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**Mediators of Cultural Heritage: Cooperation Between Craftsmen and Museums**

Marke Teppor, Agnes Aljas

Recent discussions about the social functions of museums have highlighted a new paradigm in museology shifting the focus of museum activities from objects and collections to human beings and community. Contemporary museum is expected to develop openness and community awareness, a museum should be ready and willing to communicate with its visitors and spur discussion on issues that are important to the society.

 Openness sets new conditions for museum communications: the result and impact of open discussions must be convertible into new perceivable values. In day-to-day practical work solutions are sought by organizing interactive exhibitions, expanding activities into the internet and by creating various forms of participation for different target groups. Museums seek to translate the knowledge they have collected and created into the language that can be understood by the visitors and public at large. On the other hand museums seek to create a platform for public discussion, participating both as a moderator and as an authority. Museums have to compete for the attentiveness of potential customers (DiMaggio 1985, quoted through Falk 2009) with entertainment world and have therefore to find new fascinating and intriguing ways evoking exchange of thoughts and taking at the same time into consideration the anticipation and expectations of its visitors and community.

 The question is how to turn communication with the audience into an integral part of day-to-day museum work, which would help not only to implement the budget but also to obtain essential goals. What would be the value derived from the new openness and dialogue? For Estonian National Museum (hereinafter referred to as ENM) the answer was found with the help of the contest "My Favorite Item in the Collections of Estonian National Museum" (hereinafter referred to as "My Favorite"). The analysis of this contest demonstrates what the relationship between ENM and craftsmen and the attitude of the community towards cooperation and communication with the museum is. The article is based on Master's thesis "Possibilities of cultural participation on the basis of relationship between ENM and craftsmen" by Marke Teppor defended in the University of Tartu Institute of Journalism and Communication, in which the attitudes of a target group of craftsmen and their willingness to contribute to attainment of the goals of the museum were analyzed.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Photo 1. Second place in the contest "My Favorite Item in the Collections of Estonian National Museum" in the category of new items inspired by an authentic museum piece. Above the source of inspiration - Mittens from Saarde parish (ERM A 564:1513), below a contest project - socks made by Virge Inno

Marke Teppor conducted semi-structured interviews with 9[[2]](#footnote-2) participants of the contest investigating the expectations and attitudes of the craftsmen towards ENM.[[3]](#footnote-3) In addition contest projects and their descriptions and contest-related mailings in blogs of the participants and in [www.Isetegija.net](http://www.Isetegija.net) forum were analyzed.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Contest "My Favorite Item in the Collections of Estonian National Museum"**

The Estonian National Museum organized from 22nd of Dec 2010 till 31st of March 2011 a contest "My Favorite", the target group being craftsmen, who are in the context of this article considered a community. ENM was interested how craftsmen react to the call to find from the collections of the ENM a congenial museum piece and make an identical copy of it or a new item inspired by the piece. Museum’s goal was thus to introduce to the craftsmen the vast databases of museum collections in the Internet. The participants were expected to find new meanings and usage ways for the original museum items. Through introducing web-based databases the museum hoped to activate the use of folk culture collections and expand it beyond well-known museum pieces.

 Craftsmen were given an opportunity to choose pieces from the ENM permanent exhibition "Estonia. Land, People, Culture.", from the ENM object and archival collections and from web-based databases: from the Museums Public Portal ([www.muis.ee](http://www.muis.ee)), from the ENM Portal of carpets (vaibad.erm.ee) and from various publications. The contest was organized by Marke Teppor and two members of the staff of ENM. Information about the contest was distributed mainly via the handicraft forum [www.Isetegijad.net](http://www.Isetegijad.net), and via handicraft related newsletters and periodicals. Contest projects were to be sent by post latest by 31st of March. The other option was to upload photos of the object to the contest portal "Our stories" on website http://omalood.planet.ee/ minu-lemmik/. So the contest project was either an item or a photo and description of an item with reference to the original museum piece from the collections of the ENM. The contest works could be seen in the Internet, where also news about the contest was constantly updated (the homepage of ENM, Isetegijad.net and kullaketrajad.net).

47 craftsmen entered the contest, 37 of them presented a time and labor-consuming handmade item. En total 41 projects were presented: 8 in a category of authentic items and 33 in a category of inspired ones.

The most common answer to the question about reasons of entering the contest was related with the motivation to test one's skills.

