

Research Article

INFORM – EDUCATE – COMMUNICATE: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON MUSEUM STRATEGIES IN THE MALAGASY CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes communication strategies actually deployed in the Malagasy context, based on a study conducted across eight museums located in Antananarivo and Antsirabe. Drawing on the IEC triptych (Inform–Educate–Communicate), contributions from cultural mediation (Davallon, Caune), and the field of Information and Communication Sciences (Libaert, Charaudeau, Wolton), the study highlights recurring strengths and limitations affecting public information, pedagogical tooling, and the external visibility of institutions. Based on a corpus combining field data and semi-structured interviews, it proposes an integrated approach to museum communication centered on accessibility (linguistic, economic, situational), pedagogy (curricular alignment, content readability), interactivity (multimodal devices), and participation (co-production with audiences). The article introduces the concept of “educational museum capital”—defined as the set of cognitive, linguistic, and experiential resources that a visit enables visitors to accumulate and reinvest—which serves as a through line for strategically leveraging collections and heritage narratives. It concludes by underscoring the need for coherent, evolving mediation devices that articulate communication, education, and heritage, in order to meet contemporary visitor expectations while strengthening the social anchoring of Malagasy museums.

Keywords: museum communication; mediation; education; IEC; interaction; participation.

INTRODUCTION

Analysis of museum communication practices in Madagascar — public anonymized version

In the Malagasy environment, where oral tradition durably shapes collective memory, museums still struggle to have their role as custodians of cultural heritage recognized. Although several institutions exist in the two main cities studied, their visibility, attendance, and educational impact remain limited—caught between competition from leisure activities, low public presence, and restricted financial resources. Too often reduced to static spaces or reserved for initiated audiences (tourists, elites), museums are called to reconfigure themselves as dynamic sites of culture and learning. The issue is not only material or institutional: it is also communicational. How do museums inform and educate their publics, and how can their communication devices strengthen heritage appropriation and civic engagement?

This research revolves around three questions:

(Q1) To what extent do information devices (labels, signage, digital supports) foster public comprehension and wayfinding?

(Q2) How do educational mediation practices—where they exist—support durable learning that can be transferred into the school setting?

(Q3) Which forms of institutional and digital communication stimulate active engagement (participation, revisits, user-generated contributions)?

Context and field sites — institutional configurations and audiences

The study examines mediation and communication practices in eight emblematic institutions in two major Malagasy cities, using the IEC model (Inform–Educate–Communicate) as an analytical frame, articulated with theories of cultural mediation and contributions from Information and Communication Sciences. The objectives are threefold: (1) to examine strategies deployed to inform (quality and readability of content, bilingualism, visual mediation), educate (curricular alignment, appropriation devices, school–museum links), and communicate (editorial presence, maintaining contact before/during/after the visit, interactivity); (2) to qualify gaps between existing practices and public expectations; and (3) to offer strategic recommendations adapted to the local context to increase the institutions' attractiveness, social impact, and educational relevance.

The guiding thread is educational museum capital, understood as a combination of material resources (collections, equipment), immaterial resources (heritage narratives, social memory), and communicational resources (information tools, pedagogical devices, on-site and online mediation) that a well-designed visit enables visitors to accumulate, convert, and reinvest in other learning contexts. Growing this capital requires orchestrating coherence of enunciation, legible visitor pathways, inquiry/participation devices, and feedback loops with audiences.

METHODOLOGY — EMPIRICAL APPROACH AND TOOLS

Theoretically, the analysis combines IEC with contributions from cultural mediation (notably Davallon, Caune) and Information and Communication Sciences (Libaert, Charaudeau, Wolton), to propose an integrated reading of observed devices: messages, channels, and situations of enunciation are apprehended together, while accounting for the Malagasy context's cultural and structural specificities.

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Empirically, the approach relies on direct observations and semi-structured interviews with two museum-sector experts (museography, museology), complemented by conversations with institutional leaders and front-of-house staff. It aligns with research in Information and Communication Sciences that examines the circulation of heritage knowledge, while adapting methods and evaluation criteria to local conditions of message production and reception. The approach seeks a critical-constructive reading of local dynamics, attentive to cultural specificities (weight of orality, effective bilingualism) and structural features (governance, resources) of museum communication, in order to equip pragmatic transformations for audiences.

