In Defense of Museum Education

En defensa de la educación museal

Milene Chiovatto

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/iss/2337>

DOI: 10.4000/iss.2337

ISSN: 2306-4161

Publisher

ICOM - International Council of Museums

Printed version

Date of publication: 15 December 2020

Number of pages: 70-84

ISBN: 978-2-491997-27-4

ISSN: 2309-1290

Electronic reference

Milene Chiovatto, "In Defense of Museum Education", *ICOFOM Study Series* [Online], 48-2 | 2020, Online since 26 January 2021, connection on 06 February 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/iss/2337> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/iss.2337>

In Defense of Museum Education

Milene Chiovatto

Pinacoteca de São Paulo – São Paulo, Brazil

ABSTRACT

Based on a *Friends* episode, this text investigates perceptions concerning museum education, discusses disparities in regard to the relative value and power assigned to professionals in museums, and reflects on the relevance of education as a core purpose of these institutions. It comments on the conceptual heritage left by the first public policies of culture and reflects on the updating of and decolonizing actions in museums. It discusses how knowledge is constructed and questions the rise of new nomenclatures for museum education. Finally, it reflects on the new definition of museum, and the unfortunate removal of the term “education” from the definition as one of the institution’s main purposes.

Key words: museum education, learning, decoloniality, mediation, museum.

RESUMEN

En defensa de la educación museal

Teniendo como referencia un episodio de la serie *Friends*, el texto investiga examina las percepciones sobre la acción educativa en los museos, analiza las disparidades internas relativas al valor y poder entre los profesionales de los museos y reflexiona sobre la relevancia de la educación como núcleo de estas instituciones. Comenta los legados

conceptuales de las primeras políticas públicas de cultura y reflexiona sobre las actualizaciones *decolonizadoras* en los museos. Debate cómo se construye el conocimiento y cuestiona el surgimiento de nuevas nomenclaturas para la educación museal. Por último, reflexiona sobre la nueva definición de Museo, y la eliminación o falta del término educación como uno de los principales propósitos de esta institución.

Palabras claves: educación museal, aprendizaje, decolonialidad, mediación; museo.

A perverse legacy: why it is necessary to defend museum education

I would like to use an episode of *Friends* as a basis for beginning my reflections on the updating and recognition of the role of the museum educator and the essential need for this profession, and then bring these reflections to bear on the question of a new definition of the museum.

In episode 11 of season 4 of this popular series, the character Ross Geller (a well-known paleontologist who does research on dinosaur fossils) works in a fictitious *New York Museum of Prehistoric History*. To help his friend Joey Tribbiani, a perpetually unemployed actor, Ross offers him a job as a guide in this museum.

Ross' "good deed" and its echoes throughout the episode offer a window into how the average layperson, as well as our coworkers in museums, see this profession.

Joey does not have a degree in any field related to the work of the museum, such as paleontology or biology. Nor does he have any training in education or a qualification for working with the public. Even so, his friend's recommendation is enough for him to be hired onto the museum's staff.

When Joey breaks the news to Monica Geller and Rachel Green, they ask him whether the job calls for special training. Joey says it does not; all he has to do is memorize a text furnished by the museum – a script – as if the guide's only task was to memorize texts and recite them to the public, as an actor does on TV.

In one of the scenes, Joey guides a group of 10 to 12-year-old students through the museum. The term 'Jurassic' is the only one he is able to pronounce, and everything he presents to the students is made up using that term. One of the boys, who apparently has some knowledge about dinosaurs, questions Joey and the data he is providing. Joey, then, answers 'Shhh! This is a museum, no talking' – interrupting the boy and preventing all possibilities of participation from the audience.

At lunchtime, Joey realizes how much disparity there is in the museum. While white-coated professionals (curators, conservators, restorers, and researchers)

sit together in the cafeteria, blue-coated workers (educators, guards and people who work with the audience) should sit somewhere else. It is not possible for them to mingle.

Touched by his old friendship with Joey, Ross tries to break this symbolic distance, asserting that they are all human beings and capable of being friends.

Although the episode ends without a conclusion for this situation, those of us who work in museums know that this hierarchy really does exist, and that attempts to break the stereotypes are doomed to failure.

