

## **DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION WITHIN MUSEUMS**

### ***A STARTING MODEL TO TRAIN “MUSEUM COMMUNICATORS”***

**Leonardo Da Vinci Programme  
Project MU.COM. –  
LLP-LDV-TOI-10-IT- 489**

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Printed on: 11/11/2010**

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**WP: 2**

**TITLE: DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION WITHIN MUSEUMS. A  
STARTING TRAINING MODEL FOR THE MUSEUM COMMUNICATOR**

**Status**

Draft

Public – for public use

Deliverable

IST – for IST programme participants only

Report

Restricted

## PREMISES ON THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION WITHIN MUSEUMS

“A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, **communicates** and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment” (the word *communicates* is evidenced by us, e.n.)<sup>1</sup>.

Within the definition for “Museum” proposed by the ICOM, the **Communication** appears as one of the tasks characterising the cultural and social mission of museums.

In this frame, the **Communication Expert**<sup>2</sup> is one of the key professional figures of a museum, being it actual or virtual; in fact, it will be up to this figure **the communication, the promotion and the diffusion of the museum contents**, the relationships with the media as well as the **Public Relations**.

Using specific techniques and tools, the Communication Expert or Museum Communicator will make the contents of the product interesting and usable for the museum visitors. Although pivotal, the role of a Museum Communicator is not always available in museums, in particular in case of Institutions of modest dimensions. On the contrary, the giant national museums have often an *Information and Communication Department*.

This evidence led to highlight the necessity to create specific competences related to this particular professional role, and the consequent need of **specific training methodologies and tools** in order to give to Museum staff the skills needed for a good communication.

At present times, the **Museum** is no longer just a closed space, but it must be considered as a metaphor, through which society symbolises its relationship with its own history and that of other cultures. To strengthen this principle the Museum as an Institution must find new forms of attraction for the public and scholars.

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<sup>1</sup> This definition for “Museum” has been proposed by the ICOM – International Council of Museums- within the sixteenth general Assembly (1989) amended by the eighteenth and twentieth general Assembly (1995; 2001).

<sup>2</sup> For useful information about this professional role see also M. Forte, 2002 – *Communicating the “Virtual”: a pattern of cognitive interaction*

## 1. COMMUNICATING WITHIN MUSEUMS

### 1.1. General aspects

Some scholars (Silverstone 1992; Hooper-Greenhill 1999; Pearce 1995) underline the role of Museums **as communicators**.

Museum communication is aimed at achieving educational scopes. The role of Museums as “educators” is built on three main concepts: **education, interpretation and communication**; communication, in particular, can be understood as “*a cultural process of negotiating meaning, which produces ‘reality’ through symbolic systems such as texts, objects, artworks, maps, models and museums*”<sup>3</sup>

By collecting and exhibiting objects and by providing knowledge about world history and national cultures, Museums influence culture and society.

The main goals of communication in the frame of museums are:

- Providing information;
- Increasing awareness about the cultural identity, the world and local history and culture;
- Promoting visitors’ participation to the production of meanings.

The **good communication** must be **based on a strategy**.

A **good communicational strategy** within Museums must focus on:

- Leading the identification of activities and expected results;
- Identifying and reaching communication target groups;
- Planning and implementing a communicational strategy.

A communication will allow Museums to:

- Communicate effectively with their audience

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<sup>3</sup> See Hooper-Greenhill, 1999

- Collect information and feedbacks from their target audience
- Provide patterns to manage problems and solutions
- Develop tools and medium to deliver information

## 1.2. Communication within Virtual Museums

Many social, cultural and economical transformations have changed the sense and meaning of Museum institutions.

Today, the new technologies are playing a major role in a new definition of Museums and, above all, become medium for new kind of communication patterns. The Museums of the present times must be able to deal with several communicational approaches depending on the fact that more and more often, Museums have also virtual counterparts, the “Virtual Museums”. Communicating a Museum will therefore be tailored for **actual museums** and **virtual museums**.

The **Museum** is no longer just a closed space, but it must be considered as a metaphor, through which society symbolises its relationship with its own history and that of other cultures. So, it becomes place of education and training to communicate in a new, innovative way.

Its main value, that is mainly the educational value, lies in the capacity to produce a variety of training processes of the individuals and to study a wide range of closer-examination forms.

