

Report on learning and pedagogy in Estonian museums in 2014



NORDIC-BALTIC
MOBILITY
PROGRAMME

Culture



The Nordic Centre of Heritage Learning and Creativity AB (NCK) is a Nordic-Baltic centre for learning through cultural heritage, located in Östersund, Sweden.



The preparation of this report was co-financed through a grant from Kulturkontakt Nord. It is a result of a survey being conducted by NCK. This report was written by Dimitra Christidou on behalf of NCK.

The contents of this report reflect the views of the author who is responsible for the facts and the accuracy of the data presented herein.



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1. > SUMMARY

This report presents the results from the 2014 survey addressed to museum directors in Estonia. The survey on learning and pedagogy in Estonian museums was conducted in collaboration with the Association of Estonian Museums and conducted in the first months of 2014. The answers were collected through a web-based form with an instruction on the purpose of the survey urging museum directors to answer anonymously.

From the twelve replies we received from the museum directors in Estonia, half of them agreed that learning takes place in all environments where knowledge is transmitted. Additionally, the rest found themselves agreeing upon the prerequisite of the intention for someone to learn (4) whereas the other two stated that they see learning as all interaction. They also consider learning to be at the core of the museum activity and a means for communicating the message of the museum exhibitions, and as such, learning is an essential part of the most important policy documents of each institution.

Additionally, the group that is mainly addressed through the museums' programmes and learning activities is children and young people. Precisely 24% of the museums participating in this survey have children and youth on their educational agenda, with another 8% having programmes designed for schools and students. It comes as no surprise that museum educators, who in the case of Estonian museums may hold a university degree with or without additional pedagogical training, make the decisions in most of the museums as to who will be the target group of their learning activities.

Almost all of our Estonian informants are warm supporters of further education for their museum educators and nearly all agree that it should be of formal character, with the Association of Estonian Museums being involved in this initiative's development.

2.> BACKGROUND

In 2011 NCK conducted a survey in which museum directors in Sweden reflected upon questions concerning learning and pedagogy. The underlying reason for designing this survey was the acknowledgment of the need to advance our knowledge regarding learning in Swedish museums. The Association of Swedish Museums actively participated in the on-going discussions and facilitated the design and distribution of the survey to their members. The results of the survey pinpointed towards the necessity to provide further education to the museum pedagogical staff, a need that has been addressed by launching four new university courses in museum education in the autumn of 2014.

Following the Swedish survey, similar online surveys were conducted in Denmark, Finland, Norway and the Baltic countries. Museum directors were invited to complete the questionnaire anonymously. The questionnaire was prepared in dialogue with the Museum Associations in each country, apart from Latvia. It consists of 11 questions and open-comment fields in which the informants had the opportunity to elaborate on their answers. The questionnaire is included in the Appendix.

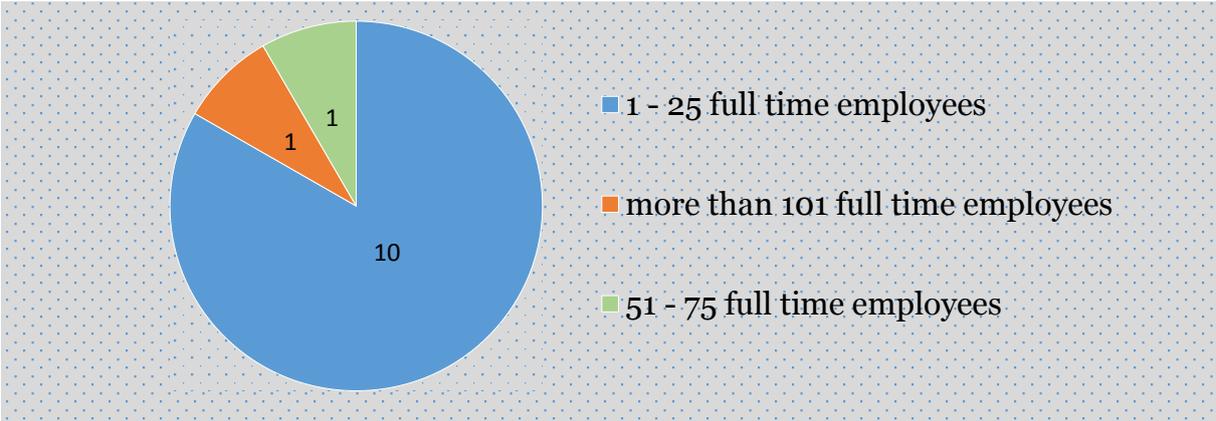
Apart from the reports for each country, a comparative analysis of all reports was produced in February 2015 as it would shed light on important insights and allow us to gain a better understanding of the Nordic and Baltic status quo.

These reports provide a lens through which we may begin to identify the current state of organisational affairs in regards to learning in the Nordic and Baltic museums. In addition to that, these reports provide the basis for further discussion and debate at both political and managerial level.

3.> WHO PARTICIPATED

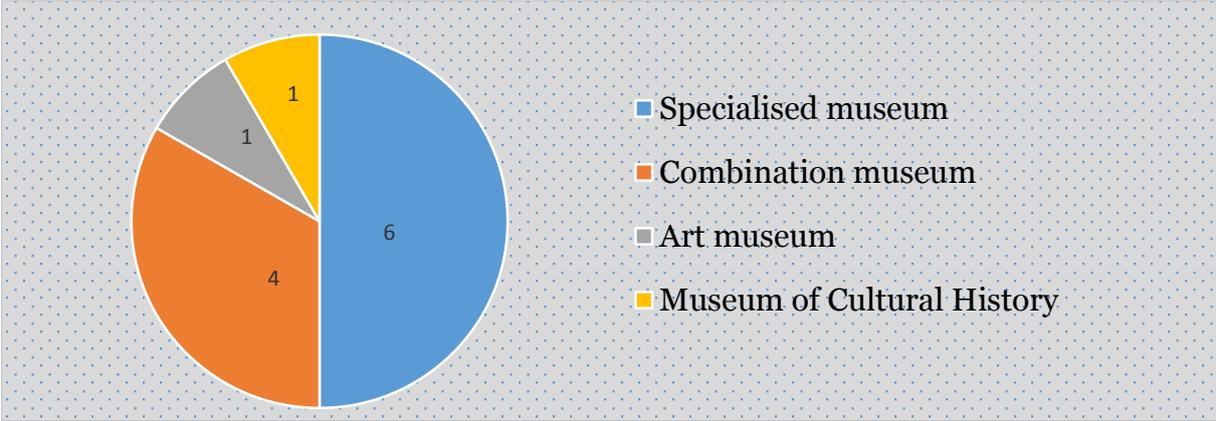
Most of the museums participating in the survey are what we categorise as small museums – that is, these museums have less than 25 employees who work full time. The rest two museums employ more than 25 people, with one engaging between 51 – 75 staff members and the other more than 101 full time employees.

