

Open Museum -presentation at MumAE conference, Copenhagen

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The case that I'm going to present is an ongoing project called Open Museum - a developing learning environment for adults.

Basic information of the project

The Open Museum is a three-year project that started at the beginning of this year. The project has been allocated funding from the ESF development program entitled "Fostering active citizenship through open learning environments".

In short, the main purpose of the project is to develop museums into more open and interesting learning places for different kinds of adult visitors. And how are we going to do this?

1. Enhancing museum staff members' adult education skills
2. Developing new operation models for adult visitors, that is new kinds of activities and services aimed for museums' adult visitors

The project has seven contributors. Finnish Museums Association is the administrator and coordinator. Finnish Museums Association is the central organisation and information centre for museums in Finland. All professionally maintained museums are members. CICERO Learning network is a research network coordinated by the university of Helsinki. It provides the project with necessary scientific knowledge on learning and learning environments.

There are five museum organizations as contributors. Pori Art Museum is a regional art museum of the Satakunta region. Satakunta Museum is a cultural history museum and a central regional museum of Satakunta region. Educational unit of Tampere museums TAITTE provides educational operations for the museums in the city of Tampere. Museum of Technology is a national special museum in Helsinki and the Finnish Labour Museum Werstas a national special museum in Tampere.

Why this kind of project?

As we all know museums have lots of experience working with children and they have developed and tested different kinds of activating and experimental models and programs for children for decades. The co-operation between museums and schools is well established. Until recently adult visitors have had to be content with for example guided tours and lectures and other quite traditional ways of learning in museums.

During the last decade or so more attention has been given to adults as museum visitors and especially adults as learners. Reasons for this shift are probably manifold.

One of the reasons is the rise of the idea of lifelong learning. Unesco took lifelong learning in its agenda already in the 60's. In Finland lifelong learning has been mentioned in the strategies of the Government and Ministry of Education ever since the 1990's. The National strategy of lifelong learning was published in 1997. In these strategies lifelong learning has been seen as a tool for enhancing active citizenship,

well-being in the work place, prolonging careers, preventing alienation and so on. However usually these strategies dealt mainly with so called continuing education, which is usually formal education for adults. Cultural institutions were not mentioned as possible places of learning.

Yet the idea of lifelong learning suites well with museums since they are considered as places of informal and nonformal learning and they have lots to offer in this sense.

Do museums meet their full potential in this sense? Museums are probably not the first instances that come to mind when thinking about possible places for adults to learn, at least outside the formal educational system.

Maybe museums have thought that adults are content with the exhibitions and guided tours and they don't need or want anything more. And there are of course many adults that don't. But yet, there are adults who never or rarely go to museums. According to visitor studies in Finland the typical museum goers are middle-aged, well-educated women, who are active in cultural activities anyways. Since museums should be physically and mentally accessible to all (because they are to great extent funded by the tax payers) museums are trying to widen their visitor profile.

Lots of work has already been done. The Lifelong Learning in Museums -project 2005–2007 is a good example of a successful program in European level. Also in Finland there are increasing amount of activities for adults. There are clubs for seniors in which they can share their memories of the past, specially tailored workshops for work teams, archaeological excavations for the public, arts and craft workshops and so on.

Despite previous development we need more information and we need to exchange already existing information more efficiently:

How and what adults learn in museums? What kind of activities and services adults wish from museums? How can museums act as environments for lifelong learning and hence contribute to the well-being and activity of adult population? How can we make museums attractive sites even for those adults that don't usually visit museums? And maybe most importantly for our project what kind of special knowledge or skills museum staff members need when working with adults? These are the main questions we are discussing in our project.

The target groups 1

The broad objective of the Open museum project is to develop museums into more interesting and accessible learning environments for adults. We believe that one way of doing this is by educating the people who work with the audience. So - the main target group of our project are the museums staff members. There will be seminars, local study groups and an e-learning course. A little bit more about this later.

The target groups 2

Along with educating museum staff members we are developing, testing and developing further new kinds of activities (and re-developing old ones) for adult visitors.

Adults are of course very heterogenous group. Each of the five museum contributors in the project has their own consequential target group, which gives their actions a specific point of view. They will develop museum staff members adult education skills and museum services from these groups point of view.

The museums in the city of Pori, Satakunta Museum and Pori Art Museum will concentrate on senior citizens. The museums will encourage both senior citizens themselves and the professionals and volunteers working with them to benefit from the wide-ranging opportunities of museums. They will also map the expectations of both the active museum visitors and the non-visitors.

The educational unit of Tampere museums TAITTE will develop museum services for immigrants in cooperation with multicultural museum guides and museum staff members.

The Museum of Technology will concentrate on company employees and companies as guests of museums. They will work together with companies to develop an innovative service package, which will present museums as an inspiring place for learning and activation for company employees.

The Finnish Labour Museum Werstas will develop such museum functions that will make museums more accessible and appealing for the unemployed, which are not, according to visitor studies, very active museum visitors.

The things that we learn from these activities, we will share with the whole museums field in Finland and here we come back to the aim of developing museums staff members' knowledge and skills on the subject of adult-education and adults in museums.

Training model: Local study groups

The project will organise three nation-wide Open museum -seminars on the subject of adults in museums. Seminars will be held in each of the three towns where the contributors come from. The themes of the seminars stem from the contributors' consequential target groups, that is the senior citizen in Pori, the unemployed and immigrants in Tampere and company employees in Helsinki.

We've noticed that there's lots of knowledge and skills already existing in museums but it is scattered around the country and is not communicated to others as well as it could be. We believe that sharing expertise and learning together will make better results.

So to complement the seminars the project has developed a training model of local study groups. We call these study groups by the name AVAAMO, which means something like a place to open up things. The aim of the study groups is to bring the actors of the same field, in this case museum staff members, into interaction with each other. Local study groups will consist of museum staff members who work in museums of certain region and who are interested and motivated in developing their own knowledge and skills and their museums adult services.

Usually the training of museum staff members is done by courses or seminars and the museum professionals travel to the course venue from their workplaces. In our project we will reverse this arrangement: the actors in our project will travel to meet the local study groups in their own workplaces. In the context of their own museum they will together develop ideas from the point of view of adult visitors. There will also be an expert educator or pedagogue involved from for example the local university to provide the necessary scientific knowledge to reflect the participators own thoughts and ideas.

The idea is to through these study groups encourage networking both locally and nationally as the study groups will be in contact with each other. One of the desired outcomes of these study groups is that the networks will continue their interaction even after The Open Museum -project has ended. This is one of the lasting effects of the Open Museum -project.

Here is a model of the idea of networking which will cover the whole country (or most of) it. So it is not only the five museums contributing directly to the project that will benefit from this, but museums in the whole country. We will probably also use the internet as a tool for interaction.

The groups will meet for the first time in November.

Contact information

Of course, there's huge amount knowledge and skills on adults in museums already existing around Europe. We would be very happy to share information and experiences. So please, don't hesitate to contact us at the Open Museum -project. You will find all our projects contact information from the Open museum -flyer. Besides me there are three members of our project group present here: Leena Tornberg from CICERO Learning -network, Jaana Ylänen from the Educational unit of Tampere museums TAITTE and Ulla Rohunen and Ulla Rohunen from the Finnish Labour Museum Werstas.