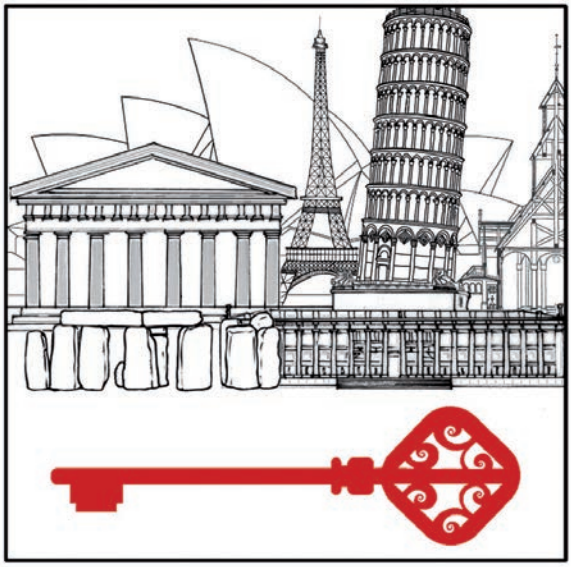
ACCESSIBILITY AS A KEY ENABLING KNOWLEDGE FOR ENHANCEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

edited by Alberto Arenghi, Ilaria Garofolo, Oddbjørn Sørmoen



Economia e management della cultura e della creatività

FrancoAngeli

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ECONOMIA E MANAGEMENT DELLA CULTURA E DELLA CREATIVITÀ

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L'idea di sviluppare una collana sull'economia e management della cultura e della creatività è nata nell'ambito dell'Egart, primo corso universitario interfacoltà in Italia in economia e gestione delle arti e attività culturali (Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia).

Questa collana si propone come strumento didattico e di approfondimento in materia di economia e gestione della cultura e della creatività. I destinatari sono rappresentati dagli studenti universitari, iscritti a corsi in gestione, valorizzazione dei beni culturali, nonché da operatori del settore (pubblici e privati).

La collana riunisce quei volumi che vogliono essere utili strumenti di studio e di consultazione, quale adeguata risposta ad un nuovo profilo professionale emergente con competenze integrate, capace di raccogliere in sé abilità manageriali e creative, e quindi di rispondere alle sfide poste dalla competizione internazionale sul piano dell'offerta di prodotti e servizi culturali e creativi.

Nella collana – che si ricollega idealmente a quella "Economia e management della cultura e delle arti" – sono pubblicate opere scientifiche che si distinguono per una o più delle seguenti caratteristiche: l'originalità del tema, la novità e l'interesse delle fonti su cui si è basata la ricerca, il taglio critico e/o metodologico innovativo, l'apporto sostanzioso al dibattito scientifico nazionale e/o internazionale, che comportano un sensibile avanzamento delle conoscenze interdisciplinari nell'ambito dell'economia della cultura e creatività.

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Tutti i testi sono stati sottoposti a referaggio coordinato dal comitato scientifico internazionale di collana.

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Ristampa	Anno
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025

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Stampa: Geca Industrie Grafiche, Via Monferrato, 54 - 20098 San Giuliano Milanese (MI)

To the memory of
our colleague and friend
Gian Paolo Treccani

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FOREWORD

Cultural accessibility is a creative challenge that enhances the resourcefulness, resilience and user-centeredness of cultural organisations. By opening up their doors to under-represented audiences, heritage organisations enrich the number of stories that are told about them and of experiences that are encountered inside them.

Ian Jenkins, Deputy Curator of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum considers the project "Second Sight of the Parthenon Frieze", which he devised in 1999 to bring the Parthenon Frieze within reach of visually impaired audiences as the most rewarding one in his professional life. By reaching out, he harvested new insights into the Parthenon Frieze, notably about its musical rhythms. The tactile images developed by his Italian partners from Tactile Vision Onlus turned out to be more than a mere instrument to convey the Frieze meaningfully to visually impaired people, it proved to be a formidable tool for archaeological representation and analysis. Engagement with new audiences transforms heritage organisations into learners. There is nothing more exciting than to be a learner or a learning organisation.