Triangulation makes it possible to cross material, spatial, and organizational dimensions. The analysis is structured by an IEC grid: informative capacity; educational effectiveness; communication strategies.

Theoretical principles underlying the study of museum communication — public anonymized version

In the Malagasy context—where oral memory durably shapes modes of transmission—museum communication is a strategic lever for valorizing heritage, raising awareness of cultural plurality, and supporting civic engagement. To analyze practices in eight museums across two cities in depth, we mobilize an integrated theoretical framework articulating three complementary approaches: communication for development (IEC), theories of cultural mediation, and contributions from Information and Communication Sciences (SIC).

1) IEC in the museum: from information to involvement

From an IEC perspective (Inform–Educate–Communicate), museum communication is conceived as a purposive process that hinges on articulating three dimensions: information, education, and communication, in a logic of change and active public involvement. Inform means providing reliable, contextualized content; educate entails fostering active learning; communicate involves tailoring message and channel to audience specificities (Libaert, 2018; Charaudeau, 2005).

This perspective invites scrutiny of messages (clarity, relevance, multilingualism), channels (labels, oral medication, digital supports), and intended effects (comprehension, memory, attitude change). Transposed to the museum field, the model frames the visit as a dynamic process in which the displayed object becomes a support for dialogue and appropriation (Caune, 2006; Wolton, 2009). It combines with the theory of cultural mediation (Davallon, 1999), which underlines the museum's role as an interface between scholarly knowledge and citizen appropriation, and with a pragmatic approach to communication (Charaudeau, 2005) centered on contextualizing exchanges.

It invites us to consider the exhibition not as a mere information support but as a communicative situation engaging knowledge, affect, and interaction (information devices, pedagogical tools, dialogic mechanisms). [Ngom] Conceived here as a purposive device, IEC allows us to evaluate, for each named museum, informative capacity (clarity, French/Malagasy bilingualism, iconotextual hierarchy), educational efficiency (alignment with school expectations, appropriation devices, scenarized pathways), and relational dynamics (editorial presence, feedback loops before/during/after the visit). It provides an operational grid to assess content accessibility, pathway coherence, and the capacity of devices to foster active participation.

2) Cultural mediation: from object to shared meaning

Theories of cultural mediation illuminate how objects, narratives, and publics are brought into relation. In Jean Davallon's perspective, the exhibition "puts the work to work" by orchestrating pathways and devices that enable shared meaning with the public. They thus emphasize meaning-making through narration, identity anchoring, and sensorial experience (gaze, ostensive gestures, atmospheres). Where local and academic references coexist, mediation acts as a bridge: it links scientific value to shared universes of meaning (family histories, community practices) and transforms the visit into an interpretive space where visitors become co-authors of the heritage narrative. In the same vein, Jean Caune stresses the symbolic dialogue between institutions and visitors: spatial scenography, wayfinding and guidance devices, language and register adaptation, and the articulation of sensorial (light, sound, materials) and explanatory times ("just-in-time" definitions, comparisons, diagrams) convert the visit into an interpretive experience.

3) Information and Communication Sciences (Mucchielli, Libaert, Charaudeau, Wolton) to frame enunciation, visibility, and relationship Information and Communication Sciences (SIC) offer an operational frame for reconfiguring museum mediation, with systematic attention to situations of enunciation (who speaks, to whom, where, how), regimes of visibility (public presence, digital communication), and knowledge circulations (before, during, after the visit). This approach allows assessment of device multichannelity (oral/written/visual/digital), observation of interaction routines (question–validation–narration), and identification of constraints (norms, resources, institutional framings) shaping reception.

