

Report on learning and pedagogy in Latvian 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.



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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 Latvia. The answers were collected through a web-based form with an instruction on the purpose of the survey urging museum directors to answer anonymously. The survey sought, amongst others, to explore the perceptions held by the museum directors in Latvia in regards to learning. Additionally, questions in the survey addressed the target groups of the Latvian museums' learning programmes, and the number and educational background of their employees.

We received 21 replies, eighteen from what we categorise as small museums – that is, these museums have less than 25 employees who work full time, while the remaining three were museums which employ more than 25 people, with one engaging between 51 – 75 staff members.

Each institution's most important policy documents have a reference to learning, unveiling its importance for each organisation's policies. This is further reflected through the presence of learning on the agenda of the Latvian museums and the plurality of their learning programmes and activities. When turning to explore the directors' perspectives of learning, most of them think of learning as encompassing all interaction between humans and the wider environment.

Both curators and museum educators make decisions regarding the target groups of their educational programmes and learning activities, with schools being prioritized along with young people and children. Most of the museum educators hold a university degree in a field relevant to the museum (i.e. archaeology, ethnology) while significantly less are the educators holding a university education along with further training in pedagogy and learning theories. This is also perhaps the reason why all directors argued that further training in special education is a requirement for all museum educators. In contrast to the overwhelming majority of museum directors arguing for the special education, there was an interesting variation in their replies concerning the need for furthering their pedagogical knowledge. Two third of the Latvian museum directors who participated in our survey seem to agree that further pedagogical training is crucial. However, one third disagrees. There is also a well-balanced dichotomy when it comes to the type of this further education. The museum directors' opinions are equally divided between formal and informal education.

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.

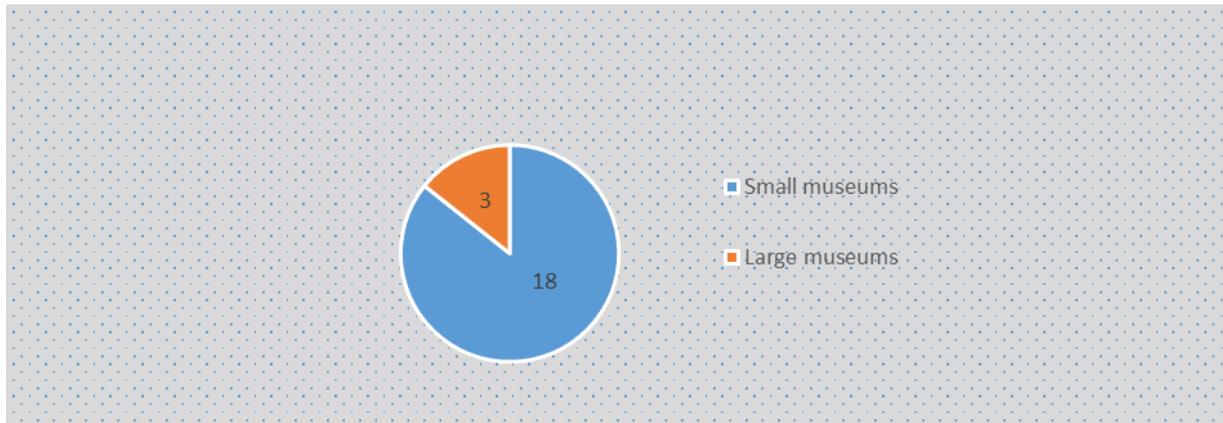
Apart from the reports for each country, a comparative analysis of all reports was produced in February 2015 as it would shed light on important insights and allow us to gain a better understanding of the Nordic and Baltic status quo.

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

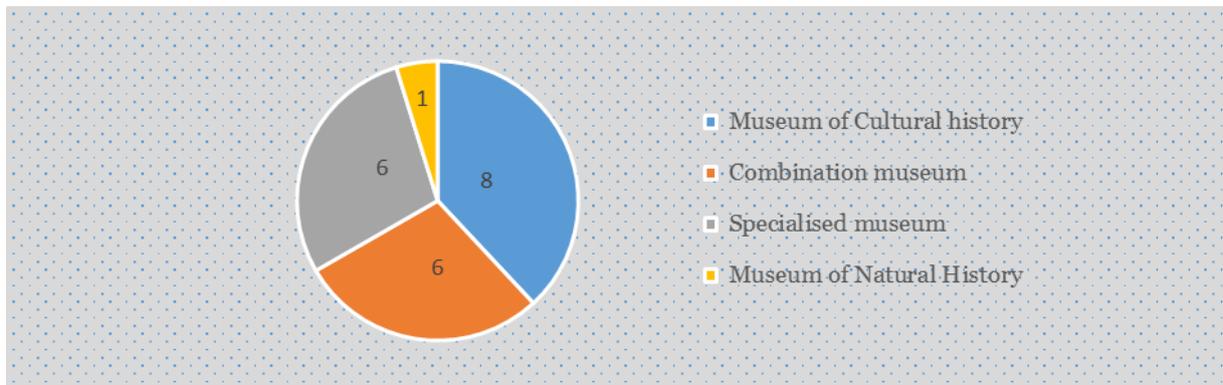
Out of the 21 Latvian museums participating in this survey, 18 are what we categorise as small museums – that is, these museums have less than 25 employees who work full time. The remaining three museums employ more than 25 people, with one engaging between 51 – 75 staff members.

