FAMILIES VISITING MUSEUMS AS COMMUNITIES OF LEARNERS; A GREEK CASE STUDY

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Katerina Gioftsali
Department of Museum Studies
University of Leicester

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KATERINA GIOFTSALI

Abstract

This study addresses the learning process as well as the impact of the Community of Learners supporting programme on family learning experiences in Greece in order to provide them with a motive to visit local museums during their leisure time. It was a qualitative study rooted in constructivist and socio-cultural learning theory of participation in communities of learners. Observation data during learning communities' meetings and museum visits combined with in-depth interviews with participants yielded much information about the social context of the family museum experience and particularly the behaviour of families in shared activities.

Thus, different levels of learning outcomes were identified from gaining information, knowledge and skills through developing new insights, enjoyment, as well as deep learning through increased understanding and most of all changed attitudes and values. Specifically, the interviews with families clearly show that the learning outcomes from participating in the community of learners' programme frequently related to attitudes and values. Most of the families commented that this programme changed their attitudes towards Greek museums and motivated them to visit museums more frequently as organized learning communities. The responses from families indicated an increase in knowledge and understanding was another learning outcome. Furthermore, families increased their skills, especially social skills, as they were active participants in the learning communities. As a result, many families were satisfied, inspired and very creative through their participation in the programme and this led them to a progression in their behaviour and actions in dealing with environmental issues.
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Introduction

Museums and galleries are considered important learning environments that enhance, reinforce and promote memorable, meaningful and highly contextualized experiences. Since their establishment, museums are recognized 'as ideal cultural institutions that offer[ed] the potential for social equality, achieved through learning' (Hooper-Greenhill, 1991:9). One of the most inspiring issues to emerge within the museum field in recent years has been the paradigm shift from Modern to Post-Modern period. Museums today are being reviewed and reformulated. In fact, models, which are theory dependant, have been developed to describe the way in which learning in museums has changed. The essence of life long learning (Anderson, 1997) and a deeper understanding of the learning processes are the most significant reflections of these changes. Furthermore, the shift from the object and collection-based museum to the audience-oriented museum emphasises the visitor’s distinctive needs and expectations. Visitors are not seen anymore as a passive and homogenous mass of people but as multi-ethnic groups made up of a range of different communities with different cultures and as individuals with their own particular needs, preferred learning styles and social and cultural agendas. It is significant that the past 'general public' has been transformed to an 'active audience' (Hooper Greenhill, 1999:67).

Nowadays, learning in museums and galleries is often referred to as informal or free-choice learning that is primarily driven by the personal characteristics, such as a visitor’s motivations, needs, interests and values, and the socio-cultural and
physical environment, as vital parts of the learning experience. Museum learning is a life long process with various in-depth components of meaningful experiences offered to the public. Generally, the public looks at the museum as a safe place, a place to create memories, a place of meaning-making, to stimulate the senses, to arouse curiosity, to enrich, to empower children as well as adults, to experience the past, to ask questions and to learn about self and the community. In addition, museums are finding themselves competing with other leisure and learning experiences in an increasingly global world (Mintz, 1994; Falk & Dierking, 2000) where people engage in highly memorable, rich experiences in a range of contexts. Museums are social institutions where social groups, such as family groups, go in order to interact and share experiences and knowledge with each other.

Museums and families as social institutions are dynamic and variable both within and across societies, since changes in society over time influence the structure of a particular social institution and simultaneously changes in this particular institution affect others and society at large. Thus, the meaning of society is not fixed: instead it varies over time, place and culture. In the past couple of decades, Western societies have seen dramatic changes in how we define family and in how individuals experience family life. Families are now different from how they used to be. More and more couples are living together before marriage and as an alternative to marriage. Many marriages end in divorce and unmarried adolescents and adults are raising children, and grandparenthood has become a distinct phase in the life course. These family changes are related to larger structural, economic and political shifts of modern society. Families today, according to Yerk, are less dependent on each other and spend less time together, but expect a higher quality of experience than before (Wood, 1996:78). Families, thus, are more diverse than ever and in order to fulfil visitor's expectations many museums nowadays have been redirecting their
goals to serve families and more diverse audiences, while still maintaining their role as free-choice learning environments.

Even though many museums abroad have increased their role as education and entertainment centres by redefining their responsibilities and revitalizing their image in their local communities, Greek museums still struggle to find their social-cultural identity and approach people of all backgrounds and abilities. To give an example, many educational programmes for different audiences in foreign museums are more focused upon allowing the visitor to experience real life activities through hands-on activities, while Greek programmes give more emphasis on one form of the public, that of school groups (Kouveli, 2000). In recent years - even though we have some indication of the importance of visiting museums as part of a school group - little is known about why Greek families do not visit museums during their leisure time. Although welcomed into the Greek museums, the family is not generally seen as an educational and social group. Instead, many Greek museums mainly direct their educational efforts on the development and delivery of educational programmes for school groups, thus seeking to improve their services towards this audience (Miroyanni-Arvanitidi, 1999) and neglecting the other groups of visitors. Greek museums, in the frame of reinforcing life long learning, ‘must be addressed separately to that audience as well’ (Miroyanni-Arvanitidi, 1999:53).

It is very sad to see a country like Greece, with its long and brilliant history, unable to make good use of museums as cultural and free-choice learning environments via the development of museum education and culture of Greek citizens. It is also very sad during weekdays to see Greek museums full of life with children’s voices whereas at the weekends they are mainly empty with no opportunity to interact with the group that constitutes the core of Greek society - the families. In Greece, museum and visitor research studies are regarded as
being in their infancy and for that reason there is no an official research that has studied the quantity as well as the quality of family learning experiences in museum settings. Empirical data that emerged from informal discussions of the researcher with museum professionals in Greece, reveals the percentage of Greek families that visit local museums for the duration of a family outing to be very small, in comparison with that of families in other countries making similar museum visits. This is concerning and the need to find ways and motives to attract Greek families to museums, even more so. In the light of this problem, a model was developed to encourage Greek families to visit museums as learning communities during their leisure time in the endeavour of enhancing their museum experiences.

This thesis attempts to improve the socio-cultural context of Greek museums, regarding the services offered to the wide public and particularly to Greek families. Therefore, this study seeks to present a social and constructivist perspective on the museum learning experience and explores the learning process as well as the learning outcomes of families as learning communities. Specifically, it concerns the development and evaluation of a family programme embedded in the socio-cultural model of teaching and learning that sees museum learning as a community process of a family’s participation in shared activities. The model of participation in a Community of Learners (Rogoff, 1996) involves a dialogue within the families who are actively involved in the educational programme, to spell out their agendas, interests, concerns, feelings, thoughts and goals in order to develop a better understanding of their museum experience. Specifically, the research considers families’ participation in learning communities and how this participation changes as children of different ages collaborate and coordinate in joint activities not only with each other but also with parents, museum educators, and teachers who are acting as facilitators (see figure 1). Through negotiation and reciprocal contributions, all participants
constitute a new community of engaged learners that is based on mutuality in joint activity and guidance. This new community of learners is the catalyst for transferable learning and development for all participants in structuring a meaningful museum visit.

This thesis set out to explore the reasons that Greek families do not make frequent visits to museums and to consider the motives that encourage families to visit museums; to assess the learning process as well as the learning outcomes of families as learning communities; to provide the proposed family educational programme as one motive for bridging the gap between Greek families and local museums; and finally to propose the use of the 'Centres for Children’s Creativity' as a forum of social interaction among museums and families.

To answer these questions, it was important to acquire background information through an examination and analysis of an extensive review of the literature from the areas of education, museum education and learning, socio-cultural and constructivist theories. Concerning the literature review, a thorough research was conducted with several books and articles that present studies relating to
museum learning and family learning in museum settings. The most influential and catalytic learning theory was Rogoff's model of participation in Communities of Learners that influenced the development and delivery of the educational programme for families. Since families - particularly Greek families - are seen as the potential museum visitors, it was essential to examine families and family life in modern Western societies and particularly in Greek society from a sociological perspective. The profile of family museum visitors based on family studies is also examined by looking at why they visit museums and how they behave during the visit. Furthermore, the idea of motivating families, especially Greek families, to visit museums as learning communities, created the need to look more deeply at the learning theories that have influenced museum practice and exhibition design, and go beyond them, capturing the complex nature of learning and adopting a definition that sees museum learning as a ‘process of active engagement with the experience’.

Hence, in order to measure the impact of the learning community model on families' museum experiences; a theoretical and methodological framework was adopted that sees learning as a life long process of meaning making. This framework represents a holistic approach to learning where learning is a dynamic process of meaning making dependant on both the individual and their environment that focuses on some change. This could be a change in point of view; a change in the way a person sees the world; a change in knowledge and understanding or deepening of skills, feelings, attitudes and values; or even a change in the way a person sees themselves. To this end, the methodology used was qualitative in nature following the Generic Learning Outcomes approach that underpins the learning theory of this thesis.

This thesis is organized around eight main chapters which relate to the research objectives. In the first chapter, studying and understanding families from a
sociological perspective is of particular interest in this thesis as it highlights the various family forms that are taken into account when considering families in the museum context. The sociological perspective places the family into its societal and cultural context, showing how societal or cultural characteristics and dynamics influence the families in the society or culture; how the family reinforces or changes the society in which it is located; and how the family operates as a social organization. Families are being studied on two levels: the micro-level that views families as social groups; and the macro-level that looks at family as a social institution. In this thesis family is defined both as a social group and a social institution because it is dynamic and variable. It also examines the theoretical and practical questions asked by different conceptual frameworks according to how they approach family life and behaviour. The discussion then turns to a child’s socialisation and looks at the family as the principal agent in socialising the child. Finally, discussion about the Greek family profile is of particular interest since Greek families have faced dramatic changes in the past couple of decades, which has influenced the way they experience family life and behaviour.

The second chapter discusses museum learning and particularly family learning, since museums are social environments where families interact with each other and share their learning experience. Different learning theories that were applied to museum spaces are discussed. However, it was important for this thesis to go beyond these theories by proposing an alternative way of learning in museums which is based more on a community rather than an individual approach. Thus, this thesis follows a socio-cultural and constructivist learning theory and sees learning and development as a community process of families’ participation in activities that is based on a mutual process of collaboration within active participants in shared activities. Since family learning is viewed as a social activity, it is essential to discuss studies on family museum experience, looking
at the reasons families visit museums and the process of family learning and behaviour in museum settings. Having set the framework around these studies, this thesis goes beyond them by explaining and comparing, in a subsequent chapter, the findings of family learning and behaviour in Greece and abroad.

The third chapter presents the GAIA Centre and the Centre for Children’s Creativity as ideal settings for enhancing free-choice learning. A discussion of the Greek ‘status quo’ highlights the need for Greek museums to broaden their educational policies and deviate from the myopic perception that education is only about children and particularly school groups. In designing educational policies particular attention needs to be given to other audiences such as families that are excluded most of time. Thus, the last section of this chapter presents the structure of the family programme aiming to motivate Greek families to visit museums during their leisure time.

The fourth chapter discusses the methodology employed for the research, which is based on qualitative research and was considered the most appropriate for data gathering and analysis. Qualitative research provided in-depth information from a relatively small number of people, revealing patterns that helped the holistic understanding of the family museum experience. Thus, in the effort of measuring learning, an approach was adopted called Generic Learning Outcomes. According to this approach, data gathering and analysis were based on the five generic learning outcomes reflecting the learning theory of this thesis: increase in knowledge and understanding; increase in skills; change in attitudes and values; evidence of creativity, inspiration, enjoyment; and evidence of action, behaviour and progression. Particularly, this study used multiple methods where the conclusions were being validated on the basis of the combination of information from a number of data sources and methods. Methods such as questionnaires and repeated observations of participants’
behaviour in the learning communities during the programme were employed. The observations were triangulated with recorded conversations amongst participants while they were interacting with each other. Furthermore, informal semi-structured group interviews with the teachers after the completion of each section of the programme helped to assess the learning process of the programme. Finally, in-depth interviews with the participants allowed the respondents to supply their own answers and assess their learning outcomes from their point of view.

The fifth part presents the first findings regarding the museum experiences of Greek families prior to their participation in the programme and in particular the barriers Greek families have to visiting museums in their leisure time compared with the findings of studies in America and Britain. Families' motivations and criteria for visiting, together with their expectations and perceptions about participating in a family programme, are issues that will be also discussed in detail.

The sixth and seventh chapters present the findings of the learning process as well as the learning outcomes of families visiting museums as communities of learners. In this view, learning is a collaborative and socially constructed entity, rather than an individual possession, where families adjust themselves in varying roles by stretching their common understanding to fit with new perspectives in shared activities. Instead of a teacher, a parent or a museum education officer attempting to address and manage many children as one recipient of instruction, the proposed family programme perceived museum learning as participation in a community of learners. Specifically, this programme involved a community working together with all serving as resources to the other, with varying roles according to their understanding of the activity, shifting responsibilities and changing their participation in museum
activities. Through negotiation and reciprocal contributions, all participants constituted a community of engaged and active learners. Thus, during the learning community process, three things happened:

- All participants were active in the sense that no one had all the responsibility and no one was passive. Families learnt to take responsibilities for their contributions to their own learning and to the group’s functioning.
- Group heterogeneity let the more skilled partners (e.g. teachers, parents, older children) provide leadership and guidance to others. Teaching was an inquiry as learners interacted with each other around topics or activities with the support and the guidance of the facilitator (museum professional/environmentalist) who had particular expertise in the area of environmental issues.
- Learning involved transformation of participation in collaborative endeavour. This transformation was expressed in the form of learning outcomes that identified from increasing knowledge and skills, especially social skills through developing new insights, enjoyment, creativity and inspiration as well as deep learning through increased understanding and most of all changes in attitudes and values towards Greek museums. The learning process motivated the families to visit museums as learning communities.

The last chapter discusses the potential of the learning community model in helping museum professionals to create meaningful and memorable learning experiences for families but also for different audiences providing the opportunity to socially interact with each other through specially designed programmes. It can guide exhibition designers to develop a learning community environment inside the museum space with exhibits that reinforce active
participation, facilitating and challenging families to interact and spell out their experiences, feelings, and knowledge in an enjoyable and creative way. It can arouse the interest of Greek museums to reach out and collaborate with other cultural agencies, like the Centres for Children’s Creativity or the Centres for elderly people, in order to establish a forum for encouraging local communities (families, elderly people, disable people e.t.c.) to work together on common goals, helping each other to develop a positive museum experience that enhances lifelong learning. Museums should accommodate the expectations, needs and concerns of family members, both as individuals and a social group in order to bridge the gap between them. Building a communication policy that is more socially inclusive will enable family visitors to put museums in their everyday family agenda, and consider them as places where learning and entertainment are combined.

The following chapters will provide a framework for motivating families to visit museums through an assessment of the process as well as the learning outcomes of the families as learning communities. Finally it will discuss the implications of the participation model of learning communities in museum settings and provide ideas for its practical use.
Chapter 1

Studying and understanding families

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to provide Greek families with a motive for visiting museums in their leisure time as learning communities. Therefore, studying and understanding the family and especially the Greek family is of particular relevance in this thesis.

The first section of this chapter attempts to define the term 'family' by examining two approaches. The macro-level approach views family as an extremely important and central social institution in all societies and the micro-level approach is based on the interpersonal relationships of the family members. The second section will briefly discuss the major conceptual frameworks used to study families and family life. The family is the basic unit of coordination and social organization because for most people the family has the greatest impact on socialisation. Therefore, the family itself is
the most important factor in the development of the self for children because, for the first few years of life, children are totally dependent on their parents. During this time, parents often relay their political and social views upon their children. Children also learn from the environment that adults unconsciously create. Family and child socialisation, thus, are discussed in the third section of this chapter. Finally, a section on Greek families is included in this discussion as it forms the sample of the case study and gives us information on social characteristics that shape the Greek family life and structure.

1.2 What is the family?

Why is it difficult to understand and study families? How can the term 'family' which seems so straightforward at first, turns out to be full of complexities and ambiguities? According to Gelles (1995), there are five barriers which affect researchers' ability to study and understand families. The first one is researchers' personal involvement in families because researchers are born into families and most of them are going to be married at least once. The values, beliefs and goals are rooted in their family experience leading them to make generalizations based on a single case (i.e. their own family). The second barrier is the private nature of families where there is both privacy from the outside world and privacy within the home. The modern family is what sociologist Erving Goffman calls a 'backstage area': a place where people can remove the masks they wear in public and be themselves (Gelles, 1995:4). The sanctity of family relations constitutes the third barrier to understanding families because the family is a sacred institution, as we tend to create an ideal image of what the family was like, is like, and should be like (Gelles, 1995:5).
One of the big issues or challenges within family studies lies in its definition. Contemporary society is changing rapidly and we have seen many family forms increase in numbers and some relatively new forms emerge. The ideal image of two biological parents and children living in harmony, as with most ideal types, does not present a very realistic framework for contemporary society. There are growing numbers of so-called ‘variant family forms’ throughout the world. The family has many forms ranging from the two-parent family (nuclear families), extended families, single-parents, blended families\(^1\), same-sex families, adoptive families and the list goes on. Thus, the variation in family forms over time and across our society is the fourth barrier to understanding families. The changes that have occurred in families during the life span and in the institution of the family is the last barrier that affect researchers’ ability to study and understand families (Gelles, 1995). For example, households with a wife in the labour force have increased dramatically in the past three decades.

The family is one of society’s main and arguably most important social institutions as it serves to socialize individuals to be productive members of society. We all look to our family for guidance, support and a sense of belonging. There are two levels of reality when considering the ‘family’. There is the ‘micro-level approach’, which examines family as social institution as it is our first encounter with socialization processes. As with all institutions, the family has within its boundaries a set of norms, values, strategies and roles, which are organised to meet specific goals for the overall society.

\(^1\) The blended family is one in which either parent brings with them children from a previous marriage.
The family as a social institution is viewed as an entity that consists of various interrelated positions (or statuses)\(^2\) that perform particular functions (or roles)\(^3\). Furthermore, the family is part of a larger system (society) and contributes to the functioning of society. Within the family institution, the statuses and roles interact with one another to form a system of relations amongst the members who hold a specific status and perform a specified role. The operation of the family institution, thus, depends upon the effectiveness of these status-role interactions (Gelles, 1995).

From a sociological perspective, the family is not only viewed as an institution but also as a social group that constitutes the 'micro-level approach' which is based on the interpersonal relationships of the people who form the small group called 'a family'. Here the focus is on the individual members (the people) of the family. What each person brings to the family and how each person contributes to the relationships with other individuals in the family, determines the reality within each family (Gelles, 1995). Families are a special kind of social group because they are 'intimate environments' that spent time together and do a range of activities. Furthermore, the degree of emotional involvement between family members is intense and they have the right to influence the values, attitudes and behaviours of other members. Families are also special because members include both sexes and a wide span of ages and because most tasks and responsibilities are assigned based on sex and age. Finally, membership in the case of children is involuntary and the knowledge of social biographies and

\(^2\) The term 'position' or status refers to the place a person occupies in the family or another social group, to where he or she fits in with others. For example, the position of wife defines a person’s relationship to other family members. The position of son or father establishes other relationships (Gelles, 1995)

\(^3\) The term 'role' refers to the set of rights, obligations, and expectations that accompany a particular role. A mother, for example, has the right to order her daughter to go to her room (a right that the daughter does not have over her mother) and the obligation to support her while she is young (Gelles, 1995).
identities are extensive to members of families as they know the strengths, vulnerabilities, fears, weaknesses, loves and hates (Gelles, 1995; Copeland & White, 1991).

Whether we examine as an institution or a group, the interest of sociologists who study the family begins with a fascination of the family entity and the relationships within its boundaries. Some writers have sought to resolve these defining problems by arguing that the 'family is what a particular social group believes it to be' (Elliot, 1986:5). This thesis considers the family 'as a social group and a social institution that possesses an identifiable structure made up of positions (e.g. breadwinner, child rearer, decision maker, nurturer) and interactions among those who occupy the positions. The structure typically carries out specialized functions (e.g. child rearing), is characterized by 'biologically and socially defined kinship and often involves sharing a residence' (Gelles, 1995:11). Both as an institution and as a social group, the family is dynamic and variable. It differs across societies, cultures and across individual families. Given the variation and change, the term 'families' is more accurate than the singular 'family' (Elliot, 1986; Gelles, 1995; Morgan, 1988).

In order to better understand the concept of families it is essential to discuss briefly in the following section the various theoretical frameworks that the social scientists use to investigate marriage and family life and behaviour.

1.3 Sociological theories and families

Different conceptual frameworks serve to guide the development of questions that social scientists ask about families and specifically about marriage and family life and behaviour. The major schools of sociological thought are ecological theory, functionalism, Marxism (conflict theory), feminism,
symbolic interaction, social exchange theory, developmental and family system theory. Each framework has a different starting-point, focuses on different aspects of the social world and provides different kinds of explanations of the relationship between the family and other social institutions (Elliot, 1986). The most influential theoretical approaches to the study of marriage and family are examined in this thesis.

In sociology, the ecological perspective studies the relationship and adaptation of human groups, such as families, to their physical environment. The ecological theory proposes that individuals' roles and environmental settings are highly interrelated. Functionalism looks at the social world as a system analogous to the factory. Each necessary social function is institutionalized and each person has a role to fulfill to make the system work correctly. For example, this theory looks at the family as an institution that meets the needs of society to socialise children and reproduce new members of society and values which are generally shared. Each person in the family has a role to play. Families become dysfunctional when people step out of their roles. Dysfunctional families, in turn, cause society to lose equilibrium. The concepts of balance, equilibrium and roles are important in this theoretical perspective (Elliot, 1986; Gelles, 1995).

The structural-functionalist approach examines the relationship between the family and the larger society as well as the internal relationships among family members. Functionalist theories emphasise the importance of the nuclear family to the 'stability and continuity of society' (Elliot, 1986:8) and view society as an integrated whole, where change in any one part of the system is seen as leading to change in other parts of the system. This approach has been criticized for being so conservative in its emphasis on order and stability and that it ignores social change.
According to conflict theories\(^4\), family conflict can take many different forms. These theories point out that the society isn’t basically cooperative but is instead divided into individuals that are in constant conflict. Rather than seeing change or conflict as bad or dysfunctional\(^5\), conflict theorists see conflict as natural and inevitable. On a macro level, conflict theorists see society not as cooperative and stable, but as a system of inequality in which groups compete for scarce goods and services. Marriage and family relationships are based on love, but the bases of these relationships are power and conflict as well. According to this approach, in conflicts, the more powerful side wins. Research workers that accept this theory believe that conflict is a natural way of human behaviour and as such it is welcome. Family members have different abilities, resources and power. Conflict theorists, thus, focus their attention on types of conflicts within families and their consequences, as well as how such conflicts are managed by family members. Conflict theorists have been criticized for overemphasizing conflict and coercion at the expense of studying order, stability, and consensus (Elliot, 1986).

Conflict theories provide a springboard for feminist theories. They focus on the ways in which socially constructed categories of sex and gender roles shape relations between men and women in such institutions as the family. Therefore, feminist theorists take as their starting-point ‘gender divisions, and as their frame of reference patriarchy, and see the family as the primary site of patriarchal power. Criticisms of feminism include the fact that they overemphasise gender conflict in families which are located in a world that is based on ‘gender division’ and ‘male domination’ (Elliot, 1986).

\(^4\) Influenced by the thinking of Karl Marx

\(^5\) Functionalist theories have been criticised for seeing conflict as dysfunctional and not being part of family relations.
Unlike structural-functionalism and conflict theories, symbolic interaction is a micro theory. Interaction is the mutual and reciprocal influencing of our behaviour and attitudes; our definitions of the situation are learnt through interaction with significant others; and family members play different roles. The meanings of language and artefacts determine our thinking and conceptualisation of social relationships. The idea is that humans interact with each other using agreed sets of symbols. Symbolic interaction theory is very useful in explaining several aspects of human development and social/interpersonal interaction. It is a social-psychological theory that attempts to conceptualise human conduct at a relatively complex level. The broad conceptual units of the theory are: the role-the unit of culture (anthropology), the position-the unit of society (sociology), self-the unit of personality (psychology). One of the most common criticisms is that because this approach emphasizes micro relationships, it ignores the impact of macro social structures (Gelles, 1995).

The social-exchange theory posits that all social behaviour can be understood as an exchange. People are basically self-interested and take action because of the benefits that will accumulate to them. Thus, some exchange theorists believe women accept dependency in a marriage in order to acquire economic security. Moreover, they say women make less than men do because they bring fewer skills to the job market having put family considerations first. This theory has no explanation for how these inequalities developed in the first place. They posit that people make decisions and choices based on perceived costs and rewards and try to maximize rewards and reduce costs. Social exchange theorists argue that most decisions are based on cost-reward considerations. Exchange theorists have been criticised for emphasizing the rational to the exclusion of spontaneous behaviour and that it does not
explain how rewards and costs come to be defined as such or how their values are determined (White & Klein, 2002).

The *developmental perspective* covers a very broad area and incorporates several approaches: structural-functionalism, symbolic interaction, and social psychology; it examines the stages the family goes through from marriage to widowhood; these stages are called the family life cycle; as family members progress through it, they fulfill role expectations and responsibilities called developmental tasks. Families, like individuals, travel over time through successive stages. Each stage has tasks critically important and somewhat unique to the stage. Accomplishment of the stage related tasks provide the means for appropriate and satisfying development for individual family members. Failure to achieve a task may reduce further individual and family development. As with all stage theories, family development is undoubtedly a more continuous process, but dividing the process into stages helps one to see the tasks more clearly. Developmental theories have been criticized because some critics feel that the stages are artificial; that because these theories are generally restricted to nuclear and stable families, they neglect families that take other forms; some critics question why life cycle theories ignore sibling relationships; and that developmental theories are not very useful in comparing family life cycles across historical periods (Gelles, 1995).

The *family systems theory* views the family as a system, a functioning unit that solves problems, makes decisions, and achieves collective goals. The systems approach is compatible with symbolic interaction theory and is especially useful for clinicians and social workers who rely on symbolic interaction to examine the patterns of interaction among family members. Again, these theories provide insight into how families work in our society, but often lack the tools for critical evaluation, especially in regard to why some families do
better than others. Some critics argue that the family systems theory is too
general to be a real theory (White & Klein, 2002).

Although, different conceptual frameworks have been developed and applied
to family studies since they focus on different aspects of the social world and
ask different questions, they are in some respects complementary (Elliot, 1986;
Gelles, 1995). However, family systems theory combined with the symbolic
interaction theory form the basis of this thesis providing an insight into how
family members interact with each other and with other families as
communities of engaged learners in social environments such as museums.
The combination of the two family theories captures the complex nature of
family learning in museums allowing the researcher to interpret families not
only from the micro-level approach but as well as from the macro-level
focusing more on the social and community process of learning.

1.4 Family and child socialisation

Every society is intensely concerned about the way its children grow up and
every generation has definite views about the way the next generation should
be brought up. This is the process sociologists and social psychologists call
'socialisation'. Socialisation is a process that begins at birth and continues into
adolescence. It is a process in which we learn how to become human and to
behave in ways that are acceptable to others. Competing perspectives on
socialisation have emphasised either the role of nature or that of nurture,
while the increasingly dominant position in socialisation research is the
'interactive' model which suggests that basic genetic predispositions must be
nurtured within the family so that the child's potential is realised (Elliot, 1996;
Gelles, 1995).
There are several institutions in which socialisation occurs, including that of schools, peers and the media. There are also free-choice informal learning institutions which families use to socialise their children into the practices of society such as museums, libraries and other cultural environments. This section will only concentrate on that which occurs within the family and museum context, as they are relevant to this thesis.

The socialisation of children has changed during the past century. According to Shepard (2001), child socialisation is defined as a close interaction with a small number of people - none of whom the child has selected - where the child learns to think and speak, internalise norms, beliefs, and values; form some basic attitudes; develop a capacity (or incapacity) for intimate and personal relationships; and acquire a self-image. In the past, a child may have learnt to be social through relationships at home, at school and at church. Today, a child learns socialisation through relationships in many different situations (i.e. museum context, TV, Internet).

For most children, families are responsible for the initial socialisation process. Families have a major and long-lasting effect on children's lives. One of the most important aspects of a child's upbringing is their relationship with their primary care givers - usually the child's parents. Parents spend time with their children for various reasons, including to nurture them, be role models, help with educational needs, and teach them life and socialisation skills. Ultimately, this time shapes the child's view of the world and lays the foundations for adult independence. The home and the family, therefore, is the first environment of learning for the child where the acquisition of knowledge, competencies, attitudes and values first begins (Berk, 2000; Koyfaki, 1997). The child learns many skills including language skills, social skills and emotional skills. Families are expected to care for and nurture
children, financially provide for them and transmit cultural and moral values to them (Bowes & Watson, 1999).

The child is actively involved in the socialisation process. Socialisation is a two-way interaction with each person influencing the other. Parents and children engage in reciprocal interaction, with children both responding to and eliciting behaviours (Witt, 1997). The family is not a closed system. Family practices reflect the values of the culture as a whole. Parents are likely to follow the role requirements for parents in their culture and also listen to advice from their own parents and friends (Arnett, 1995). Families influence children's development in direct and indirect ways. Parents, siblings and extended family members can have an individual influence on children, but that influence is more than an individual one because it occurs in the context of the family (Bowes & Watson, 1999). Parents guide their children and have some impact on the way they become socialized. Through this interactional process children develop self-concepts and thus, are actively involved in the on-going definition of the family and the relationships between family members. Hence, family conversations provide individuals with the power to negotiate their position in the family. However, outside forces are a stronger factor in the socialisation of a child (Harris, July 1999). With both parents working\(^6\), children now spend more time alone than ever before. A child who is home alone may fill his or her time on the computer or watching television\(^7\). Rather than learning socialisation with people, a child may sometimes learn by watching a monitor or a screen (Gramling & Forsyth, 1987; Gelles, 1995). All living things develop within a context which influences development. For human development, the child’s family culture,

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\(^6\)Stay-at-home mothers are becoming a rarity, as households feel the need to increase income.

\(^7\)Television and the Internet can be a huge element in a child's socialisation. What a child sees on television or what a child does on the Internet can be either helpful or detrimental, depending upon how well a child is monitored. If a parent needs a little free time at home, children may be inclined to watch videotape.
Chapter 1. Studying and understanding families

community, immediate surroundings and time in history make up the relevant contexts. The influences of the contexts such as environment, community and culture do not impact directly on children but are filtered through the child’s family (Sroufe et al, 1992). In all societies, families are expected to care for and nurture children, to provide for them financially and to transmit cultural\(^8\) and moral traditions and values (Bowes & Watson, 1999). The family therefore remains the most significant primary context for the child’s development. ‘Family members stimulate cognitive development, model various roles and behaviours, provide nurturing relationships, and filter other developmental influences’ (Sroufe et al, 1992:75). If the context is abnormal, inadequate and depriving, development is similarly affected (Sroufe et al, 1992). When family roles are unclear, distorted or reversed by parents being inappropriate role models, the child’s identity ‘is set adrift in a hostile sea of confusion’ (Forward, 1989:33).

1.5 The Greek family profile

Greece has been witness to a succession of changes that have occurred in the family landscape over recent years. Family and households\(^9\) structures have been modified. The number of households and families is increasing while their average size is becoming smaller as a result of growing rates for marital breakdown and fertility decline. Although, households with two adults and at least one child remain the dominant type (i.e. nuclear family) in Greece, the percentage of the population living in that kind of family has decreased from 42% to 38% over the last ten years (Bagavos, 2001:1). This is partly a result of

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\(^8\) For Greek families, museums are places of transmitting culture...it was one of the reasons Greek families want to take their children to museums. This issue will be discussed further in chapter 5.

\(^9\) The term ‘household’ refers to a group of people living under the same roof who share at least one meal a day and are not necessarily blood-related.
the increasing participation of women in the labour market\textsuperscript{10} and in education, as well as of changes in gender roles and relations\textsuperscript{11} in addition to high youth-unemployment levels. Furthermore, as Greece has clearly become a migration destination, the question of foreign families as well as the financial situation of all families has been debated in the context of present and future social cohesion (Filias et al, 1984). Thus, the economy and the wider patterns of work and employment affect the family structure as do the financial and educational status of the parents. Some other factors which affected family structures are lower marriage rates\textsuperscript{12} and birth rates\textsuperscript{13}; the increase in free unions, rise in divorce rates\textsuperscript{14}; the disappearance of relatives from home\textsuperscript{15} and the number of children born in outside of marriage and to

\textsuperscript{10} Women's involvement in professional life in Greece and internationally is certainly an interesting subject as it influences in very many ways both the economy and the society of a given society. In Greece the participation of women in production is a phenomenon that emerged relatively early. After 1922 the women refugees from Asia Minor played an important role. According to Avdi-Kalkani "the arrival of the female refugee population from Asia Minor was a turning point in the evolution of women's condition. The greater percentage of these women came from urban centres, Istanbul and Smyrna, where they participated more actively in the defence of their just demands (equal pay for equal work, etc.). These women, with their developed professional knowledge, were more easily incorporated in production and various professions" (Filias et al, 1984:98).

