Museum Education Summer School

Museums and Communities: from visiting to participation

Lori, Armenia

13-15 June 2018
The background
The Museum Education Summer School - Museums and Communities: from visiting to participation - was conceived and coordinated by Hayk Mkrtchyan (Director, Museum Education Center, ITP 2014 and Senior Fellow 2017) and Ronan Brindley (Head of Learning, Manchester Art Gallery), with assistance from Armenian ITP Fellows Marine Mkrtchyan, Astghik Marabyan and Davit Poghosyan. DVV International Armenia supported the event which took place at the COAF SMART Center in Lori, Armenia, from 13 - 15 June 2018. The workshop was created with the intention of discussing the future of learning in museums and galleries and to develop and share possible models for widening community engagement amongst provincial museums in Armenia. It linked to and reflected on developing the ambitions of the Learning, engagement and museums workshop held in Yerevan from 25 – 28 October 2016.

The workshop consisted of facilitated discussions and presentations, providing the opportunity for Armenian colleagues to share ideas, objectives and concerns which would support delegates’ concepts of how museums can connect with communities. Through the sharing and testing of ideas, as well as the opportunity to challenge and develop concepts of community collaboration, the format of an ideas laboratory was developed. Additionally, the event gave the opportunity for local excursions which took place both before and after the workshop and helped to give an overview of the culture and heritage sector and the diversity of museums in Armenia.

A global partnership
Museums and Communities: from visiting to participation was made possible through the partnership between the Manchester Art Gallery and Museum Education Center. The later was established in 2014 by DVV International Armenia and the Association of Museum Workers and Friends for the development of educational programmes in Armenian museums. The British Museum’s International Training Program provided travel support for Ronan Brindley (Manchester Art Gallery), the co-creator of the project and Children of Armenia Fund (COAF)’s Smart Center provided the venue. This type of global partnership is essential for the exchange of ideas that can help build conversations for future international, national and local connections which will support the development of museums and galleries.

The venue
The SMART Center in Lori kindly agreed to host the event. The Center was created through the Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) - a non-profit, non-governmental organization founded in 2003. Their community-based, comprehensive approach to reducing rural poverty enables Armenian village youth access to the resources to achieve and in turn, give back to their communities and the world. COAF’s SMART initiative was designed for the advancement of rural communities and has expanded since its establishment in 2003 through its extension of programmes to a cluster of 6 villages in Armacir in 2006, Tavush and Shirak in 2014 before it opened its first SMART Center in Lori in 2018.

"COAF’s first SMART Center opened on May 27, 2018 in Lori, a region in Armenia’s mountainous north that still struggles from effects of the devastating earthquake of 1988. The Lori COAF SMART Center is a state-of-the-art campus for education and innovation and is accessible to over 250,000 people of the Lori region via the new M6"
highway three minutes away. COAF friend and innovative architect Paul Kaloustian designed the 20,000 square foot building, which will operate as a dynamic “idea acquisition and exchange hub,” to invigorate the children of rural Armenia."

‘The COAF SMART model is designed to be replicated throughout rural Armenia. In the next ten years, we are implementing a strategic plan to realize a network of COAF SMART Centers, increasing access and empowering communities throughout the nation. Access to digital libraries and resources in robotics & IT, language trainings, arts & music, entrepreneurship, organic agriculture, economic sustainability form the foundation of each Center. Each COAF SMART Center will also create curriculum and unique initiatives that address the most pressing local issues.’

From the COAF website

The DVV International Armenian Country Office is a key player in adult education within Armenia and strives to:
- Develop a functioning adult education system.
- Strengthen competencies of the employment agency to offer vocational training.
- Promote networking and exchange between Armenian adult educators, technical specialists and decision-makers and their colleagues in the South Caucasus and in Europe as well as implementing reconciliation projects such as the current project acting together between Armenia and Turkey.

‘In Armenia adult education is not recognised as an independent education sector and receives no government support. DVV International therefore aims to educate the general public and decision-makers on the role and importance of adult learning.’

From the DVV International Armenian Country Office website

The programme
The summer school started with a tour of the COAF SMART Center by Initiative Director Shahane Halajian. Ester Hakobyan from the DVV International Armenia Country Office opened the workshop and then Hayk Mkrtchyan introduced participants to the Museum Education Center and the British Museum’s International Training Programme (ITP) cooperation and how it had created the context for the summer school and supported the initiative. Ronan Brindley followed by outlining the aims and objectives and setting the tone for delegates, as a peer group, who would share ideas and create new ways of connecting cultural organisations with communities.
Discussions took place around the following issues:

- How do we define communities?
- What ways can institutions collaborate with communities?
- How can institutions avoid the risk of ‘just being a venue’ or is this an issue?
- What makes for a meaningful dialogue between museums and communities?
- How do we find a middle ground between an ‘asset-based’ and a ‘needs-based’ approach?
- How can we measure the impact of our partnerships?
- How can institutions promote the idea of letting go of power?
- When we say ‘our museum’, who is the ‘our’?

