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Digital platforms 'without a cause': why the impact on a museum organization should not be taken for granted. The case study of Civic Museums in Treviso

Digital platforms 'without a cause': why the impact on a museum organization should not be taken for granted. The case study of Civic Museums in Treviso

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Abstract: The impact of digital platforms on different areas of the museum practice has been widely explored in museology. What is less clear is to what extent the adoption of digital platforms is connected to strategic choices and if it leads to organizational transformations. The paper addresses this issue through the case study derived from a project coordinated by the Department of Management, Ca' Foscari University of Venice at the Civic Museums of Treviso. A qualitative study was implemented to explore the impact of the introduction of new digital practices on how the members of the museums conceive the relationship with audiences, the curatorial function and the predominant museum's modes. The research outcomes show how the adoption of digital platforms can foster a broad reflection upon the underlying values and beliefs that shape behaviours in museum, but this reflection it is not enough in itself to trigger an organizational transformation.

Keywords: digital platforms, digital practices, museum strategy, organisational change, museum value framework

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1 Introduction

The impact of web platforms on the way people interact with cultural heritage has been widely explored in museology. Relevant contributions over the past decade have shown how the Web 2.0 and the advent of social media platforms have enabled an active role for users, opened the way to crowdsourcing practices, fostered processes of co-creation with stakeholders, and ultimately contributed to the evolution of the museum into a more open and participatory institution (Simon, 2010).

This wave of transformation does not affect only visitors, but the museum professionals and the whole organizational culture of the museum. It is well established from a variety of studies how the use of digital platforms are introducing new tensions and challenges, leading museum professionals to rethink some of the core function of the traditional museum: the curatorial authority (Proctor, 2010; Phillips, 2013), the relationship with audiences (Puhl and Mencarelli, 2015), the concept of heritage (Giaccardi, 2012), the processes of cultural production (Davies, 2010; Tamma and Artico, 2015) and previous business models (Falk and Sheppard 2006, Zardini Lacedelli, 2018).

However, the adoption of a digital tool it is not enough in itself to foster the transformations introduced by digital revolution. Recent studies have shown that despite the use of web platforms is a growing trend in museums, this does not always translate in or lead to a real innovation in the organization (Digital Innovation Observatory of the School of Management of Politecnico di Milano, 2017 and 2018). A recent study in Southern Europe showed how the majority of heritage organizations have a conservative attitude (Gombault et al., 2016) and often fail to integrate ITC into their mission. But why the adoption of digital platform does not always result in an actual organizational transformation? Is the decision to adopt a digital platform always driven by the intention to introduce a strategic change?

This paper will address this issue, through the analysis of a case study that originates from a research project coordinated by the Department of Management, Ca' Foscari. In the case study presented, we will analyze the impact of the introduction of three digital practices on different platforms in the Civic Museums in Treviso, in order to understand if they have been an agent of transformation from an organizational perspective. A qualitative study was implemented, to assess if the adoption of digital platforms has introduced a change in values and behaviors, with particular reference to some of the core tensions that contemporary museums are facing: the crisis of the curatorial authority, the evolution in the relationship with public, and the rethinking of the museum's functions. To highlight the underlying tensions among different values and approaches that digital platforms might have introduced, we referred to the concept of museum's "modes", introduced by Davies (2013) in the Museum Values Framework (MVF).

The following two sections are dedicated to an overview of the impact of digital platforms on museums, and to a brief review of organizational culture and the Museum Value Framework that help to understand how values shape behaviors in museums. Next, a detailed description of the case study will be offered. Thus, the qualitative study will be presented and data collected will be analysed and discussed. Finally, some conclusions about the implications of the adoption of digital platforms in museums will be underlined.

2   The transformative impact of platforms in museums

The transformative power of web platforms has been fully recognized and richly explored in many disciplines, including economics, sociology and digital humanities. Although the considerable amount of research on the impact of Web 2.0 on society and business transformation, in 2013 the Special Issue of Information System Research reported little consensus on 'what broader changes with regard to an organization's structures, processes, leadership, training, and culture are needed to harness the potential of this transformative force' (Aral et al. 2013). In the last decade, extensive research in the field of management and business studies contributed to fill this gap, raising many relevant issues on the impact of social media platforms on the internal behaviour of the organizations: the role of digital enablement and digital literacy on the organizational performance (Tan et al. 2010), internal marketing (Ge and Johns, 2013) and internal branding (Li et al. 2018) the emergence of new dynamic capabilities (Mikalef and Pateli 2015) and their role in managing tensions between the participatory nature of technology and previous management practices (Baptista et al. 2016; Huang et al. 2015). In the field of museum studies, whereas the impact of platforms has been largely explored from an audience engagement perspective and a curator-oriented approach (Kefi & Pallud, 2011), there are few studies that have investigated the changes that the use of platforms triggers from an organizational perspective. Whether technology is seen as cause of cultural change (*technological determinism*) or a way to adapt to a changing culture (*technological culture*), the introduction of ITC is never neutral to the organizational configuration of a museum: "This means moving from museums considering their digital challenge as being simply about how they must react to changing hardware and software systems, to more strategically examining how they remain relevant to audiences who are operating within a changing digital culture" ("The thinking behind One by One", 2018).

