

## TiM: Ti i Muzej (Team: You and Museum)

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### *Abstract*

This paper describes a collaborative service learning project between students of Information Sciences from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Museum of Arts and Crafts and elementary school “Cvjetno naselje” and presents the outcomes of this affiliation. Students of information sciences gained practical experience working with the museum pedagogue and leading school classes through the Museum, while the Museum gained young experts and valuable help in its outreach mission. Positive responses from all partners promoted future partnerships between the Faculty’s students and the Museum. Project evaluation addressed the role of field experiences in student education, museum education partnerships and service learning pedagogy.

*Keywords:* service learning pedagogy, museum education partnerships, elementary school, field experiences, interaction, learning opportunities

### **1 Motivation**

We live in a time where the community relationship with a museum has drastically changed, as well as its role and function in the society. The museum transforms according to the users’ needs and invites them to become participants, not merely observers. Museum is no longer a place for exhibitions and studying of cultural heritage artifacts, but a highly interactive place. Recognizing this trend, many museums around the world offer different virtual tours and interactive e-learning tools for their virtual visitors (for example, the Louvre Museum<sup>1</sup> or the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History<sup>2</sup>).

The concept of the museum audience today is very broad and may be classified by different criteria. The authors of this paper want to concentrate on just one specific type of the audience - the elementary school pupils (1st to 8th grade).

The reason for such a choice is the recognized issue - the lack of awareness of the importance of the museum that arises at this (young) age. Children at this age find museum visits mostly uninteresting,

tiresome and consider them useless, no matter if they are organized by school or by their parents.

Also, the problem is that museums do not possess the collection content that is tailored to the needs and interests of the elementary school pupils. Furthermore, the problem is that elementary schools in Croatia mostly offer no extracurricular activities that would include visit to the institutions of cultural heritage as a planned and recommended action. Such museum visits happen only if a teacher decides to include a visit to the cultural institution as a part of field work or his subject curriculum. The consequence is obvious: if the children of this age do not get assigned a high quality educational guidance in museums, they will never be able to fully understand the importance of cultural inheritance and social context of museum exhibits.

Therefore, the aim of our project described in the following chapters was to highlight the importance of the systematically organized school visits to the museums. First of all, these visits are important because they are necessary for children and secondly, because they are vital for both museums and schools as public institutions.

Why children need a museum? What benefit pupils have from visiting a place that stores "a bunch of old artifacts"? The secret lies exactly in these artifacts and their content. The museums cover so many interdisciplinary themes from the core

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<sup>1</sup><http://musee.louvre.fr/visite-louvre/index.html?defaultView=rdc.s46.p01&lang=ENG>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mnh.si.edu/panoramas/>

school subjects that it is almost impossible to imagine a single lesson that could not be carried out in a museum. Connecting pupils emotionally and intellectually to the accurate stories of the past through the museum artifacts enhances their understanding of the present and shapes their meaning.

Museums are a suitable environment for the creation of experiences, gathering of information and for communication. In the process of learning, understanding and growing up, visual and auditory perception plays a significant role. Pupils' contact with the museum artifacts facilitates and enhances their access to history, encourages historical imagination and awakens interest in the historical events that are presented only as text in their school books and are therefore often uninteresting.

## 2 Project Partnership

Project *TiM: Ti i Muzej (Team: You and Museum)* emerged through collaboration between four Information and Communication Sciences students with the elementary school Cvjetno Naselje (in further text: School) and Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb (in further text: Museum).

### 2.1 Museum of Arts and Crafts

Museum of Arts and Crafts<sup>3</sup> in Zagreb was founded in 1880 by initiative of the Arts Society and its former President Isidor Krshnyavi as one of the first institutions of its kind in Europe. Its role was to protect works of art and craft against the new predominance of industrial products, to preserve the traditional values of people's trades and to create a new aesthetic culture for the city's upper class. So, for that purpose, in 1882 the Museum as well as a Craft school (known today as the School for Applied Art and Design), were founded.

The Museum is located in the center of the downtown area. The palace, built in the German renaissance style, was constructed primarily as a museum, and with its façade it still fulfills the scenography of one of Zagreb's most beautiful squares.

The Museum houses more than 100.000 objects spanning from 14th century to the 20th century and represents a national-level museum for artistic production and the history of material culture in Croatia.

