

ICININFO

## University Museums as Spaces of Education: The Case of the History of Education Museum at the University of Athens

Sonia Geladaki<sup>a\*</sup> and Giota Papadimitriou<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Hellenic Open University, School of Humanities*

<sup>b</sup>*Technological Educational Institute of Athens, Department of Library Science and Information Systems, Agiou Spyridonos Str., 12210 Aegaleo, Athens, Greece*

---

### Abstract

It is widely accepted that museums comprise centers for the conservation, study and reflection on culture and heritage. In the Museum context, objects are presented to visitors, not simply as artifacts, but as objects embedded in cultural significance. If one of museums' main tasks consists in the contextualization of objects in their cultural meanings, past and present, museums may be cast anew, theoretically, as spaces not simply responsible for the preservation of artifacts, but as spaces of education as well. In the museum space, visitors, according to their own cognitive capacities and skills, and their educational backgrounds, approach such meanings mentally. University Museums form a peculiar case of museums as they provide laboratories for the training of students. It follows that, a University Museum concerned with the history of education, as it is oriented towards preserving the cultural inheritance related to education, can easily provide material for both study and research purposes to many undergraduate or postgraduate university students. It can cover an enormous variety of activities and excite the interest of different parts of the society. In this paper we present our personal experience from a period of study and professional work at the Museum for the History of Education in the University of Athens, reflecting on ways in which the museum tried to respond to students' needs, and those students undertaking graduate studies in Departments of Education in Greece, or those who attend primary or secondary school classes.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>).

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the 3rd International Conference on Integrated Information.

*Keywords:* university museums; history of education; teaching in higher education; archival sources; oral history; cinema; educational software; museums educational programs

---

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [sofiagel@otenet.gr](mailto:sofiagel@otenet.gr)

## 1. The Athenian history of the education museum

A University Museum is a museum like any other and, at the same time, it is a different museum, since its function depends on the place in which it operates (Pradel, 1987). In other words, a University Museum is, like any other museum, a place concerned with the collection, conservation, exhibition, study, research, since it encourages the organized and systematic documentation of resources at the service of permanent or periodical exhibitions. Yet, it is differentiated from other museums as it is dominated by a University School or Department and supports academic teaching. As a result, its collections (objects or archives) are constituted according to special programming (Alexander, 1979), since not only the communication aspect of each individual is taken into account (Lumley, 1988), but also the special audience to which they refer to (the students of the School or Department). Furthermore, its exhibitions are scheduled with considerations arising from the School or Department curriculum. The educational function of a university museum to the students-visitors is also fundamental, because i) effortless knowledge acquisition (combined with entertainment) is provided, ii) overall development of their personality is contributed, iii) active participation and self-motivation development are premised and iiiii) personal contact with teachers-trainers and creative collaboration with other students are ensured.

The Museum for the History of Education (Papaconstantinou & Geladaki, 2001), which we examine here, belongs to the above category of museums. It was founded in the University of Athens (School of Philosophy, Department of Education), in 1993, in order to contribute in the training of the students and teachers to be and the active ones, as well as to fill a gap in the cultural area in our country (Papaconstantinou, Dalkos & Geladaki, 1997). Having as its main objective to play the role of a vital organism, accessible both to scientists specialized in the subject of History of Education, or to professionals working with museums (historians, museum curators, teachers), and to the public of all ages, it has set its aims respectively: i) as a research and educational center, it aims at the study of (general and regional) the History of Education, drawing awareness to relevant topics in the educational community and ii) as a cultural organization it pursues the preservation of Greek cultural heritage in the education sector (Markantonis, 1994).

## 2. The History of Education and its academic teaching in the Greek reality

In the middle of the 19th century, the diffusion of historicity in all the aspects of social system composed several satellite fields of historical studies. In such a climate, the History of Institutions, History of Justice, History of Philosophy, History of Literature or History of Art were created. In such a climate the History of Education was also “born”. From that time onwards, the History of Education absolutely depends on and evolves together with general History.