*I am a self taught person. And thus I thought that it is a good opportunity to test myself. It coincides with my interests, anyway, I have already visited Estonian National Museum to see their collection of dishes, it is good to have such specific task with set timeline, so I thought to give it a try and see whether something comes out of it or not. /.../ it is just such a challenge. I did not enter so much to compete, winning some place was not a major issue for me, and it was totally irrelevant. I am simply happy that I managed to fulfill the task I set myself. (N 4, 21–34*)[[5]](#footnote-5)

The authority of ENM was mentioned as one of the key motivators to enter the contest. At the same time the importance of the museum as keeper and interpreter of national heritage and its initiative to seek cooperation with common hobbyists was acknowledged.

*It is great that an institution which is so important ...and famous all over Estonia... organizes a contest.... well what can I say... would it had been anybody else, I probably wouldn't have participated.* (N 1, 35–49)

*This is the thing with ENM, that when you tie yourself with this trade mark... then even in other places you would probably get a little "credit confidence", if I may put it that way.* (N 4, 21–34)

Most of the participants in the contest were previously familiar with the collections of ENM, so for them surfing in the internet databases and finding favorites was a well known activity. One of the most important participation motivators was seeking recognition - participation and exhibiting their work might draw attention and the item might finally end up in ENM collections.

*Well, I don't really think about prize or money or so. It is that generally the first place gets all the money, isn't it. The number of participants might be 50 - 100 or so... Everybody can just not win /.../. But if you end up in the bunch of the first ten, then the exhibition is still very important for you. /.../ But if I am just a handicraft hobbyist, I am not really getting to participate in any exhibitions, right? (N 1, 35–49)*

So prizes or money could not be considered as motivators for participation, although the Grand Prize - a gift certificate of 65 Euros to cover expenses of copying ENM collections, was considered to be of worth. Although the name of ENM added impressiveness to the contest, the other aspects related to ENM can't also be underestimated (being perhaps even of a greater importance) - like vast collections of ENM, the possibility of participating in the exhibition of ENM, former personal experience with the ENM, and last but not least - a reputable jury. The handicraft items were evaluated in April and May by a jury that consisted of Reet Piiri (ENM), Age Raudsepp (ENM), Kersti Habakukk (handicraft forum Isetegija.net), Kristi Jõeste (TU Viljandi Culture Academy) and Liina Tomasberg (Estonian Folk Art and Craft Union). The winners were announced on the National Costume Day on the 28nd of May. The works assessed as best by the jury stood out as innovative, creative and having modern application (usage) value.

Technical implementation was also assessed.[[6]](#footnote-6)

 Several participants valued highly the presence of a reputed jury. General opinion was that a jury consisting of persons who are well-know and highly valued in handicraft world, will keep the standards of the contest high and guarantee that only persons with very good handicraft skills participate. Furthermore - a Jury consisting of professionals adds credibility (reliability) to the contest: the competence of Jury members helps to rule out subjectivity and guarantees at least to a certain extent objectivity of assessment of the presented works. On the other hand - the reverence for the jury may have reduced the circle of participants because many of the handicraft hobbyists considered their skills to be too modest for the contest.

 The exhibition of contest works (both of items sent by post and uploaded photos) was opened till 26th of June 2011 in the Exhibition House of ENM. The jury picked out 4 works, which it recommended to be included in the collections of ENM.[[7]](#footnote-7) The photos and descriptions of all contest works were linked in the data system of the Museum with records of the original items adding thus contemporary approach and interpretation to original historical items.

**The experts and networks of Cultural Heritage**

By communicating with the public at large or with its audience in a narrower sense the museum faces a question, what is its role in this dialogue. The interviewees saw quite unambiguously that the museum’s goal is to serve as a preserver (guardian) and mediator of Estonian identity.

*Their (ENM's) goal from the very beginning is to collect and guard Estonian folk art, handicrafts, items related to Estonian history, Estonian stories. In short: to guard stories, knowledge and items reflecting Estonian identity and to make them accessible for everybody. (N. 3, 35–49)*

By tradition museum is an authority and investigator, retaining this position in its communication with the public, remaining at the same time elitist and hard to comprehend for its visitors. Museums are taken as experts and this is also the attitude of the community of handicraftsmen. ERM is regarded as an expert of folk culture, whose task is to collect, to preserve and to know, and who at the same time is an authoritative interpreter and thus opposed to smaller exhibitions held elsewhere:

*Those village exhibitions and so are really cool and all and its great isn't it. But this ENM may be totally other quality of knowledge, another quality after all, I believe.*

*(N 5, 21–34)*



Photo 2. Winning work in a category of recreating an authentic object. Andrus Kunnus "Cooking grid for Baltic Herring".



