FROM "HERITAGE EDUCATION WITH INTERCULTURAL GOALS" TO "INTERCULTURAL HERITAGE EDUCATION": CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND POLICY APPROACHES IN MUSEUMS ACROSS EUROPE
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> «Imagine the museum as a meeting place that can make a difference in people's lives.
> Visitors would not just see themselves reflected through the eyes of others...
> Nor would they find themselves trapped by viewing something they could not understand...
> The 'possible museum' would enable true interaction without the need for constant self-reference.
> Instead, there would be engagement with the other, a true dialogue». [1]

Heritage and intercultural dialogue: a problematic relationship

The heritage sector is a particularly complex context in which to discuss intercultural dialogue, since heritage institutions – and most notably museums – have traditionally been used to exclude those "who don't belong", rather than being developed for the sake of cultural diversity or in order to enhance intercultural competence.

The very notion of "heritage", by virtue of its close association with the concept of "inheritance", seems to refer to something that is acquired once and for all by birthright. As writer and researcher François Matarasso sensibly observes, this has led not only many policy makers and heritage professionals, but society at large, to assume that

> «one can become a cultured person; one can learn to understand and appreciate art, music, or ballet; as Bourdieu has shown, one can accumulate cultural capital... But one cannot acquire a heritage: it is given, fixed at birth. Heritage claims an essential, and ineradicable, difference between someone born in a village, or a country, or a faith, and someone who has chosen to make their life within that social and cultural framework; and that distinction, paradoxically, disadvantages the person who has freely chosen an identity, making a conscious commitment to a place, a group or a set of values. In this world, a migrant can only ever be an honorary member, an affiliate whose status, whether welcomed or merely tolerated, is always at risk of revocation. The root of this widely held but rarely acknowledged idea is in the reasonable idea that the past (which heritage claims to be) cannot be changed». [2]

In Matarasso's view, however, "heritage" should not be «mistaken for the neutral remains of the past, as most heritage bodies imply... Rather, it is how people

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[1] E. Veini and R. Kistemaker, "Dancing with Diversity", in *Muse: the Voice of Canada's Museum Community*, vol. XXI/4, Canada Museums Association, 2003, pp. 20-23.

[2] F. Matarasso, "La storia sfigurata: la creazione del patrimonio culturale nell'Europa contemporanea", in S. Bodo, M. R. Cifarelli (eds.), *Quando la cultura fa la differenza. Patrimonio, arti e media nella società multiculturale*, Meltemi, Rome, 2006. The English version of the paper, "History defaced. Heritage creation in contemporary Europe", is available to download from www.economiadellacultura.it/eng/genoaconference_en.htm

interpret evidence of the past for present use; and one of those uses is to define themselves».[3]

Depending on whether or not we acknowledge its constructed nature, two main interpretive paradigms of "heritage" arise:

- the "essentialist paradigm" sees heritage as the above mentioned "neutral remains of the past": static, consolidated, «of outstanding universal value»[4], and as such to be "transmitted" through a communication process which is often reduced to a one-way, linear trajectory;
- the "dialogical (or process-oriented) paradigm" understands heritage as a set of cultural objects – both material and immaterial – that should not only be preserved and transmitted, but also re-negotiated, re-constructed in their meanings, made available for all to share in a common space of social interaction.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with either of these paradigms; they are both legitimate, and not necessarily conflicting with each other. The trouble is that the former has long prevailed to the detriment of the latter, creating barriers to the accessibility of museums and excluding those who have not developed an adequate level of "literacy" – let alone of "belonging".

And yet, in a rapidly changing social, political and demographic context, museums (as well as other heritage institutions) are today increasingly asked to take on an altogether different perspective and play an active role in the promotion of intercultural dialogue

Although museums are by no means the only institutions entrusted with the preservation and interpretation of material and immaterial heritage,[5] this paper will deliberately focus on them on account of the particular strength of their (today increasingly controversial) "cultural authority", i.e. the «capacity to give meaning and, in doing so, to influence and shape visitors' perceptions».[6] It is precisely because of this authority that museums «are undeniably implicated in the dynamics of (in)equality and the power relations between different groups through their role in constructing and disseminating dominant social narratives».[7]

On the other hand, it is worth noting that the key issues, principles and practices explored in this paper are highly relevant to other contexts in which heritage conservation and interpretation take place – whether they be "institution-based" or not (e.g. libraries, archives, historical work carried out by communities themselves…).

