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Sharing Memories and "Telling" Heritage through Audio-Visual Devices. Participatory Ethnography and New Patterns for Cultural Heritage Interpretation and Valorisation

Abstract

This paper focuses on the "storytelling" and the assumptions of participatory ethnography applied to the valorisation and fruition of cultural heritage. The paper will describe the outcomes of the project *Al Museo con...Patrimoni narrati per musei accoglienti* (*At the Museum With... Narrated Heritage for Welcoming Museums,* www.almuseocon.beniculturali.it) as case study. Launched in February 2013, the project has been promoted by two Italian museums based in Rome: the National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography "L. Pigorini" and the National Museum of Oriental Art 'G. Tucci'. It aimed at developing original ways to visit museum collections through an anthropological approach based on personal narrations by "privileged witnesses" (such as representatives of *diaspora communities*, refugees as well as the deaf people community) and with the aid of audiovisual devices, enhancing a participatory and multi-vocal approach to the knowledge of heritage.

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present and analyse the relationships between the methodological approaches of participatory ethnography and cultural heritage fruition. The focus is on the involvement of the "storytelling" method and audio-visual tools and products to promote new patterns in the interpretation of heritage itself, as understood and "interiorised" by members of heritage communities, also on the basis of personal (and cultural) memories.

First, the paper will deal with the new role and social mandate that contemporary museums and other cultural Institutions are called to assume, responding to the requests and needs of multicultural societies in terms of social inclusion, equal opportunities, socio-cultural integration, personal growth of citizens, participation to common cultural values expression and interpretation.

Secondly, the paper will present some strategies and methodological participatory approaches used to involve communities as well as specific target groups in the process of shared interpretation of cultural heritage, among which storytelling is one of the most practiced and fascinating approach.

The results of an experimental practice aimed at testing the methodological approach of participatory ethnography based on storytelling at museum heritage will be described. The experience has been carried out in two Italian National Museums, consistent with the project *Al Museo con...Patrimoni narrati per musei accoglienti* (in English: *At the Museum With...Narrated Heritage for Welcoming Museums*)[1]".

Launched in February 2013, *Al Museo con…* has been promoted by the National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography "L. Pigorini" in cooperation with the National Museum of Oriental Art 'G. Tucci'[2]; it aimed at developing innovative strategies and original ways to visit museum collections through an anthropological approach, with the aid of audiovisual devices, enhancing a participatory and multi-vocal approach to the knowledge of the heritage.

Representatives of the *diaspora communities* (from Africa and Peru), refugees (from Afghanistan and Tibet) as well as deaf people and children form a multicultural school in Rome, have actively contributed to create six *narrated itineraries* to visit and discover the permanent collection of the two target museums, using their personal – and cultural - memories and background experiences. Such *stories* have been made available to the public through popular devices such as tablets and smartphones, including the augmented reality, hence through integrated communication codes (oral, visual, textual).

Anthropology, Museum studies, Heritage Communities. A Multiple voices dialogue

Museum studies have been focusing for many years on new ways to exhibit their collections, to increase the participation of their visitors and to involve local communities in

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[1] www.almuseocon.beniculturali.it

[2] Both museums are located in Rome.

the interpretation of such collections, as well as in the production of meanings associated to cultural heritage.

Nowadays, museums are attempting to make the heritage – archaeological, historical, artistic, anthropological, ethnographical, etc. - more accessible and linked to civil society values; such attempt is closely related to exploring new ways to *write* modern museums, meant as *spaces of democratic and inclusive dialogue* with different categories of users.

Visitors of contemporary museums - especially of those museums dedicated to the representation of "other", distant cultures and civilizations- as well as communities related to heritage can no longer be seen as passive recipients of cultural messages. Not surprisingly, the Museum Studies are focusing on theoretical research aimed at pointing out strategies to involve the audience in a steady process of dialogue, of messages and cultural contents interpretation through multidisciplinary approaches (from anthropology to sociology, to communication sciences passing through the Information and Communication Technologies) and different communication codes, such as textual and visual languages.

As far as the concept of participation is concerned, it has to be stressed that the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (the so-called *Faro Convention*, 2005) linked the concept of the European common heritage to human rights and the fundamental freedoms. As known, the Faro Convention introduced the concept of *heritage communities*[3] in which individuals are linked by common values related to a shared cultural heritage; such concept opens the door to a research on the relationship between heritage communities and *interpretive communities*[4].

According to the Convention, to define a heritage means to refer to a belonging community, hence "a heritage community consists 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"[5] .

According to the spirit and the principles of the *Faro Convention*, the Heritage Anthropology is focusing increasingly on the idea of involving the "publics" conceived as *interpretive community*, in the interpretation of the heritage, in the creation of cultural meanings as well as in the design of museum exhibitions.

Participatory approaches are becoming even more important for some museums, such as anthropological or ethnographic museums; although they were born as expression of western world power and have a heavy legacy of violence against non-western populations, they are in search of a new role inside the society, starting from the promotion of the dialogue and the encounter between cultures. Hence, multiculturalism, cultural encounter, cross-cultural negotiations are all themes of vital importance for the mission of ethnographic and anthropological museums. This is true also for all those museums that by virtue of geographical circumstances or by the nature of their collections, are capable   promoting a new reflection on the ways in which their own cultural contents are represented, displayed and communicated outside (i.e. *textualised*); on the value and potential impact that museum

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[3] Article 12-point b.

