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## INTRODUCTION

In today's globalised world, it is essential to dwell on intercultural dialogue as a method of social inclusion within museums and cultural institutions, even though there are numerous pitfalls in planning experiences of this kind. The problem is that these projects are often episodic and not structured well to be long-lasting. Therefore, I decided to undertake an internship at AMIR, a project aiming to include people with migrant backgrounds in cultural institutions that has been active for four years in Florence so that I could observe and analyse their activity. Unfortunately, this project is not very well known, as it is overshadowed by the more traditional visits to the Uffizi or the Accademia Gallery, where citizens and tourists look passively at collections. Nevertheless, museums should be socially and politically active places that deal with social emergencies and for this reason it's essential to reach interculturality in response to the multicultural society we live in.

In accordance with this idea, AMIR represents a new way of interpreting cultural heritage, integrating different points of view and involving people who would otherwise be excluded from these institutions. During the internship, I was fully engaged in their daily activities, such as the organisation of visits and the management of the group of mediators, including taking part in internal meetings where problems and possible solutions emerged. I was able to see how activities are based on a peer-to-peer approach in which mediators participate to a large extent in management decisions, clearly with the intervention of the coordinators and museum workers to confer professionalism. In fact, during the organisation meetings, mediators are invited to present their points of view to find solutions that meet everyone's needs and wishes as far as possible. This internship allowed me to be part of this great initiative and to develop the impact assessment of this project, which will see the start of its fifth edition in October. I decided to write my dissertation on this project because I'm interested in the museums' accessibility, especially for what concerns interculturality; therefore, this represented an occasion to observe the functioning of these kinds of experiences and their developments from the inside.

The dissertation is divided into three chapters: in the first chapter, I present the definition of intercultural dialogue and the main projects in Europe which fall into this category, also giving a brief presentation of the concept of decolonisation. For these paragraphs, I have mainly drawn from texts written by Simona Bodo, researcher and consultant on issues related to the social role of museums, who also granted me an interview; moreover, to better clarify the European

situation, I decided to also present the various laws and measures drafted on intercultural education and cultural heritage over the years.

In the second chapter, I explain the project in all its aspects, from when it started in 2018, passing through the method used by the operators, the partners involved and the recipients, arriving at the presentation of objectives set and the other cultural projects present in Florence.

In the third chapter, I finally present the points of view gathered during the interviews of the various actors: the mediators, the public and the museums, to achieve a complete overview of the project's progress. In the last paragraph, I expose my observations, the critical issues, and strengths of this project, and what distinguishes it from others.

For my research, I sourced information from several books and websites, in particular the online resource *Patrimonio e Intercultura* (Heritage and Interculturality), created and activated by the *Fondazione ISMU - Iniziative e Studi sulla Multiethnicità* (ISMU Foundation - Initiatives and Studies on Multiethnicity), where intercultural projects carried out in Italy are grouped by region, together with the primary sources on this topic, such as books, theses, and specific articles. In addition, I have referred to a series of monographs on accessibility and mediation in museums, which have helped create a cultural context and a cognitive background on the various projects developed to integrate and explain the account of the AMIR experience more clearly.

## CHAPTER I – MUSEUMS AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

### 1.1 *From collections to people's centred museums.*

Etymologically, the word *musauem* derives from the Greek *mouseion*, i.e., place of the Muses, which initially referred to a porticoed room within the library of Alexandria in Egypt, where a community of philosophers would have gathered to engage in discussion on spiritual and cultural issues<sup>1</sup>. Beyond the name, however, there is no affinity with the modern museum because the museum was seen as a public service only starting from the French Revolution in 1789. This indirectly promoted a new museological programme that radically transformed collecting practices and the visitor's relationship. The museum became a sanctuary where objects of the highest value could be kept, thus becoming a stable institution understood as a temple of art, where art kept its morality intact, far from the whims of society<sup>2</sup>. It was not until the beginning of the 20th century that a new conception of the modern museum emerged, especially in the United States, where the idea of a museum capable of attracting a broad public, promoting culture, knowledge and making visitors participate in the changing aspects of society was established. The American museum, therefore, proposing itself as a space for promotion and not only for conservation, becomes the reference point for 20th-century museums throughout the world<sup>3</sup>. Museums changed their features also on an architectural level: the formal reference is no longer the 19th-century classicist temple but is now identified with the metropolitan reality, where the large hangars represent the manifestation of modern architectural aesthetics, creating larger spaces that invite visitors to gather and dialogue.

The historical turning point that led to the awareness of the social and educational role of the museum occurred in the aftermath of the Second World War, with the foundation of the ICOM<sup>4</sup> (International Council of Museums) in 1946, which allowed exchanges of experience between professionals, joint research, and international meetings, where the primary issues concerning the museum emerged in tune with the changing expectations and needs of society. However,

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<sup>1</sup> FIORIO 2018, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 70-74.

<sup>3</sup> *Ivi*, p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> It is the leading international non-governmental organisation representing museums and all their stakeholders. The organisation assists the museum community in preserving, conserving and sharing cultural heritage by publishing documentation and definitions of universal criteria. ICOM is a forum for debate, consisting of experts from 138 countries and territories and comprised of 115 National Committees and 30 thematic International Committees.

many decades later, around the 1970s, two cultural movements arose in France and England to discuss museums' role and hypothesise new organisational and management patterns for them. Although the two movements have the same name, they arose independently from each other at different times and with different viewpoints. In France *La Nouvelle Muséologie*, founded in 1982, drew on the ideas developed around a museum «open to the outside world»<sup>5</sup>, or better, a museum made by the community and for the community. It aimed to «tear down the monumental staircase of the museum, to abolish the distance between the public and the contents of the museum»<sup>6</sup> and to emphasise its social role and interdisciplinary character. The English movement *The New Museology*, proposed by Peter Vergo in his book of the same title published in 1989, also set out to break with the old museology through the adoption of new methodologies and a new language to revisit the social and political role of the museum. Vergo wrote: «'old' museology is too much about museums methods and too little about the purposes of museums. The old passive 'general public' has become the 'new active' audience»<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, he didn't want to transform the museum into a famous structure at the service of the people, as *La Nouvelle Muséologie*; instead, he preferred to preserve «its traditional essence and elitist position in society»<sup>8</sup>.

This shift in museology is caused by the arrival of the postmodern period, characterised by skepticism and rejection of the ideologies of modernism, promoting instead a pluralism of opinions and relativism. Therefore, cultural institutions in the last thirty years have questioned their role in society and their objectives: «What roles might museums play in promoting social justice and engendering support for human rights? More particularly, how are museums engaging with and responding to claims to cultural access and demands for more equitable forms of representation by diverse communities? »<sup>9</sup>, of course, there isn't a well-defined answer, but there is an increasingly widespread idea that museums must embody a politically active role. Nina Simon<sup>10</sup> believes, for example, that museums have the task of creating connections between people by using the potential of the objects present in the collection to bring to light broader issues that otherwise would remain hidden behind the exhibition. She says that she «wants to change museums, turning them into places that are not just places where

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<sup>5</sup> PINNA 1999, p.1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> VERGO 1989, p.3.

<sup>8</sup> *Ivi*, p.4.

<sup>9</sup> SANDELL-NIGHTINGALE 2012, p.6.

<sup>10</sup> Nina Simon is an American curator, museum educator, and founder of the non-profit organisation OF/BY/FOR ALL, which provides tools, community, accountability, and coaching on radical inclusion. She presented all her ideas in the book *The Participatory Museum*<sup>10</sup>, describing how to create a participatory museum and adding some real and efficient examples.

people come to visit, but where you can actively participate and connect with culture. And hopefully, through these experiences, connect more deeply with each other»<sup>11</sup>. Thus, museums are responsible for creating a kind of social bridge because in this historical moment, there is a profound need for spaces that allow positive interactions and where it is possible to learn different opinions by a dialogical approach or a live experience<sup>12</sup>.

In this context, the education department plays a crucial role in creating a participatory environment within museums. Visitors have to develop an active role in what they learn, through a constructivist approach, without taking for granted what they are told by the institutions<sup>13</sup>. As Mensch says: «Participation is an umbrella term. The term is used for a wide variety of aims and practices. As to its aims, participation may be used as a method for audience development or in a more radical way as a form of social activism»<sup>14</sup>; therefore, it is essential to perpetuate active learning through the questioning of the objects and various discussions linked to concrete experiences, characterised by a variety of cross-cultural influences<sup>15</sup>.

The organisation of this kind of activity represents an attempt to obtain a greater ‘collaboration’ with the visitors in making the museum a more inclusive and inspirational environment instead of applying the top-down approach that has been implemented for a long-time preventing people from thinking critically.

Over the years, the museum has assumed different definitions in the hope of always reaching a better explanation of its role in harmony with the surrounding society, so much so that on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 2022, at the ICOM Extraordinary General Assembly in Prague, the last new definition of museums was approved. Therefore, Article 3 of the ICOM Statutes was changed, after fifteen years and a long participatory process involving 126 committees worldwide, as follows:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIcwIH1vZ9w>

<sup>12</sup> SIMON 2010, pp. 127-172.

<sup>13</sup> HOOPER-GREENHILL 1999, pp. 73-78.

<sup>14</sup> VAN MENSCH-MEIJER-VAN MENSCH 2016, pp. 49-63.

<sup>15</sup> BALBONI BRIZZA, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.icom-italia.org/definizione-di-museo-scelta-la-proposta-finale-che-sara-votata-a-praga/>

In this new definition, some crucial elements, now recurrent in the museological debate and the consciousness of museum professionals, have been introduced, in particular, some innovative keywords widely shared by the ICOM community, such as accessibility and inclusiveness; diversity and sustainability; community participation and sharing of knowledge.

It is thus necessary to represent any country or person adequately, free from a constant confrontation typical of the predominant western viewpoint, because as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in article 27: «everyone has the right freely to take part in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific progress and its benefits»<sup>17</sup>. To exercise this right, therefore, museum barriers, be they physical, economic or especially cultural, must be removed, even if there are many difficulties in breaking them down, because many of these barriers are generally linked to the traditions, language, customs and religious beliefs of new citizens arriving in the host country and not feeling part of it. These obstacles are often invisible to the eyes of the native population and those working in the cultural sector, who instead should receive and welcome guests from all over the world with the multiplicity of cultural diversities they bring with them.

For this reason, museum professionals also reached an expansion of the concept of heritage itself over the years, not only including new elements but also amplifying its complexity because it needed to reflect the interests of the surrounding society. Indeed, cultural heritage in 1972<sup>18</sup> was conceived as a set of static works as monuments or sites of outstanding universal value, but it took on a new meaning in 2003 when the intangible component of heritage was included in its definition:

Intangible cultural heritage refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and know-how - as well as the tools, objects, artefacts, and cultural spaces associated - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, interaction with nature and history. It gives them a sense of identity and continuity, thereby promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For this Convention, such intangible cultural heritage shall only be considered to the extent that it is compatible with existing human rights instruments and with the requirements of mutual respect between communities, groups and individuals as well as sustainable development<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> [https://www.senato.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg18/file/DICHIARAZIONE\\_diritti\\_umani\\_4lingue.pdf](https://www.senato.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg18/file/DICHIARAZIONE_diritti_umani_4lingue.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.unesco.beniculturali.it/pdf/ConvenzionePatrimonioMondiale1972-ITA.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.unesco.beniculturali.it/pdf/ConvenzionePatrimonioImmateriale2003-ITA.pdf>



Since then, the concept of cultural heritage has taken on a different value, from a traditional conception to a set of assets that can be brought into play to create relationships and exchanges between individuals with additional knowledge and cultures<sup>20</sup>. Thus, heritage has been considered in its dynamicity as something in continuous transformation, leading to constant enrichment through interactions between different individuals.

Nowadays, our cultural environment is changing quickly and becoming increasingly diversified; cultural diversity is an essential condition of society, brought about by cross-border migration, globalisation, and advances in information and communication media. More and more individuals are living in “multicultural” normality. Still, it is necessary to move beyond this multicultural model of society to an intercultural one, where cultures interact and cooperate<sup>21</sup>. So, through the development of intercultural projects, the aim is to foster the integration and promotion of cultural diversity, preventing ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural cleavages<sup>22</sup>.