Photo 3. Third place in a category of recreating an authentic object. Kadri Vissel „Carpet from Vastseliina parish“.



Photo 4. Special award in a category of recreating an authentic object. Aivi Miilits „The Book“.

The museums authority and position as an expert can however be questioned. First of all the museum has to make choices about what to collect and which topics to investigate. You can always question how grounded these choices are, why one option is preferred to the other and what is the basis of valuation (Runnel, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt 2010: 124). How to deal with whatever is left outside the collection policy and how justified are the choices within the collection policy? In other words: there is always a question about objectivity of the activities and choices of the museum, let alone the issue of sufficient resources to process the information collected.

Museums have by tradition controlled the meaning and value of heritage and issues of identity and past (Heijnen 2010:13). The position of a museum is by nature evaluative, expressing and depicting rather certain standpoints than possible interpretations and opinions. Therefore a museum that is closed for a dialogue or controls it strongly, sets limits to its activities and meaningfulness (significance).

Pierre Nora (Nora 1984−1992, referred through van Mench 2003: 8) has added a new concept the "sites of memory" (*lieux de mémoire*) to the classification of museology schools, marking thus "the anchorage of collective memory". These sites of anchorage may include all sites and objects (and concepts) that act as triggers of memory processes and form a part of institutionalized Cultural Heritage being however not musealized. Every community (group of persons) in a society has such kind of network; those networks are an alternative to the traditional museology, showing that the choices of the professionals are by far rather random (van Mench 2003). Furthermore: in addition to museums there are several institutions taking care of preservation and usage of Cultural Heritage with similar functions and goals and following similar values (protection, public access and social goals) forming a network of Cultural Heritage (Gee 1995, referred through van Mench2003: 10–12).



Photo 5. Winning work in the category of new items inspired by an authentic museum piece. Airi Gailit "Striped fabrics dyed with mushrooms".

 Various communities bearing Cultural Heritage can also be considered as a part of this network. In the light (context) of this article, a good example is the virtual community of handicraft hobbyists Isetegijad, which has large scale activities and contributes to preservation and guarding Cultural Heritage and relevant information and knowledge in virtual environment. In the context of the theory of Cultural Heritage Network the forum of Isetegija and / or any other active village handicraft club or society can be considered as an equal partner to ENM and at the same time as an inseparable part of one and the same Cultural Heritage fabric. Participants in the contest also see their activities as an integral part of Cultural Heritage, promoting folk culture and handicrafts and deserving a place in the collections of the ENM:

*At the same time I really do not know, are they going to buy, for example as Art Museum buys paintings from the artists, maybe they should also buy contemporary items [ENM]. Take this contest, I made this rug after pattern of this carpet, they could for example purchase it from me and put on display, that everyone can see, yes, this kind of rug was made in that year....*

*(N 1, 35–49)*

It is obvious that a museum can preserve, describe and put on display only a small part of a surrounding world and our cultural space and there are plenty of other alternatives for preserving and maintaining Cultural Heritage. The question is always in choices, the question being what and to which extent to preserve. The interviewees even expressed an opinion that instead of contemporary handicraft the museum might collect modern day-to-day clothing made in China!

Museum, its collections and values are most appreciated by those, who are in close contact with it. However it is probably not correct to state, that persons who are not in contact with museums do not have anything to do with the Cultural Heritage. Cultural heritage is as diverse as are the ways of its preservation, propagation and conceptualization. Museum plays an important role in preservation and introduction of Cultural Heritage, but it can only succeed in this task acknowledging, that it is only a part in the Cultural Heritage network - there are other "sites of memory" with which it needs cooperate.

In this way it is it easier for the museum to stand out in the society, extend its communication field and keep alive the Cultural Heritage.

The "My favorite" contest is just an example how a museum can share its position as an expert and interpretation possibilities of its collections with a targeted community.