[4] The concept of "interpretive communities" was created by Stanley Fish in the second half of the 19th century, in the frame of the literary critic and semiotic.

[5] Quotation from the Faro Convention.

practices can play in promoting understanding of cultural *otherness*; on the importance of *interpretation and self-representation* by particular social groups and communities such as migrants, representatives of *diaspora communities*, refugees.

The request for participation emerged several decades ago among communities of citizens, outside the Institution, many years before the concept of "participation" was theorised. Nowadays such spontaneous movements are more and more linked to institutional approaches, as Chiara Bortolotto observes: "For several decades, well before the Unesco introduced the principle of "participation" of "communities" in the process of safeguarding intangible heritage, social actors claimed the role of direct interlocutors of the institutions in the patrimonialization process (by creating private museums and associations for heritage protection, or by creating spontaneous inventory of intangible cultural heritage) as well as of "heritage communities", real or virtual (groups on Facebook or Flickr), built to intervene directly in the management of their heritage [...] These phenomena have, however, existed in parallel so far, if not in conflict with heritage institutions and their policies. The original aspect of the participatory innovations today promoted by the UNESCO is that the participation of non-professionals in the processes of patrimonialization is transformed into a tangible concern of cultural institutions that now have to associate them in the heritage-authorized factory. In this perspective, interventions on heritage are no longer the exclusive preserve of professionals or scientific and technical skilled people. They coincide with a presentation of social empowerment and capacitation in which ordinary citizens are involved not only with regard to the selection of the elements but also within the debate on the desirability of their patrimonialization, and experts are no longer considered the only responsible for interventions that have political and social implications"[6] (Bortolotto, 2013: 8-9).

These issues are deeply related to the pilot project *Al museo con…*, indeed, they are the background of such experience and the theoretical starting point, as it will be articulated in the next pages. Another important methodological reference which the experience *Al museo con…* has been built on, is the storytelling as an expression of a new participatory ethnography, according to the assumptions of post-modern anthropology.

Participation as giving voices back to "other cultures". Storytelling and other modern trends to a shared interpretation of heritage

In order to get a new role inside modern societies, museums must create a new relationship and dialogue with their visitors as well as with the territories and communities within which they are placed; in order to reach these goals, the approaches of post modern anthropology and new participatory methodological patterns can be of great help and cannot be ignored.

Many are the aspects which it is important to focus on: the way the objects are exhibited, the communicative apparatus of museums, the technologies used inside museums, the strategies put in place to encourage an active and practical participation of the public. Public participation is the element on which to focus, as it is just on this that contemporary

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[6] Translation is ours.

reflections, often interdisciplinary, on the relationship between museums and the visitors are rooted; in fact, for several years they have been experimented diverse *participatory methodologies*, based on public involvement in content production and cultural meanings. Such strategies are becoming increasingly important and alongside the traditional methods used as low-inclusive exposition of objects: *resonance*, as the "power that the object has to evoke something, and wonder as the power that the objects displayed have to stop the visitor's steps, communicating a sense of uniqueness"[7].

Recently, several participatory approaches to cultural heritage interpretation have been applied, such as the *Participatory Learning Action (PLA)*, the *Parish Map* method or *Cultural Mapping*, the *Action research method*, among others[8].

Moreover, some methods still quite experimental are at the centre of museology and museological reflection for some years, which are based on the theoretical-methodological assumptions of various humanities disciplines such as, in particular, anthropology and sociology. These strategies are aimed at promoting social and cultural participation of communities through a narrative approach or through the so-called *storytelling*.

The storytelling can be defined as an educational methodology that can be applied to heterogeneous environments, hence also inside museums; as the term itself suggests, it focuses on the use of the narrative technique conceived as "cognitive resources" whose peculiarity is to be reflexive. The narrative or story form generates personal connections between the visitors and the content is thus ideally suited to the *mission* of museums[9] .

It has been rightfully observed that the narrative constitutes a fundamental tool through which humankind performs a dual function: it takes ownership of the experience and helps defining the common feeling of society in which each people live. Therefore, narrative is a cognition and communication act that takes place in two stages: the re-appropriation of the experience, which takes place through the attribution of meaning, and the sharing of acquired knowledge[10].

A technique widely popular in the Anglo-Saxon world, the storytelling attempts to contributing to the interpretation and attribution of meaning through the re-enactment and construction of memories and stories, often in an interactive way, that are part of ordinary people personal and cultural background.

It should be noted that *telling* is not to be understood only or primarily as "to explain". It is rather *to mediate*, to tell the story and *to bring out a new meaning to the past objects*, from the

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[7] See Greenblatt (2002). Translation is ours.

[8] Satta (2005).

[9] Bedford (2001).

[10] Affede (2011 b). Concerning the huge possibilities provided by storytelling inside museum, see also Danks et al. (2007) who state "Nowadays, the focus in museums is shifting towards the use of artifacts for providing an interactive experience to visitors, in contrast to the traditional museum approach, where the focus was on the collection, display and storage of objects. Hence, more people are increasingly visiting museums with the expectation to learn something, while having an entertaining experience. Digital technologies, in particular interactive storytelling and gaming, have a great potential for assisting both the education and entertainment of visitors in museums […] Moreover, technologies can provide personalization and contextualization of the information delivered to the visitor providing advantages, such as visitors learning at their own pace" (Danks et Al., 2007: 104).

concrete experiences of the *interpretive communities*, whose stories and traditions relate to museums heritage.

