

## *Two Stops on the Croatian Silk Road*

### **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN OF OLDER PRE-SCHOOL AGE AND SCHOOL AGE IN COOPERATION BETWEEN ZOO ZAGREB AND ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM IN ZAGREB**

- The article presents the cooperation between the Zoological Gardens of the City of Zagreb and the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb (EMZ) on the *Two Stops on the Croatian Silk Road* Project. The basic activities during the project were intended for children or older pre-school and school age, and included educational programmes (exhibitions and thematic guided tours, lectures, presentations and workshops) related to silkworm cultivation, and the national production and use of silk thread. The examples presented in the text provide insight into the ways of project objective implementation – systematic development of sensitivity for the natural and cultural heritage, promotion of creative skills, transfer of traditional knowledge and promotion of the culture of sustainable development.

Key words: Zoo Zagreb  
Ethnographic Museum (Zagreb)  
educational programmes, silk production

### **INTRODUCTION: COOPERATION BASED ON SHARED VALUES**

Bearing in mind the points of contact, multiple overlaps of its spheres of interest and long-standing social activity, especially with regard to educational subjects for children and youth, the Zagreb Zoo<sup>1</sup> as the project leader and

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<sup>1</sup> According to its Charter from 1933, the City Zoo is defined as an institution “serving for the instruction of all schools and the public at large, and to scientific institutions for scientific research”.

the EMZ<sup>2</sup> launched in early May 2016 a cooperative project focused on the interdisciplinary approach to the interpretation of heritage. In this way new generations were given the opportunity for gaining close and comprehensive knowledge about a significant economic activity in Croatia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Today it also related, with some exceptions, to the attempt to revive the activity, almost totally forgotten, at the local level.

Proceeding from cooperation started during the preparation of the exhibition *From the holdings of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb on the occasion of the 49<sup>th</sup> Folklore Festival – the Heritage of the Dubrovnik-Neretva County* (15 July – 20 September 2015) and from the contacts realized at the time<sup>3</sup>, the idea arose in both institutions – almost at the same time- about a common project which would acquaint children and young people, in an attractive and dynamic way, with the forgotten tradition of national production and use of silk-thread. The project was focused on enriching the biological-ecological aspect of the silkworm life cycle and breeding with cultural elements. The name of the project followed the same line (First Stop: the Zoo; Second Stop: the Ethnographic Museum), with a deliberate association with the *Silk Road* and China as the origin of sericulture, i.e., the Croatian intangible heritage, as a marked element of this educational programme.

Along with intersectoral cooperation between heritage institutions along the line of so-called *total heritage*<sup>4</sup>, a particularly worthwhile element of the project was the practical connection of educational areas, i.e., correlative extramural teaching of subjects such as nature and society, biology, chemistry, history, geography, Croatian language, art and others. Non-formal learning took place in a relaxed atmosphere, and it was based on authentic biological/ethnographic material, implying contact with the live animal, the tactile experience of silk in the different working stages, and the use of untreated material (raw silk) in art workshops.

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2 According to the *Instructions* for the ‘commissioners’ (people who collected objects and data in the field and donated them to the museum) of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb (1921), “the task of the Ethnographic Department of the National Museum in Zagreb is (...) the promotion of school education and of education in general...” Along with the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb, the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb was the first Zagreb museum to engage in organized educational activity. The first ethnologist-museum educator was employed in the Museum in 1953 (cf. Gjetvaj 1989: 124).

3 In spring 2015 the Ethnographic Museum was instrumental in arranging the delivery of silkworms from Konavle to the Zagreb Zoo, which did not have that species at the time.

4 The concept was introduced in 1982 by Tomislav Šola, as the common philosophy of different and yet related institutions (museums, zoos, nature parks or scientific centers) under a common theoretical denominator – heritology (cf. Šola 1997: 37).

## VISIT PLAN AND PROGRAMME – CURRICULAR DETERMINANTS

Based on the interaction of nature, culture and artistic creativity – handicrafts, this semi-annual educational project, intended primarily for children of older pre-school age and school age, implied visits to partner institutions and a final art workshop in the museum. Groups of Zoo visitors first gained knowledge about the biological aspects of silkworm breeding as the condition for the development and traditional production of silk; in the Ethnographic Museum they then saw the national and foreign processes and products, and expressed the theme in a creative fashion.

Quite specifically, the visit to the Zoo implied an age-adjusted lecture (more precisely, four developed programmes adjusted to the age of the visitors), and contact with the live animal in the ‘Home House’ designed precisely for the purpose. That was the introduction to the visit to the Ethnographic Museum. The description and the contribution of the Museum, along with my own role, are outlined below.

