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Topic of the Year: Museum Archaeology



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Alessandra Cilio

Excellence and craft. A network of museums to challenge post-earthquake crisis in the Marche

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Abstract

The Research Project 'Techne' (Ancient TECHnologies and workshop NETwork) aims at reconstructing and investigating the origins, the historical development and cultural context, the technical aspects of craftsmanship, and at retrieving the excellence of artisan activities in the Marche as a contribution to re-challenge the territory after the seism. The purpose is to constitute a network of museums dedicated to craftsmanship, starting from a pilot experience (Museo della Tela, Macerata), in which past and present meet. Through a diachronic and multidisciplinary approach, the project involves different stakeholders, i.e. the University, the local administrations, private societies and inland communities, those majorly suffering the consequences of the earthquake.

Open Access Peer Reviewed Keywords: the Marche, earthquake, craftsmanship, museum, excellence

Between August 2016 and January 2017 – although the very last, rather strong, shake of the seismic swarm was registered on September 1st 2019 – a large area along the ridge of the Central Appennines, encompassing the regions of the Marche, Umbria, Lazio and Abruzzo, was struck by three major earthquakes of a magnitude of 6.0 or higher (6.5 that occurring on October 30th 2016). This catastrophe caused 301 casualties, more than 388 injuries, the demise of several hamlets, and a series of devastations, still adversely affecting the life of those who managed to survive.

The seismic crater (Figure 1) occupying an area of circa 8,000 sq. km includes 140 municipalities – 87 only in the Marche –, distributed in ten different provinces between the Alta Valle del Tronto, the Sibillines, the Laga Mountains, and the Alto Aterno Mounts (Decreto-Legge 17 ottobre 2016, n. 189, allegato 1, allegato 2, allegato 2bis).

The assistance of those seeking shelter was indeed a major priority, but the safeguard of the artistic patrimony was among the first actions undertaken by state authorities to guarantee also the memory of a shared past (of traditions) and the future local economy, much tied to tourism.

To tackle the emergency one of the measures

taken by national and local authorities was to move people towards secure sites of the coast in expectation of signs of a return to normality, wishing and striving for a rapid reconstruction even of the small inland villages, as Arquata del Tronto, completely abandoned after the second seismic wave in October 2016.

The resettlement along the Adriatic coast – meant to be temporary – implied banally not only the abandonment of their houses and burghs, but also the asset freeze of all the economic activities. As a consequence, besides the evident dramatic loss of houses and properties, most of the earthquake victims had to close medium and small family-run businesses, namely agro-food activities and craft workshops, constituting the large basis of the productive system of these regions. As a result, this engendered the loss of many jobs.

These evident difficulties have been undermining the effective and prompt economical and psychological restart and, in general, the delay of the recovery process.

A secondary effect of this (progressive) crisis of the local economy, based on family-run businesses, is the silent loss of the rich patrimony of artisanal knowledge, often transmitted from father to son, which constitutes the foundation

