"DISCOVERING" 150 YEARS OF HISTORY IN A PORTMANTEAU: AN EDUCATIONAL HISTORY PROGRAMME AT THE ETHNOLOGICAL MUSEUM OF THRACE

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The subject of this paper is the planning and creation of an educational museum programme in local history at the Thrace Ethnological Museum. The programme is organized around a traveler' s portmanteau, which is a faithful copy of such an object from colonial times and contains multimodal material consisting of authentic objects chosen from collections in the museum. During the design phase, we took account of the epistemological framework and methodological principles employed in contemporary Museum Education and in History Didactics, which is why we placed emphasis upon the use of the authenticity of the objects, on the development of genuine experiences on the part of school students and upon encouraging personal expression through the comprehension of, and composition of, multiple narratives. We even designed activities intended to develop historical skills, such as comprehension, analysis and the critical evaluation of historical sources, map reading, the dating of objects, the understanding of changes in the urban landscape. Our concern during the design process was to link Local History to National and World History and to set the place in question, Alexandroupoli, in the broader geographical context of the Balkans and south-east Europe.

1. The theoretical background to museum-based History Education: from modernity to today

The public museum, as we conceive of it today, that is, as a building in which are exhibited objects with the intention of educating and entertaining the public, is a creation of the end of the 18th century and mainly of the 19th century, and is directly tied to ideological concepts introduced by the Enlightenment and by the foundation of national states (Hein, 2004: 423). These museums, the products of modernity, which are also termed 'disciplinary museums', replaced private collections housed in the palaces of royal families and the residences of scholars. They hosted public collections and offered access for the first time for all the population to these works (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992: 167). Emerging ideologies of nationalism

regarded museums as 'temples' of national culture, which documented the continual course of the history of the nation, its presence in lebensraum and its cultural and spiritual superiority over other competing nations or over other civilizations. Thus the choice was made to exhibit works of 'high' art, which were placed into the rooms of museums in chronological order, on the analogy of the linear narrative of National History. In fact, the traditional museum hosted an illustrated version of the prevailing national narrative. This expression, precisely because of its powerful emotional nature, was intended to be received by the public as effectively as possible.

At the same time, at the central points in colonialist states, ethnographic museums were created, to exhibit treasures, arms and exotic or curious objects brought back from distant colonies (Barringer and Flynn, 1998). The aim was twofold: On the one hand, there was the intent to display the imperial wealth and the grandeur of the imperial and colonial expansion, and on the other, the desire that such museums function as evidence of the racial and cultural superiority of the western white over human races (Lidchi, 1997: 185-199, Hein, 1998: 4, Kotsakis, 2008: 35-7).

The role of the visitor to traditional museums was passive, and, in so far that the greatest museums of the world and in Greece continue to be structured on this philosophy, still is. The spectator wanders through the rooms of the museum, following the chronological order of the exhibits, (s)he observes them, (s)he admires them and learns various pieces of information about them, either by reading his or her guide book to the museum or by taking a guided tour conducted by trained museum employees. Similar behaviour and similar activities are imposed upon school groups who visit museums, even though until recently educational visits were frowned on in general (Black, 2005: 9-44). [1]

The spectacular changes that have occurred in recent decades in the field of Museology and the rise of new interdisciplinary subjects, such as Museum Education and History Didactics, have caused cracks to appear in the traditional idea of the museum and have introduced new concepts that have brought about radical changes in the landscape of museum exhibitions and educational activities within museums. Of major importance is the change from a chronological arrangement of exhibits to thematically-arranged displays, from a one-dimensional linear narrative to multiple narratives, from gleaming works of art to the remains of the everyday life of the

people of the past, from the memorization of information and the admiration of exhibits, to comprehension, critical analysis and entertaining experience. In other words, there has been a change from the museum as a 'temple of culture' to the museum that focuses on the interests and desires of the visitor and acts as a place for reflection and entertainment (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). At the same time, similar changes have occurred in the field of school education, with the instituting of new curricula that encourage the use of museum objects in the teaching of History, in the hope of bringing about a more effective and substantial approach to the past (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994: 10-5).

