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On ruralities and resistances: the management model of Pusol School Museum (Spain) and the challenges of reciprocal participation between Museum and Society.

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Abstract

‘Society in the Museum’ (SoMus) is a research project in Sociomuseology that began in 2014 from Portugal. SoMus aims to define four different participatory management models at four local museums placed in different European countries, taking as starting point their rationales and daily practices.

Chosen for the innovative nature of society’s cultural participation, these museums symbolise a diverse range of contexts, cultures and challenges, which allow us to reflect on their place in the construction of new models of full cultural democracy.

In this article, we present the model created by the Pusol School Museum (Spain). Its innovative practices in heritage education link up museum and school, knowledge and the appreciation of traditional culture, in a rural area located in the inland of the province of Alicante, at the Southeaster Mediterranean Spanish coast.

Keywords

Sociomuseology;
participatory management in museums;
cultural participation;
heritage education;
Pusol School Museum.

1. Introduction

The research project titled 'Society in the Museum: study on cultural participation in European local museums' (SoMus)¹, studies highly transformational practices associated with the concept of cultural participation in museums. The main goal is to systematise them in order to create new models of participatory management which can be exported to other cultural institutions. Simultaneously, a proposal is put forward to define the epistemological framework, the methods and practices linked to what is one of the essential functions in the current museology arena: cultural participation (Sancho Querol 2017a, 44).

To this end, SoMus finds itself within the field of Social Museology (Moutinho 2010; Sancho Querol & Sancho 2015), and combines Human and Social Sciences with Responsible Research and Innovation² (RRI), while using Participatory Action Research³ (PAR).

In this context, a group consisting of a researcher in Museology, two universities and the teams from four local museums⁴ representing Nordic Museology (and situated in Finland and Sweden) and the Mediterranean (Spain and Portugal), have been mapping their museological practices since 2014 with regard to the cultural participation of society in the museum, so as to define a participatory management model that is specific to each case, a model that represents the essence of their sociomuseological work.

Accordingly, in addition to creating a specific work method which enables a collective definition of a museum's participatory management model to be made (Sancho Querol 2017a, 43-55), in 2015 we finalised the creation of the Portuguese museum model, known as the 'Model of Museums in Layers' (Sancho Querol & Sancho o.c.), and two years later we published the Finnish museum model, or 'OPTI Model' (Sancho Querol, Kallio & Heinonen 2017). In 2019, and throughout this article, we aim to raise awareness of the collective working process which has allowed us to define a proper management formula for the Spanish museum: 'The Pomegranate Tree Model'.

The Pusol School Museum (MEP), which is situated in a rural area of the Province of Alicante, has developed its own methodology in heritage education during its more than four decades of existence. With this methodology, it is possible to learn about and give value to (Nogués-Pedregal 2006, 15-17) the traditional culture of the municipality of Elche and its surroundings, whilst simultaneously connecting to the local sociocultural needs in a creative, functional and attentive way, in order to provide new solutions. Two educational pathways -

¹ This article is a product of the post-doctoral project of the first author - the SoMus Project - supported by with a post-doctoral grant (reference SFRH/BPD/95214/2013) of the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology. Further information about SoMus can be found at the project webpage: <https://www.ces.uc.pt/projectos/somus/>

² *Responsible Research and Innovation* (RRI) is the name used by the European Commission in the 'Science and Society' programmes. It refers to participatory research with society as an essential active agent in the process to obtain a larger, more appropriate and sustainable set of positive impacts. Further information: <https://www.rri-tools.eu/>

³ PAR is a methodological and ideological option that uses practices of full participation and networking, which are characterised by its transformational and decolonising aspect (Gabarrón and Landa 2006). In the case of SoMus this means a set of collective research-action initiatives evolving citizens and museums (Sancho Querol 2017, 53).

⁴ SoMus team structure is available at the project webpage at: https://www.ces.uc.pt/projectos/somus/index.php?id=12417&id_lingua=1&pag=12430

school and museum - are therefore brought together in a single space: the last remaining unitary school that is still active in the municipality of Elche⁵, giving rise to a museum of ethnological character with which it shares a mission and challenges on a daily basis⁶.

The MEP puts us in touch with school museology, with collaborative education in a rural context, and with the multiple aspects and challenges of knowledge and active safeguarding of traditional culture in the 21st century. Among these, we can highlight the passing down of local knowledge from generation to generation, the respect for nature - its rhythms and timings - and the meaningful learning between peers and generations, or between ruralities and urbanities.

In the following pages, we outline the MEP's history, mission, values and goals. Later we shall look in more detail at methodological issues to get a closer understanding of its organic structure, good practices, and the impacts that are brought about. Finally, we will present the outcome of the process of methodological systematisation of their good practices of society participation in the museum, as well as the new participatory management model that we have created based on this outcome.

The results obtained together with the MEP team lead us to the third participatory management model created in the context of the SoMus project which, similar to the previous ones, can be replicated through adaptation to other contexts and cultural institutions who want to improve their daily management by opting for a fully participatory route.

2. Origins and history of Pusol School Museum

The Pusol School Museum is an educational-museistic project that has been operating since 1968 in the unitary school of the rural district (*pedanía*) of Puçol⁷, in Elche, a province of Alicante, Southeaster Mediterranean coast. Its main activity is to educate schoolchildren by integrating traditional local culture as a core didactic resource, while safeguarding and raising awareness of the value of these resources through its sociomuseological work.

The MEP arose in a sociocultural context that was witness to the final decline in agricultural activity, to the growth of the city and the emergence of mass media, which gave rise to a profound transformation of rural life and a rapid shift in values (Martínez Sanmartín 2010).

⁵ Most of the unitary schools existing in rural areas of low population density in Spain, closed after the start of the 1970s, when pupils were transferred to larger schools. The school associated with Pusol Museum has managed to survive thanks to the singularity of its Educational-Museistic Project.

⁶ In the case of the Spanish museum, after confirming the need, and together with the technical team, it was also made a process of collective updating its Educational-Museistic Project (now known as "PoEM") between November 2017 and May, 2018. The PoEM can be found on the institution's website at: <https://www.museopusol.com/es/publicaciones/>

⁷ *Pedanía* is the term most commonly used in the Spanish Levante to refer to a rural area which may or may not have a small urban centre and depends on a larger municipality. Although current policies on linguistic matters impose the use of the Valencian term, 'Puçol', the School-Museum maintains the use of the place name used traditionally by the neighbours from the district: 'Pusol'.

In consequence, there is a gradual loss of basic knowledge related to the agricultural setting of the school, which brings about a sense of not belonging, both in new generations and the rural community itself (García Fontanet 1985). Against this backdrop, a team of teachers led by Fernando García Fontanet⁸, came up with a pedagogic project that contextualises the school in its rural environment (Figure 1).

From that moment onwards, and throughout the 1970s, the study of professions that were dying out and the collection of oral memories from elderly people in the area was initiated. By doing so, pupils were able to involve the neighbourhood in the process of promoting local culture, thus enabling a deep and multidirectional relationship to grow between both sides: school and community. In this way, the school participated in improving and diversifying services in the area, and the community provided its knowledge of culture and local traditions for class activities.



