**SHARING IS CARING – HAMBURG EXTENSION**

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http://sharecare.nu/hamburg-2017/

**Presentation at the Opening Event**

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**Open cultural data – observations from the perspective of digital anthropology**

Open cultural materials or open cultural data, is an issue that is transdisciplinary by nature. Such crucial questions are not organized along academic disciplines, but embrace various branches. This becomes nicely visible in the conference program. GLAMs - Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums, NGOs – nongovernmental organisations, cultural administration and politics, creative professionals, social entrepreneurs and academia meet to discuss the issue of cultural data in its multifacetedness.

**Openness is a value**

Can culture be copyrighted – asked Michael Brown, an US-American Anthropologist. He did not have digitization or open cultural data in mind – not at all, when he titled his paper back in the year 1998.

In this paper he refers to the request of an ethnic group in Australia to remove information about their group in the public domain. The group did not want their cultural materials to be displayed in museums and made available to the public there.

The self-evident understanding of the free circulation of cultural materials was challenged. It was experienced as a form of disappropriation. Are we allowed to publish, what we have collected and observed in field studies elsewhere? What cultural materials should be in the public realm? Is there something like cultural or collective ownership?

This debate at the end of the 1990ies highlights that bringing cultural materials into museums and making them public was considered as an act of illegitimate openness by an ethnic group in Australia. It questions what looks rather normal to us today.

The idea of open and free circulation of knowledge is a value deeply embedded in European culture, it is a value that we cannot taken for granted, it is contested in many ways also in Europe, when economic, political or social interests emerge: copyrights, secret elections, privacy. The discussion about the conditions of openness is thus an ongoing matter. Openness needs to be balanced with other values and orientations and is thus permanently negotiated.

Openness is an issue that is not just emerging with digitization. But of course here it is at stake in a new and pressing way.

**Openness is a form of valorization**

Bringing cultural materials to museums - or translating them into the digital realm - and thus making them public changes their quality, no matter if art or everyday culture. It makes them more visible, an object of public interests and also valorizes them as a relevant form of culture, as cultural heritage.

Valorisation of culture happens in many forms, concepts like heritagization, invention of tradition, and predicatization indicate diverse ways of valorization and also ways of making culture available for marketization. The mentioned forms of valorization are by far not comprehensive, only the tip of the iceberg of possible forms. They also indicate, that the return of invest often is not a direct one in the realm of culture, sometimes it may be, but very rarely it is. Moreover, the marketization of culture is a very sensible question. To whom do cultural expressions belong? Should traditional patterns from ethnic groups be printed on materials and who earns then the money? What is the role of the museum that is displaying the patterns? Who should benefit when culture gets monetized, the bearers of culture or the bearers of the valorization?

Another complementary position on this question is taken by the prominent French sociologist, Luc Boltanski:

He recently highlighted on the example of France that it is mainly the symbolic economy that is creating additional value in Western societies: the work of designers, artists and in the cultural sector. The national economies in Europe depend on the innovation in these sectors since the industrial production is done elsewhere in a global division of labor. Moreover Boltanski highlights how essential it is for these societies to acknowledge the contribution of the cultural sector in financial terms and let those who add the value also benefit and partake in the wealth rather than having a large number of precarious living creative people. However, Boltanski does not provide a

way how to solve this claim. It is a more complicated question affecting national economies and thus rather a matter of joint, transdisciplinary efforts.

**Openness as a form of sustainability in culture**

Beyond valorization, another aspect is crucial. Even though sustainability is a not very well defined concept in the realm of culture I will use it here for highlighting that culture is a living system.

Culture is vital for human life, it is a public matter, it is a commons, we need it like food and air to breath. Humans are cultural species. Culture has a large bandwidth from art to trash, it is a concept that refers to aesthetic expressions but also more general to the man-made, to the collective, to shared conventions and perceptions, to common behaviors and intersubjective shared meanings and symbols. Uniqueness, a high value in the arts, emerges from and in reference to the collective repertoires and conventions. If we speak about culture we thus address a large bandwidth of expressions, objects and practices. It is this bandwidth that frames and maybe also complicates our discussions about openness and sharing of culture – digital or analogue. How can cultural expressions circulate in a group, when their use is regulated by institutions, restricted by copyrights or charged for economic purposes? What does this mean to the liveliness of cultural traditions, to their inheritance from generation to generation? Questions like these point towards the basic quality of culture for the organization of human life, a question that is immediately present, when we speak about open cultural data in GLAMs.

Openness in respect to this broad understanding of culture then becomes also a question of cultural citizenship, a question of partaking of all groups and people in society of staging and including their heritages in public memories. Adding the idea of cultural citizenship to the idea of open cultural data contributes to developing concepts and models of sharing and openness. This looks like a quite promising coalition.

**Digitization**

Allow me also a few sentences on digitization. Digitization indeed makes a difference. It changes the modalities of cultural production and thus of remembering and forgetting.

Copy and paste has become easy with digital technologies; sharing seems to be deeply embedded in social media. But not only there! It is deeply inherited in the everyday practices and communication. It is a nature of culture. Only what is shared can become common, can become common sense, can become the "normal" and the routines in people's lives. Sharing is what people do with cultural

materials, what they have always done; they take pictures to share them; they make texts to circulate and comment them; they use media to mashup and to create new ideas by merging old materials and adapting them to current situations. Digital media just give them new means for that.

From a historical point of view: Never before have so many people been able to spend so much time for aesthetic productions. Never have people been able to publish so easily their self-made pieces and to make them available to a world-wide mass audience as they do today through social media platforms.

We will have to cope with these changes in digital cultural production. They are already affecting our societies and will continue to affect us even more in the future to come. It deeply affects also the ways of memory work, of remembrance and forgetting. And we are only at the beginning of these changes. In future we will have to cope more with the born-digital materials, and we will have to consider and learn about the circulation of cultural materials from digital to analogue and back again and what this means for singe elements as well as for culture in general.

**Link to the future**

Let me conclude with a link to the future, because this is why we are discussing open cultural data. Digital cultural materials provide new means for how we want to refer to the past for envisioning possible futures in European societies.

Open cultural materials or data are an issue beyond GLAMs and research for society at large. It is thus a matter of education. Education is maybe not quite right in this context, we probably better speak of cross-generational learning. The term education gives the impression of a more unidirectional path. My impression is that in the context of digitization we gain a lot from young people too. In this respect I am quite happy that students are in involved in the conference. They are not only helpers with the organization. They also contribute intellectually, in various ways, through selecting relevant positions in the debate about open cultural data from literature, transforming positions and practices into digital representations or documenting the outcomes of the conference.

And probably other good ideas would have emerged if the students had had more space and time for developing them.

Opening up thus means to include more ideas,  more people and groups in the sense of cultural citizenship:  young people, people with diverse backgrounds, people not in the mainstream of society. They have to contribute a lot for envisioning possible futures in digital times. We will gain a lot from their future developments.

Thank you!