Chart 1. Share of small and large museums



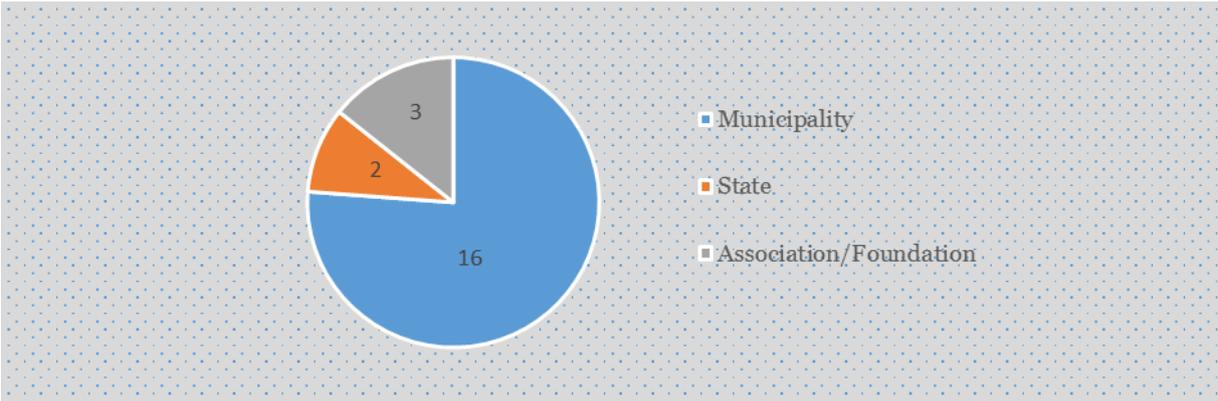
When it comes to the type of these museums, eight are museums of Cultural History, and six are either oriented towards a particular theme (specialised museums) or combining particular themes.

Chart 2. Museums divided by content



From these museums, 16 are municipality – owned, with the two of the three largest museums identified in Chart 1 falling under this category of ownership. On the other hand, the museum with the largest number of employees (51 – 75 staff members) is state-funded.

Chart 3. Museums divided by ownership

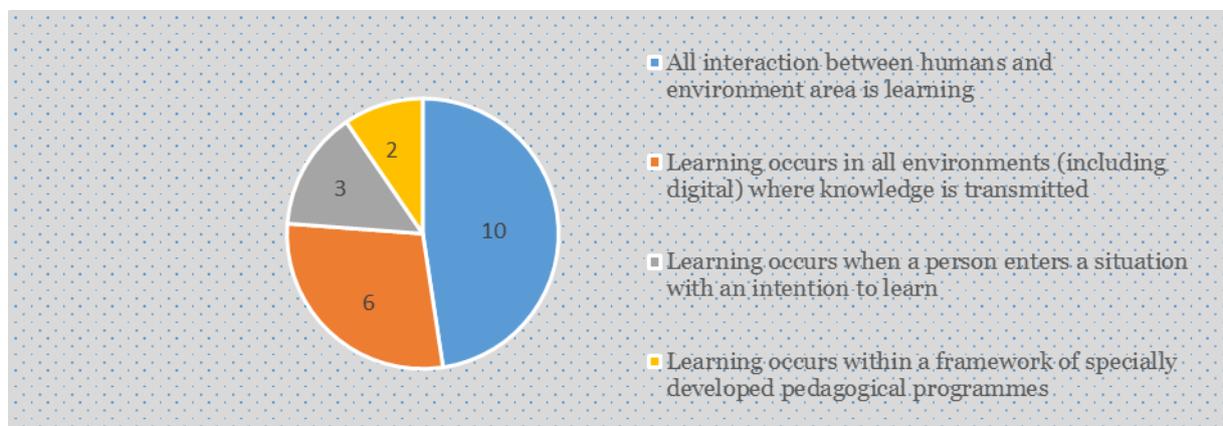


4.> DEFINITIONS OF LEARNING

The first questions of the survey were modelled to capture the Latvian museum directors' perspectives of learning. Chart 4 showcases their replies in regards to what learning is. They could choose one among four statements that best corresponded with their definition of learning, or suggest their own. All twenty-one museum directors selected among these four statements, with the one defining learning as all interaction between humans and the environment being the most popular. The reason why these directors take a wide perspective towards learning maybe seen in the following comment that describes the uncertainty surrounding learning: "it's hard to predict what part of the story will deeply touch people, what will cause most questions and what will make the strongest emotional impact".

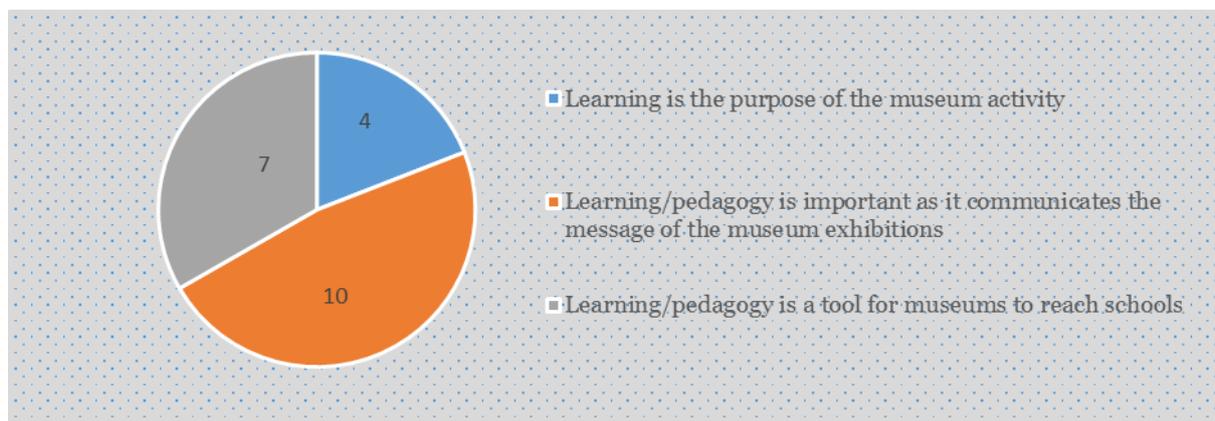
The second most popular definition was the one stating that learning occurs in all environments (including digital) where knowledge is transmitted. Both most popular definitions view learning as a wider process while the rest of the two definitions see learning within specific boundaries and occurring under specific circumstances. Furthermore, three museum directors think of learning as a process triggered by a person who has an interest to learn and two museum directors consider learning a process that takes place within a framework of specially 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. Here, the museum directors had to choose one among three statements. As seen in Chart 5, half of the informants agreed that learning is important as it delivers and communicates the message of the museum exhibitions. Seeing learning as a means for reaching schools received seven responses while four of the museum directors argued that learning is the purpose of the museum activity. The latter further elaborated with two comments highlighting the importance of learning for the museums, as “educational work is important part of the museum activity. Our museum offers educational programmes, lectures [and so forth] for preschool, primary school, elementary school, secondary school students and adults. Therefore, the Educational Program is an interactive educational activity, the aim of which is to motivate the inquiry of the processes of cultural history and society and to inspire for further creative activity” [sic]. The second comment stressed that “learning mustn’t be pressing, but something subconscious. Any pressing with serious information will scare visitors to come a second time. So there has to be purpose to educate, but in a light way”.