Figure 1

Fernando García Fontanet with some of the first pupils when segregation by sex was still applied.

Source: MEP Photographic Archive (AFMEP).

⁸ Fernando García Fontanet (Castalla, 1942) is the founder of the Pusol School Museum. He began teaching in the school in Puçol in 1968. Inspired on a teacher training course called 'The School and its Environment' (that took place around 1978 in Alicante), and according to the school newspaper '*Els Escolars*' (Pupils at Pusol School 1979), he began working on a heritage-oriented educational project which would culminate in the creation of the Pusol School Museum.

Over time, this collaboration became a reality with the donation of collections related to domestic life and agricultural work, which were studied and exhibited informally in one of the school rooms (Figure 2). Hence, the first steps of what would be the museological side of the educational centre were taken, triggering the creation of an educational-museistic project⁹ fully managed by the pupils and their teachers, where study and documentation of local culture were put into practice.



Figure 2
View of the Agricultural School Museum in the 1980s,
when the exhibition was located in the old schoolmaster's house.
Source: AFMEP.

In the 1980s, the MEP's sphere of influence spread to other rural districts and to the City of Elche. Some years later, between 1990 and 2001, the facilities were gradually expanded with the aim not only of improving its educational role, but also to encourage the musealisation of the collection being formed. Hence, apart from functioning as a school since 1959¹⁰, in 1992 the MEP was officially recognised as a museum by the Regional

⁹ The first written record we found is 'Project of a school integrated within the surroundings' signed by Fernando García Fontanet in 1985.

¹⁰ More information in the *Spanish State Gazette*: BOE (29-8-1959) at:
<https://www.boe.es/datos/pdfs/BOE//1959/204/A11391-11397.pdf>

Government of Valencia¹¹. Today it still maintains a work model with unique features that possess a dual structure, museological and educative, where the latter - due to its relevance and impact - transcends the role it is usually assigned in museology.

What is at stake is securing the museum as a civic and democratic mechanism by means of a great variety of experiences of museological pedagogy, which take shape bit by bit, and where museums like the MEP are taking the initiative. Survival of a set of values intrinsic to rural life is also at stake, from a point of view that prioritises the dialogic relationship between cultural meanings that with time and use (Nogués-Pedregal o.c.) transform in a global context and emerge together with other values, such as *slow living* (Parkins and Geoffrey 2006), as a possible and necessary alternative.

3. Mission, values and goals defining the Educational-Museistic Project

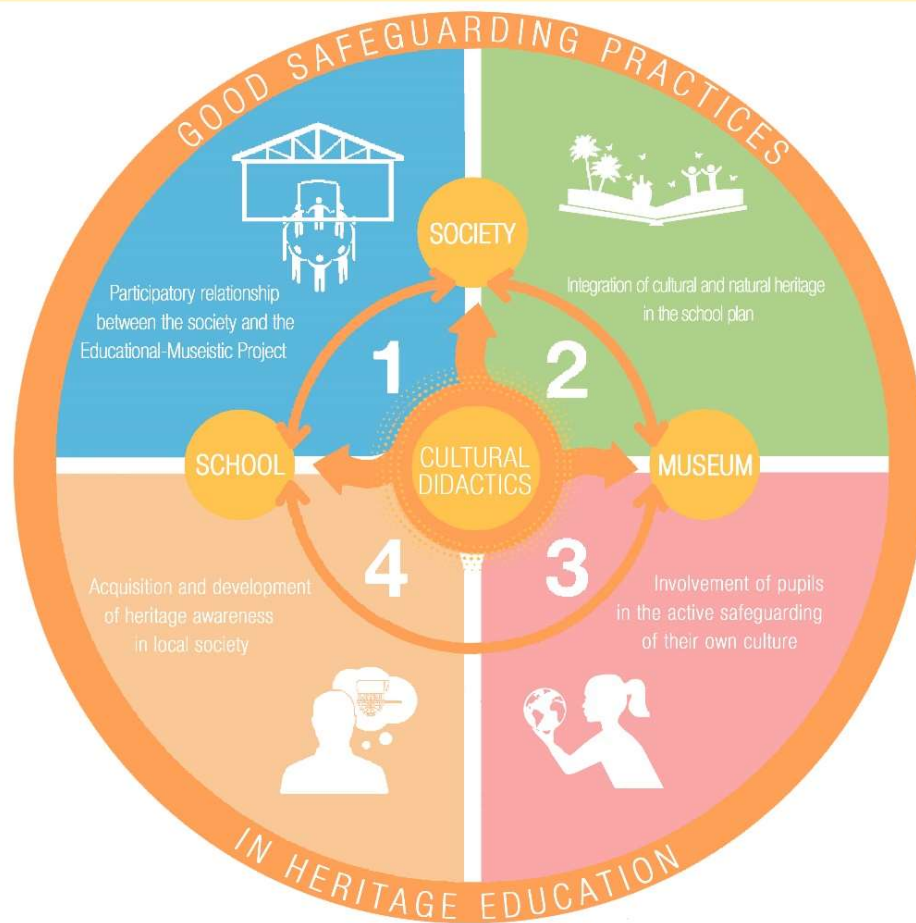
From a conceptual perspective, the MEP operates in the territory through a trinomial structure comprising the school, society and the museum. These three worlds are articulated on reciprocal participation with society as the protagonist, in which each party benefits in different ways. Thus, the MEP deploys its own cultural didactics that helps towards active safeguarding^{12G} of local culture, and that is structured around a set of good heritage education practices, which possess unique features and has been recognised by the UNESCO since 2009¹³ (Diagram 1).

¹¹ According to the *Official Valencian Government Gazette*: DOGV no. 1851 (31-8-1992.) Available at: http://www.dogv.gva.es/datos/1992/08/31/pdf/1992_825759.pdf

¹² The G stands for terms that are defined in the new PoEM glossary.

¹³ The MEP was the first European project recognised by the UNESCO in the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices for Intangible Cultural Heritage. More information is available at UNESCO webpage: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/BSP/centre-for-traditional-culture-school-museum-of-pusol-pedagogic-project-00306?Art18=00306> and in the section devoted to the 'National Plan for Intangible Cultural Heritage', in the Spanish Ministry for Culture and Sport web site: <https://www.culturaydeporte.gob.es/cultura/areas/patrimonio/mc/patrimonio-inmaterial/elementos-declarados/comunidad-autonoma/c-valenciana/proyecto-museo-pusol.html>

PUSOL SCHOOL MUSEUM
DIAGRAM 1: TRINOMIAL SCHOOL-SOCIETY-MUSEUM



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This trinomial and its participatory cogs shows us an initiative of evolving sociocultural thrust that has multiple effects in the area, whose Educational-Museistic Project (PoEM) reveals an anatomy tailor-made for the MEP, and where mission, vision, values and goals are defined in the following way¹⁴:

- The MEP's Mission consists of teaching values based on the school-museum link by integrating education into the environment, thereby developing a participatory cultural didactics where society plays a key role, and the traditional culture of the municipality of Elche and its surrounding area is the key tool.
- At this point the Vision of the project is defined: to be a universal and exportable model of training in heritage education, which adds value to, and actively safeguards, traditional local culture.

¹⁴Mission, Vision, Values and Goals are available on Chapter 2 of the PoEM.