“…what was noticeable was the spirit with which the discussion flowed. Everybody raised ideas, concerns and challenges they faced. What if local audiences were indifferent? What if they had other priorities, like being in an area recently affected by conflict?”

Ronan Brindley, Head of Learning, Manchester Art Gallery

Communities and museums

The delegates split into 4 groups to continue the discussions on how their museums could connect with community audiences and how these ideas could relate to developments at the SMART Center. Building the momentum, the groups identified target audiences that were relevant to their own museums and that would help them test new modes of engagement.

Discussions were based around building connections with the following groups:

- Rural housewives as representatives of their families
- Communities who have ‘hidden’ or ‘disappearing’ skills such as wood-crafting and jewellery making
- 18-35 year olds
- Non-engaging local families

The groups were encouraged to think differently, to be experimental and to share and combine their individual skills and backgrounds. They worked on their own but could access guidance, with feedback opportunities and provocations. All this culminated in final group presentations. Perhaps the most successful technique was an early feedback session. In this the groups presented their initial ideas, their target audiences and why these were important for their museums and, potentially, the museums to them. This technique established the concept of the ‘laboratory’, where the groups joined to test their concepts, share advice and develop the ideas behind the experiments. This work continued over two days with research trips and meal breaks, including a fabulous banquet in the gardens of a farmhouse, followed by an evening walk to see one of Lori’s famous gorges. While hugely enjoyable these ‘events’ also established the pastoral elements and connections of a true summer school.

The presentations on the closing afternoon showed the fruit of the delegates endeavours and four working models had been created through which museums could reach and connect beyond their walls. Group 1 worked up imaginative plans as to how museums could go out into communities and connect with housewives, focusing on their skills, offering platforms for them to build confidence and social networks outside the family environment, whilst at the same time linking with housewives as ‘gatekeepers’ to their families. Group 2 developed a proposal to ‘re-discover’ local skills including woodwork, jewellery-making, pickling and bee keeping. Museums could showcase these skills and act as a conduit to the market place and eco tourism. Group 3 focused on young people, identifying fashion and design as a strand to engage 18-35 year olds and build skills that could help develop interests and employability. Group 4 expanded the idea of involving families in the development of museum exhibitions that interpreted the notion of the ‘family’, the impact of migration and the sharing of family stories.

Throughout all of the presentations, one could sense an atmosphere of excitement, mutual interest, and the desire of all present to work in this inclusive manner. Working across disparate groups, the conclusion was reached that museums’ commitment to building community relationships was a core purpose.
The brilliant and insightful proposals featured target groups such as housewives, 18-35 year olds and close neighbours, and strands like eco-tourism, jewellery making, fashion and woodcraft. It was hard work summing up but huge credit to all involved. Not only did we pull a huge number of good ideas with limited time, but we succeeded in the ITP spirit of developing ideas together, offering each other friendly criticism and working for the common good. I think we all agreed that it was a positive test of a ‘laboratory of ideas’ method.

Ronan Brindley, Head of Learning, Manchester Art Gallery

The Teen Council of Museums from the Cafesjian Centre for the Arts in Yerevan and a group of young people from the locality who take part in the COAF programme also joined the workshop.

The Teen Council of Museums was created by Astghik Marabyan (Director of Education, Cafesjian Center for the Arts) following the Yerevan Learning, engagement and museums workshop in 2016 and built on a model shared by Andrea Martin, Exhibitions and Interpretation Manager, Lincolnshire Heritage Services, The Collection - Lincoln. The Council involves young people in creative art activities and encourages them to influence decision making at the Center. In return, the programme aims to support Council members to develop their confidence, life skills such as team working and decision making, as well as their professional orientation.

The Teen Council and the COAF SMART local youth group were addressed by the Director of the Institute of Youth Studies Marina Galstyan and analyst Lilit Avdalyan who presented the preliminary findings on Youth Employment Potential and the Creative Economy. This elicited strong views from the two groups that reflected the overall discussions of the summer school. It was agreed that museums would have to change to include them or otherwise become extinct: museums could no longer simply be ‘givers’ of knowledge. Coming from those whose opinions should be the measure of success of the museum and its connection with the community, this was a highly powerful and grounding testament. The youth groups challenged those present about the lack of opportunities and extremely low levels of pay for young adults. It transpired from this that 67% of museum workers in Armenia earn less than £500 per year, most being dependent on a second job or additional income sources.