Chart 1. Share of small and large museums



When it comes to the type of the museums that participated in the survey, these can be divided into three main categories: six are oriented towards a particular theme (specialised museums), four are combining particular themes (combination museums), one is an Art museum and another a museum of Cultural History.

Chart 2. Museums divided by content



From these museums, eight are owned by the state, two belong to an association and, only one to the municipality.

Chart 3. Museums divided by ownership

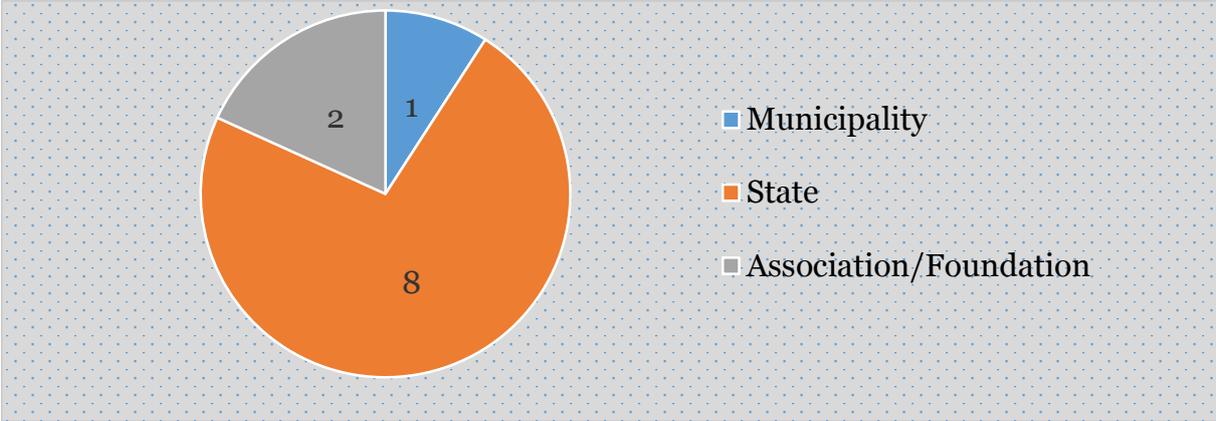


Figure 1 summarizes the museums participating in the Estonian survey in terms of type, number of employees and ownership and thus, allows us to draw comparisons across these institutions. The museum that employs more than 101 full time staff members is a specialised museum that belongs to an association/foundation, while the second largest with 51 – 75 employees is a state-owned museum of Cultural History.

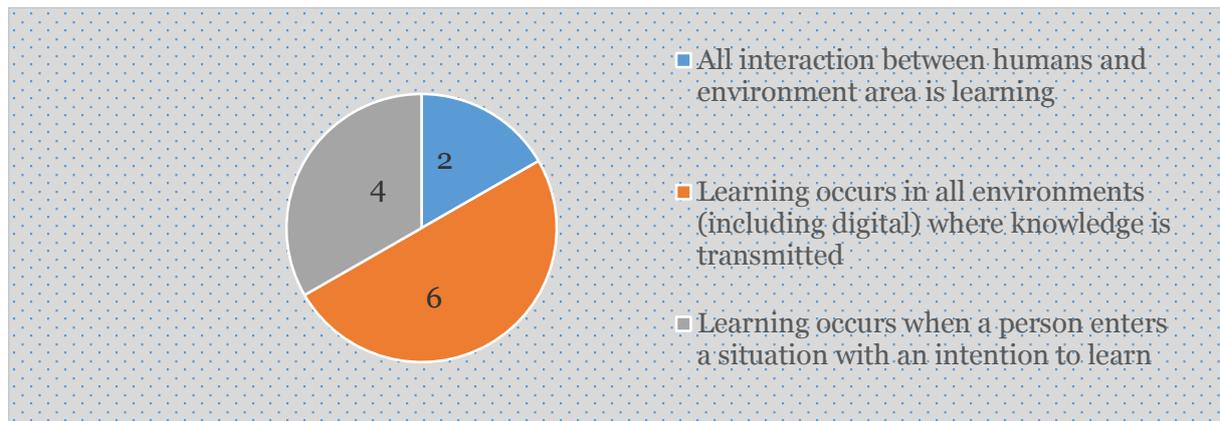
Figure 1. Summary of the Estonian museums in terms of type, ownership and number of employees

Specialised & Combination museum	Specialised museum	Museum of Cultural History	Art museum
9	1	1	1
1 - 25 full time employees	<101 full time employees	51 - 75 full time employees	1 - 25 full time employees
Association / State / Municipality	Association	State	State