The existing body of research on digital transformation in museums focus on three main areas of tensions that the use of web platforms has highlighted.

The first one regards how museum conceive the relationship with audiences and stakeholders. The advent of user-generated content has transformed the traditional visitor's role into an active participant and 'prosumer' (Puhl and Mencarelli, 2015; Fois, 2015). It is now well established from a variety of different studies the role of the Web 2.0 in the introduction of participatory heritage practices (Giaccardi 2012), such as crowdsourcing (Ridge 2013), digital curation (Cameron 2010; Giannini and Bowen 2016), co-production (Tamma and Artico 2015).

Another core area, strictly interrelated with the first one, regards how museum conceive knowledge and develop interpretative narratives. Traditionally, heritage meanings were conceived as fixed and certain and the museum's role was to communicate them to the public: in the digital domain, the narratives are fluid and objects are open to multiple interpretations. One of the most evident manifestations of this paradigmatic shift is the crisis of the curatorial authority, substituted by what has been defined 'Open authority', "the coming together of museum authority with the principles of the open Web, a mixing of institutional expertise with the discussions, experiences and insights of broad audiences" (Phillips, 2013).

Together, these conceptual transformations have ultimately contributed to a rethinking of the very concept of museum and its functions: from a temple of truth, mostly aimed to preserve material object of culture and disseminate knowledge to public, to a more

open institution, participatory in nature, that co-create heritage with people and develop its cultural offer also in the digital domain. Within the New Museology, new museological dimensions anticipated and reflected upon this shift: the post-museum (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000), the participatory museum (Simon 2010), the post-digital museum (Parry, 2013), the platform-museum (Zardini Lacedelli 2018).

All these shifts impact the internal museum's organization, introducing new conflicts and tensions among the underlying assumptions that have shaped previous behaviours, practices and ways of working. The following section will give an overview on the theoretical tools that can help to understand and highlight this range of values and beliefs which are frequently unarticulated and invisible.

3   Museum modes: a way to understand values and behaviours in museums

Changes in an organization present a complex of intertwined dimensions and aspects, which have been captured in theory and in practice with different approaches, concepts and tools. Research on organizational change and innovation in general suggest that the organizations' capabilities to change are dependent on the underlying values and beliefs of the organizational members (Feldman, 1986; Rashid et al., 2004; Büschgens et al., 2013; Matzler et al., 2013a). The behaviour of any organization is shaped by a set of beliefs, values, norms and assumptions that are commonly classified within the broad concept of *organizational culture* (Quinn 1988). Multiple conceptualizations of organizational culture can be found in the literature: one of the well known is the Competing Values Framework, developed by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983) and, successively, by Quinn and Spreitzer (1991), Cameron and Freeman (1991) among the others, as a multidimensional framework to assess culture and organizational effectiveness across common dimensions (Gregory, Harris, Armenakis, Christopher 2009).

Although there is a significant body of literature on organizational culture and its impact on organizational effectiveness and innovation, few studies have investigated the role of values and assumptions in shaping behaviours in museums. An important contribution that tried to address this gap was given by Davies (2010), that adapted to the museum field the Competing Values Framework (CVF) developed by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1981). This theoretical tool identified four organizational types that have been reinterpreted by Davies into four different "museum modes": the *club mode*, the *temple mode*, the *visitor attraction* mode and the *forum mode*. Each mode gives a different weight to the core functions of the museum - preserving the collection, increasing understanding, communicating the material and contributing to civic society - and answers in a different way to two among the main tensions discussed in the museum literature: depending on who the key stakeholders are (the museum community versus the external audiences) and on how knowledge is conceptualised (as a controlled narrative or open to multiple interpretations). These dimensions appear in a museum in a dynamic, complex and interwoven relationship, as notes Davies: "The four modes are conceptual abstracts and, while we may recognise examples of the kind of behaviours described in actual museums, the modes do not exist in their pure form. In reality, museums appear to combine these modes in various ways, and the combinations will change over time. The value of the abstract modes is in how they provide a framework to analyse behaviour and tensions in a museum context" (Davies et al., 2013, p.354).

Davies applied the Museum Value Framework tool to analyse a series of interviews related to a specific research topic (co-production processes in exhibitions), but her

research suggested that MVF can be applied more generally as a tool "to analyse and understand a range of values at the individual, group and organisational levels". This range of values are frequently unarticulated and invisible and the MVF can help to recognise the underlying conflicts, without necessarily resolve them: "Museums are complex organisations where a range of contradictory values coexist. The point is not to resolve the conflicts between these values but to work with the tensions, and the MVF can help us understand these tensions" (Davies et al., 2013, p. 356).

