

Bridging European Communities

Investigating Networks and Collaboration Models for Museums, Libraries and Public Cultural Institutions

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→ ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of the original research under development within the EU-funded FP7 SSH MeLA project, Research Field 03 (RF03) “Network of Museums, Libraries and Public Cultural Institutions.” In this Research Field we are investigating innovative coordination strategies between public European museums, libraries and public cultural institutions, for the benefit of multicultural audiences and towards European integration. Museums and libraries, in particular, developed as historically separate institutional contexts and distinct cultures, yet their commonalities are increasingly important to their sustainability in a globalised world. However, a theoretical framework to scope and address such collaborative model still needs to be developed in the specific context of a transnational and multicultural European society. The Research Field 03 team is framing its research along four thematic areas: Narratives for Europe, European Cultural and Scientific Heritage, Migration and Mobility, and Collaboration Models. The goal of our investigation is to lay the foundations for a theoretical framework supporting coordination and networking between museums, libraries and public cultural institutions at European level.

Global migration is here to stay

Knut Kjeldstadli

The term “cultural institution” can be characterized by a number of specific features: the presence of a collection, offered to users within the frame of a systematic, continuous, organised knowledge structure, and encompassed by scholarship, information and thought (Carr 2003). Cultural institutions typically address public knowledge and memory, a culture of inquiry and learning, and interdisciplinary dynamic connections. They also deal with the need to create a coherent narrative, a storytelling of who we are and what are our cultural, historical, social contexts. In modern Western society, cultural institutions include but are not limited to museums, libraries, archives (sometimes jointly defined as LAMs—Libraries Archives and Museums; see Zorich, Gunther, and Erway 2008), galleries, and various heritage and cultural organisations. Their history is often intertwined, although their interrelations have not always led to a consolidated path of collaboration. For example, traditionally museums and libraries developed as historically separate institutional contexts and distinct cultures. Jennifer Trant noted how philosophies and policies of museums and libraries reflect their different approach to interpreting, collecting, preserving and providing access to objects in their care (Trant 2009). Liz Bishoff remarked that “libraries believe in resource sharing, are committed to freely available information, value the preservation of collections, and focus on access to information. Museums believe in preservation of collections, often create their identity based on these collections, are committed to community education, and frequently operate in a strongly competitive environment” (Bishoff 2004, 35). In the last century policy-makers have attempted to group and bridge these communities of practices through “their similar role as part of the informal educational structures supported by the public, and their common governance” (Trant 2009, 369). Such commonalities are increasingly important to museums, libraries and related public cultural institutions sustainability in a globalized world. However a theoretical framework to scope and address such collaborative model has yet not been developed, in particular in the specific context of European multicultural society.

The goal of MeLa Research Field 03 (RF03) “Network of Museums, Libraries and Public Cultural Institutions,”¹ is to fill this gap by investigating, identifying and proposing innovative coordination strategies between these institutions, for the benefit of multicultural audiences across Europe. The idea of laying the theoretical foundations for a European network of museums, libraries and public cultural institutions addressing globalization, migration and new media is particularly fitting the structure of migrant communities, which “in the receiving countries can best be described from a structural perspective as a network of organizations” (Faist 1998, 215).

1 MeLa Research Field 03, <http://RF3.MeLa-project.eu/>. Accessed March 27, 2012.

→ **COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES: POTENTIALITIES
AND CHALLENGES**

In the first phase of our research, we focus in particular on collaborations between museums and libraries as a promising area to identify patterns and trends. Some studies on museums, and libraries collaborations,² have highlighted the benefits of joining forces and resources in a variety of areas, including but not limited to:

- library activities and programmes related to museum exhibits;
- travelling museum exhibitions hosted in libraries;
- links established between web-based resources in library and museum websites;
- library programs including passes to museums;
- collaborative digitization and digital library projects enhancing access to resources in both museums and libraries;
- collaborative initiatives to bring in authors as speakers;
- museum and library partnerships with cultural and educational organizations for public programmes.