\textsuperscript{11} Gender relations and roles are constantly changing in Greece, moving towards more gender equality as a result of the increase in the level of educated females and the overall increase in the number of women participating in the labour market. The education gap between men and women has almost disappeared. Over time, the number of years people devote to their education has increased much more for women than for men.

\textsuperscript{12} Over the last five years, the total rate of first marriages has dropped by 15\% for both men and women and the average age of first marriage continues to grow (in Bagavos, 2001:2).

\textsuperscript{13} 'The decrease in birth-rate ascertained in recent years also means the decrease in the number of children per family.' (Filias et al, 1984:98).

\textsuperscript{14} The relatively high number of divorces as compared with previous decades, has led to a relatively high divorce rate between 17\% and 15\% during the past five years (Bagavos 2001:2).

\textsuperscript{15} However, in Greece a close relationship between the elderly and their children still exists, reflected in the contribution of the elderly to child care and also in their financial contribution and assistance to their children and grandchildren. The share of elderly population who live in their son's or daughter's home is very high compared to the European Union average or even to such Southern States as Italy and Portugal (European Commission 2001) (in Bagavos, 2001:3).
single parent families\textsuperscript{16}. Furthermore, Greek society is very much concerned with the problem of children's education because it is considered by far the most outstanding means of acquisition of 'social status' and 'economic affluence' (Filias et al, 1984:132). Therefore, they do not hesitate to provide their children with all means for education regardless of the cost in money, time, anxiety, etc. In return for this manifested interest, the children's care of their parents is expected in the future. In this socio-cultural framework parent-child bonds are very strong in the Greek family as parents cared for children in infancy and in return their children took care of them in old age\textsuperscript{17}.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter attempted to understand families and family life and how families are structured and function in modern Western societies as well as in Greek society. In studying families, researchers encounter special problems that are related to researchers' ability to examine families and to the methodological issues concerned. By using different theoretical and methodological perspectives, researchers are able to overcome those problems. Families can be studied on two levels: the micro-level that views families as social groups; and the macro-level that looks at family as a social institution. In this thesis family is defined both as a social group and social institution because it is dynamic and variable differing across societies, cultures and across families.

\textsuperscript{16} The total number of Greek children living with just one parent has increased from 4\% to 6\%, although the proportion of the population living in this type of family has remained stable and relatively very small (2\%) (Bagavos, 2001:1).

\textsuperscript{17} This interdependence of generations was fostered and covered by a value system by which respect for the aged was a moral necessity. From a very young age children were instructed to "honour their father and mother". Therefore, care for the aged became in Greek society a moral obligation of the younger generations (Filias et al, 1984).
A number of frameworks have been developed and applied to family studies providing the researcher with a way of thinking about and understanding families: ecological, structural-functional, conflict theory, feminist, symbolic interactional, developmental, social exchange theory and family system theory. Each framework has different starting-point, focusing on different aspects of the social world, and asking different questions according to how they approach family life and behaviour.

Key social institutions, such as family and school, are constantly engaged in the process of shaping and training individuals to adapt to the values and expectations of the given society. Socialisation is the term used for the process by which individuals learn and perform behaviour expected of them by society. In order to survive and work together, people have to agree on certain common values and conduct themselves accordingly. They learn most of this from other people. As people interact with each other, all involved are affected and in varying degrees change their attitudes and behaviour accordingly. Habits, ideas, attitudes, and values are developed through this socialisation process. Socialisation begins at birth and continues throughout life. Socialisation is deliberate when individuals are told what to do or how to act. Much socialisation is indirect and simply learned by being with other people. The family is a principal agent in socialising a child. From their family, most children learn speech, basic health and hygiene, eating habits, beliefs and a prescribed set of values. Through the process of socialisation, culture and religious values are transmitted from one generation to the next.

Although we do not often realize it, the meaning of family is not fixed. It varies over time, place and culture. In the past couple of decades western societies, including Greek society, have seen dramatic changes in how we define family and in how individuals experience family life. More and more couples are cohabiting before marriage and as an alternative to marriage;
many marriages end in divorce; unmarried adolescents and adults are raising children; and grandparenthood has become a distinct phase in the life course. Within the Greek family a parent-child dialogue has been established which explains why the pathway of influence follows two directions: from the adult to the young generation and vice versa. The strength of the bonds between parents and young children has not been negatively influenced by the changes in family structure affected by the technological and industrial development.
Chapter 2

Learning in museums and family museum experience

2.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter the perception of the family and family life in modern Western societies and especially in Greek society were reviewed. However, it is essential to focus our discussion on family learning in museums because museums are first and foremost social environments (Falk & Dierking, 1992:41) where visitors, especially family groups interact and share their learning experience. Furthermore, different approaches to human learning and development are discussed since learning theories have influenced museum spaces, educational programmes and exhibition design over years and are relevant to this thesis.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section goes through a number of different learning theories relating to museum education and critiques them in order to highlight the socio-cultural and constructivist perspective of the learning experience and explore the implications for
museum practice. The second section, thus, defines the learning experience from a social and constructivist perspective and explores the development of a model that sees museum learning as a process of participation in communities of learners. This model forms the learning theory of this thesis by viewing family learning and development as a community process of participation in museum activities that are based on a mutual process of collaboration between active participants. The main aim is to contrast the position of this thesis against previous learning theories and research that are more individualistic and to set the theoretical background for the analysis of the Greek case study that will follow.

The family museum experience is the focus of the last section of this chapter as it will explore family learning in museums by viewing the family as educator (Leichter, 1989) and discussing the questions of how families learn and behave in museums and why they visit museums. The discussion of these issues is based on a review of the literature relating to family learning from studies that have been conducted in Britain and America. The main aim is to set the context of family learning in museums of abroad in order to compare it with the findings of the Greek case study, in a subsequent chapter.

2.2. Museum learning

It has been argued (Falk & Dierking, 1992) that museums are educational institutions that enhance, reinforce and promote memorable, meaningful, and highly contextualized experiences. One of the most inspiring issues to emerge within the museum field in recent years has been the paradigm shift from the Modern to Post-Modern period. Museums today are being reviewed and reformulated. In fact, models, which are theory dependant, have been
developed to describe the way in which learning\(^1\) in museums has changed. Thus, it is essential to define what learning is. The following discussion will explore learning theories by identifying some major schools of thought on learning and development - behaviourism, developmentalism and cognitive science - by referring to the application of these frameworks in the museum setting. These theories will then be contrasted with the learning theory that sees learning and development as a social and constructivist process of participation in Communities of Learners. Thus, a definition of learning will be adopted that is more closed to the constructivist and socio-cultural learning theory used in this thesis.

2.2.1 Learning theories in museums

Behaviourists were among the first contemporary psychologists to address learning. Watson and Skinner began with the assumption that much of children's typical behaviour is acquired through conditioning and learning principles (Hooper-Greenhill & Moussouri, 2002:4). The stimulus-response model is based on the concepts that learning is characterized by changes in the learner's behaviour and teaching is a process of shaping that behaviour to meet predefined and intended learning goals. This model has been applied to some extent in museum exhibitions and exhibition design by leading museum professionals to study exhibit effectiveness in terms of its 'power' to attract and hold visitors' attention (Hooper-Greenhill & Moussouri, 2002:4).

\(^1\) According to Eileen Hooper-Greenhill the 'shift from 'education' to 'learning' signals a very significant philosophical change within museum culture. 'Museum education', as an expression, has less of a visitor focus than 'museum learning' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2004:2).
One of the most influential theories concerning children's learning has been Piaget's theory for cognitive development. He believed that the child understands the world only by acting upon it (Hooper-Greenhill & Moussouri, 2002:4). He named the cognitive structures through which the child understands the world 'schemata' and supported the active engagement of the child in creating knowledge. Piaget described two processes of learning, the 'assimilation' and the 'accommodation' and outlined several principles, which children use in order to build cognitive structures and adapt to the environment. One of these structures is 'Equilibrium', which is the innate tendency to organise one's experiences so as to assure adaptation (Hergerhahn, 1976), which eventually will lead to learning. Although the main body of Piaget's work concerned cognitive structures, he did not ignore the effect of social interaction on learning. He argued that 'equilibration and dialectics must both be invoked in order to explain both individual and social systems' (Fosnot, 1996:18). Piaget's theory has influenced the museum exhibition spaces and hands-on exhibits have been mainly based on the theory of developmental sequence.

Bruner's ideas on discovery learning have been very influential and widely used by museums, especially science museums (Hooper-Greenhill & Moussouri, 2002:4). Usually the emphasis on discovery learning is on exploration, by providing the appropriate environment for individual learners to be both 'challenged and stimulated and to partake in experiences that will move them towards the desired goals' (Hein, 1998a:38). Thus, discovery

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2 Assimilation is the process of interpreting the world according to our mental 'maps' - the 'schemata', and reinforcing the already known thing. It is the individual's self-assertive tendency to view the world through one's own constructs in order to preserve one's autonomy as a part within a whole system. But this process does not stop here as people search for new knowledge, 'new territory'. In this effort of dealing with new situations we attempt to reconstitute previous behaviours to conserve our functioning. But every behaviour results in an accommodation that is a result of the effects or pressures of the environment, which many times foster contradictions to our present understandings (in Fosnot, 1996:13).
learning is an active ('physical' and 'mental') process of exploration where learners undergo changes as they learn and interact with the material (Hein, 1998a:30) and concepts we wish to teach.

Another important learning theory in museums has been Howard Gardner's theory of 'Multiple Intelligences'. This theory suggests that there are eight relatively autonomous human intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. This theory identifies how people remember, understand and learn in different ways according to the development of these intelligences and reinforces the value of extra-classroom activities (Gardner, 2001; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). Therefore, learning styles and intelligences have all equal claims to priority (Gardner, 1996) and it is with the combination of those two that learning can be achieved. The significance of this theory in the museum field lies in the fact that it helped museum professionals to acknowledge that children can have different talents and therefore various stimuli should be provided in order to activate them. In conjunction with the above-mentioned individualistic theories, Soviet psychologist, Len Vygotsky has developed the social cognition theory based on socio-cultural framework. An extensive review of this theory and contemporary socio-cultural and constructivist theory will be the focus of the following section of this chapter.

2.2.2 Defining learning experience from a socio-cultural and constructivist perspective

In order to understand the socio-cultural perspective of learning experience and highlight the theoretical and practical stance of the participation model in a museum environment, it was essential to review in the previous section some
of the major learning theories over the years and their impact on museum practice. The discussion now turns to social and constructivist dimension of the learning experience which form the theoretical background of this thesis.

Museums are social environments where social groups, such as family groups and school groups, go in order to interact and share experiences and beliefs with each other. But the socio-cultural process of learning in museums involves not only face-to-face interaction, but also the content and the organization of the exhibition (i.e. museum staff, those whose ideas and artefacts are represented in the museum, those who prepare and fund the exhibits, and the visitors) (Falk & Dierking, 1995:97).

Vygotsky focused on social interaction and, like Piaget, believed learning to be developmental, but he differentiated between what he called 'spontaneous' and 'scientific' concepts (Fosnot, 1996:18). On one hand, he defined spontaneous concepts as 'pseudoconcepts', meaning those that are naturally developed by a child in the process of construction 'emerging from the child's own reflections on everyday experience (Fosnot, 1996:18). On the other hand, he proposed that scientific concepts 'originate in the structured activity of classroom instruction and impose on the child's more formal abstractions and more logically defined concepts than those constructed spontaneously' (Fosnot, 1996:18).

He argued that the above concepts are not in conflict, but rather are part of a unitary process (Falk & Dierking, 1995:46). In this process, Vygotsky believed that scientific concepts grow downward to organize and utilize the spontaneous concepts and these in turn grow upward, preparing the ground for more systematic reasoning (Falk & Dierking, 1995:46). As a result, Vygotsky used the term 'zone of proximal development' ('zop-ed' or ZPD), according to
which there is an intellectual space one can reach with the help of a more knowledgeable partner. ‘It is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers’ (Vygotsky, 1978:86). The knowledgeable partner is relatively more skilled than the novices, with a wider vision of the culturally organized activities. In short, what a child can do with help today (zone of proximal development) s/he will be able to do by herself/himself tomorrow (actual developmental level).

Vygotsky claimed that cognitive processes occur first on the social plane between people as an inter-psychological category and then these shared processes are internalized and transformed to form the individual plane within the child as an intra-psychological category (Bjorklund, 2000:61) Thus, the socio-cultural approach and specifically the ‘zo-ped’ is a ‘dynamic region of sensitivity to learning the skills of culture’ (Rogoff, 1990:14), in which children can learn to solve problems at a level between their current ability and their ability with the assistance and collaboration of adults or more skilled children. Other psychologists like Wood, Bruner and Ross, related the concept of zo-ped to the concept of ‘scaffolding’. They proposed that scaffolding ‘occurs when experts are sensitive to abilities of a novice and respond contingently to the novice’s responses in a learning situation, so that the novice gradually increases his or her understanding of a problem’ (Bjorklund, 2000:62). For Vygotsky the nature of learning is ‘dialogical’ (Fosnot, 1996:20), as he was interested not only in the role of internal speech on the learning of concepts, but also in the role of the adult and the learners’ peers as they conversed, questioned, explained and negotiated meaning’ (Fosnot, 1996:20).
The main idea is that 'we as human beings have no access to an objective reality, since we are constructing our version of it, while at the same time transforming it and ourselves' (Fosnot, 1996:23). However, there is a debate between those who place an emphasis on the individual cognitive development and those who place an emphasis on the socio-cultural effects on learning. Terms such as cognitive constructivism, and social constructivism have become common in the literature (Leslie & Gale, 1995).

Contemporary socio-cultural theories which are based on the ideas of Lev Vygotsky, acknowledge that rather than arguing whether the cognizing individual or the socio-cultural should be given priority in an analysis of learning, it is better to recognize the 'essential' and 'inseparable' roles of the individual and the socio-cultural context (Rogoff, 1990:25). Socio-cultural theory, thus, 'emphasizes that meaning emerges in the interplay between individuals acting in social contexts and the mediators - including tools, talk, activity structures, signs, and symbol systems - that are employed in those contexts. Individuals both shape and are shaped by these mediators' (Schauble, Leinhardt, & Martin, 1997:4). In this perspective Barbara Rogoff developed and explored the concept of apprenticeship or guided participation in socio-cultural activities. She attempts to keep the roles of the individual and the socio-cultural context in focus. Rogoff claims that 'instead of working as separate or interacting forces, individual efforts, social interaction and the cultural context are inherently bound together in the overall development of children into skilled participants in society' (Rogoff, 1990:18). Rogoff developed the concept of apprenticeship or guided participation to extend Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. She viewed the transaction between children and adults as reflecting an apprenticeship in thinking with novice children improving their skills and understanding through participation and with the challenge of more skilled partners. The model of apprenticeship for children's
cognitive development focuses our attention firstly on the active role of children in organizing development, secondly on the active support and use of the more skilled partners in culturally organized activities, and lastly on the context of cognitive events and activities (Rogoff, 1990:39).

This implies a dynamic relationship and a social interaction with the characteristics of 'reciprocity' and 'bi-directionality' between two or more children together (Garton, 1992:11). As Garton points out, social interaction assumes the 'active involvement of both participants in the interchange, bringing to it different experiences, interests and prior knowledge, both qualitative and quantitative' (Garton, 1992:11).

Moreover, the notion of apprenticeship has the value of including more people than a single more knowledgeable partner and a single novice; 'it involves a group of novices (peers) who serve as resources for one another in exploring the new domain and aiding and challenging one another. Among themselves, the novices are likely to differ usefully in expertise as well' (Rogoff, 1990:39). However, the knowledgeable partner too is still developing breadth and depth of skill and understanding in the process of challenging and helping the novices. In short, as Rogoff points out 'for children as well as for their social partners, engagement in shared thinking yields the opportunity for development of greater skill and understanding' (Rogoff, 1990:195). Furthermore, children’s participation in shared activities and shared thinking is the basis on which they build their understanding. Children, as they collaborate and argue with others, consider new alternatives and recast their ideas to communicate or to convince. In these activities, children advance and construct their ideas in order to make meaning out of these (Rogoff, 1990).
Lave and Wenger tried to rethink and reformulate our conception of learning and offered the related idea of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Like Rogoff, they placed an emphasis on the whole person and viewed agent, activity and world as mutually constitutive. Learning is viewed as a 'situated activity' (Lave & Wenger, 1991:29) focusing on the relationship between learning and the social situations in which it occurs. By this we mean that learning is a process of participation in communities of practice, participation that is at first legitimately peripheral but that increases gradually in engagement and complexity (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In other words, legitimate peripheral participation provides the relations between newcomers and old-timers, where newcomers become a part of a community of practice by actually engaging in the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991:29).

Rogoff developed further her provocative ideas of apprenticeship or guided participation by positing an emphasis on thinking development and learning as a process of 'transformation of participation in socio-cultural activities' (Olson & Torrance, 1996:389-414). This is based on a socio-cultural perspective which takes as a central premise the idea that learning and development occur as people participate in the socio-cultural activities of their community, transforming their understanding, roles and responsibilities as they participate (Olson & Torrance, 1996:390). In all the above approaches, guided participation, legitimate peripheral participation and transformation of participation, the emphasis is on participation in socio-cultural activities that

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3 The concept of 'participation' has emerged from several developmental approaches: White and Siegel (1984) see child development as 'widening participation in communities of thinkers', while Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to 'legitimate peripheral participation'. Rogoff (1991,1994) used the notions of 'guided participation' and transformation of participation in socio-cultural activities'. In all of the above approaches the notion of 'participation' is common and implies the active involvement of participants in shared activities.
are not formed by individuals alone, but by individuals with other people in cultural communities.

Furthermore, this thesis embraces the constructivist learning theory which is strongly influenced by Piaget and Vygotsky and is based both on modern theories of learning and theories of knowledge (epistemologies). The model of constructivism\(^4\) postulates that knowledge is an active, internal, individual and social construct and not an external fact or reality (Hein, 1995b:22) - ‘there is no knowledge independent of the meaning attributed to experience (constructed) by the learner, or community of learners’ (Hein, 1996:30). Learning is quite simply the creation of meaning by the individual in order to make sense of the collection of experiences, which they are continuously having – knowledge is meaning and so learning is the construction of meaning (Hein, 1995b; Husbands, 1994). Accordingly, constructivist learning requires two separate conditions: first a recognition that in order to learn, active participation of the visitor is necessary. Therefore the ‘crucial action of constructing meaning is mental: it happens in the mind. ‘Physical actions, often translated as ‘hands-on’ experiences, may be necessary for learning, especially for children, but it is not sufficient; we need to provide activities which engage the mind as well as the hands’ (Durbin, 1996:4; Russell, 2000). The second condition is that the conclusions reached by him/her are not validated by whether they conform to some external standard of truth, but whether they make sense within the constructed reality of the visitor (Hein, 1998a:34).

\(^4\) See Fosnot for a brief account of the psychological theory of constructivism as have been described and defined by the theorists Jean Piaget, Len Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, Howard Gardner and Nelson Goodman (in Fosnot 1996:10-30).
Moreover constructivist learning is ‘holistic’. To be more precise, it may affect learning procedures in thought processes, in attitudes and in behaviour. In fact, changes in behaviour are the easiest to observe and they provide limited information about the complex, long-term processes of developing understanding. Consequently, ‘it is the long-term changes in thinking and in attitudes that are of most interest’ (Jackson & Hann, 1994:13). On the whole, the memory of a museum visit can be rich with associations to emotions, physical and personal sensations that become salient during a given visit and may affect all aspects of cognitive, physical, ‘emotional’, social and cultural development.

Constructivist learning theory, as opposed to didactic and behaviourist theory, has transformed the definition of communication from a one-way linear path where meaning represents the significance intended by sender to a receiver, to a process of ‘sharing, participation, association’ and negotiation among parties in which information and meaning is created rather than transmitted. It seems likely that this view of communication addresses the methods by which what counts as ‘common sense’, ‘art’, or ‘science’ at any time, is constructed by active individual agents (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000:139). Thus, meanings are accepted as plural, diverse rather than singular, and unified because there is no such

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5 Falk & Dierking describe the visitors’ holistic view as a ‘museum gestalt’; According to Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, a ‘gestalt’ is ‘a structure or configuration of physical, biological, or psychological phenomena so integrated as to constitute a functional unit with properties not derivable from its parts in summation’, (in Falk & Dierking, 1992:81).
6 Drumond argues that ‘when we ask what might constitute evidence of learning, we must be certain not to exclude the effective and the emotional ...we must be certain to include children’s emotional learning....we must not forget the children’s right to respect for their emotional powers, as well as their intellectual ones’ (In Drumond, 1993:46).
7 In constructivist theory we utilize the ‘cultural model’ that sees communication as a ‘series of processes and symbols whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed. This view proposes that ‘reality’ has no finite identity, but is brought into existence, is produced, through communication.’ (In Hooper-Greenhill, 1999:70).
8 According to this approach of communication, the logical structure for any subject matter and the way it is presented to the viewer, depend on the educational needs of the visitor. Clearly, the visitor should be encouraged to make his/her own connections with the exhibits without being guided by any fixed entry and exit points (in Hein, 1999:77).
thing as intact 'reality' but it is brought into existence, and is constructed through communication.

Constructivist theory suggest that the role of the instructor (i.e. museum exhibition, programme, museum educator) is to provide flexible structures for learning, to orchestrate meaningful and memorable experiences and motivate the learner to actively engage with them. Therefore, constructivist theory focuses 'on what people learn, that is, on what meaning they make out of whatever it is that we do and exhibit' (Hein, 1998a:190). As one might expect, visitors will bring their own theories about why things happen. The task of the museum is thus to engage, to make contact with existing ideas in order to further the development of understanding and learning. As suggested by Hein, 'if we accept constructivist theory, we also have to accept the view that there is no necessary connection between teaching and learning'. The methods of constructivist teaching are centred around 'object-based' (Peterman, 1997; Durbin, Morris & Wilkinson, 1990), 'experiential, thought-provoking, and problem-solving type[s]' (Hein, 1998b:45) of learning.

Contemporary theorists, Falk and Dierking, describe learning as a 'continuous, active process of assimilating and accommodating information within social, physical, and psychological contexts' (Dierking, 1996b:25). Light also defines the 'central and constitutive role' that context plays when we look at children's learning' (Drumond, 1993:52). Learning involves more than mere 'assimilation' of information; it requires the active 'accommodation' of information in mental structures, which permit its use at a later time' (Falk & Dierking, 1992:113-114).

9 The emphasis is on the learner and his/her needs and not on the subject to be taught. As it has been already mentioned traditional teaching and learning theories are based on the teacher's perspective, where the theory of education stipulates that the teacher (i.e. museum) decides what is to be learned and the task of education is to organize the material and present it in such a way that is transmitted to the learner (i.e. visitor) (in Hein 1998a).
Chapter 2. Learning in museums and family museum experience

Learning should be viewed as a dynamic 'process and product, a verb and a noun occurring at the integration and interaction of three overlapping contexts: the personal, the socio-cultural, and the physical. This notion is fundamental to Falk and Dierking's 'Contextual Model of Learning' which is a refined framework of the previous one called 'The Interactive Experience Model, and is intended to help us understand the 'complex nature of museum learning' (Falk & Dierking, 2000:10).

According to this model, learning is a contextually driven dialogue between an individual's personal, socio-cultural, and physical contexts through time in order to make meaning. None of the three contexts is ever 'stable or constant; is ephemeral and always changing' (Falk & Dierking, 2000:136). Concerning the personal context, Falk and Dierking support that learning is a very personal experience arising from appropriate motivational and emotional cues and facilitated by the background and personal interest of the learner (Falk & Dierking, 2000:11). At this point, a dichotomy in learning is acknowledged as it has been realized that learning can have different effects according to whether motivation is intrinsic or extrinsic. More specifically, intrinsic motivation10 which seems to characterize museum's visitors, is highly affected by the environment, in which learning will take place11. A supporting environment which enables visitors to engage in meaningful activities, to have choice and control over their learning, and challenges them to construct their own meanings based on their previous and new experiences, in not only emotionally but also intellectually and physically rewarding (Falk & Dierking, 2000). All educationalists and pedagogists know that true learning cannot take

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10 Intrinsic motivation is characterized as the human action, in which, a person acts consciously without expecting external rewards. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi states, the 'performance itself is worth doing for its own sake' and contradicts this point with school learning, which is extrinsically motivated. (In Csikszentmihalyi & Hermanson, 1995:67).
11 Section 2.3.2 discusses further the concept of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.
place unless the learner feels comfortable and in control of the situation (Hooper-Greenhill, 1987:42).

Moreover, since learning is a cumulative transformation of mental structures, the meaning making is always based on the visitor’s background. In particular, visitors themselves select the nature and the quantity of information, and interpret them according to their prior knowledge, experience, beliefs and values. Therefore, museums should accept the notion that ‘learning outcomes may vary greatly for different learners within the same learning context’ (Moussouri, 2002:8).

In addition, a significant advantage that museums have over other institutions is that they give the chance for the visitor to experience the real thing. Psychological research has confirmed that setting, rather than the individual characteristics of people, dictate behaviour and that first time visitors behave and learn differently than frequent visitors (Falk & Dierking, 2000). The physical context is not only about the built environment, the ‘feel’ of the building but also about the objects contained within it. Specifically, visitors will be motivated to experience the museum space that makes them feel comfortable and affects them emotionally (Falk & Dierking, 2000:55,117). The design of the space is therefore an extremely important factor if museums want to attract the visitor’s interest. Another vital factor stated, is the subsequent experiences that visitors have after their museum visit and either they are being reinforced or not, they contribute to what the individual learns from the visit, and the museum experience becomes relevant and useful - a factor that has being taken into account by the researcher when she designed and delivered the programme to the families.
The study of learning according to Falk and Dierking should not only focus on the individual but also incorporate the investigation of the socio-cultural milieu. The socio-cultural context supports that the most basic mental aspects of learning, such as perception, information processing and meaning making are influenced by the culture we are part of, and that the interaction with this culture, influences our learning experiences. The constructivist museum recognizes the value of social interaction that ‘allows learners to go beyond their individual experience, to extend their own knowledge and even their ability to learn’ (Hein, 1998a:172). A concept related to the socio-cultural context is that knowledge is not the same for all individuals in society, but is shared within limited communities of knowers. As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1999) states, only certain meanings appear to ‘make sense’ but the ‘sense’ that is made will depend on which interpreting community is making it.

According to the above, learning in this thesis is defined as ‘the process of active engagement with experience. It is what people do when they want to make sense of the world. It may involve an increase in or deepening of skills, knowledge understanding, values, feelings, attitudes and the capacity to reflect. Effective learning leads to change, development and a desire to learn more’ (Hooper Greenhill et al, 2003:9). As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill states, learning involves a great many processes. The most basic are perception and memory […] learning is influenced by motivation and attitudes, by prior experiences, by culture and background, and especially in museums - by design and the physical setting. Learning includes acquisition of facts and knowledge, but also experiences and the emotions. It requires individual efforts, but is also a social experience’ (Hooper Greenhill, 1999:21). Moussouri has also argued that visitors not only have an ‘agenda’ for their visit, but also this pre-visit agenda directly influences their museum behaviour and learning (Moussouri & Falk, 1998:107,116). From this theory was developed the system
of Generic Learning Outcomes (GLO) (figure 2) that forms the conceptual methodological framework of this thesis for measuring the impact of the Communities of Learners programme on families museum experience. The GLOs, thus, represent a holistic approach to learning as a lifelong process of making meaning (Hooper Greenhill et al, 2003).

In order to understand the learning process as well as the learning outcomes of the family programme, the following section views and explores how the model of participation in Communities of Learners works on family learning.
2.2.3 Exploring the model of participation in Communities of Learners

This thesis sees learning and development as a community process of participation in socio-cultural activities that is based on a mutual process of collaboration between active participants in joint activity. In order to highlight this stance, this theory will be contrasted with two other theories that view learning as one-sided process in which only one "'side' of a relationship is active' (Rogoff, Matusov & White, 1996:391). The first one treats learning as a transmission of knowledge from an expert to a novice and the second views learning as an acquisition of knowledge by learners themselves.

Transmission theory is a traditional academic position towards teaching and learning, where knowledge is independent of the learner, having its own external existence, and learning is incremental, adding bit by bit to a passive mind. It is based on the transmission model that sees communication as a linear process of imparting information and sending messages from a knowledgeable information source (i.e. learned teacher, museum exhibition, museum staff) to a passive receiver (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999:68) (i.e. pupil, visitor) who is seen as 'the empty vessel to be filled' (Hein, 1998a:37) with knowledge. Teaching involves the division of knowledge into small discrete parts, arranged in order, usually from the simplest to the most complex where 'the focus is exclusively on the subject' (Hein, 1998b:33), and teachers present information to pupils in a 'rational and incremental sequence' (Hein, 1998b:33). It is obvious that this model excludes people and 'neglects the important role of social and physical context in learning' (Dierking, 1996:24). It ignores the learner and their needs by providing only a partial and narrow view of the learning experience. Learning is not only teaching facts and concepts, but it is also about interests, prior-knowledge, experience, beliefs, motivations,
enjoyment, feelings, and sharing experiences with others in an effective environment. (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Hooper-Greenhill & Moussouri, 2002:2)

The acquisition theory of knowledge treats learning as the province of learners who acquire knowledge through their active exploration providing the appropriate environment for individual learners to be both 'challenged and stimulated and to partake in experiences that will move them towards the desired goals' (Hein, 1998a:38). Thus, acquisition theory is a one-sided process of exploration, where learners undergo changes as they learn and interact with the material and concepts we wish to teach. The individual is responsible for gaining the skills and information. Generally, both theories put a boundary between learners and the socio-cultural world, with either the individual or the environment as the active agent responsible for moving new materials across the boundary (Rogoff, 1997:267).

However, Rogoff claims that this boundary between the learner and the environment disappears if learning and development are viewed as a transformation of participation in which participants from both sides contribute support and direction in shared endeavours (Rogoff, 1997:267).

According to a socio-cultural perspective, cultural development involves individuals becoming members of communities of practice. It focuses on how, through incorporation of new community members, individuals, inter-personal relations, and community activities are changed (Falk & Dierking, 1995:103). Rogoff suggested that this process involves three aspects. The first one is the transformation of individual participation in joint activity called the 'personal plane of development' (Falk & Dierking, 1995:103). In this plane, individuals change through their active involvement in many activities. The individual participates in and contributes to ongoing activities; there is no boundary
between individual and environment. The second one is the transformation of inter-personal relations called ‘inter-personal plane of development’ (Falk & Dierking, 1995:103) that focuses on how people communicate and collaborate in both face-to-face interaction and more distal arrangements of people’s activities that do not require co- presence (Rogoff, 1997:269). The last one is transformation of community practices themselves called community plane of development’ (Falk & Dierking, 1995:103). In this plane people participate with others in culturally organized activities.

None of the above planes can be isolated. From a socio-cultural approach, developmental processes involve not only individuals, but also group and community processes. Thus, none of these processes are static. On the contrary, they are in a dynamic interplay where individual change is constituted by and constitutes interpersonal and community processes in socio-cultural activities (Rogoff, 1997:269).

The transformation of participation of people engaged in shared endeavours entails changes in ways that contribute both to the ongoing activities and to the person’s preparation for involvement in other similar and subsequent activities. The socio-cultural perspective abandons the idea that the social world is external to the individual and that development is only a process of acquiring knowledge and skills independent of activity. Instead, the focus is on ‘people’s active changes in understanding, facility, and motivation involved in an unfolding event or activity in which they participate’ (Rogoff, 1997:271). Furthermore, change is a continuous process by which prior and upcoming events or activities are involved in the ongoing present event or activity. Any present event is based on previous events as an extension and is directed toward goals that have not yet been accomplished.
Two of the most important components of the model of participation are communication and collaboration in shared endeavours, where participants adjust themselves in varying roles by stretching their common understanding to fit in new perspectives in shared activities. As Rogoff points out, 'such stretching to accomplish something together is development, and occurs in the process of participation' (Rogoff, 1997:272). Thus, the emphasis here is on learning and development as ongoing processes rather than just products.

The concept of community of learners involves the active engagement of all participants; no one has all the responsibility and no one is passive. Generally, more skilled community members support newcomers' learning and development through attention to what they are ready for and interested in as they engage in shared activities in which all contribute. In community of learners, all participants are active in structuring the inquiry, though usually with asymmetry of roles (Rogoff, Matusov & White, 1996:396). The relations among participants are dynamic serving as resources to each other, with varying roles and shifting responsibilities according to their understanding of the activity. The significant element in community of learners is the dialogue, in the sense that people build on each other's ideas on a common topic. 'Individuals assist each other in learning to be responsible, making choices and solving problems in ways that fit their individual needs while coordinating with the needs of others and with group functioning' (Rogoff, Matusov & White, 1996:405).

2.2.4. Summarizing museum learning

It has been essential to review in this chapter some of the major learning theories that influenced the museum field. Behaviourism theorists believed that learnt behaviour is defined as a 'relatively permanent change in behaviour that
results from practice or experience’ (Vasta et al, 1992:35). It sees human behaviour and learning as a mere result of a response to a stimulus. Bandura’s ideas enriched this model by taking into consideration the social learning that results from imitating a model. Piaget, on the contrary, believed that the learner is actively involved in creating knowledge rather than passively receiving it from the environment.