### *1.2 The intercultural dialogue in museums.*

The expression ‘intercultural dialogue’ is a label that was widely used in the cultural sector in the first decade of the 2000s, to define those projects that aimed to involve foreign nationals to create greater openness in the museum and to achieve an interweaving of different cultures; however, this term over the years has been used indiscriminately and often inappropriately, so the more profound concept behind it has been lost. Therefore, we need to develop a critical approach to projects that are identified as intercultural to recognise those that concretely achieve the intended goals, such as facilitating cultural access for new citizens. At the same time encourages new points of view in regular users, offers participatory practices of interpretation and attribution of meaning to the collections and fosters interaction between visitors of different generations and cultural backgrounds. Museums made a great effort to aim for greater accessibility and openness through these cross-cultural projects, which at first were considered new and challenging, but that now have shown a setback in their achievements; most of the projects of the last ten years presented a more predictable and banal approach, different from the first projects tested.

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<sup>20</sup> BODO-MASCHERONI 2012, p. 9-10.

<sup>21</sup> BODO-GIBBS-SANI 2009, pp. 4-5.

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/Source/Pub\\_White\\_Paper/WhitePaper\\_ID\\_ItalianVersion.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/Source/Pub_White_Paper/WhitePaper_ID_ItalianVersion.pdf).

Museums, however, should commit to becoming, as Simona Bodo defines them: «third spaces, unknown to both parties where different groups can share a similar experience of discovery»<sup>23</sup>, where individuals can interact on an equal and reciprocal level and where new connections and interactions with cultural heritage can be created. The concept of third spaces prompts to develop interconnections between cultures and offers a place for dialogue, debate and mutual understanding; moreover, it is important to highlight that «differences and mutual difficulties of understanding, commonly experienced as limitations and causes of conflict, are transformed into added value, into new opportunities for the exercise of active citizenship»<sup>24</sup>.

In fact, many difficulties are encountered during intercultural projects, as inclusion and integration are processes full of contradictions, which must be experienced as «opportunities for individual and institutional growth» and «not evaded or masked»<sup>25</sup>. It should be taken into account that this kind of project will present setbacks because engaging people from different backgrounds can lead to many difficulties, which can only be overcome with commitment, listening and mutual understanding.

Intercultural projects aim to establish the museum as a contact zone, creating opportunities for local communities to interact actively, firsthand with the collections through a reciprocal relationship not only between groups with different cultural sensitivities but also between them and the museum; as Clifford says, talking about these contact zones is that: «the distances at issue here are more social than geographic. For most inhabitants of a poor neighbourhood, perhaps just blocks or a short bus ride from a fine-arts museum, the museum might as well be on another continent. Contact perspectives recognise that "natural" social distances and segregations are historical/political products»<sup>26</sup>.

Museums, thus, should benefit from renegotiation and integration of new narratives, widening the interpretations of their collection and challenging prejudices that characterise our culture; in fact, intercultural dialogue is sought after not only for the inclusion of foreign nationals but also develop an awareness in native citizens of their cultural belonging, and on an equal footing a drive to be open to other identities. To be more effective, though, these concepts should be supported by guidelines and standards based on principles of sustainable development, equity, and mutual respect and followed by each country to improve the museum relationship with the community.

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<sup>23</sup> BODO 2008, p. 165.

<sup>24</sup> CIMOLI 2018, pp. 8-9.

<sup>25</sup> BODO-GIBBS-SANI 2009, pp. 26-27.

<sup>26</sup> CLIFFORD 1997, p. 204.

Nevertheless, these kinds of projects are not enough to create actual accessibility: it would be necessary to broaden our perspectives and make ‘diversity’ a constitutive fact of society without limiting it to intercultural integration but developing new horizons and spaces open to confrontation. As Anna Chiara Cimoli says: «perhaps projects dedicated only to migrants, only to refugees, only to asylum seekers, are no longer enough, and indeed are out of sync, to segment the public and draw fences within which to wedge people's identities (different is the case of projects that address those who, temporarily, are in prison, or in a reception centre, or a hospital, and so on)»<sup>27</sup>.

### 1.2.1 Problems and criticalities.

In today’s globalised society, the need for a democratisation of culture is fundamental, despite encountering various complications, as museums have to do the complex work of deconstructing their Eurocentric view of heritage and their authoritative role to develop most coherently integrative museum experience. Because in the history of relations between Europe and the rest of the world, the idea of a strongly Eurocentric culture has often prevailed and created a tendency to fix hierarchies between civilisations, according to which it is considered that the ‘newcomers’ are ‘less civilised’<sup>28</sup>.

Consequently, cultural institutions must fight for a more equitable and cohesive society through the provision of projects and information tools that enable the expansion of social and political rights because cultural exclusion contributes and amplifies other dimensions - economic, social and political - of exclusion. However, democratising cultural institutions means making them accessible to all, which is clearly impossible because of the price of admission tickets to museums but also because of the authoritative aura that characterises these institutions, which still today show themselves to visitors almost as immutable shrines that require a certain kind of education to be deeply understood. However, these environments must be open to all those segments of the public that would not typically enter a museum, either because of economic or social factors, or because they do not consider themselves worthy of the place.

Nowadays, museum educators must work on public accessibility through specific activities and workshops, such as intercultural projects, which aim to include and integrate people with

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<sup>27</sup>[https://aisberg.unibg.it/retrieve/e40f7b89-d390-afca-e053-6605fe0aeaf2/2020\\_CIMOLI\\_AGcult\\_Chi%20include%20chi.pdf](https://aisberg.unibg.it/retrieve/e40f7b89-d390-afca-e053-6605fe0aeaf2/2020_CIMOLI_AGcult_Chi%20include%20chi.pdf)

<sup>28</sup>BODO-CANTÙ-MASCHERONI 2007, p. 22.

migrant backgrounds into cultural life. Although the role of museums in promoting these projects must become a structural commitment, museums often act only as containers of various experiences without taking at the institutional level a caring vision toward the accessibility of all citizens; so, they end up feeding stereotypes, because the museum positions itself as the ‘saviour and benefactor’ of these people, consolidating a paternalistic mentality typical of Western society, which often do not provide for genuine reciprocity and instead sees the act of helping ‘foreigners’ as an act of charity:

Inclusion very often passes for an act of magnanimity, of benevolence, a hand that the museum extends to the ‘needy’ when cultural participation is a fundamental right enshrined in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). A request that is not isolated but inextricably linked and interconnected with others, such as the right to education, freedom of opinion and expression, the exercise of active citizenship, a decent standard of living, and freedom from all forms of discrimination<sup>29</sup>.

Furthermore, the episodic nature and very little continuity of these projects do not lead to a change in the internal dynamics of museums or the staff’s mentality, who keeps focusing on the increase of visitors’ turnout to reach a more significant income; moreover, they do not have enough funds to promote every activity they are interested in, whereby they must focus on earnings, resulting from tickets and bookshops’ sales.

Several difficulties are encountered as these audiences are usually kept separate from others, thus preventing a real cultural encounter and exchange: ‘other cultures’ indeed typically are presented as closed and exotic systems, affirming the usual stereotypical view also caused by a top-down involvement of individuals that does not allow the right atmosphere of equality. Furthermore, it is relevant to emphasise that museum workers are often unaware of the deep motivations behind creating such a project, so even developing a well-structured strategic design that can be protracted over the years is very complicated.

The evolution of museums as places of intercultural dialogue represents a very complex and gradual process; for this reason, it is relevant to evaluate these projects to see if the intercultural approach has been met and if any tangible changes have been achieved.

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that despite the problems mentioned above, Covid-19 represented another major setback in the last two years because of the various lockdowns and

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<sup>29</sup> BODO 2003, p. 2.

decrees, whereby museum operators were forced to postpone all projects dedicated to the public, as there was a significant change in museum priorities (numbered tickets, masks, reservations, etc.). Thus, many activities were only resumed in the last year, leading to a retreat in the progress made.

### 1.3 *The intercultural dialogue in European policies.*

It is necessary to look back at milestones in European reflection on the relationship between culture and social inclusion, focusing on the most recent developments and the topic of intercultural dialogue<sup>30</sup>. Museums have a real duty towards human rights because they have an impact on these through their ability to contribute to their possible achievement or loss. It is relevant to remember that: «The model of ‘cultural inclusion’ - officially born during the Intergovernmental Conference of European Ministers of Culture promoted by UNESCO in Helsinki in 1972 - assumes that the task of cultural policies is to ensure equal dignity and opportunities for expression for all citizens and consists in expanding access and not only to cultural consumption but also to production to distribution»<sup>31</sup>.

However, it is only recently - mainly thanks to EU policies and intergovernmental bodies such as the Council of Europe and Unesco - that the idea that cultural institutions can act as real vehicles to combat social exclusion is gaining ground, which is meant «a dynamic process that wholly or partially precludes the individual from participating in those social, economic, political and cultural systems that determine his or her integration into society»<sup>32</sup>.

Access represents the first step towards more complex and articulated strategies of social and cultural inclusion. It demonstrates how cultural institutions are anything but neutral subjects: any library, theatre or museum not committed to breaking down barriers to access is actively maintaining them<sup>33</sup>. Museums must demonstrate a critical approach to the surrounding society and represent places of debate and exchange, where solutions to world problems will certainly not be achieved. Still, it is here that people can become aware of the complexity of history and its social actors, accepting differences and seeking points of comparison<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> PECCI 2009, pp. 64-74.

<sup>31</sup> DA MILANO-FALCHETTI-GUIDA 2019, p. 128.

<sup>32</sup> BODO-DA MILANO-MASCHERONI 2009, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> *Ivi*, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> CIMOLI 2018, p. 22.

The Council of Europe (CoE) has long played a key role in the reflection on the relationship between culture and inclusion, as the right to culture is one of the fundamental rights. It has issued a preliminary definition of intercultural dialogue: « Intercultural dialogue is an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures that leads to a deeper understanding of the other's global perception »<sup>35</sup>, also providing the conditions that characterise a meaningful one. Moreover, the CoE has increasingly consolidated its action in favour of intercultural dialogue and promoting cultural identity by publishing a series of reports and declarations. In addition to these publications, the CoE's activities related to heritage education and its role in combating social exclusion, with the organisation of seminars dedicated to the analysis of cultural heritage as a factor of integration and social regeneration. For example, with Recommendation No. R (98) 5 of 1998<sup>36</sup>, the CoE defined heritage education, making explicit the fields of application and the organisation of educational actions, including teacher training for intercultural education.

Subsequently, the Faro Convention, launched by the Council of Europe in 2005 on cultural heritage values for society, emphasised that one of its main objectives is: «to commit signatory states to introduce cultural heritage policies and educational initiatives to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue and mutual understanding of differences to prevent conflicts»<sup>37</sup>. So, it has become common interest to develop these kinds of projects; the CoE has devoted increasing attention to the role of cultural policies in fighting against social exclusion through intensive research activities conducted in collaboration with ERICarts - European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research. Furthermore, for an overview at the European level, it is essential to refer to the website *Compendium of cultural policies and trends in Europe*<sup>38</sup>, an online resource launched in 1999 and dedicated to the analysis of cultural policies in about forty European countries, highlighting issues such as cultural diversity, identity and participation in culture, intercultural dialogue, and social cohesion. Concerning the programs launched in the cultural sphere by the EU, it is important to recall *Culture 2000* in which, for the first time in an EU program specifically dedicated to culture, explicit reference was made to the need to pay special attention to underprivileged people through actions that «will foster the visibility and development of new forms of cultural expression, the improvement of access to culture, particularly of young and disadvantaged people», as well as to the recognition «of culture as a

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<sup>35</sup> [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/concept\\_EN.asp#P30\\_3374](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/concept_EN.asp#P30_3374)

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.storiairreer.it/sites/default/files/norme/1998%2003%2017%20Raccomandazione%20COE.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/338231.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.culturalpolicies.net>

factor of social integration and citizenship»<sup>39</sup>. *Culture 2000* was followed by the *Culture 2007-2013*<sup>40</sup> programs, whose main objectives included fostering intercultural dialogue. The European Commission dedicated the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue to the latter theme in 2008. It declared on the act: «The main aim of the Year is to raise the profile of intercultural dialogue, which is essential for creating respect for cultural diversity, improving coexistence in today's diverse societies and encouraging active European citizenship»<sup>41</sup>. In 2004, the Compendium Working Group was set up to prepare a comprehensive document highlighting - from the compendium and with the addition of some specific indicators - information on existing policies, programs, and good practices in different European countries. In 2005, the Council and ERICarts monitored good practices in intercultural dialogue and, in 2006, published a database (that is constantly updated) on the *Compendium* website, together with two new sections specifically dedicated to intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity<sup>42</sup>. In 2017, the *Compendium* website acquired new governance and business model and is now run by the Association of the Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends (CCPT), based in Netherlands. The Association's structure enables more stakeholders and specialists in the field of culture to play a role in the Compendium's development. It should also be mentioned that in the past decade, Europe has reiterated the importance of intercultural heritage education through the publication of documents such as *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*<sup>43</sup> in 2008, as well as UNESCO and ICOM have promoted conventions and declarations in favour of the protection and promotion of cultural diversity. In its first pages, the *White Paper* asserts:

Managing Europe's increasing cultural diversity – rooted in the history of our continent and enhanced by globalisation – in a democratic manner has become a priority in recent years. How shall we respond to diversity? What is our vision of the society of the future? Is it a society of segregated communities, marked at best by the coexistence of majorities and minorities with differentiated rights and responsibilities, loosely bound together by mutual ignorance and stereotypes? Or is it a vibrant and open society without discrimination, benefiting us all, marked by the inclusion of all residents in full respect of their human rights? The Council of Europe believes that respect for and promotion of cultural diversity based on the values on which the organisation is built are essential conditions for the development of societies based on solidarity<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/ALL/?uri=LEGISSUM:l29006>

<sup>40</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:l29016>

<sup>41</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:l29017>

<sup>42</sup> PECCI 2009, p. 69.

