

Challenges for the Construction of Museum Territories

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In this article we present the main structural guidelines and contexts for an ongoing research project being carried out by the authors and which deals with the nature of social impact and museum functions in a collaborative background. We begin by briefly presenting the main contexts and challenges the project attempts to address while also considering methodological options. A discussion of the underlying concepts is also offered at this point. Drawing from the action-research and interactive-participation traditions, the field of action of this research project deals with Porto’s museums and, particularly, with professionals, as social actors, devoted to the work of mediation. It aims to promote sustainable collaboration within museum professionals, that is, the proposal involves mainly the development of a collaborative space and a community of practice that supports critical and creative thinking, promoting change.

INTRODUCTION

The title of this article reflects our conviction that museums experience a profound conceptual *revolution* (Hein, 2000: *viii*), revolution that questions some fundamental premises on which museums (*and our work as museum professionals and with museum professionals*) are established and which are strongly associated to its *intrinsic* and *unquestionable* value. Metamorphoses in social structures, cultural alliances and personal identities can be associated to changes in the nature and functions of knowledge; transformations that have supported research not only about museums' missions but also about the places that its *makers*, the collections and the audiences inhabit as discursive elements.

For that reason, this article will start with a short incursion into some of the restlessness contexts and values that have determined the *raison d'être* of the research project which is the main object of this discussion. More than describing work methodologies, what we will be attempting to share at this point will be some of the contexts that have guided this moment of speculation as well as the development of the research undertaking. Suffice to say, this work is being drawn by many hands and the concerns that we will be talking about have constantly referred us either to questions of professional and museum identity / curricular revisions, or to the conceptual fundamentals themselves, principles which have been in discussion for several years in the field of museum studies. In a second moment, we will delineate the objectives and guidelines of the research project that prompt this discussion.

EXTRAORDINARY DAYS: REPOSITIONING

In international terms – and in the context of a *museums' explosion* – we have been living *extraordinary days*. In the beginning of the late 90s of the late twentieth century we lived (*and have lived*) a particular thoughtful moment that has led to the questioning of the nature of the museum itself. If the 60-70s decades of the late twentieth century were a fertile ground for a first phase of self-assessment – *essentially* related to political and social activism (*and strong external criticism*) in the world of museums – the end of the following decade – but mainly the 90s – were essential for this re-positioning of museums in relation to society (see, for example, the seminal volumes: Karp e Lavine, 1991; Karp, Kreamer e Lavine, 1992). This is a reinvention *in progress* that should also be understood in relation to an increasing demand from different sectors to actively participate in the reconstruction and reproduction of practices of signification. Reinvention that has compelled museums to be responsible not only for the resources in its care, but also by the results achieved through these resources. Museums are no longer merely evaluated by their resources (e.g. collections, collections research) to be increasingly valued for its programmatic use, ability to plan and reach target audiences, diversification and quality of services and products. Even though the study, documentation and preservation are – more than ever – a key and basic requirement for the development of any museum project, more attention is focused on other aspects, expressing its anxiety to demonstrate a social conscience and – perhaps – even a maturity of the profession (see, for example: Weil 1995; Department of Culture Media and Sport 2000). Likewise, the roles museums play in the development of society (see, for example, Gurian 2006) and the relation, more or less obvious, with the educational and learning role in museums has been one of the central themes of this discussion (Falk e Dierking 1995 2000; Falk et al 2006; Hein 1998, 2000; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, 1996). The vision of the museum as a learning place is frequently described as a free-choice learning environment used by differentiated audiences (Falk e Dierking 2000). Through objects and knowledge, visitors create relations, meaning and learn (Hein 1998). Museums compete, nevertheless, with other learning and leisure experiences (Falk e Dierking 2000; Kelly 2004) in what has been termed the *experience economy*, in which people involve themselves in valuable experiences in different contexts (Pines e Gilmore, 1999). Museums have always

claimed for themselves a meaningful educational role and, as a matter of fact, they are often founded in view of these premises. Currently, researchers point to the trend of a conceptual change within which museums tend to be transformed from places of education into places of learning, responding – in this way – to the needs and interests of those who visit and use their services (Weil, 1995; Bradburne, 1998; Falk e Dierking, 2000). Museums aspire to cease to be repositories of knowledge and objects to become places of wonder, encounter, discussion, creativity and learning, making part simultaneously of other forms of learning and promoting themselves as an integral part of the infrastructure of learning.

However, by unlocking themselves to the policies of experience museums gradually move away from the traditional field of institutions with whom they share knowledge paradigms. This has opened up new fields and allowed museums to rediscover other arenas that can be not only complementary but ultimately may produce new types of museums. Along these lines, contemporary museums attempt to include and expose themselves to the embodied and the experienced (memory and experience) which is characteristic of models inspired by the concepts of pedagogy and performativity of Homi Bhabha (2004) – known as *performative democracy* in contraposition to a more pedagogic version – which privileged other type of approaches and conceptualizations (Chakrabarty, 2002). Indeed, this approach promotes either experience or abstract knowledge and that is exactly the type of museological attitude that possibly better rebalances the debate about functions and missions of museums.

