Society and Museums Today. Museums 'From Below'?[1]

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In the context of modern cities and of the major social inequalities and exclusions they generate, this article considers the extent to which museums contribute to building democratic and progressive societies. Indeed, numerous museums either make promises of, or directly engage in, practices promoting respect for diversity, equality, accessibility and the idea of social inclusion. In this, they appear to contradict the rationale that develops cities as places dedicated to the exclusive cultivation of relations of power, inequality and social exclusion. At the same time, the tendency towards the commercialization of museum collections and activities, as well as the growth of the cultural economy, are becoming increasingly visible. This excludes many social groups from access to and participation in museum activities. It is found, however, that increasingly vulnerable groups (homeless, immigrants, the poor, etc.) tend to develop 'alternative museum sites', where they gather and exhibit material objects, experiences and oral testimonies about their life memories and construct or renegotiate their identities. Together, these activities cultivate a feeling of belonging and community, particularly in multicultural, but also in economically marginalized, regions.
Keywords: Cultural heritage, museum, vulnerable people, inclusion, exclusion, diversity, integration, belonging.

Introduction

In light of the undeniable population mobility that is primarily tied to globalization and in particular to the social phenomena of global migration and tourist mobility, modern cities, as recipients of mobility, are subject to the constant pressures and contradictions created by the social and, especially, economic dimensions of contemporary urbanism[2] that actually appears captive to the destructive capitalism of its current neoliberal phase. Under the above phase of capitalism (Harvey 2007), the modern city is transformed into a conveyor belt and an instrument of power relations that are geared towards extracting profit from every activity that develops in the context of urban life. The modern city's varied and extreme versions of social inequality show how it is ultimately subject to exploitation by capitalism, and that life in it merely reflects the process of exploitation. In this context, the question then is whether the marginalized people of the modern cities develop cultural actions and re-actions that can claim and create new forms of social life and also social relations that exceed the limits imposed by dominant paradigms of sociability and legitimacy (Pardo and Prato 2019). Stavrides answers this question positively by introducing the relatively new term 'commoning', through which he opens up such a perspective. The term refers to discrete public and private sharing spaces that emerge in the large, modern city as 'common spaces'. These are open to public use and subject only to sharing practices that define and produce goods and services that share. For practices taking place within them that are not just about sharing but about encouraging creative encounters, these spaces promote values that are shared by and involved in sharing processes. The core of his

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[2] Prato (2009), Pardo and Prato (eds 2012) and Pardo (2020) have significantly contributed to the anthropological approach to modern urbanism, multiculturalism and to mainly neglected or invisible aspects of cultural diversity in cities.

argument is in fact that 'commoning can remain commoning only if it keeps expanding to include newcomers' (Stavrides 2016: 221).

Modern cities actively participate in the global stage of urban development, innovation and competition and work to demonstrate their unique comparative advantage over other cities (Spyridakis 2009). They do so by showcasing aspects of the city that could earn them any one of these labels — that of a 'smart' city, 'creative' city, 'green' city, 'hybrid' city, 'sustainable' city, 'cultural' city, 'intrastate' or 'digital' city. These efforts are made in order to achieve a high standard of living and to attain visibility and a high ranking in the preferences of varied organizations and companies, as well as among tourists and their own citizens. Most of these forms of urban development can be referred to with the term 'soft power' (Mouliou 2015).[3] Indeed, culture and cultural heritage are considered a strong type of soft power, and museums and exhibitions, in particular, are viewed as the most powerful agents. Dicks refers for example that according the Bazelgette Review (2017: 11), a Government-commissioned independent review of the UK's, 'on current trends, the Creative Industries (arts sector), could deliver close to £130bn GVA by 2025 and approximately one million new jobs could be created by 2030' (Dicks 2019: 31). As Lord and Blankenberg point out, where cities exist, there are museums, and 'powerful cities have omnipotent museums' (2015: 9, 19). The great importance of modern museums urges us to explore their social dimensions, the relationships between them and social groups that experience marginalization and social inequality. It is also important to explore the ways in which particular social groups establish their own museum spaces and give their own meanings. It is noted that the term museum covers a wide variety of places in which cultural objects are protected and exhibited for public benefit (there are therefore museums indoors, outdoors and in households; monuments, buildings, settlements and protected landscapes, etc.). The museums also include virtual reality sites (virtual museums). Recently the term has also come to refer to informal, perhaps temporary, actions which organize a space where a social group or a community collects, deposits and often exhibits objects, oral testimonies, memories, materials and intangible objects that represent the experiences, meaning and identity that the group or community attributes to itself.