The review of the above theories and how they influenced the museum field captures the complex nature of learning highlighting the learning theory that this thesis is trying to address. As people like to learn in different ways, constructivist and socio-cultural theories have drawn attention to how individuals construct meaning from their interaction with the environment. Whatever the visitor does attend to is filtered through the personal context, mediated by the social context, and embedded within the physical context in order to create meaning over time. Thus, learning is defined in this thesis as a lifelong process where both the individual and the social are inseparable contributors of meaning-making. The focus is on learners and their learning experiences that are associated not only with facts and knowledge but also with the development of skills, emotions, creativity, enjoyment and inspiration providing the motivation to change attitudes and values. As a result, this thesis sees learning and development as a community process of families’ participation in socio-cultural activities which is based on a mutual process of collaboration between active participants in joint activity.

Since family learning is a social activity it is essential to define in the following section of this chapter the family museum experience through a review of the literature.
2.3 Family museum experience

Family learning in museums is free-choice and informal because it has no predefined objectives nor curriculum determined outcomes (Durbin, 1996). Thus, a family museum experience is seen more as a ‘social outing’ rather than as an educational experience by the visitors themselves (Borun, 1977). The importance of family visits, however, is far more long-term because families are the greatest opinion formers and the greatest purveyors of social and cultural values in our society. Museums as educational and learning centres, today acknowledge this by trying to respond to the needs of the family visitors. The following section will discuss the ways museums have used studies from other disciplines to understand families’ needs. Much of the research carried out in museums has been evaluation studies which have been criticised for their quantitative and positivistic approach. However, this criticism has opened the way for more theory-driven and qualitative approach to evaluation. The following discussion of family studies in museums will build a framework of using these studies to explain and compare family learning and behaviour in Greece with that in abroad.

2.3.1 Family learning and behaviour in museums

Museum visiting is obviously a social learning experience since family learning can take place informally through discussion with other family members, friends and museum staff. Haggart (2000) in her NIACE report, family legacies, makes the point that family learning is ‘what people outside the family do to enable and facilitate the learning that goes on in families’. The OFSTED report describes family learning as ‘learning which brings together different family members to work on a common theme for some, if not for the whole of a

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12 As it was mentioned in chapter 1, parents have a catalytic role in shaping children’s socialisation and behaviour.
planned programme' (OFSTED, 2000:5) However, in the manifesto for family learning, the Campaign for Learning (2000) suggests that definitions of family learning should go beyond this description since family learning is mostly intergenerational. It may be formal or informal undertaken outside formal institutions such as museums or in conjunction with them and with or without professional support.

During the past 25 years numerous observational studies report that families in museums behave in ways that indicate that they are learning (Cone et al, 1978; Butler et al, 1989; Diamond, 1986; McManus, 1987, 1988, 1994; Bitgood, 1993; Dierking, 1989; Falk & Dierking, 1991; LaVilla-Havelin, 1989). It became evident that family visitors spend a lot of their time interacting with each other or other visitors (Hilke & Balling, 1985; Stevenson, 1991). In particular, family conversation in museums have been characterized by a mix of specific talk about how to manipulate exhibits, describe concrete visible aspects of an exhibit or to connect the museum experience to prior family experiences and memories (Falk & Dierking, 2000).

Although, individual museum exhibits are often not designed with a family audience in mind\(^\text{13}\), families are more likely to collaborate and talk when exhibits have among other features multiple access points, a multi-user capability, multiple possible outcomes, and content that is directly relevant to visitors' prior knowledge and experiences (Borun & Dristas, 1997). The above point is also confirmed by Blud's (1990) and Dierking's (1987) studies on parent-child interaction and learning among family groups where findings show that interactive exhibits benefit from a social environment by stimulating constructive discussion between adults and children. Findings also show that interactive exhibits that allow for touching and manipulating stimulate higher

\(^{13}\) Many Greek museums do not take into account family needs as well.
levels of ‘attentional behaviour’ (focusing attention) such as questioning and explaining, behaviour that is associated with learning (Borun et al, 1995:264).

Paulette McManus (1994) observed conversations and learning behaviour among family groups, child peer groups and teacher/pupil group. She noted that the more socially cohesive the group is, the more learning happens. She found that family groups have longer conversations and visit an exhibit longer than child peer groups and teacher/pupil groups. She also observed that families are the ‘hunter-gatherers’ (McManus, 1994:91) of museums as they actively seek to find topics of interest. Thus, social interaction is at the core of the family museum experience. July Diamond’s study (1986) demonstrates that learning does not happen simply because visitors read a label, but that learning happens because of conversation. She watched visitors going around the exhibits observing that teaching is a reciprocal activity from which all parties benefit. On one hand parents scan labels to find information that will relate to the children’s interest and prior experience by reading labels and exhibit graphics and children on the other hand give adults information and description about how to operate and manipulate an exhibit to encourage adult involvement.

Hilke and Balling (1985) compared traditional section (static exhibits) and interactive sections (hands on exhibits) by studying how families apply their personal learning strategies to the exploration of museums. They indicated the fact that ‘learning about exhibits is the principal focus of the museum visit’ by creating family interpretation. Thus, the family emerged as a responsive and adaptable learning unit.
Furthermore, Minda Borun's study (1996) on family learning in Science Museums indicated five behaviours within conversations that correlated with learning among family groups. The significant behaviours are:

- ask a question
- answer a question
- comment on the exhibit, including explaining how to use the exhibit (for interactives)
- read a label aloud
- read a label silently' (Borun, 1996:134)

Thus, the most important finding was that families do learn from exhibits and that the level of learning is related to the above observed behaviours (Borun, 1996). Another important result was the interactions among family members not just at the moment of acquisition but in subsequent and potential learning experiences. Thus 'a family group that visits a museum can enrich its culture, sharing knowledge for later sharing among family members' (Borun, 1996:13).

Deborah Perry suggests that parents have a natural will to teach in museums. If a parent knows the exhibit content, s/he can facilitate the learning process. However, parents learn more if they 'acknowledge their own uncertainty, embrace error as a step toward learning and demonstrate openness and patience' (Kress et al, 1992:58). Deborah Perry (1992) proposes that the following variables contribute to learning: having conversations; being curious; feeling successful immediately; learning something new; having the perception of choice; playfulness (feeling active, relaxed, comfortable). Falk and Dierking in their research (1994) investigated the nature of family learning and behaviour in informal science settings and they concluded with several generalizations. Among the many observations summarized in this review is
the finding that mothers are less likely to choose an exhibit for the family and more likely to follow other family members to the exhibit and that children are more likely to interact with hands-on exhibits than adults. The researchers conclude that family learning is influenced by prior knowledge and experience, type of exhibit, sex and age of parents and children, and when during the visit families encounter a specific exhibit.

Moussouri went beyond the above studies by approaching the family museum visit from the point of view of family members (1997). She found that there are different types of agendas among family members and that family museum agenda is influenced by the interaction of five factors (the family profile, socio-cultural patterns, the personal and the social context of the visit and the museum exhibition). According to Moussouri the interaction of the above factors creates the agenda for the visit and also influences the way the visit is perceived and reconstructed by all family members. Thus, families engage and interact in practices of everyday activities bringing their family agenda into the museum context which is again negotiated and refined during and after the visit itself.

2.3.2 Why do families visit museums?

For many people, visiting a museum is a free-choice activity which is intrinsically motivated not so much for the purpose of learning facts and concepts but for personal self satisfaction and relaxation. Csikzentmihalyi describes this special kind of self-fulfilling, intrinsically motivated learning

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14 According to psychologists there are two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Learning is extrinsically motivated when the anticipated benefits are external to the activity. On the contrary, learning is intrinsically motivated when is done for its own sake, even in the absence of some external reward. (In Csikszentmihalyi & Hermanson, 1999:147-148).
known as "flow experience...a state of mind that is spontaneous, almost automatic, like the flow of a strong current (Csikszentmihalyi & Hermanson, 1999:150). When a person is in flow or fully enjoying an intrinsically motivated activity he or she 'fully expresses the self' and feel connected with other entities' (in Hooper-Greenhill, 1990:152). Researchers have found that humans are highly motivated to learn when 'they are in supporting environments; they are engaged in meaningful activities; they are free from anxiety, fear and other negative mental states; they have choices and control over their learning and the challenges of the task meet their skills' (Falk & Dierking, 2002:15).

Furthermore, positive word-of-mouth is one of the most important factor in motivating visitors to visit museums because visitors have the power to communicate their on-site experiences and the resulting impressions to others (Adams, 1988). He defines visitors that communicate their museum experiences to others as 'Museum word-of-mouth broadcasters' and he fits them in five different categories: 1) those who visit the museum and after several weeks convey their impressions to others, 2) those who tell others about a visit that occurred in the more distant past\(^{15}\), 3) those who are not-visiting word-of-mouth agents but they have personal interests (for example car collectors talk about car museums), 4) those who repeat what they have heard conversationally independent of whether they have visited or not a museum and have a special interest and 5) those who tell others what they have learnt from secondary sources such as the media.

Many researchers state that 'pre-visit agendas directly influences visits' (Falk & Dierking, 1992; Macdonald, 1993; Moussouri, 1997). According to Moussouri (1997) 'the motivations people have for visiting museums form one of the two

\(^{15}\) This may lead to false impressions because a visit that occurred in a distant past cannot convey the changes that may have occurred at the museum during that time.
dimensions that the visitors have in their pre-visit agendas. Moussouri's research was conducted in three museums and she identified six categories of motivation that 'reflect the functions a museum is perceived to serve in the social/cultural life of visitors' (Falk, Moussouri & Coulson, 1998:108). These motivations were education, entertainment, family event, life-cycle, place, and practical issues (Falk, Moussouri & Coulson, 1998:108). The most important thing is that most of the visitors expressed not one but several of the above motivations for visiting a museum, a fact that indicates the multifarious family pre-visit agendas. Specifically, a large number of family visitors mentioned that they go to museums in order to learn, either learning something in particular according to a special interest or just learning in general. Entertainment was another motivation that is very important to family visitors mentioning that they go to museums in 'their free time in order to have fun and enjoy themselves and/or see new and interesting things in a relaxing and aesthetically pleasing setting' (Falk, Moussouri & Coulson, 1998:108). A family visit is a social event, a chance for individuals to enjoy themselves together or separately. Parents perceive a museum visit as part of their life-cycle that takes place at certain phases, usually related to childhood. Furthermore, families visit museums either because they are on holidays or day trips or they have out-of-town guests. Finally, families consider the practical aspect of their visit based on the external factors of weather, time availability, distance, crowd conditions, method of transportation, entrance fee and physical needs of the family. All the above factors had to be considered and negotiated with the whole family before the visit.

16 The other dimension is the strategies that people use when visiting a museum. (In Falk, Moussouri and Coulson, 1998:107).
17 The museums were The Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester, the Eureka! The Museum for Children and the Archaeological Resource Centre.
Another researcher, Hood, has looked at the reasons families visit museums, conducting three psychographics studies that demonstrate how lifestyle values are critical in family decisions about how and where to spend leisure time. The analysis of data shows that different types of family groups have different purposes as well as leisure criteria. Usually they try out leisure places where they expect they feel welcome, comfortable and rewarded and they return to those where their expectations are met and they are satisfied with the total experience (Hood, 1989:168). The leisure criteria for families were predetermined, such as having the opportunity to be with people, to do something worthwhile, to feel comfortable and at ease with one's surroundings, to have challenge of new experiences, to learn, and to participate actively in leisure events (Hood, 1989:153). Thus, family visitors want more opportunities for social interaction, active participation and entertainment, than for learning or doing something worthwhile in their leisure time.

Similar findings were being reported by McManus (1992). She found that social relaxation was one of the reasons visitors at the Science Museum in London gave for visiting. Other reasons were a general interest in science, having an enjoyable family outing and entertainment. Families' expectations were learning-related because visitors stated that they hoped to gain information related to science, to see specific exhibits or exhibitions and to satisfy a general interest in the subjects covered by the exhibitions.

The Harris Qualitative report investigated the needs and attitudes of children and their carers/parents in order to understand how to increase informal visits by children to museums and galleries. The sample was children and parents split between those who were attenders and non-attenders18. Findings indicate

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18 Attenders' were defined as children who have visited a museum in the last year and parents who have taken their children to a museum or a gallery in the last 12 months, excluding school
that sometimes a child requests a visit because s/he is doing a project in school or has heard about it from a friend\(^\text{19}\). In addition, when children have visited a museum with their class they often talk about their experience at home and ask parents or carers to go back with them to the museum, where they can show them what they have seen and done (Harris Qualitative, 1997). Attending parents tended to see visiting museums and galleries as part of their children's education and therefore worth encouraging. Another factor that attracts families to museums is the fact that they offer a unique combination to learn and to have fun at the same time and parents/carers\(^\text{20}\) make the visit sound fun and interesting.

Linton and Young identified in their research\(^\text{21}\) (1992) six factors related to a visitor's motivation. These factors were advance information; special events; the role of the children; location of museum; leisure values; and positive/negative experiences from prior museum visits. Word-of-mouth information was found again to be an important factor in attracting and motivating new visitors and repeat visitors. With regards to leisure values, it seems that they varied significantly among the four museums. Visitors to Royal Ontario Museum described the visit as a place for 'intellectual stimulation', 'reflection', 'personal growth' and 'recreation'. Ontario Science Centre visitors perceived it as a place of entertainment, a family event, hands-on, a place that stimulated their mind requiring more 'energy' than a visit to the other three

\(\text{visits. 'Non attenders' were defined as children who have not visited a museum or gallery in the last year and parents/carers who have not taken their children to a museum or gallery in the last year (i.e. 1996)\)}\)

\(\text{19 Word-of-mouth and advertising stimulate their interest in visiting a particular museum or gallery.}\)

\(\text{20 Parental attitude is very important factor. If the parents do not believe that the museum/gallery visit will provide an enjoyable and memorable day out for their children and to a certain extent for themselves, they are less likely to suggest a visit. (In Harris Qualitative 1997:61).}\)

\(\text{21 It was a three-year study conducted at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Ontario Science Centre and the Toronto Metropolitan Zoo and included visitors and non-visitors.}\)
museums of the survey. Visitors to the Art Gallery of Ontario viewed it as a place to visit specific exhibits and used it to 'calm down' and become introspective. Finally, visitors to the Zoo spoke more about the 'outdoor physical surroundings', hot weather and social-family opportunities'. In addition, all four museums were associated with positive and negative emotional feelings because visitors indicated that 'support devices' and 'environmental comforts' such as 'wayfinders safety, ease of visiting with young children, quiet areas, temperature, humidity, crowd level, and noise level' (p.253), are factors that contribute to satisfaction.

People's reasons for visiting a museum vary according to their frequency of visiting (Merriman, 1991). Nick Merriman identified four types of visitor: the frequent visitor that makes three or more visits per year; the regular visitor that makes one or two visits per year; the occasional visitor that visited museums between one to four years ago and finally the rare one that visited museums 5 or more years ago. Non visitors were also included in his sample. He found that frequent visitors went to a museum due to a specific interest, while regular and occasional visitors visited due to general interest. All types of visitors mentioned as a motivation to visit a museum, their desire to take others to see it (12%) and sightseeing (12%). Self-education was another motivation among all types of visitors but one which was quite low (1%). Merriman concluded that 'most people who visit museums do so for specific reasons of interest in the individual museums they go to'. (Merriman, 1991:56)

2.4 Conclusion

Learning theories over the years have influenced museum spaces and exhibition design by using the exhibit either as a stimulus, discovery or for meaning making. Moreover, the shift from the object and collection-based
museum to the audience-oriented museum gives an emphasis on the visitor's distinctive needs and expectations. As a result, there is much complexity and diversity surrounding learning, which is underpinned by several learning theories over time. Over the years, the meaning of learning has been gradually transformed from the traditional, expository and didactic process of learning to a new theory, where learning is seen as an active process of meaning-making with no objective but subjective reality. The essence of lifelong learning and a deeper understanding of the learning processes are the most significant reflections of these changes. The notion of lifelong learning encompasses many changes in education nowadays and its concept lies in the belief that learning takes place at all stages of life, for a variety of internally and externally motivated needs, in many different situations by using a wide range of learning 'events'. Thus, learning does not end when formal education is completed but is a never-ending process.

The literature review presented in this chapter gives to the writer the opportunity to raise issues concerning the importance of learning theories that influence human learning and development and to highlight the stance that museums are 'living organisms' that follow the pace from Modern to Post-Modern society. Thus, in a rapidly changing society, museums need to adjust and continue to change considering the learning needs of their visitors and seeking new ways to help people to pursue learning. It was important for this study to go beyond these theories by proposing an alternative way of learning in museums which was based more on a community rather than an individual approach. Thus, socio-cultural and constructivist theory were the most influential ones on this research, stressing the emphasis on social interactions in family groups and particularly between adults and children by constituting a community of engaged and active learners. The literature review, therefore, relates what has already been researched on museum learning with what this
thesis set out to do. Consequently, it plays an essential part in understanding the value of the Communities of Learners model on Greek families learning and motivation to visit museums in their leisure time and will be referred to throughout the analysis.

Since this thesis is related to families it was essential to review the studies on family museum experience by discussing the reasons that families visit museums and the process of family learning and behaviour in museum settings. Thus, this thesis builds a framework based on these studies and goes beyond them in order to explain and compare, in a subsequent chapter, the findings of family learning and behaviour in Greece with those abroad.
Chapter 3

The GAIA Centre and the Centre for Children's Creativity as free-choice learning environments

3.1 Introduction

This thesis attempts to explore the process as well as the impact on families when visiting museums as communities of learners in their leisure time. Approaching families was a difficult task for the progress of this research. This difficulty was overcome when the researcher contacted the Centre for Children's Creativity in the local community of Vrilissia, Athens, and worked together with the local authorities and families. The Centre for Children's Creativity was the catalyst in encouraging families to participate in the CoL project. Both GAIA Centre of Goulandris Natural History Museum and the Centre for Children's Creativity formed the ideal settings for enhancing free-choice learning. This chapter briefly discusses the Greek museum's 'status quo' and the importance of the two Centres as free-choice learning environments by enhancing their role to the local community of Vrilissia. The last section
presents the development and structure of the proposed CoL project by putting into practice the participation model that was presented in the previous chapter, so that the reader will have an overall picture of this intervention.

3.2 The role of the Centres for Children's Creativity

The creation of the Centres for Children's Creativity begun in response to the need of providing and sustaining free time to parents, particularly to mothers who are facing difficulties in their child's day-care since their entering the labour market. However, the role of these Centres in managing free time is much more complex as 'they have to correspond to the wider social and cultural needs of every local community' (Bafea, 2000:14).

The Centres for Children's Creativity are in the service of parents as they reconcile the parental role with the right to employment. It is well known that the pressures regarding personal time and parental obligations are extremely high for women, especially those who work, and the concept of burden sharing clearly remains a losing proposition for them (General Secretariat for Equality, 2000). The lack of childcare services tends to aggravate the unequal allocation

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1 In 1994, in the framework of a European Programme (NOW), KETHI (Research Centre for Gender Equality) in cooperation with the Institute of Labour of the Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE) and the Greek Union of Municipal Enterprises (EETA) set up a pilot programme for the creation of the Centres for Children's Creativity. This pilot programme focused on the study of the indispensable premises, staff, functional cost and pedagogical material and resulted in the creation of 10 pilot Centres (1 in Athens and 9 in other urban centres of Greece). In the period 1996-June 1998, the same partners proceeded to the creation of 8 new Centres and supported the function of the 3 still existing pilot Centres. This programme was considered a success and since 1998 the creation and support of these Centres has been incorporated in the three National Action Plans for Employment (1998, 1999, 2000). In the end of 1998 proceeded to a tender for the creation of such Centres by municipal enterprises set up by local authorities. (In Bafea, 2000).

2 In fact, as grandmothers have become less available to provide unpaid child care (more of them have a paid job of their own and most of the time they live quite far away in any case) childcare remains a core problem for working mothers (Moussourrou, 1999).
between men and women of the time devoted to family obligations. The Centre for Children's Creativity brings the family members together providing them the chance to have meaningful and creative experiences. The Centres recognise that parents and carers can play a crucial role in encouraging and supporting their children's learning, and strives to engage them in the learning process. Parents can be empowered to play and explore alongside their children or helped to consolidate and extend the learning experiences back at home. This involvement can also bring educational benefits to the parents themselves and encourage them to pursue their own learning.

The Centres for Children's Creativity are also in the service of children as they respect the right of children to have free time and be engaged in out-of-school activities. In contemporary Greek society urban children, on one hand, spend most of their free time in front of TV or computer screens because big cities are not very friendly environments where the children can play and feel free to express their creativity and imagination. Furthermore, socialization with peers is very rare since parental involvement is necessary in order to accompany children from one place to another due to traffic conditions or other problems.

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3 A fact that was also revealed by the number of parents participating as facilitators in the CoL's project (7 women as opposed to 3 men).
4 In UK there are similar Centres called 'Centres for Curiosity & Imagination'. 'They are community-based discovery centres which bring children, families and others together to learn about the world through playful, hands-on experiences. They are permanent facilities with hands-on environments, exhibitions and activities which follow the Curiosity & Imagination approach to children's learning'. (In Curiosity & Imagination; Hands-on, minds-on, http://www.curiosityandimagination.org.uk).
5 An approach that was followed by the researcher who encouraged parents to participate actively in the Community of Learners' project. For more detailed information see chapters 7 and 8.
6 Those Centres were originally planned to cover children 5-12 years old but proved in practice to attract mainly children 5-8 years old or even younger. They aim to use the free time and the development of the children's sociability through artistic and cultural activities.
7 Play is a hugely powerful tool for learning for children of all ages and encompasses a wide range of activities. Play is what children do when they are given the freedom to follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons. Through play, children explore the world around them and make meaning out of it for their own lives (Bafea, 2000).
Children in rural areas, on the other hand, are still in a position to be in open spaces where they are encouraged to play with friends and satisfy their curiosity and imagination. However, children in rural areas are living in a cultural isolation due to the fact that local authorities do not provide enough opportunities to engage children in cultural activities (i.e. museum visits and programmes, theatres etc.). Thus, the creation of those Centres offered multiple stimuli to children both in rural and urban areas by providing them with the chance to participate in various cultural activities and to be active learners in a free-choice learning environment where they can meet and share their experiences with other children and adults (Bafea, 2000).

Furthermore, a child’s participation in out-of-school activities in the Centres is voluntary and this makes the Centres to be a setting where free choice learning is taking place. One of the first priorities of the Centres is lying on the needs and interests of each child to express and explore the world. The child decides which object or activity to engage with, how he or she will approach it and how much time s/he will devote upon it. The aim of the Centres for Children’s Creativity is neither to transmit knowledge nor to impose an aesthetic perspective but to offer various stimuli that will arouse children’s curiosity, imagination and creativity in order to be active and creative learners in shaping the future.

According to Falk and Dierking free-choice learning or informal learning is a term that recognizes the unique characteristics of such learning: free-choice, non-sequential, self-directed and voluntary. It also recognises the socially constructed nature of learning, the dialogue that goes on between the individual and his or her socio-cultural and physical environment (Falk & Dierking, 2000, 2003). It results from personal exploration and discourse and may occur spontaneously in everyday life situations, within the family circle, the neighbourhood and so on. The learner is motivated intrinsically (Csikszentmihayli & Hermanson, 1995) and determines the path taken to acquire the desired knowledge, skill, or abilities. Free choice learning can occur in the cognitive domain as well as in the affective and psychomotor domains.

Similar is the aim of the Centres for Curiosity and Imagination in UK: to help children and young people of all ages to develop a strong sense of identity, deepen connections with their
Chapter 3. Free-choice learning environments

The Centres are social environments, where children can meet friends and communicate with them by sharing their common creative experiences without the fear of making mistakes or saying something 'wrong'. In these Centres, children experience the learning and entertaining process without predetermined outcomes since the process is based on the dynamics of each learning group and the originality of the intra-relationships of the members.

Furthermore, the development of children's creativity and sociability with respect to the personal needs and the right of having equal opportunities are the basic philosophical principles of the Centres for Children's Creativity. Understanding the philosophical principles of these Centres is of particular interest in this thesis since they have influenced the development of the Community of Learners' project.

Out-of-school occupation and creativity: The term 'creativity' refers to 'the ability of each person to understand the world and act upon utilizing his or her uniqueness' (Bafea, 2000:23). Creativity in out-of-school activities, thus, focuses on the process of forming original ideas through exploration and discovery. In children, creativity develops from their experience with the process, rather than the concern for the finished product. Creativity is not about doing something better than others, it is about thinking, exploring, discovering, and imagining the world around them.

Out-of-school occupation and sociability: As it was mentioned in the first chapter, families are shrinking and the structure of the contemporary city condemns families in isolation where children do not have the opportunities to

develop their social skills, such as making new friends or solving conflicts through collaboration and dialogue. The school framework impedes the development of such skills since it favours continuous assessments on learning facts and concepts as well as on behaviour, with result of encouraging the competition among children. On the contrary, in the Centres for Children's Creativity, the absence of school assessment record forms the basic criterion that contributes to the development of social skills in children's behaviour. Furthermore, participation in group activities raises the child's self-confidence and self-management in various cultural activities promoting at the same time collaboration and team working. The out-of-school occupation enhances the use of different learning styles from children without having the fear of failure on various tasks and activities they are engaged with. In these Centres, children are participating in mixed-age groups with very effective outcomes. On one hand, older children help the younger ones feel satisfied for this behaviour and on the other hand, younger children enhance their knowledge repertoire and simultaneously feel safe and proud from this kind of relationship\(^\text{10}\) (Bafea, 2000).

**Out-of-school occupation and equal opportunities:** The Centres for Children's Creativity believe that each person is an independent human being that has the \textit{a priori} respect of the others and the right to be different and have equal opportunities in the socio-cultural context (Bafea, 2000). Artistic and cultural activities are the main focus of the Centres providing children with the opportunity to be creative, active learners and equal partners in activities that promote the demystification of the social stereotypes (i.e. ethnicity, religious, gender, social class, school performance). Through participation, children have

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\(^{10}\) Social interactions among older and younger children were identified during the learning process in the Communities of Learners' project. For further details, see chapter 6 and 7.
the chance to develop imagination, creativity, social skills, self-respect and care towards one another.

Based on the above principles the content of the programme is enriched with various activities such as literary games, theatrical games, musical-kinetic games, art, puppet show, environmental games and audiovisual games (Bafea, 2000:36). Furthermore, the Centres give both to children and parents the chance to participate in common activities through family workshops. This common experience brings together the family members as they communicate and share their knowledge, understandings, and interests on specific activities. Developing programmes in collaboration with other social and cultural agencies (i.e. museums, schools, cultural centres, theatres, libraries etc.) is of particular interest in the Centres. Museum staff could develop and deliver educational programmes that motivate children and especially families to visit museums\footnote{In this framework, the researcher developed the family programme since it was an aspect that has not yet been put into practice.}.

### 3.3. Museums in Greece: The case study of GAIA Centre of Goulandris Natural History Museum

#### 3.3.1 The Greek ‘status quo’

The museum as a living organism is in a continuous interaction with society, which is changing worldwide, and is facing immense challenges of developing, promoting and addressing different needs and requirements for the public’s enhancement and enlightenment. Through this mutual relationship between museum and society, the purposes of museums have changed over different
times and in different geographical locations. This section discusses the Greek perspective on museums\textsuperscript{12} with a brief reference to museum history in Greece and the purposes, which are influenced strongly by this and reflect the cultural and ethnical identity of the Greek families.

In the contemporary Greek society, the development of museums followed a slightly different course from the rest of Europe (Oikonomou, 2003). Thus, the history and evolution of museums in Greece is connected strongly with the protection and conservation of archaeological heritage and the formation of the Greek state (Gazi, 1999:39).

Unfortunately, efforts to promote a museum policy in Greece made a late start compared with other countries. Many problems such as wars, created barriers to museum development, and during that period many exhibitions were interrupted, the collections were buried for their protection and the monuments were neglected and damaged. During the time when large systematic excavations were being carried out in the last quarter of the 19\textsuperscript{th} and beginning of 20\textsuperscript{th} century and while funds were being accumulated from every corner of the country, small museums were created to meet the urgent need. Therefore, the notion of education was to present the history of the national past and to reinforce the sense of national identity and pride\textsuperscript{13} (Nakou, 2002:117). The role of the museum was to be a depository of morals, customs and traditions and to become a symbol of the continuity and authenticity of the Greek nation through the centuries\textsuperscript{14}. Hence, the protection of cultural heritage

\textsuperscript{12} The information is from discussions with members of the Greek National Committee of ICOM.

\textsuperscript{13} Findings of this study reveal Greeks' perceptions of the role that museums play in the Greek society: Reinforcing national identity and feeling proud for their cultural heritage was a significant aspect of the Greek's museum experience. For further details see chapter 5 and 7.

\textsuperscript{14} Those purposes are the reflection of the Greek museum reality according to the different social, economic and political contexts. It is obvious how the historical background has influenced the museum policy in Greece.
was not only considered as a priority, but mainly as a moral commitment and national obligation\textsuperscript{15}. The concept of learning in Greek museums' mission and activities is mentioned many decades later.

However, during the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, it was necessary to review the purposes with consideration of the needs of society and to adopt a new policy, which is more inclusive to the public with an active participation and life-long learning. Thus, the educational role of the museum expanded and was considered as an integral part of the museum's mission. A great contributor in this change was the Greek National Committee of ICOM which was founded in July 1983, expressing the particular character of the Greek museum. It works closely with the Ministry of Culture as well as other organisations from the public sector, like the Ministry of Education, and the private sector. The museum was regarded not only as a depository of objects of great historical significance, but also as 'the school of national education' (Nakou, 2002:124). Educational activity was restricted only to guided tours, lectures and seminars. It was not until 1978 when the Benaki Museum first established educational programmes and the Museum of Cycladic Art followed in 1986. During the last two decades, there has been remarkable change in the quality of educational programmes and the range of museums services provided to schools. A significant factor that influenced this change was the establishment of 'Melina Programme'\textsuperscript{16}. Greek museums have realised 'the necessity in adjusting to the new circumstances and are trying to become educational places with autonomy and functionalism' (Alkistis, 1995:22).

\textsuperscript{15} The situation in the UK is different, where museums were seen as ideal institutions that offer the radical potential for social equality through learning. (In Hooper-Greenhill, 1999:9)

\textsuperscript{16} The 'Melina Programme' was established in 1996. The programme was collaboration among the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education and General Secretariat of Social Education. It started with 150 schools mostly in Athens and its aim was to reinstate an authentic communication of the child with its historical, social, cultural environment, through teaching, play, theatrical expression and environmental awakening. (In http://www.dimotico.gr/melina.htm)
Chapter 3. Free-choice learning environments

The significance of museum education today is recognised from government departments\(^{17}\) and many museums and other institutions. Nevertheless, even today there is no special provision for a variety of audiences such as people with special needs, families, adults or elderly people, and educational programmes are mostly aimed towards children, and more specifically school children\(^{18}\) (Miroyanni-Arvanitidi, 1999). In addition, museum education is a newly developed field in Greece and due to that fact 'the creation and implementation of the educational programmes in museums does not depend on museological principles, but on the enthusiasm, practical experience, and knowledge of educationalist, archaeologists and members of other disciplines' (Nakou, 2002:124). Hence the importance of this thesis in encouraging the relations between Greek museums and families is of great interest since the learning theory of learning communities that this study employs will create a new domain, more socially inclusive, in the museum field.

3.3.2 The GAIA Centre for Environmental Research and Education of Goulandris Natural History Museum

The Goulandris Natural History Museum, the first Natural History Museum in Greece and the only private one in the world, was founded in 1964 based on the principle that 'a reassessment of our way of life is a necessity, and our integration in the universal mechanism and in harmony with the economy of nature, is a must' (Goulandris Natural History Museum: A Guide). Looking

\(^{17}\) It is worth mentioning that, although museums and galleries have established their educational programmes in order to reciprocate to children's needs, there is a lack of collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture (except in Melina’s Programme), namely between schools and museums (Miroyanni-Arvanitidi, 1999:53).

\(^{18}\) An issue that was taken into account by the researcher when she started this research and gave the motive to develop, deliver and evaluate the impact of the Community of Learners' project on Greek families.
forward to the 21st century, the Museum established the GAIA Centre for Environmental Research and Education, supported by the Cohesion Fund of the European Union and the Greek Ministry of the Environment. The Centre is named after planet Earth (GAIA), thus being connected directly to the mythology, philosophy and the scientific achievements of the ancient Greek world.

The aims and objectives of the GAIA Centre are to promote a relationship of balance between man and his natural environment; to lead the visitor to reorient him/herself in the frame of the natural environment; to provide the visitor with motives to re-examine his/her consuming habits in order to make them comply with the principles of sustainable development. Furthermore, the Centre aims to transmit knowledge to the public and mostly to children, thus making them sensible of the environmental problems; to contribute to a different education, through which young people will realize the need for participation and joint action and finally to set measures and serve a new relationship between education and research.

