

Training the Future Together: the Potential Offer of Archives and other Cultural Institutions to the Education and Training of Younger Generations

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ABSTRACT

Archives and other cultural institutions such as museums and libraries can play an important role for the education and training of younger generations. Since these three institutions opened themselves to society, they started organizing various programs to communicate with various social groups and especially with youth. In most cases, archives, museums and libraries do not cooperate for such programs. What happens when these institutions cooperate for a common goal, such as educating younger people? And what can be the benefits for both the institutions and their users if they establish common programs on a regular basis?

Formare insieme il futuro: l'offerta potenziale degli archivi e delle altre istituzioni culturali per l'educazione e la formazione delle giovani generazioni

SINTESI

Gli archivi e le altre istituzioni culturali quali musei e biblioteche possono giocare un ruolo importante nella educazione e nella formazione delle generazioni più giovani. Da quando queste tre istituzioni si sono aperte alla società, hanno iniziato vari programmi di comunicazione con vari gruppi sociali ed in special modo con i giovani. Nella maggioranza dei casi, archivi, musei e biblioteche non hanno cooperato a questi programmi. Cosa succede quando queste istituzioni cooperano per un obiettivo comune, quale l'educazione dei più giovani? E quale può essere il beneficio per tutte queste istituzioni ed i loro fruitori nel pianificare programmi comuni su base regolare?

Skupno usposabljanje za prihodnost: potencialna ponudba arhivov in drugih kulturnih ustanov za izobraževanje in usposabljanje mladih generacij

IZVLEČEK

Arhivi in druge kulturne ustanove, kot so muzeji in knjižnice, lahko igrajo pomembno vlogo pri izobraževanju in usposabljanju mlajših generacij. Odkar so se te tri institucije odprle javnosti, so začele organizirati različne programe za komunikacijo z različnimi družbenimi skupinami, zlasti z mladimi. V večini primerov pa arhivi, muzeji in knjižnice ne sodelujejo v teh programih. Kaj se zgodi, ko te institucije sodelujejo za skupni cilj, kot je izobraževanje mladih? In kakšne so lahko koristi, tako za institucije in njihove uporabnike, če pripravijo redne skupne programe izobraževanja?

Εκπαιδεύοντας το μέλλον μαζί: η εν δυνάμει προσφορά των αρχείων και άλλων πολιτιστικών οργανισμών στην εκπαίδευση των νεώτερων γενιών

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Τα αρχεία και άλλοι πολιτιστικοί οργανισμοί όπως τα μουσεία και οι βιβλιοθήκες μπορούν να παίξουν ένα σημαντικό ρόλο στην εκπαίδευση των νεώτερων γενιών. Από όταν αυτοί οι τρεις οργανισμοί έκαναν άνοιγμα στην κοινωνία, άρχισαν να οργανώνουν ποικίλα προγράμματα για να επικοινωνήσουν με διάφορες κοινωνικές ομάδες και ιδιαίτερα τους νέους. Συνήθως, τα αρχεία, τα μουσεία και οι βιβλιοθήκες δε συνεργάζονται για τέτοια προγράμματα. Τι συμβαίνει όταν αυτοί οι οργανισμοί συνεργάζονται για έναν κοινό σκοπό, όπως την εκπαίδευση των νέων; Και ποια μπορούν να είναι τα οφέλη για όλους τους οργανισμούς και τους χρήστες εάν θεσμοθετήσουν κοινά προγράμματα σε τακτικά διαστήματα;

Archives, libraries and museums have a very important role in modern society. Their mission is to inform, educate and train their users. Although they have a common origin from the Library of Alexandria, which was a museum, a library and an archival institution at the same time, until today their objectives have been strictly separated. But, over the last years, there have been noticed movements towards the cooperation and collaboration of these three institutions. It can be said that a structure of a common mission is a current trend in various countries. A body called Re:source has been created in England and in Norway there has been established the Norwegian Archive, Library and Museum Authority (ABMutvikling)¹. In United States, Canada, Europe and elsewhere, there have been numerous initiatives of collaboration between all three institutions or at least two of them². Various administrative collaborations have taken place such as the edition of common passes for ALM³ on regional level, mostly. Soon enough, archivists, librarians and museologists realized that they had to take advantage of the new technologies so as to make available to public the wealth of their institutions via their finding aids on a common ground: shared metadata for ALM. This presumes that ALM material can coexist and be co-managed. The digital era offers the possibility for at least a virtual unification of ALM.

