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From mass tourism to no tourism: museums and tourism in Rome at the time of the pandemic

Introduction

In the past, cultural tourism was considered a niche activity. It soon became part of every trip, as many sites of cultural interest have been included in the tourist itineraries answering a growing demand. Mass tourism has often impacted the more famous historic sites. Though the way of reducing the risks of overtourism has been much discussed for many years, tourism policies have failed to overcome the addition to tourism revenues. The pandemic might represent an opportunity to critically analyse the touristic organisation for places of cultural interest. In the city of Rome, there are numerous museums, archaeological sites, churches and monuments; but too often the same tourist routes are promoted, creating a quite unbalanced tourism. Even before the pandemic, the possibility of diversifying the touristic offer on the territory of Rome and its province has been much discussed, through agreements with various tourist bodies, special deals between museum institutions as well as a process of promotion and museums

digitisation complementary to on-site activities. The pandemic has revealed the absence of digitisation of so many cultural institutions: only some museums constantly worked during the first months of the lockdown, using social media too as a means of dialogue with the public.

Cultural tourism definitions

Cultural heritage, whether tangible or intangible, is an important stimulus to tourists' demand¹. Cultural tourism started to be considered a new category in the late 1970s, when researchers realised that some people were travelling to experience more of the cultural heritage of their destination². Stebbins³ stated that "cultural tourism is a genre of special interest tourism based on the search for and participation in new cultural and deep experiences, whether aesthetic, intellectual, or psychological". There are as many classifications of cultural tourism as types of visitors, and as ICOMOS observed⁴, "cultural tourism means many things to many people and herein lies its strength and its weakness". People interested in touring a place might be interested in different aspects depending on the time available, how far they are from home and the whole purpose of a journey. Cultural tourism

¹ Mc Kercher, Bob; Hilary Du Cros: Cultural tourism – The partnership between tourism and cultural heritage management. New York: Haworth Hospitality Press 2002.

² Tighe, Anthony J.: The Arts/Tourism Partnership. In: Journal of Travel Research vol. 24, issue 3 (1986), pp. 2-5.

³ Stebbins, Robert A.: Cultural Tourism as Serious Leisure. In: Annals of Tourism Research 23/4 (1996), pp. 948-950. Here: quotation p. 948.

⁴ ICOMOS: The Declaration of San Antonio: Authenticity in the Conservation and Management of the Cultural Heritage. 1996. Online available at <https://www.icomos.org/en/resources/charters-and-texts/179-articles-en-francais/ressources/charters-and-standards/188-the-declaration-of-san-antonio>.

is part of tourism and as such embraces the different values of a country along with lifestyle, history, art, architecture or religion, in a context where people live and have formed their culture over time⁵.

Mass tourism and overtourism in Rome's cultural heritage sites

Academics and tourism professionals have reported the danger of an excess of tourism in different locations around the world. The mass tourism phenomenon affects specific sites and reveals the difficulty of managing numerous visitors. Overtourism arises from mass tourism in sites of various kind: urban contexts, museums, religious places etc. It consists in an excess of tourists present on one site at the same time. The issue of overtourism involves both physical and psychological limit and needs to be managed on the basis of an appropriate evaluation of each case.

Tourism in Rome has rapidly grown and visitors often chose to visit the cultural heritage of the city. The Pantheon, the Colosseum and the Vatican Museums were the three most visited sites in Rome⁶ in 2019. Although this is a profitable result, the presence of so many people in the same places leads to crowd management and conservation issues. Mass tourism became overtourism. Highly visited cultural institutions looked for the suitable measures to adopt: time slots allocation, a quota of visitors per day or even regulation of queues at the entrance on site.

⁵ Flutur, Lavinia Mădălina; Alexandru Mircea Nedelea: Cultural Tourism. In: *Revista de turism – studii și cercetări în turism* No 25 (2018).

⁶ *Statistiche culturali – Anno 2019. Istat 2019*, online available at <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/251882>.

