

Changes and challenges in the museum profession in Italy

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The Italian museum landscape is currently undergoing significant transformations, at the national as well as local level.

The reorganization of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, which was initiated at the end of 2014, granted 20 national museums (which later became 30) -- i.e. the Uffizi in Florence, Brera in Milan, etc. -- a high degree of autonomy with regard to the organizational and financial aspects, established 17 regional museum hubs and envisaged the creation of a National Museum System to facilitate dialogue and collaboration between the different public and private institutions and create an integrated offer to the public.

The direction of the 30 national museums with greater autonomy was entrusted to new managers sought among the leading experts in the field of museum management at international level and recruited through an international call carried out in the early months of 2015. This was a dramatic move away from traditional procedures which, for national museums, museum leadership to state officers and civil servants.

At the same time, the Ministry issued a new set of standards, which might be used in the future as quality criteria for all museums, public and private, national and local, to enter the National Museum System.

Professional profiles in the museum field in Italy should therefore be considered against the backdrop of this significant institutional and organizational change.

In addition, the economic and social situation which affected cultural institutions in recent years should also be considered, both at national and local level: “new” and more fragmented requests coming from the public; the digital challenges involving the entire museum “production chain”, from administration to education; the increasing difficulty to recruit high-quality staff (due to the economic crisis as well to the increasing “stiffening” in the recruiting system rules, particularly in the public sector) leading to arduous replacement of retired museum professionals.

With regard to museum professional profile, the reference theoretical framework at present dates back to 2007-2008 (with regard to the professions employed by the Ministry also earlier) , when the ICOM Chart of Museum Professions was launched (in Italian, English, French and German), also thanks to the contribution of the Institute of Cultural Heritage of the Region Emilia Romagna which, during the same period, collaborated with ICOM and developed additional professional profiles for the valorization of cultural heritage in general and more specifically for front of house and educational staff.

The picture emerging from this context, although roughly sketched, is one where museum professionals in Italy will be increasingly required to have the flexibility to adapt to a new working

environment, to be able to liaise with a variety of players from the same or different sectors, to network nationally and internationally, but in the first place locally.

The new standards themselves reflect an idea of the museum as an institution with a robust territorial vocation and strong ties with stakeholders.

The areas where training and professional development initiatives seem to be more crucial are:

- Use of ICT and new technologies (both for interpretation and display, digital storytelling, use of social media, etc.)
- Improving the accessibility of the museum (in general and with regard to different kinds of disability)
- Mediation with regard to different publics and in particular in the intercultural field
- Administration and financial management (in particular with regard to complex tendering or procurement procedures)