The virtual museum becomes an actual discipline, which involves specific professional competences with diverse skills, as it speaks to larger and larger number of people, who are undiversified. The Virtual Museum can experience **new communication patterns** aimed at:

- Proposing a new way to read the contents;
- Reaching a new public, above all new categories physically far or just outside the traditional targets of the museum initiatives;
- Helping or strengthening the visit and better understand;
- Experiencing a new way of communicating and enjoying the use of communication;
- Entertaining and using imagination to develop a different relationship with one’s own public.

## 2. CORE-COMPETENCES OF A “MUSEUM COMUNICATOR”

The relevance of communication for Museums led us to take into consideration the importance of a communication strategy that can be based on different **models, approaches and strategies** ranging from public relations, marketing concepts in order to promote, spread knowledge about culture, history and cultural diversity.

The Museum Communicator is the people in charge for developing communicational strategies. This role requests a well-skilled and whole-time working person, who closely works with the other members of the museum staff, especially with the Project Manager. General idea, accuracy and completeness of the information to be diffused will guide his/her work.

The tasks of the figure are complex: s/he is be able to deal with different kind of target-audience, taking care of making the educational materials, as well as other relevant document and contents usable for a wide public. As stated in the previous lines, another important task of the Museum Communicator is the **creation and maintenance of relations with media and relevant Institutions** from cultural and tourist sectors.

In summary, the Museum Communicator has several tasks and skills detailed as follows:

- S/he is a professional coming from the private or from the public sector;
- S/he is in charge of diffusing the contents of the Museum, making it “readable” for a vast audience;
- S/he is in charge for communicating with the Museum audience
- S/he is able to plan and implement Marketing campaign for virtual museum;
- S/he will work closely with relevant tourist, cultural and sponsorship Organisations;
- S/he will generate and manage visit to the virtual and physical Museum.;
- S/he is in charge for the Public Relations;
- S/he will have many and different skills in several fields: from Journalism to Marketing, from Advertising to New Technologies;
- S/he will act as a link among other relevant professional profiles working in a Virtual Museum (with particular regard to the Learning expert and the Curatorial Experts)

because his/her action is transversal to those roles.

Concerning the abilities, a Museum Communicator must be:

- Able to work in a trans-disciplinary team delivering a specified quality of output, on time and within budget.
- Experienced in communication for cultural and or e-service Organisations.
- Internet and ITCs skilled
- Competent in management issues
- Public Relations oriented

<b>Communication Expert</b>	
Profile and abilities	<p>The ability to work in a trans-disciplinary team delivering a specified quality of output, on time and within budget. Experienced in communication for cultural and or e-service organisations.</p> <p>Internet and ITCs skilled (in particular if working on a Virtual Museums)</p> <p>Management abilities</p> <p>Public Relations oriented</p>
Job specification and responsibilities	<p>Plan and implement PR for the project.</p> <p>Plan and implement Marketing campaign for virtual museum.</p> <p>Work closely with relevant tourist, cultural and sponsorship organisations.</p> <p>Generate and manage visit to the actual and virtual museum.</p>

**Summary of skills and characteristic of the Museum Communicator**

## 2. THE F-MU.S.EU.M. LEARNING MODEL

### 2.1. A Model for a network-based learning community

In order to build competences and skills for the Museum Communicator, it is necessary to point out an effective *Learning Model*.

The starting Learning Model that will be implemented within the frame of the MU.COM. Project will be the one worked out in the context of the F-MU.S.EU.M. Project.

