

Intercultural dialogue in the museum context

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Abstract: This paper underlies the importance of the museum and the international scientific partnership for the promotion and valorisation of regional cultural heritage, as a condition for developing greater awareness of civilizational framework of cultural inheritance at the global level. The goal of the action research that was carried out in parallel in Italy and Serbia and involved 170 children, was to devise, realize and evaluate an educational programme that would bring museums closer to children. Reflexivity and triangulation were used in this research endeavour based on constructivist theoretical framework. The data were collected by means of participatory observation protocol, children's artworks, audiovisual transcripts and working sheets. Upon reflection about the activities carried out and the data collected, the authors of this paper, as participants in the research, are able to validate several important roles of the museums, as the place that facilitates the development of an awareness of cultural heritage of one's own country, skills and capabilities, social and individual construction of meaning, as well as the development of an international partnership. Research findings confirm that the field of qualitative educational discourse offers museums a respectable future in terms of linking theory and practice. In other words, museums will make possible a closer application of scientific results with the purpose of improving educational practice.

Key words: museum education; educational programme; intercultural dialogue; partnership

1. Introduction: Intercultural code in the museum education

Transmission of cultural heritage to future generations, in the new millennium defined as “the epoch of culture”, is aimed at not only the preservation of heritage, but also the development and evaluation of cultural patterns, affirmation of awareness of one's own identity, as well as enhancement of economical and social development of a country. The idea behind this project¹ is reflected in the belief that interculturality, understood as an exchange and confrontation of different realities, is a privileged pathway leading to the acquisition of knowledge and the development of an identity in its social, historical and cultural dimensions. The underlying premise in the Decentralized Cooperation Agreement is that a model of sustainable development, based on evaluation of historical, artistic and cultural heritage, is more efficient if it is built within an international scientific partnership, respecting previously gained experience and developed methodologies, and using them as a starting

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¹ Partnership between the Diocesan Museum (Palermo, Italy) and the Gallery of Matica Srpska, with the support of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad (Novi Sad, Serbia), resulted in the project Feel Art—Intercultural Experience in Museum Education. It was a segment of cooperation supported by the internationalization programme of the Territorial Employment Pact Alto Belice Corleonese from Sicily and Autonomous Province of Vojvodina which was started within a wider project I.Ne.P.S. (Italian Negotiated Programming in Serbia)—exchange of experience in the area of negotiated planning in Serbia.

point for the promotion of new initiatives in various contexts.

Established relations between educational institutions at all levels and museums from different cultural regions create conditions for a closer cooperation by promoting cultural heritage locally. This cooperation is crucial for the realization of projects that are intended for children who are to acquire knowledge through art, develop competences and become aware of cultural inheritance as an aspect of global civilization. Namely, the growing tensions between “localization” and “globalization” processes indicate that local issues cannot be understood unless they are situated in a global context. And vice versa, global issues cannot be realistically appraised if local priorities are not understood (Crossley & Holmes, 2001, p. 396). In this sense, the project underlies the importance of an international dialogue between EU member states as well as all other countries, with special emphasis being put on Euro-Mediterranean and Balkan countries that are strongly and deeply linked with Europe. There are numerous priorities, from upholding the value of solidarity to the attainment of social justice, from promoting inclusion and social cohesion to struggle against discrimination.

A constructive comprehensive discussion about the role of museums in the field of education has been led at the international and the national level of the two countries. Changed economical, social and cultural conditions that characterize contemporary societies, new methodologies and communication technologies, user groups with different needs and so on, confront museums with the necessity of changing their theoretical assumptions, goals and final outcomes. While taking care of the needs, interests and expectations of their visitors, museums take on new roles and become places for communication, education, research, learning and development of identity, for appreciation of historical and artistic heritage in the social, cultural and educational context.

The project idea, realized in 2008 as the “European Year of Intercultural Dialogue”, was structured and realized in the rewarding exchange between the partners in bilateral cooperation. It was based on an intercultural perspective as a principle that inspires both the curricula and the learning processes in the museums. The researchers have taken the stand that interculturality means dialogue and mutual enrichment, respect for the other that is different, appreciation of differences between social and cultural models, as well as relations and structures of learning within these models².

2. Theoretical field of research

2.1 Humanistic orientation of the selected theoretical conceptions

Philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of this research are ontological assumptions and a personality model which describes humans as whole, self-conscious, authentic, intentional, creative, autonomous beings, who are free to choose and capable of critical thinking. These qualities, which positively correspond to educational goals as axiological categories, have become key concepts of positive changes in the educational process.

Such starting positions determined the search for ways of developing autonomous and creative personalities within humanistic approach to education. The authors chose the cognitive-developmental orientation, which strives to find methods and actions that foster children’s freedom on one hand, and create necessary conditions for their optimal development on the other hand.