We are witnessing the growth of heritage accessibility projects that make a genuine contribution to an inclusive society and urban development. The Musée des Civilisations Européennes et Méditerranéennes (MUCEM), which opened in Marseille in 2013, resulted in a bridge being built over a busy road between the medieval Fort St. Jean and the deprived multicultural neighbourhood called "Le Panier". Fort St. Jean is now a meeting ground for young people who would previously not have bothered to set foot on this majestic relic of times past. The coal-grey footbridge is slick, outrageously elegant and fitting. Its design alludes to military architecture. French disability rights legislation spurred this stunning valorisation of heritage and of the urban fabric.

The publication "Accessibility as a Key Enabling Knowledge for Enhancement of Cultural Heritage" explores a range of similar practical case-studies. Its great merit, however, lies in its reflective dimension. Accessibility is emphatically about minute care for practical details which enable or prevent interaction between humans and heritage. This loving care for detail is usually not fostered by regulations (which may be under-developed or overly burdensome). It is a manifestation of a responsive attitude, nurtured by encounters with users and the discovery of the human, aesthetic and intellectual dimensions of the challenge. The field for discussion opened up here provides a contemporary snapshot of thinking about heritage accessibility. Gone are the times when heritage accessibility was equated with unwanted ugly ramps. Here, we have a dynamic field of reflective practitioners who seek to evolve conceptual tools for the future that take the whole visitor experience into account and situate heritage accessibility within a holistic framework of human and societal development.

I wish to emphasise the urgency of the questions raised here. Surveys on heritage accessibility published in the past thirty years – there are not that many, which is a sure sign of institutional neglect in cultural administrations – all point to an unacceptable reality: for several groups of people with disabilities, choice and opportunity for quality engagement remains desperately poor. Kevin Carey, art lover and President of the Royal National Institute of Blind People, states: "All the world's authentic works that can be explored without handling gloves and provide me with a shared experience of the emotional dimension of the encounter with art taken together would fit into a single museum gallery". Tough love, unrequited love. Let's move beyond such cruelty. The aesthetic, educational, professional, ethical and societal arguments for greater flexibility taken together are convincing and difficult to oppose.

Where there is a will, there is a way. Before disability rights legislation came into force in the UK, 90% of the requests for accessibility projects in listed buildings were refused by English Heritage. Ever since 2005, English Heritage has accepted 90%. Not because of subservience to legal duties, but because elegant design solutions respectful of heritage and more open attitudes shifted the perceived boundaries of what is possible. We need a similar leap forward to open up much more of the immeasurable cultural riches held in trust by our museums and heritage sites. Then freedom will thrive.

To grant the missing freedom the collective response of the cultural sector is needed. I recommend to all cultural organisations, that they set themselves ambitious, yet realistic objectives, year by year and in every multi-annual development plan. Then a practical utopia will become true. Recommenda-

tion R(92)6 of the Council of Europe (1992) will then find itself implemented: “Local, regional and national cultural and leisure organisations should develop comprehensive policies and action plans that bring significant and lasting improvement of accessibility to all people with disabilities”.

Marcus Weisen
Expert, European Centre
for Cultural Accessibility

FOREWORD

When we started organizing the ICOM Thematic Committee – Italy "Accessibility of Museums", we only had how difficult the interconnection between "museum" and "accessibility" was on our minds. We knew individual about some initiatives by certain museums, strong and effective experiences; but there was not a common project, a shared vision within the Italian museum world.

Experiencing the real lives of our institutions everyday, visiting mostly the local museums, we saw the efforts to increase the hospitality of all the public; but, at the same time, we saw that the directors and/or the custodians, i.e., acted according to their sensitivity, without specific rules or laws, often without experience.