Brief analysis of the scenes

We will discuss the idea, conveyed by this episode, that anyone at all can do the job of a museum educator. This task, in the view of the average layperson, seems like an easy task requiring no commitment or educational background.

In this view, it can therefore be carried out by anyone, perhaps a trainee or a volunteer, underpaid categories; a person hired only for this job of receiving the public without any other link with the institution. The episode thus makes us become ironically aware of a notion that is widespread even in cultural public policies and within these institutions themselves, which sees the task of education as of little importance, requiring that someone merely translate the knowledge of specialists to the general public. This conception, besides distorting what education is, reveals an authoritarian and colonialist ideology linked with the first concepts used in cultural public policies. This perception is related to the idea that when we go to a museum, we learn based on the amount of information that we are able to accumulate, transforming the educator's task into memorizing and repeating information.

The next mistaken belief, is that the valuable information reproduced by the guide, like a sort of human tape recorder, is provided by specialists, who are the real valuable museum workers¹. This perception hierarchizes the field of knowledge and consequently the museum professions and professionals (as well as their salaries), thus reinforcing the stereotype that those who are dedicated to the study of the objects in museums know more, should be more recognized, and have more value than those who are dedicated to receiving and interacting with the public.

Visitor-related knowledge is almost never taken into account in the conceptual construction or planning of these institutions, being relegated to operate only after all "important" decisions have been made.

During that *Friends* episode, the guide leads the public along a predetermined path, also defined by the museum's experts. At the visit, the guide has no relationship with either the public or his or her own knowledge. This reaffirms

---

1. Researchers, curators, conservators, investigators and object experts.

the conception that museums produce discourses constructed according to a single viewpoint and propagated as “the truth,” thereby reinforcing the stereotype of the museum as a unique and unquestionable conceptual authority. It likewise stereotypes the members of the public as generic, indistinct and unable to contribute to one of these institutions.

The group’s silence, demanded by the guide in the episode, challenges us to rethink our institutions. It urges us to distance ourselves from a solemn atmosphere where we should remain silent, changing it for an enjoyable place for everyone, where we can express our opinions and debate matters of common interest.

Finally, the scenes of the museum’s cafeteria show our inability to develop a pluralistic institution, in which various sorts of knowledge can and should be interconnected in order to serve society.

The beginning of public policies for culture

Part of the difficulties in valuing and respecting museum education, both inside and outside of the museum, springs from how even though the museum is implicitly considered as an educational institution, there are a number of different ideas about what is meant by education. Moreover, the field of museum education is still under formation. Due to that, the cultural public policies of various countries have treated the field differently, in everything ranging from professional training to professional status (Tran & King, 2007).

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that museum educators are still the weakest links in this institutional chain. Several petitions and public letters released internationally make it clear that, in times of economic and social crisis, one of the first areas to be terminated in museums is the education department (Harris, 2020).

This fact underscores various ideas that we saw in the analysis of the *Friends* episode: for example, the notion that our job is easy; that anybody, with any sort of training, can perform this role; that it is easy to substitute these professionals; that the educator does not contribute to the conceptual construction of the museum, serving only to receive the public (mainly school students); and that, since the museum is closed, the museum can do without our presence.

This situation also reaffirms the view that the museum’s value is in its objects and collections. Even if museums are closed, its objects should still be conserved, researched and studied, so that professionals linked to those areas should be kept in the institution. It likewise evinces the notion that knowledge about the objects themselves is more important than expertise regarding the experience and needs of the museum’s users.

Various museums, at this fragile moment, have begun communication campaigns using virtual media, although most have consisted of images of their collections and informative texts about them. This is consistent with the belief

discussed above, that it is enough for a museum to furnish information and the education will take place naturally.

Our current scenario shows that, in both the TV episode and the real world, the backdrop still involves the same beliefs present in the first museums, as well as the first models of cultural public policy, historically known as the *democratization of culture*, although this has subsequently been criticized for having proved to be ineffective.

In the post-World War II years, there arose new ways of seeing the world. The creation of UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization) and of ICOM (International Council of Museums) shows how the chaos of the war affected people's thinking, and also the perceived importance of culture for reconstruction and the search for peace.