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[3] *Ibid.*
[4] See article 1 of UNESCO *World Heritage Convention* (1972).
[5] UNESCO's definition of cultural heritage as «architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science» (1972) has evolved over the following thirty years so as to encompass «oral traditions and expressions, including language…; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship» (2003, *Convention For The Safeguarding Of The Intangible Cultural Heritage*).
[6] R. Sandell, "Museums and the combating of social inequality: roles, responsibilities, resistance", in R. Sandell (ed.), *Museums, Society, Inequality*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002.
[7] *Ibid.*

Intercultural dialogue as an end or as a process? Policy approaches in museums across Europe

We have just mentioned that museums are increasingly urged to play their part in the promotion of intercultural dialogue. It is hardly surprising that such a role, even when acknowledged, has been interpreted in widely differing ways.[8] The short overview that follows, far from being exhaustive, simply aims to provide an indicative selection of such interpretations. Its emphasis is on the main ways in which interaction has (or has not) been promoted between different groups; in this context, the development of policies to improve the diversity of museum staff and governing boards is seen as an implicit pre-condition for enhancing the institution's intercultural competence, but is not the main focus of this paper.

One of the prevailing understandings of a museum's responsibility to "promote intercultural dialogue" has been to encourage a better knowledge and greater recognition/appreciation of "other" cultures. What distinguishes most of these initiatives, however, is not so much a will to encourage attendance and participation on the part of immigrant communities, as to promote a "knowledge-oriented multiculturalism" directed principally at an autochthonous public, and constructed from the point of view of a dominant culture «unmarked by ethnicity in relation to which the differences of other cultures are to be registered, assessed and tolerated».[9]

Conversely, the promotion of intercultural dialogue has often been associated with the integration of "new citizens" within mainstream culture, by helping them to learn more about a country's history, values and traditions. Such initiatives typically include guided tours (and related activities) to museums and heritage sites targeted at specific communities, which have turned out to be only partially successful due to the lack of consistent outreach policies and of a more direct involvement of migrant communities. Other museums are actively assisting groups of recent arrival and helping newcomers settle into the new country, for example by assisting them with language learning.

A further option which is being increasingly explored by museums across Europe is "culturally specific programming", i.e. the development of "compensatory" or

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[8] A growing body of evidence is available on so-called "good practices" of intercultural dialogue in heritage institutions across Europe and beyond. A few among the most recent exercises are: "Compendium of cultural policies and trends in Europe" (country profiles, 8th edition, and database of good practice); Gibbs K., Sani M., Thompson J. (eds.), *Lifelong Learning in Museums: A European Handbook*, 2007 (funded within the framework of the Socrates-Grundtvig programme 2005-2006); CLMG - Campaign for Learning through Museums and Galleries, *Culture Shock: cultural identity, cohesion, citizenship... and museums*, Home Office, London 2006 (www.clmg.org.uk/PDFs/CS-Main.pdf); the on-line database Collect & Share, www.collectandshare.eu.com (funded within the framework of the Socrates-Grundtvig programme 2003-2005); *Holding Up The Mirror: Addressing cultural diversity in London's museums*, a report by Helen Denniston Associates for London Museums Agency, October 2003 (www.londonmuseums.org/services/pdfs/Holding_up_the_mirror.pdf).

[9] T. Bennett, "Cultura e differenza: teorie e pratiche politiche", in S. Bodo, M. R. Cifarelli (eds.), *Quando la cultura fa la differenza. Patrimonio, arti e media nella società multiculturale*, Meltemi, Rome, 2006. The English version of the paper, "Culture and difference: discourse and policy", is available to download from www.economiadellacultura.it/eng/genoaconference_en.htm

"celebratory" exhibitions and events[10] drawing on collections that might hold particular significance for an immigrant community.

More in general, the under- or misrepresentation of certain groups and cultures has been counterbalanced by a growing interest in collections or activities reflecting the cultural heterogeneity of a region/city's population, or exploring the history of immigration, colonialism and slavery. Some communities are actively involved by museums in the interpretation of collections, or assisted with preserving and presenting their own cultural heritage (whether it be material or immaterial), while other communities are attempting to establish their own museums or community archives.

