POLITECNICO DI MILANO
DESIGN&CULTURES DEPARTMENT
DOCTORAL PROGRAMME IN DESIGN

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN MUSEUMS OF CULTURES: DESIGNING COMMUNITIES' PARTICIPATION IN MUSEUM CO-CURATION PROCESS
Design as strategic approach to enhance the intangible heritage

Doctoral Dissertation of:
SARA CHIESA

Supervisor:
Prof.ssa ELEONORA LUPO

External Examiner:
Prof.ssa NÉLIA SUSANA DIAS

The Chair of Doctoral Programme:
Prof. LUCA GUERINI

2016 - XXVIII Cycle

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

Heritage, communities, patrimonialization process and participation in intangible cultural heritage are key concepts that belong to anew landscape arisen in the wake of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage […]. What are the many voices of the old and new heritage communities animating the contemporary landscape, a landscape characterized by a growing emphasis on intangible cultural heritage, and to what degree does this changed landscape foster participatory processes? (Broccolini, 2016: 65).

The topic of the intangible cultural heritage, its scientific definition, its modality of preservation and enhancement has been debated in European theoretical and practical researches for more than ten years.

The present research "Intangible Cultural Heritage in museums of cultures: designing communities' participation in museum co-curation. Design as strategic approach to enhance intangible heritage" retraces researches conducted in this area of interest, but it is focused on the museographic aspect and on the *mise an scène* of the intangible cultural heritage trough a participatory design process that aims to involve migrants communities[1].

Three theoretical themes represent the cornerstones of this research. As initial aspect, the today rereading of the ICH concept, in the perspective of design exhibition and co-curation aspect and, furthermore, its legislative and literature definition in relationship with the museum mission; secondly, the reviewing of the decolonization process of ethnographic museums, by highlighting the

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[1] Examples presented in this research do not concern with the recent cases of immigration and new disembarkation on Mediterranean coast, but, we defined, with migrant communities, groups of individuals with a migrant background – first or second generation - that are political and economic integrated in the society, but not often in the cultural and educational aspects. They can work as mediators of an heritage that in different ways represent themselves.

attention on the ICH role; and thirdly the participatory design in museography as a form of co-curation of contents during all the phase and models of the dialogic exhibition process. In my discussion I will use the term 'dialogic' as a combination between the concept of "multiaccentuality of meaning" of Tony Benett (2006: 63) and the expression 'dialogic museum' as proposed by John Kuo Wei Tchen (1992, 2011), by referring here to the exhibition process.

The first part of the research is dedicated to a theoretical analysis of ICH, its different definitions and conception, the national and international legislation related to it. With respect to the previous research in this topic a glossary is realized in order to try to collect the numerous worldwide definitions of this concept. I will then present ethnographic museums in their process of decolonization (De Palma, 2001) with a specific interest on the role of intangible cultural heritage. The sphere of design for cultural heritage is important in order to redefine the role of museography for the enhancement of ICH and to understand the exhibition process within the involvement of the communities. Starting from the concept of 'indigenous curation', used by Christina Kreps in 2003, the aim is to draft the different levels and degrees of involvement in the co-curation process, supported by the design. How the concept of 'indigenous curation', developed in extra-European context, where the communities of indigenous are constantly present and involved since long time in the museum's redefinition and rereading of their heritage, still today, applicable in European museum?

Through a qualitative research, by an investigation of different case studies considered interesting for the research, the goal is to examine in depth the knowledge of intangible cultural heritage and specifically the modality to

show it in museum through a co-curation process. The second and central part of this research is the analysis of case studies where the collaboration between actors with a migrant background, museum staff and the designer in the reinterpretation of cultural heritage, through the mediation of the design discipline as activator of knowledges and catalyst for relationships, is evident. The aim of this research is to analyse all passages of the dialogic design process and to identify the phases and the models people's involvement, to build a referential theoretical model. Moreover, my intention is to underline the centrality of the immaterial heritage's "holder", the National Living Human Treasures, in all the participatory processes that will end with a possible display of the ICH, proving how the co-curation is a value added for a museum exhibition and for the visitors' comprehension. The research has the objective to compare participative processes that lead to the enhancement of intangible heritage within the museums of cultures, founding the best examples of museums carrying out a policy of co-participation and identifying the moment, within the dialogic design process, in which this happens.

In the third part, the theoretical evaluation of the case studies will be integrated by an experimental action within the MUDEC (Museo delle Culture) of Milan, designed by the English architect David Chipperfield. At the museum entrance, there is a space dedicated to the organization Forum Città Mondo (World City Forum), called in 2012 by the Municipality and composed of more than 400 migrants associations operating in cultural and social environment. The MUDEC is the legal head office of the Forum and the associations have the opportunity to use the space to organize events, exhibitions, conferences. This relationship between museum organization and migrant communities is a big as great

challenge for the MUDEC and for the municipality. It represents an innovative experience: furthermore the collaboration between museum and communities in European museums is carried out sporadically and this is the first time that the communities have a dedicated space for them. Museum staff is aware of the possible difficulties, incomprehensions, different points of view, but the opportunity to collaborate with a group that desire to be involved in the museum activities and that is asking to have a space where expressing their culture is an unmissable occasion to experiment a communities based museology.