- Similarly, the underlying Values are defined by the school, in harmony with the museum. The values, shown below in Table 1 in order of relevance, are the basis, and ideological driving force behind the MEP.

PUSOL SCHOOL MUSEUM TABLE 1: EDUCATIONAL-MUSEISTIC PROJECT VALUES	
1. Passion for learning	Motivation that leads us to broaden our knowledge and stimulate curiosity to discover and understand the reality.
2. Commitment to the environment	Willingness that motivates people to develop social, cultural, economic and ecological awareness, and to act accordingly.
3. Rigour	Ability to implement responsibility, objectivity, dedication, continuous learning and search for the common good.
4. Proximity	Behaviour that brings us closer to other people, making us accessible and helping to create a caring and cooperative environment.
5. Adaptability	Quality of adjusting to changes in society, accepting them in a positive and constructive way.
6. Respect	Attitude to accept ourselves as part of the diversity that surrounds us, learning to coexist and enrich ourselves through it as well as encouraging the construction of an inclusive society.

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Likewise, the Goals of the project deal with issues from educational and museological environments, doing so in a dynamic way to adapt to the characteristics and needs of the local area and society (Table 2).

The mission of teaching the six values mentioned, the vision of exporting the heritage education model and each of the aims outlining MEP's work method, are the essence of its *raison d'être*.

PUSOL SCHOOL MUSEUM TABLE 2: EDUCATIONAL-MUSEISTIC PROJECT GOALS	
<p>A. Teaching the values of the project through the study of traditional culture in the municipality of Elche and the surrounding area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging study of the local culture from a participative and global perspective, from within-inwards⁹ • Complementing school education and promoting the transmission of local knowledge, values and experiences between generations.
<p>B. Establish and strengthen the bonds of multidirectional dialogue between the school, museum, the environment and society.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging a fluent relationship between school, museum, the environment and society, regenerating ties between them and nurturing a <i>continuum</i> of significance⁹ • Enabling access to the collections and knowledge safeguarded by the MEP.
<p>C. Define, carry out and update the project's own cultural teaching approach towards learning, studying and researching local heritage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging regular definition and updating of cultural teaching based on meaningful learning. • Promoting cultural participation of society in the evolution of the project by means of co-creation, co-decision and co-responsibility processes. • Defining, implementing and updating a "Programme of Cultural and Educational Activities" on an annual basis.
<p>D. Identify, revitalise and raise awareness of the cultural heritage of Elche and its surroundings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting research of the cultural and natural heritage of Elche and its surrounding area. • Encouraging local society to use and enjoy their heritage. • Motivating and making society aware of the need to defend the heritage of which they are receivers, transmitters and creators.

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4. Participatory management in the Pusol School Museum: The Pomegranate Tree Model

The conceptual and methodological framework used in the SoMus project connects the principles and practices of Sociomuseology with those of responsible and participatory research-action, and views the museum in an evolutionary and organic relation with society.

Bearing this in mind, in all the experiences and management models created so far, SoMus has contributed towards overcoming subject-object and society-museum dichotomies, as well as to the acknowledgement of a museology of proximity or full participation (Sancho Querol 2017b), where society is, in various ways, part of the museum and shares the challenges of everyday responsibilities.

Simultaneously, collective production of innovative management tools defined on an equal basis between the museum, society and school, also contributes towards the acknowledgement of a citizen science whose methods, wisdom and results are often more versatile and able to respond to the specific needs of the sociocultural context from which they emanate.

It is however worth remembering two things: firstly, the fact that in participatory action research projects it is throughout the process where reflection, learning, transformation and collective creation take place; secondly, that each process is collectively built, at the pace of the group working on it, thus making it impossible to proceed according to any previously agreed plan (as it is not of a general nature). Moreover, it is necessary for everybody who is part of the group to feel and act themselves as tailors, models, fabric or working tools depending on the needs and aims marked out by each stage, if we want our tailor-made suit to adapt to a museology anatomy in permanent evolution.

With this experience behind us, and as a result of the initial work experiences carried out together with the Portuguese and Finnish museums, in 2016 we defined our own methodology for creating participatory management models in SoMus.

According to this methodology (Table 3), after a first phase of getting to know the project in depth and mapping its participatory practices, we moved on to systematising them according to their nature, use and the intrinsic rationale of the museological project. Finally, we represent this model or management system by creating a conceptual and cultural metaphor that allows the model to be contextualised.

TABLE 3	
SoMus METHODOLOGY FOR THE CREATION OF PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT MODELS IN MUSEUMS	
1st STEP - Understanding the museum project	and mapping its practises from a cultural participation point of view.
2nd STEP - Systematising the activities	according to typology, nature, participation intensity and sociocultural use.
3rd STEP - Valuing the cultural environment of the museum	choosing a symbolic element to represent the model in a contextualised way.
4th STEP - Disseminating the management model and monitoring its progress	updating it regularly.

After presenting the museum in previous pages, corresponding to the First Step of the SoMus methodology, we shall devote the following parts of this section to explain each of the aspects comprising the MEP system (Second Step). Finally, we will present the management model resulting from the work, together with the conceptual metaphor we have chosen to represent it, which corresponds to the Third Step.

4.1. The starting point: Reciprocation as a key for interacting with Society

The methodological trinomial *school-society-museum* located at the base of the MEP's educational-museistic project, is articulated in accordance with a multidirectional and participatory relationship, where reciprocation sets the tone of their teamwork.

Against this backdrop, and due to the characteristics of the educational project and the commitment acquired to safeguard local culture, the school responds to the educational needs of the local society in a transversal sense, according to a system of intergenerational transmission in which the museum is an essential and stimulating tool for developing a profound relationship with the environment.

As a consequence of an educational project that is sensitive to the environment and concerned about the comprehension and evolution of its forms, uses and values, the museum is both a socioeducational tool between generations, and also the driving force of local development. Traditional culture is its argument and *raison d'être*, and local society its active agent in all day-to-day duties.

In this context, the concept of participation is inseparable from the reciprocation between the parties and acquires myriad forms that are intrinsic to the project. For this reason, we chose to analyse the possibility of creating a new participatory variant we call reciprocal participation (RP). The aim was to get a better understanding of the MEP's mechanisms of feedback, on which not only depends its survival, but also the vitality of its school museum.

At this point and inspired by the project, we defined the concept of RP in the current Sociomuseological context and identified the parameters which best enable us to classify the different levels of intensity of RP between the MEP and society. The outcome is the three parameters we present in Table 4, together with the variants used in analysing the reality we are dealing with.

Firstly, we classified all of the participatory or cooperative relationships between the MEP and society according to their nature, i.e. depending on the existence, or not, of a relationship on equal terms, as established by the very concept of network defined by Castells (2011), which results in a fully cooperative relationships during each stage of teamwork.

Secondly, we analysed the frequency of occurrence of participatory relationships to find out whether we are talking about a regular or sporadic initiative/process over time, as this aspect charts the course, its rhythms and products in different ways.

Thirdly, we went on to classify them, bearing in mind the nature, physiognomy and transformative character of the impacts, thereby establishing a clear difference between the relationships arising from regular impacts that ensure the project works, and those which

turn out to be one-off impacts, most of which enhance work carried out by the MEP in different ways but are not essential in the everyday workings of the project.

