



# Museological Review: Museums and Partnership

A Peer-Reviewed Journal Edited by the Students of the  
School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester



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Cover image: Mark Smith and Deaf Men Dancing, *Let Us Tell You A Story, Exceptional & Extraordinary*, 2016, Photo Credit: Sarah Lee.

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## Note from the Editors

Welcome to Issue 21 of *Museological Review*. This year's issue takes as its theme the concept of partnership, analysing the ways in which working collaboratively with other organisations and individuals can shape, develop and alter the nature and work of the museum today. Museums are increasingly working in partnership to deliver and enhance their work and international, national, sectoral, social, economic and technological agendas are actively playing a part in driving and shaping these activities. The contributions presented here draw on a wide range of initiatives within museums, working both across and outside the cultural sector.

Our front cover image showcases a performance which forms part of the highly collaborative project *Exceptional & Extraordinary: Unruly bodies and minds in the medical museum*, which also features later in the issue. As with previous editions, this issue utilises a broad range of platforms, including academic articles, visual submissions and reviews. These different formats provide a reframing of key debates and enable insights to be made in new and meaningful ways. For our 'question and answer' format, contributors were invited to respond to a single question: 'What kinds of partnership are appropriate or not appropriate for museums to engage with?' The diverse responses to this question provide different contexts which invite readers to consider the opportunities and challenges that collaborative working affords.

The issue has been organised into four key sections, each of which illuminates a different aspect of partnership working. The first section, *Museums and the National Context*, explores the way in which museums have utilised and built successful partnerships to articulate and achieve their objectives. Each of the authors debates important cases of museums within specific national contexts where working in partnership plays a significant role in political and cultural conversations. **Anna Tulliach** unpicks the theory behind the definition of partnerships and places this within the context of international collaborations with museums in Bologna. **Sophie Kazan's** paper explores successful partnership work in the Sharjah Museums Department and how its resultant forms of engagement contrast with other developments taking place in the United Arab Emirates. Returning to Italy, **Chiara Cecalupo** discusses the work of the National Association of Small Museums and how this partnership organisation offers a crucial level of support for smaller museums. This section concludes with our first Q&A by **Kasia Tomasiewicz**, who explores partnerships between museums and academia within the UK.

The second section, *Museums and Communities*, considers how museums can work collaboratively to become agents of social change, working with different communities to achieve new narratives and forms of engagement. The editorial team conducted an interview with **Professor Richard Sandell** and **Jocelyn Dodd** at the University of Leicester to discuss their innovative work in the *Exceptional & Extraordinary* project, working with curators, medical experts and artists to open up debates around disability. **Ali Coles'** visual submission examines how museums can contribute to work with adults with mental health difficulties, whilst **Michael Andrés Forero Parra's** visual submission articulates a growing dialogue between a museological initiative focusing on the stories of LGBTQ+ people and the National Museum of Colombia. **Shannen Lang's** concluding Q&A argues for the importance of partnerships between museums and arts-based organisations.

Two shorter sections complete this issue of *Museological Review*. *Museums and the Digital* analyses the development of digital initiatives in museums and how working in collaboration with a broad range of partners can provide new and exciting forms of engagement. In her review of the project *The Catherine Storr Experience* **Rachel Pattinson** discusses how collaboration has enabled the realisation of an innovative virtual reality project; whilst in her Q&A, **Ting-Han Wang** considers the opportunities that working with the games industry can afford to the museums sector but notes the need to remember the museum's core purpose. The final section, *Museums and Education*, explores how partnerships in this area can realise valuable learning opportunities. **Zoi Tsiviltidou** reviews A. Gazi and I. Nakou's *Oral History in Museums and Education* and subtly explores the role that oral histories can have in shaping interdisciplinary work within museums. Finally, **Hillary Hanel-Rose's** Q&A considers the learning potential that schools can realise in working with museums, drawing on a UK example to posit similar possibilities in Detroit.

This edition of *Museological Review* also features obituaries for two much-missed members of the PhD community here at Leicester. Elee Kirk and Tracey Hovda brought rich intellectual insights, advice and support, and friendship to so many of us. We dedicate this issue of *Museological Review* to their memory.

**Peter Lester (Editor-in-Chief), Laurence Bresseur, Jenny Durrant, Kate McPhail and Elena Settimini**

## OBITUARY: Elee Kirk (1977 – 2016)

Dr Elee Kirk died peacefully in the Leicester LOROS Hospice at 6am on Monday 1st August 2016, after a battle with secondary cancer. Elee spent her final days at LOROS surrounded by friends, family and her partner Dr Will Buckingham, who shared the last decade and a half of her life.

Dearest Elee. For those of us who knew her professionally in the museum world we remember a very special academic whose ideas were rooted in practice. Elee's (2015) PhD thesis, which it was my great pleasure to supervise, has the engaging title *Crystal Teeth and Skeleton Eggs: Snapshots of Young Children's Experiences in a Natural History Museum*. The beautifully written thesis makes a valuable and creative contribution to the museum studies literature, notably drawing on Reggio Emilia philosophy of actively listening to the '100 languages' of the child in the context of the Natural History Museum Oxford. It was Elee who introduced us to the ideas of Loris Malaguzzi, Founder of the Reggio Approach, which emphasises the importance of embodied knowledge, play and imagination across disciplinary boundaries, which resonates so well here in the School of Museum Studies.

Elee developed original data collection tools as part of her methodological approach, which was specifically designed to address the needs of the young participants (aged 4-6 years old) in her PhD research. To analyse the rich data gathered in the field from photography, drawing and interview, she developed considerable expertise with NVivo and produced some extremely interesting results that have been applied to other research sites and disciplines, including the School of Law at the University of Leicester with Dr Dawn Watkins and at the Institute of Education London with Professor Pam Meecham where she was Senior Lecturer.

Perhaps most important in her approach to research is that Elee came to our PhD community in Leicester with extensive previous experience as a museum educator and as a facilitator in workshops for children, which equipped her with practical strategies to inform her theoretical knowledge. This background at the Thackery Museum in Leeds and at Think Tank in Birmingham led to her appointment here in the School of Museum Studies on a number of funded research projects, for Jocelyn Dodd Director of the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) and for Dr. Vavoula's AHRC funded projects. Elee was also funded to speak at conferences internationally, on visitor studies in the US and for the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Committee for Education and Cultural Action (CECA) group in Croatia, where George Hein singled out her paper for special praise.

I am sure I speak for all her colleagues when I say it was such a joy to work with Elee. She was a gifted communicator and we are privileged to have available on our Museum Studies website her PhD inaugural lecture, which she delivered at the University of Leicester in May 2016. Elee Kirk, a kind and generous colleague, a 'big PhD sister' to all her peers, always calm and ready to give good advice, we will miss your dry sense of humour and ready smile.

Our thoughts are with Elee's family and with Will. Before her untimely death at age 38, Elee had planned to publish her research in book form; and when she realised there would not be enough time to refashion her work, she entrusted Will with the task. We look forward to eventually seeing her research in print form.

**Dr Viv Golding, University of Leicester, School of Museum Studies**  
with special acknowledgment to **Dr Will Buckingham**

## OBITUARY: Tracey Hovda (1962 – 2017)

In 2013, Tracey Ann Hovda moved to England from the United States to join the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, as a master's student. During the one-year degree, she joined the option module of Dr Viv Golding, 'Museum education', and conducted a dissertation titled 'On the Threshold: Museums, exhibitions, and Viking artefacts as multifaceted, multidimensional threshold'. Tracey interned at the Natural History Museum in London as part of the master's degree – an experience she often talked about, as she adored this museum – after which she returned to the States. She enjoyed her time at the School of Museum Studies so much that she returned to Leicester in April 2016 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the School, and took active part in the celebrations, joining the day trips to Stratford-upon-Avon and Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Undeniably, this conference sparked Tracey's desire to return to the School for a PhD programme, which she started in September 2016 with Dr David Unwin as first supervisor. During her time at the School, Tracey was a friend to many, an incredibly supportive colleague, a provider of pop-corn and funny videos to anyone having a tough day, and a fantastic storyteller with a passion for museums. We were all incredibly saddened to learn of her passing on 18 April 2017 in Leicester, and will remember her fondly, even more so on the occasion of this year's Research Week which she greatly helped organise.

**Angela Stienne, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester**

## MUSEUMS AND THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

# Best Practice in Museum Partnerships: Bologna and its museum networking

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## Abstract

Through the analysis of several case studies of museum cooperation from Bologna (Italy), this paper will show that museum partnerships develop from a will to create networks, to attract new audiences, to increase authority in the scientific community, and to establish solid connections with museums originating from the same area. Another question to be examined in this paper is the difficulty in providing a complete definition of 'museum partnerships', due to the various outcomes and challenges involved. Nevertheless, the study shows how museum partnerships consist generally of different levels of integration, the wish to cooperate on a joint-cause and the purpose to share benefits and resources. In addition, this paper seeks to explain that successful collaborations between museums are mainly based on well-planned combined programmes, which lead to positive outcomes for all the partners involved. Finally, the study will show that cooperation between a mainstream museum and a smaller museum is possible, despite the potential power struggle and over-dominance, only if it is based on a mutual knowledge of the roles of each institution involved.

**Keywords:** museum partnerships, successful partnerships, best practise, Italy, Bologna

## Introduction

In the future museums will be built on collaborations. Collaborations between staff, museums, universities, libraries, government bodies, visitors, sponsors, donors and communities. All working to make museums more sustainable at their core. (Loach 2017)

As Nadine Loach clearly states in the above quotation, the future of museums will be based mainly on different types of collaborations with other museums or institutions, with the main purpose being to develop resilient museums with strong organisational foundations (Loach 2017). Only by building this kind of cooperation will museums be active parts of their communities and able to engage their visitors: 'museums will be cultural networks that everyone will be part of' (Loach 2017).

But, how is this possible? How do museums build partnerships with other institutions? And, most importantly, how can those partnerships become successful? The overall aim of this paper is to address a gap between theories about valuable museum partnerships and the realities of practice.

To examine the research problems in detail, it is necessary to start with a discussion about possible definitions of 'museum partnerships'. This is based on more general definitions of 'partnership' that focus on different aspects of the collaborations. Indeed, starting from definitions of 'strategic partnership' (Mather 2005) and of 'creative partnership' (European Union 2004), the study will begin by examining if these terms can be applied to the museum world as well and, above all, if a complete definition of 'museum partnerships' is possible.

The next section of this paper sets out two other research questions: on what basis are museum partnerships founded, and what are the outcomes deriving from successful cooperation? The central aim is to demonstrate how successful collaborations between museums are mainly based on strategic preparation, which leads to several positive outcomes, resulting in a win for all the partners involved.

This is followed by the focus of the research, which is the investigation of the Bolognese cultural landscape, by presenting exhaustive examples of successful partnerships between museums and/or other cultural institutions from Bologna (Italy). The following case studies are provided: the creation of the *Istituzione Bologna Musei* and of the *Polo Museale dell'Emilia-Romagna*, the ICOM Emilia-Romagna Regional Committee, and the partnership between the Archaeological Museum of Bologna and the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden. It is the first investigation of this kind in the field of Bolognese museum networking, therefore it will update the published literature about this theme. The final aim of the research is to strike a balance between more general definitions of 'museum partnerships' and how the theory can be applied to museum practice.



## How can 'museum partnerships' be defined?

The main purpose of this section is to give a definition of 'museum partnerships'. In achieving this aim it is necessary to investigate more general definitions of 'partnerships' and, then, to examine on what foundations a successful collaboration between museums and/or cultural institutions is organised.

In my view, 'museum partnerships' are defined as:

relationships, based on different levels of integration, established between two or more museums, or between a museum and other institutions, which decide to cooperate on a joint-cause, usually of an educational or heritage nature, with mutual benefit and mutual commitment of resources, sharing the positive and negative outcomes deriving from the collaboration and having clearly in mind their stated mission.

More specifically, this definition can be critically examined in greater depth by looking at specific aspects of successful strategic museum partnerships.

In the Oxford English Dictionary 'partner' is defined as:

a person who takes part in an undertaking with another or others, especially in a business with shared risks and profits. (Soanes and Hawker 2008).

This definition can also be applied to partnerships between museums or cultural institutions, which decide to cooperate on a joint-cause, often of an educational or heritage nature, and then to share the positive and the negative results of these collaborations.

Another definition is reported in Mather (2005), where the author defines strategic partnerships between museums and other cultural institutions as:

[...] ongoing relationships established with individuals, organizations, or government in which there is mutual benefit and in which there is a mutual commitment of resources in such a way that the objectives and mandate of the museum are furthered. (Mather 2005: 3).

This definition suggests that in a partnership between several institutions, the objectives will be achieved and the common benefits gained only with a reciprocal commitment of resources.

Finally, the European Union Open Method of Coordination (OMC) expert group in 2014 gave a definition of 'creative partnerships':

partnerships between cultural institutions and other sectors (such as education, training, business, management, research, agriculture, social sector, public sector, etc.), that help transfer creative skills from culture into other sectors. (European Union 2014: 7).

The main point discussed here is the partnership between a cultural institution and an organisation from another sector. The major feature of this kind of cooperation is the transfer of cultural skills into other sectors. Although the shifting of these expertise from the cultural sector may play an important role, it is clearly not the only factor. Interestingly, the cultural institution learns useful skills coming from the other organisation involved. As a result, there will be a skills development for all the partners involved.

The key points in museum partnerships are clear: in cooperating, with a mutual commitment of resources, museums consciously decide to share risks and profits. In the case of partnerships with other institutions, museums decide to share their skills and facilities with other sectors.

Significantly, there are a number of points worth noting while drawing a complete picture of 'partnership' as applied to museums. Firstly, partnerships are distinguished by three levels of integration, as Karen Dornseif describes in her article 'Joint-use Libraries: Balancing Autonomy and Cooperation' (2001), which can be applied to the museum world as well. The levels are as follows: minimal integration, selective integration and full integration (Dornseif 2001). The first level occurs when two cultural institutions cooperate, but they maintain their individual services (Dornseif 2001). For example, this happened with the creation of the *Polo Museale dell'Emilia-Romagna*, where several state museums located in the same regional area cooperate in joint public services, with the purpose of promoting the historical roots of the Emilia-Romagna region, while working as single entities (Scalini 2017: 1). This example is investigated more deeply in the last section of this paper. In the

second level, museums and other cultural institutions share specific projects, departments or facilities (Dornseif 2001), such as in the collaboration between the Archaeological Museum of Bologna and the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, described in the case studies section of this article. The two museums share the same project, 'Horemheb & Saqqara', related to a shared archaeological mission (Giovetti and Picchi 2015: 17). Finally, in a full integration level, cultural institutions are involved in the same mission, using the same facilities; they become like a single unit, such as in a fully integrated network between a library, a museum and a visitor information centre (Dornseif 2001).

Secondly, partnerships between two or more museums include collaborative exhibition projects, shared community programmes, long and short term object loans, touring exhibitions, joint-use facilities, research projects, joint learning development projects, joint scholarships, staff exchanges and combined digital resources (NMDC 2009: 1). For example, museums can organise a combined project digitising museum material to make it more accessible to broader audiences, they engage in a combined research project to contribute to scientific literacy, they organise collaborative training courses for their staff members and they host joint lectures and workshops (e.g. related to a joint exhibition). In doing so, museums use different skills and resources, most of the time taken from other cultural and non-cultural sectors, in the mutual commitment of resources explained in the abovementioned definition of 'strategic partnerships' (Mather 2005). As this takes place, museums must keep in mind what their mission is, without becoming something different to what a museum should be (ICOM 2004: Art. 5). The same idea is again expressed by Mather (2005). The author reports that two museums cooperate '[...] in such a way that the objectives and mandate of the museum are furthered' (Mather 2005: 5), that is to say, that a museum, while undertaking combined programmes with other museums or cultural institutions, needs to focus primarily on its purpose and duties. According to the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the main aims of a museum are education, study and enjoyment (ICOM 2016: 2). Another key point to remember is that, according to the *ICOM Statutes*, a museum is such only if it has non-profit purposes (ICOM 2016: 2). We can say that if one of those aims fails to be effective, the museum may cease to exist. Therefore, it would seem that museums need to keep in mind this concept while organising combined-programmes with other institutions, in particular with ones which are not 'museums'.