As the visitor enters into the Centre s/he has the unique experience to watch a show of the revolving earth, a representation of planet earth as it is seen from outer space. The GAIA exhibition19 begins with a fascinating trip around the world, an audiovisual experience, titled 'Our world today'. As the visitor passes through the exhibition s/he is engaged actively with it, as he looks at, listens to, reads and is informed about the structure and the functions of planet Earth and the main elements that support life. The evolution of civilization is also another part of the exhibition, where the visitor is invited to think the main environmental problems and to deal with the five main challenges in the

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19 The exhibition area was designed with the collaboration of the Natural History Museum of London.
course of ensuring a sustainable future. The five challenges are illustrated in five different subsections of the exhibition which are energy, transport, natural resources, water and nutrition.

In general, GAIA encourages active participation through the use of interactives\textsuperscript{20} such as touch screen, handling objects, audio and visual equipments, so that the visitor takes an active role instead of being passive spectator. Furthermore, it encourages and helps the visitor to search for additional information through the use of technological applications and the different levels of involvement. It thus enables the visitor to make his own personal choices based on his interest, prior knowledge through the alternatives that are presented. Finally, the GAIA exhibition enhances life-long learning by supporting self-directed and flexible learning and developing meaningful experiences.

However, GAIA Centre has developed educational programmes that aim towards children and more specifically, school children. The lack of reaching diverse audience such as families, people with special needs and adults, provided the researcher with the necessity of developing a programme that will include the family as a social group where the family members will share meaningful and creative museum experiences. The following section discusses further this point.

\textsuperscript{20} Blud (1990a, 1990b) in her studies found that interactive exhibits seemed to stimulate much more debate and argument than push-button or static exhibits and that were more successful in stimulating constructive exchange between parent and child than static exhibits. Feher (1990) also found that interactive exhibits at a science centre provide students with opportunities to experiment with and explore the phenomena presented. But more importantly, they can construct and test their own interpretations of them.
3.4 The Development of the Communities of Learners programme for families

From the researcher's experience as a museum educator, but also from discussions that she had at times with museum professionals, the percentage of Greek families that visit local museums for the duration of a family outing is very small, comparative with that of foreign families that make similar visits in museums of their own countries. Studies in England and America have showed that a large number of people visit museums as part of a family group (McManus, 1987; Dierking, 1989). There is great concern, and the need to find ways and motives that would attract the Greek families in Museums is greater. Therefore, the emergence of educational programmes specifically designed for family groups can be seen. In the light of this problem, a model (Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996:388) was developed to encourage Greek families to visit museums during their leisure time in the endeavour of enhancing their museum experiences as learning communities. The model's components were selected through an examination and analysis of an extensive review of the literature from the areas of education, museum education and socio-cultural theories.

3.4.1 The structure of the family programme

The structure of the educational programme for families was open-ended and flexible since it was developed according to families' interest and expectations. The programme was divided into four stages (Appendix A):

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Unfortunately, there is not any official research in Greece that measured statistically not only who visits the Museums but also the quality and the degree of satisfaction of Greek citizens from them. A qualitative research might reveal many parameters with regard to the question about why Greek families don't choose to visit museums as part of their family outing. Statistically I can speak only for Goulandris Natural History Museum in Athens which showed that the 70% of visitors is school groups while of the rest 30% only a small percentage is families.
• Preliminary preparation of the families at their houses with creative activities on the four environmental sections of the educational programme (natural resources, water, transportation, nutrition). Enabling families to work together in their homes encouraged families to spend more time together by discussing issues that are related with the subject specific of the project and to be able to bring and share their personal experience\textsuperscript{22} and knowledge with the rest of the members of the learning community.

• Preparation meetings at the Centre for Children's Creativity (4 meetings) so that 'the maximum value can be gained from the visit itself'\textsuperscript{23} (Hooper Greenhill, 1998:120). The learning community project recognized the value of sharing experiences, knowledge and feelings through social interaction among the members of the learning group and that it is exactly this social interaction that 'allows learners to go beyond their individual experience, to extend their own knowledge and even their ability to learn' (Hein 1998:172). Moreover since language is an important medium that can communicate and reveal self-sufficient messages (Hodge & Wilfred, 1999:60) it is obvious that 'language and learning are inextricably intertwined' (Falk & Dierking, 2000:39).

• Visits at the specific sections of GAIA Centre (2 visits). The visits to GAIA Centre acted to motivate, stimulate and provide a physical experience (Hooper Greenhill, 1998:120). The Centre is a supporting environment which enables the members of the learning communities to engage

\textsuperscript{22} Learning according to Falk & Dierking (2000) is a very personal experience arising from appropriate motivational and emotional cues and facilitated by the background and personal interests of the learner.

\textsuperscript{23} According to Eilean Hooper-Greenhill most of the best and meaningful visits to museums and galleries form part of three units: preliminary preparation, museum or gallery visit and follow-up work.
themselves in meaningful activities, to have choice and control over their learning and challenges them to construct their own meanings based on their previous and new experiences that acquired through social interaction.

- *Follow-up work* at the *Centre for Children’s Creativity* (2 meetings) provided to the learning communities the opportunity to recall, discuss and evaluate their visit by sharing their experiences and feelings from their participation in the project.

### 3.4.2 Creating a learning community environment

Participants were divided into 3 learning communities (see figure 3) constituted by 6-7 children, 2 parents and one teacher in each learning community. By teaming children with one another they had frequent opportunities to talk as they were engaged actively in shared activities and constructed knowledge themselves in the course of solving a problem. Two parents and the teacher who were having the role of the facilitator led one learning community. Rather than teach content, the facilitators’ aim was to manage and support team member interactions so that the teams stayed focused on their activity and made progress. A large part of the museum representative’s time either in the space of the Centre for Children’s Creativity or in the museum space (GAIA Centre) was spent managing and enhancing the learning communities providing them with new information.
3.5 Conclusion

This chapter tried to explore the role of the two Centres (GAIA Centre and Centre for Children's Creativity) as free-choice learning environments in order to set the context and justify the choice of using the two Centres as a forum of attracting the families to visit museums as communities of learners. A discussion of the Greek 'status quo' reflected the need of Greek museums to include families in their educational and communication policy. Based on the participation model of Communities of Learners, last section presented the structure of the family programme in order to move to the discussion of the methodology employed in this thesis.
Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This study addresses the learning process and impact of the Community of Learners model on family learning experiences in Greece, in order to provide them with a motive to visit local museums during their leisure time. It was a qualitative study rooted in the socio-cultural learning theory of participation in community of learners. Thus, a qualitative interpretative design was used to conduct this research, which was organized as a case study. The design choice took into consideration the nature of the research questions at the beginning of the research. Since learning and change were being considered both as individual and social activity, these questions called for a design that would make it possible to grasp the uniqueness of the impact of the use of CoL’s model on motivating the families to visit museums during a family outing. In addition, such a design would make it possible to have a more in-depth understanding of the learning processes and outcomes that were being studied, something that would not be possible if only a quantitative approach had been used. This chapter presents the methods used and the rationale behind this methodological approach.
4.2 Qualitative research

As it has been already mentioned in Chapter 2, there are different aspects of learning, which can be associated with two major and contrasting research paradigms, defined as 'quantitative and 'qualitative' methods. Traditional learning theories (didactic and behaviourist) are associated with quantitative methods, also called 'scientific' (Korn, 1989:222) or 'objective' (Hein, 1998a:69, Kelman, 1995:205) paradigm. Bicknell argues that this kind of evaluation is 'goal-oriented', which indicates that the evaluators are interested in assessing the success of the aims of the project (Bicknell, 1995:284). Consequently, museums tried to measure learning in the past using the framework in which learning is primarily the 'acquisition of new ideas, facts, or information' and trying to compare what people 'know' before they visit an exhibition with what they 'know' after they have visited. It was a positivistic approach seeking to test correlations between variables. This usually involves written surveys using the before/after method to determine whether exhibitions 'work': 'if there is a significant increase in the post-visit scores compared with the visitor's level of knowledge when they arrive, then the exhibition is considered 'effective'". It is a narrow view, which has been discounted by many researchers, as it neglects the essential factor that learning is based on what we already knew about a topic before we visited - so in a test, visitor responses are likely to vary.

Furthermore, learning depends on the interests, experiences, likes and dislikes of visitors. Eventually, there is no way of making sure that visitors see all parts of an exhibition. 'This means that they may miss a particular item or section that they might be tested on. They can't recall or learn what they haven't seen. Also, this method has been accused of measuring recal 'what people remember about the content or the exhibition, or their semantic memories - rather than of measuring their knowledge or understanding' (Ferguson, 2001).

According to Falk and Dierking, visitors may be able to 'recall new information but this information isn't really learnt until it has been subsequently reinforced (Falk & Dierking, 2000:140).

Constructivist learning theory criticizes the traditional approach of evaluation because it focuses on the cognitive aspect of learning, ignoring the other aspects of affective and psychomotor learning which take place. Constructivists hold the view that 'learning is not just the acquisition of new bits of information; it is more than that; it is also the reinforcement, consolidation and reshaping of what they already knew'. So the evaluators are not looking for evidence of whether visitors are learning specific bits of 'new' information, but on contrary they are looking for evidence of whether 'the visitors are making sense of their museum experience - by relating it to what they already knew or had experienced' (Falk & Dierking, 2000:140). Therefore, the visitor's learning experience draws on the interaction and overlapping nature of their physical, personal and social context.

Constructivists preferred the paradigm of 'qualitative' (Hein, 1998a:68; Mason, 1996:3) 'naturalistic' (Hein,1995a:191; 1998a:68; Hooper-Greenhill, 1991:130; Borun, 1996:219), 'responsive' (Kelman, 1995:210) or 'holistic' (Hein, 1995a:202) methods of evaluation. Sally Wright argues that qualitative evaluation is 'concerned with people's thoughts, opinions and feelings, rather than with statistics' (Wright, 1990:8). Mason also states that qualitative research is 'interpretivist' in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced'...it is based on methods of data collection which are flexible to the social context in which data are produced...and finally it is based on methods of analysis and explanation building which involve understanding of complexity, detail and context' (Mason, 1996:4). Kirk and Miller (1986) have described qualitative research as 'an empirical, socially located phenomenon, defined by its own history, not simply a
residual grab-bag comprising all things that are ‘not quantitative’ (in Silverman, 1999:31). However, the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research has become increasingly less straightforward. Miles and Huberman (1994:4-5) explain that ‘at the working level, it seems hard to find researchers encamped in one fixed place along a stereotyped continuum between ‘relativism’ and ‘post-positivism’ [...]’. In the epistemological debate it is tempting to operate at the poles, but in the actual practice of empirical research, we believe that all of us - realists, interpretivists, critical theorists – are closer to the centre, with multiple overlaps’.

These methods, as opposed to traditional methods are ‘open-ended’ and ‘goal-free’, aiming to ‘explore possible consequences rather than the predetermined expectation of the project’ (Bicknell, 1995:285). Evaluators stress the importance of approaching evaluation in a methodical fashion by addressing three essential steps: The first thing to be clear about in an evaluation, as Badman writes, ‘is exactly what is to be evaluated’ (Badman, 1990:20), and Hooper-Greenhill agrees that ‘methods cannot be chosen until you have identified in detail what you want to know’. The second step is to ‘work out how to achieve these objectives’ and finally to select the most appropriate methods of evaluation - data collection and data analysis in order to achieve these objectives (Hooper-Greenhil, 1996:36).

Many researchers (Binks & Uzzell, 1999:298-300; Bicknell, 1995:284; Hein, 1999:307) argue that the different types of data collection and analysis have their strengths and weaknesses, and consequently are simply more and less suitable for answering the variety of questions which evaluators ask. Nevertheless, validity of findings can be increased by simple strategies such as using multiple methods of data collection, usually known as triangulation, (Hein, 1995a:199; Hein, 1999:310; Kelman, 1995:209; Mason, 1996:25,79) where we validate our
conclusions on the basis of the combination of information from a number of data sources-methods (Hein, 1995a:199). Also it is possible to use several data collectors (Kelman, 1995:206), as well as external evaluators.

4.3 Research design

Meaningful learning occurs when the learner has an active role in creating meaning of experiences through the context s/he brings. Hooper-Greenhill and Moussouri state that ‘when we talk about learning and particularly learning in museums, we are not talking about learning facts only. Learning includes facts, but also experiences and emotions. This is a long-term process that requires individual effort but is a social experience as well’ (2002:2). Thus, this study assesses the effectiveness of the model of participation in community of learners not only from the aspect of learning facts and concepts but as well as from those (aspects) that have to do with experiences, emotions, feelings, behaviour, skills, motivation, enjoyment, inspiration, creativity, values and attitudes. These aspects show participants to learn how to coordinate by sharing interests and experiences, how to support and lead others to become responsible and organized in their own learning, and to be able to build on their previous knowledge and interests to learn in new areas.

4.3.1. Data gathering and analysis

The data gathering phase encouraged participants to talk about their own expectations and experiences of their participation in the learning community museum project. Particularly, the researcher’s aim was to assess the effectiveness
of the participation model in family groups as learning communities, acting as a motive to attract Greek families to visit museums during their leisure time.

According to the above, the research design accommodated 3 elements that constituted the process of data gathering and analysis. Firstly, the most frequent reasons that Greek families choose to not visit museums of their city in a family outing were discussed. The analysis of informal discussions with the parents individually and with the children, as well as the analysis of preliminary questionnaires concerning the families’ museum experiences prior to their participation in the proposed family programme, constituted the main methodological tools that allowed the generation of data.

Secondly, the conduct and analysis of the two in-depth interviews with two museum professionals of the Hellenic Children’s Museum (HCM), the Director and the Head of Educational Programs constituted the spark for a first and small evaluation of the motives that Greek families take into consideration in order to decide whether or not to visit local museums in a family outing. In the present research, therefore, there is an effort of presenting on one hand the reasons that Greek families do not visit museums, and the motives2 as were expressed by the point of view of the families and the two museum professionals coupled with a thorough literature review. On the other hand, the proposed educational family programme formed the main body of this thesis as it provided Greek families with an alternative way of constructing meaningful museum visits as learning communities.

Consequently, the third element of the research design was the evaluation of the learning process as well as the learning outcomes of Greek families as learning communities.

2 A survey of the causes and motives that attract or inhibit Greek families to choose to make a visit in a local museum may constitute a proposal for conducting a future research study.
communities. Thus, an observation protocol and a set of interview questions were created which accommodated the approach and the subject of the research. The Educational Family programme (E.F.P) was conducted at the GAIA Centre of Environmental Research and Education of Goulandris Natural History Museum in collaboration with the Centre for Children’s Creativity of the municipality of Vrilissia in Athens. The evaluation of the families learning outcomes regarding their museum experiences aims at the creation of those motives that will stir the interest of the Greek family to be familiar with an alternative way of learning and entertainment in museums during their leisure time. Moreover it is essential to mention that the recording of the families’ museum experiences prior their participation in the programme allowed a more valid evaluation and comparison of their overall experiences and expectations after the completion of the program.

Thus, in the effort of developing a solid methodology the researcher came across an approach that is developed by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG). This approach is called ‘The Generic Learning Outcomes’ (GLO)\(^3\) system and underpins the learning theory of this thesis (Hooper-Greenhill et al, 2003). According to this approach five generic learning outcomes have been identified:

1) Increase or change in knowledge and understanding
2) Increase or change in skills
3) Development and change in values and attitudes
4) Evidence of creativity, inspiration, enjoyment
5) Evidence of action, behaviour, progression.

\(^3\) I had the opportunity to use the GLOs approach in a flexible way and address it to my research objectives. The GLOs prompted the development of the above research questions, which formulate and explain my research study.
Chapter 4. Methodology

Taking the interviews with families as the primary data source of their learning outcomes as learning communities, Generic Learning Outcomes were used to structure the questions. They were also used for categorising the information gained from the interviews and reporting on the findings. Thus, the GLOs provided a solid and coherent framework for assessing the impact of learning community model on families' learning experiences by measuring both the breadth and depth of families' learning in participating in museum programmes. Counting the occurrence of each GLO enabled a quantification of the outcomes, while using quotes from participants enabled an in-depth description of them.

The GLOs were inter-related with each impacting on and being impacted by the others. Even though, they were separated to analyze the data, they all inter-related at the same time. Separating them was important to have a deeper understanding of each GLO. However, it is always essential to bring the GLOs back together for a holistic view of families' learning experiences.

4.3.2. Sampling

The qualitative research was conducted at GAIA Centre of Goulandris Natural History Museum and at the Centre for Children's Creativity in the local community of Vrilissia in Athens utilizing as a sample 12 families, 3 teachers, the museum representative which was in this case an environmentalist, and 2 museum professionals from the Hellenic Children's Museum (HCM). Most of the families came from upper middle class homes.

4 Suggested areas for further research: This study was conducted in a suburban upper-middle class area. It would be important and meaningful to study how the model works in different socio-economic and cultural settings.
The choice of conducting interviews with the two museum professionals of the HCM served a part of the research objectives concerning the motives that hearten or discourage the Greek family to visit or not local museums during a family outing. Moreover, the Hellenic Children's Museum in Plaka is one of the few museums in Greece, which is activated systematically in the planning and delivery of educational programmes for families with interactive activities that stimulate curiosity and motivate learning. Their main aim is 'the creation of suitable conditions that encourage parents and children to interact and collaborate in order to discover and search together the Museums, without however, having the stress of making mistakes which exists very often in the school obligations as well as in the family educational activities' (Newsletter of the Hellenic Children Museum, 2003:14).

The main reason that this particular museum was selected has to do with its multifarious action in programmes that include different groups of visitors. Consequently, the multifaceted and long experience of the Children’s Museum with regard to its effectiveness in the wide public offers valid and meaningful data concerning the various motives or disincentives that strengthen or impede correspondingly the visits of family groups to museums.

4.4 Methods used

This study used multiple methods5 (Hein, 1998:134; Mason, 1996:79) where the conclusions can be validated on the basis of the combination of information from a number of data sources and methods. Thus, qualitative methods have been used in order to generate data about the learning process and outcomes of the participation model. Data for this research was collected over a period of five

5 Hein argues that multiple methods 'are essential in qualitative work, which relies on triangulation, on the congruence of different sources of data, for validity' (Hein, 1998:134)
months. It consisted of open-ended questionnaires to the families prior to the programme, observations of the meetings at the Centre for Children’s Creativity, observations of visits to GAIA Centre using an observational protocol and participant’s interviews after the end of the programme.

Hein developed a matrix providing a convenient method of matching program issues or interests with means of collecting data (Hein, 1999:309). The matrix (see figure 4) was used to ensure that there are at least two means of collecting each data source and two people collecting data to answer each objective (Hein, 1999:310). It allowed for thinking the possible sources of information and the way that the possible triangulation will take place. This helped to ensure validity and as Hein points out ‘the key to deeper understanding of how and what visitors learn in museums is not to try to achieve a single, perfect method of study, but to recognize the limitations of all individual means for doing so and make an effort to gain information and insight about what visitors learn using multiple methods’ (Hein, 1998a:133). This model was utilized as a means of developing the evaluation of the current research and is analysed in the subsequent section of this chapter.

4.4.1. Participant interviews

In-depth interviews with families and teachers conducted ten days after the end of the programme (10–20 June 2003) were the primary data source of this research. Specifically, the researcher followed a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions (Appendix B) based on assessing the learning process and impact of the COL model of families’ learning experiences/outcomes (knowledge and understanding, skills, values, attitudes,

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6 The learning outcomes were those expressed in the short-term.

7 The open-ended questions were formed by the research questions and the recording conversations during the programme.
feeling, creativity, inspiration, enjoyment and behaviour). The interview process was very flexible because even though there were a list of questions to be covered, many questions and topics that were not included in the guide emerged as the researcher followed up the interviewees' replies (where necessary, photos had been provided to the families in order to help them to recall their experiences). There was much greater interest in the interviewee's point of view. For that reason each interview had a length of 20 minutes (the minimum) to 45 minutes (the maximum). However, there was a general plan which was followed. Prompts were used either as examples for respondents or to encourage them to expand on any points. Different questions were used for children, parents and teachers as a means of drawing all participants into the discussion according to their role in the learning community. The interviews were conducted either in a separate area at the Centre for Children's Creativity or at participants' houses. This helped the participants to feel comfortable and safe during the interviews. Interview responses were tape recorded and transcribed in the form of analysable text. Furthermore, discussions with teachers through informal conversations after the end of each section (i.e. natural resources, water, transportation, nutrition) were also used as means to collect data about the learning communities' process. Toward the end of the study two interviews with two museum professionals from the Children's Museum\(^8\) proved necessary in order to check the data and the researcher's understandings. In these interviews, the researcher wanted to understand a little bit more about the motives that encouraged Greek families whether or not to visit museums in their family outing, coupled with a thorough literature review.

\(^8\) As explained above, the Hellenic Children's Museum is one of the few museums in Greece that organizes family programmes and an interview with the Head of the Museum and the Education Officer will be likely to reveal some important data, which will help to identify more objectively why museum culture in Greece is not so enhanced, why Greek families choose not to visit museums in their leisure time and how we can bridge the gap between museums and families.
In the interviews, the gender is indicated by the following division: I for the interviewer; M for mother; F for father; G for girl; B for boy; T for teachers and MP for museum professionals. The letter and numbers in the parenthesis refer to the interview transcripts and the number of the question according to the interview protocol (i.e. F2, Q5). A full questionnaire is included in Appendix B.

### 4.4.2. Communities of Learners' Observations

Observation directly assesses behaviour of which the visitors themselves may be unaware, or ones that visitor may find difficult to express. Observation is 'one of the most basic methods of evaluation' (Hooper-Greenhill, 1996:12) and takes many forms. 'Participant observation' is one such form, which is preferred by many Constructivists, as they believe that facial expression and body language are important indicators of a learner's experiences (Kelman, 1995:206). A participant observer 'seeks to observe the behaviour of members of that setting (group, organization, community, etc.) and to elicit the meanings they attribute to their environment and behaviour' (Bryman, 2001:163). As s/he interacts with the participants, the observer gains some understanding of their perspectives and experiences. Yet, observation involves a large workload and is time consuming (Kelman, 1995:227, Binks & Uzzell, 1999:300). The data collected can avoid the bias introduced through the use of language. However, the lack of verbal data is itself a deficiency; as observation can only describe what was done, and suggest reasons why, but it cannot convey the wider context in which this took place (Hooper-Greenhill, 1996:13; Binks & Uzzell, 1999:300). Nevertheless, it is 'useful complement to other techniques such as questionnaires or interviews, as it enables you to check or corroborate responses' (Binks & Uzzell, 1999:300).
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Objectives</th>
<th>Informal group discussions with participants</th>
<th>Family questionnaire before the programme</th>
<th>Repeated observations</th>
<th>Informal group discussions with the teachers</th>
<th>In-depth interviews with participants</th>
<th>Researcher's diary</th>
<th>Interviews with museum professionals</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Considering the reasons that Greek families choose not to visit museums</td>
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<td>Possible motives that encourage families to visit museums</td>
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<td>The impact of the proposed family programme on families' learning experiences</td>
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<td>Evaluating the learning process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants' reflections on the role of the Centres as a interconnected forum between museums and families</td>
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Figure 4: The research matrix adapted by Hein
Both in the meetings and visits of the three learning communities, the researcher worked towards assuming the role of a participant observer using an observation protocol (Appendix C). During these meetings and visits the researcher tried to participate in the activities of one learning community for a total of three and observe the learning process at the same time. The focus of attention on these observations was the social interactions and collaboration among participants (children of different age, parents, teachers) and the changes that occurred over a period of three months. The observations were triangulated with recorded conversations amongst participants while they were interacting with each other in their community of learners during the programme. This was helpful in better assessing the learning process and participants' social interactions. Furthermore, it helped to develop some more concrete questions for the in-depth interviews, concerning the procedure that each participant used while s/he was interacting with others and engaging in shared activities.

In this study, the researcher was immersed in a social setting of developing and evaluating the learning process and outcomes of the participation model for an extended period of time (5 months). At this point, it is essential to mention that in the capacity of a researcher, the identity of the museum education practitioner could not be avoided, because the whole educational programme had to be planned and developed based on the model of participation in a community of learners. The researcher was actively engaged in the process by becoming 'participant observer' (Bryman, 2001:291; Mason, 1996:63) in order to interact with the participants and gain some deeper understanding of their perspectives.

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As the current author was the only researcher in the learning process, it was impossible to observe at the same time the three learning communities. So the learning process was observed by choosing randomly only one learning group for a total of three groups.
and experiences. It is important to clarify that the researcher's intervention was only at the level of organizing the socio-cultural activities rooted in the COL model and interacting with the participants for a period of time and was in no way at the process of the learning communities' functioning. This kind of involvement helped the researcher to develop a diary with field notes and observations on the learning process during the educational programme by keeping more objective notes of the participants' experiences and behaviour.

4.4.3. Family questionnaires before the programme

The questionnaire (Appendix D) was given to the families before their participation in the programme concerning their prior experiences and expectations in visiting museums during their leisure time. Questions on whether they have ever participated in family programmes were also accommodated in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was triangulated with informal discussions conducted separately with children and adult members of the families prior to the programme.

4.5 Conclusion

The research design of this thesis took into consideration three major issues: a) the families' needs for changing the boring and uninteresting museum visit to an actively engaging and meaningful visit; b) the teachers' needs to transform the Centre for Children's Creativity into a forum where the families of the local community can meet and share museum experiences through their participation in meaningful museum activities; c) finally the researcher's need to improve the
Greek museum practice providing the participants with an alternative approach of visiting a museum through their active participation in a family programme structured on the participation model in communities of learners. Thus, in order to develop a solid methodology the researcher collaborated with the teachers on formulating an intervention in the form of developing and delivering a family programme that was designed to improve families' museum experiences and assess the impact of the Community of Learners' model on participants' learning experiences.

The methods used in this thesis reflect the research questions and the research objectives. They aimed to assess the process of social interaction among Greek families as learning communities and to provide all participants with the opportunity to express their learning experiences. The choice of multiple research methods allowed the researcher to approach the research questions from different angles. The use of Generic Learning Outcomes gave a coherent and solid framework for assessing the impact of learning community model on families' learning experiences. Hence, the analysis and interpretation of data provided holistic explanations for the learning process and outcomes distinguishing at the same time the personal view of each participant in the learning community.
Chapter 5

Greek families' perceptions about visiting museums

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the questionnaires that the families completed before their participation in the Communities of Learners’ (CoL) project concerning their museum experience so far, combined with informal discussions conducted by the researcher. Furthermore, interviews with the two museum professionals from the Children’s Museum in Athens revealed rich data about their experiences and perceptions about family visits in Greek museums. In particular, this chapter discusses the perceptions of the 12 Greek families about visiting local museums in their leisure time. It is well known that the agenda of the family and its interaction with the agenda of the museum defines the family museum experience (Moussouri, 1997). Each individual brings different and highly personal prior experiences and knowledge into a learning situation (e.g. museum experience) and that these form how that individual or a social group (in this case the family) perceives and evaluates the new experience. Thus, it was essential to
Chapter 5. Greek families' perceptions about visiting museums

record these previous museum experiences of the families in order to evaluate their reflection as a result of the conditions and the context under which the new museum experience was delivered (i.e. CoL project).

According to the Director of Hellenic Children Museum (HCM), approaching the families is, as she characteristically said, 'a multidimensional issue which has to be examined according to the restrictions and the potentials of a family situation, in the sense of time, finances, interest and the role of the educator that many parents have to play to their children in a museum visit' (MP1). The indication from the above statement was the families' perceptions which were revealed by the analysis of the informal discussions and the questionnaires. Therefore, issues that will be discussed in this chapter are the prior museum experiences of the families (satisfaction, entertainment, information provided from the exhibits and family friendly exhibitions); barriers to visiting; motivations and criteria for visiting; families' expectations; and families' perceptions of participating in a family programme.

5.2. Prior museum experiences of the families

Overall, the prior museum experiences of families visiting local museums revealed the emergence of delivering programmes specifically designed for family groups to encourage them to make meaningful museum visits. Concretely, the analysis of discussions and questionnaires showed that 7 out of 12 families have not gained so many positive museum experiences from visits that they had done so far in local museums while the remaining 5 commented on their experiences positively. Specifically, the 7 families expressed a small degree of satisfaction and entertainment with regard to the way that Greek museums present their exhibits
without taking into consideration the needs and interests of the Greek families. An example of this was the revealing comment of a mother:

M: I consider that Museums in Greece are spaces, where objects are simply exhibited. That is to say, it is a simple presentation and nothing more' (F2, Q1).

The perception that many museums in Greece still remain spaces to present objects and artefacts negatively influences the picture that has been shaped into the Greek family towards the role that a museum can play in enhancing lifelong learning. Moreover, many families have a weakness to see museums as 'living organisms', (Oikonomou, 2004; Falk & Dierking, 1994, 2000) as spaces that combine learning with entertainment1 which are developed and improved according to the current museum theories. As it was mentioned above, the parents are not being suitably 'educated' and provided with those skills that will allow them to make the most of a visit in a museum. Of course, the responsibility does not lie only on the parents' side but as well with the museums professionals that shape the educational and communication policy and with the government that does not encourage to a large extent life long learning via the establishment of a museum educational policy in Greece and participation in educational programmes for a variety of audience2. Families should be informed that the museums are not only educational institutions but 'free choice learning environments' (Falk & Dierking, 2000:4) that encourage life-long learning. As the director of the Children's Museum mentioned:

MP: Parents should not have a passive role but on contrary they should encourage their children to interact and share experiences with each other via collaboration and

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1 Minz (1994:32) calls this combination 'edutainment' because entertainment is part of the learning experience. 'The words 'fun', 'enjoyment', and 'entertainment' are used in great deal in the museum world these days[...] making museums entertaining does not mean trivializing exhibits, but it does suggest designing exhibition spaces that encourage a variety of emotional responses. Entertaining exhibits actively engage the visitor intellectually and physically'. (In Falk & Dierking, 1992:142).

2 An important issue to be discussed and analysed but not in the present research. However, it is essential to record it.
communication. Children should be encouraged to choose freely which exhibits or activities will be engaged with. Visiting a museum should be an enjoyable experience for both children and parents’ (MP1).

On the contrary, the degree of satisfaction and entertainment in the other 5 families was satisfactory having mainly, as the Director of the Children's Museum typically commented, the dimension of the 'national spirit' that Greeks possess. The following extract is a salient expression of this point:

MP: *Greeks have a great need of being proud for their place!* (MP1)

Indicative also, are the experiences of two families:

M: *We felt proud of the historical greatness of our homeland.* (F4, Q1)
F: *Unquestionably, the feeling of satisfaction and pride for the adults as well as for the children each time we visiting a museum in Greece is great.* (F7, Q1)

As far as the information provided, most of the families (8 out of 12) mentioned the significance and value of acquiring information and knowledge using the museum exhibits. In most of the cases, families perceive the museum visit as a way of transmitting knowledge to their children, ignoring the entertainment aspect of it. The extracts below are typical examples of this point:

M: *The information given is priceless and is recording in our memory.* (F10, Q1)
F: *There were times we were so impressed by the information presented from the exhibits that we could identify ourselves in the environment, the subject matter and the time each*

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3 A perception that has changed since their involvement in the CoL’s project. For further discussion see chapter 7 on the outcomes of the project on families' attitudes and perceptions of the role of museums in their learning experience.
exhibit was referred to because museums are mainly the sources of knowledge and learning. (F12, Q1)

However, in many cases, the families thought that much of the information was very limited and insufficient, especially when they were written in small labels. The Head of the Museum Education department of the Children’s Museum also supported this position. The following quote is an explicit example of this point:

MP: Many museums in Greece haven’t provided yet to parents the chance to understand what this exhibit is all about in order to explain it to their child. On contrary museums present the scientific aspect of the exhibit without communicating it to the visitors following their needs and interests. (MP2).

As regards the families’ perceptions on the kind of relationships Greek museum have with family visitors, many family groups (6 out of 12) mentioned that despite the fact that many museums, especially the private ones, improved the way they communicate their exhibits to the public, most of them do not provide the opportunity to share common experiences with other family members through organized family activities. Thus, most of the Greek museums are not family friendly because of the lack of exhibition design and development of family activities that encourage family members to come across with new facts and new ideas, master new skills, change their attitudes and have new feelings and emotions in the course of an enjoyable, exciting and fascinating experience together (Halbertsma, 1999:95). The following extracts reveal this position:

M: We like museums and we visit them when we have the chance to do it, but we believe that their role towards families is not very effective and influential. (F5, Q1)

An issue that was mentioned in chapter 3 when discussing the ‘Greek status quo’ (see section 3.3.1)
Chapter 5. Greek families’ perceptions about visiting museums

F: Unfortunately, we believe as a family that there is no particular relationship between Greek museums and Greek families because we feel that Greek museums ignore our needs and interests. (F2, Q1)

5.3 Barriers to visiting museums in a family outing

Remarkable is the fact that the families in most cases (11 out of 12) mentioned that they do not plan frequent visits to Greek museums in their leisure time due to a variety of reasons. Lack of time, stress and family obligations; their perception that museums are mainly educational and learning centres; parents’ fear of being an educator for their child; children feel bored in museums and mainly lack of museums attitude and culture, are the main barriers that prevent those families to visit museums and will be discussed further in this section.