The key issue is fostering motivation for learning. Personality development is geared toward the achievement

² These assumptions were the basis for research efforts of the authors of this paper in the project “European Dimensions of the Change of Educational System in Serbia” financed by the Ministry for Science and Technological Development of Republic of Serbia, as one of the partners in the international, intercultural and scientific cooperation.

of cognitive goals, which entail a mastery over classification skills, concept usage, spatial relations, speech and communication (written and oral). Cognitive development is interactively related to social and emotional development (Piaget, 1990). Apart from cognitivist conceptions, and especially Piaget's developmental model, as well as Vigotsky's social development theory, this research is also based on personalist conceptions: Roger's non-directive teaching, models of creative learning, development of personal freedom and social interactionist conceptions, i.e., cooperative model of Lewin, et al.

There is a reason why creativity is in the focus of every humanistically oriented pedagogy. Personal strivings and needs are not to be suppressed, but cultivated and refined, without the imposition of previously verified ideas and feelings, already formed patterns of thinking, rigidly proscribed models of behaviour and the usual verbal formulations of authority. It does not mean that pupils are to be left to their own devices, but that qualities to be fostered are activity vs. passivity, personal experience vs. memorizing, creativity vs. imitation and more personal choices vs. decisions made by others.

It is believed that such foundations respect subjectivity of every person, their capability to realize themselves and express those latent powers that are hidden within every human being. Thus underlined entirety means that the authors insist on a holistic approach to the study of person as an entity within a context with which he/she also creates an entity.

2.2 Field of educational discourse

A great preoccupation with the issue of education is evident in all countries over the world today. It has become clear that in the new context of the learning society patterns of traditional cultural reactions are no longer appropriate. Traditional school system is not capable of introducing enough flexibility into pedagogical methods and the curriculum, and formal education therefore does not provide secure investment for future. Time spent on education now covers a lifetime, and there are more and more educational institutions and opportunities for learning (Delors, 1996). They should be meaningfully utilized so that the concept of lifelong learning can be put into practice in an integrated manner. In this regard, European Commission emphasized three basic categories of purposeful learning activity in the document *A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (2000): (1) formal learning, which takes place in education and training institutions and leads to recognized diplomas and qualifications; (2) non-formal learning, which takes place independently in the official system of education and usually does not lead to formalised certificates; and (3) informal learning, which occurs naturally in everyday life.

Learning in informal settings such as museums, for example, refers to systematic and cumulative aspects of experiential nature of learning that is based on encounters with real objects. Museums are open and dynamic environments where individuals of all ages can learn at their own rate, satisfy curiosity, research and test their own ideas, socialize and enjoy themselves. Museums have great potential in the sense that they help people acquire cultural and scientific information and concepts, awaken their interest, build value orientations, attitudes, social, emotional and cognitive skills. Thus, they are complementary to formal educational environments, and are an important and natural corrective to academic "truths".

Artworks displayed at museums, as layered and multilayered phenomena, offer variegated opportunities for people to experience, understand and evaluate, but do not permit improvisation and superficiality (Gajić, 2006). Experiential learning presupposes an experience of a work of art (not just one instance of experience, but multifaceted and multiple experience and a certain form of living in a new world). It is a complex psychological process, which does not include emotional excitement but a mental activity as well. Extending the concept of "experience" to include a mental element opens up a new opportunity to establish mutual relations between the

realm of experience (emotional) and the realm of the rational (cognitive). Psychological research testifies to the reversibility of these processes, their interaction and interrelation. Experience leads to learning, which leads to deeper experience. A strict boundary line between the two processes cannot be drawn.

Learning about a work of art leads the recipient toward understanding, it is both creative and exploratory and casts light on all the structures and layers in the domain of the artwork. It is a holistic system of entering the artwork in order to reach its important features. It should be emphasized that, even when experience retreats before some other value factors, it remains present in the process of evaluation, primarily in the form of an experiential and emotional standpoint that is always consequential (Nikolić, 1992, p. 207).

From this standpoint, active learning and individual creation of meaning are natural processes that take place in museums (Griffin, 2000). Dewey's ideas about the importance of experiential learning and children's innate need to explore, handle tools, materials and construct, are very important in this respect. "Experiential learning" and "learning by doing" constitute the core of his pedagogy. It should also not be overlooked what Dewey (1970, p. 19) wrote about one of the basic functions of an educational institution, which is to balance various elements of social environment and create conditions for each individual to save himself/herself from the constraints of the social group that he/she was born into, and to get into close contact with the wider environment. Translated into the museum context, this means that museums offer an individual an opportunity to link different social and cultural customs and in doing so, to establish links between different institutions and communities (Matusov & Rogoff, 1995, p. 101).

