

Policy Research Alert

FROM FLASH-IT, A DISSEMINATION PROJECT RELATING EUROPEAN POLICY PRIORITIES TO EU-FUNDED RESEARCH IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

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European Identity: Ripe for the Museum?

An inclusive identity is needed to foster social cohesion in a highly diverse Europe. As cultural institutions, museums have a vital role to play in building such an identity. With this in mind, EU-funded researchers are putting forth recommendations on how museums can address the needs of a heterogeneous society and help create a more “progressive sense of belonging”¹.

Seeing migration as Europe’s defining paradigm, the MeLa² consortium is examining how museums respond to the challenges posed by intensive migration flows. Included in the migration paradigm is the accelerated circulation of information, ideas and cultures taking place in the twenty-first century. Operating on the premise that museums play a crucial role in constructing Europe’s cultural identity, the researchers are working to identify innovative museum practices that support mutual understanding and inclusiveness. The project may be understood as part of a broader effort to draft a “New Narrative for Europe”³.

Although MeLa is not expected to issue its final results before 2015, it has already published an array of key findings that are publically available on the project website⁴. Suggested action points for museums include:

- Acknowledge the museum’s political position and potential to construct social values.
- Do not ignore oppositional voices; consider incorporating debates and antagonisms into the museum’s representation.
- Explore contemporary social differences and tensions by contextualising them historically within place.
- To counter xenophobic attitudes, present migration as a constant in human history.
- Improve opportunities for directors and curators of European museums to network and share ideas.

In addition to disseminating its findings via publications and workshops, MeLa is putting its insights into practice through experimental design actions. The project is currently preparing for “Transfigurations: Curatorial and artistic research in an age of Migrations”, an exhibition scheduled to open in June at MACBA, the museum of contemporary art in Barcelona.

¹ “RF01 – Museums & Identity in History and Contemporaneity” (electronic brochure) page 19; http://www.mela-project.eu/upl/cms/attach/20140407/151518005_9348.pdf

² MeLa: European Museums in an Age of Migrations

³ http://ec.europa.eu/debate-future-europe/new-narrative/index_en.htm

⁴ www.mela-project.eu