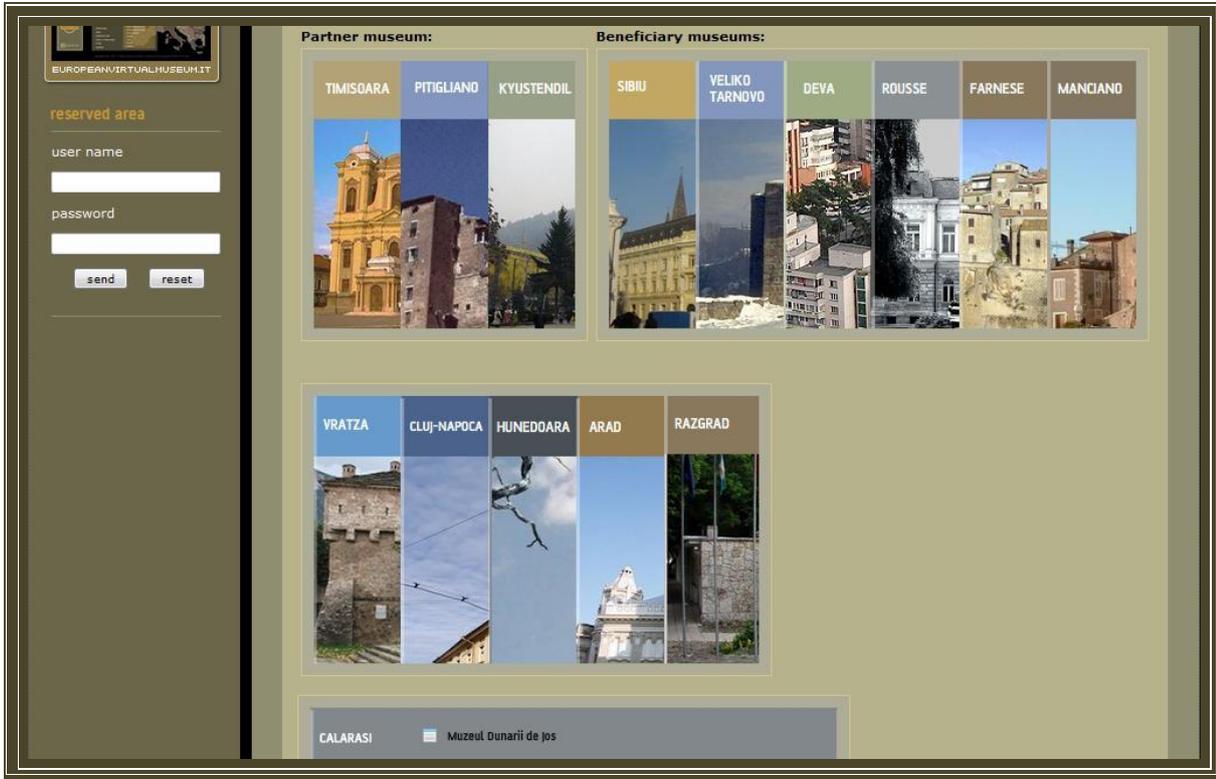
Within the F-MU.S.EU.M. Project (LLP-LDV/TOI/2007/IT/016

[www.europeanvirtualmuseum.net](http://www.europeanvirtualmuseum.net) ) – composed by 32 subjects, among which 27 national

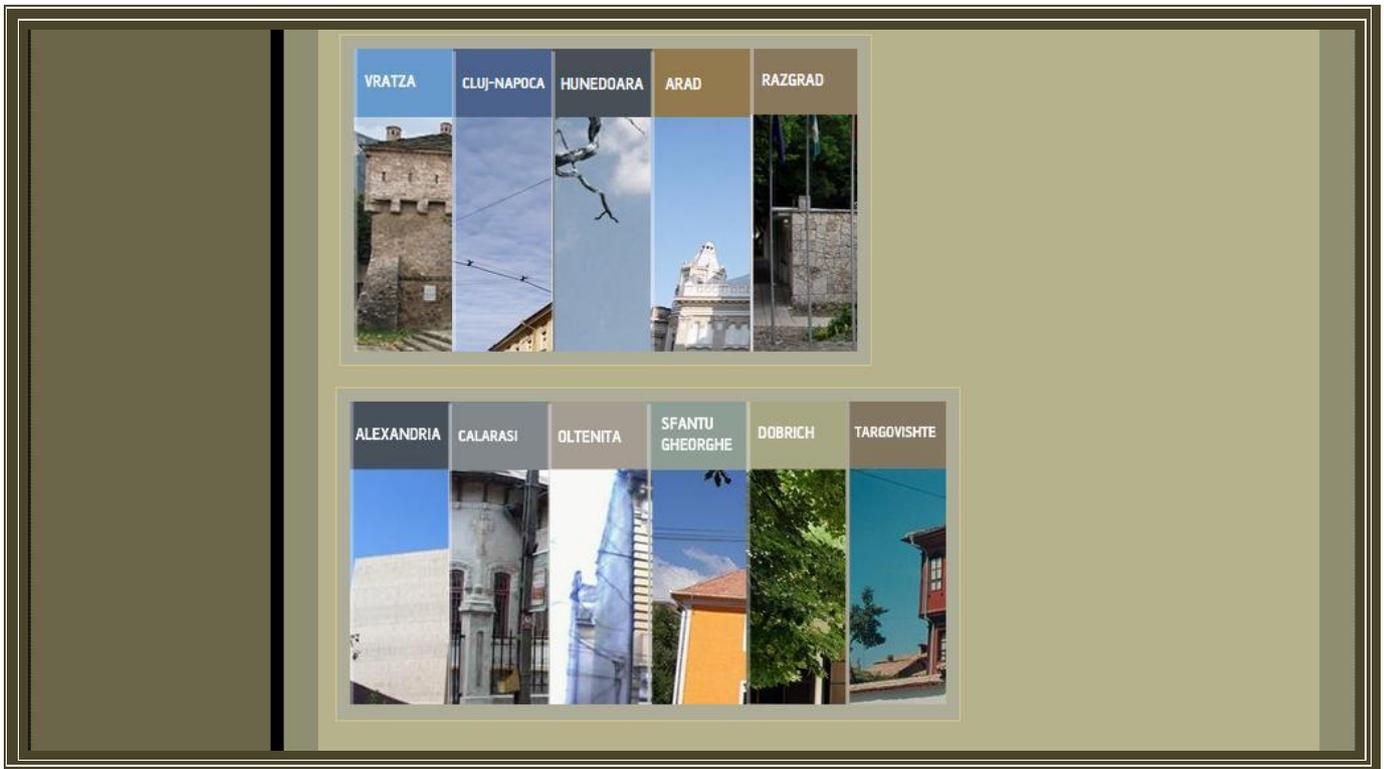
and regional Museums from several European countries– it has been realised a **training**

