

City Museums



INCAS
MONTAGNOLA
TEATRO - BURRERIA
SEPTEMBRE 1898
MIPPUS BOGIAN

STORPE ANGLISI E ITALIANI
DELLA PALESTRA DI ROMA
NEL 1898

AL PIACERE
DI RIVEDERLA
MARCHIO LETO

Baglioni's
GRAND HOTEL BRITANNIA
CINQUE GIOCOLOM
ESTERNA RINNOVATA
L'Espresso

PRINCESSA TERESA
PER LA LITTORALE
TECNOLOGIA E STILE

AL PIACERE
DI RIVEDERLA
MARCHIO LETO

AL PIACERE
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City Museums in Transition: A European Overview

Cues for reflection

→ FRANCESCA LANZ

As many authors have already pointed out, a city museum is a relatively new museum type, the definition of which is neither unified nor fixed (Galla 1995; Bertuglia, and Montaldo 2003; Kistemaker 2006, 5-6; Visser Travaglini 2008; Postula 2012). It is not defined by the type of objects it conserves; in fact, its collections usually include very heterogeneous objects, sometimes strictly related to the city's identity and history, and other more diverse items, gathered together according to the collecting strategies and the socio-political context of the time. They may thus include archaeological finds, photos, historical art works, garments, furniture, paintings, objects of material culture, and private collections and memorabilia, as well as new, recently-acquired, objects such as digital content, contemporary works of art, audio, video, and much more. A city museum is neither defined by the ownership of its collections nor by its funding sources, which may be municipal as well as national or private.

Originally, city museums developed to conserve and display the city's history and, indeed, they are usually identified with historical museums, but today this is often not the case for many new and renewed city museums, whose mission and purpose are being developed beyond their traditional role towards a more active social involvement within the contemporary city and its communities. They may be identified with local museums, but nowadays their "relatively small geographical focus (...) transcends itself in attending to the transnational relations which produce the place whose cultures the museum maps" (Whitehead, Eckersley and Mason 2012, 100).

PREVIOUS PAGE, IMG. 5.01 — "Your museum" display at Palazzo Pepoli, Museo della Storia di Bologna (the Bologna city history museum), Italy. Project by Mario Bellini Architect(s). Exhibition design by Mario Bellini Architect(s) with Italo Lupi. Scientific Director Massimo Negri. Courtesy of Mario Bellini Architect(s) and Massimo Negri.

Perhaps nowadays, one of the most telling definitions of a city museum is the one given by Steven Thielemans in 2000, and quoted by Renée Kistemaker in her introduction to the fourth symposium on city museum in 2005: “a city museum is a museum about and in the city. It is connected with both the strategy of the city and with its citizens” (2006, 5).¹

This definition has been taken as the starting point for this analysis of the contemporary evolutionary trends of city museums across Europe. The survey mapped about 50 city museums, including the museums of the capital cities of the 27 European member states, those of the capitals of the candidate states, city museums located in major European cities which have hosted significant events over the last five years—such as the Olympics, the Expo or that have been nominated European Capitals of Culture—and recent eye-catching projects for new city museums around Europe. Some of the most telling examples, selected because of their outstanding attempts at developing innovative models and approaches—in terms of both programme and museographical project—have been then visited and, where possible, their curators and designer interviewed.

The aim of the research was to explore if and how city museums are reacting to the challenges and changes posed by what the MeLa project defines as “an age of migrations.”² The survey developed around some main research questions, investigating the role that city museums can play within a changing urban context, how they deal with the growing heterogeneity of the city’s population ensuing from contemporary mobility and migration fluxes, and how their role and this context influences their strategies and narratives, in order to eventually examine how their communication tools, spaces and exhibition design might consequently change and contribute to the effectiveness of the museum’s mission.

This chapter should be understood mainly as a working document, which collects and summarises the preliminary findings from this in-progress research, and aims at outlining possible developments, cues for reflection and fields to be further investigated.

1 Such a definition leaves out many museums located in the city, owned and managed by the municipality, but where the focus is not the city itself, clarifying thus a common misunderstanding—this is the case, for example, of the Italian civic museums, a very few of which are actual “city museums.” On the other hand, it covers other museums, such as neighbourhood museums—e.g. the Kreuzberg Museum—whose activities and contents are strictly related to an important part of the city’s identity. Hence, in a way, it enlarges and blurs the boundary of the field, virtually including museums that focus on an urban region or a metropolitan area—such as the Ruhrlandmuseum or the museum of the city of Trento and the Region of Trentino in north Italy—as well as other museums that do not call themselves “city museums,” but which actually are about their host city, its socio-cultural development and its identity—such as the Galata Museo del Mare e delle Migrazioni, in Genoa or the MAS in Antwerp. Some of these museums are presented in the case study section of this chapter and in other chapters and volumes of this book.

2 The notion of “migration” is adopted by the Project as a paradigm of the contemporary global and multicultural world. Thus “migration” is not meant only as a matter related to people, but rather as a complex condition of contemporary society, which seems to be increasingly characterised by an accelerated mobility that involves people and entire populations, different kinds of “migrations” of bodies, objects, ideas, information, goods, knowledge and cultures (Basso Peressut and Pozzi 2012).

→ CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN CITY MUSEUMS: A TURNING POINT

Increasing attention is currently being focused on city museums, a phenomenon that is attested to by the lively new debate that has developed around the subject as well as by the significant economic investments of which they have recently been the target. In the last ten years a number of city museums have been inaugurated across Europe and further afield, including both new projects and renovations of historic city museums.

Examples include the Museum of Liverpool in the United Kingdom designed by the Danish studio 3XN Nielsen Architects—a £72m project inaugurated in 2011, which self-defines itself “the largest newly-built national museum in the UK for over a hundred years”—, and the Museum of London—here they have recently concluded a £25m project aimed at redesigning part of the museum’s spaces and galleries with a project by Wilkinson Eyre Architects and a new exhibition design by an in-house team, as well as opening a new museum venue in the Docklands dedicated to the history of London’s East End. In France, the Musée Gadagne in Lyon was reopened in 2009, with an investment of €30m to restore the building, double its spaces, and re-design the exhibitions. The Musée Historique of Strasbourg, closed in 1987, was re-launched in 2007 with a project by Laurent Marquart. The new Musée d’Histoire de Nantes, hosted in a fifteenth-century castle, has opened with a new exhibition design by Jean-François Bodin, and in 2013 in Marseille, the new city history museum will be inaugurated in time for the Marseille-Provence 2013 European Capital of Culture events. In Spain, the renovated Museu d’Història de la Ciutat de Barcelona opened in 2008 and the new Museo de Historia de Valencia in 2003. In Belgium, the new Museum aan de Stroom—MAS in Antwerp, a €33.5m building designed by the Rotterdam firm Neutelings Riedijk Architects, was inaugurated in 2011, and the Stadsmuseum Gent—STAM, was restored and enlarged in 2010.