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PUBLICATIONS

During the research, the following articles and papers, partially based on the work described in this thesis, have been published:

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introduction

Explicative introduction with objectives and methodology

I.I Research framework: hypothesis and research questions

The present thesis is the outcome of my Ph.D research activities in the context of Design for Cultural Heritage group of Politecnico of Milan. The opportunity to collaborate with this team within national and European projects, as well as the opportunity of attending as assistant at some university courses, played an important role in shaping my research interests in design museum and exhibition design. I approached the Ph.D in design with a trans-disciplinary background in history of art, museum studies, anthropology and ethnography, which explains my interest in focusing on museums of cultures and extra-European Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).

The subject of the ICH, its definition, protection and enhancement is central in the national and international debate since 2003, year of the Conference for the Safeguarding of ICH. What it is noteworthy is not the novelty of the idea to enhance the ICH and the participation in the museum studies domain, but the fact that these two topics are not integrated yet into design approaches within museums, in particular considering the participation of migrants and individuals with migrants' background. For the purpose of this study, I will use the expression 'migrants' or 'people with a migrant background' to refer both foreign people immigrated in European countries and their descendants born in the countries of settlement, instead of referring to the new comers such as immigrants or political refugees.

Although an extensive bibliography is available and several best practices have been developed during the recent years, as well as the abundance of international conferences, in Europe this topic is not concretely developed within museum institutions yet. During the last few years, various projects

and conferences based on these topics have been promoted in Europe: for example, the E-CHI project: *etnografie italo-svizzere per la valorizzazione del patrimonio immateriale[2]* or the *Reanimating Cultural heritage* project of UCL Institute of Archaeology[3]. Moreover, this research is in continuity regarding studies conducted in the relative area of Design at the Politecnico of Milan. In the sphere of ICH valorisation, for example, some projects have been realized in the last few years: the first one is *Autentico/Contemporaneo[4]* that aimed to study the importance of safeguarding of Milanese hand-crafters. While, PRIN 2008 *The design of cultural heritage through history, memory and knowledge. The Intangible, the Virtual, the Interactive as a design subject in a time of crisis[5]* is a big project focalized on design and cultural heritage. Moreover, the European project *MeLa- Museum in an Age of Migrations[6]* presented different cases studies of museums and museum exhibitions of twenty-first century that reflect the challenges of the contemporary process of globalization, mobility and migration and their answers to the intercultural need in the society. For this research is specifically interesting the section dedicated to considerations on ethnographic and cultures museums. The methodology of research and the analysis of the themes adopted, are prerequisites for this thesis, that has as objective to enlarge the specific knowledge concerning the musealization of the extra-European ICH in the museum of cultures. The research examines these topics from the prospective of the design discipline in which the designer assumes the strategic role of mediator among the actors involved in the exhibition design process.

Starting from an analysis of the reality and the currently consideration that ICH has both in museum and outside, we move forward with an in-depth-analysis on some institutions considered relevant in order to validate the thesis and the research questions. I will end-up to considerations through examples on demo-ethno-anthropological museums, eco-museums and ethnographic museums,

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[2] http://www.echi-interreg.eu/

[3] http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/research/directory/reanimatingculturalheritage_basu

[4] http://www.contemporaryauthentic.com/

[5] To examine in depth the topic see the final project's book of PRIN: Irace, F., Ciagà, G.L., Trocchianesi, R, Lupo, E. 2013. "Design&cultural heritage. Verona: Electa

[6] Me-La is a four-year interdisciplinary research project funded in 2011 by the European Commission under the Socioeconomic Sciences and Human Programme (Seventh Framework Programme): htttp://www.mela-project.eu

Living Human Treasures

community participation

ICH

CO-CURATION
EXHIBITION
DESIGN PROCESS

*indigenous
curation*

museum

participative
museology and
museography

Figure 1.
Research
domains

in order to focalize the attention on museums of cultures, a key aspect deeply investigated in this research. The chart here reported in Figure 1 represents an overview on the domains of the work here presented. We can observe the three main areas of research: the ICH, the museum and the community participation. The combinations between these realities generated specific subsets. Namely, I identified the participatory museology and museography as intersection between ICH and museum sets; the *indigenous curation* (Kreps, 2003) resulting from museum and community participation sets intersection; and *Living Human Treasures* as intersection between community participation and ICH. The pivotal subset, in the area common to all these categories, represents the aim and central theme of my research: co-curation exhibition design process.