Each of these institutions is very important for the communities in which they exist. Their priceless value consists on the material they preserve and their mission, which is to make this material available to society. They are the safe keepers of the memory of mankind. In older times they could coexist in one institution but eventually they separated and each formed an individual type of institution which led in separate sciences: librarianship, archival studies and museum studies. These three sciences are called information sciences. Libraries adapted to the digital era more quickly than the archives and museums. That happened because of the less complex nature of their holdings in comparison to the other institutions. Archives and museums adopted later the new technologies. Despite their separation and the “digital” differences they may have, if they collaborate they can play a very important role in modern societies.

Unfortunately, in nowadays the field of Humanities is under attack in universal level. Young people via the educational system are oriented to scattered knowledge and very strict specializations. They do not learn how to use information sources such as books and archival material and museums are identified with scholar excursions, in the best of cases. They learn to use only Internet resources when they have to do research and they do not bother to check if the information they find is documented or not. Young generations today live in a digital world and they ignore the pillars of knowledge of the real world: libraries, archives and museums.

ALM have to cooperate with the educational system so as to give youth an alternative to the digital world. They have done so, separately until now. The institution of school libraries exists almost all over the world and archival services have led various educational programs in collaboration with schools and other independent programs. In addition, there is the tradition of school visits to museums. Some or many of the above activities have been successful as they brought in touch children and teenagers with ALM. But, the present situation, in which youth tend to live in virtual worlds, has to be affronted in a more dynamic way. A cooperation of ALM with the educational system is not necessarily the unique solution and often its success depends on the educational units and the people working in them. The spirit of the educational systems in the western world is not to promote broad education and the use of primary sources. Of course, cooperation programs between ALM and school units have to continue, despite the harsh circumstances, because they are a vital link between the young generations and world's heritage. The individual approaches are not as successful as common approaches from ALM. Common activities are easier to start in small societies where people may know each other or it is easier to get to know each other. The heads of ALM can cooperate easier in small societies, such as a city, inspire other communities with their actions and finally propose actions on a national level. But what can they really do together?

1. Jon Birger ØSTBY, *Co-operation between archives, libraries and museums*, “Scandinavian Public Library Quarterly”, 2003, n. 2.

2. See: Alexandra YARROW - Barbara CLUBB - Jennifer-Lynn DRAPER for the Public Libraries Section Standing Committee, *Public Libraries, Archives and Museums: Trends in Collaboration and Cooperation*. “International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions IFLA Professional Reports”, 2008, n. 108.

3. ALM: Archives, Libraries and Museums.

ALM have fortunately left long ago the “stone age”, and they have embraced the new technologies which can be the common language they could speak with the youth. Young people are excited with the developments in new technologies but they ignore how these are used by ALM and this is something on which ALM can count on, for a start. In the terms of collaboration with school units, ALM can present to students how they use new technologies to do their work but the most fascinating for young people is to learn how the preserved material from ALM is presented in digital environment and how they can “play” with it using the available tools. They cannot “play” with the material at school and so, they have to visit the ALM. There, eventually, they will come in touch with the physical material and they will discover a new, fascinating world.

School children have various ages and various needs. ALM have to work on various programs according to the needs of each age group. Young ages are more open to new things and are less addicted to the digital world. This is an advantage for ALM because they can design simple educational programs to promote their work. These programs have to take place on a regular basis, if ALM want to have substantial results: to have future possible users. Otherwise, an infrequent appearance of ALM will not have any results and on the contrary, it may have a negative outcome. As far as it concerns older children, who are in puberty, ALM have to be more creative and more patient. The programs for this age group are more demanding. They should focus on both digital tools and the physical material. One of the substantial elements of these programs, for all age groups, is to show to them how the bibliographic material, the archival material and the museum artifact are connected. This is something that the ALM’s responsible staff for these programs should know at first, so as to promote it to others. This is why a continuous dialog between the services of ALM is substantial. They have to discover the material they preserve from a new perspective and see how they can promote it together. Common programs which cannot show the link between libraries, archives and museums will leave their audiences with several questions. So, ALM have to do their introspection and work on their relationships. This is the key to a fruitful collaboration and a successful opening to society.

