

CONFERENCES

Baltic Museology School
7th Annual Session, Riga
(Latvia), June 2010



In June, 2010, the *Baltic Museology School* (BMS) held its seventh annual session - so we can already call it a tradition. What is BMS and how did it come about? The aim of the school is to link theory with practice in order to develop and strengthen museological thinking in the Baltic states, so that museums become more professional, modern and accessible to the public.

The idea of the school arose from the conclusion that contemporary society expects even more professional work from the museums. A quality result needs an approach that is based on the theoretical and scholarly findings of museology. All Baltic States can boast of both rich cultural heritage and old museum traditions of, yet they have had limited opportunities to learn about the latest developments in museology. It was in August 2003 that, in Vilnius, the ministries of culture of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia agreed to cooperate in the international long-term project *Baltic Museology School*. The first session of BMS took place in the summer of 2004 in Latvia.

The work of BMS is centred on its lecturers - the school provides a unique opportunity to study with outstanding, internationally recognised Museology experts, to learn from their views of the Museum, its place in the society, the problems of its work. Some of the BMS lecturers were: Stephen E. Weil, Crispin Paine, Martin Schaerer, Merethe Frøyland, Alison James, Peter van Mensch, François Mairesse, Anja Dauschek, J. Lyene Teather, Alf Hatton, Jane Legget, David Fleming, Paula Dos Santos, Yvette Staelens.

The multifaceted approach of BMS is characterised by the themes of its sessions: "Museums and Their Role in Contemporary Society" (2004); "Museum Communication" (2005); "Museums and Cultural Heritage" (2006); "Museological Aspects of Management" (2007); "The Social Role of Museums: Temple or Forum" (2008); "Management of Changes in Museums" (2009); "Intangible Heritage and Museums" (2010).

The participants of BMS are museum workers from the Baltic and other countries, specialists, interested in the linkage of practice and theory, as well as the role of museology in their practical decision making process. During seven years of activity, BMS has had more than 300 participants, a part of them being regulars. The attendees acknowledge that their participation in BMS provides a chance to meet and discuss professional questions with international experts, as well as to learn about other Baltic museums and establish new contacts. BMS is an international project, so the working language there is English. The project is internationally recognized as museum specialists from beyond the Baltic region keep expressing their wish to participate. We have already welcomed colleagues from Russia, Germany, Denmark, and Australia.

The results of the project are accessible and useful for every museum specialist in the Baltic States - the articles of the lecturers, which cover the main issues around the annual theme, are translated into Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian. This is a significant contribution to the spread of theory of museology in our region. Latvia, as the originator of the project chooses the session themes and lecturers, and maintains and updates its homepage www.bms.edu.lv, while our partners manage the actual hosting of the annual session in their country.

After a week of BMS work, the lecturer Yvette Staelens gladly acknowledged that it had been a pleasure to let (and sometimes make) people think. Instead of hectic looking for quicker, easier, cheaper solutions to the problems, the main question of BMS is: why? Up to now, the work of BMS and the received feedback provides for optimism that this will remain a long-term project.

More information available at:

www.bms.edu.lv/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1%A0

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