EUROPEAN
POLICYBRIEF

CULTURAL INCLUSION: RETHINKING (MUSEUM) HERITAGE, FROM CONSERVATION TO CONVERSATION

The brief addresses the Cultural inclusion axis, i.e. the way in which museums have traditionally functioned as spaces that tend to work against contemporary social and political concerns for cultural diversity and inclusion, and how these often highly conservative institutions may still have the potential to disengage the heritage they preserve and interpret from its often "essentialised" association with the notions of identity and inheritance.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the second half of the last century, culture has experienced a profound mutation, through which its position and role in social dynamics have been transformed to constitute an essential basis of today's society. Cultural digitization and globalization have radically altered the cultural ecosystem and intensified the relationship between cultural identity, cultural heritage and cultural expression. This transformation has occurred both within the professional cultural sector as well as in society as a whole.

The **CulturalBase. Social Platform on Cultural Heritage and European Identities** project, funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme, aims to identify and analyse the main current debates and controversies as regards culture, in particular in

relation to cultural heritage and European identities from a double standpoint, namely, an analytical as well as a public policy perspective. To carry out this work, three axes have been prioritised: cultural memory, cultural inclusion and cultural creativity.

The present **policy brief** addresses the Cultural inclusion axis, i.e. **the way in which museums have traditionally functioned as spaces that tend to work against contemporary social and political concerns for cultural diversity and inclusion, and how these often highly conservative institutions may still have the potential to disengage the heritage they preserve and interpret from its often "essentialised" association with the notions of identity and inheritance**. Museums are not the only institutions entrusted with preserving and interpreting material and immaterial heritage, but have a unique power to construct and endorse dominant social and cultural narratives. The key issues, principles and practices explored in this brief as well as the suggested recommendations are relevant to other institutional contexts (e.g. libraries, archives, historical sites) which aim to create shared (physical and virtual) spaces where meaningful interaction takes place and all participants, recognised as being equal, are offered genuine opportunities for self-representation and collaborative meaning-making.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

"Fortress Heritage"?

Many European museums were founded in order to represent and validate national, local or group identities, as well as to celebrate mainstream values, through the heritage they preserve. This "historical" mission still largely underlies the narrative and messages conveyed by museums across Europe.

Furthermore, because of its close connection with the notion of "inheritance", heritage seems to refer to something that is attained once and for all by birthright, rather than developed by individuals throughout their lifetime; a perception that has informed the views of many policy makers and museum professionals, but also underpinned broader public understandings of heritage.

In fact, supporting a view of the world which is predominantly based on identity fault lines is ultimately leading "us" to deny the right of "the others" to take part in the European way of life, not only in the economic and social, but also in the cultural sphere ("European cultural heritage as European property", or in any case as a "privilege of the few", see Kouki 2016). That is why, in François Matarasso's words, "it is time that governments, agencies concerned with heritage, cultural bodies and artists, among others, began to rethink how heritage is imagined, defined and interpreted. Otherwise, and notwithstanding the rising calls for immigrants to "integrate" better or adopt largely unspecified European cultural values, it is difficult to see how to avoid, intentionally or unintentionally, creating divisions within society […] between those who belong and those who do not, those who can speak and those who cannot" (Matarasso 2004).

Rethinking heritage from a participatory, dialogical, intercultural perspective is an important pursuit, holding the potential to impact all European citizens, whether "old" or "new". Museums as intercultural spaces can function not only to promote the cultural rights of migrant communities, but also to nurture in *all* individuals those attitudes, behaviours and skills (including cognitive mobility, the ability to question one's own points of view and to challenge stereotypes, the awareness of one's own multiple identities) which are indispensable in a world of increasing contact and interaction between culturally different views and practices.

In the light of these reflections, the key question is: in an increasingly "plural" Europe, how can museums become places where not only the understanding of heritage is deepened (which is all too often connected with concerns of enhancing "heritage literacy" and filling "cultural deficits"), but also where participative, cross-cultural and creative encounters can take place, and where new knowledge systems, relationships and interpretive communities can be initiated?

Museum policy approaches to address the growing diversity of European societies

In the past ten years, especially starting from the preparation of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in 2008 (for which a survey was commissioned to the ERICarts Institute by the European Commission DG Education and Culture, see ERICarts 2008), countless surveys, reports, papers, guidelines, databases have been produced, and working groups / consultation platforms created, in order to explore the ways in which cultural institutions are addressing the growing diversity of European societies, and therefore to identify key challenges and implications for future work.