If it is true that in our days museums are subjected to many demands which make them perform other functions, it is also true that these same challenges allow them to play other roles in *new worlds*. However, these are worlds where the previous indisputable values are constantly cross-examined and in which museums in seeking to demonstrate their visibility and take on democracy, encounter profound internal tensions that have led to a passionate debate both in the professional arena and in the media. Nonetheless, it is believed that this reinvention has had significant consequences. Especially in relation to the distance of the centrality of objects towards an emphasis on promoting experience, leading sometimes to a devaluation of museum collections as a source of true meaning and value and to a tying around the *museum experience* (Hein, 2000: viii); emphasis that reveals new ethical, epistemological and aesthetic horizons. Nonetheless, it also evident in the museum world a return to the world of collections and to a central role of collections' research producing museum embodiments that do not merely focus on the cognitive experience but are rooted – identically – on the embodied and sensitive experiences (sensitive, affective and moral) of visitors and of curators / researchers / *connaisseurs* themselves, speaking openly about, discussing; opening up spaces of visibility within discourse for – for example – the *situated* processes of research and collecting *as experience* and *history*. In this manner, the demand for relevance outside their usual contexts is one of the central axes of this museological transformation, confirming museological research as a non-delimitating questioning space much in agreement with Corynne McSherry's proposition that a boundary object 'holds different meanings in different social worlds, yet it is imbued with enough shared meaning to facilitate its translation across those worlds' (McSherry, 2001: 69, cited in Strathern, 2004: 45; cf. with Message, 2009).

This relevance is called for at the different levels of the public sphere: that is, the macro-meso space and at the micro public space; this last space is probably more of interest here because it is mainly at this level that one can better appreciate the coordination of communication and the involvement of spaces of civic participation. On the other hand, this demand for significance in museums can be associated to the construction of new forms of public dialogue and civic participation, requiring not only reciprocity but also continuity and it is at the local level that these partnerships with the community probably better work and become sustainable. Museums are attempting to create relevance trough the constitution of

networks that work as critical resources of places, places they intend to inhabit. Offering not only their assets (collections, spaces, research...) – understood in a rather limited approach – but acting also as forums and, ultimately, developing innovative ways in addressing questions characteristic of the public space and of contemporaneity. Interrogations which are often fracturing, as indeed recent debate as demonstrated (see, for example: Knell *et al.*, 2007; Cameron e Kelly, 2010). We are talking, explicitly, about museums as actors of the *third space* (Soja, 2000) that participate actively in urban policies and intervene in the construction of the public space and democracy (Kirchberg, 2003); we are referring, then, to “*performative places*”; places of “*communicative action*” that, somehow, materialize the values of the “*rationalized utopia*” announced by Bourdieu (1998: 128); hence, places admittedly political and of action.

Nonetheless, these considerations are not any novelty and have been profusely disseminated through university courses, conferences and through bibliography authored by many associated both to *new museology* and to *critical museology* (*whatever you want to call it*) and are part of *knowledge* to be acquired by *professionals-to-be*. Indeed the production of an important body of bibliography related to the study of museums, as well as to the development of a series of accreditation and evaluation museum programs, constitute vital elements for the deepening of this discussion. These studies address the challenges offered by new museology¹ to – in this *second* assessment moment – extend the scope of its questions, expanding and deepening their methodological approaches and empirical basis. If we glance at any international publisher catalogue, such as Routledge, we will see that after almost twenty years since Eilean Hooper-Greenhill wrote that the museum as a research topic was practically invisible (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992: 3) it is no more so and this topic has becoming increasingly *sexy*². Undeniably a growing group of researchers from different fields investigate and write about this social artefact. Nevertheless, the dissonance between these discussions and the development of reflexive and collaborative practices continues – at least in Portugal – to be evident.

The Museology Course at the University of Porto opened during the first years of the 1990s, starting its *journey*, thus, just at a time one saw this exceptional editorial growth on this topic. Books on various subjects, readers, conference proceedings about museums flourished since then in the context of *the museum phenomenon*, to quote Gordon Fyfe (2006: 40) and as Sharon MacDonald already mentioned in her excellent *Companion for Museum Studies* (2006). Phenomenon that can be largely related to the processes that has been characterized as post-industrial, post-capitalist, late-modernity or post-modern and usually combine, among others, motivations and anxieties related to social amnesia, search for authenticity and antidotes in relation to consumer society, attempts to deal with the fragmentation of identity and individualization, desires of lifelong learning and experiential learning. But and as already mentioned, this was and has been a particular moment of fragmentation and profound examination of this world. Different studies in Portugal, France, United States and United Kingdom refer, for example, tensions and identity crises in the professional model of the curators (see, for example, Octobre, 2001; Semedo, 2003; Zolberg,

¹ For a discussion of these terms see, for example, Davis, 1999; Martinez, 2006.