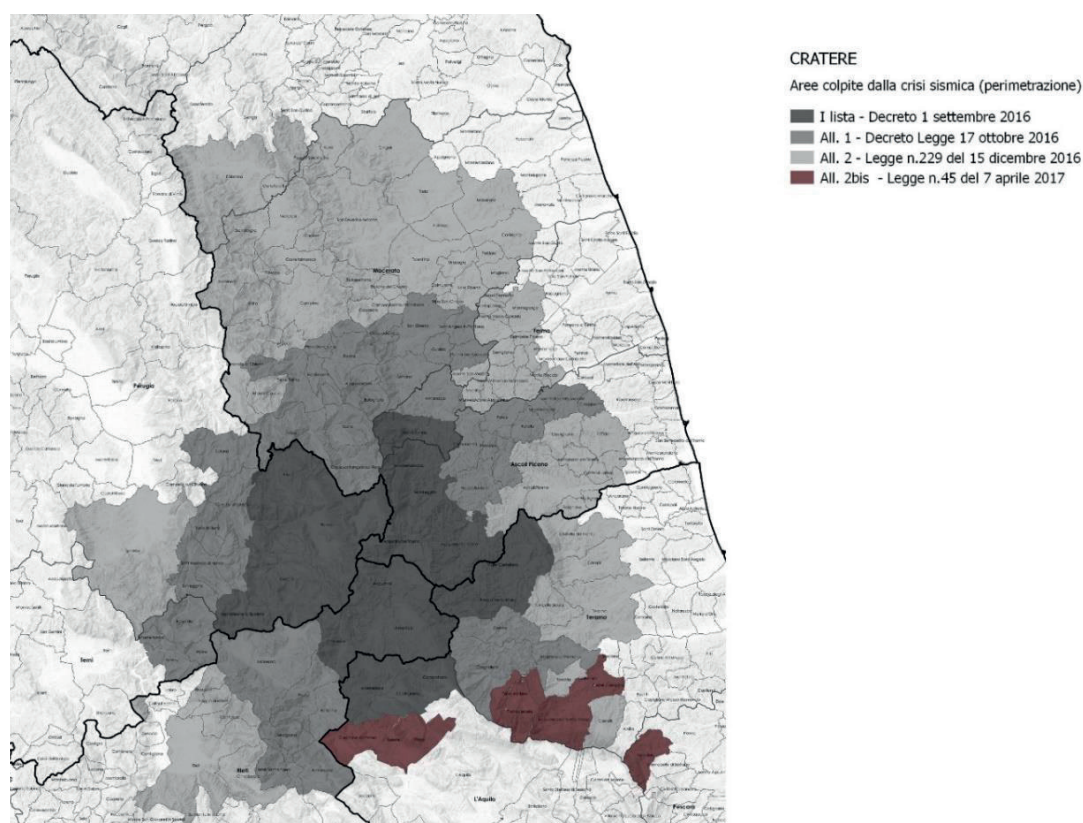


Fig.1. Seismic crater and legislative frame (from Pierantoni, Salvi & Sargolini 2019, p. 28, fig. 1).

and the richness of the Marche craft/economic excellence.

The multidisciplinary research project ‘Techne’, carried out within the framework of the *Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici* of the University of Macerata scientific activities and public engagement actions, intends first to counteract this progressive loss of the basis of the Marche excellences, i.e. craftsmanship expertise, by endorsing a new model of museums network, never attempted before in Italy. Our project drew inspiration from a Greek cluster of museums (PIOP 2020), mostly located in challenging and peripheral areas, i.e. the PIOP network, emphasising the relationships between men and natural resources.

Our goal is a museum network involving different stakeholders, i.e. local communities, public entities and private societies, to pursue the twofold and entwined aim of promoting the excellences of the Marche Region and re-challenging the renaissance of inland communities, harshly tried by the earthquake, by exploiting and transforming those activities suffering from the consequences of the seism into cultural, social and economic mainstays.

This project, thus, intends to offset and counteract the acceleration of the phenomena of abandonment of inland places, crafts and loss of knowledge derived from earthquake crisis. Without any intention to offer an easy solution to a complicate problem, this project might represent one of the many viable strategies to overcome this critical juncture, as matching the general approach of the national and local political administration, stressing the importance of tourism, excellence, tradition and innovation featuring the Marche region from ancient times.

Although this paper will focus on the Marche Region, most of the issues here tackled might be applied for re-challenging all the other areas struck by the 2016-17 earthquakes.

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Resilience versus abandonment

In the face of casualties, collapses, devastations and slow resumption, the sense of powerlessness and discouragement along with the desire to leave this wounded earth might take over. Indeed, after these unfortunate

events, one of the major problems has been the already-in-action depopulation of the inland areas, which underwent to an accelerated rate after the earthquake. According to a well-known sociological pattern, the small hamlets located in the inner and mountainous areas tend to lose population increasingly (Baldacci 1982), but between 2016 and 2017, data at hand, the population in the municipalities struck by seism in the Marche dropped significantly in number: of the 350,616 residents counted in the 87 municipalities of the Marche within seismic crater, between 2016 and 2017, 2,392 inhabitants were registered as outgoing for reasons dependent on the (consequences of the) earthquake. Although the demographic decrease is generally attested in the whole area of the seismic crater, numbers concerning residential shift from Tolentino and Matelica are particularly impressive: the first counts 238 inhabitants less, the second minus 111 (CNA MARCHE 2020).