The research data come from my on-site research visits, during the last five years to various types of museums in Greece and across Europe, including many visits to museum websites and to some online museums. The time of my site visits in museums was almost always very short, so I chose to work as a visitor or as a careful observer who recorded every

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[3] The term soft power was put forward by Joseph Nye to identify this form of power as a power that tends to derive from intangible, cultural or ideological resources (Nye 1990: 188-197). According to him, the current definition of power is being transformed. It is becoming increasingly unclear as coercive power loses its force, leaving space for cooperative power or indirect power arising from the above-mentioned resources or from others such as information, technology, knowledge, popular culture or political cohesion (Nye 1990: 31-35). More specifically, he describes soft power as power's second face, one which is intangible and based on 'the ability to shape the preferences of others'; it is, in other words, based on attraction (Nye 1990). However, Yukaruc notes that the concept of soft power is not particularly original and shares similarities with the Gramscian understanding of power (Yukaruc 2017: 497).

kind of movement and information. My interest was in exploring the relationship between museum and society, in identifying the social character of the museum and in ways in which communities and social groups participate. Ethnographic research was actually conducted at the Victoria Square Project in Athens (2017) at the Museum of Greek Folk Art — renamed as 'Museum of Modern Greek Culture', especially at the permanent exhibition 'People and Tools. Aspects of work in pre-industrial society' (at the end of 2015), and in many local, folk museums in Greece.

Throughout their history, museums have always had a dynamic public image as a field of expression and exposition for the important ideas that defined societies. However, in recent decades museums have frequently undergone radical transformations, re-adjusting or re-inventing their principles, policies and practices. As a result of these impressive and imaginative constructions, they have converted themselves into landmarks, magnets for tourists and citizens, turning a comparative advantage in projects for urban revival which are being attempted following the radical transformation of cities as regards the structure and bases of productivity. Museums are also involved in the new logic of urban economic development, although they attempt to base their contribution to it on the principles laid out in their social role. For example, the implementation cultural/museum clustering programs[4] in museums in Berlin, Amsterdam, Copenhagen and London amongst others, reflects these ongoing changes (Cook and Lazeretti 2008).[5]

The Social Dimension of Museums
As public institutions, museums have the potential to contribute to social cohesion, to substantially influence the ways in which individuals and societies perceive themselves and their relationships with others (Newman and McLean 2004: 16). The social and above all political importance of the museum as an institution was recognized during the 1960s. However, it was during the 1970s and 1980s that the museum came to prominence both as a strong cultural, educational and research structure, and as a social institution with a political agenda that was more interested in the people than it had been in the past. It was this socio-centric view of the museum that gave birth to the new museology (Vergo 1989). Since that time, the museum has tried to operate as an open site for contact and communication, for the involvement of communities and different social groups. In many cases, museums also encourage open debate on controversial social issues, either those which are still open wounds

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[4] The concept of the cluster was first advanced in 1990 by Michael Porter. It has since attracted a great deal of attention from politicians and academics. The concept has come to be regarded as a strategic tool for local economic development. Museum clusters are geographic concentrations of interconnected museums which work closely with local suppliers, tourist attractions and public sector entities (Cook and Lazeretti 2008).

[5] The creation of museum networks (as in London, Athens and Paris) is also closely linked to the strategy of cultural clustering, although in a different way (Konsola 2011). An important network is the 'Network of European Museum Organisations (NEMO)' which was founded in 1992 (https://www.ne-mo.org/), the Athens Museums and Cultural Institutions Network (2009), http://www.athensmuseums.net/index.php?lang=en&lang=gr&lang=en and many others.

or those which reflect a city's difficult cultural heritage (MacDonald 2009: 1-4) such as the holocaust (The Jewish Museum in Berlin).