The overall opportunities of improving collections, increasing the number of users, leveraging experiences and funding also comes across as some of the main benefits of such partnerships. These studies have also often included archives as a virtuous third player in museums and archives collaborations. The aims and objectives of collaboration projects between museums and libraries, investigated in previous studies, include: educational focus (e.g. learning about past civilizations, encourage families learning together, etc.), cross-over visits between institutions, promoting resources to various target groups, improving coordination among institutions, demonstrating joint working or training activities, providing models for working practices.

The International Federation of Libraries Association (IFLA) remarked that museums and libraries are often natural partners for collaboration and cooperation (Yarrow, Clubb, and Draper 2008). In this context, a study in the United States observed that “collaboration may enable [...] museums and libraries to strengthen their public standing, improve their services and programs, and better meet the needs of a larger and more diverse cross-sections of learners” (Institute of Museum and Library Services 2004, 9). The nature of this collaboration can be multifaceted and varied, and the terminology itself is interpreted with diverse meanings, in particular regarding the degree of intensity of the collaboration and its transformational capacity. Hannah Gibson, Anne Morris and Marigold Cleeve noted that “Library-museum collaboration” can be defined as the cooperation between a library and a museum, possibly involving other partners” (Gibson, Morris, and Cleeve 2007, 53).

² See for example: Gibson, Morris, and Cleeve, 2007; Zorich, Gunter, and Erway, 2008; Yarrow, Clubb, and Draper, 2008. The RF03 team is preparing a selected bibliography for the purpose of the Research Field activities.

The authors use the term “collaboration” with the meaning indicated by Betsy Diamant-Cohen and Dina Sherman, as a “combining resources to create better programs while reducing expenses” (Diamant-Cohen and Sherman 2003, 105).

Museums and libraries seem well positioned to synergically support and enable the multicultural identity of a migration society.³ As a result, museums are ideally placed to interpret and preserve culturally diverse heritage.⁴ As centres for culture, information hubs, learning and gathering, libraries are natural service providers for culturally diverse communities, enabling intercultural dialogue and education while supporting and promoting diversity (IFLA 2006). Nevertheless, the fruitful convergence between museums and libraries faces a number of challenges. Some authors have highlighted the risks and obstacles on the road to accomplishing a successful collaboration between museums and libraries with respect to their different mission, culture, organizational and funding structure.

In their case study research on libraries and museums collaboration in England and the USA, Gibson, Morris and Cleeve (2007) found differences in procedures and common working criteria: management, staffing and organizational difficulties in England, and limited space, planning, communication, managing, budget and coordination issues in the USA (Gibson, Morris, and Cleeve 2007). They have also highlighted the risk of the lack of resources, and of a domineering partner in the collaboration. Christopher Walker and Carlos Manjarrez recognized four types of risks in public libraries and museums: capacity risk, where partners are unable to perform agreed upon tasks; strategy risk of the collaboration not ending as planned; commitment risk, where partners might be misaligned in their pledge to the collaboration; and compatibility risk, where assets and liabilities of the partners are mismatched (Walker and Manjarrez 2008). The authors also identified three further sources of risks, present in each collaborative project with variable degrees of impact and probabilities: innovation, complexity, and institutional interdependence.

3 The definition of culture I am looking at can be found in the “UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity”: “culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs (See: UNESCO. 2002. “UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.” Accessed March 27, 2012. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127160m.pdf>). In this paper the terms “multicultural,” “multiculturalism” and “cultural diversity” are considered synonymous.

4 See for example Barker, Emma, ed. 1999. *Contemporary Cultures of Display*. London: Yale University Press; Bennett, Tony. 2009. *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. London & New York: Routledge; Gonzalez, Jennifer A. 2008. *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; Graham, Beryl, and Sarah Cook. 2010. *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; Karp, Ivan, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szewaja, and Tómas Ybarra-Frausto, eds. 2006. *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*. Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press; Knell, Simon J., Suzanne Macleod, and Sheila E. Watson, eds. 2007. *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and Are Changed*. London & New York: Routledge.