**Model** through which learning results have been achieved at different levels, such as:

- **Learning Community:** with reference to the transnational horizontal network (composed by seven countries) among groups of professionals working inside the partner and beneficiary Museums;
- **Learning Organisation:** in connection to the learning process within the single target Museum and to the path internal sharing by the staff ;
- **Learning Region:** according to which the share to the project operational phases by Institutions and stakeholders - forming the partner-cultural capital of the local reference area - has allowed their involvement in the planning and promotion of the Museum services according to the development of the cultural tourism local network.



The F-MU.S.EU.M. Portal: section devoted to the partner and beneficiary Museums



The F-MU.S.EU.M. Portal: section devoted to the partner and beneficiary Museums

A basic aspect of the F-MU.S.EU.M. Model is the **network learning** conceived as the sum of the acquisitions through which every cultural Institution has been able **to create new activities and services and to adapt them with the passing of time**, also within the frame of the values and the cultural paradigms forming the core of its social task.

The learning processes promoted by the project took place, to a large extent, inside the Museums working environment, rather than in a traditional class-room.

Furthermore, the F-MU.S.EU.M. Model foresees that all the involved professionals are encouraged to gather the different learning opportunities and to share them inside their working context.

### The F-MU.S.EU.M. on-line reserved working area

From a methodological point of view, this choice has been concretised in the adoption of an approach focused on the maximum exploitation of the practical experience so as to promote and valorise the immediate application of the competences to daily work contexts. The beneficiaries of the training path have been working, therefore, in their usual organisational and professional context exploiting – from time to time and according to the specific needs - the tools and the methodologies made available by the project.

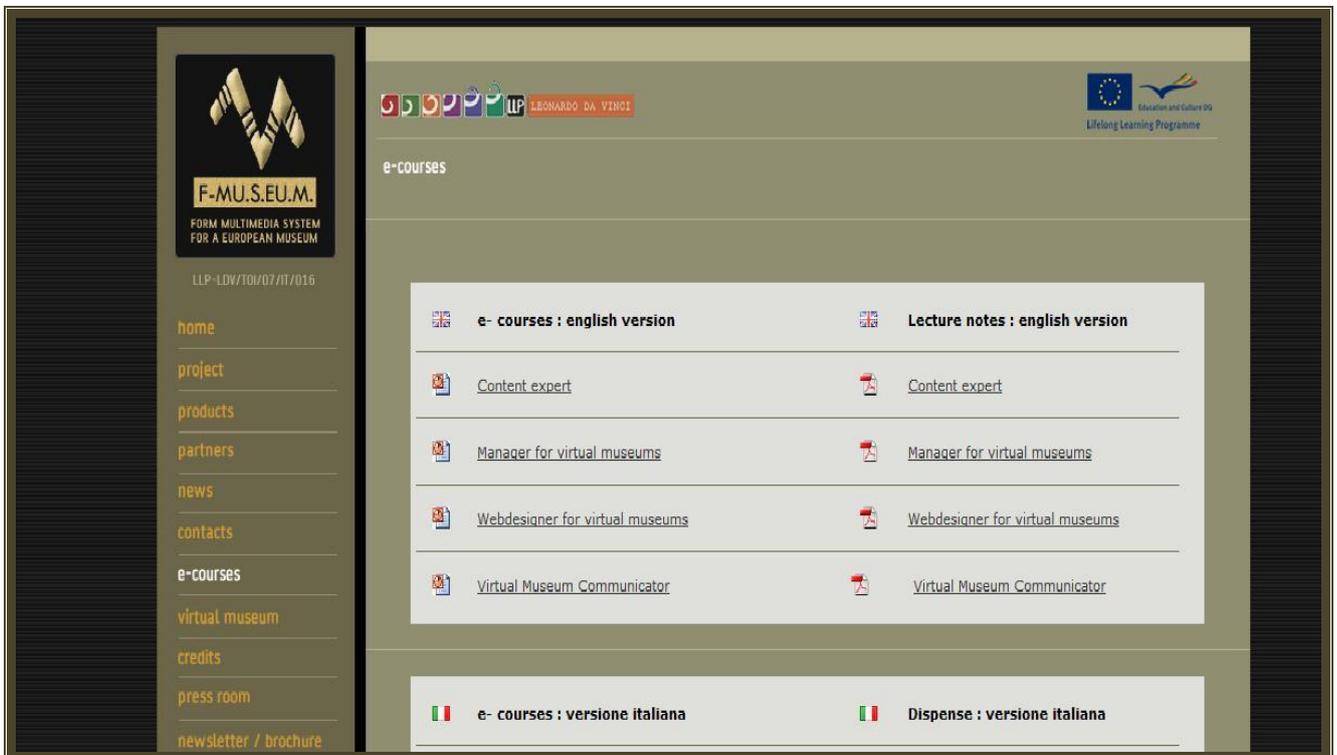
The core elements which the F-MU.S.EU.M. Model is focused on are:

- n. **4 e-learning courses** available (in English as well as in all the partnership languages) in the **public area** of the project portal.

They are addressed to:

- ✓ Manager for the Virtual Museums
- ✓ Web Master for the Virtual Museums
- ✓ Content Expert for the Virtual Museums
- ✓ Communicator for Virtual Museums.

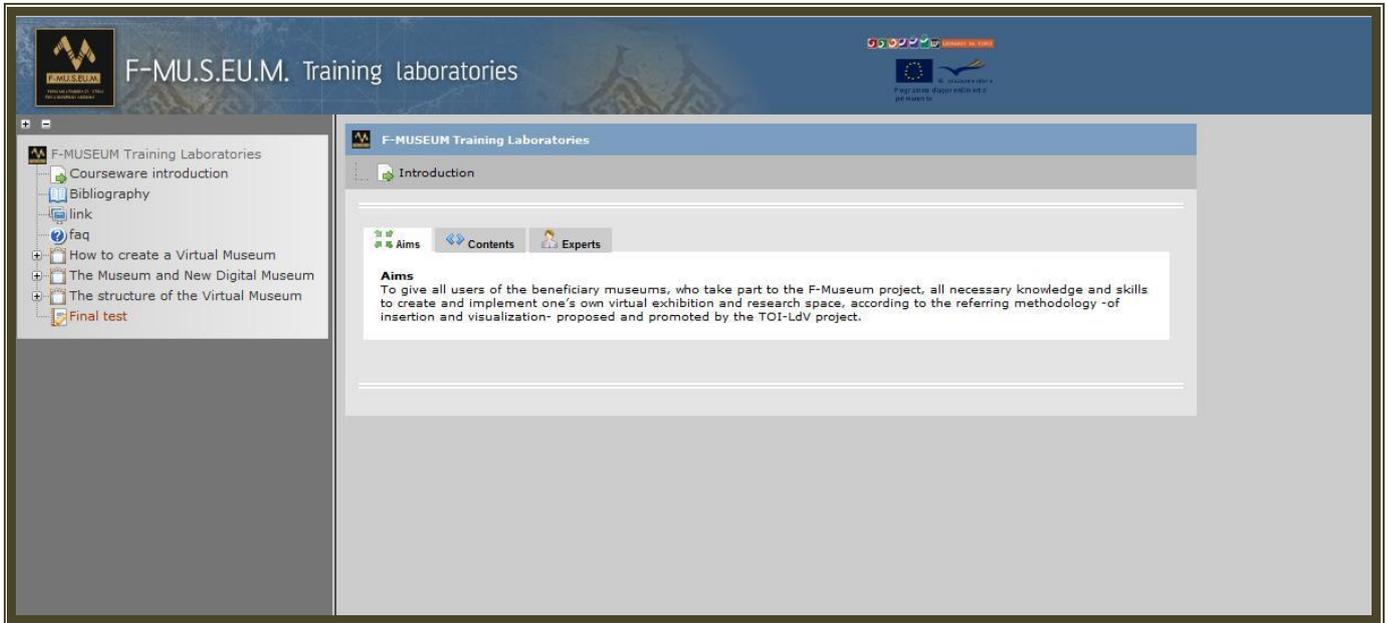
In such context, the last courseware is of particular importance: European-level researches carried out in the frame of the F-MU.S.EU.M. project stressed the urgent necessity to **train specific professional figures devoted to the communication**. This requests the elaboration of pertinent communication methodologies and techniques.



