

## INVESTIGACIÓN/RESEARCH

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# ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION IN MADRID'S MUSEUM INSTITUTIONS

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### Abstract:

We try to determine the state of the art of communication in the museum institutions in this moment in history, in which changes in this field speed up almost annually, with the appearance of new devices and platforms to disseminate content, and the also fast obsolescence of some others. The existing analyses suggest that the museum as concept is years away from where it should be, in terms of very important changes both in the aforesaid technical field and in the employment of personnel qualified in communication and with truly corporate authority.

**Key Words:** Museums – Communication - Public Relations - Madrid - Management

## ANÁLISIS DE LA COMUNICACIÓN EN LAS INSTITUCIONES MUSEÍSTICAS MADRILEÑAS

### RESUMEN:

Buscamos determinar el nivel de la comunicación de las instituciones museísticas en una fase de la historia en la que los cambios en este terreno se aceleran de forma exponencial gracias a los nuevos dispositivos y plataformas de difusión de contenidos que suponen la rápida obsolescencia de los anteriores. Los análisis desarrollados en este texto indican que el museo, como concepto, lleva años de retraso en la implantación de cambios técnicamente muy necesarios, tanto en el ámbito tecnológico ya citado, como en el empleo de personal cualificado en comunicación, dotado de capacidad directiva real.

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**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Museos - Comunicación museística - Relaciones Públicas - Madrid - Gestión museística

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1-Definition of parameters**

The most important changes to be noted in the current museum panorama in terms of communication is the definitive launch of its role in the context of Leisure and social culture. Audiences expect and are prepared for more and more interactive exhibitions at all levels, which contributes in no small measure to the increase in the number of professions involved in its achievement, thus redefining the role of all that within society.

The museums themselves have grown in number and variety, have made unstinting efforts to incorporate the 3.0 environment into their activities and to take into account the new globalized culture. An adaptation for which an increase in the budgets and, therefore, rationalization of the resources of these institutions have been necessary.

With the increase of investment the figure of the sponsor has come, the growing need for presence in social networks (Domínguez Vila, 2014) and in the increasingly eclectic social media. The offer of these institutions has also diversified both in terms of exhibitions (more temporary exhibitions, with mass influxes) and in the initiative of new types of museum and cultural activities. The relationship between cultural institution and society has changed, giving a growing role to communication managers and their departments.

### **1.1 - Communicators: communicative strategy and management fit**

The focus is on the communicative execution regarding the public, how it is planned and by what means. The most important thing is that these relationships (all of them) should be fluid and continuous over time. Periodicals. NGOs, parties, sports institutions ... everyone who is the subject of corporate communication is aware of it. It is necessary to remember that we came from a dynamic in which less than half a century ago there were museum institutions that scarcely projected external communication, focusing on their specific and praiseworthy work without realizing the necessary complementation that professional communication could bring to their work: visibility. Disseminate the very existence of the museum and its activity, and not only act as a passive exhibitor of knowledge. A very logical attempt which, however, has been slow to take place effectively.

## 2. OBJETIVECE

Making the essentially pedagogical function of museums known requires correspondingly trained human resources with a decision-making capacity at an executive level within the structure of the museum. Management and the other administrative sections should listen to their recommendations in order to agree on the well-being of the institution with the wishes of the public, without prejudicing in essence the disseminating mission that should be the focus of interest. Integral management of the communication must be attended, beyond even the person or the department that carries it out.

However, when studying the phenomenon in an orderly way, two aspects come to light: those related to the departmental structure, and the conjunctural ones. Their study will facilitate the understanding of the way in which communication is managed in each institution, allowing effective extraction of results valid for the sector. It will also give us an image of the importance granted in this to the communication and the relationship with each type of audience.

