

The Need for the European Museum Academy in the 21st Century

Museums as we know them today and as most people imagine them are a relatively new phenomenon in history. From being a prerequisite, which demonstrated social status and belief in science for the few in 17th century museums, they have in the 21st century become centres of activities designed to provide and develop knowledge and reflection for everyone about who we are and where we are going. Thoughts about museums may one day lead us to associate with exciting postmodern theme parks and the next day make us associate with places of contemplation such as mosques, synagogues or cathedrals.

The number of these strange organisations, places or virtual spaces which see themselves as museums is growing on a rapid scale. Developments around us and the growth in numbers is certainly proof of the growing need for museums in today's world. The meta question which rises from these observations is what do museums actually provide which is so badly needed? And why and how is that specific quality in museums related to the development of society today? How do we develop the best possible quality in museums?

This is where we find the need for the European Museum Academy as the organisation which brings together academic research, practices and museum professionals.

What could the European Museum Academy look like 10 years from now? The following are my thoughts and reflections on that question, and I ask readers to be aware that nobody else should be held responsible.

The European Museum Academy is in my mind based on two perspectives – which can be perceived as two dialectic power fields – on museums which hold the work together.

Firstly, we bring researchers who are interested in museums together with practitioners from museums. The complexity in this meeting is created by the diversity in both camps. The researchers have a huge variety of academic backgrounds. The number of colleagues calling themselves museologists is growing but we too see a growing activity among historians of all kinds, art historians, anthropologists, ethnologists, archaeologists, researchers in economics, tourism, sociology, education and so on. The many different academic perspectives meet the practices in the museums and find there an equally enormous and growing variety in the perspectives which the staff use as their governing competences in daily practice and strategic planning.

This meeting of perspectives from the academic side and the practice side needs facilitation for many reasons but maybe the most important is the need of both parts to meet, listen to and understand the other in order to develop.

Secondly, we see the dialectics between European museum development in all its diversity and the diversity in museum development on a global level. The international development during the 20th century and especially with the formation of the United Nations and UNESCO has shaped an organisational infrastructure of conventions, regulations, principles and policy recommendations which through organisations like ICOM, OECD, the Council of Europe and

the European Union drops down to national governments, regional and local authorities and to individual museums.

In ways which are difficult to define in a few words we can say that these principles mainstream the museums. To the extent that the museums in Europe get their international influences primarily through European organisations mainstreaming of aims, priorities and other matters shapes a European museum community. The European museum community shares many things but not all with other museum communities throughout the world.

So, we have two interesting dialectic fundamentals for the European Museum Academy from which to build our priorities and actions for the Academy. The relation between diverse research perspectives and mutually diverse museum practices, and the relation between diverse European museum policy development and realities and likewise global policies and realities. From these fundamentals the Academy shapes the vision of our governing principles. The European Museum Academy works with the production, preservation and dissemination of unique knowledge about and for European museums, and the business-model is securing that all work is carried out independently, transparently and professionally.

The three dominating fields of action for the Academy have from the beginning been and still are research and development projects, education through specially designed master classes and the European award schemes for best museum performances in several different categories. The Academy is taking on all these fields in the spirit of the above mentioned fundamentals and business model.

A few examples may illustrate how the Academy addresses the principles above.

Since 2018 the Academy has collected National Museum Reports from its network of national representatives. It may appear to be a strange and useless initiative as we all know about the fantastic job done by the International Council of Museums, the European Union and national governments. Is it necessary? The material collected and presented by the mentioned organisations is almost solely of a statistical nature and produced primarily for the purpose of stimulating policy development on a national or supranational level. The European Museum Academy's national representatives are instead asked to write a short report on what is actually going on. Do they see new legislation, financial issues, trends, policies in their countries which are important for museums?

From this kind of report we get material which provides a qualitative impression of the situation and often even makes the above-mentioned statistics understandable. In the long run this material provides a good empirical base for research. Together with the judges' reports collected from all the visits to museums which over the years have been nominated for awards it is possible to make solid empirically based analysis on museum developments at national and European level.

The Academy is working together with several organizations, among them the Pascal Observatory which is an international network of universities and regional authorities which engages with research and policy development related to regional development. We are now

engaged in developing a two-year full-time European Master programme in heritage studies which is thought to be led by University of Glasgow. The role of the Academy will – if plans are successful – be to provide experts as guest teachers and summer school programmes. That could make the master programme genuinely European and up-to-date practice related. This is an example which illustrates the Academy's ambition to bring research and practice closer to one another.

The European Museum Academy is at the time of writing involved in preparing research projects on participatory governance in heritage and heritage impact assessment. Both research projects address issues which are central for heritage policy development from the European Union now. It is important that the Academy makes clear use of the special competences we bring in to these kinds of projects. Participatory governance in arts and culture in general and in heritage in particular is the key word in the terminology from the European Union in the third generation of policy development from the European Commission on wider interaction between heritage and people. This has been a slow process of policy perspective from access to participation and now participatory governance which is important for museums to grasp in depth. The Academy hopes to help with that through this project.

For heritage impact assessment the focus of the Academy will be on the investments done through the European Regional Development Fund. The Academy chooses to focus on these investment projects as they represent approximately 70 percent of European Union resources allocated to culture. For the museum community in Europe it is naturally therefore very important to get a clear understanding of the principles used for assessment, and for researchers it is interesting to clarify trends in how the European Regional Development Fund is invested.

In such research projects the Academy has the important asset to offer of closeness to the practice and the profession and that is valuable for the universities too. The Academy 'trades' that asset for influencing projects in directions which assure that their outcome is relevant to museums.

The award schemes which European Museum Academy has administered for a number of years cover a wide field of museum practice. To collect eyewitness impressions from the visits made by the Academy's experts shapes a huge amount of material about best practice.

Combining participation in adequate and relevant research projects with the award scheme work provides a broad and up to date empirically based overview which is unique for the Academy. That in turn makes it possible for the European Museum Academy to shape and conduct advanced courses and other events.

I foresee the European Museum Academy in the coming years sailing forward on the ocean of museums in Europe as a centre of excellence which builds bridges between practice and science.

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