In Alex Mucchielli's interactionist approach (with Pierre Paillé), qualitative analysis calls for contextualizing discursive practices and accounting for the actors involved: linguistic choices, mediator stances, and modes of public appropriation of heritage discourse (Mucchielli & Paillé, 2012). Thierry Libaert, with the notion of communication in the general interest, reminds us that museums' non-market ends—social, educational, heritage—orient strategies toward the common good rather than mere promotion (Libaert, 2018). Patrick Charaudeau brings to light the enunciative strategies through which institutions build their image and legitimize their actions, across varied genres (labels, catalogues, digital devices, social media) that must remain coherent and readable (Charaudeau, 2005). Finally, Dominique Wolton defends a dialogic vision of communication: the museum as a space of exchanges and plurality, where relation to the other takes precedence over one-way transmission—a condition for genuine public participation (Wolton, 1997). Together, these contributions converge on scenarization attentive to contexts, registers, and interactions, to transform the visit into an experience of shared meaning.

SIC bring three focal points:

- an interactional, contextual reading (after Mucchielli) of museum enunciation—who speaks, to whom, where, under which norms;
- an ethics of the general interest (Libaert) that refocuses communication on equity of access (pricing, legible hours, frugal yet robust supports);
- mastery of discourse regimes (Charaudeau) and a dialogic logic (Wolton) to stabilize a communication identity (cross-channel coherence, explicit "cognitive promise") while opening spaces for debate and participation.

The articulation of these three strands translates, in our analysis, into an operational concept: educational museum capital. We understand it as all the resources a visit enables visitors to accumulate, convert,

and reinvest: cognitive resources (notions, landmarks, vocabulary), linguistic resources (bilingualism, registers), experiential resources (guided manipulations, situated narratives), and relational resources (ties to territory, institutions, communities). Measuring and strengthening this capital means optimizing the interface between communication, education, and heritage—accounting for cultural specificities and material constraints in the studied context. It guides our comparative analyses and grounds operational recommendations intended to transform the named museums into spaces of transmission, engagement, and dialogue durably anchored in Malagasy society.

Museum communication thus ceases to be mere accompaniment to the exhibition: it becomes mediation engineering in the service of durable learning and a stronger social anchoring of museums.

Applying the IEC model in the museum context — public anonymized version

Originally developed for public health and communication for development, the IEC approach—Inform, Educate, Communicate—does not reduce to broadcasting a message; it organizes a relationship oriented toward active public involvement and, ultimately, changes in attitudes and practices. Transposed to the museum field, it proposes to conceive each visit as an integrated pathway in which information makes content accessible, education supports cognitive appropriation, and communication installs feedback loops that prompt visitors to act, return, and share. This logic is particularly pertinent in Madagascar, where institutions must reconcile pedagogical, identity, and cultural missions in a constrained socio-economic environment marked by the strength of orality.

Applied to the eight institutions studied, the IEC model first examines information devices: message clarity, pathway readability, systematic bilingualism, terminological sobriety, and inclusive signage. The point is not merely to announce content but to lower access thresholds even before entering the exhibition—comprehensible hours and pricing, labels that hierarchize ideas, lightweight print or digital supports adapted to local technical realities. Well-designed information prefigures learning by establishing a shared frame of intelligibility.

The educational strand then turns attention to appropriation situations: linking notions to familiar referents, narratives anchored in local memories, inquiry devices and guided activities that move from looking to understanding. Alignment with teachers' expectations, the provision of exploration sheets and short audio/visual capsules, and the place given to guided manipulation or object comparison help transform the visit into a durable learning experience. In this perspective, the visit becomes a means to grow audiences' educational museum capital—vocabulary, landmarks, interpretive gestures—that can be reinvested at school, in families, or in the community.

Finally, the communication dimension emphasizes relationship: opening and maintaining the channel during the visit (welcome, prompts, reformulations), and also before and after, via contact points proportionate to available resources (neighborhood posters, community radio, mobile messengers, lean social pages). The aim is not technological one-upmanship but narrative coherence and circulation of exchanges: explicit invitations to ask questions, share viewpoints, post visit traces, and contribute to micro-collections of memories. By creating these phatic and conative loops, communication no longer exists at the periphery of the exhibition: it

structures the experience, builds loyalty, and broadens the audience to visitors who did not initially identify with museum codes.

Applied in this way, the IEC model makes it possible to assess each museum along three axes—information devices, educational tooling, communication mechanisms—and to orchestrate their scaling-up in service of a shared educational museum capital: making access easier, fostering understanding, engaging and connecting through acquired vocabularies, interpretive landmarks, inquiry gestures, and ties to territory and social memories. This integrated logic—adjusted to the resources and audiences of each named institution—converts collection appeal into durable learning and the visit into a living relationship with society.