Particularly, a significant number of families (9 out of 12) supported the idea that the fast and tedious rhythms of life, the stress, the family obligations, and the routine of week do not allow the family in the little remaining time to organise frequent visits. On the contrary, they prefer to use their free time on relaxation and on doing more pleasant things for them, like going to the cinema or eating out than visiting museums. The following quotes of two parents express the above point:

M: Time is limited. Also, the children consider that going to museums is not fun. After one week full of stress because of the increased requirements of our children in school and us (the parents) in the work, the museum is something that we do not see it with good eye. (F2, Q2)

5 The low frequency of family visits in Greek museum is a fact either because of the lack of time or the lack of interest in museums (in Kouveli, 2000:85).
6 It is again obvious that for many families visiting a museum is more about learning, neglecting the entertaining aspect of visit.
F: *Even if the exhibits are interesting, impressive and significant, unfortunately lassitude and stress of the week make the weekend precious and finally it is difficult to choose to sacrifice it for a visit in a museum.* (F12, Q2)

Similar are the findings in Harris Qualitative report where many families remarked that the only time spent together is a Sunday afternoon or an evening, and this may be impromptu rather than planned time. Thus, lack of time, family obligations and the busy lifestyles of UK families were also cited as reasons they do not have time to spend together as a family in visiting a museum (Harris Qualitative, 1997:30). Three families, however, support on one hand the lack of time and the fast rhythm of life but stress on the other the 'cultural pursuits' that distinguishes individual cases of parents that organize such visits. The extract bellow is a typical example of this point:

*M: I realize that the rhythms of Greek family constitute an immense obstacle. However, when the parents have a desire and cultural pursuits there is always enough time for Sunday family excursions.* (F6, Q2)

In addition, most of the families perceived the museum visit as one-sided, having a role that is more close to the educational and cognitive side rather than to the entertainment and social one. Thus, the perception that the museums are mainly educational and learning centres, forms the second barrier. Similar are the findings in Kouveli's study where pupils from urban (Athens) as well as from rural (island of Ikaria) areas perceive the museum as an educational setting where you can 'see' and 'learn' many 'new, 'interesting' and 'beautiful things'. The educational role of the museum predominated in Greek pupils' perceptions neglecting the entertainment factor. According to Kouveli, relating the museum with school may function negatively, in adults' relationships with the museum (Kouveli, 2000:193). This is also verified by this comment from the Director of the HCM:
In the shaped culture of the Greek householder, families consider that what they are expecting for is connected with something strict, something strictly educational, something as an educational duty which is deprived of enjoyment and social interesting (MSI).

Conversely, studies in UK revealed that social relations and having an enjoyable and entertaining family outing were one of the reasons UK families commented including those that they were learning-related. However, family visitors in Hood’s study placed more emphasis on the social interaction and entertainment than on opportunities to learn. The difference among UK and Greek families can be explained from the lack of Greek museums that engage families in enjoyable and meaningful activities. For Greek parents, museums are seen more as learning or educational centres (like schools) than entertaining ones where a family can spend its leisure time in a very creative and imaginative way.

Unfortunately many parents, according to the Director of the HCM, choose not to visit museums with their children because of the intense fear of revealing their ignorance in front of their children when they are seeking further explanations on the exhibits. Thus, the stress of parents to be knowledgeable information givers is another immense barrier. The presentation of the exhibits from the mainly scientific side and the lack of use of a variety of educational formats such as

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7 McManus in her study found that the amount and quality of information visitors take from exhibits is also affected by the quality of social interaction within different groups. The social aspect of the visit is at the core of the visitor museum experience and a key source of visitor satisfaction. In McManus, P. (1988) 'Good Companions - More on the Social Determination of Learning-Related Behaviour in a Science Museum', *The International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, vol 7, Butterworth & Co (Publishers) Ltd, 37-44.

8 Reporting on a study carried out at the Science Museum in London, McManus found that visitors to the Museum visited for many different reasons and that they all had learning-related expectations. Reasons for visiting included social relaxation, a general interest in science, having an enjoyable family outing and entertainment. In McManus P. (1992) 'Topics in Museums and Science Education', *Studies in Science Education*, vol 20, 157-182.
interactives and hands-on exhibit modules gives the parents the stress of how to manage the requirements and the expectations of their child to provide him/her with the right answers.

Consequently, the Greek museum environment cannot support the role of the parent as educator. The above perceptions are strengthened by the perseverance that possesses many parents of the sample that a family visit in a museum should be coupled with the traditional method of the guided tour in order to be characterized as a complete and successful visit at least on a cognitive level. They believe that a visit in a museum should be accompanied by the provision of information via verbal communication without giving great importance either at the social or physical context of the visit, which aims at the pleasant, holistic and meaningful museum experience as much as possible. This can be explained, as it was mentioned above, from the fear that parents most likely have when they have to give correct information to their child. Thus, they prefer to be guided by an expert instead of having free exploration because of their perplexity to fulfil children's expectations as well as their own, and also because of the lack of educational formats that facilitate the interpretation of the exhibits and therefore their learning experience. Particularly, they are more familiar with these traditional services (guided tours) than with those that encourage family members to explore and share their knowledge, skills, creativity, attitudes and values.

Another reason that families choose not to visit local museums in their free time is that 6 out of 12 families rely on the fact that this role must be undertaken by the school when it organises regular field trips in various museums during the school year9. Consequently, they believe that there is no reason to go to museums since schools organize museum visits. This constitutes evidence of the educational role

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9 Kouveli in her study on the relationships of Greek students with the museum found that the museum visit is an obligation of the school since it forms the main factor for the building of the relationship between pupils and museums. In Kouveli, A., 2000:283)
that Greek householders believe museums should play and the duty they should have in enhancing their children's learning experiences: a learning experience, however, that aims more in acquiring knowledge and facts and less in reinforcing entertainment and the social and emotional development of the visitors. The comments below of the two mothers reveal this point:

M: .... *because we have relied on the field trips that our children make to museums with their school...*(F1, Q2)

M ... *The contact of children with 3 to 4 museums per year is made only through school field trips.* (F6, Q2)

However, Harris Qualitative report indicated that 'encouraging school trips is important because it will lead indirectly to more personal visits with parents/carers' (1997:24). But if we want to motivate Greek children to influence their parents to visit a museum, school trips then must be meaningful, creative and enjoyable. Are they? In Greece, in the last five years, museums offer a better quality of educational programmes in school groups. But still few children will choose to visit again a specific museum.

The fourth barrier is that children become bored in museums. In particular, the informal discussions with the children of families that participated in the research revealed the children's point of view about their museum experiences and particularly the lack of interest\(^\text{10}\) in visiting museums in a family excursion. They say that they make museum visits as school groups and they do not want to 'sacrifice' their free time with such type of visits. Instead they prefer to choose activities more entertaining in character, like going to the cinema or going out with

\(^{10}\) Allon believes that one of the obstacles that cannot allow museums to fulfil their role as a 'cultural signpost' is that 'children often consider the museum to be something connected with school, and the majority are consequently are unwilling to go to the museum during their free time' (Allon, 1999:79).
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friends. In addition, they characterized the visits that they have done with their schools as mainly ‘boring’
where they only go, see and hear a guide to speak or they complete some activity sheets inside the exhibition space and then go back to school without having expanded their learning experiences by using other learning sources. Learning facts is something that they do mostly in museum visits but learning by doing with enjoyment and pleasure is something that is deficient in educational programmes of many Greek museums. This also has its implications on the design of the exhibitions because many of them still have a linear and traditional structure, which inhibits families to interact both physically and mentally with the exhibits. The following extract is a particularly articulate expression of this point:

G: Hmm! we go visits with the school but we can’t enjoy them so much... we usually get bored because either somebody speaks or we are asked to write some information. Many museums do not leave to touch some things because they say that they will be destroyed........ few times I will say to my parents to go again in a museum that I have experienced it with school, except if I liked it a lot, like I did with the Children’s Museum. I remember a time that we did some activities and one of them was to cook olive bread. I had a wonderful time that day! (girl 11 years old.)

Finally, many families (6 out of 12) argue that there is lack of museum culture and attitude in the every day life of Greek families and a belief to a large extent that it does not concern them. Interest presents the statement of a mother on the lack of techniques of using their museum experience:

11 One of the main barriers to visiting museums according to Harris Qualitative report is the ‘boredom factor’. Parents believe that museums which are perceived to be boring are avoided because their priority is entertainment and if they have a disappointing experience, then the specific museum will be ‘de-listed’ from their list despite their cultural or heritage value. (Harris Qualitative Report, 1997:31).
5.4. Criteria for visiting museums

Most of the families (10 out of 12, including those with feelings of satisfaction) place as a basic criterion of choice the combination of family holidays with museum visits. Time, the 'good words' of recommendation from friends, accessibility, cost, the subject-specific of the exhibition constitute some other criteria that families take into consideration when choosing to visit museums. The criteria of choice are various but what it is important to see is the combination of holidays\textsuperscript{12} with museum visits that shapes the museum attitude of a Greek family. This issue can be interpreted by the attitude of the traveller that possesses the Greek family as well. The traveller, according to the director of the HCM when visiting new places, deliberately chooses to visit some museums in his/her willingness to know their culture and the history. It is remarkable that 10 out of 12 families of the sample do not visit local museums frequently while on the contrary when they are on holiday, visiting a museum is one of their first priorities. Particularly, many families said that they have visited museums more often when they are abroad or elsewhere in their own country during holidays than in a family outing in their leisure time. The following quotes of two families are typical examples of the above point:

\textsuperscript{12}Macdonald in her study (1993) describes the criterion of family holidays as a 'place itinerary' when family groups are on holidays or day trips or have guests. Particularly, the place itinerary is characterised by 'a tendency to locate museum visiting within the framework of holidays or days out' or to choose to visit a museum among 'those venues which are presumably considered appropriate representations of the place'. The other 'cultural intineraries' are 'life cycle', 'family event' and 'education' (Macdonald 1993:14).
M: We will go to a museum only as part of our holidays. Unfortunately we will not choose any museum with some criteria in our mind, except of very special cases. (F1, Q3)

M: When we visit a place in our holidays we always want to visit its local museum in order to learn the history and the culture. (F9, Q3)

In addition, many families (5 out of 12) mentioned some other criteria that are related to the practical part of their visit. Criteria such as available time, museum opening hours, distance, entrance fees, and accessibility-method of transportation are considering when families want to visit a specific museum\(^{13}\). Especially, the entrance fee is an important factor for Greek families because they expect to gain the best value from the visit itself. So their decision to visit is based upon an assumption that the effort of visiting a specific museum and paying a great amount of money will be worthwhile. If it is not worthwhile, or barely so, the ‘prospect of repeat visits is low and of unfavourable word of mouth comment, high\(^{14}\). This point is also verified by the Director of Hellenic Children’s Museum:

MS1: The cost factor should not be seen alone but in combination with what the visitors ‘buy’ with it. If for example the Greek family can buy tickets to see a movie at the cinema, it is obvious that the criterion is not the amount of money that the family will spend but what the movie will give to them in terms of entertainment and fun for the whole family. Under those conditions a family will consider the entrance fee in a museum (MS1).

\(^{13}\) Moussouri, in her study on family agendas and family learning, found that ‘practical issues’ (i.e. weather, proximity to the museum, time availability, crowd conditions, and the entrance fee) influence the family agenda before the visit and contribute to many visitors’ decision-making process (Falk, Moussouri & Coulson, 1998:107).

\(^{14}\) Middleton in his paper, believes that visitors expect ‘value for money and effort’. Visitors are willing to pay but the ‘implementation of charging which is not backed up by the satisfaction of visitor expectations and in relation to perceived value for money is a certain recipe for loss of visitors. Charging must be seen not as an absolute factor but as a function of length of stay, which in turn is related to satisfaction achieved, and visitor perceptions of value for money (Middleton, 1985:24). Similar are the findings of Harris Qualitative report where the ‘expense factor’ was a consideration for some parents. However, the parents said that they were prepared to spend a large amount of money on a day out with their children if they thought they would get best values in terms of ‘entertainment’ and ‘fun’ for children (Harris Qualitative report, 1997:32).
Many families (4 out of 12) mentioned that word-of-mouth and advertising are two other criteria that motivate families to visit museums. The good or bad words from friends about an exhibition influence their choice to visit or not a specific museum\textsuperscript{15}. They feel more confident if someone from their friendly surrounding will share with them his or her museum experience saying that it is worth visiting the specific museum exhibition. Furthermore, advertising\textsuperscript{16} a specific exhibition through electronic or written media (TV, newspapers, museum leaflets etc.) motivates the family to visit an exhibition\textsuperscript{17}. The following extract is a typical example of the above point:

\begin{quote}
M: \textit{We take into account our friends' evaluation from visits they have done to museums. If we listen good words then we will probably visit the specific museum. (F4, Q3)}
\end{quote}

Another criterion is the quality of the exhibits and the exhibition space (physical context)\textsuperscript{18} that some families (3 out of 12) take into account in order to visit a museum. Thus, the physical context of the museum appeared to be a significant criterion on attracting the families. Greek museums, according to the Director of HCM \textit{‘should lose their inaccessible style in order to be related to the public’}.

\textsuperscript{15} Adams in his study found that word-of-mouth is the primary way in which visitors learn about and decide to visit museums. Thus, word-of-mouth from friends or relatives who have previously visited the museum appears to be one of the main factors for attracting visitors and forming their expectations. Particularly, he found that, at the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, between 1980 and 1988, two-thirds to three-quarters of all visitors stated that word-of-mouth influenced their decision to visit a museum. Among those visitors who stated they were influenced by word-of-mouth, most were first-time visitors, fewer were occasional visitors, and only a small number were frequent visitors. A more detailed discussion on the word-of-mouth factor is provided in chapter 2 and specifically in section 2.3.2 (in Adams 1988).

\textsuperscript{16} Advertising an exhibition and making the exhibitions known to the public is the main desire of the families. For a detailed discussion see section 5.2.4.

\textsuperscript{17} Harris Qualitative report also found that word-of-mouth and advertising stimulated parents' interest in visiting a particular museum or gallery (in Harris Qualitative Report, 1997:22). A more detailed discussion on the word-of-mouth factor is provided in chapter 2 and specifically in section 2.3.2.

\textsuperscript{18} The physical context according to Falk & Dierking is not only about the built environment, the ‘feel’ of the building but also about the objects contained in it. A significant advantage that museums have over other institutions is that they give the chance to the visitor to experience the real thing (in Falk & Dierking, 2000).
MP: *The life of a family inside the museum space is a life with tiredness, a life full of information which is deprived by those means that encourage the construction of the museum experience based on the individual's learning style. For example, somebody can learn better through music. I believe that museums must be comfortable and spaces for relaxation and social interactions.* (MP1).

*The Museum space*, as the Head of the Educational Programmes believes, *'belongs not only to the children but also to the parents. Parents can also have fun, be questioned, play and share with their children the learning experiences that they can gain from a museum visit'* (MP2). Moreover, the museums with appropriate exhibition design and the use of educational formats (like simple and comprehensible labels, hands-on exhibits, use of questions for reflection and relation to the everyday life of the visitor), should free the parent from the responsibility of *'knowing all’* and strengthen the role of the facilitator that collaborates and interacts with his/her child for the duration of a museum visit. This implies that when families’ conversations and family mediation take place in the course of valued and meaningful activities, where limitations of knowledge and skills are not stressed, they can be particularly fruitful. Therefore, museums should develop *‘enabling contexts’* that stimulate families to have momentous learning experiences19.

### 5.5 Fulfilment of expectations

Seven families feel that the visits they have done so far to Greek museums do not fulfil their expectations and they believe that the main cause of that is the

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19 ‘Learning occurs best under conditions of positive affect and high levels of involvement’ (in Falk & Dierking, 1997:13). When people know what they expect to see and they meet their expectations cognitively and spatially, then learning is facilitated. Thus, orientation which is a kind of *‘advance organizer’*, provides individuals with a conceptual and spatial preview of the museum space and can ensure greater learning. Furthermore, once oriented, visitors will be motivated to experience the museum space that makes them feel comfortable and affects them emotionally. The design of the space is therefore extremely important factor if museums want to attract the visitor's interest. (In Falk & Dierking, 2000)
insufficient presentation of the exhibits in allowing the family free exploration without seeking guidance. It is remarkable that these families consider that a visit in a museum is meaningful when it is supported by a guided tour, and how it is not meaningful when the design of the exhibits inhibits active engagement, both mentally and physically, of the visitors with the exhibits. They consider the guided tour a 'luxury' service because they regard museums to pay more attention to tourists by providing them with a tour, thus neglecting the needs of the Greek family when they are in a museum space with unfamiliar exhibits. Thus, most of the time the Greek family is 'alone' inside the exhibition area trying to interpret and explain to their children the exhibits without being actively involved in shared activities. This may cause some intense dissatisfaction and lack of pleasure of their museum experience. The following extracts reveal the above points:

F: .... There are, however, some cases (mainly during summer holidays), where Greek visitors are being ignored or enter in second fate against the tourists with regard to their guidance by the experts in the Greek language. (F7, Q4)

M: Despite the fact that Greece is a country with a brilliant and long-lasting history, many Greek museums don’t interpret and communicate their exhibits to the public following visitors’ needs and interest. I hope that many museums will change the way of presenting the objects to the public due to 2004 (i.e the Olympic year). (F6, Q4)

M: Our expectations are not very high. Probably we visit museums more like 'spectators' and not like 'explorers'. As parents we didn’t actually learn to visit museums. (F1, Q4)

20 The word 'alone' includes both literal as well as metaphorical interpretation, meaning that the lack of interaction is not only physically but also mentally either with people or with objects that enhances and facilitates visitors' learning experiences.
5.6 What do families want from Greek museums?

What a family wants from Greek museums was an essential question because it reveals the families' desires from museums from their point of view. It is also a question that will provide useful information concerning the gap that Greek museums have in their relationship with the Greek family. Issues that will be discussed are: the desire of advertising the exhibits; more quality in the design of exhibits; and providing family facilities.

Firstly, most of the families (6 out of 12) wish more advertising of Greek exhibitions through electronic and written media (TV, Internet, and newspapers) in order to be accessible in the wider public. We are living in a world of images and Greek museums need to find ways of approaching the Greek family by informing them about new exhibitions and communicating the aspect that museums are places of learning and entertaining together. The Director of The Hellenic Children's Museum believes that when a museum wants to attract families it has to advertise not only the exhibition space but also the services and facilities that a family will use. A museum must advertise the educational as well as the entertaining aspects of a visit using a language that will 'speak to' the heart of each Greek family. The following extracts are typical examples of this point:

MS: One way of attracting families is through advertising in the press and especially through the development and delivery of Newsletter because it is a medium that informs

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21 Families' needs and desires are important factors in influencing the museum experience. However, they have not being taken seriously yet by museum professionals in Greece.
22 Respondents in Harris Qualitative study stated that obtained their information from tube/train station advertising, local and broadsheet newspapers and radio advertising/coverage. These should be considered for campaigns as well as the school themselves (Harris Qualitative, 1997:67).
23 Especially, the 'amazement factor' at museums and galleries is ideal advertising because it shows the unique kind of fun to be had at museums and the concept of freedom for exploration and investigation (which is not available when going with the school) (in Harris Qualitative 1997).
24 Exhibits that 'speak to' the visitor, that stimulate curiosity and provide a greater understanding of how the visitor fits into the world, are successful (in Falk & Dierking, 1992:149).
about the services and facilities that are provided to the families. The use of simple language and attractive pictures must speak directly to the heart of the public (MSI).

M: I want museums to make known their exhibits to the public through advertisements in periodicals, news broadcast and television programme and not only through specialized leaflets or newspaper column. (F12, Q5)

Developing better exhibitions that will have ‘attracting’ and ‘holding power’ form another desire of the families about museums. Specifically, many families (5 out of 12) answered that they want more quality in the exhibition design by relating the exhibits with their everyday life and experiences. Due to the fact that many exhibits in Greece are organised in a way that makes sense to a museum expert, but not necessarily to the general public (i.e. the family), it can be difficult for the average visitor to understand the intended messages. For that reason families want exhibitions to be more visitor-centred where the museum professionals take their needs and interest into account. Only within the last five years Greek museums, in developing new visitor-centred exhibitions, use ideas about how people learn, how their attention can be drawn and held and how they can learn in an informal way using all their senses. Thus, an ‘exhibition language’ (Halberstma, 1999:90) has started to be developed in Greek exhibitions, a language,

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25 Harris Qualitative study found that in terms of advertising and promotional material, children seem to respond best to: large, colourful visuals; pictures of peculiar, novel or intriguing exhibits; pictures of animals; pictures showing people in different time periods and how they lived; promotional material with drawing/colouring elements incorporated in them. On contrary they responded least well to: heavy text; and black and white visuals (Harris Qualitative, 1997:57).

26 An exhibit has an attracting and holding power when it not only draws the attention of a visitor but also it made the visitor to stop, stay and read labels, discuss them with his/her social group, or interact in another way (Falk & Dierking, 1992).

27 Observation of visitors examining information in exhibits shows that visitors try to relate what they are seeing to their own experiences (in Falk & Dierking, 1992:74). If the museum seeks connections between the museum experience and the visitors’ everyday lives then the probability that the information presented will be remembered and used later in their lives will be high (Falk & Dierking, 1992).

28 Examples of using good ‘exhibition language’ is the Institute of Hellenic Culture, Museum of Byzantium Culture in Thessaloniki, Museum of Technology in Thessaloniki and some others.
however, that needs time to be learnt by the public itself. The following extracts reveal this point:

M: I would like museums to provide us with more information that would be related to our everyday lives. (F1, Q5)
M: ...Moreover, museums must find more creative ways of presenting and interpreting exhibits in order to approach families. (F2, Q5)

At last, many families (4 out of 12) are specifically interested in being provided with more facilities. In museums with entrance charges, a reasonable entrance fee at a special family rate is a necessity because the visit to any museum has something of the unknown, of the unexpected. As it was mentioned above, people hesitate if they have to pay too much for something they are not sure if they will like. Providing audiovisual guides and organizing family events are some other facilities that the families want in order to fill their needs. The following quotes express this point:

M: ...Because the cost of life is increasing, museums should make special offers to families. (F6, Q5)
F: I would like museums to offer the facility of audio guide so that I can choose freely which part of the exhibition is interesting more and acquiring specific information. (F10, Q5)
M: ...To organize special events that attract and engage children and their families. (F2, Q5)

29 Unlike theme parks where you know exactly what you get for your money
5.7 Families' perception about their participation in educational programmes

Remarkable is the fact that all the families stated that they want to participate in family museum programmes for a variety of reasons such as to have a better approach in material culture, to be interesting and attractive and because it is important for the family to act as a unit. In particular, many families (5 out of 12) mentioned that they want to participate in family programmes because they can access better and in more depth the museum objects. Furthermore, this access (physically as well as mentally) is encouraged by families' participation in interactive experiences that promote curiosity, creativity, and imagination. The following extracts are articulate expressions of this point:

F: Yes, because lack of time combined with the lack of information are balanced by accessing an exhibition much easier and acquiring more concrete information when we participate in an organized museum programme for families. (F12, Q6)

M: Yes, because participating in educational activities, the child will have the chance to engage actively with the exhibits in every museum space. That's why I believe that every museum has to have educational programmes. (F6, Q6)

Some other families (4 out of 12) mentioned that they want to participate in family programmes if they are interesting and attractive. If the parents as well as the children believe that participating in a programme will not provide an enjoyable, memorable and attractive day out for them, they are less likely to suggest a visit to a specific museum. The following extract expresses this position:

M: Yes, if it is something interesting and attractive for my family, otherwise we don't see why to participate in this programme! (F8, Q6)
Finally, some parents mentioned that it is good and very creative for the family to work as a group because it gives the family the chance to spend time, have fun and learn together. Group activities and creative workshops can motivate the families to visit a museum in their leisure time, especially if these address to their children’s needs. A mother’s comment reveals this point:

M: Yes, because it is very important for a family to act as a unit and to be informed about the subject-specific of the museum exhibition that (the family) is interested in by participating in creative and funny activities. (F10, Q6)

Most of the families (7 out of 12) expect from family programmes and activities a combination of learning and entertainment (‘edutainment’ according to Minzt, 1994) through active learning. Developing family activities, which provide an enjoyable and learning experience for the whole family, is something that is high on the agenda of family groups (Moussouri, 1998). Parents want from these programmes to provide more entertainment and stimuli activities for their children and to a certain extent for themselves:

F: We don’t want scientific knowledge but on contrary a more simply and comprehensive interpretation of the museum exhibits provided in a way so that together entertainment, learning, historical and conceptual reality will be in perfect balance and not to exit the museum being fatigued and unwilling to visit it again but to feel relaxed and “full” in order to transfer our experience to the others. (F12, Q6)

M: We want learning, entertainment, and information given together with active participation. (F9, Q6)

M: We would like the museum programmes to be addressed to the families providing meaningful learning experience - having printed material that sparkle children’s curiosity, discovery, imagination and observation – communication and feedback loop. Thus, our
visit to a museum will be a day with fun, learning and entertainment, like in abroad\textsuperscript{30}. (F6, Q6)

Ideally, the need of designing a communication and education policy that can be directly related to the needs of the wide public can be encouraged by the active participation of the visitors through shared activities that strengthen their learning experiences. Thus, the development and delivery of family programmes and activities should form, according to the Head of the Education Programmes of the HCM, an integral part of the education policy of Greek museums where families can meet and share their experiences together with other families. The following extract is a particular example of the above point:

\textbf{MS:} Family programmes enhance socialization where families come closer and collaborate with each other without having the stress and the pressure of giving the correct or wrong answer because they share together their thoughts and experiences. Most of all they are encouraged to participate actively in the learning process and have fun together with their children. (MS2)

\section*{5.3 Conclusion}

This chapter presented the first amount of the findings of this thesis concerning the perceptions of Greek families about museums. Informal discussions with the families, the interviews with the two museum professionals of the Children's Museum and the analysis of the preliminary questionnaires revealed rich data about their prior museum experiences and perceptions on the most frequent reasons that families don't choose to visit local museums in a family outing. It is obvious the fact that each family brought its personal agenda that influenced the

\textsuperscript{30} According to Harris Qualitative research, children in UK are more inclined to visit museums and galleries where they can offer to them the 'unique combination of opportunity to learn and to have fun at the same time' (1997:25).
Greek families’ perceptions about visiting museums

museum experience. Concretely, the analysis of discussions and questionnaires showed that most of the families haven’t gained so many positive museum experiences from visits that they have done so far in local museums while small percentage commented on their experiences positively. Remarkable is the fact that the families in most cases mentioned that they do not plan frequent visits to Greek museums in their leisure time due to a variety of reasons such as the lack of time, stress and family obligations; the perception that museums are only places of learning; the fear of the parents in revealing their ignorance to the child; the perception that schools take children to the museum; children become bored in museums; and the lack of museum attitude.

In addition, most of the families placed the combination of family holidays with museum visits as the basic criterion of choice. Time, the ‘good words’ of recommendation from friends, the subject-specific of the exhibition, the quality of exhibits formed some other criteria that families take into account when visiting museums. However, many museums in Greece do not fulfil families’ expectations because they do not address their needs and interests. According to families’ view, in order to be motivated, museums need to advertise the exhibits by using attractive material, to have more quality in the design of exhibits, and to provide family facilities. Overall, the prior museum experiences of families in visiting local museums revealed the emergence of delivering programmes specifically designed for family groups to encourage them to make meaningful museum visits. Particularly, families want museum programmes to provide the opportunity to participate in active experiences together as a family combined with learning and entertainment. The following chapter will discuss the learning process of the family programme that was delivered to the families of this study aiming to address their needs and interests and trying to change their attitudes towards museums.
Chapter 6

Greek families as Communities of Learners; A social and constructivist process

6.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the learning process of Greek families’ participation in communities of learners. The research employed repeated observations following an observation protocol (Appendix C) of children’s as well as facilitator’s behaviour over five months and also interviews, in order to identify changes in families’ experiences during the programme. Particularly, this chapter discusses how the process of participating in learning communities transformed families’ behaviour over time and how it influenced their learning outcomes as families collaborated with others in shared activities. Observation data during the Communities of Learners meetings and visits yielded much information about the social context of families’ participation in the programme.

Issues that will be discussed in this chapter are: the social interactions among participants over time and how it affected the learning process; the changes that occurred in families’ behaviour; how group heterogeneity enhanced the
dynamic nature of learning process; the role of collaborative learning and the role of facilitators in the learning communities.

6.2 Children's behaviour in the learning communities

Observation data during each meeting and museum visit yielded much information about the context of the museum experience and particularly the behaviour of children in shared activities. The process of becoming active participants passed from different stages revealing that working in groups and sharing common experiences is a dynamic procedure. An important way that children felt learning happened was through their social interactions with others as well as with the museum exhibits\(^1\). The changes in children's behaviour were strongly influenced by discussions with their peers and adults (parents, teachers and the museum professional). The findings in this section will be interpreted by looking at the changes on children's behaviour over a period of time.

6.2.1 Children's participation in the learning communities

During the first meeting children had a poor degree of participation in the activities because they did not have the opportunity to discuss and share their opinion with the rest of their learning group. The communication process was one way, thus inhibiting the social interaction among children and among children and adults. The adults had the role of instructors rather than facilitators. As a result children expressed their disappointment about the learning process and avoided developing a dialogue on the subject matter (e.g.

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\(^1\) A significant learning outcome that was reported by the families and is further discussed in chapter 7.
natural resources) by sharing experiences and knowledge with others. Furthermore, the children’s engagement with the activities was not encouraged at all. A comment from one child indicated the observed behaviours.

G: I didn’t like at all the first meeting at the Children’ Creative Play Centre. Most of the time we were sitting and listening to one of the teachers speaking without doing something specific. (F2, Q1)

On the contrary, from the second meeting and afterwards, children started to actively engage with the activities at the Centre for Children’s Creativity and children negotiated with each other by exchanging ideas, thoughts and experiences on the specific topics (natural resources, water, transportation, nutrition). Constructivists and hands-on activities like paper recycling (plate 1) and water experiments allowed them to interact physically and mentally as they had the unique experience to touch and handle objects and solve problems.

Plate 1: The learning community called “Seagulls” is engaged in workshop on paper recycling
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Findings from in-depth interviews with the family groups indicated that experiential and active learning was very effective. It had a deep impact on children's knowledge and understanding as it invited them to be active bringing simultaneously their past experience into the whole process and getting very close with old and unfamiliar things.

G: I really enjoyed the activities, the experiments, the recycling process and the exhibits we saw at the museum... I learnt useful information from the things we have done and seen. For example, I understood how important is the recycling process in order to protect the natural resources. (F4, Q9)

In addition to that, several studies (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999:80; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994:77; Hinton, 1993:16; Curtis & Goolnik, 1995:11) suggest that 'learning occurs in museum through the interaction of visitors with objects and programs provided' (Hein, 1998b:44). Furthermore, mental activity was enhanced by the 'problem-solving activity where children during the meetings engaged with questions having the opportunity to think creatively and share experiences with their peers. Rennie and McClafferty (1996) note that while hands-on activity is equated with perceptual explorations, for the experience to become meaningful, it must be interpreted with the mind. Hein and Alexander (1998) in their definitions of constructivist and active learning highlight the importance of mind-body connections during the process. While engaged in the physical activities associated with learning, children used their hands and minds to interact with the problem-solving activities (plates 2&3).
Plates 2&3: The learning communities used the recycling paper and drew four posters with slogans about the protection of the environment

Children, thus, were required to 'struggle with ideas, that is, to think' (Hein & Alexander, 1998:38) while they were handling and manipulating objects, doing experiments, solving problems and forming conclusions (plate 4). A dialogue among children on answering the question about the traffic problem in big cities expresses the above point:
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MP2: Do the drivers usually carry with their cars other passengers than themselves in order to go to their work? (asked the museum professional)

T1: What does everybody think about that? Let's express our thoughts! (asked one teacher)

C1: I think that most of the time the drivers are alone in their car. I know that from my father...he goes at his work alone.

P1: Yes, unfortunately many of us take our cars to go to work. Why do you think we do that? (asked one parent)

C2: Because they think that they will arrive earlier than if they take the bus or metro.

C3: I think it would be much better....if they take a bus because one bus can carry more people than one car.

C4: Yes, but it's not so convenient to take the bus, because the bus stops are far away from our houses.

C2: It would be much better if 3 or 4 adults who are working in the same job and stay close to each other have gone by one car instead of four.

P2: Yes, I think it's a good idea!

Plate 4: The discussion engaged the minds of the learning community “Torrents” and created a poster with signals about using friendly transports.

In the dialogue the gender is indicated by the following division: MP for museum professional, T for teacher, C for children and P for parent.
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It is worth mentioning that children were active participants within the learning communities not only during the meeting at the Centre for Children’s Creativity and the museum visits but also during the preparation activities at home on the specific sections. As a result, children had the unique opportunity to prepare for the specific topics from their home by bringing their ideas and knowledge into their learning groups (plates 5&6). The use of other learning resources such as Internet, books and magazines, provided children with a framework that helped them to expand their learning experiences beyond a specific learning setting (e.g. museums). This process had an impact on families’ learning outcomes and especially on the development of their skills. An indication of the observed behaviour is the children’s comments when they were asked about the ‘preparation activities at home’. The following extract is a particularly articulate expression of this point.