4.> DEFINITIONS OF LEARNING

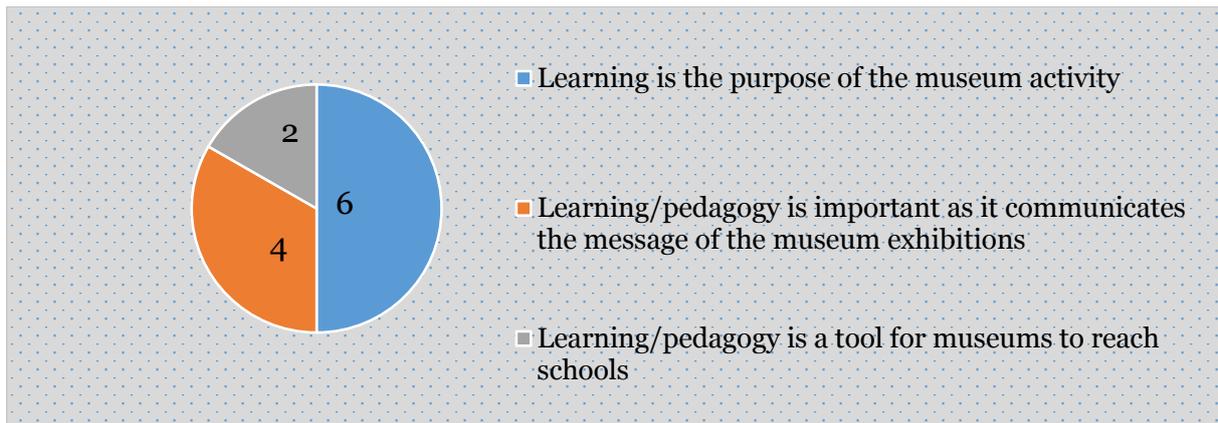
Chart 4 depicts the answers we received when asking the museum directors to select one out of four definitions of learning. The most popular definition, selected by half of the museum directors, is the one considering learning as taking place in all contexts (including digital) where knowledge is transmitted. Four museum directors see learning as a process triggered by personal intention, only two museum directors see learning as all interaction that may occur between humans and the environment whereas none of our participants agrees that learning takes place within specifically designed and developed pedagogical programmes. Interestingly enough, the museum directors seem to agree that there are specific contexts in which learning takes place and these are the ‘places where knowledge is transmitted’ but they do not feel that learning occurs within specifically developed pedagogical programmes.

Chart 4. Definitions of learning



We were also interested in finding out how museum directors valued learning in relation to the museum and in relation to different contexts relevant to a museum. Once again, the informants had to choose what they recognised as most accurate from a number of given statements. Chart 5 details the answers given.

Chart 5. The role and value of learning in relation to the museum

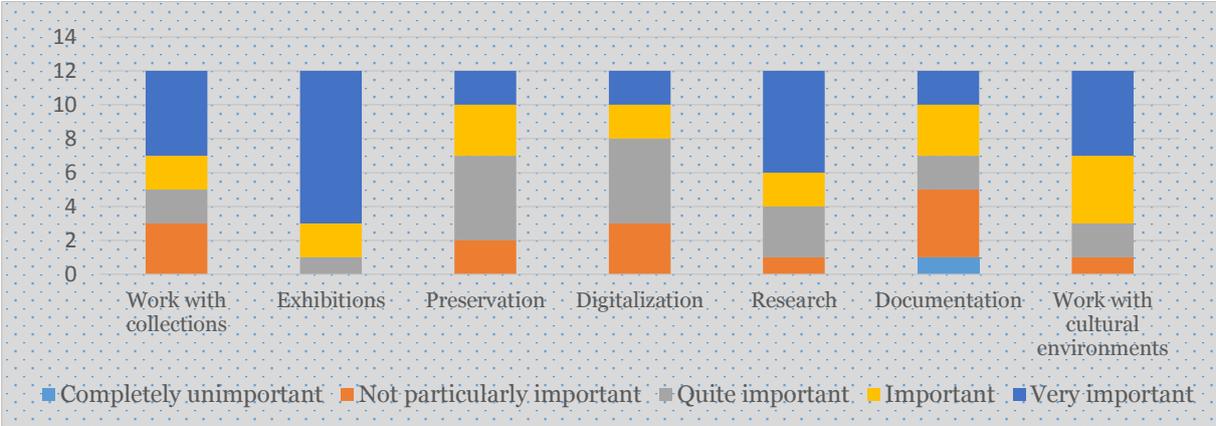


Out of the three options, half of the informants agreed that learning is at the core of the museum activity. There was one elaboration arguing that ‘learning takes place through discussion and reflection, through temporary exhibitions, workshops and guided tours’. From the rest six of them, four agreed that learning is important as it delivers and communicates the message of the museum exhibitions while two of them agreed that they see learning as a means for reaching schools.

In order to take a closer look into learning, we asked informants to elaborate on how important they thought learning is for museum users across seven museum contexts. Chart 6 showcases their replies. It becomes clear from the distribution of their answers that the museum directors in Estonia hold very different opinions regarding the museum contexts in which learning is important for museum users. They only seem to agree on the importance of learning in the setting of exhibitions. Despite the fact that they agree on the different degrees of importance, nine out of twelve agree on the high importance of learning in this setting. If we see how many altogether consider each context as important and very important, then **exhibitions** is the one which was highly perceived as an important context for learning, followed by the **work with cultural environments, research, and work with collections**.

They also feel that **preservation** and **digitisation** are quite important while their opinions are divided when it comes to documentation. Four of them agree that **documentation** is not particularly important whereas three agree that it is important.