In the north of Italy, three city museums have recently been completed, each of them focusing on the city’s history and hosted in an ancient and relevant building that has been restored to turn it in a museum: the Santa Giulia in Brescia, designed by Tortelli and Franzoni architects, opened in 1998 and extended in 2011; the Palazzo Pepoli in Bologna, funded by the CARISBO Bank Foundation, designed by Mario Bellini with Italo Lupi and Massimo Negri at a cost of around €18m, and inaugurated in 2012; and in Bergamo, the Museo Storico dell’Età Veneta, inaugurated in 2012, with a new exhibition—mainly ICT based—designed by the video and multimedia studio N!03 in collaboration with Alessandro Bettonagli Architecture Entertainment. In Germany, the new Frankfurt’s museum project, due to open in 2015, is currently underway at a cost of about €45.95 m with the constructions of a new museum building designed by architecture studio Lederer, Ragnarsdóttir und Oei.

The list may be even longer, encompassing other European cities, or even expanding out from Europe internationally, including, for example, the USA—with the \$72.5m Chicago History Museum project, the projects for the city museums of San Francisco, Tampa Bay and Atlanta, or the

IMG. 5.02 — *The Museum of Liverpool, United Kingdom. Project by 3Xn Architects. © Jose Campos, courtesy of 3XN Architects.*



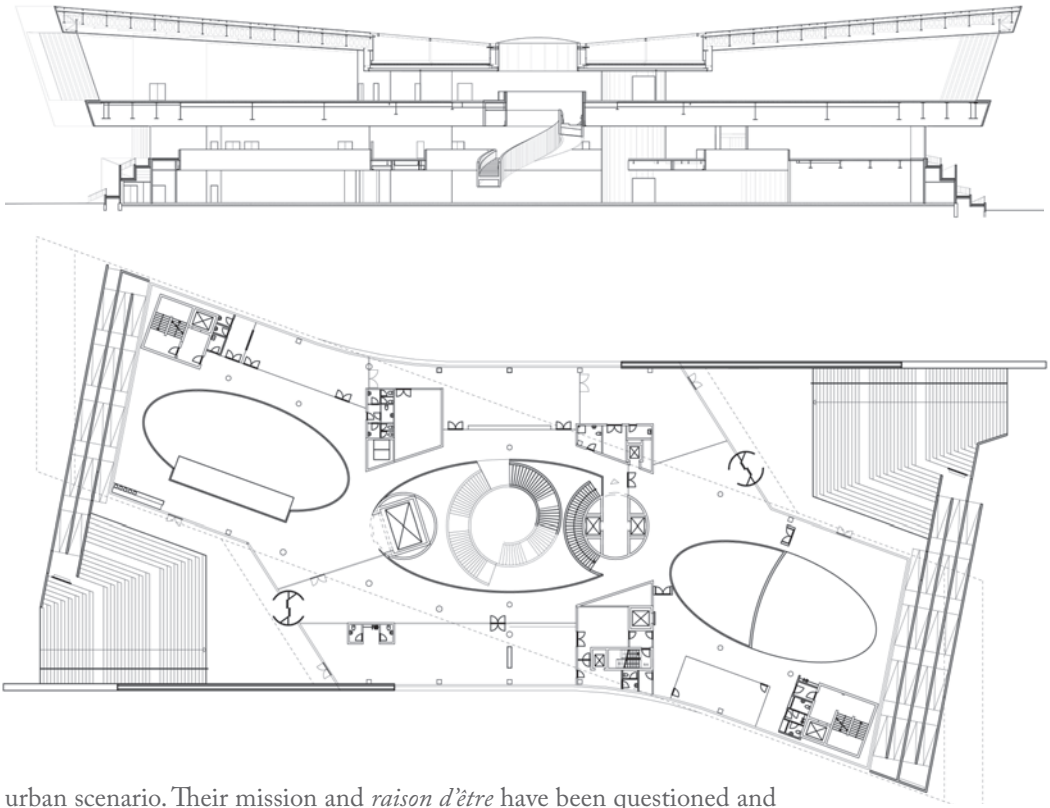
\$100m Boston Museum project—and Asia, with projects such as the \$150m Capital Museum of Beijing, inaugurated in 2006.

In addition, many other city museums throughout Europe are currently undertaking extensive renovations and rethinking their collections, spaces and exhibitions, as well as developing many interesting projects. Examples include, though are not limited to, the Museum of Copenhagen, the Amsterdam Museum, the Helsinki Museum and the Museum Rotterdam.

The birth of city museums in Europe can be traced back to the second half of the nineteenth century when the largest cities, involved in the urban, economic and social transformations of the time, attempted to preserve documents, stories, and memories from the past. These museums were usually hosted in ancient, iconic buildings of the city, and were conceived as repositories of civic treasures and places where the history of the city should be conserved. Their collections were meant to represent the city, tell its story and celebrate its glorious past; consequently, they were very heterogeneous and included several kinds of objects, usually organised according to typological or chronological criteria. From the second half of the nineteenth century, this museum type spread throughout Europe and many city museums were established.³ However, by the early second half of the twentieth century the city museum was already a mostly outdated and disused museum type.

At the end of the 1990s, city museums again became the subject of attention. This new interest was triggered by the need for these museums to move away from the doldrums in which they found themselves, but was also a consequence of the new pressing issues ensuing from a changing

³ Such as the museums of London (the Guildhall Museum, founded in 1826, and the London Museum, founded in 1911); the Musée Carnavalet in Paris, whose project dates back to 1860 and was inaugurated in 1875; the Historical Museum of the City of Vienna, which opened in 1887; the Helsinki City Museum, which was set up in 1911 or the Amsterdam Historical Museum, first opened in 1926.



