FURTIVE MUSEUMS AND DIGITAL RECIPROCITY

LOS MUSEOS FURTIVOS Y LA RECIPROCIDAD DIGITAL

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RESUMEN:

La historia de los museos ha pasado por etapas donde se ha dado prioridad a la educación, la recolección, la conservación o el ocio. Durante siglos los museos desempeñaron un papel esencial en la conservación del patrimonio cultural, pero fue a mediados del siglo XX cuando comenzó a surgir un nuevo tipo de institución centrada en la comunidad. Con la llegada de las nuevas tecnologías de la comunicación y la información, éste ha seguido evolucionando y respondiendo a diferentes circunstancias sociales y culturales. La idea de herencia común de la humanidad comienza a madurar en un momento en el que la privatización se impone en todos los ámbitos. En este contexto, el potencial cívico del procomún lo convierte en una herramienta ideal para revitalizar a la única institución capaz de proporcionar teorías para la comprensión de los seres humanos como seres sociales gracias a sus contenidos materiales e inmateriales.

ABSTRACT:

The history of museums has gone through many stages where, depending on the time, priority is given to education, collection, curation, conservation or leisure. Museums have played an essential role for several centuries, but it was in the middle decades of the 20th Century when they were developed as a new type of institution that belongs to their community. With the arrival of Information and Communication Technology (hereafter ICT), they will continue to evolve and adapt to their social and cultural context. The idea of common heritage of humankind begins to mature at a time when privatization is imposed in all areas. In this context, the commons civic potential makes it an ideal tool for revitalizing the only institution capable of providing theories

for understanding human beings as social beings through their material and immaterial content.

PALABRAS CLAVE:
Procomún, museo, patrimonio cultural, digitalización, acceso abierto

KEYWORDS:
Commons, museum, cultural heritage, digitization, open access

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"El museo es de todos, pero, en la realidad, el aprovechamiento del museo sigue estando concentrado en manos de unos sectores que se arrogan la representación de toda la sociedad […] Sin embargo, esa clase dominante del museo […] tendrá que ceder terreno a la cooperación y posesión colectiva"

A. León, *El museo. Teoría, praxis y utopía* (1990)

1. Introduction

The importance of museums is not lost for centuries. They are fully aware that their history plays an essential role in their defining characteristics. Throughout time, museums have taken priority over education, objects collection, conservation or recreation.

In fact, responsibility for cultural heritage issues is often shared by a number of different bodies, but a strong bias in favour of preservation is running through every museum. Moreover, as Temples of Knowledge many museums passed over the community, watching it furtively.

Moving closer to the present, transformation of museums from a temple figure to a social engagement space seems to be a twentieth-century phenomenon. It has to do with the idea of Eco-museums and community museums. Consequently, a surprising number of institutions are fully adapting to a new technological and social environment by generating exchange, creating local empowerment and raising heritage awareness.

This is evident from the high priority generally assigned to the community, helping to make museums stronger and more responsible. It is also evident from the ICOM's efforts to redefine the notion of museum:

> A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment. (ICOM, 2007a: art. 3)

Despite the efforts of museum's professionals to establish a common vocabulary, the statement of the museum has not yet been unified. Additionally, technology-enhanced has made it more likely to adopt a social trend which includes workstyles such as new forms of cooperation. The general emphasis on the influence of the Open movements (Free Software, Free Culture, Open Data and Open Access) is a key to ensure innovation, creation, distribution and access to shared resources. The influences of peer production as well as the creation of legal and technological tools evolve into an effective practice of reciprocity which instills in us a sense of obligation. The strength of the commons of knowledge as a rhetorical weapon relies on a respect rule.

2. A nostalgic concept

Various approaches to the commons studies have emerged in different contexts. It is not only about the study of the commons as an institution, but also as an interdisciplinary dialogue and multidisciplinary research methods that in the broadest sense have been developed. According to specific a practical purpose the

commons theories aim to explain how humans interact under a set of rules which guides their strategies for solving practical problems.

They have emerged in connection with a nostalgic concept that includes varied dimensions in all their forms, whether these are natural -water, air, wildlife and seeds- or social -cultural heritage, software, language, information and internet-. However, in both cases, a critical sense provides the basis for inquiry aimed at the ongoing story of the common-pool resources in the public sphere.

While the connivance among institutions, rules and community is essential to ensure the sustainability of shared resources, the dilemmas can only be solved through collaboration - which requires an empathic understanding of this kind of experiences and demands trust, commitment, rules and incentives-. In fact, these solutions suggest that it is in the collective and no competitive action when the best choice of managing common-pool resources sustain, though many analysts stress the importance of studying each case individually. Furthermore, Elinor Ostrom has demonstrated how people cooperate to avoid exhausting resources and maintaining it over generations (Fenell, 2011: n.p.).