In the last ten years, many things have changed; above all, the mentality has changed a bit: the enjoyment of beauty, of art, of the natural or human history, nowadays is, at least, a right. We cannot say that everyone respects this right and this is not a right acquired once and for all, but the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted on 13th of December 2006 by the UN General Assembly in New York – ratified by the Italian Parliament in 2009 and by the European Union the following year –, added certainty and belief to those who work in museums.

When we refer specifically to our work, even the definition of a museum – according to the ICOM Statutes, adopted during the 21st General Conference in Vienna, Austria, 2007 – leaves no room for doubt:

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.

This definition is a reference for the international community.

I like, in particular, to focus on the last of these terms: the enjoyment! We based most of our work on this concept. We tried to over-throw the terms of the question; we have not faced the problem by asking: "why people – and mostly people with difficulties – don't enter in the museum?" We asked ourselves: "why they should enter?".

While I was reading the articles in this book, I thought that, today, this is a "question" shared with many colleagues and this is, obviously, a sign of the times. Each "answer" we try to give, allows us to add a tile to the mosaic of accessibility.

A shared question, however, doesn't mean that the answer is shared everywhere in the world of the exhibitions. Together with many good expositions, still today we see museums without space for sensory experiences, posters and legends written exclusively in a technical language incomprehensible for the most of the public, paths full of obstacles… Why?

Probably it is a "cultural problem".

If we speak generically about "accessibility", many people (including experts) understand only the physical accessibility; and so they act only to eliminate the more obvious barriers inside the museum (per-haps adding a special path).

However, this is only the tip of the iceberg. Because, before, you have to get "inside" the museum: the public (all the public!) must have the topographical indications necessary to find what they are looking for; the opening hours and services offered must be clear; the barriers have still not been eliminated? There is a car park dedicated to people with mobility impairment? From here, you can see how the museum has been planned and how much attention it has towards the public.

Because this is the "cultural problem": we cannot be self-referential, we must imagine we are working for the people and with the people, and they have different knowledge, needs, and sensibility from ours. We must know (and we have to remind ourselves every day) we are not omniscient: we must learn to ask for help to realize everything we are not able to do.

And then, before we start doing things, we have to write a few questions on our boards: which project do we want to build this exhibition with? Who do we want to invite to the museum? Why do we want them to enter it and why should they enter? With which ideas did we build it and for what purpose? Who we consulted to help us? With whom have we verified the physical accessibility? And the cognitive accessibility? And sensory? Is the language we are using really accessible?

If the problem is a "cultural problem", we workers in the field of culture have to try to change.

And who wrote the articles that you are starting to read, know it well! Good luck and a good change for everyone.

Dario Scarpati
Archeologist
Coordinator of the Museum
Accessibility Commission
ICOM-Italia Cultural Heritage

INTRODUCTION

by *Alberto Arenghi*, *Ilaria Garofolo* and *Oddbjørn Sørmoen*

Accessibility to cultural heritage is a field still largely unexplored, although cultural heritage plays a strategic role as the major cultural assets of many countries. It requires an educated and sophisticated policy and design to make it more accessible, and thus more attractive. The aspect of accessibility to cultural heritage has opened a new way of looking at the purpose and the importance of heritage.

In general terms, dealing with accessibility to cultural heritage means combining two values: the right that every human being has to fulfil his experience through the encounter with the past and the consciousness that the conservation of cultural heritage represents on our present having passed through our past.

This does not mean looking for an answer which means that one value is more important than the other; in other words, we are not interested in making a rank of values, because it does not make sense. On the contrary, the solutions must be found with feasible compromise.

This book investigates the topic of accessibility to cultural heritage as a challenge to enhance its value. The aim is to overcome the traditional relationship between accessibility and disability and to point out the core of accessibility, which represents, above all, a cultural and operative tool to expand human freedom and the ability, for any person, to give a direct and personal contribution to the growth of society.

The book opens the readers' eyes to the importance of understanding and appreciating as well as everyone seeing the beauty of heritage. It spreads enthusiasm, and lets the readers understand why accessibility to heritage is important for everybody, and why it should not be denied to anyone.