In the Museum the programme was implemented in the form of guided tours of the exhibition, interpolated into the permanent display, and art workshops. Emphasis was placed on the following seven points: introduction; two stops in to the world culture display (China – the silk homeland; Marco Polo, the first traveller to China); four stops in the display of Croatian national costumes (Konavle, Adriatic hinterland, Slavonija, Posavina). In places where space permitted it, the permanent display was supplemented with glass display showcases with objects from the Museum holdings related to regional and local silk production and processing (e.g., raw silk, natural dyestuffs, spindle, thread winding laths, embroidery frames), and small clothing and daily use items decorated with silk thread or made entirely of silk such as *terluci*, slippers, belts worn with costumes in the Adriatic hinterland, *poculice*, small caps worn by married women in Posavina and, a rare item, *nagalete*, a woman’s neck scarf decorated with appliqués – parts of silkworm cocoons). The overall appearance of national silk embroidered and woven costumes (such as the Konavle women’s costume with silk *poprsnice*, silk embroideries worn on the breast, embroidered sleeve trimmings, *kurđelice*, belts, and the *pokrivača zlatnica*, part of women’s headgear, gold embroidered head scarf from the first half of the 18th century) was shown to the visitors on mannequins of the permanent display, including three examples of children’s clothing (girl and boy from Komaji, and a girl from Posavski Bregi). The latter items allowed the visiting children to identify themselves, at a symbolic level, with children who lived in this area a hundred and more years ago. The opportunity to identify oneself in this way facilitated the learning process.

The presentation tasks, manifested through guided tours and the workshop during each visit to the Museum, included the following themes:

- silk – the product of the silkworm (origin, specific features and interesting details about the material presented on examples of textiles from the EMZ World Culture Display, with a recapitulation of the subject matter presented in the Zoo);
- china – the silk homeland (Chinese inventions and export items presented on examples from the EMZ World Culture Display – the compass, gunpowder, paper, printing, paper money, porcelain, tea, jade etc.);
- the island of Korčula – Marco Polo's alleged birthplace (traditional use of home-spun and imported silk presented through South Dalmatian costumes in the EMZ);
- Konavle – the centre of silk production from the Middle Ages to date (description of the production process with the presentation of equipment for silkworm breeding and silk twisting, and the Konavle embroidery from the EMZ holdings; the tactile experience of silk in individual processing stages);
- the Adriatic hinterland traditional uses of home-spun silk presented on clothing items decorated with silk stitch (*lančanac*, chain stitch, on costumes from Bukovica and Ravni Kotari, examples of thin silk winding slats from the EMZ holdings);
- Maria Theresa – the beginnings of silk production in Croatia (the Military Frontier), during the reign of Empress Maria Theresa; *bagudari*, government supervisors of sericulture and silk yields; silk worm-breeding and mulberry growing in primary school gardens);
- Posavina – examples of satin stitch (*pečki vez*) with home-spun and artificial silk used on a costume, on a scarf (*peča*) or small married women's cap (*poculica*), silk on wedding inventory, e.g., the so-called *srećni rubec* ('happy scarf') used to display presents for the newlyweds;
- motives, colours and techniques applied in the making of decorative and clothing items from the EMZ holdings as an inspiration for work in the art workshops – Konavle stitch, chain stitch, silk stitch and satin stitch.

## PRACTICAL RESULTS (WITH EXAMPLES)

### CONTEXTUALIZATION AND ADJUSTMENT TO INDIVIDUAL VISITS

The objects were put into context during the programme, primarily with the assistance of the project monitor (curator/museum educator). However, in consideration of the interpolation of the exhibits into the permanent museum display, we wanted to present the theme at all our visitors including, therefore, the people who visit the museum for reasons disconnected with the *Two Stops on the Croatian Silk Road Programme*, primarily children of older preschool age and school age accompanied by adults (parents, grandmothers and grandfathers, etc.).

For this reason the captions provided with each stop were textually conceived in accordance with the principle of continuous movement between the subject-focused and reader-focused rhetoric considerations (cf. Aebli 2001 acc. to Kiper Mischke 2008: 122), and contained an optimum number of information for the understanding of the theme in the case of independent movement through the display, with a vocabulary adjusted to the school age, with many associations and concretizations, i.e., links with modern life and assumed previous knowledge of the school children.

Thus, Marco Polo's trip from Venice to China was compared in terms of the duration of travel and transport means with present-day air transport and a trip of a dozen hours; another example: the length of a silk thread taken off the silkworm cocoon (about 1 km), was compared with the straight line from the central Zagreb square (also familiar to the visiting children from other parts of Croatia) to the Ethnographic Museum where the comparison was made. Both examples, described on the captions and regularly accompanied by the 'wow' effect, very clearly although in a simplified way reflect the necessity of connecting the exhibition/educational subject with everyday life if our objective is a long-term effect on awareness/memory, and the respective action of the visiting school children (cf. Keller 2016: 29).

