



LIVING MUSEUMS FOR LIVING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE (ICH) MUSEUMS, ICH & PARTICIPATION

POSITION PAPER SIMBDEA 03.02.2018

Written by Valentina Lapicciarella Zingari & Rosario Perricone, Pietro Clemente (Simbdea) in the context of the International conference and Expert meeting on Museums, Intangible Cultural Heritage and Participation (27-28.02.2018, Palermo (IT)), connected to the *Intangible Cultural Heritage and Museums Project*.

This position paper aims to develop and share some key messages on museums, intangible cultural heritage and participation, in both conceptual and concrete ways referring to some Italian examples.

We propose five key messages to structure our message.

In a living and dynamic vision of heritage, centred on a process where values meet persons, places and objects, some Italian case-studies of museums can help us to build a contemporary heritage perspective, to nourish the basis for possible new legal/juridical framework. Given the extremely diversified situation of Italy, our vision is deeply oriented to debate on what, why, how and with whom to safeguard the living heritage, which most of these museums embody, in connection with local associations, cultural communities, groups and individuals.

Local museums, ethnographical museum and ecomuseums share some common characteristics. They are built by, or in connection with, communities and groups that are living, changing or disappearing. The question is the-

refore how to reach the 'widest possible participation'¹ of communities, groups and individuals – often located far away from the capital cities' eyes – recognised locally and nationally by each State Party, following the spirit of the UNESCO Convention for the safeguarding of the ICH (2003).

There are examples across Italy, from south to north, of communities playing, not without difficulties, their fundamental 'role in the production, safeguarding, maintenance and re-creation of the intangible cultural heritage ... transmitted from generation to generation, constantly recreated ... in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, providing them with a sense of identity and continuity'². Some of them are dynamic, innovative, inclusive, adapting to changes and open to the new multicultural challenges.

There are museums of different types and scales. In Italy public institutions, administrations, authorities and large private sponsors concentrate their attention and support to the national network of Art museums, Archaeological museums, Natural history and Sciences museums, neglecting a large number of local/ethnographical/community museums and ecomuseums. Local museums are direct and living custodians of the diversity of memories, heritage, traditional knowledge, skills, and are supported mostly by voluntary communities, groups and individuals who work often far from institutional supports and visibility. They are community-based and rooted in popular cultures. Although exceptions exist, the current distance between a real participatory approach and the dominant heritage discourse is still huge. Italy remains institutionally and administratively rooted in a full material-object conservation approach while the vitality of the civil society is clearly demonstrated by the high number of ICH nomination processes, often community-based.

1 UNESCO, *Convention for the safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Paris 2003), p. 15.

2 UNESCO, *Convention for the safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Paris 2003), p. 2.

KEY MESSAGE I: Some museums contribute, in close relation with communities/groups and individuals, to the transmission of a living cultural heritage, following the purposes of the 2003 Convention ratified by Italy in 2007 and still lacking of a national juridical framework as has been developed in other States Parties. Culture and cultural heritage are not clear and simple concepts. In 1996 Marshall Sahlins wrote for the World Commission on Culture and Development that a 'great deal of confusion arises in both academic and political discourse when culture in the humanistic sense is not distinguished from "culture" in its anthropological senses, notably culture as the total and distinctive way of life of a people or society'. Then Sahlins raised a fundamental question: 'is culture an aspect or a means of development or it is the end and aim of the flourishing of human existence in its several forms and as a whole?'³

From this perspective we can consider museums as means to the aim of safeguarding heritage and culture in living and dynamic ways. An answer comes from the contributions to the ICOM Resolution 2004 on Museums and ICH⁴: 'In order to deal with intangible cultural heritage museums must have an extensive, fully engaged, substantive dialogue and partnership with the people who hold the heritage. Cultural heritage is not something dead, frozen, stored away, but rather something living, vital and connected to the identity and spirit of a contemporary people trying to make their way in a complicated world. Museums that see life around them may be better poised to account for it, react to it, and seek it as a cause for attention and maybe even a source of inspiration. Museums such as these are laden with the purpose envisioned in the Convention on ICH, and provide a source of optimism that an old social institution – the museum – is not dead, but can itself find new life in the 21st century.'⁵

MUSEUMS, LIVING HERITAGE AND CULTURAL RIGHTS AS A CHALLENGE

In its creative diversity humanity shares common fundamental rights. ICH refers and includes a number of fundamental human rights. Museums should be seen as means to communicate diversity and, at the same time, to express our common universal human rights, in an inclusive and sustainable vision of heritage. To the International conference and Expert meeting taking place in Palermo (27-28.02.2018), we have invited some Italian inspiring cases that illustrate this, such as the *Museo delle culture del mondo* in Genova, weaving a symbolic fabric, connecting objects with cultural communities worldwide. Cultural changes, new migrant communities, economic crisis, trends in population age, environmental requirements, can help to make museums centres of mutual knowledge and universal human rights: dignity, freedom of expression, education.