In terms of change management, Diane Zorich, Gunter Waibel and Ricky Erway suggested that it is important to differentiate between coordination and cooperation, and pointed out the organizational changes required for a deep collaboration between libraries, museums and archives (Zorich, Waibel, and Erway 2008). In this regard, Kenneth Sohener stressed that “true collaboration is different from coordination. It devises a new vision for a new way of doing things. It inevitably and fundamentally involves change. Collaboration is transformational and the elements, institutions and individuals involved in collaboration must change. That’s why it occurs so infrequently” (Sohener 2005). Within a “collaboration continuum,” Zorich, Waibel and Erway remarked that “the collaborative endeavour becomes more complex, the investment of effort becomes more significant, and the risks increase accordingly. However, the rewards also become greater, moving from singular, ‘on-off’ projects to programs that can transform the services and functions of an organization” (Zorich, Waibel and Erway 2008, 10).

In particular, for collaboration on digital libraries, Bishoff and Innocenti et al. remarked that interoperability is critical to the digital library community (Bishoff 2004; Innocenti et al. 2011). Innocenti et al. further stressed the diverse organizational, semantic and technical interoperability levels that need to be addressed in a digital library, upon the classification of the European Interoperability Framework for eGovernment services (IDABC 2004). Achieving effective organizational interoperability between digital libraries can imply a radical change in the way that organizations work, manage and share their digital assets.

→ RESEARCH FIELD 03 OVERVIEW

The overarching goal of MeLa is to research the new role of museums and define new strategies for contemporary museums in a context characterized by a continuous migration of people and ideas. Within the project, Research Field 03 (RF03) “Network of Museums, Libraries and Public Cultural Institutions” investigates, identifies and proposes innovative strategies for the coordination of transnational European museums, libraries and public cultural institutions, for the benefit of multicultural audiences and towards European integration and European cultural commons. Our research aims to provide evidence of transnational systems and cases that have positively impacted on: visibility of institutions involved, improvement of the diffusion and accessibility of the collections, effectiveness of an integrated organization structure at EU dimension and coherence with European policies towards a common EU heritage definition. RF03 is essentially bridging the gap between communities—in particular museums and libraries—that, as described above, have a young and still challenging history of collaborating with each other.

RF03 is led by History of Art at the University of Glasgow (GU) and the Research Field team includes staff members from Politecnico di

Milano, Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale,” University of Newcastle, The Royal College of Art, Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design, Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle/Musée de l’Homme.

The University of Glasgow⁵ is a world-leading research institution, member of the Russell Group and the fourth oldest UK university. History of Art⁶ has been rated top in the UK (RAE 2008) with internationally recognized research. It includes a cluster of Art, Science and Technology for research and teaching, and fosters collaborations with foremost international institutions. The GU team, composed of Perla Innocenti, John Richards and Sabine Wieber,⁷ is bringing to MeLa:

- *expertise* in art, architecture, design and museum history; case study research; 2D and 3D cultural heritage; digital preservation; digital libraries design and services; exhibition practices and display strategies; gender politics and identity; library and information science; nationalism; risk assessment for digital repositories; usage models and requirement analysis for ICT;
- *experience* in academic research and teaching; cultural heritage and library management and communication; direct contribution to/lead of EU-funded FP6 and FP7 projects (DPE,⁸ Planets,⁹ CASPAR,¹⁰ DELOS,¹¹ SHAMAN,¹² DL.org,¹³ ECLAP,¹⁴ and more at the college level);
- *networks*: direct collaboration with more than 150 European and international libraries, archives, museums, universities, research institutes, professional associations, public/international organizations, and private companies.