The independent visit to the stops on the Croatian silk road through the Museum is also enriched by subject captions which familiarized children with apparently abstract, unrecognizable or partly recognizable objects not only by an adjusted description but also by illustration and interactive facilities (riddles, search aids etc.), putting the object into a more familiar context and promoting the child's active visit and, thereby, understanding of the presented material and/or text. Bearing in mind the summer pause because of vacations and the types of visitors in the summer months (mainly foreign tourists, often families with children), the texts and the object captions were translated into English, including all the

interactive parts, and in practice this produced a very positive feedback with regard to the frequently expressed wishes of foreign Museum visitors for more translations in the permanent display as well as with regard to the attractiveness, from the tourists' perspective, of an unexpected and 'authentic' theme.<sup>5</sup>

## **DIDACTIC-METHODICAL FRAMEWORKS**

In the way and course of our presentation we tried to respect didactic rules as much as possible (from the closer to the more distant, from the simple to the complex, from the easier to the more difficult, from the known to the unknown) which proved to be very rewarding and (necessary!) with children of older preschool age and junior class primary school pupils. Therefore, we did not start the first encounter with silk with examples of traditional Asian silk clothing visible in the surrounding showcases, but with well-known silk objects – women's (mother's) silk scarf and man's (dad's) tie. Line movement through the display/exhibition, enriched by many opportunities for sensorial experience not only of the visual, but also of the tactile and auditive type, and even of the olfactive type –and the planned gustatory type (however, difficult to implement because of sanitary reasons; tasting of tea during the presentation of the legend about the origin of silk according to which a cocoon fell accidentally into the tea cup of empress Xi Ling Shi), ensured on the one hand the continuity of interest and, on the other hand, provided the cognitive pause required to maintain the subsequent concentration of the child.

The hands-on principle was realized with a number of teaching means and aids, starting from the visual identity of the project in the form of captions on each stop, which followed, with a text, picture and design (mapped route with stops) every story, including the 'mysterious suitcase' which the children, as 'true' travellers, carried on their silk road and took out of it objects related to the story, examined them, touched or smelled them. For the children from the continental parts of Croatia an especially interesting material was dry Spanish broom, partly because it was a new and unknown – and thereby exotic material – and partly because of its specific, almost unpleasant smell. Objects that could be touched were mainly replicas of the exhibits or available originals. Such an approach avoided the frequent frustration children feel facing a museum object because it is, considering height, often inaccessible even to the child's eyes.

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5 According to their own statements, foreign tourists were not familiar with the tradition of sericulture in Croatia.

## THE NEW LIFE OF MUSEUM OBJECTS

In line with the principles applied in the modern development of museum collections, which include both collecting and write-off, or rather the singling out and redirecting the purpose of specific museum objects (in our case, damaged or multiplied in terms of type), textile fragments with a satin silk stitch were used by children as model-inspirational specimens in their artwork; a small woman's cap, *poculica*, earmarked for write-off, was cleaned and reconstructed to the extent possible because of its condition and offered, as part of the 'surprise suitcase' inventory, to the girls to try it on (on demand also to the boys).

Even if it used to be a part of headgear, worn (in the past) on the back of their head by exclusively married women, and served therefore as a differentiating and powerfully symbolical clothing item, at the point of transfer from the protected holdings (in line with professional rules) to the sphere of museum pedagogy, it assumes the entirely different, but very essential role of an didactic tool helping the visiting child participating in the programme to visualize and understand in an easier way the theme through empirical learning and emotional inclusion.

The basic principle of the described methodology is that the objective of this object 'write-off' is always the improvement of the quality of or of the composition of the collection and/of the placing objects where they function best (cf. P. van Mensch, L. Meijer – van Mensch 2005: 30). In the specific example, that is certainly the field of education.

## EMOTIONS FOR LEARNING FOR ACTION

In the planning of the programme one has generally sought to observe and create from the perspective of the user, i.e., of the child and of what the child would like to see or rather experience in the museum. Learning as the mainly (top-down imposed) initial reason for the visit (with regard to organized visits of pre/school groups) had to be associated (and that was the objective), on leaving the museum, with individual feelings of satisfaction and achievement, acquired through stimulative interaction and personal artistic expression.

Knowledge, the raising of awareness, and in particular the emotions appearing as a result of the described approach, are the best pledge of another visit and, in time, of the development of the culture of visits to heritage institutions, of the development of respect and of the need for a personal contribution to the sustainability of inherited natural and cultural assets. In other words, the question to which we asked for an answer was not "what did you learn" but, first and foremost, "how did you feel" (in the Zoo/Ethnographic Museum).

