



MUSEUMS AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: NEW MODELS FOR INNOVATION?

POSITION PAPER

Written for the Expert meeting on Intangible Cultural Heritage, Museums and Innovation (6.02.2019 | Aubusson – France) in the context of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Museums Project.

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The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO on October 17, 2003, has contributed to raise awareness of a new notion of heritage overpassing monuments, historical buildings, artistic works, natural landscapes, and other tangible manifestations of culture. Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) concerns “*the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills*” that belong to communities and are held by specific members. It is not static, but it continually transforms and innovates.

National registers have been drawn up in the last years, and the UNESCO lists of ICH keep growing including elements that would have been hardly taken into considerations at the international level before 2003. ICH has thus extended the boundaries of cultural heritage, but has also transformed the approach to this domain, and more broadly, the meaning of heritage.

ICH does not exist without people practicing it. This has permitted to focus the attention on the holders of heritage, in particular on the communities that recognize what it is heritage and contribute to establish its value. ICH is a living heritage, its safeguard means its use, its appropriation, its transformation, its continuous innovation. This has driven to question the idea of a safeguard based on conservation and protection of forms and materials. Elements of ICH are deeply rooted in territories and communities and their uses represent critical factors for creating new global and competitive scenarios. ICH is not an isolated item, it is integrated in a complex ecosystem. This has raised the attention on the issue of safeguarding and governance, not only from a cultural, but also from an economic, social, and environmental point of view. By bridging past and future, ICH is a source of creativity and innovation showing the limits of systems centered on individuals and creators and the role of the entire society nourishing creative processes.

ICH has thus widely transformed the approach to heritage, and entering into the sphere of museums, we wonder: how can ICH transform these institutions, their role, the approach to their collections, the relations with visitors and local communities? Moreover, how can this dialogue between ICH and museums become a source of innovation and creativity within and outside the museums? Museums and ICH are fundamental elements of the cultural system, can they become new models bringing together traditional ways of conservation, bottom-up practices, social innovation?

ICH, innovation and creativity: an economic approach¹

Innovation and creativity are central issues of contemporary economies, as well as of contemporary public policies. The flourishing of international reports (UNESCO 2009, 2018) and national ones (EY France 2013) on culture and creativity, lead us to think about the economic interests rising around the cultural domain and its contribution to the creation of new products, processes, dynamics. Thus, the starting point for understanding the contribution of ICH to museum innovation should logically be the definition of both creativity and innovation.

Creativity and innovation have been central concepts of the economic perspective, since the pioneer works of Joseph Schumpeter (1911) focused on a crucial player, the entrepreneur, and his ability to generate new ideas, products or processes. Nevertheless, these first approaches did not explain how creativity and new ideas can be inspired. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) explains creativity as the interaction of three elements: the excellence of individual knowledge and skills; the working context; the social dimension that can facilitate the access to new opportunities. In this sense, can these elements be represented by the excellence of ICH practitioners and museum workers, the dimension of museums, the creative environment where these institutions are often located? Other theories are more related to the fact that innovation and creativity come from the overlapping of different domains, permitting to crisscross references, paradigms and values. These interactions can create synergies among different fields, and unpredictable results. When the traditional art of mime comes to dialogue with the sculpture of the Camille Claudel Museum²: what can happen and be invented? These new creations come from a tacit knowledge, that is incorporated in individuals and that circulate with them. ICH, being a heritage transmitted from one generation through the other, often in a tacit way, by observing and imitating a family member playing an instrument or dancing since the first years of life, circulates from one person to the other, one city to the other, one country to the other, one generation to the next one. For Michael Polanyi, "we can know more than we can tell" (1967, p. 4). Thus, it is this tacit knowledge that can be the knowledge of approaching discovery, leading to guess, imagining, create something new.

