

# Challenges and Potential of the Digitization of Anthropological Collections in Argentina

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## The Challenges of Modernity

In 1989, English art historian Peter Vergo published *New Museology*. Celebrated as one of the milestones of what would later be popularized as ‘new’ museology, Vergo’s article called upon academics to overcome the ‘old’ methodologies of museological practice, which generated “discontent” both within and outside the Western academy (Vergo 1989: 3). The need for a more constructivist approach of museological practices and the questioning of museums in society was not new to Western academic spaces, a discussion that can be traced back to the late 1960s.<sup>1</sup>

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1 In 1968, the Canadian Duncan Cameron (1930-2006) called attention to the communicational capacity of museums and their wasted potential as spaces for citizen discussion (Cameron 1968). The need to move away from the focus on objects and to encourage citizen participation was also suggested by the French Georges Rivière (1897-1985) and Hugues de Varine (1935) through their concept of “ecomuseum” (de Varine 1969). At the same time that these works were published, museological experiences developed in Latin America and Africa, sometimes marginalized in Western literature, put into practice community museums. These experiences set a pragmatic precedent for the meeting of Latin American museum directors and experts held in Santiago de Chile in 1972. The main objective of this meeting was to discuss the way in which museums could (and should) address the specific political, social, economic and cultural situation of the societies where they were located, allowing them to constitute a comprehensive and integrated space that responded to the people’s needs (Santiago Round Table 1972). These principles, whose implementation until the early 1990s was limited almost exclusively to non-Western spaces, managed to occupy a few lines in the museum definition promulgated by the International Council of Museums in 1974. Ten years later, the first international workshop on Ecomuseums and New Museology was held in Quebec. Experts from outside and inside the academy took up the Santiago declarations to give an account of the political dimension that intersects the role of museums, a role that they circumscribe to the improvement and development of the populations’ living conditions. One of the main results of this workshop was the establishment of the International Movement for a New Museology (Declaration of Quebec 1984).

Diverse in content and their practical translation, the above discussions were characterized by objections to the primary functions of museums such as exhibition, conservation, and collection management. Thus, it was recognized within Western academia that the very discourse of modernity that for centuries had underpinned the primary mission of Western museums, namely to establish and materialize the roots of Western civilization's identity, had reached its limits. As expressed in the resolution of the eleventh general assembly of the *International Council of Museums* (ICOM), the social and political situation imposed by the “modern world” made the renewal of museology unavoidable (ICOM 1974: 2).

The call for renewal from Western academic spaces led to a series of discussions and changes within museological practice. While these were significant, issues such as the ‘ownership’ of objects and the authority and control of the discourses generated from them were not discussed in depth. The processes of negotiation between museums and source communities concerning the legal, ethical, and cultural rights of collections have been and are one of the most problematic and controversial areas (Anderson 2010; 2018). As with other forms of materialization of colonial thinking regimes, the way in which objects are accessed, made visible and dialogued through/by them accounts for the persistence of the colonial heritage within the museological epistemes, which has contributed to reinforce and perpetuate the West's cultural hegemony (Lander 2000). In this sense, I consider that the digitization processes currently carried out by Western memory institutions (museums, archives, libraries) offer a valuable resource and a space with the capacity to reverse this asymmetrical power relationship. As Haidy Geismar has pointed out, digital infrastructures have the potential to change inequalities of access and ownership as well as perpetuate them (Geismar 2018).

## The (New) Medialization of Cultural Heritage

Digitization can be considered one of the latest media devices used for the reproduction, visualization, mobilization and connection between objects from anthropological collections and discourses associated to these objects (Geismar 2012; 2018). Towards the beginning of the 1970s, conspicuously the same period in which the discourse of modernity threatened to collapse in on itself, the first projects to digitalize museum collections began in Great Britain, the United States and the Netherlands, which had the necessary socio-material infrastructure and economic capital. The advance in technological development, both hardware and software, led to the implementation of digitization programs over the next two decades by various organizations and institutions focused on “protecting” cultural heritage (Macdonald 2006; Parry 2007).