Photo 6. Third place in the category of new items inspired by an authentic museum piece. Elge Aas "Felted hat"

For this purpose the community of craft makers is a thankworthy target group, they see the museum as a strong expert and professional institution, which inspires them to perform at equal level:

*Well, what I can say about the contest of Isetegija forum.... It is such a contest of do-it-yourselfers, to which works of diverse level are presented. It is that... well, assessment is done not by professionals but rather by the members of the forum, a commission or a bunch of people is selected from the members and they judge...*

*It’s not so professional, maybe. It’s more like a civil initiative, I recon.*

*But the ENM contest is to my opinion a contest organized by professionals. Those inspired items, and then there was this carpet - a copy of an authentic item, the photo of which seemed very professional to me. Just maybe it is easier for most people to enter the Isetegija contest; they feel freer to do that. /.../. With the contest of ENM it's more complicated. You would probably think twice about whether you are capable to making something worthy to present to that contest.(N 3, 35–49)*

While museum is seen as a partner, the interviews indicated clearly, that for craft makers the museum has the monopoly of truth when it comes to quality, interpretation and approach, thus opposed to handicraft forums and local initiatives. This is moreover stressed by respectful (deferential) attitude towards collections: craft makers agree with strict storage conditions of original items and accept the fact, that their use is restricted:



Photo 7. Special award for using leather in the category of new items inspired by an authentic museum piece. Egge Edusaar "Handi bag"

*Yeah, I know how fragile is this several hundred years old sleeve, you just can't bring it out many times a year, when one comes to draw it and then again another and....(N 5, 21–34)*

*I saw in what shape everything is there and the storage conditions are not so good either. I don't think everybody just coming from the street can go inside and wander to those shelves. But if somebody is really interested and calls beforehand and then turns up, then he or she should really see, what is of interest and this opportunity is there, already.(N 4, 21–34)*

At the same time the craftsmen still oppose themselves to the ordinary people and consider being kind of experts due to their knowledge and experience.

**Possibilities and goals of participation**

The above findings enable to analyze the possibilities of cultural participation in museum communications.

Museum can through participation reveal its essence (nature), activities and collections to visitors and/or users; create dialogue (communication) and aggregate people with interest in similar topics.

American museologist Nina Simon, who has analyzed the day-to-day practice of museums (2010), classifies participation forms based on how many essential functions the museum is prepared to share. The role of a museum varies in different forms of participation being at times bigger and at times smaller.

Unlike in the conventional models describing participation in democratic processes (Citizens...2001; International.....2007)[[8]](#footnote-8), Simon finds that establishing hierarchy is not justified in the context of museums, in her opinion the different forms of participation complement each other and depend on the goals and possibilities of the museum. It is however possible to distinguish how profound participation experience can be achieved through different participation possibilities developed by the museum.

Simon (2010:26) has named this "me to we" design, explaining the development of visitors’ participation experience from personal to communal interactions using a 5 stage model.

The foundation of all stages is content, variables are how visitors interact with content and how the content helps them to connect socially with other people (Simon 2010: 26–27)...

Stage one provides visitors with access to the content that they seek, stage two provides an opportunity for inquiry and for visitors to take action and ask questions, stage three lets visitors see where their interests and actions fit in the wider community of visitors to the institution, stage four helps visitors to connect with particular people—staff members or other visitors. Only stage five makes the entire institution feel like a social place, full of potentially interesting, challenging, enriching encounters with other people.

Photo 8. Mareli Rannap "Rug from Karja", inspired by a sleight or carriage blanket from Karja parish made by Olga Janno (ERM A 652:43).

This means that in order to change a cultural institution into a social hub you need to involve individuals and support their communal interactions.



Photo 9. Tiina Toomet "Bowls", inspired by a bowl from the collections of ENM (above and to the right) (ERM A 644:64).

The contest "My favorite in the collections of ENM" is a participation action allowing participants an access to museum's content, providing them with a possibility to interpret museum collections from their own point of view and to communicate with museum staff.

Participants actions have in turn influence on museum staff (opening new perspectives), on museum collections (on specific items, which get contemporary meanings and are connected to original items).

One of the keywords in the process of creating participation possibilities is a design, which determines how participation works preferably so, that it fits cooperation with targeted group. Environment and design are essential both in physical and virtual world of the museum. A good example of participation in physical environment was the possibility of commentating photos during the exhibition "In hundred steps..." (See more Runnel, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt 2010: 125).[[9]](#footnote-9) Wider audience can be attracted by museums e-Environment, which is flexible and interactive (see previous: 119). Participants in the contest admit, that digitalization of museum items and public data basis have created much better ways of investigating museum's collections, the access to the collections is improved providing a possibility to do groundwork before visiting the museum.