Piaget's developmental theory of learning (Piaget, 1990) also had its influence on the recognition of how important is the opportunity to handle real objects as part of the educational work in museums. Children should be able to participate in the activities that will secure appropriate learning at each stage of their development (sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational stages). Approach developed by Vigotsky (1977) agreed in certain aspects with Piaget's, especially regarding the importance of activity for the process of learning and the development of thinking. Still, Vigotsky put much greater emphasis on the importance of communication and social transmission. Bruner (2000) also stressed the importance of action and discovery in the process of learning, treating every cognition as a form of (social) construction. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences can also become an important ally regarding successful teaching in museums, because it indicated the need to identify activities that might become useful for a particular group of predisposed pupils (Milutinović, 2008).

Construction of knowledge (meaning) is the common denominator of the mentioned theoretical standpoints. Individuals are not passive recipients waiting to be "filled in" by cultural contents, but active participants who follow personalized programmes, constructing knowledge through interaction with various institutions, artefacts and other people. There are many reasons for adopting a constructivist model as a theoretical basis for educational work in museums. By applying this model, museums can create a pleasant, friendly and stimulating learning environment that meets individual needs for concrete experience, individual contemplation, communication and social interaction. Constructivist theory advocates the use of interactive exhibits and legitimizes play as a form of learning, which aids the development of personal constructions. Finally, creation of meaning is the core of educational work of museums, it is about the way that a visitor interprets his/her experience or about the manner in which the museum staff interprets collections they put on display.

3. Methodological framework for research

3.1 Research approaches, orientations and paradigms

Constructivist and interpretative approach in this research is directed toward understanding the complex world of experience lived through in the museum context, from the standpoint of those who have had such experience. It is a widely held opinion that social actors construe the world of the reality lived through that is specific for a particular situation. It is the researchers' task to construe meanings, shed light on the kind of meanings that are built into the language and actions of these actors (Schwandt, 1994).

It seems that the field of qualitative educational discourse in museums is more promising in terms of connecting theory and practice and a more direct application of scientific results to advance educational practice, than quantitative approaches that have limited reach. What is more, an integrated configuration of quantitative and qualitative research paradigm has shown to be more functional, especially in the methodological sense (Johnson & Onwegbuzie, 2004).

Apart from interpretation, the new scientific orientation emphasizes not only understanding and reflexivity of the research process and its results, but also recognition of the researchers' own standpoint. Epistemological position of new approaches gives ontological precedence to relations, that is, to relationism as opposed to essentialism. In other words, it suggests that people's knowledge stems from their mutual interactions in everyday activities, which happens only through use of language and other symbolic means of communication.

The researchers have given a legitimate status to action research as a qualitative and reflexive technique and approach in this research. Its theoretical and epistemological starting point is the critical theory, created within the Frankfurt School and built on the foundations of the Enlightenment tradition, German classical philosophy and the hermeneutic tradition (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Habermas, 1975). Postulates of critical theory put theory and practice in a dialectic relationship, where the actors' interpretations are central, but they involve more than just practical reasoning. It is necessary that the actors (i.e., practitioners) develop a systematic understanding of the conditions that shape and constrain actions, which demands their active participation in the articulation and formulation of theories that are immanent to their practice, as well as development of these theories through a process of continuous action and reflection.

Action research simultaneously contributes to learning and improvement of pedagogical practice and the development of a grounded pedagogical theory (Gojkov, 2007). A very important facet of this research is that it takes place in the context of change, as an attempt to solve problems (Haggarty & Postlethwaite, 2003). It involves transformation of educational practice, "controlled innovation", i.e., an attempt to change and advance educational practice while learning about it (Smith, 1982).

Two criteria for determining scientific value of people's action research have been singled out: an interpretative validity (how they document the steps, argue their interpretation, how systematic the procedure is, closeness of the object of research) and communicative validity (Halmi, 2005). As distinctive characteristics of this research, the authors point out reflexivity—A critical personal re-examination at various levels and a continuous, functional, critical examination of the research practice/process in order to discover its assumptions, values and prejudices (Wilkinson, 1988, p. 495) and application of different perspectives and comparison of different standpoints.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Selection of the research problem

The selected research problem reflects the authors' longstanding interest and theoretical preoccupation with the museum pedagogy and pedagogy of art, as well as their wish to develop museum educational programmes.

Promotion and valorisation of regional cultural heritage in Italy and Serbia constitute the wider context of the problem selection.

3.2.2 Research goals and tasks

The research goal was to devise, realize and evaluate the educational programme Feel Art—Intercultural Experience in Museum Education in order to bring museums as places for ambient learning, education and identity development, closer to children, in an attempt to promote and popularize the value of historical and artistic heritage.

