

“Standing on the shoulders of Giants”

Suzana Faro

“After all, the unmemory not only put him aside from the objective reality as it has dismissed him of feelings, one may say. He lost his approaching stimuli, once, without the consciousness of the identity positioning us and defining us a framework of experiences and values, no one can be sensible towards the human value of his similar. His virtues or his evils can only be acknowledged as sentimental significant if contrasting with the conscience of our identity, i.e., with the tradition of the communication we commit together with the society and with our cultural memory (...). The truth is, he did not really know where he was, that was the reason.”

This is part of a book written in the first person by a well known Portuguese writer, José Cardoso Pires (*De Profundis. Valsa lenta*. 1998), after suffering a cerebralvascular accident (CVA) which made him identify himself as “the other”, as if from the exterior of himself, with no identity.

When I read this book I thought this was an interesting quote, underlying, after all, the role of museums: applying for memory to achieve identity and respect for otherness. It is all about identity! Belonging...

Museums deal with heritage (heritage is also what we receive from our parents). But we do not own it - we just have to keep it for next generations. So museums have to act in a sustainable way to preserve heritage, to preserve memory. It is no use to preserve what people do not know or respect. And people will only respect if they identify the value and recognize the importance for their lives. So our work is also to promote and exhibit to the publics, to make them reflect upon its significance, to apply to memory and promote identity.

Museums have come a long way, reinforcing their vocation and affirming their mission as *space* of ideas and of multiple interpretations. They have grown as objects of desire. But the big challenge is how can a museum become an *object of desire* for all? Can the museum identify its potential public, can it identify its needs and expectations? What is the relevance of the museum for its public?

Identity is also essential to respect otherness.

Each one of us is not only the son of our culture and the adopted son of the context we live in. Each one of us is a third element – the conscience of our selves is acceded, at one time, by differing from the others and assimilating the identity of the group we designate and identify as our own. Each one of us is this third person, gathering together the self, the selves and the other. (Ricardo Vieira - *Ser Igual, Ser Diferente. Encruzilhadas da Identidade*, 1999).

As Giddens refers, we live upon confidence. Relationships are bonds of trust, and this is a working framing process which requires opening to otherness, a mutual process of self unveiling. (Anthony Giddens - *As Consequências da Modernidade*, 2000).

Only then can museums work *in the service of society and its development* (after the ICOM definition of a museum). But how do museums achieve the accomplishment of this mission?

Museums have learned to communicate both more and better through design, multi-media, audio-visuals, new technology, and various practices in mediation, though they still face many challenges. Working with a community within its deepest level of awareness is central for museum activity to flourish. The museum needs to be flexible, imaginative and multi-sensory, thus becoming more effective, efficient and resourceful. Using technology and the wide internet global world (and we must underline that we live in the so called era of participation, which is also a new challenge), museums have a new open opportunity level to develop their work and carry out their mission. Is it enough?

The easiest it is to contact the other all over the planet, at any time, the faster we acknowledge the limits of understanding. Being easy to communicate is not enough to make better interchanges. (Dominique Wolton – *Pensar a Comunicação*, 1999).

This is a challenge that we can foretell from the ICOM's motto for the International Museum Day 2015: *Museums for a sustainable society*.

But this motto can be understood according to a double interconnected meaning. The 21st century presented a new political, social and economic paradigm in which museums face serious concerns on their own sustainability – i.e. to assure the means to gather, preserve, promote, exhibit heritage - to work *for society and for its development*.

Museums have now to deal with fierce challenges to maintain their door open and fully accomplish their mission. The museum professionalism assures that museums fulfil their mission of preserving their collections and promote them to the public. This is way museums exist. But how do museums ensure the material, economic resources to do it?

The Transport and Communications Museum is ruled by a private not for profit association (the Association of Transport and Communications Museum), which counts public and private institutional members, as well as individual members.

Historically, a customs house promoted “links”, constructing a “world wide web” of contacts, cultural influences and knowledge. So does the Museum,; it challenges the visitor to experiment and reflect upon the many forms of communication that Man

establishes in order to interact with others and with his surroundings: transports; communication (with its anthropological dimension and the gadgets which amplify it); customs history as a “house of communication”, contributing to build a frame of references that allow public to construct knowledge.

The museum project’s relevance in the National and European development strategies of the territory is recognized, for example, by the support of FEDER funds (QREN-ON2).

The Museum is located in this 19th-century, neo-classical New Customs House Building. The renovation project for this historic building has been underway since 1993, under the supervision of the architect Eduardo Souto de Moura (Pritzker Prize 2011), highlighting all the distinguishing elements of the characteristic architecture of a customs house, what they mean in terms of work routines and their symbolism for the direct users, the nearby population and the city and region.

Safeguarding cultural heritage is thus understood not only at the level of the subjects the Museum deals with, but also in terms of the building that houses it. A unique example of the city’s built heritage, the building has been permanently restored to receive the Museum’s visitors, while also offering an international congress centre involving over 250,000 people a year, which is considered a key factor in the AMTC’s sustainability.

