

Youth Videomuseums of a community: the background of a project

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Synopsis

This article aims to present the origins and the development of the Videomuseums concept. The initial project (1991) was developed with the aim to record the cultural environment of youth and provide them with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the methods of electronic journalism. To encourage teachers to implement their own versions of the Videomuseum project, the methodology of the original implementation is described step by step. All further developments of the project as designed in the 2009-2012 implementations, are being described in separate articles within this present volume.

Introduction

An action project called "Children take photographs of Omonia Square" was carried out in spring 1981 in Athens, Greece. Fifteen children, 10-13 years of age, holding simple cameras in their hands (instamatic cameras whose film was in a cassette), visited the square, photographed it selecting their viewpoints, and then they gathered in the old Fix factory, located in Patissia, to discuss the photos taken. At the end, using their photos as a reference, they painted a reconstruction of Omonia Square, and proposed solutions to the various operational problems faced at that time. The overall aim of the action project was to invite students to prepare a hypothetical presentation of the square, addressing to children who had never visited it before. The action project¹ was organised by the society for environmental education, "Round 'n Around", and – with every caution against any similar pro-

jects which might have not been publicised – it was part of the first conscious attempts to provide students in Greece with audiovisual training (that is, it was designed to offer students the opportunity to use audiovisual tools).

Since then, I and Ms. Athina Rikaki (a pioneering educator in issues of pedagogy and aesthetic education) had been considering the possibility of getting a van equipped with audiovisual tools (simple cameras and two portable video systems which would give us the opportunity to record and edit videos). Following the example of a van which visited British schools, organising theatre activities – we would visit schools in the province, providing primary, elementary and lower secondary students with the opportunity to create audiovisual presentations of their environment and, thus, become familiar with the tools and methods of the electronic mass media of the time. The text of the full proposal regarding the creation of Videomuseums was published a little



later². A relevant proposal was submitted in 1985 to the then recently founded General Secretariat for Youth, but was met with no response.

The endeavour was eventually undertaken a long time later, in 1991, by M. Haritou-Fatourou, professor in the School of Psychology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, in collaboration with the European Children's Television Centre (ECTC), which derived from the society "Round 'n Around". It was the "Action Project for Environmental Education: Programme for Introducing Young Children of Remote Towns to the Methods of Electronic Mass Media" (B4 - 3062/91/10294).

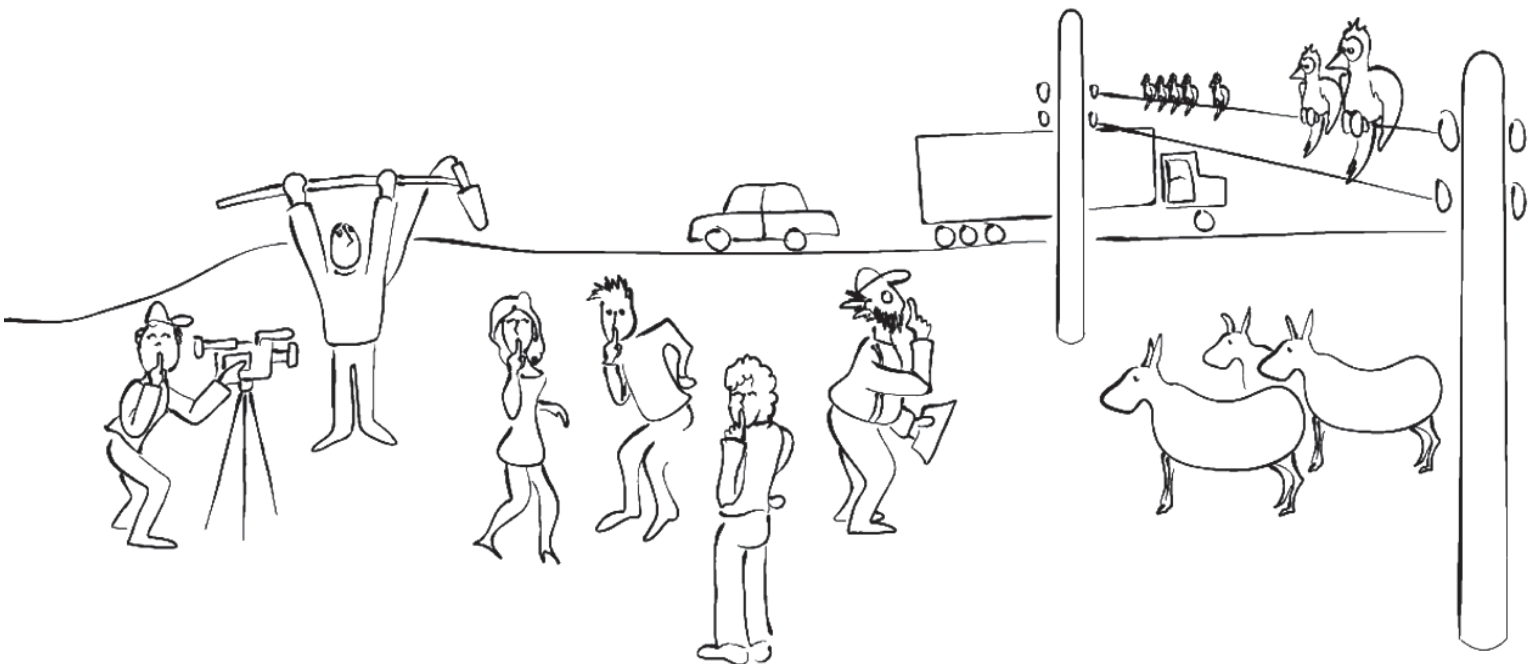
Over the years that followed, the Project was realised three times: the first time in one Greek school only, without the participation of any foreign partners, whereas during the two subsequent times, partners from other European schools participated in the project as well. Full details about the contributors and participating schools are provided at the end of this article.

