Understanding the needs of institutional stakeholders in participatory cultural heritage and social innovation projects

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Understanding the Needs of Institutional Stakeholders in Participatory Cultural Heritage and Social Innovation Projects

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Abstract

This article investigates the current practices and needs of institutional actors operating at the intersection of cultural heritage and social innovation. Through a mixed-methods approach that includes a survey and in-depth interviews, responses have been collected from GLAMs (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums), social enterprises, public administration, cultural and artistic associations, and educational institutes. A key focus is given to exploring cultural-based participatory practices aimed at engaging disadvantaged communities. The article explores problems and barriers hindering quality engagement, beneficial participation, and impactful outputs, as well as collecting instances of good practice, suggestions, and lessons learnt. The overall goal of this work is to outline the lessons learnt from fields of action to develop guidelines and recommendations for facilitating participatory, collaborative, and inclusive cultural heritage initiatives, including when planning for the use and adoption of digital tools and technologies.

Keywords: Collaborative projects; cultural heritage; institutional stakeholders; participatory approaches; social inclusion; social innovation

Introduction

In the past two decades, cultural institutions, particularly museums, have expanded their roles to embrace inclusive approaches in interpretation, curation, and engagement. They have begun engaging diverse audiences, including marginalized communities, while promoting intercultural dialogue and addressing societal issues that concern disadvantaged groups. This has meant a steady growth of participatory and socially innovative cultural heritage practices and a proliferation of participatory cultural heritage projects. However, the needs of the stakeholders who facilitate these initiatives (or who aspire to do so) remain underexplored, both in their specificity and in their cross-sectoral reach and connections. This knowledge gap can be detrimental to the participatory paradigm, as understanding and addressing these needs is crucial for maximizing the potential of participatory approaches in cultural heritage through research-informed recommendations. Our investigation therefore explores the main sectors adopting these paradigms and draws upon insights from their best practices, resources, expertise, and collaborative opportunities.

Our aim is to identify the main challenges and barriers faced by institutional stakeholders in participatory projects harmonizing social innovation with cultural heritage, by drawing on the perspectives of professionals working in GLAMs (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums), social enterprises, public administrations, cultural and artistic associations, and educational institutions. Whenever available, the information provided includes the approaches and best practices envisioned by institutions to address these challenges. The

paper provides evidence-based recommendations that can support professionals undertaking work at the intersection of cultural heritage and social innovation. Suggestions are offered for designing effective approaches, as well as improving the awareness of the concerns and priorities of these institutions.

The empirical studies were conducted as part of a larger project, and they helped generate findings related to barriers, lessons learned, and best practices. The findings are categorized into four main areas representing the main types of barriers that emerged from our analysis: limited financial resources; hindrances to recruitment, collaboration, and facilitation; challenges in assessing impact; and difficulty navigating diverse sociocultural norms and values. The outcome of our research points to the presence and enduring nature of structural barriers that obstruct collaborative efforts at the intersection of social innovation and cultural heritage.

Literature review

Participatory and socially-conscious cultural institutions

Over the past two decades, participatory cultural heritage projects and practices have been gaining momentum. The establishment of the participatory paradigm in the broad cultural heritage field can be traced back to two main factors. Firstly, the concept of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) (UNESCO 2003) has become more widely acknowledged and institutionalized, thus leading to a broadening of the concept of cultural heritage: not solely anchored to tangible and physical assets but understood as a set of sociocultural active processes that go beyond artefacts, historical monuments, or the natural world (Smith 2006; Byrne 2008; Harrison 2010; Giglitto 2017). Secondly, cultural institutions (with museums at the forefront) started to broaden the remit of their societal role: preservation, education and championing the importance of heritage conservation are now complemented by more inclusive approaches when it comes to interpretation, curation, and engagement. In doing so, cultural institutions have paved the way for growing institutional interest and action in the domain of cultural heritage. More and more local, national, and international public bodies, as well as non-profit and non-governmental organizations, have been relying on cultural heritage – even if to a small extent – to achieve objectives compatible with social innovation (Amescua 2013; Innocenti 2016; Simon 2016), and often through participatory approaches (Nitzky 2013; Simon 2016; Sokka et al. 2021). This trend is visible globally, with identifiable patterns in Europe (Colomer 2021), which is the focus of this article; Africa (Chipangura and Marufu 2019); and North (Simon 2016) and South America (Lleras et al. 2019; Murta 2019).