This is particularly relevant considering the conflicts and tensions that museums are facing in the digital age, that requires new approaches and way of working in order to negotiate the needs of different audiences and cultures, as has been discussed in the previous section.

3   The Case Study

3.1   The Civic Museums of Treviso

This case study originates from a project coordinated by the Department of Management, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, and carried out at the Civic Museums of Treviso.

Before discussing the Case Study and the methodology, the context of the research will be briefly introduced. The Civic Museums are a system of museums and collections representing a public organism directly managed by the Council of Treviso, a town of the Veneto hinterland, populated by about 85,000 inhabitants. As part of a public administration, the system of Civic Museums politically belongs to the *Assessorato Beni Culturali e Turismo* of the Municipality, and is managed by the *Settore Biblioteche, Musei e Turismo*.

Established as "Museo Trevigiano", a museum for the memory of the city and the territory in the late 19th Century, nowadays the Civic Museums enshrine a collection of around 30,000 items, made of material and documental records of the city, historical and artistic collections belonging to the antique market and to the secularisation of ecclesiastical properties, and diversified heritage originated by private legacies and donations. They keep therefore an heterogeneous heritage composed by works of different nature, provenience, acquisition, conservative status, that is collocated within three main venues – all deployed in three different corners of Treviso historic center –, in eight among storages and depots, but also in other properties around the city and the territory (civic collections are in Villa Lattes in Istrana, or within the San Teonisto Church in Treviso, etc.). The three main venues, all obtained from the reconversion of historical buildings, are the following:

- The "Museo Bailo" was originally the first nucleus of the "Museo Trivigiano" established in 1879 by abbot and scholar Luigi Bailo (1835-1932) in the former convent of *Scalzi*, where he gathered a first collection of ancient epigraphs, frescoes and headstones. The building is living now a multi-year process of renovation, with a first important phase concluded in 2015, with the architectural restoration and renovation of the edifice and the reorganization of the permanent exhibition around the work of sculptor Arturo Martini (1889-1947) and other Treviso artists who had lived and worked between 1870 and 1945 (Gerhardinger et al., 2015).

- Casa Robegan and Casa da Noal, a complex of gothic dwellings acquired by the municipality of Treviso in 1935, during the Fascist era. Casa Rogegan hosts temporary

exhibitions and events, while Casa Noal, formerly "Museo della Casa Trevigiana", is mainly used as a depot.
- The complex of Santa Caterina is another former convent turned into a Civic Museums venue in 2002 (Rizzato & Rizzato, 2015). The complex hosts the museum management headquarters and the curatorial department, the gothic church of Santa Caterina, the archeological section inaugurated in 2007, the gallery of medieval, renaissance and modern art, whose exhibition display was recently renovated in 2018. In the last years, the Complex of Santa Caterina has been offering its spaces to host grand exhibitions of great claim, organized by private agencies and associations that have brought to Treviso big names of international art.

3.2 The project design

Going back to the project, two were the main objectives: the appraisal and development of the strategic profile of the Civic Museums, and the introduction of new practices of audience engagement and audience development that could benefit of the potential of digital platforms. The project adopted a design-thinking approach, aimed to develop a series of digital practices, that were tested, implemented and successively analyzed.
We started by a qualitative analysis of the context of the Civic Museums, that was undertaken through a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews with the middle management of the Museums. Throughout the research project, we collected a total of 25 hours interviews with 10 different members of the museum team. The focus of the interviews evolved during the research project. The first interviews were aimed to understand the conception of the museum, its identity, the internal resources and audience. A group of interviews were dedicated on the specific topic of digital communication, since it was one of the main objectives of the research. An audio recording of each interview was made and, for the more structured interviews, a transcript was typed up. The findings from the first interviews were analysed using qualitative methods that led to the identification of a series of themes grouped within five main areas, each one corresponding to a museum dimension: the cultural offer (*museum as structure of cultural production*), heritage and collections values (*museum as heritage institution*), internal and external resources (*museum as a human resources system*), management dynamics (*museum as an organization*), audience (*museum as space for cultural experience*), networks and partnerships (*museum as a platform for territorial development*).
At the end of the analysis phase, a strategic document was developed, and three main areas of intervention were identified and proposed to the museum management: the first one was dedicated to the relationship of the Civic Museums with its online public, the second to the digital presence of the museums' collections, the third one to the involvement of students and volunteers in the digital communication of the museums. From these, three digital practices were designed, using the already existing Facebook page and the new accounts on Instagram and Pinterest that were opened to the purpose:

- the collection of a series of thematic images published by visitors on Instagram and the republication on the Civic Museums' Facebook Page as well as on the new Pinterest profile during the MuseumWeek 2018;
- the creation of a new Instagram profile (@museitv.ambassadors) aimed to develop a community of young Ambassadors of the museums;
- the development of a thematic collection on the new Pinterest profile dedicated to the unexposed artworks, in collaboration with the curator of the Civic Museums.