The message is a reflection going deeper into the meaning of heritage. It takes the discussion far beyond consumerism, which we so often link to modern cultural tourism.

This book starts from these assumptions, and helps the reader take stock of the situation on the current debate. Moreover, starting from concrete measures carried out to make cultural heritage more accessible to everybody, the book explores the effectiveness or remarks on the limits of "actions" developed according to the present meaning of "design for accessibility", "inclusive design", "the right to culture", as well as according to a very often too rich regulatory apparatus. Thus, exploring the given potentials from focusing on the needs of people with disabilities – more properly, on the needs of all the vulnerable users – while developing plans and projects to enhance the cultural heritage.

The book aims to contribute to reducing the condition of cultural marginalization that marks accessibility today. The challenge is to change the current vision of accessibility and deal with it in positive and proactive terms. Involving different authors with different backgrounds is an occasion to learn more from these groups as well as to which extent their experience can help to produce better solutions.

The book includes a number of writers who share their thoughts, ideas and experience.

The publication is conceived as a text that addresses the issues related to the participation by everyone in the enjoyment of cultural heritage, with reference to the strategies identified for its accessibility and use. Moreover, the book is a sort of *field for discussion* between different visions on designing for all, derived from the experience in different geographic, social and cultural contexts.

The articles by authors with different backgrounds help to raise the awareness of the importance of considering accessibility as a key strategy for building a truly inclusive society, based on the need to have a dialogue between all the stakeholders for possible effective and long-lasting solutions. They show how, beyond the constantly changing innovative technological solutions, it is possible to get living environments (otherwise "accessible") designed for everyone by integrating knowledge coming from different disciplines, even apparently far from each other, without requiring special solutions.

Aware of the amount of specialist literature on universal design produced in the last years, we still think that a handbook of theory on inclusive design can strengthen the action addressed to educate architects, designers and students of all the disciplines to the design and management of accessible spaces, goods and services, with particular reference to those that affect the cultural heritage. The book can be a help to all those directly involved in the planning and implementation of local and national policies related to cultural heritage and, more generally, to the space and goods used by the public.

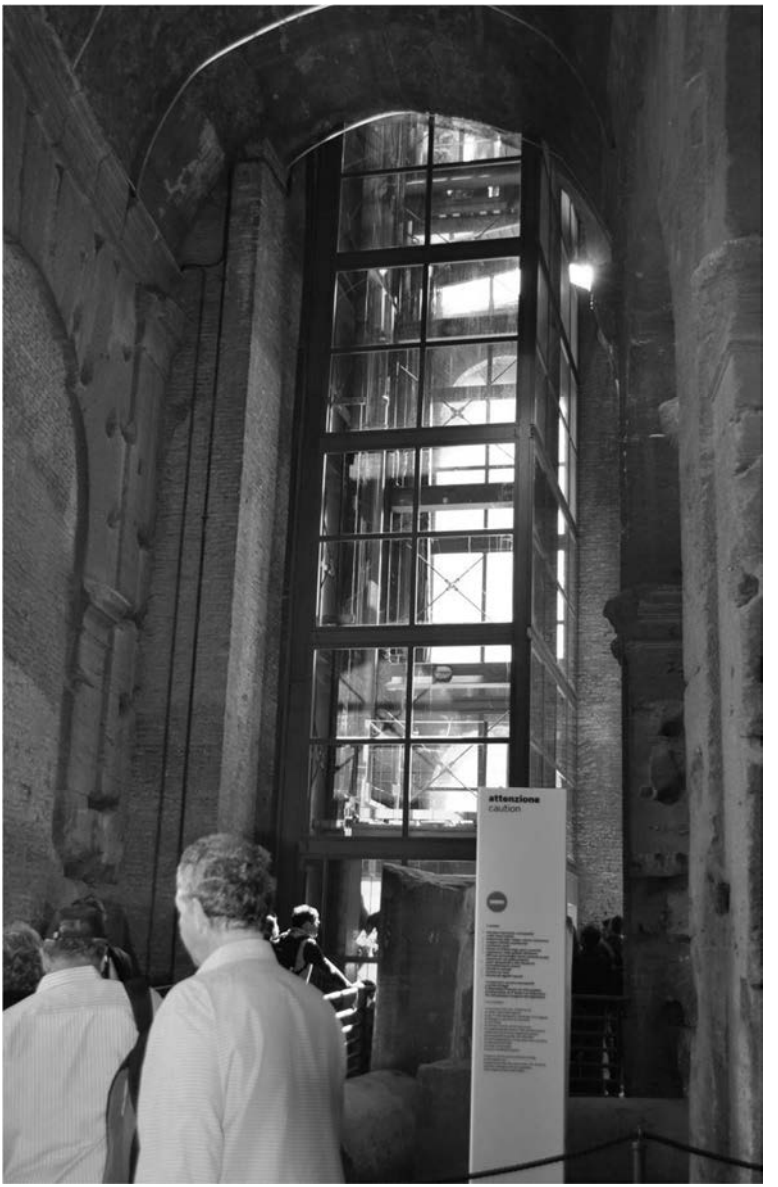
We hope the book will also be of interest to those of the general public who want to increase their knowledge about the opportunities that a more inclusive society can offer to the community in terms of wellbeing and economic impact. We hope it will make them understand better why it is necessary to ensure the right to culture and beauty for everybody.