² As Scott Lash has said during his talk at the “Museus, Discursos e Representações” Conference, in Porto, in 2004.

1986). Based on the *traditional* model for museums, the profession of *curator (conservateur)* appears torn between loyalty to the functions around the study and preservation of collections and changes in relation to its mission and values of public accessibility and democracy. Fragmentation that evokes the conceptual revolution that many authors have spoken about (see, for example, Hein 2000).

In view of that, the theoretical conceptualization of a post-critical museology seems to be a fruitful conceptual and theoretical model for the research project we will be talking about here; project that essentially seeks to build with the group of Porto museum professionals who work with museum audiences a culture of reflexivity, of collaborative action; a deeply critical museum culture; a plural museology, without exclusive manifestos but that takes on the museum as a profoundly democratic space and that suggests, for example, critical imagination and the recognition of visitors and of the *makers* of museums – as interpretative communities – as fundamental conditions for this (museum / audience development) research.

OTHER THREADS: THE CITY, THE MUSEUMS AND THE UNIVERSITY MUSEOLOGY COURSE

For Portugal the decade of the 90s of the last century was also of true *museological explosion*, heritage and museums taking on – in its broadest sense – an extraordinary visibility in the media. In the case of Portuguese museums, as a whole, museums still have essential problems to solve and have fought against difficulties and constraints mostly related to the increase in number and qualification of technical expertise, particularly in areas such as conservation. But the sector has also lacked, for example, a more intense and generalized work of interpretation / mediation of spaces, inclusive educational programs, edition of informative quality material – promoting the generalized dissemination and access to knowledge – widespread research, either about the collections or about any other museological function. Despite developments and improvements that we all recognize in the sector, many of these problems are still unresolved. The city of Porto and their museums do not escape this reality: apart some exceptions, most of the city's museums require an urgent and sustained investment in its communication / interpretation policies and to reconsider the relationship they have built with visitors, particularly in terms of *neighboring communities*. Additionally, the dissonance between discussions about the *place-museum* promoted by *new museology* credos and the development of reflexive and collaborative practices, continues – at least in Portugal – to be evident. While all museums recognize the value of their collections for educational and learning purposes, its contribution for the development of society and, rhetorically, commit themselves to fulfil this public role office, few demonstrate skills and abilities to *explain / narrate / evaluate (themselves)* publicly (*account-ability*).

Hence, the field of action of this research project is that of the museums of the city of Porto and its professionals (*those who vocationally work with visitors*). The MA dissertation of Ana Bárbara Barros (2008) presented a few years ago at the University of Porto which studied narratives of the city's museum education professionals, reinforces the fact that Porto has a significant number of museums with differentiated characteristics, such as the nature of collections, tutelage and legal organization. The city museums employ an heterogeneous group of people who – although in a plural form – share not only spaces but also social representations and values. This MA dissertation considered twenty four the museums existent in Porto (see appendix 1), being fourteen those that belong to the *Rede Portuguesa de Museus* (Portuguese Network of Museums). There are, nevertheless, an important number of records to be considered and that auto-represent themselves as museums or museological nucleus, reinforcing the large number of these type of organizations in Porto (*Inquérito aos Museus em Portugal*, Instituto Português dos Museus, 2000). As to the collections, decorative arts, science and technology, religious art and social art museums are clearly highlighted as a

number. Also, apart from the *Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis* and the *Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves*, they are mainly of local dimension and admittedly regional.

The report by the *Instituto Português dos Museus* (2000) also pointed to the fact that visitors of Porto's museums came mainly from schools (90%) and were essentially from the 1^o, 2^o, 3^o cycles of studies. Although Porto is a recognized touristic destination (*Instituto de Turismo*, 2007; Pent, 2007), the number of foreign visitors does not seem to be very representative. There is also a growing availability of a group of programs and studies related to social inclusion in museums (Costa, 2006; Marques, 2005) that should be noted here. Museum education professionals refer, as visitors with special needs, disabled people, immigrants, participants in substance addition programs, prison detainees, institutionalized children and youth, victims of abuse and also, as a distinctive group to deserve special attention, senior citizens (Barros, 2008).

During her research, Ana Bárbara Barros (2008) worked with fourteen museum education professionals that represent well the city's museological diversity. This fully involved researcher (her research origins from her own narratives / feminine identity and museum education professional) looks beyond the existing cleavages (related with, for example, the nature of collections and tutelage of museums) to enhance the dedication of these professionals to their work in the opening catchphrase of her dissertation – *soul and heart* – that expresses well some of the nodal representations of this professional group in relation, for example, to *vocation*, ways of working and *compensation*; to roles (professional / museums) they see themselves performing in relation to society. They are four the functions considered in common: project design and interpretative activities (performed by the *self* or not), dissemination, study and research of collections, partnerships. Transdisciplinarity and cooperation are the *watchwords* of this shared vocabulary and despite difficulties the experience has shown that when challenged they are able to work together to produce relevant work (see, for example, Ferreira, 2003).