Thus consciously the commons speech makes reference not only to shared resources but it is also related to our mankind. The ability to conceptual reasoning determined the nature of our cooperative and transformative social activities. It was the written language and oral speech that enabled us to exchange information and knowledge, to accumulate it as an infinite resource and to permanently reuse it in a changing environment. Arguably, as the result of the collaboration, we have created some complex tools and then we have molded our minds with new skills and capabilities related to them. The focus on open access, which can provide education, culture and knowledge for everybody, helps us to

connect with the world and to reach our whole personal and collective development.

3. A center for civic and citizenship education

Cultural heritage institutions provide a basis on which people can fulfill their lives and emphasize connections between emotions and imagination. Obviously, the majority of them help us discover our origins and our culture through collections and give us abiding values to a purposeful existence. Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (hereafter GLAM) take part in a unique common whose complex nature requires an analysis of tangible and intangible assets. On broader notions of the commons, this is not merely the knowledge or the information contained in artifacts, but it also includes enduring evidence of who we are as human beings. There is a growing awareness of how we have built our lifetime based on human and non-human resources which belong to the public domain.

Thereby, GLAM includes public and private institutions and develops a special status to protect and support the knowledge commons. According to Ostrom & Hess (2007: 20), "libraries have evolved from being archives or stewards of information goods to being collaborators and potentially catalysts within interest-based communities". However, these benchmarks oblige us to embrace an uneasy concept of the knowledge commons.

The museum as a knowledge vessel is based on the assumption that it exemplifies the ideas of the Enlightenment thinking. At the beginning of the early modern museum, the civic and citizenship education was considered a significant fact, congruent with their deepening understanding of cultural values. The Enlightenment

marked the moment when a vanguard of educated Europeans changed intellectual life forever. On the one hand, scientific academies and societies were concerned about enriching the human knowledge of society. Additionally, the cheaper printing costs were a fabulous leap in literacy and helped to create a wider reading public. As Habermas (1989) reminds us, the "print culture" in modern times enabled the public sphere to depend on social institutions, which made possible the emergence of new spaces for public expression. Consequently, the museums unlocked their doors to an ever expanding plurality of people.

It was evident that the museum could perform the public instruction through respect and admiration for classical antiquity. During 1779 Christian Von Mechel, influenced by Winckleman, organized the Belvedere Museum in Viena as "a visible history of art aimed more at the instruction of the public than at fleeting pleasure" (Arasse, 1997: 245). Shortly after, this idea was revived in France, where a new doctrine of natural and inalienable rights was created after the French Revolution. The values of the public museum as an instrument of education percolated through Europe. In this sense, Aloys Hirt stated in a memorandum that the artwork should be in public museums and not in palaces, because "they are heritage for the whole of mankind" (Arasse, 1997: 245).

Besides, the museum can be seen as a collecting institution whose criteria for acquisitions were not always legitimated. The western museums grew in despoliation's treasures as a consequence of a general pattern of the barbarian culture of conquest, domination and exploitation. At present, a historical claim from nation states against the universal museums reminds us of the context of pervasive violence and illicit trade of cultural objects in their origins. Instead of understanding the museum as an example of cosmopolitism, it can be seen as a meeting point between cultures.

The rise of the consumer society throughout the 20th-century marked a watershed in the leisure culture. In fact, it developed a consumer culture based on entertainment, wherein culture heritage became an investment. In an attempt to encourage the dissemination of cultural heritage, the exhibition policy of the museum focused on artifacts according to its profitability. Therefore, these models have influenced the visitors' perceptions and their expectations. Meanwhile, the objects have been transfigured into relics whose original values have been hidden (Bermejo Barrera, 2007). As an alternative to a debate about the ownership we should follow Serota's recommendation: "we have to be both less possessive and more imaginative in sharing items which are already in the public domain" (Serota, 2003: n.p.).

4. Furtive museums

Information technology (ICT) and a dose of imagination have had a significant influence on the prominence of the museum. Actually, part of the success of the museum is related to openness values[1]. Thereby, personal computers and the Internet have great potential to improve our civic and creative experiences through Web 2.0. This new culture develops the museums' sociability across the collection as a new method of teaching and learning about ourselves as individuals, groups and societies. However, neither is the museum defined by its participation nor by a specific role. We better reach the idea of a museum as a contingent that may enhance a holistic view of science, art and history instead of

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[1] According to Lessig (2010: n.p.), openness is a commitment to a certain set of values: freedom, community, limits in regulation and respecting the creator.

understanding it as an instance of knowledge. Nonetheless, Janes (2009: 30) contends that GLAM as we know it today is "unique and valuable social institutions that have no suitable replacement: therein lies their great worth".