Description and rationale of the intervention

The main objective of this action project was to mobilise lower secondary students to choose specific topics pertaining to their immediate environment, to evaluate and prioritise them using as a criterion their need for preservation, and finally, to produce short video-recordings (the so-called Videomuseums) which would potentially present these chosen topics (the so-called video-exhibits) to foreign students of their age. The Project was implemented for the first time in the 1st Lower Secondary School of Livadia, during Easter vacation, in 1991.

A couple of key features of the aforementioned project should be noted (as presented in the paper referenced in note no. 2 above):

- ▶ "Preservation" acquires symbolic and purely ideological dimensions, since it's not the object which is preserved on film but its image. The activity introduces students to a new way of approaching their environment. That is, apart from the role of "an empirical consumer" which they usually adopt, for the first time they are encouraged to critically examine and evaluate their surroundings.
- ▶ The notion of a Videomuseum broadens the meaning of the term "preservation" in children's minds, since the museum can include any item from their natural, man-made and living environment, such as a narration by an elderly person, or the recording of the remembrance of a specific event through a series of successive interviews etc.
- ▶ Furthermore, a Videomuseum can be enriched with new video-exhibits every one or two years. Its topics can also be revised so that the product can evolve dynamically and reflect children's most recent concerns about their environment.
- ▶ In terms of methodology, a "Videomuseum" can be used as a "research tool" for cultural comparisons and sociological research. The prospect of depicting the preservation priorities of a community will provide the opportunity for statistically valid and reliable comparisons both on a longitudinal basis and between communities of a different cultural, economic and social profile.



More importantly, the potential future realisation of the project in communities of other European countries seeks to draw conclusions in terms of the distinctive features but also the common beliefs which may be manifested through the Videomuseums of the future.

Goals – objectives of the project

Except for the general guidelines presented above, we briefly present the specific goals set up:

- ▶ To help children and adults become aware of the cultural elements around them and how these relate to their daily lives.
- ▶ To promote creative relationships between citizens of different age groups and Greek community bodies (authorities– teachers – adults – children).
- ▶ To support children’s participation in activities concerning the “production of information” and, thus, enhancing the development of their judgment when faced with mass media news dissemination.
- ▶ To help children train in the study, recording and protection of the natural and man-made environment.
- ▶ To sensitise children to collective processes necessary for decision-making and to foster the spirit of collective work and trust in the product of group work.
- ▶ To offer to children in the province the opportunity to express themselves freely and be involved in creative communication, while participating in activities (cinema – photography – television – recording) that are rarely available to them.