It should briefly be stated that the museum is an institution that was and is intertwined with the city, but not with the entirety of its social and cultural reality and identity (Bennett 1995). In the ideological climate of Romanticism, during the creation of Western nation-states (Boswell and Evans 1999), the goal envisaged was to showcase a language and culture common to all, as elements that would reinforce cultural identity. During this period, the focus of museums in the West was monopolized by organizing the concentration and display of items of high artistic and aesthetic value, familiar and appropriated works from the art and culture of civilizations (from Egypt, Greece and so on). In other words, a choice was made to promote a cultural heritage that corroborated the economic, political and cultural power of the nation, constituting the dynamic field that would participate in the process of creating a single and dominant national identity (Kaplan 1994, Kaftantzoglou 2001, Bounia and Gazi 2012). The latter would also be strengthened by the development of folklore museums which, through the reproduction of a rural cultural foundation for every nation, established historical depth for national identities (Bennett 1999: 380–393).[6] For their part, ethnographic museums[7] created images and identities of the non-Western Other as seen by the Western colonizer (Barringer and Flynn 1998); that is, as primitive, uncivilized, bizarre or exotic beings.

Within this museological perspective, the culture and daily life of the majority of a city's inhabitants was hardly an object of collection and exhibition (that is, in a real rather than an aesthetic dimension). At the same time, the working classes and other social groups, as publics, had limited access to museums. Although the project of making museums public and fully accessible was already under way in the 18th century (for example, the Louvre and British museums), access remained the privilege of the few, until the mid-20th century, notably of the social elites or those initiated to the arts. Towards the end of the 19th century, the state and museums' interest in the cultural enrichment and education of all classes and social groups through their participation in museums found expression in several ways. However, given that for citizens the museum functioned as the face of the state, it developed particular ideological, political and cultural messages and values — of guidance or control, for instance, of the habits of the working classes, which led indirectly to their exclusion from the museum (Bennett 1995).

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[6] In discussing the historical development of museums alongside that of the fair and the international exhibition, Bennett sheds new light on the relationship between modern forms of official and popular culture.

[7] Western ethnographic museums collect and classify non-Western peoples and their cultures, thereby creating a shared identity of superiority for Western civilization against the 'primitive Other'. From this perspective, the ethnographic museums of the 19th and 20th centuries contributed significantly to the consolidation and scientific justification of colonialism and the hegemony of Western Europe over the non-Western world. Since 1970, the view of the role and importance of the ethnographic museum has changed. Today it is understood as representing not only world cultures, but also the world's interconnectedness. Ethnographic collections are therefore regarded as representative bodies of cultural diversity in the present, as well as of traditions that have suffered upheaval (Barringer and Flynn 1998; Thomas 2016; Chambers et al. 2016; Solomon 2012: 88-91).

It was from the mid-20th century onwards that substantial changes in museums' understandings of their roles, policies and practices were enacted. More pluralistic tendencies arose, both with regards to providing uninhibited access for all, but also in relation to practices that incorporated hitherto overlooked items and historical subjects that had emerged after the 1970s. However, museums continued, by and large, to serve not only as fields of expression and exhibition of the important ideas that defined societies, but also foundational political mechanisms for the production and dissemination of messages, ideological or otherwise. It is indicative that since ICOM's creation in 1946, it included a definition of new museums and political practices. After 1956, in particular, these played a central role for museums and museum professionals, becoming a reference point within the international museum community. In 1960, U.N.E.S.C.O. also formally declared that 'Its member states are obliged to take appropriate measures to ensure that their museums are open to all without discrimination on the economic and social level'. Thus, museums gradually changed their mission and philosophy, rethinking their 'endoscopic' policies of a few decades ago and, above all, trying to reach a wider audience, beyond the traditional elite of the skilled and educated. These messages were supported by the authenticity of exhibited material, presented as 'objective' in relation to truth/knowledge. Further, through museums' opening up towards society, chiefly via their educational, entertainment-oriented character, they acquired a new identity, new values, policies and practices. These were based on the idea of promoting creative interaction between objects and social subjects (Miller 1987; Gialouri 2012: 25-30; Solomon 2012: 75-124).