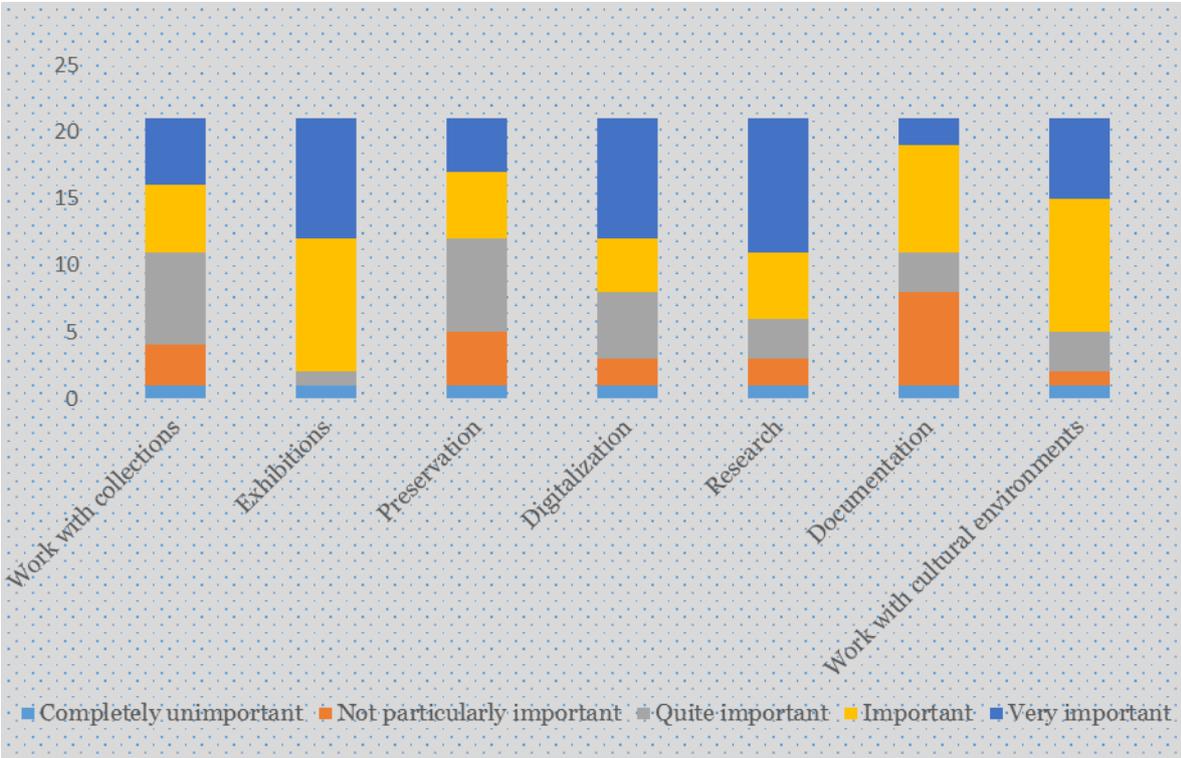
Chart 5. The role and value of learning in relation to the museum



In order to take a closer look into their perceptions about the importance of learning across seven museum contexts, we asked these Latvian museum directors to rate the importance of these contexts by using a 5-point scale. As can be seen from Chart 6, ten out of the 21 agreed that learning is *very important* in terms of research, while five of them argued that learning is *important* in the same context.

Digitization and exhibitions are also considered very important contexts: nine consider learning as very important in the context digitization and another nine think that learning is very important in the context of exhibitions. 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. Documentation raises particular interest as eight of the museum directors consider it as an important context for learning, whereas seven rate it as not particularly important.

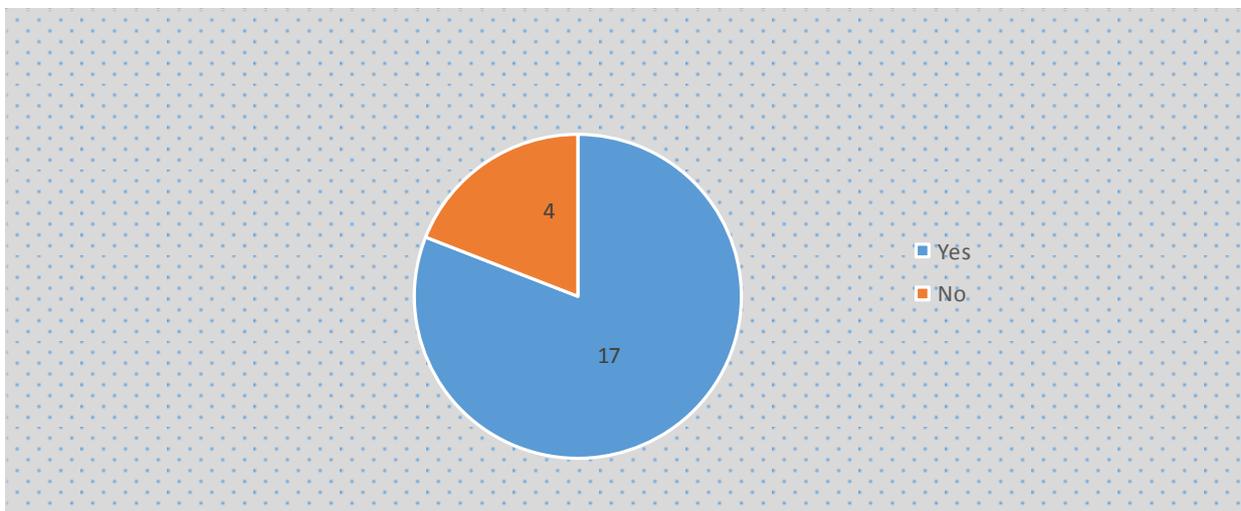
Chart 6. The role and value of learning in relation to different museum contexts