1. Observe the approach given by museums to communication tasks in terms of their organization and subsequent execution.
2. The way this implementation takes shape in initiatives appropriate to the new communicative and technological needs.
3. The recruiting policy of museums in all matters relating to communication. Specific training of such personnel.
4. Establish general guidelines for museum communication on which specific actions can be built according to the particular circumstances of each institution.
5. Management of museums implies an increasing number of specialties and the way in which they relate to one another to produce the final result. In particular, communication professionals are gradually joining these institutions because of the new realities. But, who and how have they joined the museums to complete these tasks?

It is a matter of seeing if - with or without presence in the official organizational chart - there is a global communication plan between the museum and its publics, cementing an efficient policy of public relations. It is necessary to review the academic profile of those responsible for these departments, because of fundamental differences in definition between one professional team and another. It is necessary to establish a common ground to understand what we research, because the sector generally ignores the figure of the public relations representative.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

These institutions are one of the earliest cultural organizations of civilization. The word dates from year one before Christ, and since then, museums have expanded and adapted to the changing human social reality.

### **4. DISSCUSION**

#### **4.1. Two thousand years of European museums**

The most significant change they have faced has been their openness to the public - the passage from private collection to open collection - with an audience whose interest differs from mere conservation or study, towards education, learning and even leisure as a consequence of the culturalization of the masses. The relationship between the museum and its visitors goes from monologue to dialogue: the public adds value to the museum.

Following Hernández (1994, p. 63),

"there is a strong crisis of identity within the museum institution, the channels of which will have to be defined in the new cultural policies that advocate the protection, conservation and defense of the world heritage ... In recent years, a new trend has emerged that focuses the work of the museum as a public service, which even supplants the rest of the functions"

In this regard, he states:

"We find, on the one hand, the collections and, on the other, the public, without coming to reach a balance between the two. (...) ... all the changes that are being produced, and if these will not lead us to the loss of the most essential and nuclear trait of the museum: its own identity "

The International Committee of Museums (ICOM) is the international, non-governmental organization of museums and their professionals, created to promote the interests of museology and its institutions. The definition it gives dates from 1947: "It recognizes the quality of a museum to any permanent institution that preserves and presents collections of cultural or scientific objects for the purpose of study, education and delight."

In recent years, there has been talk about the need for a new concept of museology, capable of fitting in its rightful place in the information society, due to the way in which it has affected the cultural consumption of the public. It is necessary to adapt these ways of consumption to smooth the transition of the identity of the museum

institutions to the new element. This new museum is understood as a full-time public service.

Thus, while corporate responsibility is a desirable option for the service sector, to the museum environment it becomes an obligation inherent in its activity, as can be seen in the definitions provided by law or by ICOM, leaving the way to materialize this responsibility for the debate.

In the early 1970s at Le Creusot, there was a proposal to create a museum according to the new principles of participation and autonomous management, in charge of three user committees, managers and specialists. The goal was to associate local ethnology with ecology: an "ecomuseum". The variety of committees involved in its management and the fact that users form part of it being relevant to our case: "a new type of more participatory museum (...) made by the community itself" (Hubert, 1985, p. 187). Almost at the same time, the UNESCO Roundtable of Santiago de Chile in 1972 gives birth to the concept of an "integral museum" very similar to the "ecomuseum" in its conception.

From there we arrive at the declaration of Quebec on the new museology and its pillars, adding its new social functions to the traditional concept. "For this, museology will rely on interdisciplinarity and the current media" (Hernández, 1994, p. 74).

The idea is easily summed up in the transformation or interpretation of the museum as a social agent subject to evolve with the community, advocating an active and participatory museum, the contact between people and the objects in the collections. "It is the expressive conception of heritage, which brings the museum out of its own walls "(Hernández, 1994, p.75).

When talking about big institutions (and not about new or modest ones), these principles have proven difficult to apply: the Louvre has gone as far as duplicating its spaces, the services provided to the visitor, and the well-known renovation of the facilities, but it has not adopted the new principles: the training it provides has not been updated in its form or background, ignoring the specialist trend.