Thirdly, one of the major trends in museum cooperation is the creation of cultural institutions that connect museums from the same regional area and community, with the purpose of expanding resources and sharing common history (Yarrow et al. 2008: 16). As stated by the ICOM, museums need to work in close cooperation with the communities from which they have been derived as well as those they serve (ICOM 2004: Art. 6), by promoting the sharing of knowledge, resources and collections with museums and cultural institutions originating from the same community (ICOM 2004: Art. 6, Par. 1). An effective example of this kind of partnership is the one presented in the last section of this paper, regarding the creation of the *Istituzione Bologna Musei*, where museums coming from the same area share common projects and resources in order to spread the history of the city of Bologna from prehistoric to contemporary times (1). As stated in the *ICOM Code of Ethics*, the promotion of local heritage and the subsequent interaction with the inhabitants are two of the main duties of museums, related to their educational role. Museums need to be at the service of their community (ICOM 2004: Art. 4).

From this, I can draw several conclusions: partnerships, in a more general view, are organised into three different levels of integration and this kind of theory can be applied to the museum world as well; it is clear that, from the examples provided of several types of museum partnerships, a relevant implication is that museums need to keep in mind their mission while undertaking collaborations with institutions that are different in nature; a trend that is spreading in recent years regards the creation of networks between museums coming from the same regional area, with the purpose of sharing common history and engaging the community from which they have been derived.

In light of the considerations reported, museum partnerships, as stated in the definition given at the beginning of this section, are based on different levels of integration, and the wish to cooperate on a joint-cause and to share the outcomes deriving from this collaboration.

The central point of this critical examination is that museums, while undertaking cooperation with other institutions, need to keep in mind their stated mission. This is the main challenge that museums encounter while engaging in cooperation with other institutions, having different working practices and missions.

Although the definition provided seems to be quite complete, it is difficult to come up with an interpretation which addresses all the elements and results of a partnership between cultural institutions. My view is that this is still a general definition, lacking in focus on the aspects necessary for partnerships to be successful and valuable, therefore resulting in positive outcomes for all the partners involved. Another key point to remember, while giving a definition of 'museum partnerships', is that the challenges encountered by the cultural institutions are various and, in my view, extremely relevant.

A full discussion on those last principles will appear in the next section of this paper.

## What are the results of a valuable partnership between museums?

The first section of this paper attempted to give a definition of 'partnerships' applied to the museum world. This section, on the other hand, seeks to clarify what the outcomes deriving from exemplary cooperation between cultural institutions are, focusing in particular on collaborations between museums and the challenges they experience.

The concept of valuable partnerships between cultural institutions is presented by Yarrow, Clubb and Draper, in their article 'Public Libraries, Archives and Museums: Trends in Collaboration and Cooperation' (2008). Here the authors outline the stages necessary in order to achieve this purpose. The five steps are the following: preplanning (establishing the goals of the collaboration and drawing up guidelines of commitments for each partner involved); planning (dividing the tasks between partners and defining a timeline); implementation (ensuring adequate promotion and communication between the partners involved, with updates on the progress and the problems); evaluation (evaluating the success of the partnership once this is completed or at a suitable marker); and sharing the experience (sharing the collaboration experience in professional journals or community newsletters) (Yarrow et al. 2008).

Lacking valid preparation, however, results in some risks. Walker and Manjarrez (2004) identify four types of risks involved in combined programmes which are not well-planned: capacity risk (when a partner is unable to fulfil a predetermined task, e.g., for a lack of resources), strategy risk (the possibility that the project does not conclude as planned), commitment risk (when the partners are not fully committed to the project) and compatibility risk (when the partners' assets do not match) (Walker and Manjarrez 2004). In addition, problems sometimes result from partnerships between different types of cultural institutions, such as museums, libraries and archives. These institutions have different procedures and working principles. It is important to point out that this obstacle is overcome only with a partnership based on mutual trust, shared responsibility and mutual commitment of resources (Yarrow et al. 2008).

Finally, there is the chance that one partner might dominate the partnership, resulting from a lack of knowledge about the roles of each partner involved in the collaboration (Yarrow et al. 2008: 36). Indeed, the institutions need to retain a sense of autonomy while engaging in a partnership and, in my view, this is possible only with well-planned collaborations.

Significantly, this preliminary information suggests that a partnership, in order to be effective and have positive outcomes, needs to be well-planned from its very beginning. This valid preparation is based, in particular, on the requirements reported in the 'Policy Handbook on promotion of creative partnerships' (European Union 2014: 8), which, in my view, summarises the abovementioned main points established by Yarrow et al. (2008): motivation, dedicated resources, shared responsibility, and mutual trust.

Another key point to remember is that well-planned museum partnerships 'provide win-win outcomes for everyone' (Alpert 2013: 5). To put it another way, museum cooperation offers successful results, such as improving the authority of museums in the academic world, providing greater visibility, increasing the number of projects in which the institution is involved and providing new resources and funding (The Smithsonian 2001: 1). Accordingly, well-planned partnerships engage museum visitors more actively, enabling increased access to its initiatives (The Smithsonian 2001: 1), and, above all, they attract a new audience involved in its fruition (Yarrow et al. 2008: 35), mainly composed of a 'more diverse cross-section of learners, especially underserved learners' (Yarrow et al. 2008: 5). In addition, well-planned programmes result in cost savings for the partners involved and in staff learning development (Yarrow et al. 2008: 35). They also enable the possibility to implement services that would be difficult if the cultural institution operates alone (Yarrow et al. 2008: 35); indeed, museum partnerships increase financial support (The Smithsonian 2001: 1). All these positive outcomes clearly strengthen

the museum's public standing (Yarrow et al. 2008: 5), but, as stated before, these results are possible only with valid initial preparation and, therefore, with a clear knowledge of the roles of each partner involved.

Note that appropriate combined programmes lead to a richer experience for customers, as a result of the more extensive resources involved (The Smithsonian 2001: 1). This positive outcome is based mainly on the support of community learning development, which is possible only by optimising the learning resources provided, by enabling increased access to them and by addressing the need for the preservation of heritage materials (Yarrow et al. 2008: 31).

For instance, this happened at the International Music Museum and Library of Bologna after it worked in partnership with local University Departments to digitise museum material, with the purpose of designing a web portal to make its resources available to broader audiences. The first project was carried out in 1999 with the Department for Music and Performance Arts of the University of Bologna, which digitised a compendium of almost 300 anthologies of secular music from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (2). The second project is still on-going and concerns the digitisation of all the museum's Italian music librettos from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. The project is undertaken in cooperation with the Department for Cultural Heritage of the University of Bologna and started in 2008. From its beginning until September 2016, 6,540 librettos have been digitised with 4,460 librettos awaiting digitisation (3). It should be observed that, as a result, these combined programmes gave the museum the possibility to preserve its primary materials and to make them more visible and accessible to the community.

From the data reported and the examples provided, positive outcomes in museum partnerships are possible only with valid preparation, based in particular on a consciousness about the roles of the partners involved in the collaboration.

Finally, the partnership between a well-known museum and a smaller one brings to the second one unprecedented media attention and the opportunity to attract new visitors and establish closer links within the community. For instance, this happened in 2016 in Italy, when the major exhibition *David Bowie is*, organised by the Victoria & Albert Museum, arrived at the Mambo Modern Art Museum of Bologna.

The number of museum visitors during the opening of the exhibition increased exponentially, attracting new audiences, not usually interested in the collections and the activities of the Mambo Museum. In the four months after opening, the exhibition registered 130,511 visitors (Ansa 2016), an enormous number if we think that in the whole of 2015 the museum alone recorded 87,998 visitors (Comune di Bologna 2016). The tickets were sold out for the entire last week of opening and the organisers decided to increase the daily opening hours to allow people to visit the exhibition (4).

The visitors came from different areas of Italy and the exhibition had massive media attention. In addition, the increasing number of museum visitors caused a remarkable increase in the number of tourists visiting the whole city.

Despite the new audiences attracted, after the exhibition closed, the museum's activities returned to interest only the museum's regular visitors, attracted primarily to contemporary art. Nevertheless, *David Bowie is* and the partnership with the eminent V&A gave an increased visibility to the Mambo Museum and it heightened its reputation and authority over Italian contemporary art museums.

On the other hand, this event gave the V&A the possibility to get to know the Italian audience, if there ever was any need to. However, it is reasonable to assume that this was not the main purpose of the English museum. Actually, my view is that with this touring exhibition, which reached ten international museums in four years (Victoria & Albert Museum 2016), the V&A's aims, beyond the will to generate profit and to broaden knowledge of the museum brand, were to establish closer links with the international contemporary art community and, above all, to ensure that the widest public had the possibility to experience the exhibition and to get to know the David Bowie private collection (Victoria & Albert Museum 2016). Indeed, these are the main objectives of ever more frequent touring international exhibitions (Murphy 2015), which have spread all over the world in recent years and which seem to be, so far, a feature of the English speaking museum world.

Note that, in the example used, the main aspect of a well-planned partnership is again the knowledge about the roles of each partner involved. Actually, in the given case, the V&A could have dominated the collaboration, since it is a more powerful institution in terms of visibility and world knowledge. Therefore, there could have been the risk of a potential power struggle or over-domineering with the Mambo Museum. Fortunately, this was

not the case. Both the institutions retain a sense of autonomy in the partnership, based on a clear awareness of their respective functions.

Another key example of successful cooperation between a larger institution and a smaller one comes from Bologna with the 2014 exhibition *La ragazza con l'orecchino di perla. Il mito della Golden Age* ('Girl with a pearl earring. The Golden Age myth'), the result of a partnership between the cultural institution *Genus Bononiae. Musei nella città* and the well-known Mauritshuis Museum of The Hague. The museum was closed for renovation and a part of its collection was sent to Fava Palace in Bologna, where the local cultural foundation *Genus Bononiae* houses its biggest exhibitions. Thirty-eight paintings were sent to Italy. They were painted by the most important artists of the Dutch Golden Age: Vermeer, Rembrandt, Frans Hals, Van Horthorst and many more (*Genus Bononiae* 2014), and included the famous *Girl with a pearl earring* by Vermeer.

In the four months it was open, the exhibition registered 342,626 visitors, becoming the most visited exhibition in Italy in 2014 (*La Repubblica* 2014). The exhibition caused remarkable economic results in Bologna, attracting a large number of tourists. Moreover, this was an occasion to put the city in the foreground of the Italian cultural landscape. Again, those positive outcomes derive from valid preparation and, therefore, a knowledge of the roles of each partner involved.

Notably, this was only the first of a series of major exhibitions organised by cultural institutions in Bologna. It seems that, considering the economic success of the exhibition, the increased profile of the hosting cultural institution, the development of the audience, and the will to work in partnership with eminent museums, other cultural institutions in Bologna decided to organise major exhibitions in cooperation with well-known museums and cultural organisations: *Escher* (Albergati Palace in collaboration with the Escher Foundation, 2015); *Egitto: Splendore Millenario. Capolavori da Leiden a Bologna* (Archaeological Museum of Bologna and the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, 2015/2016); *Edward Hopper* (*Genus Bononiae* and the Whitney Museum of American Art, 2016); the abovementioned *David Bowie is* (Mambo Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum, 2016); *La Collezione Gelman: Arte Messicana del XX secolo* (Albergati Palace with the Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection, 2016/2017); *Dalì Experience* (Belloni Palace and the Beniamino Levi collection, 2016/2017); *Mirò! Sogno e colore* (Albergati Palace with the Pilar and Joan Mirò Foundation, 2017).

This section has demonstrated how well-structured museum collaborations, whether between museums and/or cultural institutions or between a smaller museum and a well-known one, can be a successful experience for all the partners involved. They have positive and significant impacts on personal, organisational and social levels. In view of the above considerations, exclusively in the case of well-planned collaborations, museum partnerships provide economic success for the institutions involved, in terms of both profit and financial support, an increase of visitor numbers and audience diversity, greater visibility over other museums, a strengthening of the museum's public standing, an improvement in its authority in the academic world, provision of new resources and funding, and, finally, an establishment of closer links within the community.

While reaching these objectives, museums, in partnership with other organisations, are less isolated and 'more like "hubs in modern society"' (Yerkovich 2016: 249), becoming the key institutions of the community they originate from and which they serve, as shown in the example regarding *Genus Bononiae* and all the other Bolognese cultural institutions organising major exhibitions.

In light of the considerations reported, it is again evident that coming up with a complete definition of 'museum partnerships' is difficult due to the different aspects involved, but it is clear that this must focus not only on the general elements analysed in the first section of this paper, but also on the positive outcomes deriving from a valuable well-planned partnership as discussed above.

## Museum partnerships in Bologna: a case study

Following the previous attempts to define what a museum partnership is and what the outcomes of a valuable collaboration are, this section investigates in detail several case studies of exemplary well-planned museum cooperation in Bologna.

A number of specific examples are given regarding the minimal level of integration explained by Dornseif (2001) and which concern the creation of institutions connecting museums from the same regional area and community. The case studies are the *Istituzione Bologna Musei*, between the municipal museums of the city; the *Polo Museale dell'Emilia-Romagna*, connecting the state museums from the same Italian region; and the ICOM

Emilia-Romagna Regional committee, which gathers museum staff members from the entire region. The last case study is an example of a selective integration level partnership (Dornseif 2001): the cooperation between the Archaeological Museum of Bologna and the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (Leiden). They share the same archaeological project and several mutual loans.

### Case study one: The *Istituzione Bologna Musei*

The *Istituzione Bologna Musei* includes the municipal museums of the city. The main purpose of the institution is to represent the history of Bologna through the collections within its museums, from the first prehistoric settlements through to the artistic and industrial productions of contemporary times (5). The institution connects twelve museums, divided into six different units, related to multiple topics: Archaeology (Archaeological Museum), History and Memory (City Museum of the Risorgimento and Giosuè Carducci's House), Historical Art (Medieval Museum, City Art Collections, City Museum of Industrial Arts and Davia Bargellini Gallery), Modern and Contemporary Art (Mambo Modern Art Museum, Morandi Museum and Giorgio Morandi's House, 'Villa delle Rose' Museum, Museum in Memory of Ustica), Industrial Heritage and Technical Culture (Museum of Industrial Heritage and Galotti kiln) and Music (International Music Museum and Library) (6). In the early autumn of 2016 a new museum joined the institution in the Historical Art unit: the 'Vittorio Zironi' Museum of Tapestry.

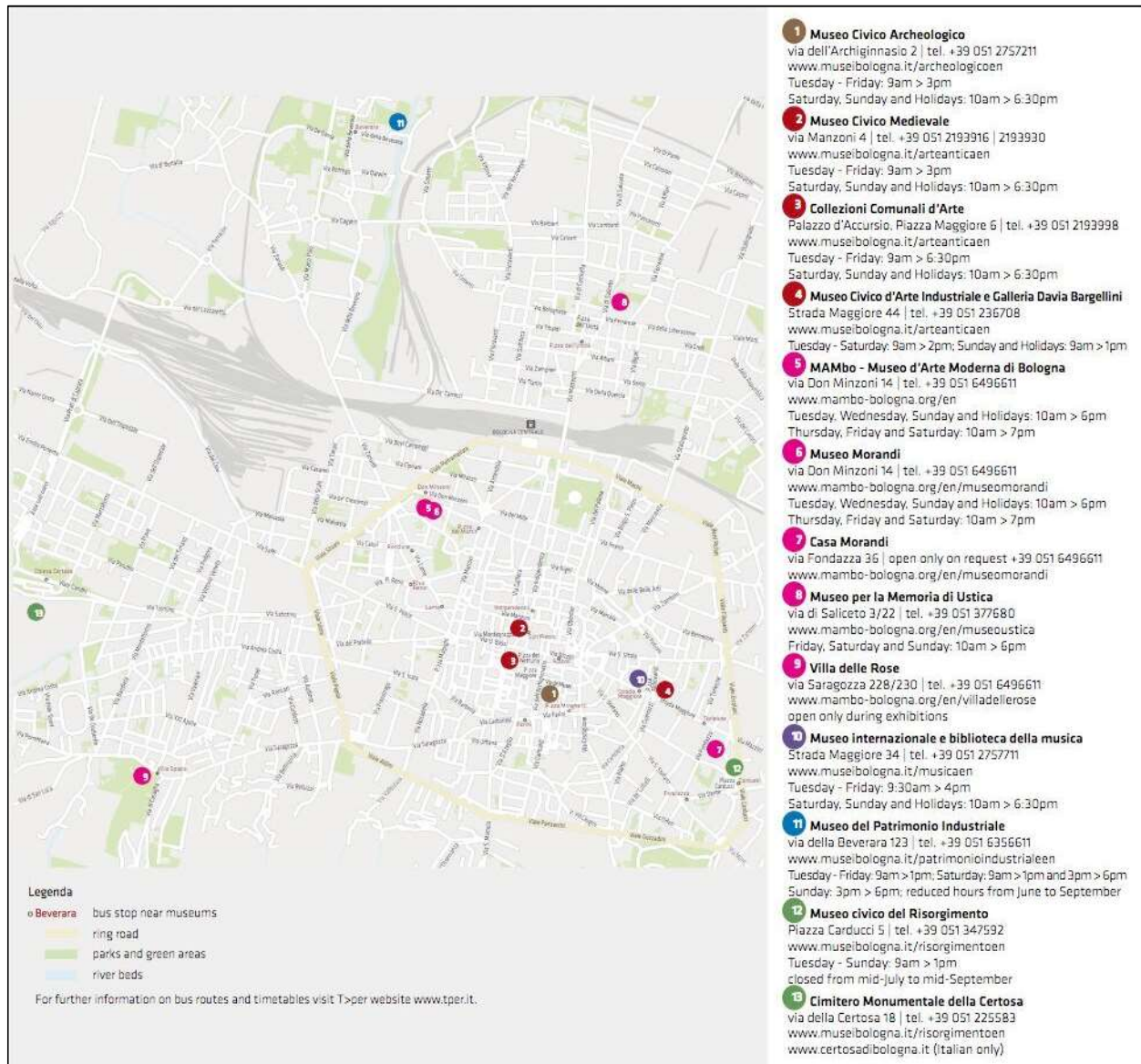


Figure 1: Map of the museums belonging to the *Istituzione Bologna Musei*

The *Istituzione Bologna Musei* is organised in a pyramid: one director for each of the six organisational units, each of whom refers to a general president and a general director (7).

