

THE MUSEUM AS A SPACE OF HISTORICAL MEMORY: FAMALICÃO AS AN EDUCATING CITY

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Abstract: This article describes how the project “De Famalicão para o Mundo: Contributos da História Local” was developed and implemented, as well as its local, national, and international projection through different community activities that promote citizen learning. The study focuses on the heritage and local history of Vila Nova de Famalicão, a municipality in the north of Portugal. It presents a museum network that brings together multidisciplinary work teams consisting of teachers, researchers, students, and cultural technicians who participate and are involved in tasks related to the memory, identity, and history of the territory. My work shows both the use of these museological practices and the cultural impact they have on different audiences. Alongside these experiences, the historical and literary narratives of the temporary exhibitions—such as the one dedicated to the Portuguese forced labourers in the Nazi concentration system (1939-1945)—expose the reflections on how the citizens of Famalicão participated and were caught up in this conflict. In this way, museums allow us to interpret not only the painful past, but also the identity awareness of past and present history.

Keywords: community museum, educational practices, identity, local history, heritage, project.

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Introduction

The project De Famalicão para o Mundo focuses on the dissemination of Vila Nova de Famalicão’s cultural heritage. It is a set of didactic, literary, museum, heritage, historical and, fundamentally, civic proposals aimed at a broad population group comprising not only the inhabitants of Famalicão themselves, but also a national and international public (Ferreira, Barca and Alves, 2019). As an educating city, the main focus is set on citizen education and the recovery of historical memory. In fact, this transmission of knowledge lies upon a continuous process of construction and social transformation (Travieso and Barretto, 2020), which is collected in the Famalicão ID 2.0 platform.

The creation of a network of museums aims at recovering the local history at regional, national, and universal levels. In this sense, the city becomes a space of identity and learning which provides the necessary skills—from an interdisciplinary perspective—for participants to acquire a social and pedagogical commitment. These initiatives help to

share, innovate, and advance in the knowledge of a local reality that takes the form of an educational, citizen and research tool.

Consecutively, from the point of view of research, attention should be drawn to the organization and planning of two international meetings, De Famalicão para o Mundo - Around the memory of the Holocaust and humanitarian aid, held September 25 and 26 2020, along with the II Meeting - De Famalicão para o Mundo: Migrations and forced labour in the context of War, held September 24 and 25 2021. These meetings are complemented by an exhibition on Portuguese forced labourers in the Third Reich - Famalicans in the Nazi Concentration System, which will remain open until December 2021.

Finally, the paper will conclude with a brief discussion and a final analysis on the potential of transmitting museum knowledge to the society, together with the relationship between the museum and the community. At the same time, it is necessary to point out that museums disseminate a narrative, historical and civic memory which exposes the educational potential influencing the social and cultural construction of reality through these exhibitions, events, and activities.



Museum network, living the community

The function of a community museum and place of historical memory has a medium and/or long-term formation process determined by the involvement of diverse population groups who are interested in knowing about their environment (Garner, Kaplan & Pugh, 2016). The subtle relationship between the different museums in Famalicão dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, when the Camiliano Museum was opened to the public in 1920 (Silva et al, 2015). Progressively, in the following decades, several more museums—gathering both the historical memory and the collective identity of the citizenship—were inaugurated. In 2012, the Vila Nova de Famalicão Museum Network was created.

In this sense, the coordination of this Museum Network is organised by the Chamber of Culture and Tourism of the Vila, and consists of thirteen museums and collections: Camilo House Museum (Study Centre), Bernardino Machado Museum, Cupertino Miranda Foundation Museum (Portuguese Surrealism Centre), National Railway Museum (Lousado Centre), Ave Basin Textile Industry Museum, Castro Alves Foundation: Ceramic Art Museum, Automobile Museum, Colonial War Museum, Soledade Malvar House-Museum, Lapa Chapel: Sacred Art Museum, Museum of the Lemenhe, São Tiago de Antas Church Sacred Art Museum and Mouquim Civic and Religious Museum (figure 1).

This museum structure is established cooperatively, as well as supported by the parties involved in the sustainable and cultural development of the territory (Layuno, 2007). Therefore, the potential of this Museum Network is based on the participation and collaboration of different private and public entities, strengthening an educational, social, and cultural strategy. These actions make the population of the municipality reflect upon the process of belonging to the historical past and present. In this regard, the aims of this study focus on designing strategies to transmit historical and heritage elements, disseminate the material culture of museums with a sense of citizenship, develop the necessary tools to identify the local heritage of the municipality, and share past events while comparing them with the present, so that we can interpret them from a personal, collective, innovative, and participatory point of view (Chapman, 2011).

