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Catering for migrants in museums: what societal challenges in Europe?

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Europe has seen major waves of migration since 2010. This geopolitical situation has led European public authorities and heritage institutions to consider the place of cultural communities in the challenges of societal changes (Schiele, 2002). However, the desire to find a way of connecting society with

museums is not new. For several years now, museums have sought to develop activities with a focus on visitors. Only a few of the many studies of visitor groups seek to determine the role of cultural institutions in the process of integrating recently arrived migrant communities.

Theoretical approach: museums and the social dimension

Almost all museums now have their own "education departments" or "visitors' departments" and reach out to larger numbers of visitors. Alongside their usual roles (research, conservation and dissemination of their collections), museums are developing what they call the social dimension. Under this heading, they group together various categories of visitors such as people with reduced mobility, the unemployed and people from immigrant backgrounds. Catering for these specific groups poses many challenges for museums in connection with the issue of the representation of identities and the concept of intercultural heritage interpretation. They are therefore trying out new mediation, appropriation and communication strategies, for which these groups are not always properly

equipped in terms of the keys to understanding (Peigné, 2007). This is because the communication tools proposed are aimed at groups with different knowledge, learning methods and sociocultural reference frameworks (Briano, 2012). A country's cultural heritage is meaningful for visitors who belong to the same culture because it refers to particular experiences and a particular history, but is not always meaningful for visitors from immigrant backgrounds. They are confronted with unknown objects which they are able to appropriate only if mediation is provided. Immigrant communities observe host countries' heritage with a different "cultural filter" (Guzin Ludic, 2004). That is why, "when there is mass immigration, it is important to study these various perceptions of and relationships

with the heritage of the host country, as the process of adaptation in a new country includes cultural adaptation which often calls for [...] an interpretation of the host country's heritage

suited to the newcomers" (Guzin Lukic, 2004: 144). The relevant "social inclusion" measures seek to turn museums into agents of change for individuals, thereby fostering social change.

European projects: initial classification

Many museum projects for migrants have now been developed in Europe. These projects involving museums and connected with the issue of immigration can be divided into three categories as follows. In the first case, the involvement is linked to the actual purpose of the institution: this first category concerns museums that focus on the issue of migration. They deal with migration issues because that is their purpose and it is part of what they have to say as museums. In the second case, the involvement is linked to good practices: this second category includes museums which use their experiences and leading positions to develop tools and resources which can be used by other professionals. In the third case, the involvement is linked to events: this third and last category includes museums which are not directly concerned by migration but take stances and trigger debate with major activities on the occasion of specific events.

As posited by Michèle Gellereau (2009), the issue of the transmission of heritage challenges us from the angle of the roles which cultural mediation and mediatisation mechanisms play in producing heritage values and building collective identities. While heritage transmission provides the basis for a sense of belonging (Poulot, 2014), it is all the more vital in connection with activities for groups who have no knowledge or only limited knowledge of the host country's cultural heritage. These projects contribute to the mixing of cultures in Europe and lead us to think differently about Europe's cultural identity. This has been given practical effect in many initiatives: the European Cultural Routes Institute (1998), the Faro Convention (2005) and 2018 European

Year of Cultural Heritage. The novel feature of a key text like the Faro Convention lies in the focus on individuals as a "heritage community" (Brianso, 2016). Of course, the aim of all these measures is to enhance the sense of belonging to a European identity, protect a common heritage and promote an "ethical solidarity based on values shared by these nations" (Brianso, 2016: 23). These concepts are echoed in the mediation mechanisms devised by museums for newly arrived groups. They bear witness to the institutions tasked with transmitting heritage taking a real cultural stance and making a social commitment. At European level, they prompt us to consider a new approach to the social role of museums within which the issues of lack of knowledge of these new target groups and the development of suitable communication tools are still present.



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