PUSOL SCHOOL MUSEUM	
TABLE 4: PARAMETERS FOR CLASSIFYING THE LEVELS OF RECIPROCAL PARTICIPATION BETWEEN PUSOL SCHOOL MUSEUM AND SOCIETY	
• The Nature (or type) of reciprocation characterising the action:	
⇒ Equality (both sides enhance their operations, satisfying their needs and/or duties, challenges, dreams, etc.)	
⇒ Inequality (one side benefits more)	
• The intensity (or frequency) of the action:	
⇒ Regular participatory action (annually, weekly, monthly, etc.)	
⇒ Irregular (occasionally, summer season, winter season, etc.)	
• The impacts (or results):	
⇒ Creation of Permanent impacts and/or products (workshops, knowledge production, improvement in emotional and physical well-being...	
⇒ Creation of Non-permanent impacts and/or products	

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Likewise, in the field of Sociomuseology and based on social and territorial structure developed by the Pusol School Museum, we have defined Reciprocal Participation as any fully reciprocal, or two-way participatory sociocultural action between the participants, where the degree of reciprocation may change depending on the equality of the relationship between the parties throughout the process, frequency over time, and the type of impact triggered off by the action.

According to this definition, the levels of RP range from those where the action is done on equal and regular terms, giving rise to a permanent impact locally (maximum level of reciprocation or level 1); and those in which the action comes about hierarchically or on a multilevel, sporadically over time and with a slight and/or sporadic impact on the local area and society (minimum level of reciprocation or level 8), which includes all possible variants between the two levels.

In Table 5 we show the outcome of the analysis of the different levels of RP between the MEP and the local society.

Afterwards, we present the graphic version of the 'Reciprocal Participation Network' handled at present by the MEP (Diagram 2).

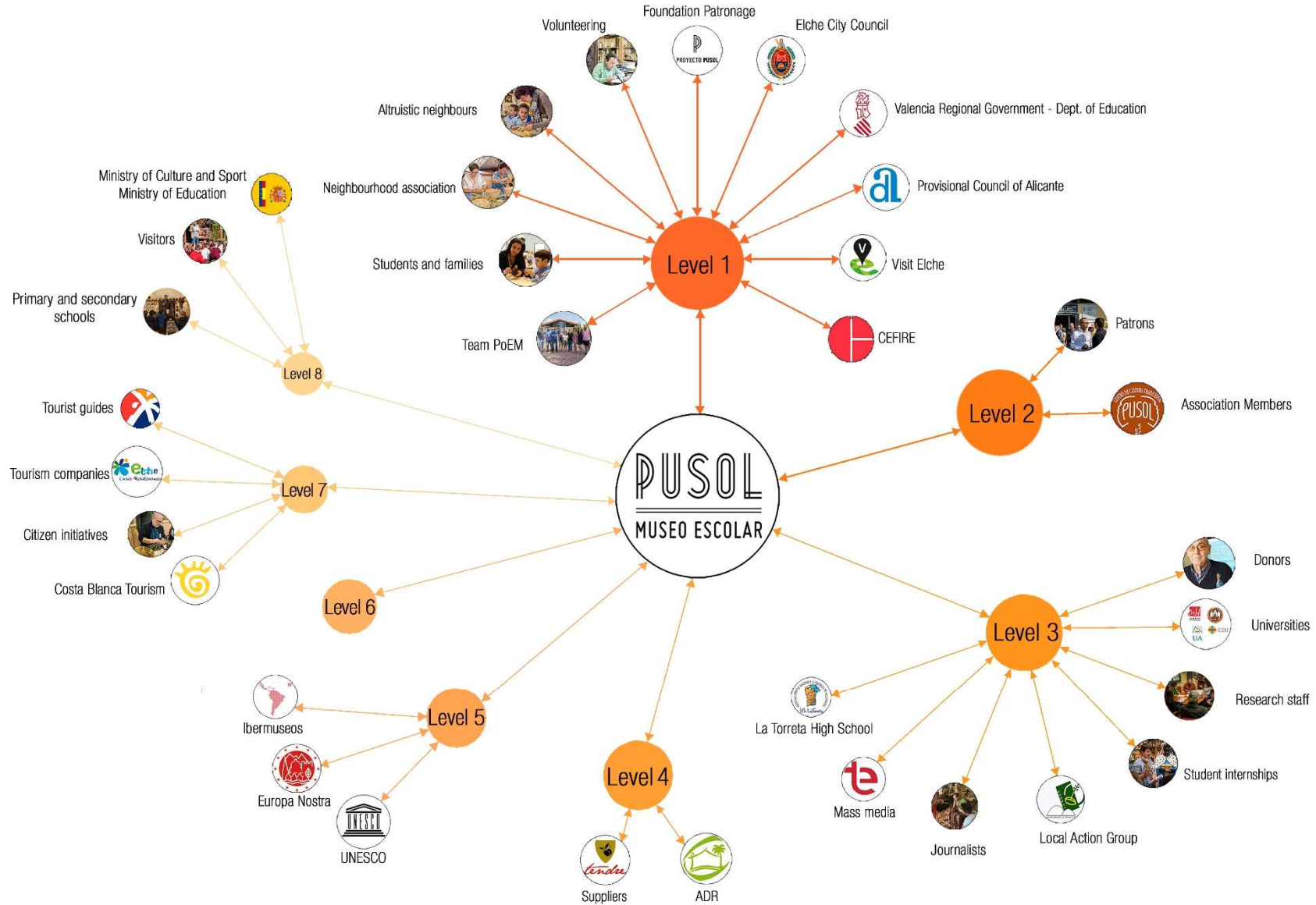
PUSOL SCHOOL MUSEUM

TABLE 5: LEVELS OF RECIPROCAL PARTICIPATION BETWEEN THE MEP AND SOCIETY

LEVELS OF RP	RECIPROCATION PARAMETERS	TARGET
Reciprocation LEVEL 1	Nature: Equality Intensity: Regular Impacts: Permanent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers • Neighbourhood association • Neighbourhood "motu-propio" • Valencian Department of Education, Research, Culture and Sports • Elche City Council • Permanent staff (School and Museum) • Pusol Foundation Board • Pupils and Parents' Association (AMPA) • Visit Elche • Alicante Council • Teacher Training Centre (GEFIRE)
Reciprocation LEVEL 2	Inequality Regular Permanent product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members (Association) • Benefactors (Pusol Foundation patronage)
Reciprocation LEVEL 3	Equality NOT Regular Permanent product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research staff • Local Action Group (GAL) • Trainee students • University • Donators • Journalists • Media • La Torre High School • Mercè Rodoreda Adult Education Centre
Reciprocation LEVEL 4	Equality Regular NON permanent product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suppliers • Association for Development of Rural Elche and Surrounding Areas (ADR)
Reciprocation LEVEL 5	Inequality NOT Regular permanent product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNESCO • Europa Nostra • Ibermuseos
Reciprocation LEVEL 6	Inequality Regular NON permanent product	Unidentified
Reciprocation LEVEL 7	Equality NOT regular NON permanent product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens' initiatives • Costa Blanca Tourist Board • Tourist guides • Tourism companies
Reciprocation LEVEL 8	Inequality NOT Regular NON permanent product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitors • Ministry of Culture • Primary and secondary schools

PUSOL SCHOOL MUSEUM

DIAGRAM 2: RECIPROCAL PARTICIPATION NETWORK CONNECTING MEP AND SOCIETY



4.2. Methodology: Two worlds interconnected through local society, culture and sustainability

Reciprocation as the hub of interaction with society is also reflected in the educational-museistic project, where the school and museum methodologies are closely related to each other, and where the activities carried out explore numerous paths linking the project to society. The school's educational activity is projected in the museum's methodologies and function, which in turn are reflected in the day-to-day educational activities (Sabaté Navarro and Gort Riera 2012; Gómez Martínez 2016).