Narrating heritage can be actually regarded as the real challenge for contemporary museums innovation. A challenge that is accompanied to the need to developing a new way to look at the cultural heritage, much more tied to the living culture linked to objects in museums, and people's stories – personal, but inscribed in their culture-, so as to give voice to a past that is far from dying or disappearing.

New productions of meaning, thus, that accordingly to the vision of museums as "contact zones" crossed by people and things (Clifford, 1999), have to deal with the background of cultural interpreters.

The possibility to open a debate and a dialogue with those human communities traditionally subjected to the colonisation policies or cultural imposition by a dominant culture is of particular importance, especially for the ethno-anthropological museums, which hold the heritage of cultures deprived of voice and memory, of their knowledge and traditions. The storytelling presents itself, in this way, as powerful and effective means to give voice - and not just symbolically - to the cultures historically oppressed and dominated by the Western world, of which the anthropological discipline was the "cultural armed branch" for over a century.

In this frame, the concept of participation has a completely different meaning with respect to the history of the anthropological discipline and to the role and activity of the anthropologists.

As known, *participant observation*, whose aim has always been to understand "the native's point of view", has historically characterized the anthropological research, thus realising its power to understand the emic dimension of the different human communities that it studied from time to time. However, in this process the groups of/on which anthropologists wanted to do research, usually ended up not to be the real protagonists of this process of participation/interpretation.

Giving voice back to the "others" is, indeed, the issue that directs contemporary anthropology, that not surprisingly become reflexive to the extent that it questions on itself, on its history, and on the theoretical and methodological paradigms with which it has always interpreted the "others". This critical process is strongly linked to the need of a participatory ethnography to overturn the anthropology traditional concept of participation.

But how can be, in concrete practice, articulated and actualised such direct participation in the interpretation that Anthropology makes about values, traditions and any other cultural expressions by "other cultures" and their representatives? Moreover, how does the mandate of Anthropology to interpret, understand and communicate "the natives' point of view" relate to the process of patrimonialization, and how can it be dynamically applied to museum and heritage studies?

As we seek to highlight in the next chapter, the *Al museo con...* project just aimed at becoming a pilot and very innovative experiment to bring new practices, new tools and new patterns combining the issues of post-modern anthropology, its participatory ethnography research method and shared patrimonialization processes together.

Participatory ethnography at the museum. The pilot case of *Al museo con...* project

As mentioned in the *Introduction* to this paper, between 2013 and 2014 the National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography "L. Pigorini" ran the project *Al museo con…* [11] in cooperation with the National Museum of Oriental Art 'G. Tucci'.

The initiative promoters can be considered as excellent actors in the context of the city of Rome, for the dialogue between cultures. In fact, the Pigorini Museum is a point of reference in the preservation and exhibition of prehistoric and ethnographic collections from around the world. Currently it is witnessing the new multicultural Italian reality, acting as a privileged interlocutor for new migrants and ethnic minorities in our country. The National Museum of Oriental Art, rooted in the multicultural area of *Esquilino*, because of its international vocation and also due to its commitment to the area, has always been an active participant in the dialogue going on for several year, which aims to promote the inclusion of first and second-generation migrants.

Al museo con... aimed at making a significant contribution to building, through a participatory, narrative and multi-vocal approach, innovative ways of *live* cultural heritage. The main objective was to involve local communities, the vast public as well as specific social groups, in order to offer to the museum's public a different look at the collections and a new way to explore heritage, alongside the specialized languages.

In its context, they have been created and tested several visit itineraries to the mentioned museum collections, created with *privileged representatives*: in particular, at the Pigorini museum the project has foreseen the collaboration of the *Diaspora communities* (from Africa and Peru), together with the community of deaf people. At the Museum of Oriental Art, indeed, it has been started a collaboration with young asylum seekers of Afghan origin, with some Tibetan refugees and with the students of the multicultural school "Daniele Manin" in Rome [12].

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[11] The idea of the project, supported by the Directorate General of Antiquities of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism, was funded as result of participation in the call for proposals "Promoting innovative forms of cultural participation", sponsored by the Directorate General for the Promotion of Cultural Heritage with Circular no. 7/2012. The project was directed by Vito Lattanzi; project staff consisted of Rosa Anna Di Lella and Irene Salerno, in charge for the project coordination, the research activities as well as the preparation of the narrated itineraries; Alessandro Flemma (development of the App); Gianfranco Calandra (communication and graphic) Paola D'Amore, coordinator of the project at the National Museum of Oriental Art; Gabriella Manna, responsible for the Educational Department of the National Museum of Oriental Art; Miriam Mandosi (ICOM Italia, Accessibility Commission); Oscar Nalesini (photographic archive, National Museum of Oriental Art); Alessandra Serges (educational activities related to the project). For further information about the working group, see http://151.12.58.207/almuseocon/index.php/chi-siamo/gruppo-di-lavoro.

