EUROPEAN
POLICYBRIEF

RICHES "Renewal, Innovation And Change: Heritage and European Society"

Co-creation strategies: from incidental to transformative

AUGUST 2015

INTRODUCTION

RICHES is a research project funded by the European Commission within the 7th Framework Programme in the domain of Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities. Its main objective is to reduce the distance between people and culture, recalibrating the relationship between heritage professionals and heritage users in order to maximize cultural creativity and ensure that the whole European community can benefit from the social and economic potential of cultural heritage (CH).

RICHES is about change; about the decentring of culture and CH away from institutional structures towards the individual; about the questions which the advent of digital technologies are demanding that we ask and answer in relation to how we understand, collect and make available Europe's CH.

A crucial topic that is addressed and researched within the RICHES consortium is co-creation, being the practice where different stakeholders with different expertise come together collaboratively to create future-oriented perspectives, enrich CH experiences and build relations with networks that are closely invested in an institution's collection.

A co-creative approach that is firmly rooted in CH institutions can potentially change the way that heritage is curated, presented, digitized and shared, involving specific experts, specific communities and specific target groups to address a topic or a collection together. By working in an equal partnership, where personal expertise is recognized and valued, and where people meet each other and share ideas through creating something together, unexpected outcomes can emerge. More importantly, ownership is created and the exhibition, campaign or programme is closely connected to the stakeholders and reflects a broader story than just the viewpoint of the CH professional. One outcome or result of co-creation is that a CH institution may become more embedded within the communities it is trying to reach.

Co-creation within CH institutions is not a new phenomenon, but the current practice often is project based, run only by the educational staff, met with scepticism from curators and conservators, leaving a lot of potential results untouched. Besides providing an indication of good practices in co-creation and a practical toolkit for heritage professionals who want to take on this

challenge themselves, the RICHES project also provides this policy brief. It is based on preliminary research findings, where the consortium gives a short overview of the potential benefits of co-creative methods and current practices in the CH sector, and offers a number of suggestions to stimulate co-creation in cultural heritage on a strategic level.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Changing context

The 21st century calls for CH institutions to transform their products and behaviour in relation to the changes in contemporary society and changing visitor expectations.[1] Technological innovation, sustainability, citizenship, lifelong learning and cultural diversity are great challenges for the institutions; the impact of new media, digital lifestyles and advent of participation in all domains of society make dialogue and activity more important than authority and one-way information provision.[2] Through the research and presentation of their collections, CH institutions can potentially position themselves as key players and actively reflect on and promote these themes and developments. The (potential) visitor has become more demanding, but also more open, adventurous and communicative.[3] Working co-creatively within CH institutions will allow the sector to address this new type of visitor and remain relevant for future, culturally diverse generations.

Fig. 1. Co-creation session at Waag Society

Visiting museums, galleries, science centres, natural history or ethnographic collections, unique masterpieces and travelling exhibitions, is more popular than ever, with many of the organizations receiving a growing numbers of visitors.[4] It seems visiting CH institutions is more and more a means of inspiration, education and entertainment. This trend is most visible for a specific

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[1] Graham Blackwell, "Museums and participation", Keynote paper presented at the Visitors Studies Group AGM, 2010.

[2] Judith Mastai, "There is no such thing as a visitor" in Griselda Pollock and Joyce Zemans, ed., *Museums after Modernism, Strategies of Engagement.* Blackwell publishing LTD, 2007, 173-177.

[3] Judith Mastai, "There is no such thing as a visitor" in Griselda Pollock and Joyce Zemans, ed., *Museums after Modernism, Strategies of Engagement.* Blackwell publishing LTD, 2007, 173-177.

[4] Ergoed Monitor, 2015: http://erfgoedmonitor.nl/indicatoren/musea-aantallen-bezoeken

audience, mainly higher educated, 'white', older people.[5] Two contemporary, socio-demographic characteristics are, however, poorly reflected in the growing number of visitors: young people and those with a multicultural background are not visiting CH institutions to nearly the same degree.

