

Strategic Communication in Cultural Organizations, the Landscape Museum

<https://doi.org/10.21814/uminho.ed.46.14>

Maria João Centeno

*School of Communication and Media Studies, Polytechnic Institute of Lisbon and Nova
Institute of Communication, Lisbon, Portugal*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4963-3119>

Abstract

This chapter intends to explore the role of strategic communication in cultural organizations, presenting the Landscape Museum. Since the field of strategic communication does not have a unifying conceptual framework (Hallahan et al., 2007), this work intends to explore one of the various communication pursuits: building and maintaining relationships or networks through dialogue. The Landscape Museum's mission is to contribute to the development of a landscape citizenship, awakening a critical and participatory sense in citizens. The museum has been trying to achieve it by building and maintaining strong and permanent relationships through dialogue. Since "strategic communication also includes examining how an organization presents itself in society as a social actor in the creation of public culture and in the discussion of public issues" (Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 27) and considering Self's (2015) proposal for dialogue, it "is not just about achieving consensus, but facilitates debate and advocacy in public policy formation" (p. 74), this chapter presents how the Landscape Museum specifically through its educational service has been promoting the acceptance, through dialogue, of ideas related to landscape's protection and valorization and thus contributing to landscape citizenship.

Keywords

Landscape Museum, strategic communication, stakeholders, mediation, citizenship

Strategic Communication, an Introduction

Originally used in the context of national governments and the military, strategic communication is now a popular expression in different fields, including communication sciences. The term illustrates the ways in which organizations¹ intentionally communicate in the public sphere. "The emphasis is on the strategic application of communication and how an organization functions as a social actor to advance its mission" (Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 7).

The organization as a social actor purposefully influences others on behalf of organizations, causes or social movements and the scope of strategic

¹ "The term organization is here understood as a public or private firm or institution working in an organized way in the same direction to achieve some goal or mission, and to realize its corporate vision in the context of which it forms a part" (Carrillo, 2014, p. 86).

communication is the different ways in which organizations communicate engaging people in different deliberative communication practices. “Strategic communication is about informational, persuasive, discursive, as well as relational communication when used in a context of the achievement of an organization’s mission” (Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 17). Persuasion is considered by Hallahan et al. (2007) as the essence of strategic communication, since it implies the use of communication to promote the acceptance of ideas.

It’s common to relate strategic communication with audiences and the organizations’ public. Instead, we consider stakeholders; they are those who are connected to the organization through their own specific interests and share some meaning with it.

They may come into contact with it through different channels and media, and at any time if they wish (...). Similarly, stakeholders may also at any time reject active participation if they so wish. Moreover, different stakeholder groups can link up and create synergies that may affect the organization positively or negatively. (Carrillo, 2014, p. 87)

Stakeholders are influenced by organizations but they also influence them; the focus is on their acts. As John Dewey (1927/1991) suggested, publics² are networks of acts and they emerge in discourse.

Their purpose is sharing experience, solving problems and assessing the consequences. Communicators who facilitate that ongoing process, linking participants across networks as publics, and promoting their discourse across the organization, also facilitate the continuous inquiry into problems, the discovery of solutions, and the shared assessment of outcomes. (Self, 2015, p. 88)

In the developing digital world we live in, strategic communication heightens opportunities for citizens and less visible or powerful publics to participate in the creation and spreading of information nurturing a multiple-way flow of information. This available information can be used, spread through different networks and promote change, which illustrates the fact that strategic communication is a matter of communication capital and must be conceptualize in the realms of dialogic flows of communication. It is vital that organizations allocate adequate resources to respond to various stakeholders and enter into dialogue.

² John Dewey (1859–1952) uses the term “public” but the emphasis is on its acts. Before, Gabriel Tarde (1901/1991) defined as one of the original features of public its symbolic character, its cohesion around themes/subjects that mobilize the attention and interests of its members.

New technologies have created new opportunities for organizations beyond the established players. “Digital media and social networks make it possible for institutions to rebuild sustained flexible discourse partnerships of shared experience among individuals and groups” (Self, 2015, p. 88). These partnerships are understood in the context of a convergent and participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006).

Henry Jenkins (2006) pointed out three characteristics of this new structure of communication: the 21st century can be considered a convergent media culture, where old and new media interact and new forms of communication arise³; the emergence of participatory culture (“in future, strategic communication between organizations and stakeholders will be less relevant to how common meaning is created and will be comparable with the communication that takes place between stakeholders, that is, between participant to participant”; Falkheimer & Heide, 2015, p. 340); the creation of collective intelligence: problems are resolved through communication with various partners who differently contribute to a whole.

