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*Participatory governance of cultural
heritage*

EENC Ad hoc question
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The present paper has been prepared, at the request of DG EAC, by the European Expert Network on Culture (EENC).

It is intended to serve as a supporting document for the first meeting of the Open Method of Coordination Working Group of Member States on the promotion of access to culture via digital means which will take place in Brussels on 16 April 2015.

The paper has been written, on behalf of the EENC, by Ms. Margherita Sani. The views expressed in the paper are the sole responsibility of the author and the EENC and in no way reflect the views of the European Commission.

About the author

Margherita Sani holds a degree in Literature and Philosophy (University of Bologna) and an MA in Museums and Galleries Administration (City University of London). Since 1985 she has been employed by the Institute of Cultural Heritage of the Region Emilia-Romagna, where she is in charge of international projects, in particular on museum education, lifelong learning and intercultural dialogue. In the last 15 years she has designed and managed several international and EU funded projects, some of which have been identified as best practice by the EU Commission. The most recent one LEM, The Learning Museum Network (www.lemproject.eu), has brought together 85 organisations from 25 European countries, the USA and Argentina. As LEM coordinator, she has recently been invited to join the Museum Ed-AMECO network, which gathers museum education organisations and museum networks in Canada and North America.

Ms. Sani is or has been member of various network boards and juries and has published extensively on the issue of heritage and heritage conservation.

“Participatory development is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, and the decisions and resources which affect them.”

(1994 Report of the World Bank Participatory Development Learning Group)

“Public participation” means to involve those who are affected by a decision in the decision-making process. It promotes sustainable decisions by providing participants with the information they need to be involved in a meaningful way, and it communicates to participants how their input affects the decision. (IAP2 – the International Association for Public Participation)

1. Heritage as common good and the notion of “communities”

In the common understanding, the term “common good” describes a specific “good” that is shared and beneficial for all - or most - members of a given community.

Common goods belong to no one, they are shared goods, but they benefit everyone. This is also true of cultural heritage which ultimately belongs to mankind and is held in trust by museums and cultural heritage institutes for future generations. If we speak of water, air, the environment, they are common goods in a global sense, but if we take a city’s historical centre, a monument, a local museum, a public garden, a landscape, these are goods which benefit in particular a community and can be key to local development, contributing to improve the quality of life of that community, and ultimately producing integration, social cohesion and a sense of belonging.

As recently pointed out in the conference “Heritage Commons: Towards a participative heritage governance in the third millennium” organized in September 2014 by the Italian Presidency of the EU: “As common goods, heritage resources require an evolved framework of collective (multi-level, multistakeholder) governance. This should recognize the role of all public and private actors and the rights of groups of interested citizens to actively participate in the maintenance, management and development of common heritage”.

Therefore, speaking of heritage resources as common goods immediately raises questions about the definition and the boundaries of the term “community” or “communities of interest” which, with different degrees of formality and involvement, increasingly identify and take ownership of what is of value for them, thus defining and reconfiguring heritage.

If the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society opened for signature by Council of Europe Member States in 2005 at Faro, Portugal,¹ defines a “*heritage community*” as consisting of “people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations”, the current literature refers to a variety of other communities all of which are to be taken into account when developing participatory processes: “*source communities*”, or “*communities of origin*” which are the ones from which, in the case of museums, for example, collections originate; “*user communities*”, e.g. visitors to a site or a museum, “*interpretive communities*”, referring to the active contribution in the interpretive and meaning making process of heritage according to constructionist theories², “*contemporary communities*”³, “*communities of practice*” or “*communities of interest*” defined as “informal, self-organized network of peers with diverse skills and experience in an area of practice or profession, held together by the members’ desire to help others (by sharing information) and the need to advance their own knowledge (by learning from others)”⁴; “*virtual communities*” or “*online communities*”, emerging as a result of the use of Web 2.0 where the increasing production of user generated content can in principle lead to the merging of all the above mentioned communities.

This is worth being noted. Already in the definition of “heritage community” in the Faro Convention no mention is made to space or territory, social status or other societal parameters. And even more now, if we consider “virtual communities”, the conceptual unity of “community” and “place” disappears. The concept of participation has traditionally been associated with that of a given community defined in spatial terms. This is no longer the case. The above mentioned definitions should help us avoid the risk of seeing communities - of whatever type - as homogeneous groups, overlooking differences in their composition.

