PUBLIC HISTORY AND HERITAGE AMONG COMMUNITIES:
PARTICIPATION AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

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This article explores the role of Public History in managing and preserving cultural heritage, emphasizing participatory practices and community engagement. It highlights the interdisciplinary application of PH, which evolved in the 1970s, to engage local communities in narrating and preserving collective memories, thereby shaping cultural and social identities. The study considers the implications of the Faro Convention, which underscores the value of community-driven heritage preservation, expanding beyond material assets to intangible aspects, such as oral traditions and collective memories. This essay demonstrates how PH fosters a connection between cultural institutions and the communities they serve by examining examples from Italy, Belgium, Brazil and the United States. This participatory approach is further enriched by digital curatorial practices, enabling a new paradigm of citizen's crowdsourcing heritage management, wherein communities contribute to digital heritage preservation through user-generated content. The essay argues for a redefined curatorial ethic that values collective memory as part of an inclusive cultural heritage framework, advancing a co-curated model for history and heritage management.

INTRODUCTION

My contribution aims to briefly describe how Public History (from now on PH), with its historical path, methods, and practices, can enrich a transdisciplinary history and management of cultural heritage. How PH could meet the needs and enhance some tasks of heritage professionals will be explained through some examples of participatory practices that involve local communities in the context of the Faro *Convention of the Council of Europe* (2005). These participatory practices in historical-archaeological heritage, emphasize the importance of direct involvement of local communities.

PUBLIC HISTORY AND HERITAGE

PH has long been part of the methodological toolkit of many professionals dealing with the historical and memorial dimension of heritage. As a 'glocal' discipline, PH engages with local communities and uses methods that are universally applicable (Noiret & Cauvin, 2017). PH unfolds on the ground with local communities, using methods that apply universally within communities and in local heritage contexts. Even though there were earlier practices from the early 20th century (Shambaugh, 1912), PH emerged as a discipline of history only in the 1970s, thanks to the pioneering work of American and British historians. PH operates globally, emphasizing that history is alive, relevant to the present, and publicly useful to study collective memories, cultural and anthropological identities. Its main characteristics include the interdisciplinary openness of historians and cultural heritage professionals to applied participative activities with communities willing to contribute to their own history and heritage preservation, trace individual and collective meanings and shape plural identities made of material and intangible heritages. The research and narratives of community life stories are based

on a transdisciplinary analytical perspective, focusing on the changing cultural role of past experiences in shaping new multiple identities and social affiliations[1] (Passerini, 2018). Public historians, along with other social scientists, analyze how memories have reached the present and actively focus on their changing perception or persistence through generations, feeding into intangible heritage and shaping the definition of identity, as investigated by Levy-Strauss (1995).

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FARO CONVENTION (2005)

Public historians studying intangible individual and collective memories connected to places and landscapes, fit in the purposes of the UNESCO (2003) and Council of Europe (2005) conventions on cultural heritage as social assets directly inherited from the communities to which they belong. Involving citizens actively in the management of that heritage is implicit in the provisions of the *Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*. Giuliano Volpe professor of archaeological research methodology, wrote a 2015 cultural heritage manifesto in which an interdisciplinary approach to such a path involves the direct participation of citizens and their communities. In such a context, the creation of archaeological parks and museums for a 'renewed awareness of places', has become an essential component of social and economic identity of local communities. This has been done promoting cultural paths in a territorial ecosystem that privileges the historical identity of the territories and their populations through various participatory cultural activities.

In 1999, the UNESCO published a guide of digital resources to cultural and historical heritage projects for the new millennium which indicated the desire for direct communities' participation. The guide announced a path that would develop in the 21st century with the idea that "people want to participate and share" their documents and memories of the past. It highlighted what would characterize the rethinking

of the world's cultural heritage according to the communities to which they belong.