Process

Target age: Lower and Upper Secondary students (13-18 year-olds)

During the first week, and with the help of three young animators, students were divided into equally numbered teams and each one created a short video-reportage about how they spend their leisure time in the city. In those days, taking into account the complexity and high cost of the equipment (semi-professional VHS), the assistance of a young filmmaker available in turns to the teams, was considered essential. The filmmaker guided technically the children to apply their own choices by getting “orders” from them (the commonly known, even today, relationship between a journalist, a cameraman, and a video editor, with the children usually playing the role of the journalist). Although the filmmaker tried not to intervene, sometimes he got involved in the process, since he had to operate the equipment himself. On the other hand, giving directions to the filmmaker, often required students to experiment themselves in trial shootings. Before and during the project, the filmmaker and the coordinator of the project

(also a person working on television productions) held short workshops – separately for each team – to help students get acquainted with the audiovisual tools.

During the second week, the three student groups along with their animators, following the process for the selection of “video-exhibits” which is described below, designed and applied the elements-exhibits they had selected. The filmmaker acted as a video editor/sound engineer (using a VHS editing suite), processing children’s choices not only with regards to editing, but also to music or voice-over recordings. In some cases the video editing was not completed in the school and children gave detailed instructions to the filmmaker so that he could complete it on his own. In these cases, the filmmaker visited the school again to offer students the opportunity to watch the videos and discuss the final outcome. It would have been worthwhile, after the completion of the project, if the rest of the students, parents and any interested young people of the community had been given the chance to watch the videos on a special screening (but unfortunately this didn’t happen). However, those students who participated in the project filled in evaluation forms about it.



Detailed animation process for the selection of “video-exhibits”

(It can easily be used by interested teachers)

The project concerning the production of a student film is thought by many teachers to require specialised knowledge as well as some artistic inclination. What’s more, terms such as script, technical equipment, acting, video editing sound far too technologically advanced and mysterious to some teachers who maintain that an ignorant person can easily make a fool of themselves. But, just like in any other unknown area, one can start with introductory activities that

will help both the teacher and students to get a grasp of basic concepts and processes.

Moreover, many teachers hesitate to invest so much effort and free time in a project whose final result, in its content, will be anything but compatible with the typical curriculum objectives. They would rather direct their efforts to an audiovisual project that would refer to a *subject matter*, such as a historical documentary for instance, or a documentary on physics experiments! But one should bear in mind that the activities for a student production have to be considered as part of an open, free project (a collective, constructive activity) whose educational aim is to promote the development of communication skills, collectivity, research methods, as well as data presentation skills. These skills will be important methodological qualifications for the students' future work in any scientific field, while the main educational benefit has more to do with students' knowledge and understanding of the media and the use of audiovisual tools than with the content of a specific documentary film.

As this skepticism on the part of the teachers could not be disregarded, the endeavour to produce Videomuseums was shaped in accordance with the wishes of those teachers who would consent to devote time and efforts in a project closer in concept to the school setting. Hence, emphasis was put on the protection of the natural and cultural environment!

Plan for a proposed process for selecting subjects and for the pre-research required to prepare shootings (as it was, more or less, implemented)

1. The activity starts with a discussion held in class about the meaning of terms such as *safeguarding*, *protection* and *preservation*, when these are used to refer to the natural and cultural environment. Then, students are introduced to the

notion of *museum*. Students will attempt to understand the meaning of the term (based on what they already know or assume), as well as examine whether the function of a museum is related to the meaning of the above terms.

2. Having expressed some opinions on the subject under discussion, students are asked to imagine, for instance, a "Car Museum". Students are asked what kind of exhibits they would expect to find in such a museum:

- ▶ the most rare cars?
- ▶ the most unusual cars?
- ▶ the most expensive cars?
- ▶ the most representative (thus, usual) cars of every era?
- ▶ perhaps knowledge and law provisions on car technology, and the development of the relevant technology in the course of time?
- ▶ perhaps cars associated with unique historical moments or events?