The pioneering initiatives include the creation of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in France, in 1959, considered the world's first Ministry of Culture, which was highly influential. At that time, this agency presented the following goals:

“Article 1. The ministry charged with cultural affairs has as its mission: make accessible the chief works of humanity, and first of all of France, to the greatest possible number of French citizens, to ensure a wider audience for our cultural heritage, and to favour the creation of art and of the spirit that enriches it” (Genevieve & Poirrier, 2012).

”

This was when the expression “cultural policy” gained an effective format, defining culture as an obligation of the State. The actions carried out based on this policy sought the “popularization of culture,” but were based on the belief that to achieve this, they should bring *high culture* to the people, facilitating access to the officially recognized heritage which, according to the belief at that time, would automatically allow for the development of greater critical and aesthetic awareness among the public--a very elitist way of thinking (Genevieve & Poirrier, 2012).

This political proposal was thus based on the presupposition that there is just one culture, the officially recognized one, and one people, disregarding their particularities and specificities. It moreover assumed that this culture would be naturally attractive and understandable to everyone, all of this evidently couched in a strong ideology of nationhood, co-substantiated on the nationalization of cultural policy. What was lacking was the *means* by which the public could have access to the cultural institutions.

But this plan led to a false democratization (Botelho, 2001), according to the studies of cultural habits that followed, whose conclusions indicated that efforts to reduce the physical barriers between refined culture and the popular

classes – for example, by encouraging people to visit museums by no other means than reduced admission prices, or free admission – are not enough to bridge the abyss that separates these two worlds.

Like the rise of the museums, the model of the democratization of culture was based on an elitist and structural colonizing conception, like that which holds that Europe had the *true* culture and therefore had the *mission* to spread it to the other nations and the uncultivated populations as a way of *civilizing* them.

This sort of structuring thought persists, for example, when current cultural policies insist that reduced prices are enough to encourage increased attendance in cultural venues. Or when we see museum education being treated as a way of bring a bigger quantity of public into cultural institutions or a way of inculcating the taste for high culture.

To advance the paradigm of the democratization of culture to another more diverse and egalitarian one, like that proposed by so-called *cultural democracy*, it will be necessary to let go of crystallized values and the elitist/colonizing view in order to advance toward a view that

“espouses a broader definition of culture, recognizes the diversity of existing expressive formats, seeks greater integration between daily life and culture and, as a condition of cultural policy, assumes the decentralization of cultural interventions” (Rubim, 2009).

”

It will be necessary to carry out something that museum education – at least that which is based on constructivism and the dialogic approach – has been doing for years: to recognize the objects in museum collections as pretexts (pre-texts), as things that kindle the dialogue with the public. Instead of representing a single, rigid narrative, historical structure or aesthetics *authorized* by the experts, this approach valorizes the interpretations arising from the repertoires of the different publics, thus making the museum objects come to life and take on another sort of value (beyond their social, economic or historical aspects).

More than conserving memory, the museum should be responsible for telling the story of the past through eyes that are of and in present, meaning that when we present an object, we are always talking more about ourselves, contemporary human beings, than about the object *per se*.

Rethinking the museums in controversial times

We live in turbulent times. The most recent elections of leaders in important countries, including parts of Latin America, have clearly shown that populations are attracted to discourses of segregation and violence, creating a false

opposition between promises of economic growth and the need for social equity, affecting even legally constituted rights. Added to this is the massive destruction of the planet and its resources for the sake of a consumerism that perennializes economic inequalities and, more recently, the unbridled expansion of a lethal virus that has demanded that we take emergency social measures.

The times remind us of the many efforts made during the 1960s and 1970s, with struggles for equality and for the recovery of democracies in the face of, for example, political authoritarianisms that dominated a large part of the countries of Latin America.

It was not by chance that in the 1970s the Roundtable of Santiago, Chile, produced its document as museums were involved in the efforts for the construction of more equitable societies and stimulated to be concerned, beyond their objects, about their role in the social landscape and in the societies in which they are installed.

From this Roundtable grew a notion called the Integral Museum (Roundtable Santiago do Chile ICOM, 1972), able to deal with economic inequalities, social development, the ecological and urban scene, and educational responsibility through culture. The very notion of “public” was problematized, becoming understood as the participants of the communities where the museums operate.