Based on this wealth of evidence, *three prevailing policy approaches* have been identified in the museum domain, which may be briefly described as follows:

- *encouraging an increased understanding and greater recognition of "other" cultures, which have traditionally been misrepresented or made invisible in European museums* ("showcasing difference"); although this approach may take very different forms, what often distinguishes it is not so much a will to encourage attendance and participation on the part of migrant communities, as to promote a "knowledge-oriented multiculturalism" directed principally at an autochthonous audience;

- *integrating "new citizens" within mainstream culture, by helping them to learn more about a country's history, language, values and traditions* ("heritage literacy"); in the best of cases, these initiatives are rooted in communities' needs and expectations, rather than driven by curatorial and institutional interests, or transitory political and social agendas; in the worst, they are informed by a patronising attitude;

- *promoting cultural self-awareness in migrant communities through "culturally specific" programming*: alongside initiatives such as exhibitions and events drawing on "ethnographic" collections, intended to redress the under- or misrepresentation of specific minority groups, and developed in close cooperation with them (as opposed to the "showcasing difference" approach described above), there has been a growing interest in collections or programmes that reflect the cultural heterogeneity of a region or city's population and those which explore topics (such as the history of immigration, colonialism and slavery) that enable diverse cultures to be represented.

The ERICarts survey found that these approaches, as different as they may be, often have some key features in common (ERICarts 2008, Bodo 2012):

- they tend to be underlined by a static, essentialist notion of heritage, which is primarily seen as a "closed" system, a received patrimony to safeguard and transmit;

- they generally avoid cross-cultural interaction, and build programmes/activities which are targeted either to "migrants" or to a "native" audience (in other words, also audiences are "essentialised");

- even where interaction between different groups *is* encouraged, the main aim is to promote mutual knowledge and respect, rather than to initiate new knowledge systems, relationships, interpretive communities;

- they are generally reluctant to identify tensions and conflicts which may be dealt with in order to change attitudes and behaviours (quite predictably, it is much more reassuring for museums to exclusively embrace the rhetoric of "diversity as a richness");

- more in general, they conceive intercultural dialogue as a *goal* or pre-determined outcome, rather than as an interactive *process* which is ingrained in a museum's practice.

These reflections are obviously not meant to suggest that the policy approaches outlined above are to be discredited or abandoned; on the contrary, they all have a vital role to play, from supporting a multicultural base, to compensating the past misrepresentation of "other" cultures in museums and other heritage institutions; from recognising museums as "social agents" addressing the issue of migrants' and refugees' cultural rights, to helping individuals and groups maintaining a vital link with tradition, whether it be in the form of "cultural specific programming", migration museums or "migration heritage" interpretive practices.

What the ERICarts study rather wished to argue – and remains to date a crucial issue, whose potential is still largely untapped – is that these approaches would find a new, fuller legitimacy in so far as they are seen to be part of a *process/journey* which is ultimately aimed at allowing individuals to cross the boundaries of "belonging", and to reshape cultural participation and self-representation on their own terms, rather than being pigeon-holed as "minority groups".

The challenge, in other words, is to:

- go beyond policies targeting individuals and groups according to their racial origin and ethnicity, working on identity as "the start rather than the end of the conversation" (Khan 2010) – or, in other words, addressing needs, not backgrounds;

- facilitate new connections between people and objects, thereby generating new, inclusive meanings/narratives around collections – which means going beyond the static notion of "heritage", and exploring new interpretation strategies and methodologies;

- and (ultimately) reshape heritage as a shared space of social and cultural interaction, rather than as a mark of distinction.

Museums as "intercultural spaces": exploring new paradigms

In the light of these reflections, it is not hard to see how substantial a change is required in most museums' policies and working practices.

Drawing on the experience of ground-breaking practices in Italian museums – systematically documented in "Patrimonio e Intercultura",[1] a platform launched in 2007 – there seem to be *three key preconditions for reinterpreting heritage in a truly intercultural perspective*, i.e. shifting the focus:

From heritage as "substance" (or conservation) …

a closed system, the "neutral remains of the past" (Matarasso 2004): static, consolidated, "of outstanding universal value" (UNESCO *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, 1972) – an *inheritance* to safeguard and transmit

… to heritage as "process" (or conversation)

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[1] "Patrimonio e Intercultura"/"Heritage and Interculture" is an online resource promoted by Milan-based Fondazione ISMU – Initiatives and Studies on Multiethnicity. Over the years, it has become a unique observatory of heritage education projects in an intercultural perspective, with no parallel in other European countries. Along with the website, and in close connection with it, the "Heritage and Interculture" programme also includes training courses, publications and toolkits, seminars and conferences, joint planning and running of intercultural projects in partnership with museum institutions.

a cultural wealth, both material and immaterial, that should not only be preserved and passed on to the next generation, but also renegotiated, reconstructed in its meanings, constantly questioned and rediscovered by individuals who breathe new life into it – a *resource* to trigger reflection, new insights, self-questioning, interaction, recognition, representation and self-representation, personal growth, community cohesion.