[12] Partner of the project have been: Istituto di Istruzione Superiore Roberto Rossellini, Scuola Internazionale di Comics, Istituto Comprensivo "Daniele Manin", FOCUS (Federazione delle Organizzazioni dei Consumatori Utenti e dei Diritti Sociali "Casa dei Diritti Sociali"), Kel'Lam Association, Comunidad Peruana di Roma, KIASSO (Turismo Internazionale per Sordi ONLUS), Ente Nazionale per la Protezione e l'Assistenza dei sordi (ENS), Cooperativa Sociale di Interpretariato, Ricerca, Formazione LIS (CREI).

Through the study of interactive forms of museum communication, the strong support of the new technologies such as tablets and the augmented reality as well as through critical approaches to the collections, the project tested the participatory and multi-vocal approach into the knowledge of heritage from the point of view of the interpreters involved. In this way, heritage becomes a vehicle for re-interpretation and re-appropriation of identity, belonging and means for the promotion of a new and active interculture.

Creating visiting itineraries through cultural memories and personal tales: six paths to discover archaeological and anthropological heritage

Overall, six narrated paths are available as a result of the project. In more detail, they have been created three itineraries at each of the two museums.

The three visiting itineraries created at the "Pigorini" museum in collaboration with the Kel'Lam Association, with the Comunidad Peruana in Rome, with the non-profit organization Kiasso and the students of the School of Specialisation in demo-ethno-anthropological Heritage of Rome are related to the ethnographic collection (which covers the Americas, Africa and Oceania) and to the prehistoric collection of the museum. The first route of the Pigorini museum, entitled "Sign and word" is suited to explore the theme of communication in its various expressions. Exploring objects of prehistoric collections, two deaf narrators take us through the signed language, to discover the origins and development of human communication that have characterised the history of mankind since its very beginning, that is from prehistory. Thus, it is possible to learn how encoded sounds, facial expressions and gestures have always allowed people and other living beings to communicate. The theme provides the opportunity to open a window on deaf people's world, in such a way as to bring to light the culture of deaf people highly visual, focused on gesture and visual expressions.

This itinerary is the result of the active collaboration among the Pigorini museum and the Associations Kiasso, CREI, ENS - Provincial Section of Rome, with the support of ICOM Italy - Thematic Commission on Museum Accessibility.

As a parallel, the project has developed a glossary in the Italian Signed Languaged (LIS), titled "Prehistory in signs. Glossary LIS/Italian on Archeology, Anthropology and Museology[13]. This original product finds its reason and necessity in the fact that usually, in standard museum educational activities, we often encounter obstacles in the terminology relevant to the specific knowledge of the museum itself; in the case of the deaf people community, specific or shared signs do not always support the terminology.

Sharing the experience of Kiasso as part of the historical and artistic communication in LIS and spreading the cultural heritage contents at all levels of use, has created optimal conditions to start a shared work that would introduce different knowledge and different skills.

The Thematic Commission "Museum Accessibility" of the Icom-Italia, the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of the Polytechnic of Milan as well as the no profit Association TSO PEMA supported the initiative.

[13] We want to thank for the information related to the LIS glossary, provided in these pages, Alessandra Serges and Miriam Mandosi.

The activities focused on developing a glossary with technical terms closely related to the prehistoric and ethnographic museum, so as to start from the deaf people's experience, and on creating a code of good accessibility for all museum users.
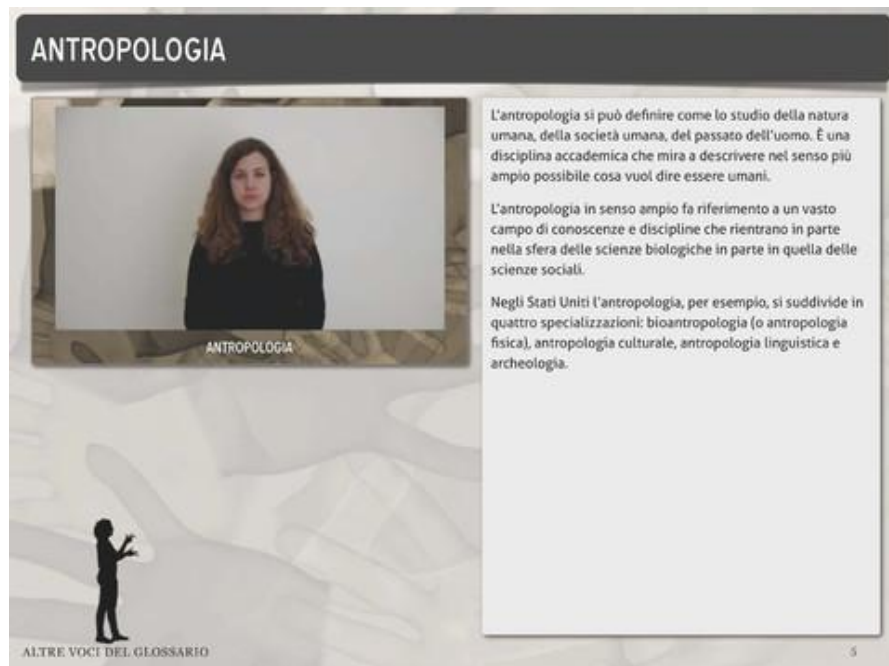
Picture 1 - A video clip from the LIS Glossary. This clip describes in the Signed Language the word "Anthropology".

In order to broaden the basis of the debate, a technical-scientific committee was set up, coordinated by the Kiasso Association concerning the linguistic aspects of the initiative, and by the Pigorini museum for the scientific part. The committee comprised several paleontologists, anthropologists, museum accessibility experts, linguists and young deaf people from different regions of Italy, and communication experts in signs language.