Still today, the themes set forth by ICOM for International Museum Day recover fundamental points from that Roundtable document, spurring museums to a more incisive social activity.

However, since 1972, while ecomuseums have emerged in different parts of the world, connecting community and culture, a very small number of traditional museums have changed their structure to engage more with society. In addition, if they have, they made this change mainly through their education areas (Varine-Bohan, 2008).

This way, the more traditional museums, instead of reconstructing themselves internally to focus on society not only as the receiver of their action but also as a partner in their construction, delegated this contact to their education areas, while making little or no change to their internal mindsets, constitutions and modes of operation.

Although most researchers and curators have not taken the path proposed by the 1972 document, it is nonetheless praiseworthy that they currently participate in the struggle against historical evils such as colonialism, patriarchalism, misogyny, racism and every sort of discrimination. They are thus advancing, slowly, toward the dissolution of the belief in single, universal truths. However, although these postures are urgent and very welcome, in most cases they are taken from a revision of their collections, focusing once again on the objects rather than on the ways of rethinking the institution itself. This changes the point of view for thinking about the objects, but it does not change the enunciator.

Some institutions have advanced a little more and have begun to incorporate objects and curators representative of previously invisible social and ethnic groups that were stereotyped or scarcely represented in the institutional collections -- an extremely necessary advance.

The term used internationally to denote this revision of the collections is “decolonization,” in the sense of overcoming the thoughts and processes inherited from colonialism (Restrepo & Rojas, 2010).

Nevertheless, few representatives of society, without a specific specialization or training in the area of museum activity, can effectively manage to sit at the same table with museum specialists to be heard and understood, and to convey their discourses, ways of thinking, creations and propositions into new configurations of the collections, or into new uses of the physical space of the museums.

The decolonial revision of collections and heritage objects is fundamental for bringing new and welcome airs and meanings to museums. From the point of view of the workers at different levels in the museums, however, colonial thought still prevails and is felt in a static organizational hierarchy. In a large portion of the museums, we still find at the top of their organizational structure the professionals linked to objects, who are seen as thinkers, and, at a lower level, the professionals who deal with the public, who are seen as the executors of the plans from those “thinkers”.

Moreover, there is an international tendency for the highest positions in museums to be occupied by men, mostly white men, the greater part of whom are curators, researchers, historians, or, at best, museologists, while the levels below this, of an executive character, have their positions occupied extensively by women, although efforts are needed in regard to gender equity.²

However, that there is an inherent risk when a significant part of the researchers and curators remain focused on their research and at a distance from the public and from other professionals in those same museums. In the controversial times in which we live, with strong political polarizations, diminished individual freedoms and decreasing opportunities for the least privileged in society to participate in the construction of their own history, if the museum does not engage in a real connection with society, how will it be relevant? (Simon, 2016)

In our world – with its maelstrom of images, disseminated and reproduced in a myriad of virtual media formats that tend to obliterate their authorship and to spread fake news at the same rate as real news, in which the web is constantly available by touching a smartphone screen, thus amassing essential and unim-

---

2. Concerning this theme, search for the action launched by ICOM in March 2019 titled “Gender mainstreaming: ICOM’s mission in the past three decades” (URL: <https://icom.museum/en/news/gender-mainstreaming-icom-mission-in-the-past-three-decades/>); and the formation, in 2016, of the Gender Equity in Museums Movement (URL: <https://www.genderequitymuseums.com/>).

portant information with the same hierarchy of value – society needs, more than ever, not a place where the correct answers are preformulated, dictated by the experts, but rather a place where it is possible to be heard, in which security springs from the possibility of personal constructions of meanings and the development of critical thought, to individually assess if there are possible truths, and to act collectively in the construction of a more equitable society.

Museum education and cultural mediation

Words get old. In contemporary times, we often seek new words, as many of them become heavy due to the load of meaning and historical sense that they bear.

Also, whenever one sets out to define a concept in the international context, like the current campaign of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) aimed at the construction of a new definition for the museum (as the one set forth in 2007 seems to be no longer adequate), it needs to be borne in mind that the same words can have different meanings in different cultures, often transforming into false cognates.

As the proposal presented in June 2019 was widely criticized and gave rise to controversy, so far without resolution, we will discuss below the possible reasons that the concept of *education* was removed from that more recent text, while in the former definition it appeared as one of the primary functions of museums.

