



CULTURE

for Cities and Regions

Rom san - We are Roma: Museum fighting discrimination through intercommunity dialogue

- Access to culture
- Social cohesion
- Citizenship
- Civic participation
- Inclusion of marginalised groups
- Intercultural dialogue



Context

Sweden's second largest city, renowned for its rich culture, **Gothenburg** launched a new culture plan in 2013, with 2021 as the target date to achieve a boundless, cosmopolitan city, where culture and art occupy a prominent position. The strategy aims at curbing segregation and promoting openness, trust, respect and understanding. As a tool for social cohesion, culture is put forward to increase understanding and strengthen intercultural dialogue.

Cultural programmes for the city of Gothenburg seek to give direction for the City Council's ambition to make the city a centre for cultural events. Culture is perceived as important for the city and its residents' welfare, but also for business, labour, tourism and the city's profile and attractiveness. Social inclusion is one of the targets, especially for underprivileged communities. The city of Gothenburg has even been elected one of the five pilot cities by the Swedish government as part of a national 20-year strategy for Roma inclusion. This population, recognised as a national minority in 2000, has long lived in Sweden and numbers over 50,000.

The strategy's overarching goal is to ensure every Rom person born in 2012 has the exact same opportunities in life as a non Roma person in 20 years' time. The strategy also underscored the absolute necessity for increased Roma representation in society.



Challenges

With the "Roma san" project, the city council aimed at better dealing with Roma inclusion in the city, as the community suffers exclusion. It was an opportunity to provide a space for citizens to meet a community against which most others are prejudiced. Also, the specific set-up of the project was in itself a process empowering Roma and giving them autonomy and the ability to control, develop and modulate their own discourse.

Rom san - We are Roma

"Rom san - We are Roma" is a temporary photography and document exhibition created by Roma. It is the result of cooperation between local activists, journalists and a photographer, who initiated the project. In 2011 the team produced a photography exhibition, which later resulted in a meeting with the Gothenburg City Museum and a joint application to the European Social Fund Council in Sweden. It was then produced by Roma in the area as part of a special relationship with the museum, which implied implementing new working methods in a collaborative way by yielding decision-making power to Roma. In a unique way Roma have had the interpretative prerogative and the right to oppose decisions.

The exhibition, which opened in 2013, included photographs, personal narratives and a visitor handbook containing photographs related to the exhibition. Visitors were guided by two Roma experts and four Roma pedagogues employed by the museum. Storytellers, artists and musicians were occasionally contracted.

Exhibition information was not formulated so as to be pedagogic: facts and figures were deliberately overlooked. The visitor was rather invited to get acquainted with Roma culture and history through personal statements and testimonies. The exhibition also included an educational programme for museum professionals, school programmes and an extensive public programme to address the discrimination and prejudices that affect Roma in Sweden. Considering prejudices the result of a lack of knowledge, the exhibition is used as a tool to raise awareness and disseminate information. "Rom san - we are Roma" was not only an exhibition but also a meeting place and exchange platform for different Roma groups. As a flagship project of the role of culture and social inclusion in Gothenburg, the city showcased the exhibition at the European Parliament in Brussels (10-14 November 2014), also as part of a broader debate on the inclusion of Roma in Europe.



Budget and financing

The project was planned in 2012 and the exhibition opened in 2014 at the City Museum, lasting until March 2015.

The exhibition and complementary educational activities were funded by the European Social Fund. It received SEK 10.5 million (€ 1.1 million) from the Swedish ESF Council.

