EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Title: New technologies in museums for the city development: Evidence from European policies and the case of the Uffizi Galleries

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Abstract:

1. Context of research

The digital revolution is bringing radical changes in the economy and society. From Web 2.0 which has led to an interactive use of the online environment through social media, blogs and platforms [O'Reilly, 2005] to Web3 which imagines the online environment as a decentralized ecosystem [Voshmgir, 2020], a paradigm shift is taking place that is leading to new virtual economies and the convergence between physical and digital reality. In this context, the concept of the territory becomes multidimensional [Lazzeretti, 2020], and cities build their digital dimension, using smart technologies to make traditional networks and services more efficient on the one hand, and being reflected in the content created by users online on the other hand.

According to this view, the smart city concept is gaining attention. Caragliu defines a city as smart when "investments in human and social capital and traditional (transport) and modern (ICT) communication infrastructure fuel sustainable economic growth and a high quality of life, with a wise management of natural resources, through participatory governance" [Caragliu et al., 2011].

In recent years, the smart city concept has taken on a more focused approach on people and their participation and civic engagement [Foth, Hudson-Smith, & Gifford, 2016; Kitchin, 2016; Mattern, 2017].

In this context, cultural organizations, particularly museum institutions, can play a crucial role in the smart city: on the one hand adopting technologies to activate new business models and to interact with their audiences; on the other by contributing to local policymaking establishing themselves as centers of reflection on the city, capable

of contributing to social cohesion, digital literacy through offline and on-life shared spaces.

Museums are cultural centers that place community participation and civic engagement at the center and contribute to the reputation and visibility of the cities they represent, functioning as creative hubs for education and imagination [Oliva & Lazzeretti, 2020; Dematteis & Magnaghi, 2018], and constituting themselves as centers of cultural elaboration in the territories [Salerno, 2013]. Museums can play a fundamental role for smart cities in reconstructing the past of the city [Grajales et al., 2020] and in the co-creation of urban imaginaries, or narrative representations of the city following the visions, experiences and desires of citizens [Cinar & Bender, 2007; Silva, 2012].

Museums can foster citizen participation in online communities through audience development, attracting non-publics and minorities, and engaging audiences through educational and immersive activities and co-creation of digital content [Bollo, 2014]. In this way, museums can lead to audience empowerment, providing valuable tools and skills to citizens, to empower them at work and in private life [European Commission, 2014]. In addition, through online communication, museums contribute to the city's reputation and brand, attracting visitors, talents and investments in the city by promoting the city's culture and values [Lord & Blankenberg, 2015].

Despite the importance of the new development prospects of the internet and new digital technologies, and the potential synergies between museums and cities to exploit new opportunities for the local economy and social cohesion, the debate on these issues is still limited.

In the literature some studies and reports highlight the importance of studying European cultural policies, on the one hand in the context of regional and urban development [Sacco, P., Ferilli G., Blessi G.T., 2018; Kea, 2021; OECD and ICOM, 2019; OMC, 2012; CSES 2010]; on the other hand, in the context of digital transformation [Lazzeretti, 2020; Caramiaux B., 2020; Kulesz O., 2018.; Kulesz O., 2020; THE ARTS+, 2018]. However, to the best of our knowledge, in the literature there is no simultaneous policy analysis on the synergies and links between cultural, regional development and digital policies at the European level.

2. Scope and research design

The present research aims to contribute to the existing literature by analyzing the interrelation of the European policies for the cultural and creative sectors, regional development, and new technologies to outline to what extent the debate at the European level considers the digital transformation of museums and cities at the same time, opening to the resulting reciprocal opportunities and synergies.

In the first phase of the research, results of the analysis of European policies highlighting the potential unexpressed strategic role of museums in the smart city will be presented. The study was conducted by reviewing legal acts of the European Union, such as regulations, directives, decisions, recommendations, and opinions but also communications, programs and initiatives of the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament published on institutional websites.

Only the policies that explicitly integrate the three dimensions considered will be proposed, which consciously consider digital opportunities for the culture-led development of cities.

The analysis results were categorised according to three main themes: the digital preservation of the city's cultural heritage; the enhancement of the tourist experience in the city through digital cultural content; and the role of cultural organisations for cultural participation in the digital space.