According to most etymological dictionaries, the verb “to educate” derives from the Latin *educare*, which means “to educate, to instruct” but also “to create,” meaning the development of something new. It is composed of the prefix *ex-* meaning “outside,” and *ducere*, to guide, to lead. The combined word involves the idea that introducing someone to the world through instruction is akin to leading them, showing them what exists beyond themselves.

But when someone is led to know what exists beyond themselves, this modifies the teacher as well as the person being taught (Larrosa, 2004).

It is not enough, therefore, to merely transmit information (Bordeaux & Caillet, 2013), nor is this what education is about; to educate, the educator pays attention to the development of the learner in the sense of stimulating his or her growth through tensions and not by ready-made answers (Larrosa, 2004).

In the real world, this liberating and broad concept has given rise to preformatted and rigid structures, such as the traditional school. It is a mistake, however, to reduce education to only what is experienced in the schools, or worse yet, take that model as a parameter for what education is or could be in other contexts.

To surpass this common mistaken notion, it is necessary to reflect on how the acquisition of knowledge takes place.

We see that the ideas of “to instruct” and “to create” are important and meaningful parts of the act of educating. However, these ideas seem to be contradictory. On the one hand, “to instruct” is related to transmitting knowledge, training and domesticating, presupposing the external existence of knowledge that is to be transmitted to someone, while simultaneously adjusting the individualities to pre-existing models, molding them to a pattern. On the other hand, “to create” is related to giving existence to (someone), generating, and producing, while presupposing an autonomy of the individuals in relation to preexisting models and/or knowledge, as well as their intense participation in the construction of meanings. That is, it presupposes an autonomy of signification.

To go deeper into these questions, we can seek the references in the classification of the theories of knowledge, starting from that which considers knowledge as something that is external and given to the learner (a unique and objective truth, therefore transmittable) and that which considers knowledge as something to be constructed and created by the learner (with multiple and contextual truths, which are therefore unrepeatably and impossible to be transmitted) (Hein, 2006).

Up to now, the institution of the school has perpetuated an educational model that sees the student as an empty recipient, ready to receive knowledge that is always true and unquestionable, and this is what has ultimately given rise to a profoundly mistaken idea of education.

“If the learner is seen as a passive vessel into whom education is poured (to use the crude but popular metaphor) then the focus of any pedagogy is on organizing the subject matter and presenting the content in the most appropriate way so that it can be absorbed by the student (or museum visitor). But the notion of an active mind mandates a concern for the particular “mind” of the learner” (Hein, 2006).

”

The educational model that understands knowledge as something created, constructed by the active action of the learner, taking into account his or her previous experiences, is known as Constructivism and is fully articulated within the pedagogical proposals of Paulo Freire, the internationally venerated Brazilian educator.

That theoretician, besides proposing the dialogic model of education, held that the true education process begins by building on the preexisting knowledge of learners, to educate them with the aim of developing their critical capacity, for the very necessary purpose of social transformation (Freire, 1981). Besides being a model more suitable to the experiences that take place in the museum, these attitudes point to the development of educational proposals aimed at

different profiles of the public, with each specialist engaged in educational activities dedicated to his or her own specificity.

For Freire, education is a political act. In his works, he argues that education must aim for the development of the critical conscience of the learner, and he strongly criticizes the mechanical process of teaching a person to read and write [or acquire knowledge] (Elias, 1975).

Freire's educational process, defined as "conscientization" (awareness), is explained as

"the process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives, and of their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it." (Freire, 1981)

”

The concept of education, approached in the way discussed above, seems completely suitable for museum education, without the need for the creation of any other nomenclature or theory to serve as a basis for this action.

Nevertheless, since the 1980s, texts have arisen proposing a change of nomenclature based on apparently unclear reasoning. The proliferation of the term "mediation" appears to be an attempt to espouse an approach through dialogue and a constructive action with the public, aiming at social modification (Lemay-Perreault & Paquin, 2017)—all of which, as we have seen, is fully considered in the proposals of a constructivist/Freirean museum education.

The French term *médiation culturelle* has been found in French statute law since 2002 (Bordeaux & Caillet, 2013), and it is clearly associated with the subsequent enrichment of the world and the appearance of social responsibility divisions in companies the world over.