In addition to an in-depth analysis of the lexical meaning of the most common languages in the museum, the activities of the committee focused on the analysis and verification of the different existing signs in Italy, assessing their relevance to the meanings explained by the experts, but also developing new signs, which hopefully will be shared by the whole deaf community at national level.

The second visit itinerary, titled "Secret worlds", is dedicated to the theme of the secret, and focuses on six objects from the museum ethnographic collection (coming from the Americas, Africa and Oceania) classified as:

- "bridge-objects", i.e. those objects allowing communication among different worlds;

- "anchor-objects", which perform a protection and guidance function during the passage rites;

- "world-objects", bearers of a meaning closely connected with the peculiar culture of human groups that produced them, and which contain a message that needs to be "decoded".

Even in this case, according to the storytelling methodology, the objects represent a starting point for the re-enactment and narration of personal and cultural memories by a cultural mediator from Camerun and by a young Peruvian boy, which tried to make some of the exhibits more familiar and to "give them voice".

The third itinerary, "Matter of death, matter of life", explores the diverse lifestyles of our more distant past reconstructed by a young archaeologist, who gives voice to the human skeletal findings and funerary objects from prehistoric mounds, caves and burials.

With regards to the visiting itineraries available at the National Museum of Oriental Art, indeed, the first itinerary, "My Islam", is dedicated to the art and archeology section of the museum, which holds finds from Afghanistan (Palace of Mas'ud III) as well as from Iran. The itinerary has been designed and realised with two young asylum seekers of Afghan origin coming from Iran, who have been encouraged to share their knowledge and narrate their memories and experiences related to some valuable objects kept at the museum. The volunteers of the Association Focus Casa dei Diritti Sociali[14] also participated to the experience.

From daily life to rituals, from the objects and experiences related to life to those relating to death: crossing less known paths related to Muslim religion and mystic, to the festivals and celebrations, and to the concept of beauty in the Islamic culture – both ancient and modern - and the everyday life, the stories, memories and the concrete experiences of the Afghan young narrators accompany us in an unusual and intensely emotional journey to the discovery of the museum Islamic art collection, seen through the eyes of Muslim people.

The second itinerary, "Return to Tibet", was built with the involvement of a refugee of Tibetan origins, a Tibetan monk refugee and a young Italian Tibetologist. For Tibetan storytellers, visiting the museum rooms featuring pieces from Tibet, a lost country, has been an intense and emotional moment of encounter with their culture of origin, mediated by the museum objects. As it happened in the case of the Afghan narrators, such encounter is therefore a trip to the rediscovery of a lost, inaccessible world, but that can be remembered and recalled through the museum objects.

The third itinerary, "Orient in Harmony" was built with the active participation of the students of the School Manin; in particular, eight young students - some of them being second-generation migrants- were interviewed. They also did a group research on the theme of music and musical instruments produced by mankind through the ages and the diverse civilisations, between the East and the West and from the past to the present.

The young narrators have written thoughts and reflections about the meaning of some musical instruments displayed in the museum. In this way, they had the opportunity to develop their knowledge and produce narratives mediated by their direct experiences – for example, interviewing their parents and asking them about their native traditions, relating to the use and value of music in all its forms, thus drawing inspiration from their different geographical origin and religious belonging.

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[14] A laical Association in Rome that has the mandate to help migrants.

Narrated memories between oral, textual and visual: from the tale to the text, to the audio-visual document

Establishing the project objectives required a methodology based on techniques and tools such as reflective autobiography, participatory writing, and oral history. More in detail, the methods applied are:

- *The narrative approach.* It has been reflected in the organisation of workshops of narration and writing, in which the users involved were able to express their knowledge and their own interpretations of some museum objects. In view of the creation of "narrated visiting itineraries" to the target museum permanent collections, some laboratories allowed the exhibits to "regain voice" and to bring the museum institution to the emotional and intellectual experience of the people involved in the creation of such shared visiting paths. Hence, consequently the traditional forms of museum representation was enhanced, making it alive and contemporary heritage and giving value to the subjective views of the interlocutors.

In this context, large room has been given to the emergence of memories and personal stories of the narrators, who thus became *authors* of oral texts that weave autobiography and participatory writing with the interpretations of the material and immaterial aspects of their native cultures, expressed by the material culture held in museum. This happened in particular in the case of the construction of four of the visit itineraries pointed out: "Secret worlds", "Sign and word", "My Islam" and "Return to Tibet".

The relevance - in terms of the evocative power and capacity of expressing values and themes of cultural significance – of the narratives emerged, is intimately and inexorably linked to the poignancy of memories and interpretations of cultural and symbolic expression, and finds its "raison –d'être" in the fact that it represents *a life within a culture, a culture from the inside of a lifetime[15]*.

- *The participatory approach.* This strategy has allowed building dialogical and relational meanings related to heritage, emerging from the personal narratives, building a bridge between people and partners who hardly find common areas of comparison. This also allowed the construction of new dialogue forms between diverse social actors, which determines shared "documents", dialogically constructed.

- *Innovative communication forms.* The availability to the vast public of the narrated itineraries was made possible through innovative communication forms – including the augmented reality, which is, to date, a widely used audio-visual device- and the integration of increasingly popular hardware such as tablets and smartphones.