A remarkable contribution to the subject of creativity comes also from the work of Granovetter (1973), who talks about *The Strength of Weak Ties*. Here, he relates the analysis of creativity and social networks and he distinguishes strong and weak ties. Strong ties are the result of frequent interaction, emotional involving, and are based on reciprocity. Weak ties are built through less frequent interactions, less emotional involving, and need less reciprocity. Strong ties are essentials for explaining relations within stable groups and organizations, while weak ties establish unexpected relations between groups or organizations and permit to access new information, that can incite innovation and creativity. If we analyze the relations within a museum, the ties among its workers can be interpreted as strong ties: people spend a lot of time together, and this creates emotional intensity and intimacy, and reciprocal services that make the structure functioning. While weak ties come, for example, from the

1 This part of the paper resumes the main insights of the article: Cominelli F., Greffe X. (2012), "Intangible Cultural Heritage: Safeguarding for Creativity", *Culture and Society*.

2 As an example, we can mention the work of Hippocampe mime corporel, carried out in May 2017, at the Camille Claudel Museum in Nogent-sur-Seine, which has staged a series of visual, corporal and movement poems inspired by the sculptures of Camille Claudel.

interactions with researchers involved in the scientific committee of a temporary exhibition, artists organizing a performance within or outside the museum, entrepreneurs benefiting of a guided visit to some objects of the collections, students coming for a school activity, families enjoying the museum's workshops on holidays. All these are occasions for creating weak ties among members of different groups, often small ones. Through strong ties the information disseminated within the museum is more or less of the same kind; through weak ties, this information is new and rich (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1376). The meeting with groups with whom the museum is weakly tied, permits to access to new information relevant in other social contexts.

"These different approaches to creativity lead us to consider that the origin of creativity is not only related to specific, exceptional and individual characteristics. Creativity can be the result of sharing personal and tacit knowledge embodied in people, of unexpected meeting and discussions, of weak ties created between individuals, of synergies risen by the exchange among individuals, their environment, the social context. Thus, the simple fact of working together can have an impact on creativity" (Cominelli, Greffe 2012). This debate can be pushed further taking into account the increasing and diversified role of the mediated communities on Internet (Greffe, Sonnac 2008). New technologies of any kind, within the sphere of museum, can create links among communities. An example can be the one of "Robotino"³ a robot that can be guided at distance and circulate within the collection of the museum. Its pioneer use regards people in hospitals who are unable to go to visit a museum. Thanks to this technology, they can realize their personal visit. Nevertheless, the uses can be multiplied and help to build weak ties, with a strong potential in terms of creativity. The following step will be to see how innovation and creativity more deeply deal with museums.

Museum and innovation: the OECD⁴ perspective

Nowadays, museums are considered central institutions at the cultural level, especially in Europe. Their increasing number and their growth in the last part of the 20th Century is the result of important investments, both public and private. This has permitted to develop their collections, the number of temporary exhibitions, the mediation activities, all kind of services meant for museum's publics, as well as their architectural dimension, in some cases involving star architects contributing to the popularity of museums.

Even if the objective it is not here to retrace the history of museum, it is easy to say that these « places of the muses » kept evolving, since their first prefiguration described by Pausania in the ancient Greece: a portico at the agora of Athens or the Pinacoteca of the Propylaea on the Acropolis. Dominique Poulot (2013) underlines that "Most narratives about the history of museums describe it either as a logical process of progressive democratization (the passage from places of privileged access to generalized access) or as spaces of social control specific to the development of liberal government according to a post-Foucauldian perspective, or lastly as the cultural model, the museum temple of universal art which supposedly led naturally to Europe's domination of art history and heritage consciousness in the 21th century". It is clear that museums, as well as ICH, have been able to pass through time and to evolve both in terms of historic perspective, functions, objects and collections. As defined

3 This robot as been tested in several museums in France, like the Louvre-Lens Museum.

4 OECD stands for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

by the Reinwardt Academie in Amsterdam in the 1980s, the functions of museums can be synthesized as follows: preservation, research and communication. Preservation includes the acquisition, conservation and management of collections, while communication itself includes education, exhibition, and mediation. This latter becoming a crucial objective in the last decades. If these functions remain at the heart of museums, different studies seek to underline the broader role of museums, overpassing the borders of their architectural structures, and more traditional functions.