In practice, many cultural institutions are experimenting with participatory approaches for increasing audience engagement with their collections and encouraging dialogue with their visitors, expanding their practices as audience-centred institutions (Simon 2010; Siegel 2013; Onciul 2018; Vermeeren et al. 2018). Such a change in practice implies reworked priorities. Museums and other cultural bodies such as archives aim to open their doors to more diverse audiences, focusing also on marginalized communities, some of whom do not always perceive museums as a place for them, or a place where they are represented (Simon 2016). Cultural institutions aspire to become places for intercultural dialogue, and building deeper connections and being culturally relevant in specific socio-cultural contexts are key to achieving this. As a result, cultural institutions have adopted and engaged with more practical approaches that deal with societal issues: from strengthening cultural identities and senses of belonging (Sandell 2002), to advancing equality, human rights, and social justice issues (Golding and Modest 2013; Sandell 2016). These practices aspire to overcome previous scepticism about whether cultural institutions can systematically tackle issues of inequalities and injustice (Janes and Sandell 2019), as well as a deeply rooted fear of press and public scrutiny (Kidd 2019). The adoption of participatory approaches that engage people who are usually disenfranchised from the cultural sector is at the forefront of these trends, with a concentration of efforts on boosting the participation of disadvantaged groups and communities

such as, for example, ethnic minorities (Lynch and Alberti 2010), young people (Morse *et al*. 2013), visually-impaired people (Cober *et al*. 2012), people with disabilities (Siegel 2013), migrants (Iervolino 2013), and refugees (Puzon 2019). Besides these categories, identified by existing literature, the socially innovative participatory projects that were surveyed as part of this research particularly pointed out that groups such as women, unemployed people, minors who are migrants, people navigating mental health issues, people with a criminal record, asylum seekers, and survivors of domestic violence are at a disadvantage when it comes to targeted initiatives for active engagement with culture and heritage. It should also be noted that the characteristics of these groups are also highly intersectional, meaning that certain individuals may face even higher barriers (O'Connor *et al*. 2019). Although less explored in the current literature, other types of institutions have also increasingly relied on cultural themes to address societal needs, including social enterprises, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local authorities, cultural associations, and educational institutions (Calabrò *et al*. 2019; Giglitto *et al*. 2021; Fava 2022).

Given the complexity of the task at hand, we argue that the socially inclusive participatory paradigm can benefit from two approaches: the proposition of some unifying concepts and terminology; and the incorporation of insights from cognate disciplines. In this research, we have adopted the concept of social innovation (Pol and Ville 2009) to describe the application of research-informed lessons and recommendations to overcome barriers in the field of participatory cultural heritage activities. We have also drawn from cognate disciplines such as human-computer interaction and participatory and co-design, which offer a parallel, converging, and useful discourse on addressing barriers to participation. The next two sections explore the concept of social innovation and the role of digital technologies in the context of cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage and social innovation

Although a common accepted definition of social innovation has not been (and perhaps will never be) established (Pol and Ville 2009; Edwards-Schachter and Wallace 2017; Solima *et al*. 2021), certain patterns in its usage reveal the existence of a fruitful terminological ground for framing the purpose and outcomes of socially inclusive cultural heritage projects. For instance, the four empirical conceptions of social innovation identified by Pol and Ville (2009) show great consistency with the ambitions of the participatory projects that were surveyed as part of this research: 1) social innovation has to do with institutional change; 2) it has a social purpose; 3) it tries to resolve social and cultural challenges; 4) it tries to improve the quality of life of stakeholders and communities.

As the concept of social innovation moves towards the domain of creativity and participation (Edwards-Schachter and Wallace 2017), more scholars have been adopting and applying the concept to the cultural heritage domain. By building upon these previous conceptualizations of social innovation, this paper aims at recognizing: the role of external stakeholders in helping museums fulfil their new social functions (Solima *et al*. 2021); the importance of exploring commonalities between different actors, disciplines, and approaches (Fernández Fernández 2016); the attention given to connecting civic society with grassroots activities as a new means of organization and cooperation (Kaldeli *et al*. 2019; Kaldeli *et al*. 2023); and the emphasis on working in novel ways to create social change (Malm 2021). In this context, social innovation includes both the processes and the outcomes informed by these underpinning principles in attempts at establishing new potential solutions (e.g., new forms of collaboration, best practices, tools, norms, and values) to address existing barriers hindering engagement and participation in cultural activities.