Many CH institutions state the ambition to invoke a sense of belonging and citizenship within their community, and to foster a relationship with future generations through their collections. However, not many have the tools to do so in an open, creative and responsive way. Traditionally they are used to catering for their existing audience; consequently, exhibitions, events, and publicity campaigns are developed within, and the current group of visitors a reflection of, that framework. So, CH institutions not only have to cater for and maintain their existing audience, they also have to create sustainable solutions in attracting a new generation of visitors.

Peressut and Pozzi, in their introduction to the first publication in the MeLa* (European Museums in an age of migrations) project[6], see the redefinition of the role of CH institutions in our contemporary society as a political and social issue,

> "because the museum makes us come to terms with the tensions between local and global, the dualism of "selfness" and "otherness," and issues of inclusion and exclusion. It is here that the complexity of our multicultural society acquires a visible form through the museum representation. This is especially true of those museums that focus on themes born out of our postmodern and postcolonial age, when great national narratives have given way to a multiplicity of stories, voices, and narratives."[7]

In the same publication Giovanni Pinna pleas for museums to function as a 'contact zone', a term that was coined by Mary Louise Pratt, referring to the meeting of people with different cultural backgrounds, and later drawn into the cultural sphere by James Clifford. Pinna says

> "One of the requirements of the museum as contact zone is the possibility to develop reciprocity and related systems of cultural exchange among subjects who meet, and the ability for self-interpretation of the community of reference. This presupposes a non political use of the museum by the dominating subjects. This would exclude, for example, most museums on immigration, whose realization is almost always linked to the national politics of the ruling class."[8]

It is of key political importance that not only large, national CH institutions representing the dominant local culture are represented in the political debate on culture, but that there is also validation for CH institutions enhancing social cohesion through more youth and migrant involvement and co-creative methods.

Co-creation, when moved from an ad hoc activity as part of creating an exhibition to a programme on an organizational level, can provide CH institutions with those tools needed to broaden their perspective and allow them to establish long-term relationships with both existing and new audiences.

Co-creative practices

Co-creation as a method has been used in different domains for collaborative and creative work[9],

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[5] Cultuur in Beeld, 2014: http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/rapporten/2014/12/01/cultuur-in-beeld-2014.html and Kultúr Styrelsen, 2015: http://www.kulturstyrelsen.dk/institutioner/museer/fakta-om-museerne/statistik-om-museer/unges-museumsbrug/

[6] MeLa* was a four-year Research Project funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Programme, which aimed to delineate new approaches for museums in relation to the conditions posed by the migrations of people, cultures, ideas, information and knowledge in the global world. http://www.mela-project.eu

[7] Peressut, L.B. and C. Pozzi (eds), *Museums in an age of migration, Questions, Challenges, Perspectives.* Milan, Politecnico di Milan, 2012, 11.

[8] Ibid., Pinna, G., "European Museums as Agents of Inclusion", 136.

[9] (Digital) social innovation, the creative sector and service design are among the different domains in which co-creation in different forms and shapes is being used in innovation processes.

where it brings together people from different backgrounds and expertise to make creative outputs (whether texts, events or complete exhibitions or large-scale innovations). As Sanders and Stappers write, "The practice of collective creativity in design has been around for nearly 40 years, going under the name participatory design. Much of the activity in participatory design […] has been going on in Europe."[10] Co-creation is practiced and/or taught at design companies such as IDEO[11], universities such as Stanford[12] and civil organizations such as Solidaridad and Red Cross as a novel approach to (social) innovation. Within RICHES, it is undertaken in a transdisciplinary way, starting from tangible, real-world problems and resulting in solutions that are devised in collaboration with multiple stakeholders. In this approach the process of 'making' is central, in line with contemporary methods as advocated in the maker movement.[13]