IMG. 5.03 — First floor plan and section of the Museum of Liverpool, United Kingdom. © 3XN Architects.

urban scenario. Their mission and *raison d'être* have been questioned and reconsidered, and their role redefined from one of merely preserving and displaying the city's glorious past, to representing and interpreting the city's present, as well as imagining and debating its future (UNESCO 1995; Fleming 1996; Kavanagh, and Frostick 1998; Bertuglia, and Montaldo 2003; McDonald 2006; Kistemaker 2006; Aymonino, and Tolic 2007; Jones, Macdonald, and McIntyre 2008; Calabi, Marini, and Travaglini 2008; Jones et al. 2012). Several new tasks have been envisioned for them, starting from their historical role and moving beyond it. They are seen as a custodian for the city's history, a mirror of civic memory and belief, a place of identity-building, interlocutors for local governments and urban planners, access points to the city, and much more. Among their new tasks they are understood on the one hand, as urban marketing tools for city promotion, acting as a portal for city communication, often tourist-oriented and occasionally also implemented in relation to city branding and local policies (Monlieu 2012; Tisdale 2012a). On the other, they are asked to carry out a social role, being more involved in urban and social issues, addressing difficult topics and contributing to fostering dialogue between the different ethnic, religious, social and generational groups of the city (Galla 1995; Fleming 1996; Lohman 2006; Kistemaker 2006).

As David Fleming pointed out, the increasing attention paid to city museums is not only theoretical or speculative, but is also a response to the new cumulative demands which are “part ideological, part economic,

driven by perceived social and educational needs, and by cultural competitiveness between cities looking to diversify their post-industrial role towards European tourist currencies” (1996, 132). At the same time it may also be related to the re-emergence of local and regional identities in a context of political and cultural re-definition, and to the current dynamics which affect many European cities.

It is widely recognised that the ongoing political, economic and cultural process of creation of the European Union, the fluid mobility occurring at the European and global level, and the new economic and cultural opportunities offered by globalisation, are transcending the political-economic sphere, to the extent that they influence almost every aspect of human life and activity. Extensive research, as well as statistical surveys, has already shown how cities are deeply affected by these phenomena in every aspect of their structure (Sassen 1991, 1994; Martinotti 1993; Amendola 1997; Rykwert 2000; UN|DESA 2012). Being the destination of material and immaterial fluxes of objects, individuals, information and business, many “European capitals”—which may be national capitals, historical centres, as well as new cultural, political or economic key areas—are currently experiencing rapid and profound changes, assuming crucial new roles in a highly competitive framework, struggling to hold on to a large share of the market, attract tourism, and secure economic investment and the hosting of international events.

At the same time, the ongoing phenomena of migrations and movements of people are also leading to a new demographic growth in European cities, and are reconstituting an internal cultural diversity after a long period of ethnic simplification. According to the Eurostat 2012 statistics, 9.7% of the population of the 27 EU states are citizens born in countries other than those in which they reside.⁴ Of this number, a third were born in a non-European country, and most of them are concentrated in urban centres. Consequently, matters and concerns related to globalisation, migration and the growing ethnic-cultural mix which characterises contemporary societies currently represent some of the most pressing issues for urban cultural institutions and policies, including city museums.

While on the one hand all these processes undoubtedly produce new energy within European cities, they also pose new challenges and can lead to an increase in social friction and new cultural, social, ethnic and economic “invisible boundaries” (UN-HABITAT 2008). As Georges Prevelakis pointed out:

cities are today in the forefront of new opportunities and dangers (...) In order to promote new forms of cooperation between cultures, cities need to invent and to propose new cultural and political models. They are in an

⁴ Since 1992, net migration continued to be the main determinant of population growth in the EU-27: in 2010 there were 47.3 million foreign-born residents in the EU, corresponding to 9.4% of the total population—of these, 31.4 million were born outside the EU and 16.0 million were born in another EU Member State. According to recent statistics, there were 48.9 million foreign-born residents in the European Union in 2011—of these, 32.4 million were born outside the EU, and 16.5 million were born in another Member State.

excellent position to become laboratories of the “dialogue of civilization” in order to counterbalance the effects of the “conflict of civilizations” raging in the surrounding sea of the global archipelago. (2008, 21)

Many major European cities are currently reconfiguring their cultural and political agenda according to this context, a renewed cultural and economic impulse and a new emerging social context.

As already envisaged by the theoretical debate so far developed on this subject, city museums, as institutions historically charged with representing the city, recording its transformations and conserving its memory and history, should and could play an important role, not only in registering these urban changes, but also by acting as cultural tools capable of influencing and driving them, going beyond their traditional role of repository of city history, and involving themselves in contemporary urban and social issues.

Nowadays the number and features of new city museums recently opened and renovated around Europe and beyond and in particular some pioneering experiences developed in recent years, seem to suggest that this very debate and the above mentioned urban socio-political scenario are ultimately encouraging an actual transformation of this museum type, and that city museums are reacting to these stimuli. Different city museums are in fact experimenting with new strategies, promoting intercultural programmes, redesigning their exhibitions, reorganising their collections, broadening their activities, rethinking their narratives and communicative approaches and ultimately facing new challenges and seeking out new models and tools with which to tackle them. It is undoubtedly difficult to set up shared strategies or common tools and, obviously, different cultures, histories and museological models generate different kinds of museums—this is especially true if we consider city museums, which are nowadays facing a deep evolution, and which are deeply influenced by and embedded in their specific local contexts, the city, that, moreover, is itself under transformation. However, several city museums are currently implementing new approaches and interesting solutions that may provide suggestions worthy of further exploration and development: the aim of this essay is to outline the most significant challenges and possibilities, paying particular attention to the role of exhibition and museum design and to the emergence of new museographical models.

→ CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Whether city museums develop more towards city promotion and tourist communication, or direct their efforts more towards a socially-oriented purpose, a common trend in this transformation is the shift in their focus from urban history to social history, and in an interest towards the contemporary evolution of the city. This shift currently represents an impetus for development and one of the major challenge.

More generally, the challenge of representing contemporaneity is a matter of reflection for many contemporary museums, a field which offers exciting development prospects but which also opens up several new issues and questions: how to represent something that is happening while we are talking? how to prevent the rapid obsolescence of the museum's message? and how to get away from the "closed history" model of representation?

Museums seem to face a dichotomy between representing what is in the here-and-now—processes that are ongoing, rapid and unpredictable—, and their own traditional and consolidated practices and approaches, concerning which it could be argued that they are a non-natural place to represent processes. The shift that many city museums are performing in order to focus on the city's present and future, on the one hand should be related to a wider frame of reference avoiding to self-refer in dealing the subject, which undeniably requires the development of new working strategies and the use and implementation of new communication tools, as well as the development of new approaches to storytelling, exhibiting and new museographical models. On the other hand it also entails a deep reflection on their very cores—the collections and the museum's relationship with the city itself.

