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Introduction

Museums are often described as informal means of learning, with the potential to offer different kinds of knowledge, from art to history, from science to technology (Bartels & Hein, 2003; Nardi, 2004).

The literature concerning museum visitor studies has shown that there may not be much of an attraction in these temples of culture for adolescents and young adults. In the USA in 2008, a large-scale survey on public participation to different cultural events reported that only the 12.9% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 years visited at least one museum during the previous year (Williams & Keen, 2009). In Germany, about the 23% of young people between 15 and 25 years reported visiting at least one museum of art, science, or history during the previous 12 months of the survey (Kirchberg, 1996). These findings have been confirmed by other data around the world: in France, people between 15 and 24 years corresponded to about 15% of visitors (Lemerise, 1999); in Australia and New Zealand, art museum visitors between 20 and 29 years were the 26% of the population (Mason & McCarthy, 2006). These results suggest that in different parts of the world, museums do not attract very many young people.

There are a number of reasons that may explain this lack of interest. Young adults often see museums as a place for old people, more focused on the past, while their interests and needs are more oriented to the present and the future (Shrapnel, 2012). What often leads this group to attend a museum is not real interest, but a mere curiosity or 'duty' that forces them to take part in an experience. Without being accompanied by a genuine desire, attendance is related to attitudes of indifference (Bartlett & Kelly, 2000). Many young people would make the equation museum = school; both are places to acquire knowledge regarding a great number of subjects (art, science, history, anthropology, etc.). Regarding the learning

process, it might be difficult for them to distinguish museum from school; the risk is that museums are seen as an addition to their learning workload and therefore look very unattractive and boring.

Bearing in mind all of these explanations, it is important to verify the interest manifested by young adults towards museums. For these reason an international research project has been funded and based at the University of Roma Tre (coordinated by Stefano Mastandrea). The first aim was to create an international network of researchers interested in discussing and working around the topic of museum fruition by young adults. The group was constituted by scholars of nine different Countries: Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, New Zealand, Portugal, Taiwan, and the USA. Once the researchers group was established, the purpose was to create a survey on a large scale to investigate attitudes, motivations, personality traits, emotions and learning processes regarding the museum visits experience. After a deep discussion among researchers a questionnaire articulated in two parts was created; the first regarding socio-demographic variables: art education training, parents school diploma and profession; the second part covering the experience of museum visit with particular reference to motivation, personality traits, attitudes, emotional experience and learning processes.

The questionnaire was translated in the language of each participating Countries (Chinese, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, and Portuguese). Participants of the research was made up by a sample of undergraduate university students of different non art or architecture Faculties in order to avoid participants with a high level training in art. Participants were recruited from the Faculties of psychology, sociology and education. The questionnaire was administered in two modalities: paper and pencil (delivering the questionnaire to several groups of participants) and on line through the LimeSurvey system.

An international congress was organized in October 2013 in Rome by the Department of Education and the Laboratory of Experimental Psychology of the University of Roma Tre. All the international partners of the project participated presenting the findings of each single research unit. The first part of the congress was held at the Department of Education and the second part at the National Gallery of Modern Art of Rome. The data and findings presented at the congress constitute the chapters of this proceedings book.

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