It has a permanent exhibition that extends over 3 floors at more than 2,000 m<sup>2</sup> of museum space and

includes about 3000 exhibits. The artifacts are classified into 19 diverse museum collections: furnishing, metal, painting, sculpture, clocks, photography and photographic equipment, musical instruments, graphic design, ivory, printing and bookbinding, printed and painted leather, devotional items, smoking accessories and toys. The permanent exhibition was brought up to date in 1995 with commentaries on the exhibits in the form of legends, videos and computer installations. The new concept of the permanent exhibition is a reflection of the system and scope of the museum stocks.

The Museum also has an important library with more than 50.000 titles.

Thanks to its rich abundance of objects from abroad, the Museum goes beyond national importance and is a part of European heritage. Furthermore, the Museum also possesses its own restoration labs specialized in metals, ceramics, glass, textiles, paintings and polychrome sculpture.

The modern role of the Museum is seen in its rich cultural and societal events: it regularly organizes cultural and historical, problem and thematic exhibitions, expert meetings, educational playrooms and workshops.

### 2.2 Elementary school "Cvjetno naselje"

Elementary school Cvjetno naselje<sup>4</sup> celebrated its 50th anniversary in the school year 2011-2012. The school is located in an urban area, surrounded by big roads with heavy traffic.

In the school year 2012-2013 it had 334 pupils in 17 classes (nine classes with children aged 7-10 and eight classes with children aged 11-14).

Since 1998 the school has classes in one (morning) shift in line with European standards. A small number of pupils per class allow teachers to observe each pupil's social, emotional, physical and intellectual development and individualized approach, as well as group work.

In the school year 2001-2002 it was among the first schools that introduced an experimental program of foreign language learning from the first grade.

The school management places an emphasis on the respect and recognition of human values of both pupils and teachers, promoting humanization of the school system to achieve equal opportunity and equal treatment for all pupils and effective communication between parents, teachers and the school administration. Finally, this elementary school pays particular attention to the moral and

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.muoz.hr/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.os-cvjetno-naselje-zg.skole.hr/>

social issues, encourages the development of pupils' interests, abilities and skills with the desire to obtain a high quality communication and mutual respect and accomplish the most important task - to enable each pupil to develop a strong belief system in their own abilities and to become a happy child.

### 2.3 Project partnership and community need

As part of its outreach activities, the Museum of Arts and Crafts needed to increase the number of pupils visiting museum and recognizing museum educational activities, the faculty mentor was seeking ways to expand university's involvement with the local community and to increase service-learning courses, while students needed to obtain the field experience.

By identifying a community need and matching it with the skills of university students, a vital service was provided to the community's youth, while students obtained practical service experience.

## 3 Project Description

Service learning project TiM (You and Museum) aimed to emphasize that many tasks of the educational process that are realized in the natural and social environment can also be accomplished through the visit to the museums with a somewhat greater engagement.

The core knowledge pupils receive through school subjects may be easily expanded in the museum environment through observation, independent research, encouraging curiosity and reasoning. This may be marked as a process enhancing the successful adoption of the compulsory learning content through an entertaining element, which is a visit to the museum.

Museum artifacts are a source of knowledge, but that source needs to be opened not just for experts, researchers, artists and those who already possess awareness of the importance of a museum, but also for young brains that are full of questions and that cannot abstract or understand answers read from the legends printed in their textbooks.

Pupils that get the opportunity to interact with the exposition artifacts begin to communicate with the history and start learning which ends not only in acquiring new knowledge but, what is more important, acquiring unforgettable impressions and observations. Museums can therefore create an atmosphere of educational practice which listens to its young visitors and promotes curiosity through

learning and collaboration with other public institutions, such as elementary schools.

### 3.1 Learning through Experience and Interaction in a Museum Environment

Pupils visiting a museum receive concretization and enrichment of the specific educational content; they experience the culture of life, belongingness to the museum circuit and enjoyable memorizing. Important educational parts of the visit to the museum are creative workshops that include hands-on activities that each pupil participates in. These workshops should be a supplement to the museum tour and should be based on the content of the tour, satisfying the main objective of the museum visit.

Elementary school pupils should be allowed to participate in the guidance through museum because, apart from curiosity, the museum artifacts evoke associations to the "items in grandma's home", old stories they have heard, etc. These artifacts are vehicles for looking into the past and museum needs to uncover the meaningful story behind them to these young visitors.

Furthermore, a museum should ideally take pupils somewhere they have never been in their imagination and thus reveal its function in their lives, enabling them to perceive it not just as a place for professionals and tourists, but as their place of learning and growing.

The direct encounter of children with museum artifacts is the beginning of communication and learning, and workshop can activate the participation in the communicational and educational circle which starts from them and ends with them. Children's' perception of the world around them, as well as information they receive, must be processed and presented in an interesting way. Otherwise, their visit to the museum has no educational effect.

