

DE **BIAS**

Detecting and Cur(at)ing Harmful Language in Cultural Heritage Collections



DE **BIAS**

Community Engagement

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Community engagement

The concept of access

- Has to be intended not as merely **economic** access, even if this is for sure a barrier still nowadays
- Other barriers connected to the word access are **geographical** access, **physical** access and **cultural** access
- Economic, geographic and physical access have been tackled in most European countries
- Cultural access, however, remains to be solved and is still very much related to the social, cultural and educational background of people
- It is the most complex and critical issue, because it is about interpretation and acknowledgement of values



Community engagement

The concept of representation

- Cultural heritage collections in Europe are the product of a dominant elite, which decided and chose at the time what kind of objects to expose and what sort of description and explanation to make available to people
 - Very strong mean to communicate values, which were also linked to national values and to the creation of national states in Europe
- Most of these values are absolutely not in line with the contemporary plurality and changes still happening very fast in our society
- Representation means giving the opportunity to all different components of the society to be represented in cultural heritage collections and the institutions that hold them and make them available



Community engagement

The concept of participation

- Not only participation in cultural activities, but, more importantly, participation in decision-making processes in the light of the Faro Convention of 2005
- Very difficult to achieve because allowing decision-making processes to be opened to different stakeholders means to let go of the control or power on the part of cultural heritage institutions
- DE-BIAS is trying to tackle this and the challenges mentioned on the previous slides by **engaging communities** in the process of attributing new values, new perceptions, new points of view to the descriptions of heritage collections



Embedding in EU heritage policy

The concept of audience development

- Policy development started by the European Commission in 2015
 - Study on audience development proposed by the Commission in 2015 and published in 2016
 - Emphasises the concepts of access, participation, and representation as essential to the idea of audience development
 - Promotes the diversification of audiences, which can be very clearly linked to the idea of community engagement



Embedding in EU heritage policy

The concept of audience development

- **Audience** intended not just as spectators or visitors, but as all the stakeholders who are interested in processes of cultural participation and cultural meaning making
 - Not limited to those who go to museums or go to theatres, or participate actively in creative processes, but open to **all possible stakeholders** within the society
 - Based on the **idea of diversification**, trying to include in cultural participation different groups and communities
- The DE-BIAS project picks up on this connection, referring to “communities” instead of “audiences”



Strategies of community engagement

First strategy

- **Invest in places** which can be safe places, both physically or virtually, for different people to express their own visions, their own ideas
- Concept of legitimising people, allowing them to be the main, the real main stakeholders of the cultural meaning creation process



Strategies of community engagement

Second strategy

- Use **digital** tools to foster the participation of groups of society or local communities which are not used to participation
- Keep in mind that the use of digital can also create biases and gaps of its own
- DE-BIAS works towards the development of a tool that could easily be used by cultural institutions with the input of local communities in terms of detecting and curating harmful language in cultural heritage collections (which is the title, actually, of the project)



Strategies of community engagement

Third strategy

- **Build capacity** to ensure that a process like the diversification of participants can take place
- Cultural heritage professionals need to be updated and challenged in order to try different ways to engage with different people
- Capacity building is one of the main components in DE-BIAS and one of the project's main investments to foster widening the vision, the competences and the skills of cultural heritage professionals



Strategies of community engagement

Fourth strategy

- **Enable co-creation**
- Co-creation is at the basis of the DE-BIAS project
 - The AI tool which will be developed to detect biases in cultural heritage collections is based on a vocabulary which is the product co-created with communities



Strategies of community engagement

Fifth strategy

- Combine the above four strategies to initiate **organisational change**
- Main objective of all audience development and community engagement strategies is a change in the point of view of cultural organisations and cultural institutions to put people at the centre of what they do
 - Not just a matter of inviting people to have access to cultural heritage, but of considering people and communities as stakeholders in the definition and attribution of meanings
 - Requires also the capacity of creating networks, of creating partnerships with different organisations in society, which can act as bridges, as mediators towards local communities





Website

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