Digital technologies for cultural heritage and social innovation

The role of digital technologies for fostering participation and channelling social innovation initiatives cannot be underestimated. Research in the fields of cultural heritage technologies,

digital heritage, human-computer interaction (HCI), and participatory and co-design have explored ways to deploy digital tools and technologies to support participatory engagement. This research highlights the essential requirement for continuous and sustained efforts to generate innovation value through co-design (Avram *et al*. 2020). Participatory approaches have long been applied to the design of cultural heritage technologies, particularly to engage certain demographics of visitors, such as children, into the process and refine museum interpretation strategies (Taxén 2004; Roussou *et al*. 2007; Smith and Iversen 2014). More recently, these approaches have been systematically employed to support the wider representation of voices and values in heritage (Arrigoni and Galani 2019; Schofield *et al*. 2019; Claisse *et al*. 2020), including a specific emphasis on the critical heritage concept of polyvocality (Whitehead *et al*. 2021). The participatory engagement of communities at risk of exclusion and in disadvantaged positions is even more recent when it comes to digitally enhanced exhibitions and online forms of engagement (Galani *et al*. 2020). This is because of the later recognition of the potential benefits that digital technologies offer in terms of inclusivity and accessibility. However, more work is needed to develop the body of knowledge to support the role of the digital in relation to social inclusion and heritage, both in museum and heritage studies and in HCI, and particularly in relation to participatory methods and processes.

Therefore, we argue that there is a further gap to be addressed between actual heritage practice within relevant institutions and research exploration around heritage technologies for social inclusion and social innovation in fields such as HCI, interaction design and participatory design. Although these trends are gaining traction in research and practice, professionals and institutional stakeholders face several barriers that may hinder effective implementation. Digital tools and technologies may hold promise, but also present challenges and demands (Beltrán *et al*. 2014; Ott *et al*. 2014; Clarke and Lewis 2016; Giglitto 2017). Overall, there is a lack of evidence articulating the opportunities and barriers to more pervasive and sustained participatory practices in the cultural sector in relation to social innovation; this work aims to fill this gap by detailing the perspectives of institutional stakeholders operating in this domain.

Methodology

The research informing this article was carried out within the CultureLabs project and aimed at surveying the needs of the professionals involved – as part of their duties within the organizations in which they work – in cultural heritage-related approaches while promoting social innovation with disadvantaged groups. The research participants acted as representatives of their employed organizations and were recruited because of their prominent role and responsibilities in the types of projects mentioned above.

The research employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative data was gathered through a survey (n=90) which was designed to gather insights about current projects, the barriers faced in the implementation of participatory approaches, and the measures adopted to overcome them. Semi-structured interviews (n=17) expanded upon the survey data and were conducted with a subset of survey respondents that had agreed to a follow-up interview. This opportunistic sampling process meant that the two institutions leading the investigation (based in Italy and Finland) influenced the geographical distribution of survey respondents and interviewees by recruiting a higher number of participants from these two countries. This research design obtained ethical approval from Sheffield Hallam University.

Survey

The online survey containing closed and open-ended questions was designed to gather data using a free, open-source, and GDPR-compliant tool called KoBoToolbox. The survey was designed in English and translated into Italian and Finnish, and snowball sampling was used to recruit participants, starting from those who were connected to the CultureLabs project partners' networks, which predominantly consisted of GLAMs, NGOs, and educational institutions in Europe (see Tables 1, 2, and 3). Additional recruitment continued through purposive sampling,

following the logic of recruiting participants that were already operating at the intersection of the cultural heritage and social innovation sectors, based on the responses they had provided through the survey. The survey consisted of 20 questions that focused on the implementation of participatory projects and aimed at identifying key objectives, the level of facilitation of collaborative aspects, adopted approaches, barriers faced, and aspects of impact.

Type	Number
Galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAM)	20
Social enterprises, cooperatives, and NGOs working with migrants	29
Local and governmental administrations	10
Cultural and artistic associations	10
Schools and educational institutions	17
Other	4
Total	90

Table 1. Types of institution involved in the survey.

Country	Number
Italy	35
Finland	24
United Kingdom	16
Greece	10
Sweden	3
Belgium	1
Poland	1
Total	90

Table 2. Country of survey respondents.

In addition, experience in participatory projects was used as a variable to analyse the survey data. This allowed the identification of the needs of the organizations experienced in culture-based projects and/or in the involvement of disadvantaged communities. Grouping the organizations based on their experience was a meaningful approach for the needs analysis and revealed interesting insights from professionals operating in the different sectors (i.e., cultural, social, educational, and public administration sectors). A total of 90 valid survey responses were received.