Therefore, the methodologies which are most common at Puçol school consist of shared mentoring, the Montessori method, meaningful learning and service learning¹⁵. Together with value-based education, these methodologies strengthen the contents and stimulate pupils' social, cultural and territorial involvement.

The museum focuses its activity on the use of the following methodologies:

- During Incorporation, which includes the processes of forming the collections, the most common options according to project relevance, are: donation, cession, recovery and acquisition. Given the museum's idiosyncrasies, the frequency with which donations are made, as well as its variety, may come into conflict for two reasons: the criteria for putting together the collections used by the museum - prioritizing items which are threatened and/or rare-; its ability to manage the collections properly.
- During Preservation, which comprises an inventory of goods (respecting their origin) and the necessary preservation and/or restoration procedures, the museum places priority on work performed by the pupils, who receive specific training in a preservation workshop as part of their educational curriculum. Preservation usually consists of cleaning and basic treatments, packaging and storage. Restoration is carried out sporadically and is under the control of the museum staff.
- In Communication, the museum bases its way of working on three main tools:
 - Events occurring *in situ*, where we can highlight exhibitions, workshops and thematic tours.
 - Dissemination through publications (websites, social networks or academic circles) and institutional and scientific events on a national and international scale.
 - Advertising in different media both physical and audiovisual.
- In Education, it performs an extracurricular role comprising the daily work experiences of pupils carrying out routine tasks at the museum, as well as supporting educational activities making up part of the school's *curriculum*.

¹⁵ These methodologies are outlined on Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of the PoEM.

- In Research, it incorporates that carried out by the pupils together with the museum team; that carried out specifically by the museum team, and that performed by external researchers using museum collections or related to work experience at the PoEM.

From here on, the methodological bond that we call 'from museum to school' becomes more real through a type of education adapted to the environment, where pupils carry out numerous activities in intimate contact with the museum's sociocultural activities, mainly those of communication, education and research.

In communication, the pupils: a) curate some temporary exhibitions based on their interests and personal motivations; b) prepare the digital newspaper "*Els Escolars*", fully written in Valencian, the native language used in the area.

In the educational field, they develop their knowledge of traditional local culture by carrying out activities such as 'The Museum Guide'¹⁶, and workshops on baking, gastronomy and traditional games, or different types of craftwork using vegetable fibres. Moreover, in line with meaningful learning rationale, these workshops are carried out with the participation of the local community, so as to connect knowledge of varying nature and origin about the area and also the evolution of its culture between different generations.

With regard to research, by adding service learning to meaningful learning pupils carry out work on traditional culture and the museum collections, hence encouraging knowledge of customs and values, which may contribute to improving society's understanding and respect for the planet.

Similarly, the methodological link that we call 'from school to museum', takes shape through a deeply plural sense of museum, where the pupils become part of the museum team and take on responsibilities that are fully appropriate for their age, development and interests.

All these activities carried out by the museum highlight the principles that are inherent to the teaching methodologies applied at the school:

- Deciding on which exhibits to show and how to put their ideas into action is based on pupils' needs, interests and motivations.
- Mutual help, respect and working in a team are encouraged.
- Learning and social commitment with society are brought together as a result of acquiring knowledge that can contribute to improving society.
- Interacting with the educational community - in a wide sense - through workshops carried out with the teachers and families.

¹⁶ Since the beginning of the project, pupils have acted as museum guides. The goal MEP aims to achieve consist on raising the pupils' awareness of Elche's traditions and values, in order to protect traditional culture and its environment by using a cultural didactics in which the new generations behave as active safeguarding agents.

4.3. *The core of the work model: Good Practices in Heritage Education*

The referred context with the conceptual trinomial situated at the base, the methodological bond between school and museum, and the reciprocal participation network connecting the MEP with local society, gives rise to a set of singular initiatives that respond to the concept of Good Practices currently used in different fields on an international scale.

The concept of Good Practices was defined in the *Agenda 21 for Culture* in 2004¹⁷, and later on by the UNESCO (2017), within the framework of the MOST1¹⁸ programme. Focusing on sustainable development, the selection criteria set out by MOST1 for Good Practices are innovation, effectiveness, sustainability and replicability, thus bringing the concept closer together with science. Likewise, apart from the criteria mentioned above, *Agenda 21* includes participation and transversality.

Against this backdrop, which represents the result of the MEP's four decades of existence working side by side with society, and due to its link with safeguarding cultural tradition, the school museum has identified and defined a set of Good Heritage Education Practices (GHEP).

Some of the GHEP go back to the beginning of the project. We may even have doubts about which was first, whether the project, or the ideas which would become a GHEP by virtue of improving day by day, since the inductive approach giving rise to the present MEP project has been the true driving-force behind an initiative that was visionary for its time: a rural school committed to knowledge and raising awareness of its own culture, concerned about the disappearance of its hallmarks and where a community-based museology has slowly developed.

The GHEP of the project have from the start been distinguished for their response to the criteria defined by the international bodies already cited, i.e., for being innovative, effective, sustainable and replicable, as well as participatory and transversal.

After all these years, four measures have become consolidated which can nowadays be identified as GHEP:

- (1) Participatory relationship between Society and the Educational-Museistic Project.
- (2) Inclusion of local tangible and intangible heritage in the school curriculum.
- (3) Involvement of pupils in actively safeguarding their own culture.
- (4) Acquiring and developing heritage awareness in the local society.

The first three arose in the 1970s in a school context, in which commitment was made to innovation and practicality by applying the basic idea of trial and error, in order to achieve a methodology that could adapt to the resources and possibilities of a small unitary school in a local setting. The fourth one, resulting from greater social involvement, has appeared over time as more and more people from Elche have approached MEP to learn

¹⁷ *Agenda 21* is available at: <http://www.agenda21culture.net/es/buenas-practicas/criterios>

¹⁸ The MOST1 programme (*Management of Social Transformations*) can be accessed at: <http://www.unesco.org/new/es/social-and-human-sciences/themes/most-programme/>

about the project and acknowledge its value and relevance as a collective and dynamic tool for safeguarding local heritage and culture.

Each of GHEPs are outlined below:

1. Participatory relationship between society and the Educational-Museistic Project

This is the first GHEP to emerge. Its foundations are based on a reciprocal, constant and multidirectional participation between society and the school museum. Therefore, while the social and cultural life in the neighbourhood is notably enriched, the pupils receive traditional knowledge and develop skills associated with local know-how and practices, of which local society is the guardian.

