



## FROM VISITORS TO CITIZENS. CULTURE TRULY BELONGS TO EVERYONE WHEN COMMUNITY IS ENGAGED

Nowadays, heritage conservation is no longer exclusively in the hands of government agencies. The new approach involves the active engagement of people in heritage protection, a concept that is now widely accepted but that opens up several challenges: how can community participation be truly activated? During my PhD at UniTo - in the Tech4Culture contest - I am trying to give an answer.

Local participation in cultural heritage conservation has always been a concern since the Venice Charter so far (1964). In addition, the Faro Convention (2005) shifted focus from cultural heritage values to the values of cultural heritage for society. In this case, it is necessary to achieve the maximum engagement of stakeholders in all stages of management. Nowadays, the concept of community engagement in all stages of cultural heritage management is accepted for almost everyone. But the idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you. If we accept that community engagement is good for us, the problem is how letting people participate? Not only communities are not very aware of their rights on their cultural heritage, but also cultural heritage authorities are unwilling to involve people in their decision making process.

Suppose, in an ideal society of course, people know that the cultural heritage is their properties and they would like to manage their assets by themselves, and authorities have realized that they are not omni-knowledge and omni-potent, there is still an unsolved problem, no one knows "how" we want to implement a people-centered approach in cultural heritage context. This "how" is referring to two main issues related to community engagement approach; lack of recognized method, on the one hand, and determining an appropriate tool, on the other hand.

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Now, in order to find a way and a tool, we are working on designing an application called iCommunity which could facilitate public participation in cultural heritage management. The main idea is that all people who are somehow affected by a decision have the right to be involved in the decision-making process. Any cultural heritage institution will be able to publish activities on the application as a means to evaluate the users' feedback before the implementation of any activity.

Based on the user's location, the application displays ongoing and future activities and, as a part of the participatory approach, the users share their experience or data related to the posted activity with other users. They can also show their agreement or disagreement about the scheduled activities by voting. In addition, iCommunity will be able to extract and show the activities posted on related websites such as ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property), UNESCO World Heritage Centre and related social networks (e.g. Facebook and Instagram). The analyzed data will be shown in real time for volunteer users helping authorities to consider the impact of their activities for transparent and effective decision-making.

The main goal of this project is to find a universal method for inclusive societies in decision-making processes for cultural heritage management. The idea is to encourage different stakeholders, such as local people living in or around the museums and cultural heritage sites, to take active roles in decision-making processes related to management and conservation. Furthermore, this mobile application will provide sufficient information and clear data in order to organize specific workshops for direct and indirect education. Data shown in the application will also help people to understand the reasons behind the implementation of planned activities by taking part in comments and talking with experts or professionals. In addition, it also aims to make the decision-making process clearer and more transparent by presenting voting functions and showing all comments for users. Finally, the application outcomes (which include analyzed data collected by feedback, voting, communication, etc.) will help to understand the real needs and interests of different stakeholders in cultural heritage sites and museums.

During this research, it is necessary to involve people in designing iCommunity and examining the proposed method. Thus we need to really interact with communities, people, and society. Let's hope Coronavirus will let us do that!