Type	Number
Cultural sector	35
Social sector	24
Educational sector	17
Public sector	10
Others	4
Total	90

Table 3. Sector of survey respondents.

Interviews

Following the analysis of the 90 survey responses, a sample of respondents (17) were then selected for in-depth interviews because of their experience with projects in the fields of cultural heritage and social innovation. While the survey served the purpose of mapping existing approaches and barriers, the interviews allowed the expansion of key themes including the level of experimentation and innovation in existing approaches as well as insights into decision-making processes underlying participatory projects.

The 17 interview participants ensured the inclusion of different perspectives and expertise (see Table 4). The projects they described featured a variety of target groups involved, including unemployed people, women and/or minor migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, but also people managing mental health issues, offenders and convicted people, and survivors of domestic violence. Nine interviews were performed in Italy, four in Finland, three in the UK, and one in Poland. The interview transcripts have been analysed through inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021), leading to the identification of the five thematic areas through which we structured our findings.

#	Role	Type of institution	Country
1	Administration Official	Regional administration	Italy
2	Theatre Director	Cultural association	Italy
3	Law Expert	Islamic studies research centre	Italy
4	Coordinator	Women's rights NGO	Italy
5	Chief International Project Expert	Governmental institution	Poland
6	Creative Director	Arts and heritage organization	UK
7	Arts Festival Producer	Migrants' rights NGO	UK
8	Project Coordinator	Museum	Finland
9	Academic Coordinator	Adult education centre	Italy
10	Associate Professor	University	Italy
11	Art Executive Director	Local municipality	Italy
12	Researcher	University	Finland
13	President	Women's rights association	Italy
14	Executive Director	Cultural association	Finland

15	Director of Creative Learning and Engagement	Theatre	UK
16	Director of Organizational Development	Cultural association	Italy
17	Project Manager	Migrants' rights NGO	Finland

Table 4. Anonymized list of Interview Participants (IPs).

Institutionally-led participatory projects: main barriers and recommendations

The research findings have been organized into the four main types of barriers that emerged from the thematic analysis: limited financial resources; hindrances to recruitment, collaboration, and facilitation; challenges in assessing impact; and difficulty navigating diverse sociocultural norms and values. The identification and exploration of such barriers enables the understanding of the issues that institutional stakeholders raised in relation to rendering effective participatory approaches as an established core working practice.

While the survey responses enabled the identification of the key points of discussion, the interviews were designed to elicit in-depth perceptions about them. As such, the findings related to the other four themes emerged from the interviews, and the presentation of findings below represents a cohesive narrative summary of the in-depth interview data. In the presentation of findings and discussion that follow, the term 'community' is used to describe a 'community of practice' (Wenger 1998) composed of members that come together to take part in cultural heritage activities, and that share a set of social, demographic, and cultural characteristics.

Limited financial resources and widening gap

The lack of sufficient economic resources was indicated across the organizations as one of the most important barriers to the planning and implementation of participatory projects. Accessing and obtaining appropriate funding is a key issue for the sustainability and widening of successful initiatives. This issue is particularly critical for migrant associations and NGOs working with migrants as these types of institutions admit to the structural scarcity of financial resources.

To circumvent such scarcity, institutions have been trying to work creatively and adapt the quality and length of their cultural heritage and social innovation projects to the extent of available resources. For instance, museums and galleries often take advantage of their art-filled premises to foster cultural initiatives and, in doing so, save the money and the time that would have been used to rent suitable venues. In contrast, migrant associations may have an easier time recruiting through relying heavily on their strong inter-sectoral networks and making the most of resources by sharing premises and equipment. This approach is not possible for other types of NGOs and associations, which tend to depend on more costly traditional advertising and recruiting techniques that can put a drain on the funding they have available.

Most interview participants reported that funding schemes usually cover a project from one to three years and, consequently, the long-term sustainability and planning across organizations remain limited. Organizations often develop a dependency on external funding and become unable to sustain their efforts beyond it. It was reported that even though projects were working smoothly and efficiently, it was not unusual for funding to run out, which forced projects to end early, for instance: 'People always want more after the project ends which is not always feasible due to funding' (IP7).