In January 2017 over 33,000 people in the Marche Region were estimated to have been displaced; most of them moved to the coast, abandoning their inland villages and towns. Not all the family-run businesses were relocated in the new places of residence. By way of examples, those engaged in animal husbandry and food production were not able to transfer all their activities, such as the relocation of the surviving animals away from the pastures and the slaughter, and now struggle to survive.

Likewise, the resumption of all the other craft workshops *in loco* has been difficult. This has been felt as a constant emergency by the local and national administration as well as by the Universities in the Region, so much that several projects, in forms of financial helps to assist craft workshops resumption and post-seism cultural heritage preservation, have been devised (Volpe 2019a; POR Marche FSE 2014/2020; Bando Fesr 2014/2020 Asse 8; University of Macerata D.R. N.152 of May 12th 2017 within the frame of the initiatives promoted by the Marche Region as published in Consiglio Regionale 2020), whose results have been recently published (Pierantoni, Salvi & Sargolini 2019; Figure 2).

The risk of desertification of most of the municipalities within the seismic crater, especially in the most remote areas, and the total abandonment of the local economic activities are real. Few local family-run small

and medium businesses managed to survive *in loco*, but they demand constantly state support. They ask for major investments on tourism, tax concessions and benefits for bank loans to start new activities and specific measures to refrain this increasing depopulation.

Recent investigation of the *Centro Studi Cna Marche* of the *Confederazione Nazionale dell'Artigianato e della Piccola e Media Impresa* pointed out the major detriment suffered by local businesses: between the end of 2016 and March 2018 circa 500 firms closed and did not re-open. Most of them were agro-food enterprises (circa 240). The most direct and obvious consequence was the loss of 1,500 jobs, causing inevitable enormous damages that have impaired profoundly the social fabric of the area and the Region (CNA MARCHE 2020).

The total abandonment and economic depression of inner areas are issues, burdening the agenda of the local authorities and regional administration, along with the other related problems as the decline in incoming tourism, the depletion and degradation of peripheric areas. The political administration of the Marche, from the initiative promoted by the Region to the activities of the local municipalities, tend to stress craft and tourism as the two major milestones in the actions for the renaissance of the territory struck by the earthquake.

A similar approach also emerged during 2017 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, where a series of proposals, aiming at strengthening the public participation in the preservation and exploitation of cultural heritage as well as the investment on the recognition and enhancement of traditional local tangible and intangible knowledge as a means of resilience in post-disaster recovery, were put forward (UNISDR 2017).

Any strategy pursued, thus, needs to engage and stimulate civic participation in the creation of a sense of territory, community ownership and preservation of the cultural heritage (O'Neill 2010; Marstine, Bauer & Haines 2013; Dodd & Jones 2014; Gelichi 2019, pp. 9-10; Kyriakidis 2019, pp. 2-5, 73-87; Volpe 2020 *passim*). In so doing, the cooperation of different stakeholders, private and public partners, contributing to the resumption and enhancement of public engagement towards local, tangible and intangible, cultural heritage, understood in the broad sense, is essential.

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Fig. 2. Presentation of the results of the research promoted by the Marches region.

Sprout from our roots and guiding principles

Culture and cultural heritage are fundamental elements in the construction and affirmation of the identity of a country and a community (Gelichi 2019, pp. 9-11). Preserving heritage and local knowledge boosts disaster resilience. This strategy of combining the protection of cultural heritage and the strengthening of the potential impact on related economic activities and social cohesion is indeed shared by a few recent projects, as Storm, a project funded by Horizon 2020 aiming to improve preventive strategies to protect EU cultural sites by climate changes and extreme weather events (Storm Project 2020), and ResCult (The Increasing Resilience of Cultural Heritage project), financed by European Union Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection and launched in February 2017 as a drive to protect heritage sites from disasters (ResCult 2020). In particular, ResCult focused on three case studies, emblematically one of which is the Monastery of San Nicola at Tolentino, suffering from major disasters, such as flood, fire and earthquake, to prevent and support risk prevention and action increasing resilience.