The final goal of RF03 is to produce an innovative coordination framework and best practices document towards a European network of museums, libraries and public cultural institutions. To achieve this, the RF03 team will conduct a desk and field investigation including an online

5 www.gla.ac.uk.

6 www.gla.ac.uk/subjects/historyofart/.

7 See GU staff profiles: Perla Innocenti (www.gla.ac.uk/schools/cca/staff/perlainnocenti/), John Richards (www.gla.ac.uk/schools/cca/staff/johnrichards) and Sabine Wieber (www.gla.ac.uk/schools/cca/staff/sabinewieber/).

8 Digital Preservation Europe (DPE) project (www.digitalpreservationeurope.eu/).

9 Preservation and Long-term Access through Networked Services (Planets) (www.planets-project.eu/).

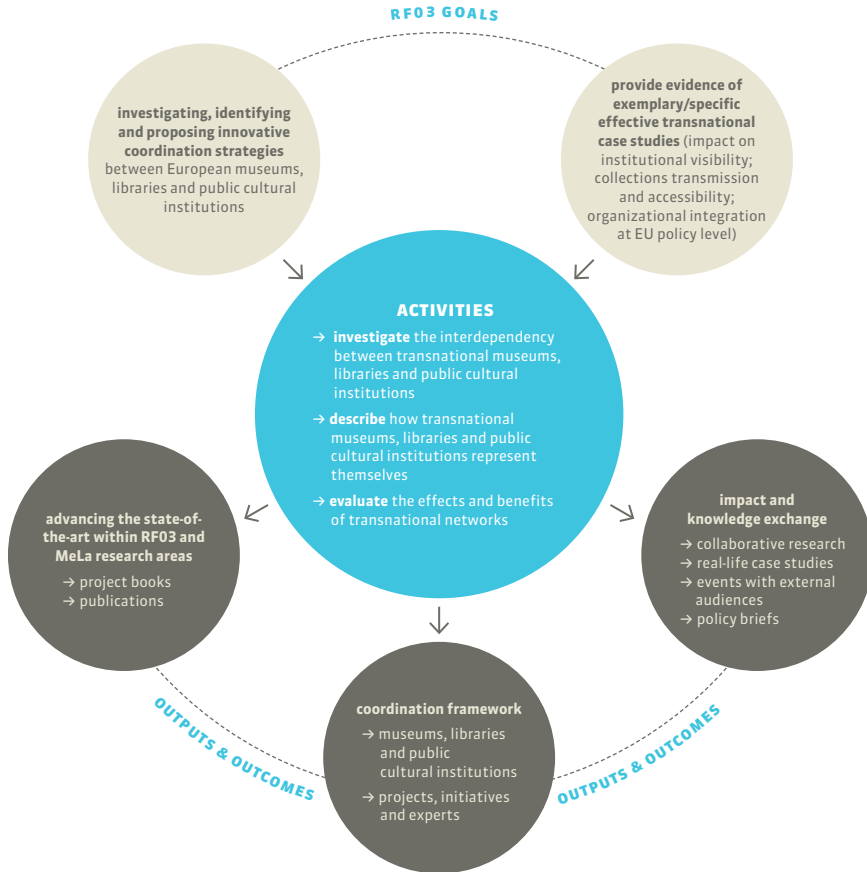
10 Cultural, Artistic and Scientific knowledge for Preservation, Access and Retrieval (CASPAR) project (www.casparpreserves.eu/caspar-project.html).