Several interviewees also highlighted another issue pertinent to funding streams: the same established institutions are the frequent beneficiaries of support and funding, while less-known institutions and grassroots associations who want to undertake new projects find themselves competing for the same leftover funding pots. As a result, certain institutions tend

not to be given any opportunity to improve their structures and practices, whereas, in contrast, established institutions continue to develop and professionalize their participatory work.

Hindrances to recruitment, collaboration, and facilitation

Generally, interviewees thought that staff members do not have the specific skills needed to approach and engage groups such as minorities who experience disadvantaged circumstances, and this can become a key barrier to inclusion. Whilst some staff units are aware of the necessity to update their infrastructure and practices, developing specific skill sets and making broader organizational changes require time. GLAMs, and particularly museums, succeed in attracting young migrants through collaborations with schools, but adults are considered more difficult to engage. The most effective way to reach community members is through direct personal contacts or through the mediation and support of organizations working with them, for instance:

> […] it is not fruitful that the people working in culture try themselves to recruit participants and invent the wheel again. There are so many NGOs that are already working with migrants. They have competence in social work and may understand the backgrounds of the people in a different way than cultural professionals (IP8).

Community members are more easily reached via direct contact or mediating organizations, while advertising recruitment on social media or other forms of online communication were deemed as ineffective.

Beyond recruitment of groups and communities, competent facilitation and fruitful collaborations are instrumental to the success of cultural heritage and social innovation-compatible participatory projects. Interview data stresses the need for stakeholders to establish and develop respectful relationships with community members. To do this, stakeholders need to directly work with and involve facilitators who belong to the target community. For instance, employing a respected representative of the targeted community can provide (often much needed) culturally relevant advice and insights as well as assist in facilitating the interaction with migrant participants. In addition, collaborating with cultural experts from migrant communities can also help stakeholders to organize and implement culturally appropriate programmes and practices to ensure that cultural content and designed exhibitions are relevant and meaningful to the participants.

Settings and style of facilitation also have a bearing on the way participatory projects with disadvantaged communities can develop. Facilitating sessions in informal settings (such as in cafés) can provide an opportunity for artists and community groups to build trust, rapport, and mutual respect. Informal conversation sessions allow for the sharing of stories but also require skilled facilitators who can commit the time to consistently manage these interactions, as well as develop structured frameworks (that focus on key topics) that are needed for success. Moreover, mentoring can be a useful tool for helping migrants develop their skills and knowledge. However, stakeholders should be careful about making assumptions and about how their attitudes may be perceived from the mentee perspective.

Finally, linguistic barriers are complex and can impact participation and facilitation by directly inhibiting access to many opportunities, particularly by migrants. Therefore, institutions need to support participants with their language competence and the chance to practice the new language is a first important step in their integration. In considering this, staff members need the training to be able to confidently approach groups with different linguistic competencies, and this takes time that may not have been considered in the planning stages. The acknowledgement of the different group dynamics because of different language skills may also be important, as those with more proficiency in a second language can become representatives of the community and be heavily relied upon by the community; the way to properly understand these dynamics and promote these types of relationships should be carefully considered. The participants in the study shared their ideas on how to overcome

language barriers in participatory projects. They suggested using bridging languages like English and/or French alongside the host country's language. They also recommended involving children, who may have better skills in the host country's language. Another solution was to recruit translators or mediators, even though this might be costly. The participants also suggested including both new arrivals and people who have been in the host country for a longer time, as their shared language knowledge could facilitate informal translations. Finally, they recommended limiting the number of topics discussed in meetings to ensure that everyone can understand, and prioritizing collective understanding over speed.

Challenges in assessing impact

The interviewees emphasized the importance of the need for evaluating projects after completion. The impact of participatory projects should in fact be evaluated in a two-fold manner that considers both the organizational advantages – expressed by aspects such as strengthening of networks, widening of collaborative opportunities, and increased visibility – and the advantages for the communities of participants – expressed by aspects such as the extent of the activity involvement and the quality of participation.

Nearly all interview participants showed the proclivity to embrace a multifaceted evaluation process and an inclination to acknowledge the intrinsic importance and value of it. However, the existing evaluation practices that are commonly implemented suggest that a comprehensive evaluation of participatory actions – specifically, incorporating the benefits and impact of these actions into the evaluative framework – is more of an aspiration than an actual occurrence. Generally, most of the interviewees admitted that feedback is rarely gathered in a structured way: if it is not formally required by the funding body, measuring (both immediate and future) impact may end up being neglected for the simple reason that motivating participants to give their feedback is perceived as challenging and demanding. This is especially the case when oriented at future and/or different actions that do not immediately concern the participants. Additionally, the cost and time it takes to evaluate impact beyond the scope of the project funding is an ongoing issue.