As different as they may be, the approaches to the promotion of intercultural dialogue that have just been briefly outlined often have some key features in common:

- they still tend to have a static, essentialist notion of "heritage", which is primarily seen as a "received patrimony" to safeguard and transmit;
- they target communities exclusively in relation to their own cultures and collections, while cross-cultural interaction across all audiences is generally avoided;
- by keeping "majority" and "minority" cultures/communities apart, and by generally treating the latter as «unified, traditional, unchanging and thereby exotic»,[11] they sometimes end up reinforcing stereotypes;
- they are inclined to embrace the rhetoric of "diversity as a richness", rather than identifying tensions and frictions which may be dealt with in order to change attitudes and behaviours;
- they conceive intercultural dialogue as a *goal* or pre-determined outcome, rather than as an interactive *process*.

This is one more reason why it is so important to reflect on what it means to work at heritage education projects with intercultural goals: is it simply about enhancing the "literacy" of immigrant individuals and groups in a country's history, art and culture, "compensating" their past misrepresentation in museums and other heritage institutions, or is it rather a bi-directional process which is «dialogical and transformative on both sides»[12] – i.e. individuals belonging to "dominant" culture and immigrant communities?

By asking this question, I don't want to imply that these approaches are mutually exclusive, or that any of them is not worth pursuing; in fact all are essential, in their own distinctive way, to create the conditions for the encounter and exchange of culturally different practices, to promote the richness of diversity, and to help immigrants retain awareness of their cultural background.

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[10] R. Sandell, "Rappresentare la differenza: strategie espositive nei musei e promozione dell'uguaglianza", in *Economia della Cultura*, journal of the Italian Association of Cultural Economics, n. 4/2004 (themed issue on "Culture and Social Inclusion"). The English version of the paper, "Displaying difference. Museum exhibitions and the promotion of equality", is available to download from www.economiadellacultura.it/eng/publishing.htm

[11] J. Bloomfield and F. Bianchini, *Planning for the Intercultural City*, Stroud, Comedia, 2004.

[12] R. Isar, "Una 'deontologia interculturale': utopia o realismo utopico?" in S. Bodo, M. R. Cifarelli (eds.), *Quando la cultura fa la differenza. Patrimonio, arti e media nella società multiculturale*, Meltemi, Roma, 2006. The extended English version of the paper, "Tropes of the 'intercultural': multiple perspectives", is available to download from www.economiadellacultura.it/eng/genoaconference_en.htm

However, as the present research project is focused on national approaches to intercultural dialogue, we should not lose sight of the very process of "dialogue/conversation", and of the ways in which it may help creating «third spaces, unfamiliar to both [sides], in which different groups can share a similar experience of discovery».[13] Raj Isar provides us with yet another interesting insight when he speaks of an «actively implemented intercultural deontology» as «a process of building encounters between individuals and groups that oblige each of them to mobilize the basic characteristics, symbols and myths of their respective cultures on a shared terrain that is new to each and belongs to none alone».[14]

Challenges for future action

In beginning to approach intercultural dialogue as a process rather than as a goal, it is not hard to see how substantial a change is required in most museums' working practices. In this respect – and just to make one example – a useful lesson may be drawn from the many challenging ways in which contemporary creativity has been used to «de-freeze and re-discover» cultural heritage and memory.[15]

As Lola Young puts it by evoking James Clifford's vision of museums as "contact zones"[16], «an integral function of this model would be to generate new interpretative frameworks that encourage greater access, participation and a holistic historical record of our past and our present. It would also enable us to work towards a more integrative model of diversity rather than the current model with its tendency to reify difference and put people into discrete categories without interaction or overlap».[17]

If we turn to national policies to see how such a process has been furthered, very few useful indications come from the Ministries/Departments of Culture across Europe, where the issue of intercultural dialogue has either been barely addressed, or falls under the larger umbrella of cultural diversity.

On the other hand, an interesting perspective comes from the education system of a number of European countries, e.g. in Italy, where the notion of "intercultural education" made its official appearance in 1994, with the then ground-breaking Ministerial Memorandum 73/1994 ("Intercultural dialogue and

[13] D. Edgar quoted in N. Khan, *The road to interculturalism: interstate highway or dead alley?* paper prepared for the EFAH conference "Islands & Bridges", Helsinki, October 2006 (www.islandsandbridges.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=38&Itemid=13).