Do people want to participate and share in the emerging networks? One of the most far-reaching examples at the national level is the Museum of the Person established in Brazil (Museum, 1999). Using simple oral history documentation techniques, this project collects stories and photos from citizens across the country. The conjunction of the various narratives enables the reader to absorb a multiplicity of views. The collective effect is a documentation of life and language across all economic, geographic, and social layers. In a cultural context, these multiple points of view reinforce appreciation of the differences among people and strengthen individual values and beliefs (Holland & Smith, 2000, pp.186-196).

The same 1999 UNESCO report quoted the Italian *Mu.Vi* project, the *Virtual Museum of the Collective Memory of Lombardy*, in which the methodological characteristics of the Council of Europe's Faro Convention were anticipated.

All together, [wrote the project coordinators], let's build a large Gallery, a Memory Museum of images and memories, visible to all, consultable by all on the Internet, a unique undertaking to capture the recent history of the territory and its inhabitants, before the documents are irretrievably lost (UNESCO, 2000).

Intangible Cultural Heritage is defined by the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in its article 2 as:

The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills –as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith– that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity

and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. (UNESCO, 2003, art. 2).

Five categories of goods belonging to the Intangible Cultural Heritage were identified which include:

Traditions or living expressions inherited from ancestors and passed on to descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. (UNESCO, 2003).

The *Faro Convention* (2005) signed by Italy in 2020[2] updated the 2003 UNESCO convention on intangible heritage, adding the role of local communities in identifying heritage, underlining the intrinsic relationship between cultural heritage and heritage communities, made up of a "set of resources inherited from the past that populations identify as a reflection and expression of their continuously evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions" (Council of Europe, 2005). The *Faro Convention* starts from the idea that knowledge and use of heritage are part of citizens' right to participate in cultural life, as they concern human rights and democracy. The Convention promotes a broader understanding of heritage and its relationship with communities and society and encourages us to recognize that urban and landscape objects and places are not, in themselves, what is important about cultural heritage, but are important because of the intangible meanings and uses that people attribute to them and because of the social and cultural values they represent.

The convention thus highlights the history rather than the aesthetics of heritage when it says:

Cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time. (Council of Europe, 2005)

The intention was to move from a bureaucratic and administrative definition of material cultural heritage to a public and participatory one of heritage communities which gave an essential and continuously evolving value to the history of heritage. The mourned Massimo Montella, who was professor of Economics and Management of Cultural Heritage, wrote that "the survival and ultimate meaning of cultural heritage depend on society's way of thinking, rather than on that formalized in institutions and legal provisions which may no longer respond to the need" (Montella, 2016, n.p).

A landscape heritage historian like Rossano Pazzagli underlines the importance of the participation of local populations in the 'awareness of the place' or in the construction of an identity heritage that also involves a collective memory of the local communities' industrious past. It encourage "the use of the past as a recreational resource with economic and cultural purposes thus responding to an identity claim of the local populations". Communities "contribute to strengthening the feeling of belonging, to determining the sense of a place and therefore to produce social and political awareness as a driving force that leads to correctly considering to safeguard this heritage. All this is social capital: it is the awareness of place" (Pazzagli, 1996, p. 110).

IDENTITY OF PLACES, HERITAGE COMMUNITIES AND PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY

Let's take one of the fields of application of PH's participatory methods, namely Public Archaeology (now PA) (Bonacchi et al., 2020; Bonacchi, 2022), and only with a specific area of PA practices such as industrial archaeology. Recovering the collective consciousness of 'the places' in a participatory way allows us to interact with the communities that live around the sites. Participation is built on a double track, that of historical research and attention to the territory's history, and to its landscapes shaped by

industrialization and deindustrialization. PH practices need to establish a dialogue with local communities' generations and their memory and reconstruct the long history that has shaped these territories for centuries. A collective awareness has grown of the importance of "heritage understood as cultural heritage, which includes a mix of tangible and intangible elements: historical buildings and monuments, production sites, traditional landscapes, popular events and practices, lifestyles, typical productions, etc." (Pazzagli, 2017, p. 110). Giuliano Volpe, insists on the fact that a landscape is certainly not to be understood exclusively aesthetically, as a "beautiful landscape", but as "a complex system of relationships [with] the traces of the millenary relationship between man and nature", a condensation of memories of the Anthropocene, which imposes a global gaze (2020, p. 35).