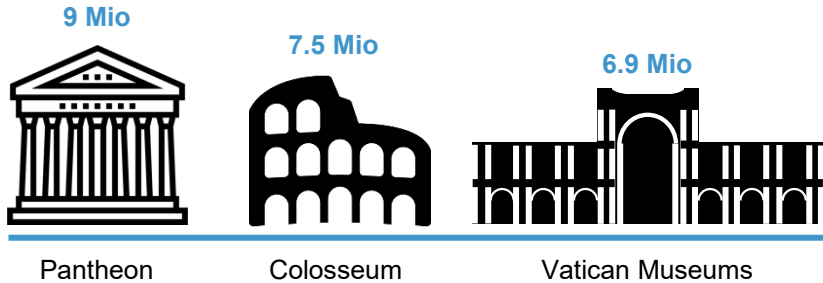


Fig. 1: The most visited sites of Rome in 2019 (number of visitors per year). Source: Istat⁷, chart⁸ Stéphanie Wintzerith.

In the case of the Pantheon, the Municipality of Rome discussed a symbolic entrance fee of 1.50 € – the site is a historical State monument managed by the Ministry of Italian Culture as well as a church. The Vatican Museums experienced difficult crowd management due to a very high demand for access. The Vatican is a State with a surface area of only 0.44 km² with a daily concentration⁹ of 68,490 visitors per km². In the last decade, visitors to the Vatican Museums increased¹⁰ by more than 20%, reaching 6.9 million visits in 2019 (Figure 1). Saint Peter Basilica in the Vatican also experiences a critical

⁷ Op. cit., see footnote 6.

⁸ Icons Pantheon and Colosseum: flaticon.com, Vatican Museums: Stéphanie Wintzerith

⁹ Peeters, Paul M.; Stefan Gössling; Jeroen Klijs; Claudio Milano; Marina Novelli; Corné Dijkman; Eke Eijgelaar; Stefan Hartman; Jasper Hessel Heslinga; Rami K. Isaac; Ondrej Mitás; Simone Moretti; Jeroen Nawijn; Bernadett Papp; Albert Postma: Research for TRAN Committee – Overtourism: impact and possible policy responses. European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies, Transport and Tourism (2028). <https://doi.org/10.2861/919195>.

¹⁰ Antoniutti, Arianna : Musei Vaticani troppo affollati, preoccupazioni per la sicurezza. Esposto del codacons. In: Il Giornale dell'Arte, 18.10.2017. Online available at <http://www.ilgiornaledellarte.com/articoli/2017/10/128338.html>.

situation¹¹ as praying pilgrims are disturbed by big crowds entering the church. Moreover, crowd issues increase during major catholic holidays¹².

The situation requires careful planning and a constant crowd monitoring. Fostering important cultural heritage sites is not only a tangible conservation problem, it also puts the cultural identity at risk while favouring a standardisation of cultural paths which do not give a realistic image of the visited place. As the Istat annual report 2019¹³ pointed out, there is a large gap between tourist flows in different sites: some museums and archaeological areas, while rich in history, are far less visited than the most famous sites.

The audience difference between the most famous sites and the rest of Rome's cultural heritage is high. Academic and government institutions highlighted interesting aspects such as the inconvenience in reaching a site – which is connected to a broader planning of the urban transport network that needs strengthening –, insufficient promotional campaign for museums, reduced reception skills. Moreover, museums are often self-referenced places where the management only dialogues with a more educated part of the general public. Most museums focus their communication campaigns on temporary exhibitions or short-time special events. It is also crucial for a museum to be outreaching, interactive and inclusive. Museums still find it difficult to survive with their low income due to small entrance fees and the lack of funding from the government. Furthermore, museums and cultural institutions in Italy are managed under various statuses: they can be State-owned, municipal, private or with religious collections. These dissimilar management structures certainly do not help, neither to build up a consistent promotion, nor

¹¹ Timothy, Dallen J.: *Cultural Heritage and Tourism: An Introduction. Aspects of Tourism Texts*. Bristol/Buffalo/Toronto: Channel View Publications 2011.

¹² Op. cit., see footnote 6.

¹³ Op. cit., see footnote 6.



Fig. 2: Queuing at the entrance of the Saint Peter Basilica. Photograph: Caterina Ruscio.

to develop a common strategy for museums. On top of this, numerous State museums are allocated in concession to external companies, which decide independently over the management and promotion of the site¹⁴.

Proposals for the promotion of cultural tourism in Rome

Covid-19 could be an opportunity to reduce addiction to tourism in many historical cities where tourist activities are vital. Post-crisis tourists might choose to travel to destinations closer to their place of residence as it is safer and cheaper. The need for cultural tourism to peripheral centres, spread throughout the year, is an even closer

¹⁴ The management issues of Italian museums would need an in-depth analysis which would be desirable for future research work.

possibility in this specific circumstance. Smaller and less known museums might develop a new strategy to respond to the needs of an increasingly varied “omnivorous” public, which is over-exposed to a lot of information¹⁵. Cultural heritage should no longer be only places to visit, but spaces and opportunities to be shared with the communities living there¹⁶. A new model of “visitor spreading” to many more destinations is increasingly important, given the situation created by the pandemic. The ideal tourist flow has to be better distributed and tourists have to be trained to become visitors¹⁷. The World Tourism Organisation outlined¹⁸ the importance to engage various stakeholders to re-create and co-create local tourism offers in safety. Re-opening museums, churches or historical buildings in general with the pandemic still circulating, requires new strategies and actions to distribute visitors in different areas with the promotion of new sites to make.

The Municipality of Rome has examined a strategic plan for the city where a new tourist offer is needed to guarantee greater quality in reception and services, through a constant dialogue and in collaboration with consortia of travel agencies or hotels. The promotion of the “old paths” to the public no longer works because it reduces the intensity of the visitor’s experience, creating more distance between the public and culture. In Rome, the promotion of cultural activities combined

¹⁵ Cerquetti, Mara: La componente culturale del prodotto turistico integrato: la creazione di valore per il territorio attraverso i musei locali. In: sinergie n. 73-74/07 (2007), p.421-438. Here p. 423-425. Online available at https://u-pad.unimc.it/bitstream/11393/37234/1/Cerquetti_Sinergie_73-74_2007.pdf.

¹⁶ Bonomi, Aldo; Roberto Masiero; Filiberto Zovico: Dalla Smart city alla smart land. Venice: Marsilio 2014.

¹⁷ Burgen, Stephen; Angela Giuffrida: Un’Alternativa al Turismo di Massa. In: the Guardian, 5 August 2020.

¹⁸ Cultural tourism & Covid-19. Website of the World Tourism Organisation UNWTO. <https://www.unwto.org/cultural-tourism-covid-19> (accessed September 2021).

with the public transport system, the so-called “city cards”, was a success. The city card system worked well, allowing the public to visit as many museums as possible. Existing relevant cards are the following:

The *MIC* card (Musei in Comune of Rome¹⁹) has been sponsored in 2018 by the Municipality of Rome: it is valid for one year for people who live, work or study in Rome and allows visiting the museums of the circuit of the Municipality of Rome at a reduced price of 5 €. In the first two months of 2018, some 10,000 cards were sold, reaching 60,000 cards by October 2019. Beginning of 2020, the *MIC* card was extended to those who live in the province of Rome.

The *Roma Pass* card is mainly used by tourists and allows entry to various museums and archaeological areas in Rome, including free public transport for the entire validity of the Card (48 hours at 32 € and 72 hours at 52 €). The *omnia card* also gives opportunity to tour the city attractions and particularly religious sites such as the Vatican Museums and the Basilica of Saint Peter along with other churches. Moreover, the 72-hours *omnia card* can be combined with the *Roma Pass*.

Sustainability of tourism is a long and complex process in Rome. The pandemic put aside any issue of overtourism, at least temporarily, and opened new perspectives for a more balanced and diversified tourism in the urban context. Responsible tourism promotion and diversification of cultural offers have become recurring objectives for a relaunch of cultural heritage in the post-pandemic era. In addition, numerous Tourist Info Points have been scattered throughout the city to inform visitors on more cultural heritage sites of Rome. The information on the spot became, in a context as wide as that of the city of Rome, valuable in this pandemic era with last minute cancellation threats. More recently, the Municipality of Rome reorganised the website dedicated to entertainment and culture in the capital. Furthermore, the Municipality has launched the *Rome Safe Tourism*

¹⁹ <https://museiincomuneroma.it>.

campaign²⁰, which provides for the certification of some places of hospitality and culture that follow the rules of distance and sanitation.