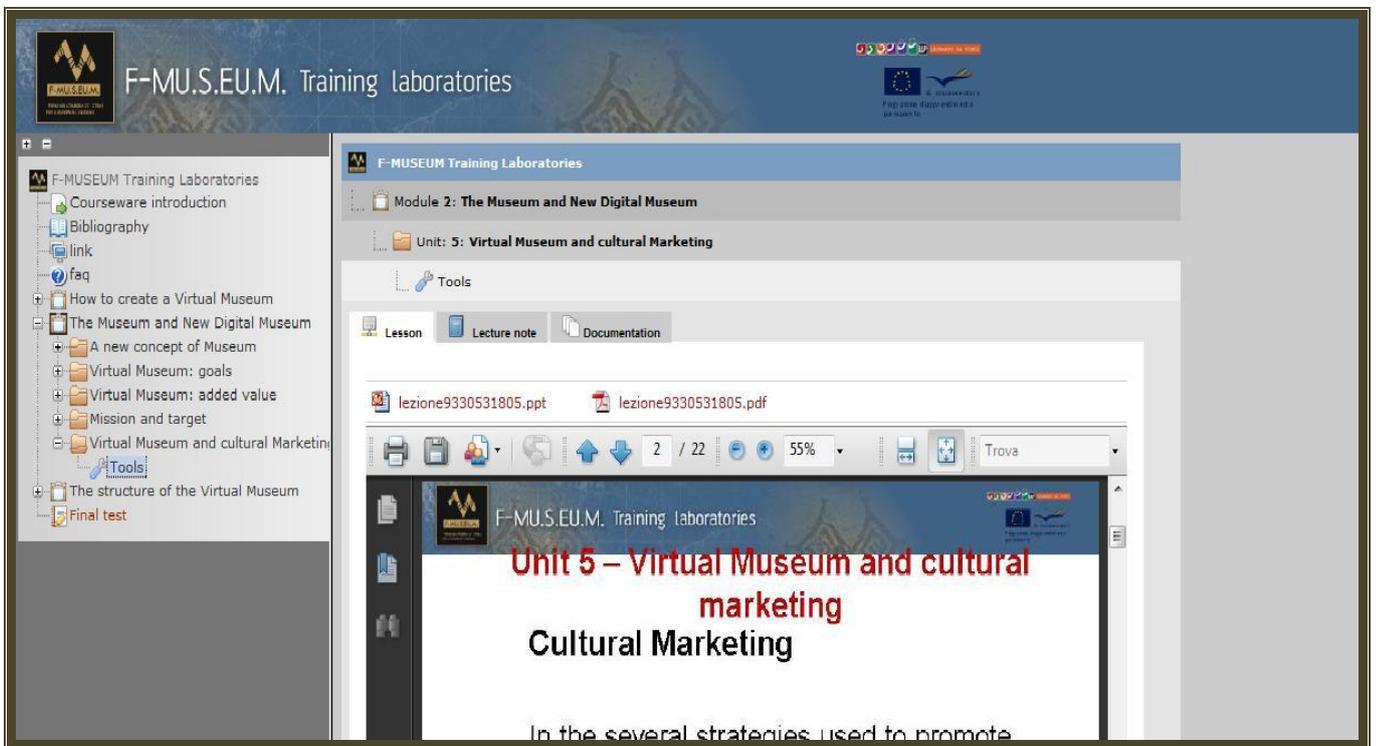
**F-MU.S.EU.M. on-line e-courses in the public area**

### F-MU.S.EU.M. on-line e-courses in the public area

- A training made through **laboratories** available inside the reserved working area for partner and beneficiary Museums
- Continuous distance supervision and tutorship
- Individual study with the aid of specific lecture notes
- Opportunity for interaction, in presence (inside of the Institution) and distance (within the network of partners and beneficiaries) exchange of experiences.