On the other hand, although there are some projects of great social interest with communities (e.g. Costa, 2006), the truth is that there has not yet been developed a systematic and structured evaluation of the impact of these practices which can better support future program policies and guide overall planning decisions, opening way for research and other practices that can truly integrate urban policies and state these spaces as democratic, creative, collaborative (representations often found in the group).

Ana Bárbara Barros (2008) reports, for example, that qualitative studies are practices almost inexistent in these museums, enumerating factors for this problem such as: the lack of training on the processes of research and evaluation, lack of time for professionals to engage in this time consuming task and, finally, lack of investment of the institutions themselves that fail to hire professional technicians to perform specific evaluation.

We add to these assumptions the almost complete absence of an evaluation culture of the cultural sector in Portugal, in general, and, specifically, of the museological sector – establishing itself as one of the hallmarks of dissonance to which we referred to before. Moreover, little has been done to disseminate among these professionals their own projects,

sharing and celebrating their successes while reflecting on strategies and methodologies of *action*³.

If the Course of Museology of the University of Porto has lived its *journey* in these contexts of profound transformation of the museological fabric it is also true that it has been visibly influenced by other wider academic and professional contexts, such as, a vision of the University as a collaborative network at the service of society, the relationship between this vision and the notions of *activist professionalism* and of *critical agency*, the understanding of the value of *organizations / communities of learning in museums*, the notion of discursive object, the very *contemporary contexts*, among others. It is precisely in the confluence of all these contexts that the Course has advanced and developed some research proposals in collaboration with some Porto museums. Besides establishing working and research partnerships with universities and other teaching and research institutions, the Course recognizes itself in its *proximate territory* with all that that implies in terms of *activist professionalism* and *critical agency*. This concept – *activist professionalism* – has been introduced as an essential work value, also reformulating the political and professional roles of the teacher-researchers, who recognize their specific responsibilities and calling for their involvement and, fundamentally, for a collective responsibility. Moreover, this teaching approach has also sought to take into account the contingencies of day to day practices, attempting to overcome the production of places of tension between universities and museums (theory and practice) and, at the same time, take place as an essential protagonist of the *circle of culture* (Hall, 1997) of the group. Judyth Sachs (2000: 81), citing the work of Giddens applies the notions of *active trust* to the work shared by the group, notion that can also be applied here. This active trust is not unconditional but a characteristic of professional relationships negotiated in which a shared group of values, principles and strategies is discussed and negotiated. A second fundamental concept relevant for this context – adopted by this researcher for the development of her points of view about the activist professional – is that of *productive politics / generative politics* that intervenes in the public domain in which it operates. This *productive politics* is expected to be organic; that is, it is expected to develop directly from the global and local needs and it is from this productive and implied understanding of research that this project arises.

VISIONS, OBJECTIVES AND WORK METHODOLOGIES

The challenge for this participatory appreciative action research project lies in constructing *contact zones* for the production of knowledge about museums by the *academia* and the different actors that work in the field. These theoretical and methodological approaches were developed in the Nordic countries about the involvement in more equitable terms of participants and other actors outside traditional circuits of research are quite an unexplored potential (Ghaye, 2008) for this construction in the world of museums. In the interactive action research the role of the *practicing professionals* and of *academic professionals* is shared among participants (as well as with other actors considered relevant for the

³ While many conferences and seminars have many success stories (which work in the group of professionals as *good practice*) in most of these events time for reflection, debate and learning is extremely limited and only rarely offer more individualized and inviting spaces that encourage the exercise of critical imagination of group members.

collaborative research project). This approach is understood as a mean to fulfil a better “social vigour of science” (Novotny, Scott and Gibbons, 2001). Moreover, the tradition of the approach of participant action research results from situations where people want to make changes from reflections, that is, after critical reflection that arises when participants want to think of how they can transform their own practices (Denzin e Lincoln, 2000: 573).

Thus, the project presented here focuses on the development of work processes and innovative methods; it arises from the traditions of action research and interactive participation promoting sustainable collaboration and aspires to participate in the construction of innovative cultures with potential for change in museums. The project was inspired by the research guidelines of PAAR / *Participatory Appreciative Action Research* (Ghaye, 2008). Guidelines which seemed fruitful to us in this context taking into account some of its fundamental premises⁴. Therefore, we aimed at a *reframing* of work contexts, *reframing* arising from positive reflexive processes constructed on experiences and so characteristic of an appreciative work culture. This methodological approach has proved, in other instances, to be fertile both either at the individual and group or even organizational level (Ghaye, 2008).