*For example this collection of carpets is pretty great, there are all these photos and you can see, what is there available..* (N 1, 35–49)

*That the person who uses Museums Public Portal, so is it possible to get real survey of the item, that is enough to decide whether there is a need to see it or not... So groundwork can be done where it is convenient.*

*And if there still is an need to go and see the item, there is no need to waste the time of museum staff to only start pondering over there, what is that I want and to order, say, tens of items.* (N 3, 35–49)

E-Environment plays an increasingly strategic role in offering participation. Runnel and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt (2010: 119–120) point out that the main potential of e-Environment in addition to the possibility of access to the content is the possibility to create a content that may supplement and enrich the existing collections and at the same time add new content to digitalized collections, helping thus to create a common communication field embracing both museum and its visitors. Contest "My favorite" is a good example of that, for the participants were willing to share their knowledge and experiences with the museum. Quite a few interviewed craft makers shared their opinions and experiences about how to improve the display of objects in digital databases and offered their help with digitalization and adding to the databases:

*If you need to learn a certain technique, the left sidebar is very informative. It is the same with textiles or for example wooden objects - you can turn this stool upside down. You can open the doors of this cupboard to see, what's in it. /…/*

*I have nothing to give them, not a single item to donate to the museum that would be of interest for others. But well, if participate in the contests and use for inspiration some of the object just for my own use, and send information about it to the, which may suit them /…/*

*And well, it would certainly be good to test the use of their digital databases. (N 3, 35–49)*

*I think this is pretty cool, that once I have drawn some item from there and I could upload it somehow, well, there should be an option on the ENM website where to upload this, people work, sort of free of charge... If she has this pattern at home, why wouldn't she upload it.... And ENM would check it and approve it is of the correct standard and it could be uploaded, then their staff wouldn't have so much work...*

*Yeah, it could be that way. The more you have in internet, so you can search for patterns and other things, the better, I think. /.../. Well it may be in the internet, if this is of good quality and may be also for charge, so that you pay a little something and can use it. (N 1, 21–34)*

To create a functioning e-Environment, the users should be understood by potential ways of participation. Simon (2010: 8) states that it is common to concentrate on providing just one way of participation: to create a new content. According to classification made by Forrester Research (2011) there are even 7 ways of contribution in e-Environment, especially in social media, and 7 types of users respectively.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Based on the information of Forrester Research [10] it is obvious that one person falls usually into several user categories and that creators form only a small part of social media users. The role of second type (conversationalists) is significantly larger.

This typology is valid also for museums. Simon admits in her comments to the typology that the number of creators among the visitors of the museum is small and this has to be taken into consideration, when creating participation opportunities both in internet and in physical environment (2010: 9). Many people will never become creators and prefer to participate in other ways - criticizing, organizing content, commentating, rating, etc (Simon 2010: 9).

When creating a participation action it is essential to think of the ways to make participation possible. Concentrating on creators only will narrow the circle of possible participants from the start. Participation in a time- and effort-consuming contest like "My favorite" can never be as active as any action which requires just choosing between categories "Like" "Don't like" in the internet.

 The effective use of E-Environment by a museum requires a good knowledge of its working principles and museum's auditorium and this is not so simple in practice.

In the context of this article the discussion of Runnel and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt (2010: 123) about practice of using internet environment and possible barriers of using it is of great interest. The authors have pointed out that people’s participation is usually concentrated on day-to-day life, and as museums are very seldom part of it, the e-Environments created by the museums remain usually outside the common internet routes of the users. In e-Environment it is important to familiarize people with Cultural Heritage through collections, an interpretation and reuse possibility of Cultural Heritage (Runnel, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt 2010:123). The courage of participants to express their opinion is for sure reduced by the fact, that museum is perceived as a professional expert. On the other hand the staff members may turn out to be an obstacle too, among them there is a continuous concern that due to digitalization and transferring activities to e-Environment the real museum experiences are left behind (become insignificant). This concern is not supported by the interviews with handicraft hobbyists - quite on the contrary, it is rather obvious that habits of using the collections are not about to vanish:

*I think it shouldn't be like that, that you just go and take from the selves of boxes whatever you like and use it in the way you like.*

*I should be possible to open them a lot or a bit less, so that the objects are not harmed, but still the people could see them at certain conditions.*

*I think that this Museum Public Portal is like a digitalized museum and nobody can see these originals any more - this might just not be enough /.../*

*Take for example the embroidery of sleeves of national costumes - you don't see what materials are used.*

*You can't see on a photo was it done by silk, linen or woolen thread.* (N 3, 35–49)

Although Internet and the New Media enable museums to find new auditoriums and implement new kinds of participation practices, the physical environment of the museum, its diverse range of opportunities, its flexible, inventive, elaborate and purposeful use still play an essential role in museums activities.