In parallel, a broader reflection on the evolution of the museum's functions in the digital age was introduced through the development of a 'Carta dei Servizi' - the Customer Charter adopted in the Italian museum system. The design of the charter followed a benchmarking activity for the identification of models, methodologies and best practices concerning structure and contents of the document. Also, a parallel investigation on the topic of museum quality standard was carried out, in order to understand the inspiring principle, rules and codes – at both Italian and international levels – of Italian museum charters, and the ongoing process and debate on the theme (Negri & Sani, 2001; Maresca Campagna & Sani, 2008; Sanesi 2014). The charter developed was therefore inspired by the Italian ministerial guidelines and by a series of European documents[1] and reflects upon the evolution of the heritage interpretation and the role of digital tools to enhance cultural accessibility and improve participation to the cultural life.

The digital practices were directly implemented during the research project and then continued to be performed by the museum middle management after the conclusion of the research project. This paper analyses the impact of the introduction of these digital practices on the museums' modes through a qualitative study that was implemented nine months after the conclusion of the research project. Each practice will be described in detail in the following section.

3.3 The digital practices

The Museums Seen by You

The present practice was introduced together with a huge reflection, among the museum management staff, on the role and the increasing importance of online audience, as a new category in open and mutual dialogue with the museum, able to express and share multiple perspectives on heritage and to generate user-generated contents. A Pinterest account was opened for the Civic Museums, where the board "The Museums Seen by You" was designed exactly to give value to user-generated contents, in particular to collect the most visually effective photographs shot and posted by visitors that are part of the Instagram community. Pinterest was chosen as a particularly fitting instrument, as a social network that allows to collect images already present on the Web by means of a specific form of linking (called 'pin') that connects images to their online sources. A preliminary hashtag research on the Instagram platform (using keywords such as #museicivicitreviso; #museobailo; #trevisomusei) permitted to discover a number of photographic contents concerning the Museums. Relevant information on the digital presence and identity of the Museums also emerged and the digital practice was purposely continued and tailored to give value to this online visual repertoire, as well as to enhance the dialogue with the online audience. Within the board, images were organized in seven thematic galleries, inspired by the seven topics launched by the international campaign #MuseumWeek 2018 (#womenMW, #cityMW, #heritageMW, #professionsMW, #kidsMW, #natureMW, #differenceMW). In April 2018, the Museum participated to the MuseumWeek, sharing on its Facebook page the seven Pinterest galleries during the seven-day long global initiative. In doing so, the museums

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[1] The Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage (UNESCO 2003), the Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society ("Faro Convention", Council of Europe, 2005), the Decision of European Council, May 21, 2014; the recent adoption, by the Italian Ministry of Culture, of "Uniform minimum levels of quality" for public museum and cultural places, with the activation of the National Museum System (*Adozione dei Livelli minimi uniformi di qualità per i musei e i luoghi della cultura di appartenenza pubblica e attivazione del Sistema Museale Nazionale, Decreto Ministero Beni Attività Culturali e Turismo, February 21, 2018, n. 113*).

entered in direct contact with the photos' authors/Instagram users, by sending to them private messages with a request of republication permission of the pictures.

Figure 1: The Museums Seen by You board on the Civic Museums' Pinterest profile
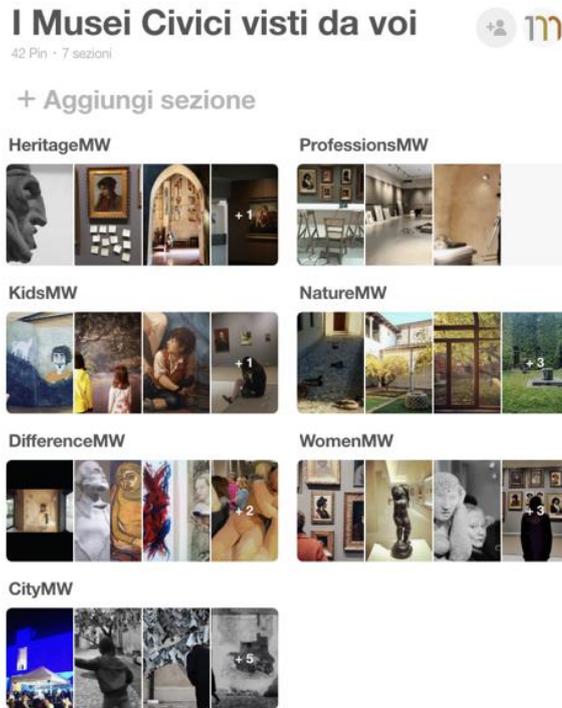