<sup>43</sup> [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/source/white%20paper\\_final\\_revised\\_en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/source/white%20paper_final_revised_en.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/source/white%20paper\\_final\\_revised\\_en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/source/white%20paper_final_revised_en.pdf)

This document was produced because of the belief that old approaches to managing cultural diversity were no longer appropriate for today's society. For this reason, six chapters were developed in which the conceptual framework of intercultural dialogue, five policies on its promotion, and policy recommendations and guidelines for future action are presented.

At international level, however, in 2015, world governments developed *Agenda 2030*, accompanied by seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The primary purpose of the Agenda is «a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination [...] A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met»<sup>45</sup>. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and fundamental human rights treaties are already embedded within the *Agenda 2030*, its goals, and targets. Supporting the SDGs and their targets is a really effective way of working to empower everyone; museums, therefore, play a crucial role in achieving these goals. In 2016, the Creative Europe programme launched a specific call to fund projects for integrating refugees, in particular, to help them socialise and establish transnational cultural and audiovisual projects. Therefore, cultural institutions' response to a specific social and political situation is evident, such as the Syrian refugee crisis.

#### *1.4 Surrendering authority and deconstructing the Eurocentric view.*

Europe is invested with the responsibility to represent the centre of universal aesthetics because of the birth of Greek and Roman art in its territory, and this, over the centuries, has contributed to creating a stigma against 'other' cultures that are always judged inferior and not up to the mark merely because they are different<sup>46</sup>. Eurocentrism, therefore, creates a series of prejudices and stereotypes that alienate museum institutions from social inclusion, which is why museum curators must strive to establish new ways of interpreting other cultures and, above all, a reinterpretation of our own culture, which over the centuries has been influenced by all parts of the world.

Unfortunately, it is tough to develop truly coherent and efficient intercultural projects since deconstructing one's Eurocentric cultural structure, which envisions Caucasian man feeling superior to those of other origins, leads interculturality to be seen as something detached from

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<sup>45</sup> MCGHIE 2020, p. 13.

<sup>46</sup> GRECHI 2021, p. 101.



the museum's way of thinking<sup>47</sup>. A compelling adaptation of the museum offer to the current expectations of visitors would imply a reinterpretation of the entire museum material as they seek a sense of belonging or, more generally, emotional, aesthetic, and intellectual incentives. In this sense, the museum still appears to be poorly aware of its cultural potential due to an unjustifiably paternalistic attitude on the part of the decision-making staff. This is, directly and indirectly, one of the leading causes of the limited interest of young people and many potential visitors because the museum is perceived as a static place and not open to the surrounding community and, above all, a self-referential system, not capable of dialogue with visitors. It is in this field that the fundamental challenge for the very survival of museums in a society that increasingly demands not so many new activities as new ways of relating is played out<sup>48</sup>.

It is difficult for the museum to ensure absolute continuity leading to the achievement of institutional change because these are gradual processes that require a lot of time and commitment. In order to achieve this, the museum should divest itself of its pre-established authority and meet the needs of the community and individuals by including new narratives. However, cultural institutions are usually the product of an elite culture, which acts as an instrument of social exclusion both physically and culturally, not only on the level of the creative process of the works but also on the decision-making and consultative processes that characterise the cultural system; thus, this gap leads to a great distance between curators, art directors and citizens. Despite this, it is imperative to note how cultural institutions appear not very reassuring about access, participation, and cultural diversity issues; to date, policy rhetoric has focused mainly on cultural heritage's value and economic impact without reflecting on its social effect. The point is that heritage is seen as acquired by birthright and finds it difficult to involve citizens of foreign origin, who are consequently cut off. Only a decade ago, the notion that museums and cultural associations might engage in the activist practice with the explicit intent to act upon inequalities and injustices was met with scepticism; today, although this conception remains controversial, museums are regarded in their political and social role.

Museum educators though are inclined to devise intercultural projects characterised by isolation and discontinuity and, above all, have different methodologies, making it challenging to maintain a long-term regularity. There is undoubtedly a need to develop a unified strategy to contribute more to the inclusiveness of cultural institutions, although this requires a lasting commitment, i.e.:

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>48</sup> <http://musei.beniculturali.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Il-patrimonio-culturale-per-tutti.-Fruibilita%CC%80-riconoscibilita%CC%80-accessibilita%CC%80.-Quaderni-della-valorizzazione-NS-4.pdf>

An investment of time to experiment, carry out an in-depth revelation and analysis of the needs of marginalised groups, and build a relationship of trust with them; investment in terms of political will to give continuity to the commitment undertaken even in the absence of immediate visible results<sup>49</sup>.

#### 1.4.1 Decolonising process.

Decolonisation involves a profound rethinking of museum collections through specific staff training and a new approach to the public. It is a collective activity, which can be complex and emotional, spurred by the desire to obtain justice and equity. This work is intersectional and requires a significant commitment, as it challenges structural inequalities across the board to change conservative people's mentality and repair historical and ongoing harm<sup>50</sup>.

The decolonisation of museum content, particularly for the ethnographic and anthropological ones, is still a topic of intense debate; in fact, a relevant and recent project which involved ten European museums in reflecting on the role of ethnographic museums within an increasingly differentiated European society was SWICH - Sharing a World of Inclusion, Creativity and Heritage. The focus of this European project, co-funded by the Creative Europe programme, lay on central concerns of museum practice through a series of conferences, workshops, residencies, and collective exhibitions based on post-colonial strategies. Therefore, SWICH created a network embracing museum curators and other staff, such as researchers, artists, activists to reflect on decolonising issues, especially within ethnographic museums. This project lasted four years, from 2014 to 2018<sup>51</sup>.

Taking into consideration that most of our museums originated from colonial routes and the appropriation of cultural goods not owned by us, it should be a priority of any museum to present the story of its collection, which exhibit the objects stolen, once as evidence of the conquest of new lands and now silently integrated into museums.

Nowadays, we try to bring out the colonial origin of our collections faintly by showing their exotic side with a sense of curiosity and inclusiveness but without recounting the violence with which they were obtained. This approach always remains part of white supremacist logic. There is a tendency to want to remove the colonialist past so as not to feel complicit or guilty, however

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<sup>49</sup> PECCI 2009, p. 74.

<sup>50</sup> <https://ma-production.ams3.digitaloceanspaces.com/app/uploads/2021/11/07135807/Supporting-decolonisation-in-museums-final-version.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.swich-project.eu/about/index.html>

without making a critical analysis of it that would lead to fundamental social changes; this happens especially in Italy, where many people mistakenly believe that our colonialism doesn't have the same severity of the other countries because it was of lower impact. It can be said that:

All this has continued to produce certain imaginaries about oneself and others, which today shape those racist and violent impulses towards difference, which remain inexplicable and incomprehensible if we cannot connect the traces of those shifts from one "place" to another of memory<sup>52</sup>.

We can speak, therefore, of the presence of coloniality, which stems from the European imperialisms and colonialisms of the past and which lives in our daily lives, in our knowledge through an intricate system of privileges and oppressions, which we have internalized to the point of perceiving it as 'normal'. We must necessarily strive to identify these behaviors and try to break this coloniality, avoiding attitudes of fear or anger toward the 'foreigner'.

In fact, ethnographic museum collections are encompassed in the colonial logic according to which all non-European cultures are deemed inferior, through an illegitimate hierarchy. Therefore, objects are labeled, decontextualized and re-contextualized, or rather «cannibalized»<sup>53</sup> by Europe, which needs to reinforce its own identity by crushing others. Surely it is not easy for museums to relate to communities with foreign origins, avoiding cultural determinisms, and soliciting their role as critical agents of their own epistemological and narrative paradigms<sup>54</sup>. So, we need to ask «how to avoid the paternalistic gesture of 'giving voice' to a subject who nevertheless remains other, and instead trigger a reciprocity of gaze, at the cost of radically questioning the museum narrative and its authority»<sup>55</sup>.

Many museums are experimenting with cross-cultural projects to promote a dialogue between cultures, yet the results are barely visible: dialogue, inclusion, accessibility are words that echo within museums, but do not really seem to determine the approach of these institutions. Collaboration, such as engaging with refugees or second-generation immigrants, has a central role in decolonising museums because through intercultural dialogue, institutions have the opportunity to come into contact with new perspectives and insights, developing meaningful relationships with the community. To promote collaboration, museums have to identify and remove barriers that make access difficult for many people. Moreover, the reevaluation of the

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<sup>52</sup> GRECHI 2021, pp. 99-100.

<sup>53</sup> *Ivi*, p. 104.

<sup>54</sup> *Ivi*, p. 106.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*.

museum's collections, considering different viewpoints, leads to a new conception of cultural institutions.

In this context, one of the possible acts that museums can do is the repatriation or restitution of items to the original country: this can be a compelling and symbolic act which recognises our illicit appropriation of those objects, even though it is a very complex process:

Repatriation of tribal works is not the only proper response to contact histories, relations which cannot permanently be reduced to colonial oppression and appropriation. But it is a possible, appropriate route. And although the return of objects may be a fortunate homecoming, it is not always obvious where home is for collected objects. The situation can be complicated and ambiguous. Indeed, some native groups do not want physical possession of traditional objects; they simply wish to ongoing connection and control<sup>56</sup>.

In practice, this means that a metropolitan or state museum can hold the collection in trust for specific communities. Indeed, some museums can function as a depository or library, circulating art and culture beyond their walls. Therefore, decolonisation requires an empathic, proactive and inclusive approach that places justice and equality at the center of its actions<sup>57</sup>.

Nowadays, many artists, curators and museum professionals are working on these issues: especially in the last few years many exhibitions are organized according to decolonizing principles such as *The Past is Now* in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. The exhibition was curated by six creatives and activists, who wanted to point to the less-known components of the collection by narrating those aspects that are usually omitted. Whilst the exhibition received enthusiastic reviews and international acclaim, the process in putting it together was a difficult and tough one. As one of the first of its kind, this exhibition prompted many museums in the UK and abroad to follow its example. Unfortunately, since then many institutions and organizations have tried to decolonise their collections, without understanding what it actually means or entails, and creating thus tokenistic initiatives of inclusion<sup>58</sup>.

An interesting stance is the one developed in UK by *Museum Association*<sup>59</sup>, a membership organization that advocates for socially engaged museums and acts to improve different

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<sup>56</sup> CLIFFORD 1997, p. 211-212.

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.museumsassociation.org/about/>.

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.shaheenkasmani.com/the-past-is-now>

<sup>59</sup> <https://ma-production.ams3.digitaloceanspaces.com/app/uploads/2021/11/07135807/Supporting-decolonisation-in-museums-final-version.pdf>

museological practices, including decolonisation, on which they published a guide. According to them:

Decolonisation is not simply the relocation of a statue or an object; it is a long-term process that seeks to recognise the integral role of the empire in museums – from their creation to the present day. Decolonisation requires a reappraisal of our institutions and their history and an effort to address colonial structures and approaches to all areas of museum work<sup>60</sup>.

Historically, the word ‘decolonisation’ referred to the political processes that ended direct colonial rule, including varied forms of anticolonial resistance. Today decolonial thinking and practice recognise that, despite the formal end of colonial rule, the legacies of empire remain with us in many ways of thinking and everyday experiences. The decolonising practice challenges legacies of oppression and calls for an honest and accurate reappraisal of colonial history, thanks to the intercultural exchange, which allows one to understand better collections in the process of mutual learning to amplify, acknowledge and marginalise credit perspectives.