Museum experience is influenced by both physical and virtual environment, which largely complement each other and require for better realization of their synergy, a skillful and creative designer, who realizes the expectations of visitors.

**Participation practices as a field of communication.**

We analyze subsequently what kind of possibilities did the cooperation in form of contest offer and what kind of social interaction (communication) really took place between ENM and craft makers.

The contest "My favorite" helped to understand how the common communication field between ENM and craft makers and their communal interactions were formed (see drawing 1). Communication lies in a wide social and cultural context, which influences the flow of information both for the museum and handcrafters.

The experiences, attainments, interests, goals and expectations of handicraft hobbyists are developed in interaction with goals, roles and information of ENM (incl. collections).

This article sets its focus on the contest "My favorite" as a communication act directed from ENM to craftsmen.



Drawing 1. *Model of a communication field*

The most important data carriers on the communication field are collections, digital databases, staff members of ENM, publications and exhibitions (including permanent exhibition of the museum). The collections contain information about Cultural Heritage, digital databases mediate collections and publications, exhibitions and members of ENM staff both mediate collections and provide interpretations of Cultural Heritage based on research work.

Interviews with handicraft hobbyists confirmed, that for them collections are the core of ENM, all other activities of the museum are of secondary significance.

*Well, I think these (collections) are important to all people. For there is so large amount of Estonian history. And so wonderful items. It is like our common necessity. Not only the necessity of handcrafters on historians. /…/*

*Research, publication, and organization of exhibitions.... it is nice, that this is done for ordinary people and handicraftsmen. So that people, who don't do research have access and I can go and see myself. It is like very much positive. (N 4, 21–34)*

Museum has to take into account that the driving force of handicraft hobbyists in their communication with the museum is their personal interest in handicrafts.

Handicraft hobbyists participating in the contest weren't random visitors - they are very interested in ENM collections. They want the collections to be easily accessible and easy to use, they are aware of different possibilities how to find information about the museum pieces (for example from ENM publications and website of the museum. Participants noticed shortcomings of digital databases and were able to compare these with other ones.

The analysis of Isetegija forum in internet showed clearly, that the participants in the ENM handicraft contest are willing to share their knowledge - they provided references, recommended ENM publications and ENM experts to those, who were not so experienced.

This indicates that handicraft hobbyists are potentially important mediators of ENM information and make it possible for the museum to broaden its communication field and reach a wider audience not only virtually but also physically in various Estonian regions:

*Well I thought /…/ that sometimes /…/ these contests /…/ have helped to find partners. In the sense that in spite we are a small country, you just can't reach everywhere, but if you have somebody on the spot, then the information can be passed on via partners or people...(N 2, 21–34)*

The interviewees confirm that handicraft hobbyists are ready for purpose- and meaningful cooperation with the museum. They are interested in cooperation and consider this useful. Different cooperation ideas were proposed starting from participation in contests like "My favorite" to making copies for the museum, preparing pattern sheets and drawings and also participating in creating content for databases and testing their user friendliness.

At the same time for handicraft hobbyists ENM is an active part of the cooperation, they admitted that a fruitful cooperation can develop only when interests and goals of both parties are taken into account. This aspect has to be considered when planning participation communication. We may assume that the more specific a target group is, the larger contribution is expected and therefore it is even more important to offer participation that is intriguing and fascinating. The goals and gains of both parties have to be apparent and transparent.

Still, providing possibilities for cultural participation should not turn to ends in itself (goals per se) for the museum. Participation projects without goal should be avoided - there is no use in acquisition of results which don't add to museum collections and remain a meaningless noise on the field of communication. The goal should rather be producing meaningful information enriching both museum and community and easily accessible for both parties in form of knowledge and experience. Analysis of interpretation ways of museum pieces by participants of the contest indicated that handicraft hobbyists could act as valuable mediators and interpreters of museum information into contemporary language doing it in the way, that is not possible for the museum.

For the higher purpose is the same both for handcrafters and the museum: raising awareness about folk culture and keeping it alive.