But the young people also gave praise - as well as thought-provoking criticism - of Armenian heritage, engagement in the arts and their interest and the attractiveness of the creative atmosphere of the cultural workplace.

Conclusions
Manchester Art Gallery is increasingly adopting an active social agenda, tackling issues that are priorities in the city and inspiring debate about contemporary urgencies. In many ways, bringing this to an international forum is lifting this to another level, showcasing the work we do, sharing it in a new arena, and bringing back new experiences from other museum cultures. In particular gaining an experience of the Armenian culture that is so rich, deep and at times tragic, offers a whole new context to consider our own work and identity.

“Highlights of the summer school keep on coming back to me – learning about the diversity of museums in Armenia, what it’s like working in a museum in the territory of Karabakh (Republic of Artsakh), the four presentations from the delegates, and the strong voices of the Cafesjian Teen Council.”

“Initial feedback suggests that the delegates found the ‘laboratory of ideas’ to be useful, they picked up ideas and skills and formed a network. In my parting words, I stated that I hope I imparted as much as I’d gained. I think it was a genuine learning experience for all.”

Ronan Brindley, Head of Learning, Manchester Art Gallery

“DVV International Armenia has been pleased to hear about several initiatives that evolved from the workshop and are currently being explored between the museums and the SMART Center. The success of the workshop enhanced DVV International Armenia’s plans for revising its approach to support to museums for its next three year phase and emphasizing museum and community linkages by developing a program that will motivate museum to share their assets and knowledge with distant communities in beneficiary regions in creative ways”.

Ester Hakobyan, Country Director, DVV International Armenia

“The workshop ‘Museums and Communities: from visiting to participation’ proved the importance of working with museums not only in urban but also rural communities. The geography of the participants made the workshop issues more diverse and meaningful with its problems and solutions, challenges and keys”.

Ester Hakobyan, Country Director, DVV International Armenia
Anahit Minasyan, Cultural Programs Coordinator, DVV international Armenia.

"The event will definitely foster further development and expansion of the activities of the Cafesjian Center for the Arts. Most importantly the workshop became a practical platform for sharing one of the best practices of the Center highlighting the importance of engagement and work with community groups”.

Astghik Marabyan, Director of Education, Cafesjian Center for the Arts

The British Museum’s International Training Programme (ITP) works to develop a sustainable global network of inspired museum and heritage professionals, through sharing knowledge, skills and experiences. By building a global network of colleagues across geographical and cultural boundaries, the programme provides a place for mutual learning, discussion and collaboration thus helping to shape the museums of the future.

The annual summer programme is at the core of the ITP and here fellows are introduced to a global network of colleagues and exposed to a variety of museum practices. Whilst further engagement projects such as these are essential to the core objectives of the ITP. Finding ways to give our fellows the widest possible opportunities for further training and development is fundamental.

“For the British Museum’s International Training Programme (ITP) to be able to support the workshop ‘Museums and Communities: from visiting to participation’ in Lori was a wonderful opportunity. To see relationships – and friendships – continue to grow and produce vibrant and positive outcomes for the culture and heritage sector in Armenia is a credit to both Ronan and our creative and engaging network of ITP Fellows. While there is a numerical limit to the number of fellows that can come to the British Museum each summer for the ITP, workshops like this enable the programme to support cascaded training in-country, which can only be beneficial to all involved.”