General History was dominated for a long period by historicist and positivist epistemological paradigms with a literary-historical approach towards primary sources dominant (that is analyses focused on documents authenticity audit, texts critical restore, narrative reconstruction of the past). Then, the detection, revelation, analysis and explanation of the structures within historical phenomenon were emphasized (as in the historiographical example of the “Annales school”), a fact that led from “history-narration” to “history-problem” and to the development of interactive relationship between historian and source. Afterwards, serial history emerged and -with the assistance of P/Cs- aimed at the explanation of qualitative alterations through the quantitative transformations. Then, a reorientation from structures and procedures (macro-history) to ordinary people experiences and every-day life history (micro-history) was attempted, resulting to the shift from “general” to “personal”, where each distinguishable object constitutes a separate group based on its distinct and formatted specificities. Finally, in the age of post modernity, an effort of reconciliation at the level of questioning and methods of literary criticism and historic science began and History -using the conceptual tools and the techniques of the cultural studies- made the so-called “linguistic turn” to the narration (verbal fiction), to the content (more invented than discovered) and to the form (more commons with literature than with history) (Iggers, 1999).

History of Education - as a part of general History - was influenced from it in its three discrete levels: i) the research (epistemological tools), ii) the historiography (historiography trends) and iii) the teaching (instructive examples). But, there was no full synchronization with general History, resulting to the fact that historicism still

has deep roots at this specific field of study and raises issues for discussion (Popkewitz, & Franklin, 2000). Nevertheless, it seems that History of Education has attempted to re-orientate abroad so as to reinstate dynamically in the context that constructs the historical reality of today.

In Greece, the contexts of relative bibliography (Koulouri, 2002) make everybody understand that any changes made concern more the methodological rules of research and less the general approach of the object of study itself; a situation which is reflected also in academic teaching. The reason is connected to the fact that in Greece the equation “History of Education = written archival sources” has even more power than abroad. To avoid misunderstandings, however, no one denies that written archival sources are precious (Bautier, 1987; Giannakopoulos 2004). But, i) this material, which is considered as a “natural source”, is created to serve public or private needs and not the historian’s ones, ii) the historian’s questions are those that confirms its use as a source and iii) since it is composed of official institutional texts, it doesn’t allow determining whether there is divergence between plan and result.

Therefore, what is needed is the reconstruction of educational past in university teaching practice with a more complex process. A process that will raise interest and curiosity, promote the training of analytical skills, ensure teaching variety and vividness, develop knowledge on historical representations and narrations, provide good sense of place and time, accustom in the formulation of active queries on the sources and get opportunities for correlations with historiography consideration (Chapman, 1981). All the above may well be achieved if -except from being engaged with written records- further historical sources are utilized and new techniques of approaching material are embraced (Moniot, 2000). And it is here that the exhibits and archives (oral testimonies, movies etc) as well as whatever may be generated with them (software, educational programs) of a University Museum for the History of Education can play a key role (Shuth-Hennigar, 1982).

### *2.1. Oral Educational History*

Oral testimonies are not a kind of a new archival material. It is something more vivid and educative, both because they are a field of on-site research and because they reveal the function of memory (Giannakopoulos, 1993). It is probable that they do not substitute written sources, but it is also probable that, with their assistance, a retrospective ethnography of everyday school life may be configured. The everyday life of any school level, in which the teachers work out ways to adapt the state regulations in the particular needs of their students and the students play their own central role both as subjects and as tools of their teachers’ labour (Humphries, 1984).

### *2.2. The cinema*

Image is another significant tool for the analysis of teaching and educative practices of the educational past. It holds its own position next to written texts and oral testimonies, since photography and cinema or television allow us to create a personal relationship with the past and to “imagine” it much more vividly (Sadoul, 1988). Particularly for cinema, practice has shown that it is a special educational audiovisual media and, if used properly in teaching, it may bring to light unknown aspects, trigger discussions and widen the knowledge field and the perception of students. Although it approaches the past in a special way, creating a more personal relationship with it and constituting a world that is closest to the world of oral History than with that of classical historiography, its movies belong to historical sources (Mavroskoufis, 2005).

Of course, cinema in no case (except maybe from documentaries) depicts events, but fabricates them based on individual strategies of animation and fiction. In addition, even when prior investigation is conducted, the movies creators are not ideologically distanced from the events since their (ideological, political etc) beliefs work as a filter. Thus, the critical approach (based on parameters set in advance) of the film material and its comparison with other historic sources or with bibliography is therefore necessary before evaluation (Geladaki & Konstantakopoulou, 2004).