The Ethnological Museum of Thrace was founded in 2002 in Alexandroupoli, a city nearby the Greek-Turkish border.[2] It contains various collections drawn from the general area of Thrace. Thrace is a geographical area divided after the World War I into three states (Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria). Since its foundation, the museum has been notable active. It is continually adding to and conserving its collections. It is involved in recording and digitizing written and visual sources. It works mainly with historians and anthropologists in its efforts to promote interdisciplinary research. It produces its own publications and organizes conferences and seminars, to which it invites academics from Greece and abroad. The most important area in which the museum is active is education. It has planned and brought to fruition many educational projects regarding diet, art, folk tradition, social stratification, archaeology, music, the environment and local history. The museum conducts educational programmes for all age groups – family programmes, seminars, workshops, events and lectures, all of which enjoy enthusiastic participation. The basic aim of these educational programmes is the application of the methodology of Museum Education and the establishing of a stable relationship of trust and mutual influence with the local community and educational institutions. It should also be noted that in 2014 an oral history group was founded at the museum, with the aim of creating a database of oral testimony from the inhabitants of the whole of the region of Thrace.

2. The epistemological framework of the project

The aim of our project, like that of many other such educational projects designed in museums, is to draw together various disciplines

and various distinct courses in the school curriculum. Thus we intend it to possess interdisciplinary and cross-curricular qualities. We have incorporated contemporary perspectives and methodologies drawn both not only from Pedagogy and History Didactics but also from Social Sciences that connect with History, such as Semiotics, Social Anthropology and Archaeology. The most important points in our research involve the relationship that arises between the visitor/learner and the objects exhibited in the museum and the meanings and experiences that are produced thanks to this relationship. This is so, because we attempt to use the objects that we have placed in portmanteau are important media tools, which bring the school students into contact with the past of their local community.[3]

This is certainly an enormous subject and much has been written in recent years on the matter. Here I will limit myself to a few observations:

1. In the Semiotics of Material Culture[4], objects are regarded as 'texts' which produce not one, but multiple meanings, depending on the cultural environment in which they happen to be embedded at the time and on the codes of communication employed in this environment [5]. This view thus rejects the belief, held by many, that objects preserved from the past, by reason of their physical presence, constitute documents or evidence from the past and so retain intact their original meaning up to the present day (Lidchi: 162-163). In the view of Charles Pierce, the assigning of meanings to exhibits in a museum and the creation of experiences arise from a triple-pole relationship, a semiotic triangle, as it were, the corners of which consist of the interpretant, the object and the representamen. The interpretant (rather than 'intepreter') Pearce defines as the individual who is bearer of experiences, ideas, knowledge, culture, education, abilities, feelings and disposition. Respectively, Taborsky offers us an analytical tool, which consists of three realities, material, individual and group reality. The interaction between them products meaning and provides experiences (Latham, 2008, Taborsky, 1990). Objects are comprehended as mediating cultural tools, which can offer us experiences of the past and encourage intellectual activity at the highest level (Nakou 2009: 37).

2. During the 1980s, however, a movement came into being among the archaeologists of Cambridge, pioneered by Ian Hodder, Daniel Miller and Christopher Tilley. This, which was to spread

worldwide, assigns a distinct place to the study of the relationship between the men and objects of the past. This movement was labeled Post-processual Archaeology, in reaction to traditional Processual Archaeology, which regarded Archaeology as a scientific discipline, which employed scientific methods to lead to objective interpretations and conclusions and to the formulation of general rules regarding human culture (Shanks-Tilley, 1987: 29-45, 53. Hodder, 1991: 7-18). Post-processual Archaeology borrows the perspectives and analytical tools of Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Semiotics and British Marxist Theory. It asserts that there is a dialectical and constantly changing relationship between mankind and objects, that material objects from the past cannot be 'read' in isolation and should be comprehended through their cultural context, whilst the meanings that we create regarding such objects are multiple and thus subjective. In his final work, eloquently entitled 'Entangled', Hodder studies the multiple relationships that connect man and objects in space and time. Defining entanglement as 'a heterogeneous mix of humans and things, potentials and constraints, ideas and technologies', he rejects any contradictions between subjectivity and objectivity, materiality and idealism and indeed any such dualisms in general that predominate in the philosophy of knowledge (Hodder, 2012: 208).