The Marches Region is, more than any other area, characterised by a strong productive system found on craft workshops and family-run businesses. Circa 51,000 craft-based firms made it the region with the highest number of enterprises. The progressive loss of the intangible cultural expertise at the basis of the Marches craft excellence, resulting from earthquakes emergency, will inevitably entail the levelling of competences, skills and, ultimately, the standardization of products, so that the soul and uniqueness of each artefact will be removed.

This project aims at offering a viable combined strategy enhancing both the craft workshop and local tourism, according to a model already successfully applied in Europe, as the strategic agenda of the United Nation to implement the Sustainable Global Development Goals (SDGs) in Albania, especially in the area of Gjirokastr (United Nations Albania 2020), and in Italy the workshop of Assunta Perilli in Campotosto (AQ), who works on hand weaving and wool, flax and hemp folk traditional craftsmanship (Tessitura a mano di Assunta Perilli 2020).

To this purpose a network of thematic

museums of crafts in the Marches, where the specific nature of production in the corresponding community is highlighted, will be created. On the other hand, museum strategy to re-challenge post seism area are not unusual (Nizzo 2013; 2014; Osti et al. 2017). The aim is to conceive a new idea of Museum as a place of inclusion (e.g. Sandell 2002; Carrara 2014; Colombari & Troilo 2015), where of dialogue and encounter, where Past (traditional knowledge and its retrieval) and Future (enhancement of local excellences through the exploitation of innovation and technology) meet in the Present (communication and mediation to a different and inclusive audience).

The first step is to enhance of an already existing museum, which will work as pilot museum (see *infra*). Second, our purpose is also to create a network of museums, as those supported by the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation (PIOP 2020) in Greece. The Greek museums, so far nine (Figure 3), but whose number grows over time, differ in size and nature; they arose with the aim at highlighting the history and tradition of local production and promoting tourism as well as public engagement in areas out of the canonical circuits of leisure travels. The Open-Air Water Power Museum in Dimitisana, Peloponnese, focuses on the importance of water power in traditional society; the Silk Museum in Soufli, in Thrace, concerns sericulture, the whole history of silk production and all the processing of silk manufacturing, from incubation of the silkworm's eggs to the dyeing and weaving of silk textiles; in Thessaly at Volos there is the Rooftile and brickworks Museum N. & S. Tsalapatas, housed in the old Rooftiles and Brickworks' Factory of Nikolaos and Spyridon Tsalapatas, where the restored industrial spaces recreate the virtual production process step-by-step: from the locomotives, the clay wash backs and the grinding mills, to the brickmaking berth with the various types of presses and cutters, through the corridors of the drying chambers, up to the impressive Hoffmann kiln. The Museum of Marble Crafts at Pyrgos on the island of Tinos describes in details the processes of marble working, giving emphasis on the use of this stone in pre-industrial societies. On another island, at Chios there is the Mastic Museum, which showcases the cultivation and processing of mastic, the natural resin, largely exploited in food and parfum industry.

The Environment Museum close to the lake Stymphalia in Peloponnesian Korinthia, aims at showing the interdependence and harmonious co-existence of mankind and nature, with the main objective to raise public's ecological awareness and preserve the knowledge of the region's traditional occupations. In North-western Greece, in Ioannina, in one of the bastions of the Castle, there is the Silversmithing Museum, which presents the know-how of the silversmithing in pre-industrial period, with a focus on the history of this craft in Epirus. Two are the museums dedicated to the major resources of Greece, oil and olive oil: one is the Museum of Industrial Olive Oil Production in Lesbos, which presents the industrialization of olive oil production by focusing on the changes brought about by the introduction of mechanical motion on oil extraction; the second is the Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive Oil in Sparta, which highlights the culture of the olive and olive oil, and the whole history of its production in Greece, from prehistory to modernity.