Chart 6. The role and value of learning in relation to different museum contexts

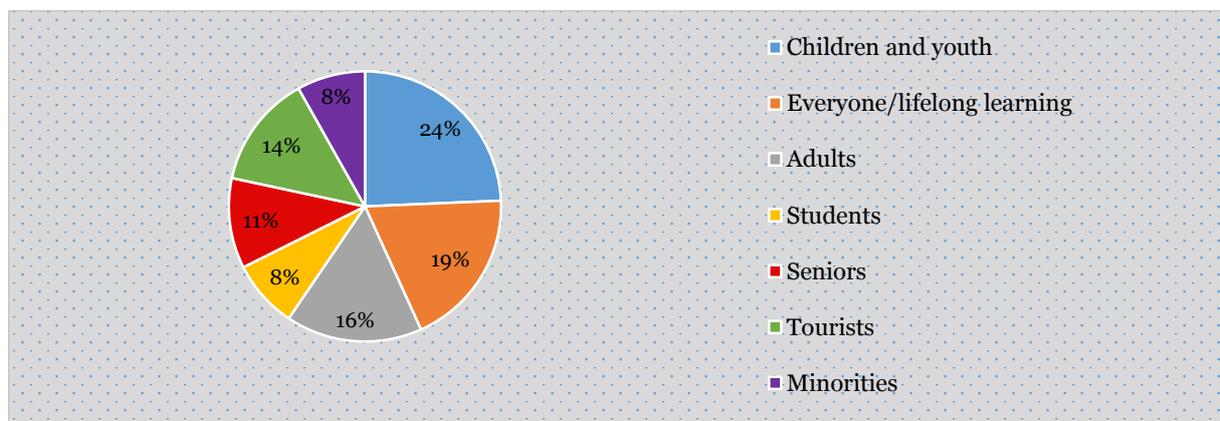


5.> PRIORITIES AND TARGET GROUPS

We wanted to realise if learning plays a critical role in the mission of the Estonian museums. We shifted our attention to the official documents of the institutions participating in this survey in order to identify the role of learning in these institutions. Indeed, all twelve museums confirmed that learning is explicitly included in the policy documents of their institutions.

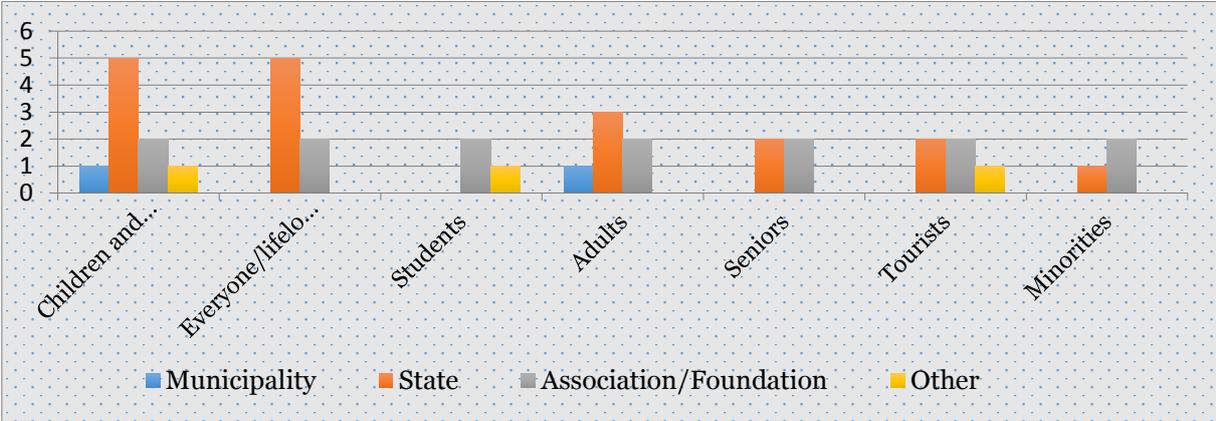
Learning is a wide concept and to better understand what kind of learning opportunities are available at the Estonian museums, the informants were asked to prioritize from a list of six target groups in regard to learning museum programmes and activities. According to their replies, the first priority for the majority of them is the elementary school, followed by high school and preschool. When they were further asked to identify which target groups are currently addressed by their learning programmes and activities, children and youth received most of the votes. Two factors in this question complicate the analysis: (a) some of these seven categories overlap, completely or partly, and (b) the informants could choose between one and seven of the available categories. Despite this initial complication, the data collected for this question shed light on the variety and the priorities that currently characterise the Latvian museum sector. Chart 7 presents their answers in percentages.

Chart 7. Target groups for learning programmes and activities



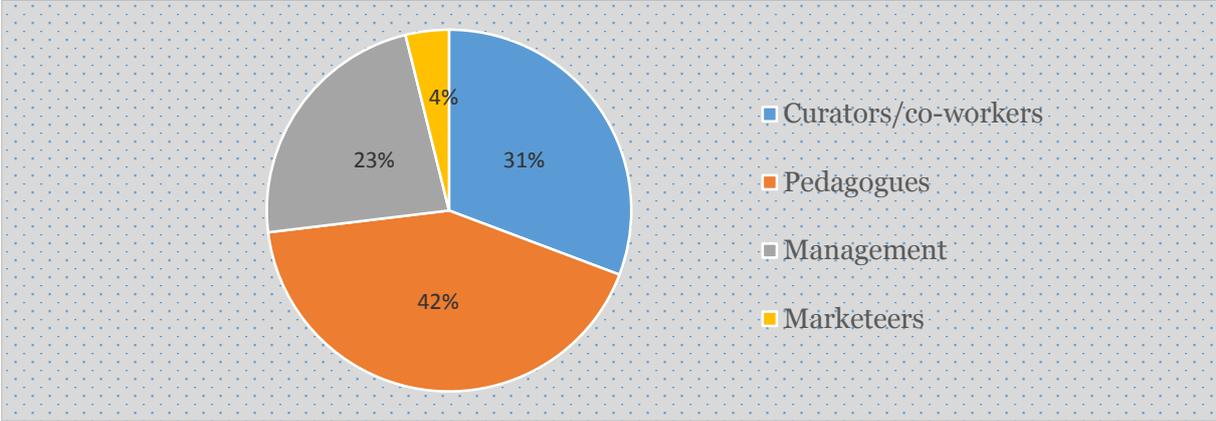
Findings from the Estonian museums are no exception to the long tradition worldwide with museum learning activities addressing mainly children and youth. Nine of the twelve museums participating in this survey have children and youth in their educational agenda while seven of them address everyone through their learning programmes, and thus, fostering lifelong learning. What is interesting in these findings is that despite these institutions claiming that their learning activities address everyone, only half of them report that their programmes address students, seniors and minorities.