The Museum has a particular relationship with its neighbours. Miragaia, this part of the city, has been identified as a social and economic delicate city context, which is also reflected in terms of formal education demanding for special support. This also means rootlessness, some aggressiveness and lack of identity. The Museum develops various partnerships, as well as related outreach projects.

It is also important to mention the institutions’s contribution to local development through the financial benefits it brings as a result of the permanent circulation of people who visit the place (contributing significantly towards the development of the local socio-economic fabric).

The Museum is supported by no aids or sponsorships. It works on several partnerships for its long term exhibitions and is grounded on the professional and qualified work it develops not only as a museum, but also as a congress centre. It demands a strict and cautious management to guarantee the sustainability. And it also demands a strict and cautious management to guarantee the necessary inward balance between both activities. This is, probably, the most difficult but also the most challenging task.

It is time for rethinking the museum paradigm. It is time to assume that we have to face difficulties as challenges and undertake a different positioning towards the future of museums.

In this new approach it is unavoidable to reflect upon the museum social function. The wealth of the museum cannot simply be measured by the economic impact of an admission ticket. It is a lot more than that. Museums perform an important socio-economic role as democratic/accessible places, acting towards social integration, contributing as social, economical and educational partners for the development of society, contributing to more informed and active citizenship. And I guess we are all aware of the social and economic charges that the citizen's rootlessness represents for our societies.

Stephen Weil (*Rethinking the museum and other meditations*, 1990) reminds us that "*within a static timeless world, where everything was and would ever be the way it always had been, museums would be superfluous*". But we live in a moving world...

We have been witnessing several iconoclastic attacks to heritage and museums. We have also been witnessing different economists approaches on museums expecting their mission to base up on material profit that can ensure their economic autonomous activity and wealth.

What does this mean?

That we forgot that informed evaluations about the past allow us to make better choices for the future?

We should think over Isaac Newton's words (1643 – 1727): "*If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants*".

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Suzana Faro

suzanafaro@amtc.pt



MTC

Museu dos Transportes
e Comunicações



40th IATM Conference

**Museu dos
Transportes e
Comunicações**
(Transport and
Communications
Museum)

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José Cardoso Pires. *De Profundis. Valsa Lenta*, 1998



Memory



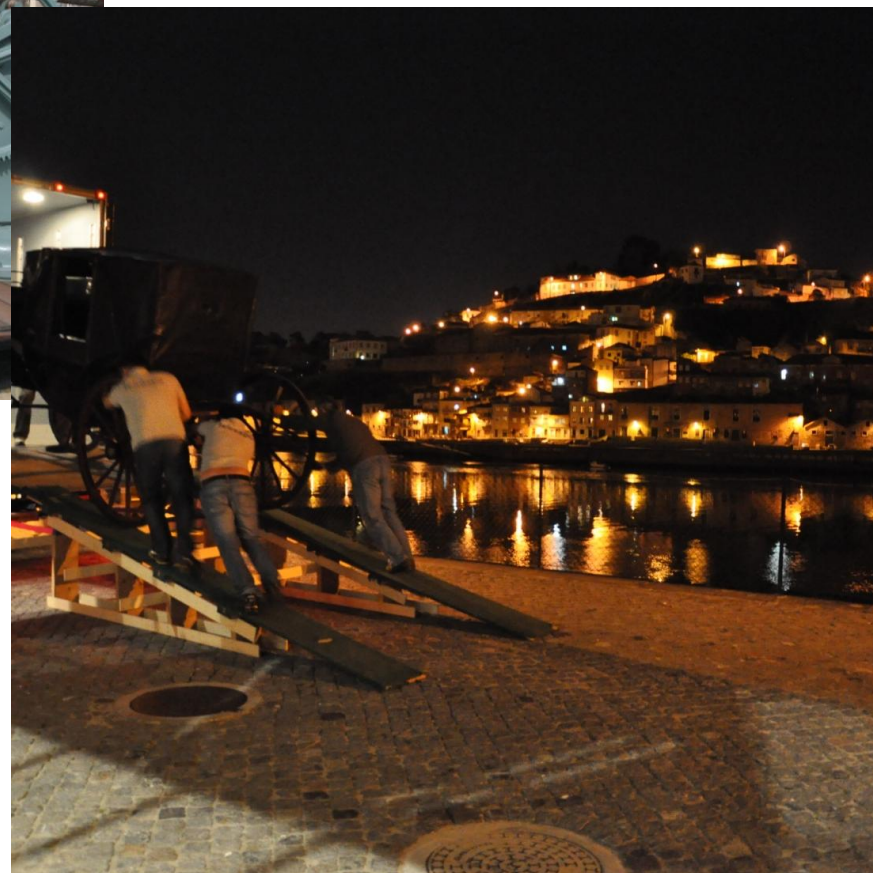
Identity



Otherness



Heritage



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Ricardo Vieira - *Ser Igual, Ser Diferente. Encruzilhadas da Identidade*, 1999.