The goal of this research is made operational through the following research tasks:

- (1) Making children aware of the culture in their territory and realize that there are differences between Serbia and Italy regarding culture and religion;
- (2) Opening up the museum for local community and establishing relations with the territory it belongs to, as well as with its social, educational and cultural institutions, most of all with pre-school institutions and schools;
- (3) Developing a concept of education in the museum that is reflected in multiple teaching strategies within realization of educational programmes with an intercultural matrix, in order to facilitate an exchange of experience and cooperation as well as specific approach to works of art;
- (4) Evaluation of historical and artistic heritage through an active “reading” of paintings and a sensory approach to works of art, which contribute to the development of children’s perceptual abilities (smell, taste, vision, hearing and touch);
- (5) Development of imagination, cognitive abilities, creativity and critical attitude by contrasting different cultural identities;
- (6) Development of social competences through cooperation and communication.

3.2.3 The method of sample selection

The authors applied the non-probability sampling strategy, i.e., convenience method and sampling based on judgement. Consideration of procedures for sample selection included:

- (1) Selection of the research location: The Gallery of Matica Srpska in Novi Sad and the Diocesan Museum in Palermo;
- (2) Temporal sampling: Taking into consideration different time cycles in the two museums, the project lasted about 6 months. It was realized in several phases and was finished in June, 2008, with a presentation and an exhibition of children’s works in the Diocesan Museum in Palermo, May 24-June 2, 2008, and in the Gallery of Matica Srpska, Novi Sad, June 13-21, 2008;
- (3) Selection of research participants (subjects): Validity of the selected participants depended on their special characteristics that put them into the sample based on the variables of age, life experience, preschool and school background, situational relationship with other subjects in the sample and the researcher. Organizational reasons determined inclusion of the second, third, fourth and fifth grade pupils from the “G. E. Nuccio” elementary school (ages 7-10, 94 pupils in total) in Palermo, children from the preschool institution “Radosno detinjstvo” in Novi Sad (ages 5-6.5, 35 children in total), as well as the first and second grade pupils from the elementary schools “Jovan Popović” and “Žarko Zrenjanin” (ages 6.5-8, 41 pupils in total) in Novi Sad. The sample therefore consisted of 170 children in total.

3.2.4 Phases of action research

(1) Phase: Plan of action

- (a) Identification, evaluation and formulation of the research problem;

(b) Introductory discussions and negotiations between scientific and museum staff/researchers from Palermo and Novi Sad (exchange of knowledge from the field of education and of previous experience in educational work);

(c) Study of relevant literature and deciding about the theoretical-methodological basis for research;

(d) Selection of research procedures (sample selection during contacts with kindergartens and schools, selection of artworks to be displayed, preparation of working sheets for children, selection of research/learning methods, division of resources and assignments);

(e) Selection of formative evaluation techniques.

(2) Phase: Strategic action

Development and implementation of the educational programme *Feel Art* through a systematic monitoring of the activities in the museum by the researchers. Data collection for critical reflection and evaluation for the purpose of continuous improvement of the programme, as well as presentation of results took place during this phase.

(3) Phase: Evaluation and critical reflection

General summary and re-examination of the project results. Formative evaluation ran in parallel with the programme and its function was to expose shortcomings and benefits of the programme, in accordance with the defined goals and tasks. Evaluation provided constant feedback about the extent to which the “real” programme corresponded to what the researchers had devised, in order to facilitate its further revision and improvement.

3.2.5 Processing of the data collected

The data collected in the museums in both countries underwent various types of processing (qualitative analysis and descriptive statistics), and the conclusions were drawn on the basis of interpretation of data collected by means of the following research tools: participatory observation protocol, filled-in working sheets, children’s artworks and audio-visual recordings.

(1) Phase: Plan of action

Although the very idea of museums has acquired new meanings, today in Serbia, it is still difficult to put into practice the idea that the presentation of museum materials and the way it is used by visitors are at least as important segments of the museum work as the protection and scientific processing of that materials are (Milutinović, 2003). In the new circumstances of the 21st century, it is a great challenge for museums to be perceived by the society as important sources of learning and generators of ideas in real life.

Respecting global societal changes, museums have a responsibility of building quality relationships between individuals, groups, communities and cultures alike. At these times of identity crisis, museums can help people discover their own cultural roots and thus understand themselves better as well as others. Museums can become relevant means of cultural exchange, cultural enrichment and better mutual understanding, cooperation and peace (Gajić, Milutinović & Klemenović, 2008). For all these reasons, it is necessary to explore viable approaches for bringing museums and artworks closer to children, and offer ways of changing the present status of the museums as conservatorial institutions and presenters of cultural heritage into museums as proactive educational institutions.