Aware not only of the varied degree of previous knowledge but also of the different ways of acquiring knowledge, we tried to enrich the programme with elements matching the imaginary, analytical, dynamic and problem-oriented learning style, i.e., different styles/phrases of experimental learning (by observation, feeling, thinking and one's performance) (cf. P. van Mensch, L. Meeijer – van Mensch (2015: 39).

In this process the starting point was the awareness of the changed needs of our audience due to the deep cultural (generational) turn to the experience of participation and social, informal learning, generated from the visitor, as opposed to the hierarchic model of the traditional museum/educational institution (cf. Wyrick 2014: 232).

## **ANIMALS (ALSO) IN THE MUSEUM**

Just as the introduction to traditional silkworm breeding was emphasized with ethnographic elements already in the Zoo, we endeavoured to extend the link with what the children had just seen in the museum story; thus, in addition to silk as a raw material of animal origin, the children also familiarized themselves with wool, another natural material with supreme warming properties (at the same time also closely linked with silk on clothing in the Dalmatian hinterland), and with storks, migratory birds which live during one part of the year in Posavina, a region known for its silk-decorated costumes. On the other hand, the story about Marco Polo, the first traveller to China – the homeland of silk – mentions camels, horses and *yaks*, mountain bovinds, as means of transport of people and goods in ancient times, and the Byzantine monks who, according to the legend, smuggled silkworm eggs across the Chinese border in sticks made of bamboo, the leaves of which are the panda diet.

The children were especially pleased with the opportunity for active participation at the very beginning, during the recapitulation of the subject learned in the Zoo (silkworm, silk, legend about the origin of silk), which provided an excellent motivating start for the continuation of the programme in the museum.

Such an interactive, interdisciplinary approach was focused on enhancing interest and the feeling of joyous anticipation, ensuring the joy of discovery of a different material and acting by applying the surprise method (cf. Nagyne Batari 2014: 346). From the museological aspect, it supports the modern theory and practice in interpreting objects, which implies that the visitor is offered not only one (correct) way of reading the message of the object but – always – several possibilities allowing him/her to perceive the difference and experience the meaning (or



multiple meanings) of the object and to arrive at conclusions in interaction with the object – made possible, of course, exclusively by the interdisciplinary approach (cf. Antoš 2012: 46).

## **STORYTELLING**

The result of internal communication leads to understanding, and the outcome is the creation of a link between the child and the exhibition. This produced a process of active learning and inclusion through which the child experiences the transforming ‘aha’ effect (cf. Nagyne Batari 2014: 342).

In order to mediate the many information presented to the youngest visitors during approximately three hours of the complete programme (with breaks), we selected several stories (legends) interpolated at several points into the guided tour – three legends about the origin and smuggling of silk across the Chinese borders and two thematically linked stories about known historical figures, Marco Polo and Maria Theresa. Both stories referred to the merits of these persons in silk trade and production, but in a way maximally adjusted to the younger visitors, by highlighting elements with which the children can identify and which are interconnected. Thus, Marco Polo sets off, almost on a trip round the world in present-day terms, as a seventeen-year-old teenager; legend connects him with Korčula, just as south Dalmatian islands link their costumes with silk. Additionally, the introductory element to the story about Maria Theresa is Müller’s portrait of the archduchess at the age of seventeen. Later she deserves the merit for introducing compulsory primary schools in Croatia, and for being ‘guilty’ of moving the summer vacations to autumn (because of silkworm breeding and mulberry growing in school gardens in summer months).

Because of the limited time for guided tours as well as because of the wish to respect the attention of the youngest visitors and to promote their imagination, all the stories were very brief, theme-defined, sketches from biographies, focused on illustrating and bringing to life distant (temporally and geographically) themes. In other words, just like all good stories, our stories did not discover everything, leaving to the visitors (listening children) the opportunity for incorporating their own experiences into the recognition of what they heard.

## **THE MEANING OF ROLE PLAYING**

Performance-related learning implies learning by participation which actively includes the body, the mind and emotions; in other words, it is learning in which the multiple processes of remembering and attributing attention take place almost without the conscious will of the pupil (cf. Hooper-Greenhill 2007 acc. to Keller

2016). In the imaginary world of play and life, children present all the roles and persons with a sincerity that is equal to their direct experience of reality. The Russian actor, director and theatrologist Konstantin S. Stanislavski, who influenced method acting, urged his actors to learn from children by saying: “When playing children create a mighty illusion of real life and therefore find it difficult to return to reality. For them it is enough to say ‘as if it were’, and the thought comes to life right away. Let us preserve this sincerity and imaginative power for subsequent pursuit in life” (cf. Nola 1987: 107).

