

Audience development or audience empowerment? Let's be contemporary.

As the President of the European Commission, Mr. Juncker stated in his State of the Union speech of Sept. 13th, Cultural Heritage is one of the pillars on which the new European House must develop. The opening of the House of European History in Brussels last May and the launch of the European Year of Cultural Heritage next year are the signs of how much Europe has started considering the values Cultural Heritage can vehiculate.

Of course, in order to make Cultural sites, parks and museums – not to say of cultural landscapes and performing arts – keystones of the citizens empowerment, people working in the sector and all the institutions involved have to stand up and ask for more and continuous attention and investments and if our political institutions are not able to provide us with a strategical plan and a middle-long term vision of what can be done in the field, it is our duty to work for submit it to them and make it become a committing document. If that could be done at European level, the better.

But to achieve this goal, that might bear an increase to the one percent of the EU budget for Culture, we must overcome some of the cliché we are not able to get rid of yet. Meaning that we must start, once and for all, to look around and outside the local or national borders, to make comparisons not in a copy/paste way among the different models of management, organization, participation and use of our Cultural goods; that we must start from a given threshold and avoid talking and looking always to the past. If museums must be considered “liquid” they must be contemporary in the way they communicate, in the way they approach their public, in the way they build they cultural offer. Some figures i.e. accessibility (cognitive and physical), experience-storytelling, multidisciplinary, audience development must be given for stated. We must start building on that to promote empowerment of the visitors through Culture.

Can't we start giving for granted the ICOM definition of museums, considering that an international working group of ICOM has started already to think how to redefine and to update the definition of museums? Can we agree that in the world there will be always some museums mostly dedicated to conservation but the greatest number of museums in the world has a social mission and can we agree that museums must fill in the gaps other educational institutions or societies are not able to cover providing a non formal (eventually informal) education to our citizens?

This role is much broader than one can believe. In facts, it's not only a matter of education, although the importance of sometimes re-educate our fellow or new fellow citizens is utterly important on the agenda. Micro or little museums can play an important role as touristic attractions, maybe not for mass tourism – this would not be a disgrace – but most of the time these sites are little jewels on an artistic point of view or for the stories they can tell; good showcases demonstrate that they can play an important role in the development of creative production chains In this sense, the explosion of the gaming industry in the museum field can be considered an important achievement in finding a contemporary way of communicating with audiences rarely attracted to museums providing them keys to decipher the past in their present. On the other hand, the exploitation of digital tools in the management and communication of museums helps to consolidate the acquaintance of the public by museums collecting a great deal of

big-data, although often museums are unaware of it – on which the audience strategies could be already built. Nevertheless, we need to make a step ahead: we must stop saying that we must study our targets – we should already know them, we need to start empower our visitors.



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