The round table “Promotion of Sustainable Tourism and Proximity Tourism” held on 16 June 2021, highlighted in a specific guideline the different points to be considered in order to relaunch a more balanced and less destructive tourism for the future. The first aspect addressed during the conference was the assessment of tourist carrying capacity²¹ – i.e. the maximum number of tourists acceptable without causing damages – of sites in connection with the distribution of visitors over various parts of the city and over different periods, trying to beat seasonal tourism. The second point dealt with the offer of guided tours in lesser-known areas of the city by promoting more museums itineraries at arrival places such as airports or railway stations. Diversification seems an adequate strategy to increase tourist arrivals through the offer of multiple activities and it improves the image of the destination by promoting new and distinctive expertise. The regulation of access to the main sites, in particular for large groups (for example by establishing the maximum size of a group or the maximum number of visitors who can visit a site at the same time) was an aspect discussed in depth during the meeting.

Another fundamental point is the importance of identifying the tourist targets that have less negative impact on the city, creating contact between external visitors and the local community. Tour operators often propose standardised events with the replication of identical mass activities to undifferentiated customers. The round

²⁰ <https://www.comune.roma.it/web/it/informazione-di-servizio.page?contentId=IDS620229> (accessed December 2021).

²¹ The “tourism carrying capacity” is defined by the World Tourism Organisation UNWTO as “the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, and sociocultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors’ satisfaction.” It is a key challenge for tourism developers and managers alike (UNWTO, 2006).

table emphasised the need to promote events or itineraries that allow the participation of both local communities and visitors.

Furthermore, a significant aspect is the possibility of extending the opening hours of the museums. Last but not least, the round table showed the importance of a constant monitoring of data of cultural sites: every sector related to tourism and cultural heritage should exploit new technologies to monitor and evaluate the performance of the city and the impact of tourism. The dialogue between all the actors in cultural tourism with the involvement of the main stakeholders, allow the tourist to be considered a visitor who benefits from as many cultural sites as possible²².

Promotion of cultural heritage through museums' digitisation

Culture offers economic and social benefits. Museums are places of culture symbolising history and cultural identity. The definition of museum²³ formulated by ICOM encompasses all the significant aspects of the role of museums for a society:

“A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.”

Learning, promoting culture within communities and interacting with the audiences are fundamental standards to keep in mind the

²² The material of the round table is not completed and is partially available on the portal of the Municipality of Rome: <https://culture.roma.it/>

²³ ICOM 2022. Statutes, online available at https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Statutes_2022_EN.pdf

way of perceiving a museum. An important aspect of promotion and support to the various cultural institutions is represented by the digitisation process. Digitisation has the potential to reach an ever-wider audience. It establishes a new dialogue with the public and it enhances participation. Many museums promote their collections through the web, achieving visibility along with an increasing public interest. Some of the elements characterising museum objects can easily be conveyed to the user through multimedia and in particular through the web. Media learning includes elements that work in favour of a total immersion in learning: sounds, videos or texts help the interactivity of the virtual visitor, who becomes as sort of a co-editor²⁴ of the museum.

Technologies contribute to sustain the relationship between cultural institutions and communities. But the digital space remains mostly unknown and the professional skills required for digital communication are still scarce. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated an already persistent virtual reality process, which has its own role of inclusiveness through the use of numerous tools: virtual tours, app installations, more interactive websites, online storytelling, daily social media bulletins etc. An effective communication with the virtual public is now a continuation of the activities in presence²⁵. The University of Milan Politecnico produced a report²⁶ on the online reputation of museums, archaeological parks, institutes and places of Italian culture on behalf of Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism. The disruption of the on-site museum activities has increased the

²⁴ Di Pietro, Irene: *La nuova frontiera dei musei: digitalizzazione, comunicazione culturale, coinvolgimento*, [Dissertation thesis], Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna. Dottorato di ricerca in Arti visive, performative, mediali, 29 Ciclo. 2017. DOI 10.6092/unibo/amsdottorato/8245.

²⁵ Terras, Melissa: *The Rise of Digitalization – An overview*. In: *Digital Libraries*. Ed. R. Rukowski. Sense Publishers 2010, pp. 3-20.

²⁶ Op. cit., see footnote 26.