The institution offers various public combined services such as guided tours, workshops, training programmes for adults, educational programmes for younger customers, itineraries for sight-impaired visitors, and workshops (8). Furthermore, the museums of the institution have a common web portal, which connects all their activities, projects, events, and collections. A common web portal is, indeed, effective in solving the problem of searching through different museum databases (Whittaker, quoted in Yarrow et al. 2008: 16). In addition, it is useful for sharing common events and projects and making them more accessible to visitors, who navigate one webpage, rather than searching for the same information on different museum websites.

In 2016, the *Istituzione Bologna Musei* activated a museum pass programme, *Card Musei Metropolitani*, which provides customers with complete access to its museums. This is a combined ticket valid for one year that can be bought at all the museums' ticket offices. It also offers special admissions for other city museums that do not belong to the institution, such as the National Picture Gallery or the Lamborghini Museum (9).

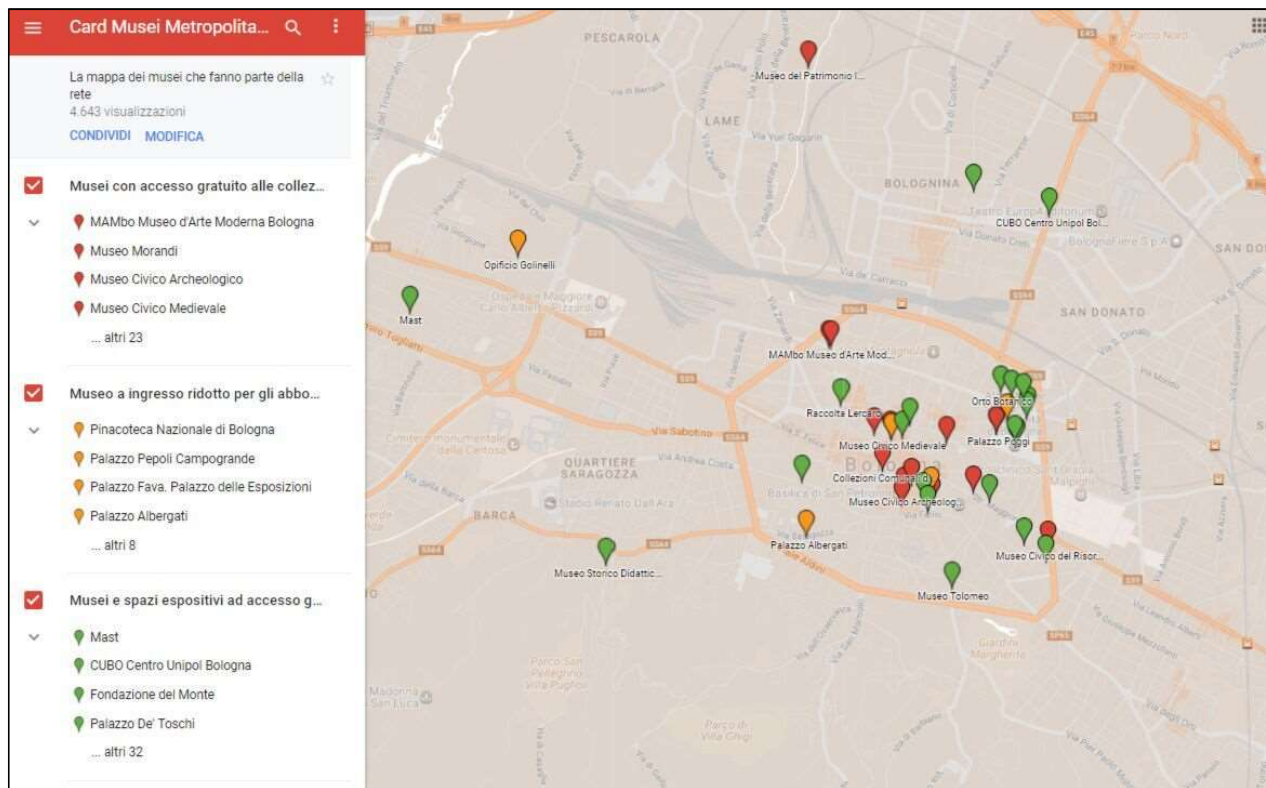


Figure 2: The museums that joined the pass programme *Card Musei Metropolitani*. In the first column, some of the museums belonging to the *Istituzione Bologna Musei*, where access is free for visitors holding the card; in the second column, the museums with reduced tickets for card holders; in the last column, some city museums with free access for everyone, independently from the card

## Case study two: *Polo Museale dell'Emilia-Romagna*

In March 2015 the Italian Minister for Cultural Heritage, Dario Franceschini, decided to reorganise the Ministry, creating a governmental agency responsible for state museums and state cultural institutions in each Italian region, the so-called *Polo Museale*, a sort of Regional Museum System. This is configured as a single entity with one director (De Simone 2014). Its purpose is to coordinate the promotion of cultural and artistic heritage; safeguard, instead, is carried out by the local *Soprintendenze* (De Simone 2014). The *Polo Museale dell'Emilia-Romagna* was created for the Emilia-Romagna region, which connects twenty-seven state museums, galleries, monuments and historical mansions (Scalini 2017: 1); amongst them, the National Picture Gallery of Bologna, the Archaeological National Museum of Ferrara, the Farnese Theatre in Parma, the National Museum of Ravenna and the San Leo Fortress in Rimini.

The purpose of the institution is to promote the historical and artistic roots of the Emilia-Romagna region, from Etruscan findings, through to Byzantine mosaics and Medieval and Renaissance art (Scalini 2017: 1). The *Polo*

*Museale* offers multiple joint public services, such as thematic guided tours, temporary exhibitions, workshops, educational programmes, concerts and conferences (Scalini 2017: 1).

### Case study three: The ICOM Emilia-Romagna Regional Committee

There is another kind of partnership between museums in Bologna and the Emilia-Romagna region: the ICOM Emilia-Romagna Regional Committee. Interestingly, ICOM Italy is the only ICOM National Committee which decided to create Regional Committees with the purpose of having a widespread presence in Italy and to examine local museum issues more closely. The Regional Committees currently exist in thirteen regions out of twenty-one (10).

The ICOM Emilia-Romagna Regional Committee meets three or four times a year, gathering museum staff members with the purpose of exchanging opinions on themes of common interests and organising combined events in the whole region. These aims reflect the main mission of the International Council of Museums, as the former ICOM Italy President, Daniele Jalla, stated in the introduction to the book *ICOM Italia. Dalla nascita al 2016*:

[...] This is the main strength of ICOM, [...] it allows a constant exchange of other experiences and visions and contributes to the global growth of the International museum community, respecting differences, but also focusing on their cooperation. (Sutera 2016: 94).

### Case study four: The Archaeological Museum of Bologna and the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden

Another example of a valuable partnership between museums in Bologna is the cooperation between the Archaeological Museum of the city and the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (Leiden), particularly in relation to their Egyptian collections.



Figure 3: Various Egyptian pottery and objects on loan to the Archaeological Museum of Bologna from the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden



The collaboration between the two museums began in 2011 with the signing of a five-year cooperation agreement, with the purpose of sharing their scientific activities, organising joint workshops and conferences and providing mutual loans of objects for exhibitions (Giovetti and Picchi 2015: 17). Among their similar historical and museological characteristics, both museums have Egyptian antiquities originating from the same archaeological site, Saqqara.

The first combined programme between the two museums was the project 'Horemheb & Saqqara'. This project examined architectural restoration and iconographic integration in parts of the Saqqara archaeological site, which saw digs that were directed by the Rijksmuseum (Giovetti and Picchi 2015: 17). The Archaeological Museum of Bologna created copies of two wall inscriptions from the tombs of Horemheb and Ptahemw, using non-destructive testing techniques (Giovetti and Picchi 2015: 17). This joint programme allowed the Archaeological Museum to be present physically on an Egyptian archaeological mission for the first time in its history (Giovetti and Picchi 2015: 17), increasing its authority in the scientific community.

Moreover, in 2011 the two museums started a series of mutual loans. The Bolognese museum loaned the Rijksmuseum 127 items and a model of an Etruscan tomb for the exhibition *Etruscans: Eminent Women, Powerful Men* (Giovetti and Picchi 2015: 17). In May 2012, the Rijksmuseum loaned thirty-five Egyptian antiquities to the Archaeological Museum for a long-term period. This loan allowed the Archaeological Museum to fill a chronological gap in the Bolognese Egyptian collection and to exhibit some items that in Leiden were preserved in storage, making them available to a broader audience. The loan was recently extended to 2020 (Giovetti and Picchi 2015: 17).



Figure 4: A room of the exhibition *Egitto: Splendore Millenario. Capolavori da Leiden a Bologna*

In 2016, as a final act of cooperation, a major exhibition was organised at the Archaeological Museum of Bologna: *Egitto: Splendore Millenario. Capolavori da Leiden a Bologna* ('Egypt: Millennia of Splendour. Masterpieces from Leiden in Bologna'). During the temporary closure of the Rijksmuseum for the renewal of its collection, five-hundred Egyptian antiquities were sent to Bologna (Giovetti and Picchi 2015: 17). The objects were exhibited in an itinerary which linked the exhibition rooms to the museum spaces that housed the permanent Egyptian collection, creating a 'dialogue-comparison' (Giovetti and Picchi 2015: 18) between the two collections.

This exhibition was an enormous success in terms of media attention and public interest. This was one of the most visited exhibitions organised by the Archaeological Museum of Bologna, with almost 164,000 visitors during the nine months of the exhibition (*La Repubblica* 2016). Not only did the exposition allow the Archaeological Museum to increase its authority over the academic world and to attract new audiences, but also enabled it to start a partnership with the Egyptian Museum in Turin and the National Archaeological Museum of Florence. In 2015, before the *Egitto: Splendore Millenario* exhibition, those museums signed a cooperation agreement in order to create a network of the three most important Egyptian institutions in Italy and to disseminate their knowledge about the ancient Egyptian civilisation through the organisation of joint workshops and conferences, the mutual loan of objects for exhibitions and long-term loans of antiquities (Giovetti and Picchi 2015: 21).

Both the Rijksmuseum and the Archaeological Museum saw this partnership, and the creation of a network, as a success: they recently signed the renewal of the agreement.



Figure 5: Another exhibition room of the exposition *Egitto: Splendore Millenario*. *Capolavori da Leiden a Bologna*

These examples of museum partnerships are valuable in terms of positive outcomes deriving from the collaboration, such as gaining greater visibility in the scientific community, increasing the number of projects in which the institution is involved, providing new resources and funding, attracting new diverse audiences, and establishing closer links within the community, as in the examples regarding the *Istituzione Bologna Musei* and the *Polo Museale dell'Emilia Romagna*. Again, note that only well-planned museum partnerships can result in a benefit for each partner involved.

Once more, I have reported an example of cooperation between a larger museum and a smaller one, as in the collaboration between the Archaeological Museum of Bologna and the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden. Again, it has been shown how this kind of cooperation can be valuable only if the institutions involved clearly have in mind the role of each partner, in a way that neither, especially the larger institution, dominates the partnership.

## Conclusion

It is possible to draw a number of conclusions from this study. Firstly, this research has proved that it is difficult to provide a complete definition of 'museum partnerships' due to the various outcomes and challenges resulting from the collaboration. Nevertheless, I have tried to give a general definition of the topic. Actually, this paper has shown that the basic points of a partnership between museums and/or cultural organisations can be summarised as the following: establishing different levels of integration between the institutions, cooperating on a joint-cause, producing mutual benefit and mutual commitment of resources, and transferring creative skills.

In addition, this study has demonstrated that a museum partnership, in order to be successful, needs to be well-planned. This is the key point of every effective partnership, which leads to economic success, growth in the audience diversity and public attraction, enhanced authority over the museum and the academic world, the provision of new resources and funding, and an increase in the museum's public standing. Likewise, when working in close collaboration with their community, it is only with effective partnerships that museums can strengthen their link with them, therefore becoming the key institutions of the society they serve and they originated from, as in the examples reported in the last section, specifically the *Istituzione Bologna Musei* and the *Polo Museale dell'Emilia-Romagna*. However, in engaging partnerships, museums must keep in mind their roles as organisations which promote education and enjoyment and as non-profit institutions. Another key point to remember, that I have discussed deeply in the paper, is that institutions only retain a sense of autonomy in a partnership with valid preparation. This is also possible when a smaller museum engages in a partnership with a larger institution, as shown in the examples of collaborations between the V&A and the Mambo Museum, and between the Archaeological Museum of Bologna and the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden. As I have demonstrated before, in the cooperation between these museums there was no power struggle nor over-dominating, due to the clear knowledge of the roles of each partner involved.

Finally, in the last section of this paper, I was able to document a number of cases of valuable partnerships between museums located in the city of Bologna. In light of the examples reported, it is clear that those collaborations were well-planned and had successful results in terms of attracting new audiences, increasing authority and reputation, and establishing closer links within the community they originate from. As seen in the study cases described, these well-structured museum partnerships allowed the entire city of Bologna to increase its authority over the Italian cultural landscape.

## Notes

- (1) [www.museibologna.it/documenti/70925](http://www.museibologna.it/documenti/70925) (Accessed 27 May 2017)
- (2) [http://www.bibliotecamusica.it/cmbm/tools/pro\\_dig.asp](http://www.bibliotecamusica.it/cmbm/tools/pro_dig.asp) (Accessed 28 October 2016)
- (3) [http://www.bibliotecamusica.it/cmbm/tools/pro\\_dig.asp](http://www.bibliotecamusica.it/cmbm/tools/pro_dig.asp) (Accessed 28 October 2016)
- (4) <http://www.mambo-bologna.org/mostre/mostra-202/> (Accessed 3 November 2016)
- (5) [www.museibologna.it/documenti/70925](http://www.museibologna.it/documenti/70925) (Accessed 27 May 2017)
- (6) [www.museibologna.it/documenti/70927](http://www.museibologna.it/documenti/70927) (Accessed 27 May 2017)
- (7) [www.museibologna.it/documenti/70926](http://www.museibologna.it/documenti/70926) (Accessed 27 May 2017)
- (8) [www.museibologna.it/documenti/70920](http://www.museibologna.it/documenti/70920) (Accessed 27 May 2017)
- (9) [www.comune.bologna.it/cultura/card-musei-bologna](http://www.comune.bologna.it/cultura/card-musei-bologna) (Accessed 3 November 2016)
- (10) [http://www.icom-italia.org/index.php?option=com\\_phocadownload&view=category&id=15&Itemid=122](http://www.icom-italia.org/index.php?option=com_phocadownload&view=category&id=15&Itemid=122) (Accessed 27 May 2017)

## Useful links

Archaeological Museum of Bologna: <http://www.museibologna.it/archeologico>

David Bowie is: <http://davidbowieis.it>

Egitto: *Splendore Millenario. Capolavori da Leiden a Bologna*: [www.mostraegitto.it](http://www.mostraegitto.it)

Genus Bononiae. Musei nella città: [www.genusbononiae.it](http://www.genusbononiae.it)

ICOM Regional Committees: [www.icom-italia.org](http://www.icom-italia.org)

International Music Museum and Library of Bologna: [www.museibologna.it/musica](http://www.museibologna.it/musica)

Istituzione Bologna Musei: [www.museibologna.it](http://www.museibologna.it)

Polo Museale dell'Emilia-Romagna: <http://polomusealeemiliaromagna.beniculturali.it>

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# Sharjah: The United Arab Emirates' Museum Partnership

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## Abstract

Though Sharjah is not as familiar to visitors of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as Dubai or Abu Dhabi, with their international art fairs and cutting-edge art galleries, it nevertheless has an impressive history of museum traditions and development. This paper will focus on Sharjah: having briefly situated the emirate in the context of UAE history, it will consider why and how the Sharjah Museums Department (SMD), a partnership between diverse museums, was created and took on such an important role in Sharjah's civic make-up, leading local initiatives and promoting learning within the emirate. Diplomacy, museum ethics and international relations each have an important part to play in the building and development of SMD. The paper will explore the importance and success of this museum partnership that interests and informs 800,000 visitors per year.