Whilst it holds potential, technology does not seem to offer handy solutions that satisfy stakeholders' demands. Although cultural professionals and community facilitators have a desire for effective, digitally-mediated methods for gathering participants' feedback (Giglitto *et al*. 2019), the readily available solutions do not seem to go beyond simple monitoring and surveying. This creates a mismatch between the evaluation ambitions of the stakeholders and the actual evaluation that is undertaken, which often ends up being rather superficial. Examples identified in the interview responses included measuring a participant's satisfaction score or documenting visible enthusiasm, such as through positive comments, which does not need translating into measures and numbers. This means that many undeniably important aspects of impact remain underexamined and poorly documented, for instance, the benefits of meeting people, being involved in leisure activities, improving self-esteem, feeling a sense of value, joining the local community's initiatives, or even just 'giving mothers a chance to leave their houses' (IP17). In general, it was found that there are no specific tools available to effectively measure the social and emotional effects resulting from participatory initiatives. This finding contradicts the belief, held by a majority of the research participants, that such impact assessment tools could provide valuable insights into how community members perceive their involvement, both during and after the initiatives. These tools would also be useful for assessing the broader impact of the projects beyond their immediate objectives.

Difficulty in navigating diverse sociocultural norms and values

In the context of socially innovative participatory projects, cultural activities serve as the foundational elements around which the participation of disadvantaged communities should be built. There is, however, a series of systematic barriers that may prevent cultural activities with disadvantaged communities from reaching their potential in terms of quality engagement,

beneficial participation, and impactful outputs.

Migrants and/or refugee communities that have been involved in participatory cultural projects have been shown to be highly aware and proud of their cultural heritage, yet they are seldom active in sharing it. This is either because they perceived a lack of interest from the hosting society or because they are not given the right opportunity to do so (Giglitto *et al*. 2021). Understanding the cultural and social norms, characteristics, and needs of migrant communities should be foundational to any attempt at ensuring participation. Furthermore, internal differentiations within a community, as well as the diversities between different communities, should always be considered through the exploration, where possible, of individual communities' dynamics, for example:

> […] we need to deeply understand the community (namely, explore and understand their characteristics and their needs), otherwise the risk is losing the participatory element and becoming colonial in our approach. Given the great internal diversity in the way of living, thinking, and organizing between and within communities, it is important to first get in contact and understand how communities works (IP10, translated from the original Italian).

Interview responses show that certain cultural activities, such as engaging a community of participants in the design of an exhibition or in the development of an artistic performance, typically enjoy a certain degree of success. However, to truly foster a sense of ownership on the whole participatory process, the community being engaged should be involved at an early stage, namely, in the conceptualizations, planning, and design of cultural initiatives. Furthermore, fertile ground for participation is more easily provided when the motivation of participants is properly articulated and leveraged, and when appropriate professional support can be provided. The question 'what do I get if I engage in a cultural activity?' should be answered fully and satisfactorily when a participatory project is proposed, with the aim of avoiding the risk of tokenism, as one interviewee noted: 'Refugees and asylum seekers are often being seen as "resources" within the arts and culture sector for different projects and research' (IP6). As IP7 stated:

> Even simple projects, such as drama workshops, might not run as expected. We should not push people too hard because they may have many problems (legal, shelter, health, etc.) in their lives before coming to the session, therefore we should lower expectations and provide more support as much as possible so they can get more out of the project. We are thinking of having a counsellor alongside the project so people can receive support if needed (IP7).

In line with the growing alignment among policy, administrative, and academic circles that view cultural heritage as a conduit for advancing social innovation (Amescua 2013; Innocenti 2016), there is a specific focus on empowering migrant and refugee communities by encouraging a greater civic involvement from cultural institutions (Sandell 2002; Simon 2016). To truly foster innovation, cultural activities must deliberately address the social inequalities that underpin society. For instance, curating an exhibition should not only be about considering aesthetic arrangements or well-thought displays, but should also be about flagging social values through the communicative and expressive power of cultural heritage. Cultural institutions are, therefore, facing the arduous challenge of dealing with the pressure of addressing issues of injustice, considering race, gender, and class, while also avoiding censorship and managing disagreement and differences of opinion. These major challenges were expressed by the vast majority of interview participants.