City museums were created as historical museums; recording, conserving and representing the history of the city was—and in some ways still is—their main purpose, and their narratives and collections have been constructed on this basis. Their collections thus include various objects, sometimes collected because of their relevance to the city's history, others donated to the museum by private citizens and collectors; they were often influenced by the taste, different collecting strategies and the city's socio-political context of the time of the museum's creation. The heterogeneity of their collections often makes it difficult to go beyond the nineteenth-century model, while historical collections may be not appropriate for representing the contemporary city, its dynamics and multifaceted identities.⁵ Hence, city museums today need to work hard on and with their collections, reinterpreting them, making the most of their archives, and developing new selection criteria for the objects to be displayed—often also reducing their number. At the same time, they need to set up new collecting strategies to enlarge their collection, upgrading them to include contemporaneity, and thus facing questions of how and what to collect, how far from the object they should go, and how to display the

5 It is the case, for example of the Museum of Vancouver. Since 2009 the Museum of Vancouver is going through a deep process of renovation, involving the museum all-round including a rethought of the museum's mission and vision, as well as the redesign of its permanent galleries and the reassess of its collections. When the Museum born in 1894, the goal was to showcase the curiosities of the world for the enlightenment of Vancouverites; today new acquisitions centre on reflecting the Vancouver story, from major directional shifts in communities to those items that create everyday memories. Thus many objects today are not apt to represent the story of Vancouver according to the new museum's vision: the Director of Collections and Exhibitions Joan Seidl explained during a tour to the archives, that when the museum's staff was setting up the new galleries, they realized, for example, that there were no objects in the museum's collections about Chinese Vancouverites. The museum is currently carrying out a massive project of digitalization of a large part of its collections, creating a on-line open access database, handling objects repatriations, while at the same time collecting and acquiring new objects to represent Vancouver and its inhabitants as they are today.



IMG. 5.04 — Joan Seidl, Director of collections and exhibitions, inspects native artifacts in the storage of the Museum of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Photo by Ric Ernst, Vancouver Sun.

new kind of objects collected—which may sometimes be unusual and problematic, consisting of personal items, as well as voices, films, sounds, photographs and contemporary works of art, and in some cases also related with difficult topics and delicate personal histories.

In addition, their other cornerstone, the relationship with the city itself, is also questioned by this shift. Since the museum is now attempting to focus not only on the city's past and history but also—and sometimes primarily—on its present and future, what kind of relationship exists between the museum and the actual city which is, at the same time, the cultural and physical context of the museum, the subject of the museum itself, and also exists just beyond the museum's walls? Which links, synergies, cross-references and mutual enrichments may be established? What should and could a visit to the museum add to the experience of the city?

A definition of a city museum as a museum *in* and *about the city*, understands the city on the whole, including its history, present, and future, its places and their transformation, its multifarious identities and its many and different inhabitants.⁶ The current developments of many cities also give rise to rapid urban changes, with the demolition of large industrial districts, the building of new areas, and the social and physical transformation of many historical neighbourhoods. At the same time, the global economy is making the cities' architecture progressively less diverse and more homogeneous, deleting many points of reference and thus affecting the citizens' sense of belonging and the overall urban quality of life.⁷

The city which these city museums are representing is thus neither monolithic nor unitary. Its identity is strictly related to the identities of a variety of subjects coming from abroad, who live and experience the city with their intellectual and cultural differences, with different expectations

6 Several scholars (e.g. Mason, Whitehead and Graham 2012) have already highlighted the role of places and the representation of places in museums in shaping people's personal identity and providing a setting for collective memory.

7 With no reference points, Rykwert states, quoting Kevin Lynch, "a citizen cannot 'read', let alone 'understand' his home," since they make the place legible, and "not only offer security but also heighten the potential depth and intensity of human experience" (2000, 133).

IMG. 5.05 — Pop-up project “If This House Could Talk,” Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. This community-based history and public art project was created and produced by the residents of the Cambridgeport section of Cambridge. Photo by Ross Miller.



IMG. 5.06 — Pop-up project “If This House Could Talk,” Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. Photo by Cathie Zusy.



and aims, on a long-term as well as temporary basis. The city's places—considered not only as physical locations but also “in terms of the social relations which they tie together,” as “processes” themselves with their own identities (Massey 1991, 28)—change and evolve constantly. “The modern city—pointed out Joseph Rykwert—is a city of contradictions (...) it houses many *ethnes*, many cultures, and classes, many religions. This modern city is too fragmentary, too full of contrast and strife: it must therefore have many faces not one” (2000,7).

Which city museum for this city? What is the “place” of “city” in city museum? What may be its role in handling these urban transformations? Should it only record them, or it can play a part in driving them? How can this be done?

→ TO REACH OUT: THE CITY MUSEUM BEYOND ITS WALLS

It stands to reason that one of the priorities for city museums is to create, recreate or strengthen their bond with the city and its inhabitants. Therefore many of them are currently devoting considerable effort to the development of multipurpose outreach projects, aimed mainly at connecting with the different urban communities. At the same time, these projects are tools for the museum to address contemporary city issues, develop new collecting strategies focused on contemporaneity, experiment with alternative curating approaches and also to reach a broader audience (Betti 2012).

An interesting field of experimentation in this context is that of exploring the possibility of the museum physically moving into the city and its communities, bringing the museum into the streets, and out of its enclosure. This is not only a strategic trend for city museums, as for all contemporary museums—which has several positive effects from a communicative and promotional point of view as well as in community engagement (CFM 2012)—but, for a city museum, it is also a basic question of approach and conception, a metaphor for, and a reflection of, the city museum's openness and bond with the urban reality.

This aim results in several different types of project and experiment. These include, for example, the development of outdoor pop-up projects (Tisdale 2012b), which are proving to be a very effective tool. They are flexible and cheap—a very important quality in this particular time of crisis—, open to multiple levels of engagement with the public, able to accommodate different perspectives and, moreover, they can create direct links between the museum, the city and the people, reconnecting places, history and personal experience.

Similar advantages are provided by the implementation of out-and-out mobile museums and urban installations such as the “Museum on the Move,” a series of outreach events using a mobile trailer developed by the Museum of London in the early 1990s at the time of the “Peopling of London” exhibition to consult and publicise the project as extensively as possible (Merriman 1995, 1997). Another example is the San Francisco

IMG. 5.07 — Exterior view from East First Street of the BMW Guggenheim Lab, New York City, USA. Project by Atelier Bow-Wow from Tokyo: the structure is designed to be responsive to the cities that the Lab visits. © Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York. Photo by Paul Warchol.



IMG. 5.08 — BMW Guggenheim, Berlin, Germany. The Lab opened in Berlin from June 15th to July 29th, 2012 at Schönhauser Allee 176, Hof 3. Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin, Germany. © 2012 Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York. Photo by Christian Richters.