**Keywords:** Sharjah; United Arab Emirates; UAE; Arab museums

## Introduction

Early public museums in the Western and modern tradition such as the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (1683) and the British Museum in London (1753) were centred around their collections and they became famous for their attractive displays of antiquities and curiosities. At the 2006 Intercom conference in Taiwan, 'New Roles and Missions for Museums', KulturAgenda Director Christian Waltl emphasised that, 'museums have entered a time of change: they [must] ... redefine their role in society, partnering with audiences through their exhibition programme, interpretation and marketing outreach to create a unique experience or relationship' (Waltl 2006). The 'audience development' that Waltl describes as being vital to modern museums means that firm links must also be established with other museums and organisations continually to enhance this experience. Museums working in partnership mean a coordinated exhibition programme, touring exhibitions, lending and borrowing of artefacts and the general sharing of best practice. Sharjah Museums Department (SMD) is an inspiring example of a contemporary museum partnership in the Arabian peninsula, working successfully to form significant relationships with visitors and building bridges nationally and internationally to offer its visitors an ever widening range of inspirational and instructive museum settings as well as a diverse cultural calendar of events.

This paper will introduce Sharjah, one of the seven emirates in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Sharjah's ruler and the patron of the SMD, HH Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi, the SMD and its museums. SMD has built a substantial reputation as a collaborative and cultural entity, which will be considered in this paper, along with the SMD's growing civic responsibilities, and its successful national and international museum partnerships for the purpose of its many exhibitions, activities and events.

## The UAE: History and background

The emirate and port city of Sharjah, on the shores of the Persian Gulf, has always had a culture of communication and connection with the rest of the world. During the 18th and 19th centuries, it was the homeland of the seafaring *Qawassim* tribe (1). With British trade routes passing through the gulf on their way to India, the British wielded considerable naval power in the region. In 1820 and 1835, the *Qawassim* and the other sheikhs or rulers of the region signed peace treaties with the British, becoming known as the 'Trucial states'. They received British protection in return for allowing British trade routes to cross their territories without interference. A British military garrison was built in Sharjah and the region's first airport was created in 1930, as a trading connection between India and Great Britain (Radoine 2013: 197). Trade with the British and a primitive tourism industry developed in addition to pearl diving, fishing and herding as the poor, arid region's principle sources of income. Wealthy sheikhs from the ruling families began to send their children to British schools and universities.



Figure 1: Sharjah Heritage Museum

Though oil fields were located off the UAE coast and excavations began in the 1950s and 60s, British influence weakened and the ruler of the emirate of Abu Dhabi, HH Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan, brought together the monarchs of the other Trucial states with the idea of forming a united country and a federal government, breaking free of British protection. The United Arab Emirates was created in 1971-72 and with the drilling and export of oil, great wealth and rapid development began to pour into this young country (2).

### Sharjah: Background history and the creation of its museum partnership

When the UAE was first created, Sharjah's crown prince, HH Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi, was made its Minister of Education. He suddenly became ruler of Sharjah following his brother's untimely death in 1972. Sheikh Dr al-Qasimi's method of rule was strongly influenced by his academic grounding, by his interest in museums and their educational potential (3). As the UAE was establishing itself in the early 1970s, so the oil and gas industry developed and with it the property, investment and financial markets. The population began to swell with foreign managers, contractors and manual labourers causing cities such as Sharjah to expand rapidly. As well as bringing strain to the emirate's infrastructure, it resulted in a population imbalance, with UAE nationals beginning to feel as if they were 'foreigners in their own country', making up only 10% of the population (Langham and Barker 2014: 80). This also threatened traditional Emirati culture with wealth and success being associated with a liberal and less Islamic lifestyle. For a nation guided by conventional Islamic religious principles and law, this did not bode well for the stability of the country and its rulers. Drastic changes were needed to maintain stability and safeguard local culture. Sharjah's culture officially became focused on the traditional values of religion and family life, as well as respect for the country's heritage and education. Between 1993 and 2006, over fifteen new museums were created and a partnership of museums, the Sharjah Museums Department (SMD), was formed to manage and administer them (4). In 2000, the first airport was converted into an aviation museum, celebrating its role in the development of the country. The partnership between museums meant that their exhibitions and messages were coordinated and many of the museums' displays were centred on promoting traditional Emirati life, its architecture and marine tradition, as well as inspiring interest in science, religion, art, and wildlife. The creation of the SMD played an important part in Sharjah's continued 'traditional



values' approach, reminding local people of their ancestral traditions and informing visitors of the nation's strong foundations and rich culture.

DATE	Museum and description
1993	Sharjah Archaeology Museum opens.
1995	A traditional Emirati house, <i>Bait Al Naboodah</i> opens.
1996	The traditional <i>Majilis Al Midfa</i> and <i>Barjeel</i> wind tower open. Mohammed al Midfa was a man of letters who was instrumental in the creation of the region's first newspapers in the late 1920s and early 1930s, holding lengthy discussions in the shaded ornamental courtyard ( <i>majilis</i> ).
	The first Sharjah Islamic Museum – closed in 2007 and re-opened in 2008 – see below.
	Sharjah Science Museum opens.
1997	Sharjah Art Museum opens.
	<i>Al Hisn Fort</i> opens. With its numerous defences and crenellations, this majestic building was originally built in 1823 as a historic base for the ruling Al Qawasim tribe. It has since been restored.
	The royal residence of the late Sheikh Saeed Bin Hamad Al Qasimi opens.
	The Sharjah Discovery Centre opens.
2000	Sharjah's first airport <i>Al Mahatta Museum</i> opens.
2002	Sharjah Calligraphy Museum opens.
2003	<i>Al Eslah School Museum</i> opens.
	Sharjah Maritime Museum opens. The region's seafaring, pearl-diving and mercantile history was brought to life in the first Sharjah Maritime Museum. It was later housed in a purpose-built structure, from 2008.
2005	Sharjah Heritage Museum opens.
2008	Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation opens.
	Sharjah Aquarium and Maritime Museum opens.
	Sharjah Classic Car Museum opens.

Table 1: Chronological list of Sharjah's Museum Development

## Museum education and interactivity: Sharjah's museum infrastructure

'Museums are made to educate our children and our future generations'

HH Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, *from* a speech given at the Second Heritage Exhibition, November 1995 (Rahman 2014).

Whilst the three richest and most densely populated emirates of Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah responded to the surge in their populations in the 1990s and 2000s by rapidly enhancing their infrastructure, their roads, their information technology and internet capabilities, and investing in water desalination and housing, according to Bouchenaki (2011: 93) Sharjah added to its agenda, a 'museum infrastructure'. Indeed, the mission of SMD is not only to manage the growing number of museums in the emirate, but also to take on a civic role, enhancing, 'an appreciation of culture and learning through its exhibitions, education and community programmes' (Sharjah Museums Department 2015).

Why put the important responsibility of guiding and teaching civilian society how to live and be socially aware onto the emirate's cultural agenda? Due to his academic background, HH Sheikh Dr Al-Qasimi saw the enormous potential of museums and cultural centres not as propaganda machines but as a way of reaching, interesting and inspiring people (Ataya and Deemas 2013: 59). He understood their instructive and developmental potential for his Emirati subjects and for civil society in general. He saw that if Sharjah's cultural agenda was to be successful, it had to reach a wide-range of local people and expatriates: educated CEOs and project managers, who may have been used to sophisticated exhibitions and cultural presentations, as well as uneducated manual labourers who may never have been to a museum before. This demographic needed something to do in their spare time,

alone or with their families. A comprehensive and informative system of museums to appeal to all tastes and interests emerged. An airport museum, a car museum, a discovery centre and an aquarium, a museum dedicated to local culture and architecture, and another dedicated to the Islamic civilization, for example, allowed people of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, ages and nationalities to develop their own understanding of Sharjah's national and cultural identity and their view of the world and to broaden their education. Drawn together to form a coordinated network of museums with things to see, do and learn, the museums making up the SMD provided interest and activities that were not un-Islamic and would mean that families or friends could spend time together in a safe and enjoyable way.

As a national museum network, the integrity and ethics of the museums themselves were vital to this undertaking. High standards of exhibition and display needed to be in place as well as professional deontology for all those working in the museums and educational programmes and interactive activities to reinforce this work. For example, fishing trips and boating excursions to support the work of the Maritime Museum, art workshops to promote the understanding of art in the Sharjah Art museum, calligraphy lessons for the Calligraphy and Islamic Civilisation museums, and science workshops for the Science Museum, were put in place. These activities would have implications for viewers more generally, by giving them a sense of accomplishment, helping to promote mutual respect and knowledge for Emirati and Muslim heritage and fostering national dialogue. It was thought that the development of a museum partnership in Sharjah would develop the country's common culture and draw people throughout both the emirate of Sharjah and the UAE.

In order to be truly effective, a deep understanding, knowledge and appreciation of what constitutes the local history and heritage as well as the religious, cultural and national identity is very important.

HH Sheikh Dr Al-Qasimi (Ataya and Deemas 2013: 59)

The role of Manal Ataya, who has been the SMD's Director General since its creation in 2006, is not merely a museological undertaking, but one with huge civic and educational responsibilities. Like HH Sheikh Dr Sultan Al-Qasimi, Ataya holds a postgraduate degree in Museum Studies from Harvard University in the United States and understands Al-Qasimi's two-pronged approach to education and cultural awareness through schools and universities and also through museums and public activities. Following Ataya, we can say that providing an educational and insightful opportunity to learn about the emirate through a collection of objects is empowering, informative and it encourages interpersonal partnerships. The provision of state-of-the-art interactive technology and easy access to everyone are also keys to reassuring audiences and making education enjoyable and topical.

The largest proportion of our visitors is drawn from local and regional audiences, i.e. from Sharjah, the UAE, the Gulf region and the Arab world. They are attracted to our museums due to shared cultural interests and values and both our venues and our staff are readied to highlight and celebrate these interconnections... Museum education and visitor interactivity lie at the heart of everything Sharjah Museums Department presents to its audiences. Displays, exhibitions, events, guided tours and activities are carefully devised to ensure that all visitors have an experience that is innovative, immersive and educational as well as enjoyable (Ataya 2016).

The UAE has a comparatively small landmass (83,000km<sup>2</sup> or a third of the size of the UK) and with local Emiratis so heavily outnumbered by foreign expatriates (1:10), it is understandable that great efforts are made to articulate local culture. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) standards and best practices have been adopted by the SMD as a way of reinforcing its role as a committed museum partnership and affirming its international mindset and openness to the world (Ataya 2016). The ICOM model, which is linked to many international organizations such as the United Nations and Interpol, and whose members spans 137 countries and 20,000 museums, not only acts as a best-practice guide and monitor, setting standards for the museums' day-to-day practice, but also ensures that the museums are protected and have a partnership both within the state of Sharjah and the wider world (Ataya 2016). Ideas or advice can be shared and consequently museums, however small, and their staff are empowered (Ataya 2016). Recognising the importance of international standards and ethics is also an example of HH Al-Qasimi and the SMD's determination to protect and empower the museum partnership and by extension, the state as a whole. Being a partnership of museums in an international museum network is also an important way of ensuring that each of the museums in Sharjah retains

its own unique identity and purpose by which it can be identified and this is reinforced by staff who are, in many ways, custodians of the country's heritage.



Figure 2: Sharjah Archaeology Museum

While every museum within the partnership could also be seen as an icon or symbol for Emirati culture, Ataya has compared visiting museums in the SMD to being like a series of journeys. 'Both venues and staff provide rich and diverse opportunities to learn about Arab-Islamic, and specifically Emirati, culture and heritage and to engage in positive intercultural dialogue through both objects and direct human encounters,' says Ataya (2016) (5). Working to international standards successfully and respecting set guidelines for SMD staff also results in trust from visitors. Small museums such as the Emirati house, *Bait Al Naboodah* or the traditional *Majilis Al Midfa* may not be as publicised as other larger projects initiated by government entities, but, according to Ataya, these are greatly valued by the SMD for the part that they play in enriching the community's culture and education for local and tourist audiences (Ataya 2016). It is telling that of the 800,000 visitors to SMD last year, the largest proportions of visitors were non-Emirati residents (35%) and schools and university students (21%).

### Partnership-building as a method of work

'The importance of partnerships goes beyond the projects themselves' (Ataya, 2016)

As well as working together in a coordinated way, the SMD museum partnership continues to partner with other UAE organisations to various ends, most often to promote education and understanding amongst young people and students. One of SMD's aims is to make education fun and accessible and to break down barriers to learning, whether they are barriers of understanding, social challenges, gender or age. In 2016, a nationwide government initiative aiming to bring technology into UAE classrooms and transform the country's education system was launched, in collaboration with SMD and the web-based *Smart Learning Programme* ([www.smartlearning.gov.ae](http://www.smartlearning.gov.ae)) championed by Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashed Al Maktoum. *The Sharjah Science Carnival* held a string of chemistry and physics events in the Sharjah Science Museum, as well as outreach events in local schools and outdoor environmental clean-up activities, to show the importance of science and technology in everyday life and the importance of protecting the environment.

With so many museums around the world today, reaching a wider audience and expanding its network is vital to the SMD's survival. The department actively encourages and promotes interaction with other international museums and museum partnerships as well as governments, cultural organisations and stakeholder groups. This is also a way of promoting awareness of what the country itself has to offer in terms of history, culture and resources. An example of the close collaborations within the SMD museums and between the SMD and government organisations occurred in 2016, when HH Dr Sheikh Al-Qasimi, himself a historian, held a press event at the Mleiha archaeological site, to share news of the discovery of a tombstone bearing Aramaic inscriptions that mentioned an ancient King of Oman, Amad bin Jar bin Ali Kahin. This 3rd century BC discovery was important as it represented the earliest mention of the kingdom of Oman (6). The excavations relied on the collaboration of the Belgian archaeological team from the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels, Ghent University, and Sharjah's Department of Antiquities. The discovery was also widely reported in the media and it kept media interest in the following months, partly due to the Sharjah Investment and Development Authority (Surooq)'s development of an ecotourism resort and desert activity centres close to the site. It also drew attention from investment, business, and real estate industries (Sharjah Update 2016). Finds from the site were put into display cases alongside the touring exhibition *Petra: The Wonder of the Desert*, by the Sharjah Archaeology Museum, which opened a few months later. The large exhibition was centred on artefacts from the Department of Antiquities in Jordan and visitors were invited to draw parallels between both sites, which dated from about the same time, through the objects on display and the descriptions of their architecture and cultures. The Belgian archaeological team reported on the similarity of both cultures' monumental tombs, and noted that the cultural parallels could be due to trade relationships along the trans-Arabian trade routes, which was supported by the fact that the remains of camel and horse bones were found on the site (Overlaet and Haerinck 2014).



Figure 3: Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation

Many Sharjah Museums have formed lasting partnerships with a range of museums from around the world through loans and events in order to develop a better understanding of Sharjah's heritage, its culture and the importance of Islam. Housed in what had been one of the city's main shopping areas, the *Souk al-Majarrah*, the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation is a monumental building at the centre of Sharjah. Its impressive classical Islamic architectural elements with a gold central dome, arched windows and towers make the museum an eye-

catching landmark for locals and visitors alike. Since 2009, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London has allowed the museum to host its touring Jameel Prize for Contemporary Islamic Art twice, as well as lectures and interviews with the artists in the prize shortlist, who come from countries all over the Islamic world (7). Other exhibitions such as the successful *Ottoman Masterpieces* exhibition in 2016, feature loans from other museums, in this case the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts. Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation exhibitions are sometimes given 'blockbuster' style advertising with national magazine coverage and posters around Sharjah and Dubai. The museum is an impressive showcase to Islam, an introduction to non-Muslims and an inspiration for Muslims. Non-Muslims are invited to marvel at the beauty of the museum's architecture, its decoration and the piety of Islamic artists and craftsmen. The displays explain the beginnings of Islam and the main themes of the religion, exhibiting intricate and diverse objects of worship and manuscripts, telling specific Quranic stories through objects or highlighting parts of Islamic history. While much effort is made to distinguish Emirati culture from that of its Arab neighbours, in the Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation, Emiratis and Arab Muslims alike are encouraged to think of Islamic culture as their own uniting culture.

It would seem that SMD's visitors' profile is a complex one and the museum partnership needs to build trusting relationships both with civilian society, its visitors, and various stakeholders, as well as regional and international museums. To fulfil and support its mission in promoting education and interactivity the SMD has adopted international museum guidelines and undertakes robust staff training (8). In fact, Ataya affirms that in Sharjah, how a project is put together and presented relies more on the work of partnerships, rather than on the content of the project itself (9).

## Conclusion

Langham and Barker (2014: 82-83) refer to the 'high context', intercultural style of curatorship that, according to them, is particularly common in the Gulf region. They suggest that traditional activities such as wearing the national costume or falconry are purposefully being revived by government-run organisations and museums, as a successful style of engagement for people in the region. According to Langham and Barker (2014: 82-3), this is because audiences in the Arabian Gulf are unreceptive to 'the static, unemotional, labelled exhibits of the 19th century European museum tradition' and that the latter have to feel and absorb exhibits or ideas in a practical, manual sense in order to truly understand their importance and gain a sense of heritage. If Langham and Barker are suggesting that Emiratis or Gulf Arabs are uneducated, this is untrue. According to UNICEF figures, the UAE has a 90% literacy rate. They also fail to give enough credit to the importance of Sharjah's existing and successful partnership of museums, its sophisticated networks of international contacts and the fact that for over ten years, it has operated according to recognized global museum standards, creating coordinated activities, events and initiatives to reinforce local culture and maintain stability. While Langham and Barker's paper is out-dated and has a stereotypical or simplistic view of the Gulf and of Emiratis, it is important to question who, in this fast-paced, internet age, responds to the aforementioned, '...unemotional, labelled exhibits...'? Museum partnerships, such as the SMD in Sharjah are able to identify and maintain an effective and consistent dialogue with visitors throughout their partnership. The SMD website encourages visit planning, shares news and builds online interest and interaction before and after museum visits.

This paper suggest that a comparison of SMD with a similarly varied partnerships of museums elsewhere in the world such as the Réunion des Musées Nationaux in France or the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC would be a worthwhile exercise (10). This would also help ascertain the extent to which Sharjah's multi-sensory museum-wide curatorial style is indeed the style of contemporary museums of the 21st century. SMD is responding to the challenges of a contemporary audience with an extremely varied demographic that is equal or exceeds those of many museums of other global cities such as New York or London, and it is able to do this because its museums work in partnership. This is a way of engaging with people who might have become despondent with cultural activities and information, due to their varied backgrounds and cultural understanding, the surge in alternative media and social media, the rapid development of their country or situation, changes to their economic circumstances and, in the case of the UAE, to the sudden influx of people from overseas, threatening to change their local culture.

In 1998, Sharjah was named Cultural Capital of the Arab Region and the UNESCO - Sharjah Prize for Arab Culture was established annually to reward promotion of Arab art and culture in the world (UNESCO 2009). Building partnerships based on viewer engagement and interaction is, I would challenge, becoming an effective means of appealing to people and gaining the attention of museum visitors and members of the public who often suffer

from a cultural overload brought on by the changes and stresses of modern life. Would Sharjah or indeed SMD have gained the UNESCO titles were it not involved in a partnership where its methods of engagement and quality of training are uniformly applied?

When it was announced, in the national and international press in 2007, that museums, such as The Louvre Abu Dhabi, The Guggenheim Museum, The Maritime Museum and The Sheikh Zayed National Museum would be part of a cultural district on Saadiyat island, in Abu Dhabi, many wondered what role the country's hitherto largest network of museums, SMD, in Sharjah would have in the project. Would past rivalries between the emirates prevail? Or perhaps SMD would be asked to share advice or best practice with the international museums' management or staff in Abu Dhabi? With time, however, it seems that The Saadiyat Island Cultural District's role is very different to that of SMD. On the one hand, SMD is a partnership of museums and its role is firmly rooted in the concept of partnership; it partners with other organisations, other museums and primarily with its visitors to educate and inform. On the other hand, the aim of Saadiyat Island is to house prominent world museums and become an international art hub for 'a global culture, drawing local regional and international visitors' in a district 'unprecedented in scale and scope' (Saadiyat Cultural District 2016). Though it may seem that HH Sheikh Al-Qasimi's vision of education and communication through art and history is overlooked, and SMD's successful experience of building bridges with local and international organizations, people and communities are cast aside, they are not. Visitors to Sharjah are struck by the city's 'sense of authenticity' (McLoughlin n.d.). The rapid growth and architectural development in the cities of Abu Dhabi and Dubai during the 1980s and 1990s that was described at the beginning of this paper, during which Sharjah took a 'back to basics' approach and adopted a more conservative and conservationist approach, may have resulted in a loss of authenticity in the former cities. It is therefore not surprising that the SMD model, which was created to support local traditions, history and architecture, does not fit with Saadiyat's impressive line-up of traditional French, English and American museums that are built by fashionable non-Emirati architects on a man-made island outside the centre of the capital. The ruler of Sharjah's daughter, HH Sheikh Hoor Al-Qasimi, the President of the Sharjah Art Foundation refers to the 'strong sense of the traditional fabric of Emirati life' in the city (McLoughlin n.d.). She suggests that, 'much of the character of Sharjah is a reflection of it being a place people live in rather than simply visit as tourists' (McLoughlin n.d.). 'If it's only for the international art crowd, we can be anywhere in the world... We don't have to be in Sharjah' (Kino 2015).

This paper concludes that there is a lot to learn from SMD, not least the strong sense of cultural awareness, authenticity and partnership that this eastern emirate's museum department has brought to the UAE over the past 20 years. Its attributes include the building of enduring partnerships between universities, regional and international organisations, museums, and between people – locals, expatriates and visitors. SMD represents the bright future for museums in the 21st century, as interactive tools for communication, awareness and understanding assimilated into the fabric of the state, promoting local culture, confidence and national pride as it has done in Sharjah and could do throughout the UAE, as well as at an international level.

## Notes

(1) '... the Qawassim tribe made Sharjah their urban hub and it was there that the initial settlers survived through fishing, pearl diving and sea trading' (Radoine 2013: 197).

(2) In 1979, HH Sheikh Dr Al Qassimi and Sharjah's regional government took the drastic step of banning alcohol completely in what had been the country's most international emirate. Leadbeater (2010) writes that, 'While Abu Dhabi has been conjuring elaborate Grand Prix tracks in the desert and Dubai has been throwing up skyscrapers ... Sharjah [went] ... back to basics'.

(3) The ruler of Sharjah, HH Sheikh Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qasimi (b.1939) is a historian and gained his PhD in History with distinction from Exeter University in 1985 and another in Political Geography of the Gulf from Durham University in 1999. As well as being a professor at Sharjah University, he is a visiting professor for Exeter University and Cairo University.

(4) Although the first museum in the UAE, the National Museum, was created in 1971 in Al Ain, in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, to mark the country's creation, Sharjah inaugurated almost 20 museums between 1993 and 2006.

(5) 'Oral and written material available in English and Arabic, with audio guides at our major sites also provide information in other key languages, including Urdu, Russian, German and Chinese' (Ataya, 2016).

(6) Though the announcement was made in 2016, the findings could have been the result of the 2009-2013 Belgian-Emirati excavations reported by Overlaet (2013). Nonetheless, the coordination of so many different entities to provide such an impressive effect on the press and on public opinion is remarkable. The exact location of the find and its boundaries are also unclear, since French archaeologists were also working on the site on different prehistoric digs. They are mentioned in the detailed description of the site on the Mleiha website: [www.discovermleiha.ae/en](http://www.discovermleiha.ae/en).

(7) Past venues for the prize exhibition include museums in Russia, Singapore and Turkey.

(8) 'The largest proportion of our visitors is drawn from local and regional audiences, i.e. from Sharjah, the UAE, the Gulf region and the Arab world. They are attracted to our museums due to shared cultural interests and values and both our venues and our staff are readied to celebrate these interconnections. Museum education and visitor interactivity lie at the heart of everything SMD presents to its audiences' (Ataya 2016).

(9) '...the importance of strategic international partnerships goes far beyond the actual [museum] projects concerned' (Ataya 2016)

(10) In North America, this could be The Smithsonian Institute which comprises 19 museums, galleries and the National Zoological Park in Washington DC, or in Europe, France's Reunions des Musees Nationaux (RMN) – an umbrella organisation responsible for 34 museums around France.

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## Illustrations

1. Sharjah Heritage Museum, official photograph from Sharjah Museums Department: [www.sharjahmuseums.ae/](http://www.sharjahmuseums.ae/)
2. Sharjah Archaeology Museum, official photograph from Sharjah Museums Department: [www.sharjahmuseums.ae/](http://www.sharjahmuseums.ae/)
3. The Museum of Islamic Civilisations, official photograph from Sharjah Museums Department: [www.sharjahmuseums.ae/](http://www.sharjahmuseums.ae/)

# Partnerships Between Small Museums as a New Management Culture: The Italian Case

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## Abstract

Italian museums are currently experiencing a period of significant change. The cultural and political debates concerning the institutional reform introduced by the Minister of Cultural Heritage in 2014 cuts off small museums, despite the fact that they are sometimes not only the single historical reference point for local communities, but also an important cultural landmark in a defined territory. The National Association of Small Museums was created in 2007 in order to give strength and support to this particular kind of institution. This article aims to show what a partnership among museums can do (and is doing) to let these museums reach their conservation and dissemination goals.

**Keywords:** Small Museums, Italy, Association, territory

## Introduction

Currently, the situation regarding Italian museums is of great interest, due to their quantity, their differences and the political and cultural challenges they have to face. In general, Italian museums can be divided into national and non-state (i.e. not national, both public and private) museums: these two different types of institution are experiencing particular issues relating to their legal status. In order to understand better how non-state museums are responding to the challenges of museology (e.g. social inclusion, educational programmes, conservation, and entertainment) and how they are facing the needs of modern society, the national context will be described through a statistical analysis. The article will provide special focus on small and local museums, showing how small museums are an important part of Italian cultural life, even if they have to tackle management difficulties. In relation to this, the National Association of Small Museums will be introduced as a supportive actor in the cultural and legal life of the smallest museums, its main aim being to connect small museums, enabling them to resolve problematic and unsolved issues together.

## National context

The last few years have represented a nodal period for Italian heritage sites and museums and their management: the debate about the conservation and management of cultural heritage, which poses questions concerning their role, perspective, and relationship with society, is now shifting into a more political level (1).

To understand the organisation of museums in Italy more clearly, it is necessary to point out two important issues. The first of these is the strong nationalisation of museums management. Since the beginning of the Unitarian state in the 19th century, the protection of cultural heritage in general has been delegated to public institutions and authorities (Emiliani 2015: XXVIII-XXXVI), both national and local, with the coordination of the Minister of Education and, since 1975, the Minister of Cultural Heritage. In the past, this helped to protect cultural heritage from illegal expatriation, to promote cultural knowledge among a wider public, and to create the idea of *Italian culture* within the new Italian nation (Falletti Maggi 2012). Secondly, there is the issue of the widespread presence of sites and museums throughout the whole country, from the biggest and most famous cities to isolated villages: this is a special feature of Italian heritage (Italianostra 2010: 4-7).

These two themes show the public richness and accessibility of Italian history, but they can also recall the weakness of this huge heritage, which is subordinated to institutional changes, ministerial reforms and different management practices according to their fame and accessibility to tourists. This weakness has never been clearer: recent earthquakes (August-October 2016) prove that there is still a lot to do to secure local buildings and sites, a commitment that will take time and that surely asks for more incisive action than the on-going general reform of the Minister of Cultural Heritage that is now rearranging its presence in territories and reorganising the main museums (Cammelli 2013, Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali, 2016).

The biggest museums and the most well-known historical sites are what the majority of recent political and cultural discussions focus on (2). The debate seems almost to be forgetting the great number of local museums, different not only for their size, but also for their legal status and property rights (from local public institutions to museums owned by cultural associations or private citizens). Actually, the national debate and the reform introduced by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism involve less than 10% of Italian museums and sites, but it is necessary to understand the core of the recent reform in order to point out its relevance on the real life of Italian museums and their current situation.

After a long period of development, the organisation of Italian national museums underwent a process of change between 2014 and 2016. As a result of a special ministerial decree, the so-called '*Decreto Musei*', Italian national museums included within the National Museum System are now divided into twenty autonomous museums and seventeen Regional Centres, which act as supervisors for the other museums in the same region (Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali 2014). For the first time since the creation of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism in 1975, every museum is asked to have its own statute: this document has to be accepted by the Director of the Regional Centre and, later, by the Minister. All museums must submit their own economic and budget plans annually, and they must have five different management areas, each of them with dedicated responsible personnel: 1. General direction; 2. Collection management, research and teaching; 3. Marketing, fundraising and public relations; 4. Administration, financial and human resources; 5. Structure, space and safety. In addition, this decree underlines that all national museums must belong to the National Museums System, and adds that other museums (scientific, university, demo-ethno-anthropologic and private) can join the National Museum System if they can properly conform to the required conditions. The specific requests to join the national system stated in this decree had already been underlined in the ministerial decree of the 10th of May 2001 that pointed out the technical and scientific standards for museum management and development (Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali 2001). This official document aimed to give national museums standard technical rules and a practical code of behaviour for officers. The technical rules relate to eight areas: juridical and financial matters, museum structure, staff, museum safety, collection management, relations with the public, and connections with local territory. For each area, all museums are called to satisfy clear quality standards and to give themselves human, legal, financial and organisational resources to reach and keep these quality standards.

For a cultural institution, answering to these issues is therefore mandatory in order to enter the National Museum System, which means becoming part of national programmes, national protection and promotion activities, national calls and funding.

These ministerial requests, despite their positive intentions, sometimes happen to be far from the real experiences of local museums, which are, first of all and according to the ICOM definition of a museum, 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' (3). The National Institute for Statistics (ISTAT) quantified that museums and other similar institutions numbered 4588 in 2011 and 4976 in 2015; of these, only 8.8% are national museums connected to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism (ISTAT 2016). This is unsurprising when it is considered that a good proportion of local cultural heritage throughout the nation (especially in small towns and villages) is stored in small museums, with a single officer, limited funding and shifting opening hours. These museums, even if strongly connected to their territories, local audience and history, are clearly unable to make structural changes to reach ministerial quality standards (for example, a defined group of workers with clear tasks, a financial plan, a new juridical status) to join the National Museum System, even if they answer to the fundamental and universal definition of the museum.

A real help in understanding the reality of Italian museums is given by a recently published study led by the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT). The research, named 'Survey about small museums and similar institutions' (ISTAT 2016) counted all the institutions and structures that in 2015 acquired, conserved, ordered and exhibited cultural heritage for education and study. Firstly, the study lists 4976 cultural heritage sites in Italy, of which 4158 (83%) are museums: the number has increased from the 4588 sites listed in a similar study held in 2011 (ISTAT 2013). From the latter statistics, we learn that 91.2% of museums are not connected to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, but have different legal status. The proportion is considerable and can easily show how ministerial policies can have a limited effect on the whole of Italy's heritage.

Non-state museums appear to be significantly smaller than national ones: 44.4 % of them conserve less than 500 objects, and 20.8% less than 2000; while 20.8% of national museums have big collections of more than 10,000 objects. Such a discrepancy between collection sizes can obviously have meaningful effects on needs and policies.

Even considering the quality standards of the buildings that host the museums, the reality of Italian museums is far from the desired situation required by official ministerial documents (Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali 2001 and 2014): only 18.3% of non-state museums have a fundamental service charter that defines management practice and public service offer. In addition, Italian museums suffer from a general lack of building safety: focusing on non-state museums, ISTAT revealed that 73.2 % of them have never been the subject of a seismic upgrade, and 36.5% have no internal security and emergency plan, which is clearly mandatory for the Ministry in order to be included in the National Museum System (ISTAT 2016) (4). In addition, the Ministry, as previously explained, asks for a clear definition of its organisational structure, where each officer has its own job description. Once again, the reality of Italian museums shown by ISTAT is completely different: 19.4% of non-state museums have no officers at all; 33.9% have just one or two; while 17.4% of them work with three to five people (ISTAT 2016) (5). These data highlight the chronic lack of funds available to these museums, which consequently does not allow for new staff to be hired. For now, however, they demonstrate the inability of the majority of non-state museums to achieve ministerial requirements of the National Museum System to improve their status. This widespread heritage is registered, conserved and disseminated by small, local museums, but at this moment in time they seem to be left out of the centralised system of conservation, promotion and funding. This exclusion may lead to the demise of small museums: outside common debate and ministerial channels, it is not easy to continue working whilst remaining focused on core museological objectives.