It is precisely for this reason that participants (volunteers) had the opportunity – during the guided tours through selected parts of the display – to play a few roles or, rather, freeze a few scenes, which they ought – in line with the foregoing – to retain in permanent memory. They played the role of travellers (carrying the ‘surprise suitcase’), of the Chinese empress who discovers silk in the moment when a silkworm cocoon falls into her afternoon tea (by pretending to drink tea from a porcelain cup), of the Byzantine monk who smuggles silkworm eggs across the Chinese border (by examining the interior of a bamboo stick), of a primary school child from the time of Maria Theresa (by picking in the school garden the mulberry leaves for feeding silkworms), girls/married women of Posavina (with a silk headband, *parta/cap, poculica* as a symbol of marital status), the Konavle girls-breeders of the ‘small bugs’ (by winding original raw silk on a fig leaf), and shepherds of the Dalmatian hinterland (by donating a thin carved wooden slat for silk winding, of their own making, to the selected girl, teacher/educator and even to the project monitor).

### **IT IS HARD TO BE FULL COOL – THE CHALLENGE OF WORKING WITH ADOLESCENTS**

The *Two Stops on the Croatian Silk Road* Programme included visits of children and young people of varied age – generally, between 5 and 18 years old. Such a chronological spectrum required the development of the basic subject in at least four stages – for preschool children, for younger primary school children, for older primary school children and secondary school pupils – with additional nuances related to the characteristic, interest and group dynamism of aspecific group.

In line with the foregoing, the programme for older primary school and secondary school pupils was based on the already described theme, the presentation of which was modified according to age, with the support of the already mastered subjects, e.g., with links to assigned reading (the references of Matija Antun

Reljković and Ivan Gundulić to home-made silk making in *Satyr and Dubravka*), history (Croatia during Habsburg rule), geography, politics and economy (Silk Road, Dubrovnik Republic).

We tried to blend the subject structured in this way with opportunities for independent research work, also bearing in mind the observed endeavours of the pupils themselves to arrive, for example, at specific answers through search in databases of their own smart phones. Such a way of enriching the presentation of the subject matter matched the dynamism of the guided tours through the display, and aroused in the visitors a feeling of importance, inclusion and control, prompting them to research and study, and at the same time reconciling, in the virtual, digital, networked conditions of modern living, the ever greater intergenerational (young/old) and intergenerational status (pupil/teacher) conflict of authority over information.

In order to create conditions for structured conversation, cooperative learning, brainstorming and joint art projects, it was especially important to split large classes – less typical for lower age groups – into two or three groups with an optimum of 15 persons; all that developed in the light of developmental education – “the child (adolescent) was not dictated ready-made knowledge or burdened by a mass of information. He/she is only given tasks, riddles that teach him to think, to think constructively and creatively. By balancing continuously between what he/she knows and does not know, the child builds his/her perceptions on his/her own. He/she is not given the truth, he/she has experienced it” (Rašković-Zec 1887: 242).

In other words, even in cases involving older participants we tried to find forms of knowledge transfer which would not constitute an attack or coercion but rather provide an opportunity for dialectic and creative thinking as a form of respect for persons in the formative years of their lives. Even here, perhaps even more than in younger children, the key is arousing interest and being interesting, in a low-key and spontaneous way.

By expanding the definition of the effect of museum programmes on the young, one must leave the framework of existing paradigms and study ways whereby the children will not only be the objects of effect but also achieve an effect on the institution they are visiting, educators/curators and other persons they meet during their stay in the museum (cf. Wyrick 2014: 234). By adjusting a guided tour to age and to the individual is precisely what we wanted to do – to explore through action and, by resorting to acquired experience, to respond momentarily to the observed needs and, first and foremost, provide opportunities for the active contribution of the young visitor to the museum whose users - in the full sense of the word – they should also remain/become in the future.

## ART WORKSHOPS – EXTERNAL EVALUATION BY CREATION

After a guided tour lasting – depending on the participants' age – 30 to 45 minutes, the programme planned an art workshop of the same duration, implying work with a specific raw material – silk, in different stages of its processing and of different origin (e.g., home-bred cocoon, home-made silk thread, industrial thread/ribbon); in terms of motif and colour, inspiration was provided by Croatian traditional silk embroideries, examples of which the visitors could see as details but also as decorations on the full costume (e.g., the konavle embroidery as an example of silk thread dyeing with natural dyes, animal ornaments – 'cats', 'eagle talons claws' etc., the *lančanac*, chain stitch; examples of geometrical ornamentation on objects from the Adriatic hinterland; Slavonian silk embroidery in pastel tones and floral motifs, e.g., flowers, corn ears, grape bunches; contrasting light elements and dark backgrounds, such as found in cases of cocoon appliqués on women's neck scarves; and the satin stitch, *pečki vez*, as the starting point for explaining the symbolism of the red colour; floral motifs in the form of Baroque roses).