From this perspective, the possibility of visualising a past event that can be related to the present conceptualises the different characteristics that have given name to the history of each museum. Therefore, the museum, as a living space, promotes participatory actions which are constantly renewed. In fact, by providing us with an image of the past, it allows us to guide ourselves through time and to materialise the description of a specific historical event. Thus, the local history of Famalicão builds the understanding of the past, its relationship with the present, and the projection of the future. These initiatives are characterised by particular hallmarks in relation to the social contexts to which they are addressed. Therefore, within this Museum Network, a community

would be identified with both a local and global approach with an impact on the educational, socio-economic, cultural, sustainable, geographical, historical, and heritage progress of the municipality, creating a “learning network” (Fernández Dos Reis, 2015).

Investigating the project “De Famalicão para o Mundo”

The project De Famalicão para o Mundo is a significant opportunity to work on the tangible and intangible heritage values of this municipality’s inhabitants. For this purpose, the Famalicão ID 2.0 platform has been created. It is a website which is constantly updated with new resources and information—photographic content, videos, historical manuscripts, and literary sources (family letters) telling the history of the territory from centuries ago to the present day. The access to this virtual space is public, and the events follow a chronological linear sequence to know about the traditions, narratives, festivals, and legends of the most distinguished characters in the history of Famalicão (figure 2).

One of the most striking features of this website is the compilation of the Famalicão heritage values and their implementation in the educational programs of local schools. Likewise, these didactic improvements influence the training of students and the achievement of methodological changes (Molina, 2021b). The public can share their experiences in a space which is both on-site and virtual—besides, they can contribute new content for the creation of different areas in the museum. These participatory tasks help teachers show their students that local history can be integrated into national history—this, in turn, helps them understand the most important contributions of a community museum (Molina, 2021a). In this way, through these practices, students from different educational stages explore the possibilities that museum materials offer for their education.

As it is well known, historical contents are not invariable—instead, they are under permanent construction. However, the continuous omission of local historical facts in the official educational curriculum shows the educational deficiencies that have arisen—and continue to arise—in society. With a multidisciplinary approach, the implementation of this project’s methodology unifies different fields such as literature, history, geography, ethnography—which structures a research aimed at the general public—and especially teacher and student training, both at school and at the university (Hattie, 2012).

The scientific events are an example of this. For instance, the event held about the memory of the Holocaust and humanitarian aid, and the II Meeting - De Famalicão para o Mundo: migrations and forced labour in the context of War. In this context, the strategic lines of the Never Forget Project - National Holocaust Remembrance Programme were approved by Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 51/2020 of 25 June. This is where both Holocaust Remembrance outreach initiatives are included, with the aim of raising awareness about the local communities’ memory.

Firstly, with regard to the event about the Holocaust memory and humanitarian aid, it allowed us to integrate—from both

an individual and collective perspective—the local history of Famalicão in a national and global context. This meeting has also encouraged a reflective and critical stance on heritage and historical education—in fact, it has led to the presentation of several papers related to the situation of calamity of the Portuguese in the Nazi concentration camps, the teaching and memory of the Holocaust in Portugal in secondary education, and a series of narratives related to the history of Famalicão, not included in educational curricula.

Regarding the second meeting dedicated to the project *De Famalicão para o Mundo: Migrations and forced labour in the context of War*, the program exposes the presence of the Portuguese in the Nazi German concentration system (1939-1945), the testimonies and research documents, the emigration of Famalicans (19th and 20th centuries), and the historical narratives of young people from immigrant families. All these contributions enhanced the knowledge of a local reality framed in a universal and patrimonial history which shares its contents with the exhibition about the Portuguese forced labourers in the III Reich –Famalicans in the Nazi concentration system (figure 3).

Inaugurated in July 2021 in the Casa do Território, the exhibition has consisted of photographic material, real experiences of the participants in this conflict, and bibliographic documentation recorded in a YouTube video.¹ It focuses on the study of the Portuguese victims of Nazism forced to work, during the Second World War, under the concentration system of the Third Reich. This includes a considerable group of Famalicans who were in dire conditions, as well as in detention and subjected to this system.

Throughout this journey, the project has been both a novelty and a challenge to get to know a stage of history which reinforces the public presentation of the identity—together with the historical memory—of a community that took part in these events. The aim was to reflect upon the possibilities and limitations of a museum as an accessible resource for cultural dissemination among citizens, teachers, and researchers who are part of this project. The museums of the municipality promote these activities and interact with them, along with the existing narratives and literary stories which allow to compare them with the historical past. Finally, these experiences facilitate education, empathy, and historical thinking, turning this space—the museum—into a laboratory to exchange social, cultural, and personal experiences.

Discussions and final reflections

A museum should be understood as a place of preservation of both personal and collective identity—that is, an element of self-representation of the consciousness of a past and a present. In this respect, heritage education is a key factor in the achievement of educational and social competencies. The intervention of a museum as an educator promotes the motivation to discover and understand heritage assets (Calaf, Gutiérrez and Suárez, 2016). In this area, the teaching strategies and resources implemented by the museum staff are

necessary not only to transmit this knowledge to the general public, but also to contribute to the professional development of teachers at different educational stages (Cooper et al, 2018).