M: At home, together with my daughter and some relatives we discussed many of the environmental problems and this helped us to bring and share our experiences in our group. (F12, Q6)

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3 The interrelation among the learning process and the learning outcomes indicates once more the complex nature of learning and triangulation of the findings provides the opportunity to capture that complexity.
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Plates 5&6: The above drawings are from the preparation activities at home where the children were free to express their learning experiences using not only drawings on the subject-specific but also games that engage the mind such as acrostics, riddles and crosswords.

During the third meeting, children were engaged in water experiments where they had the chance to express their thoughts, clarifying ideas and misunderstandings through discussion and debate. Children were actively involved in the learning process by defining questions in their own language and working out answers together instead of reproducing material presented by the adult (teacher, parents, museum professional). Changes in children's participation among the two visits on the four museum sections were being observed. During the first visit the three learning communities visited the two sections (natural resources and water) of the museum. The degree of active participation was good and children within each learning community expressed their satisfaction about their museum experience as they were engaged in meaningful group activities (Plates 7&8). Museum exhibits and experimentation allowed for bodily engagement, through touching and manipulating, and stimulated higher levels of attention-focussed behaviour.
such as questioning and explaining - behaviours that according to Dierking are clearly associated with learning (Borun, Cleghom & Garfield, 1995).

Plates 7&8: Learning communities are engaged in problem-solving activities concerning the sections (natural resources and water) they visited earlier that day.
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Children’s participation in the second visit was much more active than the first one because they had the unique experience to get involved in creative workshops with activities that allowed them to interact physically and mentally (plate 9). Inside the exhibition area children were engaged in problem-solving activities using activity sheets which helped them to explore the exhibits more deeply and think critically in order to solve problems concerning transportation and nutrition.

Plate 9: Children from the learning community “Seagulls” are trying to explore the museum exhibits using the activity sheets.

Furthermore, inside the museum the children had the chance to participate together with the parents and the teachers in creative workshops such as making dolls and posters from wasted material, buying ecological children’s books, attending a musical and drama performance (plates 10,11,12&13). Their museum experience was very memorable because they were active participants during the learning process.
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Plate 10: children are making dolls from waste material

Plate 11: The learning communities listening and singing together with the invited orchestra.
At the last meeting, children had the privilege to transfer and reinforce their museum experience at the Environmental Conference by presenting to the members of the Conference the process of paper recycling. Children used their past experience in a meaningful way by continuing and extending their...
learning beyond the temporal and physical confines of a single learning community experience. This transformation from 'novice' to 'expert' made children more responsible for their learning.

6.2.2. Children’s collaboration in the learning communities

During the first meeting at the Centre for Children' Creativity the degree of collaboration among children in the learning communities was very poor because some of them wanted to change groups. Conflicts among some children were the major problem that imposed building a collaborative environment. Specifically, two children did not want to participate in the same group because they did not like each other. Parents' intervention through developing discussions with their children resolved these conflicts, and meeting after meeting the relationships between the two children became better.

G: In my group there was a girl that I didn’t like. I didn’t want to participate in my group because of her. My mother told me that it’s not very good to be selfish and that I have to try to collaborate with her. So I’ve made some concessions. Now I realise that I learnt many things from that girl because she knew many things, which I heard for the first time in my life. (F11, Q5)

Furthermore, the level of discussion and debate within the learning communities was low because they participated in a discussion led by an adult where one person could speak at a time.

After the second meeting, the learning process had changed and collaboration among children started to emerge. Specifically, by dividing the three learning communities in a roundtable setting a new social context was created whereby
children had the opportunity to share individual cognition with their peers and come to a conclusion based on the sum of these cognitions. Cooperative learning enhanced children's collaboration where families worked together in shared activities (plate 14).

Plate 14: Children and facilitators are working together to achieve common goals. In this picture they discuss their nutrition habits.

In addition to that, the interest was continuous and the atmosphere was good and very creative. They were feeling free to express their thoughts and because of the good communication, the participants decided to give names to each learning community directly related to the museum exhibition and were relevant to specific topics (Torrents, Dewdrops, Seagulls). Each learning community had an identity revealing the dynamic process of working in groups. The follow extract is a discussion among participants in the learning communities in order to find a name of their team.
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C1: I have an idea! Do you want to give a name to our team?
C: Yes!!! (all the team-mates agreed to name their team)
P: That is a good idea. What do you suggest?
C2: What about Drops?
C3: Yes, it’s nice.
C4: What about Dewdrops?
C: We liked Dewdrops a lot (all the team-mates agreed on that name)
C1: Ok, from now on you will call us “Dewdrops”. (said the child to the other learning communities)

Gradually, meeting after meeting, children working together were engaged in the learning communities process representing an effective form of social interaction. Children were developing valuable problem solving skills by formulating their ideas, discussing them, receiving immediate feedback and responding to questions and comments from their peers. Thus, the social interaction was continuous as children were engaged learners during the meetings both at the Centre for Children’s Creativity and the Museum.

Furthermore, when children collaborated, the learning process became interesting and fun. The roundtable process facilitated brainstorming ideas to be emerged by giving possible answers to questions or generating a group of questions. An example of this process was the following: A parent posed a question that had the potential for a number of possible answers in creating a poster about friendly transportations. In their learning community, children took turns adding their ideas. First, a child wrote down an idea and shared it out loud. Then the poster was passed to the left and the second child wrote an idea, shared it with others and so on. (plate 15)
Plate 15: Children and adults take turns and add their comments in a very creative and imaginative way.

Children within each learning group discussed the list of ideas and then they shared them with the other learning groups. Furthermore, while children they were reading a text together and explaining the concepts to each other they were engaged in high level critical thinking by using their own vocabulary and basing their comments upon their previous knowledge. Thus, they constructed a new knowledge based on top of their existing base. This process as we will see in the next chapter led to a deeper understanding on the specific topics.

F1: Here, we have a picture. What does it shows? (asked one parent)
C1: A factory
F2: Yes, that's right....but what kind of factory? Look at the picture carefully (asked the other parent)

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4 Falk & Dierking (2000) state that conversation is a primary mechanism of knowledge construction and distributed meaning making
5 Several studies suggest that recognizing and accommodating children’s social agendas can result in significant learning and that when children have opportunities to explain their learning to other children or to adults, they remember their discoveries better and are also more likely to transfer the new insights to new situations. (in Falk & Dierking, 2000:102)
C2: It's a factory with water
C1: Yes I know…it's a hydroelectric factory
C3: I know, we use the water in order to take energy
F2: That's right. Well done to all of you (said the parent)

In addition, the children’s collaboration in learning communities provided a safe learning environment to some children that were initially hesitant to speak out and offer their opinions publicly for a fear of appearing foolish. While children were working in groups, solutions came from the group rather than from the individual. In essence, the focus was removed from the individual, thus diffusing the effects of criticism from any child. Those children had the opportunity to propose ideas to their group prior to formulating a final response, which was going to be the end product of a group process. Thus, learning was a result of a continuous dynamic negotiation between the individual and the social setting in which the individual’s activity took place. This learning process had an effective impact on enhancing self-esteem of some children.

Learning community process inside the exhibition area was encouraged and valued. Exploring exhibits, children and adults worked together to achieve common goals. They watched and listened to one another, asked questions, made suggestions, gave directions and collaborated to solve problems. Each member of the learning community was responsible for their own actions as well as for helping others when necessary (plate 16).

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6 It is obvious how the learning process of participating in learning communities influenced the learning outcomes children’s attitudes towards themselves. For further discussion see the findings presented in chapter 7 and specifically in section 7.2.
Collaborating in learning communities encouraged children to take responsibility for their learning and for their group functioning. Children assisted each other and took different roles within their learning communities (plate 17). Roles such as reader, recorder, reporter, materials handler, time keeper and challenger were rotated among participants and especially children for each topic. Thus, in order for each child to practice all the roles, they were encouraged to develop and practice skills including leadership, information recording, communication, challenging ideas and presenting information and materials to group members. Collaboration in learning communities followed by joint activities provided an environment in which children had the chance to build good social skills as we will see in the next chapter.
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Plate 17: Children took different roles such as recorder, timekeeper, challenger, material handler etc.

6.2.3 Heterogeneity of the learning communities

The learning communities contained diverse members (older and younger children, parents, teachers) having the benefit of exposure to different ideas and the challenge of incorporating these ideas into the learning process of each learning group. Heterogeneity, then, among the learning community members was a condition established by the teachers from the first meeting in order to trigger interactions. Each learning community consisted of younger and older children in which some of them were more knowledgeable on the specific topics than others, teachers and parents. Thus, heterogeneity was based on differences such as age, behaviour and knowledge on specific topics among group members. A teacher's comment illustrates this point:

T: What children have told me during the learning community process was that they had the chance to work in groups and share their experiences through conversation.
They didn’t get bored at all! On contrary, they felt inspired because they were engaged in various activities with group discussions, creative workshops and handling museum objects. There was a balance and they were active participants in the whole process. I think that heterogeneity in learning groups enhanced a lot the dynamics. (T2, Q6)

During the learning community process and while children express themselves orally, the more advanced children demonstrated appropriate ways of approaching a problem analysing content material and formulated arguments and justifications for their approaches. Through the process of questioning by peers, these children became more aware of the thinking processes they were using. Furthermore, by discussing various aspects of a problem solution and questioning the more knowledgeable children, the novices in the learning community participated in actually solving the problem with the help of their peers. Thus, when children work cooperatively in groups the more knowledgeable children led the less knowledgeable child in the appropriate direction required to understand new concepts. This led the novice child to trust the expert on through a specific learning experience in order to understand better specific information. The following extract illustrates the above point:

G: The collaboration with my team-mates was very good because we discussed a lot. I remember once the first visit at the museum; I had a disagreement with Reggina on the section of natural resources and specifically on the ‘wall of ecological thinking’. I thought that if we took sea sponges from the sea we would not harm the environment. On contrary, Reggina believed that we do harm the environment because the sea sponges are living creatures and if we took them from the sea we might create some problems to other living organisms in the sea. Reggina helped me to understand this better. (F5, Q6)
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Giving and receiving help was another characteristic of the learning communities functioning, where children could consult, question, explain and monitor one another. Novice children had the opportunity to ask questions and seek help immediately either from their more knowledgeable peers or from the facilitators. This give-and-take process encouraged the degree of children's respectfulness and care for one another throughout the programme. The following extract expresses this point:

B: In my team I admired George most of all because he knew many things and he helped us a lot. The fact that in each team there were children and adults that knew more things than others helped a lot. (F6, Q6)

Changes in children's behaviour were identified during the process of participating in the learning communities. Children transformed from passive to active learners through engagement with hands-on as well as minds-on activities. Collaboration among participants and group heterogeneity gave to children the opportunity to feel free to express themselves, to give and receive help and to engage with new ideas through embodied learning events. Facilitators' role contributed to a great extent to the function of the learning communities and this will be discussed in the next section.

6.3 Facilitators' behaviour in the learning communities

An important aspect in creating an effective learning community environment was the role of adults (teachers, parents, and museum professional) as facilitators instead of instructors. Adults and children became equal partners during the learning process where no one had all the responsibility and no one was passive. The relations among children and adults were dynamic serving as
resources to each other with varying roles and shifting responsibilities according to their understanding of the activities. Providing help and explanations to children and challenging ideas in order to better understand some activities and new concepts were behaviours that encouraged and valued. The findings will be interpreted in this section by looking mainly at the behaviour of adults as facilitators during the learning community process.

6.3.1 Adults' participation in the learning communities

At the first meeting, adults were hesitant to contribute actively to the function of the learning groups. It was difficult to take off the role of instructor that were familiar with and act as facilitators. They were confused and for that reason most of the parents and the two of the three teachers were passive participants in the learning process. Social interactions among children and adults were not encouraged and instead of developing a two-way communication process, a monologue from a teacher was established. As a result, many children and adults were not very satisfied by the process because it was not so different from attending a lesson in a traditional school class.

However, the unsuccessful first meeting gave the participants the opportunity to discuss and change the learning process from passive to active. Thus, from the second meeting and afterwards, adults played a very active role in facilitating the process and interacting with each child. Parents, teachers, museum professional and children became integral parts of the learning community process. The adults became facilitators instead of directors and the children became willing participants instead of passive followers. The following extracts indicate this change:
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MP: It was clear the difference between the first and the last meeting. At first, we were very confused... we didn't know what to do what was our role in the programme. The stress of first time to deliver a good programme to the families blocked us and made the programme a bit boring! However, from the second meeting until the last one, things have been changed to better and all participants knew exactly what to do. Our role as facilitators was to support and encourage children's thinking. (Museum professional, Q1)

T: We realized after the first meeting how much children want to be approached from a different angle by triggering their curiosity, imagination and interest on subject-specific and that traditional teaching made the children feel tired, bored and terrified reminding them the traditional school class. After that, we decided together to follow a more active process through experiential learning and active engagement with activities (T1, Q1).

Facilitators, thus, became active participants in the learning community process by interacting and engaging as equal partners with children in shared activities (plate 18). They tried to exchange and negotiate ideas, thoughts, knowledge and experiences on specific topics related to the museum exhibition. They provided help and explanations to children, at the same time encouraging them to turn to each other for directions and explanations. During the museum visits facilitators were always together with the children helping, encouraging and sometimes leading the group towards its goal. The following extracts are comments from one parent and the museum professional towards their role as facilitators.

P: Yes, we were active participants providing help which was more on managing the learning process and less on providing to the children with the 'right' answers and thus transmitting knowledge in children's minds. We encouraged children to turn to each other and seek solutions on problem-solving activities through meaningful discussion
and arguments. We also helped to keep the balance by giving roles to each child in the group. (F6, Q11)

MP: Something that impressed me about the parents' behaviour was the fact that even though I was expecting to be more uninterested during the museum visit, on contrary they insisted to be engaged in learning activities and workshop encouraging the children to try more. They were saying for example: 'only these advantages you found? What team we are? Come on let's try more'. Encouragement was valued and I believe that the parents fulfilled their role as facilitators. (Museum Professional/environmentalist, Q11)

Plate 18: The facilitator is participating as equal partner in the process of paper recycling
6.3.2 Adults' collaboration and heterogeneity in the learning communities

Furthermore, intergenerational learning occurred as the learning communities consisted of children, parents, teachers and the museum professional became co-investigators of the environmental problems presented at GAIA Centre of Goulandris Natural History Museum. They collaborated by working together to achieve group goals and improve their understanding of a topic or concept. Adults as facilitators played an important role, scaffolding children’s learning in collaborative learning community situations (plate 19). When children were facing difficulties in understanding some concepts, adults were central in challenging children’s minds to think more critically and make judgements based on the museum exhibits and their personal experiences and knowledge repertoire.

Plate 19: The parent-facilitator scaffolding children’s learning
Thus, through guidance, when necessary, and encouragement, facilitators created a comfortable and supportive environment for active and experiential learning. The following extract is from a dialogue between children and facilitators of the learning community called “Dewdrops” (plate 20):

_**PI:** What problems are caused on humans and on the environment because of the unwise use of the transports?

_**C1:** The gas pollutes the environment.

_**MP:** What do the rest of you think about?

_**C2:** People have health problems like having difficulty to breath.

_**MP:** Do you know a phenomenon that is caused by the polluted atmosphere and it is related to rain?

_**C3:** Yes! This rain is called acid rain because it is polluted and goes to earth destroying the environment as well as the marbles and the archaeological monuments. I read it in that label over there!

_**PI:** Yes, that’s right! So, what do we have to do reduce this phenomenon?

_**C4:** Maybe to use public transports instead of private cars.

_**C5:** Or to use cars that are friendly to the environment like solar cars.

_**MP:** That’s nice, children!

**Plate 20:** The learning community “Sea-gulls” after the visit at GAIA Centre is discussing together with the museum professional the environmental problems caused by the unwise use of transports
In addition, facilitators - aside from providing scaffolding to children - were active learners during the learning process where they had the opportunity to learn new concepts and experience a more active way of teaching based on collaborative learning. The following extract is an explicit example of this point:

T: I think that this way of teaching to children made learning to be more active and transformed myself in a learner because I was involved in the process of searching information, participating in workshops, reading and discussing with my husband issues related to the subject specific of the programme (about water, nutrition, transport, natural resources) in order to be useful in my group. This is life long learning and through this programme we learnt how to learn. (T2, Q3)

As a result, adults enjoyed the learning process because group working and sharing, transformed them from knowledgeable givers\(^7\) to equal learners without having the fear of always providing the right answers. It is obvious again that the process of active and equal learning led to enjoyment and motivated parents to participate in the programme and in creative museum workshops and thus to visit the museum\(^8\) (plate 21). A teacher’s comment on the learning process reinforces the role of the parent as facilitator:

T: This programme motivated the parents to be active learners because they had a specific role to play of facilitator instead of instructor who knows everything and tries to transmit knowledge into children’s minds. I think that parents have transformed from parent-teacher to parent-learner that facilitates and encourages children’s as well as his/her learning. (T3, Q11)

\(^7\) Being knowledgeable information givers was a barrier for parents to visiting museums as discussed earlier in chapter 5 and specifically in section 5.2.2.

\(^8\) The finding of the impact of the programme on families’ museum experiences will be presented and discussed further in chapter 7.
6.4 Conclusion

Within learning communities, children and adults supported one another’s endeavours. A more experienced or knowledgeable adult or child would often help other children less experienced to learn how to use an exhibit or how to solve a problem in order for the learning community to have a successful learning experience. Thus, peer-to-peer as well as peer-to-adult scaffoldings were being observed in situations where children engaged in activities related to environmental problems. Furthermore, learning by doing was a very effective process because it invited both children and adults to be active participants, simultaneously bringing their past experience and knowledge into the learning process and getting very close with unfamiliar things and concepts. Children and adults learnt well together because the learning community environment provided effective ways of teaching and learning like
working together in activities, solving problems in groups and sharing solutions with their peers. Hence, visiting a museum as communities of learners formed a social and constructivist learning process, which significantly influenced the learning outcomes of the Greek families.
Chapter 7

The impact of visiting museums as learning communities on Greek families' museum experiences

7.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the impact of the communities of learners' programme on families' museum experiences. Thus, different levels of learning outcomes were identified from gaining information, knowledge and skills through developing new insights, enjoyment, as well as deep learning through increased understanding and most of all changed attitudes and values. Specifically, the interviews with families clearly show that the learning outcomes from participating in the community of learners' programme frequently related to attitudes and values. Most of the families commented that this programme changed their attitudes towards Greek museums and motivated them to visit museums more frequently as organized learning communities. The responses from families indicated an increase in knowledge and understanding was another learning outcome. Furthermore, families increased their skills, especially social skills, as they were active participants in the learning communities. As a
result, many families were satisfied, inspired and very creative through their participation in the programme and this led them to a progression in their behaviour and actions in dealing with environmental issues.

7.2 Changes in families' attitudes and values

The interviews with the families show that most of them spoke more of attitudes developed than of content learnt. By experiencing something new, reinforcing and building on previous knowledge, attitudes and values were modified as a result of personal change and growth. Specifically, some families developed new attitudes and perspectives and gained new meaning in their lives and some others experienced life-changing transformations. Following from this, the interviews with families probed to demonstrate the depth and range of attitudes and values by presenting the specific outcomes and thus capturing the complexity of learning.

Families' motivation to visit museums: It is remarkable the fact that all the families commented that the opportunity to participate in a museum programme, to get close to other families, places, or objects increased their motivation to visit museums. They believed that when someone participates in a programme, then the interest is immense. This attitude reinforced the opinion of some families, that if museums could not offer meaningful activities as part of organized programmes then it would be very difficult to attract families to visit them during a family outing.

M: I think that participating actively in museum programmes by engaging with shared activities together with other families like we did in GAIA Centre and in Centre for
Children's Creativity gives us a motive to visit museums during our leisure time. If something is organized then I believe it is easier to participate in it. There are many things to do on weekends but if you put something on schedule then it is easier to do it. I liked it a lot and the first visit in GAIA Centre was the catalyst one to keep coming to the meetings. I think all the families had the motive to come because none of them left from the programme. The programme kept the interest of the families. (F2, Q8)

M: When you organize something it is easier to do it. If you say that I will visit that museum on this Sunday and if the museum offers activities to be engaged with then I'm sure that I will definitely visit the museum…as I did with this programme. (F7, Q15)

G: Yes we like the whole programme. When I go again to the museum I would like to go with my team like we did in this museum. I don’t want to visit other museums without being prepared with activities. I liked a lot the way we worked together in the activities. It was fun. (F10, Q8)

F: I think that participating in something gives you the motive to go to the museum. Everything was nice. I wish we would do it again! (F12, Q8)

Families' participation in organized activities, having fun, being interested and well prepared at home and at the Centre, sharing with others, knowing exactly when, where and what to do are examples of intrinsically motivated learning activities that developed to families the desire to visit the museum as learning communities. Learning was volunteered and occurred for intrinsic reasons and thus free-choice learning was highly effective.

Families' positive attitudes in relation to their participation in learning communities: Some children (in 4 out of 12 family groups) and adults (in 2 out of 12 family groups) had a positive attitude in relation to their participation in
the family programme and this reinforced the value of collaboration and team working. At this point, it is essential to mention how the positive attitude in relation to their participation led to an increase in social skills: The following quotes are typical examples of this point:

G: I liked it a lot because the help is bigger when you work in teams than alone and most of all you can discuss and share your opinions about many things. I remember that Reggina’s mother helped my team a lot. I liked the idea of working in teams because we were sharing many things and I’ve never felt that I don’t do anything. I liked doing many things a lot, helping the others and this chance has been given to me through my participation in the family programme. (F12, Q5)

B: It was very nice because we had the chance to come close with other families to discuss and share our experiences. It has nothing to do with the way we do the lesson in the class. In class we are not working in groups. (F6, Q13)

M: I liked a lot the whole process. It was very good because we collaborated very well with each other. I was watching the children to participate in the activities. I tried to support and help them. (F7, Q9)

Some other responses reflected on how families’ positive experience as communities of learners reinforced the value of visiting museum and learning through participating in shared activities. Specifically, children (in 3 out of 12 family groups) and adult family members (in 2 out of 12 family groups) commented that their experience provided them with a positive attitude towards their participation in the family programme in museums and thus motivated them to visit again. The following responses are typical examples of this point:

1 One of the strengths of GLO’s approach is the interrelation of the learning outcomes.
Chapter 7. The impact of visiting museums as Learning Communities on Greek families’ museum experiences

G: I didn’t imagine that we would do such things in a museum visit. I thought we go to a museum just to see without touching or doing some things. In other words I thought that a museum visit is boring! But here after all the activities we did I feel very satisfied because we did totally different things. I like that we participated in the activities and I want to come again. (F10, Q1)

M: I can assure you that the visits we have done at the museum and the preparation meetings at the Centre of Creative activities helped my daughters to understand better things that were unable to learn and understand during a course at school called ‘Environmental Study’. School learning is only words and facts not an experience. On the contrary, few meetings at the centre and two visits were enough in order to assimilate and accommodate knowledge in an enjoyable way. (F11, Q1)

Finally, four adult family members and seven children commented that preparation for specific themes helped them to better understand the subjects they were engaged with. Thus, the value of preparation before the museum visits was very important for them. Preparing for the visits and being responsible with increased critical thinking and participating in shared activities were all things that made them have a positive attitude towards the experience. The extracts below from two mothers captured the meaning of this point:

M: First of all I would like to thank you for the good research you have done in order to support the families in their visits. It is something that we don’t have here in Greece. The level of the work was very professional. The whole issue for a good visit is to have a good preparation. The children’s willingness to participate in the activities impressed me. (F11, Q1)

M: In fact when you are prepared as a family for the visit you become more focused on the specific things that you want to learn and do. We have the chance to imagine it and
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expect something specific. I think that the meetings and the activities we did at the specific sections of the museum helped us to understand better some things. (F1, Q4)

Overall, the families’ positive attitudes in relation to participation in the programme strongly influenced the value of the experience of collaborating and working together with the members of each learning community. Furthermore, positive experiences that the families had, reinforced their attitude towards museum programmes. Finally, families’ preparation (at home as well as at the Centre for Children’s Creativity) for each of the specific sections of the programme influenced their attitudes towards museums and family programmes, as they had the freedom and time to search and focus on specific things. However, in the beginning, some negative feelings and attitudes emerged but it is important to understand that these negative feelings changed into positive ones. The following section discusses this issue.

Families’ negative attitudes in relation to their participation in learning communities: Two families had a negative attitude in relation to a prior visit (before their participation in the programme) at the specific museum saying that they ‘couldn’t understand’ many of the exhibits being presented in the exhibition. On the contrary, this negative attitude changed into a positive one when they visited the museum again as participants in the programme together with other families. This changed attitude, according to the families’ comments, was a result of their ‘active engagement with activities’ inside and outside the museum and of the ‘good preparation’ that they had made prior to the visit:

2 As it was discussed in chapter 5, families stated that they want to participate in family programmes because they will help them to understand better the exhibits and to encourage their curiosity, creativity and imagination (see section 5.2.6).
G: Before this programme I had visited together with my father the museum and I can say that I didn’t like it too much because I couldn’t understand it......and my father couldn’t help me a lot because he knew little about the museum. But now after this programme I can say that I understood many things because we did a lot of preparation with activities not only at home but also at the Centre of creative activities. Because of that I could understand many things at the museum. (F5, Q4)

B: It was the second time that I visited the museum. The first time I went it was with the children from Germany who were guests by the municipality and I didn’t understand many things. The second time I visited the museum was much better because we were prepared prior to the visit...in the museum we had activity sheets that helped us focus on the exhibits. (F6, Q2)

There were three families that expressed their displeasure about the number of the visits in the museum. In the beginning, the number of the pre-planned visits at the museum was four, as well as the specific sections of the museum exhibition (i.e. natural resources, water, transportation and nutrition). Afterwards, due to some practical problems, the visits had to be decreased from four to two, thus the families had to visit two sections each time instead of one. Even though the families characterized the specific attitude as a negative one from their point of view, the researcher interpreted this reaction as being mainly positive. Specifically, if the learning community programme was not so interesting and attractive to the families then the reduction of the visits would not have been so important for them. The families’ desire for and interest in as many visits as possible to the museum, results in a positive attitude and confirms the belief that when there are interesting things for a family to do during a museum visit, then the motives are strengthened and there is always enough time for this kind of family outing. Thus, it is obvious from the above
that barriers to visiting are not always lack of time and concern, or the lack of a positive attitude towards a museum as place that combines both learning and entertainment: in addition a barrier is the lack of motives for families to visit and spark their interest and thus have meaningful museum experiences.

G: Yes, I feel very satisfied. The only thing that I didn’t like was the fact that in each visit to the museum we did two sections together, for example at the first visit we did natural resources together with water. It would have been much better to do one section in each visit and instead of two visits to make them four. I would have the chance to look at the sections with more details. But it’s ok, I will go again. (F4, Q10)

Another negative experience that has been changed into a positive one was the disappointment of some children after the first meeting at the beginning of the learning community programme. Meeting after meeting their attitudes changed towards the experience of being participants in the family programme. The following quotations are from a dialogue between a daughter and her mother and are typical examples of this point:

G: In the beginning, it was a disaster for me. I didn’t like at all the first time we met at the Centre for Children’s Creativity in order to prepare for natural resources. We were sitting and listening one of the teachers speaking without doing something specific. But after the second meeting the things had changed for better. You remember mammy? (F5, Q1)

M: Yes, of course...I remember! I remember your disappointment when you came home after the first meeting at the Centre of Creative activities. You told me that you were bored and I told you that maybe next time would be much better. In fact it was! After the second meeting at the Centre of Creative activities you came home being full of enthusiasm and described to me and to your dad your experience of recycling a paper.
You told us in details the whole procedure of recycling a paper. Most of all, I remember your excitement from the first visit at the museum. (F5, Q1)

This section looked at the negative attitudes that some families had before or at the beginning of the programme. But what was of particular interest in this discussion was the fact that the families' negative attitudes have been transformed into positives because of the overall meaningful experience that was shaped in families thoughts during the dynamic process of participating in learning communities.

Families' opinions and attitudes towards their team-mates. Most of the families (10 out of 12) reflected on how their participation in the learning communities enhanced their opinions or attitudes towards others. Most of the children (in 10 out of 12 family groups) liked that they were helped by their team-mates during the activities. Sharing thoughts and helping each other induced positive opinions towards other team-mates. In fact, most of them find interaction with other participants beneficial to their learning:

B: Regina helped the team a lot because she brought useful information from her research at home with her father. (F1, Q6)

G: A friend of mine from the other team told me that there was a boy who knew many things on the sections we did and that he helped his team-mates a lot to understand many things. In my team there was also a boy that helped us a lot. I learnt from him many things. (F2, Q6)

B: All my team-mates were very nice. We didn't argue but on the contrary we helped and complement each other. I was always listening to the others when they had something to say. About the adults I liked a lot that they were in the teams helping the
children to understand. They were explaining to us many things and I remember that many times I was asking my mother’s help. (F6, Q6)

Opinions towards the role that more knowledgeable children and adults had in helping the others were also introduced. The opportunity of more novice children to work with experts increased their ability to solve problems. The children also acknowledged the role that adults played as facilitators in the learning communities. The adults became facilitators instead of instructors, having an active and supportive role to play, and the children became willing participants instead of passive followers. The following extracts are an articulate expression of this point:

M: I liked the fact that the environmentalist came to the Centre several times and helped us a lot with the activities. It was very good to have an expert during the activities. (F6, Q6)

B: I thank all the children, the teachers, and the parents that helped to work together and learn many useful things about the environment. I made some new friends too. I felt very lucky that I participated in that programme. Thank you. (F10, Q15)

G: The adults were very helpful with us in many different tasks. We were asking them to explain us many things that we couldn’t understand. (F3, Q6)

M: I think that the teachers helped a lot the three teams. I can speak more for Maria, the teacher in our team. She was always very well prepared helping a lot the dynamic of the group because she was challenging us to express our thoughts and to discuss in depth the problem solving-activities. (F8, Q6)

3 Asymmetry of roles was one of the most important characteristics in the learning community philosophy and was discussed in details in chapter 2.
It is obvious from the above that when children and adults worked cooperatively in the learning communities, the more knowledgeable child or adult led the less knowledgeable child in the appropriate direction required to understand new concepts. This collaborative attitude, thus, led the community members to have a good opinion of their team-mates and to value the importance of helping others in different tasks. It is significant again to mention the interrelation of skills with attitudes and values and specifically how the development of social skills through helping others influenced the individual’s attitudes and opinions towards others.

Families’ opinions about themselves: Many adult family members (in 8 out of 12 family groups) expressed their satisfaction about themselves and the role they played as facilitators. They believed that their contribution in the three learning communities enhanced their self-confidence in managing, challenging and supporting children’s attempts in shared activities. The following quotations express this point:

*M: As a mother my role was to help, support and encourage children’s attempts to solve the activities. So, this programme was a challenge for me because I had to manage a mixed group with boys and girls with different learning experiences. Some children knew more things than others and my role was to keep the balance and the active participation of all in the activities. And I managed to succeed in that together with the teacher’s help and the other mothers. In the team we shared different views and experiences and this was very good for me because I was not only a mother who helped the children but at the same time I was a learner who learnt from the children many things.* (F2, Q11)

*M: My role was to support and help the children to express their thoughts....of course I had to keep the balance among children so that neither of them could feel unprivileged.*
wanted to reinforce all the children to speak out their opinions especially those that were afraid to do it. (F8, Q11)

Some children (in 4 out of 12 family groups) commented that working in groups increased their self-esteem. Before the programme, these children were hesitant to speak out and offer opinions publicly in a traditional classroom setting for fear of appearing foolish or saying something wrong. During the programme and when the children worked in groups, solutions came from the group rather than from the individual. In essence, the focus was removed from the individual, thus diffusing the effects of criticism. The learning community environment created a safe, nurturing environment, where participants expressed themselves and explored their ideas without the fear of failure or criticism. The following extract is a typical example of this point:

G: I liked the way we collaborated in my team because we weren't ashamed of making a mistake. Many times at the beginning I didn't want to speak because I wasn't sure if my answer was the correct one. I was afraid! But meeting after meeting I got more confident by saying loudly my opinion without having the fear of saying something wrong. I didn't care because all my team-mates made me feel relaxed. I was sharing all my thoughts together with the other children. I didn't have the feeling of being at school! I liked it a lot....it would be great to do it again! (F5, Q8)

Both children and adults learnt better as they had to contribute as much as possible to the function of the learning communities. The whole was greater than the sum of the parts and many family members understood the value in helping others to succeed: something that actually helps them to become better and more active learners.
Attitudes towards the role of museums and the Centres for Children’s Creativity: Prior to the programme, most of the families and especially the children, considered museums as ‘boring’ places where there are not many interesting things to do. In contrast, some statements indicate that most of the families (8 out of 12) changed their attitudes towards museums and the role they can play for them as a social and family event. It was a special family experience, a unique opportunity to spend time doing something together:

*M: It is very good to visit a museum as organized family groups because the museum is not only a place of seeing things but also is a place of participating actively together with your family in order to understand the exhibits and relate them with your everyday life. (F1, Q1)*

*M: I now feel after the end of the programme that beyond the important things we learnt, the whole experience gave me a different view of the role of the museum in the society. The museums are not only places for exhibiting objects but also active places for experiencing, questioning, thinking and most of all for changing the attitude towards life. And for that we thank you. (F12, Q15)*

When families were asked about their attitude towards the role that the Centres for Children’s Creativity can play in bridging the gap between Greek museums and families, all of them agreed that the Centres can act as a forum where families can meet and share their museum experiences together. This inter-agency relationship became the core setting of attracting the families and holding their interest in visiting museums. The following quotations are explicit examples of the point:

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4 Boredom factor was analysed in Chapter 5 as one of the main barriers that Greek families have in visiting museums.
D: We liked it a lot. It was the reference point of knowing about the family programme. It was a meeting place where families from the local community were gathered in order to collaborate on a common task. (F9, Q14)

M: I think that the way the programme was organized brought the family in the museum. The use of the Centre for Children’s Creativity as a place of bringing the families together was very creative and interesting because we had a meeting place to prepare and share our experiences for the museum visits. (F2, Q14)

Overall, families valued the role of both museums and the Centres for Children’s Creativity as free-choice learning environments where learning and entertainment is combined. Thus, reinforcing inter-agency relationships is of particular interest in motivating families because through this cooperation, museums can reach out the public and attract the local communities to participate in organized museum activities.