5. > PRIORITIES AND TARGET GROUPS

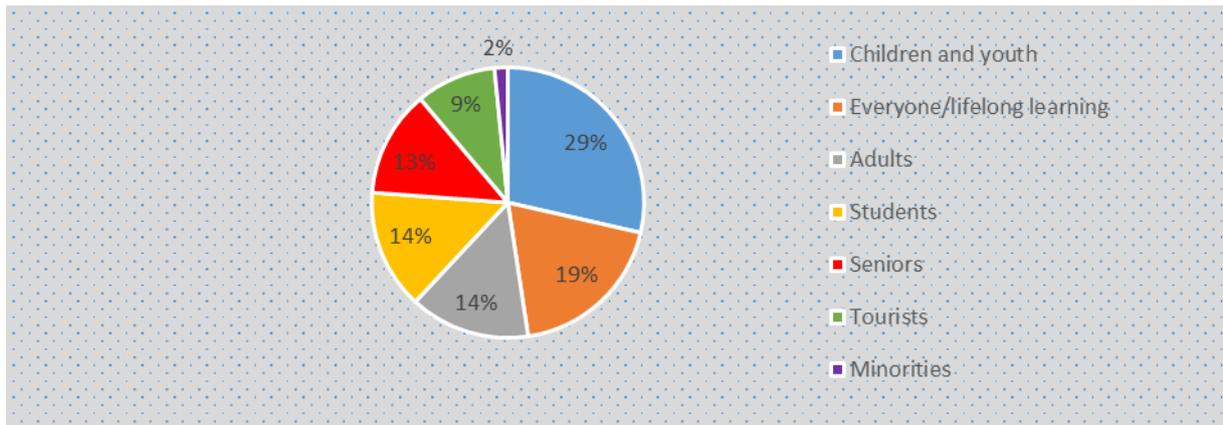
So far, we have explored the perceptions of the directors of 21 Latvian museums in regards to learning. In this section, we shift our attention to the official documents of the museums so as to identify the presence of learning in the official institutional guidelines. We firstly wanted to realise if learning is a critical aspect of the museums' agenda and thus, included in their policies. Out of the 21 replies, 17 informants stated that learning is explicitly included in the policy documents of their institutions.

Chart 7. Learning in policy documents



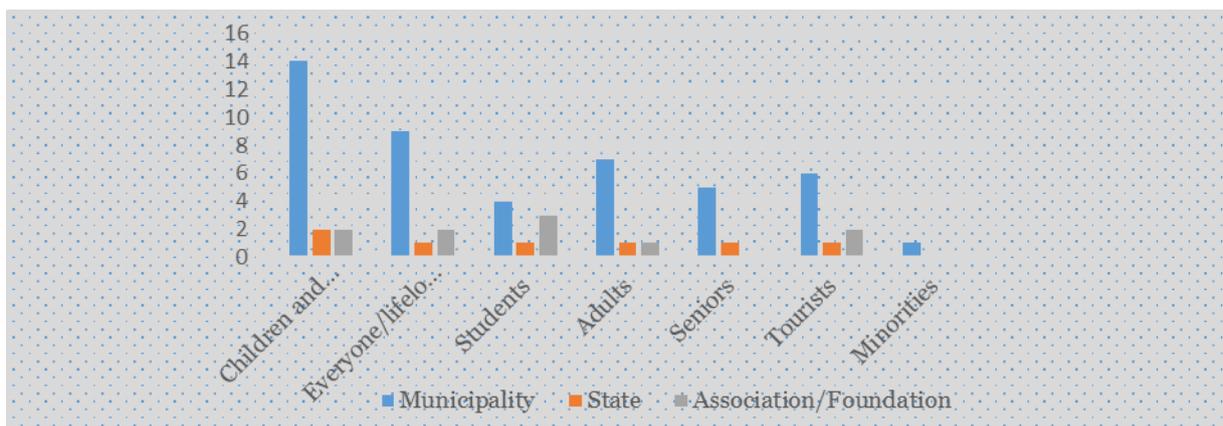
Learning is a wide concept and to better understand what kind of learning offers are available at the Latvian museums, the informants were asked to choose from a list of seven target groups while also having the option to add new categories. Two factors in this question complicate the analysis: (a) some of these seven categories overlap, completely or partly, and (b) the informants could choose multiple 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 8 presents their answers in percentages.

Chart 8. Target groups for learning programmes and activities



There is a long tradition in crafting learning activities and programmes addressing mainly children and youth. Findings from the Latvian museums are no exception to this tradition: the group of children and youth is the top priority (29%) on most museums' learning agenda. More specifically, schools and students of all ages are also part of their learning agenda (14%). What is interesting in these findings is that 19% of these institutions argue that their learning activities address everyone and in this sense, support lifelong learning, while for example only 2% of the existent learning programmes and activities across these Latvian museums address minorities.