In this participatory model, society is involved in all the processes, ranging from decision-making, through implementation, to assessment. Similarly, this initiative responds to the diverse needs of society, such as:

- Collective revitalisation of local culture and memory, thus forging a sense of belonging.
- The stimulus, diversification and realisation of social and cultural life in the Puçol area.
- The incorporation of volunteers in the team (Figure 3).



Figure 3

Volunteer interpreting the collections of a school exhibition with the pupils.

Author: Borja Guilló (MEP ICT manager).

2. Inclusion of local tangible and intangible heritage in the school curriculum

From the very outset of the project, the relationship between the school, society and the museum has involved the natural and cultural surroundings of the school in the pupils' education.

Any cultural revelation gathered by the MEP's museum activities is turned into an educational resource, which the student can approach from different areas of knowledge: social sciences, languages, art education, etc.

Very often, the team rely on the guardians of local knowledge and practices to pass on to the pupils the knowledge associated with local culture and the values that derive from it.

One of the characteristics of the project is the development of a set of complementary and extracurricular activities related to traditional culture, which enables society to participate and allows the pupils and teachers to research and learn about Elche's heritage and its surroundings. In this context, the schoolchildren take part in a set of initiatives where the following can be highlighted:

- Organisation, curating and preparation of thematic exhibitions.
- Carrying out interviews with the guardians of local memory, thus gaining access to uses and customs through their life history.
- Restoring local cultural goods that is part of the museum collections.
- Dissemination of traditional culture as MEP guides through guided tours, exhibition curation or by participating in thematic workshops.
- Practising local craftwork techniques (Figure 4).



Figure 4

Workshop on white-palm weaving. One of the most symbolic crafts from Elche using palm leaves.

Author: Borja Guilló.

3. Pupil implication in actively safeguarding their own culture

Throughout school life, all the boys and girls at the school can participate in diverse activities, workshops and experiences through which they can contribute towards the upkeep of traditional knowledge and practices, or conservation, research and dissemination of different cultural goods. Moreover, they also learn about the life cycle and traditional uses of autochthonous plants and the diversity of the fauna in the area. All this endows pupils with experiences that enable them to continue revitalising and protecting cultural and natural heritage after they leave school.

Among the museological functions and educational activities complementary to the core subjects that a pupil can study during a school year, we can highlight:

- Heritage cataloguing, dissemination, education, conservation and research (Figure 5);
- Preservation, conservation, recovery and uses of autochthonous plant species;
- Participation in activities that enable the transmission of knowledge and practices between generations.



Figure 5

Two pupils carrying out conservation tasks on the first museum collections in the 1980s.

Source: AFMEP.

4. Acquisition and development of heritage awareness in the local society

The steady progress of the project throughout its existence has brought about support and commitment from all kinds of public, especially local. Perhaps this is because the MEP has always acted in a selfless, socially active and educationally pioneering sense.

Furthermore, the constant growth of museum collections has started to make an impression on MEP public, generating a sense of valuing their own history and knowledge while recognising the great cultural and identity value they may have. This has led to a slow awakening of heritage awareness in Elche's society, which has led to initiatives with similar goals in areas such as the university and local public administration.

This fact is particularly relevant in the process of evaluating the project and its activity and is undoubtedly a process for safeguarding heritage from within-inwards, i.e. meeting the needs for knowledge of the local culture in order to ensure lasting and sustainable safeguarding. As a result of this process we identified the following indicators:

- The MEP inventory exceeds 100,000 items, which mainly come from donations from over 1,800 people and institutions. This inventory is being updated and currently comprises 70,817 entries.
- There is a local association attached to the MEP that had 110 members in 2020, a figure which is increasing annually. They are mostly neighbours and/or former pupils and their families.
- Institutional relations are maintained with six universities, all public administrations (from local to national level), and more than fifteen associations and nearby museums as well as most educational centres in the area (Figure 6).



Figure 6

MEP collaborator performing a demonstration of esparto grass craftwork during a summer course at the Miguel Hernández University of Elche.

Author: Borja Guilló.

4.4. Impacts of the Pomegranate Tree Model

This complex and dynamic system has led to a set of impacts of differing nature in the area.

The first impact is the continuous regeneration of the unitary school located in the district of Puçol. In the 1970s the team of primary school teachers initiated a rehabilitation programme, not only of the building that houses the school, but also the educational curriculum itself, since the boys and girls were unaware of the basic terms related to an agricultural environment. The project, called '*The School and its Environment*', contextualises the institution in its surroundings and encourages a profound and direct relationship between the pupils and the neighbourhood community, the resources, the knowledge and the local landscape.

The second impact arises as a direct consequence of this relationship: local sociocultural dynamism. The school becomes the driving-force of change in the district and takes on a social commitment through proactively participating in the call for improvements in basic services (electricity, water, roads, transport, etc.). The school facilities become a recreational area for the local community, where meetings and celebrations are held, while the neighbourhood community collaborates in school activities, thus providing traditional knowledge of the rural environment. A close relationship which has been kept alive and active to this day in spite of undergoing changes.

Throughout these years, pupils have been involved with tasks related to cataloguing, cleaning and conserving cultural goods, picking up donations, and researching and writing articles about traditions in Elche, whilst also keeping in direct contact with the culture of the surroundings and its other protagonists. As a result - and also by chance - the schoolchildren were the authors of the first ethnographic studies in Elche and led the beginnings of a process for raising awareness about local culture. Today, researchers from different Spanish and foreign universities have joined up with the museum team and the local community. This process of local ethnographic study is therefore the third impact.

In the 1980s other rural districts as well as Elche municipality started to become aware of the project in the area of Puçol. In this way, the catchment area of the school grew and immediately led to an increase in donations. The school building soon became obsolete for a project that was gradually turning into a school and museum at the same time. Official recognition of the museum in 1992, as a direct result of the school and its GHEPS for safeguarding the local culture, is the fourth impact.

As a result of the creation of the Pusol School Museum and acknowledgement of the Educational-Museistic Project's and Good Practices by international institutions, such as the UNESCO, Europa Nostra¹⁹ and Ibermuseos²⁰, the unitary school from Puçol has weathered time and the surroundings. This type of rural school, whose methodology is mainly based on grouping together schoolchildren of different ages and levels, was plentiful in Elche and its surrounding area. Over the years and due to changes in education, these schools gradually died out and made way for the standard primary school we know today. The school in Puçol

¹⁹Special mention in the context of the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage/*Europa Nostra Award, Hispania Nostra*. Awarded in 2009.

²⁰ IV Ibero-American Education and Museums Prize, Category 1 (Project Excellence). Awarded in 2014.

has held out over time thanks to its close attachment to the area, the success of its GHEPs, and as a consequence of its Museum, which on several occasions impeded the closure of its doors. Its survival is therefore the fifth impact.

The focal point of the impacts of the work model, which has gradually evolved to adapt to modern times, is the school - the protagonist of the first and last impacts - the driving force of a project that breathes through and for its commitment with society and local culture.

