volunteers can gain knowledge, learn new skills, increase their value on the labour market, enhance their social well-being or status, and receive formal or informal recognition as a benefit of volunteering.
6. In considering the cost of setting up and running a volunteer programme, the museum needs to bear in mind the necessary investment of financial and personnel resources required for recruitment, marketing, communication, training, reimbursements and incentives. There are costs associated with running a volunteer programme and volunteers should not be seen as a form of 'cheap labour'.
7. Recruitment, training, integration and retention of volunteers, as for permanent or paid staff, require regular care and attention. The appointment of a volunteer coordinator is recommended to develop and manage the volunteer programme and to mediate between all stakeholders within the museum organisation.
8. The quality of a museum's volunteer programme can be an indication of the museum's quality as a whole. Attractive museums, with a strong focus on their public, will be more successful in attracting good quality, skilled volunteers.

9. The relationship between the volunteer and the organisation should be based on the principle of shared values, be reciprocal and be formalised in a contract or other document defining the volunteer's role and setting out mutual obligations, rights, expectations and limitations.

10. Within a well-developed programme, volunteers should be viewed as full members or stakeholders of the organisation, with the ability to state their views and influence decision-making. They should not be seen as a threat to professionalism, the position of regular staff or the continuity of the organisation, rather they should be seen to enhance these areas.

In conclusion

For the benefit of cultural exchange and improvement of cultural awareness on the European level, it is recommended that the work of volunteers in the cultural sector be stimulated and opportunities created to exchange experiences of museums and other cultural institutions.

The participants in the 2007 EMF Workshop expressed the wish to continue such exchange at a distance, possibly relying on the research outcomes and on the tools which will be developed by European projects, such as the forthcoming LLP Grundtvig 'Volunteers for Cultural Heritage', as well as on the network it will establish over the two years of its duration.

The need to build a deeper relationship among people working in the field and to create a professional community was strongly felt and concrete steps have already been taken by some participants to organise study visits and professional exchange, giving such wishes and aspirations a very fertile ground on which to grow.

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List of Participants

A = Administration
DF = Discussion facilitator
DL = Discussion leader

- Austria**
Graz: MUSIS
Mrs Evelyn Kaindl Ranzinger evelyn.kaindl@musis.at
- Finland**
Tampere: Tampere Museums
Mrs Tuire Hänninen tuire.hanninen@tampere.fi
- Germany**
Darmstadt: Institut Mathildenhöhe
Miss Sonja Fessel Sonja.Fessel@darmstadt.de
- Dortmund: Hoesch Museum**
Mr Michael Dückerhoff M.Dueckershoff@web.de
- Ireland**
Dublin: The Chester Beatty Library
Miss Justyna Chmielewska jchmielewska@cbl.ie
- Italy**
Bologna: Istituto Beni Culturali
Mrs Valentina Galloni vgalloni@regione.emilia-romagna.it
A Mrs Margherita Sani MaSani@regione.emilia-romagna.it
- Bolzano: Culture Department, Province of Bolzano**
Mrs Patrizia Reggiani Patrizia.Reggiani@provincia.bz.it
- Ferrara: Argenta Ecomuseum System**
Mrs Nerina Baldi ecomuseo@comune.argenta.fe.it
- Longiano: Museo della Ghisa Cast Iron Museum**
Mrs Raffaella Bassi bassineri.ra@museoitalianoghisa.org
- Marostica: Municipal Culture Department**
Mrs Francesca Xausa xausa.cultura@infomarostica.it
- DL **Milan: EMF Director**
Mr. Massimo Negri kriterion.negri@libero.it
- Mulazzo di Lunigiana (MS) : Emigration Museum of Tuscan People**
Mr Stefano Battaglia stefano.batta@yahoo.com
- Padua: University of Padua**
Mrs Mimma De Gasperi mimma.degasperi@unipd.it
- Prato: Association of Friends of Museums**
Mrs Elisa Biagi amicimuseiprato@libero.it

- Prato: Textile Museum**
Mr Filippo Guarini f.guarini@museodeltessuto.it
Mrs Chiara Lastrucci c.lastrucci@museodeltessuto.it
- Reggio Emilia: Trainer and Consultant**
Mrs Amelia Ceci amelia.ceci@ausl.re.it
- Rome: ECCOM**
DF Mrs Cristina Da Milano damilano@eccom.it
Mrs Martina De Luca martinadeluca@eccom.it
- Rome: Pierreci**
Mr Leonardo Guarnieri leonardo.guarnieri@pierreci.it
- Turin: Fondazione Fitzcarraldo**
Mrs Nicoletta Gazerri nicoletta.gazerri@fitzcarraldo.it
- Netherlands**
- DF **Haarlem: Het Dolhuys National Museum of Psychiatry**
Mrs Marjelle van Hoorn vanhoorn@hetdolhuys.nl
- Spanbroek: Scheringa Museum of Realist Art**
Mrs Belia van der Giessen
b.vandergiessen@scheringamuseum.nl
- DL/DF **Tilburg: Brabant Natural History Museum**
Dr Frans Ellenbroek f.j.m.ellenbroek@hetnet.nl
- Poland**
- Gdansk: Archaeological Museum**
Mrs Olga Krukowska OK@archeologia.pl
- Gdansk: Polish Maritime Museum**
Mrs Agnieszka Piórkowska a.piorkowska@cmm.pl
- Portugal**
- Lisbon: Sete Pes, Projectos Artisticos e Culturais**
Mrs Ana Rita Canavarro rita.canavarro@nectcabo.pt
- Slovakia**
- Bzrotin: Biospektrum NGO**
Mrs Judita Bekeová borka35@post.sk; bekeova@smopaj.sk
Mrs Monika Rákaiová monika.raakeiova@post.sk
- Slovenia**
- Ljubljana: City Museum of Ljubljana**
Mrs Janja Rebolj janja.rebolj@mm-lj.si
- Murska Sobota: Slovenian Museum Association**
Mrs Metka Fujs Metka.Fujs@quest.arnes.si
- Sweden**
- Visby : Riksställningar – Swedish Travelling Exhibitions**
Mr Mathias Stromer matthias.stromer@rikstustallningar.se

United Kingdom

- A **Bristol : European Museum Forum**
Miss Ann Nicholls mail@europeanmuseumforum.org
- Cambridge : Fitzwilliam Museum**
Mrs Linda Brooklyn lmb26@cam.ac.uk
- Cardiff : Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum
Wales**
Mr Mark Richards Mark.Richards@museumwales.ac.uk
- London : Royal National Theatre**
Mrs Alison Rae ARae@nationaltheatre.org.uk
- DF **Milton Keynes : Arts & Museums Consultant**
Mrs Kirsten Gibbs kirsten.gibbs@virgin.net