

CONNECTING CITIES, CONNECTING
CITIZENS: TOWARDS A SHARED
SUSTAINABILITY

CAMOC ANNUAL
CONFERENCE 2021

Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

CONFERENCE ORGANISERS:

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international committee
for the collections and activities
of museums of cities



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INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE COLLECTIONS AND ACTIVITIES OF MUSEUMS OF CITIES

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Connecting cities, connecting citizens: Towards a shared sustainability

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FROM MUSEUM DISTRICTS TO CULTURAL DISTRICTS. LINKED OPEN MUSEUMS AS A CULTURAL STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

Museums are but a single piece of a city's cultural network, made up by institutions such as libraries, schools, archives, cinemas, theatres, cultural and creative activities and associations.

Furthermore, civic museums need to be found and used, and, just like the data on the web, they need to be open, permeable, interconnected and interoperable with one another and all cultural activities of the district they belong to.

Organising museums according to territorial criteria certainly helps their management and allows the sharing of specialised professionals as well as of projects and goals related to citizenship. Milan City Council's programme goes beyond simply mapping a community or a neighbourhood. We know the location of monuments, cultural venues, cultural associations, and the contacts that exist in a given area. Now, the programme aims to create a civic structure that will be readily available to the city and capable of connecting both public and private institutions, as well as professionals and individual users, in a constant and stimulating relationship. This process is certainly complex and require time and effort. Therefore, we are constantly and carefully considering every aspect of the project by sharing, discussing and evaluating every proposal. The city's temporary offer, which involves museums, can significantly contribute to this process, in particular through the "City" and "Week" palimpsests: the *DesignWeek*, *FashionWeek* and *BookCity* can create synergies between the public and private sectors as well as identify stakeholders who do not directly produce cultural activities, but who draw attention to the city's cultural life.

During events, different areas of the city come alive in different ways. The configuration of the districts allows the use of different common spaces (squares and gardens). The civic museums themselves are included in the timetable of the main events, becoming cultural hubs and platforms where creativity is combined with knowledge, which visitors can interact and share with.

Recurring events can also connect users with cultural organisations and companies by addressing different audiences, fostering connections, ensuring more stable relationships and promoting a sense of belonging to the territory where they take place.

Key words: Citizenship, belonging, connections

Introduction

Milan is a great city of culture that provides a rich and diverse offer in this field. Its 1.3 million inhabitants have access to about a hundred public and private museums and exhibition spaces, over seventy theatres and performing art venues and almost two hundred and fifty cinema screens.

The city, known for the La Scala theatre, Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, for being the city of Giuseppe Verdi and Cesare Beccaria, has expanded enormously in terms of culture in the last 15 years, radically transforming its image and identity. The Municipality of Milan has been working on the study and application of an innovative model of cultural offer, based on bringing museums, cultural operators and local authorities together. Both cultural heritage sites and museums are an asset in terms of knowledge, which should be valued in the social context and with a view to participation.

The new relationship, connecting cultural heritage sites and museums to areas of social engagement and local cultural production, alongside creative cultural industries (CCI) and tourism, both global and local, can be developed by means of planning evolved cultural districts, based on an integrated management model.

The new interpretation of the museum system: the strategic plan

Creating a new model to improve the cultural offer of the city

Milan has an articulated system of civic museums, made up by over twenty institutions, including permanent collections and temporary exhibition spaces. Its current organisation is based on the typically technical-scientific criteria of the nineteenth-century tradition, which divides the museums in four thematic areas: historical and archaeological museums, scientific museums, modern and contemporary art museums, and artists' houses and studio museums. This organisational model has no direct connection with the territorial distribution of the institutions.

Following the models set by numerous international examples, the city administration chose to reorganise its museums' offer according to management concepts and on a territorial basis, identifying the city districts characterised by the concentration of various institutions around places that are known landmarks.