Since early 2000, digitization has become a central strategy in the policy of Western memory institutions with collections considered 'patrimonial'. This new direction, in line with the new millennium's futuristic rhetoric, was presented as the culmination of their primary objectives: the acquisition, conservation, research, communication and exhibition of the tangible and intangible humanity heritage (ICOM 2012). Seen as a move away from the vehement material empiricism of previous decades, this methodological and discursive shift was inscribed within the broad global turn in the social sciences, offering a suggestive way to overcome the limits imposed by the local or national analysis context, safeguard tangible and intangible heritage for future generations, and guarantee free access to it (Ballestero et al. 2020; Juergensmeyer 2014; Reca 2016).

Digitization is a new technology of memory that, in the current era of global interconnectivity, can lead to a transformation of both the spaces and practices of memory (Assmann/Conrad 2010). In this context, digitization promises to establish an egalitarian, inclusive and broader space for interpreting the past. Compared to their conventional analog counterparts, digital archives provide a fundamental step towards the democratization of scientific practice (Müller 2017). At the same time, they encourage negotiation processes regarding access and research on the material and intellectual 'capital' that for too long was the exclusive property of Western memory institutions (Cameron/Kenderline 2007; Risam 2018).

In the specific case of museums, the digitization processes led to discussions on the management of their institutional policy, the transformation of museological practices and the possible implications in the restitution and repatriation processes (Brown 2007; Hazan 2007). It also enables the discussion of more abstract issues such as power, authority, authenticity, interpretation and representation (Cameron 2007). These elements are essential to reverse the coloniality of remembering practices. By this I mean the process of marginalization and invisibilization of certain histories and memories in order to reduce them to the 'universalist' ideal of the European experience (Englund/Leach 2000; Lander 2000).

With respect to the last point, Walter Mignolo remarked that Western museums gathered "[...] artifacts representative of 'other' memories [...]" but were never interested in activating the cultural memory of their owners (Mignolo 2014: 7). Far from political, cultural and epistemological neutrality, digitization has the potential to rectify this disinterest in 'other' cultural memories (Dahlström et al. 2012; Mignolo 2014). It must nevertheless be borne in mind the aforementioned discussions. Otherwise, there could be a risk that the spaces generated by digitization perpetuate existing asymmetrical power relations with a new language and become a 'neo-colonial' space (Boast 2011).

Following, we will explore the digitization processes carried out in Argentina. Along with an external perspective that can complement the experiences carried out in Europe that other articles in this volume discuss, this will allow us to in-

investigate whether the political limitations and epistemological challenges of the digitization processes are typical of a particular academia sector or respond to the continuity of the asymmetrical power relations that characterized museological practices.

## Digital Repositories for the Southern Hemisphere

In the 1990s, the decade pointed out by several scholars as the beginning of the new museology (Coombes 1994; Falk/Dierking 1992; Karp et al. 1992; Lumley 1988; Macdonald/Silverstone 1990; Sherman 1994; Teather 1991; van Mensch 1992; Vergo 1989), two Argentine social science institutes undertook the first initiatives in order to establish digital repositories. In 1994, the *Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana. Emilio Ravignani* (Buenos Aires National University) began with the “Historical Heritage Project” which aimed to preserve the important body of private documents, facsimiles and publications dating from the 18th century. The other pioneering institution was the *Biblioteca Profesor Guillermo Obiols* of the *Facultad de Humanidades* (La Plata National University), which in 1997 presented through its first web page the results of the restructuring and informatization processes of its database (Banzato and González 2017; Feldgen et al. 2002; Izeta and Cattáneo 2019).

The advantages and potential of the digitization of collections and databases demonstrated by these two initiatives were closely linked to the technological advances in software and hardware and the funding granted by local and international organizations to this type of project. As a result, towards the end of the 1990s the *Museo Etnográfico Juan B. Ambrosetti* (National University of Buenos Aires), the *Instituto de Arqueología y Museo* (Tucuman National University) and the *Museo de Antropología* (National University of Córdoba) began with the digitization of part of their material object collections, inventories, catalogs, personal legacies, newspaper articles, journals, maps and photographs. Projects for the digitization of documentary and bibliographic collections were initiated at the *Archivo General de la Nación* (2008), the *Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Buenos Aires* (no specific date) and the *Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales* (2002). Although many of the projects were constrained by the absence of common legal frameworks, material infrastructure and especially financing mechanisms, significant progress was achieved (Izeta/Cattáneo 2019; Pegoraro/Spoliansky 2013).