As a consequence, when referring to participatory practices, our field of action widens enormously, to comprise “the aspirations of population groups which may not be linked by language, an ethnic tie or even a shared past, but are linked by purposive commitment to specific heritages”⁵.

¹ <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?CL=ENG&CM=8&NT=199>

² Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Interpretive Communities*, Paper presented at ‘Musing on Learning’ Seminar, Australian Museum, 20 April 1999, <http://australianmuseum.net.au/uploads/documents/2004/paper2.pdf>.

³ ICOM Code of Ethics, 2013 http://network.icom.museum/fileadmin/user_upload/minisites/icom-us/PDF/code2006_eng.pdf.

⁴ Business Dictionary Online 2011, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/community-of-practice.html>.

⁵ Daniel Théron, ‘Benefits and innovations of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society’, in *Heritage and Beyond*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2009, 9-11.

The Participation Paradigm

Participation is not a new concept in the museums and heritage fields. The “new museology” movement began in the 1960s, being fundamentally concerned with the democratisation of museum practices and stressing the importance of community participation in all aspects of museum work.

The term “integrated museum”, meaning an institution which takes into account social and political problems and acts as dynamic instrument of social change, was coined in 1972 at the UNESCO Roundtable on the Importance and the Development of Museums in the Contemporary World in Santiago del Chile. Whether directly or indirectly influenced by the Santiago Declaration, new museum models developed in other parts of the world (ecomuseums in France, museums of indigenous communities in North America), showing a strong commitment to and involvement of the local communities.

In the 1980’s the New Museology (André Desvallées 1980 and Peter Vergo 1989) contributed to the discussion by stressing aspects of social inclusion, access and representation in museum work.

Drawing from her research work and field studies in Indonesia and South East Asia, Christina Kreps underlines the importance of a participatory approach to successfully carry out museum development projects by valuing traditional knowledge and incorporating indigenous curatorial practices and defines ‘appropriate museology’ as “an effort to refashion professional museum practices and technologies to better fit local cultural contexts and socioeconomic conditions”⁶.

However, it was only more recently with Nina Simon’s book “The Participatory Museum” (2010), that the participatory paradigm was fully explored in its theoretical and practical implications, Nina Simon’s book presents an interesting categorization of participatory practices into four types which are relevant not only for museums, but for a wide range of heritage contexts:

Contributory projects, where visitors are solicited to provide limited and specified objects, actions and ideas to an institutionally controlled process.

Collaborative projects, where visitors are invited to act as active partners in the creation of institutional projects that are originated and ultimately controlled by the institution.

Co-creative projects, where community members work together with institutional staff members from the beginning to define the project’s goals and to generate the programme or exhibit based on community interests

Hosted projects, where the institution turns over a portion of its facilities and/or resources to present programmes developed and implemented by the public”⁷.

⁶ Christina F. Kreps, *Appropriate museology in theory and practice*, in *Museum Management and Curatorship* Vol. 23, No. 1, March 2008, 23-41.

⁷ Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, Santa Cruz, 2010, p. 187.

If initiatives relating to the contributory or collaborative types of projects are quite frequent (e.g. the involvement of the public in the planning and production of exhibitions, through focus groups; the setting up of advisory groups representing different segments of the local community, their needs and interests prior to the opening of new galleries or of a new museum; the “bring/donate your object” invitation addressed to the public to contribute to the increase of the museum collections), as we move towards the more truly participatory end of the continuum, where not only participation, but shared responsibility comes into play, examples tend to become more scarce. Likewise, fewer examples seem to be available when moving from the front of house activities (exhibitions, education) to the back stage functions (collecting, conservation) which are still in most cases considered to be the exclusive domain of the professionals.

In this context, however, one shouldn't forget those cases where the initiative of managing a cultural good in a collaborative way is not taken by public authorities or by the owners, but is the result of citizens' initiative to reclaim and re-use a long time unused building, for example. There are cases where a theatre, a formerly industrial area, etc. have been brought back to life by the sole effort of passionate citizens or local associations who spend time and resources to restore and upgrade a space, which is then given back to the community and its function of "common good" reinstated. We could call these *Grassroots projects* and add them to Nina Simon's taxonomy as a fifth case. However, these bottom-up projects are analysed in David Wilcox's book, which stresses the importance of supporting local initiatives⁸.

Participatory approaches should be context specific and adapted to circumstances, depending on the different heritage resources, but also on whether we deal with contributory, collaborative, co-creative, and hosted or grassroots projects.