Reasons for actions or personal viewpoints: Many families (5 out of 12 family groups) mentioned that participation in the programme changed their views about their responsibility for protecting the environment. They became more sensitive to environmental problems by adopting habits that protect not only themselves but also the environment:

M: I liked the programme a lot. I believe that it increased our environmental sensitivity that we all must have in saving the water or recycling some products in order to protect the environment. (F7, Q1)

Some parents (in 4 out of 12 family groups) who were not active participants in the learning communities due to their work requirements did not feel at all excluded by the learning community programme. Instead, they were peripheral
participants offering from the house their support and helping their children to better understand the problem-solving activities. It was one of the reasons that those families decided to participate in the programme. The following extract is a typical example of this point:

M: This programme helped my family a lot because it gave us the chance to participate actively even though we didn’t have the possibility during the programme to visit the museum together with our daughter. You see... we are both doctors and many weekends we are on duty at the hospital...and this is an obstacle for us to organize with our daughter a museum visit. The structure of the family programme gave us the opportunity to participate from home helping our daughter to prepare for the meetings at the Centre of Creative activities and at the museum visits. The fact that the visits were organized as groups with teachers and other families made us feel safe for letting our daughter to participate without our presence. (F9, Q15)

Another mother who was an active participant in the programme mentioned that the whole programme gave her a chance to work together with her daughter and being with her was one of the reasons that she was engaged actively in the learning community programme:

M: I wanted so much to be together with my daughter in an educational Centre like this museum. It’s not easy this role to be given to a mother. Usually the mother works taking care many things like food, housecleaning without having enough time to do with her children other activities for entertainment. I did it for my daughter and for the other children in my group. (F4, Q15)

Actions and personal viewpoints such as to be aware of the environmental problems, to provide help as peripheral community members and collaborate with others were attitudes that were shaped during families’ participation in the programme.
Expressing empathy: Many children (in 5 out of 12 families) developed empathy towards children that die from starvation or because they do not have clean water to drink. This attitude led to increased understanding about image in society and social inequality. Some other children (in 4 out of 12 family groups) developed empathy on the significance of recycling paper for the protection of the environment.

G: I didn’t expect that it (recycling a paper) would have been so easy and that you could do it by yourself at home. I was thinking why we have to cut so many trees and destroy the environment in order to make a paper while you could recycle old papers. (F5, Q2)

B: I felt sad when I saw at the museum two pictures standing at a seesaw... in the first picture there were some overweight people and in the second picture there were skinny children. Some people die because they eat too much food and some others die because they don’t have food to eat. Instead of eating too much food, the overweight people could have given the food to the poor children. (F8, Q2)

B: I didn’t feel very nice by learning that many children in poor countries die because they don’t have clean water to drink and not only that... those people have to carry water from far away. And many children die from diseases because the water is polluted. And here we waste the water without thinking that it is so precious for our life. (F10, Q2)

To sum up, families’ positive attitudes in relation to their participation in the programme and generally in the learning communities motivated them to visit the museum and be engaged in meaningful activities understanding simultaneously the value of knowing yourself through helping others. Moreover, their positive attitude towards the role that museums and the Centres for Children’s Creativity can play in enhancing their learning experience led the families to realize the value of the inter-agency relationships as free choice.
learning environments bridging the gap between museums and families and sparking their curiosity, imagination and creativity. Thus, shaping new attitudes and values - or in many cases changing some of them - was the strongest impact of the learning communities' programme on family overall museum experience.

7.3 Families' knowledge and understanding

The second learning outcome families most frequently mentioned related to content knowledge. Learning new facts and remembering specific pieces of information were outcomes that emerged that were closely related to the subject-specific aspect of the family programme. In addition, many families came to a deeper understanding about something and learnt how museums operate.

**Increased knowledge about something:** Most of the families (9 out of 12 family groups) stated that their knowledge about the environment has increased. Specifically, many children (in 9 out of 12 family groups) mentioned that they learnt useful information about how they can protect the environment when they knew very little about it prior the programme. In addition, many adult family members (in 4 out of 12 family groups) commented that the programme made them know 'what' and 'about' the environmental problems. The following quotations express this point:

B: *I learnt many useful things that I haven't known before. I learnt things about the environment and how I can help for its protection.* (F8, Q3)

G: *I learnt useful information from the things we have done and seen. For example, I understood how important is the recycling process in order to protect the natural resources.* (F9, Q3)
I can remember that we saw a video at the Centre for Children’s Creativity concerning the process of recycling glass, paper and aluminium. It was very interesting! I learnt lots of things (F12, Q3)

The raise in awareness about the problems of the environment and how to protect it were things that the families commented on most as being valuable in their learning experience. Thus, as it will be discussed in the following section learning a specific new fact about the environment was high in the list of families’ knowledge repository.

Learning a specific new fact: All family members commented that they learnt a specific new fact about the environment that they did not know before. Some of them mentioned that they learnt how environmentally-friendly the use of solar car is, as opposed to a car that is fuelled by gas, and how smog can harm human health. Many of the families mentioned that they learnt about renewable natural resources and the recycling process of some products. Some others said that they learnt how the earth was created and another three mentioned that they learnt how bad junk food is for human health. Finally, some other children stated that saving water is very important, not only for their family, but also for the wider world. The following extracts are typical examples of the above points:

B: The solar car at the transportation section impressed me! I learnt many things. This car moves using solar energy and that it has glasses called solar collectors which they look like mirrors and they collect the energy from the sun giving the car the energy to move. The most important thing is that this car does not pollute the atmosphere because it is not using petrol. (F1, Q2)
G: I liked the globe a lot. It was so impressive! I learnt how the earth was created billions years ago. At the beginning earth was only a cloud. After an explosion oxygen was created in the atmosphere, and the first organisms were appeared in earth. (F3, Q2)

M: One of the activities we did was the vocabulary-box where I learnt many new words like the meaning of the word ‘smog’. I learnt that it is a cloud of polluted gas created by cars, industries and that it is very bad for our health because it causes many problems. (F3, Q2)

G: In the museum I learnt that if we recycle a product we could produce another product from it. For example, if we recycle plastic bottles we take an isothermal jacket. Amazing haaa!! I couldn’t even imagine it before! (F4, Q2)

B: At the museum we discussed in my group how we could save water in our every day activities. I remember that it is better to have a shower instead of filling the bath with water and while we brush our teeth it is better to turn off the tap. (F12, Q2)

Furthermore, some children remembered specific names and things like the name of the earth ‘Pagaia’ or the name of the first solar car. Some parents mentioned that they remembered the process of recycling a paper. There were also two parents and five children that learnt the name of a specific poisonous gas and its bad effects for human life.

B: At the Museum I liked the moving globe a lot. I learnt many things from it. I specifically remember when the earth was created. If I’m not mistaken I think it was 4,6 billions of years ago. I also remember that when the tectonic plates were united in one the earth was called Pangea. (F7, Q2)
M: I learnt that there is a poisonous gas in the atmosphere called smog and is mainly caused by the cars and the factories. This gas is harmful for our health because it causes headaches and inflammation in the eyes and the nose. (F11, Q2)

G: I remember that there is a car which cannot harm the environment because it moves with the sun energy and it is called solar car. At the museum I saw with my group a solar car of Honda. (F3, Q2)

Remembering, and thus learning, a specific fact was something that all family members have mentioned as a result of their active engagement in the learning process. Participating in the learning community environment was the catalyst in enhancing families’ learning experiences.

**Deepening understanding:** In most of the families (10 out of 12 family groups) children and parents came to a deeper understanding about the subject specific. Learning about environment led the participants to look beyond the facts and information and grasped the meaning more firmly. It is essential to mention how children’s museum-based experiences were re-contextualized in their home environments. The following extracts are typical examples of this point:

B: I learnt that it is not good to waste water while at the same time many children from poor countries die because they drink polluted water. Also we must keep the sea clean in order to protect the species living in it. (F7, Q2)

G: In transportation I learnt that it is very good to use the public transportation like buses and trains because if we all take our cars and go out the atmosphere then is polluted by the petrol causing many problems in the environment and in our health. (F9, Q2)
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F: The nutrition section and the activities we did gave me the opportunity to discuss at home together with my family and understand the significance of choosing and eating healthy foods. (F10, Q2).

Learning a specific new fact is the shell of the learning experience, but deepening families' understanding by looking at the reasons or the causes or even more engaging them in decision-making, is the core of the learning experience. It is essential to mention the interrelation between two generic learning outcomes (developing skills and increasing knowledge) since social interactions\(^5\) among the learning communities' members helped them to increase and deepen their knowledge and understanding.

**Learning how museums operate:** Knowledge and understanding included finding out more information about how museums operate and this contrasted with the image about museums that many families had before participating in the programme. Many families realised that museums are places for learning and enjoyment and are not boring places with objects only being presented in the glass cases. Many families (5 out of 12 family groups) referred to the hands-on aspects of the programme inside as well as outside the museum space, an aspect that many families would not have been so keen of until their participation in the programme.

G: This museum wasn't like the others that I have been to. They didn't let me touch anything and I was only looking and listening to someone talking. On the contrary in this museum I could participate actively together with my group by touching and engaging in many activities. I understood many things and for that I enjoyed the programme a lot. (F7, Q15)

\(^5\) Social context, thus, becomes important in determining what information is perceived, how it is stored, and when and how it is recalled (in Dierking, 2000:27)
M: I used to have a different image about museums in Greece that are old fashioned and that they don't care about families. Now, after participating with my family in the programme I found out that museums are caring about us by offering programmes and activities. (F10, Q15)

Families acknowledged that museums can be active places of learning and entertainment by promoting object-based, experiential, thought-provoking, fun, and problem-solving types of learning. The 'minds-on' as well as 'hands-on' (Hein, 1998b) engagement of activities provided to families led to a change in their attitudes towards the role that museums can play in families' learning experiences.

Using prior knowledge in new ways: Two children mentioned that they used their knowledge gained from the family programme in new ways when they had, for example, to transfer their learning experiences to their classmates. The following extract is from the interview between the researcher and a girl expressing the above point:

G: I remember once in school when we did a course called 'the study of Environment' and we spoke about the nutrition I brought in my class all the information I had from the museum programme that I was participating in. That information reinforced the class to discuss many things and I shared with my fellow pupils all the things that I had learnt from the programme. (F9,Q2)

I: Did you tell your class what you did in the programme?

G: Yes, yes. I told them about the meetings we had and that we were working in groups together with other children and parents. I also told them about the preparation we did before the museum visits not only at the Centre of Creative Activities but as well as at our houses. My teacher was very impressed by this programme saying to the class that next year we will organize a programme like this and go to that museum.
The use of prior museum experience and knowledge to motivate others to visit the specific museum and participate in an educational programme was positive word-of-mouth behaviour by a few family members. Overall, the increase in knowledge and understanding was a significant learning outcome in families' learning experience since they had the opportunity to engage in meaningful, hands-on and problem-solving activities and learn new facts and information about the environment and how they can protect it. Deepening understanding by relating new facts and information with everyday life was a significant aspect of families' learning experiences. However, it is essential to highlight the complex nature of learning in developing an individual's social skills and transforming his or her attitudes, since increases in knowledge and understanding of how museums operate were influenced by social interactions and led to the change in families' attitudes towards Greek museums. As a result, the findings strengthen the learning theory employed in this thesis that sees learning as the 'process of active engagement with experience'. Thus, the following section will discuss how during their participation in the community of learners' programme, families developed their skills and how this learning outcome was inter-related with attitudes, knowledge, behaviour, feelings and enjoyment.

7.4 Families developing their skills

During this programme most of the family members increased their social skills, capturing the nature of participation in community of learners and showing at the same time that learning and understanding are not merely an individual process supported by the social context; rather they are the result of continuous, mutual and dynamic relationships between the individual and the social setting in which the individual's activity takes place. Both the individual and the social
context are active and inseparable contributors of learning and development (Rogoff, 1996). In addition, increase in knowing 'how to do something' or in intellectual, management, emotional and communication skills, was also identified as a learning outcome by the families' responses.

Social skills: All the families mentioned that participating in the learning community programme enabled them to develop their social skills. The community of learners' environment provided opportunities for participants to socialize where cooperation was the rule and competition was discouraged. The purposes of the activities were best served when participants (children and adults) worked collaboratively to reach their goals versus competition among group members to address a problem. Even though there were times of disagreement, the participants spent time learning jointly and this raised the quality of their learning and everyone's understanding and knowledge was enriched by team working. Most of the children (in 8 out of 12 family groups) mentioned that making new friends was a great benefit from their participation in the programme. Thus, social interaction among participants was a major memory and learning outcome of families' museum experience. The following extracts are typical examples of this point:

G: It was very pleasant. We were sitting all together and we were an enjoyable group. I had the chance to meet many new children. At the beginning I knew only two girls but now I've made new friends and I'm feeling more comfortable with them. (F3, Q5)

G: In this programme each of us had the chance to participate actively in the team and work together to solve the activities... I had my role in my team and this facilitated me a

6 Observation data revealed that the learning community environment reinforced social interactions among participants. For further details see chapter 6.
lot because I had the chance to help and being helped at the same time from others. (F4, Q7)

B: I liked the family programme a lot because we shared many things helping each other. There was a great help from the parents and the teachers and we were not ashamed of making mistakes. We had the opportunity to discuss the mistakes. I also helped my team-mates by discussing about some things that they couldn't understand. For example when I knew something I was always willing to help the others to understand it. I didn't keep it to myself. (F7, Q6)

G: No, No. We didn't have any problem in my team. We agreed on many things and when we had a disagreement we were always trying to discuss it and reach to a decision that was acceptable from all. We were helping each other to explain some things better so that everyone could understand them. (F9, Q5)

Furthermore, social interaction in relation to participation in a family programme led some families to an increase in understanding and knowledge by being more aware about something in relation to their own life. Participating in the family programme was perceived as a significant learning resource for their cognitive and social development. The extracts below are typical examples:

M: My daughter, after each meeting wanted to share with us her experiences and impressions of the programme. This gave us (the parents) the opportunity to have useful discussions with her on many subjects related to the specific thematic of the museum. Believe it or not, we (the parents) learnt many things we didn't know before such us the process of recycling, how to save water, the good nutrition and many more. (F5, Q13).
G: I think that in the programme we had the chance to help each other and discuss some things. In my team, Reggina’s mother helped us a lot. She was always encouraging us to tell our thoughts. I like doing something and helping others and through this programme I had the chance to do it. (F5, Q5)

The role of the parents as facilitators promoted the social interactions among participant members. Eight parents who were active participants in the learning communities mentioned that they helped and reinforced children’s experiences by trying to keep the balance during the group interactions. It is worth mentioning the fact that two of them stated that except for facilitating and reinforcing children’s attempts, they had the chance to learn from the children things that they have not known before the programme. Thus, participating in learning communities made them all equal partners in learning and understanding. The following quotations express the above points:

M: I liked working with children a lot. I was trying to help them and reinforce their experiences. I didn’t want to provide them with the right answers. Instead I let the children to think and discuss their arguments with the rest of the group. I encouraged every child to talk and share his thoughts with the rest of the team. I tried to give equal opportunities to all of them, to participate in the dialogue and in shared activities. (F1, Q11)

M: I tried to help the children in my group by providing them with information on environmental issues, to encourage them talk and share their thoughts with the rest of the team. But the one that I liked most was that except for being facilitator and a partner that knew some more things I was also a learner. There were new things that I learned from the children. It was a great programme! (F9, Q11)
Finally, most of the children (in 11 out of 12 family groups) mentioned that they were discussing with their parents the activities at home in order to be well prepared and better understand some concepts. It is remarkable that even though some parents were peripheral participants in the learning community programme, they still had an active and supportive role to play when their children asked their help at home in order to be well prepared for the activities. The following extracts explicitly express this point:

G: My father helped me a lot at home even though he didn’t participate in the groups because of his work. At home we were surfing together in the Internet looking for more information in order to help my team. We were sitting all together and discussing the activities in order to be well prepared for the meeting at The Centre of Creative activities and the museum visit. We solved together with my parents the questions in the activity sheets and many times my father was sending me by fax more information from his office. (F4 Q4)

B: At home when I had some questions I was always asking my parents to help me and this helped me be prepared for the meetings and the museum visits. (F8, Q4)

B: At home our mother helped us to complete the activity sheets so that we can be prepared for the meetings. She knew everything we have done at the programme even though it was difficult for her to come to the meetings because of her work. So she was trying to help us from the house by discussing with us many things. (F10, Q4)

Overall, families developed their social skills via collaboration as children socialized with family members, teachers and other children and worked in activities which required team work and group work. The collaborative learning process provided an environment in which most of the family members built good social skills and became equal partners in learning and understanding.
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Participating in learning communities raised the quality of their learning and everyone’s understanding and knowledge was enriched by working together and sharing their experiences.

**Knowing how to do something:** Most of the families stated that they have learnt how to recycle a paper. Specifically, 13 children (in 10 out of 12 families) and 8 parents (in 8 out of 12 families) mentioned that by recycling the paper they had the opportunity to experience the whole process of recycling and learn through their active engagement in the activity. Experiential learning through their active participation was something that all families have mentioned as a meaningful experience. The following quotation is from a dialogue between a mother and her daughter during the interview process and is a typical example of this point:

G: *Mum, I remember very well how we recycled the paper. At the beginning we cut old papers in small pieces, then we put them in hot water and we stir them until they melt. After that we drain out the water (interrupted by her mother who was very excited on describing the process). (F4,Q2 ) M: Yes, yes and after we spread it into dry newspapers and we let it dry for one day! It was a very good experience. (F4, Q2)*

Active learning through families’ engagement in hands-on activities influenced their ability to learn how to do something in relation to the subject specific of the programme. Thus, experiential learning was a very memorable experience for the families because it helped them to better understand some concepts, ideas and facts.

**Intellectual skills:** Nine children (in 7 out of 12 family groups) appropriated intellectual skills through their active engagement with the activities not only by
watching and listening others; rather, by working in a learning community setting, children were encouraged and helped by their peers and adults learning from one another, thinking critically and making judgements. Both children and adults developed valuable problem-solving skills by formulating their ideas and discussing them with the team-mates. The following quotations express this point:

G: *I have learnt to look at the information and solve the quiz by thinking what we have discussed in the group. If I was facing difficulties I asked my parents to help me.* (F2, Q7)

B: *In my group we were trying to analyse the questions and discuss our opinions about the environmental problems we were facing at the activities.* (F6, Q6)

G: *The activity sheets that the teachers gave us for our preparation helped my group to focus on some basic issues and share our opinions about them.* (F5, Q4)

M: *As a facilitator I was trying to reinforce children to think by making questions that foster their critical thinking and in no way to provide them with ready answers.* (F8, Q11)

Another adult family member stated the importance for his son of participating in the programme because it gave him the opportunity to put his thoughts in order. Thus, the increase in knowledge and understanding led to increased intellectual skills. At this point it is worth mentioning the inter-relation among the two generic learning outcomes, knowledge and understanding with skills and the impact that each has on the other.

F: *George knew some things but being able to participate in this programme helped him to put them in order. Even though he had some images, impressions about the*
environmental problems he had never placed them in order until now. He understood them in depth and now he is able to make judgements and think critically. (F8, Q7)

Children working together were engaged in the learning community process instead of passively listening to adults (i.e. teachers/parents). Most of the families developed high intellectual skills by engaging in problem-solving activities, discussing and formulating ideas and thus enabled them to think critically and make judgements.

**Information management skills:** Six children (in 6 out of 12 family groups) mentioned that the activity sheets helped them to focus on the specific sections. Another 3 children and one adult family member (in 3 out of 12 family groups) stated that the use of other learning resources like Internet, books or discussions with other people (i.e. relatives) helped them to better understand some concepts by using the information in order to contribute to their group. The following extract is a typical example of this point:

G: The activity sheets helped me pay attention to specific things and think carefully about some of them like what things I can do in order to save water. If you hadn’t given us the activity sheets I believe that I would have not been able to focus on some sections. I would have just looked at some exhibits and nothing more. (F2, Q4)

Learning how to manage information by using other learning resources was very important for the learning process of family members because it helped them to focus their attention on a particular concept or topic in an active learning environment.
**Communication skills:** Four children mentioned (in 4 out of 12 families) that they learnt how to listen to others and express their thoughts. When children worked in the learning community groups they had the opportunity to verbalize their ideas while the others were listening, asking questions or commenting upon what they had heard. Effective dialogues were essential components of the communication process:

*B:* *In the group I was discussing my ideas with others. Also I learnt to listen what others were saying without interrupting them.* (F10, Q7)

*G:* *I learnt how to share my opinions with others through dialogue.* (F11, Q7)

The learning community environment influenced the development of families' communication skills by using language in order to express and share some thoughts or ideas and to formulate arguments.

**Key skills** (learning how to learn): Adult members of three family groups expressed that participating in the programme helped their children to learn how to learn through active engagement with activities and encouraged families to visit museums. Thus, this specific learning outcome is inter-related with that of attitudes and values capturing the value of visiting museums by participating in meaningful activities. The following comments by two family members confirm the above point:

*M:* *I think that being able to participate in this programme encouraged children to visit museums and learn how to engage actively in shared activities.* (F1, Q1)

*M:* *Before the programme my children had no experience (in or out of school) in learning by doing as I had when I was a child and used to live in Canada. This programme helped*
my children to learn by engaging actively in activities that promote their thinking and I’m grateful for that. (F11, Q7)

One of the most important outcomes was that families had the unique opportunity to ‘learn how to learn’ through active engagement with the learning experience. This led to increased motivation in visiting museums and thus changed families’ attitudes towards museums as setting that promote active and meaningful learning.

**Emotional skills:** Three children (in 3 out of 12 family groups) managed to overcome some intense feelings towards some team-mates. In the beginning of the programme, these children expressed their displeasure of being members of a learning group in which they did not want to be. Their parent’s intervention helped the children to realize that collaboration in a team does not always depend on choosing the person you will be working with. This programme taught them that they have to try to collaborate with others for a common purpose and not only for themselves. Again this outcome is inter-related with the opinion or attitude that someone has towards other people. An increase in social skills and specifically in team working led to a change in attitude towards others by encouraging at the same time the value of collaboration. The following quotations are typical examples:

**M:** I remember that at the beginning my son didn’t want to participate in his group without his closest friend who was in different group. This gave me the opportunity to have a useful discussion with him. I told him that some times we have to learn to collaborate with others. It’s not necessary to make them friends but we should always try our best for the shake of the team. He understood it and since then he had never complained about his team again! (F1, Q5)
G: In my group there was a girl that I didn't like. I didn't want to participate in my group because of her. My mother told me that it's not very good to be selfish and that I have to try to collaborate with her. So I've made some concessions. Now I realise that I learnt many things from that girl because she knew many things, things that I heard for the first time in my life. (F11, Q5)

M: The family programme helped my daughter to realize how useful is to collaborate with others in shared activities even though she had a problem with her group. She didn't want to participate in this team but in another one. At home we discussed a lot about this. I remember that I told her that many times in her life she has to collaborate with people that are not her friends. When you work with someone who is not very sympathetic to you after some time you can find out that he isn't as you thought he was. In reality, no one is antipathetic to us but simply he is just unknown and some times the unknown scares us! (F12, Q5)

Overall, participation in the learning community programme led the families to develop their social skills as well as their ability to learn how to manage information, to formulate judgements and think critically, and even more, to overcome some intense feelings. Experiential learning and mainly learning how to learn increased families' willingness to visit museums, changing at the same time their attitudes towards museums as places that promote learning and entertainment.

7.5 Families' enjoyment, inspiration, creativity

Evidence of enjoyment, inspiration and creativity was another generic learning outcome of the families' experience from participating in the learning community programme. Specifically, families' responses regarding having fun
was the most frequent outcome with exploration and experimentation coming second. Feeling inspired, being creative and surprised and having some innovative thoughts while participating in the programme are outcomes that also emerged in the families' responses.

**Having fun:** The majority of the families (9 out of 12 family groups) stated that 'having fun' during the programme motivated them to participate in every meeting and to participate in the family programme again in the future. It is worth mentioning the inter-relation among enjoyment and motivation and how enjoyment leads to increased motivation to visit museums and participate in meaningful programmes. In addition, there were 5 families who said that the main source of enjoyment for them was the pleasure of being with other families and sharing their experiences. It is obvious again the inter-relation among enjoyment and skills and how enjoyment leads to an increase in social skills among participants. The following extracts are typical examples of the above points:

G: I liked it a lot and I would like to do it again. (F11, Q9)

M: I feel very lucky that we had the chance to participate as a family in this programme. I liked it a lot! I really enjoyed it. That's why we didn't stop coming to the meetings. And the most important thing is that we had a wonderful time! (F4, Q9)

M: This family programme brought the families together, especially my family who is a newcomer in that area. We had the chance to meet other families, share our experiences and spent some time together. It was fun! (F2, Q13)

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7 As it has been already mentioned in chapter 2, a family visit is a social activity where families can share their experiences, feelings, enjoyment, knowledge and understanding.
Chapter 7. The impact of visiting museums as Learning Communities on Greek families' museum experiences

The families' enjoyment and entertainment during the programme positively influenced their museum experience as they are encouraged to visit museums more frequently. However, a significant factor contributing to enjoyment was families' engagement in activities that employed experimentation, exploration and learning by doing.

**Exploration, experimentation, and making:** Many children (in 7 out of 20) liked the hands-on approach a lot because it was seen as facilitating their learning. The hands-on activities were those that children 'remembered' and 'liked' most. The following quotations express this point:

G: I liked a lot the section about the natural resources and especially when we recycled the paper.... I couldn't believe that it is too easy to recycle a paper by yourself! (F5, Q9)

G: I liked all the things we did, especially those in the museum.... you thought that everything in the museum was alive. I liked a lot that we could touch and experiment with the exhibits. I also liked that we could touch the screens and getting information. I remember putting our hands into the holes trying to guess which object was in each hole. (F11, Q9)

M: The children enjoyed touching some exhibits at the museum especially when most of the Greek museums don't allow the visitor to touch. (F3, Q7)

B: I liked the programme a lot because I could touch many exhibits in the museum and do many activities like recycling paper or making experiments with water. (F8, Q9)

Hands-on and problem-solving activities that reinforce exploration and experimentation influenced strongly families' learning by sparking their minds and making their museum experience pleasant and memorable.
Being inspired: Participating in the programme made many families (5 out of 12 family groups) feel inspired because many subjects were presented in new ways. It is interesting to list some of the comments that both children and parents made in reference to inspiration. In addition, another inter-relation between two generic learning outcomes captures the complexity of families’ learning experiences because the social interactions (social skills) among participants inspired many families to participate in the learning community programme leading some of them to change the quality of their life:

G: If the programme wasn’t so interesting with the teams working together I wouldn’t have participated at all. (F2, Q9)

B: The atmosphere in my team was cheerful, fun, serious, and pleasant. That’s why I liked it a lot. (F8, Q9)

B: I found the programme very interesting and I liked it a lot. It gave me the chance to know more things about the environmental problems and since then I’m trying to make things that protect the environment. (F10, Q9)

Some families (4 out of 12 family groups) believed that participating in programmes in informal learning environments such as museums reinforces the value of having meaningful learning experiences. The value of museum visits for some children was very important and losing one of them would have being very disappointing for their experience.

M: I believe that if you’ve tried to make this programme at school and not at the Centre for Children’s Creativity it would not have been so successful because children would have looked at this programme as a lesson. Here we were very flexible. I wish children to meet museums through this kind of activities. (F2, Q14).
B: I wouldn't have been so disappointed if I would have lost one of the preparation meeting at the Centre for Children's Creativity. But to lose a visit at the museum...yes I would have been very disappointed because at the visit you have the chance to see the exhibits and learn much more. (F6, Q4)

Inspiration, thus, was another specific learning outcome that was interrelated with an increase in motivation and knowledge. Feeling inspired motivated families to continue coming to the meetings at GAIA Centre as well as at the Centre for Children's Creativity.

Creativity: The experience of being a participant in the family programme resulted in creativity. Three parents (in 3 out of 12 family groups) mentioned that the programme provided them with a different perspective on things that they do in everyday life.

M: It was something pleasant, creative and completely different from things that we do in our everyday life. It was a breath in our life especially because of the stress of the work. (F2, Q9)

One adult family member said that giving the learning groups names was something essential for the function of the groups because they give an identity.

M: There is something noteworthy about the names of each learning group. In general, I believe that naming something or somebody is very essential. Generally, I believe that any entity or group of people in order to acquire personality it should has a name. From that point they began all. Actually I liked it because we didn't put the idea out of our head neither from the schoolteachers but it did come spontaneously from the children's head. (F2, Q9)
Finally, some other parents (in 4 out of 12 family groups) mentioned that having 'well designed activity sheets' was something that made children 'more creative'. Children as well as parents were encouraged to try new ways of doing things, emphasizing the enjoyment and the value of the process of creating something more than the results or the finished product. Creativity was developed during team working where social interactions enhanced participants' curiosity and imagination forming original ideas and innovative thoughts and actions.

**Innovative thoughts, actions or things:** Five children (in 5 out of 12 families) mentioned that they enjoyed the programme and the activities they did because they had the chance to do different things than watching TV or going to a museum and seeing only the exhibits. The following quotations are examples of this point:

*G: I was coming to the meetings because I enjoyed them a lot and because it was something unique from some other activities like watching TV.* (F5, Q9)

*B: In the second visit at the museum I remember that we made dolls from waste materials and we listened traditional music from an orchestra. But the best of all was the theatrical performance that we have seen in the museum after our visit.* (F10, Q9)

Participating in meaningful activities resulted in innovative thoughts and actions. Families, thus, had the chance to see the museum turning from a static place to a dynamic setting and participate in an experience that was unique for them.
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**Being surprised:** Being surprised was something that emerged from the children's participation in the programme. Four children (in 4 out of 12 family groups) mentioned that their excitement was huge when they visited the museum because they saw things that they could not even imagine before. Being excited was something that three other children have mentioned:

B: *I liked the museum a lot. It was the best museum I had ever visited!* (F6, Q9)

B: *I was very excited with the museum visits. I was looking forward to visiting the museum. I wanted to see what are the new things that are expecting me!* (F8, Q9)

G: *I was very impressed by the visits we did at the museum. I didn't expect to like the museum and the activities we did so much.* (F5, Q9)

Evidence of enjoyment, creativity, and inspiration were significant learning outcomes for families' museum experience because they reinforced the motivation to visit museums and learn new concepts and facts about the environment. Furthermore, creativity emerged through social interactions among the participants in the learning communities. As a result, enjoyment and creativity impacted on and were impacted by an increase in skills knowledge and understanding, change in attitudes and values leading families to a progression towards lifelong learning and museum experience.

### 7.6 Evidence of families' activity, behaviour and progression

Families' responses revealed evidence of actions and behaviours that families have done or intend to do as a result of their participation in the learning community programme. Some of these actions led to change in families'
behaviour towards the way they manage their lives about visiting museums during their leisure time and doing simple things in protecting the environment. Thus this change led to a progression of some families' lives towards life-long learning. It is worth mentioning that this learning outcome is inter-related to all the above generic learning outcomes because increased knowledge and understanding, skills, attitudes, values and enjoyment are means to change the way Greek families act and behave towards Greek museums that can provoke meaningful and life-long learning experiences.