In this context, the Gallery of Matica Srpska in Novi Sad launched educational programmes to bring art and cultural heritage closer to youngest visitors. From short workshops in the beginning (*Museums and Friendship Building*, 2003; *Touch the Untouchable*, 2004; *Art Topics*, 2005), which were followed by continuous educational programmes (*My Portrait for the Museum*, 2006; *Beauties and Heroes*, 2007), a new system of programmes for

children was developed—from day workshops to yearly programmes.

These educational programmes, as well as knowledge and experience of the scientists and museum workers formed the basis for cooperation between the Diocesan Museum and the Gallery of Matica Srpska. Thus, the vision of educational role for the museums acquired a wider context of the intercultural cooperation of the two institutions with the idea to apply the same model of educational programme with the artworks from each of the institutions.

(2) Phase: Strategic action

In various periods, realization of the educational programme *Feel Art* included the following activities: (a) presentation of the programme in kindergartens and schools; (b) realization of educational workshops with continuous evaluation; (c) organized tour of the standard exhibition and evaluation; and (d) presentation of results and an exhibition of children's work in the Diocesan Museum and the Gallery of Matica Srpska (see Appendix).

(3) Phase: Evaluation and critical reflection

Starting ideas made it possible to identify a framework for critical reflection: an intercultural perspective, as a principle that inspires educational work, and learning processes in the museum.

In the realization of the project, the intercultural was translated into an exchange of experience from local environments, the Diocesan Museum as the museum of sacral art and the Gallery of Matica Srpska with works of sacral and general art. The intercultural is defined by the relationship of different participants who are enriched by the process of mutual exchange and confrontation of ideas, with the promotion of values such as, openness toward that is different (cultural, social, economical, religious and political), equality of rights and duties, integration of different social and cultural models (Sebastianelli & Amoroso, 2008, p. 52).

Realization of the educational model based on the intercultural partnership did not mean a uniform approach. Educational approach in museums was projected in relation to the context and the territory. Suggestions related to the teaching methods took care of the specific characteristics of museums as well as of the educational institutions, the age of the children, their social and family environment, their interests and motivation. Each museum thus required a different approach, which did not rely just on the subject matter being presented, but also on the characteristics of the museum in question. These included the richness of historical memory preserved in the works of art, which provided the tools for the decoding of the past and an understanding of its relationship to the present. In this regard, the past and the future, cultural heritage and children's creativity, became the bridge that spanned different cultures, customs and territories. Children's works inspired by the works of Italian and Serbian art became the exhibits, which connected the Diocesan Museum and the Gallery of Matica Srpska. This project had thus built a solid base for the next step in the confrontation and the exchange of experience, which meant children's direct contact with culture and art from another country.

The process of learning, as the second referential framework of critical reflection, is specific because of the context of the environment, and the characteristics it acquires in this environment. Namely, as opposed to the traditional approach, which is focused exclusively on the transfer of information, the constructivist approach enables a transformation of the pupil into an active participant who is aware of the process of discovery of a cultural good. In this case, rich learning environment together with optimal activities and contents enabled learning through play. Different modalities for the acquisition of information (painting, word, sound and touch) appropriate for different learning styles secured active participation of the children. By applying the principle of "learning by doing", the authors stimulated children's attention and the development of certain motor skills (expressed through modelling). The principle of "handling allowed" (tactile expression) ensured a holistic

learning experience, documented by a better understanding of the form and the function of an object, as well as of the connection between the two.

Operational modalities of educational work implied individual cognitive effort expressed through conversation, drawings and specially designed working sheets that were used as tools for knowledge construction. Most often, the children expressed their answers in working sheets through drawings (98.2% of the examinees of preschool and school age), whereas a somewhat smaller percentage of children (86.5%) also answered questions which demanded of them to connect a particular taste with the particular facial expression on the traffic light of feelings, or to order the pictures according to the strength of sound produced by the objects presented in the paintings (82.3%). A smaller number of children (just 9.15%) answered the question “What are the sculptures like?” by stating a different number of features: smooth, cold, rough, hard, soft, warm, etc. Three features were mentioned by 7.5% of the examinees, four features by 31.6%, five features by 51.7% and six features by 9.2% of the examinees. These answers reflect individual progress of children, especially fluency of their ideas and a variety of features they could think of, which are all components of their creativities.

Since drawing is one of the basic forms of children’s expression, which reflects the level of their general intellectual development, development of fine motor skills, their perception and finally, their temperament or the feelings they have and the way they think about the environment, the authors analysed these drawings in order to answer the previously set research tasks. The drawings represented two-dimensional objects, usually with a prominent perspective (mostly in drawings by children of 6-9 years of age), and a combination of different elements. Considering the level of their expression, they were mostly re-drawings, drawings by observing the authentic object and free drawings from memory and imagination. Apart from static conditions (a flower, a tree and a musical instrument), children also tried to capture dynamic processes (a volcano eruption, ocean and sea waves and birds’ flight). Based on the analysis of the elements in these drawings—shapes, structural and spatial relations, schematic presentation of processes, concretizations and abstractions—it was possible to recognize different conceptual structures and mutual relationships of the elements. Choice of colours depended more on the momentary inspiration, emotion and temperament than on the colour of the actual object.

