

Cultural Heritage and Open Data: a possible key?



«A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment». So the **International Council of Museums** has defined the museum since 1986, highlighting the importance of preservation and communication with the public aimed at different objectives.



Today, museums are more and more following this path showing the works, opening virtual galleries to the public and sharing their databases with users. This is exactly the philosophy of the *OpenData*, «data available for free use, reuse and redistribution only limited by the author's request for attribution and for redistribution in the same way (that is without variations) » (FormezPA, 2011). The core of the open data theory lies indeed in the concepts of availability and accessibility through download and in the possibility to make modifications; in the concepts of re-use and re-distribution, also through interrelation with other data; in the concept of universal participation and the idea that anybody, be it general user or qualified operator, can use those data (Open Knowledge Foundation, 2012).

Such recently-developed concepts have been applied in different domains and by different subjects, both public and private, also in the cultural field, so generating virtuous mechanisms within the museums, which interpreted the *OpenData* as a further opportunity for interacting with their audience creating shared and cultural values.

Especially with respect to culture, indeed, it is fundamental that the works' enjoyment remain always accessible, nurturable and reproducible through the slogan defined *openGLAM* (*Open Galleries, Libraries, Archive and Museum*). This initiative, promoted by the **Open Knowledge Foundation**, fosters the free access to the digital heritage of galleries, libraries, archives and museums.

What is the international and national best practice arising from this new awareness?

Overseas, Los Angeles' **Paul Getty Trust** is developing an Open Content Programme according to the philosophy that is important showing one's own works to a qualified audience, but also to passionate, interested and common users. The archive contains more than 10.000 images of drawings, paintings, sculptures and photographs, which can also be downloaded from a dedicated page.

In Europe, the **British Museum** of London was the first English museum to develop databases available online. Since 2007, indeed, it implements a **Collection Online** by means of which is possible searching images and records via a 'work in progress database', as defined by the museum itself.

In Amsterdam too, since 2011 the **Rijks Museum** has been working at the 'Open Archives Initiative', including digital images and

over 110.000 metadata, such as ID number, date of creation, title and subject of the work. Accessing these data requires the user to authenticate on the Rijks Studio website.

Moving to Italy, in Turin, the *Fondazione Torino Musei*, first Italian museum corporation, opened its data under *Creative Commons Italia 3.0* licence with the aim of «transparency, spread information, usability and knowledge sharing on art and cultural heritage» (Asproni, 2014). This happened right on occasion of the International Open Data Day, international initiative occurred on the 22nd of February 2014 and promoting the dissemination and transparent spread of the open data.

Through a dedicated portal, the *Open Data Fondazione Torino Musei*, web users can so access different typologies of dataset related to collections, visitor turnout, restorations, loans and metrics of Google Analytics and Facebook. The download formats are ?xls.?, ?csv.?, ?xml.? e ?json?.

«These activities are part of the transparency and engagement strategy which we define *Open Museums* ? **Patrizia Asproni**, President of *Fondazione Torino Musei* affirms ? being aware it is important to open the museums to the citizens, so those can be first of all actively lived and not only visited by passive users». Museums become therefore pleasant places, «social museums where everybody, from children to third age can know and enjoy the cultural heritage which is symbol of active citizenship. From here all the initiatives continuously animating our museums arise: with the Art Speed Date, for instance, an artwork gets narrated in ten minutes by the Museum's Director and becomes this way a deepening experience», Dr Asproni highlights. Museums open therefore toward the outside, to the real and the virtual world, with the aim of making aware more and more the citizens but also of engaging ?new patrons? wishing to tackle the new challenges of cultural globalisation.

Nothing left to do but use this ?key? to open our museums!

Free translation from [Emanuela Gasca's article](#) in *Il Giornale delle Fondazioni*, [editor's note]

[Open Knowledge Foundation](#) collaborates with the [Europeana-Space](#) project providing the **OpenContent Exchange Platform**. The platform will comprise of collated public domain and open content materials related to the value of digital public domain and best practices around open licensing. [editor's note]

Sources

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Fondazione Torino Musei, Turin: www.fondazionetorinomusei.it

International OpenData Day: opendataday.org

Paul Getty Trust, Los Angeles: www.getty.edu/about/index.html

Paul Getty Trust, Open Content Program: www.getty.edu/about/opencontent.html

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