### 1.5 *The intercultural projects.*

The experiments carried out over the past decade in terms of the relationship between museums and immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers have shown great potential and just as many elements of fragility, as is to be expected when experimenting. A catalog of these projects can be found on the *Patrimonio e Intercultura*<sup>61</sup> website edited by Simona Bodo and Silvia Mascheroni, who have subdivided the various experiences according to regions; in addition, another interesting reference is the *Museums and Migration*<sup>62</sup> blog, where there is a more global view of all those museums that follow an intercultural method. The latter specifically points out those museum institutions that are interested in the current debate on migration and organize exhibitions, conferences, and workshops focused on the topic<sup>63</sup>.

It should be clarified that intercultural projects developed in the last decade in European museums and heritage institutions are very numerous and of a wide variety of models, which can be grouped according to the subdivision made already by Simona Bodo in 2009 who

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>61</sup> <http://patrimonioeintercultura.ismu.org/progetti/>

<sup>62</sup> <https://museumsandmigration.wordpress.com/museums/>

<sup>63</sup> CIMOLI 2020, p. 2.

recognises three main approaches. The first is 'Cultures on display', «that is, a 'cognitive multiculturalism' aimed at promoting in the native public a greater respect and recognition of 'other' cultures»<sup>64</sup>. Programs and initiatives that fall under this umbrella include major exhibitions or museums dedicated to non-European cultures, such as the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris or the Museo delle Culture in Milan (MUDEC). These museums make use of temporary exhibitions, permanent exhibition spaces or the acquisition of new objects to reflect on the cultural diversity of today's society, as well as educational activities, exhibition routes or entire areas dedicated to the history of colonialism or slavery. Many countries in the world have such museums, such as the Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration in Paris, the Museo de Historia de la Inmigración de Cataluña in Barcelona or the Migration Museum in London.

In the second approach outlined by Bodo, reference is made to a 'literacy of new citizens' through the development of programs and activities aimed at helping individuals of immigrant origin to deepen their knowledge of the country they reached. However, «many of these initiatives [...] have proven to be only partially effective due to the lack of preparatory work in the field - they are often top-down projects, not corroborated by an in-depth analysis of the needs of the new publics - and a more direct involvement of immigrant communities»<sup>65</sup>. Several projects in Italy take this approach. For example, *La cultura dell'accoglienza. L'accoglienza della cultura*<sup>66</sup>, developed at the Musei Capitolini in 2002, represents one of the first intercultural projects conducted in Italy, which involved the organisation of an experimental cycle of free guided tours for foreign visitors, divided by groups of countries of origin. Their purpose was to make 'new citizens' participate in the cultural heritage of the city where they had arrived, making these collections accessible also to a non-native public.

Finally, the third approach is the one that has proven to be most effective because it is based on the actual participation of these audiences, as it involves certain groups being actively part of the museum through the interpretation of the collections or helping in the preservation and presentation of their artefacts. So, «these initiatives are grounded in the needs of new audiences, rather than in 'institutional' or curatorial interests»<sup>67</sup>.

In Amsterdam, a cultural foundation called Imagine, Identity and Culture<sup>68</sup> (Imagine IC), which has existed for more than two decades, aims at the democracy of heritage and therefore presents itself as a place of debate open to everyone, where the composition of Amsterdam's collective

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<sup>64</sup> BODO 2009, p. 163.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.museicapitolini.org/it/mostra-evento/laccoglienza-della-cultura-la-cultura-dellaccoglienza-0>

<sup>67</sup> BODO 2009, p. 164.

<sup>68</sup> <https://imagineic.nl>

memory can be negotiated. Imagine IC emphasises the complexity of a multicultural society by proposing intercultural projects of various kinds that always aim at a direct involvement of the surrounding community made up of people of different backgrounds. In 2008, it also became part of the *MAP for ID*<sup>69</sup>, a two-year (2007-2009) European project funded by the European Commission under the *Lifelong Learning* program. The main objective of this project was to recognise a series of pilot intercultural experiences developed in some cities of Europe to show concrete models of using museum resources through the exploration of new inclusive mediation methods of collections. MAP for ID foresaw the following steps: creating a research group to identify case studies and good practices related to intercultural mediation activities and then sharing the results among European museum professionals through a report. The implementation followed this in partner countries of some thirty pilot projects to test new forms of inclusive mediation of collections. Finally, the publication “Museums as a Place for Intercultural Dialogue: Experiences from Europe” was published to recount the process and results of this project.

Early projects include the Manchester Museum, which organised a series of *Collective Conversations* in 2004, coordinated by a moderator and filmed for inclusion on the museum’s website. It consisted of an interdisciplinary working group composed of curators and educational services workers and a group of refugees from Somalia and Sudan. Participants were invited to choose objects from the collections and share their own stories and reflections. This project marked the museum in its approach to collection interpretation and exhibition design. In addition, the museum has since then become a place of meeting and dialogue, where local communities can actively interact<sup>70</sup>.

Similarly, in Italy, there have been several projects that aim to ensure physical, political, and economic accessibility for all: one of the leading institutions that sought to reach interculturality in its visits was the GAMEC of Bergamo, which started around 2004 with initial activities dedicated to foreign children. Later, in 2006, the *OspitiDONOre* project was developed. The aim was to bring adult migrants closer to the museum, finding in the concept of ‘gift’ a platform for dialogue from which to reflect on the meaning of the museum. Moreover, GAMEC’s operators wanted to use the encounter with the museum as a place of integration, knowledge, and language enrichment, making the participants the protagonists of the creative process: this was achieved by building a ‘new museum’ together with them.

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<sup>69</sup> BODO-GIBBS-SANI 2009, p. 64.

<sup>70</sup> PECCI 2009, p. 83-84.

From this project emerged a need for the museum to train mediators who could act as spokespersons to their respective communities; therefore, the course *Training Course for Museum Mediators* took place later in 2007 and consisted of several weekly meetings of training, at the end of which an official diploma was awarded after an examination. Giovanna Brambilla Ranise, head of educational services, explains:

The professional figure born at the end of the course, that of Museum Mediator, becomes the voice of GAMEc; it is a person from another country who has acquired a good knowledge of the museum and its permanent collections and who continues to attend all the training initiatives on contemporary art and on the various exhibition initiatives that we organise from time to time, with a view, which moreover also concerns GAMEc's Museum Educators-of Long Life Learning Education<sup>71</sup>.

Starting in 2007, GAMEc's Educational Services indeed created a group of 33 mediators from different countries, who over the years, have acquired a high level of knowledge of art history and skills enabling them to conduct not only tours in their mother tongue for migrants or tourists, but also narrated tours for intercultural projects, advanced training seminars for university students, and accessibility projects in prisons or with the disabled. Therefore, this project is representative of a typology where migrants and people from other countries are given a prominent role as mediators. This model has been proposed in different museum contexts such as Pinacoteca di Brera, Museo del Cinema in Turin, Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico 'Luigi Pigorini' in Rome as a paradigm of a way of working with collections by promoting art knowledge and social and cultural inclusion. In addition, it is essential to say that GAMEc gives free admission to migrants and takes care of paying its mediators by making them part of the museum staff. GAMEc is always very active in intercultural mediation, so much so that over the years, it has continued to develop various projects such as *12 storytellers in search of an author*<sup>72</sup> in 2015, *My Place/My Text*<sup>73</sup> later, and others.

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<sup>71</sup> BRAMBILLA RANISE 2009, p.196.

<sup>72</sup> The project led to the creation of several narratives in Italian and in the mother tongue of the different mediators, each one linked to a painting in the Permanent Collection and resulting from an interweaving of historical events, artistic information and autobiographical stories, in order to encourage a new way of approaching the works. These narratives were recorded to make them accessible online.

<sup>73</sup> The project set out to create a process of creative participation, dispelling the museum's image as a place of devotion, respect and distance. More specifically, the title "My Place / My Texts" was intended to summarise the aims that GAMEc has set itself: the museum must become "My Place", i.e. a place of belonging in which one recognises oneself, and where a reading process takes place, in which one can put oneself at stake. "My Texts", on the other hand, is the point of arrival: the writing of personal texts, in which to give form to the confrontation activated between oneself and the works on display.



Other successful intercultural projects that fall under this approach are: Turin's *L'Egizio per gli stranieri* and Milan's *A Brera anch'io*. The latter has its roots in the general reflection, dear to the Accademia of Brera, on the role that the museum can play as a vehicle for social cohesion and, more specifically, on the contribution it can make to the development of a critical understanding of the world, of a constructive dialogue between individuals and communities that bear different cultural instances<sup>74</sup>. The project in question is directed at primary and secondary school children. It seeks to educate them in listening and dialogue as an opportunity to learn about others and get closer to some traits of their own culture.

The project involves some activities carried out within schools with teachers and a subsequent visit to the Pinacoteca. The latter, as well as GAMEC, is the protagonist of several intercultural projects that have taken place over the years, such as *Brera: un'altra storia. Percorsi interculturali nel museo* in 2013 or *Raccontami di Brera*. Among other purposes, the project aimed to make the museum a genuinely attentive institution to the social problems surrounding it and open to the needs of its audiences, capable of making the preserved past a place for reflection and discussion.

The Turin project, on the other hand, is aimed at adults of different nationalities, especially migrants of North African origin, with a fair command of the Italian language and seeks to make the museum accessible for other ethnic groups, especially concerning the Arabic-speaking community. Activities aim to make project recipients acquire skills and competencies, making them capable of being their own 'guides' to the collections for companions, friends, and relatives; as for the GAMEC's project.

The Egyptian Museum of Turin still engages in intercultural mediation, with projects such as *My Egyptian Museum*<sup>75</sup> of 2017 or with exchange days such as those organised in 2018-2019 on the topic of *Museums and Migrants*<sup>76</sup>, used as tools for encounter and designed with the goal of mutual and integrated listening with the local communities. Moreover, Turin's municipality developed projects of social inclusiveness «The exclusion of certain groups from Turin's museums (both from access as visitors and engagement as active participants) contributes to

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<sup>74</sup> PECCI 2009, p. 81.82.

<sup>75</sup> <http://patrimonioeinterculturala.ismu.org/progetto/il-mio-museo-egizio/>, The main objective of this project was to make the Egyptian Museum known to the North African community living in Turin: studies on the museum's use had in fact shown the absence of this public, felt to be a serious lack given the nature of our collections. To achieve this aim, the Egyptian Museum wanted to train mediators who could promote it to their communities.

<sup>76</sup> It consists of three days of training, study and reciprocal listening among museum, cultural and social workers from the city of Turin and other realities. Each day is divided into a morning of listening to practices and views, and an afternoon of workshops, in the museum rooms.

the reinforcement of the broader social processes of alienation, highlighting the persistence of the many barriers that keep out anyone who does not fit into the standard visitor typology»<sup>77</sup>.

Other projects giving a more prominent role to migrants have emerged over the years, including in Berlin in 2015 (ongoing), where a very relevant one for the European scene was born, the *Multaka: Museum as Meeting Point – Refugees as Guides in Berlin Museums*<sup>78</sup>: here Syrian and Iraqi refugees are being trained as museum guides so that they can then provide guided tours to fellow country people in their native language.

This project was born in Berlin and then reproduced in different European cities; Multaka (Arabic for “meeting point”) was appreciated because it aims to facilitate the interchange of diverse cultural and historical experiences. In collaboration with the department of education, a training program for the guides was strengthened based on the themes of the museums and issues of didactics and methodology. In Berlin, the program is aimed primarily at teenagers and young adults but also addresses older people in mixed groups. By addressing visitors in a clear and straightforward language suitable for all age groups and using peer-to-peer communication, the *Multaka* project hopes to facilitate refugees’ access to museums and to help them to find social and cultural points of connection, as well as to increase their participation in the public sphere.

To create an awareness of the diverse cultural backgrounds of the refugees, from January 2016, *Multaka* also boosted the involvement of the native population in the project. Therefore, this project should be conceived as an opportunity to foster the growth of new structures of understanding and acceptance in a heterogeneous and ethnically diverse society. It took place in two different museums in Berlin, among them the Pergamon museum.

The project has received numerous international prizes and awards and is a pilot initiative at European level, studied and subsequently shared by other museums as an example of cultural inclusion, including the Pitt Rivers Museum and The History of Science Museum in Oxford (UK), Musée d'Histoire de Berne in Switzerland, Museo Egizio of Turin and several museums in Florence.

In Florence, a cooperative<sup>79</sup> was inspired by this project to create a similar one called AMIR<sup>80</sup> that will become part of the *Multaka* network, which is a fairly well-known experience at the European level because it gathers all those museums that proposed the same working model.