The digitalization of the collections allows us to achieve the fundamental promise to open access to knowledge. Certainly, scholarly literature on digital era is brimming with theories upon the powerful impact of digitization on collective knowledge and its dilemmas:

> Before the digital era, types of knowledge commons were limited to libraries and archives. Only when vast amounts of knowledge began to be digitally distributed (after the development of the World Wide Web in 1992) did it take on more and more characteristics of commons and commons dilemmas. (Ostrom & Hess, 2007: 47)

However, this deployment cannot give excellent results without a noteworthy effort to change discontinuous series of objects into information and data. By digitizing collections, organizations contribute to the flowering of cultures and generate collaborative dynamics for preserving cultural diversity and ensuring its protection. All of these growing interactions aim to open up research collections to a broader audience of users. Digitization often requires that old wisdom be combined with new skills in order to describe the complexity of knowledge and information as resources. The flow of resources all over the Internet generates "the network effect": knowledge is more valuable when greater numbers of people share it simultaneously.

In light of recent critical writing on the museum as a space for experimentation, innovation and creativity asset, professionals have given serious consideration to the role of culture and the benefits of cooperation. Community-based efforts will increase

insofar as museums promote proactive participation and enhance the "rules of use". According to Hess & Ostrom (2007: 52-53), intellectual property rights may act in the digital environment as "rules of use" asset - access, contribution, exclusion, alienation or removal - to specify who is to be involved in resource usage. The successive enlargements of Intellectual Property Laws have restricted access to information, knowledge and innovation through watermarks and low-resolution images.

Hence, the enforcement of the Intellectual Property Rights is inferred from two perspectives. On the one hand, Elster Pantalony would consider the museum as an important part of the experience economy, operating in both the tangible and the digital environment. The museum would be part of the "experience economy" because of cultural, physical, digital, environmental, human and social dimensions to enhance the visitor experience, develop educational content, tourism applications and games (Elster, 2013: 36-38). However, intangible assets on the Internet should be treated as a flow of information, non-rivalry goods, rather than fixed assets as digital copying means that reproduction costs are virtually non-existent. Accordingly, many economists suggest that the deadlines set by the Intellectual Property Laws should be considerably shorter and not retroactive since long periods of time, neither provide additional money earned nor incentives to innovation and creativity. On the contrary, it will refrain it (Urrutiaelejalde, 2009; Boldrin & Levine, 2007; Heller, 2008; Png & Qiu-hong, 2009 or Heald, 2013).

Despite the role given to Intellectual Property Rights, the Internet has evolved due to a convergence of multiple technologies which provide the context used for the media process. In fact, it creates an opportunity to produce, collect and retrieve an ever-increasing variety of data and develop a collective dialogue through

technological devices in areas not dedicated to the arts. From a cultural heritage perspective, cultural data is the key to inter connectivity and influence the impact of our knowledge of the past on our perceptions of the present. In response to the demands of these high-tech trends, this collective-action initiative has changed operational rules[2] in order to protect community rights and spur the innovation.

5. Collaborative efforts powered by digital reciprocity

The majority of the worldwide museums have been updated embracing digital changes and the needs of their users. In the last years, they have already made great strides to provide open access and co-produce broadly representative projects led by the community. Therefore, museums are taking advantage of technology developments making up networks and relationships with common interests. The best practices involve blogs (*Dulwich on View*), social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest or Flickr) or geolocation platforms (*The goSmithsonian Trek*) which engage these practices in a kind of collaborative effort, with innovative potential, able to create significant values. Eventually, collective knowledge, collective narratives, and architectures of participation allow us to tackle knowledge topics from a variety of perspectives.

Regarding their aim for openness, museums promote global access to the World Wide Web using multimedia productions - magazines (*Online Journal V&A*), podcasts (*Access All Areas,*

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[2] Creative Commons and other licenses were developed to "provide an alternative to the brittle confines of copyright law" (Hess & Ostrom, 2007: 52).

Museum Victoria in Melbourne), Art channels (*ArtBabble, Prado Museum YouTube Channel*), educational resources (*Tate Kids*) or exchange among professionals (*Musaraña, Thyssen Museum*)- via a free license and universal redistribution tools. All these resources encourage entertainment and reinforce long-term relationships across participants in those learning and performance ecosystems.

Free suggestions exchange in collaborative 2.0 upbringings increases sharing diversity. According to Brazuelo & Gallego (2011), the uptake of digital communication tools and ubiquitous networked applications help to build knowledge and develop a fully autonomous learning. The openness of the system mobilizes participants to act together to accomplish something beyond the capabilities of any individual contributor. Museums are faced with the task to handle novel expanding opening tools to transform people's perception of heritage and engage societies through social media and technologies. They produce quality contents (*Wikipedians in Residence*). They are also able to promote the creation of derived works based upon one or more preexisting works (*VanGo Yourself*), so royalty-free image banks are essential (*Flickr: The Commons or Europeana*). Likewise, museums encourage users to share curatorial activities such as exhibitions (*Click! A crowd-curated exhibition, Brooklyn Museum*), tagging (*Steve.museum*), deaccessioning (*Deaccessioning Bernard Smol Georgia Museum*), or transcriptions (*Red Een Portret, Amsterdam*).