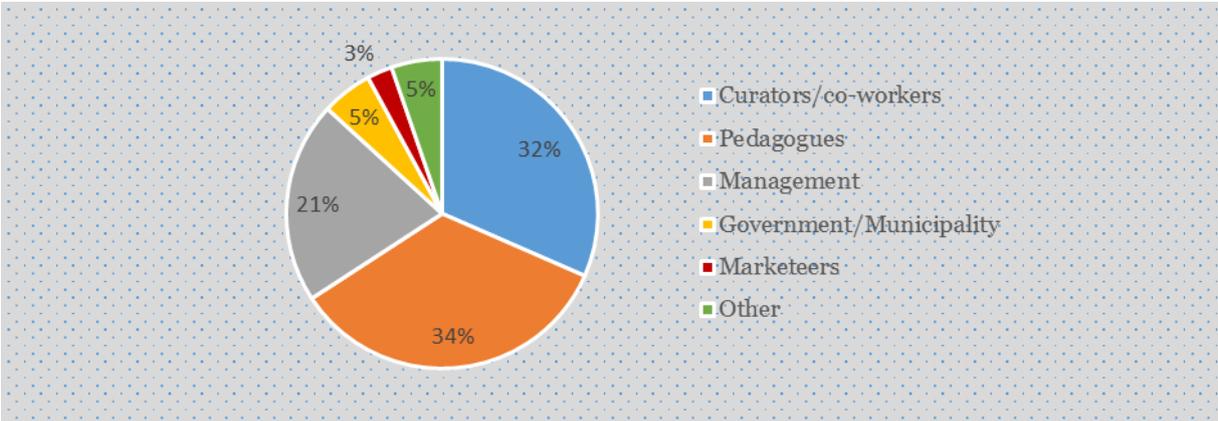
Chart 9. Target groups in museums owned by the municipality, the state and association



This interesting deviation maybe better understood once we know who makes the decisions when it comes to selecting the target groups of educational programmes and activities for each museum. Again for this question, the museum directors could select multiple choices among five given museum departments while also being able to give their own answers.

As seen in Chart 10, it is the education staff who make the decisions regarding these target groups (34%), followed by the curators/co-workers (32%). Management also seems to have its say in the drafting of decisions (21%).

Chart 10. Who does the selection of the target groups?

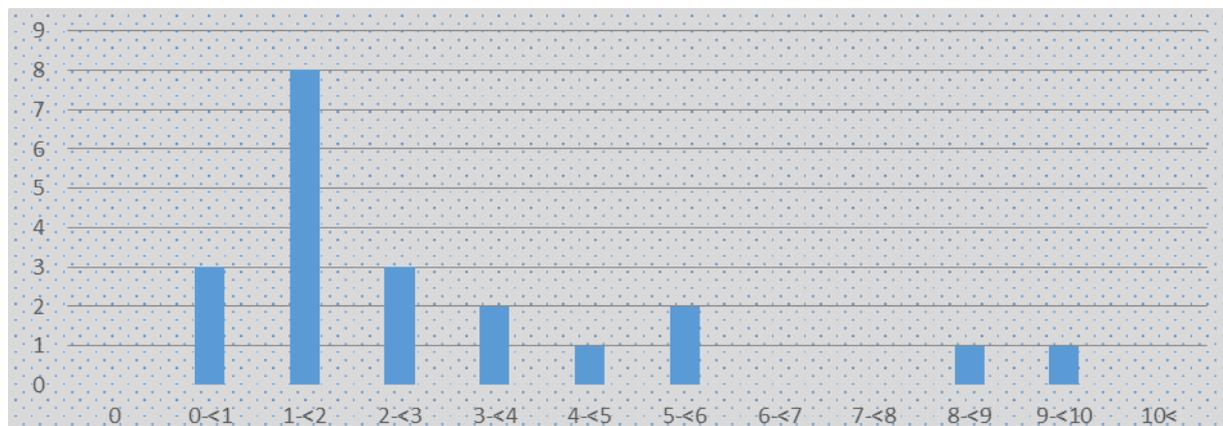


6.> THE EMPLOYEES

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.

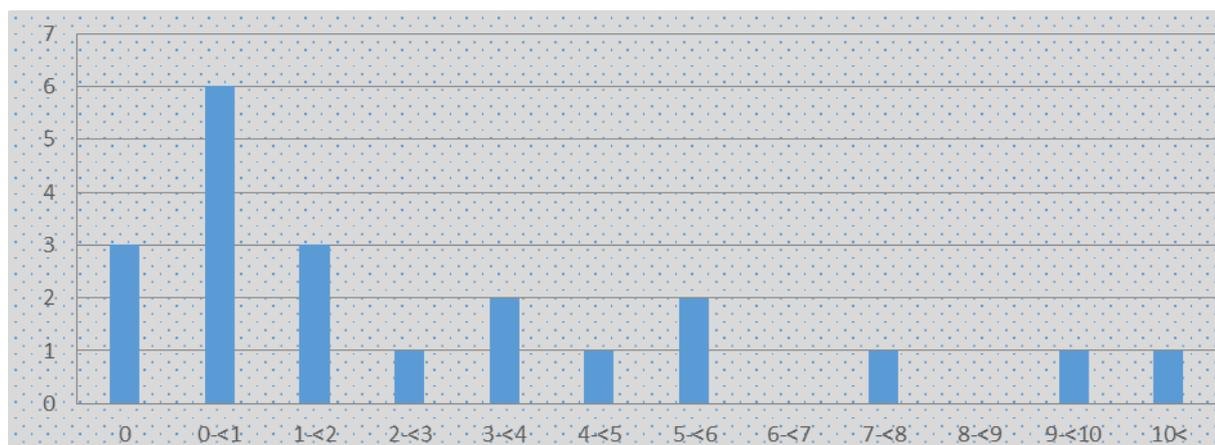
From the 21 replies we received, eight museum directors answered that they have 1-2 full time employees working with learning. Three museum directors indicated that they employ just one staff member and another three that they employ 2-3 full time staff members responsible for running the learning activities. Despite learning being included in the Latvian museums' policy documents (Chart 7) and considered as a means for reaching schools and communicating the message of the exhibitions, these museums have very small educational teams, consisted of 1 to 3 full time employees.

