

# FOSTERING INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL RELATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN:

Building free, inclusive, and creative  
societies

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Inspiring **Knowledge** Driving **Action** Uniting **Cultures**

## Abstract



In an increasingly polarised world, museums, libraries, and cultural institutions have become vital “third spaces”—neutral grounds where young people can encounter diverse perspectives and histories. This session highlights how museum objects and cultural heritage can be reinterpreted as educational tools for intercultural dialogue. Civil society educators and cultural mediators will present practical approaches to using these institutions to support emotional connection, historical awareness, and social inclusion, especially among youth from diverse backgrounds.

**Key words:** museums, libraries, cultural institutions, third spaces, young people, diverse histories

The following paper was written and collated by Jenny Siung, co-head of the Irish Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) network (2019-2025). They organised and co-facilitated a workshop with specialists from Tunisia, Morocco, France and Spain all of whom are contacts through the respective ALF networks.

This paper includes the background to:

- Chester Beatty, its role and collaboration with the Anna Lindh Foundation and Irish Network
- Cross network actions including preparation for the ALF Forum in Albania 2025
- The theme of the workshop
- The relevance of the workshop
- The partners involved
- Recommendations and conclusion
- Appendix

## Introduction



The Chester Beatty’s Education Department offers a wide range of ways to learn about and engage with the Collections. Through its vibrant and exciting programme of events and professional training for teachers, educators and creatives, the museum offers opportunities to explore world cultures, as found in Chester’s Beatty’s Islamic, East Asian and European Collections. Intercultural dialogue and learning play a key role in the museum’s mission and fosters dialogue with the communities as represented in the museum. The Learning and Education Department has worked for several years exploring ways to engage primary and post-primary schools and teachers with this unique Collection.<sup>1</sup>

### The importance of intercultural dialogue

Intercultural dialogue is a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of interaction

between individuals, groups and organisations with diverse cultural backgrounds or world views.

Among its aims are:

- To develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices;
- To increase participation and the freedom and ability to make choices;

- To foster equality;
- And to enhance the creative process. <sup>2</sup>

Intercultural dialogue underpins both the work of the Chester Beatty and the Anna Lindh Foundation.

## *The Chester Beatty and the Anna Lindh Foundation*

The Chester Beatty joined the Anna Lindh and Irish network in 2005. It has been involved in a number of initiatives funded by the ALF including a tri-part series of workshops and symposium with members of the Irish Anna Lindh Network (2015-2016) under a scheme known as a Common Action; partners included Dublin City Interfaith Forum, Mary Immaculate College and Triskel Arts Centre.

Each of the partners held one-day events addressing interfaith dialogue in contemporary Ireland and addressed third level students, educators, teachers, multi-faith communities as well as members of the Irish Anna Lindh Network.

During the one-day seminar in Mary Immaculate College the museum worked with post-graduate education students to deliver an event based on a previous workshop held with the Anna Lindh Common Action and organised by the Spanish network in Tarragona, Spain in 2015. It explored how the resource can be used with teachers, educators, NGOs, and members of the Anna Lindh Network including Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, Algeria, Morocco, France, Belgium, Spain and Ireland.

In 2019 the Head of Education, Jenny Siung, was nominated as co-head of the Irish network and subsequently collaborated with members from the Turkish and Irish network in 2020-2021 the ALF Virtual Academy to support life long learning.

The one-year online training programme supported the following:

- Promote intercultural dialogue and support the value of cultural diversity
- Approve the cultural richness of communities
- Overcome major social and cultural challenges
- Facilitate access and share intercultural resources, competencies and experiences in the Euro-Med region through civil society multipliers
- Empower ALF networks

Members from the Turkish, Irish, Belgian, Moroccan and UK networks participated in the project. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chester Beatty Learning and Engagement Policy 2025-2028, [https://chesterbeatty.ie/assets/uploads/2025/04/Learning\\_Engagement\\_Policy\\_2025-2028.pdf](https://chesterbeatty.ie/assets/uploads/2025/04/Learning_Engagement_Policy_2025-2028.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Bodo, S., Gibbs, K. and Sani, M., eds. (2009). Museums as Places for Intercultural Dialogue: selected practices from Europe, Map for ID Group, p.6.