The future of institutional participatory work at the intersection of cultural heritage and social innovation

Operating at the intersection of cultural heritage and social innovation can represent an ideal ground for participatory work with disadvantaged communities. However, this research revealed a series of established needs (see Table 5) that are helpful for supporting the ambitions of institutional stakeholders wishing to implement socially innovative cultural heritage projects. The previous sections have explored barriers and challenges in terms of financial resources, recruitment, collaboration, facilitation, assessing impact, and navigating diverse sociocultural norms, whilst this section proposes broader perspectives that should inform the future of cultural heritage participatory work at the institutional level.

   The needs of institutional stakeholders related to engagement and outreach activities represented the bulk of hindrances and barriers affecting cultural heritage participatory work. Some of the more pressing issues documented through our research data concern collaboration and communication. A fruitful collaboration between different institutional stakeholders, and between institutional stakeholders and community members, remains somewhat problematic and difficult to achieve.

Proposed recommendations for institutions undertaking participatory work at the intersection of cultural heritage and social innovation are stated in the following list:

Engagement and outreach. Need for…

- better understanding of migrants' and refugees' viewpoints

- effective approaches for involving disadvantaged communities in cultural heritage activities

- reaching migrants in disadvantaged situations

- reaching out to and engaging migrant and refugee women

- broader and more effective collaboration with other stakeholders

- more considerations towards engaging the wider local community

Material and digital resources and capacity. Need for…

- impact assessment methods and tools

- digital tools that facilitate collaboration and communication

- long-term funding streams

- easier access to facilities

Intangible resources and capacity. Need for…

- practices that can help the cultural sector to become more open and establish long-lasting collaboration

- increasing the intercultural and social competences of organizations' staff

- managing and overcoming language barriers

- easily and efficiently accessing helpful information about other successful projects

A specific challenge that emerged concerns the collaboration between cultural institutions working towards the implementation of participatory projects, and particularly those involving migrant communities. Traditionally, museums often encounter difficulties reaching out to new and especially disadvantaged target groups (Price and Applebaum 2022). While collections and displays are their core business, curators do not always consider whether a collection or exhibit relates to or even potentially excludes non-targeted communities. An established way of working in many museums is to offer initiatives in other languages or targeted thematic initiatives for communities other than their usual audiences (i.e., visitors). Attitudes towards audiences are, therefore, the real challenge: awareness and openness to 'others' should be part of museums' core way of operating and not as an add-on to be considered only when some extra funding is available. Activities with a focus on social integration should be seen in a wider perspective and not only as single one-time initiatives for specific targets, as they can only increase the gap separating established visitor groups and other (minority) communities. In this regard, having collections displayed and narrated in ways that make them relatable to a wider range of visitors is important to make such communities feel involved. Such practices could be just what is needed to provide a better ground for participation. This should be accompanied by an emphasis on approaches that include and represent the perspectives of target groups in their core activities and that involve minority communities as collaborators rather than passive beneficiaries. These findings resonate with the current debates on cultural heritage polyvocality that pushes for broadening and diversifying the knowledges and values associated with cultural heritage interpretation, use, and reuse (Arrigoni and Galani 2019; Tsenova *et al.* 2022; Cere *et al.* 2023).

Although museum staff play an important role in the process of making museums more open and socially responsible, they may hold low expectations and have some hesitation towards social innovation initiatives involving community members whose background and culture are different from their own. Our research has highlighted how the lack of specific intercultural and diversity management skills may become a key barrier to inclusion. Although some staff units are taking the necessary steps to update their infrastructure and practices, such a change in mentality requires time and resources. Interview responses indicate that museum staff are usually characterized by homogeneous professional profiles, and even when they are animated by a sincere intention to work inclusively, they may not have the competencies needed to approach and involve these groups. A potential solution can once again be found through collaboration with cultural mediators and facilitators belonging to the targeted community, and these may lead more easily towards customized approaches that include being more aware of and sensitive towards the community's needs.

Professionalization is, therefore, a key path to pursue for cultural institutions, migrant associations, and local authorities. For cultural institutions, this might mean developing skills in sensitively tackling social issues and in promoting intercultural approaches, and in certain circumstances even to develop trauma-informed and psychological expertise (Giglitto *et al.* 2021). For migrant associations, it might mean formal opportunities to learn about the cultural heritage of the hosting society as well as developing networking and funding acquisition skills. Local authorities may need their staff to become more sensitive towards inclusive initiatives if their aspiration is that of becoming agents of change and not only mere executors of administrative procedures.