Having worked on their relationships and on how they can use the material they preserve, together, ALM can expand their activities out of the educational system. The focus on young generations is not a tradition but a demand, as if they do not attract and train future users, their future will be eventually uncertain. To organize educational activities out of the educational system is a big challenge. It is the free market, and they have to make the young ones come to them. It is easy to go to a classroom, where the students are obliged to be present and listen to what an invited speaker tells them. But it is difficult to make the young ones to come by themselves to institutions such as a library, an archive or a museum. In addition, such a mission becomes more difficult when these institutions have to erase their past bad reputation: the fact that they were not as open to society as they should be.

So, a common policy has to be built on how ALM should approach the various social groups together, and especially the young people. They have to take into consideration the special characteristics of the community they serve and adapt their plans to them. The citizens of a city which has a very long history and has a good living standard have different needs than the citizens of an industrial city with a high rate of unemployment. This means that the heads of the local ALM, apart from working on their bonds and what they can accomplish together, they have to understand and feel the needs of their own community. This is another important factor that will help them build a successful educational policy. The ALM must use the special features of their society and build their activities on and around them. Understanding and supporting with their activities what their society wants and needs will turn ALM into its cornerstone.

Tab.1

A guide for ALM to build a successful communication strategy	
1	Each institution to examine its mission and function
2	All together to work on their relations and on what they have in common
3	Learn their community
4	Design their strategies according to the special features of their community

Tab.2

ALM implementing educational programs in schools	
1	Study the target group
2	Cooperate with the professors/ teachers
3	Design the educational program according to the needs of the target group
4	Implementing the educational program

To implement programs to attract young people without collaborating with school units demands a bold policy on behalf of ALM. They have to make a distinct presence in their community to attract all possible future users. It is difficult to make the youth come to them by themselves. To make this happen, ALM have to study the needs of all target group ages and see how they can serve them. They have to go out of their institutions and watch the life and behavior of these groups. After that, they have to plan their policy based on the results found and see which material they should use for their activities. The approach programs should take place on a regular basis, so as the ALM to show a constant presence to their target groups and to their community. Each institution should have a group of employees working on these programs and ALM as a union should have a group responsible for them. ALM should use all possible media to make their programs and activities known. Children depend on their parents for such information and older ages use social media and television. So, ALM have a variety of means to advertise their activities. As far as it concerns teenagers, ALM have to study their communication styles and use them. If their call to the youth is successful, the more difficult part is to make the young ones come again. This is why only people who really enjoy it should be involved into these activities. Enthusiasm should be a key to the entire activities ALM plan and organize. Young people need to belong to groups and need to be appreciated. They do not need to go to a place that reminds them of school. They need an interactive environment where they can show their skills, improve them and eventually be proud of themselves. This is how future ALM users can be created.

Tab.3

ALM implementing programs for young people out of the educational system	
1	Bold policy
2	Have special committees to organize these programs
3	Study the behavior and needs of young people
4	Plan their activities based on their research results
5	Use all possible media to advertise their activities and use the special communication styles young people use
6	If young people respond to their call, try to make them come again

ALM can build the future together. They can use the wisdom they preserve but first of all, they have to work on themselves, understand deeply their community and especially the young ones. They have to be fresh, inventive and receptive to what their community tells them. National or local policies often enough do not support ALM's mission. Therefore, ALM should protect and promote this mission by themselves. The protection and promotion of human heritage is on their hands.

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SUMMARY

Archives, Libraries and Museums have common origins but they led separate paths during the centuries. They share a common mission: to preserve human heritage. This common mission makes them today to collaborate and organize common activities. Their orientation towards the young people would be profitable for both. ALM could build a future audience, future users and experts who would continue their work in a hostile world towards broad education. This is not an easy task as, first of all, they have to work on themselves, on their bonds and on the ways they could use their material of different nature. Once they accomplish that, they should focus on the special characteristics of their target groups and organize their policy based on these characteristics. All positive outcomes would be to the benefit of society.

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