Chart 11. 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 work concerning learning activities in general such as counselling, web pedagogy but not work that is a precondition for learning activities (i.e. digitization).

Chart 12. Full time employees who work with learning in general



Another very interesting aspect of learning relates to those people responsible for the learning activities and their educational background. Chart 13 depicts the answers we received for the educational background of those involved in learning programmes for (high)school. As may be concluded from this chart, most of them have a university educational background in a major relevant to the museum, followed by those having a university educational background coupled with a university course in pedagogy. A separate question addressed the educational background of those working with adults/seniors. As illustrated by Chart 14, the answers we received are very similar to the ones for the (high)school with the only nuance being the number of primary/secondary or preschool teachers, which is very low when it comes to adults/seniors. Chart 15 presents the answers for both schools and adults so as to allow comparisons.

Chart 13. Educational background for museum employees who work with school/high school

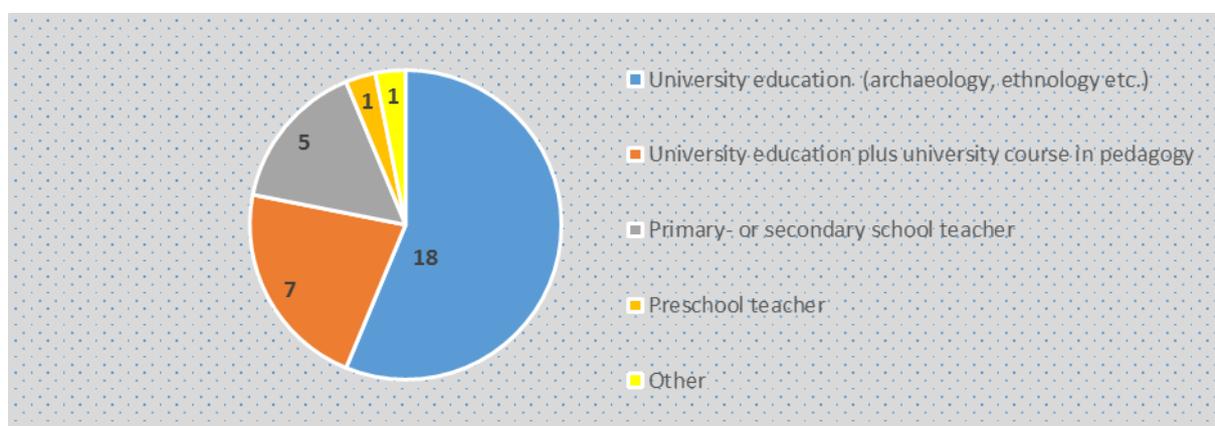


Chart 14. Educational background for museum employees who work with adults/seniors

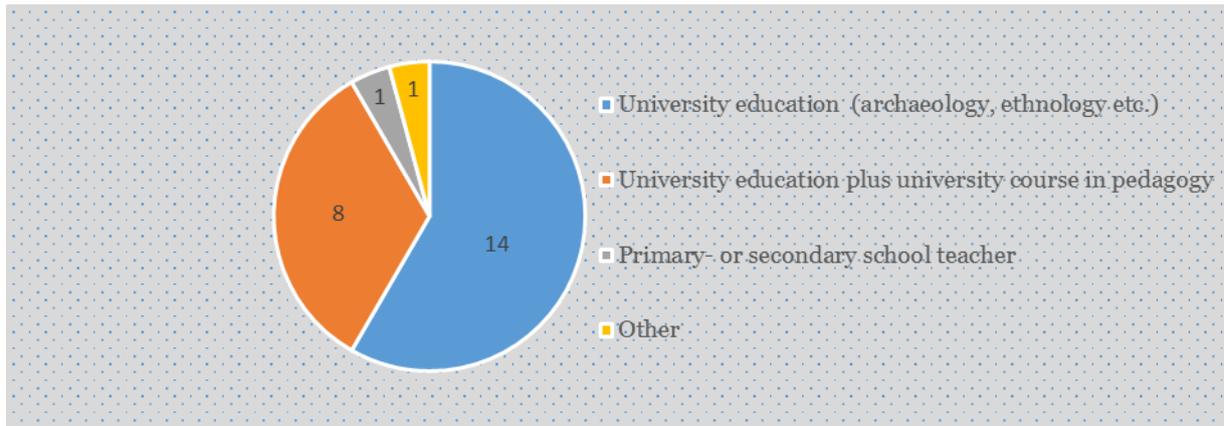
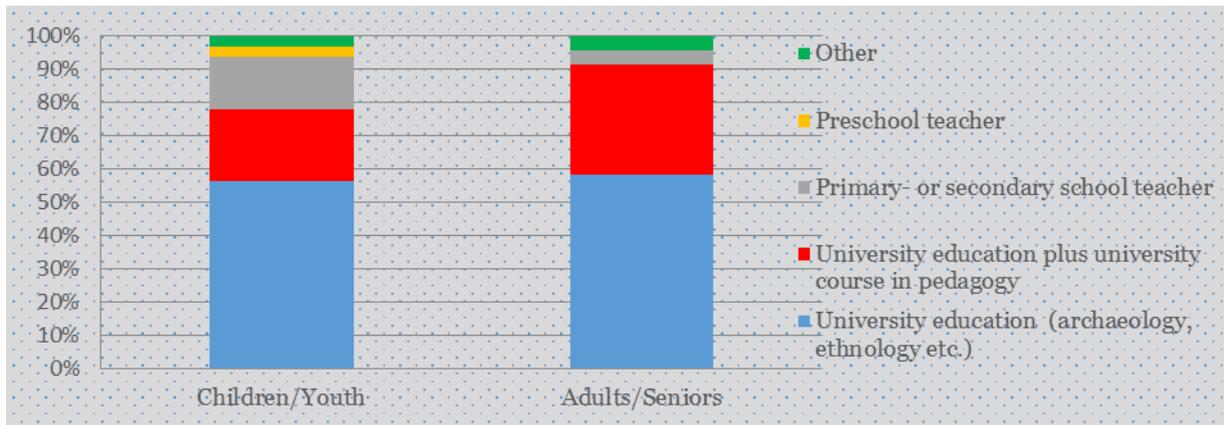