IMG. 5.09 — BMW Guggenheim Lab, Mumbai India. January 3rd, 2013, Batliboy Compound Mumbai. © 2013 Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York. Photo by UnCommonSense.

The Mumbai Lab was developed by Atelier Bow-Wow in cooperation with Mumbai's SDM Architects, who designed a structure which suited the densely populated environment of the city. Modeled after the Indian mandapa, an outdoor pavilion traditionally used for public celebrations and events, the Mumbai Lab structure is built primarily in bamboo; it evokes a light, open and transparent quality.

“Mobile Museum,” a participatory touring exhibit that fits in the back of a car, or “the WALL” by the Museum of Copenhagen, an interactive multimedia urban installation travelling around the city over a four-year period up to 2014, developed as a communicative tool for the museum, a way to improve accessibility to the museum’s archive about the city history, and an experimental tool to collect material about the contemporary city (Sandahl et al. 2011).

Food for thought and ideas for further development can also be provided by other city-related projects, such as the BMW Guggenheim Lab, a mobile interdisciplinary laboratory travelling between 2011 and 2013 to major cities worldwide and aimed at addressing issues of contemporary urban life through programs and public discourse, or the Berlin’s “Info Box,” a red pavilion designed in 1995 by Schneider and Schumacher as a temporary structure to provide information about the construction around Potsdamer Platz since 2001 (Choi 2009), as well as by performative art and other cultural events as festivals and fairs in public spaces.⁸

It is important to remember that the possibility of establishing and nourishing a relationship between the city and the city museum lies not only in temporary or communicative projects or educational and participative activities, but also in the very project of the museum itself. The design of a city museum can be seen as an opportunity for urban development, for the rediscovery and enhancement of the city’s heritage, and a chance to nurture awareness of the city’s cultural resources and identity, thus contributing to the cultural, touristic and economic development of the city. Including the city in the museum and the museum in the city also means considering one as an inseparable part of the other, also from an architectural and urban planning point of view.

⁸ New technologies can also make a significant contribution to these outreach projects. Social media facilitate the communication and promotion of these experiments, and increase their level of openness and the possibility of audience involvement and engagement. They can also enrich the experience by adding new levels and content (Allen and Lupo 2012). Examples abound: in the field of city museums and in relation to their relationship with the city, two interesting examples are the historical pop-up, developed by the Museum of London “street museum” mobile application, and the “city insights” programme for city exploring.

IMG. 5.10 — The Amsterdam Museum, Netherlands. © Amsterdam Museum.

The museum is located in the old city orphanage, which was restored and opened to the city. The restoration project was developed by Van Kasteel and Shippers. According to the aim of the work, focused on the possibility to “give back this urban space to the citizens by truly opening it up,” the architects realised extra windows and some huge show case, opening the walls of the orphanage (Kistemaker 2008).



The opening or renovation of a city museum can provide an opportunity for the restoration and rehabilitation of a city neighbourhood or a significant historic building which has its own history and identity, and which can be thus returned to the city and itself become part of the museum’s collection—among the many examples, the Italian museographical tradition has largely experimented in this sense (Lanz 2013). The construction of a new museum, on the other hand, offers the possibility to work on urban planning, rehabilitate or enhance an urban area and create a new iconic city symbol, which can act as a new, cultural and physical reference point within the city—the project for the MAS in Antwerp and the Museum of Liverpool for example, originate also from this aim.

The museum itself can be considered part of the city’s urban fabric; its rooms can be the city’s streets and squares, its windows the city’s show-cases, its facilities urban meeting points, and its exhibitions libraries and schools, transforming the museum’s mission and approach into an architectural concept. The Antwerp museum for example has been intended as a city walk with a panoramic terrace; the design of the Amsterdam Museum was meant to represent the museum’s openness towards the city, including a gallery—the Schuttersgalerij Gallery—meant as a freely accessible “museum shopping street” (Kistemaker 2008); and similar reflections can be done in relation with the renovation project of the Museum of London by Wilkinson Eyre Architects (see ahead the section on the Museum of London). At the same time, the city’s streets and squares can be seen as a part of the museum collection, not with historical reconstructions within the museum, but rather with a broad-based museographical project, which considers the actual places of the city as if they were rooms of the museum, and which encompasses the whole city and its cultural heritage—including city areas such as archaeological sites or historic buildings, as well as the city’s everyday life—a part of the city’s cultural heritage which the museums should collect, preserve and present.



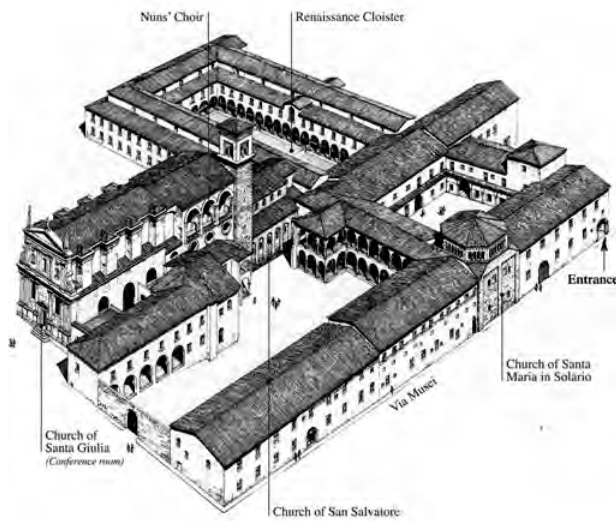
IMG. 5.11 — Stadsmuseum Gent-STAM. The Abbey Refectory, which was restored and included in the museum itinerary. © Phile Deprez, courtesy of STAM.

The museum can be the starting point of a journey within the city, beginning inside the museum's walls and spreading outside,⁹ recounting the city's history and representing its identities as bonds with and enabled by people's relations to, with and within the city's places over time, and thus contributing to restoring the sense of city places at a time of rapid urban change.

9 The Museum of London, for example, provides maps for thematic city walks related to some museum topics – for example, passing through several historic buildings connected with the slavery trade; the Amsterdam Museum has recently inaugurated the exhibition *Amsterdam DNA*, an introduction to the city museums and a visit to the city in the context of four topics identified as the city's main values, and which characterise its development in the past as well as today. Other meaningful suggestions can be provided by the Bologna city museums or the Brescia city museum, developed according to the Italian model of the "museo diffuso" (Lanz 2013).