### 2.3. *The educational software*

Young people develop in a higher degree the ability for understanding (general or educational) History through the image and, being very familiar with technology, they are positively disposed to the introduction of I(nformation) and C(ommunication) T(echnologies) in teaching practice. If their professor endorses the same view, then we may look forward to substantial changes in teaching procedure of higher education (Campbell & Pargas, 2003). As it is well known that each educational innovation directly depends on the environment of its application (Grimes & Warschauer 2008) the above mentioned parameters make things both easier and at the same time more difficult in the higher education of our country. They make them easier because the use of PCs is now generalized in the Greek primary and secondary education (and it may also be generalized in the higher education relatively easily), but at the same time they make them more difficult because the utilization of PC in teaching practice requires the production of material with specifications. Exactly the requirements met from the educational software, which is based on a scenario and seeks the development of self-acting through the acquisition of information from selected sources (archives, photographs, etc), so that the answer in any historical question is derived (Geladaki & Papadimitriou, 2002).

However, both the production and the use of educational software in teaching practice of higher education involve difficulties. The complexity of teaching and tutorial approach of the issue requiring an answer through technology, the necessity to involve different cognitive areas and factors and their forced synergy, the direct correlation of the scenario with the contemporary reality so that it contributes to the understanding and smoothies difficulties during learning communication are for sure some of these predicaments. On the other hand, in the use of educational software reference points can be the need for the widest possible involvement of students in the materialization of activities, the development of high quality and meaningful dialogue among them (so that they get opportunities for expression and thinking process) as well as discussions with their academic teacher (that are not “controlled” nor “directed” from the latter). The final result, however, is usually rewarding. What usually is shown as a result is that the educational software assists in the development of cooperation and enhances socialization and communication abilities, since each students’ working group is asked to explain to the other groups the specific historical issue they undertook to investigate and presents its findings (Hadeed & White, 2000).

### 2.4. *The educational museum programs*

An educational museum program utilizes museum collections and constitutes an experiential teaching activity that promotes knowledge through original constructions (Kaniari and Giannakopoulos, 2011). This is an activity significantly differentiated from the classical academic approach, which is based on the description of historical events using the language code. It is an activity that contributes to revive the past through imagination, which is motivated during the sight or tactile contact with museum collections. In other words, this is clearly a communicative activity, in which the exhibit carries a message and the museum visitor (in this case the student) is the receiver, who through observation develops a dialectical relationship with it (Hooper-Greenhill, 1983).

Is it easy, though, for educational programs to become accepted as an alternative approach to the academic teaching of History of Education? Not very much, we have to admit, and for many reasons. The research for the current learning processes in museums, for example, is still in its infancy. Furthermore, the relationship between museums and education (of any level and especially of higher education) is not direct and sometimes it is also competitive. Finally, many academic teachers have the opinion that museum is an area of automatic learning, some know the way to employ it in their teaching and only a few are used to the incorporation of such techniques of investigation (Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1988).

## 3. **From theory to practice**

Although the above reports in approaches and tools made clear that, as long as the relative museum collections exist, the way of teaching History of Education in university can be easily upgraded (Andreou, 1996), it is not unreasonable to repeat something that is also well known to everybody: the need to develop a communicative

relationship between the two distinct parts of educational team (teachers-students) (Dalkos, 2000). A relationship i) characterized by the equal exchange of perspectives, ii) helpful to the team to form a final perspective or to make decisions related to the organization, planning, conduct and evaluation of teaching and iii) capable to permit to experiential situations to be transformed in teaching activities and play their own role in the whole teaching act (Tilden, 1957). Finally, whatever the progress of a relevant process, it must be evaluated (make a detailed discussion, fill in questionnaires etc) in order to make sense.

Whatever you choose however, the fact is that a university Museums for the History of Education enables a different approach of the educational reality of the past and may contribute decisively in the differentiation of academic teaching of the subject. In this context, two activities based on the active learning-teaching model, which have been developed at the Museum for the History of Education in Athens University, represent an indicative example.

### 3.1. Activity I: «Educational policy and everyday life in school»

The challenge here was the analysis of the educational acts (institutional and administrative documents) for the Greek secondary education during two decades (1950-1970).

Through an investigative process (project method) and having as hypothesis that what happened at that period of time followed the dictates of central government, the students first co-decided what would be interesting for them to be examined and how to do it and then formulated questions† which should be answered based on the historical “contextual” of the revised period of time in order to evade the evaluation using the perception of today. Thus, the students were asked to: i) understand the fluidity of social relationships, the rigidity of political structures and the institutionalization of ideological and political polarization of the era (the elements that imposed strict ideological control in all the expressions of the Hellenic social and political life), ii) realize that the official political discourse acted as a legitimating factor of the system in power and that school mechanism was of great interest for political leadership (acting as its assistant in youth) and iii) identify the reasons that prompted the exponents of political will to “remedy” the educational trunk from the “dangerous for social balance” ideas, (prefixing the growth of the values included in the triptych «country-religion-family”).