Changes in the way that families manage their lives: All the families described what they did during the family programme by reflecting on the most memorable moments. The most essential moment the majority of the families mentioned was working in groups by sharing their thoughts and ideas and engaging with meaningful activities inside and outside the museum space. The following extracts are explicit examples of this point:

M: I tried to encourage children to share their thoughts in their group. Working in groups helped us a lot to understand better the activities. (F2, Q11)

G: I told my class about the museum and the activities we did. They haven't listened at all about this museum and that it has objects that you can touch! (F3, Q10)

G: I liked all the activities we did. Generally, the museum was very nice and the sections we did were very interesting because it had to do with the environment. I have learnt many things by sharing my opinions with others. (F4, Q1)

Furthermore, participating in the learning community programme and increasing knowledge and understanding made some families (8 out of 12
families) change how they manage their lives towards environment. Saving water or energy and eating healthy foods were some of the things that families try to implement in their everyday life. The following examples reveal this point:

G: Together with my family we try to save water at home by turning off the tap when we brush our teeth or by having a shower instead of a bath. (F9, Q12)

M: We really enjoyed the whole programme because it gave me the chance to talk with my children about the things we can do in order to protect the environment. At home we are trying to save water or to eat more healthy food. (F1, Q12)

G: Together with my parents we keep the newspapers and the magazines and we take them for recycling. (F5, Q12)

M: Before the programme my daughter preferred to eat fast food. When she didn’t like the homemade food she was always going to the fast food, which was placed under our house, and eating junk food. When she learnt from the programme that the meat in the hamburgers has so many unhealthy ingredients not only she stopped eating this kind of food but also she is trying to convince friends, cousins not to eat hamburgers. (F3, Q12)

Families’ behaviour towards their lives was influenced strongly by their museum experiences. These experiences embedded within families’ culture and contexts were powerful mediators of motivation, enjoyment and learning, leading to a change in managing their lives and thus an intention to act.

What families intend to do: Four children (in 4 out of 12 family groups) mentioned that knowing about environmental issues (i.e. the process of recycling a paper) led them to the intention to act by spreading their knowledge to other people. The following quotations express this point:
B: Now that I know the process of recycling a paper, I decided together with my family to gather all the materials and when we go to Kalavrita for holidays we will show the whole process to our cousins who are in the same age with us. (F1, Q12)

B: Now that I know many things about the environment I will try to help my schoolmates when we are going to visit the museum. (F6, Q12)

Three other families commented that this programme provided them with thoughts about the action that they have to do in order to protect the environment:

M: We all enjoyed it and came away thinking we must do things that protect the environment, small things like switching off the TV button or having a shower instead of having a bath. (F9, Q12)

Thus, increased knowledge and deepened understanding led the families to an intention to act by transferring their knowledge about the environment to relatives and friends linking their museum-based experience with their familiar context.

Families' actions: Some families described some actions that they did while they were participating in the programme. These actions are closely related and are results of their satisfaction of the family programme.

M: My daughter was so satisfied from the programme that she didn’t want to lose any of the meetings. I remember once that she had to go two trips, one with her school and the other with the Sunday school. She chose neither of them and she preferred to go to the museum with her group. The museum visit was on Sunday, she chose the museum and
of course she didn’t regret it at all because she had fun, she did lots of things and workshops activities. (F3, Q12)

G: I remember once when I cancelled my English lesson in order to participate at the recycling process. I would have been very disappointed if I would have lost this activity. (F2, Q2)

It is essential to mention the inter-relation of families’ enjoyment with their actions during the programme. Choosing freely what to do was an essential part of the families’ museum experience. The programme gave the families the opportunity to ‘choose’ and ‘control’ when and what they will learn.

Changes in families’ behaviour: Change in behaviour is the learning outcome that has also been identified and mentioned in the other learning outcomes (i.e. attitudes and values) thus, is inter-related. Change in attitudes and opinions about themselves or towards other people led some families to change their behaviour. A mother’s comment reveals that:

M: During the programme children’s behaviour was changing. At the beginning, there were some problems in the groups because some children didn’t want to be in the same team with others. But meeting after meeting I was observing that the behaviour of those children was changing by collaborating in a very effective way. They were respecting each other. (F11, Q12)

8 According to Falk & Dierking visitor choice in what and when to learn and perception of control over learning are fundamental variables in learning from museums (in Falk & Dierking, 2000)

9 Findings on the changes in children’s behaviour were identified during the observation process and are discussed further in chapter 6 and section 6.2.
Evidence of families' actions and progression as a result of feeling satisfied and understanding specific facts about the environment led to a change in their behaviour towards the way they manage their lives, motivating them at the same time to participate in the programme and to feel free to choose and control their learning experiences.

7.7 Conclusion

The above learning outcomes are the results of families' learning experiences as learning communities. Participating in the programme gave the participants and especially the families the opportunity to have a different museum experience thus changing their views on museums as institutions and being motivated to visit museums in their family outings. Moreover, families developed their social skills through their active participation and collaboration in meaningful and shared activities. Through negotiation and reciprocal contributions, all participants constituted a new community of learners, which was based on mutuality in joint activity and guidance. This new community of learners was the catalyst for transferable learning and development for all family members in structuring a meaningful museum visit. Considering the model of participation in community of learners, this chapter placed an emphasis on how participants changed their participation in the learning community as they collaborated and coordinated with others in shared endeavours. The central question was one of understanding participants' changing roles as they took part in museum activities. Consequently, this chapter analysed the findings of the learning experience.

10 According to socio-cultural theory on 'transformation of participation' it is essential to define that individual change studied 'as it is constituted by and constitutes interpersonal and community processes in socio-cultural activities' (Rogoff, 1997:270)

11 Hence, from the transformation of participation perspective the focus is on how participants' involvement changes through engagement in activities of particular interest.
outcomes\textsuperscript{12} of families' participation in and contributions to the ongoing museum activities as a result of their dynamic engagement in the community of learning process.

Even though, they were separated to analyze the data, they all inter-related at the same time. Separating them was important to have a deeper understanding of each generic learning outcome. However, it was essential to bring the learning outcomes back together for a holistic view of families' learning experiences and stress the unique impact of the Learning Communities' programme on motivating Greek families to visit museums.

\textsuperscript{12} The transformation of participation view holds the stance that learning and development should be evaluated focusing on the process of individuals' participation in and engagement to the ongoing activities 'rather than on 'outcome' and individuals' possessions of concepts and skills' (Rogoff, 1997:279). It is essential to clarify that my study aims to assess not only the process but also the impact of the CoL's model on families museum learning experiences in order to gain a holistic view of delivering that model to family groups in the form of an educational programme.
Chapter 8

Conclusions and implications

This thesis set out to explore the process as well as the impact of the Communities of Learners' supporting programme on learning experiences of Greek families in order to provide them with a motive to visit local museums during their leisure time. Although this research refers to a relatively small number of families, it was carried out over by observing and conducting interviews with the same sample during a five month intensive field research in order to identify changes in families' behaviour as a result of their participation in the programme and letting them to express their experiences from their point of view.

Based on socio-cultural and constructivist learning theory, this thesis placed an emphasis on the active role of families in creating meaning from their experiences through the context they brought to a learning community environment. It was a long-term process that required individual effort but it was mainly a social experience. Since museum learning was defined in the thesis as 'an active engagement with the experience' it was essential to assess the effectiveness of participation in a community of learners not only in terms of learning facts and concepts but also in terms of those aspects that have to do with experiences, emotions, feelings, behaviour, social interactions, understandings, thoughts, ideas
and memories and thus capturing the complex nature of learning. Participation in a community of learners provided to families the chance to learn how to coordinate with each others by sharing interests and experiences, how to support and lead others to become responsible and organized in their own learning, and how to build on their previous knowledge and interests to learn in new areas. Families, thus, learnt and developed new insights through their participation in communities of learners. The Community of Learners as a supporting programme was based on mutuality and collaboration where families together with the teachers and the museum professional had differing roles in the group's functioning. Participating in the Communities of Learners' programme, thus, was a dynamic, inspiring and enjoyable process that encouraged Greek families to change their attitudes towards museums and motivated them to visit more frequently museums in a family outing as learning communities.

8.1 Methodology

This research employed qualitative research methods in order to capture families' experiences and gain insights into their perspectives about the process of participation in the learning community supporting programme and the resulting outcomes. It was a time consuming study that entailed a great effort in gathering, managing and interpreting data.

Particularly, observation methods employed to identify changes during the learning communities' meetings and visits combined with in-depth interviews with the participants, yielded much information about the social context of the family museum experience and in particular the behaviour of families in shared activities. The researcher had the role of participant observer and this allowed her to go into the social situation and take part in the learning community process.
The researcher was able to gather data using an observation protocol together with a diary that helped her to keep additional field notes that the protocol could not capture. By being part of the social setting she learnt first-hand how families acted, reacted and interacted with each other. The participant observer learnt about how children and adults who played the role of facilitator, helped one another during the activities by being part of the learning community. This gave a privileged position from which the researcher observed repeated patterns of social action and interaction, and experienced expected and unexpected events. By participating and interacting, the participant observer built trust with the participants and over time she became less of an outsider and more of a trusted insider who heard and observed things and behaviours that strangers could not have observed. Through participation, as well as looking and listening, the researcher felt, acted and responded to events and interactions that helped her to interpret the data and justify in a more objective way by knowing exactly how and why a specific pattern of behaviour had emerged. This objectivity in interpreting the data was also achieved by combining different sources of data and methods. Validation of findings, thus, was a great aspect in using these methods. Different patterns of behaviour were identified not only from the researcher’s side but also from participants’ accounts during the in-depth interviews. Thus, a holistic approach was adopted in order to explain the learning experiences of the families.

Since the emphasis of this research was on process as well as on outcomes, measuring the impact of participating in learning communities on the family learning experience was of great importance and interviews with the participants provided rich data. The Generic Learning Outcome approach helped the researcher to form open-ended questions and capture the dynamic nature of learning. In-depth interviews, not only with families but also with other participants (teachers, museum professional), generated interesting data,
providing them with the opportunity to express their expectations and experiences both individually and as members of the learning communities. In retrospect, it would have been interesting to gather data through conducting focus groups within each learning community separately in order to give participants the opportunity to reflect on their learning experiences in a community and social environment. Nevertheless, an important aspect of conducting in-depth interviews was to assess each family’s learning outcomes and conducting focus groups could not allow individual learning outcomes to emerge. Possibly, a combination of the two methods would have probably provided different aspects of families learning experiences both as social groups and as individuals.

The family’s questionnaire before the programme proved to be a valuable tool for uncovering their perceptions of their past museum experiences. Particularly, it helped to identify the barriers and motives families had to visiting museums, their expectations from a museum visit and their perceptions of family programmes and compare these with the perceptions of families abroad, as well as to contrast them with the new experience after the programme by identifying changes in their overall museum experiences. Finally, interviews with two museum professionals from the Hellenic Children’s Museum helped to validate the findings by looking from a different perspective the motives and barriers for Greek families to visit museums in their leisure time.

8.2 Motivating Greek Families to visit museums
Findings of this study revealed that most of the Greek families choose not to visit museums during their leisure time due to a number of reasons such as lack of time, stress and family obligations. Furthermore, those families believed that museums are only places of learning and thus, many parents hesitate to take their child to the museum because of their fear of revealing their ignorance. The perception that schools have the role of taking children to museums and that many children become bored inside the exhibition space are some other reasons that form the barriers to visiting. Nevertheless, the lack of museum attitude in family’s agenda and the ignorance that many Greek families have about the role that museums can play in enhancing their learning experiences revealed the need for the museum professionals to find ways to motivate and attract family groups to museums providing them with meaningful, creative and enjoyable experiences.

Findings revealed the desire of families to participate in family programmes offered by museums that combine learning with entertainment and which have the potential to transform them from passive followers to active learners in shared activities with other families.

8.3 Greek families visiting museums as Communities of Learners; A dynamic process and its impact on family museum experiences

Based on socio-cultural theory, Rogoff, Matusov and White (1996) characterize learning as ‘participation in a Community of Learners’. In this view, family learning in the programme and thus in this thesis, was understood as a

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1 The findings of this study about the motives and the barriers to visit museums form a small part of this research which was essential to use it for the purpose of this thesis. However, it is important to conduct a qualitative as well as a quantitative research in order to evaluate in depth the perceptions of families about museums in Greece. This will allow museums in Greece to establish a museum communication policy focusing more on the needs of the audience and less on the objects.

2 A perception that has being changed for some families since their participation in the family programme.
collaboratively and socially constructed entity, rather than an individual possession\(^3\) where participants, and especially families, adjusted themselves in varying roles by stretching their common understanding to fit with new perspectives in shared activities\(^4\); teaching was a process of ‘facilitating’ learning as learners interacted with peers around topics or activities with the support and the guidance of an instructor (i.e. museum professional/environmentalist) who had particular expertise in the area of environmental issues related to the exhibition space.

In the Community of Learners, both visitors (families and teachers) and the museum staff were seen as active participants in organizing the inquiry. The family members, the interaction with other families and teachers and the cultural milieu (the GAIA Centre and the Centre for Children’s Creativity) were meaningful and integrated components of the family programme. The participants were inseparable contributors to the ongoing activities that were engaged with and in which they developed their experiences and understandings.

Rogoff argues that ‘museums can be considered as places where different practices and their participants can meet, learn from each other as peripheral members in different communities, and contribute to each other’s practices’ (Falk & Dierking, 1995:101). In the family programme, the relationship within and between the learning communities was based on mutuality where family members, through negotiation and reciprocal contributions, together with teachers and the museum professional were engaged in shared endeavours by spelling out their diverse agendas, concerns and goals. The following figure shows the participants of the learning community providing one form of social

\[\text{In socio-cultural theories individuals “do not exist in isolation or out of cultural context” but on the contrary individuals participate in socio-cultural activities by interacting with other people in ‘cultural communities’ (Rogoff, 1997:266)}\]

\[\text{Rogoff argues that ‘such stretching to accomplish something together is development and occurs in the process of participation’ (Rogoff, 1997:272)}\]
interaction and collaboration not only among people but also among the physical and intellectual space of cultural milieux (i.e. museums, Centres for Children’s Creativity) (figure 5). The social interaction was a dialogical and dynamic communication process, where it stressed an emphasis on the active role of participants with different prior experience, interests and motivations.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 5. The Learning Community

This research revealed the dynamic process of families’ participation in learning communities by identifying three major characteristics:

The first characteristic was that all participants were active: no one had all the responsibility and no one was passive. The process of becoming active participants passed from different stages revealing that working in groups and sharing common experiences in a collaborative environment is a dynamic procedure of family learning. Families learnt to take responsibilities for their contributions to their own learning and to the learning community functioning.
Instead of a teacher, a parent or a museum professional attempting to address and manage many children as one recipient of instruction, the proposed family programme perceived museum learning as participation in a community of learners. Specifically, this programme involved a learning community working together with all serving as resources to the other, with varying roles according to their understanding of the activity, shifting responsibilities and changing their participation in museum activities. Through negotiation and reciprocal contributions, all participants constituted a community of engaged learners which was based on mutuality in joint activity and guidance. Both children and facilitators were actively involved in the learning process by defining questions in their own language and working out answers together instead of reproducing material presented by the adults. Furthermore, meetings at the Centre for Children’s Creativity and visits at the GAIA Centre allowed for physical as well as intellectual engagement through handling and participating in creative activities that stimulated higher levels of attention and thinking. These communities of learners were the catalyst for transferable learning and development for all participants, especially for the family members, in structuring a meaningful museum visit.

The second characteristic was the effective process of group heterogeneity, where more skilled partners provided leadership and guidance. The model of participation in the family programme tried to treat all the participants as a community. The discourse was often conversational in the sense that participants built on each other’s ideas on a common topic or activity guided with mutuality and support by more skilled community members such as older children, parents, teachers, and museum staff. Through the process of questioning by peers, these children became more aware of the thinking processes they were using. To be more precise, the Community of Learners model assumed a collaborative system in which whoever had the responsibility for leadership was still carefully
coordinating with and assisting the others in shared endeavours. The collaboration between children from different ages and between parents, teachers and museum staff, using the adults and (sometimes) the older children as more skilled partners, aimed to facilitate and guide the younger children during the educational program. Thus, adults as facilitators played an important role by scaffolding children’s learning in collaborative learning community situations in order to achieve difficult tasks that without their contribution and help would have never been accomplished. Moreover, when children worked cooperatively, the more knowledgeable children led the less knowledgeable child to the appropriate direction required to understand new facts and concepts. Overall, collaboration among participants and group heterogeneity influenced social interactions and gave children the opportunity to feel free to express themselves, in addition they were able to give and receive help and to engage with new ideas through meaningful activities while facilitators contributed significantly to scaffolding children’s learning and becoming active learners in the learning community process.

The final characteristic was that learning involved transformation of families’ perceptions about their museum experience in collaborative endeavour. Specifically, the research considered the families’ participation in learning communities and how this participation changed families’ attitudes and values towards the role that museums can play in their family life and increased their knowledge and understanding as children collaborated and coordinated in an enjoyable and creative way, not only with each other, but also with parents, museum professionals and teachers in joint activities. Families developed their skills, especially their social skills, by assisting each other in transforming their behaviour and learning to be responsible, making choices and solving problems in ways that fitted their individual needs (personal plane), while coordinating
with the needs of others (inter-personal plane) and with group functioning (community plane)\textsuperscript{5}.

Thus, measuring the impact of the Communities of Learners' programme on families learning experiences was of great importance in this research and the Generic Learning Outcome approach was used to capture the complex nature of learning revealing the more deep components of family learning experiences. Specifically, the Generic Learning Outcome approach shows that family learning is more than simply acquiring facts and knowledge, rather it is a life-long process of change someone’s behaviour through changes in attitudes and values or increase in skills engaging at the same time in creative, enjoyable and inspiring experiences. Thus, most of the families developed or changed their attitudes and values towards the way they see themselves and the way they perceive the museum experience. In particular, some families modified or developed new attitudes and perspectives and gained new meaning in their lives while some others experienced changes in the way they act and behave in their lives by understanding the value of knowing yourself through providing help to others.

Furthermore, most of the families realized the value of museums and the Centres for Children's Creativity as free-choice learning environments and acknowledged that building an inter-agency relationship among them could bridge the gap between museums and families by motivating them to place their museum experience in their family agenda. This inter-agency relationship helped local families to know that there is a meeting place, a forum, where they can participate

\textsuperscript{5} Rogoff introduces three interrelated planes that can be used to contribute to the study of human development: 'the personal plane which focuses on how individuals change through their involvement in one or another activity...the interpersonal plane which focuses how people communicate and coordinate efforts in face-to-face and side-by side interactions...the community plane which focuses on people participating with others in culturally organised activity' (Rogoff, 1997:267-268.
in a supporting programme with hands-on as well as minds-on activities that stimulate their curiosity, imagination and creativity.

8.3.1 The interrelation of families' Generic Learning Outcomes

Even though most of the families spoke more of attitudes developed than of content learnt, it is essential to mention the inter-relationship among knowledge and understanding with the development of skills, changes of behaviour, attitudes and values. Particularly, deepening understanding by relating new facts and information with everyday life in a collaborative environment was a significant aspect of families' learning experiences that resulted in changing the way they behaved and acted towards the protection of the environment and transforming their attitudes towards the value of museums in contributing to their learning experience. Furthermore, increases in knowledge and understanding happened because family groups were being intrinsically motivated to participate in the learning community process as they were engaged in meaningful creative and enjoyable activities and shared their experiences with each other. Learning and entertainment, thus, was considered to be the most important combination in motivating families to visit museum and in creating a meaningful family museum experience.

In addition, learning and understanding was the result of a continuous, mutual and dynamic relationship between the families and the social setting (learning communities) in which the family's activities took place. Working in learning communities, families had the opportunity to develop their skills from managing information as well as intense feelings, intellectual and key skills (i.e. learning how to learn) through developing social skills by learning how to share ideas and experiences in a collaborative environment. Even though there were times of disagreement, the families spent time by learning together raising at the same
time the quality of their learning experience. Furthermore, it is essential to mention that even for the parents who could not be full participants (as facilitators in the learning communities) they had a peripheral but still an active role to play in their families when their children transferred their experiences to them by developing meaningful discussions (at their homes). Moreover, active learning influenced the families' ability to learn how to do something (i.e. paper recycling) in relation to the subject specific of the programme. Thus, experiential learning through engagement in hands-on activities was a very memorable experience for the families because it helped them to better understand some concepts, ideas and facts, providing them with a motive to visit museums in their leisure time.

Evidence of families' enjoyment, inspiration and creativity led to increased motivation to visit museums and participate in meaningful programmes. Many families felt inspired and very creative because the learning community programme gave them the opportunity to find new ways in their learning and make innovative thoughts and actions during the learning process. Thus, the value of the process of creating something was greater than the value of the finished product.

It is significant to mention that the increase in knowledge and understanding, the development of skills, the changes in attitudes and values together with feelings of having fun and being inspired and creative are learning outcomes that changed the way Greek families act and behave towards Greek museums as compared with their past experiences before their participation in the programme and thus, led to a progression of some families towards life-long learning. The inter-relation among learning outcomes is apparent and captures holistically the notion of family learning. In conclusion, the model of participation in a Community of Learners involved a dialogue among the families who were actively involved in the educational programme, to spell out their agendas, interests, concerns,
feelings, thoughts and goals in order to develop a better understanding of their museum experience.

8.4 Implications and applications

The current research was a qualitative study rooted in the constructivist and socio-cultural learning theory of participation in community of learners, but one which is essential and has much wider implications for the future of museum learning especially for the Greek reality. Particularly this thesis places an emphasis on the endeavour of museum practitioners to make museum visits as meaningful as possible for families. It attempts to contribute to the continuing conversation on measuring museum learning and highlight the increasing importance of conducting audience research in the development of exhibitions and programmes, especially in Greece, in order to take into consideration the needs of diverse audiences and accommodate them in the education and communication policy of museums promoting them as places for life-long learning. In building a social communication policy, museums will be open places inviting visitors from all cultural, social and ethnic groups to feel welcome and engage in experiences that combine learning with entertainment.

Furthermore, studying and understanding families from a sociological perspective, using a variety of family theories was of particular interest in this thesis as it highlights the various family forms that can be taken into account when considering families in museum context. By understanding the structure and function of the different types of families, museum professionals will be able to develop exhibits and educational programmes that are based on the needs of families when they participate in cultural activities.
In addition, the Generic Learning Outcome approach will help museum professionals, especially in Greece, to start thinking about museum learning more holistically and to use it as a tool to evaluate exhibitions and programmes based on visitor’s needs and interests. Most would agree that learning involves development and change where the interaction of the physical and the social environment together with personal experiences (Falk & Dierking, 2000) play an important role. Thus, the use of Generic Learning Outcomes as a theoretical and methodological approach provided this research with a solid ground to use it flexibly and assess family learning, focusing on ‘how’ and ‘why’ as well as on ‘what’ families have learnt.

This study perceives museum learning and especially family learning as a social and constructivist activity where the family members are active constructors of knowledge (both individually and socially) in a social environment (Hein, 1991; Hooper-Greenhill, 1999a, 1999b; Silverman, 1995). Thus, family learning in its broad meaning includes the positive or negative experiences and meanings families make of their museum visits as learning communities, the variety of motives that influence their decisions and the quality of learning experiences together with enjoyment and entertainment when they engage individually and socially in creative and imaginative activities. Overall, the use of the model of participation in Communities of Learners and the Generic Learning Outcome approach succeeded in capturing the learning process as well as the learning outcomes of families as learning communities.

In this thesis, the researcher tried to present an aspect of museum learning by stressing an emphasis on the view that museums are places where the roles of the individual and the social are ‘essential’ and ‘inseparable’. Thus, educational

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6 Some museums in UK have started to involve visitors in exhibition development from early stages following a more cultural communication policy (Hooper-Greenhill, 1995, 1999).
programmes in museums must be defined and redefined by utilizing new teaching and learning methods aiming to address visitors' needs and interests. Museums must find ways to engage visitors actively in experiences that promote different kinds of learning. Furthermore, the model of participation in a Community of Learners in museum settings could also be applied to other audiences such as adults respecting their own styles and pace of learning and providing them with flexible and varied modes of delivery (handling sessions, sound guides, trails, different voices offering varied opinions, writers or members of ethnic communities) (Reeve, 1998:32). These techniques will probably enhance adult's learning because they involve a dialogue among the different communities of practice who are actively involved in creative activities, to spell out their agendas, interests, concerns, feelings, enjoyment, inspiration, thoughts and goals in order to develop a better understanding of their museum experience.

According to the participation model, learning in the museum, and particularly family learning, was viewed in this thesis as active engagement with the museum experience through participation in Communities of Learners. Participation in a Community of Learners involved participation in free-choice learning environments, such as museums and the Centres for Children's Creativity, in which families pursued inquiries, made connections among various contexts, shared interests, expertise, experience and knowledge with others, and learnt how to learn and how to assist and collaborate with others in shared endeavours. Thus, the learning community model in the form of a family programme captured the needs and expectations of Greek families as social groups and motivated them to visit museums as learning communities. Usually, participation in museums as free choice learning environments required more involvement from family groups in organizing their museum visit and provided more freedom to manage their own choices about where to go first, how long to stay, which aspects of the exhibit to explore deeply according to their interests than participation in other formal
settings such as schools. Thus, visiting a museum as learning communities involves opportunities for families to participate in various and meaningful shared activities.

To conclude, motivating the families to visit museums in their family outing as learning communities can arouse the interest of Greek museums to organize outreach programmes by collaborating with other cultural agencies in order to establish a forum of attracting local communities such as families, adults, people with disabilities and others to work together on common goals, helping each other to develop a positive museum experience that reinforces life-long learning. As museum professionals, it is important to create effective links and networks in a way that enables active, personal and social learning allowing diverse audiences to move, explore and choose freely according to their past experiences, prior knowledge, needs, and interests. The learning community model will help museums professionals to create museum spaces where different Communities of Learners can work together to generate new knowledge, develop their skills and create a positive attitude towards the value that museums have in enhancing memorable and life-long experiences in an enjoyable and innovative way.
APPENDIX A
Timetable of the COL’s family programme
April 2003

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAYS WEEKS</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Family Preparation at the house on “Natural Resources”</td>
<td>Family Preparation at the house on “Natural Resources”</td>
<td>Family Preparation at the house on “Natural Resources”</td>
<td>Family Preparation at the house on “Natural Resources”</td>
<td>Meeting for the preparation of the CoLs at the “Centre for Children Creativity on “Natural resources” section</td>
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<td>(31 March - 6 April)</td>
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<td>2nd</td>
<td>Family Preparation at the house on “water” section</td>
<td>Family Preparation at the house on “water”</td>
<td>Family Preparation at the house on “water”</td>
<td>family Preparation at the house on water</td>
<td>Meeting for the preparation of the CoLs at the Centre on “Water” section</td>
<td>1st visit to GAIA Centre on “Natural Resources” and “water” sections</td>
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<td>(7-13 April)</td>
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<td>(21-27 April Easter Holidays)</td>
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# Timetable of the COL's family programme

**May – June 2003**

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<th>DAYS</th>
<th>WEEKS</th>
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<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>(28 April-4 May Easter Holidays)</td>
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<td>9.00-12.00 a.m</td>
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<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>(5-11 May)</td>
<td>Family Preparation at the house on “transportation”</td>
<td>Family Preparation at the house on “transportation”</td>
<td>family Preparation at the house on “transportation”</td>
<td>Family Preparation at the house on “transportation”</td>
<td>Meeting for the preparation of the CoLs at the Centre on “Transportation” section</td>
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<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>(12-18 May)</td>
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<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>(19-25 May)</td>
<td>Family Preparation at the house on Nutrition</td>
<td>Family Preparation at the house on Nutrition</td>
<td>Family Preparation at the house on Nutrition</td>
<td>Family Preparation at the house on Nutrition</td>
<td>Meeting for the preparation of the CoLs at the Centre on “Nutrition” section</td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; visit to GAI Centre “Transportation and “Nutrition”</td>
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<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>(26 May-1 June)</td>
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<td>Follow-up work with activities at the Centre for Children’s Creativity</td>
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<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>(2-8 June)</td>
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Appendix B

In-depth interview guide

Name of family/teacher/museum professional..........................

Date.................................................................

In-depth interview with participants

Hello. This interview is being conducted to get your reflections about your participation in the family programme as learning communities.

If it is ok with you, I will tape recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time to be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential without any reference to your name.

(Note: The questions were slightly different according to the participants-families/teachers/museum professional-environmentalist)

1) I would be interested to know about your learning experiences about the family programme as learning community.

2) What do you remember about the programme? (prompts: Can you remember the sections we have done in the programme? Can you tell me more about them?)

3) Do you feel that your participation in the family programme increase your knowledge and understanding on the particular themes? (prompts: Did you learn any new information during the programme and now you feel more confident that you understand it better? Can you give an example?)

4) How did the preparation both at the house and at the Centre help or not your visit to the museum? (prompts: How important was the preparation before the visit for yourself and your family? Did you like it? What did you do?)
5) In what ways do you think that the family programme encouraged teamworking? (prompts: how did it help you to work effectively or not in the learning community? Did you have any problems in your group? How did you overcome them?)

6) How was your collaboration both with peers and adults (parents + teachers) in your learning community? (prompts: Can you describe it? Did you like the idea of having more knowledgeable peers on the specific topics? Was it helpful?)

7) How do you think your participation in the family programme as community of learners increased your skills? (prompts: how to do something, how to work with others, how to manage information)

8) What is your attitude towards museums? (prompts: How did the family programme make you feel? Did it give you a motive to visit Greek museums? Why?)

9) Did you enjoy this programme? Why? (prompts: What did you like most?)

10) Do you feel satisfied from your participation in the programme? (prompts: Do you feel that your expectations were fulfilled after the programme?)

11) What was your role in the learning community?

12) What do you intend to do after the programme

13) Have you ever collaborated both within your family and with other families in visiting a museum? (prompts: Was it positive or negative experience and why?)

14) What is your attitude amongst the role that the Centre for Children's Creativity can play in bridging the gap between Greek museums and families? (prompts: Can the Centre act as a forum where the families can meet and share their museum experiences?)

15) What is your reflection as a family in organizing museum visits as learning communities?

Thank you very much for your great help.
APPENDIX C

Observation Protocol of children’ behaviour in the learning community

Date: ..................

Name of the Learning community: ....................................................................

Degrees: 1 to 4 where 1 is poor, 2 is fair, 3 is good and 4 is excellent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COL’s meetings</th>
<th>1st preparation at the Centre</th>
<th>2nd preparation at the Centre</th>
<th>3d water experiments at the Centre</th>
<th>4th museum visit</th>
<th>5th preparation at the Centre</th>
<th>6th preparation at the Centre</th>
<th>7th museum visit</th>
<th>8th follow-up activities</th>
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<tr>
<td>Children’s behaviour</td>
<td>Degree of active participation (e.g. interaction with exhibits, engagement with shared activities-mental and physical)</td>
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Degree of children’s collaboration/teamworking in their learning community?
(doiing together, speaking each other, listening to others, helping each other, sharing ideas/actions)

Degree of challenging ideas in the learning community
(e.g. generate ideas, questions, conjectures, and propositions)
| Degree of negotiation by exchanging ideas, thoughts, knowledge and experience on specific topics. |
| Degree of children's respectfulness and careness of one another |
| Degree of changing roles among participants (e.g. reader, recorder, prober, time keeper, challenger) |
| Degree of providing explanations to each other in order to understand better some activities or new concepts? |
| Degree of seeking guidance and help from the facilitators while the children are engaged in shared activities? |
| Degree of providing guidance and help from more advanced children to novice ones during the shared activities |
| Degree of children's enjoyment in the learning community |
Observation Protocol of facilitator’s behaviour in the learning community

Date: .....................

Name of the Learning community: ........................................................................

Degrees: 1 to 4 where 1 is poor, 2 is fair, 3 is good and 4 is excellent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitator’s meetings</th>
<th>COL’s behaviour</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>4th</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>7th</th>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of active participation (e.g. interaction with exhibits, engagement with shared activities-mental and physical)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of facilitator’s collaboration/teamworking in their learning community? (doing together, speaking each other, listening to others, helping each other, sharing ideas/actions)</td>
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<td>Degree of fostering joint collaboration among children in the learning community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of challenging ideas in the learning community (e.g. generate ideas, questions, conjectures, and propositions)</td>
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<td>Degree of negotiation by exchanging ideas, thoughts, knowledge and experience on specific topics.</td>
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<td>Degree of supporting novices attempts</td>
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<td>Degree of changing roles among participants (e.g. reader, recorder, prober, time keeper, challenger)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of providing help and explanations to children in order to understand better some activities or new concepts?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of encouraging children to turn to each other for explanations and directions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of encouraging more advanced children to help and support novice ones on specific topics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of facilitator's enjoyment in the learning community</td>
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APPENDIX D

Families' questionnaire before the programme

Name of Family...........................................................................................................
Date:.....................................................................

Hello. This questionnaire concerns your family experiences about the museums. Please complete it after you have discussed the questions together with your family. If you need more space for the answers you can also use the backside of the pages.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

1) What are your experiences as a family from visits you have done so far in Greek museums in relation to:

   a) your satisfaction

   b) the degree of entertainment
c) quality of information provided from the exhibits

d) your perception about the role that Greek museums have towards Greek families

2) Does your family plan frequent visits in Greek museums during your free time?

   a) YES

   Why?
b) NO

Why?

3) What are your criteria to visit a museum as a family?

4) Does your experience from the visits you have done so far fulfill your expectations?
5) What does your family want from Greek museums?

6) Would you like to participate in museum programmes for families? Why?
   
   a) NO
   Why?
   
   b) YES
   Why? What do you expect from these programmes?
*If you want to add some other thought, ideas and feelings please use this page.*
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