Chart 8. Target groups in museums owned by the municipality, the state and association



This interesting deviation may be better understood once we know who makes the decisions when it comes to selecting the aforementioned target groups of educational programmes and activities for each museum. As seen in Chart 9, it is the education staff who make these decisions (42%), followed by the curators/co-workers (31%) and the board of directors/management (23%).

Chart 9. Who does the selection of the target groups?

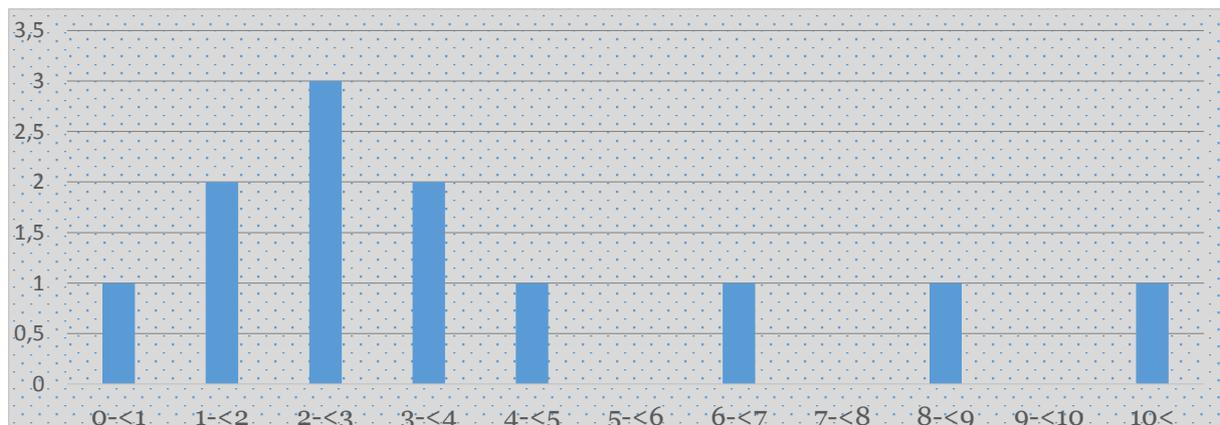


6.> THE EMPLOYEES

Often a prerequisite for an efficient museum learning team is to have employees who work full time on planning and realising learning activities as well as meeting groups and individuals face-to-face.

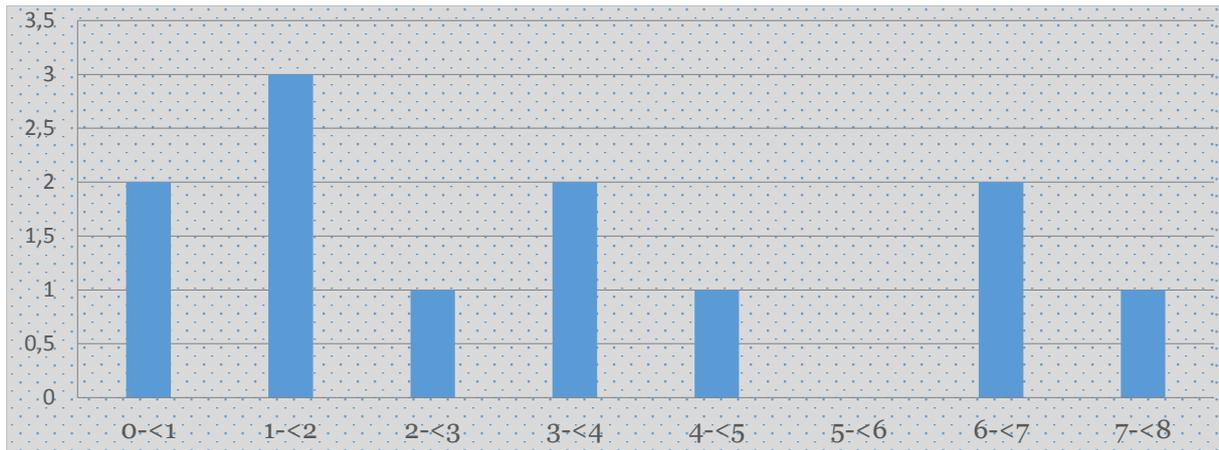
From the twelve replies we received, seven of the Estonian museum directors indicated that their institutions employ between one and four full time staff members responsible for the learning activities and meeting visitors face-to-face. Specifically, three of them reported that they have between two to three full time employees, while the rest four have either one to two, or three to four employees. There have been also two museums with a team of eight to ten employees running the learning programmes.

Chart 10. Full time employees who work with learning and meet visitors face-to-face



As learning involves other activities than face-to-face encounters, there was an additional question about the work concerning learning activities in general such as counselling, web pedagogy but not work that is a precondition for learning activities (i.e. digitisation). As seen in Chart 11, the Estonian museums seem to have a different number of employees for this type of work: three of them have between one and two people; two of these museums employ three to four people while other two between six and seven.