Staging the object to spark visitor engagement — public anonymized version

At the heart of museum communication, object staging is not merely about exhibiting a remarkable piece; it organizes a meaning-making device in which the object becomes the pivot of a shared narrative. In this perspective, Jean Davallon's analyses recall that an exhibition is not a simple alignment of things but a plotted arrangement (Davallon, 1999): through the succession of spaces, information hierarchy, and graphic/material choices, the museum proposes a pathway that orients attention, suggests interpretive hypotheses, and institutes a community of reading between institutions and publics. Framed by visual, textual, and spatial cues, the object changes status: from silent witness to actor in a story that links scientific knowledge, social memory, and contemporary uses.

In the same movement, cultural mediation in Jean Caune's sense emphasizes the symbolic dialogue the institution establishes with its visitors. This dialogue arises neither from erudition alone nor from isolated spectacle, but from a calibrated *mise-en-scène*: language and register choices, alternation of sensorial highlights (light, sound, materials) and explanatory times, way finding cues, and questions addressed to the visitor. Staging is thus an art of address: it opens and maintains the channel (phatic), invites participation (conative), explicates codes (metalanguage), and thereby stabilizes comprehension without flattening complexity.

Transposed into practice, this conception invites us to think of the object in interpretive layers. A sensorial layer first captures attention (ostensive gestures, controlled proximity, tactile cues where conservation allows, a restrained soundscape). A narrative layer situates the object—provenance, uses, circulations—and weaves identity ties with local referents. An explanatory layer articulates notions, vocabulary, and comparisons (forms, techniques, materials), with legible bilingualism and “on-the-fly” definitions. Finally, an activation layer assigns a visit challenge: a question to solve, a micro-inquiry, making links between pieces, or producing a short testimony. This layering—from emotion to explanation to action—converts attention into learning and nourishes what we call educational museum capital: the set of cognitive, linguistic, and experiential resources that visitors can reinvest beyond the exhibition.

So conceived, staging is not an aesthetic “extra” but mediation engineering in its own right. It articulates the three strands of IEC: it informs (message readability), educates (conceptual progression, pertinent comparisons), and communicates (relationship, address, participation). Above all, it moves beyond the face-to-face of display case and gaze by giving the visitor an active role: not only to see but to link, question, interpret. In this dynamic—at the crossroads of Davallon's plotting and Caune's symbolic dialogue—the object ceases to be an endpoint and becomes a starting point toward shared

understanding of heritage and more inclusive, durable visiting practices.

Optimizing museum mediation with contributions from Information and Communication Sciences — public anonymized version

Information and Communication Sciences (SIC) provide powerful conceptual tools to transform museum mediation from mere accompaniment to an engineering of relationships in the service of access to meaning, inclusion, and engagement. Four theoretical contributions structure our integrated approach. By crossing the perspectives of Alex Mucchielli, Thierry Libaert, Patrick Charaudeau, and Dominique Wolton, institutions can finely adjust how they address their publics, structure their discourses, and organize the encounter.

1) Contextualize enunciation and interaction (after Mucchielli).

In Mucchielli's interactionist and contextual horizon, any utterance is situated: it unfolds through roles and norms, within a specific space and rhythm (Alex Mucchielli, Pierre Paillé, 2012). Museum communication should be conceived as a situated situation: multiple actors (mediators, publics, teachers, communities) co-construct meaning from linguistic, postural, and contextual cues (language, status, norms, space, temporality, ambience). Operationally, this implies: legible bilingualism and definitions on labels; mediation stances oriented toward prompting and reformulation; variations in rhythm (dialogic pauses, guided manipulations) to stabilize understanding. The aim is to continually adjust discourse to the actual reception environment rather than to curatorial intentions alone.

2) Anchor action in the general interest (after Libaert).