The Ambassadors Community

As seen before, also this second initiative, started in May 2018, benefitted from the preliminary research of the online visual material, and in particular of images posted on the Instagram platform by visitors – both regular visitors and tourists, but also participants of the manifold program of events, concerts, festivals hosted by the museum venues throughout the year. This initiative continued the reflection on the role of online audience and on the necessity to reshape the interaction with online publics, but it considered also another element emerged while researching and interviewing the staff. The specific need was that one of enhancing the role of interns, civil service volunteers, and of all other young people and students gravitating around the museums. Especially in the case of interns and civil service volunteers, the potentiality seen was that one to extend their regular tasks and responsibilities of welcome service, visitor assistance and administrative work, to digital communication and interaction with online audience. The practice was then tested, involving in the months of May, June and July 2018, the civil service volunteer and the group of summer interns of the museum. A new designated space on the Instagram platform was opened (@museitv.ambassadors) as a space where younger generations living the museum – the ambassadors – could gather and creatively express their points of view on heritage. Also, an instrument that they can use for managing the communication and the engagement with Instagram users (for instance by chatting with them in order to obtain repost permission) and for generally monitoring online contents concerning the museums. Students received a specific formation in order to carry out this practice, two training sessions were realized where

formats, roles and coordination issues were discussed together with the researchers, the museum management and the curatorial staff.

Figure 2: The first museum Ambassadors on the new Instagram Profile

Figure 3: An online treasure hunt proposed by the museum Ambassadors on the new Instagram page.
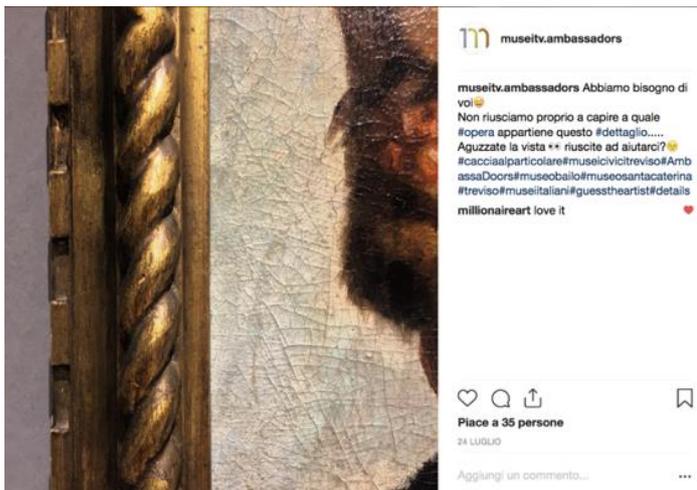
The hidden artworks of the collections

The present initiative was aimed at reflecting upon the importance of the digital heritage within contemporary museums and at introducing, among the museum management, the practice of extending the function of curatorship to the virtual environment. The newly opened profile on the platform Pinterest was used once again and a second board was created, entirely dedicated to the civic collection. Elaborated together with the conservation office, the board presented artworks that were not displayed but, for conservative reasons, were kept within the museum storages. The digital instrument became therefore the place to make them visible and the board "The hidden artworks of the Collections" an experimental space for testing new ways of interaction between different types of digital heritage. The hidden items of the museum were therefore put

in dialogue – through the mechanism of 'pins' – with other visual, audio, textual materials existing in the Web, such as videos, films, books, other images, recordings, in a multidisciplinary and sometimes multisensorial narration around a specific inspiring theme.

Figure 4: The hidden artworks of the collections board on the Civic Museums' Pinterest profile
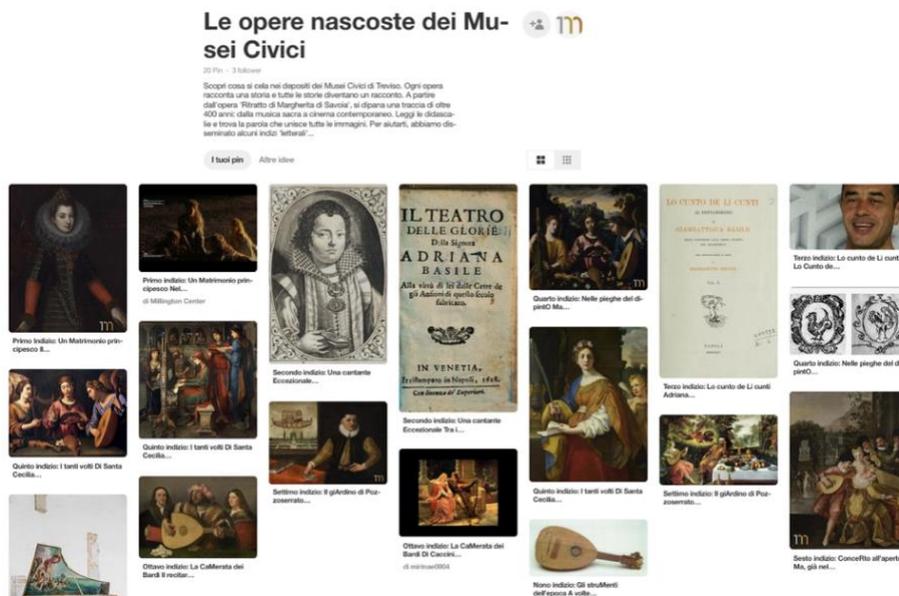
4   The Study

4.1   Methodology

With the literature review in mind, a qualitative study was implemented, to answer to our research question: to what extent does the introduction of new digital practices foster an organizational transformation?

The study is founded on an in-depth knowledge of the organization of the museum, its processes and its practices, having observed it closely for about a year. It has been possible gather a "thick" information on aspects that are difficult to study in depth without a long and multiple viewpoint observation.

We investigated the impact of the introduction of digital platforms in the Civic Museums in Treviso, addressing three main issues:

1) the relationship with audience

2) the curatorial function

3) the predominant museum's "modes"

In implementing the qualitative study, we combined different methods: an online interview and a focus group. Following a triangulation approach, the complementary data obtained from these two methods have been interpreted according to the theoretical perspectives underpinning each method (Caillaud & Flick, 2017). While the online

interview was aimed to gain individual perspectives and synthetic judgments around these issues, the focus group was used to gain insights from the social interaction among the members of the Civic Museum team, analysing more or less shared meanings, beliefs, and perceptions.

The following sections will explain the data collection process and will show the results.

4.2 Data collection

Online interviews

As regards the instrument used to collect the data, an online interview was designed consisting of 4 sections and 7 questions.

Thus, the first open-ended question was aimed at monitoring the new practices introduced and implemented. The second question aimed at exploring a change in perception of the relationship with audience, while the third question had the purpose to assess a change in perception of the curatorial function. The second and third open-ended questions were followed by a four-point Likert scale (1=not at all and 4=very much) aimed to get a synthetic judgement to help the interpretation of participants' qualitative responses. The fourth question was aimed to identify which museum 'mode' was perceived as predominant, according to each participant, using a four-point Likert scale on some functions derived from the theoretical framework, and the work of Davis (2011) in particular. We proposed six functions that include also the digital dimension of the museum and ask participants to indicate to what degree they thought each of them was present in the Civic Museums of Treviso. The six functions were: (1) preservation and valorization of tangible cultural heritage, (2) Creation and valorization of digital cultural heritage, (3) Design of cultural experiences in the physical spaces of the museum, (4) Design of cultural experiences in the digital spaces of the museum, (5) Involvement of museum professionals and experts in the development of the cultural offer, (6) Involvement of communities in the development of the cultural offer.

Since the museum 'modes' are not static, and the emphasis put on different aspects of each mode seems to vary (Davies, 2013), we also choose to replicate this question in the focus group (see following section), in order to understand the changes in perception within a group dynamic.

As regards the last three open-ended questions, they were aimed to identify opinions and attitudes toward the role of digital platforms in the contemporary museum transformation at a general level (sixth question), the potential benefits that they can bring to the museum (seventh question) and the challenges to overcome in the development of digital practices (eighth question).

This online interview was administered to all the museum professionals that participated in the research project (N=5) but, of these, only 3 responded with 2 belonging to the Administrative Office and 1 to the Curatorial Office. The online interview questions were designed in Italian, and answers were later translated into English without changing the content and intent of participants' speech, or putting words in their mouth (Liamputtong, 2011). In so doing, the aim was not to homogenise participants' voice, but to let their geographical and cultural uniqueness to still be represented.

The Focus Group

The focus group took place a week after the online interviews, on May 16, within a triangulation perspective. Four persons participated to the focus group, three of them

were representatives of the museum middle management - belonging to both administrative and curatorial departments - and a young University student who is currently carrying out an internship on digital communication at the museums was also invited by the researchers and the museum staff to listen and share her point of view. The session had a duration of 90 minutes and participants were sitting around a table within the Museum library, a spot bustling with people coming and going, as located by the offices main entrance, and at the crossroads of the administrative headquarters and the curatorial-conservation department. The focus group was moderated by one researcher, while the other one recorded and typed the conversation.

The questions of the Focus Group were developed from an analysis of the results of the open-ended questions of the online interview (Caillaud & Flick, 2017). Following Content analysis, participants' responses were analysed to find repeated patterns of meaning (Liamputtong, 2011). Three main issues were identified: the potentials of digital platforms, the operational needs to develop and maintain digital practices, the disconnect between the curatorial and the management function. Each of them were proposed as single questions of the focus group as input to trigger the discussion. As fourth stimulus, we reproposed the questions of the online interview related to the museum's modes, in order to explore in more depth the perceptions of the participants on the predominant museum's mode and complement the quantitative data. In reporting the qualitative results, participants' ID numbers were used.

4.3 Results

A new relationship with audience

In terms of relationship with audience, both the results from the online interviews and the focus group show the potential of digital platforms.

First of all, the digital platforms have opened the Civic Museums of Treviso to potential and new public, providing them with the opportunity to develop new languages and cultural experiences:

P3: New audiences and new cultural experiences. When we ask on Instagram "Do you know that…" or visitors take selfies: these are new ways to interact with culture, there are new possibilities of fruition, beyond the scientific side.

P3: New languages, more friendly, that do not intimidate who is not an art expert. We empathise with potential visitors, we try to intercept them.

Another potential shared by the participants is brand awareness, that is interpreted both in terms of visibility and reputation (managerial perspective) and cultural identity:

P1: First input is that we are there, increased visibility. We are good, increase in reputation.

P3: Digital thinking should allow the museum to communicate its unique identity, a museum is like a person with its history behind it.

Another potential emerged was accessibility, how digital platforms allow museums to be accessible also online:

12

P3: I would add accessibility, because we become much more accessible for those who don't physically come in the museum.

On the other hand, all these opportunities are perceived to remain at a potential level. This emerges strongly in the answers of a participant in the Focus Group:

P2: For me this potential remain more at a theoretical, than a practical level... After a year of experience, there is no concrete response in terms of new visitors.

Both the answers from the online interviews and the focus groups show how the first and fundamental requirements to develop and maintain any digital practice are time and human resources:

P2: What we need, in addition to people, is also time. A time that we should be able to find and more tranquility for a series of reflections, for data analysis, for planning, for deciding which campaign to do….and very often we don't have this calm.

Interestingly, participants perceive the governance configuration of their organization - a public museum managed by a municipal administration - and the directives received as an obstacle to leverage the potential of digital platforms:

P2: We actually operate on political inputs who require us to complete certain requests. These requests do not take into account any aspects of the potential of digitization (...). The municipal administration is managing the museum as it used to do in the 1950s. And this emerges from the digital dimension. It is still an analog system.

This is a particularly interesting evidence, highlighting the close relationship between the adoption of digital practices and the strategic lines coming from governance conditions.
The potential evolution of the relationship with audience actually did not result in fundamental changes in the strategic direction of the Civic Museums. One of the main obstacles perceived by participants is the very organizational configuration of the public museum, that they describe as not suited enough to the contemporary society and the new dynamic museum model that is emerging.

The evolution of the curatorial function
In terms of how the curatorial function is interpreted, the Focus Group allowed to highlight the role of digital in introducing a reflection upon previous practices:

P2: For the curatorial and conservation work, digital is now essential. However, we still need to shift from an analogic way to catalogue cultural data to think digitally. This is still a slow process.

In reflecting upon the phenomenon of user-generated content, the theme of the crisis of curatorial authority emerged:

P2: I observed more and more people in rooms with professional cameras that photograph all the works one by one. When you ask them why they do it, they say for personal use.

Moderator: How do you think the museum should react to this?

P2: They should be in contact with the museum. The museum might use part of this material.

The evolution of the curatorial function and its relationship with the managerial function was a central issue in the focus group. From the answers of the online interviews, in fact, all the participants agreed on the fact that any change in the curatorial practices only affects the curatorial team and that the use of digital platforms did not foster any interaction with the management and administrative office. This emerges strongly in the answers to the question related to a change in the curatorial practices, that show a disconnect between the two functions:

P1: I am not qualified to answer the question, as I am not a curator.

The focus group helped to deep the understanding of this issue. Interestingly, the organizational configuration of the public museum is perceived again as a core obstacle to an interaction between the two functions:

P3: [In order to reduce the distance between the two offices] it would help to overcome our municipal mentality, which focuses on the administrative processes. Heritage valorisation should have at least equal dignity of this.

P1: Unfortunately the needs are segmented. (...) What we do [the management office] to narrate our heritage is limited to the communication of what happens (laboratories, events, exhibitions). My function is to ensure that everything the museum needs should be adapted to the criteria of public administration.

The rigid commitments that both offices need to comply with, results in a lack of freedom and in a lack of time, an issue already emerged also in relation with the potential of digital platforms in terms of public:

P1: If we had more oxygen there would also be more circulation, which is why we don't communicate with each other.

P2: For me it's a matter of organization. It is the organizational system that doesn't work.

P4: The two offices should have more freedom. If they had, given a budget, the museum could live better.

The impact of digital platforms on the museum's modes

Finally, we evaluate the impact of the digital platforms on the museum's modes, comparing the individual answers collected in the online interviews with the opinions and interactions emerged in the Focus Group.

Table 1: Histogram that summarizes the results of the question related to the predominant "museums' modes".
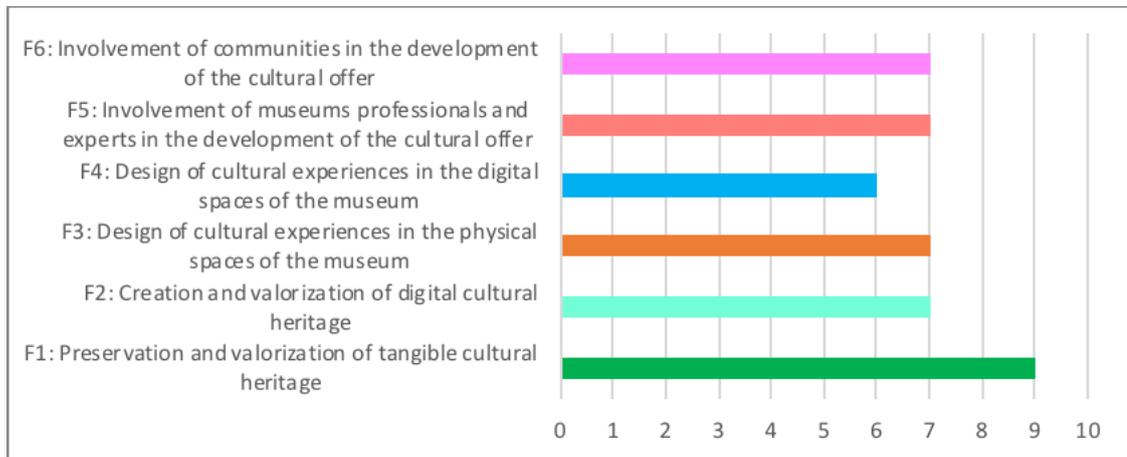
In the online interviews, the three participants agreed in considering the preservation and valorization of tangible cultural heritage (function number 1) the predominant dimension of the Civic Museums, assigning a lower score to the other functions. However, during the Focus Group the opinions were socialized and deep.

As regarding the creation and valorization of digital cultural heritage (function number 2), participants agreed that this was of pertinence of the curatorial office:

P2: As conservator, I digitized more than 300 artworks of the collection, so I would say function number 2. But this is only one of the dimensions of the museum. Embracing digital requires different logic.

Regarding the two functions related to the development of cultural experiences (function number 3 and 4), although the recent development of activities in the digital domain, the participants agreed that the cultural offer of the Civic Museums succeeds more in the physical spaces:

P2: The experience of the online contest made us realize that our presence in the digital world is very fragile. We have just celebrated 3000 followers on our Facebook Page, but nobody participated in the contest. Today the virtual experience has complemented the physical one, of course it has different value but it is another way to convey the museum identity. I think we are fragile in this.

P3: We have just entered the digital dimension, so it will probably take time, continuing to have the chance to have the right direction.

In terms of the involvement of different communities in the development of the cultural offer (function 5 and 6), the Civic Museums seems to balance both the academic knowledge and the informal expertise, thanks to the participations of different stakeholders in the activities of the museum.

5 Conclusions

This study has provided new insights on the intrinsic value of web platforms on the digital transformation of the museum and, on the other hand, revealed the limits of their uncritical adoption. Our case findings reveal that the mere introduction of a new digital tool is not in itself sufficient to leverage the transformative power of platforms.

Three are the main evidences from our study.

First of all, the adoption of digital platforms introduced a broad reflection upon the new opportunities that museums have in the digital age. The results show how the members of the museum team increased their awareness around the main tensions that contemporary museums are facing - the advent of user-generated-content, the crisis of curatorial authority - and their understanding of the potentials of the use of platforms to reach new audiences, develop new cultural experiences on the online spaces, and introduce new languages.

However, this reflection does not necessarily result in a fundamental strategic change. Among the elements that inhibit this transformation, the organizational configuration seems to have a crucial role. A rigid organizational structure does not favour the necessary freedom to experiment new approaches and the interaction among different museum offices, traditionally conceived as separate.

Ultimately, it seems to be a strict relationship between the adoption of digital platforms, the development of digital practices and the museum organizational values. To investigate the underlying combination of values and approaches that shape behaviours in our case study, we used the concept of 'museum modes' developed by Davies, that we further developed in order to include new functions that museums are developing in the digital age.

It should be noted that this study was exploratory in nature and that further research is needed to investigate whether, in a long-term perspective, the digital practices introduced in the research project can trigger a broader organizational transformation. Nonetheless, the current research gives a contribution in showing how the adoption of a digital tool, even if can contribute stimulate reflections upon new values, does not necessarily foster change in the organization. The case study presented shows the risk that platforms become 'tools without a cause' (to quote the inspiring title of the 1955 American film 'Rebel without a cause'), if they don't become an intrinsic part of the strategy and the value proposition of the museum. However, it should be noticed that the opposite might be true: in order to evolve into a cultural institution open to the new demands of the contemporary society, the development of a digital strategy seems to be essential.

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