

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ethics in Action at the Refurbished Archaeological Museum of Ioannina, Epirus, Greece

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The first exhibition of the Archaeological Museum of Ioannina (northwestern Greece) was inaugurated in 1970, in a building designed by the Greek architect Aris Konstantinidis. The museum closed in 2003 in order to be refurbished. Five years later (2008), the new exhibition was completed following the latest museological trends with a focus on the education of a diverse public and with awareness of the museum's role as keeper of the collective memory.

This article deals with the application of the ICOM Code of Ethics in the refurbished Archaeological Museum of Ioannina. More specifically, it examines the way in which the museum's new exhibition applies display methods and undertakes educational activities in order to accomplish its role as an educational institution.

Keywords: museum; educational programs; organisation of exhibits

Introduction

Museums and their activities are an important part of global socio-cultural activities, and they will have greater prominence in the future. Museums can have an impact on both humankind and the ecosystem in positive ways. The means by which this challenge is met will depend on the ethical attitudes and practices of all museum personnel. Each member of the museum community has an opportunity to participate in establishing museum standards to serve as the base for the museum profession (Edson 1997: 36–37).

The ethical obligation of the museum's personnel to the public is outlined by the Code of Ethics adopted by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 1986, revised in 2004 (ICOM 2006). It includes the acquisition of artefacts, the politics of display, the rights of indigenous people, repatriation, the conservation of objects, the management of the museum and the role of education (Edson 2009: 6–7).

In Greece the legal framework for museums is established by article 45 of law 3028/2002. Museums are governed by internal regulations and are divided into state museums and museums established by or belonging to other legal persons. There is not a written Code of Ethics for museums in Greece, however, the most basic

principles of the ICOM Code of Ethics are followed. In this article, emphasis will be given to two basic principles for museum governance, using as a case study the Archaeological Museum of Ioannina (hereafter AMI) in Epirus (Northwestern Greece): displays - exhibitions and the educational role of the Museum.

A Brief Presentation of the AMI

The AMI is located in Ioannina, the capital city of Epirus, and houses archaeological objects from all over the region (**figure 1**). The museum was designed and built by the distinguished Greek architect Aris Konstantinidis in the early 1960s. The stone walls and stone structure that support concrete beams give the building a very strong architectural personality. Konstantinidis used a rigid grid pattern and a design methodology clearly indebted to modernism,



Fig. 1: The Archaeological Museum of Ioannina. View of west entrance.

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but combined modern design methods with a respect for climatic conditions and an interest for the environment that give the building a unique sensitive comprehension for material and light (Konstantinidis 1992: 37; Fillipidis 1997: 93–112; Cofano and Konstantinidis 2010).

The first exhibition was inaugurated in 1970 (Vokotopoulou 1973; Zachos 2008: 13–14; Kotjabopoulou and Vasileiou 2009: 97). It was divided into five halls where artefacts were displayed according to chronological order and excavated unit. The museum was not yet specialised and included archaeological finds from the entire Epirus region and a small modern art collection.

During 2003 to 2008 the AMI was completely refurbished in order to respond to contemporary needs. The project of 'Expansion and Modernization of the AMI' was part of the Operational Programme 'Culture' 2000–2006 of the 3rd European Community Support Framework, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

During the refurbishment of the AMI, display methods, objects and their surroundings were coordinated in a balanced and open dialectical relationship. Preserving the generic character of the old exhibition, the philosophy of the new one stressed its multi-cultural character through the peculiarities of the cultures which left their imprint in Epirus (Kotjabopoulou and Vasileiou 2009). Seven exhibition halls, a long corridor and three atria on the first level of the building, host nine thematic units dating from pre-history (200,000 BC) to the end of the Roman period (2nd c. AD). The units follow a chronological (prehistory (Hall 1), history (Halls 2–7)) and a thematic axis: *Prehistoric Epirus* (figure 2), *Political and Administrative Organisation of Epirus* (figure 3), *Aeacides, Kings of Molossians* (figure 4), *Everyday Life of the Epirotes* (figure 5), *The Archaeology of Death* (figure 6), *Roman Epirus* (figure 7), *The Sanctuary of Dodona* (figure 8), *Ancient Myths and New Cults* (figure 9a), and *Donations* (figure 9b).



Fig. 2: Prehistoric Epirus. Hall 1.

Ethics in Display and Exhibition

The exhibition is the main way through which a museum communicates with its public and for this reason it has to be meaningful (Singh 1997: 72–73). The exhibits, the surroundings, the colours, and the lighting should be coordinated in such a way that the visitors, irrespective of their educational background, can understand them.

In the AMI the museographical planning respects the museum's architecture in several ways. The exhibit units follow the grid of the building. The display cases are transparent and their height usually reaches the ceiling. They are placed in the centre or near the walls of the exhibition halls (Katsanika-Stefanou 2006). The materials used are also a key element of the exhibition design. The preference for glass, stone of neutral colour, and plexiglass expresses the museologist's principles of clearness and transparency.

The display is based on a chronological 'narration' and is linked each time with selected exhibit units in order to elaborate different historical events. In other words, in the course of the exhibition visitors are given the opportunity



Fig. 3: Political and Administrative Organisation of Epirus. Hall 2.