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<sup>77</sup> <http://patrimonioeinterculturala.ismu.org/progetto/un-patrimonio-di-tutti-torino/> :

<sup>78</sup> <https://multaka.de/en/project-2/>

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.stazioneutopia.com>

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.amirproject.com>

*Multaka Berlin* was created in 2015 on behalf of the German government, which in those years required not only a physical opening of the borders but also a cultural opening to welcome refugees in every aspect of German daily life. Therefore, most of those projects are linked to the political decisions of those years.

## CHAPTER II – THE AMIR PROJECT

### 2.1 *The inception.*

AMIR was born in the wake of the experiences made in museums until then, which consisted of specific visits aimed at refugees in response to the political situation in Italy in 2018 in which right-wing parties were campaigning on racist and xenophobic anti-immigrant rhetoric. This type of visit has been instituted more regularly since 2015, when the Syrian refugee crisis emerged, to try to integrate these people into the cultural life of the country of arrival. However, these experiences were unsuccessful from several points of view: on the one hand, there was undoubtedly a strong language barrier, and on the other hand, there were also deep cultural gaps that made the understanding of those contents that we take for granted very complex, thus creating a great distance and misunderstanding. Therefore, to counteract the very violent political rhetoric that was being perpetuated against the ‘foreigner’, Chiara Damiani<sup>81</sup> felt that the *Multaka* project in Berlin could be the solution as it consisted of training Syrian or Iraqi refugees as mediators, who could offer their compatriots visits with the same language and shared references, thus constituting that missing link in previous projects. Chiara had the opportunity to see the project up close thanks to the European project *Emme - education museums and migrant experiences*, funded by Erasmus+, which facilitated professional training exchanges for museum educators on the inclusion of migrant narratives in museum programmes. On this occasion, Chiara and some educators were able to go to Berlin and see the project's management and organisation. This allowed them to replicate it in Florence, even if differently.

Shortly afterwards, Chiara proposed the AMIR project to a call for proposals planned by the Fondazione CR in Florence to obtain funds and put it into practice. While writing the application, moreover, she thought it would be appropriate to involve other museums in the project and not only the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, for which Stazione Utopia manages the educational programmes; so, she proposed it to Silvia Borsotti, the director and coordinator of

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<sup>81</sup> Chiara Damiani is the creator of AMIR and one of the coordinators of Stazione Utopia, a cooperative operating in the cultural, performing, and social sectors. Founded in 2010, it carries out activities on behalf of public and private institutions, including theatres, museums, foundations, and festivals of various kinds, as well as developing national and international projects. Particular attention is paid to the activation of museum education programmes and social inclusion and promotion practices aimed at audiences at risk of cultural and educational exclusion, including migrants, people in economic/social distress, and people with cognitive impairment and disabilities.

museums in Fiesole, who was so very enthusiastic about it that she proposed it to the entire thematic museum network *Musei di Tutti*<sup>82</sup>. Other museums gradually embraced the project, although, at the beginning, it was unclear what the objectives were and which methodology they would use. It was the first time in Florence that young migrants were trained as mediators and could lead the visits independently. However, despite the museum collaboration, the project remained tied to the Station Utopia cooperative, which manages the fees, the organisation and general coordination.

## 2.2 *The goals.*

Through the training and the subsequent visits, AMIR intends to valorise people with a migratory past as bearers of original values and points of view, capable of enhancing the reading and interpretation of the Florentine cultural and museum heritage. The mediators should not be mere recipients of the project but active subjects in cultural institutions, capable of developing narratives derived from intertwining cultures, and enriching museums with their own contents and experiences.

AMIR aims to gather a group of individuals who can be trained to become mediators in order to create real social inclusion within the museum institutions. Guided tours, workshops and video lectures are offered to participants as opportunities for intercultural dialogue and confrontation, aimed at constructing a counter-narrative in which migration and cultural differences are recounted as a phenomenon that has always existed: not a social emergency but a historical process that has contributed over the centuries to enriching and changing the construction of our cultural identity.

With this project, they also want to convey knowledge of the suburbs, which are hardly included among places of art and visit, especially in a city of mass tourism like Florence, where everything revolves around monuments and museums in the centre.

Le Piagge, for example, is a fairly recent neighbourhood that has always been considered a place of crime and social discomfort. Still, thanks to the collaboration with the *IlPrisma*<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> The Network consists of the following museums: Municipality of Fiesole | Fiesole Civic Museum and Archaeological Area and Bandini Museum; Primo Conti Foundation | Primo Conti Museum, Florence; Municipality of Florence | Mus.e, Palazzo Vecchio Museum and Museo 900; Istituto degli Innocenti, Florence.

<sup>83</sup> A cultural project born in Florence and dedicated to artistic research and experimentation. *IlPrisma* aims to establish Le Piagge as one of the city's contemporary art venues, creating cultural events that involve the citizens of the district and beyond.

association, there has been the opportunity to discredit its lousy reputation through the organization of exhibitions inside the district's large residential buildings, called 'Le Navi'. Moreover, thanks also to AMIR's visits, it was possible to bring people from all over Florence to get to know the new face of the suburbs from different viewpoints.

### *2.3 The recipients and beneficiaries.*

In 2018 the cooperative Stazione Utopia contacted the Ufficio Marginalità e Immigrazione of the municipality of Florence to obtain a list of associations dedicated to the cause to which subsequently an invitation to participate in the first training was sent. So, all the cultural associations that bring together foreign communities were involved, such as Senegalese, Angolan, etc., which are also formed by people who have been in Italy for a long time. Some of them, intrigued by the project, decided to participate and sent their applications.

At the same time, immigration centres, cooperatives, and SPRAR centres<sup>84</sup> were contacted to get more people involved. During the first training a Nigerian boy detained in the Sollicciano prison, who had obtained a permit from the probation judge to leave, was also recruited. The first training was a special moment that brought many people together, forming an excellent initial group; however, it was the only time a prisoner was involved as it was very complicated to obtain permits.

Nevertheless, the intercultural value has been maintained over the years, so people with a migration background are always sought out for the group. The people gathered belong to different age groups (eighteen years and older) and origins: what they had in common was the migrant background and a little knowledge of Italian language.

Furthermore, there was a more significant presence of men, who are the most present category among immigrants. Therefore, the situation was complex; many did not speak Italian, and each had a different and complicated background. As the project grew, the target audience has broadened to include second-generation people who do not have strong ties with their culture of origin, which sometimes creates difficulties in organising the content.

Over time, the number of mediators changed, and new people were added, while twelve of those who had participated at the beginning of the project left the group for various reasons;

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<sup>84</sup> The Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR) consists of the network of local authorities that access the National Fund for Asylum Policies and Services for the implementation of integrated immigration projects, within the limits of available resources.

some because they were not getting their documents renewed and had to leave the country, others because they found a job on their own or no longer had time/interest in pursuing the project. At the same time, new participants emerged, who found out later about the project on their own or through personal contacts or associations.

Currently, the group consists of a total of thirty-four facilitators. Furthermore, it is essential to specify that AMIR hires its mediators through a letter of assignment for an occasional collaboration, remunerating them for each visit or official training.

The project addresses different audiences, without priority criteria, from children to adult audiences of any kind, such as Italians or resident foreign communities; school audiences of various grades (primary and secondary school), after-school programmes, or summer student centres; CPIAs<sup>85</sup> and cooperatives that deal with the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers; homeless; volunteer associations; and all those audiences that museum institutions usually exclude.

It also collaborates often with the association Anelli Mancanti, a Florentine intercultural center that organizes various activities of support and assistance to all migrant citizens and people living in socially and economically marginalized situations. They offer Italian language courses, medical, legal and ‘welcome’ counseling, etc., and try to integrate people into cultural life.

#### *2.4 The methodology.*

Since its inception, AMIR has planned several training opportunities. The first meeting took place in September 2018, when two refresher and training days were mainly aimed at educators from museum partners, so that they could be adequately prepared to become tutors of groups of citizens of immigrant origin, but also open to external professionals.

Subsequently, a twenty-four-hour course in history and art history divided into six days (from Etruscan Civilization to 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe) was held in November 2018, led by two secondary school teachers and addressed to a group of forty citizens of immigrant origin including refugees, longtime residents of the Florentine territory and an inmate from Sollicciano prison with a special permit. Attendance at the training was compulsory and only those with a valid residence permit or a temporary one could participate in the course. In the beginning clearly

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<sup>85</sup> They are centres for adult education where first-level and Italian language learning courses are implemented.

there were problems with the language, as most of the participants hardly spoke Italian; for this reason, training had been given to museum educators to teach them how to relate to illiterate people. So, they started with teaching basic art-historical topics in a simplified way to enable new mediators to understand Western history, and slowly consolidated the language to tell their own stories.

The methodologies employed in the training of mediators, which can also be used during visits, are those of object-based learning and constructive dialogue by which, through questions and contributions, conversation and the active participation of each person is encouraged. Therefore, the training successfully prepared mediators, and visitors of the first visits were understanding of the difficulties arising from language barriers.

After the primary training, the group was subsequently divided into smaller groups, assigned to the heads of the educational services of each museum, according to their own choice: together, they deepened the general themes of history and art history already addressed, as well as the more specific ones inherent to their respective collections, while developing methods and approaches to museum mediation, such as how to relate to the public and how to move around the museum space. Therefore, mediators are trained gradually by museum operators in order to learn how to offer a reading of artistic heritage from an intercultural perspective, presenting different viewpoints and opportunities to engage in dialogue about cultural diversity.

Over the years, the project has become routine and continuous, so much so that the activities are now part of the education and mediation programs. However, each museum has developed its own work phases according to its needs and interests. The participants can choose any museum institution, even more than one, where they receive specific training on the collection. The training takes place in this way: a first tour is given initially to understand the possible themes to be addressed, after which, together with the educators, the participants choose the works that, according to them, have the most exciting and stimulating subjects and stories. So, there is active participation in the training: individuals are prompted to express what they think about the objects and to reflect on these also in relation with their country of origin.

From the study of the work, a cross-sectional research starts in order to construct a text where the official contents are intertwined with their narratives so that the visit is conducted through the intersectionality of the different cultures. This text, composed of essential historical-artistic elements and individual contributions, is subdivided according to the various stages of the pathway, and each paragraph bears the name of the mediator who will expose that part.

Moreover, the canvas is available on a shared file to make it available to everyone and usable by any new mediators who join the network. The participants have to study the content on their



own to memorise it. In subsequent meetings, they have to repeat in front of the educators what they have learned to consolidate their preparation and get used to orally present arguments in front of an audience; moreover, they have to organise in a balanced way the visit that is usually divided between two or three mediators.

Even today, the project guarantees hours of training dedicated to specific topics, such as artistic techniques or historical insights, as well as opportunities for cross-curricular training with issues related to intercultural dialogue to expand the number of possible contents for the visits. AMIR's mediators are always spurred to investigate, not only Florence's artistic heritage but also aspects of their culture that they are sometimes unaware of. So, they develop a relatively wide range of skills that sees the intersection of different elements. In addition, the way of conducting the visit is interesting because it involves one or more mediators taking turns presenting the various museum rooms to create a chorus of voices accompanying the audience. Thus, each tour is unique because any mediator brings a particular point of view that arises from their original country.

During the visits, it is preferable to minimise the interventions of the educators, who are always present, to the point of letting the mediators themselves conduct all stages. The museum educators, in fact, always act as support, showing their availability for general advice with a peer-to-peer approach even during the visits, expressing interest in their ideas and letting them talk and handle different situations, usually just acting as facilitators in the group to handle more complex dynamics (such as arguments, misunderstandings, sudden absences). In addition, before any visit, regular meetings are held with the mediators to refresh their memory in case some content has not been covered for a long time, or there are new participants in a museum. Therefore, on this occasion, they try to organise the visit together the best they can, dividing the presentation of the rooms in a balanced way among the mediators present.

The mediators in this context can propose new ideas for the tour or bring up critical issues based on their own experiences in other museums or collaboration with other mediators. Therefore, there is a lot of dialogue and debate and that creates tours that are not totally preset: rather, only the initial route is defined, and then each visit takes its shape according to the type of audience or the group of mediators.

## *2.5 The partner museums and the suburbs.*

From the beginning, a good number of museums showed interest in the project: the first were those of the Fiesole complex (Museo Civico Archeologico, Area Archeologica di Fiesole e Museo Bandini) along with Museo Primo Conti, Museo di Palazzo Vecchio, Museo del Novecento, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, and the Fondazione CR Firenze. The latter, moreover, is among the project's major funders, as well as other public and private entities, and at first, offered tours that were different from the others because they were only in Arabic. These visits stopped with the arrival of Covid-19. They were not resumed in the following two years because the Fondazione closed its collection to the public until October 2022 when they will finally resume visits. Each museum develops specific visits according to its collection, providing new contents to mediators; the visits are held only during the weekends, except for group reservations.