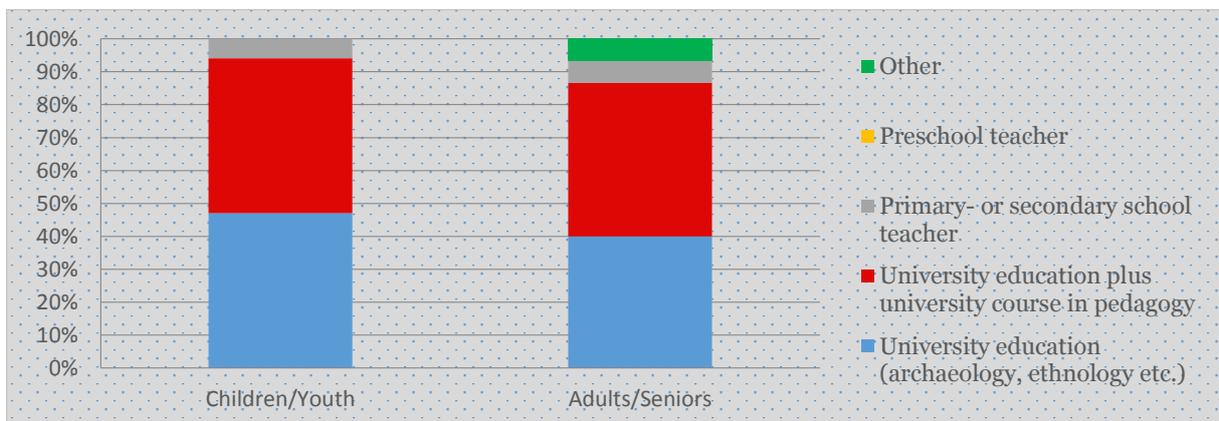
Chart 11. Full time employees who work with learning in general



Another factor impacting upon the learning activities at the Estonian museums is the educational background of the people responsible for running them. To address this inquiry, museum directors had to select among five types of educational background. Findings from the comparison between those involved in programmes addressing children/youth and those involved in programmes addressing adults/seniors can be seen in Chart 12.

As illustrated by the graph, there are no significant variations between the two groups of employees: they tend to have a university background in a relevant field to the institution while a significant number of them also has received an additional course in pedagogy.

Chart 12. Educational backgrounds for employees who work with learning



7. > FURTHER TRAINING & EDUCATION

In order to elaborate further upon the educational background of the museum educators, we asked the Estonian museum directors to share their thoughts on their employees receiving further education in the future. Ten out of the twelve directors participating in this survey agree that there is a need for further education (Chart 13). From these ten museum directors, eight believe that this further education should be of formal character and that there is a need to increase the pedagogical knowledge (Charts 14 and 15). As seen in Chart 16, when further prompted to answer if they think it is necessary to know more about the activities that take place at schools, nine of them agreed that this is important.

Chart 13. Do you think there is a need for further education for museum educators?

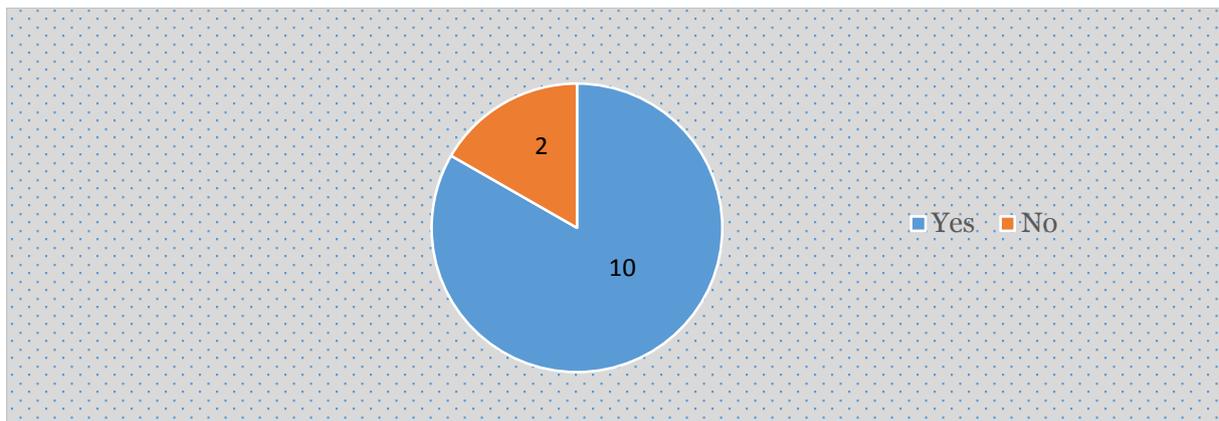


Chart 14. Should further education be of formal character?

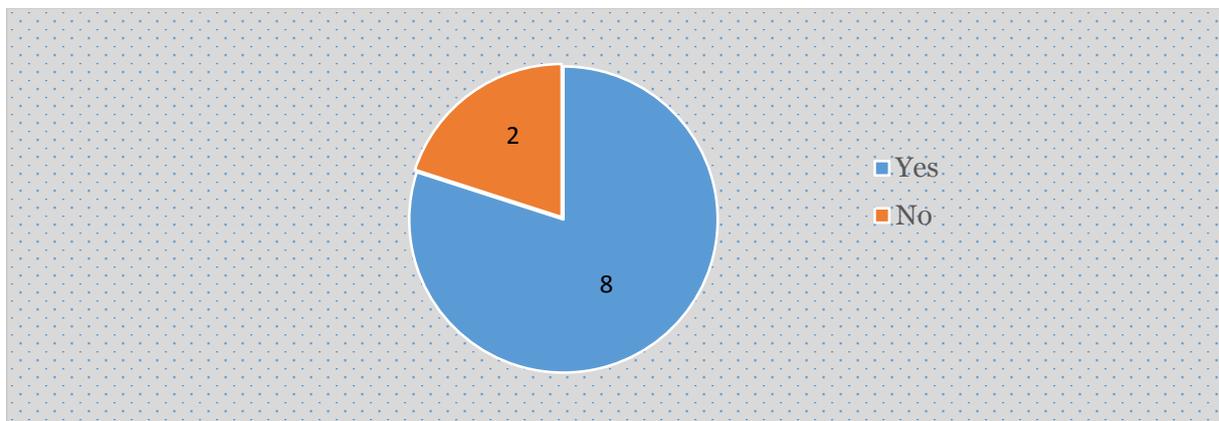


Chart 15. Do you find it necessary to increase the knowledge about pedagogical theory?