11 Network of Excellence on Digital Libraries (DELOS) (www.delos.info/).

12 Sustaining Heritage Access through Multivalent Archiving (SHAMAN) (<http://shaman-ip.eu/>).

13 Digital Library Interoperability, Best Practices and Modelling Foundations (DL.org) (<http://www.dlorg.eu/>).

14 European Collected Library of Artistic Performances (ECLAP) (www.eclap.eu/drupal/).



survey,¹⁵ brainstorming with external experts,¹⁶ in-depth analysis and evaluation of data collected through the investigation [Img. 01]. The research programme is articulated through a series of enquiries that intend to:

- investigate the interdependency of developing transnational museums, library and public cultural institutions collaborations and the society of migration;
- identify and describe how transnational museums, libraries and public cultural institutions collaborating together present themselves to various public communities;
- understand and evaluate the effects (benefits and disadvantages) of transnational museums, libraries and public cultural institutions collaborations on the audiences, in terms of recognition of delocalized cultures.

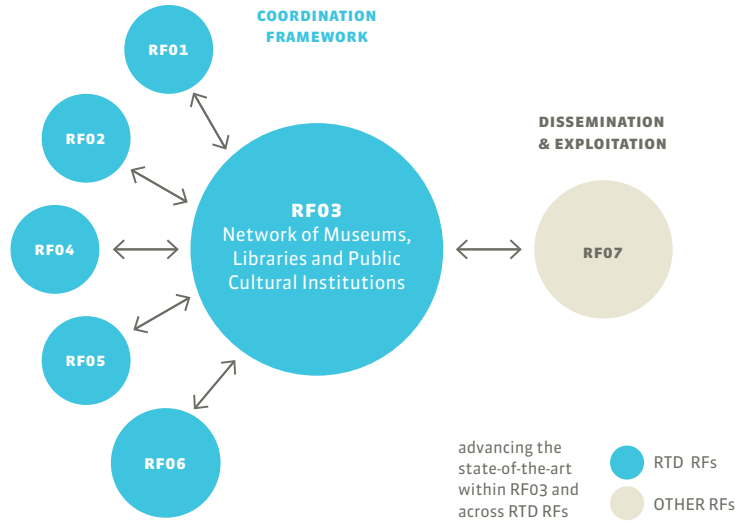
Through its desk and field investigation, RF03 aims to provide evidence of effective case studies of collaboration among operative museums, li-

IMG. 01 — Diagram of MeLa Research Field 03 goals, activities, outputs and outcomes.

15 <http://RF3.MeLa-project.eu/RF/pages/research-field-03-online-survey>.

16 <http://RF3.MeLa-project.eu/RF/pages/research-field-03-brainstorming>.

IMG. 02 — Diagram of interrelatedness of MeLa RF03 with other RFs.



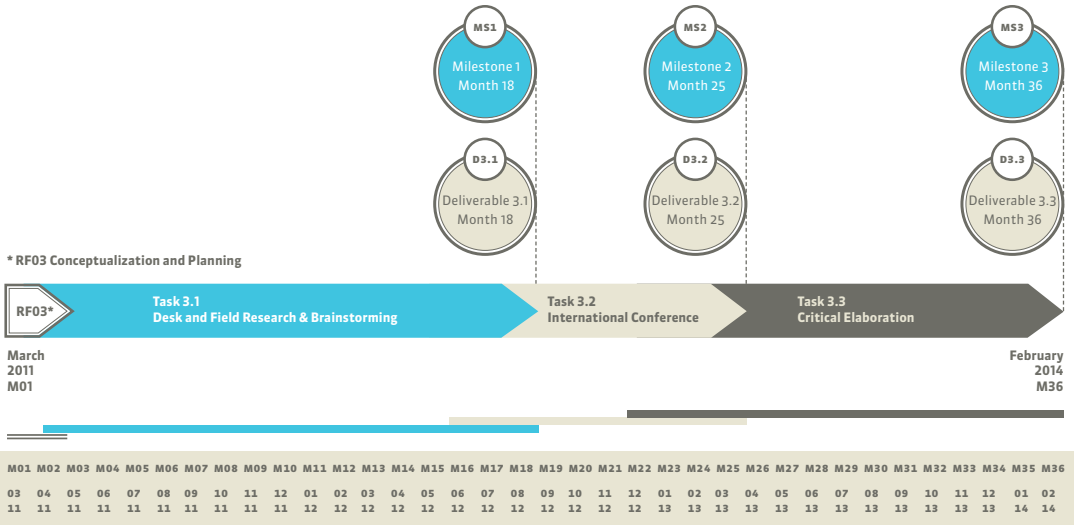
libraries and public cultural institutions. Targeted case studies will be selected where possible identifying their positive impact on:

- visibility of the single institutions involved;
- improvement of the diffusion and accessibility of the collections for the audience;
- effectiveness of an integrated organization structure at the EU dimension;
- coherence with EU policies towards a common EU heritage definition.

The RF03 team is selecting targeted organizations from a pool of identified institutions, which will be part of the RF03 case studies. Overall RF03 will contribute to achieving MeLa main objectives by:

- conducting case studies of collaboration models and experiences of among operative transnational museums, libraries and public cultural institutions;
- setting up a platform for discussion in the form of a multidisciplinary expert group, in which selected leading internal and external experts will be engaged on RF03 research activities;
- organizing an international conference on RF03 research activities and intermediate results.

These goals will be met also by liaising with other MeLa research fields, with which RF03 is interconnected [Img. 02]. RF03 is connected on one side to the other MeLa Research and Technological Development (RTD) Research Fields for what concerns the areas of “Museums & Identity in History and Contemporaneity” (RF01), “Cultural Memory, Migration Modernity and Museum Practices” (RF02), “Curatorial and Artistic Research” (RF04), “Envisioning 21st Century Museums”



(RF06). RF03 also has a close connection with RF05 “Exhibition Design, Technology of Representation and Experimental Actions” and with RF07 “Envisioning Dissemination and Exploitation.”

IMG. 03 — Diagram of MeLa RF03 timeline, deliverables and milestones.

→ RESEARCH FIELD 03 ORGANIZATION AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES

This Research Field is organized in three distinct tasks within the timeline planned for RF03 in the MeLa Description of Work [Img. 03]: “Desk and Field Investigation & Brainstorming,” “International Conference” and “Critical Elaboration.” “Desk and Field Investigation & Brainstorming” focuses on extending the knowledge of transnational museums, libraries and public cultural institutions and their effective collaboration, and developing a more precise understanding of effective case studies in this area. This task will investigate the state of the art and potential advancements in the research on collaboration models for transnational museums, libraries and public cultural institutions, conducting desk and field research activities. The “Brainstorming” will build upon the work carried out in the desk and field investigation, in order to exchange of ideas at theoretical and operational level with a panel of experts (scholars, directors and other museums, libraries and public cultural institutions representatives but also practitioners). The “International Conference” task will include organizing an international conference with call for papers¹⁷ on the research areas of RF03. Finally the critical elaboration task will provide critical explanation of data collected from previous actions (desk and field research; brainstorming; conference), leading to knowledge advancement in this area of research. The results of RF03 research will be disseminated, along with other re-

17 <http://wp3.mela-project.eu/wp/pages/research-field-03-international-conference>.

search, through three project books and various publication in selected conferences, journals and further channels.