## Partnership between small museums

Given this background, it can be argued that partnership between local museums and local cultural institutions is the only answer to not being left out of the hierarchical management of culture: in 2007, a group of museum professionals and experts joined together and founded the National Association of Small Museums (*Associazione Nazionale Piccoli Musei*) (6). Aware of the difficulty of being a local museum in Italy, the Association aims to promote a new management culture for this kind of institution; to give value to their peculiarities; to create a network where they can find support and share their experiences and knowledge with other similar museums throughout the whole country. Since its foundation, the Association has also had the institutional goal of bringing to ministerial attention the existence of such a big number of different museums with strong territorial roots that feel almost ignored by national policies and are excluded by great cultural campaigns and projects. After ten years the Association counts hundreds of small museums and similar institutions among its membership, has participated in eight National Congresses and confirmed itself as a powerful tool to put museums in contact with each other and help them in pursuing their social, cultural and historical goals of conservation, dissemination, and promotion within their localities.

The structure of the Association tries to respond properly to the diffusion of small museums throughout the country. The Directorate-General and the Secretariat are the legal centres of proposals, activity coordination, and financial and management issues. The Directorate defines cultural policies for the whole Association, but it works in concrete and constant connection with regional coordinators (museum directors or free-lancers, voluntary scholars), who act directly on the field, have strong relations with their museums, take part in central decisions and make them operative. This means that the Association can be present and active in supervising and supporting small museums in every region and area, in order to give a better service to its partners. Regional coordinators know their assigned area well, so they are able to report to the Directorate-General and act as spokespersons for local situations during national meetings.

The museums that have joined the Association so far are spread through the whole Italian peninsula and are very different from each other. They are not alike in legal status (they belong to municipalities, cultural groups, or are private), type of collections (e.g. agricultural machinery, archaeological objects, clothing, botanic) and historical background, but they share the same experiences: a strong connection with their territory and local history, cultural policies dedicated to local communities, experience-sharing, their small size and small number of officers completely dedicated to the museum and its audience.

For instance, one of the most emotional small museums of the Association is the Museo Tolomeo, in Bologna. It is housed in a single room of the Cavazza Institute for Blind People and it exhibits (in an innovative set-up in darkness) many historical and modern materials connected to reading systems for blind or partially-sighted people (books, maps, machines): all the objects are strongly connected to the important Institute the museum is located in. The museum is managed by only two curators, who work in an ongoing relationship with the employers of the Institute and manage to create an emotional museum that continues to be the centre of cultural life in the region, with many activities dedicated to students, blind people, the general public, and other museums, which offer a new way to 'see' the world, mixing multimedia interaction and historical collections. The museum also hosts and promotes a very important event for the city of Bologna: the creative marathon called 'Museomix', a three-day workshop about creating and managing museums, open to Italian scholars and museum professionals interested in rethinking the idea of museums from collections to design and computer science (7).

The Association also counts among its members many museums of taste and food traditions, such as the Museum of Peperoncino inside the Ducal Palace of Maierà, a very small village in the deep south of Italy. This is a unique museum, entrusted to a local group (*pro loco*) and to the municipality. It is composed of four sections, which concern the chilli plant as the basis of Maierà economy and tradition, its commercial and agricultural diffusion, and its presence in art pieces and commercials (8).

Small museums seem to represent the perfect place to show and protect small local stories, which most of the time cannot find space in bigger museums located in main cities. Small museums discuss local history and they can be an important reference point for local communities, which see them as an expression of their own past. Without small museums a huge part of local history, traditions and memories are bound to disappear completely for future generations.

## How can partnership help small museums? The current work of the Association

When we talk about small museums, we often imagine little places run by few people with very limited funding, but completely dedicated to local history and traditions. According to the National Association, however, small museums are not only small rooms with a few workers, but also special places with a particular management culture that want to offer real and original stories in a friendly environment and in strong connection with local places and communities (Dall'Ara 2016). The large number of small, local museums in 2016 reveals the social need of villages and small communities to have their own museum in order to preserve and promote their own history (Di Matteo 2016, p. 59). As has already been shown, however, it is not easy for this kind of institution to survive at the edge of national networks. Consequently, the partnership within the National Association of Small Museums is essential, and can help small museums in many ways, as expressed in its *Statute* (Associazione Nazionale Piccoli Musei 2007): firstly, by promoting and spreading small museums, in order to give value to these institutions and their strong connection with local communities and encouraging a management culture for small museums in order to offer high-quality standards of visitor service; secondly, by inciting national and regional institutions to create appropriate rules for small museums, and to encourage the Minister of Cultural Heritage and Tourism to define standards and professional profiles that suit the size and features of these museums; thirdly, by bringing to a national level the debate about the importance of small museums in preserving historical and cultural heritage and in protecting the moral, legal, and economic conditions of the workers in small museums, as well as providing professional representation in cultural, scientific, technical, legal, legislative and management fields. Eventually, the Association wants to promote other kinds of partnership between similar institutions and associations to encourage experience and knowledge exchange and to pursue common aims.

One of the crucial moments in the life of the Association is the annual National Congress, which is an effective means of gathering all the partners together and to address various issues. Since it began in 2010, each national congress has discussed a special theme. In the later congresses, the Association felt the need to focus mostly, as we will see, on accessibility, institutional recognition, and promotional activities.

## Accessibility

One of the crucial features of Small Museums is their special relationship with the public, as nowadays it seems very important to take care of museum visitors and to create a special relationship with them. The analysis of

the situation started during the 2014 Congress in Viterbo and led to a strong and frequent reflection on public engagement. These discussions also included other non-associated institutions, foreign museums (from Spain, Croatia, Slovenia, and Brazil for example), and the general public, in order to learn from each other, discuss with visitors and promote themselves as well (Associazione Nazionale Piccoli Musei 2016; Ceci and Pisu 2014: *passim*).

The results of these discussions are considerable. Located outside the big tourist areas, small museums are always dedicated to local communities, groups or individual visitors, who are their main audiences. Small museums and their collections are traditionally close to local people because they have the same historical background and talk about and share common memories: small museums could not exist outside their localities and without their communities, their first aim being to preserve and share local stories. Ethnologic collections or museums of traditions and crafts can provide perfect examples: their museological work revolves around histories shared with their visitors, who may even become donors of private material and the main characters of events and storytelling. Small museums talk with local people and about local people: the strong belief that visitors have to feel at home in a small museum makes necessary the creation of special policies of accessibility. The first step appears to be the offer of 'tailor-made' tours, in which museums managers are directly involved in receiving every visitor in a customised way, according to their personal interests and experiences. In this sense, it is necessary for museums to follow good museums practice (as strongly expressed during the 5th National Congress and in every contribution of its act: Ceci and Pisu 2014), in that curators and employees within small museums have to plan welcoming strategies from the moment visitors arrive to their memories after the visit. Small museums find their own expression in being completely with local communities and good welcoming policies have to be free of barriers for everyone (Associazione Nazionale Piccoli Musei 2016). Every visitor has its own needs, which the museum should aim to fulfil; museum staff must be ready to listen to their audience, to deepen the relationship between what the collection offers and what the public wants, and to create a dynamic relationship with local life. It looks clear that these connections are difficult to establish in bigger museums, and so the opportunities which smaller, local museums offer should be valued.

In this way, small museums can offer a serious alternative to bigger, national institutions for a substantial part of the population. The above-mentioned statistical research on museums and similar institutions held in 2011 (ISTAT 2013) can support this statement: it shows that small museums are not interesting enough for foreign tourists (61% of them choose a big museum, while small ones are reached by only 14%), but they manage to attract 29% of young public (compared to 20% for big museums) and 31% of older people (only 19% in big museums). It can be argued that small museums in Italy are now the possible answer to the public demand for cultural spaces which are not dominated by mass-tourism. These different categories of audience make alternative requests to museums, which are called to give more attention to local life, to be always part of their communities, and to be a place where local people can have a sense of ownership. In addition, there is an expectation that small museums provide dedicated activities for different age ranges interested in local collections.

It is clear that small museums speak to other kinds of public. And the aim is to speak to this public in an open way, to be the door to the locality, to be the starting point to discover local history and culture. Sharing experiences and methods through the partnership can be the only real way to enable every single museum in the Association to grow in strength and self-awareness of its goals and its social role. The stronger they become, the clearer they can highlight themselves to national institutions.

In terms of general audiences, there is a great debate within the Association about the strength of social media in promoting small museums to the wider public (9). Being free and easy-to-use, they are one of the most common working tools for promotion and dissemination available to the managers of small museums; in addition, it is clear how the creation of a good social strategy can be of great help for local museums that want to be known nationally (De Gottardo, D'Amore, Gasparotti and Cominesi 2014: 48-52). Clever and efficient use of social media, as well as the online reputation of small museums, should not be underestimated, since these are very often the strongest weapons in a small museum's hands. For this reason, the Association leads the online promotion and communication of national events for small museums and uses national congresses to introduce case studies, to train museum managers, and to help museums create their own social strategy (Associazione Nazionale Piccoli Musei 2016).

## Institutional recognition

According to the ISTAT statistics (ISTAT 2016), the great majority of museum institutions in Italy are located outside the National Museums System and they are consequently unprotected by the system itself. On the one hand, the Association is working to help every partner in the long process towards achieving a recognised museum standard: through training and remote support, the current aim is to provide every museum with the right and objective scientific tools to value their collections, to write their own catalogue according to national criteria, to create high quality text panels, to undertake, step by step, at least a basic research activity. One of the most important objectives, articulated with formative intents during national congresses and other relevant occasions, relates to acquisition, cataloguing and communicating the collection (Associazione Nazionale Piccoli Musei 2007).

On the other hand, while small museums work to reach acceptable national standards, the Association is leading the awareness campaign at institutional level. In order to make the Minister of Cultural Heritage and Tourism sensitive to the great number of small museums and to their social role in local communities, spokespeople for the Association are leading consultations and meetings with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and the Ministry of Education, to ask for more flexible standards that will allow small museums to join national cultural management programmes.

The relationship between small museums and the Ministry is, then, a big concern for the Association. In addition, the regional coordinators are improving connections with local governments and other associations spread throughout the country. It is like creating partnerships between partnerships: the National Association of Small Museums is working to create strong networks on a national level with other associations like GAL (Groups of Local Actions) and Proloco (groups for local people working on tourism), which work for the general development of small areas and towns and sometimes run small local museums (10). These links help small museums to stay even more connected to their communities, to become active parts of the cultural life and tourist destinations in their area, to be known and recognised by local administrations; in addition, these links will help other local groups in managing their museums successfully.

In terms of developing local tourism, it is necessary to underline the connection with the so-called *Alberghi Diffusi* ('widespread hotels', an innovative concept of hospitality for small places, in which the rooms of a single hotel are not in one building, but in various historical buildings throughout the town). In recent years, *Alberghi Diffusi* have managed to give new life to small villages, especially in summer (Dall'Ara 2015). In the end, small museums work with the same aim of promoting local culture; the connections with local institutions are, therefore, natural.

## Promotional activities of connection

One of the most successful ways to share experiences and connect small museums is the training programme led by the Association (Associazione Nazionale Piccoli Musei 2007). The first course took place in Cittadella, a little town near Padua, where a local cooperative asked the Association for appropriate training in order to be able to manage properly the little circuit of historic city walls currently under their supervision. The Association created a special twenty-day course, 'Education for small museums', covering various subjects, from local history to small museums management in general, with a particular focus on comparing different types of museum education for different typologies of audience (e.g. schools, people with disabilities, online public). The interesting feature of the classes was that different directors of small museums held each of them. In this way, it became a development and sharing experience not only for the students, but also for the directors, who shared their experiences in museum education and the outcomes of their own work. At the beginning of 2017, the group involved in the course re-organised the complete wall circuit visit for the first time and started offering guided tours which also involved small exhibitions inside the towers. The Cittadella wall circuit is now the most important sightseeing attraction of the town and its area (11).

With the same promotional aim, the Association is organising the first National Day of Small Museums, to take place in June 2018. It will be a special occasion for all the associated museums to open all day long with no entrance fee and to join an event of national appeal, with many national partners (including the national press, tour agencies, cultural sites, and web portals). For that day, every museum will offer a gift to the visitors, in

order to underline the special relationship it has with its public: the gift has to be unique and handmade, and it has to embody the real soul of the museum (12).

## Case studies

One of the most famous museums in the National Association of Small Museums is the Bora Museum of Trieste (Lombardi and Cecalupo 2016). Created in 2004 by a local cultural organisation interested in promoting the city, it aims to be the first museum in the world completely dedicated to the Bora wind, the most important attraction of the city of Trieste (*Il Magazzino dei Venti / Progetto BORA Museum*). This museum perfectly embodies the spirit and the features of small museums. From a legal point of view, it is a private museum with no national support, managed by a single person who works as director, keeps it open and provides guided tours. The relationship between the Bora museum and its audience is fundamental: visitors have the opportunity to contribute to the making of the collection, with donations of private objects connected to the Bora and of 'winds in bottles' for the internal archive of the winds from the world (*Progetti in corso*). Everyone can play an active part in the collection and this makes the Bora Museum a true participatory institution. In recent years, the museum has managed to grow in reputation and importance thanks to connections with local institutions (such as the local council, other cultural groups, libraries, schools and universities), resulting in the opportunity to organise important events about the wind outside the museum, in the city centre (such as the annual BoraMata Fest, which celebrates the city wind with public games and international artists and authors, has received much attention from the local and national press, and has become an influential tourist attraction (*Follie di vento a Trieste – BoraMata*). Thanks to many other national events linked to the Association (including conferences about modern museology and communication, articles on specialist journals and newspapers, master classes and television appearances), the Bora Museum has become nationally well-known, gained more visitors and can be seen as a reference point for cultural life and tourism in Trieste (Lombardi and Cecalupo 2016, 15).

If the Bora Museum is constantly growing thanks to the National Association of Small Museums (of which it is now an active member), there are many small museums that are new to the Association, but are already working with great success. One of those is the MuLa+ Museum, a museum complex in the south of Italy that, since 2016, has connected four small exhibitions in the town of Latronico, which lies outside the main tourist route of southern Italy. In the same year, it joined the National Association of Small Museums after the last National Congress. The museum fits perfectly with the spirit of the Association: it tells the whole story of the town from its archaeological past (the archaeological section is connected to a small archaeological site and hosts important prehistoric objects in two rooms), to its anthropological life (with sections relating to arts, crafts and peasant culture, as well as the local thermal baths) and its modern culture (it hosts the city library). Therefore, since it opened, it has been trying to offer unique experiences to tourists and local people, who are always connected with their own past thanks to a great number of inclusive activities held inside the museum (MuLa+ 2016).

Another example is the Museo San Paolo, the museum of the small town of Monselice, near Padua. The museum, hosted in the medieval church of Saint Paul in the centre of the town, will be the museum of the church as well as the museum of the whole town. It opened in 2017, but it has already become a crucial member of the Association. It was the location of the VII National Congress of Small Museums (which had an influential tourist impact on the town) and it has been followed step by step in its creation by the national group. It is possible to follow the setting up of the museum and the debate about its genesis through a dedicated blog and the social profiles of the Association (*San Paolo Monselice Museo della Città* and *Associazione Nazionale Piccoli Musei*).

## Final considerations

The process so far described is obviously not yet finally accomplished; it can be seen as a work in progress with the clear goal of helping small museums to find their correct management style and in promoting themselves and their specialisms.

In conclusion, it may be useful to point out again the complex situation of Italian museums and collections. One of the major features is obviously the large number of museums in Italy and their national distribution: in 2015, ISTAT counted 4976 museums and similar institutions; given that Italian cities, towns and village currently



number 7983, it is possible to say that, on average, almost 2 towns out of 3 in Italy have a museum. The analysis of numerical data showed that national and ministerial policy on museums refers to a limited group of museums (only 8.8% of Italian museums depend on the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism) and does not involve all other institutions, which sometimes lie at the edge of national cultural life. The great number of non-state museums (91.2% of Italian museums) appears to be excluded from political and cultural debate on heritage and are currently unable to find any support from national institutions.

Italian museums are facing complex issues: on the one hand, the majority are small museums with very few employees. On the other hand, they appear to be more connected to their communities, but are sometimes unknown outside the local context. This is one of the essential aims of the National Association of Small Museums, which since its foundation in 2007 has been working on bringing small museums to national attention, especially through the national press, social networks, and national cultural events. The work of the National Association of Small Museums comes from the belief that small local museums can become stronger and more visible only if they work together. This seems to be the best answer to the needs of small museums that want to increase their visitor numbers and show to national authorities not only their circumstances or their problems but also their precious role in local life in preserving history and memories.

