

Museums for a fairer world: XXI Museums and Education Seminar: Sustainability

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Abstract

The challenge of changing the world is undoubtedly fascinating and the need for it, prevailing. If Greta Thunberg, only sixteen years old at the time, has set for herself the mission to leading the defense against climate change, every museum professional and every institution should be able to embrace a personal and collective commitment in favor of this global agenda.

This is the starting point for the XXI Museums and Education Seminar, of the MMB, which was held on April 30, 2019, under the title "Education and Sustainability". This event was organized by both the Museu Marítim de Barcelona (Maritime Museum of Barcelona) and the Museu de la Vida Rural de la Fundació Carulla (Museum of the Rural Life of the Carulla Foundation), near Tarragona.

«The fluid encounter between the areas we know today as education and culture could (and should) facilitate tools to face the fear of living, an ever-present dimension in the history of humanity, which today is showed widely and openly. It could (and should) generate trust and hope».

Eulàlia Bosch(1)

On September 25, 2015, the General Assembly of the United Nations approved the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, which marks a series of lines to follow in order to transform the world to make it more habitable and more just: ending poverty, eradicating hunger, guaranteeing a healthy life and a quality education; achieving gender equality; ensuring access to water and energy; promoting sustained economic growth; adopting urgent measures against climate change, and promoting peace and facilitating access to justice.

Unesco sustains that administrations, companies and civil society have an unavoidable duty to contribute to the establishment of more sustainable lifestyles to guarantee coexistence, prosperity and equity around the world for everybody, now and in the future.

According to this idea, ICOM creates a working group to analyze how museums can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, knowing the role that such institutions can play in raising public awareness, generating networks, supporting research and creating knowledge. This group will present its recommendations during the 25th ICOM Triennial General Conference, which is to be held in Kyoto (Japan) in September 2019.

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XXI Jornades de Museus i Educació de l'MMB
Museus, educació i sostenibilitat
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Since 1995, the MMB has organized the Museums and Education Seminars. You can find links to all the programmes
here:<http://mmbeducacio.blogspot.com/2014/09/preparant-les-18enes-jornades-de-museus.html>

The framework address, entitled "Putting life in the center: towards an anthropology of limits and vulnerability," was offered by **Yayo Herrero**, a female anthropologist, engineer, professor and activist and one of the most influential researchers in the ecofeminist and ecosocialist field in Europe.

Yayo Herrero emphasized that the prevailing capitalist model, which is based on unlimited growth, is leading us to the depletion of natural resources in the very near future. She also stated that we are not aware that these resources are not regenerable or, if so, they regenerate at a much slower rate than they are exploited. Ending ecological resources is ending life on the planet and human life too, a fact that the capitalist and patriarchal model does not consider. We are nature, we are exempt of it. "We could say that hegemonic culture, economics and politics have declared war on life," she said.

She defines the combat of myths and beliefs on which Western culture has been built as patriarchal, colonial and unjust. She does so from the ecofeminist perspective, a social trend created in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne, who emphasizes the important relationships between the subordination of women and other non-privileged social groups and the exploitation of natural resources.

In her lecture, Yayo Herrero strongly advocated the need to embrace new practices that put life (which is vulnerable and finite) as a priority, and to fight for an economic model that seeks balance with the capacity for regeneration of nature, a responsibility that we all share.

In case anyone wants to find out more about this philosophy, Yayo Herrero's thesis is very well described in the book *Petróleo*,⁽³⁾ which starts with a phrase by Pablo Martínez, the Program Manager at MACBA, that summarizes very well what we are asked to be: "Something more than viewers of a disaster."

Lázaro Israel Rodríguez Oliva, the next speaker, a specialist in internationalization and cultural policies, had the ability to redirect the theoretical speech of Yayo Herrero towards the objectives of the 2030 Agenda in the conference "Cultural Transformations of museums, education and 2030 Agenda for sustainable development."

His work focuses on strategies for human development through culture, cooperation and regional integration. He recently focuses on knowledge management for the creative economy (Unesco's German Commission) and on the creation of policies and strategies for local creative entrepreneurs.

Rodríguez Oliva also stressed the fact that museums should use the power that each one can exercise in favor of sustainable development aiming to making a more livable and fairer world. And, as Unesco's General Director Irina Bokova states in the "Education for Sustainable Development Goals" report: "Now more than ever, education has the responsibility to adapt to the challenges and aspirations of the 21st century and to promote the appropriate values and competences to achieve a sustainable and inclusive growth and a peaceful coexistence."



The number of participants in the Museums and Education Seminars is usually around a hundred.

And moving forward from the objectives to the activities, **Pablo Martínez**, Program Manager at MACBA, presented the address "Cultivating and cooking. Popular education and recovery of knowledge before the apocalypse."

It was found very important to have the contribution of someone who worked on the matter of sustainability from an art museum. Martínez, before arriving at MACBA, had also passed through the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and the Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo.