Understood as a service to the common good, museum communication goes beyond promotional logic: it renders knowledge intelligible, reduces access asymmetries, and strengthens social ties. In Libaert's perspective, framing communication as a public-interest service reorients priorities toward equity of access and pedagogical continuity rather than mere promotion (Libaert, 2018). This entails legible practical information (hours, social pricing, targeted free admission), frugal yet robust supports (hierarchized labels, universal pictograms, reusable print formats), and local partnerships with schools, associations, and community media. The priority is not stacking effects but ensuring equity of access and traceability of learning (exploration sheets, classroom re-use supports, short audio capsules).

3) Master discourse and image regimes (after Charaudeau).

With Charaudeau, each museum is a discursive actor that puts its credibility on the line with each utterance (Charaudeau, 2005)—whether in situ (exhibition, visit) or mediated (print, platforms). Hence the need for a charter of enunciation: who speaks, to whom, for what purpose, with what “reading contract”? This translates into dual-entry texts (introductory for the general public / deeper for specialists), probative iconography (object-evidence, interpretive diagrams), and cross-channel coherence (shared key vocabulary, consistent cognitive promise, from posters to labels to digital relays). The expected result: a stable, recognizable, and trustworthy communication identity.

4) Organize dialogue and plurality (after Wolton).

Communication is not unilateral transmission but a meeting of viewpoints (Wolton, 1997). Installing spaces for debate (addressed questions, micro-forums, “objects of controversy”), opening phatic loops before/during/after (pre-visit, on-floor prompts, frugal digital follow-ups), and recognizing public diversity (youth, families,

occasional visitors) convert the visit into a shared experience rather than a solitary pathway.

Aggregated, these four strands outline an operational frame for optimizing mediation:

- accessible, contextualized information;
- equipped education (progression, comparisons, activities);
- relational, dialogic communication;
- all measured by the educational museum capital accumulated (acquired vocabulary, landmarks, interpretive gestures, territorial ties).

By articulating context (Mucchielli), general interest (Libaert), discourse regimes (Charaudeau), and dialogue (Wolton), museums shift from a content-centered logic to a situations logic. This move increases the cognitive and social yield of each visit without depending on costly technologies; it requires, above all, coherent enunciation, attention to contexts, and an ethic of address that make museums genuinely public, intelligible, and hospitable spaces. Mediation becomes clearer, fairer, and more participatory—in the service of durable learning and reinforced social anchoring.

Multisite qualitative method and data triangulation

This research is based on a multisite qualitative design conducted in eight museums across Antananarivo and Antsirabe, two major cultural hubs in Madagascar. The collection strategy rested on triangulation from the outset: field observations conducted between April and May 2023 (visit notebooks, label transcriptions, audiovisual documentation, photographs of interpretation devices), semi-structured interviews, and use of institutional sources. Two in-depth interviews of about 90 minutes each were conducted with a museographer (11 April 2023) and a museology specialist (19 April 2023). These were complemented by semi-structured exchanges with institutional leaders and front-of-house staff, as well as visitor questionnaires. In parallel, documents produced by the museums (catalogues, panels, posters, digital publications) were gathered to situate in situ observations within a broader discursive ecosystem.

The value of this multidimensional approach lies in systematically crossing viewpoints: those of professionals (design, constraints, editorial choices) and those of audiences (perceptions, understandings, expectations). This crossing is anchored in attention to material parameters (support quality, graphic legibility), spatial parameters (pathways, wayfinding, visit rhythms), and institutional parameters (missions, resources, positioning), to render museum communication as a situation and not just a sum of contents. Materials were transcribed and normalized (visit sheets, descriptive grids, iconotextual records) to ensure comparability across sites and traceability of interpretations.

Analysis relied on an IEC theoretical grid structured in three dimensions: (1) informative capacity, assessed through content quality, linguistic accessibility (effective bilingualism, “on-the-fly” vocabulary explanations), and clarity of supports (labels, signage, maps); (2) educational effectiveness, accessed via the presence of pedagogical devices (exploration sheets, guided activities, supervised manipulations), articulation with the education system, and the suitability of mediation to audiences; and (3) communication strategies, examined through online presence, interactions before/during/after the visit, and clarity of the cultural offer (programming, messages, promise). Each museum was analyzed through a matrix crossing these indicators, without automated coding: the chosen option favors a reflexive, argued interpretation of data, faithful to observed situations and attentive to contextual singularities.