IMG. 5.12, 5.13 — Aerial views of Santa Giulia, the city history museum of Brescia, Italy. The pictures illustrate the museum complex and the surrounding area, situated in the historical city center. © Archivio fotografico Civici musei d'Arte e Storia di Brescia.

The scientific project of Santa Giulia: was curated by Andrea Emiliani, the architectural project by Giovanni Tortelli and Roberto Frassoni, 2012. According to the so called "progetto brixia," the museum should spread in the city, involving other areas of the city centre and historical remains.



IMG. 5.14 — Axonometry of the ancient monastery, which was restored to host part of the museum.



IMG. 5.15 — A view of the monastery and the Domus Pavillon from the Horti.
© Archivio fotografico Civici musei d'Arte e Storia di Brescia.



IMG. 5.16 — A view of the archaeological remains in the Domus Pavillon.
© Archivio fotografico Civici musei d'Arte e Storia di Brescia.

The Santa Giulia museum is an example of the implementation of the idea of “museo diffuso” developed Andrea Emiliani and Fredi Drugman in the 80s.

The “museo diffuso”, a term that is almost impossible to translate in English, is a kind of museum that aggregates different places and complementary functions. It is a system of cultural places that does not only include other museums, local cultural services and centres (such as libraries, schools, universities), but also archaeological and historical sites, witnesses of local material culture and industrial remains – which are considered the roots of this culture – and any kind of local cultural resource relevant for the cultural life and identity of the territory. This museum is not constrained by a geographical definition. It has a physical site, but, as a matter of fact, it is a “network-museum,” rather than a museums’ network: it reaches out beyond its own walls, involving and interacting with the whole territory and cultural institutions it refers to, broadening its cultural horizons and its collection by including people and places, local, historical, and material cultural, tangible and intangible heritages. It is a ‘civic project’, a museum with a social utility and cultural and political dimension whose aims are to: recreate a link between the museum’s collections and the contexts they originate from; rekindle memories of places and traditions by enhancing the rich cultural heritage of the territory it refers to; act both as a place of identity making and as a modern ‘access portal’ to the territory, making the most of local resources, also in a touristic and promotional point of view, in a fruitful collaboration between public and private institutions (Drugman 1982; Emiliani 1985).

IMG. 5.17 — A view of the city from the boulevard of the Museum aan de Stroom–MAS, Antwerp, Belgium. Project by Neutelings Riedijk. © Filip Dujardin, courtesy of MAS.



City places are the very roots of a city museum, and might become a powerful starting point for the museum itself to help people rediscover them, the history of those who lived and live them, the events which have taken, and still take, place there, and the memories embedded in every corner of the city. This means giving a sense to places in order to better understand them, and thus better live them, as well as deciding whether to preserve or change them, respecting history, which is not mere subordination, but rather an awareness that this is the precondition for conscious choices concerning the future of the city.

The museum's activities and policies, as well as its architecture, exhibition design and communication tools, can contribute to furthering the rediscovery of the city and its places, and to nurturing in the city's inhabitants a sense of belonging to the city and its communities despite their ethnic origin or place of birth, creating the basis for an inclusive idea of "citizenship" and ultimately contributing to the development of the city from many points of view.

→ TOWARDS FLEXIBLE AND OPEN MODELS: THE TEMPORARY DIMENSION

As mentioned above, city museums in this process of rethinking are faced with the challenge of representing the city altogether, accounting of multiple perspectives, including plural voices and allowing alternative interpretations, including in the story those who have traditionally been excluded. They are thus currently attempting to develop tools and communicative strategies that can both reflect the new purpose of the museum in relation to its new mission and role, and help them in such a shift.

Flexibility and openness seem to be among the main features required.

New information and communication technologies may represent one possible response; they are changeable, can allow multiple entry points, include plural voices, overlap several layers to the display, make archives

and collections available to a wider public, and encourage participation. However, it currently seems that the ICT are not really a solution or, at least, not as important as they could be. In fact, the costs of these devices, their maintenance and updating should be carefully considered as well as the problems related to the technological divide, while their integration with museum messages and exhibition design still need to be explored further—the outstanding design process for the Wall of the Museum of Copenhagen demonstrates how the use of these new technologies not only allows and foster but actually requires, also a deep rethought of the visual, communicative and epistemologic approaches to history and storytelling to really make a difference (Sandahl et al. 2011).

Another strategy that is being implemented by city museums, is to work with temporary exhibitions to deal with current city issues and with sometimes hot and difficult topics (Pohels 2011). Here, curators can explore new topics and experiment with new strategies and tools, while designers are free to develop new communication and exhibition solutions. Temporary exhibitions are flexible both in terms of content and communication strategies, and thus may be more appropriate than other tools for representing highly contemporary topics and may also obviate the risk of the rapid obsolescence of the museum's messages due to their relatively short duration. Temporary projects can be an excellent opportunity for museums to tests new curatorial approaches—such as co-curating and community involvement—and new topics. Moreover temporary projects provide the opportunity for the museum to work with its collections by reinterpreting them and displaying objects which are usually stored, and occasionally enlarge their collections by acquiring new items, and implement new collecting strategies, such as participative collecting, loans, or digital collecting.

Several city museums are working extensively with temporary projects in this sense. Some of them are intended as actual pilot projects, leading to a more extensive revision of the museum's permanent display. The Amsterdam Museum, for example, in 1985 started to explore the topic of migration through several temporary exhibitions, which then led to the decision to include this topic in the new permanent display in 2000 when the new permanent exhibition on the contemporary city was opened. The museum continues to this day to develop temporary exhibitions and programmes with the aim of problematising the history of the city and dealing with contemporary issues (de Wildt 2012). The new Galleries of Modern London of the Museum of London on their side are the result of a long process of reflection on issues related to diversity, migrations, and the identity and history of the city of London, carried out by the museum since the 1990s and marked by several projects and temporary exhibitions.¹⁰ The Musée d'Histoire de la Ville de Luxembourg has also

10 Examples are the "Peopling of London" project, (1993–1994); the project "Belonging: Voices of London's refugees" (2003); the Symposium "Reflecting Cities," held at the Museum of London in 1993, and several programmes focused on "diversity strategies" carried out in the 2000s, such as "London Voices"

IMG. 5.18 — The exhibition “My Town: A celebration of diversity,” at the Schuttersgalerij of the Amsterdam Museum, Netherlands, 29.06. 2012 - 1.02.2013. © Amsterdam Museum.



worked extensively with temporary exhibitions since its opening in 1996. Since then, it has promoted several exhibitions in accordance with its mission of representing history “as the visualisation of the political, cultural and social development of the city, in order to stimulate the public to dialogue with its cultural heritage” (Jungbult 2008, 77). Some of these exhibitions have also been achieved by exploring new working models, such as the possibility of virtual exhibitions and cooperation with other historical and city museums throughout Europe and the world. As the former deputy director of the museum, Marie-Paule Jungbult, states,

(2001-2004) or the “Reassessing What We Collect” project: all these projects ultimately informed most of the thinking behind the new permanent galleries.

transnational networking proved to have several positive aspects; beyond having an evident economical impact on the exhibition budget because of the possibility to share some expenses, it provides the museum staff with an important opportunity to improve their skills, enhances the visibility of the museum, also at an international level, and gives the curators the possibility to widen the exhibition contents, and encourages them to explore difficult topics in a less restrained way.

