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Paper proposal

Case study: student participation in local heritage in Maastricht.

Abstract

At the MACCH conference, I would like to present a case study, a project called Meet Maastricht, launched in September 2016. The goal of Meet Maastricht is to bring closer together (international) students and local heritage, by organizing a number of cultural activities for them, in collaboration with local experts. Maastricht, a city with a particularly rich cultural heritage and a distinctive cultural identity, since a few decades has been facing a process of fast internationalization, resulting among others in new challenges in the area of heritage participation. The population of the city is changing quite rapidly, with the number of students registered at the city's higher education institutions being at the moment more than 10% of the total population. Half of those students do not speak Dutch. Students are temporary inhabitants of Maastricht, genuinely interested in the local heritage, and apparently still overlooked as a distinctive target group in the city's overall cultural offer. The ambition of Meet Maastricht is to fill this gap. At the moment the project is led by a team of 4 people, including myself, organizing one activity every week, and reaching out to approximately 80 students every month. The project focuses on active participation, in-depth experiences, and personal involvement of participants, and although it has been running only for a short period now, it is possible to observe first results of the use of this method. For example, during a recent museum visit, the group was led by a local expert who was monitoring a workshop and a discussion about such concepts as roots, belonging, home – referring both to the topic of the exhibition and to personal experiences and beliefs of the participants. As a result, the participants could develop a strong emotional bond with the exhibition. Secondly, active participation gives students an opportunity to get to know each other, making the social aspect of Meet Maastricht activities also important. Other participants of the MACCH conference may appreciate learning about a practical and locally based example of cultural entrepreneurship aiming at increasing involvement of temporary inhabitants with local culture and heritage. Similarly, I look forward to receiving feedback on our progress so far, and am eager to increase my understanding of participatory practices in arts and heritage from an academic perspective.