4.5. *The Pomegranate Tree Model: Building utopia organically with society*

During development of the third phase of the SoMus methodology, in which we have taken the organic and evolutionary relationship between the museum and school as a reference, or the multiple roots that have developed in the area through the RP network, we opted to represent the MEP's work model by setting up an analogy with one of the most representative species in the Elche region: the pomegranate tree (Figure 7).

Figure 7
Typical view of Elche
with pomegranate trees.
Source: AFMEP.



The pomegranate tree (*Punica granatum*) is a small tree whose fruit is the pomegranate (Figure 8). It has been widely cultivated in the municipality of Elche since ancient times and has a protected designation of origin called 'Mollar Pomegranate from Elche'. As a result of its long history, and most likely due to the deep red colour of the seeds inside it (an allegory of blood) and a certain touch of 'hidden treasure' - as it has a stringent and tough skin protecting the interior - the pomegranate has acquired its own symbolic meaning.

An example of this can be seen in cultural and religious events such as the *Mystery Play of Elche*²¹, or *Our Lady of the Pomegranate*²².



Figure 8
Anatomy of the pomegranate.
Author: Javier Beltrá.

²¹ *Sacred-lyrical* performance held in August in the Basilica of Santa María, Elche. It dramatises the death, assumption and crowning of the Virgin Mary. The Mystery Play uses different aerial devices that strive to bring to life “wondrous things”. The pomegranate is the popular name of the object that descends from the dome of the Basilica simulating a cloud transporting an angel. (Castaño García 1997; Llorens 1998; Massip and Bonet 1991).

²² In classical iconography of European art, the pomegranate in the hands of Virgin Mary alludes to her chastity, whereas if Baby Jesus is touching or holding it, it is a sign of his death and resurrection (Falomir 2016). We also find this meaning in the Greek myth of Persephone.

At this point, by focusing all our attention on the day-to-day management that typifies the PoEM, we developed a conceptual metaphor to symbolise the MEP's participatory management model: The Pomegranate Tree Model (Diagram 3)

This model delves deep into the earth, like the roots of the pomegranate tree, symbolising the reciprocal participation network that the school museum has developed with society, which comprises the main nutrients for the present model. RP happens simultaneously from different angles and in a multitude of directions, as well as connecting all the generations living in the area.

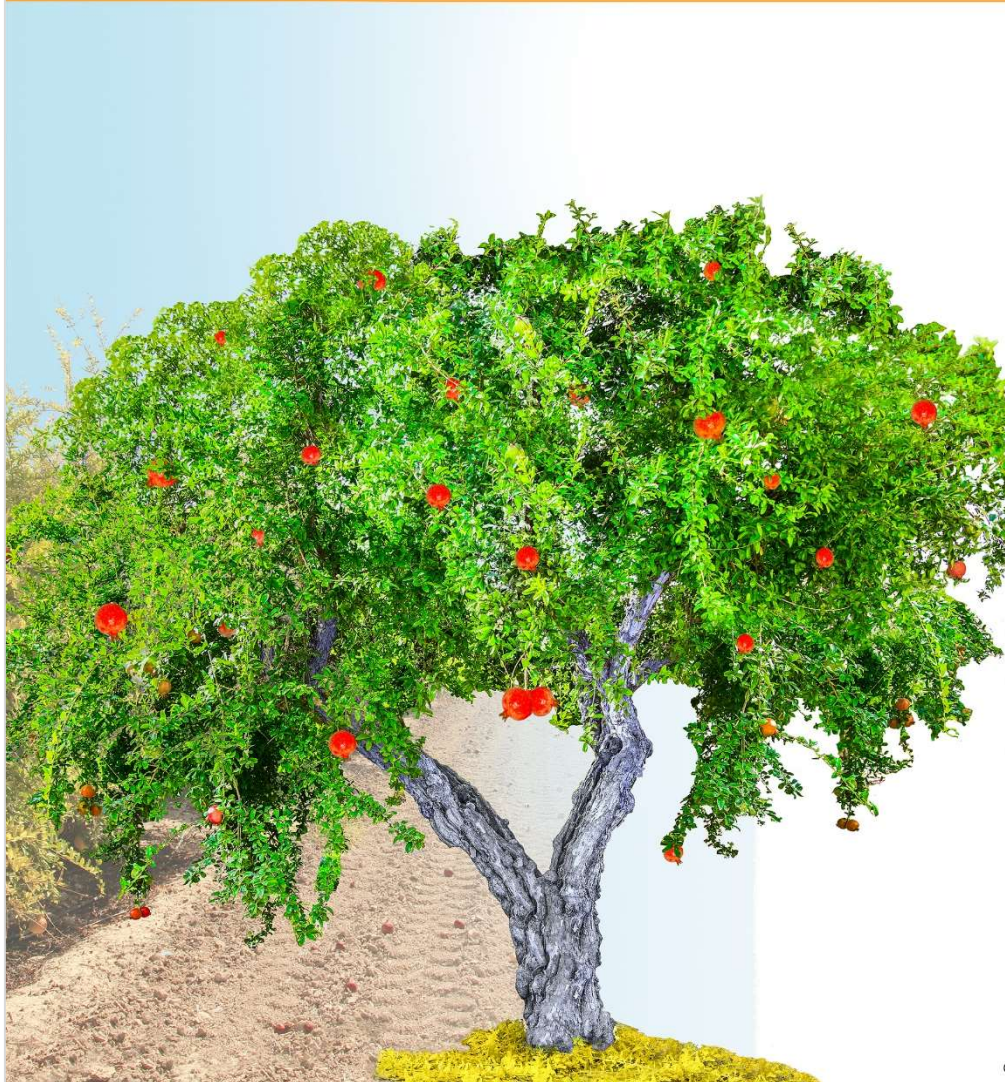
Next, the trunk, the mainstay of the model and the pomegranate tree, which in our case branches into two parts, symbolises the methodological structure that breathes life into the project, which is made up of the school and the museum linked in harmony as though they were one single pillar. The trunk consists of two culturally and pedagogically synchronised teams who complement one another in daily activities to achieve the goals of the project: maximum benefit for the pupils, further cultural and sustainable development of society, and collective revitalisation of Elche traditional culture.

The trunk sprouts out into branches from the project, in other words, the four GHEP resulting from a long period of attachment to the area. They constitute the sap of the work carried out in the MEP and are also the base of a continuous process of revitalization and updating.

Finally, the pomegranates arising from their reproductive process flourish and pop their heads out each summer, thus symbolising the impacts of the project from the outset. These results have emerged over time and may well continue emerging as the project progresses. They are of a consistent and lasting nature and reveal an anatomy split into two perfectly divided halves, inseparably connected at the same time, which remind us of the connected worlds causing it to exist. Moreover, they are often the most visible part of the project.