The F-MU.S.EU.M on-line Training Laboratories available in the reserved area



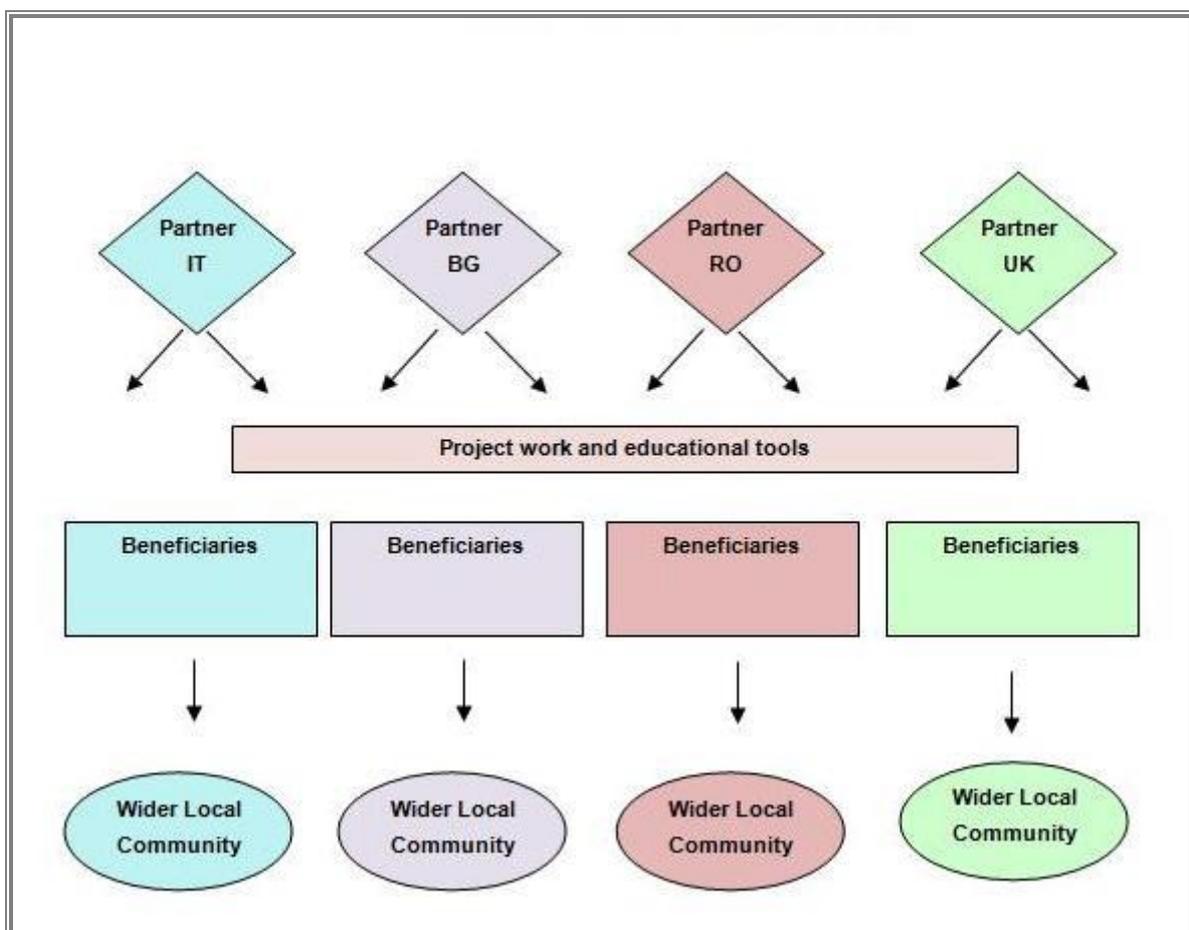
The F-MU.S.EU.M on-line Training Laboratories available in the reserved area

## 2.2. The network-based learning community

The key-aspect of the proposed Learning Model is the collective learning meant as sum of achievements by which each museum creates new assets and adapts itself over time in the framework of its reference values and cultural paradigms that are the core of its social mandate.

The learning assets are intended as **ability to act** (by an individual, an Organisation, and a local Community) certain knowledge in regard to context changing in order to give an adapting and distinctive performance.

Below it is presented a graphic summary explaining how the Learning Model will act inside the national and local contexts of the countries involved in the MU.COM. Project.



### 2.3. A training for Museum Communicator

Further to the learning Model, the starting point of the transfer action will be the e-course for Museum Communicator (see *Annex I* to this document).

The Course, focused on the figure of the Communicator within Virtual Museums, has been built at the end of the F-MU.S.EU.M. project; in order to realise the Course, a focus group within stakeholders in 5 museums has been organized in Bulgaria. Interviews with PR experts on web-communication have been also carried out.

At the end of this process, the assessment and analysis of the local Museums communication needs took place.