2. Participatory practices vs Participatory governance

In the report written for the Paul Hamlyn Foundation in 2010 “Whose cake is it anyway?”⁹, after examining 12 museums across the UK, Bernadette Lynch comes to the following conclusion: decades of public funding aimed to increase engagement and participation in UK museums, have produced many examples of innovative practice, but have failed to build participatory work into the institutional fabric of the organisations, or - as she says - to shift it “from the margin to the core” of the organisation. In some cases, the opposite has happened: funds provided outside core budgets to undertake participative activities have contributed to keep them on the

⁸ David Wilcox, The guide to effective participation, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1994, p. 13. Available at: <http://partnerships.org.uk/guide/guide1.pdf>

⁹ Bernadette Lynch, *Whose cake is it anyway?*, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2011, <http://www.phf.org.uk/page.asp?id=1417>.

organisation's periphery. And when external funding is no longer available, one could conclude, also participatory work will come to an end.

Lynch's research showed all the limits and pitfalls of participatory work if this is not embraced by the organization as core value: the disillusionment of community members who feel their input is not really valued; their resentment and frustration in realising that their contribution is simply used as a means to rubber-stamp existing plans; the dissatisfaction of staff in the relationships with their community partners. It also showed however, that the present funding crisis can be an opportunity for some museums to refocus on their local community and work with them in a truly collaborative way.

In the case of museums it is maybe a matter, as Mark O'Neill explains, of shifting from the Elite Model (focused on collections) and the Welfare Model (adding visitor services like education and marketing to an elitist core), to the "Social Justice Model" which integrates public engagement strategically into the structures and makes it a responsibility of all staff¹⁰.

It is ultimately a political and strategic decision, as there is a huge difference between setting up and, in many cases, successfully delivering short term, one off participatory projects and sharing responsibility, which is what "participatory governance" should be about.

To turn the former into the latter a clear vision and a leadership which places public engagement at the core of the organisation's values are needed. In addition, participatory governance requires a cultural and structural change, where the organisation demonstrates to be ready to share institutional decision making with a wider public.

Governance structures of cultural heritage organisations usually do not offer the public any formal role and therefore limit their deeper and long term impact. If the decision is taken to share responsibilities and governance with other stakeholders, cultural heritage organisations will have to adopt new management models.

3. Cultural heritage and volunteers: building alliances with the community

Volunteering is probably the most common and straightforward example of public or community involvement in a cultural institution's life. Organisations like the National Trust in the UK rely heavily on volunteers and have put into place a series of programmes to train, motivate and retain volunteers, contributing to their personal and professional development in a mutually

¹⁰ Mark O'Neill, 'Museum Access – Welfare or Social Justice?' in *Heritage, Regional Development and Social Cohesion*, Jamtli Forlag, 2011

profitable exchange. In order to accommodate the contribution of this unpaid workforce, however, cultural organisations have to make adjustments.

In 2007 the EU funded project VoCH, Volunteers for Cultural Heritage¹¹, researched the phenomenon at European level, identifying different types of voluntary work, the areas in which cultural volunteers are engaged and looking at the change occurring in the organizations hosting them.

It turned out that, far from being a simple replacement of paid staff, a volunteer “costs” in time and monetary terms and requires organizational adjustments which should not be underestimated. In fact, in order to be effective, a volunteer programme has to be planned well, supported by a clear vision and forward plan, meet the needs of the organisation and fit with the organisational mission, involve staff at all levels and at all stages, be adequately resourced, be aware of the context externally and work in partnership with external agencies.

It also requires internal advocacy to ensure that cultural heritage professionals and trustees understand the benefits of involving volunteers in their work. The value of working with volunteers goes beyond the simple achievement of a task. When cultural organisations include volunteers, they engage key supporters in their vision and mission. Volunteers, in turn, are invaluable advocates for a museum or heritage site, bringing passion and commitment to the way in which they communicate with audiences and potential audiences. Volunteers can play an important role as “bridge” between heritage organisations and the rest of the community, which is much more significant than simply being an instrument to cope with lack of financial or human resources.

4. Participation in the digital era

The digital world offers an opportunity for institutions working with heritage, culture and the arts to connect with audiences in ways which were unthinkable of only a decade ago.