*Surely contests of this kind help to keep these handicraft techniques alive and make them more popular /…/. For the reason that traditional handicraft techniques have vanished and not handed down from generation to generation. This tradition is broken in families and at school. Surely contests of this kind help to keep these handicraft techniques alive and make them more popular. /…/ not many people can copy the authentic piece mostly due to elaborate techniques. (N 3, 35–49)*

  

Drawing 2. *Communication of Cultural Heritage through process of interpretation*.

Information moves from museum to handcrafter and through interpretation of latter to the society bearing both original information and the one added in the process of interpretation.

This information enriched in the process of communication, returns back to the museum and a new circle may begin. At the same time it is important to understand that while museum's interpretation strategies of Cultural Heritage are based on scientific research and knowledge, the handicraft hobbyist have a more creative approach interpreting the heritage in ways not used in museums practice.

Both strategies complement each other.

It is therefore essential for the museum to establish well-functioning cooperation with handcrafters and make this cooperation visible in the society.

For handcrafters interpretation is a process of communication, during which they find and recreate through their work the meaning and values of heritage bringing it to contemporary context and making it comprehensible for modern auditorium.

There are three important dimensions of interpreting authentic pieces: patterns, material and technique. All three are subordinate to the idea and goal set by the creator, enable to create new meanings and tell the story in a unique way appropriate for the moment.

There are endless variations within the frame and in between of these three dimensions.

Mittens are not just mittens but tell through pattern, material and accomplishment a story containing "storyteller's" experiences, meanings and values.

The works of handicraft hobbyist speak to us not only in visual language, for in addition to aesthetic value they can actually be used in day-to-day life.

**Summary**

Museum’s daily activities are more than ever connected with involving visitors and communities in processes of interpretation and creation of Cultural Heritage.

The goal of museum communication is to create a public space for dialogue and discussions which requires good understanding of potential auditorium and participants and ability of taking their expectations into consideration. Analysis of contributing participation practices shows, that these are usually connected with people’s daily life. At the same time the interpretation of Cultural Heritage is very seldom a part of day-to-day life. It is therefore very essential to cooperate with communities, whose everyday activities include dealing with Cultural Heritage.

This article analyzed on basis of interviews carried out with participants of the ENM contest "My favorite piece from the Collections of ENM" targeted to handicraft hobbyists, which are the expectations and attitudes of the community towards the museum and how they see their role as mediators of Cultural Heritage. The "My favorite" contest is just one example on basis of which we can analyze museum's role as an expert and possibilities of sharing interpretation possibilities with the public.

Contest "My favorite from the collections of ENM" indicates that the community of handicraft hobbyists and ENM are deeply connected. Craft makers are a direct target group for the museum and use widely its collections. The participants' knowledge about the activities of ENM and particularly about the collections is higher than average. The development of cooperation must take into account motivators that make people to participate in museum's activities and at the same time also the characteristics of the communication field, i.e. what are its attributes and impact factors.

An essential motivator for each participation act is creation of a platform from which the willingness of participants to share their knowledge and experiences begins. The contest was targeted at *creators*, who took on to a time- and effort-consuming task to make a copy of an authentic piece from ENM collections or a new piece inspired by an original object.

The Analysis indicated that the key motivator for participation in the contest was personal - to test one's skills, to draw attention to one's work in an exhibition, a hope that one's work will be selected to ENM Collections.

ENM’s reputation as an authority in the field of Cultural Heritage was another important motivator. Cooperation with the museum is evaluated as a matter of honor.

Traditionally museums are considered to be experts of interpretation of Cultural Heritage, this was confirmed by interviewees. Museum is seen as a partner, but also as an institution having monopoly of truth concerning the quality of presented items and ways of new interpretation of old pieces. Museum's point of view is opposed to that of handicraft forums and personal initiative.

At the same time the handicraft hobbyists see themselves as important mediators of Cultural Heritage forwarding the narratives of heritage to further auditoriums. They are creators of Cultural Heritage and spokesmen of folk culture and handicrafts. While museum's interpretation strategies of Cultural Heritage are based on scientific research and knowledge, the handicraft hobbyist have a more creative approach interpreting the heritage in ways not used in museums practice.

Quite a few participants in the contest are ready for further purposeful cooperation even in a wider scale. For handicraft hobbyists the core of ENM is its collections (physical objects or objects in digital databases) which they constantly discover and explore. Knowledge about the collections of ENM and about principles of its activities give them potential to be mediators of ENM’s information including specific information about the collections, which in turn enables the museum to broaden its field of communication and reach a wider audience.