A museum's value lies precisely in its possession of objects. Thus, it inherently reflects and creates relationships between people and objects. Moreover, it also reflects and creates social relationships. This is because objects have the power to mobilize diverse mental, mnemonic, imaginary and emotional processes, which create an impact both on the items and on social subjects' identities (Tilley 2001: 260). While visitors are of course called upon to follow the trajectory and interpretation put forward in the museological narrative (Voger 2000), they always retain the possibility of engaging in a solo dialogue with the objects, giving meaning to and interpreting them and their discourses in their own way. Being a privileged space for the reformulation and development of relations between subjects and objects, as well as for developing a sense of belonging and shared identity, museums can bring to the surface myriad stories. Interdisciplinary perspectives, oral history and new technologies all contribute significantly not only to reflecting relationships, conflicts and contradictions in the museum, but also to articulating the above. For instance, by using oral history, some museums make the most of their oral history archives[8] in order to strengthen people's sense of belonging to a place and a community, to address traumatic memories and/or to promote reconciliation (Solomon 2013: 59-75; Mouliou 2016: 51-70; Nakou 2005; Nakou and Gazi 2015). It is after all the case that oral history was associated, during its initial period, with the political demand to give voice to and highlight the perspective of social groups and subjects who had been excluded from official history (Thompson 2000).

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[8] For example, the Museum of London has more than 5000 interviews that were recorded with the participation of residents.

Museums as Fields of Coexistence and Sociality: Tolerant of Diversity

Since the turn of the 21st century, the key concepts of what has been defined as contemporary or new museology have included participation, adaptability, participatory democracy, social justice, empathy, inventiveness and creativity. These have risen to salience in a context of intense migration flows and mobility, social insecurity and increasing social inequality in cities. The title of the 7th International Conference that was organized at the Benaki Museum on the 30th November 2017 is indicative; it read, 'Museums as agents of change. Diversity, Accessibility and Inclusion'. The conference emphasized[9] the importance of museums and cultural institutions as pillars of society and as ideal spaces for communication and connection between people (Bennett 1999). The following statement is characteristic of the event's tone:

> 'Museums and cultural institutions can change people's lives. They are pillars of healthy communities and ideal spaces to connect people. While communities around the globe address issues of immigration, religious expression, cultural diversity, discrimination, gender identity, and equality, the commitment of museums to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion has never been more important.' (Excerpt from the text of the invitation of the 7th International conference, titled 'Museums as agents of Change: Diversity, Accessibility and Inclusion', Benaki Museum, Athens, 30 November 2017).

Museums today are therefore not merely cultural organizations with defined spaces, functions and actions. Rather, to the extent that they interact with society and aspire to become part of it, their role goes beyond defined spatial, exhibition and organizational boundaries (Bennett 1995: 59-64). From another angle, the power of museums to govern or regulate the social values and attitudes that underpin a sense of citizenship, and to define[10] community groups and identities, has also, to a significant degree, been proven (Bennett 1995). For this reason, many professionals and academics consider that museums should take on the responsibility of acknowledging and representing cultural and community diversity, which in fact has obvious relevance for community consultations (Sandell 2002, Witcomb 2003, Watson 2007a).

Based on the recognition that it is the people who give value to the objects and collections and that 'there is not any meaning for the museum if it cannot forge associations with people' (Crooke 2007: 131), museums have been developing more collaborative projects between themselves and communities, in which the community is present. In addition, of course, an extensive bibliography that includes critical commentary about these collaborations has also grown up (Watson 2007b; Sandell 2003: 45-62). Under the umbrella of the above ideas and

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[9] https://diavlos.grnet.gr/event/e976. The conference included four keynote addresses of the following speakers: Dr Nicole Ivy, Director of Inclusion, American Alliance of Museums (USA); Georgia Krantz, Independent Accessibility Trainer and Consultant (USA); Sarah Plump, Research Associate, Research Center for Museums and Galleries (UK); Jess Turtle and Matt Turtle, Co-founders, Museum of Homelessness (UK).

[10] It is usual to treat communities as something that is 'collected' or acquired; the consultation consists in 'telling' communities what they need (Watson 2007b).