## Cross network actions across the ALF March 2024

An Inter-Network Action of the Anna Lindh Foundation, took place in Morocco from in March 2024, and focused on “Cultural Diplomacy: Mechanism for Intercultural Dialogue.” The agenda included discussions on intercultural dialogue in the current Euro-Mediterranean context and panel discussions on youth involvement, governance, cultural cooperation, intercultural dialogue, and networking in the Mediterranean region. This initiative was promoted by the Moroccan ALF network with the collaboration of Belgium, Ireland, Spain and Tunisian national networks. As a result of various debates and workshops, significant conclusions were agreed. The event concluded with the adoption of the Tangiers Declaration<sup>4</sup>, and a proposal to hold a cross-network series of workshops at the ALF Forum in 2025.

“This activity in Tangier emphasized the necessity for Cultural Relations to be driven by values of reciprocity and mutuality, to develop strategies with a human focus, to promote interpersonal relationships over interests, with the aim of fostering a renewed spirit of dialogue, mutual understanding, listening, and learning.”<sup>5</sup>

## Cross network meeting Morocco January-February 2025



**Image:** Members of the ALF Cross Network initiative preparing for the ALF Forum, Marrakech, February 2025 © ALF Moroccan Network

<sup>3</sup> Chester Beatty blog post, Anna Lindh Virtual Academy for Lifelong Learning, 18 August 2021  
<https://chesterbeatty.ie/education/anna-lindh-virtual-academy-for-lifelong-learning-2020-2021/>

<sup>4</sup> Carina, Soriano, ed., XXIII Meeting of the Spanish Network, Barcelona 19 and 20 March 2024, Fundación Anna Lindh, Red Española <https://www.annalindhfoundation.org/sites/default/files/documents/network-news/Report%20FAL%20EN.pdf>, pp 8-9

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. pp. 8-9

## Think, Act, Show - thematic approach in preparation for the ALF Forum 2025

Members from the Moroccan, Irish, Spanish, Tunisian, Belgian and French networks met in Marrakesh in February 2025. Between the 29-30 February members co-developed a cross network exchange between six countries and looked at how each member country would select suitable candidates to facilitate a workshop, panel discussion, performance or debate during the upcoming ALF Forum in Tirana, Albania June 2025.

Members present in the Marrakech meeting presented themselves in a round table discussion, talked about their skills and background and their work within the ALF network. These included the members as mentioned above. Each member reflected on how best these skill sets will match or reflect the theme of the Forum Think Act Show. The aim of this cross-network exchange is to support dialogue between the global north and south. Throughout the meeting, members looked at how best each country could collaborate with a specific thematic approach. This took some time and at the end of second day, a formula or table of who would go where, present which theme and topic specifically related to the areas of interest was finalised.

## Anna Lindh Forum Tirana, Albania June 2025 - Outline of the workshop

Jenny Siung introduced the workshop including learning approaches used in the Chester Beatty museum Dublin.

The workshop comprised of:

- An introduction
- Learning methodologies
- Examples from across the Euro-Med region using cultural heritage and the arts to support young people by members from Morocco, Spain, France and Tunisia
- Q&A
- Feedback

The first learning methodology used in the Chester Beatty is object-based learning whereby everyday objects can be used to support exploration of the learner. Multiple questions can be used e.g. where is the object from, how was it made, who made it, what does it feel and smell like, are some examples of questions that can be used by facilitators. By using these questions, it builds curiosity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration for the learner.

### Object-Based Learning (OBL)

Object-Based Learning (OBL) is a student-centred learning approach that uses objects to facilitate deep learning. The use of objects can act as multi-sensory “thinking tools” to promote learning. The objects are used to stimulate the learners’ imagination and to help them apply their understanding to other contexts and problems. The central proposition of OBL is that working with objects mediates and strengthens learning.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Romanek, D. and Lynch, B. (2008). ‘Touch and the Value of Object Handling: Final Conclusions for a New Sensory Museology’, in H.J. Chatterjee (ed.), Touch in Museums: Policy and Practice in Object Handling, Oxford and New York: Berg.

## Object Based Learning

<https://chesterbeatty.ie/>



**Image:** Object based learning in the Chester Beatty, Schools of Sanctuary workshop, Chester Beatty, May 2023, © Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library

The second methodology is Visual Thinking Strategies and is learner-centred using three key questions: what do you see, what makes you say that, what more can you find? These questions are carefully crafted to allow and encourage the learner to share their competencies without having to be the 'expert' in the room.

### Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS)

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is a teaching method that improves critical thinking skills through teacher-facilitated discussions of visual images. VTS encourages participation through a group problem-solving process. It uses art to teach thinking, communication skills, and visual literacy. Students contribute to the discussion by presenting their own observations and ideas to the class. All contributions are accepted and considered neutrally by the teacher and class, so that students can learn from the perspectives of others.

