

BENFICA MUSEUM - COSME DAMIÃO: GROWTH AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF PANDEMIC

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In March 2020, COVID-19 arrived in Portugal and imposed our first lockdown. In just a few days, the reality as we knew it changed completely. At first, we could not imagine the Benfica Museum - Cosme Damião closing its doors, but, soon after, we realised it was inevitable.

The initial shock was followed by the need to adapt to an unknown context. It was urgent to respond to the constraints created by the pandemic. The first step was to develop an action plan that would allow us to continue working for the different audiences. With the Museum closed, digital platforms proved to be the most viable means of communication, as they allow constant interaction at a distance. Thus, the website and the Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages of the Benfica Museum became the centre of cultural mediation. The first initiative of the digital transition plan was a guided tour of the exhibition, made available on YouTube and social networks.

Once the main mediation tool had been defined, it was necessary to rethink communication with the followers and understand how to meet their expectations and needs. Therefore, the work developed in the social networks, during the pandemic, sought to highlight a strong sociocultural aspect. The publications were intensified, creating content that guided the followers towards new behaviours. Several regular segments were created, among them *Your Choice*, *Memory of the Match*, and *Before and After*, aimed at referring the followers to specific events, to the Club's collection and to the importance of the work developed by Sport Lisboa e Benfica Cultural Heritage Direction.



Post on Twitter from Benfica Museum, under the heading *Memory of the Match*. In this case, the tweet was shared by Eintracht Frankfurt with the message "Great memories, @museubenfica".

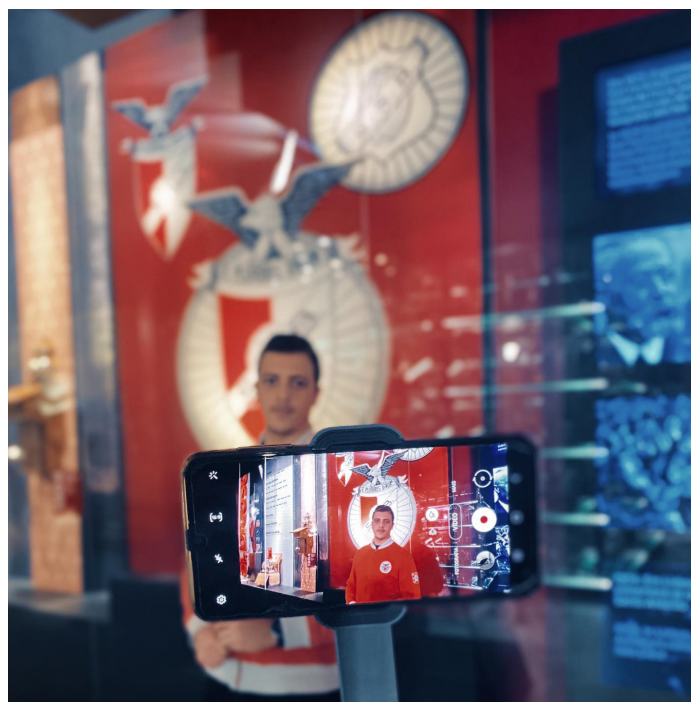
In the original post, it is possible to read: "We have with us the pennant of the match! For @SLBenfica, the players were Rita, Jacinto, Cruz, Cavém, Raúl, Humberto, José Augusto, Santana (Torres, 45'), Eusébio, Coluna (C) and Simões. The manager was Fernando Riera. Thanks for the reminder, @Eintracht_por!"

The digital transition was embodied in the #BenficaMuseumAtHome project, with the purpose of guaranteeing access to culture during the pandemic. Firstly, investment was made in the adaptation and online publication of previously created recreational and educational materials. These materials were incorporated into the website and allow the public to continue to experience the Benfica Museum at a distance from a screen. We highlight articles from *O Benfica* newspaper, games for the whole family, drawings for colouring and activities to commemorate anniversaries and develop artistic skills. The public's receptivity was very positive, which boosted the continuous growth of this project. Throughout the pandemic, the Cultural Heritage Direction provided various cultural contents to educational institutions and families including papers on the history of Sport Lisboa e Benfica, documents that communicate the Club's collection, encouraging meditation on the theme of sporting heritage, and guides on healthy eating and physical exercise. In addition, as a founding member of the International Sports Museums Association (ISMA), the Benfica Museum has created measures and recommendations to be adopted by members to guarantee a safe reopening.