Claire Messenger, Manager, International Training Programme
**Appendix 1**

**Museums and Communities: from visiting to participation**

**Workshop programme**

| DATE/PLACE/TIME | DAY 1: WEDNESDAY, 13 JUNE  
COAF SMART CENTER, DEBED, LORI PROVINCE |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 12:00 – 12:30  | Arrival at COAF SMART Centre in Lori  
Tour for delegates by Shahane Halajyan (Initiative Director, COAF Smart Center) and Krist Marukyan (Operations Director, COAF Smart Center) |
| 12:30 – 12:45  | Welcome  
Ester Hakobyan, DVV International Armenia Country Office  
Inessa Grigoryan, Deputy Director, Head of Administration, Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) |
| 12:45 – 13:15  | *MEC and ITP: collaboration beyond boundaries*  
Ronan Brindley, Head of Learning and Education, Manchester Art Gallery  
Hayk Mkrtchyan, Project Coordinator, Museum Education Centre |
| 13:45 – 14:00  | *Museum as a community development asset and community mobiliser*  
Tatev Asryan, Project Coordinator,  
DVV International Armenia Country Office |
| 14:00 – 15:00  | Lunch Break |
| 15:00 – 15:30  | Getting to know each other: participants will talk about their institution, experience of working with communities and expectations from workshop. |
| 15:30 – 17:00  | Working with Communities in Manchester Art Gallery, Ronan Brindley  
Plenary session:  
- What we mean saying community?  
- Why are museums important for communities?  
- How you work with communities in your museums?  
- What community bring to your museum and what it takes from your museum? |
| 17:00 – 17:30  | Coffee Break |
| 17:30 – 18:00  | Summary |
| 18:15 – 18:30  | Participants travel to Dsegh |
| DATE/PLACE/TIME | DAY 2: THURSDAY, 14 JUNE  
COAF SMART CENTER, DEBED, LORI PROVINCE |
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<tr>
<td>9:30 - 10:00</td>
<td>Participants arrive at Smart Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00 – 10:30</td>
<td>How to work with new community groups? How we change our visitors from a passive audience into being active participants?</td>
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<td>10:30 – 11:20</td>
<td>Group work: worksheets will be distributed to participants</td>
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<td>11:20 – 11:50</td>
<td>Coffee Break</td>
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<td>12:00 – 13:00</td>
<td>What are some of the obstacles? How can we overcome these? How can we improve? Set the tone for the ‘laboratory for museum / community ideas.’</td>
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<td>13:00 – 14:00</td>
<td>Lunch Break</td>
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<td>14:00 – 16:00</td>
<td>What type of project could you bring to the SMART Centre or different location? Who could this connect to? How will this work and how will you measure its success? Reporting back on the next day</td>
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<tr>
<td>16:15 – 17:30</td>
<td>Participants visit to Hovhannes Toumanyan House-Museum in Dsegh How to interpret new audience for museum?</td>
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<td>18:00 – 20:00</td>
<td>Farwell Dinner at the local house</td>
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<td>20:00 – 20:20</td>
<td>Trainers and staff return to COAF SMART CENTER</td>
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| DATE/PLACE/TIME | DAY 3: FRIDAY, 15 JUNE  
COAF SMART CENTER, DEBED, LORI PROVINCE |
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<tr>
<td>9:30 – 10:00</td>
<td>Participants arrive to SC</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00 – 11:00</td>
<td>Preparation for presentations</td>
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<td>11:00 – 11:20</td>
<td>Coffee Break</td>
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<td>11:20 – 12:00</td>
<td>Group Presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00 – 12:45</td>
<td>Panel discussion about presentations. Have we discovered some new models for working with communities? Has our laboratory worked? What are we going to do differently? What are the tools to do this?</td>
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| 12:45 – 14:00   | Creative Employment in Armenia  
Marina Galstyan, Director, Youth Studies Institute  
Lilit Avdalyan, Analyst, Youth Studies Institute |
| 14:00 – 15:00   | Lunch Break                                                      |
| 15:00 – 16:30   | Sharing local best experiences through public discussion  
Cafesjian Center for the Arts Teen Council: what does the council stands for? Communities as advisory groups for Museums |
| 15:30 – 16:00   | Delivering Certificates  
Participants leave                                                  |
Appendix 2

Organizers:
Museum Education Center
https://museumedu.am
DVV International Armenia Country Office
Association of Museum Workers and Friends
https://museumarm.am
British Museum’s International Training Programme
http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/skills-sharing/international_training.aspx
Manchester Art Gallery
http://manchesterartgallery.org/
Children of Armenia Fund (COAF)
https://www.coafkids.org/smart/

Special thanks to:
Hayk Mkrtchyan (ITP 2014/Senior Fellow 2017 and Coordinator, Museum Education Centre)
Ronan Brindley (ITP UK Partner Representative and Head of Learning at Manchester Art Gallery)
Ester Hakobyan (Director of the DVV International Country Office)
Marine Mkrtchyan (ITP 2014, Director, The Museum of Russian Art)
Astghik Marabyan (ITP 2017, Director of Education at Cafesjian Center for the Arts)
Davit Poghosyan (ITP 2015, Lecturer and researcher, Armenian State Pedagogical University after KH. Abovyan)
Anahit Minasyan (DVV International Cultural Programmes Coordinator)

Additional thanks to:
Grigoryan Innesa (Deputy Director, Head of Administration, Children of Armenia Fund)
Krist Marukyan (Operations Manager, COAF Smart Center)
Shahane Halajyan (Initiative Director, COAF Smart Center)
Seda Mkhitaryan (Operations Manager, COAF Smart Center)
Anahit Evoyan (Media Relations Coordinator, COAF Smart Center)
Tatev Saroyan (Head of Exhibitions and PR, The Museum of Russian Art)