The application of the New Museology to the big museums is almost impossible. For example, the Louvre has been renovated, it has duplicated spaces, services, etc., but it has not accompanied all this with a new museological project; instead, it follows reformed traditional schemes. The content remains encyclopedic, when the current trend is the specialized museum.

In this new way of understanding the museum and its surroundings, the society of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the gradual emergence of the global phenomenon of tourism have been very influential: first as luxury reserved for elites, then as mass leisure as the century went by. The museum collects, but it also shows and technologically, didactically and conceptually renews the way in which it is

exploited (Rodríguez Torres, 2013). The new influx of public led to the specialization or specificity of museums in the Mediterranean basin, while in northern Europe, teaching and pedagogy were the standard.

Museology needs to find a new way of expressing the information it transmits to the public, adapting it to the growing educational level of the masses, and ensuring that they reach a growing public: the democratization of knowledge. In short, the new museology will always involve an ever greater openness to the exterior. Another legacy of the convulsive 20<sup>th</sup> century is the multiple organizations that have arisen around the museological phenomenon on a global scale; as well as an increasing number of jobs and closely related specialties. There is, of course, ICOM, at the international level, and the unavoidable protection of UNESCO, in addition to the ascendancy that these institutions have won in the cultural budgets of the countries. Following Alonso (1993), this rethinking, this crisis takes place from 1968 to 1977. The 9<sup>th</sup> General Conference of ICOM addressed the issue of substance, it dared to mention the elephant inside the room and began to question the procedures of museum institutions as cultural agents. Conceiving the museum as a temple or a palace and its stocks as treasures that were to be hidden instead of being displayed ceased to be the standard: humanity had evolved, and museums should move forward with it.

Museums have developed a post-industrial sensitivity (Alonso, 1993: 66) in which immediacy gains followers over long-term results: exhibitions of great impact and splendor sometimes sacrifice the correct order in the analysis of the pieces in pursuit of their presentation.

For this same reason, museums have begun to devote more effort to a detail apparently as insignificant as their external image as a building, through decorations. An excess of language that proclaims to the street its belonging to the world of knowledge, through emblems and allusions that are key in the reading of the learned and artistic world (Bolaños, M., 1997: 154-5).

Nowadays museums, such as those of contemporary art, continue to seek to communicate their interior through architecture. Turning the exterior into a museum in itself, but suitable to the contents of the building.

The ethnography museums also joined this trend and were highly favored by the states, with more and more of them appearing throughout Europe, oriented -at least initially- to the local level, or to the reaffirmation of national identity (Bolaños, 1997, 275).

In 1923, Valéry (Valéry, 1993, pp. 1290-3) reflects in an article his unease about the state of the art of museums and their conception as a species of cold sanctuaries distant from the masses:

"The ideology propagated from the museum in the last century has emanated to make it a place of mere social convenience, of good tone, of cultural superiority, but in return, a place without life that violates the sensitivity of the visitor. (...) In effect, the reaction of the public to so much piled up effort and experience is counterproductive (Bolaños, M: 1997: 303-4).

The museography that we inherited with the 20<sup>th</sup> century believed in the re-organization of the funds "adapting to the levels of knowledge of the different kinds of public" (Bolaños, 1997, p. 31). And they begin to move towards a policy of social education, being for this reason in the need to revise the placement of the pieces, their lighting, the meticulousness and the vocabulary with which they were explained, and other established techniques. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all social levels of the scale were highly aware of the importance of culture, as evidenced by the important efforts made during the Spanish Civil War to safeguard the contents of museums (Bolaños 1997, Pp. 334). A shared sensibility in other parts of the world, which helped intellectuals and politicians see the need to make museums affordable to the proletariat.