In Italy, the AIPAI, the *Italian association for industrial archaeological heritage*, was founded in 1997 and became a member of TICHII, the International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage, founded in 1973. That attention to industrial archeology, in the long run, was present elsewhere in Europe at the same time. For example, the museumization since 2012 of the UNESCO World Heritage site of the Grand-Hornu in Belgium[3], or Luxembourg's ARBED steel industry blast furnaces heritage defining the identity of the place even in the space that houses the library and the University of Luxembourg campus in Belval and Esch-su-Alzette[4].

In the USA, Cathy Stanton, pillar of the *National Council of Public History* (NCPH), studied the industrial archeology national historical park in the town of Lowell in Massachusetts. The park was created in 1978 and has allowed to reinterpret elements of the history of work, immigration, and women's history. As a long-standing and well-known example of "culture-led redevelopment," Lowell is an exceptional site for tourism studies in the context of the heritage communities envisioned by the principles of

the European *Faro Convention* (Stanton, 2006). In Lowell, the public archeology and PH experiment led to the creation of local cultural assets building on deindustrialization and a necessary reconversion, also in tourist terms, of the industrial heritage, its landscape, and the collective memories that populate this National Historical Park[5]. As Stanton describes, it has become a real testing ground for American public historians, professionally trained historians who have had to deal with other professions and the local public. Such a PA experiment carried out in Lowell adopted a multidisciplinary approach involving anthropology: the complex creation of the cultural park was in fact based on the preservation of local memories, and on the need for economic redevelopment through forms of cultural tourism and maintenance and promotion of the industrial landscape.

CONNECTING ANTHROPOLOGY AND PUBLIC HISTORY

Between 1986 and 1996, coordinated by an anthropologist, Lucia Carle, the multidisciplinary proto-PH project, called *Urban Identity in Tuscany,* developed with the support of the European University Institute of Fiesole analyzed the long-term persistence of traditions and collective memories of the Tuscan medieval past until today (Carle, 1998). In June 1986 the project was launched during an interdisciplinary conference aiming at a comparison between different social scientists' research around the concepts of places and identities, a way to bring historians and anthropologists into dialogue about urban identities. For Martine Segalen and Lucia Carle "as individuals think of them, mental images of space are clearly determined by the social context in multiple and complex ways. Furthermore, conflicting images of social space coexist in each society and individuals move between available narratives as if to redefine their identity in relation to different alter-

native identities". (Carvalho, 1986, pp. 443-445).

Based on traditional archival research and ethnographic methods and interviews that involved local communities between public and private (Klapisch-Zuber, 1986), this study of centuries-old civic and popular traditions also used the knowledge of architects and urban planners as well as the work of historians. It investigated the permanence of collective memories inside and outside the walls of six small medieval villages and produced six distinct monographs, each dedicated to the urban community investigated (Carle, 1986; Carle, 1996; Capelletto, 1996; Chabot, 1997; Mineccia, 1996; Pazzagli,1996; Pirillo, 1997;). The researchers remained on site for three years and their fieldwork made it possible to outline the changes and permanence of urban identities and how these solidified from the 15th to the 20th century. Carle wrote "the term identity is intended as a research area in which to investigate the multiple and complex aspects of a problem that is in many ways extremely current, that of the socio-cultural identity of a defined population" (Carle, 1986, p. 226).

The importance of not limiting oneself to applying only the tools of the historian's craft (mainly working with local archives) was emphasized. In the various essays of the book, thus indicating the importance of multidisciplinary and participatory investigation, with its ethnographic dimension, the history of landscapes, the urban and rural architecture, and historical demography. The participatory method of the project included meetings between historians and local communities to carry out the study of the entire historical period required, up to the end of the twentieth century.