In this shared creative process, values, ideas and assumptions are made explicit. 'Target groups' are directly involved and mixed: curators and educators work together with young people, students or older people. Co-creative methods start from the idea that everyone is an expert on one issue or another, first and foremost on their own life. Different levels of expertise are equally valuable in co-creation; participants build a relationship where exchange of ideas and values is vital. According to Sanders en Stappers, "In generating insights, the researcher supports the 'expert of his/her experience' by providing tools for ideation and expression. […] Users can become part of the design team as 'expert of their experiences', but in order for them to take on this role, they must be given appropriate tools for expressing themselves."[14]

Co-creation as a process is often linked to very different approaches. The free, user-created encyclopaedia Wikipedia or the free and open source operating system, Linux, are almost completely developed by users. At the other end of approaches there is consultation, where visitors are only involved for a short time span and are asked to contribute ideas, time and opinions, but are not made (partly) responsible for the content and the quality of the work that is presented. In the co-creative approach advocated here, CH professionals share their expertise and their responsibility for the outcomes with the participants (on a strategic, institutional level).

The following image[15], portraying how different levels of knowledge are accessed by different methods, might clarify the type of deep relationships CH institutions can engage in by using co-creation methods in working with their existing and emerging stakeholders. This can lead to programmes and exhibitions that are more sensitive to the latent needs of their visitors and potential visitors.
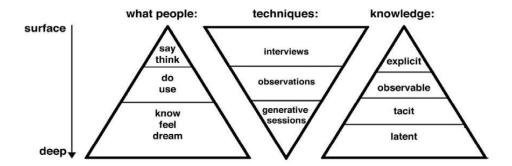

Fig. 2. Different levels of knowledge are accessed by different methods (Sleeswijk Visser et al., 2005)

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[10] Sanders, E.B.N. and P.J. Stappers, 'Co-creation and the New Landscape of Design', in *CoDesign,* March 2008, 3.

[11] Ideo: http://www.ideo.com/

[12] Virtual Crash Course in Design Thinking by Stanford University: http://dschool.stanford.edu/dgift/

[13] Hatch, M., *The Maker Movement Manifesto: Rules for Innovation in the New World of Crafters, Hackers, and Tinkerers,* McGraw-Hill Education, 2014.

[14] Sanders, E.B.N. and P.J. Stappers, 'Co-creation and the New Landscape of Design', in *CoDesign,* March 2008, 9. The term 'expert of their experience' is quoted from: Sleeswijk Visser, F., *Bringing the everyday life of people into design.* Academic dissertation at Technical University Delft, 2009, 18. It should be noted that, in addition to researchers, designers and curators are also involved in this process.

[15] Sleeswijk Visser, F., 'Re-using users, co-create and co-evaluate' in *Personal and ubiquitous computing*, 10(2-3), 2005, 148-152.

The co-creative development of the Derby Silk Mill public programme as a way of engaging the local community with Derby's industrial history[16] and the co-design approach taken in the meSch [17]project (Material Encounters with Digital Cultural Heritage, funded under the 7th Framework Programme) provide good examples of how these methods can be used. Although the CH sector has shown interest in the potential strategies and benefits of co-creative practices, according to consultancy group Netwerk CS, "within the mainstream cultural heritage institutions activities with regard to multicultural society - although increasingly in collaboration with migrant partners - are in many cases separate, temporary and occasional, instead of regarded as core business."[18]

Fig. 3. Co-creation session at Make the Future workshop

Working co-creatively will enable CH institutions to build a relationship with their local communities, with new visitors, with younger people or with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. A co-creation process can enable organizations to:
-   find a connection between groups that would normally not collaborate;
-   raise awareness and sensitivity towards important issues with certain groups;
-   create a safe space for sharing;
-   create a common understanding;
-   enable the creation of more layered and nuanced exhibitions and events;
-   build relationships between groups that exist well beyond the scope of a project.