Fig. 4: Aeacides, kings of Molossians. Hall 3.



Fig. 5: Everyday life of the Epirotes. Hall 4.



Fig. 6: The Archaeology of Death. Hall 5.



Fig. 7: Roman Epirus. Hall 6.



Fig. 8: The Sanctuary of Dodona. Hall 7.

to engage with the objects and listen closely to the stories they unravel. For example, the tooth of a sylvan gracile rhinoceros (a remnant of the prey of Neanderthal groups or of a large carnivore), found on the banks of the Louros river and dates to almost 120,000 years ago, raises the question 'Who ate the rhinoceros?' (figure 10, Kotjabopoulou 2008: 10). The curators cannot answer the question with certainty, thus they prefer to give alternative

perspectives to the public. Four possible answers are provided from which visitors may freely choose the one that suits them best based on their personal preconceived data and expectations.

Another example comes from the display of artefacts from the 'Nekromanteion' (Oracle of the Dead) and especially its last section, entitled 'The last days of Nekromanteion' (figure 11). In this instance, standard narratives



Fig. 9: a) Ancient myths and new cults b) Donations. Central corridor of AMI.



Fig. 10: Palaeolithic showcase. Hall 1.



Fig. 11: 'The last days of Nekromanteion'. Hall 5.

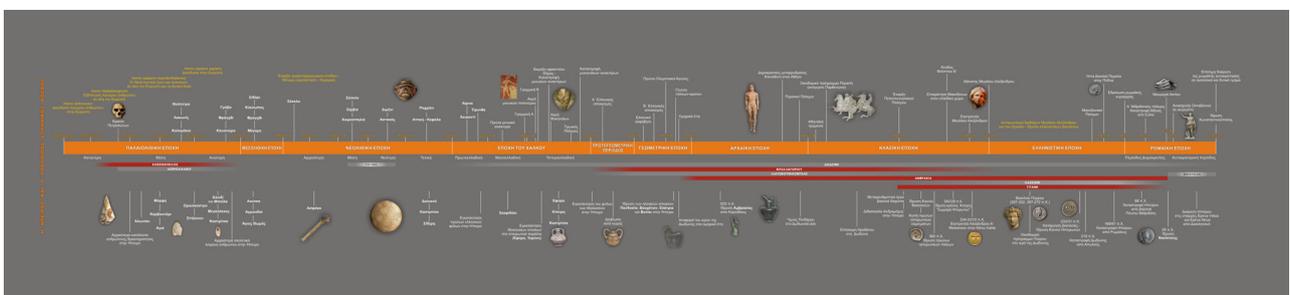


Fig. 12: Timeline at the beginning of the AMI's central corridor.

about the building's destruction (Dakaris 1993; Faklari 2008: 117–125) are challenged and alternative interpretations are suggested through the display of a catapult's cast in natural scale. This caused a great ethical dilemma for the curators. According to the excavator of the site, Sotirios Dakaris, (considered to be the founder of Epirotic Archaeology) the building operated as an Oracle of the Dead. But how can one explain the discovery of metal artefacts belonging to seven different siege machines? Should the curators have respected Dakaris' opinion and not refer to a different interpretation that identifies the building complex with a fortified farm? They preferred to be objective and honest by following a middle ground. The display units and texts are merely suggestive, providing all the data available to the visitors who are actually invited to reconstruct the past themselves.

Subsidiary material in the form of introductory, group and label texts, maps, diagrams, photographs, and two and three-dimensional reproductions is used to explain the exhibits. The timeline at the beginning of the museum's corridor underlines the specific and discrete characteristics of Epirus (Hammond 1967: 3–18) in comparison with the rest of Greece so that the visitors can conceive the 'parallel histories' of ancient Epirotes and of their contemporaries in southern Greece (figure 12). The detailed maps of Epirus help the visitors to immediately submerge into the region's geography (Kalpakis 2010). Mountains divide Epirus into two large geomorphological regions: a coastal lowland and a mountainous hinterland, settled by a number of small tribes struggling for the formation of their cultural identities. The aforementioned division is reflected in the multifaceted story of the Epirotes from



Fig. 13: 'Magic in the oracular tablets of Dodona' educational programme. September 2010.



Fig. 14: Making pots for drinking and eating with earth and water. March 2012.

the prehistoric period to the present. Inland populations inhabited unfortified villages and were engaged in stock-breeding, while coastal people lived in cities founded by settlers from Corinth and Elis, and practiced fishing, trade and farming (Pliakou 2008: 67–89).

In several instances, due to the scarcity of data, the curators had to decide whether it was scientifically correct and moral to use ethnographic material in the form of black and white pictures to fill the gap of the archaeological record. Great discussion has been made regarding the use of ethnographic data in interpreting the past (Binford 1968: 268–273; Stiles 1977: 87–103; Gould 1978: 249–293; Hayter 1994: 39–49). The AMI's curators used contemporary pictures in three instances, based on the belief that humans draw upon what is known or can be observed in order to understand the unknown. They had no intention of promoting cultural continuity between the present and the past. The picture of a flock of sheep inside the showcase of 'Everyday life in the mountains of Epirus' helps the visitor to understand that the first unit of the showcase refers to husbandry in the mountainous villages as few relics of its practice have survived (mainly bones). Next to it the picture of a coppersmith behind a group of bronze vases sheds light to the way they were manufactured. Finally, the silent lamentation of black-clad women in historical times in a photo at the entrance of the Burial Custom's hall conveys the feeling of mourning and creates an evocative atmosphere.