Looking at the civic traditions of local communities, an important element of the work hasn't been stressed at the time: the need to also deal with the knowledge and methods of other social scientists, an essential characteristic of proto-public history practices. The project ignored that it was anticipating what had not yet been formalized in such research contexts: the methodological implications

of PH with forms of shared authority and a participatory construction of knowledge directly with the local comm unities, a method that is now central in today's PH hermeneutic that includes citizen's history practices (Adair et al., 2011; Ridge, 2014; Gardner, 2010; Gardner, 2020).

PARTICIPATIVE MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE

Let's go deeper into talking about museums that have followed a similar path of opening to territories and communities. The 2017 code of museums' ethics mentions that they operated in close collaboration with the territories and that:

"Museum collections reflect the cultural and natural heritage of the communities from which they have been derived. As such, they have a character beyond that of ordinary property, which may include strong affinities with national, regional, local, ethnic, religious, or political identity. It is important therefore that museum policy is responsive to this situation" (ICOM, 2017, p. 21).

The latest revision of ICOM's museum definition dates from the Prague conference in August 2022. And it stipulates that

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing" (ICOM, https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/).

And especially referring to heritage communities mentioned in the Faro Convention, it writes that museums are:

"open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums promote diversity and sustainability. They operate and

communicate ethically and professionally and with community participation, offering diverse experiences for education, pleasure, reflection, and knowledge sharing" (ICOM, https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/).

An initiative such as the *Manifesto of the small villages and territories museums* for a new cultural model open to communities (Barreca, 2020) takes up the socio-cultural approach of a heritage that comes to life in its history and through the shared memories of local communities. This manifesto insists on the fact that the cultural sector (MAB in Italy) and especially museums, as tools for developing cultural networks and social relations, must adopt new, more inclusive museum formats, closer to communities. Establishing a relationship with the local communities, it is urgent to rethink its role and the management of participatory activities with and for the public. Of course, the discipline of PH would add to this statement that participation is actively done and takes place not only to understand the kind of public with which to communicate but also to engage directly to build local territorial networks made of small and medium-sized heritage institutions.

In 2010 in Santa Cruz, California, a museologist, Nina Simon, wrote a Participatory Museum practical guide for working with community members and visitors to make cultural institutions more dynamic, relevant, and essential places for the public. Simon describes the museum as a place of dialogue and community involvement, which was centered on the needs of the community itself. (Simon, 2010). In 1997, Barbara Franco, president of the *Seminary Ridge Historic Preservation Foundation*, which manages the museum and landscape of the Battle of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania, wrote that museums as heritage institutions, were "public (for the public), participatory (with the public), activist (by the public) and that they also looked at the public as subjects (on the public)" (Franco, 1997).

CURATORIAL TURN AND HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

A 'curatorial turn' occurred in digital PH projects. It characterizes how heritage legacy can be better managed today worldwide influenced by digital technologies and PH methods (Tebeau, 2022). A new curatorial ethic has emerged at the heart of digital PH, reflecting curatorial work flourishing across cultural institutions. Everyone has become a curator, the disc jockey who selects playlists for streaming Internet radios, as well as the creator of a digital native archive that collects and organizes document sharing through descriptive metadata.

This curatorial breakthrough began with the birth of new digitally invented archives and through public participation. The first major example has been September 11 launched at the beginning of 2002 which used electronic media to collect, preserve and present the stories and memories of the *September 11*, 2001, attacks. The platform encouraged participation by loading sources on the website and calling for the construction of a people's archive: "Contribute to the archive 9/11 Digital: Tell your story, add your email, and upload images, documents, and other digital files to the archive" (Sparrow, 2006). In September 2003, the Library of Congress incorporated this bottom-up popular "invented archive" into its permanent collections. 9/11 became the Library of Congress's first major digital acquisition, ushering in a digitally driven form as a fusion between GLAM institutional missions.