The work of the first lockdown was crucial to prepare the reopening of the Museum and create activities adapted to the pandemic context. Given the impossibility of holding face-to-face activities while closed, the Cultural Heritage Direction organised online initiatives. In 2020, the Storage, Conservation and Restoration Department promoted two webinars on the Zoom platform, which brought together various conservation and restoration specialists and provided deep thought on the challenges linked to the management of cultural heritage. In January 2021, on the verge of the second lockdown, the Museum organised the first cycle of online guided tours, entitled *Stories in Red and White*. The acceptance of the public led to the creation of two new editions. In all, between December and April, twelve visits took place which communicated the exhibition from different perspectives. One of these tours opened the doors of the Storage, Conservation and Restoration Department, and the Documentation and Information Centre to the public, giving them the opportunity to get to know their daily activities. The celebration of the 117th anniversary of the Club also included a special programme. Online interviews were organised, on Instagram, with former and current athletes of the Club, recalling the achievements and great moments of Benfica's history.



Some of the historical papers written within the #BenficaMuseumAtHome project. In the central paper, one can read the title "The 1918 pneumonic flu and sports in Portugal: what relationship?".



One of the online guided tours to the Benfica Museum - Cosme Damião, integrated in the cycle of online guided tours *Stories in Red and White*.

Photo: Fábio Leite

Aware of the difficult period that teachers and students were going through, the Museum reinforced its educational action. Pedagogical materials were created for different teaching cycles, which were made available on the website and sent via e-mail to Portuguese schools, to serve as supporting documents for education. Among them are the documents *Saint Martin's Values*, which relates the legend and traditions of Saint Martin with the values of sport, and *Saint Vincent, Patron Saint of Lisbon*, which unveils who Saint Vincent was and explores the symbology of Lisbon's coat of arms and the emblem of Sport Lisboa e Benfica. These materials include a creative workshop proposal to promote students' art education and critical thinking. The pandemic context also revealed the urgency to work directly with and for the surrounding community. It was in this context that the school project *The Place We Are* was born, with digital and face-to-face versions. Aimed at students from various educational levels, this project involves schools from the Lisbon parishes surrounding the Stadium: Benfica, Carnide, and São Domingos de Benfica. The aim is to use the concepts of identity and community to promote the history and heritage of the areas where the memory of the Club is present.

To date, Portugal has gone through two periods of lockdown. Football and other sports stopped, the active life of the Club narrowed, and the Benfica Museum took over, on digital platforms, as one of the main emotional links to members and fans. After two closures, the Benfica Museum recorded a drop in visitors of around 80%, like other national museums. However, the digital transition resulted in a growth of approximately 15% in social networks: the number of publications increased by approximately 50% and the increase in digital accessibility boosted its reach. Visits to the website also increased due to the #BenficaMuseumAtHome project, which receives about a thousand visits every week. In addition, the Museum's programme was, on several occasions, reported in the national press, showing the impact of the work carried out. Thus, we can see that, despite the difficulties, this period allowed the Benfica Museum - Cosme Damião to find new opportunities for growth.



One of the initiatives of the #BenficaMuseumAtHome project: "Thank you, Champions!". The goal is to honour the professionals working on the front line during the pandemic.

ENDNOTES

1. Hyperlinks

Website: <https://www.slbenfica.pt/en-us/instalacoes/museu-benfica>

#MuseuBenficaEmCasa: <https://www.slbenfica.pt/en-us/instalacoes/museu-benfica/ficaemcasa>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MuseuBenficaCosmeDamiao>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/museubenfica/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/museubenfica>

2. Sport Lisboa e Benfica Cultural Heritage Direction

Aware that the preservation of its cultural and heritage collection also indicates the preservation of the Club's true identity, it was decided to create the Cultural Heritage Direction whose mission is to preserve, valorise and communicate this heritage through its conservation, research, interpretation and communication, as well as through other educational and cultural programmes.

Benfica Museum – Cosme Damião is par excellence the communication tool of the Club's cultural collection, and the project's most prominent part. However, the mission and goals of the Cultural Heritage Direction can only be possible with the combined efforts of its five composing areas: the Storage, Conservation and Restoration Department, the Documentation and Information Centre, the Curatorship, the Production Department, and the Mediation and Educational Services.

3. International Sports Museums Association (ISMA)

Sport Lisboa e Benfica is one of the promoters of ISMA. The International Sports Museums Association is a membership network which brings together sports club museums, sports museums, and other sporting cultural heritage institutions, that together promote the recognition, importance, and the cultural relevance of sports heritage.

The organisation is made up of museums and clubs of international standing that in addition to having a substantial heritage collection, believe that its preservation is a means also of protecting and defining each member's identity.



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