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1933, the Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, Fernando de los Rios, signed a law that entails the second regulation of the Spanish artistic heritage, where it states, "the right of the nation to the enjoyment of the works of art and of culture bequeathed by the past" (Bolaños, 1997, p.335). It is a good example of political support for the social right to access to culture as a consequence of social opinion and the public service, although the opportunist interest of the political class to attract that opinion to its ballot box cannot be ruled out.

Throughout the 1950s, the constant activity of museums served to mitigate Spanish isolation and cultural feedback (Bolaños, 1997, p.395). But by 1970, the pace of activity had not risen, becoming a necessary breather in the fifties, a stifling opening past the mid-century. Only a small increase in the annual number of visitors to these institutions was perceived (Bolaños, M., 1997: 399).

In 1977, a survey was carried out to determine the state of the art in Spanish museums, through four categories of questions: organization, museum, functioning and management, social activity and market of art objects. No mention of the relationship with the public. Incredible as it may seem, in Spain the Ministry of Culture was not an entity separate from Education until 1977 by Royal Decree 1558/1977. From that date on, management of the museum issue was handed over to the DGPAAM or Directorate General of Artistic Heritage, Archives and Museums; In charge of matters of promotion and endowment of the institutions, as well as their correct advice.

The constitution of 1978 (article 148.15) allowed the Autonomous Communities to put their hand in the direction of these issues: to take on powers that, progressively,

were transferred to them through the corresponding statutes, decentralizing state management of museums. A step taken, according to Hernández (1994), both for political reasons and for lack of museum policy at the state level.

#### **4.2. - In Madrid and Province**

The information technology has leveled so many sections of museum management that the most relevant difference between them is whether they are controlled at the public or the private level. The Community of Madrid has museums of all kinds in its territory: archaeological, fine arts, monographs, sciences, etc., of all levels of importance and with all the possibilities of either public or private ownership.

In the Community of Madrid, we can find museums that are state-owned, autonomous, municipal, private, etc.

The Community also has the most important and recognized museums of the national panorama, such as Prado, Thyssen-Bornemisza and Reina Sofía, or Paseo del Arte.

It is, therefore, representative of the situation in the big European and American cities in terms of museum management and its communication. Through the analysis of the material and the campaigns undertaken by several important centers, the following variables were established as object of study:

- Responsible for Communication and Public Relations. The training for these positions indicates the level required to take on these positions.
- The number of people and organizational chart of the Department of Communication.
- Staff in the Department and its Training
- Creation date and important milestones.
- Functions attributed to the Department, both supposed and real.
- Characteristics of the contracting policy and objectives pursued with it.
- Research. Types, objectives, criteria and special considerations.

#### **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The most relevant results for the purpose of the state of the art were the following:

- Only four museums in the community have a director - who is not responsible - for communication with a directive authority.
- Of these directors, none have specific training in communication and PR, nor have they previous experience in agency or consultancy in the field.



- With the exception of El Prado and Thyssen, in the Museums of Madrid, the area of Communication depends on pedagogical dissemination, not on management.
- Only five museums do research, and not continuously.

In spite of the contributions made by ICTs and the 3.0 environment (Caldevilla, 2014), most museums continue to cling to the information dissemination model advocated by the principle of public information.

The greater the independent management capacity of these institutions, the more efforts they devote to the PR and communication department. Correct academic training in these subjects has not yet been extended among those responsible.

Proof of this is the lack of previous studies on which to base the communication plan: there are no defined objectives in this field or studies related to the public image of institutions. Those museums equipped with the means to do this seek to incorporate this talent specialized in the management of PR. The circumstances of each institution provide handicaps of a different nature, such as preference for those trained in matters related to each museum rather than communication. The research effort in communication does not seem to be included among the priorities of these institutions in the near future, although it is not impossible to happen, albeit sporadically.

PR and communication are becoming necessary - and for a long time now - for the intrinsic organization of museum institutions, they are not an alien element of leadership. Their implementation as such will take time to be completed, but their growing effect on the public will eventually impose them as a fundamental tool of culture.

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