VTS emphasises the student learning process, individually and in conjunction with others, rather than the instructor's dissemination of knowledge. Therefore, VTS is learner-driven, it places the power in students' control. It is process focused not product focused – students are not given a right answer because the process of learning and discussing is the answer. VTS fosters critical thinking skills.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Yenawine, P. (2013). *Visual Thinking Strategies: Using Art to Deepen Learning Across School Disciplines*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press.

## Visual Thinking Strategies



**Image:** VTS activity, Chester Beatty, November 2023, © Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library

These methodologies have been tried and tested in numerous museums and provide the foundation of the Chester Beatty's School's programme. <sup>8</sup> They also feed in to the Lundy Model, a model devised by Professor Lundy of Queen's University. Children under the age of 18 years (which includes youth) are provided space, given voice to express their thoughts and ideas, an audience to listen to them and influence, i.e. how do we act upon young people's concerns and feedback? <sup>9</sup>

### **The Workshop**

The four colleagues were given fifteen minutes each to present and share their organisations and a specific learning methodology for participants.

#### **Spain**

Ainara Garcia Sanchez presented the Foundation of Islamic art and cultural heritage, their work and initiatives. This was followed by a brief activity inviting the participants to act for and against the debate: all cultural heritage in your city does not hold value.

#### **France**

David Stoleru of the Beit Project presented a number of case studies including the Boat Project where young people work and live on board a boat that sails around the Mediterranean. Young people are taught multiple skills including how to live and work together. The other project is an outdoor classroom of portable units young people can work from when exploring cultural sites.

#### **Morocco**

Lahcen Tighoula explored object-based learning using a local object from his region in Morocco. participants were invited to guess what the object is used for – bread. He presented a 'deep dive' into the meaning of what object-based learning is, how it can be used and the impact it has on learners.

<sup>8</sup> Siung, Jenny, Sunderland Bowe, Jo, authors and eds. Embracing Cultural Diversity in the Classroom; building an intercultural school's programme. Research and development report, Chester Beatty, 2021, [https://chesterbeatty.ie/assets/uploads/2018/09/Chester\\_Beatty\\_RD\\_Intercultural\\_Schools\\_Project\\_Report.pdf](https://chesterbeatty.ie/assets/uploads/2018/09/Chester_Beatty_RD_Intercultural_Schools_Project_Report.pdf)

## Tunisia

Héla Karmous is a street artist and presented methodologies using art and connecting to the self for expression and art therapy. Hela brought samples of their work for display and invited participants to try these methods out.



**Image:** the ALF workshop, session 1, ALF Forum, Tirana, Albania, June 2025, © Lahcen Tighoula

## Q&A/Feedback

Participants were engaged throughout the workshop as our group wanted an interactive session where people could try things out. They provided very positive feedback.

## Conclusion

Why are these tools and methodologies important when working with young people in museums, libraries and cultural heritage? Young people are encouraged to share their personal experiences and knowledge with the help of a facilitator using the tools described in this paper, rather than being provided with continuous information throughout in a didactic, formal style of learning. Children and young people should not be underestimated when it comes to their knowledge of themselves and the world around them. The tools and methodologies implemented lead to an enriched learning experience for both museum, libraries, cultural heritage and class. The aim of the workshop was to demonstrate that young people not only learn about the objects, but also learn about themselves and their peers within the cultural contexts. Practitioners are encouraged to prepare in advance learning sessions, as a way to continue this enriched learning. It was the first time our group worked together. It was essential we met beforehand to get to know each other and identify each person's strengths to help build the activity. The dynamic worked very well.

## Recommendations

By bringing different voices from the Euro Med region these are the recommendations:

- Workshops reflecting methodologies relevant to the theme of creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking for young people needs to be dynamic

This is reflected in the responses from our workshop.

Fun, interactive, motivating, passion, stimulating etc. are some of the words to describe the workshop

- Learning something new for participants is essential and should be embedded in all of the workshops i.e. Provide tools for participants they can use in their own practice
- Do peer-to-peer exchanges between Europe and MENA utilising museums, libraries and cultural heritage to support learning for young people - harness the commonalities between the regions
- Embed the voice of young people in decision making as reflected in the Lundy model

[https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022\\_12/lundy\\_model\\_of\\_participation\\_0.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022_12/lundy_model_of_participation_0.pdf)



**Image:** Share 3 words to describe today's session, workshop, ALF Forum, Tirana, Albania, June 2025, © Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library

## Did you learn anything new today?

Boat is boot is beit	Endangered cultural heritage in Spain	New ideas New methodologies for engaging young people	Another culture information
The role of cultural education	Relation to bread in Morocco	Yes	New techniques to engage with students. Some interesting info about cultural objects.