In 2008, the Historical Archive of the *Museo de La Plata* received a grant from the “Endangered Archives”<sup>2</sup> program of the *British Library* for the microfilming and

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2 The Endangered Archives Programme aims at the preservation and public access of cultural heritage located in countries that do not have the necessary material and economic infrastructure to preserve it. The category of “endangered archives” includes any audio, visual, and

digitization of a series of photographic collections. The pilot phase of the project began in 2006, making it possible to identify the most threatened photographs and locate materials deposited in precarious conditions in various sections of the museum or as part of private collections. The positive results obtained in this first phase were continued in a major project (18 months) in which the provenance of selected photographic collections was determined and an online catalog was created for them (Kelly Hopfenblatt 2012)<sup>3</sup>.

Regarding the biological, palaeontological, anthropological and geological collections deposited in the *Museo de La Plata*, there has been a program since 2002 to digitize their database. However, each section presents different degrees of progress, which, independently of the number of elements in each collection, are conditioned by the availability of human, financial and structural resources.

In 2016, the Digitization Laboratory of the *Instituto Superior de Estudios Sociales* together with the Archive and Conservation Area and the *Museo de la Universidad Nacional* of Tucumán carried out a photographic-documentary register of 300 archaeological textiles belonging to the Nazca, Tiwanaku-Huari, Chimu and Inca cultures. Despite its short duration of less than a month, the project served to establish a series of guidelines aimed at documentation, preventive conservation and enhancement of a materially fragile cultural heritage (Cohen et al. 2017).

Among the initiatives to digitize anthropological collections and archives implemented in Argentina, those carried out by the *Laboratorio de Documentación e Investigación en Lingüística y Antropología*, the *Museo de Antropología* and the *Instituto de Antropología* are particularly relevant. These have achieved significant progress in terms of the number of digitized elements, the establishment of digitization norms, the formation of human resources, the capacitation offered to other institutions and the dissemination of the results obtained in specialized journals and scientific events.

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written material dating from before the second half of the 20th century. For more details see: <https://eap.bl.uk/>

- 3 The following collections were digitalized: Guido Boggiani (Gran Chaco), Pedro Godoy Album (Tierra del Fuego), Francisco Moreno (Museo Antropológico de Buenos Aires. Fieldwork 1878, 1883-1884), Samuel Boote Album (Tehuelches), Calchaquí (Calchaquí Valleys-NW Argentina), Christiano Junior (Río Negro-Patagonia), Julio Koslowski (Patagonia), Carlos Bruch (Yungas, NW Argentina), Roland Bonaparte (Collection Anthropologique du Prince Roland Bonaparte-Old and New World), Natalio Bernal Collection (Altiplano-Bolivia), Fernando Lahille (Tierra del Fuego), Adolfo Methfessel (NW Argentina), Omar Gancedo (Paraguay), "Gaucho" Collection (Buenos Aires), Hermann ten Kate (Tehuelches), Benjamin Muñiz Barretto (NW Argentina), "Vignati" Collection (Patagonia), Fuegian Collection (Tierra del Fuego) (Kelly Hopfenblatt 2012).

## Endangered languages

The Archive of the *Laboratorio de Documentación e Investigación en Lingüística y Antropología* (DILA) was created in 2007 as part of a scientific cooperation between the *Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas of Argentina* (CONICET) and the *Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics* of the Netherlands. The initial objective of DILA was to build linguistic databases, audios and videos for the conservation of four languages of the Chaco region considered to be endangered: Mocoví, Tapiete, Vilela and Wichí<sup>4</sup> (Alfonso et al. 2020).

The progress made by the DILA in documenting, preserving and disseminating the linguistic and cultural heritage of Argentina's native peoples led to the expansion of the disciplinary and thematic areas that were part of DILA's database. Collections and documents from other institutions and researchers were loaned and/or donated to DILA for digitization. As a result, three programs were established: 'American Indian Languages', 'Migration Languages' and finally 'Anthropology, Ethnography and History'. Currently, the DILA repository has more than 6,000 elements including visual, written and audio documents, covering three main areas: Linguistics, Anthropology and History, with subjects such as ethnobotany, archaeology and history of anthropology (Table).