Opportunity to use the preferred learning style resulted in a wealth of socially and individually construed meanings, and development of skills and abilities. To mention but a few: by drawing notes, some children (16.2%) emphasized the functional aspect of the musical instrument, i.e., its capacity to produce a sound (understanding the function of an object); a great number of children (70.6%) linked the feeling of warmth with objects made of ceramics, which was defined as a smooth material, and the feeling of cold with objects made of bronze, which was a rough material (recognition and description of different qualities of the material); some children (43%) recognized categories of musical instruments, for example, they differentiated brass and woodwind instruments from stringed instruments (classification, category recognition and description). Children depicted not only the chosen instrument, but also detected relations and relationships: For example, a wooden sculpture was linked to a drawing of a tree (5.4%), which indicated a connection established between materials-wood and the final product as a work of art (observation and understanding of crucial relationships). Although skills and abilities the authors have just described do not constitute proofs about outcomes of learning in the museum, they certainly confirm that a process of learning did take place.

One of the starting ideas of the programme was that emotions are important contributors to learning in the museum context. Especially designed methods of teaching made it easier to construct meaning by way of establishing links between works of art and everyday life. Through play, children expressed their own emotions

(joy, frustration and envy) as well as a successful control over them. All this confirms that affections were equally involved in the process of learning. The adopted theoretical approach reflected the attitude that social interaction is key to cognitive development. Activities that were offered therefore made it possible to include a larger number of children in group work (cooperative learning), which in turn made it possible for children to improve their social skills, exchange associations and experience, all of which further improved their speaking skills.

4. Final considerations

Discussion of issues related to the field of qualitative pedagogical discourse, especially critical scientific value of action research and its relevance for the practice and planning of educational policy, have a prominent pragmatic dimension. Cultural heritage of a certain territory situated in the museum context carries exceptional educational potential that should be used when working with the public, especially with preschool and school populations, as well as teachers and educators. To this end, the authors tried to promote consciousness and knowledge about museum education through a more intensive cooperation between museums, kindergartens and schools. Assumptions of this cooperation, among other things, are joining plan and realization of the programme with the support of local community, related ministries, media and other factors.

Results of the programme evaluation could generally be described in terms of pedagogical outcomes. Experience gained from the project doubtlessly contributed to a better understanding and appreciation of the historical and artistic heritage of the territories involved. It also helped build an international partnership where each of the partners, depending on their own experiences, actively cooperated in the development of valid teaching methods and a good practice. Educational programme *Feel Art* created conditions for quality socializing, learning and participation in various activities, which confirmed pedagogical value of constructivist learning in museums. Activities that were carried out could usefully complement a formal educational curriculum. They helped teachers and educators realize how museums could help them develop and realize curricula. Generally speaking, the interdisciplinary and intercultural programme *Feel Art* successfully showed potential of the museums as learning organizations to transform educational system into a particular community, and help schools abandon traditional methods of working.

Numerous observations of the way children behaved during the programme activities indicate effects of the programme: Children were very motivated to learn, their curiosity and readiness to learn were maintained throughout. Different teaching strategies contributed to the acquisition of basic concepts and children's ability to link what they learned with their previous experience from everyday life. In addition to this, the programme evaluation showed some of the special characteristics of children's thought and ability: creativity and creative expression (evident from children's artwork and modelling), critical and active approach to the learning process (children often expressed the need to discuss, they asked questions and showed initiative). Their inclination toward cooperation with others was also evident, as well as mutual support and help during learning, as opposed to competitive spirit and rivalry, which are usually dominant among peers in the process of learning.

Monitoring the realization of the educational programme, the authors have concluded that participatory observation protocol (with widely defined categories, which contain phenomenological descriptions of the examinee's behaviour) can be recommended as a valid form of formative assessment of a programme, which is focused on further development and improvement of a project. Especially valid were the data acquired through observation and discussion between researchers and workshop leaders, which, to a certain extent, helped shed

light on the workshop leaders' hidden agendas, their implicit beliefs about what and how should be done with children in the museums, as well as at the discrepancy between what had been planned and what was actually realized. This exchange was also useful because of different perspectives and views of the phenomena that were studied. Quality data acquired through formative evaluation (i.e., systematic monitoring of the programme activities) were used to modify and improve the programme, also as information about the programme effects.