## Did you learn anything new today?

Yes	That one can use the "intuitive" object based learning in a very productive way for intercultural dialogue.	It's a bread basket	heritage city walks and objects-based learning by making curiosity emerge and people talk to one another
Power of emotional response to experiential learning			



Image: Image: collated feedback from participants, 'did you learn anything new today question', workshop, ALF Forum, Tirana, Albania, June 2025, © Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library

## Which learning approach would you use in your work?



**Image:** Participant's feedback on which learning approach they prefer, workshop, ALF Forum, Tirana, Albania, June 2025, © Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library

## Can you recommend how museums, libraries & heritage can work across the Euro-Med region?



**Image:** Recommendations for the ALF, workshop, ALF Forum, Tirana, Albania, June 2025, © Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library



### Moderator Ireland

**Jenny Siung** is Head of Education at the Chester Beatty, Dublin. She has worked in museum education for over 28 years and has developed the first intercultural learning programme in an Irish museum. Her work involves engaging with the Islamic, Asian, North African, East Asian and European collections of the Chester Beatty, devising numerous programmes including intercultural projects for schools, cultural festivals, and creating links with local multi-ethnic communities. She has developed and edited museum-based learning resources with local and international partners. Jenny has been involved in a number of EU-funded projects looking at how museums can engage with creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication especially when working with teachers and schools. She regularly presents and writes about museums and learning, cultural diversity, national identity, interfaith dialogue, creativity and innovation. Jenny is Canadian-born, Irish-Trinidadian and is a descendant of Chinese migrants. Her ancestors moved from South China and Hong Kong to British Guiana in the mid-to-late 19th century to work on sugar and coffee plantations as free and indentured labourers.



### Speakers (Morocco)

**Lahcen Tighoula** is an English Language Teaching supervisor and teacher trainer for the Moroccan Ministry of Education. With 27 years of experience spanning classroom teaching, educational supervision, and teacher training, he brings extensive expertise to the field. He holds a master's degree in gender studies and obtained their PhD degree in February 2025 in applied linguistics. Lahcen has been actively engaged with the Moroccan ALF network for the past 16 years, initially as vice president of the Friends of Peace Association and now as a member of the national steering committee. He has participated in and led workshops and seminars with ALF in various countries, including Egypt, Lebanon, Cyprus, Finland, and Jordan. As part of a select group of educators, he contributed to the piloting of the ALF Handbook on Intercultural Citizenship Education. In Morocco, he has been leading training sessions for educators and youth workers, focusing on capacity building and bridging the gap between formal and non-formal education in the context of intercultural learning.



### Speakers (Spain)

**Ainara García Sánchez** Fundación de Cultura Islámica (FUNCI) graduated in Sociology and International Relations from the Complutense University of Madrid and holds a Master's degree in Contemporary Arab and Islamic Studies from the Autonomous University of Madrid. Development Expert. She works at the Fundación de Cultura Islámica (FUNCI) as a content creator for the blog Twist Islamofobia, and also collaborates in other projects such as Med-o-Med, Cultural Landscapes of the Mediterranean and the Middle East.



### Speakers (France)

**David Stoleru** is a French architect and policy advisor, dedicated to European remembrance projects and educational programmes developed all over Europe and the Mediterranean area.

Combining expertise in architectural design and education, David has founded The Beit Project in 2010, which collaborates with cultural institutions and governmental bodies to develop educational innovation. David's work emphasises the critical role of historical memory in combating discrimination and hate, thereby inspiring efforts toward building more inclusive and just societies.



### Speakers (Tunisia)

**Héli Karmous** is a Tunisian manga and comics artist born in Sousse in 1990. Initially pursuing studies in physics, she later transitioned to her true passion: visual art. Since 2015, she has worked as a freelance digital artist. Her artistic style is heavily influenced by Japanese manga, and she is particularly known for her vibrant murals that adorn the streets of many cities in Tunisia transforming public spaces with her imaginative creations. Karmous is very active within the Tunisian civil society organizing graffiti events across Tunisia, promoting artistic expression in public spaces.



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