On the other hand, the projects aims at emphasizing the participation and influence of non-academics in the process of creation of knowledge (Israel *et al.*, 1998), positioning them as co-researchers, basing itself in the community of practice and encouraging the members of the group to participate at the different levels of research. Thus the active involvement of members of the group and their influence on some aspects of the research is considered essential. Involvement which implies participation and that lies either on the construction of trust relationships, on dialogue or on the ability of the group to build a collaborative space for social change (Stoecker, 2005).

Collaborative research is an investigation process in which participants have an active *voice* and are included in all (or at least some of) its phases, departing from the traditional perspective in regard to their participation. Taking into account experience of all involved in this process, any of the participants is considered an expert since it is the diversity of knowledge and of viewpoints that will provide greater depth to research.

This approach has also been described as being collaborative, participative, *empowering* and constituting itself as a transforming process of the group / community / public space (Hills e Mullett, 2000). According to the action research perspective, the argument is that relationships of egalitarianism between participants and researchers may – through the articulation between learning and practices – generate knowledge qualitatively different and more democratic that, ideally, promote processes of *empowerment* of the people involved while also producing sustainable collaboration (in space and time). The concepts of *empowerment*, *social justice* and *transformation* are, indeed, of vital importance in this type of research – and, in particular, for this project – underlying the fact that all participants have something to gain by working together and, as such, it is expected that partnerships will be built, even after the formal conclusion of the project.

Epistemologically this type of research is consistent with constructivist paradigms and critical theories and emphasizes the constructed social nature of knowledge (Israel *et al.*, 1998). Also, it recognizes the value of multiple forms of knowledge and the value of individual contributions. Hence a clear principle of this approach is the critique of positivist

⁴ PAAR - This approach starts from what *works* and not from its weaknesses, thus focusing more on the

approaches to modes of collecting data that emphasize objectivity and tend to see participants to be studied as objects rather than actors in the research process.

From the theoretical point of view it comprehends theory as something unknown as being created through the iterations of action and discussion that lead to *praxis* and generate evidence for future practice. In fact, at the axiological level and in relation to the theory of value, this research is evaluated in terms of the *difference* in the transformation that aims to build in the *community of practice*. Consequently, conceives the capacity to construct and transform as valuable both at the individual and at the group level (Hills e Mullett, 2000). This type of research also emphasizes the principle of working partnerships that aim at integrating and producing benefits for participants involved. Finally, it is based on the principle of *empowerment*, building strengths and resources in the *community of practice* and promoting processes of co-learning. Hills e Mullett (2000) set out six learning principles for community research that can also be adopted here. These principles include systematic planning, significance for the group, group's involvement, problem solving, social change and sustainability.

Israel *et al.* (1998) also discuss some of these principles for research such as, unity of identity, strength in the community, fostering partnerships, and integration of valuable knowledge for the participants involved, *empowerment* and dissemination of knowledge. However, since we intend to introduce the prospect of *Participatory Appreciative Action Research* (Ghaye, 2008) which bases its assumptions on a vision that although does not alienate the problems, focus mostly on the positive achievements of the group, the principle of *problem solving* will only be developed if the group so states it. The method *PAAR* has its roots in participative action research that also emphasizes the improvement of practices through involvement and participation. The contribution of *PAAR*'s approach is, as has been said, the accentuation of positive features, which means, for example, working together and sharing best practices, appreciating each other competencies and skills. In this sense *PAAR* may be understood as the opposite of the resolution of problems because it focuses on success instead of focusing on problems. The central concepts in *PAAR* are the reframing of questions in a positive way, participation and a positive present. *PAAR* offers a positive opportunity to ask questions and to transform them in positive actions. This perspective may also be used when we want to build a learning environment that encourages cooperation and sharing which makes possible a positive psychosocial culture that enhances the processes of learning.

Clearly these principles can be applied to this model but this list will not be exhaustive and will depend on the context of research and of organizations involved. Also the emphasis on interactive actions makes it easy to combine this approach with an interactive action research approach (Aagaard e Svensson, 2006). Similarly, knowledge is here understood as having its material roots in everyday practices whether that of practicing professionals or of researchers. With respect to the roots of knowledge there are therefore strong similarities between both traditions. It should be noted that this model may be understood either as theoretical model or as a joint interactive platform for researchers and other actors (museum participants) to share experiences talk and discuss; to act as a space that develops processes of learning and transformation.