During the art workshops the children had at all times access to specimens and/or representations of the types of embroidery (stitches); they were also additionally motivated by audiovisual reminders of the encounter with the live insect in the Zoo in the form of fragments showing the phases of silkworm breeding. The synergy of the picture and reassuring sound (rustling of leaves, fluttering of butterfly wings) was supposed to relax and stimulate imagination, and, ultimately, result in the transformation of experience into matter.

Therefore, in addition to meeting the need for creation, the workshops were also supposed to sublimate the learned subject matter into an art form which every child could take along (to school or home), whether it was an object of everyday use such as a necklace or pendant, or collage, drawing or sculpture, as a permanent reminder of the acquired perceptions and impressions gained during the programme he/she has attended. The success of the achieved work (without measuring it with the anyway biased art yardstick), culminating with the joy of involvement and creative pleasure of each participating child, also served as the best feedback (and, conditionally, evaluation) on the impression acquired about the overall previous offered subject matter.

## LECTURES, PRESENTATIONS, WORKSHOPS – THE COMMUNITY IN THE MUSEUM

The described adjusted guided tours, applied on the average once a week (on Tuesdays), were supplemented on several occasions with lectures, presentations and workshops led by painter Antonija Rusković Radonić, acting director of the Museums and Galleries of Konavle, and Jure Marinović, professor of history at the Confucian Institute of the University of Zagreb.

Through selected co-workers the project promoted multiculturalism as well as openness to potential transnational cooperation, and the practical inclusion of individuals from the local community into the work of the museum in a high quality and sustainable way primarily through the presentation of national silk thread production and the art of Konavle embroidery – since last summer a protected intangible cultural asset of the Republic of Croatia. The basic purpose was to achieve sensitization not only at the local level but within the public at large.

This is precisely why we opened these programmes to all interested visitors, with a particular emphasis on vocational school pupils (School for Fashion and Design, School of Applied Arts and Design) and students of the Faculty of Textile Technology, Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Science (Departments of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Anthropology, History, History of Art etc.), Faculty of Science (Department of Biology), Faculty of Teacher Education, etc.

The objectives of the subject matter supporting the educational programme were the following:

- provide for access to the skill of Konavle embroidery making to the public;
- popularize Konavle embroidery and sensitize young people to the need of its preservation, and raise the awareness of the need to protect the cultural heritage from the earliest age;
- promote the Croatian sericultural tradition abroad by promoting interculturality and openness to transnational cooperation;
- involve the local community and individuals supporting and moderating the tradition of silkworm breeding and the making of Konavle embroidery in a quality-wise appropriate and sustainable way;
- directly involve and urge visitors to engage in creative expression processes by offering opportunities for the possibility of learning the basic skills in the making of Konavle embroidery;
- establish innovative networking of heritage and cultural institutions through an interdisciplinary educational programme along with increasing the audience of all the involved organizations and institutions;

- expand the opportunities for interdisciplinary correlative learning (history, biology, art etc.) through extramural teaching - users: educational institutions of the city and state;
- develop long-term partnerships of public cultural institutions at the national and international levels.

### WHY THE KONAVLE EMBROIDERY?

“...the modern museum has started searching for the future past... In such a situation, the museum appears as a form of social intervention.. In a nutshell, a responsible museum can implement efficient action by ensuring the survival of jeopardized skills” (Šola 1997: 59).

The skill of making Konavle embroidery was protected as an intangible cultural asset of the Republic of Croatia in July 2015. The promoter of the protection is the Matica Hrvatska branch in Konavle led by painter Antonija Rusković Radonić, acting director of the Konavle Museums and Art Galleries, whose name has for quite a few years associated with active efforts focused on the preservation and revival of silkworm breeding in Konavle and the promotion of the skill of making Konavle embroidery in Croatia and abroad.

This status is an important determinant of the future of Konavle embroidery because it involves protection measures related to the transmission of knowledge and the organization of educational programme, the proper spreading of awareness of what the Konavle embroidery really is, and familiarization with the skill of Konavle silk-thread production practiced since medieval times thanks to strong commercial links with the Dubrovnik Republic and favourable geographic and climatological conditions.