Unfortunately, all these considerations may lose their propositional value when confronted with the harsh reality surrounding certain migrant communities across Europe. For example, in Italy, the most represented country in this research, the restrictive laws on migration upheld by the Italian Government at the time of the study (mirroring the political trend of many other European countries), together with the increased number of rejected asylum seekers' applications, may have contributed to a difficult social atmosphere and, consequently, many migrants may have felt reluctant to join inclusive cultural activities. This situation was confirmed by the NGOs and cultural associations in our research. GLAMs, and

particularly museums, still succeed in attracting young people with migratory backgrounds through collaborations with schools, but results from our research indicate that adults remain more difficult to engage, while the overall perception and paradigm around migration stays unchanged. This is particularly true for the most precarious and excluded migrants and refugees, the involvement of which in cultural activities is highly dependent on policy change.

Within this complex landscape, digital technologies do have a role to play as they can offer support to the work of professionals, especially those who aim to engage with disadvantaged groups in participatory cultural heritage activities, by facilitating several of the processes reported throughout this article. Technologies can help to structure and streamline approaches into well-defined formats that facilitate access, understanding, and collaboration. Furthermore, as knowledge sharing is a key aspect of social work, technologies tend to provide easy access to state-of-the-art intercultural work so that facilitators can obtain guidance and inspiration. Additionally, participants are less likely to be the subject of 'experimentation'. Digital tools can also simplify communication, collaboration, and participation, as well as tackling language barriers – providing that they have intuitive interfaces and functionalities. However, these perspectives on technology – drawn from our research participants – suggest how at the institutional level, technology is mostly conceptualized for mere curatorial or outreach purposes. There is little to no consideration for the complex dialogical, ethical, and political aspects related to decision making, power, and representation (Huybrechts 2014; Storni 2014) to which engaging with disadvantaged communities can lead. When it comes to technology design, these findings should inform how participatory processes are envisioned, framed, and supported in the actual context of working with institutions and communities (Giglitto *et al*. 2021).

Conclusions

This research gathered insights and perspectives from a variety of stakeholders undertaking participatory work at the intersection of cultural heritage and social innovation representing institutions such as GLAMs, social enterprises, social cooperatives, NGOs, local and governmental administrations, cultural and artistic associations, and schools and education institutions. Our findings from the survey and interviews indicate the existence (and persistence) of structural barriers hindering participatory work at the intersection of social innovation and cultural heritage. These include, firstly, the limited financial resources available and the subsequent widening gap between consolidated and emerging cultural institutions; secondly, the recurring difficulties in recruiting participants (especially in situations where multiple intersecting disadvantages are at play), collaborating with other stakeholders (especially from different sectors), and facilitating competently; finally, the inherent challenges of addressing (or, at least, not reproducing) social inequalities. When we consider the needs of institutional stakeholders identified in our research in conjunction with the expectations of community members benefiting from social innovation projects (Giglitto *et al*. 2021), a complex scenario emerges. Disadvantaged communities desire more accessible and collaborative institutional opportunities to express their cultural heritage, which clashes with the difficulties faced by institutional actors in providing fair and responsible grounds for participation. This scenario highlights an existing tension between the marginalized communities' desire for inclusive participation and the challenges institutions encounter in facilitating fair and responsible ground for the community members to engage and express their cultural heritage.

The future of social innovation and cultural heritage-oriented participatory work is, therefore, one that needs institutional actors who firstly invest their efforts into becoming more aware of the persistent and structural nature of the barriers affecting the field, and secondly collaborate towards tackling them. It is also crucial that the development of technological tools and digital innovations is informed by such evidence. The growing wealth of academic research that pushes the boundaries of the discourses around the value of cultural heritage to pursue social innovation (Sandell 2002; Vlachaki 2007; Amescua 2013; Innocenti 2016; Simon 2016; Vlaskina 2017; Giglitto *et al*. 2021) and around inclusion and polyvocality in heritage technology design (Taxén 2004; Roussou *et al*. 2007; Smith and Iversen 2014; Whitehead *et al*. 2021) now plays a key role in terms of investigating and systematizing the barriers as

well as mapping potential solutions. We believe that the institutional sector acknowledging more of these sets of evidence-based observations and recommendations is the best way to inform and advance the future of participatory practices.

Acknowledgments

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