This approach is shared by few British museums, such as Tyne & Wear, the Museum of London and National Museums of Liverpool, which also went further by engaging a different

form of dialogue between the community and individuals, challenging public participation and shifting the focus from 'users and choosers' to 'makers and shapers' (Cornwall & Gaventa 2001; Lynch 2011; 2014). In other words, they changed the perspective, looking at museums not simply as collections-focused places, but as public-service institutions, where objects displayed are functional to develop the active participation of the public. Thereby, as stated in one of the first articles of Pharos Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, "cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving value, belief, knowledge and traditions" (Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, Pharos 27/X/2005, art. 2).

Our challenge is to tell a different story and promoting community engagement through the gathering of alternative and diverse objects (Black 2005; Watson 2007; Simon 2010; Kyriakidis 2019, pp. 73-87; Volpe 2019b, esp. pp. 257-272), starting from the triptych People-Environment-Culture.

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Fig. 3. Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation network of museums (courtesy of Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation).

‘Techne’: People-environment-culture

Our major milestones will be:

- 1) The exam and investigation of the sources (literary and epigraphic evidence as well as material culture) on the various ancient craftsmanship in the Greek and Roman world, without neglecting the neighbouring regions and cultures;
- 2) The collaboration with different local and national stakeholders;
- 3) The use of modern technology and communication strategies in the dissemination of these goals.

The Research Project ‘Techne’ main objective is the retrieve of the local artisanal knowledge in a diachronic perspective and the enhancement of the excellences of the territory, which should be preserved even in their micro-development. For this reason, it is essential to create a ‘place’ where innovation meets tradition. Crafts museums, or better craft excellence museums (e.g. musical instruments, toys, textiles, leather, wine, oil and olive oil productions), in the Marches, either established ex novo or developed from pre-existing structures, will be not simply showcases of local cultural heritage and identity, but places where to preserve and enhance the traditional, artisanal and industrial technology of the region.

The project, from its acronym solved as ‘Ancient TECHnologies and workshops NEtwork’, stresses the intervention of human intellect in craft activities; it aims at deepening the knowledge of productive activities, especially those having a modern development in the Marches, at enhancing the excellences of the territory in the context of local productive industry and manufacture, at identifying the roots, at studying the development of the artisanal knowledge in a diachronic perspective, at disseminating, also outside academic context, such achievements, so to create a technical and scientific understanding and awareness in a wider public, differing from age group and socio-cultural context.

Moreover, the project underlines the idea of net: network of knowledge, network of tradition, network of innovation, network of communication, network of museums of expertise and artisanal knowledge. The choice of the acronym is significant as retrieves the Greek word τέχνη, even in its inherent semantic value, indicating the manual skills of

an artisan in combination with the expertise of the mind (H.G. Liddell & R. Scott, s.v. τέχνη, in *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford 1968⁹, p. 1785; P. Chaintraine, s.v. τέχνη, in *Dictionnaire étimologique de la langue grecque*, Paris 1968, p. 1112).

Museums of this type are not in the Marches and not even in the Italian peninsula (Luca Borghini 2020). Within the region at the moment two different museum realities exist:

- a) Archaeological museums and *antiquaria*, which offer thematic and chronological-and-topographical-ranged exhibitions of the different communities living in the region in the ancient times (Dall’Aglio & Campagnoli 2002, pp. 207-260; Fabrini, Paci & Perna 2004; de Marinis & Paci 2000, pp. 176-196; *Guide al patrimonio storico-artistico delle Marche*, in the series “Gli scrigni”; Regione Marche 2020; Polo Museale delle Marche 2020; Sistema museale della Provincia di Macerata 2020);
- b) Folkloric museums, focused on the popular tradition, which gather together the traces of the daily life of the most recent past of the region, sharecroppers’ museums, often without a critical approach (e.g. Il Museo della Nostra Terra di Pietvetorina, close after 2016 earthquake).

