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AIUCD 2021

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10° congresso annuale **PISA** 19-22 gennaio

DIGITAL PUBLIC HUMANITIES
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The DCH in the Italian cultural system. The necessity of a change*.

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ABSTRACT

Digital Transformation is changing the daily life of the communities, but a clear definition of what can be defined as Digital Cultural Heritage (DCH) still misses. Moreover, in this period Cultural Institutions (CI) have been under pressure because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper proposes a digital strategy based on a central role of the cultural heritage users. To this goal, a first-rate need is to hire new professionals provided with digital knowledge and skills.

KEYWORDS

Digital Cultural Heritage (DCH), Cultural Institutions (CI), COVID-19.

1. INTRODUCTION

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has modified worldwide the relation between people and cultural heritage, increasing the use of digital media to supply the lack of physical enjoyment. Full cultural ecosystem is still inaccessible: museums, archives, libraries, archaeological and monumental sites are closed because they cannot guarantee safe access to their places. Moreover, they haven't planned useful digital strategies or programs for fostering the enjoyment of heritage. Recently, several purposes in the digital cultural field have been hypothesized. The Italian cultural system is living a quick change, and we need to understand how CI could address the digital challenges fostering the creation of DCH.

But the question is: does DCH exists? In the last years, a first proposal for defining what we could identify as cultural among the digital floating "magma" have been drafted as follows: "*Digital Cultural Heritage is the ecosystem of processes, Born Digital and Digitized entities, virtual phenomena certified and validated as meeting the requirements in since their genesis and over time, which will became testimonies, manifestations and expressions of the evolutionary processes that identify and connote each community, socio-cultural context, simple or complex ecosystem of the Digital Age, assuming the function of memory and source of knowledge for future generations*"[1].

This definition claims the topic of a recent Horizon Call: "*So far, digitisation focused mainly on capturing the visual appearance of individual objects, collections or sites. There is a real need to establish a comprehensive picture of the studied assets, capturing and re-creating not only visual and structural information, but also stories and experiences (stored in language data), together with their cultural and socio-historical context, as well as their evolution over time*"¹.

Digital Humanities (DH) too must address the challenges of digital preservation and the opportunities coming from CI. The 2019 founded *Istituto Centrale per la digitalizzazione del Patrimonio Culturale*² has not suggested a useful strategy that guarantees an integration between heritage and digital processes. The modern society should choose a new approach to tackle the challenge of how best to convey the DCH. The goal of institutions is to ponder an innovative emotional offer [2]: the new DCH connected with the tradition. The key is not to destroy the old cultural systems, but to develop processes that unify tradition, innovation and long-term necessities. As it is argued in "*Musei del Futuro*"³, in the Italian museums tradition the digitization lacks because a standard that organizes different realities doesn't exist. Their main issue is the necessity of a ubiquitous culture in which the digitization plays a fundamental role, and this needs to improve the National higher education system for providing the future generation with digital culture.

2. THE ITALIAN DISCOVERY OF THE DIGITAL

The cultural ecosystem needs processes to facilitate the production of digital cultural artefacts. During the pandemic, many cultural Institutions attempted to offer digital services aimed at encouraging the enjoyment of their CH. Italian

¹* M. De Bari edited the Par. 2 and the References; N. Barbuti edited the Par. 1.

<https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/dt-transformations-12-2018-2020>

² <https://www.beniculturali.it/ente/istituto-centrale-per-la-digitalizzazione-del-patrimonio-culturale-digital-library>

³ http://www.project-musa.eu/it/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/03/Musei-del-futuro_Mu_SA-it.pdf

Institutions have offered several proposals to promote something they consider similar to DCH⁴. However, several issues have emerged because of the conclamant confusion existent in terms of digitization.

Digital artefacts created by augmented, mixed and immersive reality processes are rare. What is considered innovative and avant-garde in Italy, in other Countries is practice. Still, the legitimate question is whether these digital cultural services offered by galleries, libraries, museums which have received an enormous consensus during this peculiar context, can receive the same attention at the end of the closure imposed by law? One of the hypotheses born from the MIBACT was the creation of a *Netflix of culture*⁵. However, the idea of payment for digital cultural services could be a winning action?

What will happen when the closing of CI will end? Users will have the opportunity to choose between analogue and digital content: is it sure that Italian users will choose innovation?

A first answer has been offered by the analysis of "*Soluzioni museali*"⁶. The organization conducted an open-ended and multiple-choice survey using social platforms. The results show that today is still difficult to build customers loyalty to online offers. Assuming that users are familiar with the digital, they request a more stimulating and engaging offer, especially if a payment is required.

The Italian offer is limited in terms of production and processes used, except some rare cases. An example based on innovation and user interaction is offered by the project "*Crowddreaming. An Erasmus+ project about digital cultural heritage*"⁷. The users experiment on multiple levels, starting from the interaction of young people with the practice of Crowddreaming and Museater methodologies, meshing the museum and the theatre in an original way of conceiving the DCH [3].

The idea of community lacks in Italian museums: the user doesn't feel himself like a part of a bigger system. Italians try to be *prosumer* [4], but the actual state-of-the-art doesn't permit it. The audience has a marginal role in terms of consideration. Sometimes, CI are synonymous with elitist knowledge [5]: most of the public museums, libraries and archives open more for academic finalities rather than to offer a good user experience. The Director of the *Reggia di Caserta* stated that the primary function of the museums is the academic research activity⁸. This dominant conception has led to underestimating the importance of new technologies⁹, implementing the inequality of knowledge in terms of DCH.

Institutions must improve their offer with a multifaceted staff with digital abilities. In this, the digital and its processes can be facilitators. It is crucial to understand which abilities must learn the professionals that will work inside CI to avoid the externalization of digital work outside their realities. Recently, the Department of Humanities DISUM of University of Bari "A. Moro", in collaboration with important international partners, has launched the BIBLIO¹⁰ project. The project aims to identify two different levels of professionals with digital capacities in the librarian field. The COVID-19 pandemic has confirmed that the digital is a need more than before. The cultural system should promote a flexible strategy to improve those realities that try to invest in the digital. As BIBLIO project is researching good practices to promote the training of professionals, Italian CI should activate academics and researchers to ponder a competent category of digital cultural professionals capable to maximize the productivity, the attractivity and the professionalism in digital Italian Institutions processes. This solution will influence the user category too, that will be a functional part of the cultural system.

⁴ <https://www.tribune.com/arti-visive/arte-contemporanea/2020/03/lorestoacasa-musei-covid-19-contenuti-online-guida/>

⁵ https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2020/04/18/franceschini-pensiamo-a-una-netflix-della-cultura_ea51312e-43dc-4812-81d1-42518db342c7.html

⁶ https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1JiEnYf0GChT3p5aMEPBgKW6HnHZN_6Tx

⁷ <https://crowddreaming.eu/it/>

⁸ http://www.project-musa.eu/it/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/03/Musei-del-futuro_Mu_SA-it.pdf : p. 23

⁹ http://www.project-musa.eu/it/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/03/Musei-del-futuro_Mu_SA-it.pdf : p.12

¹⁰ <https://www.biblio-project.eu>

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