From the museum as a place of conservation …

the only authority entrusted with the interpretation of collections and with the preservation of their integrity, both physical and scientific

… to the museum as a place of interaction and collaborative meaning-making

an open, "relational" institution consulting and actively involving diverse audiences, encouraging multiple visions and interpretations, welcoming new voices and narratives.

From intercultural education as "didactic of difference" …

"the other" as an object of knowledge, "cultures" as static and self-contained organisms – emphasis on the knowledge of cultural diversities

… to intercultural education as a transformative practice

"the other" as an individual with whom to engage in a real relationship – emphasis on interaction, exchange, challenging one's own cultural assumptions, initiating new knowledge systems and awareness*.*

This shift in focus is clearly visible in a number of *experimental strands of practice* which need not be understood as separate approaches – each one guided by its own rationale and methodology – but rather as virtuous practices intersecting, nurturing and cross-fertilising one another:

- training and actively involving museum mediators with an immigrant background in the planning of narrative trails, collaborative exhibitions etc. with a view to exploring a more dialogical, multi-vocal interpretation of collections (both "European" and "extra-European");

- engaging mixed groups ("native" and with a migrant background) in the development of new narratives around collections through storytelling, theatre techniques and other unconventional mediation methodologies, starting from the premise that project participants can provide a significant contribution to the knowledge, understanding and interpretation of museum objects, and help overcome the museum's self-referential language, often elitist and based on scientific expertise only;

- promoting a gradual acquaintance between audiences and collections, by initiating a dialogue between museum objects and "objects of affection", and creating a shared heritage of stories and life experiences of individuals (not only project participants, but also museum staff, educators and mediators) with different cultural and social backgrounds;

- encouraging the symbolic adoption of museum objects as a means of building new bridges, creating a new "resonance", revealing unexpected links between artefacts and people;

- promoting the interaction between project participants and contemporary artists in order to develop new perspectives on the notions of heritage or identity, and to experiment with unconventional interpretation and relational methodologies, mediated through contemporary art languages.

All of these experimental strands share a commitment to encourage individuals (whether they be museum operators, mediators with a migrant background or "simple" project participants) to choose the heritage/objects with which they want to engage in a dialogue without necessarily having to wear the "uniform of culture", and therefore to explore heritage – its contemporary value and relevance – from unusual perspectives, acknowledge its different layers of meaning,

appreciate its potential "resonance" with personal life experiences (rather than just "cultural backgrounds").

<div style="background-color:green;">POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</div>

Based on the analysis presented so far, a series of recommendations are provided aimed at a range of policy-makers at European, national, regional and local levels.

1. Greater focus should be placed on exploring those strategies and programmes which, at least in the past decade, have been aimed at creating "shared spaces" (see experimental strands of practice above) where individuals are finally allowed to cross the boundaries of belonging and are offered genuine opportunities for self-representation and collaborative meaning-making. Such strategies and programmes are, in fact, far less visible and investigated than the more "traditional" policy approaches to promoting cultural inclusion for the increasingly diverse population living in Europe; and yet, they have shown a tremendous potential in terms of creating a more dialogical understanding of heritage, as well as more cohesive and diverse interpretive communities.

1.a. We recommend the development and maintenance of a European online facility (website) for the systematic gathering, archiving, sharing and disseminating of innovative intercultural museum practices across EU Member States; this would be not only a first step towards sharing expertise and knowledge at a European level, avoid fragmentation and duplication of projects, stimulate new initiatives; it could provide a shared framework for reporting on such practices, which would strengthen our understanding of what works in specific contexts, and enable more realistic assessments and appropriate comparisons between policies and programmes across Europe.

1.b. This online facility should place a particular emphasis on the *evaluation* of such strategies and programmes, not only to reflect on what works, what does not work, what are the short/medium/long term impacts of such practices, and to expand their scope and transferability, but also as a strategic asset for policy: more specific and longitudinal research designs are needed to gather the sorts of "hard" evidence politicians and policymakers require.

2. More in general, greater focus should be placed on research, information sharing and evaluation of *existing policies, practices and tools*: "the majority […] remain unknown to most citizens, including experts and academics in countries across the EU", whereas "we need to make the most of existing and finished projects and find new ways to link them and disseminate their findings" (CulturalBase Consortium 2016).