practices, a history and memory of silenced issues such as those of migration, labour, slavery, the holocaust,[11] excluded communities[12] and others have emerged. Examples in Greece include the Hansen Museum in Spinalonga, the Holocaust Museum in Kalavrita, the Ai Stratis Museum of Exile in Athens, the Makronisos Museum of Political Prisoners. Indicatively, I will refer to the Museum of political exiles of Ai Stratis that could be considered a place of counter memory, in the words of Foucault (1997). Counter memory in the sense that its founders and the museum items 'opposed' to the official policy of forgetting / amnesia of exile and camps. In place of the non-memory version, they put the emergence of their history and their collective/social memory. The pioneers in the establishment of the museum (1988) are Greek citizens who during the civil war (1946-1949), the post-war years (1950-1962) and the military dictatorship (1967-1974) suffered due to their political beliefs — mainly leftists — an unbridled state violence and repression (confinements in exile camps, deportations, executions, etc.), (Panourgia 2013, Voglis 2004). Thousands of men, women and children spent much of their lives in some 100 isolated geographical areas of Greece — and more than 40 were barren islands of this country. Ai Stratis, a small island in the North Aegean, was the place with the longest-running exile and received more than 10,000 political prisoners, men, women and children.

The museum's collections[13] are composed of the remaining traces of the exiled life. Objects, personal files, documents, memories and oral testimonies, images and art projects, show experiential aspects of the daily life of the exiles. As museums exhibit and document, they open the exile wound, and represent political and social relations of power, conflict and violence. They represent mainly a difficult heritage, which, however, in the museum place can be managed and interpreted by the social subjects.

Numerous museum exhibitions have also been dedicated to contemporary international migration which is seen as an increasingly globalized phenomenon, displaying qualitatively new characteristics (Castles et al. 2014: 19). The most recent ones narrate the challenge of global migration in a more or less critical, longitudinal manner. In Italy, for example, new permanent exhibitions focus both on Italians' perceptions of migration and on migrants' perceptions of themselves in their new context. Other museums also respond to these issues with temporary initiatives. In the 'Mare Internum' exhibition at Rome's Ara Pacis Museum, a transparent room, overlooking the city, was set up as a memorial to the victims in the Mediterranean. A boat made of fragments of wood from boats that have carried migrants towards the coasts of Lampedusa acts as the object and sign of people seeking refuge and hope for a better life (Boccalatte 2017: 6–8). An exhibition was also organized on the island of

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[11] See for example the Jewish Museum in Berlin which uses targeted architectural symbols to narrate a difficult heritage's experiences and memories (Mac Donald 2009).

[12] During the 1960s and 1970s, community museums tended to be created and run by activists rather than museum professionals. A community museum is a museum serving as an exhibition and gathering space for specific identity groups or geographic areas. They are usually multidisciplinary, and may simultaneously exhibit the history, social history, art or folklore of their communities. They also emphasize collaboration with — and relevance to — visitors and other stakeholders, and, as a result, often appear more overtly political than other museums (Watson 2007a, 2007b; Kadoyama 2018).

[13] https://www.exile-museum.gr

Lampedusa itself, entitled, 'Towards the Museum of Trust and Dialogue for the Mediterranean'. Interspersed objects from ancient times till the present referred, in varied ways, to contemporary trauma in the Mediterranean Sea. Personal items belonging to refugees and migrants who had drowned trying to reach the island served as living witnesses to the drama.

The many functions and practices which museums have assumed in relation to current migration (Mouliou 2018: 11-20) show that they are engaging with contemporary urban life, namely with the critical issue of tackling new social inequalities and the social exclusion of otherness, xenophobia and so on. Thus their goal of acting as both mediators for a renewed kind of world citizenship and sites of inclusion and communing, are their most important functions, as organizations like the Commonwealth Association of Museums (CAMOC, CAM) and the International Committee for Regional Museums ICR Organizations claim.[14] The project 'Migration: Cities (Im)migration and Arrival Cities', the preliminary results of which were discussed at a first conference in Athens (6-8 February 2017), and in later conferences in other cities, is indicative of this trend (Mouliou et al. 2019: 40-44). It is noteworthy that there is no museum of migration in Greece,[15] although it was, until 1970, a country closely tied to the experience of emigration and later a host country for a large number of immigrants and refugees. It seems that museum theory and practice in Greece is not yet ready to embrace the social purpose of the museum and to integrate other communities and identities. Nonetheless, in 2018 the Museum of Greek Folk Art and Greek Folk Musical Instruments — Foivos Anogianakis Collection — renamed the 'Museum of Modern Greek Culture', presented the exhibition 'New Homelands'[16] within the framework of the European FAIDRA project (Family Separation through Immigration–Dramatizing Anecdotal European History). Key themes in this exhibition were immigrant adjustment and social inclusion, as well as the relationships of cohesion or family breakdown.