We cannot forget that the rise and expansion of the term "cultural mediation" is connected to the formalization of French public policies of culture, and also to the phenomenon of the growth of large exhibitions and museums in the final decades of the last century and the beginning of this one, in response to global economic and political interests. It was in these contexts that museum education began to be a theme of interest for debates, including in regard to the professionalization and training of the sector, due to the growth of investment in culture, which, not by chance, presupposed an exponential growth in the number of visitors to events of a cultural character, as institutions sought to promote the visibility of brands that support culture. This established spurious criteria which yet today hold sway in most museums, such as that which measures the "quality" of a cultural activity according to the relation between the amounts invested and the number of people served.

The scenario outlined above led to the increased hiring of people who could intermediate the relationship of these large cultural events with the massive public that is invited to them.

And it is in this context that the term “cultural mediation” was created and expanded in Germany, France and Canada, justifying it as something different from “education”, as supposedly it

“refers to the process of gaining and negotiating knowledge about the arts and social or scientific phenomena through exchange, reaction and creative response. [...] Where “education” or “educator” more frequently connote involvement with the formal education sector, the term cultural mediation also allows practitioners to imagine themselves as part of a larger spectrum of cultural workers across artistic disciplines working in a variety of cultural and social realms.” (Mörsch, 2012)

”

Although often used today as synonymous with dialogue, the term “mediation” should never be thought of as a substitute for the concept of education itself, the latter being much deeper and more encompassing than the former. When we espouse “museum education” as a nomenclature suitable to our practice, we are also reiterating the need to understand culture not as a product and/or expenditure, but as a personal enrichment and social right.

The term “mediation” has been disseminated by ICOM itself, apparently trying to avoid an approach to museum education predicated on the mere transmission of information. As shown by our above analysis, however, once we have chosen to adopt constructivist and dialogic models, we have already broken away from the educational approaches based on content, transmission and formalism.

In the publication *Key Concepts of Museology*, we note one of the main problems in the use of the term “mediation”: namely, the idea of underlying conflict that it bears.

“Mediation is defined as an action aimed at reconciling parties or bringing them to agreement. In the context of the museum, it is the mediation between the museum public and what the museum gives its public to see” (Desvallées & Mairesse, 2013).

”

Outside of the legal context, the term “mediation” implies a third entity that is placed between the parties in conflict, in the sense of achieving an agreement between them. But in this case, isn’t the spread of the term “mediation” only

a way for the French and European Academy to bring a new nomenclature to museum education?

It is imperative for us to understand the fundamental role of museum education, as well as the importance of the presence of the public beyond the numbers of visitors in our museums. It is simple: the public is our reason to be.

The new definition

Comparing some definitions of the museum proposed by ICOM over the years, we can catch sight of the transformations through which this institution has passed in the last 74 years, as well as the modes of thinking, concepts and politico-social changes that lie behind them.

The removal or assertion of each one of the terms used in these definitions presupposes agreements and disagreements. For example, we know how memorable the debates were when the term “non-profit” was inserted, as well as when the idea of “intangible heritage” was inserted as a possibility for the construction of collections.

These changes simultaneously affirm what the museum is, while presenting the limits of what a museum is not. On the other hand, the intense and necessary defense of an increasingly socially engaged activity should not eclipse the basic characteristics of this institution.

Thus, to propose a new definition is not an easy task, although it would be possible to base it on the years of maturity shaped in the 2007 definition.

As we know, in 2016 ICOM once again began a process of reviewing the definition of the museum which, according to this international body, is its very backbone, since it is taken as a basis for legislation and public policies relating to this sector in various countries.

Although the beginning of this process was particularly democratic and participative, with statements collected from around the world and a digital platform that received open suggestions, the process was finalized in a procedure that was closed off and impervious to any discussion. When the final version of the new definition was presented, in June 2019, the museum community was taken by surprise and perturbed for various reasons.

I will not talk widely about these, since probably many have already done so in this publication, but I will point to some of them.

It must be made clear that the reasons for rejecting the new proposal are multiple, and under no circumstances can be reduced to the game - so common and misleading today - of proposing the new definition as “an advance” and those resistant to it as “conservatives”. That is reducing and trivializing the debate.