We recommend to single out projects/programmes which have proved to be particularly effective in developing tools for museums (and other heritage institutions) to manage institutional progression and change in dealing with diverse audiences,[2] and identify possible funding resources to provide support for "spin-offs" of these projects, so that they may be tested, implemented and "owned" by as wide a range of institutions as possible.

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[2] A relevant example is the benchmarking tool for diversity management in cultural institutions developed in the framework of the "Brokering Migrants' Cultural Participation" project (funded by the DG Home Affairs of the European Commission, "MCP Broker" may be seen as a continuation of the work on Access to Culture and on Intercultural Dialogue under the Open Method of Coordination), tracking the potential journey of a cultural institution from a basic level where MCP is an imposed agenda, to an advanced level where the cultural institution fully reflects society's diversity and promotes full-fledged cross-cultural interaction.

3. The genuine inclusion of "migrant" community voices in interpretation and display (*collective empowerment*) is a complex and time-consuming process, which has not only cultural, but also political, social and financial implications: if policy makers want to avoid tokenism when referring to the importance of involving diaspora organisations[3] in developing more inclusive and dialogical understandings of heritage, there is a clear issue of representation and recognition which needs to be addressed: "empowerment for a disempowered community means demanding power in the arena where you are invited to act" (Lagerkvist 2006).

We recommend to support accreditation schemes/procedures allowing diaspora organisations to be fully recognised as strategic partners in heritage interpretation strategies and programmes (in the framework of EU-funded projects in particular).

4. A greater and more systematic effort should be placed on the recognition and validation of migrants' skills and talents in heritage interpretation (*individual empowerment*). Experience has shown that when they are not merely involved as "guides" for their respective communities, but recognised as "new interpreters" to all effects of the museum's heritage, mediators with a migrant background are key in the promotion of different levels of accessibility and inclusion, by fostering a new familiarity between the museum and "new citizens", by encouraging the participation of "native" non-visitors (with particular reference to youths), by promoting in regular museum-goers new ways of looking at the collections, and ultimately by going beyond policies targeting individuals and groups according to their "ethnicity".

More in general, the recognition and validation of migrants' skills and talents should be reflected in staff diversity at all levels (and in all areas of work) of the organisation. Over the years, several surveys have clearly pointed out that diversity in programming and audiences hinges on diversity of staff and governance, but the resulting policy recommendations mostly remained unanswered.

We recommend to establish a legal framework allowing to employ more professionals with a migrant background in museums and other heritage institutions (e.g. acknowledging their role as "key interpreters" of collections). Funding is also needed to support on-going training and long-term involvement of these new professional figures in building the institution's intercultural competence and leading to systemic change in the way it is perceived by stakeholders. Finally, the support of schemes/programmes for diversifying governance in museums (and other heritage institutions)[4] is strongly recommended, so that a range of different competencies and skills are actually tapped, applied, brought into dialogue and implemented in audience development and cultural participation strategies and programming.

5. When it comes to European heritage and identity/ies, academic research and policy agendas often seem to keep travelling on parallel paths, without ever really meeting. But ideally, a research agenda on issues like the ones we are addressing in this policy brief should be highly *functional* to policymaking. When talking about cultural heritage policies in a "troubled Europe" (CulturalBase Consortium, January 2017), we are referring not only to the challenges posed by the so-called "refugee crisis" currently affecting many EU Member States, but also to the failure of many museums to *acknowledge* the growing diversity of the societies in which they are immersed (by way of example, the increase of migrants being awarded citizenship status in different national

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[3] See for example the experience of the READ-ME network (Réseau européen des Associations de Diasporas & Musées d'Ethnographie), which was discontinued due to the difficulty in many partner countries to recognise diaspora associations as fully-fledged partners.
[4] An independent initiative running in the Netherlands since 2000, Atana, comprises "the recruitment and training of new board members for cultural institutions and non-profit institutions, in close cooperation with those organisations. Atana focuses on people with a double cultural background; people who are at home in the Netherlands, but are also rooted in one of the many other cultures situated in this country. People with skills that are needed in boards, such as knowledge of finance, law, marketing & communication, management, and arts and the networks that come along with relevant working experience".

contexts, pointing to a gradual shift "from workers to population",[5] should have clear implications in terms of how cultural participation of this still largely under-represented "audience" is encouraged), let alone address it.

We recommend the creation of *permanent* (rather than project-based) platforms and mechanisms of consultation and mutual feedback between academics, researchers, policy makers and practitioners (community of research and community of practice).