The main role museums have is the cultural management of the community demands in order to interpret both their history and its relationship with their present. Here the narratives contribute particular stories that cannot be considered closed. Using the story to illustrate the narrative competence shows the need for an understanding of moral awareness and values (Rüsen, 2004). Learning about the historical time solves methodological problems and, at the same time, provides teacher training programs allowing to involve citizens in the past places and events they are not familiar with (Lee, 2004).

In the case of the project “De Famalicão para o Mundo,” the community is an essential part of its set-up and its projection to the outside world. These ideas, such as the scientific meetings and the exhibition on the memory of the Holocaust, along with the humanitarian intervention in these war events, favour a constant reconstruction of historical knowledge. It is significant to point out that painful pasts are excluded as a sensitive subject to transmit to museumgoers in both educational and social processes. Being a controversial subject, these events that took place in Vila Nova de Famalicão help to teach history with all its nuances, without disregarding the objectivity that should characterise these historical events. Including these issues—which are so emotional for the population—leads to the exposure of different opinions and, on many occasions, a lack of critical understanding of a stage in history. As a matter of fact, having different opinions and perspectives on a controversial issue facilitates an approach to democratic culture and heterogeneity at different experience levels.

In short, the use of methodological approaches related to those historically painful events depicted in these themes achieves the understanding of a complex process that encompasses an emotional, social, and cognitive dimension in the participants of these events held in a museum (Falk and Lyn, 2000). That way, it is possible to contribute to the construction of non-passive learning—in an individual and collective sense (Alemán, 2017). Therefore, the set-up and exhibition of a community museum with a project such as the one presented in these lines connects several collectives, such as the inhabitants of Famalicão, the agents involved in the progress of the territory, the teachers who develop classroom programs, and the students who internalise the past and future heritage, both historically and culturally (De Troyer, 2005).

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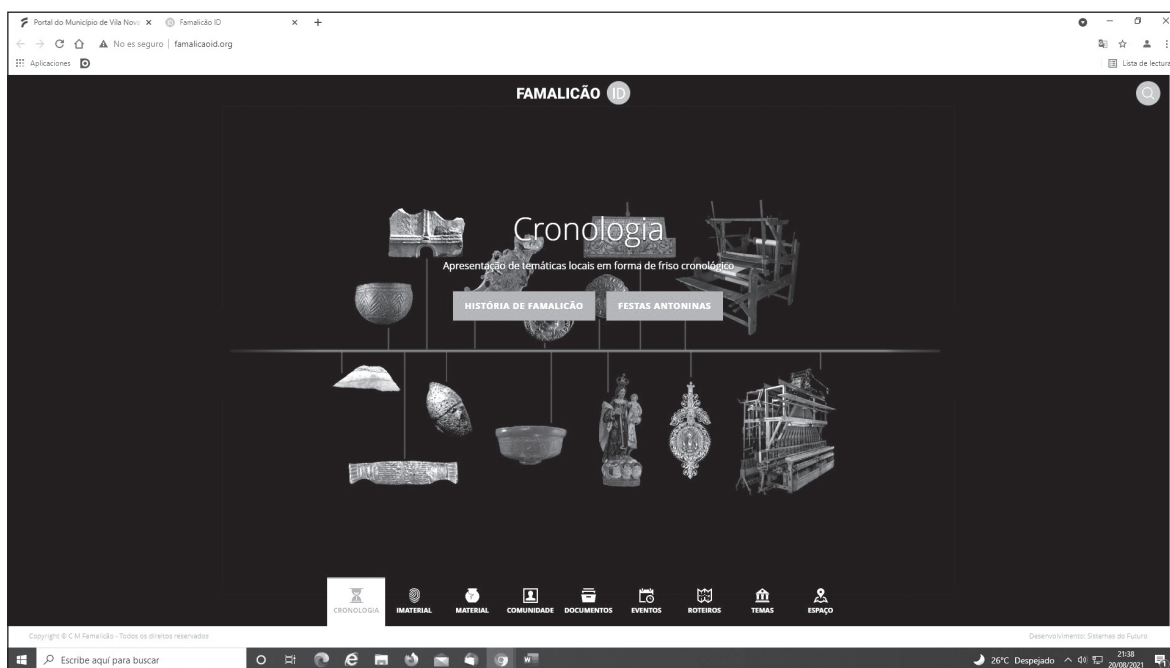


Figure 2
Website: www.famalicao.org



Figure 3
Website: <https://www.cm-vnfamalicao.pt/famalicense-no-sistema-concentracionario-nazi-em-destaque-na-exposicao-na-casa-do-territorio>