Ethics and the Educational Role of the Museum

The museum should take every opportunity to develop its role as an educational resource used by all sections of the population or specialised group that the museum is intended to serve (ICOM 2006: 2.6).

Bearing in mind that nowadays the museum functions as a meeting place for different social and age groups, the curators of the AMI plan and realise educational activities tailored to suit the needs of different visitor categories (children of primary and secondary schools, youths and adults). Programmes are age orientated, and give emphasis to the promotion of the local history through the exhibits

of the museum. Due to the fact that Epirus is a not thoroughly excavated region and that the references to its history in schoolbooks are scanty, curators take advantage of every means that they have at their disposal (exhibits, texts, photos, movies and 3D representations).

A priority has been given to programmes for school children since they constitute the largest group among museum visitors (**figure 13**, Katsadima and Vasileiou 2011). Each programme is developed for specific ages, taking into account the vocabulary, comprehension level and social manner of the group (Edson and Dean 1994: 193). For example, the three programmes of the AMI ('Birds and animals in the AMI', 'Naiades, Nymphs sing at the river's bank' and 'Plants in the AMI') designed for young children are based on their ability to observe and on the knowledge present in children's books and television programmes or movies. Archaeological information is limited to the absolutely necessary and it is transferred using simple words and minimal terminology. The main aim of all the activities is to create a friendly and warm environment for the children in order to make them feel cosy and acquainted with the museum.

On another level, the activity 'Making pots for drinking and eating with earth and water', designed for children of secondary school age, focuses on the hands-on experience (**figure 14**). Students have the opportunity to touch authentic clay shards of the Neolithic period from the storerooms of the museum. The fact that children get to interact with the real objects gives them pleasure and a motive for more interactive learning.

Furthermore, the organisation of temporary exhibitions empowers the educational dimension of the museum. In 2010 the AMI hosted the temporary exhibition 'Alexander the Great. From Macedonia to the Edge of the World' (**figure 15**). All the coins displayed in the exhibition belonged to the Alpha Bank Numismatic Collection and outlined the history of Alexander the Great's coinage, as well as its effect on the ancient world even after his death. The history of Alexander the Great and his successors is included in the fourth grade curriculum of elementary schools in Greece. In this period, reference is also made to the history of the most important king of Epirus, Pyrrhus. He acted at the period of Alexander's



Fig. 15: Temporary exhibition, 'Alexander the Great. From Macedonia to the edge of the world', AMI, May - October 2010.

successors and, motivated by Alexander's example (to whom he was related by blood), he tried unsuccessfully to conquer the West. Prompted by the fact that in the AMI a hall is devoted in Aeakides, kings of Molossians and Pyrrhus, the curators designed the educational activity 'From Alexander to Pyrrhus. The Great Adventure in the East and the West'. Their thinking was that nothing will be more educational for children than learning history through their interaction with findings related immediately to the era under study. Findings have the ability to reify the often-vague textbook description and enhance school effort. Children have the opportunity to compare the deeds of the two great Kings and get emotionally engaged as they access information through the senses (Hartinger 2001: 332).

Conclusion

From considering all of the above, it should by now be clear that display and exhibition methods, as well as educational programmes in the AMI, follow the basic principles posed by the ICOM Code of Ethics. Through them the museum is able to fulfil its educative role. The way the artefacts are presented and interpreted through questions, familiar vocabulary, photos, diagrams and charts show respect to the visitor's personal beliefs and expectations (Edson and Dean 1994: 190). At the same time displays trigger the visitor's imagination and encourage the expression of thoughtful conclusions.

Regarding the educational programmes, their organisation is based on the fact that the museum was, is and will be an educational institution where free choice learning takes place (Falk 2001). Creative learning (Csikzentmihalyi and Hermanson 1995: 36) is achieved through the interaction between children and the ancient objects, the organisation of activities based on discovery (e.g. treasure hunting) and interaction methods and the exploitation of their senses. Most recently, the focus of the AMI's curators has shifted to expanding learning to other groups of visitors (aged people and people with special needs) in order to fulfil the task to 'attract wider audiences from the community, locality or group they serve' (ICOM 2006: 8).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Victoria Ferentinou for polishing my English. I owe special thanks to Dr Konstantinos Zachos, former Director of the 12th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, who trusted me and gave me the opportunity to participate in the refurbishment project of the Archaeological Museum of Ioannina.

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How to cite this article: Vasileiou, E 2014 Ethics in Action at the Refurbished Archaeological Museum of Ioannina, Epirus, Greece. *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies*, 12(1): 3, pp. 1-7, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/jcms.1021212>

Published: 10 March 2014

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