3 World Commission on Culture and Development, *Our Creative Diversity* (Paris 1996).

4 ICOM, *Seoul Declaration* (2004).

5 R. Kurin, 'Museums and Intangible Heritage: Culture Dead or Alive?' in: *ICOM News* 4 (2014), p. 7-9.

KEY MESSAGE 2: Promote a new vision of the museum as a living tool to spread the ICH message.

The long road of the UNESCO Conventions shows to what extent the notions of heritage, culture, monuments, sites and museums have been liberated from an objective, static and structured vision to a living, dynamic and functional role carried by communities, groups and individual holders of knowledge, skills and practices. The vision of ICH 'is more clearly historical and anthropological, based to a greater extent on the social, cultural and spiritual significance of a site (or monument), rather than on its form'. Sites, monuments, museums will have to integrate their human dimensions as messages for all.⁶ In other words we can say that any individual and any museum has a personality rooted in its context and community.⁷

MUSEUMS AND PARTICIPATION

In Italy local museums often are based on bottom-up, voluntary actions coming from communities, groups or individuals. On November 28, 2013 the National Italian Statistical Office (ISTAT) published the results of a study on Museums, Archaeological Areas and Monuments in Italy based on 2011 data. The statistical picture shows to what extent Italy is the Country of scattered museums. Out of 3.874 recorded museums (46% in the north, with the region Tuscany having highest number: 550, 14%), the main typology is ethnographic and anthropological (17%), followed by the archaeological one (15%). Around one municipality out of three hosts a museum. 64% are public with 42% municipal. 805 have not more than five people working in it. 20% are municipalities with less than 2.000 inhabitants. 2.199 (48%) were established between 1960 and 1999; 1.565 after 2000: therefore the 'nation's museum heritage' is rather young.

The Italian model is characterised by structures of very small dimensions (with less than 1.000 visitors per year) in small urban areas, rather isolated, weak in human and economic resources, and with limited capacities in cultural animation and in generating financial resources. Many structures are municipal (42%) or private (40%) with ethnographic and anthropological collections related to the territory and to the local history. They play in this sense a role of cultural portals of their context (40% of the smallest units provide information on resources found in the area with 60% for the bigger ones) and have a large capacity to attract both the young and the elder public.

The local museums are often established by local actors without any financial support, outside the museographical professional circle, but in most cases adopted by the local administrations (municipalities, districts), later becoming professional museums. The economic crisis especially affected the cultural sector and obliged to close many local museums or to rely on voluntary support. All these museums survive only thanks to occasional funding for single initiatives and thanks to voluntary work of elder or younger people (for example civil service) and thanks to the contribution of single researchers or NGOs.

6 S. Boukhari, 'Beyond the monuments, a living heritage', in: *UNESCO Sources* 80 (1996).

7 R. Dornan, *Should museums have a personality* (October 4, 2017).

Sometimes the contribution and involvement of academia bring some institutional and intellectual support. In other cases private support is provided. Often, the local museum is a *museo d'autore* connected to communities and groups. In other cases a connection – and support – exists between the local governments, the curators and the local communities and traditional practitioner sharing values, roles and responsibilities, like in the case of the *Museo etnografico della Provincia di Belluno e del Parco nazionale Dolomiti bellunesi*. This integrated, collaborative approach is applied in other cases, like the *Ecomuseum del Casentino*.

The issue of ICH still remains a challenge due to the long-term institutional and customary habit to work with the objects as such. The gap between institutional positions and participation remains. The current Italian Code of Cultural “Goods” of 2004 contributes to this gap, creating confusions between ICH as a whole and its material expressions, confirming a lack of juridical orientations.⁸ At the same time Simbdea assists a wave of ICH nomination projects, carried by communities, groups or civil society associations, that in some cases lead to new, constructive and sustainable experiences. The case of the Puppet Museum of Palermo is one of the most interesting. Once the nomination for the Representative List from the precedent UNESCO programme of Masterpieces of oral and intangible cultural heritage, of the *Opera dei Pupi* – Sicilian puppet theatre – was obtained in 2008, the Museum – as a key actor in a local conflictual context – tried various experimental solutions to involve the practitioners. The new impulse has been given by incorporating the *pupari* (the puppeteers) as main living actors in the participatory co-management of the Museum with their knowledge, skills and practices embodied in performances: puppets, puppeteers and the Museum are the drivers of a living ICH.

Looking at experiences and process that took place in the latest decades, what do we mean by participation? Since the 1970s the international arena considered field programmes where participation of stakeholders, bottom-up approaches and forms of co-management have been implemented. One major visionary programme is Man and Biosphere (MAB) (UNESCO). MAB works with local communities and groups combining natural, social, economic, cultural and education aspects to improve human livelihoods and the equitable sharing of benefits. One of the first lessons is obvious: participation is not just about inviting people to sit in a meeting. Decades of experiences demonstrate that there are a few basic criteria and steps to be considered when starting a participation process. Participation means first of all mutual respect among different actors and then most of the following actions:

- identify and recognise the main actors
- inform, motivate and involve them
- include them in decision-making and management
- mediate, negotiate, arbitrate whenever necessary and in case of conflicts
- harmonise and coordinate views and inputs
- institutionalise participation when required⁹

8 A.L. Tarasco, 'Diversità e immaterialità del patrimonio culturale, una lacuna sempre più solo italiana', in: *La Ricerca folklorica* 64 (2011), p. 55-61.