Tab. 1: Details of elements present in the DILA database

Collection	Type	Provenance	Geographical coverage	Year	Material type	Quantity	Entry date
Bucca	Letters	/	International	1950/ 1970	written	/	2014
Bucca	Photographic	/	International	1950/ 1970	visual	192	2014
Bucca	Linguistic	/	International	1950/ 1970	audio	16	2014
Cordeu	Linguistic	Qom/ Angaité/ Sanapaná e Ishír	Argentina	1967/ 2002	audio	513	2018

4 The project, "Endangered Languages, Endangered Peoples in Argentina: mocoví, tapiete, vilela and wichí", took place at the *Facultad de Filosofía y Letras* (Buenos Aires University) and was part of the Endangered Languages Documentation Program (DoBeS) of the *Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics*. For more details see: <http://dobes.mpi.nl/?lang=es>.

Collection	Type	Provenance	Geographical coverage	Year	Material type	Quantity	Entry date
Dobes Programm	Linguistic	Vilela	Argentina	2002/2006	audio	34	2007
Dobes Programm	Linguistic	Wichi	Argentina	2002/2006	audio	37	2007
Dobes Programm	Linguistic	Mocoví	Argentina	2002/2006	audio	23	2007
Dobes Programm	Linguistic	Tapiete	Argentina	2002/2006	audio	5	2007
Dreidemie	Linguistic	Quechua	Argentina	2004/2006	audio	4	2016
Dreidemie	Photographic	Quechua	Argentina	2004/2006	visual	34	2016
Gualdieri	Linguistic	Mocoví	Argentina	1989/1996	audio	25	2017
Ibarra Grasso	Photographic	/	International	1953/2000	visual	1131	2018
Ibarra Grasso	Linguistic	/	/	1953/2000	audio	25	2018
Ibarra Grasso	Letters	/	International	1953/2000	written	304	2018
Piroddi	Photographic	Sardinian	Argentina	2019	visual	10	2020
Piroddi	Linguistic	Sardinian	Argentina	2019	audio	21	2020
Rex González	Field notebook	/	International	1940/2000	written	60	

Collection	Type	Provenance	Geographical coverage	Year	Material type	Quantity	Entry date
Rex González	Letters	/	International	1940/ 2000	written	2055	
Rex González	Photographic	/	International	1940/ 2000	visual	2704	
Scarpa	Linguistic	Quichua	Argentina	1996	audio	81	2016
Stell	Linguistic	Nivacle	Argentina/Paraguay	1968/ 1980	audio	14	2015

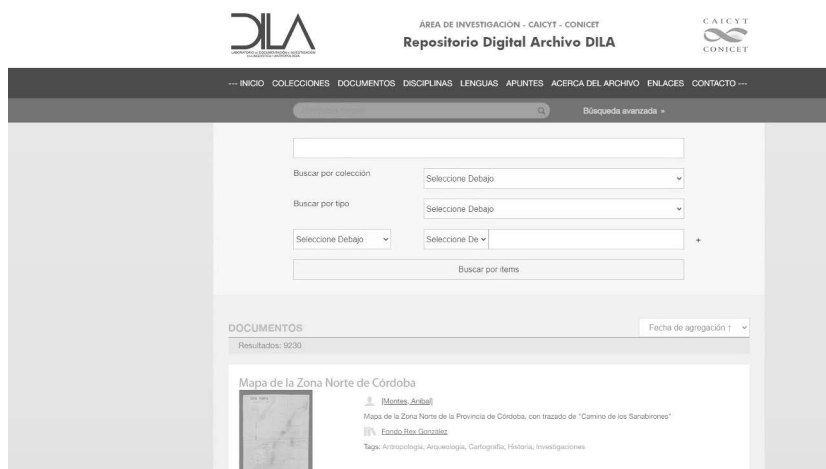
Table made by the author; Source: <https://www.caicyt-conicet.gov.ar/dila/>(accessed on 4.1.2021)

The search of the elements in DILA database can be filtered by collection and type. Within collections, you can specify the document type: audio, video, photograph, graphic or text. The description of the digitalized objects is specified by: collection, author, geographical coverage, identifier, type, discipline, date of production and material support (FIG 1). In this description no mention and/or reference to “other” ontologies or knowledge systems of the native peoples and/or their descendants could be found regarding the interpretation, function and meaning of the digitalized objects. The same descriptors are used in the elements categorized as “folklore” and “ethnographic” and resulting from the collaboration with representatives of the native peoples, specifying the type of relationship with the scholar, the name of the interviewee and his/her socio-language affiliation.