The project could be successfully achieved through the basic Greek educational historiography of the era: the individual studies (Bouzakis, 2002) and the archival sources, which are found published (Dimaras, 1998). This is the students initially were directed to. But quickly they realized how difficult their effort was. As the whole educational activity of the examined period looked like a pyramid with two parts: i) an upper part (the institutional framework of the organization and the function of education, the (pedagogical, educational, political) intentions and their promotion tools) and ii) an inferior part (the pedagogical and professional practices), the bibliography provided information almost exclusively for the upper part of this pyramid.

Therefore, in order to clarify what happened at the inferior part of the pyramid and to realize the individual processes that happened then at the peculiar “workplace” of school, they should have the ability to open the door of the classroom and walk at the schoolyard. Since they could not act as external observers, their only alternative was to use the oral testimonies of the teachers and pupils of that period, which is to reveal the perspective of the people who participated and co-affected learning process and its functions. In this way, individual experience was emphasized and the characteristics of teachers’ and pupils’ life were utilized as expressed and imprinted by themselves. Further on, the students correlated the collected information with other information from (school and other) archives of the era and bibliography. In this way, the risk to conceal information and details or to present them in excess and with excessive sentimentality was reduced, since many times through comparison with the

---

† Some of the students’ questions were the following: “Which were the pedagogical principles of that time?”, “At what extend pedagogical principles were combined with the atmosphere of the era?”, “What were the used teaching practices trying to highlight?”, “Which perceptions, opinions and practices were developed within the school?”, “How did school classes function?”, “Was everything that happened within each school related or not to the specificities of operating area?” etc.

school situation of today there is an attempt to highlight the pre-eminence of the school situation of the past.

As far as the testimonies of school practice protagonists are concerned, these could be derived from a prepared in advance corpus. Since such a corpus never existed, the students created it with the interviews they collected (teachers and pupils of the past from three old Athenian schools). In this way a particularly useful archive with oral testimonies was created in the Museum for the History of Education, ready for anyone who wants in the future to use it in teaching. At the end of the above-mentioned project, the students deposited the conclusions they arrived after processing the oral and the archival material.

### 3.2. Activity II: «Listen to the objects speaking»

The development of close relationship between the students and objects from the past, so that the latter directly inform the first for the cultural context they belong to, cannot happen anywhere else but in a museum. Therefore, what was necessary was adequate preparation of the academic teacher and adequate historical training of the students, so that the Museum for the History of Education collections would become their assistant to consolidate the knowledge acquired during the teaching of the same subject (History of Education) and to clarify the points that were not fully understood in the auditorium.

The visit at the Museum happened after the completion of teaching the events the relevant of Kapodestrian and Ottonian period of time (1828-1864) and after the students had already acquired sufficient knowledge for the educational work of that period. This fact was taken into serious consideration at the stage of preparation for the teaching that would take place in the Museum. When was finally decided to emphasize on mutual-learning school, two choices were given: i) to take advantage of the images in the photographic archive of the museum, in which the spatial arrangement and the objects used during teaching in a relevant school were obvious and ii) to familiarize the students with the happenings during the lesson in the same schools, with the help of literary or other text set in the Museum library.

The students were divided into groups and were asked to walk in the Museum and locate the objects they have seen or heard that were used at mutual-learning schools. The investigation necessarily guided them to identify evidence coming from different areas. From there on, many choices were available. In our case, due to the available authentic material, was preferred to pass from the general to the local educational History for investigating relevant issues. Of course, there were available choices in order to raise the interest on these issues or to excite the curiosity and imagination of the students. For example, the observation of photographs (not necessarily of the same period) with a school class from a known region, where the presence of the similar multi-position desks is evident, led them to ask questions relative with their lived school experience. Finally, using inter-thematic approach, they started to make assumptions on what would the existence of such desks in a school of another era mean and their assumptions were confirmed or rejected based on their historic (and not only) knowledge.