The book consists of articles written by a variety of authors with different professional skills and backgrounds. They deal with the following issues:

- inclusion/exclusion from the right to culture and the concept of "human diversity" facing the "universal values" of cultural heritage;
- the enhancement of cultural heritage;
- the value of experiencing cultural heritage;
- the missing link between idealistic design assumption and practice;
- different approaches to accessibility to cultural heritage;
- inclusive and exclusive art;
- economic value of accessibility to cultural heritage;
- the use of the competence of the people with disabilities to increase, improve and enhance the experience for everyone.

The editors would like to thank those who answered to the invitation to give a contribution to the discussion on the matter, that we intend to implement in the future. The starting point of the project was a talk among a few colleagues on the results of a focus group, where interest in the field by the participants was pointed out. But it would not have been possible without the suggestion given by Gian Paolo Treccani who passed away before the book was completed, and to whom this book is dedicated.

Lifts at Colosseum, Rome



Source: Ilaria Garofolo

ART, ARCHITECTURE & DISABILITY: THE RIGHT TO BEAUTY

by *Simone Fanti*

Are people with a disability entitled to participate in the "beauty's fair"? Do they have the Right to see, touch, "feel" the highest works of the human mind? Are these unusual questions to ask ourselves? At a first glance, they are not, as Art, in all its forms, has been conceived for all, which is the idea at the base of the institution of museums, as art has the capacity to get in touch with everybody. Art moves feelings, hearts and mental processes. So why should it be precluded to only a part of humankind? And yet, if we turn to real life, the idea of "for all" diminishes and becomes shaky. As a result, the "beauty's fair" seems to be prohibited to people with disabilities. Have you ever noticed how many architectural barriers prevent them from visiting gardens, museums or cultural heritage? Or simply from going out, shopping, living "everyday life"? Have you ever noticed that all objects projected for the disabled look like medical devices? They are functional, easy to use, built with aseptic materials, painted in white or grey (the colours of sadness), with an unattractive shape. It seems very often that design and disability run on parallel railway tracks and that they don't work together. But today architects and designers are facing a new challenge called Universal Design or Design for All which mixes beauty and usability, fashion and comfort together.

If I told you I was a man of about 40 years old, over 1,85 cm tall, weighing about 90 kilos…, married, a journalist, you would range me into different categories of people according to your interests. Among the overweight for example. Or the middle-aged. Or even among the professionals ... and so on. But as soon as I add the word "disabled", the whole premise disappears. A disabled person is a disabled person. The person disappears under the weight of a definition. There are many people who think the disabled are incapacitated, asexual, unable to live their lives only because fate has deprived them of a limb, hearing or sight. In Italy, if a person with a disability gets a degree,