The narratives and the data collection made through in-depth interviews and written autobiographical texts thus became digital and audiovisual documents, allowing visitors to discover the narrators' stories immediately.

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[15] Clemente, P. "Gli antropologi e i racconti della vita"
https://www.academia.edu/4203547/Le_parole_degli_altri_Gli_antropologi_e_le_storie_della_vita

Through the extensive use of multimedia solutions of demonstrated impact, a new communication model has been created, mediated both by museological methodologies and anthropological-sociological-literary methods, able to reach different audiences, with the objective of undertaking a fascinating personal journey. Such journey was supported by narrations and computer graphics with three-dimensional elements, merged into a single communication medium.

More specifically, the methodology used focused on storytelling and writing workshops, according to the different cases and the various narrators who participated in the project. Thus, starting from the month of September and until the month of December 2013, two preliminary meetings took place at each museum; in these occasions, the narrators benefited from guided tours to the permanent collections of both the Pigorini and the Tucci museums. Subsequently, two storytelling and writing workshops were organised (two for each itinerary to be created, twelve workshops in total), with a duration of about 3 hours each.

During the brainstorming meetings, the narrators were able to identify the objects that they were most impacted with, while in the workshops themselves, the narrators received further scientific information on the objects (such as their history, provenance, dating and use). After that, the narrators were again asked to further choose a few objects that had them most affected.

Picture 2 – Guided tours in preparation of the narration and writing workshops at the National Museum of Oriental Art 'G. Tucci' (Photo by Gianfranco Calandra).

Picture 3 - Guided tours in preparation of the narration and writing workshops at the National Museum of Oriental Art 'G. Tucci' (Photo by Gianfranco Calandra).

Picture 4 - Guided tours in preparation of the narration and writing workshops at the National Prehistoric Ethnographic Museum "L. Pigorini" (Photo by Gianfranco Calandra).

From these choices, the next step was to *stimulate memories:* narrators were asked to explain their choice and to motivate their interest in the specific object. In some cases (for the itineraries "Secret Worlds", "Sign and Word", "Orient in Harmony") such stimulation of memories was the starting point for the production of textual documents written by the narrators themselves; in some other cases (itineraries "My Islam" and "Return to Tibet") they have been the focus of in-depth interviews, recorded and subsequently transcribed. The decision to proceed with the collection of memoirs and autobiographical data rather than to ask for a textual document directly written by the narrators was dictated, in the case of "My Islam" and "Return to Tibet" by the fact that the people involved had difficulty to express themselves and to write in Italian especially. The method of gathering information through semi-structured in-depth interview, as it is in the form of a dialogue, allowed to investigate everything that emerged, overcoming the language barrier.

Thus, along this work carried out through different methodological approaches, surprisingly, items have started to "talk"; each object chosen proved in fact to be associated with a story, a memory, a personal recollection by the narrators. The objects told "another" story, different from what the narrators had heard through the words of the museum guides. They spoke about the personal stories of the narrators and their human experience, with a cultural relevance, which the narrators did not always seem to be aware of.

Picture 5 - Narration and writing workshops at the National Museum of Oriental Art 'G. Tucci' (Photo by Gianfranco Calandra).

Picture 6 - In-depth interviews and collection of oral narrations and memories at the National Museum of Oriental Art 'G. Tucci' (Photo by Gianfranco Calandra).

Picture 7 - In-depth interviews and collection of oral narrations and memories at the National Museum of Oriental Art 'G. Tucci' (Photo by Gianfranco Calandra).

Picture 8- Writing workshops at the National Prehistoric Ethnographic Museum "L. Pigorini" (Photo by Gianfranco Calandra).

Picture 9 - Writing workshops at the National Prehistoric Ethnographic Museum "L. Pigorini" (Photo by Gianfranco Calandra).

At the end of the workshops, the texts collected by the recorder, both the oral testimonies recorded on a digital recorder and those directly produced by the narrators in written form, were analysed by the anthropologists and the experts of the two museums, from a linguistic and expressive point of view.

A draft of the texts on which they had worked on was then returned to the storytellers, for comparison with them so as to make sure that the texts were faithful to their stories as well as the message of their words, and that the written texts had not been misunderstood or altered in their essence.

This was a very delicate and critical step in the project. As a matter of fact, the work done by anthropologists and experts of the two museums, consisted basically - especially in the case of data collection in oral form – in uniting and connecting narratives in a single coherent speech around the core-themes emerged in relation to the museum objects, chosen by the narrators. This work of *textualisation* also led inevitably to lexical choices which could result, in the end, far away to the feeling and intentions of the narrators, whose mother tongue was not Italian.

The restitution and sharing of the texts with their direct or indirect producers was then a moment of confrontation between narrators and texts, and the re-appropriation of the texts themselves by them.

In many cases, the texts processed by the anthropologists and experts of the museums have been extensively changed and rearranged by the narrators themselves, who also adapted some of the terms to a more natural and direct language, certainly less dignified.

Thus, what was a critical uncertain outcome, or even a possible weakness of the project, has become in our opinion a successful experiment of participatory writing, in which the holders of traditional knowledge were able to express concepts in a very dense way with immediacy, spontaneity and authenticity.

The role of the anthropologists participating in the project was to accompany narrators in a "maieuthical" work, and to help them processing memories, identifying what could be of interest for the public due to its cultural relevance and meaning.