The second phase of the research will present the exploratory case of the Uffizi Galleries in Florence, analysed during a period of ethnographic research within the

institution and through semi-structured face-to-face interviews conducted between December 2021 and March 2022. In addition, data was collected from secondary sources such as reports, social media and the institution's website.

The case study was selected to investigate the role of new technologies in museums for the city's development. In particular, Uffizi was chosen for two reasons: because it is one of the most important museum institutions in the city of Florence, and because it has distinguished itself for a daily and pervasive use of online communication channels and new technologies. Since 2016, the Uffizi has had a Department of Information Technology and Digital Strategies dedicated to digital communication through websites and social media. Over time, the Uffizi has implemented several digital initiatives, which correspond to the themes that emerged from the policy analysis: initiatives for the digital preservation of cultural heritage, for the enhancement of the tourist experience in the city through digital cultural content; and the role of cultural organisations for cultural participation in the digital space.

These initiatives are part of a context that sees the transformation of the city of Florence from a city of art to a creative and 'smart' city. This transition is being realised through the valorisation of Florence's creative industries, and through the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to improve the quality of life of residents and visitors in the city.

3. Preliminary Results

The analysis of the European policy framework has shown that policies most often do not consider the digital transformation of culture and cities simultaneously. Consequently, the development models, reciprocal opportunities, and synergies between these dimensions are not yet sufficiently explored.

The role of museums in the city is often recognized, for how they contribute to the city's brand, for establishing themselves as places of community interaction and knowledge centres capable of empowering citizens, and at the same time attracting talent and tourism and ensuring social cohesion. However, in many policies, it is not considered how digital tools and the online environment can multiply those powers of museums to benefit the city.

Regarding the case of the Uffizi, some preliminary conclusions can be summed up by stating that the actions of the Uffizi Galleries in the digital environment are in line with what emerged from the analysis of the synergies of European policies in the cultural, urban and new technologies fields, promoting tourism through the creation of digitized and freely accessible cultural content on their digital channels such as the website and social media, boosting the democratic dialogue and active and inclusive citizenship through heritage education activities, involving local schools, associations and other local bodies, and involving potential and non-public audiences through their audience development and engagement strategies on digital communication channels. The implications of the present research for cities and museums relate on the one hand, to the need for cities to work with museums and local digital economic actors for social cohesion and well-being, breaking out of silos and thinking about urban development that integrates art and technology and, on the other hand, to the need for museums to use digitized cultural content to promote tourism in cities, to help to foster democratic dialogue and active and inclusive citizenship in digital shared spaces, and to promote the local specificities, culture and history of the city, but also new creativity in the online environment, contributing to the diversity of online cultural expressions.

4. Conclusions

The research presented here contributes to the literature in the field of cultural economics and management on the one hand, and urban economics on the other, tracing

the intersecting spaces in European Union policies where museums and cities can act together for social, cultural and economic urban development through the use of new technologies.

If the academic literature on the topic of museums in the smart city - although still limited - highlights the significant role of the use of new technologies in museums in contributing to the development of the city, the preliminary results of the analysis conducted on European policies for culture, regional and urban development, and digital in Europe show that these policies do not yet sufficiently consider this potential. Therefore, European policy-makers should adapt the vision of culture as a heritage capable of generating economic development, social cohesion and creativity in the light of the opportunities and challenges that the new digital environments are posing. In this way, cultural heritage could not only contribute to online cultural diversity by promoting local specificities and stimulating inclusiveness and democratic dialogue on the web, but it could also constitute a resource capable of fitting into the new digital economies.

In this context, museums could be more stimulated to extend their action also in the online environment, in order to include and involve not only the already public, but also the non-public, who use online communication channels but are not inclined to interact proactively with cultural content. In this way, visitors (residents and tourists) could be more involved, rediscovering the cultural roots of the city, its transformations in time and space, and possible development models for the future. On the other hand, cities could be more aware of the impact that the use of new technologies in museums can have on economic and social development. In this perspective, museums are also configured as organisations that can significantly contribute to the promotion of the image and building of the reputation of the city online.

From the analysis conducted, it emerges that there is a need for cities and museums to work closely together to ensure social cohesion and the wellbeing of citizens, thinking about urban development that integrates culture and technology. By collaborating with museums, smart cities can offer "smart citizens" online access to cultural heritage to promote its enjoyment for leisure and study, to develop new skills useful for their present and future, and can offer spaces for citizens to share opinions and visions of the city's present and future.