Traditionally, heritage institutions have offered their audiences a pre-defined content for interpretation or educational purposes. Internet, and in particular social media, are challenging the traditional way in which cultural heritage content is developed and communicated and have introduced a new community of interest: the ‘virtual’ or ‘online community’. In the era of Web 2.0 the distinction between users and producers is blurred and there is an increasing production of user generated content, data and information can be collected via crowdsourcing and the new media offer the possibility to give voice to different narratives, This gives museums and cultural

¹¹ www.amitie.it/voch.

institutions an opportunity to re-position themselves as architects or organisers of newly established knowledge networks¹².

Of course there is concern about the quality of the content created through public participation, but this shouldn't be a problem if the museum or heritage organization retains the power to validate the data.

The Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency, for example, is building an extensive database of Dutch archaeological finds and monuments eliciting information from a number of different stakeholders including amateurs and creating the conditions (via thesauri and linked open data models) for different players to access and use the data the way they want.

Via digital means heritage organisations can increase access and participation and play the same facilitating role with regard to an online community any heritage organization plays when engaging in participatory activities with a local community or a physically identified group of people.

5. Participatory governance models and organizational culture

In the cultural heritage field, participation connotes particular kinds of relationships between institutions and communities – be they physical or virtual – as well as particular approaches to practice. Participation is part of an ongoing process of democratisation of cultural institutions by which they acknowledge that knowledge, experiences, and skills of local people or laymen hold as much value as those of experts.

A participatory institution therefore understands that all its stakeholders - audiences, employees, managers, trustees, etc. – can contribute to the achievement of its mission and objectives and puts in place all strategies to create the conditions for the co-creation of content, narratives and values.

The benefits of the integration of participatory approaches in the running of cultural heritage organisations are clear: engaging the public, alongside professionals, in managing cultural, historical and natural resources can create a greater sense of collective ownership in the community and facilitate the sustainability of the cultural organisations involved in the long run. But a participatory approach also requires adjustments in the governance structure and a change in the organizational culture of the institutions involved. The cultural organization must be ready to cede authority, stakeholders have to be given a real opportunity to have a say.

¹² Frank van Harmelen, Jacco van Ossenbruggen, *Connected content, connected organisations – An appraisal of RCE's vision for a Dutch Heritage Digital Infrastructure*, 2015, Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, 2015.

Whether a participatory process is “top down” or “bottom up” is probably a false problem, as it is more likely to be both. Empowering stakeholders in any case begins as an institutionally controlled process, or maybe could be better described as an “institutionally facilitated” process, where the cultural organization acts indeed as broker. The “brokering” or “facilitating” role of cultural heritage professionals in participatory processes is recurring in the literature and seems to be key to their success. “The group will function far more smoothly if it is led by someone. This person doesn’t necessarily need to understand the full complexity of the situation, but does need to be seen as nonthreatening and without significant biases. Think of this person as an honest broker or a local Champion”¹³, or “When building a virtual and physical network, to overcome potential mistrust you have to make clear to all stakeholders that your goal is not to be a dominating player. It has to be an equal playing field, in which every organization has its position and the museum is not at the centre of all”¹⁴.

The theoretical framework developed by Daniel Laven and others to assess the successful management of U.S. National Heritage Areas (NHAs)¹⁵ provides other useful elements along these lines. National Heritage Areas are designated by the Congress, but management is retained at local level through the creation of private-public networks. While constructing - in a participative way with different stakeholders- the four components which make up the model (1. core ingredients, i.e. resources and investments to initiate and sustain the programmes, 2. guiding strategies, 3. implementation activities, 4. accomplishments, i.e. achievements that provide evidence of progress over time), the following elements were identified as essential for National Heritage Areas to operate effectively: “the use of ‘heritage’ as a public engagement strategy, the development of intersectoral networks, and collaborative approaches to management. More specifically: bringing together different actors at regional level, building partner capacity, implementing projects that cut across multiple sectors, maintaining a grassroots perspective while ensuring that management and governance activities are conducted in open, participatory, and inclusive ways, adopting a collaborative leadership style, described as the ability to “share the credit” and “share the risk” inherent in complex projects”¹⁶. The conclusion is that, provided that these elements are in place, a heritage based approach proves successful in bringing together around a shared vision and shared objectives the different components of an area and ultimately achieves landscape-scale stewardship and development.

¹³ James Carter (ed.), *A sense of place. An interpretive planning Handbook*, 2001

https://portal.uni-freiburg.de/interpreteurope/service/publications/recommended-publications/carter_sense-of-place.pdf.