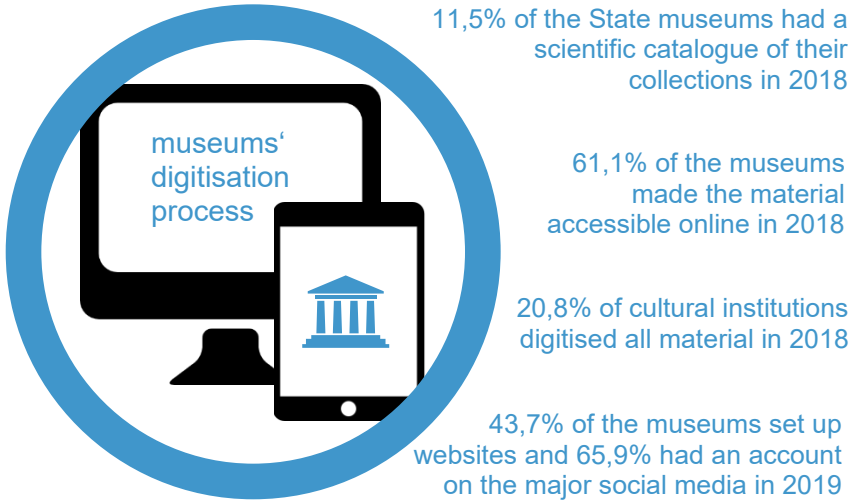


Fig. 3: Museum digitisation in Italy. Source: Politecnico di Milano²⁷, chart²⁸ Stéphanie Wintzerith.

presence of museums on social media channels: the number of publications doubled compared to the pre-Covid period.

Museum management in times of Covid-19: the social media experience

The first phase of the pandemic from March to May 2020 saw many initiatives to promote the museum collections through a constant dialogue with the public. The directors of various museums in Italy and in the world opened a “virtual window” on their collections with

²⁷ Politecnico di Milano. A report on behalf of the Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities (2020), online available at http://musei.beniculturali.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Report-Reputazione-Online-dei-Musei_Maggio-2020_sintesi.pdf.

²⁸ Icons: screen from icon-icons.com, smartphone from flaticon.com

special visits: the Colosseum as well as the Vatican Museums have recorded their own guided tours through YouTube channels, showing the museums exclusively behind closed doors.

The municipal museums of Rome “Musei di Roma” and two of the autonomous national museums, the National Roman Museum and the Etruscan Museum of Villa Giulia, organised many online events and never stopped working during the lockdown in 2020. They continued to monitor the interest of the public online and offline after re-opening in May 2020.

Musei di Roma publicised their activities and collections both via their websites and social media. These museums have in fact collaborated in the development of a common communication strategy to engage the public during the lockdown. They are all part of the web portal *museiincomunediroma.it*, which facilitated the audience participation in as many activities as possible inside the museum system. In total, Musei di Roma recorded 39,161 Instagram followers during the first three months of the lockdown. Its Twitter account has significantly increased the number of followers on a national scale, as reported by Istat data²⁹, mainly following the MuseumWeek2020 campaign held on 11-17 May 2020. 5,379,000 visitors attended the first free Sunday of the municipal museums of Rome³⁰, re-opened after the lockdown in 2020. Among the most visited sites of the municipal museums were the Capitoline Museums, the Imperial Forum and Trajan’s Market.

The importance of the web with social media and interaction with the visitor is a concept of major importance for the two autonomous Roman institutions: the National Roman Museum (MNR) and the Etruscan Museum of Villa Giulia. The MNR is an Italian State museum; it houses collections concerning the history and culture of the city in

²⁹ Op. cit., see footnote 26.

³⁰ Musei Capitolini 2020 <http://www.museicapitolini.org/it/notizie/oltre-5-mila-visitatori-la-prima-domenica-gratuita-dei-musei-civici>.

antiquity. Owned by the Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities since 2016, it is now one of the museum institutions with particular autonomy. The MNR manages four museums: Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, Terme di Diocleziano, Palazzo Altemps, Crypta Balbi. The MNR³¹ strengthened its relationship with the public during the 69 days of the lockdown. Its main objective was to present the museum as an open and active place during a difficult historical period. The public became an active user and took part in the renovation process. Dr. Agnese Pergola, head of the communication office of the MNR, argued that the constant and almost daily dialogue with the public through social media has helped the museum to increase the number of users: families, adults, students, professionals etc.