The models in the urban Gothic and Renaissance fashions are clearly reflected in the festive Konavle costumes whose silk-embroidered parts, distributed strategically on the usual places of ornamentation, the breast and the wrists, enhance the value of their wearers, the local women, as a rule personally responsible for their making (from silk worm breeding to embroidery). While sericulture in this region used to be the usual practice of each family with a female child, and almost every free room became in spring the space for silkworm breeding in order to secure material required for the wedding dress and after the wedding, today sericulture has survived primarily at the level of local identity and promotion of the rich heritage of Dubrovnik and its surroundings. This is why the spreading of silkworm breeding and its presentation to the public at large becomes even more precious, and enhances our joy for having contributed to it as a museum.

The presentations/workshops included the following:

- short history and geographic introduction;
- description of silk production in the Mediterranean;
- survey of the topic of Konavle women (history, girl education);
- story of silkworm breeding in Konavle – detailed description by phase, examination of eggs under a microscope, and puzzle for the youngest visitors;
- presentation of technique of thread drawing, and silk washing, dyeing and weaving;
- presentation of the specific characteristics of Konavle embroidery in relation to other types of weave;
- practical teaching of basic Konavle embroidery;
- short description of Konavle costume.
- The duration of every presentation with a workshop was between 30 and 45 minutes depending on the attendant's age, background and interest.

At this point I need to highlight another essential element, and that is the fact that only empty cocoons were used for the requirements of the workshops. Such an approach (rarely used in Croatia in the past, and especially developed in India because of religious beliefs) derived from a new focus of the Ethnographic Museum as the first publicly declared museum/animal friend in Croatia.

### WHY THE CONFUCIAN INSTITUTE?

“Education in world heritage is a dynamic process which advocates the reaffirmation of identity, mutual respect, dialogue, unity in diversity, solidarity and positive interaction between world cultures” (Bandarin 2011: 5).

The Confucian Institute of the University of Zagreb is an educational university centre-founded in order to promote the Chinese language and culture, and strengthen the economic ties between the Republic of Croatia and the People's Republic of China. Over the years to its activity it has been focused on familiarizing the Croatian public with the Chinese language and culture through many courses and workshops from different fields of culture, science and art. The mission of Confucian Institutes as non-profit educational institutes throughout the world is to contribute to the better understanding of the Chinese language and culture among citizens of other countries, develop friendly relations between the People's Republic of China and other countries worldwide, and, ultimately, promote the development of multiculturalism on the global scale.

Therefore, cooperation with the Confucian Institute occurred as the logical choice not only because of the topic but also in terms of the understanding of the museum as a point of encounter and “a creative environment for learning social solidarity”

(Falk and Dierking acc. to Petursdottir 2011). Affirmative knowledge of others and different things is indispensable in conditions of global connection and the only proper way to peaceful coexistence, and a museum, an ethnographic one in particular, may (and must) play significant role, realize through active social involvement and the securing of conditions for dialogue of all types, international dialogue in particular. Therefore, teaching of the intercultural type is of crucial importance for overcoming stereotypes and biases, the classic generators of conflict, and knowledge of the beauty of diversity means recognizing oneself – “only partners clearly aware of their own values and possessing a strong identity can realize a harmonious unity which does not threaten anybody. Flexibility and open dialogue, and cooperation, are the logical consequence” (Kovačić 2001: 136). Through lectures on the Silk Route presented by Jure Marinović we wanted to bring China closer to all the interested public, and especially to young people; as we saw, many of them knew China only on the basis of some internationally famous attractions (e.g. the Chinese Wall), Chinese food and Chinese goods, present on an increasing scale on the streets of Croatian cities as well. By following the programme-defined principles of correlation, our objective was to trace the (silk) route from China, the homeland of silk, through Asia to Europe and Konavle, the Croatian cradle of silkworm breeding since medieval times. In order to achieve a maximum impression, we used media such as photography and documentary shorts, and live evidence of the significance and application of silk in modern life (e.g., painting on silk). The latter offered the audiences opportunities for direct insight, discussion and exchange of experience, and it also gave the Ethnographic Museum and the Confucian Institute of the University of Zagreb the opportunity for future cooperation and mediation in potential transnational cooperation.