Currently, many co-creation projects in the CH sector are seen as extras, adding to the core practice of CH institutions. Long-standing exhibitions and programmes are almost never made co-creatively and often only a distinct part of the CH organisation is involved in a project. CH institutions could gain a lot more impact and prolong the effect of projects if they were better placed in terms of strategy and planning to embed co-creative practices and aims.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

What are the main recommendations emerging from the research?

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[16] Visser, J., "The convincing transformation of the Derby Silk Mill":
http://themuseumofthefuture.com/2014/07/21/the-convincing-transformation-process-of-the-derby-silk-mill/
[17] Material Encounters with Digital Cultural Heritage: www.mesch-project.eu
[18] Netwerk CS, *The Elephant in the Room*, 2009. A report offered to the minister of Culture, providing an analysis of 10 years implementation of cultural diversity policies

- Young people and people from migrant backgrounds should be included in contemporary missions and strategies of CH institutions, if the latter are to ensure that their current success in terms of visitor numbers continues and the cultural diversity of European society is adequately addressed. **Policy-makers are advised to encourage co-creative processes in CH institutions**, in order to foster the relationship between young and/or multicultural visitors and Europe's CH and to build more open, responsive and creative CH institutions in the light of current and future demographic changes.

- Powerful co-creation is not a matter of organising a number of interventions, it is about entering into a long-term transformational process as a CH institution, where expertise from different areas is consistently involved to create new insights, thus strengthening the relationship with important stakeholders, including under-represented groups in society. CH professionals at all levels of the organisation should be involved in and committed to the process of achieving the open-ended outcomes of co-creation. **Funding needs to support long-term involvement at all levels of the CH institution**, for there to be a systemic change in the way the institution is seen by stakeholders and the way CH is made relevant for those same people.

- The outcomes of co-creative projects are unpredictable and difficult to measure, often involving small groups of participants. Therefore, flexibility is needed. Bureaucracy (in regard to measuring impact and effectiveness, asking CH institutions 'How many' and 'How much') stands in the way of organising truly co-creative collaborations. **Funding agencies should be responsive to this type of open-ended project in the CH sector and support the development of tools that capture the impact of more small-scale projects that are process-oriented, long-term and creative in nature**.

- Co-creation is not an easy process. Strategic partnerships with mediating parties are crucial to organising a successful co-creation project. A partner that knows the target group, that is experienced in guiding creative processes, and that has an objective view towards all the parties involved, can help bring the collaboration to an inspiring and surprising conclusion. Expertise needs to be built up in this field. **Future CH professionals and current mediators need to be trained to guide these types of projects.**

What are the main, constraining factors and the challenges emerging from the research?

- Entering into a co-creative process within a CH institution almost always requires additional, project-based funding. CH institutions are not able to incorporate methods or lessons learned into their standing practice without support from their local and national funders, who are often structurally committed to funding the institution. These funding agencies need to value and appreciate the methodology, the resulting relationships with stakeholders and the likely impact. This dependence makes it difficult to secure a 'legacy' for initiatives that receive project-based funding.

- There is little space to become socially engaged in the CH sector. 'Don't bite the hand that feeds you'. There isn't a tradition of being culturally or socially outspoken as a CH institution. But often co-creative processes ask for, or demand, socially engaged statements. Especially when working with target groups such as young people, ethnic minority groups, and especially when working with a culturally sensitive collection.

- Often there is no IP policy instated in CH institutions that deal with a co-creative process. As each co-creation process needs to be custom-built, a flexible approach needs to be developed to understand IP issues without dismaying participants, obstructing participation or preventing uptake by institutions.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Piloting

Within RICHES the consortium has researched how CH institutions, in collaboration with mediators and new audiences, can develop co-creative methods that support connections to a more diverse visitor group. European society has changed significantly over the past decades, and a vital and diverse audience should reflect these changes. As part of the project, two co-creation pilots have been defined and are, at time of writing, halfway through being carried out:

Dutch Botanical Gardens[19] (NVBT)