[14] R. Isar, *Tropes of the intercultural: multiple perspectives*, keynote address given at the annual conference of the Nordic Network of Intercultural Communication on the topic "Intercultural Dialogue: Creating New Perspectives" (University of Tampere, Finland, 2-3 December, 2005); published in N. Aalto and E. Reuter (eds.) *Aspects of Intercultural Dialogue. Theory. Research. Applications*, SAXA Verlag, Cologne, 2006. See note 11 of this paper.

[15] See the summary of the research workshop "Artistic explorations in cultural memory", Faculty of Creative and Performing Arts, Leiden University (Scheltema, Leiden, 3-4 November 2006), available to download from www.artsandsciences.nl/content_docs/art_explor_cult_memory_def_rpt_231206.pdf

[16] J. Clifford, "Museums as contact zones", in D. Boswell and J. Evans (eds.), *Representing the Nation: Histories, Heritage, and Museums*, London, Routledge, 1999, pp. 435-437.

[17] L. Young, *Our lives, our histories, our collections*, paper commissioned by the Museum of London to initiate the project "Reassessing what we collect", 2005 (available to download from www.museumoflondon.org.uk/English/Collections/OnlineResources/RWWC/Essays/Essay2/).

democratic coexistence: the planning engagement of the school"). The key principles outlined in the document were the following:

- intercultural education should be considered as the pedagogical answer to cultural pluralism, and as such should not be seen as a mere compensatory activity, but rather as the "integrating background" against which *any* education is possible in a world of increasing contact and interaction between culturally different practices;
- it must concern *all* students, both "autochthonous" and "foreign";
- it has to do more with the development of *relational skills* and *dialogic identities* than with the teaching of specific disciplines/topics;
- it implies a *less Euro-centric approach* to school subjects, as well as the safeguard of minority languages and cultures.

If we now turn back to the museum sector, the still relatively few institutions across Europe actually willing to take on similar challenges[18] provide us with some useful guidelines on how to evolve from a "heritage education with intercultural goals" to an "intercultural heritage education", in that they:

- understand *"intercultural dialogue" as a bi-directional process* involving both autochthonous individuals and those with an immigrant background in ways that go beyond the occasional encounter between "dominant" and "minority" cultures (conceived as static and separate entities);
- embrace a *dynamic, dialogical notion of "heritage"* as a set of cultural objects – both material and immaterial – that should not only be preserved and transmitted, but also re-negotiated, re-constructed in their meanings, made available for all to share in a common space of social interaction;
- acknowledge that an "intercultural" heritage education should not be exclusively centred on the acquisition of competencies and skills related to a specific discipline, but first and foremost on the development of those *attitudes and behaviours* which are indispensable in a world of increasing interaction between culturally different practices;
- *focus on methodology rather than content*: in other words, recognise that the intercultural potential of a given topic does not in itself guarantee the success of a project (if, for example, this topic is developed and dealt with through a traditional "transmission" model);
- are able to respond to the growing diversity of their public by working with *all types of collections* – i.e. are not dependent on the immediate relevance of objects/documents to specific cultures and communities;
- recognise the need for a *long-term work and commitment,* rather than an occasional encounter, *with audiences*;
- promote *inter-sectoral partnerships* (museums, libraries, archives, schools, adult learning agencies, local authorities, community organisations, cultural mediators, contemporary artists…).

In short, these museums have devoted a specific attention to the development of policies, strategies and programmes aimed at creating "third spaces", where

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[18] See the case studies of the Manchester Museum, UK ("Collective Conversations" project), the Museum of World Culture, Sweden ("Advantage Göteborg" project) and Fondazione ISMU, Italy ("Planning together for an intercultural heritage" programme).

individuals are finally allowed to cross the boundaries of "belonging", and are treated as «creators rather than consumers of identity».[19]

However, a fundamental question still needs to be answered: how far do these initiatives impact on the institutional culture of the museum as a whole? Even the most forward-looking museums tend to associate the promotion of intercultural dialogue with the work of outreach, access or education departments. Further challenges for the museum sector, therefore, lie in:

- ensuring that the *outcome of programmes and activities* aimed at promoting cross-cultural interaction between different publics is *clearly visible and easily retrievable* – whether in the collections documentation system or (most importantly) in permanent displays and temporary exhibitions;
- rethinking *all* the fundamental functions of a museum (from collections management and conservation to exhibition strategies) in an intercultural perspective, so that this is built into its institutional fabric.

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[19] See CLMG, op. cit.