Strategic communication reinforces stakeholders’ participation on causes and has an active role in the development of full citizenship.

Strategic Communication in Cultural Organizations

Cultural organizations encourage participation when they break instrumental relationships between themselves and their stakeholders, relationships directed only according to the interests of one of the parts. Cultural organizations also encourage participation when they consider themselves as promoters of networks of relationships whose cooperative activity is intended to be recurrent (notion of “art worlds” from Howard Becker, 1982). But how can cultural organizations promote participation?

Jürgen Habermas (1929-), one of the most important European philosophers of the second half of the 20th century, has highlighted the role of dialogue, of communicative action⁴ in the struggle for the decolonization

³ “Welcome to convergence culture, where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways. Convergence culture is the future, but it is taking shape now. Consumers will be more powerful within convergence culture – but only if they recognize and use that power as both consumers and citizens, as full participants in our culture” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 270).

⁴ “Those symbolic manifestations (linguistic and non-linguistic) with which subjects capable of language and action establish relationships with the intention of understanding each other and thus coordinating their activities” (Habermas, 1982/1996, p. 453).

of the “lifeworld”⁵, in the fight against the supremacy of the media power and money (symbolically generalized media of communication of the political and economic systems). Those media can only be controlled involving individuals in processes of enlightenment through debate, through an argumentative use of language.

Due to the role of dialogical practices in building and maintaining relationships, it’s more or less simple to understand the active role cultural organizations play in the articulation between the lifeworld and the political and economic systems, contributing to recover the traditional critical and emancipatory functions of a public sphere.

Cultural organizations cannot, and it is not desirable that they want to, contain the meanings that a public sphere might generate in its users, what they truly can and should is to enhance access, to promote the use of that space in the most universal way possible, so that space can mediate the subsequent social production of conflicts and negotiations and become a social and public sphere, democratic and inclusive by promoting access, construction, and debate of knowledge.

If individuals expand their critical sense and argumentative competence by participating in acts of publicity, it is cultural organizations’ duty to promote meeting spaces, to stimulate the argumentative confrontation of ideas. By doing so, they fulfill the function of satisfying the requirements of leisure and enjoyment fundamental to the construction of communities’ representations and identities. In this sense, the function of mediating relationships between the organization and stakeholders is crucial to the construction of knowledge and the establishment of a lasting and demanding bond.

At this point it is essential to highlight the contribution of strategic communication in building and maintaining relationships. The programmatic practices of cultural organizations affect, but are also affected by, a set of actors, who become stakeholders when they become aware and active because they recognize a situation, they get involved in it, and they feel they are able to act, to intervene in it. Stakeholders are defined according

⁵ Habermas recovered the concept of “lifeworld” from Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), for whom indicated the land of the immediately familiar” and the “unquestionably certain. Habermas (1996/2002) inserts the communicative action in this lifeworld that “provides a protective cover from risks in the form of an immense background consensus” (p. 127), implicit and pre-reflectively present. Hence, most of the daily communication practices are not problematic, insofar as they resort of the certainties of the lifeworld.

to levels of interest on subjects. What unites and holds them together is the communion of shared ideas and, above all, the awareness of that communion.

Strategic communication is concerned with the ways organizations intentionally communicate, with the ways of building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders that are aware of situations since the organization considers them as partners in a relationship, as subjects capable of language and action who coordinate their activities, as Habermas proposes, capable of a communicative action.

Cultural organizations must have the capacity to afford situations based on artistic proposals and

it must conceive a parallel pedagogical action that favors this public contact with contemporary and innovative proposals, making them share the interest that this time of cultural and artistic uncertainties may have, transforming them into better, more critical and more competent spectators. (Costa, 2008, p. 324)

It is the responsibility of cultural organizations to provide a critical fruition in the sense of offering not only artistic creations but also ways of approaching the backstage of creation and the conditions, for instance, of the events' conception. The scenario of interaction thus set up is favorable to a dialogical practice that enriches the ability to choose, by advocating actions oriented towards understanding, communicative actions that correspond to reciprocity between the parts. Those dialogical practices make clear the role of cultural organizations in contributing to the problematization of established forms and the renewal of the imaginary; encouraging a dialogical practice enriches others ability to choose inasmuch as participating in events leads to an accumulated experience, stimulating skills that allow individuals to have a better relationship with themselves and with others.

What happened in bourgeois cafes and salons (Habermas, 1962/2012), where different artists, writers, philosophers, and other authors were subjected to critical evaluation and public judgment (which derived from a rational and reasoned argumentation), can happen again in the forums promoted by cultural organizations, with the difference that the meeting does not take place on the initiative of private people who come together to exchange experiences, but on the proposal of one of the parts that, to contribute to the dynamization of new public spheres, has to consider

the coordination of the action plans of both parts. Therefore, consensus is reached, not because one of the parts forces the other but because the individuals, who meet in that space (physical or virtual), invoke reasons and through the strength of the best argument feel free to make their choices regarding understanding. These forums contribute to the reconquest of colonized areas, by purposefully influencing individuals to participate in communicative actions.

The question that can be asked is: is it enough for a cultural organization to propose forums to guarantee interactions guided by the coordination of the action plans of the parts involved? The answer is no! The existence of specific proposals, being essential, is not a condition for guaranteeing the promotion of *public spheres of action and dispute*, nor does it guarantee the participation of the local community and partners (groups of patrons, central and local administration bodies, media, school audiences, and other stakeholders). This practice is also dependent on other factors, such as the existence of a programmer/artistic director with autonomy to perform his duties; an active educational service; a team and their continuous formation; artists willing to dialogue and to demystify the *aura* supposedly inaccessible of the creation; regular and qualified programming; financial autonomy of the project; evaluation of the measures taken and how the participation of different stakeholders/partners in the activities proposed by the equipment is promoted. Basically, and not wanting to simplify, what is at stake is the organization not limiting itself to presenting cultural manifestations, but promoting action and argumentative dispute, that is, increasing the public sphere in the intersubjective sense (Centeno, 2012).

Cultural organizations, by promoting a repeated experience of usufruct and circulation through the intentionally built spaces, generate a dynamic of meanings. "Insisting on this dynamic of social construction of space allows politicizing the presence" of the new space, because "it confers representativeness, transformative capacity and entity of subject (and not only of object) to the local community, in the face of the hegemonic significant force (...) of those who design, finance and manage urban spaces for public use" (Balibrea, 2003, p. 50).

The organization's proposal has to be seen as a fluid bind, which has to be constructed spatially and discursively with the local community, making it the protagonist of the identity meaning that is associated with those spaces. "It is possible to conceive spaces where the works of worship take place and by which a particular community identifies, recognizes and revitalizes itself. After all, programming is this!" (Ribeiro, 2000, p. 15).

From what has been said, we can affirm that the cultural organizations' mission is to restore the collective experience of the public sphere, taking into account that afterwards each one must define objectives and strategies according to the specificities of the region it serves.

Strategic Communication Through Educational Services

Within the activity of cultural organizations, we would like to highlight educational services.

The importance of working on the educational level has been reaffirmed in Portugal since the 50s of the 20th century when the then director of the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga (National Museum of Ancient Art), João Couto, created the educational service at the museum consecrating the link between plastic arts and museographic practices.

If the access to cultural goods by individuals had been one of the achievements of modernity, we know that these goods are not harmoniously adapted to all. So, this is what shapes the action/communication of cultural organizations and concretely the possibility of constituting them as platforms for educational performance, rather than providing such a service.

Fundamental to mediation between organizations and publics/communities/partners, the educational services should provide a dialogical relationship, in which the action plans of the parts involved are coordinated, "a type of long-term work, aimed at the formation of taste, linked to the principle that from the awakening of appetites and habits of living with cultural goods and organizations since childhood fixes the future consolidation of cultivated publics" (Centeno, 2012, p. 145).

The interaction scenario in which different forms of discovery and appropriation are proposed is envisaged to enrich each one's ability to choose.

In this desire to bring together publics and works, intersect activities related to production-diffusion and reproduction-training, with the aim of renewing the production process itself. (...) Animation can contribute to break, using an expression of Giddens, with the 'space-time fixity', subverting routines that have long been institutionalized. In other cases, it allows loyalty, enlargement and the formation of publics; contributing, more or less decisively, to overcome the mere effect of cultural marketing, indispensable, no doubt, but of a too ephemeral nature. (Santos, 1998, pp. 249–250)

Within the scope of the formation of publics or raising awareness to the arts of the general population, as Maria de Lourdes Lima dos Santos⁶ calls it, we can identify four groups of activities:

activities that have been designated as *Contemplatives*, as they group a set of practices more aimed at observation/hearing, including guided Visits, Exhibitions, Publications and dissemination Actions; (...) *Formation* activities imply actions related to the attendance of courses of general Formation or vocational Formation, but also with the organization of festivals and conferences and debates. (...) The third pattern - *Creative/Playful* activities - consists mainly of actions that involve experience and participation. Workshops/ateliers, Animation on academic holidays and Contests/hobbies are the activities that stand out the most, being, as a rule, aimed at a child/youth public. Lastly, actions referring *To Stage* activities should be mentioned. This set, including marginally conferences and debates, is much more expressive for activities related to entertainment and animation. (Gomes & Lourenço, 2009, pp. 122–123)

Through this range of activities, it is easy to understand that promoting the approximation of cultural goods to individuals is a herculean task, since these goods are not harmoniously adapted to all, mainly when it comes to sensitize others to landscape citizenship. Therefore, any educational service must think of this awareness in terms of age group, but also as a possibility to carry out innovative mediation practices.

The Landscape Museum

The Landscape Museum is a digital platform devoted to landscape and it is a scientific and cultural association since April 12, 2019. It stands up in the context of raising awareness and education towards landscape citizenship, which, like the landscape itself, must result from a continuous and collective process. This process is intended to be plural and not ensured by a single voice, since it is the responsibility of all protagonists in the public sphere. It is in this context that this proposal for museological mediation emerges as an axis of valorization, protection, and construction of sustainable landscapes.

⁶ Maria de Lourdes Lima dos Santos was the former president of the Observatory of Cultural Activities (from 1996 to 2007), the Portuguese public organism responsible for providing information to support cultural policy options.

The Landscape Museum then starts from a concept of territory-museum, which the visitor will have to go through and read, aided by several mediation practices present throughout the visit. Thus, for this model of landscape musealization, it is necessary, at first, to ensure the presence and recognition of the museum's mediator who presents himself as the one who intentionally communicates with the other, an interlocutor between the public and the landscape.

Towards the idea of a diffuse museum, without a building, dealing with complex, sometimes abstract and intangible issues associated with the landscape, the program for creating the online headquarters of the Landscape Museum was based on the use of a very concrete language, easily associated to the traditional museum concept. The starting point was a common language code, usually used by museums, that allows visitors to recognize the online space as a museum space. This space is the main interface for the recognition of the museum as a mediating entity; it is the anchor that guarantees a permanent link between the museum and its public. Communication issues assume another relevance here in the museological context, in the sense that, in addition to understanding a museum based in its collection or a museum based in its building, as usual, it is now possible to assume the idea of a museum based on communication.

Thus, seeking to translate the language of the architectural space of traditional museums into digital media, the website of the Landscape Museum (<https://museudapaisagem.pt>) appears on its home page as a wide frontage with horizontal screens that announce the main exhibitions and activities of the museum's programming. The visitor can enter the exhibitions and other highlights directly through these screens or scroll and move to the area corresponding to the museum's atrium. Here the visitor will find suggestions of programming, agenda, and more detailed information about the exhibitions on display. At the top of the page there is a menu, the building's signage system, which shows the visitor the way to the different spaces of the museum. In this menu there is also a map, which allows the spatial location of the visit points within the Portuguese territory.

From the museum's lobby (entrance page), the visitor can proceed to one of the exhibition rooms, to the museum's services – “educational service”, “media library” and “library” – or to more functional areas, to which correspond the file (menu “landscapes” > “explore”), the auditorium (menu “landscapes” > “film the landscape”) or the research laboratories (menu “the museum” > “research”). The museum also promotes a network of partners, volunteers, and associations with whom it collaborates in different projects.

The contents that can be found in the digital platform are meant to be complementary to the visit. It was not intended to provide only a set of facts and technical information to support visits, but also to be a mediator, to accompany the visitor along a route, on a journey, in which landscape experiences, sensations, thoughts, readings, and interpretations are shared. The digital headquarters functions as a pocket-museum, accessible from a mobile phone, tablet or computer screen, in which the fundamental characteristic is allowing a meeting point between the museum's contents, its public and the landscape (Abreu & Pina, 2019).

Strategic Communication in the Landscape Museum

The Landscape Museum tries to get the best out of digital culture.

There has been a change from a push culture, with traditional analogue mass media where publics had little influence on the content, to a pull culture, where publics are expected to search for and collect the information they are interested in. (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015, p. 344)

The museum as a digital museological platform can play an active role in the articulation between the lifeworld and the political and economic systems, by guaranteeing free spaces for dialogical communicative experiences that concretize the idea of a shared symbolic space. On the other hand, its online existence can also increase the number of people participating in its activities and develop complex mediation networks, as well as collective work. "Mobile technologies provide an opportunity for a situated and informal learning experience that encourages interaction and a sense of community among learners" (Lewis & Nichols, 2015, p. 555).

Contrary to the work of art, which is inserted in a hermetic enclosure and protected from degradation, it is seen but not used, the digital museological platforms are intended to be marked by the visitor who will not have the role of passive observer, but rather an actor who leaves his marks and a track. The digitization of museum collections and other cultural collections has in recent years reached an unprecedented scale, which has brought changes and opportunities to the way visitors and users can interact with these collections. Museum's social media are being used "to extend the authenticity provided by museums by enabling a museum to maintain a cultural dialogue with its audiences in real time" (Lewis & Nichols, 2015, p. 550).

The action/communication of a digital museological platform includes: to disseminate works; to resize the other's reference system, namely by promoting an argumentative confrontation when questioning the various dimensions of the work; to propose the interaction scenario in which the apprehension occurs and which is responsible for encouraging a dialogical practice that enriches the ability to choose. "Relationships are bonds based on trust, a trust that is not predetermined but built, and in which the construction involved means a mutual process of self-disclosure" (Giddens, 1992/1995, p. 94).

However, to achieve a critical appropriation of the territory is something that can't be done just online. That is why the Landscape Museum, despite having its headquarters online, is not a virtual-museum, but rather a territory-museum that the visitor is invited to visit. So, it has been trying, through innovative forms of mediation, to stimulate creative/playful activities (from the list previously presented) that enhance landscape citizenship, participation through the experience of the territory and living together.

The Landscape theme and its "reading" is not only an instructive concern but also an educational one in that it enhances a more comprehensive formation of students and people in general so that they can more consciously intervene civically - in their reading, in their defense, in its use, in its ecological preservation. (Martinha, 2013, p. 109)

The educational service of the Landscape Museum (Museu da Paisagem, n.d.) has been developing programs with the communities of the Portuguese territory. By promoting the encounter between these communities and the landscapes they inhabit, the museum has been seeking to challenge ways of seeing, interpreting and feeling.

The educational service of the museum knows that to apprehend, with all the senses, the landscape and its various layers implies exploration and a varied picture of readings. In fact, the landscape is not external to individuals who inhabit it and must be perceived from within, in a situation of immersion, simultaneously mobilizing the senses and the intellect.

The educational service of the museum does not develop only exhibition methods or even the contemplation of the gaze. It has been trying to promote streamlines activities that involve experience and participation, as developing an emotional connection to landscapes leads to deeper cognitive involvement. There are several studies that show how productive

pedagogies of experience-based learning, which provide engagement, are a vital part of environmental learning processes, a fundamental catalyst for expanding knowledge, changing behaviors (Ballantyne & Packer, 2008) and increasing satisfaction in the acquisition of knowledge (Morag et al., 2013).

Lave and Wenger (1991) created the term “community of practice” in the context of situated learning theory, the theory that advocates knowledge is best learned and retained in an authentic context.

Communities of Practice (CoP) are informal, pervasive, and an integral part of our daily lives. Knowledge and skills are obtained by participation in activities that expert members of the community would perform. Learners become involved in a CoP, which embodies certain beliefs and behaviors to be acquired through legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger, 1998). (...) bring organizations together through social ties that lead to strong relationships, trust and exchange of knowledge. (Lewis & Nichols, 2015, p. 556)

Lave and Wenger were talking about “groups of people who interact on an ongoing basis to further develop their expertise around a shared concern, problems, interests, and passions” (Annabi & McGann, 2013, p. 58).

The activities proposed by the Landscape Museum can be seen as *communities of practice* since the members of a community learn through interaction during the activities, and eventually become contributing members and full participants.

Thus, in environmental matters, activities, which use active learning methods and techniques in an educational performance context, have proven to be more effective in increasing landscape awareness than traditional pedagogical methodologies (Uzun & Keles, 2012) and field visits with immersive activities offer learning opportunities that develop both the knowledge and skills of individuals in a way that adds value to formal acquired knowledge in other contexts (Dillon et al., 2006).

It is a question, returning to Habermas, of providing dialogical communicative experiences responsible for building and maintaining relationships on behalf of the Landscape Museum’s mission, to contribute to the formation of a landscape citizenship.

This is how the Landscape Museum is being influencing the individuals who inhabit the Portuguese territory on behalf of a cause, the landscape citizenship. Through strategic communication it has been possible to promote the acceptance of ideas related to landscape's protection and valorization.

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