By interpreting civic museums through a district approach, the Culture Sector of the City of Milan aims to create a new model for improving the cultural offer of the city. We found out that addressing the museums' organisation by taking into account their geographical location will improve their management of the economic resources and of skilled professionals. As it has been done for some years in Europe, these are now being identified in Italy, including cultural designers, museum mediators, web communicators for cultural institutions, scientific animators and territorial marketing experts.

Museums are an essential part of a city's cultural network and, like the data on the web, they must be linked, open, permeable, interconnected and interoperable with one another as well as with all the structures that make up the cultural heritage of the territory.

The relationship between museums and the city lies at the centre of the strategic plan, which seeks to activate connection processes between institutions and



culture, to create identification and exchange chains and to ignite participatory strategies by the city's communities. Museums have become the spine of the network that connects the four city poles and the other players of the cultural offer, thus multiplying the impact of the twenty civic museums. The application of the strategic plan has been a complex process that involves a large and qualified workgroup.

The experience gained during the pandemic has led to an important reflection and revision of the potential and expectations for an effective and sustainable development. Besides the local administration, a number of institutions has been involved, namely: the Fondazione Scuola dei beni e delle attività culturali, under the purview of the Ministry of Culture, the Luigi Bocconi Commercial University, through the Ask Bocconi cultural management research group, and the PTSClas, a company which has collected all the information in the preliminary research for laying down the plan.

About the strategic plan: the research

The first part of the research described how the system would be operated and the current relations of museums with the territory and the communities. In essence, the survey sought out to understand what city museums do, with whom they do it and how they activate exchange relationships with the city. This has led to the understanding of how the activity of museums, in line with an organisational model based on their technical-scientific peculiarities, is mainly devoted to projects on collections and the research and conservation related to them, while actions regarding relationships with the territory and the communities are far less developed. It is no coincidence, then, that the subjects with whom relationships are activated belong mainly to the scientific field, namely universities and other museums or cultural institutions.

The second part of the project involved the study of the conformation of the territory and the research on the identity of the new museum districts. In particular, each "district" was analysed in socioeconomic terms and its cultural infrastructure level was mapped; afterwards, the various active supply chains besides exhibition were evaluated, such as those related to entertainment, reading policies, cultural and creative industries. Subsequently, we proceeded to the identification of "proximity audiences" through the analysis of the characteristics of the neighbourhoods and communities made up by residents and users. The relationship between museums at a city level from the perspective of loyal museum-goers was also described. At the end, the research was presented to the museum professionals and then shared with the city.

The cultural infrastructure was mapped by first investigating the physical presence of public and private cultural institutions, such as museums, exhibition centres, libraries, archives, theatres, art galleries and project spaces. The activity carried out by cultural industries in the area was surveyed as well, in terms of production and distribution of cultural products and services. The activation capacity of museums was also analysed with regard to the offer of events organised in the city, such as design and fashion weeks, like the *ArtWeek*, a week devoted to contemporary art, or *Bookcity*, a festival dedicated to the world of books and reading, which are typical features of Milan's cultural life. On the other hand, an attempt was made to identify the features of the local communities, by investigating the educational, the economic and professional systems, as well as those linked to tourism and mobility. Finally, a study was conducted on the strategic choices of the strongest

consumers in terms of cultural habits, which were traced through the analysis of the data on ticketing and subscription systems for cultural consumption. It was possible to collect all the information present in the preliminary research for the development of a real strategic plan.

The plan defines strategic and operational guidelines for rethinking the cultural offer of city museums, and, more precisely, it provides a series of management, communication and policy tools that favour museum management offices, new ways of cultural participation and accessibility within the urban context. Museums' activities were planned by focusing on offer and demand: offer was understood as the urban, architectural, cultural and professional infrastructure put in place by the administration, whereas demand meant the participation of the public as a constitutive element of the very identity of the museum proposal.