The exchange of experience between Italian and Serbian scientists and experts confirmed important role of the museums as the place that raises awareness about one's cultural heritage, which is a prerequisite for the understanding of cultural diversity. Research results are the basis for their further cooperation, and all new activities will be carefully monitored, and the results obvious in the years to come. Educational programme Feel Art could be understood as an example of a model of cooperation between museums across Europe. Successfully realized cooperation can be an incentive for many museums to similarly realize their own educational visions, i.e., advance their own educational work through an intercultural dialogue. Such cooperation could help cultural integrations of the 21st century and the formulation of cultural policies in the European continent.

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Appendix:

Diocesan Museum, Palermo	Gallery of Matica Srpska, Novi Sad
1. Presentation of the educational programme in kindergartens and schools	
<p>During the first stage of the programme in both countries, there was an organized meeting with the groups of children included in the project that lasted about an hour, and was held in the corresponding schools and the kindergarten. The goal of this activity was to stimulate attention and arouse interest for the unfamiliar environment. The programme activities were described on that occasion, and a special emphasis was put on the five senses. In addition, the participants were given relevant information about the referential context, and specific features of the museums were emphasized. The children got an explanation that at the same time their peers in another country were going through similar experience, and were informed about geographical and cultural characteristics of that country and the museum in question.</p>	
2. Realization of educational workshops with continuous evaluation	2. Organized tour of the standard exhibition and evaluation
<p>The second stage of the action in the Diocesan Museum included realization of educational workshops. The idea was to engage the five senses in children and stimulate their individual appreciation of the artworks through observation accompanied by adequate instructions. Every encounter was focused on the interpretation of the artworks chosen to affect a particular sense, and was followed by the request to fill in the specially prepared accompanying working sheets. Children were given the opportunity to express themselves through drawings, since their language as well as writing skills were still not sufficiently developed. These activities were important for scientists and the museum staff alike, because children's drawings showed not only their capability to memorize and the skills they had, but also the level of understanding achieved through the manual and mental activities in the museum.</p> <p>There were two encounters with each class of pupils, during two weeks in the Diocesan Museum, which lasted 2 hours each. From the operative standpoint, two routes were formed: hearing-touch and taste-smell, presupposing that vision is the main sense in the perception of an artwork.</p> <p>The first workshop covered the development of hearing and touch. The artwork that was supposed to engage hearing predominantly was <i>Coronation of the Mother of God</i>, by a Spanish painter from the 16th century. Children were first asked to recognize musical instruments. Afterwards, they listened to the recordings of these instruments and filled out working sheets with questions such as: How many musical instruments do you see in the painting? Which of them do you recognize? Who plays these instruments in the painting? Draw the instruments you like most! For touch, children were shown artworks from various materials, which represented <i>The Birth of Christ</i>, <i>The Assumption of the Mother of God</i> and <i>The Mother of God in Heaven</i>. Tactile feelings were expressed in working sheets through questions: What do you feel when you touch the sculpture? Among the "light" and "dark" parts, which seem to be colder, and which smoother? Draw and colour the work you like most!</p> <p>The second workshop was aimed at the development of taste and smell. Children were first presented an oil painting from 18th century, <i>St. Benedict the Black</i>, where they were supposed to recognize elements that appealed to taste. Here too working sheets were offered with the questions: Which food do you see in the painting? Describe the food you have recognized in the painting. What does it taste like? Draw what you like to eat! In order to active children's sense of smell, the chosen artworks were made of wood: <i>San Cristoforo</i> (19th century), <i>Ornamental Motive from the Crucifixion</i> (18th century). Different kinds of wood were used, and working sheets contained the following questions: What kind of trees do you know? What are their names? Did you know that this kind of tree had a smell? Draw the object you liked most!</p> <p>Continuous monitoring followed realization of the educational workshops. Workshop activities motivated children to participate actively, there were productive dialogues with members of the research team, but also between children themselves, and they were interested in filling out the working sheets. Second grade pupils, who could not fill out the sheets due to their low writing and reading skills, were more oriented toward drawing.</p> <p>Since the realization of the programme Feel Art in the Diocesan Museum started one month earlier, the research team from Novi Sad had an opportunity to gain certain insights through direct observation and useful dialogues with the Italian team, which resulted in certain modifications of the original plan. Experience showed that it was not advisable to deal with two senses during</p>	

one encounter with certain age groups. It was therefore agreed that activities in the Gallery of Matica Srpska would take place in the form of weekly workshops/encounters (for each sense), for the duration of four weeks, and that each session would last one hour for each class/group. Since it had been noted that children's attention declined in the third stage of the programme in the Diocesan Museum ("guided tour"), research teams agreed that the tour of the standard exhibition in the Gallery of Matica Srpska should precede educational workshops. These modifications of the original plan seemed appropriate even more so because the programme in Novi Sad involved the kindergarten children also.