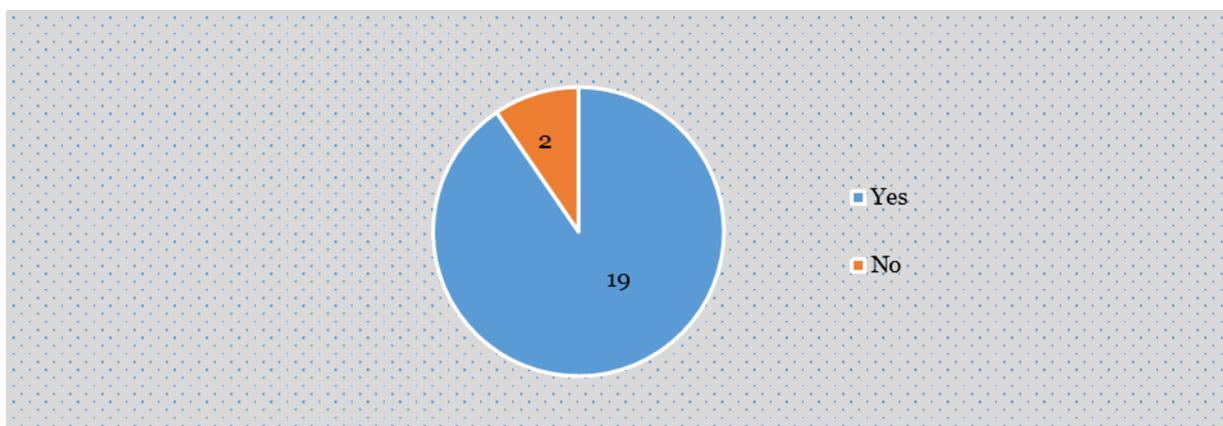
Chart 15. Educational backgrounds for employees who work with learning



7. > FURTHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION

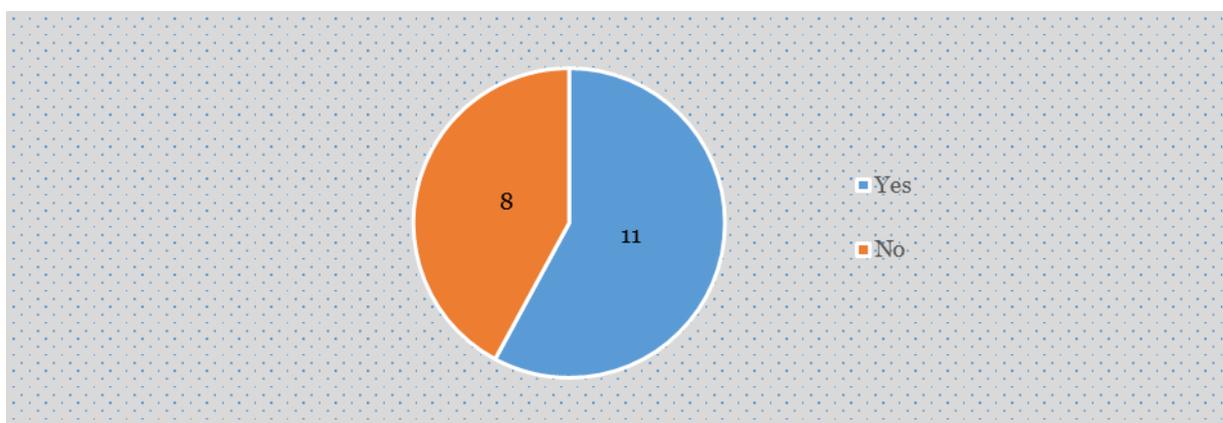
We shall now turn our attention to the future. What are the considerations of museum directors concerning further training of staff working with learning in the museums? Two of the museum directors in Latvia do not agree that there is a need for advancing the training of their museum educators. On the contrary, 19 of our informants agree on the need for further development and training of the museum educators.

Chart 16. Do you think there is a need for further education for museum educators?



From those 19 museum directors, eleven believe that further education should be formal while eight of them also support other forms of education.

Chart 17. Should further education be of formal character?



Additionally, out of the 19 directors in favour of further education and training for their pedagogical staff members, 14 agree on the necessity to advance particularly the pedagogical knowledge and skills of their personnel. Furthermore, the same directors had a positive attitude towards increasing the knowledge about activities taking place at schools.

Chart 18. Do you find it necessary to increase the knowledge about pedagogical theory?