On the other hand, the problems of archiving such events can make them less effective in the long term, and their message can be lost and forgotten more quickly, in particular when they have no impact on the museum's permanent display and message. However, the benefits of temporary exhibitions are considerable and numerous, and these experimentations can provide interesting stimuli and insights for the development of new approaches and communication strategies. New and more flexible exhibition tools and techniques, which can easily allow changes and upgrades to museum content, also need to be explored and developed.¹¹ Some museums, for example, are already working on hybrid solutions by developing long-term temporary exhibitions and short-term permanent displays, as the Museum of Copenhagen that is gradually replacing the former permanent chronological galleries with shorter-term thematic and issue-oriented exhibitions. Other examples include the gallery "your Museum" at the Bologna's city history museum where people, associations and groups active in the city can contribute with objects and small collections, which are displayed on a temporary basis to represent the contemporary city and its citizens' memories, or the new Roman section of the Museum of London "Our Londinium," which was opened in 2012 and will last for two years. This is co-curated, with several young people contributing to the update to the Museum's Roman gallery exploring the parallels between Roman London and today's city, and represents an interesting experiment to create an exhibition comprising installations which are based in and around a pre-existing permanent gallery.¹²

At the same time the important role of temporary exhibitions and other programmes requires that a particular attention is devoted in the design of the museum's areas for workshops, didactic activities and temporary exhibitions. The latter in particular need today more space than in the past; these spaces have to be well connected with the other exhibition areas and museum's facilities, but at the same time they should be inde-

11 This should also involve a serious reflection on exhibition sustainability, in terms of costs, environmental impact, and recyclability, especially at this time of deep economic crisis and change.

12 The idea of working simultaneously on two different levels, one based on the permanent display, the other temporary and thus more flexible and changeable, has also been explored by other museums, and could be implemented further in city museums, opening up interesting possibilities. Among others, examples are provided by the "Passports" exhibition at the National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, where particular attention is devoted to the representation of different communities on a temporary basis; the experience of the Design Museum in Milan, where the collections are re-displayed every year according to a new interpretation of the scholar and designer who curate the new exhibition; the exhibition "Ospiti Inaspettati" (Milan 2010), a temporary exhibition of contemporary design pieces displayed in four historical house-museums in Milan; or the experimentation of the inclusion of contemporary artworks in historical museums, as in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, or in the Museum of the Romanian Peasant in Bucharest under the direction of the Romanian artist Horia Bernea.

IMG. 5.19, 5.20, 5.21 — A view of “Our Londinium” exhibition in the Roman London Gallery of the Museum of London, United Kingdom, 2012. Photos by Francesca Lanz.

“Our Londinium 2012”, an exhibition and a new installation in the museum’s Roman London Gallery, was created through the cooperation among the museum staff, some artists and a group of more than 100 young people aged 14-24, who worked together for over three years.



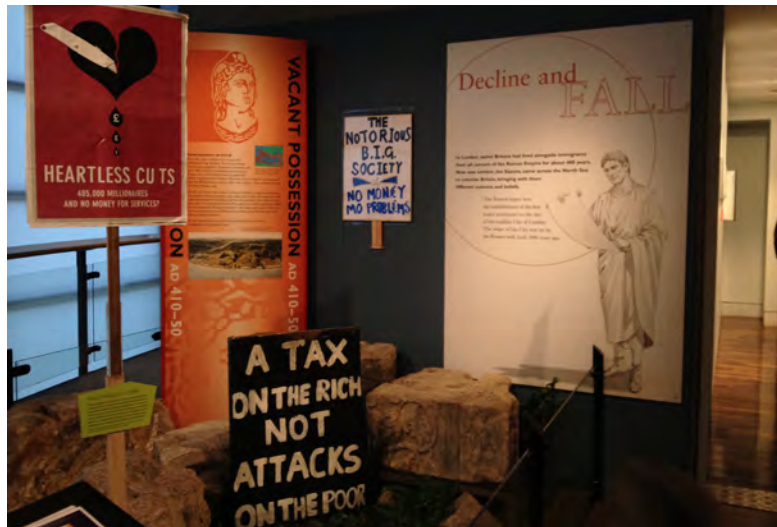
The exhibition “reinterprets what the Romans left behind and questions how Londoners today are similar and different to the people who lived in Londinium (Roman London).

It comprises a series of installations in the Roman London Gallery, including creative artworks, digital exhibitions and modern objects (...) poetry, sculptures, animations and films, all inspired by London past and present.

The young people who worked in this exhibition represent London’s diverse identity.” (from the exhibition introduction)



“Responding to crisis: these placards were collected by students at Goldsmiths College from the ‘Anti-CUTs’ demonstration in March 2011. The placards express dismay and anger about the current economic crisis and Government spendings cuts. We don’t know how Roman Londoners reacted to their government’s decision to withdraw from Britain. Is protesting the most effective way of dealing with problems in society today?” (from the display label)



pendent, in order, for example, to be capable of hand out different visitors flows and allow frequent refurbishments without interfering with the museum's everyday work. Moreover it is worthy to be pointed out that the implementation of temporary exhibitions as well as new type of exhibition and communicative tools and interfaces (as computer terminals, art installations, video based displays, etc...) seems to be actually furthering the development of new museum spaces, which are poly-functional, multi-purpose, and more flexible in their destination and uses and whose relevance and architectural features are currently under definition.

→ FURTHER CUES OF REFLECTIONS

Most of the above considerations briefly outlined above obviously do not concern only the city museums, however these changes altogether are nurturing significant change in city museums, a change that is ongoing and full of promising perspectives and difficult challenges. It is not the purpose of this section to draw any conclusions, but rather to outline some early insights for further reflection and investigation.