In addition to institutional partners, the project has expanded on the occasion of specific initiatives, such as Like Seeds on a Journey, organised for the "Florentine Summer" in 2019 and 2021, which took place in the Boboli Gardens of the Uffizi Galleries and in Botanical Garden of the Athenaeum Museum System. On the other side, in the second year, the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo decided to stop participating in the project.

Subsequently, Stazione Utopia chose to expand its visits to the Florentine suburbs, such as the Borgo di Quaracchi and the Borgo and Church of Santa Maria a Peretola and the Piagge district with the AMIR4ALL project, to raise awareness of marginal places that are often not considered equal to the historical centre.

The project's third edition encountered numerous difficulties due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so many activities proposed for 2020 were carried out later in 2021. During these two years, two other artistic areas joined the project: Villa Medicea La Petraia and the Garden of the Villa Medicea di Castello. One of the main difficulties encountered by the involvement of so many different institutions was that each museum showed a different approach to the project; therefore, to create a greater homogeneity, the coordinators of AMIR last year, between December and January, decided to do visits called "Mediator Training Visits" where everyone went to each other's visits in order to understand if there were some discrepancies between museums and possibly adjust them.

In addition, this training served to find new themes on which to build the visits and fresh content that could be common across museums. This activity led to cross-training that highlighted many interesting aspects. Each facilitator could express their point of view, pointing out critical issues

and strengths of their colleagues. It was helpful for all: project participants, museum workers and mediators; therefore, it should be reorganised in the coming months to monitor how visits evolve in each museum.

Moreover, AMIR has a parallel relationship with *Multaka* Project at a European level, even though each city shows different approaches and methodologies. Berlin's museums indeed have many artefacts from Syria or the Near East, so the Syrian collaborators who were involved found themselves recounting a heritage close to them; above all, the team group is composed mainly of professionals in the artistic or archaeological field who also spoke several languages, and that has proved to be beneficial because they initially only made visits in Arabic for the Syrian community. Still, this type of audience decreased over the years, and the mediators started to make visits in English and German, addressing them to a more European target. Even Oxford works with foreign students who have a specific academic preparation. AMIR though, by involving people from different backgrounds has a more social purpose.

Each city has its approach, and the coordinators annually meet to exchange their experiences to see which works best and what changes can be made: for example, over the years, it emerged that mediators get paid only in Berlin and Florence, an aspect which creates an imbalance between projects.

## *2.6 The outcomes.*

One of the primary achievements over the years was that the mediators learnt Italian not only in its simplest form but also in the vocabulary specific to the art sector; lacking any initial training, they challenged themselves, dealing with the first embarrassment and learning how to speak in front of an audience and to move around the museum space properly. They also learnt how to collaborate, respecting each other's viewpoints and different ways of doing things. Furthermore, Stazione Utopia, at a bureaucratic level, aims to help migrant youth handle paperwork; even though the cooperative is not an educational institution, and it cannot issue official certificates of job training.

They can offer only certificates of participation that are often useful for the mediators to obtain documents because they prove their active role in society. Sometimes, letters of recommendation are also issued to help them find jobs. So, this project is also a stepping stone

to the community, giving these young people a chance to develop a passion for art history or find a job in other fields.

### *2.7 The AMIR project in progress.*

The project has developed various activities or training according to the needs that emerged. For example, *AMIRedu* is the section dedicated to training meetings, appointments aimed at mediators and dedicated to specific issues, and later made available to all audiences and the mediators themselves, online for possible further study. So, these are training and refresher meetings to get a broader idea of contents.

In the summer of 2020, *AMIRlab* was born to organise children's workshops and laboratories that address schools, summer centres, families, and after-school programs. These activities were proposed due to the impossibility of conducting activities in the museum because of health restrictions caused by Covid. Some schools have maintained an ongoing relationship with AMIR as time has passed, like the Metropolis Center in Piagge, which participates in workshops every year.

Moreover, during the pandemic, AMIR produced a series of videos with the mediators that were shared on social channels; each video was dedicated to general artistic issues and less related to the individual museum. They presented videos with short art explanations, some filmed by themselves at home, others by the museums. In addition, the Art Collection of the Fondazione CR Firenze has made some videos for its project entitled *In collection...dialogues*, some of which are made by Amir mediators and others by the children from the ENS-Ente Nazionale Sordi (National Deaf Organization) of Florence to boost social inclusion and cultural participation.

New sub-projects have been initiated in the last year; for example, on the occasion of the “Week of Action Against Racism”, a special calendar of activities was prepared, both online and (when possible) in person, aimed at school and after-school students, adults, and museum professionals; the common goal of this project was to bring cultural heritage to life as a resource for anti-racism education and intercultural confrontation. UNAR - National Anti-Racial Discrimination Office funded this project which lasted from March 21 to 27. It proposed a varied calendar of activities with video lectures, museum visits, video conversations, and activities for children.

Starting from 2020, Amir has expanded its horizons to the Florentine suburbs, offering a project of cultural participation called AMIR4ALL, which consists of a series of free unique visits and workshops aimed at schools, summer centres, families, after-school programs in Piagge, a suburban neighbourhood with a social and housing distress; the project also offers some visits to the ancient villages of Quaracchi and Peretola. The guided tours to the Piagge are made in collaboration with IlPrisma, with which AMIR has organised several exhibitions in the condominium spaces of the 'Navi' (large buildings that are characteristic of that area).

Furthermore, during summer, AMIR organizes special projects, such as *Like Seeds on the Road* funded by the Florentine Summer, which consists of visits to explore the botanical and cultural diversity that has made Florentine gardens actual laboratories. There is in fact a wide variety of plant and artistic forms come from other climates, crops and cultures that have consistently reproduced and crossed paths. It thus represents an interesting reflection on the cross-cultural composition of nature, as well as that which characterises people.

In the past few months, AMIR has organised *Inform Perform Transform, Re-visit the Cultural Heritage* on the occasion of the "Week of Action Against Racism," which offered new thematic visits, an exhibition at Piagge, an online seminar carried out in collaboration with the University of Florence, an itinerary in the city on the traces of the stories of Africans in Renaissance Florence, and a visit to Peretola to tell the story of the braiders' revolt.

The latest project AMIR has participated in was *Uncomfortable tours*, which was curated by Stazione Utopia and funded by Estate Fiorentina; it consisted of creating dissonant itineraries on Florence's cultural heritage, with five AMIR tours being part of it. AMIR, on this occasion, decided to propose a new itinerary called Colonial Florence, to tell the story of the city's colonial past from a different point of view.

### 2.7.1 Upcoming activities.

For the fifth edition of the project, new activities have been planned for primary and secondary schools, including offering a package of visits and possible workshops or lessons on specific topics, such as decolonization or interculturality. AMIR considers it essential for young people to develop a greater awareness of the issues of cultural exchange and social inclusion, especially considering that many classes consist of children of different origins.

In October, moreover, AMIR is organising the training of new mediators since many have left the project over the past year, making it increasingly difficult to manage the various visits. It is

expected that one-half of the new mediators will be from SPRAR centres and the other, composed of people who have already been in Italy for years, to balance and speed up the learning process of language and content.

From October to January, these new participants will be invited to follow the various visits to learn the method and then they will be able to start participating actively as mediators from March. In addition, a conference will be organised on interculturality in November, which has been postponed since March 2020. It will be aimed at museums and their operators, so practitioners can explore specific topics that are otherwise overlooked. Another appointment scheduled for March 2023 is the week against racism when like every year they will plan many different activities such as visits, workshops, podcasts, and video lessons.

The project has put a lot of effort into creating content for the Instagram channel (which has grown from 300 to nearly 2,000 followers), which has been managed since 2021 by an Amir mediator of Brazilian origin who has boosted the Facebook channel and created a web communication campaign to promote the project to foreign communities residing in Florence, migrants staying in reception centers, Italian visitors, school groups, families and informal groups.

Nevertheless, AMIR's following goals are focused on engaging the new mediators. The latter can participate and enable the resumption of those activities lost with Covid-19, such as the visits in Arabic to the Fondazione CR Firenze.

## *2.8 Other intercultural projects in Florence.*

In addition to AMIR, two other interesting cross-cultural projects have emerged in Florence, one at the Uffizi Museum and the other at Bargello. In 2016, the Director of the Uffizi Galleries, Eike Schmidt, established the Department of Cultural Mediation and Accessibility to bring to the museum both the so-called "new publics" (e.g., citizens of immigrant origin) and that segment of potential visitors, who for various reasons (disability, socio-economic hardship, etc.) have difficulty in attending the museum. The idea was born to activate a project dedicated to new citizens in this context. It started with a survey of foreign residents in Florence, weaving relationships with cultural and community associations in the area to learn about their relationship with the museum. To make the Uffizi an increasingly open place and attentive to the relationship with the entire city community, freeing the museum from the stereotype of the

elitist site, the Cultural Mediation and Accessibility Area, in collaboration with Simona Bodo and Maria Grazia Panigada, developed *Fabbriche di Storie* in 2019.

This project also builds on an intercultural experience previously developed by Uffizi, called *Sguardi dal Mondo*. The *Fabbriche di Storie* took place in several stages: first, there was a selection of the works and subsequent construction of the narratives in the exhibition spaces; then, there was the development and drafting of the texts to be used for the recording of the audio tracks; and finally, through the recording and editing, they created the audio path.

The audio tracks can be downloaded from the Uffizi website and major podcasting platforms such as Spotify and Apple Podcasts. Therefore, this project consists of recording several videos made by nine Florentine citizens of immigrant origin, who present some of Uffizi's works and artistic content, offering never-before-seen points of view both in their mother tongue and Italian.

The choice to involve these young people amplifies the narrative potential of the project because it encourages the interweaving of different knowledge and experiences: the gaze of people with foreign origins sheds new light on things that may seem more obvious or sometimes obsolete to us. Moreover, the project includes four museum workers to increase professionalism and reflect a commitment by the Uffizi to create a heterogeneous, broadened, and inclusive interpretive community.

The project's culmination was creating an audio journey divided into twelve narratives, in which «the history of the works is interwoven with personal stories that touch on universal themes: from family to friendship, from prayer to travel»<sup>86</sup>. The voices in the audio tracks were donated free of charge by great actors and actresses of Italian theatre.

The other project, *Museum is Community*<sup>87</sup>, takes place in the Bargello Museums from 2019. It is promoted by *L'immaginario* Cultural Association, which was established to create activities, tools and paths that give all people an active role in interpreting works of art, understanding their contents and constructing meanings.

Each edition involves museum educators and people of immigrant origin who have formed a multicultural work team over time. So far, three editions have been held respectively in Bargello National Museum, Casa Martelli Museum and Palazzo Davanzati. The project consisted of several stages: an initial one of training, in which the group of people from Italian and immigrant backgrounds follow a path that enables them to carry out cultural mediation. Participants freely choose works/themes/environments to work on based on connections with

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<sup>86</sup> <https://www.uffizi.it/news/fabbrichedistorie>

<sup>87</sup> <https://patrimonioeinterculturala.ismu.org/progetto/museo-e-comunita/>

their personal experience and history; then, a co-design of the visit itinerary takes place. Sharing with the working group serves to highlight the strengths of each narrative but also to develop further narrative insights through discussion. Every year the participants are invited to share the content of the individual stages set, write a storyboard and create digital storytelling accessible to all on the website. The project's premise is the conception of the museum of the third millennium as a meeting place not only between past and present, but also and especially between the different cultures that make up contemporary society.

Museums thus can play a significant social role, not only through their collections but also through relational and interpersonal educational action, through the exchange between different cultures and civilisations to help create a shared identity, a mutual understanding of the past and one's history, to foster a shared vision of the future.

Of course, these general objectives are common to the three projects, but they are implemented differently. For example, Uffizi and Bargello collaborated with a much smaller number of mediators than AMIR, the only ongoing one. They concluded with digital storytelling in order to obtain an archive of the testimonies of encounters with the museum and its collections, accessible to all.

AMIR shows some similarities with the *Museum is Community* project, as they both have the training and subsequent visits held by mediators. However, the Bargello creates mixed groups made up of people of both immigrant and Italian origin. Thus, AMIR has a more excellent continuity in its activities and demonstrates its social role within the museums, with the implementation of several visits held by mediators only of migrant origin unlike the other two projects, which see a more restricted involvement of the participants in the cultural institutions. Bargello's project, unfortunately, ended after three editions, whereas *Fabbriche di Storie* was even more limited as it started and ended with the production of the audio visits; AMIR thus seems to be the most long-lasting and continuous of all, both in terms of time and of objectives. Each year AMIR, following an evaluation of the previous year, proposes new activities and visits according to the needs and the critical issues that emerge over time.