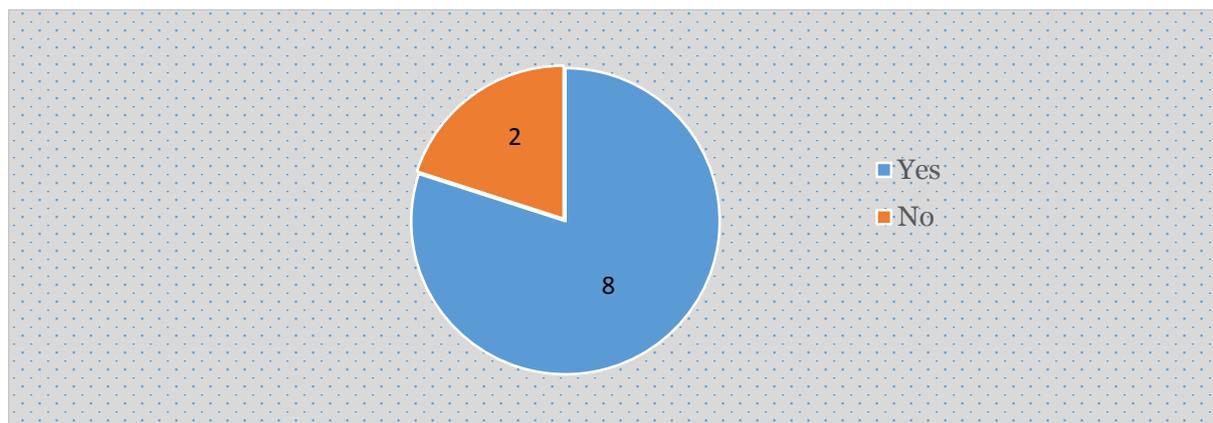
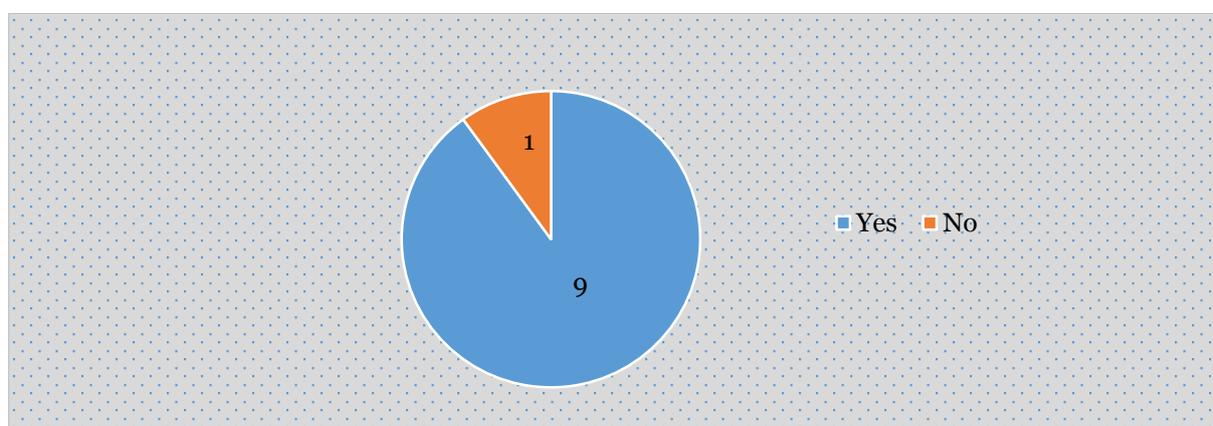
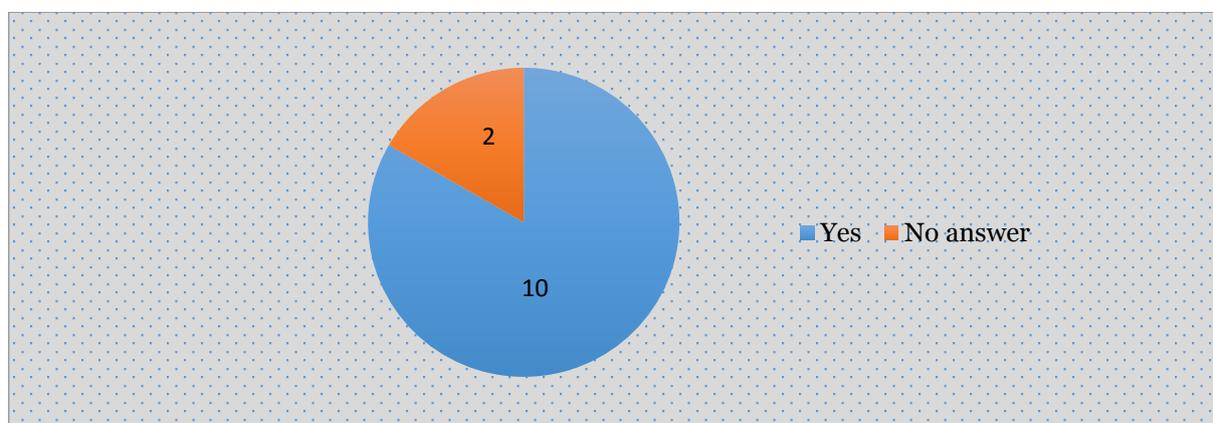


Chart 16. Do you find it necessary to increase the knowledge about activities taking place at schools?



The last question asked participants for their thoughts on the Association of Estonian Museums developing these opportunities for further learning, perhaps in collaboration with other stakeholders. All ten museum directors who supported further education and training, welcomed this initiative.

Chart 17. Do you think that the Association of Estonian Museums should (perhaps in collaboration with other stakeholders) develop possibilities for continuing education for museum educators?



8.> CONCLUSIONS

This report is the result of a survey that took place in 2014. This survey was one of the first systematic attempts to provide insights into the museum sector in the Nordic and Baltic countries.

In Estonia there are a total of 245 museums (Estonian Ministry of Culture, 2011). Despite this large number of museums in the country, the survey was only distributed to two of the largest institutions which were then responsible for the dissemination of the survey to the rest of the museums.