At the same time the shift of the focus of city museums from city history to the contemporary city and the reconfiguration of their role from repository of civic memory to agent of urban development also entails a gradual disappearance of the idea of total representation and supposed objectivity of the museum. An increasing importance and attention is paid to the significant identity, social and political work which city museums can carry out within the city having and declaring at the same time, their stance and transmitting their outlook through their activities, exhibitions, design and architecture.

Migration and cultural diversity are also recurrent areas for reflection in this process of rethinking. Migration is usually interpreted as a movement of ideas and people, whose experiences, skills, and backgrounds have always enriched a city's economy, identity and culture; it is often presented as the catalyst and pre-condition for a town's growth and change, or the history of the physical, economic and social development of the city is traced in relation to the various immigration flows over time. Migration is sometimes included in the museum as the core of new temporary exhibitions, programmes and activities, or at others as a stand-alone gallery—having much in common in terms of communication strategies, narratives and approaches with many new Migration Museums. At other times, it is embedded in the main story, either as a parenthesis or as part of the thread. It is usually presented through highlighting the cases and personal stories of migrants as examples of the current ethnic and social diversity of the city, using pictures, personal items, audio and video recordings, focusing on particular groups—such as guest workers or refugees, or a city's ethnic groups.

In doing so city museums are eventually reconsidering their understanding of civic social identity—even challenging approaches and purposes—

IMG. 5.22 — The Sackler Hall in the Museum of London, United Kingdom. Design by Furneaux Stewart. This hybrid space works as a cafe, an information hub and a place for temporary exhibitions. It is the conceptual and physical fulcrum of the whole exhibition area, characterised by a circular curtain of led displaying information and video art works, commissioned every two years by the museum. With its highly adaptive character, it reflects the ever changing and questioning approach of the museum. Photo by Francesca Lanz.



IMG. 5.23 — The Visible Storage of the Museum aan de Stroom–MAS, Antwerp, Belgium. This space is occasionally used for temporary exhibitions; these activities are often organized by a group of young people (MAS in Young Hands) actively collaborating with the museum. © Filip Dujardin, courtesy of MAS.



IMG. 5.24 — The “Expanding City” room in the Stedsmuseum Gent–STAM. © Phile Deprez, courtesy of STAM.

This space is meant as a room for temporary exhibitions, as well as for debates and meetings. It currently hosts a web-based exhibition on the contemporary city (including a video game on the problems and concerns of the contemporary city), a terminal where visitors can create their own movie on the city, and, in the center, a relax area where some screens display videos about the contemporary city.



eventually furthering an idea of “citizenship” that is not based on legal or bureaucratic rationale, on ethnic origin or place of birth, understanding a “citizen” every people living in the city and being part of the city’s community, despite their origins, religions, birth or culture. Against an official definition of “citizenship,” intended as “the particular legal bond between an individual and his or her State, acquired by birth or naturalization, either by declaration, choice, marriage or other means under national legislation”¹³ they promote an idea of citizenship as a multifaceted sense of belonging and participation, an open category, a sense of entrenchment, “civic connoisseurship,” identification and active citizenship in and with the public space.

City museums, as they are currently evolving, thanks to their long tradition and experience of working locally with other cultural and social actors, due to their local roots, community engagement, closer links with places and people, and their ability to establish a privileged and enduring relationship with the communities and other cultural actors settled in the urban territory, may effectively become spaces where encounter and dialogue among different identities can take place, where the interferences between local and global emerge, and discussions about potential frictions materialise. In this way they can contribute, even more than other institutions, to the reconfiguration and dissemination of a multifaceted sense of belonging and participation and to the promotion of a sharper awareness of an inclusive European identity.

Moreover it is worth mentioning that both new and renovated city museums are currently trying to bring in new approaches, including new strategies for storytelling and the representation of history, as well as a rethinking of their narratives and communication. In this sense, most are reinterpreting the city’s history in relation to a broader perspective, looking at the local city’s history within a European or even global context, and with reference to contemporary issues. Hence, the museum’s narrative is often structured on two levels, one which is very locally based and strictly related to the city and the immediate vicinity, and another which extends beyond the national context, by consciously expanding its vision and adopting transnational values.

At the same time many city museums are attempting to move away from a purely chronological approach and are beginning to narrate the city’s history from the present, or including frequent references to contemporary matters along with the historical narration. In some cases, they have decided to develop a thematic, diachronic display, which is organised around some main topics—often presented as the cornerstone of the city’s identity and part of its intangible heritage—and explored through the city’s history. This method in particular, characteristic of temporary exhibitions and recently implemented in permanent displays, seems to

13 From the Eurostat Glossary http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Glossary:Citizenship (accessed 8 April 2013).

have given rise to new and multiple interpretations of the history, connecting the past more directly with the present, while the filter of the past may simultaneously help to address some current city issues which may be difficult or contested.

Broadly speaking, it would seem possible to identify an overall shift from an object-focused to a content-oriented approach to storytelling. Consequently, new—or revisited and implemented—exhibitions techniques should be used to effectively convey the messages and display new objects—which can sometimes be very difficult both in terms of their physical or intangible forms, and as far as the embedded values and stories are concerned—, allow multiple interpretations and, at the same time, avoid misunderstandings.

Exhibition design may play a fundamental role. As Sharon Macdonald pointed out in her article reflecting on the role and potentialities of museums to articulate new identities in a post-national and trans-cultural perspective, “visual and spatial features of museums also have implications for conceptions of identity” and such issues need to be tackled “through aesthetic strategies (...) as well as through content” (2003, 3). The nineteenth century model, she continues, “entailed a detachment of the viewer—thinking of themselves as outside or above that which was represented” offering “the idea of a privileged, objective view point” (ibid.).

If the exhibition design and the museum’s organization of that time reflected the same premise of objectivity and reality and a traditional conception of identity as unique, homogeneous and consolidated; similarly some current trends in museological as well as museographical approaches can be seen as the results of a overturning of this state of being—we are reminded of the increase of projects and activities oriented at involving and engaging the museum’s visitors; the ever major attention paid to visitors surveys and studies; the penchant in displaying personal stories or the development of participative programmes and curatorial approaches as well as, from a design and communicative point of view, the implementation of particular exhibition tools and devices that can foster the interaction, encouraging an even physical participation of the visitors, and creating a sympathetic connection between them and the museum narration. The *viewers* become *The User*, who is no more detached from what is represented, but actively part of it, touching, listening, choosing, playing a role in the exhibition and in the making of its contents.

In considering the current evolution of contemporary museums, as well as of many other contemporary museums, it is important not to underestimate the crucial importance of the connections which exist between the museum’s design and the museum’s contents, and the intellectual and expressive aspects of the exhibition design itself.

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