→ RESEARCH FIELD 03 INITIAL RESEARCH COORDINATES

Within the MeLa RF03, we will be investigating exemplary experiences of collaborations between museums, libraries and public cultural institutions, followed by the analysis of strategies and models towards a network framework at European level. In this initial stage of the project, we are in the process of establishing critical nodes and points of research, and a consequent timeline articulated through a detailed RF03 work-plan that has been prepared by the University of Glasgow. The theoretical foundation knowledge of the RF03 will be brought into a concrete context via selected case studies, to observe how this knowledge within collaborations can become operative in practical terms: for example who, what, how should be represented in particular museums and libraries, how to exhibit, how to catalogue, how to document and preserve. We will develop collaborative scenarios with existing museums, libraries and public cultural institutions, whereby critical interdisciplinary and intercultural perspectives are elaborated in existing contexts in order to see how MeLa is actually addressing its research questions, and how such situations can critically feedback into the ongoing research and its subsequent proposals. Our research will be articulated in four clusters: Narratives for Europe, European Cultural and Scientific Heritage, Migration and Mobility, Collaboration models. Sub-clusters include case studies on museums, libraries and public cultural institutions collaborating for European integration; national and transnational collaboration models: partnerships, cooperation, coordination; Identity, memory and heritage in European museums, libraries and public cultural institutions; the making of European cultural and scientific heritage: actors and processes; European cultural policies, migration and mobility; studies on European narratives and cultural commons; operative approaches to multiculturalism, interculturalism, transculturalism in public cultural institutions; visitor experiences in collaborative projects involving European museums, libraries and public cultural institutions.

We will be investigating both transnational and translocal connections of museums, libraries and public cultural institutions collaboration to address contemporary challenges of globalization, European integration, and new media. This will enrich the current research directions indicated in the MeLa Description of Work, and allow more flexible and heterogenic connections to be considered, both within Europe—where for example public libraries are at the forefront of leading initiatives addressing multicultural diversity—and outside its assumed confines (for example the Mediterranean), also in terms of European Union legitimacy and identity.¹⁸ To examine how to frame and improve collaborations,

18 See for example Fuchs, Dieter and Andrea Schlenker. 2006. "European Identity and the Legitimacy of the EU. EU FP6 Consent Network of Excellence." Accessed March 27,

we will start by looking closely at the similarities between museums and libraries. The core activities of archiving, cataloguing and framing memory (and the associated categories of hierarchies of cultural value and historical identity) provide a common unifying nexus between museum practices and those of the library. However, as described in the opening paragraph, these are distinct entities with their own histories, coming from different communities of practice and with different procedures and perspectives that can clash in the context of collaboration and partnerships.

At the beginning of this project I remarked the differences and current tension points between museums and libraries: from collection management, funding documentation and cataloguing standards, to the type of artefacts that they hold (typically unique for museums—although perhaps less so for digital/new media artworks¹⁹—and typically serial and as much as possible managed with automated processes and OPACs for libraries), their audiences and the dissemination and public availability of their catalogues and holdings. It is also interesting to notice the progressive hybridization of media and digital artefacts both within museums and libraries. Iain Chambers, leader of RF02 and member of the RF03 team and authors of relevant publications in this area, suggested two critical lines of thinking for museums within RF03 theoretical analysis and understanding (Chambers 1994, 2007; Chambers and Curti 1996): on one hand the “government mentality” of the power of the museum and museum display (Bennett 2009); on the other, the concept of museums as “contact zones” (Clifford 1997), flexible spaces that support diverse forms of belongings and aggregations, and that can allow the narration of more diverse histories.

We will also analyze how museums, libraries and public cultural institutions may overcome the challenges built into their infrastructure and manage the change conveyed by collaborations. For example, for museums to be effective agents for multicultural education, Ivan Karp and Steven Levine suggested that museums should abandon the concept of museum as a temple and take on the role of museum as a forum (Karp and Levine 1991). In order to achieve this, museums need to go beyond only exhibiting and providing information about objects. One of the strategies to provoke critical thinking on cultural diversity can be to provide as much context as possible: collaboration with libraries focused on the use of ICT to promote their collections could be an effective way to foster this. A further theoretical area of research will touch on EU policies on cultural heritage and how globalization, migration and ICT impact on them. Research Field 03 activities and results will be progressively made available through the MeLa RF03 webpages and blog.²⁰

2012. www.eu-consent.net/click_download.asp?contentid=1258.

19 See for example Graham, Beryl, and Sarah Cook. 2010. *Rethinking Curating. Art after New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

20 MeLa Research Field 03—Network of Museums, Libraries and Public Cultural Institutions Blog (<http://www.MeLa-blog.net/archives/category/field03>).

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