Research questions

If museum is a negotiated reality – as result of the confrontation between the expressed needs of different components of society – design can play an important role thanks to its capacity to mediate and interpret the requests coming from the collective; with its 'participative dimension', design, can help the community to build a sharing vision of its cultural heritage, sustainable, incisive and durable (Lupo, 2009, p. 140). Here I would like to present the research questions covering the investigated areas and themes of interest, by differentiating them into theoretical questions, referred to general topics also in an interdisciplinary context, and practical questions, proper of the design discipline, in order to provide suggestions concerning the co-curation aspects of ICH in an exhibition design process. Once identified the heritage object of the present work, the extra-European ICH, we must also identify the actors involved in its enhancement. Namely, those that should be considered as holders of this heritage; the institution in charge of preservation of such heritage, and the role of the designer as mediator in the reactivation of ICH during the dialogic exhibition design process (since she acts over the design process phases and punctually in the participatory models).

Theoretical-oriented research questions:

- Can people with a migrant background participation foster multicultural dialogue by favouring an intercultural process within the society?
- How to involve bearers of the heritage in the process of safeguarding, enhancement and mise an scène of ICH?

Design-oriented research questions:

Considering the museum institution in an era of globalization and the growing need that people have in participation and involvement in cultural life, the design discipline can have a double role in this scenario: on the one side it is more related to the exhibition design, on the other side it is closer to the social design acting as mediator between the knowledges and the actors involved in the exhibition design.

- How to 'musealize' the ICH not losing its inherent qualities of variability and flexibility and at the, same time, volatility?
- How to transform a museum display into dialogic exhibition?
- Which kind of museums embrace a co-participatory policy in Europe? How

does it proceed in doing that?

- Which moment of the dialogic exhibition process is more affected by an active engagement of different actors that 'own' the knowledge?

- What is the role of the designer in the exhibition process and in the engagement with the actors?

The main purpose of this research is to identify efficacious solutions to enhance and 'musealize' the ICH with the collaboration of the heritage's holders, by proposing also a series of best practices, to be considered as suggestions that should be applied in future to similar contexts and with comparable ICH, interpreted by the proposed framework. The research paradigm is the enhancement of extra-European ICH and their musealization within the museum of cultures. Through a qualitative research, based on the analysis of some case studies, it is my intention to examine the modality to re-exhibit the ICH through a co-curation approach with the owners of the heritage.

I will provide case studies to allow a better comprehension of the research topic and the relevance that design discipline can have on it. Furthermore, I would like to provide to the readers theoretical experiment meta-design models of participation, using the elaborated framework, in the different phases of the exhibition design process within the MUDEC (Museo delle Culture of Milan), through the collaboration with the Forum Città Mondo (World City Forum).

I.II Methodology, research phases, timetable

The three-years long research is structured in three main phases articulated in several secondary phases summarized in Figure 2, in order to achieve the prefixed goals:

1- Background and literature review

2- Metaproject and case studies

3- Results and discussion

- The first phase is aimed at investigating the theoretical context within which the research is framed and identifying the research hypothesis, questions and objectives. The methodology adopted in the first part of the research is a desk research based on literature and bibliography review to define the state of the

art and consequently to refine the scope of the research.

- The second phase has the goal of mapping diverse approaches to participation within museum institutions to enhance the ICH. The case study is the strategy of research adopted in this phase, relying on literature search, interviews and observation. The outcome of the study of cases is a design framework and the formalization of a matrix used to examine the phenomenon of participation in the exhibition design process, divided for phases and models.

The analysis of the cases individuated as interesting for the research - because relative to an extra-European culture, or because part of a museum collection, or also because linkable to a referring community, to a single individual (*Living Human Treasure*) or to an artist - will allow to make a mapping of the different action's typologies to enhance the ICH, comparing each others and generalizing them. The abstraction of the specific case and its generalization, where it is possible, will offer an interesting opportunity to design a new intervention, giving some ideas for the practical phase, where we intend to test a participatory research method. The strategy allows to evaluate and correct tools and methods used for a participatory enhancement of the ICH. In the participatory action research more subjects are called to build together the project, in the cases we will observe that actors involved are curators, designers, communities heritage's holders, artist coming from the same geographical and cultural context of the heritage and single individuals that act as delegate for a community.

- The third phase has the main goal to verify the proposed design framework in a pilot project within the Museo delle Culture of Milan. Since 2012 I followed the process of the MUDEC opening and the birth of the World City Forum, collaborating with the operative table of MUDEC and their activities and I made some interviews to the World City Forum components. The research strategies used in this phase include participatory action research, with workshop and interviews. Then the results are assessed and framed within the up-to-date theoretical context, toward the final editing of the research.

With this thesis I make a proposal for the contextualisation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the interdisciplinary field of heritage studies, museology, museography and design.