A recent publication of OECD and ICOM (2018) states that « Museum and cultural heritage sites are powerful assets for local development. They can inspire creativity, boost cultural diversity, help regenerate local economies, attract visitors and bring revenues. There is also increasing evidence that they can contribute to social cohesion, civic engagement, health and well-being.” This publication follows an extensive research developed jointly by OECD and ICOM in 2018 and concerning several international museums like for example the MUSE Science Museum of Trento, Italy, the Museum of Lisbon, Portugal, the Municipal Museums of Venice, Italy, the Louvre Museum and Louvre-Lens Museum, France, the Lyon Museum of Confluences, France, the Montreal Fine Arts Museum, Canada. The role of museum as levers of innovation is thus at the hearth of the international debate and is explained with reference to four main areas:

- Economic development and innovation: museums, through their activities, directly and indirectly contribute to the creation of jobs and revenues. These impacts can be fostered by local governments through policies, funding, urban planning, public services. The development of visitors, especially through touristic policies and projects, is seen as a factor increasing the economic impacts of museum. Moreover, museums contribute to the dissemination of new technologies and the creation of new products and support creativity. They are here seen as “facilitators of knowledge and creativity by creating opportunities for artists, entrepreneurs, designers and craftsman through the display and access to the collections” (OECD, ICOM 2018, p. 14).
- Urban regeneration and community development: museums, their architecture and the urban planning they stimulate, contribute to both physical and social design. The renovation of historical buildings, the construction of new museums, interventions on their surroundings can stimulate urban regeneration of areas with a lack of social dynamism. Museums appear able to both stimulate urban regeneration and develop ties between people and communities, enforcing social capital.
- Cultural development, education and creativity: as we saw, the contribution to education is one of the main functions of museums. As underlined by the OECD and ICOM report “this objective has become more complex to encompass now, not only education but training and life-long learning; not only knowledge but also creativity; and not only native populations but immigrants and marginalized communities”. It thus becomes crucial for social actors, public authorities and museums to tidily work together to cross social and cultural policies, with the more traditional activities of museums.
- Inclusion, health and well-being: the extension of the educational role of museums to public often marginalized and excluded, also for physical constraints, rises the importance of the social dimension of museum activities. Museums contribute to individual and collective well-being, especially in the domain of health, inclusion, reinsertion.

This approach shows the potential of museums in terms of innovation and creativity and show how this potential overpasses the main functions of museum, investing the relations museums can strengthen with other cultural institutions, social actors, entrepreneurs, local authorities, just to mention some of them.

ICH and museums interactions, a path for innovation?

From this perspective, we understand how crucial the interaction of ICH and museums can be: ICH can help to transform these institutions, their approach to collections, the relations with visitors and local communities. Museums can represent new dimensions for ICH practices. How can this dialogue between ICH and museums become a source of innovation and creativity within and outside the museums?

An exercise of "imagination" is developed here, in order to define possible interactions between museums and ICH.

ICH and museums: a way for "surprising"

In a brief paper about museums Umberto Eco (Eco, Pezzini 2015) defines his ideal museum: "Mon idéal est un musée qui serve à comprendre et à jouir d'un seul tableau (ou d'une seule sculpture, ou d'une seule salière de Cellini). [...] Mon musée du troisième millénaire serait toujours inédit, il pourrait toujours me surprendre. [...] [un tableau] reviendrait, avec cette nouvelle disposition, à la vie et à la culture d'où il vient ; et il discuterait non seulement avec d'autres tableaux, mais aussi avec la culture dont ils proviennent, ou avec la vie dont ils sont inspirés"⁵. In this perspective, ICH in museums can contribute to create the atmosphere to understand the artwork, the life where it comes from, the skills used to produce it, the emotions linked to a painting, a sculpture, any object used in ritual, dances, crafts activities. ICH can make accessible the intangible part of art that is often invisible. This objective might be reached creating a dialogue between objects and ICH practices, permitting to invent new forms of mediation (Desvallées, Mairesse 2010), interpretation, filling the space and the distance between the collections and the visitors, creating connections and seeking to surprise. This process can lead to an understanding of the social and cultural sphere of museum objects, of the common tangible and intangible heritage which unites the members of a community, but also to share experiences between visitors, and facilitate the circulation of different knowledges. ICH experiences within a museum, can raise subjectivity, inspire self-knowledge and understanding, make visitors live their own surprising adventure.