Such methodological processes are in our opinion deeply linked to a new idea of participation and to a concrete practice of "participatory ethnography".

As Bortolotto (2013: 20-21) writes,

> Some recent ethnographic theories (Marcus 2001, 2002, Lassiter 2005) have questioned the interpretations according to which the ethnographic research is an inherently participatory practice and intend participation as a simple consequence of the fieldwork. Participation is then understood not as the intimate relationship between the researcher and the subjects of his study, intimacy that has always characterised the ethnographic research, but as a deliberate choice, that systematically affects the entire research, from design to final writing. This approach involves the adoption of new methods in the design, implementation and dissemination of research. The social actors are involved in the definition of the project objectives and are directly involved in its implementation and in the drafting of the resulting forms through collaborative writing. The stated aim of this anthropology is to establish a collaboration between the actors met on the field at all stages of research, from the definition of the project, and to keep it in particular in the

writing process, in order to share with the studied groups the construction of the ethnographic text and the representations that it brings with it[16].

Following such reflections, it is possible to state that the experience carried out by *Al museo con…* represents an example of participatory writing that comes after a fieldwork of participatory ethnography:

> The use of collaborative writing in anthropology attempts to share with the research subjects the construction of the ethnographic text and representations conveyed by it. [...] The basic principles of participatory writing thus require that the research theme is established with its subjects according to their interests and that the writing is accessible and avoids jargon and specialised language generally used in texts addressed to colleagues in the academic world. The collaborative writing intends to be clearly differentiated from other forms of sharing text with ethnographic research subjects, such as the return (of research). [...] The writing of a participatory ethnographic text instead provides that the points of view of the research subjects are integrated into the main text. In practical terms, however, it is worth underlining the numerous cases in which the research subjects had appropriated texts written by anthropologists and have used them in their interest [...] The inclusion of the research subjects' perspective is carried out through sharing the process of re-reading and editing. In many cases, however, the social actors have neither the time nor the interest to invest many resources in this process. The researcher then collaborates in the work of revision of the text with a representative of the community involved in the research. In some cases, groups of actors most directly affected by the issues addressed in specific sections of the project come together in focus groups to discuss them with the researcher. Several attempts have been made by some anthropologists to share control of the text and its representations with those who, in this perspective, are considered co-researchers[17].

At the last phase of the work, the narrators have been trained in view of the filming of their narrations, at *the State Institute for Cinematography and Television "Roberto Rossellini*.

The heart of the initiative was making available original documents (largely autobiographical, as we have seen) that tell different stories about museum objects, through audio-visual clips.

The narrators have tried to memorize as much as possible the thread of their narratives, and even at the moment of filming, texts produced from their stories have been revised and further processed by them, often adapted to an increasingly simple and more immediate language.

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[16] Translation is ours.
[17] Translation is ours.

Picture 10 – Filming of the narrations at the "Roberto Rossellini" State Institute (Photo by Gianfranco Calandra).
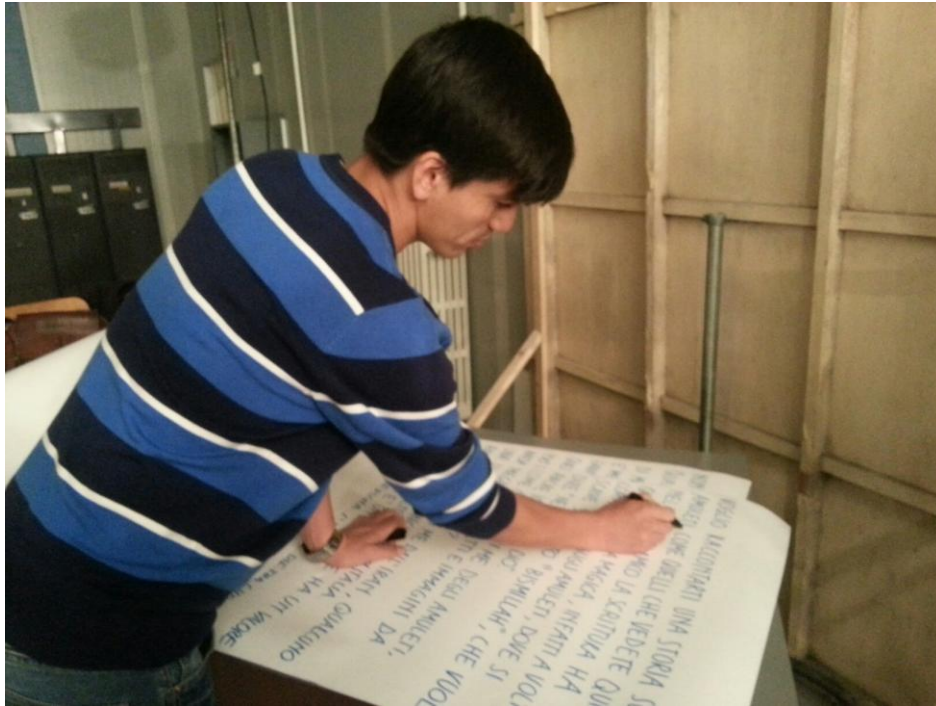

Picture 11 – Geshe Soepa, narrator of the itinerary "Return to Tibet", on the chroma-key backdrop (Photo by Gianfranco Calandra).