Curating digital archives has been one of the most important activities for connecting cultural heritage institution's data. *Europeana* was launched in November 2008 and became the first transnational European project that, for the first time, linked the digital contents of cultural institutions in the countries of the Union through descriptive metadata. The interoperability of metadata in the 2013 British project, *Connected Histories*, linked the resources held by the main heritage institutions in the UK, the *Brit-*

ish Library (Library), the *National Archive* (Archive), and the *National Gallery* (Museum). *Connected Histories* brought together a range of federated digital resources relating to the early modern period and the nineteenth century that "enabled sophisticated searching of names, places, and dates, as well as the ability to save, link and share resources within a personal workspace"[6]. These projects served both the academic research community, and the large public made of amateur. It did not yet propose participatory content production as it happens today in institutions that practice PH and curate digital content with the help and participation of the public such as with the 9/11 project.

The construction of new participatory curatorial practices has also contaminated *Europeana* over time which has collected directly from the public memories and documents related to the First World War during its Centenary commemoration. This digital PH upgrade allowed *Europeana* to "mix documentation from libraries and archives across the globe with memories and memorabilia from families throughout Europe"[7].

This new curatorial ethic of knowledge provided by the public and for the public defines what is now commonly understood as crowdsourcing and user-generated content practices. They are technically demanding because their promises of inclusion and participation are made possible thanks to data interoperability, and they strongly depend on the mastery not only of techniques but also of increasingly specialized administrative procedures in the management and sustainability of data in digital platforms.

CONCLUSIONS

The models of production and transmission of culture have been transformed by a digital revolution that used new forms of popular and community participation when dealing with the creation, protection, curation, and access

to common people's sources and knowledge. Today, communities inheriting local heritages do not only help to preserve and valorize such heritage but create new contents, new memories, and narratives directly generated by the communities which build their plural identities around their diversified and complex cultural heritage.

In Europe, the content of the *Faro Convention* took care of what had already emerged with the new field of PH in the 1970s at the University of Santa Barbara in California as a new professional ethic of the making of history in public and with the public through different forms of authority sharing. The digital dimension of these new practices, introduced with a participatory Web 2.0 and through the semantic Web 3.0 allowing for new forms of "co-curation" thanks to descriptive metadata, has boosted a new relationship between history professionals and inheriting communities identified by the Convention.

Making history and promoting hereditary heritage are practiced in direct contact with the communities to which they belong. Faro has taken note of this, valorizing the production of history as a common good and an integral part of the inalienable rights of humanity to access its past through the participation of individuals and their communities. The right to access one's history (heritage is an integral part of it) is central to the hermeneutics of PH.

NOTES

1 See *#Memorecord*, the project to collect the memories of migrants in Luxembourg by Anita Lucchesi https://memorecord.uni.lu/.
2 Law of the 1st October 2020, n. 133, "Ratifica ed esecuzione della Convenzione quadro del Consiglio d'Europa sul valore del patrimonio culturale per la società, fatta a Faro il 27 ottobre 2005", https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:2020;133.
3 MACS, *Musée des Arts Contemporains de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Site du Grand-Hornu*, https://www.mac-s.be/en/grand-hornu.
4 The five-year Project (2019-2024) coordinated by Stefan Krebs, *Remixing Industrial Pasts in the Digital Age: Sounds, Images, Ecologies, Practices and Materialities in Space and Time* offers an advanced form of enjoyment of

these industrial heritages with the participation of local communities; https://www.c2dh.uni.lu/projects/remixing-industrial-pasts-digital-age-sounds-images-ecologies-practices-and-materialities.

5 See the park website, https://www.nps.gov/lowe/index.htm

6 *Connected Histories: British History Sources, 1500-1900*, http://www.connectedhistories.org/.

7 *Europeana 1914-1918 – untold stories & official histories of WW1*, now available in Internet Archive: https://web.archive.org/web/20240107011617/http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu/en

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