Many museums, belonging to this last category, are grouped in a cultural Association ‘Il Paesaggio dell’Eccellenza’ (Il paesaggio dell’eccellenza 2020) which aimed to enhance, preserve and re-discovery the Industrial and Craft Heritage of the region, but despite the clear goals its activity has been limited. Moreover, the consortium gathers together only the realities encompassed between the Musone and Potenza rivers valleys.

In this respect it is paramount to follow these issues:

- the appraisal of the knowledge of the crafts and craft technology in the ancient world;
- the retrieve of the traditional knowledges;
- the enhancement of the excellences of the territory within the artisanal production;
- the dissemination to the broad public of the knowledge, especially to school-students;
- the creation of new adequate spaces and enhancement of already-existing

museums on craft production according to an innovative approach.

The starting point will be certainly the study of craftsmanship in the ancient world and the analysis of the various different activities, going from food production and goods of first necessity, as wine and olive oil, to consumer products (textiles, *medicamenta*, metal working, and vases) and luxury products (*aromata*, jewelry and precious objects). They were crafts with high level of specialization, already in the ancient world, well documented by ancient sources.

The knowledge and information acquired will be increased and spread through: the implementation of research programs and the publication of academic works and the organization of thematic seminars; the planning of a variety of academic and cultural actions, open to the wider public; the realization of educational programs and activities for different age groups, focusing in particular on children of school-going ages; the participation in the public dialogue for the definition of the strategies to be followed in the area of culture.

At a second stage, such stock of knowledge will be transferred into museum settings, thanks to the help of experts in the field, within the frame of the key idea that museums were not (only) a mere cultural institution, but a place performing an (inter)active dialogue with schools, social communities and, last but not least, the local business owners, who inherited the knowhow from the past and represent the ideal prosecutors of these traditional skills and excellences in the modern world.

Driven by the motto of our University, i.e. *L'Umanesimo che innova*, which defines the guiding principles and the character of the University of Macerata, strongly founded on humanistic disciplines, the idea arose from the will to combine past and present, antiquity and modernity. The Humanism is not at the service of technique, but the technologies are functional to the improvement of the quality of life: starting from the knowledge of the past, which is strongly rooted in the most ancient history of Mankind, means to get the full and mature understanding of the development of technologies and wisdoms, but also the awareness of the human history and progress, hinging on Man.

The artisanal production, which rooted in a remote past and drew vital sap from a series

of competences transmitted from generation to generation, cannot be trumped by modern industrial production, globalization and the competitive power of low prices resulting from the exploitation of cheap workforce. The survival of regional markets and the future of the local businesses, beyond the earthquake, stand in the preservation of this expertise and the enhancement of these excellences, for which there is no competition.

In this perspective the transmission of this idea to new generation, more and more immersed in the virtual world, which often estranged them from reality, is fundamental: an approach with the material data is crucial to understand a complex reality before each virtual shift. For this reason, experts in communication and pedagogists are involved in the project so to define the right strategies and modalities of transmission of knowledge as applied in museum itineraries with a strong didactic vocation. In particular, pedagogists with a strong focus on education and cultural heritage will offer their contribution in adapting and disseminating the contents achieved according to the audience: experts, school students, families, people with various disabilities.

In the museum(s):

- a) virtual exploration will be realized, on the one hand to give access to knowledge and disseminate the information also to those who cannot visit physically the structure, on the other to reconstruct ancient contexts, nowadays lost. The aim is to exploit technology, as 3D, for a conscious use. The virtual reconstructions of the ancient contexts will not disown the project, which will be strongly tied to a material dimension through tactile sensory pathways in the exhibition space (e.g. dyeing fabrics and pressing of the olives);
- b) activities for people with different kinds of disabilities will be also planned.

The implementation of the project requires, by definition, more stakeholders rooted in the territory and having different competences: universities and research centres, national authorities and ministerial offices (e.g. MiBACT), public administration and private societies, both those engaging in museum settings and industrial companies, which now operate in the region.