## References

- Alexander, P.E. (1979). *Museums in motion. An introduction to the history and functions of Museums*. American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, Tennessee.
- Andreou, A. (1996). *History, museum and school*. Thessaloniki: Dedousis Publisher. [in Greek]
- Bautier, R.-H. (1987). Les Archives, in L' Histoire et ses methods. In: *Encyclopédie de la Pleiades* (3rd ed.), 3, 83–132, Athens: MIET Publishing. [in Greek]
- Bouzakis, S. (2002), Educational Reforms (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), vol. 2, Athens: Grigoris Publisher. [in Greek]
- Campbell, A.B. & Pargas, R.P. (2003). *Laptops in the classroom, Clemson University*. Clemson: South Carolina, United States.
- Chapman, H.L. (1981). The future and museum education. *Museum News*, 62, 48–56.
- Dalkos, G. (2000). *School and museum*. Athens: Kastaniotis Publisher. [in Greek]
- Dimaras, A. (1998). *The Reformation that was not performed* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), vol. 2, Athens: Estia Publisher. [in Greek]
- Geladaki, S. & Konstantakopoulou, Ch. (2004). Oral and visual testimonies. The Greek education system and its presentation in the films of the Greek cinema, Proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference of the University of Patras “History of Education”, Patras (CD-ROM). [in Greek]

- Geladaki, S., Papadimitriou, P. et al. (2002). An educational software for the academic teaching of the History of Education, Proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference of the Aegean University “The use of Information and Communication Technologies in teaching”, Rhodes, vol. 2, (pp. 433-436). [in Greek]
- Giannakopoulos G.A., ed. (2004). *The General State Archives 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary: Exhibition catalogue*. Athens. [bilingual]
- Giannakopoulos, G.A. (1993). The reconstruction of a destroyed picture: The Oral History archive of the Centre of Asia Minor Studies. *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 1 (2), 201–217.
- Grimes, D. & Warschauer, M. (2008). Learning with laptops: a multi-method case study. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 38 (3) 305–332. Baywood Publishing Co. Inc.
- Hadeed, L. & White, Dr. (2000). *Effects of using the Anytime, Anywhere learning model (laptop program) for the enhancement of problem solving and critical thinking skills*. University of South Florida, United States.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1983). Some basic principles and issues relating to Museum education. *Museums journal*, 83 (213), 127–130.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1988). The “art of memory” and learning in the museum. The challenge of GCSE. *The international Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, 7, 129–137.
- Humphries, S. (1984). *The handbook of oral history*. Inter-Active Imprint.
- Iggers, G. (1999). *Historiography in the 20<sup>th</sup> century*. Athens: Nefeli Publisher. [in Greek]
- Kaniari A. and Giannakopoulos G.A.(2011), Museological claims to autonomous knowledge. Rethinking the conceptual mode and its claims to knowledge, Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference on Integrated Information (Kos Island), Piraeus, 169–171.
- Koulouri, Ch. (2002). The historiography of the modern Greek education. Sequels and breakings (1967-2002), Proceedings of the 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference “Modern Greece Historiography (1833-2002)”, Athens, vol. 1, pp. 496-510. [in Greek]
- Lumley, R. (1988). *The museum time machine*. London: Comedia/ Routledge Publisher.
- Markantonis, J. (1994). Museum in the future school, Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of Ethnographical Museums in the countries of the European Community, Athens, pp. 265-272. [in Greek]
- Mavroskoufis, K. (2005). The use of cinema as a historical source. Theoretical, methodological and practical issues. *Modern Education* (142), 95–107. [in Greek]
- Moniot, H. (2000). *The teaching of history*. Athens: Metaixmio Publishing. [in Greek]
- Papaconstantinou, Th. & Geladaki, S. (2001). *A Museum for education*. Athens: University of Athens Publishing. [in Greek]
- Papaconstantinou, Th., Dalkos, G. & Geladaki, S. (1997). The Athens University Museum for the History of Education as a research center. *University of Athens Journal «Presence»*, 11-12, 351–358. [in Greek]
- Popkewitz, Th. & Franklin, B. (Eds) (2000). *Cultural History of Education. Critical Essays on knowledge and schooling* (12<sup>th</sup> ed.). USA: Routledge Publisher.
- Pradel, P.G. (1987). Les Musées, in L’ Histoire et ses methods. *Encyclopédie de la Pleiades* (3rd ed.), 3, 83–132. Athens: MIET Publishing. [in Greek]
- Sadoul, G. (1988). La photographie et le cinema. *L’ Histoire et ses methods - Encyclopédie de la Pleiades* (3rd ed.), 2 (3), 11–26. Athens: MIET Publishing. [in Greek]
- Shuth-Hennigar, J. (1982). Teaching yourself to teach with objects. *Journal of Education*, 7 (4), 9–20.
- Tilden, F. (1957). *Interpreting our heritage*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press