Connections between small museums, managed by the National Association of Small Museums as their national spokesperson, offer the only realistic way for them to overcome international museum challenges and to enable them to manage their collections and their cultural and historical heritage properly. Partnership can help strengthen small museums on their way to institutional recognition: working together means growing together, improving in visitors number, research and museological skills, without losing their own special features. Partnership can help small museums not only in shaping their future in contemporary Italian society, but also in configuring the future of Italian museology, far from famous cities and tourist sites, but close to the local population, serving as the real reference point of cultural life for many communities.

## Notes

(1) This debate has concerned Italian cultural life for many years, leading to a great number of papers, talks and discussions from Universities, independent scholars, ministerial employers, politicians and administrators. It is possible to access a complete list of articles, books and events on [www.patrimoniosos.it](http://www.patrimoniosos.it) and [www.emergenzacultura.org](http://www.emergenzacultura.org).

(2) For example, Rome and its central archaeological area (Colosseum and Forum) is always in the spotlight, as can easily be seen in the ongoing press reviews on [www.patrimoniosos.it](http://www.patrimoniosos.it). The same happens with Pompeii, which received massive funding after UNESCO expressed/issued notes of concern. Even the famous Brera (Milan) and Uffizi (Florence) Galleries are currently going through some important changes: <http://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/export/MiBAC/sito-MiBAC/MenuPrincipale/GrandiRestauri/index.html>.

(3) This definition can be found in Article 3 of the ICOM Statutes adopted in Vienna (Austria) by the 22nd General Assembly of International Council of Museums on 24 August 2007. Since 1946, when ICOM was founded, the definition has evolved and improved according to changes in museology and society. This statement is the most important reference for the whole international community.

(4) It should be noted, however, that the situation for national museums is not too different: 75.7% of national museums have never been the subject of a seismic upgrade, and 18.2% have no internal security and emergency plan (ISTAT 2016).

(5) The issue has already been deeply analysed by Valeria Minucciani in a weighty speech during the VII National Congress of Small Museums, held in Monselice (near Padua) in April 2016 (Associazione Nazionale Piccoli Musei 2016).

(6) The Statute of the Association, adopted in 2007, is one of the main reference points of the paper. It is freely available in its complete version on [www.piccolimusei.com](http://www.piccolimusei.com).

(7) Much information and frequent updates can be found at [www.cavazza.it](http://www.cavazza.it), [www.museumix.it](http://www.museumix.it) and the Facebook page of Museo Tolomeo.

(8) The *pro loco* website provides information about the local museum: [www.prolocodiamante.it/andar-per-musei/museo-del-peperoncino-maiera](http://www.prolocodiamante.it/andar-per-musei/museo-del-peperoncino-maiera).

- (9) The relationship between social reputation and small museums was deeply analysed by Veronica Ramos and Nicolette Mandarano during the 2016 Congress of Monselice (Associazione Nazionale Piccoli Musei 2016).
- (10) The situation of local museums run by *pro loco* has not been analysed yet. It is not possible to provide general bibliography or statistics, but it is possible to have an idea about this situation by checking the activities of Italian *pro loco* and local groups.
- (11) It is possible to verify constantly online reviews and feedback to the new guided tours, in order to prove that tourists' perception of the value of the tour is now higher than before:  
[www.turismo.comune.cuttadella.pd.it](http://www.turismo.comune.cuttadella.pd.it).
- (12) All the events of the day are available on the Association website [www.piccolimusei.com](http://www.piccolimusei.com).

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## QUESTION AND ANSWER: What Kinds of Partnership are Appropriate or Not Appropriate for Museums to Engage With?

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Undertaking a Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) studentship means my doctoral research embodies a link in a growing partnership between two institutions; the University of Brighton and the Imperial War Museum. This will likely outlive the duration of my research, but like all productive partnerships the outcome of the project should provide insight into the partnership's value. Rather than being a static, only-in-name partnership CDAs are also trilateral relationships, they are highly fluid and require maintenance from all three parties – museum, university, and researcher - to succeed. If correctly undertaken, this form of collaboration is wholly appropriate and should be encouraged. Students gain museum-based experience, museums receive much-needed researchers for unexplored collections, and the innovative research produced becomes a badge proudly worn by universities.

To reach their full potential, support and maintenance of CDAs in the form of frequent dialogue and the realisation and management of expectations is vital. Researchers must manage the reality of and potential for feelings of isolation whilst working across two institutional sites; negating time at university in favour of museums whilst not attaining employee status among colleagues can prove problematic. Institutional supervisors from partner organisations must have a heightened awareness of this and encourage a dialogue surrounding the researcher's position.

In aiming to create a partnership that brings academia and museums closer within an often closed working museum environment, the CDA scheme is ambitious. However, in facilitating the development of truly fascinating research, a well-executed partnership with a little ambition can go far.

## MUSEUMS AND COMMUNITIES

## INTERVIEW: Professor Richard Sandell and Jocelyn Dodd

### Exceptional & Extraordinary: Unruly bodies and minds in the medical museum

*Museological Review* conducted an interview with Richard Sandell, Professor of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, and Jocelyn Dodd, Director of the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) at the University of Leicester, relating to their collaborative project *Exceptional & Extraordinary: Unruly bodies and minds in the medical museum*. *Exceptional & Extraordinary* was initiated and led by RCMG in partnership with four artists – David Hevey, Francesca Martinez, Julie McNamara, and Deaf Men Dancing – and eight medical museums. The project was funded by the Wellcome Trust and Arts Council England. The project web site is available at [www.unrulybodies.le.ac.uk](http://www.unrulybodies.le.ac.uk).

#### Can you tell us about the *Exceptional & Extraordinary* project and what its aims were?

*Exceptional & Extraordinary* is the latest in a suite of collaborative research projects carried out over the past fifteen years that have developed new narratives of difference and disability in museums. *Exceptional & Extraordinary* set out to critique deeply entrenched negative attitudes towards physical and mental differences that permeate many aspects of our daily social, political and economic lives. We wanted to lend support for ideas and values that lie at the heart of the global disability rights movement and offer new ways of seeing differences – not as unwelcome deviations from a perceived idealised norm but as part of human diversity.

#### How has working with artists enabled museums to engage in new discussions and debates?

All of our projects in this field have aimed to empower disabled people to determine the ways in which museum narratives are shaped. With this project we commissioned four artists with lived experience of disability to work collaboratively with the research team, with museum curators and medical experts to create compelling new work that would not only stimulate debate but also enrich the ways in which people viewed disability. The artists played a critical role in opening up new ways of seeing collections in museums that had tended to be viewed from highly medicalised perspectives.

#### How has working with museums enabled artists to shape and develop their work?

Some of the artists had worked with museums before, and were aware of their potential as sites for research and inspiration. Others had not previously considered museums in this way but found the stories linked to objects intriguing, inspiring and open to multiple possibilities for reimagining and reinterpreting. Mark Smith, choreographer, found the museums' collections of material linked to Deaf history utterly compelling and, through a sustained process of exchanging ideas and working with museum staff, produced a remarkable new contemporary dance that breathed new life into objects.

#### What were the opportunities and challenges for the museums and for the artists who participated in *E&E*?

Collaboration – the exchange, negotiation and creation of ideas – lay at the heart of this project and proved to be critical to its successes. However, collaborations between groups that have little experience of working together and approach themes from sometimes divergent perspectives can be challenging and all parties were on a steep learning curve. The length of the project and the time allowed to build trust and explore creative approaches to resolving differences proved to be enormously significant.

#### How do you feel that working in partnership enables museums to push the boundaries of what they do and what they can achieve?

Partnerships can push boundaries and generate new insights – when managed carefully and, in our experience, when they are built on a foundation of shared values and ambitions – by bringing together new thinking and perspectives. We adopted a model known as the trading zone which resists the hierarchies that can undermine successful collaboration and instead insists on a process of mutual respect and equity.



Figure 1: Mark Smith of Deaf Men Dancing, *Exceptional & Extraordinary*, 2016, Photo Credit: Richard Sandell

### **How do you respond to people who suggest that this kind of work is beyond the remit of the museum?**

Thankfully, there is increasing awareness and understanding of the role that museums can play in not only prompting debate and discussion but in enriching the conversations that a society has about difference. Today, the debate is more about how we can do this work than whether it is a valid part of a museum's remit. Museums have always played a part in shaping the way we see things – this project builds on this key idea by arguing that their potential to shape ways of seeing should be harnessed towards addressing social inequalities.

### **How has this work enabled audiences to engage in new thinking around disability?**

Our research has shown that museums can play a powerful role in shifting attitudes and enriching people's understandings of difference. Many visitors learned new information about disability history and found their engagement with our project elicited a suite of emotions that opened up new ways of thinking.

### **What were the outcomes and achievements of this project?**

Our project addressed a pressing but often overlooked question – why are some lives more highly valued than others? This was an ambitious question to tackle but the sustained process of collaboration between diverse partners – artists, disability activists, medical history and museum experts – proved capable of eliciting rich discussions and reflections amongst participants.

**Professor Richard Sandell, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester**

**Jocelyn Dodd, Director, Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester**



Figure 2: Julie McNamara, David Hevey, Mark Smith of Deaf Men Dancing and Francesca Martinez, *Exceptional and Extraordinary*, 2016.  
Photo Credit: Julian Anderson

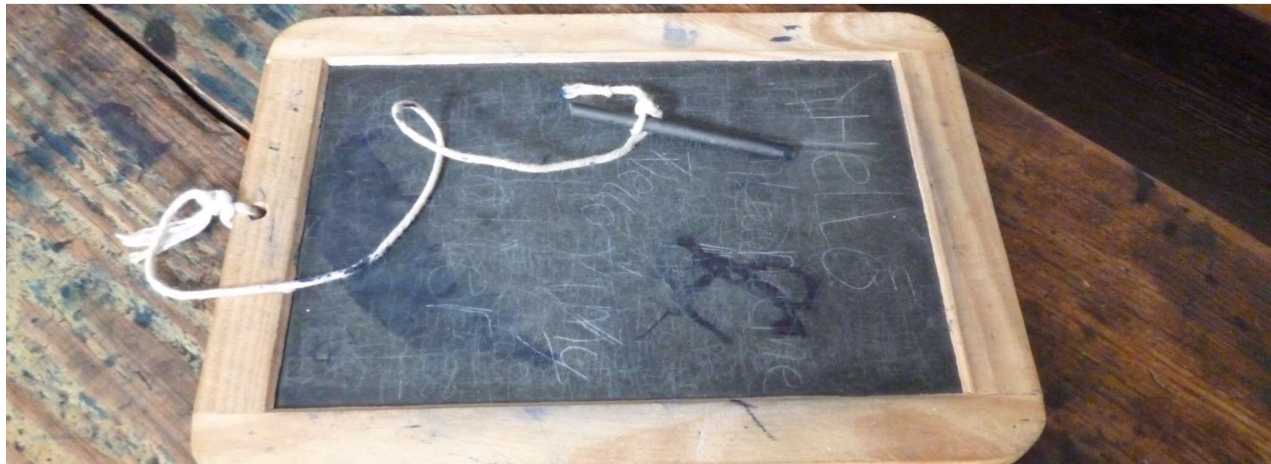


## VISUAL SUBMISSION: Psychotherapy in Museums

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Museums in Gloucestershire are contributing to psychotherapy for adults with mental health difficulties. 2gether NHS Foundation Trust runs Art Psychotherapy groups in museums, using museum objects and environments to facilitate the therapy. According to one participant, 'Being in a museum helps bring out your creative side. It makes you think outside the box which tricks your brain into looking at things in a different way. You get the chance to see things that you wouldn't normally consider relating back to your own life, and this gives you a new insight into your experiences and thoughts and feelings.' Another participant was inspired by a Victorian slate to make a picture of an 'Etch-a-sketch' drawing toy, expressing her desire to 'wipe away' the past and 'start again'.

Artwork and quote used with kind permission of clients. Photograph of slate used with kind permission of Gloucester Life Museum.

## VISUAL SUBMISSION: Queering Museums, Fostering Partnerships in Colombia

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Museo Q is a new museological initiative in Colombia, which aims to recover and display histories and memories of LGBTQ+ people as an essential part of the national story. On 3 July 2016, Museo Q came out onto the streets to take part in the 20th pride march in Bogotá. As they approached the National Museum, Museo Q shouted criticisms concerning the lack of inclusion and representation of queer people in museums. Months later, the National Museum reached out to Museo Q and shared plans to renovate one of its permanent galleries, incorporating the history of social movements. Although the project has been envisioned for 2018 and as part of an entirely curatorial narrative change, a fruitful dialogue between an activist project and the oldest public museum in the country has just started. Undoubtedly, all museums – with or without walls – play a significant role in subverting misconceptions, transforming perspectives and encouraging advancements on human rights.

## QUESTION AND ANSWER: What Kinds of Partnership are Appropriate or Not Appropriate for Museums to Engage With?

**Shannen Lang**

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Partnerships with arts based organisations are appropriate, and furthermore, necessary for museums to engage with. In a difficult climate for arts and heritage, new and innovative partnerships are vital to the sustainability and relevance of such organisations. The Peace Museum worked on a joint partnership with an arts company, The Brick Box, who are based in Bradford, who turned an abandoned Marks and Spencer store in the city centre into an indoor Wild Woods, with a series of evening events open to the public with art activities, live music, performances, food and drink. We installed a small exhibition within the space as an extension of a textile exhibition held in our gallery. The events were a huge success with thousands of local people attending. It was a success in terms of audience development as most of the people engaged with had never visited the museum and did not usually visit heritage organisations. It demonstrated that museums can be engaging, relevant, flexible and above all fun and can offer more than the perceived museum experience. It was also a way of the museum engaging with city regeneration; Bradford is a city with many empty shops and spaces and more and more of these are being used for innovative cultural activities, demonstrating to local people that shops are not the only answer to a solution of what to do with a disappearing high street. Above all, collaboration continues to be essential to the future of arts and heritage.

## MUSEUMS AND THE DIGITAL

## PROJECT REVIEW: Museum Partnerships, Virtual Reality and *The Catherine Storr Experience*

### Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books, and Digital Cultures in Culture Lab, Newcastle University, November 2016

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#### Abstract

This review explores the role of partnership in creating *The Catherine Storr Experience*, which presents the life, work and collection of children's author Catherine Storr through a virtual reality platform. Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books, which holds Catherine Storr's archive, worked with Professor Kim Reynolds, who developed the content for *The Catherine Storr Experience*, and Digital Cultures in Culture Lab at Newcastle University, which provided the virtual reality expertise. Partnering with university researchers has enabled this museum collection to be interpreted and presented to a public audience using cutting-edge technology.

**Keywords:** Catherine Storr, virtual reality, technology, digital, museums, partnerships

The use of digital technology and museums is a very topical issue. As Adrian Murphy (2015) notes, 'as the use of technology in everyday life has become the norm, integrating this into the museum offer is becoming even more essential.' Yet many heritage organisations lack the expertise to explore emerging digital technologies. Our digital age therefore poses several challenges to museums: how can collections be presented and interpreted in an engaging way online? Can digital technologies provide the same depth of experience as, or enhance a visit to, the physical museum? How can museums practically manage, resource and deliver digital activity?

Museums are increasingly working with external partners to engage visitors with their collections and spaces through new technologies, such as virtual reality. Virtual reality, or VR, is an immersive simulation of a computer-generated environment, experienced through a VR headset and/or on a mobile device. Carrozzino and Bergamosco (2010) note that virtual reality technologies have 'been rapidly gaining consent and positive reception... in the field of Cultural Heritage', and VR is named as one of '11 technologies to watch in 2017' by the technology blog 'Mashable' (Ulanoff 2016).

Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books aspires to create engaging digital content such as VR, but lacks an in-house IT department to support this. As the Vital North Partnership Manager leading the strategic collaboration between Seven Stories and Newcastle University, I looked to see whether this could be addressed through a new partnership with academics working on digital technologies. The Catherine Storr collection held by Seven Stories was identified as an appropriate archive to explore. Catherine Storr was a psychiatrist turned children's author who wrote more than thirty books. She was unafraid of portraying the unsettling, saying: 'I write to frighten myself. If I haven't given myself that shiver down the spine I know I haven't brought it off. I was told of at least one child who had nightmares after reading *Marianne Dreams*' (Storr 1970: 22). The Catherine Storr collection includes material relating to her 1958 novel *Marianne Dreams*, alongside correspondence, biographical material and original material for several of her other published works.