If such a museum housed only 15 cars and was located in their city, how would they rank the above criteria for a "complete" Car Museum in the city? In what way could such a museum contribute to the *safeguarding – protection – preservation* of their cultural environment?

3. Spending approximately one hour in the above activity, students are asked to imagine a Museum of their own Community (or their district). What should such a museum contain? Can a spontaneous exhibit list be drawn up? (An effort should be made to compile a potential exhibit list).

4. Then, students are asked a new question: 'If there was a separate exhibition hall within the Museum of their Community bearing the sign "Youth Museum of our Community"; what would they choose to exhibit in it?' Certainly, their choices should not include the exhibits already included in



the proposed exhibit list of the Museum of the Community. They should focus on the *safeguarding-protection-preservation* of exhibits which are related to youth (not necessarily excluding exhibits related to the history of the community, which might have been or still are, in a way, related to youth). Likewise, students should avoid selecting exhibits related to the sites of the community (those cultural elements that a visitor-tourist is supposed to visit). Instead, they should focus on what they would like to show to a visitor-friend, such as their own favourite items, presented through their own eyes.

This discussion should not be of a theoretical character. Instead, each suggestion should be specific and written on the board. It is advisable that suggestions be subjected to the judgment of all students present and written on the board only if they are accepted by 3-4 students. The suggestions should refer to individual exhibits and not to variations of relevant exhibits which could possibly be incorporated into a single component. It should also be pointed out that the suggestions do not have to refer to tangible objects; on the contrary, we may consider that our exhibition hall in the Museum of the Community will be fully equipped with adequate audiovisual tools allowing presentation of images and sounds of the exhibits that could not otherwise be transferred there. Therefore, buildings, venues, people, sounds, special events and the like can form part of the audiovisual (virtual) exhibits.

Gradually, a proposed exhibit list will be formed without overlapping and repetition of exhibits, and every suggestion will be clearly stated in a few words so that any young person in the community, who is aware of the exhibits but is not a member of the class, can recognise what they refer to. Teachers can also propose exhibits they consider interesting, having first held a discussion to ensure they really appeal to students.

5. When the final list of about 30-50 exhibits is complete, students will be asked a new question: 'If a visitor to the exhibition area of the Youth of the Community had time for just five three-to-four-minute audiovisual presentations (videos) of an equal number of exhibits from the list, which exhibits would you choose to present?'

The selection can be the result of an open voting or, in order to acquaint students with other methods of public opinion polls, it can take place as described below.

The full list of the suggestions will be numbered and written on an A4 sheet of paper. The exhibits of the list can

be classified into categories: history and past, entertainment and leisure time, natural environment, function of the community. Every student in the class will get three copies of the list, one for writing down their own personal answers and two more for the answers/opinions they will get from two other young people of the community, who are not members of their class. Only five exhibits can be marked on every form – those exhibits which, according to the person filling in the form, are the five most important exhibits that should be displayed in the exhibition hall of the Youth Museum of the Community. They will ask students from other classes to fill in the forms, making sure that each student will fill in only one form. Writing down the name of the student answering the questions will help avoid counting more answers given by the same student and will ensure that more young people of the community will be offered the chance to participate in the activity. The forms should be filled on the spot so that in two days every student hands in their three forms.

6. Then, after counting votes in class, using the usual tallying procedure, out of the proposed exhibit list, the five most popular exhibits will emerge. This systematic procedure acquaints students with the process of quantitative social research. Mathematicians can help express students' answers as percentages (leisure time, natural environment etc.).

7. At this stage, the audiovisual activity can be implemented. Five teams will be formed and will be assigned the production of the five three-to-four-minute videos relevant to the five exhibits selected by the students. The methodology applied (group formation, way of work, collective decision-making, mode of research etc.) will develop the principles suggested by the Project Method. Prior to the Videomuseum productions, the members of every team will conduct research, having to decide on:

- ▶ the information which is important to be included
- ▶ the way of their presentation:
 - with an accompanying comment (voice-over)
 - interviewing those in charge or experts
 - interviewing passers-by
 - with diagrams or other file images
 - on the spot filming
 - guided by a presenter



Livadia, Greece 1991

- ▶ the collaborators and their preparation
- ▶ the sites and the kind of filming (which days, what time, under which conditions etc.), in order to effectively present the exhibit and so on.