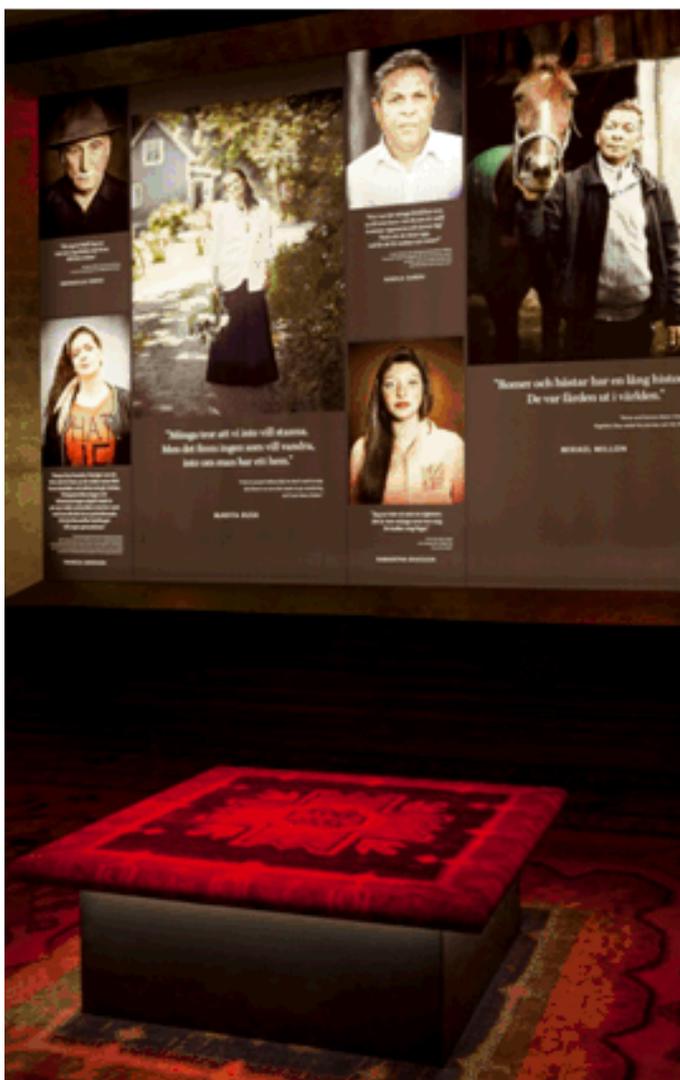
Impact

Over 130,000 people attended the exhibition, including 1,200 council officials. At the opening of the exhibition, the number of visitors set a record for the museum, with over 4,000 visitors. Also, training programmes were fully booked over the exhibition period. As a result of this success, cultural institutions in other Swedish cities and a number of other countries have expressed interest in taking on the exhibition. But the impacts went far beyond these figures and thanks to the "Rom san" exhibition, the integration of Roma is finally on the political agenda.

During the exhibition, when some conflicts with the Roma community was reported by the media, the museum became a centre of information and was contacted by journalists and citizens who wished to know more on the topic. The project shed light on the need to have a permanent Roma information/cultural centre with greater visibility. The exhibition's education programme contributed to overcoming prejudices. As regards the internal functioning of the museum, collaboration between individuals not used to interacting within regulatory systems and institutional routines, and a museum staff not used to establishing more horizontal and redistributed power relationships or negotiating working methods and content has been very enriching.

The "Rom san" project has also impacted the Roma community itself, reinforcing its self-esteem, providing a legitimate space for developing and building its own discourse in displaying a diversity of views, values, experiences, hopes and dreams, and offering a sense and place of belonging.





Tips

- 💡 Make sure the artwork is authentic.
- 💡 Involve people from the community itself for inside perspective and intercultural competence.
- 💡 Allocate appropriate resources that allow for a mutual learning approach and the recognition of the intrinsic value of the learning process.
- 💡 Allow time for appropriately building the process of mutual recognition.

Management level and partners

The organisational and management model is also unique as the "object" of the exhibition is embedded in the management, curatorship and organisation team. For the exhibition, the Gothenburg City Museum had the status of project manager and worked in collaboration with two journalists and a photographer.

Links :

www.goteborgsstadsmuseum.se/en/node/348

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