Kim Reynolds, Professor of Children's Literature at Newcastle University, had conducted research exploring the Catherine Storr archive. Having worked in partnership with Seven Stories for a number of years, Professor

Reynolds was awarded funding from Newcastle University to create an innovative online exhibition with Seven Stories loosely based around the story of *Marianne Dreams*, using her own research findings and digitised items from the Catherine Storr collection.

With funding secured, Seven Stories and Professor Reynolds approached Dr Tom Schofield, from Digital Cultures in Culture Lab at Newcastle University, and collaborator Dan Foster Smith, to design and build the digital exhibition. Digital Cultures was identified as an appropriate collaborator due to the research centre's previous work on digital projects using literary archives. Dr Schofield suggested virtual reality as a suitable technology, in terms of both the innovation required and the subject matter. Originally envisaged by Jarod Lenier in the 1980s, virtual reality creates a 'world without limitation, a world as unlimited as dreams' and seemed the perfect fit for Storr's *Marianne Dreams*, a text where real and fantasy worlds intersect (Lenier 2017).

The result of this project, *The Catherine Storr Experience*, illustrates how working in partnership helped the museum to open up access to a previously hidden collection. *The Catherine Storr Experience* is a virtual reality exhibition launched by Seven Stories and Newcastle University in November 2016. Landing on *The Catherine Storr Experience* website at <http://digitalcultures.ncl.ac.uk/Catherine-Storr/>, the user reads a short introduction giving the background to the project, the partners involved, and advice on accessing the resource, before entering the virtual reality environment.

We are taken inside a virtual reality bedroom, designed and built by Digital Cultures, which is described in the introductory text as 'Marianne's room'. The bedroom has a 3D quality and is displayed in full colour. A piano plays in the background and a voiceover states: 'Doubles, doppelgangers, ghostly Others and supernatural events haunt the pages of Catherine Storr's children's books.' As the narrative, written by Professor Reynolds and performed by Seven Stories' Storycatcher Elena Joy Miller, gives relevant examples from Storr's work, the books in question appear from mid-air and slowly fly across the room to land on a bookcase (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Marianne's room, *The Catherine Storr Experience*

When this sequence is over, the user is given the opportunity to explore the bedroom for themselves. Photographs from Storr's life adorn the walls and dolls owned by the author appear around the room. These items were selected by Professor Reynolds, and digitised by the Seven Stories collections team. When focusing on these objects or on the audio symbols that are displayed next to them, the voiceover gives additional information about Storr's life and work, and a caption gives specific details about the item. These real objects add to the sense that this is Marianne's 'real' bedroom.

Yet, the Marianne that sits up in bed is a flat black and white illustration, taken from *Marianne Dreams*. As the user finishes looking around the bedroom we move inside the book that lies on Marianne's bed, and into Marianne's dream world which is represented as a black and white environment with two-dimensional drawings of the house and Marianne (Figure 2). Once again, the environment created by Digital Cultures allows the user to look around a ghostly copy of the 'real' bedroom previously explored. The exhibition here moves from presenting biographical material to the literary archive of Catherine Storr held by Seven Stories. All of the paintings on the walls of this world are digitised illustrations from Storr's books and the voiceover tells us more about her other stories. As Marianne tries to escape the dream-world, the user moves back to Marianne's real bedroom. But we keep zooming out; this bedroom too moves away into blackness and *The Catherine Storr Experience* concludes.

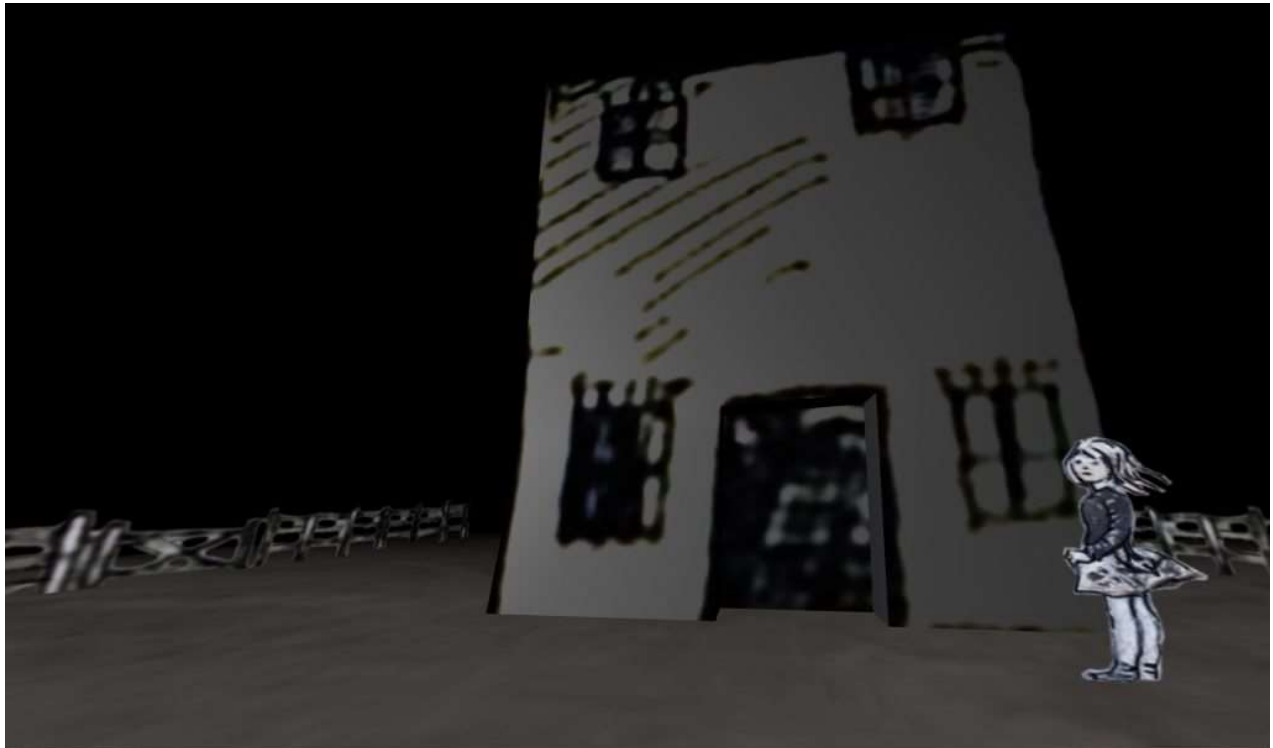


Figure 2: Marianne's dream world, *The Catherine Storr Experience*

*The Catherine Storr Experience* combines a narrated tour of Catherine Storr's life and work with opportunities for the user to explore the different environments for themselves and find out more information. The blurred lines between the real and dream worlds of *Marianne Dreams*, the environments designed by Digital Cultures to represent them, and the documentary and textual collections we are invited to explore, have a synergy with the VR technology that the user experiences. As Professor Reynolds' narrative for *The Catherine Storr Experience* suggests, 'reality and fantasy are not different things, but different ways of seeing and thinking about oneself and the world.'

The collaboration between Seven Stories and Newcastle University led to an iterative process of co-creation and co-curation, as the partners contributed their unique skills, resources and expertise to develop *The Catherine Storr Experience*. The resulting VR platform would not have been possible without input from all partners, who report that the partnership process was a positive experience, and are pleased with the resulting resource.

For Seven Stories' Archivist Kris McKie, this project created new routes for Seven Stories' audiences to access this collection: 'It was interesting to see how a talented group of people from outside the museums and heritage sector were able to respond to the challenge of representing an archive in a new way' (quoted in Pattinson 2016). Without internal IT support, Seven Stories drew on the experience of Digital Cultures, who envisaged how this collection and Professor Reynolds' research could be displayed through new VR technologies. The risk of undertaking this experimental project was reduced for Seven Stories, as the digital aspects of the project were funded by the University.

From Newcastle University's perspective, Dr Tom Schofield and Dan Foster Smith said that working on *The Catherine Storr Experience* had given Digital Cultures in Culture Lab the opportunity to explore 'new and experimental technology, which is on the edge of a breakthrough into the mainstream' (Pattinson 2016). The project gave them a real application for their research and practice in cutting-edge digital technologies. Professor Reynolds also commented on how the process of creating the resource enhanced her children's literature research: 'It required new ways of writing, and Dan and Tom approached the task in adventurous ways that re-engaged me with the material' (Pattinson 2016).

Bringing Digital Cultures in Culture Lab onto this project involved an investment of time in building a new working relationship, which caused a minor delay in launching *The Catherine Storr Experience*. However, the project has opened up new avenues for collaboration and the partners will continue to work together on research, teaching and public engagement initiatives.

Partnering with university researchers has enabled Seven Stories' Catherine Storr collection to be interpreted and presented to a public audience using emerging digital technologies. As a successful collaboration *The Catherine Storr Experience* shows how working in partnership can help museums create new digital routes into their collections. The rapid development of contemporary technologies suggests that digital partnerships, or developing internal capacity to deliver such projects, will become increasingly important to museums moving forward, and future research could explore the different ways in which museums are approaching this.

## Acknowledgements

Images used with permission of Newcastle University and Seven Stories: the National Centre for Children's Books. Additional items from Catherine Storr's daughters Sophia Hartland, Cecilia and Emma Storr, and use of original illustrations by Marjorie Ann Watts. Every effort has been made to contact those with a possible copyright interest in material used in this project. Please contact [kim.reynolds@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:kim.reynolds@ncl.ac.uk) regarding any errors or omissions.

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## QUESTION AND ANSWER: What Kinds of Partnership are Appropriate or Not Appropriate for Museums to Engage With?

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In the last 20 years, through considerable research, we know one of the major reasons for people choosing to visit museums is leisure. To keep abreast with the times and to provide an enriched cultural life for people, more and more museums are developing various educational activities to attract visitors. Accordingly, museums look for cooperation with other professions, for example the games industry.

When the mobile app 'Pokémon Go' launched in the summer of 2016, visitor attendance at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) soared 37% over that of the previous year. At the end of 2015, the Children's Museum of Houston released a Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) game, which boosted membership by over 10%. Later in 2016, the National Museum of Taiwan History introduced the True-escape game. Evaluations show the game helped change visitors' stereotypes about museums with 98% of them willing to recommend the museum to others.

Through these cases, we can conclude that an alliance with the games industry can be seen as part of a multi-functional marketing strategy. Not only can one brainstorm wonderful ideas and attempt to reduce the isolation of visitors, it can also increase the number of visitors. However, the museum must retain its central purpose of social education, otherwise it will turn into an amusement facility.

## MUSEUMS AND EDUCATION

## BOOK REVIEW: Oral History in Museums and Education

**Gazi, A., and Nakou, I. (eds.), 2015. *Oral History in Museums and Education*. Athens: Nissos. ISBN: 978-960-589-008-7, hardback, 263pp.**

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The book under review is an edited compilation of research about the applied value of oral history in the work of museum professionals and teachers. It is structured in two parts with seventeen chapters. The first part presents case studies of oral history in partnerships with museums on national and international projects, and the second part presents case studies of oral history in partnerships with schools and universities; it concludes with a case study about the implementation of oral history in museum education in collaboration with a school. The book is written in Greek with an introduction in English, and is a comprehensive guide of the latest research conducted in Greece, Australia, Great Britain, Northern Ireland, United States of America (USA), Israel, Japan, and Turkey.

The research presented in the first part discusses a variety of oral history case studies in museums. Oral history projects have gathered momentum since the 1960s and early 1970s when the collection and archiving of oral testimonies was introduced as complementary elements to the extension of the museum's materiality and temporality. Drawing heavily on the idea that objects are attributed meaning in the context of human thoughts, feelings and memories, the principal aim of the monograph authors was to present contemporary theoretical concerns and research which promote the use of oral history in many disciplines, and from diverse perspectives. They expressed the intention 'to shed light on the affordances, the limitations and the dangers of the use of oral history, and to highlight the fact that successful practice can only be grounded in a deep understanding of oral history's historical, societal, political, communicative, educational and representative dimensions' (Gazi and Nakou 2015: 24). Many of the ideas in this book are in dialogue with Chew (2002), Griffiths (1989), McMurray (1986) and Whincop (1986), who each examined critically the role of oral history in the practice of designing and mounting exhibitions, as well as in developing strategies for and implementing oral history projects within the audience engagement and learning provisions of museums.

Of particular interest are the chapters by Chadzinikolaou, *Memory and Remembrance: A New Approach to Museum Collection*, and Bartow-Melia and Mieri, *Enlivening History through Personal Stories*. These contain case studies from Greece and the USA and portray the renewed interest in appreciating the testimonial value of oral history to enrich existing interpretation efforts, and foster collaborations with communities in visitor-oriented exhibition designs. The chapter authors appear to agree that oral history has the potential to help the visitor approach museum objects in a personally-meaningful way, helping them to explore the content and the encoded messages either by taking into account or rejecting the collective memory. However, the use of oral history in museum exhibitions, with the intention of adding a personal human element to the content, does not necessarily expose new ways of interpreting the past. It would be interesting to examine how the visitor could become a contributor to the story told, and therefore to the shared heritage.

Research presented in the second part of the book showcases how oral history adds value to the transformation of students' learning in situations outside of the museum. Its educational use in history, social sciences and other subjects has the potential to open up avenues for experience- and emotion-driven learning, which supports the negotiation of different meanings. Most of the work presented in this section echoes Erll's treatise (2009) on the role of oral history in memory-making for the formation of socio-cultural identity. The way life stories are moulded as an act of memory, which reconnects temporalities and extends history interpretation and

everyday life representation, is placed in discourse teaching. The case studies herein address this issue, at the same time highlighting the dangers of revisiting history using personal oral testimonies.

Of great interest is the chapter by Vlachaki, *Museums, Oral History and Intercultural Education: From the Speech of the Few to the Voices of Many and Different People*. In this chapter the author presents her work on designing and implementing school projects and museum exhibitions which promote intercultural mediation and communication between individuals of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This approach of integrating oral history into the work of teachers, archivists and museum professionals is of prominence nowadays and the benefits should be assessed by further research and analysis. Of equal significance is the chapter by Abatzoglou, *Listening the Story, Speaking with Memory: Psychotherapies and Narratives of Childhood*, which discusses the role of oral history within clinical psychotherapy. Research in narrative medicine (for example Charon 2008; Frank 2013) is still in its infancy and conclusions about life stories and clinical psychotherapy are drawn on a case by case basis.

Overall, the chapter authors do not focus on descriptive details about their work. Rather, they wish to provide an overview of the current theoretical debates in an uncluttered prose which is easy to understand by specialists and non-specialists alike. This overview blurs the deterministic lines which previously separated historiography and ethnography from autobiographic memory and narrative studies, and it sheds light on the intersection of individual and collective conceptual understandings of oral history. Nonetheless the volume lacks a central argument, other than a pressing concern to further examine the applied value of oral history not only as a research method of value to historiography and ethnography, but also as an audience engagement practice intended to enable people to ask questions, find answers and reaffirm or refute ideas and lead them to new questions.

The volume is a delightful read and is of interest to researchers and professionals whose work touches upon narrative-based ethnography, museum studies, and education. It contributes to the shared stock of knowledge about oral history studies, particularly in Greece, and is a clear attempt to promote existing partnerships and forge new ones between disciplines at national and international level, and open up knowledge exchange in the field.

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## QUESTION AND ANSWER: What Kinds of Partnership are Appropriate or Not Appropriate for Museums to Engage With?

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Schools often compartmentalise learning into separate subject areas, but this is not how the real world works. By learning to combine different disciplines into one project, students will gain important analytical skills and experience to help prepare them for future opportunities. An intersectional partnership between several museums, working with local schools, would be an appropriate use of resources and expertise that museums have to offer. Museums offer students opportunities to develop a variety of practical skills when partnering with schools, especially if they collaborate with other museums for in-depth learning experiences.

Detroit is home to several museums that are well-situated for school partnerships. The Detroit Historical Museum, Detroit Institute of Arts, and Michigan Science Center are three such museums. Students can already benefit from visiting any one of these museums, but imagine if they could visit all three to harness the powers of art, science, and history. These organisations can be the basis of a new cross-curricular programme involving Detroit museums and schools.

One example of this type of programme can be found in North Devon, United Kingdom. There, three schools piloted a programme in which students visited one of several local museums, had a programme session in school, and developed technological skills as part of a web-project. The goal of this particular programme was for students to have an open-ended assignment which involved technology, literacy, art, and history. Through this programme, titled 'North Devon on Disk', participants helped to produce high-quality online resources and build a partnership between the local museums and schools.

This type of programme could be taken a step further by involving multiple museums in the same project. While participating in a partnership of this nature in Detroit, students would benefit from visiting the museums and learn how science, art, maths, and history can be intertwined in their daily lives.



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