The details of the strategic plan

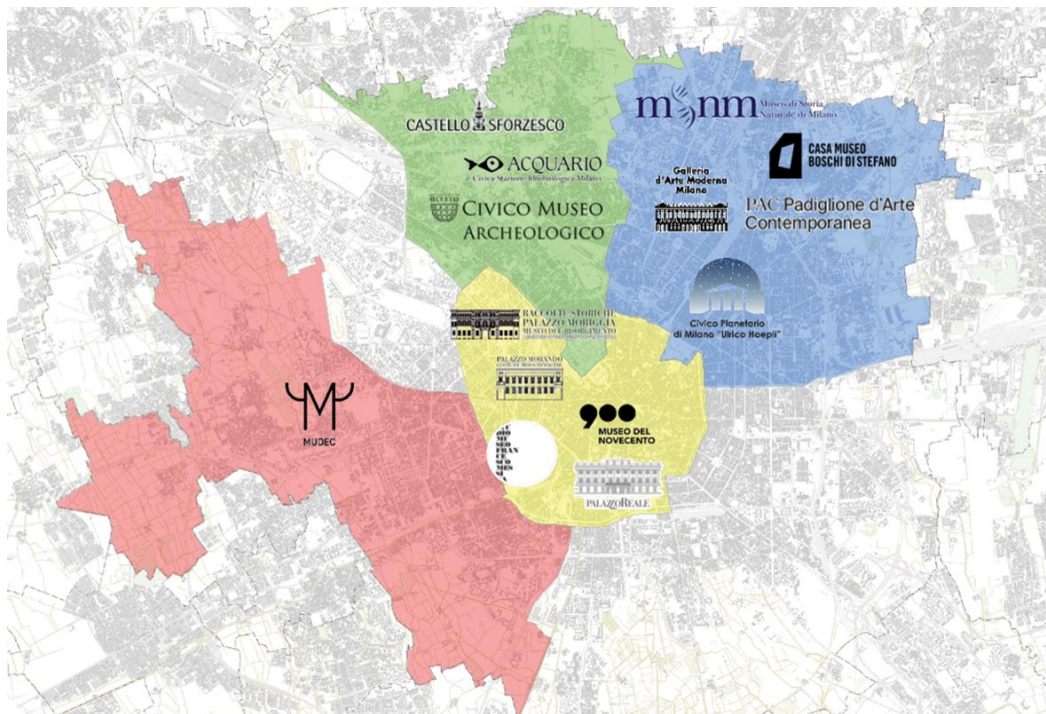
The strategic plan consists of four pillars or axes. These are focused on projects that can improve the perception of the territory, the level of public participation, the creation of partnerships at a territorial level and the definition of useful organisational processes. For each of them, the strategic plan has focused on the goals to be achieved and the useful actions necessary to achieve them.

The first strategic axis concerns the public perception of the variety of territorial offers. It revolves around the creation of a specific identity, through the identification of a specific vocation and cultural proposal of each district, giving rise to a real product identity. The second strategic axis is that of participation. In addition to requiring specific communication and cultural planning policies, it implies incentive tools in the relationship with the public, ranging from targeted discounts to the offer of complimentary service packages. The third axis or pillar envisages the creation of partnerships at a territorial level, which can be activated to optimise the integrated offer of the area. Finally, the fourth pillar envisages organisational processes: it holds a very complex scale of actions, ranging from the simple increase of communication and marketing strategies, over activation of innovative management system models that integrate the existing structure and organisational base, up to the study and proposal of innovations at the governance level.

In the beginning of 2021, the strategic plan was approved by the administration of the city. Its contents will form the basis for the new cultural policy of Milan's museums and the new model of cultural participation for the city of tomorrow.

From museum districts to cultural districts

In 2021, the city administration launched two other important projects intertwined with the development of the strategic plan for city museums. On the one hand, an interactive map that georeferenced the entire system of the cultural "spaces" of the city has been created. This entails setting up a database of over four hundred places, starting with the topographical location of the offices open to the public throughout the city, which are able to offer access to cultural content. Once this content is definitely validated, it will be published on an information portal of the city services, and become available for online consultation by all users. It will be constantly updated and corrected with the collaboration of sector operators. The location of the cultural offer will be immediately perceivable, as it is divided into categories of offer and consumption, such as libraries and bookstores, archives,



Cultural districts map.
© Fondazione Scuola
dei Beni e delle Attività
Culturali

cinemas, theatres, music and concert halls, museums and exhibition spaces, cultural centres and multidisciplinary spaces. On the other hand, the Banca Intesa study centre conducted an important research where it analysed data from over three hundred cultural operators, from the smallest association to the largest city theatre, which had applied for funding during 2020. This research offers an extraordinary cross-section view as it analyses the structure of the individual stakeholders in detail, considering the scope of their activity, their size, the organisational structure, their budget and territorial distribution.