DIAGRAM 3

PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT AT THE SCHOOL MUSEUM OF PUSOL THE POMEGRANATE TREE MODEL



● FRUITS – IMPACTS

PRODUCTS RESULTING FROM 5 DECADES OF LOCAL WORK

1. REGENERATION OF AN UNITARY SCHOOL IN ITS RURAL AREA
2. EXPANSION AND IMPROVEMENT OF LOCAL SOCIOCULTURAL DYNAMICS
3. ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH OF ELCHE CITY AND SURROUNDINGS
4. MUSEUM AS A RESULT OF THE SCHOOL'S BEST SAFEGUARDING HERITAGE PRACTICE
5. SURVIVAL OF THE LAST UNITARY SCHOOL OF ELCHE IN ITS ORIGINAL AREA

● BRANCHES – ESSENCE OF THE MODEL

GOOD PRACTICES OF HERITAGE EDUCATION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF TRADITIONAL CULTURE

- BP-1. PARTICIPATORY RELATION BETWEEN SCHOOL-MUSEUM AND SOCIETY
- BP-2. INCLUSION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE MATTERS IN THE SCHOOL PROJECT
- BP-3. INVOLVEMENT OF SCHOOLCHILDREN IN THE SAFEGUARDING OF LOCAL CULTURE
- BP-4. KNOWLEDGE BUILDING OF HERITAGE AWARENESS

● TRUNK – CENTRAL AXES

METHODOLOGICAL LINKING BETWEEN SCHOOL AND MUSEUM

- FOUNDATION IN EDUCATIONAL VALUES OF THE PROJECT
- TEAMS AND METHODS CULTURALLY AND PEDAGOGICALLY SYNCHRONIZED

● ROOTS- CONNECTIONS

RECIPROCAL PARTICIPATION NETWORK BETWEEN SCHOOL MUSEUM & SOCIETY

- MULTIDIRECTIONAL, MULTIFOCAL AND INTERGENERATIONAL ACTION
- STRONG TERRITORIAL NETWORKING

5. Final reflection

Work carried out in Pusol School since the 1960s has led to a sociocultural and educationally transforming initiative, which has also helped to highlight the importance of the ethnological diversity in the municipality of Elche.

The first outcome of this initiative reflects the development of a singular pedagogy focusing on a study of the environment and put together on the basis of work done by the schoolchildren, their families and the MEP team. Additionally, regular practice has enabled the team to value traditional culture from the municipality and surrounding area in two ways: a) its actual protagonists appreciate and protect their culture; b) it becomes known outside the area, thus asserting itself as a reality requiring an efficient preservation strategy.

As sites of cross-cultural interaction and practical tools for building an inclusive present, museums are today hubs for disseminating knowledge of a varying nature, platforms for cultural co-creation, and also for the understanding, acknowledgement and assertion of rights and comprehension of contemporary conflicts²³. In this context, the MEP is an example of an activist museology (Janes and Sandell 2019, 1-18). A mediating museology between a vanishing rural life and globalisation, whose homogenising effects are relentlessly imposed. A museology that paves the way for the practice of good cultural, active and collective citizenship. In this way, local, everyday things and proximity are acknowledged for their value. Creativity in its multiple forms, and diversity in its local condition are established, opening up and speaking out for their own place in education and as a sociocultural tool that allows the configuration of more supportive, more sustainable and happier societies.

Starting out on a new decade in life, the MEP is today a privileged arena for the revitalisation of Elche's traditional culture and continues to grow along its two interconnected and organic branches: as an educational project that values diversity, micro history and intergenerational communication; as a multiple process of research and dissemination of the local culture that leads to developing cultural awareness. This evolving nature, which is adaptable and rooted in the area, presents us a project with a chameleonic profile. A project that survives in the long term, not unconsciously or through improvisation, but by planning and regularly scheduling the most suitable methods to meet all the needs of the local society, with whom a deep relationship of reciprocal participation exists.

In this context, participating in the SoMus project has led the MEP team to think carefully about the structure of the MEP museum project, to identify weaknesses and new potentials, to analyse and assess the daily practices, or to systematize its diversity using useful criteria to maximize their resources. In short, it has enabled the school museum staff to understand each other better as a team integrated within the area, and as an area integrated within the team; to provide better explanations so that everybody can understand the MEP

²³ The theme of International Museum Day in 2019 focuses on "Museums as Cultural Hubs: The future of tradition". Further information at: <http://imd.icom.museum/international-museum-day-2019/museums-as-cultural-hubs-the-future-of-tradition/>

way of handling the difference on a local scale; to project towards the future through a consistent approach that allows us to respond to the needs of the local society, while also positioning ourselves in a critical, constructive and creative way in a global context.

At the same time, it has been an educational and museological revolution for the small MEP team to rethink its goals, mission and place in society, to identify and improve the methodologies and actions that allow MEP team to achieve them, or the best heritage education practices that have been created or implemented throughout the project existence.

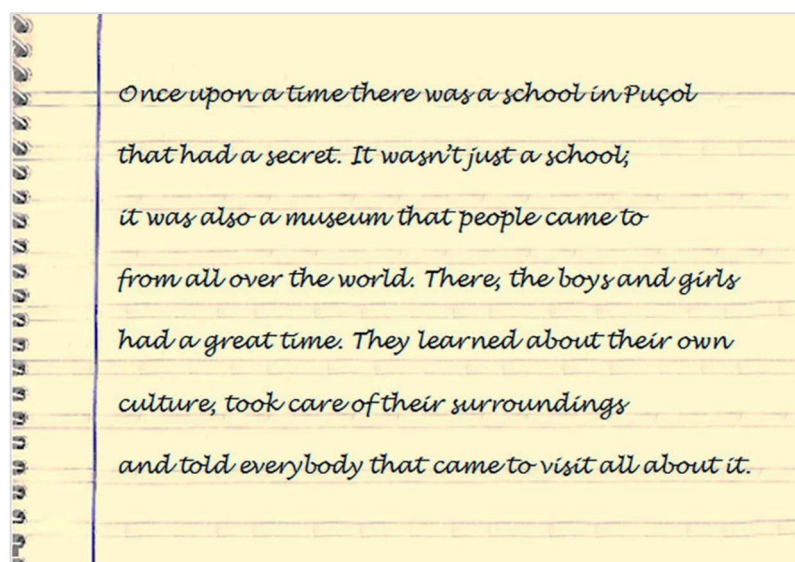
Because the MEP team's experience and results are transformative and stimulating for everyone who is part of the project. Because the participatory network that drives MEP enables the team to contribute from the environment towards building a culturally inclusive world. Because hurdles stand for possibilities to learn, and difficulties an opportunity to reformulate our steps. Because MEP team learns from each collaborative gesture and each shared challenge, taking great effort in breathing life into a conscientious museological management based on the concept of *mindful museum* (Janes 2010) and on exercising collective leadership (Janes and Sandell 2019, 9), MEP can be an inspiring example in heritage education training, an example capable of promoting appreciation and active safeguarding of local culture through education.

The reflection necessary to respond to the challenges required by a project like SoMus, has resulted in better awareness and understanding between the two teams comprising the MEP, professionals from the fields of museology and education.

Throughout this process a shared feeling has stood out guiding the team's reflections: a profound respect for the land we inhabit and for the people who have lived here before, who have fought to preserve for our generation the cultural and natural wealth we have today, whilst also leaving us the responsibility to comprehend it and transmit it wisely to coming generations.

In the meantime, the pupils who come to school every day constitute an essential link. They are connectors of worlds, experts of a very special culture which, like others, is destined to evolve in their hands, minds and gestures (Figure 9). They are the main characters in a story that starts out like this...

Figure 9
History of the MEP told by children.
Authors: Pupils from the Pusol School Museum (2019).



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