It is obvious, and there is no need for me to argue the case, that contemporary education, and in particular, Museum Education rests on the view held by Dewey that learning must be connected with the life experiences of the students and that the learning activities must be "lively, vivid and interesting" (Dewey 1938: 14). Nevertheless, Dewey himself observed that this does not mean experiences on their own will teach (ibid, 25). Particularly as regards History, children tend to see events and persons in a simplistic fashion and to interpret them in terms of presentism and atemporality, so that they end up with stereotypes and misconceptions that are very difficult to change (Castle, 2002). Thus "there is no intellectual growth without some reconstruction, some remaking, of impulses and desires in the form in which they first show themselves" (Dewey, 1938: 73). Thus entertaining oneself in a museum is not enough for the experience to have educational value. Entertainment, as Hein notes, is "necessary but not sufficient for education". The aim is "how to transform the obvious enthusiasm of visitors into connected, engaging activities that lead to growth" (Hein, 1998: 3). Thus perhaps what is needed is

what Gardner terms "discipline". This, as regards history teaching, means familiarizing the students with the methods employed by historians and with the processes of historical research in order to cultivate and acquire historical skills (Gardner, 1999: 122).

3. Project aims and methodology

Fundamentally speaking, what we have is a Local History programme that offers school students the opportunity to learn the history of their town, Alexandroupoli, from its foundation, in 1872, up to the present. The basic idea is to place an amount of multimodal material in a traveller 's portmanteau. The material relates to the history of the city and to the daily life of the inhabitants and can be used for teaching, since it consists of a wide variety of materials, such as historical texts, documentaries and snap-shots taken from the cinema, maps, photographs, aural evidence containing testimonies given by inhabitants of the city, written texts and objects in daily use. The project addresses students in the final class of primary school and in the first three classes of Gymnasium (lower secondary). Those who I have worked together over this project are the Director of the Ethnological Museum, Ms. Angeliki Yannakidou, the animateur, Ms. Valentina Sokratous.
The aims we set ourselves were as follows:

Firstly, it was our goal that school students should cultivate an understanding of History, critical thought and creative imagination. We also wished them to express themselves both individually and collectively, rather than simply memorizing and recalling historical information. We preferred interpretation, or rather interpretations, over explanation. There is a real distinction between interpretation and explanation in modern history teaching. Explaining a phenomenon or accounting for a material object from the past means a rational, ostensibly objective procedure, which rests on the acceptance of a general rule linking teleologically the object with a cause, a canon that holds generally. On this view, the explanation is absolute and rarely allows alternative interpretations. By contrast, interpretation rests on accepting the point that meanings, rather than being the product of rules and of the adherence to principles, in fact change, depending on circumstances and people's views at the time, so that interpretations can never be anything other than multiple (Kotsakis, 2008: 31-2). On the basis of this consideration, we

encourage our students, once they have studied the historical material, to offer their own interpretations and to develop and express their own reflections and arguments, obviously based on the historical sources.

Secondly, in students activities centred on the use of historical sources, we use teaching strategies based on discovery learning, as Bruner defined it in the 1960s and turned into teaching practices later (Bruner, 1966, Saab, Joolingen & Hout-Wolters, 2005). Since, however, in our case the museum objects being investigated are to be regarded de facto as historical sources, we have attempted to apply History teaching strategies, in order to construct a dialectical relationship with the sources and to create causal and chronological conceptual representations. In particular, as regards the teaching methods and techniques, the objects are initially approached via their visual and tangible features, after which follows further research employing supplementary information that contributes to the decoding of the messages conveyed by the objects and to the broadening of subjects for discussion and of the historical field in question. This supplementary information concerns the materials used and the technology employed in producing the object, the creator of the object, the one who commissioned it, its use, any subsequent transformation or after-use, the human values that it bears and to its social role. Briefly put, that is, the information refers to the historical context of the object. Obviously, during this process, the students are encouraged to express alternative views and interpretations. Working sheets distributed to student groups require that they record the features of the objects that they are examining and the information that they acquire from the objects, that is, the working sheets demand that the students develop strategies and techniques for 'reading' the objects. However, the students are then set more open-ended questions that can be answered in multiple ways, in order to enhance individual expression and interpretation and so lay the foundation for multi-perspective aspects.