## **PROMOTION IN LIBRARIES – THE MUSEUM IN THE COMMUNITY**

Along with standard forms of promotion (newsletters, social networks, posters and leaflets, media advertising), addressed to potential visitors from all over the state, the project was supported by the Zagreb City Libraries the premises of which were used for short promotional lectures, informative introductions to the subject matter presented in the Zoo and in the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb. The lectures were intended primarily for educational workers (teachers, educators and school principals), and interested parents of children attending primary schools in Zagreb, and were held by the representatives of the project partners, I. Kovarik and G. Viljetić. They used the presentation which covered the basic data on the programme (duration, number of participants, cost, transportation etc.), ancillary material (photographs of biological material/ethnographic



exhibits), and facilities and methods, for achieving extramural, interactive and correlation teaching which the specific programme could offer. The promotion of the project realized in this way simulated the affirmation of creative potentials of the project partners (e.g., the installation of mini-exhibitions on silkworm breeding in host libraries and the organization of promotional workshops for the children) through the continuous development of the programme and the introduction of new initiatives for interdisciplinary learning adjusted to the requirements and interest of the audience. Thus, it was precisely at the quest that libraries also hosted short presentations of the subject matter offered by the Zoo (Ethnographic Museum. On these occasions children of preschool age were shown the life cycle of the silkworm, the legend on the origin of silk and some objects made of silk. The very stepping out of the museum from the framework of an (elite) institution to the local community (neighbourhood) stimulated the community to accept that act as a sincere intention and opportunity for dialogue in which both partners play an equally important role without any hierarchization and consumption of imposed rather than chosen subject matter.

In order to develop the strategy of museum pedagogy in the range from preschool to university student age museums necessarily require close cooperation with educational institutions at all levels (cf. Petursdottir 2011: 302). The example above is one of the ways of stimulating the crossing of boundaries and helping educators (teachers) to use the museum in a meaningful way and museum workers to gain insight into the real world, wishes and needs of those who prepared programmes.

### **INTERNAL EVALUATION: I HAVE TO DEAL WITH TWO, THREE CATERPILLARS IF I WANT TO GET TO KNOW THE BUTTERFLY<sup>6</sup>**

Finally, the programme shortcomings and constraints observed in the museum regard first of all space (in some cases restricted freedom of movement due to the showcases of the permanent display and, in this connection, the moving of certain elements in other activities are under way on the first floor of the building) and during visits of school groups from places outside Zagreb; along with travel, several hours spent on activities on two locations, that may mean an extra effort for children of preschool and younger school age. On the other hand, other groups may find the variety of subject matter and dynamic movement a motivation for concentration and continued discovery of new elements. The modest resources spent mainly on fees of outside co-workers and the material

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6 Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

equipment of museum space/art workshops, with no funds for providing visually and cognitively multimedial elements, have been compensated by concentration on drawing the maximum out of the educational process, adjusted to the age, interest and psychophysical condition of each child through an adjustable style of dialogue in managing groups of visitors, knowledge transaction, methodically and didactically meaningful subject matter, unmolded working material and the museum's own teaching aids (work of the museum's preparatory workshops, written-off museum objects etc.).

## **CONCLUSION: RESULTS AND FUTURE PLANS**

According to our own records, the programme was mainly attended by children/pupils with the teachers and educators of Zagreb primary schools and kindergartens. However, what was more essential than the number of visits is the response to the quality of the offered subject matter, as well as the opportunities for long-term partnership of the Ethnographic Museum and cultural institutions through the continuation and expansion of the programmes or similar forms of innovative network activity as well as the realization of contacts for potential international cooperation.

At the educational level, at least judging by the feedback and impressions of the participants (children, parents, educators and teachers), we have improved the children's knowledge of, and ties with, cultural and natural heritage, with particular emphasis on their sensitization to the protection of the cultural heritage on the concrete example – making of Konavle embroidery – and on the higher awareness of the significance of the interdisciplinary and extramural approach in the teaching of educators and teachers. In other words, we have recognized the learning/teaching opportunities offered by the museum as the place of non-formal and/or informal learning and amusement stimulating curiosity and innovation, and, finally, contributing to the better understanding of the world in which we live – the condition for respecting the intangible cultural heritage developed through the reciprocal action of man and nature (ecological aspects of the skill of Konavle embroidery making), and for the prevention of its disappearance, destruction or excessive consumption at the local and global level.

In spite of physical/financial constraints, the described approach to museum activity is actually the basis for a humanistically oriented curriculum. It is agreed in advance as fully determined and completed, but developed in educational (museum) practices. In keeping with this it also lends itself to change and continuous improvement (cf. Miljak 1996: 38); the same applies to our programme, where we already have some ideas of andragogic transformation which would, taking

into account the biological side of this story (the life cycle) in a very symbolic way practically realize the mission of lifelong education in a modern museum as the place of intergenerational encounter, live memory, creation, communication and dialogue.

“Creative success does not start with constraints but with good cooperation of the multidisciplinary team” (Kovačić 2001: 136). On this occasion I would like to thank the management and all the workers of the Zagreb Zoo and the Ethnographic Museum, and all part-time co-workers, who have supported the development of the Project *Two Stops on the Silk Road* in a variety of ways, from the recognition of the initial idea through the detection of optimum solutions for its realization to constructive criticism.

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