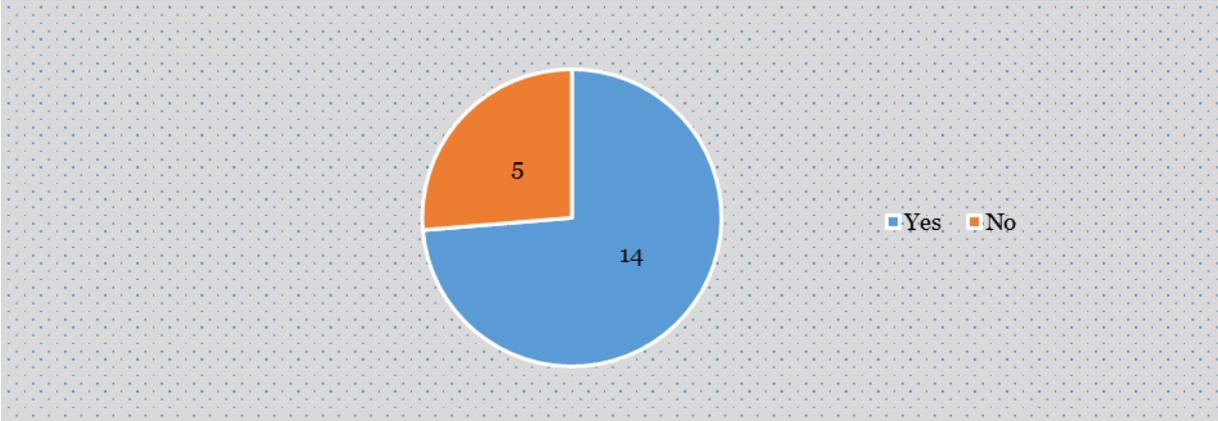
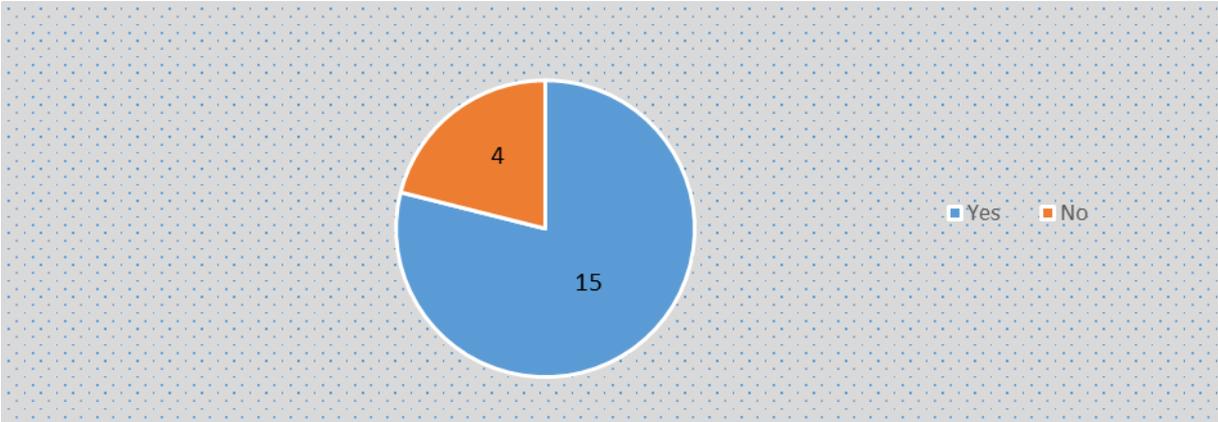


Chart 19. Do you find it necessary to increase the knowledge about activities taking place at schools?



Lastly, all participants welcomed the prospect of the Latvian Museum Association being in charge of organising and running a training programme for the pedagogical staff members.

8.> CONCLUSIONS

Each institution's most important policy documents have a reference to learning, unveiling its importance for each organisation's policies. This is further reflected through the presence of learning on the agenda of the Latvian museums and the plurality of their learning programmes and activities. When turning to explore the directors' perspectives of learning, most of them think of learning as encompassing all interaction between humans and the wider environment. According to one comment we received educational programmes are "an interactive educational activity, the aim of which is to motivate the inquiry (...) and to inspire for further creativity activity [sic]" while learning "mustn't be pressing, but something subconscious".

This broad stand towards learning becomes more specific when it is applied to the museum context. The reasons why learning is taken into account by these museums are mainly twofold. Half of the museum directors believe that learning is important in relation to the museum as it facilitates the delivery of the exhibitions' messages while another seven argued for its use as a means for reaching schools. The importance of learning for museum users in the context of exhibitions was also mentioned by almost all informants. One informant commented that it is very important to develop and run learning programmes for a diverse audience as the museum is a place where different people go.

As such, schools and the key presence they have in the Latvian museum learning programmes and activities may become more apparent if we turn to identify the target groups that each museum has. According to their replies, the group that is mainly addressed through the museums' programmes and learning activities is children and young people. One reason for that may be reflected in the two comments we received arguing that "if you prioritize preschool, then knowledge stays with them throughout the elementary and high school, and they return to learn more" while "museum educational work is very necessary and essential in bringing up the next generation."

Precisely 29% of the museums participating in this survey have children and youth on their educational agenda, with another 14% having programmes for schools and students of all ages. These findings pinpoint towards the importance of schools, and

young people for museum programmes and activities in Latvia and can be seen in relation to the two thirds of the museum directors who believe that it is necessary for museums to increase their knowledge about activities taking place in schools.

Equally important 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 both curators and museum educators make these decisions. If we turn to explore the educational background of these museum educators for both schools and adults, the majority hold a university degree in a field relevant to the museum (i.e. archaeology, ethnology). Significantly less are those museum educators who hold a university education and have also received further education in pedagogy and learning theories. This is a rather interesting finding as it shows that people employed at these museums may have different specialisations, in most cases related to the type of each institution, but lacking pedagogical training.

As the way we perceive and deliver education has undergone considerable changes during the last 50 years, nearly all informants consider it pivotal for museum educators to advance their skills and knowledge in special education.

In contrast to the overwhelming majority of museum directors arguing for the need for their employees' special education, there was an interesting variation in their replies concerning the need for furthering their pedagogical knowledge. Two thirds of the Latvian museum directors who participated in our survey seem to agree that further pedagogical training is crucial. One third of them though disagrees. There is also a well-balanced dichotomy when it comes to the type of this further education. The museum directors' opinions are equally divided between formal and informal education.

Despite this dichotomy, one museum director argued that the training of their museum educators should be done in collaboration with colleagues from other cities and countries. Through this international exchange of knowledge and practices, museum educators should gain helpful insights into both learning practices and methodologies while developing skills that will help them to address more diverse audiences. Additionally, further synergies and active, ongoing dialogue between formal and informal settings of learning will help museums themselves to advance their learning potential.

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 environment

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 Latvian 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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