Thirdly, the aim of the programme is for school students to recognize the value of Oral History. And so included in the educational material are recordings of the testimonies in the Museum archive taken from inhabitants of Alexandroupoli. We should stress the point that the testimonies that we have chosen in various cases do not agree with each other. This is of great value for the historical thinking of school students, since they may be led to conclude that it

is not unusual for differing narratives to co-exist, not only in the present but also in the past.

Fourthly, in the planning and in the selection of the material, we have used objects from the daily life of Alexandroupoli during the 19th and 20th centuries that are not exhibited in the display cabinets of the Museum and so are not known to the public. For us, this was a remarkable opportunity to take these objects out of storage in the Museum and for visitors to become aware of the unseen, but important functions of the Museum.

Fifth, most of the objects chosen and placed in the trunk are real, whilst the remainder are faithful copies. These objects include documents, photographs, clothes, toys, tools, decoration items and accessories. The students can touch these objects, scrutinize them more closely and then put them back in their place. Thus students develop a sense-based communication with the remains of the past. They can comprehend the materials, the feel, the weight, the technology and the functionality of these objects and can perhaps intuitively relate to the era in which the objects were produced and to the men and women who made and used them. They may even be able to compare these objects to objects of today used for the same purposes. As Lipe (1984: 4) stresses, the authenticity of the objects (1984: 4), is the foundation for the creation in the observer of a subjective knowledge that offers him or her an experiential contact with the past, whilst a sensory contact with objects in a museum is of great pedagogical value[6]. Thus, in Museum Education use is made of the eloquently expressive term 'hands on', to describe accurately this form of communication; museum visitors are both entertained and awakened intellectually –so 'hands on' leads to 'minds on' (Hein 1998, 2). Naturally, all this occurs mainly in children's museums, where, however, authentic objects are not used. In this sense, the initiative of the Thrace Ethnological Museum is pioneering. Besides, one of the pedagogical aims of the programme is for children to learn to treat exhibits with care, to acknowledge their value and the need to preserve them, since it is via the exhibits that they are able to learn of their past.

As regards our methods for the interpretation of the concepts of historical time and space, we should make the following points:

- Regarding the structure of the programme, the distribution of the activities that we planned within in a projected teaching period of four hours (see below) and the arranging of the objects in the

draws of the portmanteau, we decided to subdivide this length of time into five historical periods, namely, a) 1872-1912, b) 1912-1923, c) 1923-1940, d) 1940-1974 and e) 1974-2014. As for the chronological impetus of the programme, we combined two methods, a) the conventional 'chronological or periodical method', which is almost universally applied in the most curricula, starts from the past and leads to the present day and, b), the 'regressive approach', which uses the present as historical starting point. Applied during the 1930s by teachers who were followers of the Progressive Education Movement (Evans, 2004: 47), the chief advantage of the 'regressive approach' lies in the fact that it starts from the known and familiar, that it awakens the curiosity and desire of the students to learn how we ended up here and in the fact that this approach gradually reveals the relationship between the past, recent or distant, and the present (Carpenter, 1964: 26-48). At the level of National or World History, the application of this method indeed involves many problems and difficulties, since students and educators are obliged to function in a fashion opposite to that to which they are accustomed, but above all because they require a broad and well-composed picture of the past. Nevertheless, in educational History programmes directed at a younger age and differentiated in terms of subject and methodology from conventional narrative teaching, as Local History and Museum Education programmes are, this approach method can offer considerable benefits, since such programmes rest on students' cognitive structures that already exist (and indeed derive from their own experiences) and on students' emotional experiences. For this reason in our own educational programme we have chosen the present as starting point for the development of educational activities and we examine the present, our impetus being in the direction of the past as far as the Asia Minor Disaster and the Treaty of Lausanne, whilst we then take the usual chronological direction, starting from the foundation of Alexandroupoli in 1872.

