**Participation workshop, Ljubljana, September 2014**

More than thirty people attended this workshop, at the Museoforum in Ljubljana, on the 12th October 2015. Their challenge was two-fold:

* To make proposals that would help to create a user-friendly environment and thus make it more likely that people would participate in museum activities.
* To put forward simple approaches that would stimulate user participation. We recognised that deeper engagement would require a different level of exhibit. The ambition here was to take the first steps to creating an environment in which users would wish to take part.

***Creating a user-friendly museum environment***

Creating a friendly museum environment will enable our museums to broaden the range of audiences who come and will make it more likely that our visitors will enthusiastically participate in museum activities. The creation of a friendly environment requires a shared vision that places visitors at the heart of the museum. We must put the visitor first, looking at every stage of the visitor experience from pre- to post-visit, and ensure every member of the museum team plays a visitor-centred role:

If everyone in the museum – and I mean everyone from cleaner to director – believes that their first and most important duty is to ensure that each and every visitor gets what they want from their visit then the museum will be [visitor] friendly. It’s as simple and as hard as that. It’s not primarily about the nuts and bolts, and the ticking of check lists. It’s about attitude. Get that right and you’re a winner.

Ian Forbes, Director, Killhope North of England Lead Mining Museum, winner of the first Guardian Family Friendly Award, 2004

<http://www.kidsinmuseums.org.uk/the-guardian-award/2004-guardian-family-friendly-museum-award/>

To plan, create and sustain a friendly environment, we must look at every aspect of the experience, from first contact with the museum to the resources that can be drawn on after the visit. The workshop focused on three elements:

* Creating a welcoming environment
* The creative use of seating (also highly relevant to simple participative exhibits)
* Ensuring ‘good goodbyes’

1. **Welcoming environment**

*Pre-visit*

* Warm corporate identity
* Welcoming external image – including online
* Clear signage to and from site
* Welcoming external appearance of museum

*Environment*

* East access on arrival to water, café, WCs, seats
* Inclusive for those with disabilities
* Discrete security
* Warm atmosphere – heating, lighting, colour schemes all about making people feel welcome and relaxed

*Support*

* Smiles – Friendly entrance area

Friendly staff

Friendly and professional guides, front-of-house staff

Friendly shop

* Good orientation

1. **Creative use of seating**

*Who sit?*

* Individuals, families, groups, with strangers

*Sitting as ‘experience’*

* On vehicle, boat, exhibit type
* ‘At the seaside’
* Bench with sculptures of famous people
* Around ‘campfire’
* Around objects
* Around ‘things to do’
* Information in WCs

*Sitting as ‘activity’*

* Throne
* Toilets through time
* Torture stool
* Giving birth
* Freud’s couch

*How sit?*

* Different ways of sitting – e.g. Japanese, Turkish, animals
* Different professions
* Sitting as a metaphor

1. **‘Good Goodbyes’**

* Smiling face at end – discuss visit with you, get your suggestions for what more to include
* Quiz on what in the museum – with fun prizes
* End of trail for children – praise + sticker for their ‘good work’
* Visitors leave thoughts/message at end – What liked

What did not like

What more they would like to see

Recommendations for next visitors

* Guide/trail to area around the museum
* Good directions home
* Karst Museum: Goodbye projection on floor

Stones to write comments on

* School Museum: ‘Certificate’ for ‘good behaviour’

***Stimulating user participation***

The second challenge for the workshop was to propose the strategic use of minor changes that begin the process of transforming ‘permanent’ exhibitions. Yes, the long term ambition is for a profoundly different, more participatory, more meaningful museum experience – and one where there is always something new happening. The proposals here represent the first step, in themselves enhance the visitor experience and also buy time while your museum plans more profound change.

Again, three headings were available, with some overlap between them:

* **Developing cheap participative exhibits**
* **Stimulating conversations around objects**
* **Stimulating user contributions**

In the event, only one was used.

**Stimulating conversations around objects**

N.B. Important to distinguish between types of visitor groups – different approaches required.

* Put objects in context
* Introduce the stories behind the objects
* Ensure visitors can *Relate* to the objects + can bring their own knowledge to bear
* *Provoke* – use intrigue and the unexpected
* Use different senses
* Ensure handling opportunities
* Provide opportunities for visitors to contribute to content, including their own stories