Introduction to module and assignment

The focus of the module *History and culture of museums* is on the culture(s) of museums, i.e. the different traditions that have developed within the museum field. In addition attention is being paid to how these traditions are challenged by contemporary constraints.

The lectures are constructed around a series of topical themes in which case studies (ideally from all parts of the world) play a crucial role. Each theme is discussed from three perspectives: theory, practice and ethics. The connecting question is how museum workers conceptualise their work. The assumption is that the concepts museum workers use do not just reflect theoretical positions, but have serious impacts on daily museum practice. One example is the change from the concept of “visitor” towards the concept of “user”.

The content of the module is informed by “new museology” and “critical heritage studies”. The aim is to develop a critical understanding of how museums function, front-stage as well as back-stage.

In this discursive approach the lectures can hardly be replaced by reading texts. However, the rules of the university makes it possible to do exam without attending lectures. To compensate for the lectures the not-attending students are required to study – in addition to the compulsive texts (see at the end of the programme) – following materials. It is possible to choose between, either

Peter van Mensch & Léontine Meijer-van Mensch, *New Trends in Museology* (Muzej novejše zgodovine, Celje 2011). The book can be ordered by sending an e-mail to tajnistvo@mnzc.si

The book costs 15 euro; in addition the museum will charge shipping costs.

Or, the recordings of lectures given elsewhere:

Peter van Mensch on “New thinking in museology” (Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vvo2VLbiXEA

Peter van Mensch on “Re-conceptualising learning in museums” (Šiauliai University, Šiauliai, Lithuania)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unXg9EOx38M

Peter van Mensch on “Do museums need to be replaced by something else?” (National Museum of Lithuania, Vilnius, Lithuania)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jqKZSSIImE

Peter van Mensch on “Museums for all? Museums and their communities” (National M. K. Čiurlionio Art Museum, Kaunas, Lithuania)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0V2C1dLgLsY
Programme

12.11 16.00-17.00  1.1 (lecture) Introduction
Program overview; hidden and explicit assumptions; resources.

17.00-18.00  1.2 (discussion) What is a museum, and why is it important to ask this question?

18.00-19.00  1.3 (lecture) Museum infrastructure
Formal networks as context of professionalization.

13.11 09.00-10.00  2.1 (lecture) The origin of museums
From private to public; the rise of professionalism; the emergence of the European model.

10.00-11.00  2.2 (discussion) Are all museums equal?
Typology of museums; separate traditions.

11.00-12.00  2.3 (lecture) Museology as academic discipline
Museology vs. museography; new museology vs. museology nouvelle
basic parameters and defining conditions

14.11 09.00-12.00 (excursion) A “Benjaminian” visit to the Museo Civico Scienze Naturali E. Caffi
Piazza Cittadella 10, Bergamo (http://www.museoscienzebergamo.it)
meeting point: in front of the main entrance of the museum (at 10.15 h)

03.12 16.00-17.00  3.1 (lecture) Systems dynamics approach to museums
The museum as a system of input-output systems; output vs. outcome; effectiveness vs.
efficiency.

17.00-18.00  3.2 (discussion) What do museums offer to which users?
Making an inventory of museum products.

18.00-19.00  3.3 (lecture) Collections development
Collecting and disposal; selection; collections mobility.

04.12 09.00-10.00  4.1 (lecture) Museum ethics
Historical overview; basic principles; ICOM code.

10.00-11.00  4.2 (discussion) Should museums avoid controversy?

11.00-12.00  4.3 (lecture) Current issues in museum ethics

10.12 16.00-17.00  5.1 (lecture) New museum models
Integrated approaches; functional specialization; community museums.

17.00-18.00  5.2 (discussion) Will new technologies make museums more popular?

18.00-19.00  5.3 (lecture) Museums and the topographical turn
The role of place; extending the concept of museum; locative media.

11.12 09.00-10.00  6.1 (lecture) Trends in exhibition design
Structure-style-technique; interaction and immersion; learning theory and museums.

10.00-11.00  6.2 (discussion) Learning versus entertainment?

11.00-12.00  6.3 (lecture) Experience design
Pine’s theory of experience economy; flow.
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| 12.12    | 09.00-10.00 | **7.1 (lecture) Authenticity**  
The role of the real; objects as data carrier; continuities in time and space. |
| 10.00-11.00 | 7.2 (discussion) Does a more profound experience depend on a higher degree of authenticity? |
| 11.00-12.00 | 7.3 (lecture) Issues of conservation and restoration  
Principles of restoration; current trends. |
| 17.12    | 16.00-17.00 | **8.1 (lecture) Who owns what?**  
Legal versus intellectual ownership; repatriation-restitution-return. |
| 17.00-18.00 | 8.2 (discussion) Do visitors have rights? |
| 18.00-19.00 | 8.3 (lecture) Visits or visitors?  
Visits or visitors; problems of statistics; repeat visits; why do people (not) visit museums? |
| 18.12    | 09.00-10.00 | **9.1 (lecture) Museums and the contemporary**  
Social role of museums; documenting the present. |
| 10.00-12.00 | 9.2 (discussion) Museums and the future |

**Compulsory texts**

**Course text 1:** Susanna Pettersson ed., Encouraging collections mobility – a way forward for museums in Europe (Finnish National Gallery/Erfgoed Nederland/Institut für Museumsforschung, Helsinki/Amsterdam/Berlin 2010)  
In particular the following chapters:  
- Susan Pearce, ‘The collecting process and the founding of museums in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries’ (pp. 12-33), and  
- Léontine Meijer-van Mensch & Peter van Mensch, ‘From disciplinary control to co-creation – Collecting and the development of museums as praxis in the nineteenth and twentieth century’ (pp. 34-57).  


**Course text 3:** ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums (2004)  

**Course text 4:** Museums Association, Museums 2020. Discussion Paper (2012)  
[http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=806530](http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=806530)
Assignment

With the general objectives of the master “Planning and management of tourism systems” in mind, I ask you to write a paper in which you discuss the specificity of the museum language. In this context, language should be understood in the widest possible sense as the totality of means used by museums to communicate with their audiences indoors\(^1\). What are your personal expectations for the future of this “specific museum language”? It is a rather open assignment, but it would be nice if you could address issues such as heterotopia, experience, authenticity, ethics, and, when relevant, museum history.

The frame of reference for my assessment is based on the content of my lectures and compulsory course materials. The use of additional material is, of course, allowed, but not required. Be aware of the danger of using internet texts without proper referencing. When you use existing texts (including the course materials) without mentioning the source, the paper will be rejected.

You may choose to write this paper as a case study, based on a specific museum (not the natural history museum of Bergamo!), but this is not required.

I expect a paper with a proper beginning and a proper end. As English is neither your nor mine first language I will not be too strict on language. However, since everybody has language check in his/her computer there is a limit to what I still consider acceptable. I assumed that every student is familiar with basic requirements for academic papers, such as proper referencing (footnotes, bibliography). The Chicago Style is the most commonly used system of referencing, but I would accept any form, as long as is clear where the information comes from.

The required size is 3,000-4,000 words.

The paper should be send to peter@menschmuseum.com as WORD document. You will usually receive my comments within one or two weeks. The grading will be send to prof. Stefano Ghislotti, who will be responsible for the administrative processing of it. The grading will be consistent with the policy of the Facolta di Lingue e letterature straniere.

Peter van Mensch

\(^1\) How museums use websites is not part of this assignment.