Photo 1- Porto, Work Session 2: Journals (July 2011)

In terms of methodology the approaches adopted are part of any such approach of this type and are not predetermined but instead emerge from the selected principles of the project and of research questions. The methods emphasize the analysis, the responsibility of actors and processes of reflexivity and co-learning. Given the context of this research project and the necessity to create a profoundly collaborative context of trust, it seemed that this would be a more appropriate approach. It is expected that the involved partners gain knowledge about their own research processes by developing an appreciation of its value and that the participation in this project develops new social relationships among the members of the group, relationships of trust and *social efficacy* (Schlove *et al.*, 1998). It also aspires to promote awareness about local configurations that may lead to more relevant flows of information and collaborations. In fact this form of research has been discussed as leading to best practices of networking, involving the building of sustainable contacts and, as a result, the consolidation of social networks as opportunity structures that facilitate access to different types of resources and develop relationships allowing participants to discover and have access to positive opportunities. Moreover it is expected that the involvement of members of the group, either in the construction or the dissemination of research, promotes greater acceptance and use of results (Ayers, 1987) by participants and tutelage. The active dissemination of findings and reflections of the project is essential for it to have a real impact and needs to

circulate to enter public domain. In this model participants and co-researchers learn from each other, to share personal stories and experiences, gathering and documenting their stories.

In this model, by sharing personal stories and experiences, gathering and documenting their stories participants and co-researchers learn with each other (Papineau e Kiely, 1996). We also hope this involvement contributes for personal development through learning of specific skills such as the use of new technologies, planning skills, etc. Moreover, the involvement in research processes develops leadership skills and potential leaders at various levels, expressing different skills, abilities and functions. Thus this project aims to creating sustainable change in this community of *body* and *soul*, discussing existent dissonances between rhetorics and politics; to enhance *situated* positions, skills and *knowledges* of its members in research processes. Logically, the project focuses on a more local *agenda*, reflecting on specific issues and practices and involving members of group, promoting, in particular, an assessment of quality / social impacts centrality model. The problem of internal imbalance of power in the group (Taylor, 2000); the difficulty to establish a trustful setting and time management are, for example, some of the areas that we need to consider carefully.

In any case, all these perspectives seem to support the methodology advanced which is essentially qualitative. Data collection will occur during a period of about twenty months and will be constituted, for example, by semi-structured interviews with participants, journals, workshop sessions, participation in social network.

During the interaction with participants the use of different interactive methods are foreseen, for example, the design of a project page (in *wiki* form, blog or social network, that is one of the decisions to be taken in connection with the development of the project itself) providing a constant dialogue and interaction among stakeholders and support the building of a common resource platform. Our reason to propose the writing of Journals as central instruments for this research project, relate with the teaching experience of one of the authors of this article who has been attempting to implement this methodology as a teaching and evaluation tool for a while⁵. This approach aims to encourage and develop experiential learning as argued by Klob (1984). By using *journals*, for example, we hope to challenge participants to question, theorize and construct hypotheses about ideas about the discussions and work proposed by the different *workshops*; and in this manner – we hope – develop a conscience of how knowledge is constructed, that is, critical thinking and an awareness of themselves as critical professionals, as critical subjects.

On the other hand, journals can be precious instruments to map experiences and personal journeys, accentuating the emphasis we put on the process of identity and reflexive practice. Subjectivity, museum and heritage experience will be emphasized through teamwork, specific questions and reflexive writing (namely journals). Simultaneously we want the interactive experience of the workshops to be also used to enhance learning through discussion, depth and collaborative construction.

In order to build a more inclusive and above all, more participative, reflexive and trustworthy experience, different actors will be heard during different stages of the project planning and development, allowing for its review and ensuring the credibility of the study taking into account the parameters set out above.

⁵ Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy in Museology (2° and 3° Cycles), Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto (http://sigarra.up.pt/flup/cursos_geral.FormView?P_CUR_SIGLA=MMUS).

CONCLUSIONS

Although the principles announced by *new museology* have been part of the unchallenged vocabulary of museum professionals for years, the truth is that there is a profound dissonance between what one says and what one does. Moreover while not denying in any way that the differentiated nature of museums requires different approaches – and even diverse definitions in terms of what can be considered as social impact or, undoubtedly, its mission – there is a vocabulary that would be useful if it was collaboratively built. In this construction we intend to involve not only other tools but also to fulfil other *greater* objectives that we will refer to later in this conclusion.

We should not forget that museums are also learning contexts for professionals themselves. This research project presupposes that only when organizations themselves (and their professionals) internalize and discuss values and repositioning themselves in relation to the nature of *museums and museum work* – notably the search for relevance, activist professionalism, critical agency, generative politics, etc. – can, in reality, practices in museums be truly transformed and this dissonance be addressed.

The work of Peter Senge (1990) about learning organizations was for some years now – and quite interestingly – adapted by Lynne Teather, Peter van Mensch e Sara Faulkner-Fayle (1999) to the world of museums. These project practices' fall, broadly, in this context. Senge presents organizations as being places where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and open ways of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspirations are set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together (Senge, 1990: 484).