These studies have provided a map of the cultural presence in the city, which shows how museums are at the centre of a web of relationships among cultural operators capable of participating in the construction of an integrated interdisciplinary and highly articulated offer. It also presents where there is an absence of contacts in the network and where they may be activated for specific projects aimed at increasing the operators' capacity for dialogue with the city communities and other stakeholders.

Moreover, the knowledge of these components has facilitated the implementation of participative activities in the context of *Distretto X*, a palimpsest of territorially-based projects in which the Municipality of Milan involved the city communities by setting up events for the interaction between them and the museum districts; this is the case of the project carried out in the district of the museums around the Public Gardens, which involved a large part of the LGBTQI+ community of Porta Venezia. More than twenty local LGBTQI+ associations have joined the project and all contributions have been collected in a catalogue. The action provided an opportunity for reflecting on gender identity by means of an artistic narration mediated through emotional cards. In 2021, a second edition took place through the action *Distretto X: Domani Ti Scrivo*, which envisaged a territorial awareness-raising action with the involvement of two different generations, joined together in a path of sharing and personal narration. This initiative for the museums of the Parco Sempione area proposed a project based on the written correspondence between citizens from the surrounding neighbourhoods under the age 18 and

A moment from a
Distretto X workshop.
© Samuele Briatore



over 65. This project investigated the creative and narrative aspects of the letters. Through the letters, we wanted to establish a relationship between people of two different generations through the reflections on a work of art from the collection of the neighbourhood museums. Museums and collections are the inspiring engine of intergenerational knowledge.

In recent years, the Ansaldo district has developed a specific role in the construction of networks and forms of cooperation between the various cultural communities in the city, thanks to the Museo delle Culture, the project *Milano Città Mondo* and the international vocation of the district.

Currently, the third edition, dubbed *Distretto X - Time for a coffee* is underway. This is an action of involvement and territorial animation of the cultural district of Piazza Duomo. A group of professionals will be involved in workshops which, through mindfulness-derived techniques, will help understand how the cultural assets in the district can be the subject of a short break from work.

A moment from a
Distretto X workshop.
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BIOGRAPHIES

Marco Edoardo Minoja is a cultural manager with over ten years of management experience in public administration. Since 2018, he directs the Culture Sector of the Milan City Council, which all city's culture departments refer to, including the 20 museums. He previously ran the regional offices of the Ministry of Culture in Lombardy and in Sardinia, coordinating territorial offices, museum networks, autonomous museums, national archives and libraries. He graduated and specialised in archaeology at the University of Milan. Between 2009 and 2015, he directed various archaeological territorial offices of the Ministry of Culture. Before joining the Ministry of Culture, he worked for various local administrations as a museum curator and as an independent professional. His bibliography counts around 100 entries, including monographic studies, curatorship, catalogues of exhibitions, articles in collective works and specialised reviews.

Samuele Briatore holds a PhD in music and performative arts. He is a researcher at the Scuola del Patrimonio (School of Cultural Heritage), currently involved in the action *Distretto X* of the Culture Department of Milan City Council. He has collaborated with the University of Malta, the European University of Rome, the Research LAB of Sapienza, Mimar Sinan University of Istanbul, and he was awarded a research grant at the Yildiz Technical University.

Antonella Andreotti works in managing public cultural services. For the last three years, she has collaborated with Marco Edoardo Minoja, Director of Culture at Milan City Council, in projects related to culture heritage promotion and management. She participated in the project of Milan's museums districts and in the first, second and third edition of *Distretto X*.

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