## Experiences from Central Argentina

At the local and regional level, two institutions have made significant progress in digitizing anthropological collections: the *Museo de Antropología* and the *Instituto de Antropología* of Córdoba. In 2010, the *Museo de Antropología* began with the “Project to support the computerization of the documentary archives and collections of the Museo de Antropología” which aimed at the preservation, conservation and digitization of anthropological collections and associated archival material (Izeta/Catáneo 2016). As pointed out by archaeologist Andrés Izeta, general coordinator of the project and director of the *Instituto de Antropología*, this project allowed a precise census and inventory of one of the most important and significant anthropological

Fig. 1: Details of the DILA database



Source: <https://www.caicyt-conicet.gov.ar/dila/items/browse>, last access 10.01.2021

collections in central Argentina.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, it led to the establishment of a virtual environment as a complementary space to the physical environments per se, and allowed the establishment of an interdisciplinary research team and the training of human resources for the project's expansion (Izeta, personal communication 2020; Izeta/Cattáneo 2019).

Two years later, and in order to continue the massive digitization processes of the cultural heritage deposited in the museum, the *Instituto de Antropología* of Córdoba was created. This was part of a new institutional policy of the CONICET aimed at increasing the presence of scientific institutes outside the area of the city of Buenos Aires and La Plata. At present, it has been possible to establish a provisional list of 12.000 records made up of 'lots' which make up a total of approximately 190.000 elements, including archaeological and ethnographic objects and documentary collections from the provinces of Córdoba, Santa Fe, Entre Ríos, Santiago del Estero, Catamarca and Chubut. Along with the objective of digitizing the tangible and intangible heritage, the institute aimed to train human resources,

5 A team of archaeologists, photographers, historians and conservation specialists surveyed nearly 60 thousand archaeological, ethnographic and folkloric objects from the provinces of Córdoba, Santa Fe, Entre Ríos, Santiago del Estero, Catamarca and Chubut (Izeta/Cattáneo 2016).

promote the implementation of this type of initiative among other professionals and facilitate the transparency of results and knowledge to a wider public.<sup>6</sup>

Basic in its formulations, these objectives seem to be among the main epistemological challenges. In this sense, Andrés Izeta pointed out that one of the great challenges is “[...]the awareness of anthropological colleagues[...]” about the importance of digitizing anthropological collections (Izeta, personal communication). This evidences the need for continuous training of human resources for research projects and, in addition, the inclusion of specific programs and/or seminars as part of the curricular training. In the particular case of Argentina, this is accompanied by a legal framework that favors and encourages digitization projects.<sup>7</sup>

In their study on digital museums, Ramesh Srinivasan and Jeffrey Huang pointed out that the digitization of museum collections offers the opportunity to develop fluid and reflective ontologies adapted to the priorities of the actors involved (Srinivasan/Huang 2005). It is in this capacity to develop fluid ontologies that digitization becomes an invaluable instrument for the interpellation and deconstruction of museological practices at both practical and theoretical levels.

This may seem like a distant, almost utopian goal, but the digitization of anthropological collections is producing a change in the daily dynamics of anthropo-

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6 The specific objectives are: 1) The standardization of collections' acronyms and inventory systems, 2) To advance in the preventive conservation of those lots or objects that have been identified and that present potential problems of loss of information, 3) To carry out the technical registration of digital photography of the remaining 3D objects, 4) To preserve and digitalize the audiovisual material of the folkloric collection and the institutional collection, which includes recordings on paste disc, film (16mm), photographs on paper and their negatives in 35mm and glass plates (Izeta/Cattáneo 2019). It should also be noted that the institute was part of the pilot test group of the “Interactive Research Platform for the Social Sciences” together with the *Instituto de Geografía, Historia y Ciencias Sociales* of Tandil, the *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios sobre la Cultura y Sociedad* of Córdoba, *Instituto de Investigaciones Geohistóricas* of Chaco, DILA and the *Instituto Superior de Estudios Sociales* of Tucumán. This platform, which began in 2011, aims to compile, preserve and promote open access to documentary sources and primary and research data sets in the social sciences.

