

Direct and indirect work with marginalised groups¹

Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova Museum

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Who identifies the 'marginalised groups'?

Our museum is actively making contacts to the groups in question and seeks funding for both national and international projects. On the basis of this we already have a relatively large contact network with actors in the same field and target groups. Our networks encompass groups of handicapped, special needs people and immigrants.

Do you have any issues with how these groups are defined?

We have tried to proceed with a step-by-step programme, focusing on each group at the time, since we have a relatively small staff and cannot spread our activities too wide at any given time. We believe that in-depth pilot projects with a specific target group give us substantially more knowledge than working in a large, yet more superficial scale would. The information and experiences gained through this work can then be used to spread the activities to a wider audience. Since most of these pilot projects have been executed with outside funding and they have a certain time span, the problem always is: how to keep up with the work and how to maintain contacts after that. There is a lot of demand for continuation of the projects both from our side and from that of the target group, but unfortunately we don't have the possibility to carry out all of the projects beyond the actual project time span.

Is funding for your work linked to reaching some or all of these marginalised groups?

I have used outside funding (national and international) in order to be able to conduct most of the projects, but some of them have been carried out even without external funding.

For Example:

Grundtvig Learning Partnership, Nordic Cultural Fund, Nordic Council of Ministers, Finnish National Board of Antiquities, Finnish Arts Council, EU

Describe (simply) the different marginalised groups your organisation works with:

Handicapped (physically handicapped, deaf, visually impaired, blind)

¹ In the 3rd ICD Conference in Stockholm invited experts from DK, EE, FI and LT were chairing workshops on "What is the 'optimal learning environment' for intercultural dialogue?" For the purpose, all experts had been asked to answer a number of questions beforehand concerning their work with marginalised target groups, which are collected in the paper on hand.

Special needs children (dysphasia, autism-related symptoms, ADHD, dyslexia, a. s. o.)

Senior citizens

Immigrant women

Immigrant children

Immigrant youth

State what DIRECT activities your organisation undertakes with each marginalised group

With all of these groups: Workshops and projects carried out in the museum.

In case of schools: planning the projects carefully with the help of the teachers.

In case of refugee shelters: planning carefully with psychologists and the staff at the centre.

In case of the handicapped: consultancy and cooperation.

Explain what works successfully about this activity

“Hands on”: Tactile and creative activities in the museum surroundings and workshop

Presenting the outcomes in the museum exhibition hall

“Self on”: association, making connections with your own life and life in the past

Cooperation with schools

Mixed groups (for instance Finnish and immigrant youth, special needs children and the so called normal children, senior citizens and pre-school children)

Say what evidence there is of this success

All of the groups have wished for the cooperation to continue.

At least in one school there has even been some competition between pupils as to who gets to participate in the next project. There are also some pupils who have chosen to join projects on their own initiative (even on their free time) on a basis of their previous good experience.

Does this activity promote intercultural dialogue? If so how?

The best dialogue is done during the activities themselves, but the exhibitions and press conferences we hold at the opening of every exhibition are a part of a wider communication with the general audience and cultural sector, decision-makers, politicians and funders as a whole.

I prefer mixed groups with people who come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, which brings the intercultural dialogue to the very personal level.

What evidence do you have of ICD success if any?

On one occasion one of the groups (women from former Soviet Union) planned a musical evening on their own initiative. The meaning of this was to promote their own exhibition and make Russian culture visible – and audible – in the museum surroundings. I have also gotten feedback from them later on that they feel much more welcome in the museum now and enjoy its atmosphere.

We were chosen to be one of the institutes to get funding from the EU Year of the Intercultural Dialogue 2008 (Part of the Finnish contribution to the Europe-wide project) in order to make a seminar around these themes.

We have been awarded with the “Treshold prize” for the work we have done with the handicapped. The prize was given by the Association of Handicapped.

Do you undertake any activities which may have an INDIRECT benefit to marginalised groups?

We work mainly with children and the children bring their families to the museum at least to see their own exhibition and I encourage them to go to the whole museum, where the children can guide the parents around and explain things in their own mother tongue. This makes the situation mostly very rewarding and successful both for the child and the adult.

The same works for the adult project participants, too: they bring their next of kin to the museum to share their own experience. This makes the situation a peer-learning one, which is both a social occasion and a learning experience.

Do you have any examples of work (DIRECT or INDIRECT) with marginalised groups that may help to illustrate your work and any points about this work that you think are important to share?

The work done at the museum is in itself informal learning and therefore it is ideal for activities conducted outside curriculum. That is why it is so versatile and includes everybody who is willing to participate. The problem is, though, that it is difficult to find persons belonging to your target group, to inform them and motivate them to come and join the activities. It is even harder when your target group are the typically non-museum-goers. Finding the key persons within the target group is difficult. I have had help from the already organised groups, but that does not help much if you are also looking for the non-organised people.

Museum education is also rather easy to integrate with school work, at least with groups who also otherwise have special programmes. These groups include for example immigrant groups and children with special needs. Much of their learning is based on visiting places, seeing, touching, self-expressing and being creative. Creativity and use of basic associations are key factors to the kind of working at the museum. Schools are a very easy target point, the problem is, that the parents are not often coming to see the children's works at the museum. This builds the gap between the museum and the home and maybe even the child and the parent. The role of a student is different than the role of a son or a daughter. In those cases where I have managed to get the parents to come to the opening event to see the children's works have based on the fact that I have found the right spokesperson, who works fluently in both worlds: the school and the home. Those persons are the teachers of the individual child's mother tongue. They understand the cultural differences and can mediate, persuade and motivate both the child and his/her parents. As to what extent they succeed in

that, is dependent on the individual person and what kind of status he/she has in the community in question.

Having worked with handicapped I have learned that there are far more definitions of being handicapped than I have ever realised before. It has been a true eye-opener for me. A handicapped person is first and foremost an individual; the handicap is secondary to that, even though the handicap can be a big part of the personality, too. All too often people are fixed to what they see first and which is obvious at the first glance, such as the wheelchair or the white cane and cannot look beyond that. The same goes for categorizing immigrants or any other persons with differing looks. We focus on the differences rather than the similarities, when, in fact, it should be the other way round.