In order to disseminate the techniques

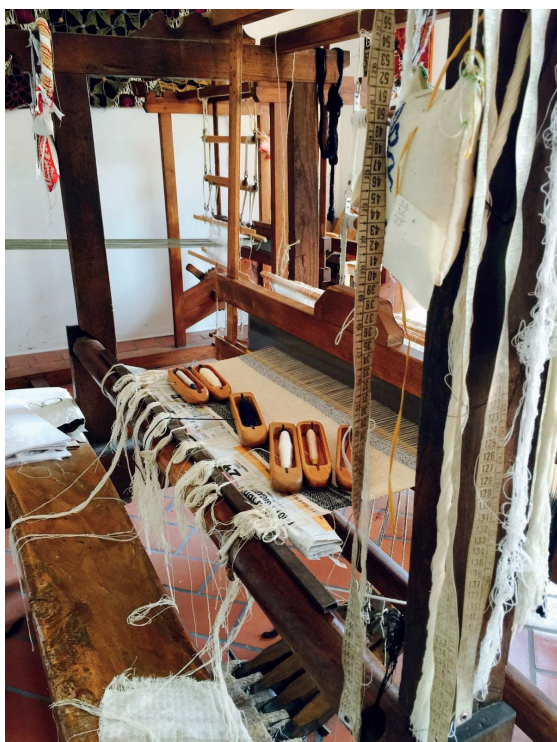


Fig. 4. Hand weaving on a horizontal loom
(courtesy of M. G. Varagona).

and artisan knowledge in the ancient world, moreover, it is necessary to organize thematic seminars open to the wider public, about the different crafts in pre-industrial and industrial society, covering a chronological span stretching from Prehistory to Modern Times, and in a wide geographical perspective, that is to say by encompassing all the Mediterranean cultures.

One of the aims of our project is to extend this museum network to all the excellences of the Marche, from Pesaro to Ascoli Piceno, according to a model already existing abroad, as the above-mentioned Piraeus Bank Foundation Museums. Aware of the fact that the proposed project is a very ambitious one, whose results will be seen in the long run, our intention is to start progressively from the textile manufacture, exploiting a reality already existing. For this reason, the first step is to enhance the Museum of Weaving, part of the net of Museum of the Macerata Province, which has a section concerning the origins of this activity in the ancient world, the history of techniques of weaving, spinning and dyeing textile fibres (<http://www.latela.net>). This Museum and workshop has recovered the ancient technique 'a liccetti' (artistic weaving) and revived typical

decorative patterns used in Central Italy in the 14th and 15th centuries (Figure 4 and Figure 5). In collaboration with the pedagogists and experts in museum layouts, such a museum will be enriched with digital media panels, spaces for workshops and activities of experimental archaeology, virtual reconstructions of the different stages and places of production, with a focus on communicating this information to people with various disabilities.

The Museum of Weaving was chosen as a pilot museum for different reasons. First of all because it lays within the seismic crater; second, because it is already operating and it does not need further personnel costs; it then shows high potential as the forward-looking founders, who have reserved spaces for didactic purposes since its establishment (Figure 6); finally, the competences of the research team, already engaged in the investigation of ancient craftsmanship within the Graeco-Roman world, play a key role in the development of this project. Several contributions concern the study of *instrumentum domesticum (inscriptum)*, with a focus on objects relating to weaving, as loom weights, and with the processing of textile production (e.g. Antolini & Marengo 2012). Following this line of reasoning, such



Fig. 5. 'A liccetti' weaving detail
(courtesy of M. G. Varagona).



Fig. 6. 'Horizontal Frame for 'a licetti' weaving (courtesy of M. G. Varagona).

a model could be applied to other excellences of the territory, as the crafts shoe-making craftsmanship, musical instruments workshops, toys, ceramic industries, oil and wine productions, and all the other local artisan activities, which might prompt collaboration for the creation of museums and spaces. These last areas of expertise are also covered by the interests of the members of our team, who have also been working on the study of ancient

musical instruments (Piccinini 2013), games, as knucklebones (Piccinini forthcoming), perfumes and *medicamenta* production and trade (e.g. Marengo & Tadorelli 2010), and oil and wine circulation (e.g. Paci & Marengo 2008).

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