23rd of July 2021

Summary-Intro

In concert with CHARTER's efforts to identify skills shortages and sustainable strategies for the cultural sector, the findings and achievements of the CultureLabs project come to offer a timely and fresh perspective on the social role that cultural heritage can play. How can cultural heritage institutions promote social inclusion and particularly the inclusion of under-represented or marginalised communities? And how can digital technologies facilitate the adoption of socially purposeful and participatory practices in this context? Learn more about the exciting research and creative results of CultureLabs!

Highlight

The recently completed Horizon2020 Research and Innovation CultureLabs (2018-2021) project developed innovative methodologies and a digital platform that can facilitate the organisation and wider deployment of participatory projects for social innovation through cultural heritage.

Main article

Social innovation in and via Cultural Heritage (CH) is an emerging broad field, which seeks to connect institutional heritage with civic initiatives with the ultimate aim to strengthen social cohesion and community empowerment. In dialogue with ongoing practices in this context, CultureLabs CultureLabs' main objective has been to investigate, propose and test in practice participatory models that create bridges between institutional and communities' cultural heritage, with a particular focus on the engagement of migrant and refugee communities.

In order to gain a better understanding about the current situation in the intersection of cultural heritage and social innovation, the CultureLabs consortium has invested a lot of effort towards collecting and analysing perspectives from institutional and community actors involved in the field[1]. The findings of this analysis shed new light to the complex relationship between migrant communities and CH institutions and have been used to inform and guide the multi-faceted

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[1] More information about the results of the analysis can be found on the following papers:

Giglitto, D., Ciolfi, L., Claisse, C. and Lockley, E. (2019), "Bridging cultural heritage and communities through digital technologies: Understanding perspectives and challenges", in Proc. of the 9th International Conference on Communities & Technologies – Transforming Communities. Link to publication.

Giglitto, D., Ciolfi, L., & Bosswick, W. (2021). Building a bridge: Opportunities and challenges for intangible cultural heritage at the intersection of institutions, civic society, and migrant communities. International Journal of Heritage Studies, 1-18. Link to publication.

contributions of the project. Those contributions can be roughly categorized along four dimensions, which offer complementary insights into participatory approaches to social innovation in the cultural sector: the digital technologies dimension; the policy dimension; and the practical one.

The digital technologies dimension

Particular attention has been paid in investigating how ICT tools can support stakeholders' work with and for communities. Some of the common concerns that emerged in this respect include the need for ICT tools that can facilitate systematisation; access to experience gained from previous experiences; collaboration; reuse and adaptability. An important concern shared by several people was that the legacy of participatory projects often comes down to positive reports about the successful final results, while there is often a lack of awareness of what was happening on the ground and a lack of self-reflection. What is actually missing is the *how* and the inside information, the whole process that was followed, including the insights, the hurdles, the "unsuccesses" as one of the interviewees put it.

With the aim to assist actors to address those needs, CultureLabs has developed an online platform that aims to streamline and facilitate the organisation of participatory projects. The platform makes openly available and searchable a rich pool of resources, including policies, co-creation tools, impact assessment methodologies, digital tools, reports of past participatory projects, as well as novel ideas and approaches that can facilitate social innovation through culture. These resources, which we call "ingredients", can be combined in various ways to form a "recipe" that describes the process of carrying out a participatory project. Through a well-defined template and multiple functionalities, users are guided to capture the "internal" knowledge of projects, by including information about the steps followed, the challenges encountered, tips and resources that can be useful for the replication of similar projects in the future. Currently, there are more than 200 ingredients of various types to be found on the platform as well as more than 40 fully-fledged recipes, which either describe past projects representing good practices or ideas for new projects. The platform also offers a set of added-value functionalities that allow users to collaborate with each other on a common project and exchange feedback. Users can also reuse and combine elements from different recipes uploaded by others, make changes, and complement them with their own material in order to construct a clone of the original recipe that fits their specific situation.

The practical dimension

Four different recipes for participatory projects have been implemented as pilot actions in Finland, Italy, and the United Kingdom, to demonstrate and evaluate in practice how various means of creative interactions with cultural heritage can engage different migrant and refugee groups, with the ultimate aim to promote intercultural understanding and social inclusion.
- 'Zoom In On Heritage' in Helsinki, Finland was led by Museovirasto, the Finnish Heritage Agency, and involved members of the Russian-speaking minority and a group of women migrants. The participants brought new perspectives to the museum's photographic collections, were engaged through storytelling, and co-created a series of virtual and physical exhibitions that combine photographs of the museum's Picture Collections with their own photographs and thoughts.

- "[Bridging Culture Through Arts](#)" in Ancona, Italy was led by Cooperative Sociale Marche Onlus and brought together migrants and locals living in a neglected neighbourhood with multiethnic variety. Migrants and locals used theatre-based techniques to overcome language barriers and explored several artistic forms, such as collages and animations based on paper-based drawings, to express their different cultural identities, experiences, and thoughts.
- "[More in Common](#)" in Manchester, UK was led by the People's History Museum and created opportunities for people with diverse backgrounds living in Greater Manchester to meet, discuss, and explore what they have 'in common'. The culmination of the pilot project was a physical exhibition that took place in the summer of 2021 to mark the fifth anniversary since Jo Cox MP was murdered by a far-right terrorist.
- "[So distant, incredibly close](#)" in Pisa was led by Fondazione Systema Toscana. It engaged sub-saharan migrants and women with several migration backgrounds living in the area of Pisa through guided tours in four different museums with exhibitions on Italian history, science, technology, and nature. With the assistance of arts students, the participants' thoughts and experiences were depicted in the form of webcomics, which presented alternative narratives around the museums' collections.

All four pilot projects have been documented as recipes and can be found on the CultureLabs online platform.

The policy dimension

Building on the empirical findings of the needs analysis, the literature research of past and ongoing participatory projects, and on the hands-on experience gained from the pilots, CultureLabs has also produced a set of policy recommendations for the more effective implementation of participatory approaches at the intersection of cultural heritage, civil society and migrant communities. The CultureLabs [policy brief](#) points both to the great potential of cultural heritage for addressing social issues in relation to migration as well as to a number of related fundamental challenges that exist at the institutional and organisational level and call for certain policy interventions. The recommendations concern policy makers at the EU, national, regional and local levels as well as decision makers in museums and other organisations from the Cultural Heritage sector who wish to assume a socially active role and engage with communities and in particular with migrant and refugee communities.

The CultureLabs project may be over but its legacy lives on: participatory approaches can be a transformational experience both for the involved institutions and the participants and make a meaningful impact on the broader CH sector and society at large.