This protocol preserves the richness of qualitative materials while enabling reasoned comparison across sites. The results, presented in the next section, reflect this granularity through concrete field examples and shed light on the strengths, limitations, and potential evolutions of museum communication practices in the two cities studied.

Classification of the museums examined

The sample covers a broad institutional spectrum reflecting Malagasy museum realities—university, associative, private, and public statuses—distributed across two urban poles. In the first city, a private museum dedicated to photographic heritage aims to preserve and valorize historical visual holdings; alongside it, a public service of iconographic archives conserves historical documents of national scope. A state-run museum of natural history and ethnography presents a reference collection in paleontology and material cultures; lastly, a university museum complex dedicated to civilizations, arts, and archaeology articulates research, teaching, and mediation for academic and school audiences. In the second city, an associative cultural center combines exhibitions, training, and territorial anchoring, while two private museums respectively present historical objects and evoke everyday life of the past, from heritage and tourism perspectives.

This statutory and thematic diversity reflects the richness of the studied offer while revealing marked disparities in resources, ends, and target publics. University institutions prioritize scientific anchoring and pedagogical use; public structures carry national conservation and accessibility missions; associative initiatives bank on local participation and proximity mediation; private museums seek models balancing attractiveness, tourism, and preservation. These gaps directly shape IEC-framed communication choices: variation in information level (content quality, effective bilingualism), educational tooling (learning devices, school links), and modes of relating to publics (online presence, interactions before/during/after the visit). The typology is thus not merely descriptive; it illuminates constraints and levers specific to each governance, providing the comparative scaffold for ensuing analyses.

Analysis of information, education, and communication

Observations across the eight institutions reveal a contrasted landscape: promising initiatives coexist with structural gaps that limit access to meaning, learning, and audience relationships.

Information. Most museums offer rich, well-documented content anchored in archives, reference objects, or recognized expertise. It is less content quality than form that poses difficulties: very dense labels, under-used iconography, uneven bilingualism and rare translation into the most accessible local languages, limited visual mediation to guide the eye and hierarchize ideas. There are a few counter-examples: a private photography museum has deployed bilingual labels (French/Malagasy) with QR codes linking to audio capsules and downloadable digital catalogues; an associative cultural center has redesigned its wayfinding by integrating universal pictograms. These gestures reflect a will to lower access thresholds, but remain isolated at the ecosystem scale. The picture aligns with critiques of top-down mediation: an expert posture remains dominant at the expense of co-constructing meaning with visitors.

Education. Potential is real but underused. Formalized links with schools remain fragile: class visits occur but without clearly scenarized pedagogical pathways or level-differentiated supports. Active sequences are observed in some natural science museums

(e.g., supervised object manipulation to illustrate geological phenomena), but such practices remain occasional. Solutions are emerging—hands-on workshops, heritage-box-type kits—without yet constituting a structured offer. In IEC terms, the educational orientation would benefit from clarification (objectives, progression, evaluables) and operationalization through simple tools: exploration sheets, short bilingual capsules, inquiry protocols adapted to local material constraints.

Communication. Disparities are pronounced. Some institutions have invested in social media and stabilized a legible editorial identity: regular posts in short visual formats (“object of the month,” behind-the-scenes, brief videos), and flagship events (theme nights, international days) that temporarily amplify visibility. A public iconographic archive service, for example, organized livestreams that gathered several thousand viewers—well beyond physical capacity—signaling appetite for remote access. Conversely, other structures—particularly university or associative—exhibit a weak or irregular online presence. Interactivity is generally limited: few devices invite visitors to take part (polls, micro-narratives, iconographic contributions) or maintain a phatic channel before and after the visit. Partnerships with community radio or online cultural actors are beginning to appear, but remain weakly formalized. This tableau reflects both a resource deficit and the absence of a shared communication policy. From the discursive perspective emphasized in SIC, institutional discourse’s credibility and readability are nonetheless decisive for stabilizing museums’ social legitimacy.

Reception. Audience analysis confirms sustained interest, alongside a strong expectation for more interactive, situated, and inclusive experiences. In the spirit of communication as management of diverse perspectives, this requires recognizing heterogeneous visit positions (learner, curious visitor, resident, tourist) and opening participation spaces where the visitor is no longer merely an observer but an actor in the interpretive process.

These findings point to two theoretical requirements. First, following Charaudeau, the museum’s legitimacy as a discursive actor presupposes a coherent, credible, and accessible institutional discourse, transposed without rupture from the gallery to print and digital supports. Yet many institutions do not yet treat this dimension as a strategic undertaking, weakening their public visibility. Second, after Wolton, “to communicate is to manage the diversity of viewpoints” (Wolton, 1997): recognizing positions of visit (student, family, neighbor, tourist) implies inclusive, participatory devices that remain too rare. So long as the visitor is essentially an observer, mediation struggles to produce durable engagement.

Taken together, these results argue for an integrated reading of the three IEC dimensions. It enables objectifying gaps between installed devices and audience expectations, while valorizing local innovations already underway. The near-term challenge is to convert promising signals into shared standards: more accessible information (effective bilingualism, hierarchized labels, visual mediation), better-equipped education (pathways, supports, inquiry gestures), and more relational communication (feedback loops, lean online relays). Only then can the visit durably nourish audiences’ educational museum capital and strengthen museums’ social relevance in the studied context.

Toward a coherent and flexible strategy

Designing a coherent, adaptable museum communication strategy presupposes a model explicitly anchored in IEC (Inform–Educate–Communicate) and enriched by contributions from Information and Communication Sciences. Such a frame first requires effective

coordination across the three strands: information must become accessible, readable, and hospitable (reasoned multilingualism, hierarchized content, restrained visual supports); education must be structured through formal alliances with schools (agreements, level-adapted resources, professionalization and tooling of mediation); and communication cannot be reduced to visibility—it must organize interactive, participatory relationships aligned with local digital uses and social practices. This model does not prescribe a single form: it should reflect each institution's resources, ambitions, and specificities, privileging appropriate, evolving solutions over a uniform standard.

Within this frame, four implementation axes structure capacity-building. First, continuous training for mediators and front-of-house staff to move from a declarative register to prompting, reformulation, and guided inquiry; a natural history & ethnography museum and a university museum complex are well-placed to co-lead shared workshops drawing on their respective strengths (natural sciences on one side; material cultures and ritual on the other). Second, reasoned digitization of content—frugal but regular: where a private photographic museum and a public iconographic archive have expanded bilingual QR-enhanced labels and livestreams, this can be accompanied by editorialization (chaptering, replays, FAQs). In an associative center in Antsirabe, a local digital media library could extend exhibitions. Third, public involvement in co-constructing the offer: collecting micro-narratives; hands-on workshops around gestures and materials in two private museums focusing respectively on historical objects and bygone daily life. Fourth, economic and cognitive accessibility: legible pricing, dedicated school time slots, universal pictograms, and Malagasy/French glossaries on-site; the associative center has already moved in this direction through revamped signage.

At the core of this device, educational museum capital acts as a catalyst. It denotes all the resources that a well-designed visit enables visitors to accumulate, convert, and reinvest in other learning and social contexts. These resources are material—collections, buildings, visitor-reception equipment; immaterial—heritage narratives, social memory, local expertise; and communicational—IEC informational, pedagogical, and relational devices. This capital is only truly effective if activated by an integrated strategy: IEC provides the method, linking opening access (inform), building understanding (educate), and creating durable ties (communicate). The challenge is to move beyond a strictly utilitarian view of mediation and make the museum a site of shared interpretation, where scholarly transmission, citizen appropriation, and cultural narration come together. In university museums, supervised fossil handling anchors learning in experience; bilingual situated narratives link artefacts to identity practices; in iconographic and photographic museums, the image library becomes a reservoir of easily shareable evidence; in Antsirabe's museums, territorial anchoring turns visitors into co-authors of meaning.

