



***Navigating Difference* Launches in New York, Charleroi and Genoa**

Museum installations facilitate transatlantic dialogue on immigration in US and Europe

New York, USA, November 17, 2011 — **Is immigration good for my country? Is immigration good for my community? Is immigration good for me?** Starting November 17, museum visitors in Belgium, Italy and the United States will have the chance to respond to these simple but provocative questions.

Navigating Difference, an interactive installation opening at three immigration-related sites – [Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration](#) (New York), [Le Bois du Cazier](#) (Charleroi) and Galata Museo del Mare - [Mu.MA](#) (Genoa) – invites visitors to respond to these questions and compare their responses to those gathered at every site. The installation launches November 17, 2011 and will remain open through early 2012. The project was coordinated by the [International Coalition of Sites of Conscience](#) and funded by [Museums & Community Collaborations Abroad](#).

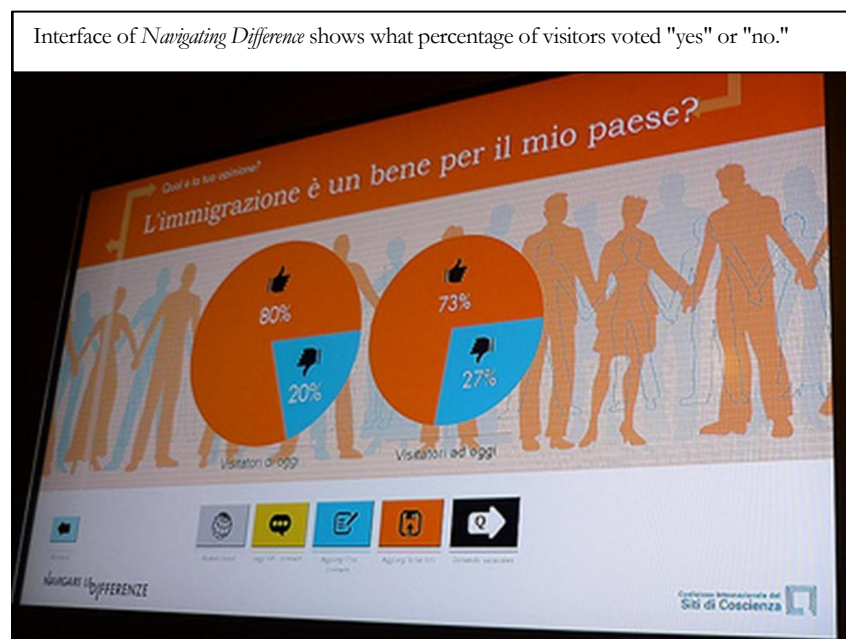
Navigating Difference aims to give fresh perspective to today's debates about immigration and migration taking place in the United States and Europe by doing two things: placing immigration within a historical context by sharing the stories of those who journeyed before, and providing a trans-Atlantic aspect to the immigration debates by allowing visitors to see how people in other countries feel about the same questions.

Developed by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience and created by interactive design firm [Blue Telescope](#), the installation features a touch-screen display and simple navigation system that allows users to answer each question and leave comments. They can review the responses of other users (see photo at right) and scroll through comments. Responses in other languages will be translated to the home museum's core language (English, French, or Italian).

But the installation is the jump-off point for more. Each museum also hosts community dialogues bringing together groups of people with differing perspectives on immigration to delve into why people immigrated then and now, and what their experiences can entail. The goal? To help visitors navigate the complexities of migration and inspire more informed public discourse about immigration today.

"Where are the public spaces for people today to talk openly and productively about immigration?" asks Elizabeth Silkes, Executive Director of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, a global network of museums that use history to inspire civic action today. "Sites like ours are today's new civic spaces because they use the past to invite reflection on the present, which enables a richer conversation - and hopefully, inspires constructive action."

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International Coalition of
Sites of Conscience



More about *Navigating Difference*: www.sitesofconscience.org/categories/activities/navigating-difference

Photos of *Navigating Difference*: www.flickr.com/groups/navigatingdifference

Facebook page: www.facebook.com/NavigatingDifference.

Funding for Navigating Difference was provided in part by the Museums & Communities Collaborations Abroad Program, which is made possible by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and administered by the American Association of Museums.

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

International Coalition of Sites of Conscience: www.sitesofconscience.org.

We are a worldwide network of “Sites of Conscience” – historic sites, museums and initiatives that activate the power of places of memory to engage the public with a deeper understanding of the past and inspire action to shape a just future. The Coalition provides member sites with direct funding for civic engagement programs, organizes learning exchanges ranging from one-on-one collaborations to international conferences, and conducts strategic advocacy for sites and the Sites of Conscience movement.

Galata Museo del Mare (Mu.Ma): www.galatamuseodelmare.it/jsp/index.jsp.

This maritime museum in Genoa, Italy focuses on the city’s seafaring history, including its legacy as an emigration port. In the interactive exhibit “From Genoa to Ellis Island,” visitors take on the roles of emigrants who left Italy for the Americas between 1892 and 1914. Armed with a passport and ticket, visitors walk in the shoes of thousands before as they prepare for the voyage, travel overseas, undergo screening at Ellis Island, and settle in New York City. This exhibit, a key step in building the planned Emigration Museum at Mu.MA, asks us to explore how immigration affects not only the destination nation but also the home country, both socially and economically.

Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration: www.nps.gov/elis/index.htm.

Ellis Island was the United States’ premier federal immigration station for over 60 years. From January 1, 1892 until 1954, the station processed some 12 million immigrant steamship passengers. After 30 years of abandonment, the island’s Main Building was restored and, in 1990, opened as a museum operated by the US National Park Service. Today, more than 40 percent of America’s population can trace their ancestry through Ellis Island, and the museum’s exhibits focus on this shared history.

Le Bois du Cazier: www.leboisducazier.be/index_en.htm.

On August 8th, 1956, a fire spread through the Bois du Cazier coal mine in Marcinelle, Belgium, claiming the lives of 262 men of 12 different nationalities. More than half of the victims were immigrants from Italy, who filled the need for laborers in Belgium’s economic heartland. The tragedy put an end to a decade-old worker treaty between Belgium and Italy and led to stricter safety regulations for coal miners across the nation. A visit to Le Bois du Cazier encourages visitors to question the costs and benefits of industrialization and to consider issues of workplace safety. The site also offers visitors the opportunity to reflect on the lives and contributions of immigrants in Belgium and the factors influencing immigration policy today.

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