***A museum is a non-profit,
permanent institution in the service
of society and its development.***

ICOM Statutes, adopted during the 21st General Conference in
Vienna, Austria, in 2007

COMMUNICATE

exhibition



Communicate exhibition



***“True interactivity is not to click or download,
but to encourage communication.”***

**A verdadeira interatividade não
reside em clicar em ícones
ou em fazer downloads,
mas em encorajar a comunicação.**

Edwin Schlossberg



Communicate exhibition

*It is impossible
not to
communicate*

Paul Watzlawick

Museums for a sustainable society.

ICOM, IMD 2015

Transport and Communications Museum Mission Statement

To improve and publicise knowledge on the role of transport and communications in the evolution of modern society. To promote the memory of the place – The New Customs House of Oporto.

The Customs House



The engine of the Republic:

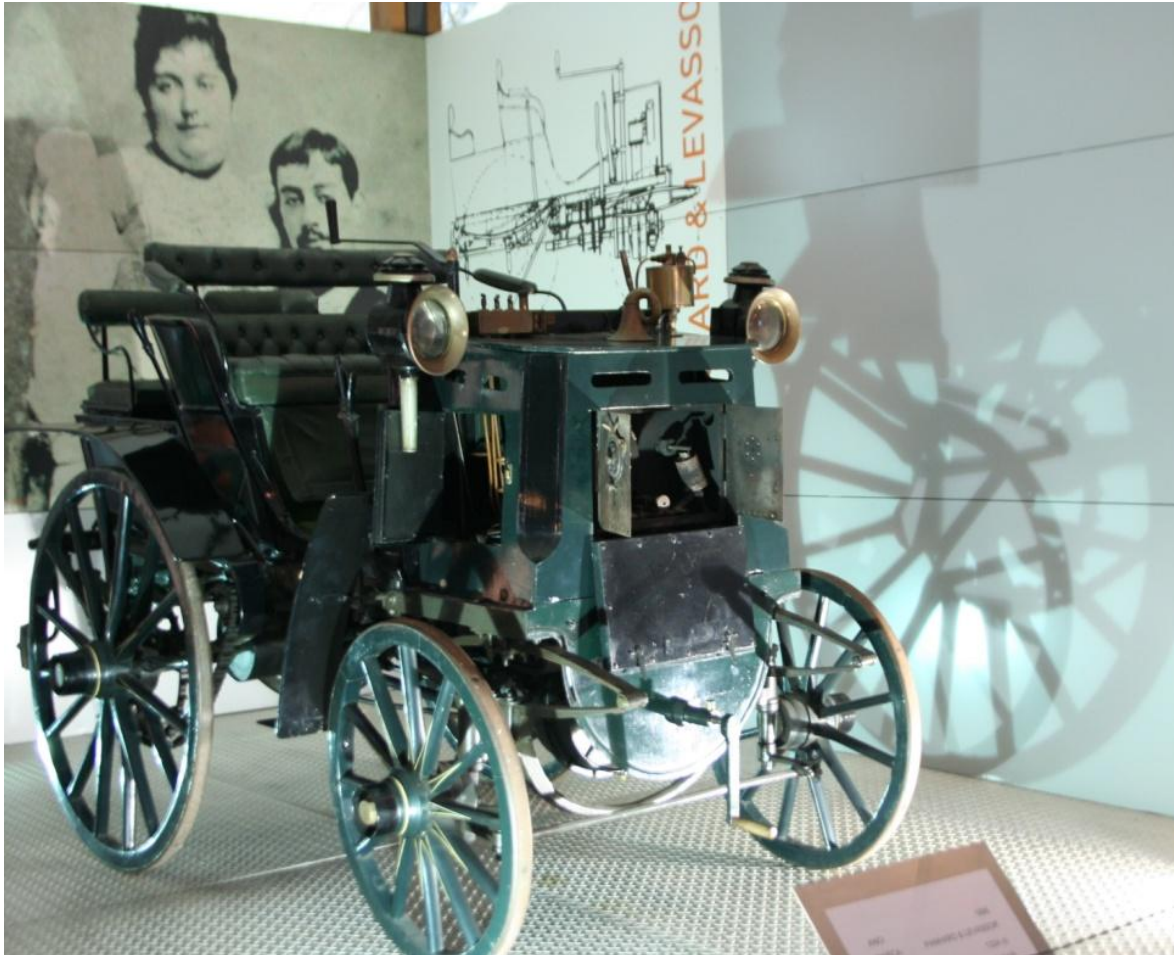
Presidential Cars exhibition



Car in Space and Time exhibition



Car in Space and Time exhibition



Communicate exhibition



Communicate exhibition



Communicate exhibition



Temporary exhibition



Educational Servive





Educational Service



Educational Service



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Stephen Weil - *Rethinking the museum and other meditations*, 1990