Building strong and weak ties for innovation

The human element is fundamental in the framework of museums. It is mainly represented by the staff working within the museum and the public for whom the museum is meant to exist in the present and in the future. As stated at the beginning of the paper, people permanently interacting within a structure are linked by strong ties, whether more occasional interactions with the public and other actors of the social, cultural and economic sphere can lead to the reproduction or creation of weak ties. Strong and weak ties are fundamental for the organization

5 Translation of the author: "My ideal is a museum that serves to understand and enjoy a single painting (or a single sculpture, or a single Cellini salt cellar). [...] My museum of the third millennium would always be original, it could always surprise me. [...] [a painting] would come back, with this new disposition, to the life and culture from which it comes, and it would discuss not only with other paintings, but also with the culture from which they come, or with the life by which they are inspired"

to work, evolve, innovate. In this perspective, ICH practices within a museum can contribute to create new ties, bringing together new practitioners, publics, ideas, skills... Museums as "institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public" (ICOM 2007) are places where ICH practitioners can meet, ICH can be performed, transmitted, create new links and relations, reinvented. ICH can contribute to associate new users to the museum activity, linking skills of museums with new skills, developing the creative potential of everybody. Museums keep opening up towards the society; welcoming social economic cultural activities that were before considered as far away from their core activity. ICH finds thus a space in museums, not to be frozen, as we have often been afraid of, but in order to be part of a dynamic creative process.

Fostering sustainability and cultural ecosystems

As affirmed by ICOM (2011) "sustainability is the dynamic process of museums based on the recognition and preservation of tangible and intangible heritage with the museum responding to the needs of the community. To be sustainable, museums, through their mission, must be an active and attractive part of the community by adding value to the heritage and social memory." Museums are part of our societies, and establish with them a coherent system of relationships and exchange. Museums welcoming ICH, ICH within museums, museums following ICH out of their architectural boundaries, and ICH circulating can create an inter- and pluri-disciplinary space where issues related to our societies can be discussed (migration, ecology, history, minorities, technologies) and this knowledge can overpass the boundaries of museums to invest more broadly our economic, environmental, social and cultural systems. As stated by Don Undeen (We Are Museums 2013) "As technology continues to open the world of creative production to a broader spectrum of society, it's important for art museums to open their doors to new kinds of participation and engagement with their collections." A challenge for museums is thus to foster a creative ecosystem, allowing the museum's content and expertise to inspire, ICH to create new perspectives and people to be the protagonists of this process.

Conclusion

As Xavier Greffe (2014) affirmed in his publication *Les mises en scène du patrimoine culturel*: "En synthétisant on peut dire que le *patrimoine médaille* fonctionne à la monumentalisation ou à la commémoration et produit des valeurs d'existence; le *patrimoine séquence* fonctionne à partir d'une mise en connaissance et produit des valeurs d'usage; et le *patrimoine lien* fonctionne à partir d'expériences et produit un capital social."⁶

This sentence sums up three main phases of cultural heritage, and can also correspond to the evolution of the role of museums in our societies. From institutions dedicated to the exhibition of objects; museums become institutions inventing new ways of valorization and creation of economic revenues (publications, derived objects, locations...); and develop nowadays a new role that is the one of creating experiences, places for meeting and strengthening relations. The dialogue between ICH in museums, as we saw, can accompany this evolution of museums.

6 Translation of the author: "In synthesizing we can say that the *medal heritage* aims at monumentalization or commemoration and produces values of existence; *sequence heritage* works as a knowledge and produces values of use; and the *link heritage* works from experiences and produces social capital."

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