To embed these orientations over time, two levels of action are complementary. Nationally, a museum communication policy—led by the competent authority (in coordination with Education and Higher Education)—to pool good practices, harmonize realistic standards (bilingualism, readability, welcome), and professionalize practice via continuous training in mediation, public writing of knowledge, and digital editorialization. At the institutional level, tighter school-museum links: partnership agreements, co-design of pedagogical materials, mobile devices such as kits/micro-exhibitions, and explicit curricular integration of the visit (pre-visit preparation, level-scenarized pathways, classroom extensions). In parallel, a frugal, targeted digital strategy can boost attractiveness: regular editorial presence on social media, short bilingual content, collaborations with

local cultural actors and educational platforms (podcasts, audio/video capsules), and time-bound campaigns for calendar highlights. Finally, a participatory, inclusive approach completes the whole: co-creation workshops, collections of micro-narratives, calls for contributions, and a dialogic museography involving communities in interpretive choices.

Taken together, these levers support the transition from institutions perceived as static to cultural actors able to contribute to identity construction, social cohesion, and intergenerational transmission. Conceiving the museum as a dynamic space of cultural citizenship implies a posture shift: understanding publics (expectations, narratives, practices), steering mediation with reception indicators, and asserting the political will to locate the museum at the intersection of culture, education, and public communication. In this frame, strategy is not ornament; it is the operative condition for growing educational museum capital and, in so doing, durably embedding museums within the horizons of development, inclusion, and collective memory. Thus the museums of Antananarivo and Antsirabe will consolidate their place in the country's cultural, school, and civic ecosystem.

LIMITS AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

The study remains qualitative and focused on two cities; longitudinal measures of attendance and learning, as well as inter-regional comparison, would refine device evaluation. Consolidating indicators (label reading time, social interactions, teacher feedback, revisits) opens a perspective for data-driven steering.

Restoring heritage through integrated communication — public anonymized version

By articulating IEC principles (Inform–Educate–Communicate) with contributions from Information and Communication Sciences, this study proposes an integrated reading of museum communication adapted to the Malagasy context. The eight-museum inquiry reveals a mosaic of practices and a convergent potential: to make museums not only places of conservation but spaces of transmission, dialogue, and engagement. To that end, we advance an operational model that combines information accessibility (multilingualism, readability, visual mediation), collaborative education (formal alliances with schools, inquiry devices, conceptual progression), and inclusive communication (feedback loops, audience participation, frugal digital extensions).

This practical, flexible frame (adaptable to each site's constraints and ambitions) can serve as a foundation for a national charter or strategic museum development plan (co-led with the competent authority, schools, universities, and professional networks) in order to pool good practices and establish realistic standards (bilingualism, readability, cross-channel coherence). It does not impose a single format: it adapts to each institution's resources, missions, and publics, while setting shared milestones—quality of enunciation, clarity of pathways, reception indicators, continuous training of mediators. Its horizon is not visibility alone but the growth of educational museum capital: the set of cognitive, linguistic, and experiential resources that visits enable and that can be reinvested in school learning, cultural life, and citizenship.

Re-centering communication within the museum's mission revitalizes the link between heritage and society: opening access, supporting understanding, recognizing viewpoint plurality, and encouraging participation. It also secures museums' rightful place in the country's cultural, educational, and civic ecosystem by positioning them as facilitators of knowledge, mediators of identities, and actors of

development. Under these conditions—coherent, measurable, and adapted strategy—heritage restoration takes place not only in storerooms and display cases but also in the living relationship woven with publics, where shared meanings and collective memory are made.

Malagasy museums hold major potential for education, memory, and social cohesion. By placing communication—in the IEC and dialogic sense—at the heart of their mission, they can move from exhibition to animating civic culture and strengthen public appropriation of heritage. The proposed model is neither prescriptive nor uniform: it offers a toolbox adaptable to each institution's resources, publics, and priorities.

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Conceptualization: R. Mihaja; Methodology: R. Mihaja, A. Tianarisoa; Investigation: R. Mihaja; Formal analysis: R. Mihaja, A. Tianarisoa; Writing—original draft: R. Mihaja; Writing—review & editing: R. Mihaja, A. Tianarisoa; Supervision: R. Mihaja.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare no competing interests.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The study relied on interviews and observations. Participants gave informed consent; institutional and site names are anonymized in publicly shared analyses to avoid sensitive attributions. No vulnerable populations were targeted.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Qualitative materials (interview guides, anonymized observation grids) are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Notes (optional)

None. Per IJISRR, avoid footnotes; if essential, list brief notes here after the References.

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