Another Tendency: Towards the Cultural Economy

At the start of the 21st century, one can say that some museums have radically transformed, adjusted and re-invented their principles, policies and practices (Dicks 2019). A growing number of museums (mega museums in particular, such as the Getty Centre in Los Angeles, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao or the Tate Modern in London) appear to have entered a

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[14] CAMOC, Museums City Review 2017/1, p. 39 (http://network.icom.museum/camoc/)

[15] During the last decade, however, there has been a strong interest from citizens in the establishment of an immigration museum in Piraeus, in the port from where thousands of Greek migrants left for America from the beginning of the 20th century and later for other destinations (Australia and New Zealand). Among other actions, citizens call for the collection of objects, printed documents, oral life stories of immigrants, economic support, etc. (MoM http://mompiraeus.blogspot.com/2010/03/ellis-island.html. Despite their efforts its establishment has not been possible.

[16] http://www.mnep.gr/gr/ektheseis/proigoumenes/kainourgies-patrides/. Several also temporary exhibitions have been sparked by the current refugee crisis. See, for example, the Folklife and Ethnological Museum of Macedonia-Thrace, where the exhibition, 'What would you take with you? Uprooting | Borders' was organized (http://www.lemmth.gr/-/esy-ti-tha-epairnes-mazi-sou-xerizomos-borders-2016).

new era of existence, which has led to new struggles over their role and mission (Mathur 2005: 697-700). The tendency towards the commercialization of museum collections and activities, as well as the growth of the cultural economy, have become visible in many vast cities 'that represent the emblematic initiatives of the global capitalist cultural economy' (Scott 1997: 324). According to Scott, the modern museum 'comes to the fore as one of the most dynamic scenarios of capitalism at the start of the 21st century' (Scott 1997: 323). Searching the 'cultural logic of the late capitalist museum', Krauss also recognizes that in museums there is a deep shift both in their identities and in the ever more corporate nature of their frameworks of operation (Krauss 1990: 3-17). It is evident that the ICOM's museum definition no longer reflects contemporary museums' challenges and manifold visions and responsibilities. According to the ICOM Statutes, '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'.[17]

New Responses: To Create for Ourselves a Place in which to Be Together

In the last decade, a new form of museum has been emerging from social groups that experience insecurity, vulnerability (Spyridakis 2018) social exclusion, inequality and marginalization in a variety of ways. It is connected with the creation of spaces in which, in the present, peoples' items and experiences are gathered, created and exhibited. Further, in these spaces, activities that cultivate a sense of belonging and community take place, particularly in multicultural but also in economically marginalized regions. Museums such as the Museum of Homelessness[18] in London, the Victoria Square Project[19] in Athens and the currently active Hansens Museum

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[17] Adopted by the 22nd General Assembly in Vienna, Austria, on 24 August, 2007. In 2016, a new Standing Committee was appointed to study the current definition. The Committee on Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials (MDPP 2017-2019) explores museums' shared but also profoundly dissimilar conditions, values and practices in diverse and rapidly changing societies.

[18] The Museum of Homelessness (MoH) Founded in 2015. This is a community driven social justice museum, created and run by people with direct experience of homelessness. As the curators emphasize: 'Together we collect and share the art, history and culture of homelessness and housing inequality to change society for the better. Together we find hope in deeply divided and difficult times.' (https://museumofhomelessness.org/).

[19] In the popular consciousness of Athenians, Victoria Square symbolizes the movement of refugees and immigrants. It is a meeting point for different populations. Victoria Square Project is a social and cultural space where various activities take place. It aims to create a sense of belonging and of community in a very multicultural yet economically degraded area. Referring to the importance and meaning of the Victoria Square Project, its main participants emphasize that 'on a larger scale, the Victoria Square Project is renegotiating what the concepts of "citizen" and "participation" mean. We want to break the isolation of privacy that exists in cities such as Athens and together with the local community to co-decide and create our neighbourhood identity.' Referring to the dynamics of future museums, Dr Nicole Ivy, director of the newly formed Department of Social Inclusion at the American Museum Association (AAM), believes that the inclusion of all people is essential to the sustainability of future museums and the development of meaningful local relationships. She also notes that a successful example is the