Second stage of the research action in the Gallery of Matica Srpska (guided tour of the standard exhibition) was used to expand children's experience in a contextualized environment: Was it possible to experience smell and how it could be done, was it possible to feel taste and touch and to hear a sound, just by watching a work of art? It was noticed that the encounter with the works of art contained many meanings and moved multiple inner mechanisms: feelings, curiosity, imagination and creativity. Experience made it possible for children to articulate their feelings through play in the workshop stage.

3. Organized tour of the standard exhibition and evaluation	3. Realization of educational workshops with continuous evaluation
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The third stage of the research action in the Diocesan Museum involved a "guided tour", which facilitated detailed familiarization with the Museum, but was also a moment of the final validation of children's experience, especially in relation to their expressed interest and efficacy. At this stage there was a decline in children's attention, which indicated that the time allotted for this activity was inappropriate for the children of that age.

Concerning the realization of educational workshops in the Gallery of Matica Srpska, for each workshop there were selected works of art that stimulated specific senses in various ways. There were also the accompanying working sheets to be filled in and numerous other activities (drawing, painting, modelling, costumography, role-play and an encounter with an expert).

The first workshop was devoted to the development of the sense of smell. Children talked about what kind of smells there were, which smells they liked and which they did not, what kind of sensations were caused by: fruits (an unknown painter from the 19th century, *Still Nature with a Watermelon*), flowers (Sava Petrosić, *A Girl with a Flower*, 1839 and an unknown painter from the 19th century, *Flowers in the Blue Vase*). Working sheets followed it with the assignments: Do you recognize objects that have smell in the paintings (draw or write)? Which objects in the painting do not have smell? Draw objects whose smell you like or do not like! The next workshop was devoted to the sense of taste. Depending on the objects presented in the paintings, children differentiated between different tastes: sweet (Dimitrije Ž. Petrović, *Still Nature with a Watermelon*, 1857), salty, hot (Milan Konjović, *Onion, Checked Napkin*, 1951), and bitter (Đorđe Bošan, *Still Nature with Orange Peels*, 1956). Working sheets included the following assignments: Recognize and draw the food you see in the paintings! Relate the taste to the facial expression! Which of the things in the paintings you would like to eat, and which you would not?

Hearing was the topic of the third workshop. Children recognized what in the paintings could produce sounds and imitated it: sea waves, volcano eruption (Dimitrije N. Petrović, *Vesuvius in Flames*, about 1870), birds, frogs, rustling of leaves (unknown author, *Still Nature with the Bird*, 1840), musical instruments (Dimitrije Stakić, *Moses on Mt. Sinai*, about 1860). They expressed their impressions by filling out the working sheets with the following questions: Do you recognize sounds in the paintings? Order the paintings according to the strength of the sounds produced by the objects they depict! Which instrument would you like to play? Draw a musical instrument or a natural phenomenon whose sound you like! The fourth workshop was devoted to the sense of touch. Observing the exhibited paintings, children imagined what kind of tactile feeling would be produced by the objects in them: a bow, a necklace, hair, lace (Uroš Predić, *A Girl from the Burger Family*, 1904), metal sculptures (Sava Sandić, *The Penguin*), marble (Slavka Sredović Petrović, *A White Bear*), wood (Sava Sandić, *A Medusa*) and plastics (Ana Bešlić, *A Pillow VI*). Working sheets assignments were: How do the sculptures feel when you touch them? Draw and colour the sculpture you like! Which materials do you recognize in the painting? Draw a detail!

Realization of the programme in the Gallery of Matica Srpska was continuously evaluated. It was noticed that the efficiency of children's narrations was reflected in the development of their motivation and the capability to take part (thinking through the presented material, establishing the contact with the familiar ideas and comparing them with those that were unfamiliar and new). With the hindsight from the Diocesan Museum, a modification was introduced in the part of the programme that took place in the Gallery of Matica Srpska, related to the final evaluation, which was this time outside the museum. The next stage of the action was organized in kindergartens and schools, and it confirmed that a carefully planned topic, well adjusted to children's interests and experience stimulates creativity and develops sensitivity for the works of art. It was also confirmed that children learned more easily if they had visited the museum.

4. Presentation of the results and the exhibition of children's work

The last stage of the action was to take place in the museums, where children's work was to be presented. Realization of this stage was in the form of multimedia exhibitions, presentation of drawings made by Italian and Serbian children and promotion of the publication that showed the experience that was gained through drawings and working sheets. The data we have collected are certainly positive. They testify to the deep and fruitful relationship between the Italian and Serbian scientists and experts, who have managed to achieve previously set goals through an intercultural dialogue and mutual exchange of experience; they succeeded in devising an educational programme that brought museums closer to children. The project created conditions for an intercultural exchange at two levels: at the level of distribution of knowledge and experience between the research teams, and at the level of children's learning and expression.