In implementing these collaborative partnerships between Porto ⁶ museums we hope to enhance true forms of learning that emphasize the dynamic and dialogic nature of these processes and in that manner to compromise partners involved in their own *governance* and *agency* (Giddens, 1996). This approach includes, both in training and in the discussion of these processes, the community of practicing professionals themselves. As a result, this conceptualization of the research project will allow the integration of voices of different professionals both as individuals and as institutions and not as mere representations / conceptualizations establishing true (*one hopes!*) sustainable relationships across this network / time. Moreover, we also hope to overcome a series of barriers and stereotypes that exist and circulate within the group about how each team / person works.

The main objective of such a network, therefore, is to add value to the different actors involved. Value creation is essentially based on knowledge of all actors involved and on how they combine this knowledge (eventually with the processes of mutual learning themselves, the transformation of these resources of knowledge and the creation of new resources). Basically knowledge sharing and resource development form the result of the interactions between the different partners. All formal and informal relationships established teach them something and become part of it. We consider museums (as well as the University / the Course) as being part of a dense network of relationships and that means we have to take into account other possible actors with whom museums (as well as the University / the Course)

⁶ At this point the project will include professionals from most of the institutions listed in the attached table with very different characteristics, such as, the nature of collections, tutelage and city location.

and museums themselves / other actors are permanently related (that is, students, visitors, etc.). Museums (the University) are not understood in an atomized and neutral world but, instead, as *professing-in-action*, intervening, participating in the public sphere and in the cultural arena of which, in the end, they are part of; in its *natural* territory that is, after all, its region; using its own resources that become richer with every partnership. The objective is, therefore, to create spaces, collaborative / creative organizations of mutual learning, spaces of reflexivity that can establish relations of credibility and trust, re-negotiating spaces and operating also from the standpoint of all actors involved and overcoming, sometimes, pre-established frontiers (for example, what is a collection). It is expected these collaborative / creative spaces (*spaces of co-curatorship universities – museums – communities, why not? Could this approach allow the overcoming of some existent dichotomies and more or less sterile areas of tension still existent in the field?*) work also as reflexive spaces.

Visions, values and practices of museum professionals will be the starting point of this study; a starting point that also intends to be a discussion on practices of programming that take into account multiple objectives; a starting point from the inside, from the *cultural capital* of the group, of its resources, its actors and their own representations about what they perceive as being not only social impact but the very nature of the museum and their work.

Reflecting about their own work, rethinking constructively, creatively missions and spaces for action and proximity in the community. Getting them involved, at the outset, in the redefinition of this approach for the sector and listening to their own expectations and guiding values. We hope that this analysis can work as a fundamental key instrument to think in a more structured and reasoned way action for Porto museums with and for communities; to create a valid and sustainable framework for the value of social impact of museums in individual, community and social terms for this local museological context; to develop evaluation processes about the values of museums as public service; to promote spaces for the debate among museums and other institutions / cultural / educational / social / actors about its social function and its role as a public service; to test options of a framework of value and impact with professionals of the sector.

One of the needs of this project is, therefore, to make a first assessment of existent projects, of the type of impacts museums think they have (Scott, 2004), define social impacts typologies, structure definitions in order to develop research and act in the territory more systematically and in a more integrated way. The analysis produced at the end of a twenty month phase will enable that on a second moment of the project a concerted action be recommended in terms of research project for museums (evaluation of social impacts and of support of a community of practice). The training in partnership with the different organizations involved and the dissemination of contents of the final report will be also part of this whole constructive / creative process (and of deep critical thinking).

This project has, as its starting point, the model of participative interactive action research that arises from the qualitative model. The qualitative model was elected taking into account that the centrality of this study is the analysis of how museum education professionals understand the nature of these institutions and their work with audiences, relating these understandings with incorporated *poetics* and *politics*. Therefore and essentially, in the first phase of this research project, we aim at initiating a wide discussion with museum professionals in the city of Porto as well as with other cultural institutions in the city about the roles museums play in the community as agents for social development. We hope this study will provide a discussion about fundamental concepts, such as, inclusion, social functions, community, as well as visions what social impacts may be, identifying, for example, key-areas of intervention. The relation with the nature of museums and of museum work itself seemed to us rich ground to be explored. We also hope to be able to identify contexts and methodologies of work in each institution, work phase that will support auto-reflexivity in the

group of practicing professionals and researchers involved, exercise that this project aims at imprinting on all process. The definition of indicators that enable evaluation can also eventually be an integral part of this project.

This study will also be, in some way, a diagnosis study of which social impact indicators museum professionals design for their projects, opening up way for a second phase of work / research with the communities themselves. The workshops developed at the end of this first phase of work are determinant for the common discussion. During a second phase, having developed visions about social impact it will be relevant to do a more exhaustive survey of needs and expectations of communities of Porto, of their uses of museums, motivations for visiting, etc. and to examine these studies taking into account their own development of evaluation indicators and the more institutional vision of this study. The development of other visitor studies (museums and culture), in connection with PhDs or MAs will also be indispensable to support this study. Partners involved in the project have no doubt that any notion of impact or any indicator should probably be negotiated with service users (in this case, visitors) and that, in a second moment of the project, that should be taken into account. This project accepts, nevertheless, the internal space of *producers* as a key device for the construction of practices and perhaps even an urgent and priority necessary space of reflexivity and training and, for that reason, the first *locus* of this research, research and action for the transformation and discussion about the museum space.

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APPENDIX 1/TABLE 1– PORTO MUSEUMS. LEGAL STATUS.
TUTELAGE. COLECCTIONS

A	B	C	Museum	Legal Status / Tutelage	Type/Collections nature
1	1	1	Arqueosítio da Rua D. Hugo	Public/Câmara Municipal do Porto	Archaeology
2	2	2	Casa do Infante – Museu	Public/Câmara Municipal do Porto	Archaeology
3	3		Casa Museu Eng. António de Almeida	Private / Fundação	Decorative Arts
4			Casa Museu Fernando de Castro	Public / Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis/ Instituto Museus e Conservação	Decorative Arts
5	4	3	Casa Museu Guerra Junqueiro	Public / Câmara Municipal do Porto	Decorative Arts
6	5	4	Casa Museu Marta Ortigão Sampaio	Public Câmara Municipal do Porto	Decorative Arts
7	6		Casa Oficina António Carneiro	Public / Câmara Municipal do Porto	Art
8			Centro Português de Fotografia – Núcleo Museológico António Pedro Vicente	Public / Direcção Geral de Arquivos	Specialized
9	7	5	Fundação Maria Isabel Guerra Junqueiro e Luís Pinto de M.C. – Museu	Private / Foundation	Decorative Arts
10	8	6	Gabinete de Numismática	Public / Câmara Municipal do Porto	Specialized - Numismatic
11			Instituto Arquitecto José Marques da Silva/ Núcleo Museológico	Public / Fundação Universidade do Porto	Architecture
12			Jardim Botânico	Public / Fundação Universidade do Porto	Natural History
13			Museu da Ciência da Escola Secundária Rodrigues de Freitas	Public / Ministério da Educação	Science
14	9		Museu da Faculdade de Engenharia do Porto	Public / Fundação Universidade do Porto	Science and Technology
15	10		Museu da Indústria	Private / Association	Science and Technology
16	11	7	Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves	Private / Foundation	Contemporary Art
17	12		Museu de Arte Sacra e Arqueologia	Private / Diocese do Porto	Religious Art and Archaeology
18			Museu de Ciência	Public / Fundação Universidade do Porto	Science
19			Museu de História da Medicina Maximiano Lemos	Public / Universidade do Porto	History
20			Museu de História Natural da Escola Secundária Alexandre Herculano	P Public / Ministério da Educação	Natural History
21	13		Museu de História Natural	Public / Fundação Universidade do Porto	Natural History
22	14		Museu de S. Francisco de Assis/ Ordem Terceira de S. Francisco	Private / Ordem Terceira	Religious Art
23	15	8	Museu do Carro Eléctrico	Private / Sociedade de Transportes e Comunicações do Porto	Specialized
24			Museu do Centro Hospitalar do Porto	Public Fundação Universidade do Porto	History of Medicine - Science
25	16		Museu do ISEP	Private / Instituto Superior Politécnico do Porto	Science and Technology
26	17	9	Museu do Papel Moeda	Private / Foundation	Specialized
27	18	10	Museu do Vinho do Porto	Public / Câmara Municipal do Porto	History
28	19	11	Museu dos Transportes e Comunicações	Private / Associação Museu Transporte Comunicações	Specialized
29	20		Museu Militar do Porto	Público/ Ministério da Defesa	Specialized
30	21	12	Museu Nacional da Imprensa	Public / Association	Specialized
31	22	13	Museu Nacional de Soares dos Reis	Public / Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis/ Instituto Museus e Conservação	Decorative Arts
32	23	14	Museu Romântico da Quinta da Macieirinha	Public / Câmara Municipal do Porto	Decorative Arts
33	24		Museu das Belas Artes	Public/ Universidade do Porto	Art

A	B	C	Museum	Legal Status / Tutelage	Type/Collections nature
34			Núcleo Museológico da Santa Casa da Misericórdia do Porto	Private / Santa Casa da Misericórdia	Religious Art
35			Tesouro da Sé	Private/Diocese	Religious Art
36			Fundação José Rodrigues – Fábrica Social	Private	Art

Coluna A – Totalidade de museus/ núcleos museológicos referenciados, no Porto

Column B – Porto Museums referred to in Barros, 2008

Column C – Porto Museums belonging to the Portuguese Network of Museums - Rede Portuguesa de Museus (2010)