9 F. Berkes and C. Folke (eds.) *Linking Social and Ecological Systems: Management Practices and Social Mechanisms for Building Resilience* (New York 1998) p. 459.

KEY MESSAGE 3: Ensure the widest possible participation and active involvement. The text of the 2003 ICH Convention is clear on the role of communities, groups and individuals, devoting it an entire article (15) and a full chapter in the Operational Directives. Beside their role in the production, safeguarding, maintenance and re-creation of the intangible cultural heritage, they are the direct sources for the inventories, the elaboration and implementation of programmes, projects and activities, and the preparation of nomination files for inscription on the Lists. Their participation and empowerment creates social inclusion, economic opportunities, including local jobs and incomes, and an overall environmental respect. Participation also includes non-governmental organisations which have proven competence, expertise and experience in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and objectives that are in conformity with the spirit of the Convention as well as operational capacities: they may be accredited to have advisory functions to the Committee. Participation is also the sustainability core of any museum, avoiding misuse of heritage as fossilisation and commercialisation.¹⁰

HERITAGE COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC ACTION

The Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention, 2005) introduces new and ambitious key concepts, among others the following:

- human rights, democracy and laws as common heritage;
- cultural heritage as a resource for sustainable development and quality of life;
- people and human values at the centre of an enlarged and cross-disciplinary concept of cultural heritage;
- need to involve everyone in society in the ongoing process of defining and managing cultural heritage, recognising individual and collective responsibility towards cultural heritage;
- heritage community, consisting of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations.

Objects and places are not, in themselves, what is important about cultural heritage. They are important because of the meanings and uses that people attach to them and the values they represent within a heritage community. The heritage community is considered the first holder and custodian of the processes, while the public authorities are called to be responsive and supportive through strategies, laws, planning and administration. This ambitious approach to the safeguarding of heritage opens to a new human, social and democratic dimension at the national and local level.

10 Ph. Demgenski, *Fossilisation, Commercialisation or Participation?* (Paper presented at the Museum Anthropology Conference. Chinese National Museum of Ethnology, Beijing, China, 1-2.8.2017).

KEY MESSAGE 4: Build each museum on basic shared rights, responsibilities, respect, values, knowledge, skills, practice, and benefits. New challenges are faced by society, culture, heritage, museums in the latest decades. Responses come from different relevant sources. One of this is the Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society of 2005 that put local communities at the centre of heritage processes through a clear connection to human rights, new facilitating public responsibilities and the social and economic benefits of considering heritage as a living and dynamic resource. In this perspective museums should take up the new challenges of being living and dynamic tools for an inclusive tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Among the approaches to identify and clarify the roles of different stakeholders and the nature of relationships between them, 'the Four Rs' aim to operationalize the concept of 'roles' by unpacking these into Rights, Responsibilities, Revenues (benefits) of stakeholders, and the Relationships between stakeholder groups.¹¹

COMBINING CULTURAL, SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE: THE ROLE OF MUSEUMS

Although each museum can focus on one single heritage practice, area or community, one major challenge today is the ability to combine the many perspectives and levels required for sustainability, as we already remarked in these notes, for example in Key message 3, or in the case of the Faro Convention. Museums in Italy are centres of diversity and multicultural heritage reflecting the composite Italian society and history. Seeing the small, diversified and multitude of museums as expressions of communities', groups' and individual's intangible heritage-s, can highlight the role of museums (and their projects) as 'centres of heritage responsibility' (Charter of Siena, ICOM Italy¹²), contact-zone and connective structures.

11 International Institute for Environment and Development, *The Four Rs* (London 2005) p. 12.

12 ICOM Italy, *The Siena Charter. Museums and Cultural Landscapes* (2014).

KEY MESSAGE 5: Museums as contact zones and connective tools to strengthen the projects of heritage communities, bringing their voices/actions in the public space as a process

In accordance with the Seoul Declaration of ICOM on Museum and Intangible Cultural Heritage (21st General Assembly of ICOM, Seoul, Korea, Friday 8 October 2004)¹³, that:

- > Urges national and local authorities to adopt and effectively implement appropriate local laws and regulations for the protection of intangible heritage;
- > Recommends that museums give particular attention and resist any attempt to misuse intangible heritage resources and particularly their commercialisation without benefits to the primary custodians;
- > Recommends that all training programmes for museum professionals stress the importance of intangible heritage and include the understanding of intangible heritage as a requirement for qualification;

can we look forward to national networking systems, connecting the wide variety of museum with *local museum as living/intangible heritage safeguarding centres*, linking their experiences and skills in a national, inclusive and participatory heritage-system?¹⁴

13 ICOM, *Seoul Declaration* (2004).

14 E. Rodley, *On Museums and contact zones* (May 6, 2016).



Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union

"The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein."