

Museums as culture center and economic fly off

News

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What is a museum? It is that tedious and boring place where we are told to admire a "fantastic" collection that most of the time we don't even understand what we are looking at. Wow, how interesting! It is a place where our teachers, our parents or our companions bring us to acknowledge, when all we would want is something totally different, like a football match on television. This is a common thought among people, among the non scholars, because museums in the past have been dead places.

Fortunately museums have come to understand, in the last 10 years or so, that having a great collection was not "that big of a deal" to attract the public. People wanted something more thrilling and more comprehensive with which to understand the great collections. It is obvious that a museum will always have at its center the collection. What they are trying to do now is to become the center of knowledge and culture, by using all means; adding laboratories along with new technologies, making exciting events and so on.

A marvelous example of a modern museum is the Ara Pacis in Rome. Much has been said already about this project, some like it, others don't, others are still uncertain; nevertheless it has centered the goal.

Richard Meier has done something extraordinary, not only tourists visit the Ara Pacis but people living and working in Rome use the Museum as well. He has created a place that is a museum, with its collection, its labs and so on, but it is also a space that Roman citizens can use for conferences, meetings, films and occasions which are not necessarily linked to archeology.

For the 40th anniversary of stylist Valentino's career, a great exhibition with all of his dresses was housed in it; the other month a three day talk on Public Administration, organized by the City Council, was held in the conference room. These are just some examples which are carried out normally by the museum. Rome needed and still needs a space in which culture, history, modern architecture, style are all combined together to be used by all, tourists, citizens and scholars.

Ara Pacis Museum - in side

Bringing people to the museums means much more than acknowledging the masses, it also means bringing money to finance cultural pursuits and to the city itself. This is the case of the Guggenheim in Bilbao, it was built as revitalization plan for the city. The Spanish town, which was once an attractive center for tourism, at the end of the 80's visitors prefered to go to Ibiza, where they could find the famous spanish "fiesta!", or else like Barcelona, an important cultural center where many eclectic artists lived and worked.

A museum like the Guggenheim brings people from all over the world to see its collection, therefore the city needs infrastructure like hotels, restaurants, coffeeshops, information centers and so on. The

museum in this case changed the entire economic system, because it brought money, it brought work and international fame. In other words it brought national and international, private and public stakeholders to invest their money in the museum itself and in the city as well.

Bilbao's Guggenheim Museum - the building

These two case studies are different aspects of what a museum should and could be if well managed.

Italy has one of the most important and famous archeological and artistic heritage, it could live only on the income linked to tourism, but unfortunately Italy invests a very small amount of money for its culture patrimony. This kind of attitude doesn't encourage private stakeholders to invest money, thus if little money is spent to improve infrastructure little money is gained because people won't be attracted to experience culture.

Recently it seems that small changes are occurring, on the 19th of November our Minister of Culture Heritage Rutelli has announced, during a press-conference, that all Italian museums should have a "Quality Standard Card". This represents a very big change; museums will now be forced to improve the services offered to the public.

In this card, museums have to say what kind of utilities the public will receive, how the collection explained, what kind of new-technology is used, what kind of labs are available; if there is the restaurant or coffee shop, a bookshop or a library, it has to inform the public what of future programs it will be carry out. At the end of tours, visitors will be asked to give a vote for each service, in this way museums are forced to be accountable in the management and quality of services provided. Making museums economically reliable, in addition to reducing taxes to those who invest on culture, will bring stakeholders to invest money on museums, which means more work and greater richness for local economy.

At the end of the day, a museum should be a place where people go to with enthusiasm because they can find many interesting services besides a great collection. If a museum is well managed it will be a great advantage to the local economy and to the public.

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