¹⁴ Dirk Houtgraaf, “From ‘a museum with a network’ to ‘a network with a museum’” in the *Virtual Museum*, The Learning Museum Network Project, 2012

<http://www.lemproject.eu/WORKING-GROUPS/Partner-in-Evidence>.

¹⁵ Daniel N. Laven , Jennifer L. Jewiss & Nora J. Mitchell (2013): ‘Toward Landscape- Scale Stewardship and Development: A Theoretical Framework of United States National Heritage Areas’, *Society & Natural Resources: An International Journal*, 26:7, 762-777,

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08941920.2012.723304>.

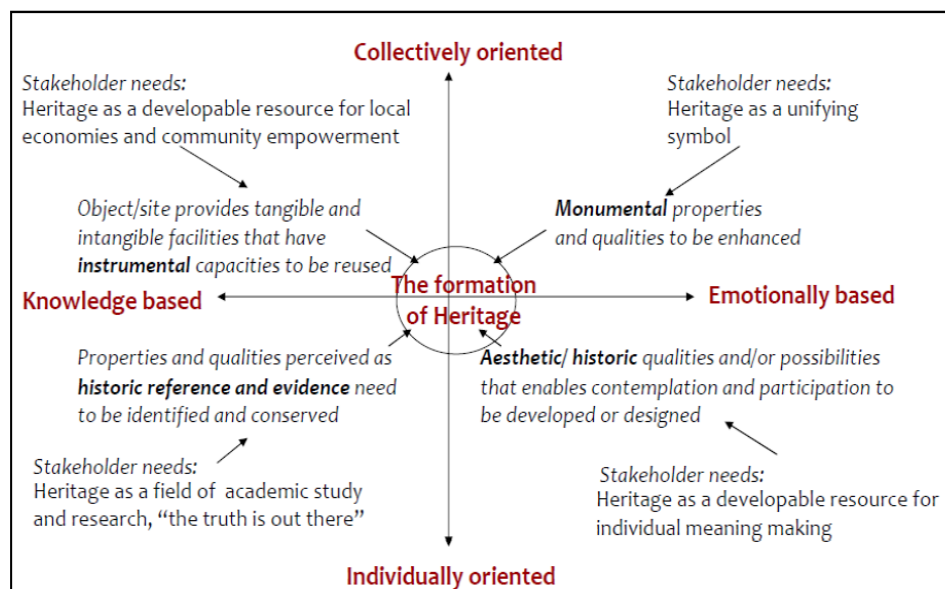
¹⁶ Daniel N. Laven , Jennifer L. Jewiss & Nora J. Mitchell (cit).

Ethics of participation

Participatory projects are time-consuming; they require efforts and time to build relationships, understanding and trust between members of the institution and other stakeholders. At organization level they raise questions of internal organizational change, which involve risk taking, challenging the hierarchical and governance structures and relinquishing authority.

In this delicate process it can be useful to refer to a set of principles, such as the Code of Ethics and the Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation developed by the International Association for Public Participation¹⁷. The values speak equally of the rights to information and communication of decision makers, as of those who will be affected by such decisions. They also declare the right of all those involved in a participatory process to design the ways in which they participate.

In the present case, it would be appropriate, if not ethical, to also take into account the values different stakeholders can attach to the heritage at stake. Depending on the heritage resources and the more or less intimate relationship people entertain with them, needs, expectations and perceptions of the individuals involved might vary. In his study of how industrial remains come to be identified as heritage by a community and included in a conversion process which brings them back to use creating a bridge between past and future, Bosse Lagerqvist develops a model for analysing different stakeholder's needs and values which I think might be useful in any heritage context¹⁸.



¹⁷ <http://www.iap2.org/>.

¹⁸ Bosse Lagerqvist, 'The landscape of industrial heritage and issues on heritage valuation', *Environment - Landscape - European Identity. 2011 Annual meeting of the Faculty of Geography, University of Bucharest, Romania, 2011*.

Different needs from different stakeholders provide a decision base for actions deploying conservation, restoration, reconstruction, design, addition and demolition.

The argument is that heritage is formed and defined by people and that it will acquire and develop meaning if that interaction continues: "...it is necessary to understand heritage in its broader context as an arena for continuous change and development through ongoing socio-cultural processes. In that process the historical narrative could be of increased importance not only for museological interpretations and representations, but also for a local community where the historical past could be intertwined with all sorts of societal development"¹⁹.

¹⁹ Bosse Lagerqvist, (cit).

Annex 1

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