- The central point of the programme and a crucial factor for its success is to cultivate in students the ability to orient themselves in historical time and in general to adopt chronological skills. This we have attempted to do by creating a historical timeline on which are placed the most important historical events of the period, these being not only political, diplomatic and military, but also cultural. The timeline revolves around three parallel axes, centred on Local,

National and World History. Thus Local History is placed in wider contexts and students are aided in their understanding of the changes that occur in Local History under the influence of events taking place on the borders of the state or on a broader geopolitical scale. Today, it is considered particularly important for school students, from primary school onwards, to acquire historical skills that enable them to understand the links between micro-scale events and the international arena in terms of space and time and to function effectively in this interaction (Skelton & Reeves, 2009). Alexandroupoli, formerly Dede Ağac, is a typical example of the great impact that international events had on local society during the First World War, since the neighbouring Gallipoli peninsula was for ten months the scene of violent clashes (1915-1916). In almost every educational activity, the students are referred to this triple timeline and are required to link the two sets of events or to place the photographs, post cards and written sources on the time axis.

- An equally important axis informing the programme is space. The significance of anthropogenic locality in, among other branches, historical research and education is enormous, if we recall that upon this is written, albeit sporadically, the life and cultural development of human communities (Kasvikis & Andreou, 2008: 125-6). Despite the fact that the programme is intended to be used indoors, in the museum or in school, the referent point is familiar to students and makes up the environment of both their historical education and of their own lived experiences: This place is, of course, their town. Here, at the micro-scale level, the main aim is the didactic use of mainly visual sources, such as photographs and city plans, that contain buildings or areas in the city that have survived up to the present. This is not an easy task, if one bears in mind the swift changes or, more precisely, the change in the appearance of cities in Greece that occurred suddenly with the mass construction of apartment buildings during the 1960s and 1970s. Today, among the apartment blocks very few old public buildings, private buildings and churches have been preserved. These, however, can aid students in orienting themselves when they are examining historical photographs of Alexandroupoli and in restoring in their imagination the townscape that has been lost. On a wider geographical scale, the aims are easier to achieve, given that use will be made of digital maps and software that depict the repeated changes to national borders that have occurred in Thrace during the period in question.

The project was applied in pilot form in May 2014, in the Department of History and Ethnology of the Democritus University of Thrace, with 22 students participating. During this meeting, there was an extremely fruitful dialogue, in which views were expressed and new ideas regarding improvements to the programme suggested. In schools in the area, it will be put into operation during the winter of 2014.

4. A brief description of the structure of the project

First two-hour session

1st activity

The pupils are divided up into five groups. Each group is given a tablet, which functions as a learning tool. The pupils are then asked to use the history map software CENTENIA, to locate the point on the map where their town is located.

Phase A, period 1974-2014

2nd activity

Starting from the present and moving backwards through the past, the pupils are required to use the photographs loaded on the tablets of each group to create a picture of the town as it changes, all the way back to the 1970s. Then, using the working sheets for this period, they are required to pinpoint important events during the period. The subjects on which the learning activities are centered are as follows: political events that influenced the inhabitants of Alexandroupoli, development that made it an urban centre, internal and external migration, urbanism and the decline of traditional agricultural communities. The students are encouraged to include accounts from their parents and grandparents.

3rd activity

The animateur explains to the children how a timeline functions and stresses the importance that parallel lines of world, national and local history have for understanding the history of their city. The pupils then seek information and discuss the above topics. Also, they are encouraged to make use of the timeline throughout the programme and can themselves pin events and pictures to the timeline.

Phase B, period 1940-1974

4thactivity

The pupils are required to locate on their tablet the folders for 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. They examine carefully the photographic archive for each decade and fill in their worksheets. They then open the trunk. With the help of the animateur, they examine the contents of the trunk and how they are organized. In each group they study the contents of a drawer, list and describe the contents on a working sheet in terms of shape, material and colour. They discuss use, functionality, value and aesthetics of the objects. At the conclusion of the activity, each group presents its findings to plenary session of the class.