## CHAPTER III – THE PROJECT APPRAISAL

### 3.1 *The mediators.*

At first, AMIR consisted of thirty-eight mediators from various origins, like Egypt, Angola, Brazil, Albania, Gambia etc. This made the group heterogeneous and complex as the different backgrounds of these people, and their cultural traditions sometimes led them to misunderstand each other and discuss. Some of them came to know about AMIR thanks to acquaintances and associations, while others decided to join the project after participating in a visit.

However, over the years, participants have learnt to know each other and to collaborate in a well-balanced manner. Now the group consists of thirty-four people, but only fourteen are currently active in the project and conduct guided tours every week.

During the past few months, I have interviewed seven of them: Pinto, Mary, Adriana, Zeina, Patrick, Ebrima, and Sanaa, who are currently the most actively engaged. They all come from different backgrounds, e.g., Pinto arrived here four years ago to join his uncle and study law at the university; Mary, Sanaa and Zeina have been in Italy for many years and joined the project because of their passion for art or a social purpose; Adriana and Ebrima got to know AMIR through a volunteering association they belong to.

On the other hand, Patrick arrived as a child from the Philippines, grew up in Italy, and joined the project thanks to one of his high school teachers. AMIR also involves second-generation migrants who do not share the same linguistic or cultural barriers. Still, it can become exciting and challenging for them to find out curiosities about their parents' culture. Patrick, for example, sees his identity as somewhat conflicted, and he says: «I am not enough Italian for Italians, nor Filipino enough for Filipinos».

As I explained in the previous chapter, mediators are divided among the various museums according to their choice. Therefore, they have different experiences because every museum and visit has its itinerary or approach. For example, some of them prefer working in the Fiesole area, while others, such as Patrick, really appreciate visits to the suburbs because they have more flexible contents, as they are unfamiliar places to the majority so that during the formations, the mediators have to find out information about these unknown areas and create links, even though sometimes it is not so easy. The contents in more affirmed museum institutions generally relate to traditional topics.

This project for me is an excellent thing because it allows foreigners to enter the world of culture and to make people understand how various parts of the world influence Italian art. With the project, I can learn so many things not only about Florence but also about my own country. However, I have to do research in the library or online from time to time.

Zeina, Egypt

Furthermore, they appreciate that every museum develops specific visits for their collection, adding new content or different perspectives every year. Mediators are invited to recount the Florentine heritage from their point of view, integrating it with autobiographical accounts and stories from their country of origin.

Nevertheless, at first, they found it complicated as not everyone had a broad knowledge of their traditions and stories. Most of the time, the mediators had to do research about their country on the internet or through relatives to learn enough about their country so to enrich AMIR visits with their cultural background; blending different cultures is what makes the visits unique, and this encourages the mediators to keep doing research. Over time, connections have become more and more immediate and more manageable. It is essential that mediators now feel free to express their ideas and tell their stories and traditions without fear of being judged.

In the Amir project, while we were discussing the heritage of Florence, they would look at us and ask, “and what is it like for you?” and then I was curious to remember those things that my father used to tell me and that I didn’t listen to. I understood the importance of those stories, which enriched me personally and spiritually because this knowledge is lost nowadays. Still, it is essential to know how your ancestors did certain things, and this is a concept that I already knew of in Angola, but I only really understood and internalised it while I was part of the Amir project.

Pinto, Angola

The AMIR mediators, through the interviews, turned out to be enthusiastic about the project and the goals achieved. However, some of them are aware of the limits that society imposes on this type of project:

For me, it is essential to participate in this project because foreign children who see me explaining in a museum understand that they, too, may have that role one day; we, therefore, offer a new perspective in society. However, there is still extreme structural racism and today’s society demonstrates this in many ways, and even in AMIR, sometimes stereotypical ideas emerge, which

can be discussed altogether. I am sorry because, in the last twenty years, I have seen racism worsen and increase, and prevent a fundamental change in the structure of society.

Mary, Brasil

Nevertheless, mediators find it exciting to work together in museums and develop a trustful relationship with the educators, feeling part of a team and the cultural life in Florence; the educators indeed are always available for further information, and they explain the content with a simple language understandable to all:

When I started working for them, I was always eager to learn because they always welcomed me with kindness, gave me freedom of expression, and made me want to know more and more. They always let me say what I thought in front of the artwork. With all its different people and cultures, AMIR allowed me to learn to accept others and balance my culture with theirs. Also, it taught me to be more open and to learn how to express myself in public because they never demotivate you, they always encourage you.

Adriana, Albania

All mediators believe in this project's social inclusion purpose, which is also in line with the fact that most of them participate in other social initiatives or volunteering experiences. Still, this one is particularly appreciated as it combines art with social aims.

I told to myself that I have a crazy opportunity to teach people the African view, that is, really how Africans used to do before and still do today because there is a distorted view of what the African reality is; therefore, I make this project my resistance, this is my means to fight racism, which leads to the ruin of society and makes society unhealthy because children are born with stereotypes in their minds.

Pinto, Angola

Talking about the public's reaction, they told me that the visitors always look enthusiastic about the visits and the contents, and they especially appreciate the intertwining of emerging cultures. What they like most is that visitors feel free to ask questions and create a stimulating interaction which brings to an exchange of stories; also, the tours in the suburbs are very appreciated because people discover places they would never have explored otherwise. Not being traditional tour guides, they are glad they can have a less formal approach, keeping the audience's attention with unconventional stories.

People who attend the visits are always very interested in foreign cultures and ask mediators many questions. Moreover, over the years, the mediators became aware of the importance of their role in the museums, whereas, in the beginning, they felt more like guests of a place they didn't belong to:

I am not a tour guide; I am a cultural mediator. Therefore, I mediate between Florentine culture and my culture. The public at the beginning came because it was a new experience for them. Now, they come to get to know something new. We have our audience that has grown over the years.

Ebrima, Gambia

AMIR provides compensation to mediators for visits, which while not being a real fixed salary is still an incentive. Not many intercultural projects in Italy provide remuneration, which devalues the mediators' work. Although the mediators said they would also do the visits for free, as they believe in their social purpose, it is still fair to recognise the commitment and time required of the participants. Moreover, since many have another job, receiving payment encourages them to keep on, mainly because the project is time-consuming as it requires a constant study of the contents apart from the time of the visit itself.

Unfortunately, many people have left the project over the years. This has led to a problem managing visits as the number of facilitators is too tiny to provide for unannounced absences. Therefore, the mediators agreed that it is necessary to organise another training to get new members; consequently, the coordinators are working to recruit new mediators for next year to meet everyone's needs.

The participants felt that the visits should be publicised more to increase participation.

More promotions on social media let people know more about the project, and it would be interesting to go and present the project in the schools. In my opinion, the City of Florence should include these visits in schools, because they are very interesting.

Zeina, Egitto

Finally, a very interesting point that one of the mediators always stresses is that we must try to move more and more toward a real interaction rather than integration because it is only from a mutual exchange that we will achieve true changes.

### 3.2 *The partner museums.*

I decided to interview each partner museum's directors or project coordinators to understand their points of view and reasons for pursuing this project from year to year. All museums are part of the network *Museums of All* and have been part of the project from its inception because they felt the need to reach greater inclusiveness. Museums have been engaged in accessibility development for years: from intercultural experiences to any activity dedicated to various targets of the public.

However, among these cultural institutions, each one has its characteristics and consequently experienced the project differently. For example, being the Primo Conti Foundation tiny and specific, it initially created workshops with children and only later developed the modality of visits, in that they appeal only to a small audience interested exclusively in the figure of this artist.

Palazzo Vecchio and the Museo del 900, on the other hand, see a different approach to the collection and the public even though the same association runs them, Mus.e<sup>88</sup>; in fact, the latter is more suitable to AMIR visits as there is an audience more predisposed to intercultural dialogue, while the former one is more rooted into traditional contents.

AMIR has initially represented a bet for everyone because there was no telling how it would turn out, both from the public and the mediators. The latter, however, surprisingly always proved to be enthusiastic and participatory, and this led to excellent collaboration with the museum operators; from the beginning, it was an experience that was not only a good opportunity for migrant people but also for museums to discover alternative narratives to the official ones.

On the part of the mediators, there is great enthusiasm, great participation; in fact, they always bring new considerations. AMIR is a multifaceted project and to make it grow, there is always a need for new themes and new points of view, not only coming from personal experience but we need to try to make more and more cultural references to the different countries of origin.

*Arabella Natalini, Director of the Museo degli Innocenti*

Intercultural dialogue, as the professionals I interviewed claim, is a process and not a result, requiring commitment and dedication as the involvement of people from different cultures

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<sup>88</sup> <https://musefirenze.it/muse/>

and with different sensitivities can clearly lead to complications of various kinds. Some museums shared a common problem, that is they have found difficulties always engaging the same educators due to a shortage of staff or management issues; however, in the last year, Stazione Utopia's coordinators specifically requested that educators who deal with mediators always be the same, in order to be able to create a stable and trusting relationship.

I thought it was important that the same people were always working with the mediators to have continuity because a real relationship was created between them over time. Only since this relationship was born, and it didn't happen right away, each of the mediators started to bring up seriously their observations. Still, it was much more difficult until we trusted each other and a relationship that went beyond that. They also took time to figure out what we were asking them, but more importantly, to find the way and the trust to say it.

*Silvia Borsotti, Director of Musei di Fiesole*

From the interviews, it emerged that the project has not overwhelmingly influenced so far the museum or its approach to the collection, as Renaissance collections have difficulty in approaching cross-culturalism; however, the training has been a tremendous enrichment for the staff because they have shown how heritage can be told in ways other than the academic one and how collaboration with people from different cultures can create new perspectives.

The success of the project is demonstrated by visits' bookings, which are highly appreciated, even though audiences who attend them usually are already sensitive to the topic; in fact, the museums all agree that there should be more promotion to gain wider popularity even among those who do not usually approach this kind of experience or museums in general.

It should be better promoted to make it more known, although it is not easy. Florentines are lazy in moving around, so they must be stimulated and urged. Indeed, social media works a lot and has good feedback, but it also needs to be promoted by other means. It is a project with a lot to give and a lot to develop, so there is much to do.

*Maria Chiara Berni, Manager of the archive and the library of Fondazione Primo Conti*

Visits always take place on weekends and are free. Mus.e for example, places its appointments on the first Sunday of the month, which is a free day at Florentine museums, where citizens flock and so the museums use the opportunity also to promote a certain kind of sensitivity to cultural heritage.

Some problems have been encountered over the past year due to a shortage of mediators and an increase in absences and delays that have sometimes led to organisational difficulties; however, there is still a strong desire to continue this project and expand it, so it is just a matter of organizing new training that can increase the number of mediators and bring further new insights.

We strongly believe in it and continue to believe in it. We are putting a new formation in the pipeline, which on the one hand means that every few years we have to change or expand the group, and this is definitely a big commitment, but on the other hand we avoid remaining in stable and predictable situations. The AMIR group is crucial because they are the key players in this project and so if they change, if they are participatory and motivated this makes a difference. In addition, work must also be done by the public, because it is a civic and social operation of opening horizons that is necessary for today's society, we are convinced of this.

*Valentina Zucchi, Manager of the Cultural Mediation of Mus.e*

Every interviewee, therefore, seems to be proud of her work, but at the same time aware of the commitment required to improve the museum's approach to its collections and to the intercultural concepts.

### *3.3 The public.*

During these three months, after each visit I attended, I stopped to talk to visitors to find out what they thought of the project, or I sent a questionnaire by email. The interviews refer to several visits made by partner museums and conducted by groups of different mediators, so comments may vary. Still, the general impression is that people are always enthusiastic and interested in participating again and recommend it to family and friends. Doing the internship I undertook from June to September, I met some problems in interviewing several visitors because, in summer, the turnout is meagre from the moment that the visits are aimed at Florentine citizens, who especially attend the museum during colder seasons; therefore, I've talked with around thirty people and most of the interviews have been conducted in September, when people came back from holidays.

Starting from the first questions, which were about how they found out about the project, their gender and their age, it emerged that target of audiences vary, and they usually become aware

of this kind of visit through social media or by word of mouth. Apart from school groups or visits organised for specific targets, the public comprises ninety per cent of women of adult age, generally over forty generally. From the other answers to the interviews, I assumed that results were very positive; it came out that a majority agrees that the level of fluency is usually excellent, but it depends on the kind of visit you attend and the group of mediators you meet because every tour is unique. Not everyone goes in the same way, anyway as someone said, even though fluency is:

Not optimal (many interruptions, poor narrative skills of the guides, information often repeated, little interaction with the audience). This is overcome by the mediators' great enthusiasm and passion for their work.