Preparation



Pagrati, Athens 1994



Pagrati, Athens 1994

Filming



Livadia, Greece 1991



Livadia, Greece 1991



Livadia, Greece 1991

Depending on the degree of teachers' familiarisation with audiovisual tools, some cooperation with a professional in the cinema or television industry might prove to be an important factor that would lead to success. Today's technology allows the resulting video presentations to be available within a virtual museum in the form of a DVD-ROM format.



Chalastra, Thessaloniki 1997



Livadia, Greece 1991



Chalastra, Thessaloniki 1997



Pagrati, Athens 1994

Video editing – Sound processing



Livadia, Greece 1991



Livadia, Greece 1991



Pagрати, Athens 1994

In conclusion, “restless” teachers should not forget that the proposed model for producing Videomuseums could be easily turned into a Guide for the Production of an “Annual Video-report of the events prevalent in the lives of the youth of the community over the year” or any other similar subject (with a special emphasis on the intrinsic consistency of the video-product so that it is not “a little bit of everything”).



Pagрати, Athens 1994

Schools and partners from 1991-1998

The contributors of the three Videomuseums, which were produced following broadly the abovementioned model, were:

- ▶ “Action Project for Environmental Education: Programme for Introducing Young Children of Remote Towns to the Methods of Electronic Mass Media” (B4 - 3062/91/10294):

1991, 1st Lower Secondary School of Livadia

Scientific advisor: M. Haritou-Fatourou

Programme design and coordination: M. Theodoridis, Ath. Rikaki

Programme evaluation: El. Hodolidou

Partners: K. Halkia, B. Mesthaneos,

Student group coordinators: M. Sfakianopoulou, P. Aggelopoulos, K. Ziros

Editing for television: Ch. Tsagakis

Implementing body: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, School of Psychology

- ▶ Directorate General XXII, Task Force - Unit A2, European Union

1995, 17th Lower Secondary School of Pagrati, Athens

Scientific advisor: M. Theodoridis

Coordinators: K. Lappa, Ag. Igglesi

Editing for television: Ch. Tsagakis

Implementing body: European Children’s Television Centre (ECTC)

1996, Tourmakedy College, Ireland, Coordinator:

Eithne Ni Dhonncha

1996, Colegio de Santa Doroteia, Lisbon, Portugal, Co-

ordinator: Francisco Vares Machado

- ▶ “My Europe: Seeking Local Cultural Aspects as Chosen by Fifteen-Year-Old Students for a Wider Understanding within Europe” (26599-CP-2-97-I-SE-COMENIUS-C31)

1997, Lower Secondary School of Chalastra, Thessaloniki

Scientific advisors: M. Haritou – Fatourou, K. Deligianni

Project manager: M. Theodoridis

Coordinator: El. Xyla

Teachers-advisors: K. Skritzovali, D. Spanou, El. Xyla, N. Kapsahilis

Editing for television: Ch. Tsagakis

Implementing body: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, School of Psychology

Partner-evaluator: J. Chorley, University of Wolverhampton

1998, St Mary’s Baldoyle / St Patrick’s College / Drumcondra, Dublin, Ireland

1998, Hagebyskolan College, Norrköping, Sweden

1998, Överum College, Sweden

1998, Linköping College, Sweden


Notes

1. A brief description in the paper: Theodoridis, M. (1987). Aesthetic education and child socialisation: What aesthetic education is and is not about. *A tribute to Aesthetic education in Open School*, issue N° 14, Sept. – Oct. 1987, pp. 24, 25, 30. [In Greek].

2. A detailed description of the rationale and methodology of the proposed programme deriving from the ideological choices of the corresponding organisers-coordinators: Rikaki, Ath., Theodoridis, M. (1982). Round ‘n Around: Theory and Practice (Environmental Education Utilising the Means of Electronic Journalism). In *Ecology and Environment*, issue N° 5, Nov. – Dec. 1982, pp. 73-76.

Translated from Greek
by Vassiliki Mitsiou

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 www.karposontheweb.org