



## Result 4

### Report on the visits to museums carried out during the lifetime of the project

This report should be read together with the result 3 (study of the professional profile of the MVST) and result 7 (study of the language learning needs of MVST staff). The aim of this report is to provide feedback on the experiences the partnership had when visiting the different museums which were kind enough to invite us and to co-operate with our work as part of the project.

One of the most rewarding parts of this project was the chance to visit several different museums, to see so many beautiful things and to talk to so many dedicated professionals, and we are especially grateful to all the museums who welcomed us and allowed us to share so much amazing art.

#### 01. Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon, Portugal

Partners had the privilege of a guided tour, led by one of the museum’s most experienced curators, who was able to share with us several valuable thoughts, not just on the works of art of the collection but also related to art in general, all in English. Here are some of her thoughts:

- a) Security is such an important issue for the museum because **we are taking care of humanity**: our dreams, our aspirations, our feelings. A work of art represents somebody’s thoughts.
- b) Mr. Gulbenkian used to say that it was as if the works of art in his collection were his daughters, and that he had dedicated his life to taking care of them.
- c) Looking at works of art helps us to understand something of ourselves. When we are “reading” art, we are thinking about our own lives and experiences.
- d) Up to about 20 years ago, the visitors treated the exhibits with respect. Now the objects have to be protected by glass.
- e) The captions in the museum are available in both Portuguese and English.
- f) The collection is finite, i.e. the museum does not make acquisitions to expand it. The collection is exactly as Mr. Gulbenkian left it.
- g) The museum organises important temporary exhibitions on a regular basis, involving regular contact with other museums worldwide.

We also had the opportunity to share ideas with the human resources department:

- h) The great majority (more than 70%) of the visitors to the museum are from outside Portugal.
- i) However, the security staff may not be able to perform all their tasks in English. Sometimes they have to resort to sign language.



- j) The museum provides language training for its own internal staff, but cannot provide training for outsourced staff and has difficulty in persuading the outsourced provider of the need to implement this kind of training.
- k) The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, of which the museum is a part, takes language learning and customer service very seriously and organizes courses for staff from all areas of the organization on a regular basis. One of the main aims of this training is to ensure that the level of courtesy provided to the visitor, as part of customer service, should be at the same level in English as it is in Portuguese.

During the visit a gallery assistant asked a Turkish colleague to move a little further away from an exhibit, which seemed to be successfully accomplished (politely but firmly) using a mixture of English and gesture.

### Conclusions:

- 01. Security is important, not just in terms of protecting an object, but because in so doing we are protecting our own cultural identity.
- 02. Language training should be adjusted to meet the customer service policy of the museum.
- 03. Museums often cannot provide training for outsourced workers, and the providers of the services outsourced are often unwilling to do so.

## 02. Museu das Comunicações, Lisbon, Portugal

Here, following a visit to the main collection, we were able to talk to the director of human resources and the training manager at this interactive museum, who shared their concerns with us:

- a) The museum has a very low percentage of foreign visitors. 95% of the visiting public comes from Portuguese schools. A considerable investment would be needed to attract a broader public.
- b) Foreign language needs are covered by the fact that museum offers 9-month VET apprenticeships for recent graduates, most of whom speak English, whereas the older staff have difficulty. However, these apprentices allow the museum to get by. In any case, reductions to the museum's HR budget given the present economic crisis in Portugal mean that it is virtually impossible to make investments in training.
- c) English is our first priority and our most realistic target.
- d) The museum offers summer courses (workshops) for children, and there could be a market for reorganising these courses so as to include learning about communication and about English at the same time.



- e) Language learning at the museum in the future would have to be carefully geared towards the language needed to talk about the specific exhibits, i.e. strictly focused on the students’ professional needs. In previous learning experiences, this has not always been ensured.
- f) Given the nature of our museum, there would be no problem whatsoever in using technology in language learning.

### Conclusions:

- 01. The opening of the museum to a broader basis of foreign visitors would require a change in policy and, consequently, in funding.
- 02. In the meantime, the museum has found informal ways of solving the problem with the (few) visitors who do not speak the local language.

### 03. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany

We were given the opportunity to discuss language training needs at this major group of museums with the directors of the human resources department, who had also been active participants in the ECHOCAST project (related to vocational training standards for museum workers, but which did not approach language training).

- a) The SMB is interested in establishing standards of training and of qualification.
- b) Every five years, the museum holds a public tender for the provision of security services. These security services are therefore outsourced.
- c) Often, the staff move from one outsourced provider to another, and therefore manage to “stay on” at the museum.
- d) The SMB insists that all the security workers are trained to ECHOCAST standards (although this has not proved to be easy), and would like to introduce a similar standard in language competence.
- e) The key language for interacting with the public is English, but the SMB is also interested in French, Italian, Spanish, Polish and Russian. Audio guides are, however, available in 11 languages in the main museums of the group, located on the “museum island” in central Berlin.
- f) The level of register to be used by workers should be linked to ECHOCAST standards for interaction with the public.
- g) The security staff are, in general, “pure” security and therefore have a relatively low level of academic qualification. Nevertheless, they have to provide basic information to the visiting public. Because of the number of museums which make up the SMB, there are several thousand workers doing this job, most of whom work shift timetables.



- h) If language competence were included in the standard required, then the security providers would have to provide language training for staff working at SMB museums. In other words, the responsibility for training the staff in languages would pass to the service provider, rather than the museum.
- i) The staff working on the information desk, providing information to the public both in person and on the phone, are also outsourced. Their tasks are considered very important, given the direct contact with the visiting public.

The visit also included a guided tour of the *Gemäldegalerie* (historical art museum), one of the museums of the SMB organisation. Our guide was able to describe not just the history of the amazing works of art on display but also the techniques used and the symbology hidden in them.

- a) The captions were only in German.
- b) The collection was begun during the reign of Frederick II of Prussia, also known as Frederick the Great, during the Enlightenment period. Intellectuals at the time began to question whether art had replaced religion in European society, but Frederick was apparently more interested in buying famous names, suggesting that he saw art as an investment only.

After the visit, the project co-ordinator visited the Egyptian Museum (also part of the SMB group) and noticed that the ticket sales staff and the gift shop staff were perfectly competent in English, but not the security staff on the door or (surprisingly) the gallery assistant in the Nefertiti exhibition, who had to communicate the need to check in a jacket by using gesture.

## Conclusions:

01. Museums are increasingly interested in establishing standards of training and of qualification, driven by the need to develop the concept of customer service.
02. Our target population may well include increasing numbers of organisations which provide outsourced staff to work in museums, and not just the museums themselves.
03. Our project is absolutely necessary, given the fact that an outsourced gallery assistant at one of Europe’s most important cultural tourist attractions appeared unable to communicate in English.

## 04. DDR Museum, Berlin

Here we had the chance to visit this private interactive museum accompanied by a guide. The museum appears to be extremely popular with foreign tourists, given its location and its theme. Our guide explained to us that all of the museum workers are trained, fully-qualified museum guides and that therefore they are all perfectly able to interact with foreign visitors,



although we did not manage to ascertain in how many different languages. The museum does not employ gallery assistants or other security staff. Curiously, this was the only museum we visited which expressed this position.

## Conclusions:

01. Interactive museums would appear not to need our project quite so much, given the fact that their exhibits are completely different in nature (and perhaps value). At the DDR museum visitors are actively encouraged to touch exhibits and there seemed to be very few restrictions about taking photographs, etc.
02. Everyone at the DDR museum seemed perfectly comfortable in English, although not quite so comfortable in other languages. At a museum with so many foreign visitors from so many different countries, should all of them be obliged to communicate in English with the MVST?

## 05. Isparta Museum, Isparta, Turkey

We visited this regional archaeological and ethnographical museum in the company of one of the archaeologists, with an interpreting service provided by our partners at the Isparta Teachers' Association. Free guidebooks are available in English and French, and some of the exhibits had captions in English, but not all. Following our visit, the archaeologist shared the following concerns with us:

- a) The team at the museum is made up of a manager, 6 archaeologists, 3 office workers and 4 security guards who work at night. There are no specific workers whose task is to interact with visitors except special groups, who are usually received by one of the archaeologists.
- b) The museum has no shop and does not sell tickets. It would therefore seem perfectly possible to visit the museum and leave without talking to anyone.
- c) Foreign visitors are relatively rare. Sometimes they can appear during the summer. If so, one of the archaeologists can speak English and he receives the visitors. If he is not available, there is a problem! But usually most of the 100 or so foreign visitors per month (during the summer) come with their own tour guides, which solves the problem.
- d) Key languages for this museum would be English and German. The specialised academic community for archaeology in Turkey uses German as an international language.
- e) The museum has a relationship with ICOM, but the main problem is that, in comparison with other sites in Turkey, such as Ephesus, it is difficult to compete for visitors, despite the fact that local sites such as Sagalassos are just as magnificent if not more so. Saint Paul's Road also runs through the locality, which could also represent a major visitor attraction.



- f) The Isparta/Burdur region of Turkey has enormous potential in terms of archaeological treasures, but the development of the region is dependent on the political will to promote tourism, and also to promote the local airport as a tourist destination.
- g) Until such time as this policy changes, and given the low numbers of foreign visitors, language, although important in the abstract sense, is not really of crucial importance. “Most archaeological sources are published in English or German, so language is important for me, but if I’m just going to stay here, then why bother?”

### Conclusions:

- 01. The potential in this region for the development of cultural tourism appears to be enormous, given the unbelievable wealth of the Roman, Christian and Ottoman archaeological sites and works of art, just to mention three of many. But the ability to capitalise on this potential would appear to be a matter of political decision-making, without which the situation will probably remain unchanged.
- 02. However, by the same token, if encouraged, cultural tourism could become a major factor in local economic development.

### 06. Wawel Castle, Krakow, Poland

At this major tourist attraction, the cloakroom staff could only speak Polish, but smiled. Upstairs to see the Leonardo da Vinci portrait “Lady with an Ermine”, the security staff seemed tense, which is understandable given the value of the painting. There was an obvious need to protect. They were able to say “No photographs!” in English but a related reference to tablets and smartphones was only given in Polish. Our guide also seemed rather uncomfortable in English and so a colleague from our partners at MNK took over.

### Conclusions:

- 01. At another major cultural tourist attraction (one of the very few opportunities to see a Leonardo da Vinci portrait “in the flesh”), staff in contact with the visiting public were unable to provide basic information to visitors in English.
- 02. Given the importance and value of the exhibit, it would seem urgent to provide security instructions in at least English, even if the castle is (perhaps understandably) more concerned about this issue than about customer service.

### 07. Bishop Erasm Ciolek Museum (part of MNK), Krakow, Poland

We were greeted by friendly cloakroom staff who tried in English, although not always successfully. We had the opportunity to visit the collections with a guide, for whom English



seemed to be not the easiest thing in the world, but who nevertheless managed to impress because of the wealth of specialised technical vocabulary in English and his obvious profound knowledge of the subjects.

### Conclusions:

01. Our target population is the MVST and not the museum guides, whose level of cultural preparation shines through and whose level of English is, despite one or two hesitations, of a generally high standard. Our guides at the Gulbenkian Museum and at SMB also showed extraordinary vocabulary resources, cultural knowledge and a captivating personality. If we needed to clarify this doubt, it is now clarified: our target is the MVST, not the guides.

### 08. The Szolayski House (part of MNK)

In what amounted to a very similar experience to the previous visit, we were fortunate enough to be given a guided tour of the exhibition in perfectly proficient English but had more difficulty in the cloakroom, although no difficulty whatsoever in the gift shop.

### Conclusions:

01. As might be expected, the younger staff in the gift shop appear to have a higher level of skills and confidence than the relatively older staff in the galleries or in the cloakroom, and although this is not always the case it would seem that our most urgent target is the 40+ age bracket.

### 09. Historical Museum of Krakow (part of MNK)

Also part of the MNK, we visited this interactive museum accompanied by a young guide who told us a lot of interesting details:

- a) The museum receives visitors from all over the world, probably thanks to its location in the central square of the city. Visitors are mostly English-speaking but can also include speakers of Spanish, German and Russian. Around 1000 visitors per day, roughly 70% of whom are Polish.
- b) The exhibits have captions in English, there are audio guides in 6 languages and there is multimedia in different languages. Visitors can also hire a guide in several languages, including Japanese, for example. These guided tours are outsourced to a subcontractor.
- c) The museum also outsources 11 gallery assistants, whose task is to ensure security but also to provide basic information to the visiting public. This subcontractor is obliged by



the museum to provide language training in English, but the general feeling is that this has not been very successful so far, although the process is still in its early stages. These courses are teacher-led and vocationally-oriented, given the fact that they are provided with specific vocabulary through glossaries, which ends up being rather like memorising a phrasebook.

- d) The HMK appears to be very much aware of the need to provide a good image to the visiting public, and of the fact that this image includes language competence.

## Conclusions:

01. Museums are progressively more and more interested in the concept of customer service and of attracting more visitors.
02. The ability to communicate in different languages is clearly perceived as being part of this concept.
03. Our target is not just the museums but also the providers of outsourced MVST services.

## 10. The Hunterian Museum, Glasgow, Scotland, UK

The Hunterian Museum is an integral part of the University of Glasgow and is located in the very heart of the university campus. Our visit was accompanied by the museum director and the HR manager, together with a volunteer guide (a student at the university), who shared the following ideas with us:

- a) The founder of the museum was a man of science, knowledge and enlightenment who created the collection so as to exchange knowledge and aid learning within the cultural and academic environment of the University of Glasgow.
- b) It is a living collection, but new acquisitions are made within the framework of the founder. Currently, the collection is still looked upon as an aid to expanding the thinking of the university's research teams.
- c) The visiting public includes approximately 60% UK and 40% non-UK.
- d) Nevertheless, captions appeared to be only in English.
- e) When faced with non-English-speaking visitors, staff tend to speak slowly and carefully and use gesture.
- f) The museum has recently taken on board the idea of providing an improved experience for the visitor, and this will probably include foreign languages for the first time.
- g) There are 25 front-of house staff working 40 hour weeks. Over the past 5 years or so, the museum has employed a certain number of workers originating from other countries, for example native Greek and Ukrainian speakers.





- h) All members of MVST staff are expected to work in accordance with the minimum standards of customer service defined by Glasgow Welcome, an online resource which they can go back to and use time and time again.
- i) Our visit also included the Charles Rennie Mackintosh House, which is also part of the Hunterian, and where the visitor levels are 55% UK, 45% non-UK. Security here felt tighter, evident through the small numbers of visitors allowed in the house at any one time. Many of the objects are unique and irreplaceable. Printed information was available in different languages but MVST staff spoke slow, clear English.

### Conclusions:

01. Customer service and an enrichment of the visitor experience appear to be growing in line with the increasing internationalisation of the city of Glasgow (major international cultural and sports events) and of the university and is perceived as a key issue for future development.
02. Foreign language competence is perceived as being a part of the above.