Giulia, 29

In addition, the project aims to create reciprocity, exchange, and subsequent integration on both sides through the interweaving of stories with direct involvement of the public; interviews show that this goal has been fairly achieved, as curiosity about other cultures has grown in visitors:

I think it is an innovative and exciting project. It concretely succeeds in creating connections between different cultures, fostering dialogue and raising awareness of issues not often dealt with in schools or the citizenry. It allows for a more complete and aware view of the city and some of the artworks.

Tessa, 22

Interviews revealed the fact that younger people are definitely more aware of the concept of interculturality in a broad sense. At the same time, the elderly appreciate the visits but fail to fully understand the purpose or complexity involved in these types of experiences, attending them with a more paternalistic or simply less informed approach. For example, here are two statements by older people: «Personally, I find the project a smart idea and feel like it is a respectable attempt that has to be added to language integration» (Paola, 67) and «the mediators should know and speak better Italian» (Tosco, 75).

While younger people can express more well-articulated responses:

I understand that intercultural projects require much commitment from the curators. Also, the participating audience, in my opinion, needs to be highly motivated to listen because, at certain



times, it may not be easy to follow the thread of the discourse [...] but if they are willing to look beyond the "formal" correctness, then they can grasp the deeper meanings of the experience.

Francesca, 28

The main problem is that a relevant sample of the public has never dealt with social inclusion activities, so they do not understand which are the aims of these visits, as they are only familiar with this project.

Nevertheless, most of the time visitors grasp at least their potential and seem to appreciate the fact that people of migrant origin can come into contact with our heritage and explain it by interweaving it with their own. As one of the interviewees said: «I think it is a beautiful idea, we can see our city from other points of view and people from other countries learn to know the new city they live in well (better than we do)» (Bettina, 39) or someone else, « I find it a clever way to look at the city with a different and enriching gaze» (Anna, 47). The younger visitors also understand there should be more cross-cultural visits to museums.

I don't like museums precisely because they don't mean much to me; they give me the impression that they are just a showcase to celebrate Italian art, contextualising it too little and commodifying it for tourists.

Rebecca, 27

In addition, it is very appreciated that visits are conducted by different mediators, who bring their perspectives and stories «you have different points of view, given the different backgrounds and ages of people» (Laura, 42) and «each mediator contributes to a choral narrative that amplifies meanings» (Gulia, 29).

Some visitors have also made suggestions to improve the visits, such as «I would add the linguistic aspect, like similarities, borrowings, and sounds of other languages». In contrast, the majority thought that there should be better time arrangements because sometimes mediators have difficulty summarising content due to the linguistic barriers «they could extend the time of the visit or split it in two different times by circumscribing the topic in each» (Rosangela, 67). Furthermore, everyone said there should be a better promotion because citizens do not know the project very well.

Taking into account that during the summer, many visits are booked through school summer centres, on such occasions, children have proved to be curious and often even participatory as

they are encouraged by the fact that the mediators express themselves in a simple language that they understand.

This year AMIR has decided to collaborate with primary and secondary schools to bring greater inclusivity among children and young people; in the last month, I had the occasion to participate in one of the first visits with seventeen and eighteen years old. During the interviews, it emerged that the youth appreciated the fluidity of the visit, and especially the alternation of the mediators, which they felt gave a greater dynamism and kept the attention higher: «The narrative of a city we know took on a different value, a perspective outside from our habits, a known place to be rediscovered» (female, 17). Most of them have developed a curiosity about other cultures and have shown interest in returning to other visits « It is interesting because, in addition to fostering interaction between different cultures, it allows those who attend to learn about the works from a different point of view» (female, 18).

In addition, many believe that AMIR gives a way to see our heritage with ‘different eyes’, primarily through direct testimonies, creating a dialogue with the public. It also emerged that young people believe that AMIR visits can be a way to entice people to go to museums: «I would recommend AMIR to those who feel like rediscovering Florence and to those who, bored with traditional history, might find new aspects of the artistic heritage, or to students to learn something different from what they find in books» (male, 18).

### *3.4 Critical issues and strengths.*

After three months of internship and an in-depth study of the characteristics of AMIR and other similar projects, I realised how many cross-cultural projects, as well as any participatory projects, require a great deal of commitment. Engaging people who do not share anything apart from an interest in participating entails an organisational difficulty, as coordinators are faced with all kinds of issues, from the personal problems of individual mediators to the logistical issues of the project, which takes time, but most of all, it takes dedication.

The fact that these cross-cultural experiences have not-so-abundant fundings means that only a small number of museum workers can devote themselves to them, so getting in close contact with mediators and keeping a cohesive group is very difficult.

After the first years of great enthusiasm, the project is now experiencing some critical issues, which urge coordinators to find new solutions, especially for maintaining a steady group of mediators.

One of the major difficulties resulting from the constant growth of the project is the loss of close relationships and a cohesive group among participants; this could result from several factors, such as the design of ever-changing visits and content that end up creating fragmentations, or a general decrease of motivation which sometimes can lead to misunderstandings also among the mediators. As a consequence, some people end up being less committed to the project by giving priority to other tasks, work and family related.

Furthermore, despite being paid, visits cannot replace an actual salary, and as the years go by, people who have other jobs have less and less time to devote to the project. Therefore, the coordinators initially decided to pay not only for the visits but also for the training, but unfortunately, this resulted in many participants only coming to the courses and after one or two visits disappearing, so now they are thinking instead to give a higher fee for the visits to incentivise participation.

It is important to highlight how remuneration is one of the significant distinguishing factors between various projects, as those that do not involve amount have difficulty lasting over time since mediators are less encouraged to participate because they do not feel remunerated for their commitment and work.

Considering the various intercultural projects carried out over the years, it is relevant to understand what factors can make projects more durable and effective as a means of inclusion. For example, AMIR is proving solid and willing to continue because it is focused on social inclusion. It differs from some experiences within *Multaka* or other projects in that it invites people with no knowledge of the cultural and artistic field to participate, while the others choose to involve foreign people who already benefit from a certain degree of education.

AMIR is focused on its social role, and visitors understand from the beginning that they are not attending a traditional visit, where mediators are wholly prepared on every topic. Still, any visit represents a meeting point among different cultures where everyone must feel comfortable and part of the same community.

Therefore, the main goal is not the perfect explanation of the contents, but rather a shift in perspectives for them and us, another look and another point of view not only on cultural heritage but also on social relations. Furthermore, coordinators are taking into account the idea that it would probably be better not to create a fixed group, which proved to be very difficult, but rather to do new training every two or three years to involve new people and keep

motivation high and also to have greater social inclusion with a renewed group of people of migrant origins.

Clifford's idea of the museum as a contact zone, albeit on a small scale, is affirmed in this project: «the museum must be reborn from the ashes as an instrument of active citizenship committed to facilitating integration through its cultural heritage preserves»<sup>89</sup>.

The museum must change the cultural and social space around it, be a leader in promoting heritage as a factor of social cohesion, and increase the sense of belonging of each individual, migrant and non-migrant, to the community. An urgent need is to activate a multi-voice process by making the museum a permanent place of encounter and relations between different cultures. Like most cross-cultural projects, AMIR still is under museum authority, which does not yet show genuine openness to social issues. Therefore, to move toward greater inclusion, each museum should include Amir in their regular programming, focusing a more significant effort on training mediators to deal with different audiences and also trying to democratise the decision-making process.

Museums, therefore, should take advantage of the Amir's experience to develop ad hoc materials within the collections, such as introducing new captions over the already established content or materials designed for audiences of foreigners, language equipment etc. It would be a breakthrough trying to include in their staff also some of the mediators, as well as including new professionals who should be in charge of a more inclusive communication to invite as many people as possible to be part of the cultural life.

The intercultural method should seek to distance itself from institutional control over the interpretations of the collections, acknowledging that museums are not neutral and that they have played a large part in the misrepresentation of cultures around the world for hundreds of years.

## CONCLUSIONS

The pressures exerted by technological change, heightened social tensions, the outbreak of pandemics and the looming threat of environmental disasters remind us daily how much we are

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<sup>89</sup> DA MILANO-FALCHETTI-GUIDA 2019, p. 122.

part of a symbiotic network of interdependencies that binds us to one another. Cultural institutions should represent these social emergencies by activating forms of action that go beyond aesthetic contemplation, making way for a new kind of more direct involvement that is both practical and emotional.

In recent years, many artists are responding to these needs, reacting to a system of values openly in crisis. Therefore, they have a solid desire to appropriate these spaces that should contribute to critical thinking and create meaning. This re-appropriation should occur through works of art that refer to today's society's problems and through projects involving the community.

This internship experience helped me understand how intercultural projects succeed in making people with a migration background feel like an active part of the local culture. However, much work still needs to be done to achieve social inclusion within museums. In fact, from my analysis of this project and similar ones, I deduced that the main difficulty of these experiences is to go beyond the classist and racist mentality we were raised with, as this requires a great deal of personal deconstruction work as our position of privilege leads us to feel superior to others and therefore to often approach with a presumptuous or charitable attitude. We take so many things in our daily lives for granted, and it is only through contact with others that we can understand their value and recognise our privileged status.

Despite these difficulties, what I appreciated most about this project was the human and empathetic side and how people and their feelings always come first. Good performance in visits is the result of a trusting relationship among all members. Indeed, mediators sometimes make mistakes or are not as prepared as they should be, but this is never a reason to scold them, but rather to encourage them to do better and better and to feel at ease in an environment that is usually hostile to them.

What makes this project even more special are the people who are part of it, from the mediators, and the museums' staff, to the project coordinators, Zita and Chiara. They immediately welcomed me into this 'big family', engaging me in every activity and discussion. The project, therefore, represents something to believe in, something that gives hope in seeing the museum as a place of encounter and exchange, especially in the political situation we are in now, which shows that every time the right-wing parties come to power, we face with a social defeat and that the spread of hatred and xenophobia blocks every step taken with effort and commitment to this type of projects. As I asserted in the last chapter, museums still have many changes to come through; nevertheless, AMIR represents an excellent starting point.

## INTERVIEW FORMS

### - MUSEUMS

- How long have you been a member of AMIR?
- Why have you decided to join the project?
- What do you think of the AMIR project?
- Have you had a good turnout so far? Have you experienced changes over the years?
- What type of audience is the most present?
- Do you think it is effective as a method of inclusion?
- Do you think it has influenced the museum's approach to the public and the collections?
- How can the project be increasingly integrated into the museum?
- What approach do educators use with mediators? Are there difficulties in the interaction?
- What difficulties emerge most frequently (in the organisation, management, communication)?
- Do you think there should be more promotion of the project?
- Do you think there should be more weekly visits?
- Do you think there would be more attendance if it were more publicised? Or are people not as interested in this type of visit?
- What improvements/changes would you make in the project for the following years?

## - MEDIATORS

- Age
- Where are you from?
- Tell me about your story (when and how did get to Italy?)
- How did you find out about AMIR?
- How many years have you been part of it?
- How do you relate to the project/ What do you think about it?
- Did AMIR impact your daily life - how did it affect you (language, interests, interpersonal relationships)?
- Which museums do you work in?
- Do you like the fact that there are multiple tours of different types for each museum?
- Which museum approach (training and project management) seems better to you? Why?
- Is it difficult to recount the Florentine heritage from a different perspective? Do connections to your home country come quickly to mind during training?
- Do you think AMIR is effective as a method of inclusion?
- Do you participate in other social inclusion initiatives?
- How do you perceive the reaction of the public? Have you noticed changes over the years?
- Does the payment seem fair to you? Would you still do it even without compensation?
- Is there anything you would change in the project?

- **PUBLIC**

- Age
- Gender
- Did you enjoy the visit?
- How do you rate the level of language fluency?
- How did you learn about about the AMIR project?
- Do you think the content discussed during the visit is original and interesting? What impressed you the most?
- Do you like the fact that there are more mediators passing the word around?
- Would you change anything in visit management or content?
- Did the visit spark your curiosity about other cultures?
- What are your thoughts about a guided tour of your city made by people of foreign origin?
- Do you feel that AMIR succeeds in its goals of creating social inclusion and developing intercultural dialogue within museums?
- Do you think there should be more cross-cultural visits to museums?
- Would you recommend it to other people?
- Will you go to more of AMIR's visits?



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