Also, the proposed text is not a definition, insofar as it cannot be used as an objective basis for purposes that are political, economic, managerial or

related to representativity in society; at the most, it is an aspirational text, a vision of the future. This means that perhaps one of its main aims cannot be accomplished. Another point is that it completely ignores all of the previous versions (and this means ignoring the discussions held throughout the years). Made from scratch, it has left aside important and already established concepts.

Finally, and most importantly, it has removed the concept of education as a primary function and goal of these institutions. When criticized, the authors justified this absence by stating that the idea of education is implicit in the new text. But as we see, in light of the persistence of elitist and colonizing mentalities, coupled with the rise of new terms that have contributed nothing to our activity or professionalization, the recurrent misunderstanding of what museum education *can* be, and the mistaken notion that sees the museum educator as someone with functions that anyone can do who is therefore entirely dispensable, it is not enough to leave the purpose of “education” unspoken, as an implicit concept.

So that we can have cultural public policies around the world that are able to conserve and support not only the existence of museum education but also the processes necessary for its professionalization, it is crucial for the new definition of museums to include explicit mention of education in all its incisiveness, as one of the main functions and purposes of our institutions.

Only in this way can museums break away from their elitist and colonialist origins to begin to carry out their necessary internal and external transformation, in order to be converted into spaces of continuous resistance and negotiation of meanings and of power, contributing to shaping and transforming the society in which we live into the one in which we wish to live.

References

-
- Bordeaux, M.-C., & Caillet, É. (2013). La médiation culturelle: Pratiques et enjeux théoriques. *Culture & Musées*, 139-163. <https://doi.org/10.4000/culturemusees.749>.
- Botelho, I. (2001). As dimensões da cultura e o lugar das políticas culturais. *São Paulo Perspec*, 15(2), 73-83.
- de Varine-Bohan, H. (2008). Museus e Desenvolvimento Social: um balanço crítico. In M.C. Oliveira Bruno & K.R. Felipini Neves (Eds.), *Museus como agentes de mudança social e desenvolvimento: propostas e reflexões museológicas*. São Cristóvão: Museu de Arqueologia de Xingó.
- Desvallées, A., & Mairesse, F. (Eds.). (2013). *Conceitos-chave de Museologia*. Translation and commentaries by Bruno Brulon Soares and Marília Xavier Cury. São Paulo: Comitê Brasileiro do ICOM / Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo/State Secretary of Culture.

- Elias, J. L. (1975). The Paulo Freire Literacy Method: A Critical Evaluation. *McGill Journal of Education / Revue Des Sciences De l'éducation De McGill*, 10(002). Retrieved from <https://mje.mcgill.ca/article/view/7044>
- Freire, P. (1981). *Ação cultural para liberdade*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.
- Harris, G. (2020, April). Wave of museum educator redundancies worldwide sparks open letter. *The Art Newspaper*. Retrieved from <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/open-letter-educator-redundancies-at-museums-worldwide>
- Hein, G. (2006). Museum Education. In S. MacDonald (Ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell Pub.
- Larrosa, J. (2004). *Nietzsche e a Educação*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica. Col. Pensadores e Educação.
- Mörsch, C., & Chrusciel, A. (2009–2012). *Time for Cultural Mediation*. Zurich: Institute for Art Education of Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). Commissioned by Pro Helvetia.
- Poirrier, P., & Geneviève G. (ed.). (2012). *Cultura e estado: a política cultural na França, 1955–2005*. São Paulo: Iluminuras, Itaú Cultural.
- Restrepo, E., & Rojas, A. (2010). *Inflexión decolonial: fuentes, conceptos y cuestionamientos*. Popayán: Editorial Universidad de Cauca.
- Round Table Santiago do Chile ICOM, 1972. Sociomuseology IV, *Cadernos de Sociomuseologia*, 38–2010.
- Rubim, A. A. C. (2009). Políticas Culturais e novos desafios. *Matrizes*, Ano 2 – nº 2, 93–115. <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v2i2p93-115>
- Simon, N. (2016). *The art of Relevance*. Santa Cruz, Calif. Museum 2.0
- Tran, L.U., & King, H. (2007). The professionalization of Museum Educators: the case in Science Museums. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 22(2), 131–149.