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RESEARCH PARAMETERS

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Bodo S., "Museums as intercultural spaces", in R. Sandell, E. Nightingale (eds.), *Museums, Equality and Social Justice*, Routledge, London and New York, 2012: pp. 181-191.

CulturalBase Consortium, *Cultural heritage policies for a troubled Europe. Proposals from the CulturalBase social platform*, January 2017.

CulturalBase Consortium, *Rethinking Research and Policy Agendas on Cultural Heritage and European Identities*, November 2016.

ERICarts Institute, *Sharing Diversity. National Approaches to Intercultural Dialogue in Europe*, Study for the European Commission, DG Education and Culture, March 2008; see in particular the challenge paper by Bodo S., *From "heritage education with intercultural goals" to "intercultural heritage education": conceptual framework and policy approaches in museums across Europe*.

Fabiani J. L., *The European Migration Cultural Heritage*, CulturalBase Vision Document (Cultural Inclusion Axis), March 2016.

Khan N., *The Artist as Translator*, paper delivered at the seminar "Super Diversity – Who Participates Now? Discussion on the phenomenon of 'super diversity' in the visual arts", Institute of International Visual Arts, London, 2 February 2010.

Kouki H., *Instrumentalizing European Cultural Heritage: exclusionary challenges & suggestions for inclusion*, CulturalBase Vision Document (Cultural Inclusion Axis), April 2016.

Lagerkvist C., "Empowerment and anger. Learning how to share ownership of the museum", in *Museum & Society*, July 2006, 4(2): pp. 52-68.

Matarasso F., *History defaced. Heritage creation in contemporary Europe*, paper delivered at the international conference "When culture makes the difference. The heritage, arts and media in multicultural society" (Genoa, 19-21 November 2004). The paper is published with the title "La storia sfigurata: la creazione del patrimonio culturale nell'Europa contemporanea" in S. Bodo, M. R. Cifarelli (eds.), Quando la cultura fa la differenza. Patrimonio, arti e media nella società multiculturale, Meltemi, Rome, 2006: 50-62.

OMC (Open Method of Coordination) group of EU Member States' experts, *Report on the role of public arts and cultural institutions in the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue*, January 2014.

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[5] Fondazione Ismu, *Ventunesimo rapporto sulle migrazioni 2015*, FrancoAngeli, Milan, 2015.

Visions of Culture – Structured dialogue between the European Commission and the cultural sector, Brainstorming Report *Promoting intercultural dialogue and bringing communities together through culture in shared public spaces*, March 2016.

Web sources:

Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe: see Country profiles with chapters devoted to "Cultural diversity and inclusion policies" (4.2.4) and "Intercultural dialogue: actors, strategies, programmes" (4.2.7), and the section "Culture & Democracy themes",
Museums and Migration blog
The Incluseum blog
Brokering Migrants' Cultural Participation" project website
NEMO - Network of European Museum Organisations' Reading corner on Intercultural Dialogue
Museum & Society on-line journal

The **experimental strands of practice** described in the chapter "Museums as 'intercultural spaces': exploring new paradigms" of this brief may be exemplified by **model case studies** documented in the "Patrimonio e Intercultura" website (all project descriptions are in English):

Museum mediators as "new interpreters" of the museum's heritage
Brera: another story, Brera National Picture Gallery, Milan
Twelve storytellers in search of an author, Gallery of Contemporary and Modern Art, Bergamo

Engaging diverse groups through storytelling
Plural Stories, Guatelli Museum, Ozzano Taro (Parma)
DIAMOND - The museums as a space for dialogue and collaborative meaning-making, City Museum of Zoology, Rome

Promoting a dialogue between museum objects and "objects of affection"
TAM TAM – Tutti al Museo (The Museum for All), Museum of Peoples and Cultures, Milan

Encouraging the symbolic adoption of museum objects
[S]oggetti migranti - Migrant subjects/objects, "Luigi Pigorini" National Prehistoric Ethnographic Museum, Rome
In someone else's shoes, City Museum of Natural History and Archaeology, Montebelluna

Promoting a synergy with contemporary artists in order to develop new perspectives on the notions of heritage or identity
A Vision of My Own and City Telling, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin
The art of making difference, Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the University of Turin

PROJECT IDENTITY

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FURTHER READING	CulturalBase documents used for this Policy brief include: CulturalBase Consortium, *Cultural heritage policies for a troubled Europe. Proposals from the CulturalBase social platform*, January 2017. CulturalBase Consortium, *Rethinking Research and Policy Agendas on Cultural Heritage and European Identities*, November 2016.