Second two-hour session

Phase C, period 1922-1940

5thactivity

We now move to the interwar period. With the arrival of thousands of refugees from the Asia Minor catastrophe, the city changes dramatically. The animateur introduces topics regarding how and why the topography and the human geography change. The pupils are required to point out on the map using arrows the origin and destination of the waves of refugees.

They draw information from historical texts, eyewitness accounts by refugees, extracts from documentaries and from the objects in the trunk. Finally, each group presents its information that it has gathered and offers its views.

PhaseD, period 1880- 1912

6thactivity

We move in time to 1872 when the small town of Dede-Agaç was founded under the Ottoman Empire. The pupils are required to use the timeline to extract information on the period, regarding the Industrial Revolution, commercial networks, railways and new international alliances. They use the following opening questions: What are the reasons for the foundation of the town? How did it start? The pupils are encouraged to speculate, search through the trunk for texts, photographs and objects from the end of the 19th century and prepare small extemporizations for their presentation.

7thactivity

Through role-playing exercises the pupils use clothes and objects dating to the early 20th century that they have found in the trunk. They attempt to recreate this particular period in the life of the city,

when it evolved into a cosmopolitan urban environment with many consulates, trading houses, an aristocracy, educational foundations and schools of music. The overall aim is to reveal the multicultural character of the city during this period.

PhaseE, period 1912-1922:

8hactivity

The children are required to play on a map a strategy game, in which they use pieces and cards representing the armies of the various Balkan states. They are given information that takes them from the Balkan Wars to the Asia Minor catastrophe. Through the game, the pupils offer answers to the following questions: What alliances were created? What treaties were signed? Who were the victors? What areas was Thrace divided up into and what states was it shared among? How did Alexandroupoli pass from the hands of the Ottoman into the Bulgarians and then into allied hands and finally into Greek possession?

Final activity

1923-2014

Using the Treaty of Lausanne as a starting point, the children acquire an understanding of the geographical status of Thrace as it is today. They then move onto the micro-scale of their city, Alexandroupoli. They consult a town-planning map and so become aware of the development and growth of Alexandroupoli from 1880 to the present. Finally, some time is devoted to the evaluation of the programme by the students.

Notes

[1] On the context of the development of the museum as an institution, see Nakou, 2009: 14-52. On the epistemological background to the relationship among museum, history and education, see ibid: 87-113 and Nakou, 2002.

[2] Alexandroupoli was founded in 1872 as Dede-Agaç, the name meaning in Turkish 'Grandfather's Tree'. The aim was that Alexandroupoli should function as a commercial stop on the route from the Ottoman east to the European west. The large-scale construction of an infrastructure consisting of railway and a harbor contributed to the growth of the population. Many consulates opened,

together with branches of commercial and shipping enterprises. After the Balkan Wars and in particular the Treaty of Bucharest, in 1913, the town was given to Bulgaria. After the Allied victory in the First World War, all of western Thrace was placed under Allied administration and was definitively handed over to Greece under the conditions of the Treaty of Sevres, in 1920. It was renamed Alexandroupoli in honour of King Alexander of Greece. After the Asia Minor catastrophe and the implementing of the compulsory exchange of population between Turkey and Greece, imposed by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, Alexandroupoli received a large number of Greek refugees, mainly from eastern Thrace.

[3] About the benefits of developing trans-regional and trans-national perspectives based in material objects exhibited in local museums and the questions that arise in the framework of History Education, see Schumann and Popp (2014).

[4] On what 'material culture' is and what it includes, see Hodder (2008).

[5] Latham gives a good summary of four important theories and taxonomic models of the comprehension and interpretation of the meaning of museum objects: a) The semiotic triangle of Charles Peirce, b) Buckland's typopology, c) Taborsky 's 'three realities' and d) Rosenblatt's interactive model (Latham, 2008).

[6] In research conducted recently in the UK, whose aim was to record the views of children themselves in regard to museum educational programmes, it was found that children ask to be allowed to touch the objects and to engage with them experientially (Black, 2009: 205-207).

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