It is important to emphasize that the guidance through the museum exhibits and amusements should be tailored to the curriculum of a specific grade that visits a museum. In that way, the museum pedagogue would be given the curriculum and learning content which he might, in cooperation with the teacher, include in the educational guidance. The final product would be a professional guidance that insures rich learning experiences, induces museum's educational outreach and raises pupils' interest in the museum.

Elementary school pupils do not perceive field work as an obligation but as an enjoyable and informal process of learning through experience. Their emotions are an indispensable part of it which

plays a very important role during a visit to the museum, especially if such emotions create a connection with the real world and encourage children to pose questions.

It is important to maintain and continually develop standards for the pupils' visit to the museum. In order to accomplish all educational goals of the visit, both the school and the museum must set clear expectations in advance, to avoid misunderstandings. The teacher as an individual has a major role in this process, because the realization of the whole visit as well as its success depends on his attitude.

The long-term goal of these visits would be to significantly increase the communication between museum and the local community, where museum fulfills its outreach mission, raising the community knowledge and awareness about the importance of preserving cultural heritage in the area of human consciousness. The authors of this paper believe that this approach might be one of the best courses of action to shape the perception of the new generations.

### 3.2 Project framework

At the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Zagreb), as part of the graduate course titled *Service Learning in Information Sciences*, students have conducted a mentored project aimed at pupils who never had a guided museum experience before.

In order for pupils to learn in a museum setting, they must be able to make mental investments in the learning process and stay motivated [6]. Therefore, it is important to offer them a challenge, arouse curiosity and motivation for further exploration in the museum environment.

To satisfy these demands, one of the objectives of the service learning project TiM was to design age-appropriate instructional materials, such as worksheets and activity kits that will encourage pupils during the museum visit to grasp new concepts, relate them to the past experiences and integrate new information with previous knowledge, retaining it in memory for the later application. The other objective of the project was to demonstrate that a strong will and minimal resources can make huge transformations in lives of the local community, especially its youngest members.

### 3.3 Methodology

Three problem areas were covered by this project: the role of service experiences in preparing

graduate students for their future careers; school-museum-university partnership and student project management capabilities.

Regarding the service experiences, students were able to frame their theoretical knowledge in the context of the local environment, which enhanced their understanding of civic responsibility in the local community and society in general [9]. Service learning experiences shifted their focus from developing skills for their future careers to learning outwards, beyond the classroom [5].

Furthermore, studies of student museum internships showed that students gain valuable teaching experience interpreting museum collections with children visiting the site [2].

Regarding the educational objectives, students planned to acquire new knowledge in the field of museology and informatics, which are both important segments of the pedagogical practice in museums. They also decided to encourage the development of critical thinking and instill a sense of cultural heritage in a younger generation.

Elementary school students (fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth graders) have visited Museum of Arts and Crafts with their class. Firstly, they visited the permanent collection of the Museum under the professional guidance of the museum pedagogue.

The Museum wanted to offer tour and workshops for school children as part of their outreach mission. Therefore, after the tour of the permanent exhibition, the pupils took part in a creative workshop prepared by the museum pedagogue. Each workshop has been specifically and professionally prepared depending on the pupils' age and grade. Thus, one group of pupils has made antique furniture out of corrugated cardboard; others drew their bodies on large format paper, while the last group was given a smooth paper coated with a mixture of black ink and egg yolk, which they scraped with wooden chopsticks. The museum pedagogue selected all the themes for the workshop and provided all materials.

Students have documented all the activities as video-journal, interviewing the pupils who visited the exhibition and who took part in the creative workshops.

The second and final part of the service learning project was carried out both in school and at home, where the children could visit the web page created by students and read museum news, browse through the gallery of pictures showing their recent visit to the Museum and take part in the quiz that tests their knowledge about Museum of Arts and Crafts and its artifacts.

During the semester, students were introduced with different reflection e-activities (e-journals, e-portfolios and e-discussions) that were assessed at the end of the course. They used e-learning tools available through Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) and Mahara (ePortfolio system), creating digitized collections of text, graphic and multimedia artifacts that represent their learning curve over the course of semester. Their reflective journal writings and ePortfolio selections proved once more that service learning projects enable meaningful teaching and learning experiences [1].

### 3.4 Results

In this project, information and communication science students succeeded in presenting the MUO museum to pupils (that never visited museum before) as a place filled with dynamic projects based on the evocative collection content and as an environment for open-ended and self-directed learning experiences.