in Spinalonga, bring different experiences, imaginaries and memories into contact with each other, giving rise to new compositions and hybrid ties, and also new tendencies and shifts. The Victoria Square Project is an indicative example. In 2015-2016, when many immigrants and refugees made their way to Europe through Athens and Greece, the Victoria Square, located in the centre of Athens, has become a campground for refugees and immigrants. A year later the square, became a place of an open artistic activity that took place in the framework of *documenta 14*. The aim of the artists was to operate the Victoria Square Project as an open action, based on the creative participation of the people of the square and the neighbourhood and to bring together the local society. Many and more people of the area are now involved in all kinds of activities. The participation of immigrants and refugees was expressed immediately and in many ways. Various events, handicrafts, discussions, rough exhibitions of small objects, brought by immigrants and refugees from their homeland (a small wooden box, an old suitcase, a pair of damaged shoes, a traditional dress, pictures, disks with music, photographs), virtual and memorial journeys in the daily life of the past, took place in the small space of the project and the surrounding open space. Looking at the ways in which the immigrant and refugee communities involve, express and communicate their particular cultures and identity, we can find out that integrating into a modern society, goes through tolerance of diversity and otherness. 'We also have a culture, many things to say and show'*,* said a Moroccan woman to me. It's about the emblematic persons of diversity, who are both 'here' and 'elsewhere' at a threshold that leads to precariousness but also hope. So, through the 'museum spaces' — which in essence are not fixed or crystallized, but dynamic and interactive sites — vulnerable people invent and create hybrid and temporary identities and roles, suspended between past and present. Although they operate outside of and beyond institutional frameworks, these initiatives fully realize the true meaning and content of the terms participation, coexistence, diversity, accessibility and integration.

Conclusion

It is primarily urban societies across the world that are confronting social inequality, immigration, cultural diversity and discrimination. Modern cities are under constant pressure to showcase their unique comparative advantage over other cities, to achieve a certain quality life and to gain visibility and a high ranking in the preferences of organizations, businesses, tourists and citizens. Thus, culture and cultural heritage are viewed not only as providing the potential for a comparative advantage in the revitalization of cities, but also as channels for communication, coexistence, social inclusion and integration. In response, a wide range of cultural institutions and organizations, including museums, have emerged. As public institutions, museums have the potential to contribute to social cohesion, to substantially influence the ways in which individuals and societies perceive themselves and their relationships with others. It was after the 1970s that the social character of the museum and its social dimension expanded. However, from its inception as a public institution, the museum

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Victoria Square Project Museum. Interview in the http://www.huffingtonpost.gr. See also https://museumfinder.gr/ta-mousia-tou-mellontos/, December 2017.

has never constituted a neutral or passive cultural space that merely preserves and exhibits the cultural past. Museums have always been living social spaces in which culture was not only represented, reproduced and consumed, but in which creative encounters, conflicts, tensions and exclusions manifested themselves. These centred around museums' aims of controlling or asserting ownership over the past and more importantly, the present. Museums are in other words spaces in which relations of power but also of resistance and the edification of powerful cultural identities are expressed. They are spaces in which newly formed identities, interwoven with the crisis of heterogeneity, vulnerability and inequality, are reciprocated and demonstrated.

From the beginning of the 21st century, the tendency towards the commercialization of museum collections and activities, as well as the growth of the cultural economy, have at the very least become visible in many vast cities 'that represent the emblematic initiatives of the global capitalist cultural economy' (Krauss 1990, Mathur 2005). Alongside this, more and more people are experiencing extreme forms of insecurity, vulnerability and social exclusion, especially in times of crisis. The insecurity experienced by large swathes of a city's population reflects, of course, the neoliberal capitalist reforms that have reshaped the landscape and social fabric of the modern city. What is remarkable, however, is that a new form of museum is emerging, presided over not by a cultural institution or museologists, but by the aforementioned individuals and social groups living in modern cities in precarious conditions. The form of the museum — created by marginalised social groups — seems to be an emerging possibility of reaction and creative alternatives. For the time being, in the above museum spaces, peoples' items and experiences are gathered, created and exhibited. Further, many activities that cultivate a sense of belonging and community take place, particularly in multicultural but also in economically marginalized regions. Finally, the museums of the precarious and marginalized people appear to be capable of creating places and activities that cultivate participation and the sense of co-belonging to a community. As such, they stand in juxtaposition to relationships of power, inequality and exclusion.

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