The interpretation strategies of both parties complement thus each other, craft makers are a good partner for the museum helping to make its essential values visible, to interpret essence and possibilities of Cultural Heritage in universal visual language and day-to-day practices, putting heritage back into circulation. No museum should restrict the significance of its collections; the future is in trust and sharing.

**Sources**

Interview no 1 - a woman, age 35-49

Interview no 2 - a woman, age 21- 34

Interview no 3 - a woman, age 35-49

Interview no 4 - a woman, age 21-34

Interview no 5 - a woman, age 21-34

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**Marke Teppor** (MA 2011 – communication management).

**Agnes Aljas** (MA 2006 – ethnology) is from 2007 a PhD of the Institute of Journalism and Communication of University of Tartu and scientific secretary of Estonian National Museum.

Her research interests are related to development of Estonian memory institutions and presentation of results to the public. She is also involved in Grant nr 8006 of Estonian Science Foundation "Development of Museum Communication in the information environment of 21st century".

1. This article is written within the framework of Estonian Science Foundation's (ESF) grant's project "Development of Museum's Communication in the Information Environment of the 21st Century" [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Topics of the interviews were: meaning of handicrafts, motives of participation in the contest, knowledge and understanding of the activities and goals of ENM, experience of using the collections, cooperation with ENM. In this article quotations from 5 interviews are used, the data of which is listed in the index of publications used. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Interviews at issue have been also analyzed by Krista Lepik and Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt in their article „Handicraft hobbyists in an ethnographic museum – negotiating expertise and participation“– *ECREA European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School* (going to be published). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Isetegija (the one who makes it oneself) is the forum of handicraft hobbyists on website isetegija.net, where photos of self made handicraft items are uploaded, blogs with description of the process of making the items (techniques, materials) are kept and where handicraft hobbyists hold discussions, learn and get inspiration from each other. Contests of handicraft items, auction sales and other activities that are meant to be shared are also held through the website [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The authors of the interviews are marked by numbers, references can be found in the index in bibliography. For easier reading the authors’ specifications are marked in brackets after each quote. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In a category of recreation of an authentical item the winner was Andrus Kunnus with his work "Cooking grid for Baltic Herring", the second place was awarded to Virgo Inno for "Tõstamaa gloves" and third place to Kadri Vissel for "Carpet from Vastseliina parish".

Special award was given to Aivi Miilist for "The Book".

In category of new items inspired by authentic items the winner was Airi Gailit with her work "Stripe fabrics dyed with mushrooms", the second place was given to Virge Inno for "Socks", the third place to Elge Aas for "Felted Hat", special award for using leather to Egge Edusaar for "Handi Bag" and special award for a good idea to Marvi Volmer for "Jewelry". [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Three winning places in the category of creating a new item ( Airi Gailit "Stripe fabrics dyed with mushrooms", Virgo Inno "Socks", Elge Aas "Felted Hat" and winning work in the category of recreating an authentic item (Andrus Kunnus "Cooking grid for Baltic Herring") [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Various hierarchic models of participation are widely spread and used in different contexts; they are mostly developed for describing democratic processes and analyzing the activities of the institutions of public sector.

Common participation hierarchy differentiates 5 stages of the growth of citizens influence in decision making:

1. Informing: the citizens are provided with balance and objective information to support understanding of problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions;

2. Consultation: collecting citizens' feedback about analysis, alternatives and/or decisions;

3. Contribution (placation): communication with citizens has to be genuine throughout the process to ensure consistent understanding of citizens' interests and goals;

4. Cooperation (partnership): involving citizens in all aspects of decision making including elaborating alternatives and finding the most suitable solution;

5. Empowerment (delegated power): citizens achieve final decision-making power [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. On an exhibition introducing the photo collection of ENM the visitors had a chance to leave their comments about the photos using pencils and paper provided for that purpose. Leaving comments was motivated by a prize - copy of the photo, that visitor liked most. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 1. The Creators upload their videos, music, etc, publish blog posts or web pages, write articles and stories; 2. Good Conversationalists update their status on a social networking site at least once a week.

3. Critics post rating and reviews of products and services, contribute to online forums, edit articles in a wiki; 4. Collectors use RSS feeds, vote on web sites, add tags to Web pages or photos;

5. Joiners create accounts in social networking sites and use them;

6. Spectators read blogs, watch YouTube videos, visit social networking sites, read forums, other customer reviews, and ratings. 7. Inactive persons do not visit social networking sites or use them in any possible way. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)