To preserve such efforts, not only will museum's professionals need to manage and coordinate the participation carefully but also develop a sustainable long-term data archive through a consensus-based process that focuses on preservation and collaboration with other ongoing initiatives. The vulnerability of our digital heritage forces some museums to promote a flexible

collaboration within universal accessibility criteria which involves a migration format to ensure the longevity of digital information.

> The problem of deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphs may look like child's play compared with recovering all the information on the hundreds of major software programs that have been discarded during the astonishing transformations of the computer revolution. (Stille, 2002: n.p.)

The emergence of community as a relevant and potentially transformative tool for museums depends on trust. Openness and user centrality are core components of Web 2.0, and in response, museums are opening up themselves to avoid digital obsolescence risks -file formats and software- and ensure their survival. Museums with limited resources at their disposal will find free or open source software an attractive option. In fact, sustainability is an important factor in the selection of software applications (Colford, 2009). The designers of FLOSS (Free/Libre and open-source software) share quicker innovation, exchange experiences and offer the possibility of social / moral / ethical issues. These non-profit organizations potential benefits widen range from collections management to social media or image manipulation (*Omeka, Specify o Serendip-o-matic*).

6. Interesting consequences for museums

All things considered, museums are not just about objects, acquisitions, management of exhibitions or communities. They are ultimately fixed on generating experiences. Holding public domain art works, classifying and making collections ready and available are undoubtedly useful purposes for nonprofit institutions to achieve. Since language is such a powerful part of our lives, social tagging harness the power of language to build memorable

associations. Additionally, tagging allows chasing the links between the cultural heritage and the community through digital footprints.

Not only do community dialogue and shared authority seek to be socially inclusive, but they also contribute to the preservation of their heritage and their cultural legacy. However, the statement above may pose doubts about the relation between participant viewpoints, the management of the resources and the important decision-making process. Firstly, professional and intellectual elites emphasize the negative consequences of the opening experiences highlighting the loss of control. Such attitudes have been called by Boyle "cultural agoraphobia"[3]. Secondly, the digitization of cultural objects is leading us into oblivion of cultural amnesia. Monopolistic and internationally-oriented businesses tend to define the desirable culture to digitize and provide the best possible access to the rest of the world. Against this cultural colonialism warned a *comité des sage* of the Council of Europe (European Union, 2011). Finally, the digital divide is associated with a technological disparity which threatens to exclude a large part of the population. Excludability depends on concrete circumstances such as technical or institutional decisions which could change normative convictions. Thus, excludability is mostly produced by social processes and it is not always fair.

Certainly, it is possible to advance the principle of doubt and caution. It is necessary a change which introduces a technological, social and legal dimension without forgetting that they are all

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[3] "I argue that we have a measurable cognitive bias against "openness" — I call it cultural agoraphobia, and I argue that it impedes us in understanding the creative potential, productive processes and forms of social organization that the web makes possible" (Boyle, 2009: n.p.).

human creations and therefore they can evolve and adapt to new dynamics. The museum as a commons institution should be considered an "open and unified database, a user-friendly design, multi-format documents, high resolution images, free/open source software […]" (Edson & Cherry, 2010: n.p.). Additionally, social involvement could contribute to establish long-term links with the museum in order to transfer the legacy of humankind. After all, the way in which resources are made accessible to society also defines them as common resources.

There are no commons without a community. According to Linebaugh, there is hardly a society that does not have the commons at its heart (Caffentzis & Federici, 2014: 93). The museum itself is a common which contains our collective memory narrated through a multiplicity of cultural objects. However, such idea of the museum emerged in concrete circumstances and evolved historically. It seems to be natural when, in fact, they were produced by human beings. In an accelerating changing world, the openness potential isn't just an opportunity to connect the museum to a vast core of values that give meaning to people's lives, it also becomes an imperative for social and community life.

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Licenciada en Filología Hispánica (2007) y en Teoría de la Literatura y Literatura Comparada (2010) por la Universidad de Salamanca. Certificado de Aptitud Pedagógica (2008). Periodo de Docencia del Programa de Doctorado "Vanguardia y Posvanguardia en España e Hispanoamérica", con estudios de Filosofía (Área de Estética y Teoría de las Artes) (2008). Máster Oficial "La enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera" (2011). Diploma de Estudios Avanzados en la Especialidad de Literatura (2012). En la actualidad (2016), está realizando su tesis doctoral en la Universidad de Salamanca, bajo la tutela de Francisca Noguerol Jiménez, dentro del Programa de Doctorado "Español: Investigación avanzada en Lengua y Literatura".

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