Picture 12 – The narrators of the itinerary "Secret worlds" during the filming of the clips (Photo by Gianfranco Calandra).

Picture 13 - Filming of the narrations at the
"Roberto Rossellini" State Institute
(Photo by Irene Salerno).

Picture 14 - Abdullathiff, one of the narrators of the itinerary "My Islam", works at his
text during the filming of the clips (Photo by Irene Salerno).

The filming was performed e in chroma-key, and afterwards the clip have been post-produced by the staff of the Pigorini museum. At this stage, the audiovisual clips were also subtitled, in respect of the participation of the deaf people community to the project.

At the end of the process, the clips constituting each of the six narrated itineraries have been made available on tablets; it is also possible to download the application that runs on the smartphones, from the project website.

The mechanism that starts the clips is also highly innovative. In fact, despite of the fact that in most cases the museum applications available on the tablet are activated by QR-codes, the audiovisual clips giving access to the narratives of *Al museo con...* use the museum space and the same objects that the narratives refer to as a marker. This is an innovative technological solution; also as unusual is the way in which the narratives are made available: when directing the tablet on the object – identified by appropriate graphic signs-, the narrators appear, in augmented reality, in the museum space, next to the object related to the stories told by them[18].

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[18] For what concerns the technologies applied, the communication system has been built on open source software. This choice enables the sustainability and transferability of the initiative and of the products created.

Picture 15 – How the narrators appear near the museum objects, in augmented reality, through the screen of a tablet.

As it can be inferred from what has been written in the preceding pages, the narrators do not expose technical and scientific information about the objects, but rather they tell the memories of their own culture and the episodes from their lives that somehow deal with that particular museum object.

In the end, it should be noted that a number of additional textual and iconographic materials (such as short scientific information concerning the object, thematic deepenings as well as drawings made by the students of the International Comics School, and archive photographic documents normally not immediately accessible to the general public) have been made available on the tablets, so that visitors can explore many more different contents linked to the museum object, beyond the narrations. This is functional to the emotional involvement of the public and to effective and immersive communication of the various topics.

Conclusions

The experience described so far has been the starting point of a broader research, which is still in progress.

From the point of view of the methodologies and technologies applied along the project *Al museo con...*, the initiative appears to be strongly devoted to continuity over time: the museum staff who took part in the experience, in fact, has been able to acquire specific training thanks to the support of the anthropologists and the sociologist involved in the initiative.

The aspects to be further investigated consist of an assessment of the initiative impacts on the public (through an open and closed questions questionnaire) and of the transfer of experience to other communities and other museum collections.

Also other theoretical and methodological aspects deserve to be further thoroughly investigated. They concern the possibility to apply the methods and the practices of

anthropology in the first place, and of sociology in the second instance, to reach the enhancement of cultural heritage, to analyse the substance and significance of the so-called heritage communities and the role of individuals in the construction, perpetuation and transmission of meanings, codes and cultural values.

Hence, in the next year we intend to further investigate the importance of the oral sources in these processes; the role and vitality of the auto-biographic paradigm and of the word authority in the production of culturally shared meanings, as a source of truth and authenticity[19], as well as the experience of a more participatory writing practice, together with representatives of "other" cultures.

Still, the research intends to further investigate the application of methods such as the storytelling in the museum education field, and to evaluate its critical aspects. Among them there are, for example, the need of museum staff for specific training as well as the presence of adequate professional skills - as anthropologists and experts in autobiographical methodologies - which is essential. Unfortunately, these skills and expertise are not always available in museums.

Connected to the importance of staff training and to the role of anthropologists in the process of shared patrimonialization is the observation that often people, groups and communities called to participate in the construction and production of cultural meanings and interpretations, are neither aware of the knowledge they possess, nor of the other value that such knowledge has. Also, they are not autonomous in producing narratives and interpretations that however they could perfectly express, if properly stimulated.

For that reason, very often the production of cultural representations by native actors, stimulated by anthropologists concerned, stands within a space of negotiation between the anthropologist and his interlocutors, as we have tried to highlight in the case of the production in the project *Al museo con...*.

Ciarcia (2011) observes that more and more often we assist to the transformation of the so-called "informants" or keeper of indigenous traditional knowledge, in author and transmitter of cultural materials to be patrimonialized. In this sense, this has created a problem of "authorship" and legitimacy of cultural knowledge that the "natives" own: often times, the "informants" are claiming to be the legitimate guardians, transmitters and interpreters of their own cultural heritage, disregarding the conceptual and theoretical mediating role of the anthropologists. However, without this negotiation between anthropologists and their interlocutors, the risk is to fall into a sort of "emptiness" or anguish of the narrative, which must absolutely be overcome by involving professionals who can deal with the whole process of personal and individual narratives production.

These are some current theoretical issues of great importance. They concern the evaluation of the possibility to use different sources such as auto-biography - whether oral or written, the assumptions of ethnography participatory strategies applied to the museological and museographic field, as well as the participatory interpretation of the heritage, and as food for thought and research on the experiential world and symbolic values of the heritage communities.

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[19] See Pietro Clemente, "Gli antropologi e i racconti della vita". A pdf version of such paper is available at the web address https://www.academia.edu/4203547/Le_parole_degli_altri_Gli_antropologi_e_le_storie_della_vita (consulted July 30, 2014).

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