Phase 1: Analysis of current relationship of the 24 gardens to their audiences through desk research, interviews, observation and self-reporting.
Phase 2: Organisation of co-creative labs with employees (of the 24 gardens), from different backgrounds and functional levels. The labs each lasted six weeks (one day a week). In the labs, the participants experimented with storytelling, new technologies, novel interaction formats and invited new and existing audiences to evaluate the proposals.
Phase 3: Evaluation and selection of ideas within the NVBT organisation.
Next phase: Design, development and evaluation of a novel audience engagement tool, to be used by all gardens. This will be done through an agile, iterative process with the gardens and their visitors.

National Museum of World Cultures[20] (RMV)

Phase 1: Identification of (Dutch) young individuals who have a multicultural background and have stated a sense of exclusion from current CH institutions and practice; definition and selection of appropriate methods and setting.
Phase 2: Organisation of three, co-creation sessions in Leiden with 19 young individuals, that represent a range of backgrounds (age, gender, residence, education, etc.) and seven museum representatives from different backgrounds and functional levels; documentation of process and ideas; each session lasted one day.
Phase 3: Evaluation and selection of ideas within the museum organisation; materialise ideas in intervention plan (by the participants).
Next phase: Design, execute and document one or two interventions at the museum by the participants in cooperation with the museum.

In addition desk research has been done into participatory projects and good practices of co-creation (examples from different countries, in different contexts) and an IP analysis and proposal has been made to support IP discussions in co-creation contexts. The experience of several co-creative approaches in European projects such as meSch[21] and Europeana Space[22] has been included in the RICHES approach.

Transferral

The research into good practices for co-creation and the experience with several co-creative approaches will be documented further and made available for a larger audience in a (web) publication. Leading up to this publication, insights and observations will already be made available through RICHES' channels. The research will culminate in a 'tool kit', available online, that will allow CH institutions that want to take on a co-creative approach themselves to explore and use the methodology and strategies. The toolkit will provide CH institutions with practical hands-on ways to support participation, dialogue and interaction with (new) audiences and will provide insights into the multiple challenges the heritage sector is facing.

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[19] The Dutch Botanical Gardens: http://www.botanischetuinen.nl/

[20] Museum Volkenkunde: http://volkenkunde.nl/

[21] meSch: http://mesch-project.eu/

[22] Europeana Space: http://www.europeana-space.eu/

PROJECT NAME

RICHES: Renewal, Innovation and Change: Heritage and European Society

COORDINATOR

COVENTRY UNIVERSITY (COVUNI)

Coventry, United Kingdom

Neil Forbes, Project Coordinator, n.forbes@coventry.ac.uk

CONSORTIUM

HANSESTADT ROSTOCK (ROSTOCK)

Rostock, Germany

STICHTING NATIONAAL MUSEUM VAN WERELDCULTUREN (RMV LEIDEN)

Leiden, The Netherlands

STICHTING WAAG SOCIETY (WAAG)

Amsterdam, The Netherlands

THE UNIVERSITY OF EXETER (UNEXE)

Exeter, United Kingdom

PROMOTER SRL (PROMOTER)

Pisa, Italy

FUNDACIO PRIVADA I2CAT, INTERNET I INNOVACIO DIGITAL A CATALUNYA (I2CAT)

Barcelona, Spain

SYDDANSK UNIVERSITET (SDU)

Odense, Denmark

STIFTUNG PREUSSISCHER KULTURBESITZ (SPK)

Berlin, Germany

TURKIYE CUMHURIYETI KULTUR VE TURIZM BAKANLIGI (KYGM)

Ankara, Turkey

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DURATION

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BUDGET

EU contribution: 2,432,356 €

WEBSITE

RICHES website: http://www.riches-project.eu/

RICHES resources website: http://resources.riches-project.eu/

RICHES blog on Digital Meets Culture: http://www.digitalmeetsculture.net/riches/

FURTHER READING

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