The museum has launched a campaign called “MNRconte” and “MNRconteKids” through their social media channels like Facebook. The campaign message at the beginning of the lockdown explained the intention to tell stories by showing the works of the MNR collections. Families and kids were the first audiences addressed. From 10 March to 18 May 2020, the museum recorded an increase of 11.5% in the interaction with the public via Facebook. Instagram showed a great potential and the feedback obtained in this social media generated a virtuous circle of attention and “likes” towards the museum. Users started to contact the museum directly as if people have crossed the screen barrier without feeling the cultural distance from the institution. The MNR has established a relationship of exchange and dialogue with users that persists even after the lockdown, precisely because such a rich museum institution has developed a personal narrative.

According to Agnese Pergola, the basis for creating specific content on a social page and for increasing the effectiveness of a content is to constantly monitor the level of satisfaction and the quality of the

³¹ Source of the data reported about the NRM: Interview of Dr. Agnese Pergola by the author, information kindly provided by the MNR Communication Office, and data report from the Politecnico di Milano (see footnote 26).

interaction by the user. The lockdown experience contributed to the creation of a new MNR website, completely renewed in graphics and contents. The new site was designed with a modern layout, conceived to give users a fast, simple and intuitive browsing experience. Inclusiveness is the new key word to define the post-lockdown renovation. Through the website, visitors can contextualise the collection by exploiting the interactivity and multimedia characteristics typical of social networks. Visitors integrate and deepen information collected and become participants in the process, protagonists of a fluid transmission of knowledge.

The Etruscan Museum of Villa Giulia in Rome offers an interesting case study of communication in a museum context, implementing an efficient strategy for relations and communication with the public via the web well before the pandemic. The Villa Giulia Museum is a State museum which, like the RMN, is also autonomous. It is located in a residential area of the city, outside of the usual tourist trails. The challenge of managing this site³² was to make the museum a multifunctional place. The director Dr. Valentino Nizzo has been working on the museum website and social media activities since 2018. He has highlighted the importance of communication with the public. The dialogue with various audiences has given greater importance to the museum as a place of culture where the outstanding Etruscan collection and the offers such as concerts, culinary events and guided tours coincide. The main target groups are academics, students, cultural organisations and families.

Paradoxically, the pandemic further strengthened communication with the public. Since the beginning of the lockdown, the museum updated its Facebook page daily with various activities that the

³² The data for the Museum of Villa Giulia was kindly provided by Dr. Anna Tanzarella, Communication Office of the museum. It was analysed by the author with the access credentials granted by the Etruscan Museum of Villa Giulia for this specific research.

public has appreciated and supported through their comments. The level of attention of visitors on social media in general seemed very high in the first weeks of March 2020. The posts were quite regular as they were published in the morning, late afternoon and more often on evenings, when people were more frequently online. Facebook followers went from 17,988 in March to 21,325 in June; Instagram had 9,456 followers on 10 March and 15,363 on 30 June.

Videos seem to be a tool that reached more people and was most engaging. During the lockdown, Valentino Nizzo often used the YouTube channel for live tours of the closed museum: the public could interact with the director who guided the users through the galleries and collections. On social networks such as Facebook, the interest of adult audiences has been reiterated. Young people and students followed especially Instagram and YouTube. Many academics and intellectuals had to admit the efficiency of YouTube, which is not only a frivolous digital tool, but can also be used as an effective communication instrument. The activities advertised on social media reached their peak in September and October, with an increase of followers by 14%. Interestingly, the public continued to follow the museum's activities when it re-opened and responded with great interest to the events on-site.



Fig. 4: Implementing outdoor cultural activities in the post-lockdown period (Courtesy of Sinopie association).