This report details the findings from 12 Estonian museums regarding learning and pedagogy. The sample may seem small, but we feel that it is important to report upon the replies we received so as to draw some preliminary comparisons across the participating countries while grounding for future research and debate.

From the twelve replies we received regarding how learning can be defined, the museum directors in Estonia agreed in their majority that learning takes place in all environments where knowledge is **transmitted** and when someone has an **intention** to learn. It is interesting here to see the link between the two most preferable definitions as they both point towards more teacher-centred approaches, which see learning as something transmitted from the teacher to the learner, and not vice versa. Perhaps this is the reason why these museum directors argue that learning is important in predefined contexts as for example exhibitions in which learning is a means for communicating their message.

The key presence of schools in the Estonian museum programmes and activities may become more apparent if we turn to identify the target groups that each museum has. Precisely 24% of the museums participating in this survey have children and youth on their educational agenda, with another 8% having programmes for students. These findings pinpoint to the importance of schools, and young people for museum programmes and activities in Estonia and can be seen in relation to their belief that it is necessary for museums to increase their knowledge about activities taking place in schools.

Equally important to identifying who is the main target group for the museum learning activities, it is to consider who decides which target group of museum users will be addressed through the museum education programmes. Here, the replies we received unveiled that museum educators make these decisions in most of the museums, may or may not in collaboration with the curators. What is more interesting is when we turn to identify the educational background of these museum educators currently involved in making these key decisions while also being actively involved in the pedagogical activities, for both schools and adults. According to the replies we received, museum educators hold a university degree with or without additional pedagogical training.

Nearly all informants consider that there is a need for advancing their museum educators' special education and especially in pedagogical theory, and were in favour of the Association of Estonian Museums organizing and running this initiative.

References

Estonian Ministry of Culture (2011)

<http://www.kul.ee/index.php?path=0x2x213x790x1887> (accessed 26 May 2012)

9>. APPENDIX

Questionnaire for **museum directors**

1. Which definition of learning do you see as the most accurate? Choose *one* alternative.

All interaction between humans and environment area is learning

Learning occurs in all environments (including digital) where knowledge is transmitted

Learning occurs when a person enters a situation with an intention to learn

Learning occurs within a framework of specially developed pedagogical programmes

Your own definition of learning:

Comments:

2. How important is learning for museum users in the following museum contexts?
Select a number from 1-5 where the number means that learning is: 1 (completely unimportant), 2 (not particularly important), 3 (quite important), 4 (important), 5 (very important).

___ Work with collections

___ Exhibitions

- ___ Preservation
- ___ Digitalization
- ___ Research
- ___ Documentation
- ___ Work with cultural environments

Comments:

3. Which of the following sentences is the most appropriate for you? Choose *one* alternative.

Learning is the purpose of the museum activity

Learning/pedagogy is important as it communicates the message of the museum exhibitions

Learning/pedagogy is a tool for museums to reach schools

Comments:

4. How do you prioritize the following target groups in regard to learning/pedagogical activities at your museum? *Rank* from A-F (A is highest priority, F is the lowest)

___ Preschool

___ Elementary school

___ High school

___ University and vocational training

___ Adults

___ Seniors

Comments:

5. Is learning or pedagogy explicitly included in the most important policy documents of your museum?

Yes

No

6. What target group/groups is/are addressed with the learning and/or pedagogical activities at your museum? Mark the groups that are relevant.

Everyone/lifelong learning

Adults

Seniors

Children and youth

Tourists

Students

Minorities

Others

Who has selected it/them?

Pedagogues

Marketeers

Curators/co-workers

The management/board of directors

Government/municipality

Others

7. What kind of education has the staff at your museum that is working with the pedagogical activities for school/high school? Mark the topics that are relevant.

Preschool teacher

Primary- or secondary school teacher

University education

University education plus university course in pedagogy

Other:

Comments:

8. What kind of education has the personnel working with the pedagogical programmes for adults/seniors at your museum? Mark the topics that are relevant.

Preschool teacher

Primary- or secondary school teacher

University education (archaeology, ethnology etc.)

University education plus university course in pedagogy

Other:

Comments:

9. Do you think there is a need for further special education for museum educators?

Yes

No

If yes:

Should further education be of formal character with a possibility to achieve university credits etc.?

Yes

No

Do you find it necessary to increase the knowledge about pedagogical theory?

Yes

No

Do you find it necessary to increase the knowledge about activities taking place at schools?

Yes

No

Do you think that the Association of Estonian Museums should (perhaps in collaboration with other stakeholders) develop possibilities for continuing education for museum educators?

Yes

No

Comments:

10. Brief characteristics of your museum:

The museum is *mainly* a:

Museum of Cultural history

Art museum

- Museum of Natural History
- Specialised museum
- Combination museum

The museum is owned by:

- State
- Municipality
- Association, foundation
- Other

The museum has:

- 1-25 full time employees
- 26-50 full time employees
- 51-75 full time employees
- 76-100 full time employees
- More than 101 full time employees

How many full time employees at the museum work with learning/pedagogical activities and meet visitors face to face?

- 0 full time employees
- 0 - <1 full time employees
- 1 - <2 full time employees
- 2 - <3 full time employees
- 3 - <4 full time employees
- 4 - <5 full time employees
- 5 - <6 full time employees
- 6 - <7 full time employees
- 7 - <8 full time employees
- 8 - <9 full time employees
- 9 - <10 full time employees

10< full time employees

How many Full Time employees at the museum work with learning/pedagogical activities in general (for example counselling, web pedagogy etc. **but not** such work that is a precondition for learning/pedagogical activities for example digitalizing)?

0 full time employees

0 - <1 full time employees

1 - <2 full time employees

2 - <3 full time employees

3 - <4 full time employees

4 - <5 full time employees

5 - <6 full time employees

6 - <7 full time employees

7 - <8 full time employees

8 - <9 full time employees

9 - <10 full time employees

10< full time employees

11. Your comments in general concerning learning/pedagogical activities in museums:

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