The Course has been articulated as follows:

- Part A - General information
- Part B - Assessing the level of development of the museum from the perspective of
  - communication and public relations
- Part C - Choosing an e-museum communicator
- Part D- Course for e-museum communicators – Basic, Medium and Advanced level
- Part E - Further reading and useful links

The scheme of the training path is the following:

<b>DU 1: General Information</b>
<p>Objectives :</p> <p>Promoting awareness about the importance of the communication activities and tools for the museum and the virtual museum</p> <p>Leading the identification of skills, activities and expected results from the work of the Museum Communicator.</p>

<p>LO1 Communicating your museum</p> <p>LO2 Profile of the communicator</p> <p>LO3 Branding your museum</p> <p>LO 4 Organising successful events</p> <p>LO 5 Virtual museum target group</p> <p>LO 6 Preliminary preparation</p>
<p><b>DU 2: Assessing your level</b></p>
<p>Objective: Assessing the level of development of the museum from the perspective of communication and public relations.</p>
<p>LO 1 Preliminary preparation</p> <p>LO2 Test</p>
<p><b>DU 3: Choosing an e-museum communicator</b></p>
<p>Objective: Support the museum staff to identify effective virtual museum communicator.</p>
<p>LO1 Finding the right person</p>
<p><b>DU 4: Course for e-museum communicators</b></p>
<p>Objective: Developing communication skills at basic, medium and advanced level</p>
<p>LO1 Basic level</p> <p>LO2 Medium level</p> <p>LO 3 Advanced level</p>

### 3. PERSPECTIVES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND ENRICHMENT OF THE STARTING MODEL

The goal of the MU.COM. project consists of **transferring the F-MU.S.EU.M training Model**. The focus is on the Model's ability to answer to the increasing need of new professional competences within the Museum sector, addressed to the planning and management of innovative modalities to present the cultural heritage through a mix of culture-art-technology-economy.

The general aim of developing and transferring such a Model is to get **a stronger training for a strategic professional chain (communication) within Museums**, towards the rapid evolution that the organisational and technological innovations are imposing to the promotion of the cultural heritage near a more and more ample and diversified audience.

This objective will be achieved through:

- Elaboration of an **innovative Learning Model** including the new professional figure of "Museum Communicator";
- Realisation of new educational tools, technically advanced, tailored for the acquisition of new validated competences;
- Setting and validation of the Model through experimental local laboratories and project works;
- Exploitation of the innovation within the daily activities of the target Museums.

The actions will be articulated on six branches:

1. The enlargement of the focus, from the figure of the "Virtual Museum Communicator" to the "Museum Communicator" with regard on his/her three main fields of competence:

- **Communicator with the vase audience**
- **Communicator as interface with the Mass media**
- **Communicator as link between the Museum Institution and the territorial actors.**

The employability of this figure regards not only the museum staff: s/he can also work as dependent of an Association/ cooperative Society taking care of the communicative device of one or more museums, or of a network of Museums;

2. The enlargement of the target. While the modeled course (e-course for Museum Communicator) concerned only pre-existing (Manager of the Museum, press officer and PR) employed figures, in the frame of the MU.COM. project a training Curriculum for the main target (**employed adults**) and for the second target (**young people accessing the labour market**) it will be provided. The training Curriculum will be just focused on the new professional figure (**Museum Communicator**) pointed out.

3. The amplification of the potential users' number toward Museum Institutions that manage a wide range of cultural goods and collections: not only historical-archaeological Museums, but also artistic, ethnological, naturalistic and scientific Museums;

4. The adaptation and transfer toward Organisations belonging to the private and no-profit sectors. The inclusion of private Museums within the project network is aimed at the institution of a paradigmatic and cooperative comparison between private and public museums that must answer to parameters of Quality Management focused on the efficiency and the satisfaction of the customers;

5. The adaptation and transfer of the Model training elements toward Organisations of local importance and medium-small size, as privileged field for an effective intervention on the territory by the Museum Communicator. Such Museums-enterprises, in fact, have specific needs-commitments-potentialities that will find adequate answers in the MU.COM. Model;

6. The adaptation and transfer of the Model inside Museums-enterprises as Institutions devoted to the training and education. In this way, Museums will be able to integrate their offer with the existing training contents and with the ones that will be implemented within the MU.COM. project.

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The "Virtual Museum": New Perspectives For Museums to Present Objects and Information by Werner Schweibenz [http://is.uni-sb.de/projekte/sonstige/museum/virtual\\_museum\\_isi98.html68](http://is.uni-sb.de/projekte/sonstige/museum/virtual_museum_isi98.html68)