May 2020: the response of visitors to the activities of cultural organisations in Rome

Museums re-opened their doors after 69 days lockdown. Many religious places, museums or archaeological sites opened, giving as much information as possible on safety and distance rules. Especially the local public seized the opportunity to visit the cultural heritage of the city of Rome. During this delicate phase of attempts to return to normality, the numerous cultural organisations operating in the Roman territory played an important role. Cultural associations are private non-profit organisations, using their financial resources for cultural, didactic and educational purposes. They are a significant symbol of cultural model within the Roman context, since they act as intermediaries between the public and museum institutions. The promotion of sites through cultural associations is very common,

and these special non-profit bodies became very active in Rome. They generally promote a model of culture where their members – the Roman public – feel part of an exclusive group where they find cultural skills and proper organisation of activities for groups of adults, families and children.

The Sinopie Cultural Organisation, founded by Dr. Marina Gatti and Dr. Mileto Benvenuti, has been promoting the city of Rome as a living museum with programmes of guided tours and on-site lectures with specialised staff. Since 2008, Sinopie developed activities to raise knowledge and enhance the Italian artistic heritage for all kinds of users: cultural heritage experts, local communities, tour operators and schools. Sinopie is a perfect example of the efforts many of these organisations undertake to make everyone aware of history and to “inculturate” the communities. Marina Gatti, also CEO of the association, has maintained the communication with the public while opening a YouTube channel during the lockdown. It recorded 479 users and 2,415 views.

Sinopie analysed the management of its activities after the 2020 lockdown³³. The most relevant aspects identified as the key factors for the promotion of cultural heritage in the post-lockdown experience are the following:

- the importance of promoting niche sites along with the major tourist cultural heritage sites (such as the Colosseum and the Vatican Museums);
- people living in Rome tend not to visit tourist sites, as professionals working with cultural heritage and tourism outlined;
- increased activities and visits with small groups;
- greater social interaction/follow up of the on-site activities (pictures, video or posts and likes that make the visitors’ experience more realistic),

³³ Sinopie information is kindly provided by Sinopie, with the help of Dr. Silvio Faraone, Sinopie Culture designer.



Fig. 5: Guided tours for members of the Sinopie association are organised according to the health and safety emergency regulations (Courtesy of Sinopie association).

- the value of all cultural heritage as a means of inclusion and cultural identity.

Being member of a cultural organisation offers opportunities for learning through the guidance of experts. The importance of associations in the Roman context has grown over time as a model for simplifying access to culture. The pandemic triggered a further step towards the awareness of the advantages of culture to be educated in beauty and knowledge.

Conclusions

This article outlines issues related to cultural heritage and museums promotion in Rome. Cultural tourism is indeed an activity that has rapidly developed towards many destinations around the world. The number of visitors to the city of Rome has grown exponentially over

the years. Experts pointed out the danger of a mass tourism moving on standardised paths: some of the museums in Rome have recorded so many visitors that it became difficult to manage. Numerous conferences, proposals and projects looked for solutions to solve the problem of overtourism in the most famous heritage sites. One element that could and should be improved, is a model of visitors spreading to various sites. The pandemic accentuated many problems related to the management of heritage sites in Rome, where the numerous museums face very different situations, some with too many, others with too few visitors. Tourism and museum professionals continue to talk about promotion and a diversification process that would help rebalance the museums' audiences.

An interesting starting point comes from the definition of a museum as a place of culture, dialogue and therefore inclusiveness; a place where everyone can develop a common identity. The pandemic has highlighted the role played by the digitisation of the cultural sector: it is one of the solutions for opening up a dialogue with the public. The virtual world that the public saw in the months of the lockdown in 2020 must be a complementary tool to the experience of museums on-site. Not all museums have been able to develop a virtual dialectic due to the absence of digital skills, but some of them did, and did it well. Two examples were presented in this article, showing the benefits of virtual promotion in a professional and systematic way.

The potential for the post-lockdown strategies looked promising and many museums saw a growing public interest. Nevertheless, the path is long and complex due to numerous issues in museums' management in Rome.

As for the promotion of cultural heritage in the Roman context, the role of cultural organisations is significant – and there are many of them in Rome. Their activities are mostly addressing the local community, which in the very first phase of the re-opening after the lockdown, actively took part to the events. One of those cultural organisations received many positive responses in recent years and

provided interesting thoughts for the future of cultural heritage in general: continue to dialogue with the public and promote the city of Rome as much as possible as a living museum with more options.

At the moment we do not know how the pandemic situation will evolve; but it is certainly important to re-open museums, archaeological sites and all cultural institutions and make them available as places of education and memory.