In my research I trace this shift in cultural heritage conceptualisations through the different interpretations of the concept of ICH in the museums' practices

of cases studies. In order to do this I followed the method of 'cross-cultural' and 'comparative' museology argued by Christina Kreps that is the "*systematic study and comparison of museological forms and behaviour in diverse cultural settings*" (2003: 4). My aim is to conduct an ethnography research mainly through participant observation and semi-structured interviews, that will let me to assess the different negotiations of ICH and how this is translated in museum-work. An inter-disciplinary methodology is adopted: an important relevance is done to a series of knowledge in museology and museography, but also anthropology, history, sociology of contemporary, museum learning, history of art and of demo-ethno-anthropological heritage, as well as design competences.

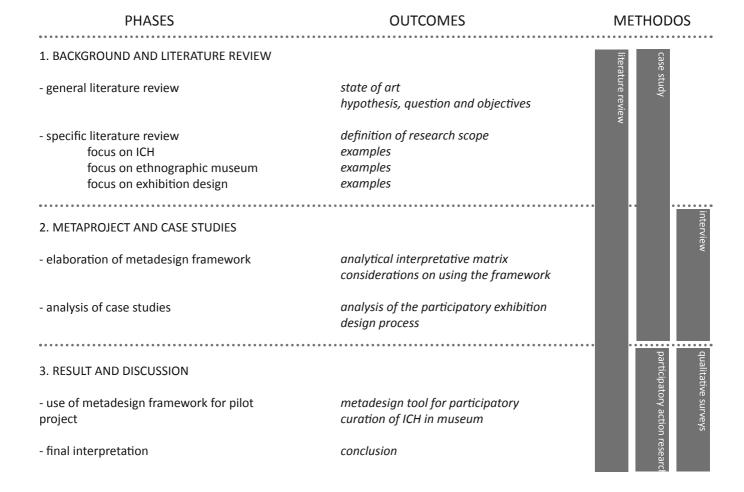| PHASES	OUTCOMES	METHODOS
1. BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW		literature review / case study
- general literature review	*state of art* *hypothesis, question and objectives*	
- specific literature review focus on ICH focus on ethnographic museum focus on exhibition design	*definition of research scope* *examples* *examples* *examples*	
2. METAPROJECT AND CASE STUDIES		interview
- elaboration of metadesign framework	*analytical interpretative matrix* *considerations on using the framework*	
- analysis of case studies	*analysis of the participatory exhibition design process*	
3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION		participatory action research / qualitative surveys
- use of metadesign framework for pilot project	*metadesign tool for participatory curation of ICH in museum*	
- final interpretation	*conclusion*	

Figure 2. Research phases, outcomes and methods

I.III Chapters' organization

The structure of the thesis broadly follows the steps described in the previous section and is organized in the three parts
1- phenomenological action: exploration of museum reality
2- analysis of case studies
3- experimentation at MUDEC

The first part includes chapter one, two and three and presents a broad literature review addressing ICH, ethnographic and cultures museums and design strategies to enhance the ICH through a participatory process, bringing concrete examples.

In chapter one there is a theoretical reading of ICH from different perspectives: literature, anthropology and law. The original aspect is the realization of a glossary useful to understand the complexity of the ICH and its terminological hues in the different cultures.

In chapter two subjects involved in the ICH's enhancement are individuated: museum as place designated to preserve the heritage and as promoter of the valorisation, and communities or individuals with a migrant background as holders. Concerning museological aspects, it is recalled the process of decolonization that interest ethnographic museums in a sphere of a bigger change interested museum institution, with the growing importance of audience, community and intangible aspects.

Chapter three is focalized on design for cultural heritage and specifically exhibition design to enhance the ICH. Four strategies have been individuated and here described with cases of exhibitions. The chapter core is the paragraph dedicated to the indigenous curation and examples from museums located in countries where native people still living there and are concretely engage in the museological and museographical process.

The second part of this work is structured in chapter four, five and six and presents the research framework through the description of the different phases of the exhibition design process and the models in which participation can be actuated.

Chapter four presents the analytical interpretative matrix used to classify and to revise the case studies; models of participation and actors are described. Models of participation will be indicated on y-axis of the matrix.

Chapter five discusses the phases of the exhibition design process, starting from articulated declination of the different phases, I summarized in four synthetic and clear phase introduced on the matrix on x-axis.

Chapter six systematizes the case studies individuated, highlighting participatory experiences in diverse models and phases and participants' role.

The initial part of the third phase is dedicated to a practical experimentation at the MUDEC (chapter seven), then chapter eight discusses the role of the exhibition designer, the achieved results, the contribution and the limits of the research as well as the future works.

Each chapter is introduced by a synopsis, which outline the contents and ends with a list of bibliographical references quoted within the text. A complete list of all the references is instead presented at the end of the document.

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