According to Pablo Martínez, it is essential to transform the programs and practices of museums in proposals of proximity where life is put in the center. He explained the case of "Un huerto en la azotea," (An Orchard on the Roof) driven at the Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, where a group of elderly people took care of an orchard installed by the museum's team on the roof of the building and shared the social dynamics that this experience led them to. He also announced the proposal "La cuina" (The Kitchen), which MACBA defines as a meeting place open to the participation of everyone, especially to people and organizations that want to share their knowledge and experiences about the cookery to reflect on food sovereignty, the end of fossil fuels and the extreme dependence on oil of the current food model, climate change and the depletion of resources. These are two programs that, in his own words, promote the culture of curing, the recovery of traditional knowledge, the strategic imagination and the practice of a world in transition.

In the last address, **Gemma Carbó** presented the pedagogical proposal of the Museu de la Vida Rural, focused on education for sustainability. Since the 1972 Unesco's Cultural Heritage Convention, museums and heritage spaces have sought to link culture and nature to improve the understanding of past and present problems. Academic specialization makes us continue thinking about these two areas separately. Environmental education and natural heritage have taken important steps in Catalonia. Today, in the Anglo-Saxon world, ecoliteracy is more common trend. Ecoliteracy is a movement inspired by Fritjof Capra, a prestigious physicist who was the first to raise the ties between physics and the tao, between scientific reasoning and spirituality, and to promote projects that connect, for example, food and climate change.

Education for sustainability or ecoliteracy is linked to the Sustainable Development Goals and is reflected in a Unesco proposal,[\(4\)](#) a pedagogical guide that helps to understand the connections between culture and the environment, and proposes guidelines for working on this connection from the museums.

This is the line in which the Museu de la Vida Rural is working. It has placed the education for the sustainability in the center. It has claimed the usefulness of these memories and ethnological knowledge of the rural world, and has highlighted the new social function of museums. But it has added a new last question that is also strategic and that is still not closely linked to education, and even less to environmental education or sustainability: the use of artistic languages and contemporary creation.



Exhibition 'Plàstic' opened in February 2019 at the
Museu de la Vida Rural

As Edgar Morin says, we must not only overcome the split between past, present and future, but also the division between academic disciplines and closed boxes of knowledge. If we want knowledge and culture to be transformational tools, we must work with all forms of intelligence and with all ways of accessing and producing knowledge. Music, photography, visual arts, dance or theater need to sit on the table with physical sciences, botany, medicine or architecture.

This is what we have tried in the last temporary exhibition, "Plàstic, genial o pervers, tu com ho veus?" (Plastic, great or perverse, how do you see it?). It is an exhibition that has self-applied the decalogue resulting from the Mutare conference for its condition as a transformative cultural project that is an essentially educational project for sustainability.

To sum up, museums are fundamentally spaces for managing the memory of the past with a clear educational function that must try to respond to the fear of living pointed out by Lali Bosch. This fear is manifested today, among others, in movements like that of Greta Thunberg (Fridays for future), which claim a possible future.

What do museums bring to the new generations? How can they help them in guaranteeing the future they claim?

First of all, if museums want to be educative, they must adjust as soon as possible to the necessary requirements to be more sustainable as institutions that manage equipment and services, and seriously consider their environmental, social and economic impact as well as the cultural one. This means that they must innovate in the production of exhibitions and activities and make them more consistent with a rational use of resources. It also means that they should change their agenda or, at least, their perspectives, and be more involved in this change, which is demanded both from the General Assembly of the United Nations and from social movements, many of which must be led by young people.

Following the words of Jane Sledge,⁽⁵⁾ of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, probably the best contribution of museums to the challenges of sustainability is to work on the issues that we face today to make them understandable. Generating useful knowledge to understand and, from there, to look for solutions. Each of our museums, said Lázaro Israel González Oliva, must exercise its small share of power for this change, which must allow the sustainability of our world to be possible. We are asked to commit to this fight, and not just from the areas of public programs.

Notes

1. Bosch, E., in *L'assignatura pendent. Converses sobre educació, política i cultura*, by Gemma Carbó, p.183. Ibidem, p. 189.
2. https://www.mmb.cat/wp-content/uploads/ws/267558-76083_uri.pdf.
3. Santiago, E. Herrero and Riechmann, J. *Petróleo*. Barcelona: Arcàdia and Macba, 2018.
4. *Guia dels Objectius de Desenvolupament Sostenible de la Unesco*: <http://unesco.cat/portfolio-items/publicacio-del-la-versio-en-catala-del-document-de-la-unesco-leducacio-e-pr-als-ods-objectius-daprenentatge/>.
5. Sledge, J. Cited by Lauren Styx in *Museums and the environmental sustainability*. Museum next. <https://www.museumnext.com/2019/01/museums-and-the-art-of-environmental-sustainability/>.

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