



Voluntary Cultural Mediators at the National Museum of Slovenia
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Voluntary Cultural Mediators

A project developed by
The Slovenian Third Age University

Project leader
Rajka Bračun

VOLUNTARY CULTURAL MEDIATORS

Project description

The programme *Cultural Mediators* aims at educating and training elderly students of the Slovenian Third Age University to work on a voluntary basis in museums, galleries and similar public intercultural settings. The pilot project was done in collaboration with one of the leading museums in Slovenia, the National Museum of Slovenia. The Museum is a public entity, which holds in trust for the nation and the world a collection of Slovenian art and antiques from ancient times to the present day. We believe that elderly volunteers could play a vital role in supporting the work of the Museum.

A group of knowledgeable and formally high educated students of history, art history, anthropology at the third age university was educated and trained to work as voluntary assistant guides at the museum exhibition *Slovenian Language: Identity and Symbol - A Short History of Slovenians*. Other possible areas of museum activities and tasks have since been identified in collaboration of the Third Age University, the volunteers and the National Museum of Slovenia. Their talks could cover many different aspects of the Museum, from the History and Identity of Slovenians to the processes of conservation and preservation of artefacts.

Voluntary cultural mediators are cultural ambassadors to the local community, their families, friends, study groups at the Third Age University etc.



Marija Kaplan, voluntary cultural mediator.

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Project aims

The principle aim of the project is to make the elderly aware of the importance of volunteering for both, their personal growth and for the community.

This leads to several objectives: (1) to enable the students gain knowledge and skills and to share it within their social networks and museum visitors; (2) to expose the students to transformative learning leading to their empowerment and social engagement; (3) to establish permanent conceptual links with selected partner organisations and to "educate" them for working with volunteers; (4) to exert an impact on public opinion concerning the contribution of the elderly to the economic and social development by means of wide public campaigning.

Since the project is of transformative nature we thought that the collaboration of all participants in all stages of the project and of the curriculum development has been crucial, although conceptually led by the project leader and the experts of The Slovenian Third Age University. The proposal of the contents and the aims of the programme was presented to the students-volunteers and the partner organisation. The concept was further upgraded and laid out in the form of written agreements between both institutions on one hand, and between the institutions and the volunteers on the other hand. The written agreements contribute to the sustainability of the project.

Training

The recruitment of potential volunteers was strategic. Volunteers were first recruited from the students of the Third Age University who have been attending study circles specialized in the field of art history, history, anthropology etc. The first introductory meeting between future volunteers and project coordinators was held at the Third Age University. This was followed by a special one-day training programme, which was set up jointly by the Slovenian Third Age University, the National Museum of Slovenia and the Slovene Philanthropy. Since organized volunteering is not common in museums and galleries of Slovenia, the project coordinator decided to develop a holistic training programme which covers different aspects of volunteerism, particularly in the fields of culture and art. The training was therefore intended for both, the volunteers and the museum staff, and it covered the following topics: Social Mission of Volunteerism of the Elderly, Organized Voluntary Work and Ethics, Presentation of the National Museum of Slovenia in Theory and Practice: mission, exhibitions, departments, Guided tour of the exhibition *Slovenian Language: Identity and Symbol - a Short History of Slovenians*, Visit to Museum Departments. Each participant received the *Code of Ethics of Organized Volunteering*, issued by the Slovene Philanthropy.

The one-day training was followed by educational sessions, mentored by a museum professional (Dr Maja Zvanut, the author of the exhibition) and co-mentored by the project leader (Rajka Bracun, the Slovenian Third Age University). Different learning and teaching methods were applied when approaching future volunteers: group sessions, individual study of literature (volunteers had free access to the Museum Library), reciprocal learning (sharing knowledge and learning from each other), simulation of voluntary work (practice orientation).

Finances

The project was funded out of the funds received for the programmes of the Slovenian Third Age University from local authorities, different ministries, and by own activities. The project was run mostly with the help of volunteers. There was no fee for the participants.

Public campaign

Articles in national newspapers, national radio broadcasts, TV shows, lectures and presentations, articles in professional and scientific magazines. The project *Voluntary Cultural Mediators* was presented as good practice example at the European Organisation for Quality Summer Camp in August 2007 (Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia) and at the Festival of the Third Age in October 2007 (Ljubljana, Slovenia).

Research

On the basis of the induced practice of this project a model for thematic education of the elderly and education of the elderly for volunteering, as well as education for public institutions for working with older volunteers has been developed.

The programme *Cultural Mediators* combining lifelong learning, active citizenship and social inclusion was researched by Sanja Knežević, a student of andragogy (adult education) at The University of Ljubljana (thesis done in 2007). The programme *Cultural Mediators* as a pilot programme in organised museum voluntary work has been researched by Vida Papić, a student of museology at The University of Zagreb (thesis expected in 2008).

Project results

- sustainable collaboration between Slovenian Third Age Universities (Ljubljana, Škofja Loka, Radovljica, Maribor) and Museums (the National Museum of Slovenia, the Architecture Museum of Ljubljana, the Museum of Škofja Loka, the Radovljica Municipality Museums);
- more than 50 cultural mediators working in intercultural and intergenerational settings;
- strong efforts towards impact on public opinion about old age and older people.



Nada Pleško, voluntary cultural mediator.
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