Students took part in the creation of age-appropriate activities and developed their leadership, communication and teamwork skills, while contributing to the quality of the Museum's educational program in an informal learning environment. They were able to apply their classroom learning to the local community and practice their skills in a real-world setting.

Students' reflective activities served as evidence that a university-community partnership developed in response to an expressed need results is a transformative experience of teachers, students, and museum educators [3].

The resulting videos with the pupils' responses were used not only by students to document the service learning project experience, but also by faculty mentor to evaluate the students' service learning project.

Answering the students' questions in the interview, pupils have expressed their enjoyment in the museum tour. The majority of them liked the professional educational guidance and the follow-up workshop. They also learned new facts about different historical periods. Some of them even expressed wish to work in a museum once they grow up, while the majority of pupils stated that they learned many new concepts related to the museum (such as *curator* or *depot*) and that their first visit to the museum was an enjoyable experience. Furthermore, as a result of the video journal, students have received very positive comments on their project.

Together with the museum pedagogue as community partner they planned a range of opportunities to help pupils learn in ways that match their learning preferences and to engage school pupils in meaningful and creative activities that represent learning as an active process.

Additionally, the museum pedagogue brought students' ideas to action with drawing and modeling activities and handling of the artifacts in a museum collection.

Furthermore, pupils have expressed their surprise by the artifacts in the Museum's possession and its informal educational function that supports the children lifelong learning perspective. They were also impressed by the improvisation of the artist Boris Badurina who introduced fifty interventions in the Museum's permanent exhibition, as part of the cycle of dynamic exhibition events titled "Contemporary artists in the permanent display".

Finally, pupils reported that, apart from being entertained and being able to learn many useful facts, they abandoned the prejudice of museums as places with dusty antiquities, decrepit valuables, remains and scraps. Creative workshops were more interesting to girls than boys, but all of the pupils agreed that they would like to visit museums more frequent and to learn in this way because they had a chance to link the historical facts to the actual artifacts from the museum.

## 4 Conclusion

Although schools nowadays have the tendency to pay more attention to learning from sources other than books (such as multimedia – pictures, animation and video), very few schools in Croatia possess conditions to establish interactive and multimedia learning environments. However, few schools organize regular visits to cultural institutions that not only preserve knowledge, but also play an active role in presenting knowledge in an interactive way and enable dynamic learning.

Teachers visit heritage institutions such as museums quite rare, although many studies prove that children acquire knowledge better and faster in the informal environment. Parisa et al. [8] report in their study that children develop thinking, a sense for real values and a sense of belonging to the group through non-formal learning.

Research [10] also proved that museums can be models of institutions where pupils encounter a variety of learning opportunities to enhance school-based learning.

In a museum, if activities directed to pupils are combined with student- or teacher-directed

experiences, students (teachers) shift their roles from dispensers of information to designers of rich learning environments for school children.

Already Gardner [4] imagined museum as an educational environment where local pupils take school courses, exposed to a knowledgeable guide who demonstrates the way to use a skill or solve a problem. Gardner [4] contrasted schools (that connote formal, serious and decontextualized learning) with museums (that connote casual, entertaining and enjoyable learning). He pointed out the difference between experience-based place that offers open-ended learning opportunities and place that offers lectures about remote subjects and tests based on drill-and-practice of memory of disconnected facts.

But, neither all museum experiences are as ideal as those described by Gardner [4], nor school pupils possess motivation to discover such experiences.

Students in TiM service learning project learned about many vital roles in their profession, such as handling of administrative tasks and communication between the museum, the school, the faculty professor and fellow students. They learned how to review project plans for feasibility, time allotment, appropriate content, and continuity across the semester. The faculty mentor observed each part of the project and had weekly contact with the student team.

But, the project realization process was not easy. In the project planning phase students encountered many problems, such as project time management and sharing of the project workload among themselves. Furthermore, the problem that students encountered was the lack of public understanding. More precisely, as part of their project promotion activities, students have asked the rich and powerful companies for a symbolic donation. These companies were stalling on their demands and finally rejected them.

The next problem was a dysfunctional school administrative system. School teachers have complained to students that they were not informed about specific goals of the visit to the museum and the necessary collaboration between them, the museum pedagogue and their pupils.

Finally, museum practitioners, socialized to adopt a pragmatic approach to new situations and problems, had issue with school members, socialized to take a more theoretical approach to it [7].

In the end, despite all the troubles, difficulties and problems that students encountered during their service learning project, it was implemented on time, in scope and without any budget to the

satisfaction of all parties: faculty students, school teachers, faculty mentor, museum staff and school pupils.

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