7 In 2011, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Productive Innovation established Resolution No. 469, creating the National System of Digital Repositories. It consists of an interoperable network of repositories from 44 institutions, making available 336.506 scientific and technical papers to read and download for free. This decisive policy in favor of Open Access was completed with the enactment of Law No. 26. 899 in 2013, which established that all public agencies and institutions belonging to the *National System of Science, Technology and Innovation* and funded by the national state “[...]must develop institutional digital repositories of open access, own or third party, in which they will deposit the scientific and technological production resulting from work, training and / or projects, financed in whole or in part with public funds, of their researchers, technologists, teachers, postdoctoral fellows and masters and doctoral students” (<http://www.repositoriosdigitales.mincyt.gob.ar>, last access 10.01.2021)

logical practice. The reduction of material objects linked to anthropological practices (collections, documents, etc.) to a binary code allows new criteria for the distribution, reproduction and creation of discourses generated from the material objects, criteria and discourses that are made available to a public that exceeds the sometimes-occluded academic space.

## Suquía

The systematic digitization work carried out by the *Museo de Antropología* and the *Instituto de Antropología* of Córdoba had important corollaries in the enhancement of an open and collaborative science. In 2015 the “Digital Archaeology Program” was established. One year later, and in order to continue the efforts in the digitization of the tangible and intangible heritage, the *Suquía* digital repository was inaugurated (FIG 2). With an emphasis on archaeology, and built on FAIR<sup>8</sup> principles, this repository is organized into 19 ‘communities’ that are subdivided into different ‘collections’ (FIG 3). The information contained includes: institutional documentation and archives, digitalized objects, researchers’ intellectual productions, educational materials for museum visitors, archaeological impact studies, and radiocarbon dating.<sup>9</sup>

Fig. 2: Details of the *Suquía* database

The screenshot shows the Suquía digital repository interface. At the top, there is a header with the 'PAD' logo and the text 'Suquía'. Below the header, there is a search bar and a navigation menu. The main content area is titled 'Añadido Recientemente' and lists several recent entries, including correspondence and expeditions related to archaeological collections and personnel.

<https://suquia.ffyh.unc.edu.ar/>, last access 10.01.2021

8 For Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable.

9 For more details see <https://www.suquia.ffyh.unc.edu.ar/community-list>, last access 04.01.2021.

Fig. 3: Details of the *Suquia* ›collections‹

The screenshot shows the PAD website interface. At the top, there is a search bar and a 'Login' button. Below the header, the main content area is titled 'Comunidades en Suquia'. It features a list of communities with expandable sections. The first community is '1º Congreso Argentino de Estudios Líricos (CAELA)', followed by 'Archivo del Museo de Antropología', 'Centro de Investigaciones de la Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades, UNC - 1988 - 2002', 'Instituto de Antropología FFyH, UNC - 1956 - 1999', 'Instituto de Antropología, Lingüística y Folklore, UNC - 1941 - 1999', 'Museo de Antropología FFyH, UNC - 2003 al presente', 'Archivo Investigaciones del Instituto de Antropología de Córdoba - IDACOR', 'Área de Educación Museo de Antropología', and 'Bases de datos'. On the right side, there is a sidebar with a search bar, a 'Login' button, and a table with filters: 'Todo Suquia', 'Comunidades & Colecciones', 'Por fecha de publicación', 'Autores', 'Títulos', 'Materias', and 'Mi cuenta' (with sub-items: 'Acceder', 'Registro').

Source: <https://suquia.ffyh.unc.edu.ar/community-list>, last access 10.01.2021

Currently there are more than 3.000 digital objects under the Creative Commons license (Izeta/Cattáneo 2019). Together with institutions from La Plata and Rosario, the *Museo de Antropología* and the *Instituto de Antropología* of Córdoba have the objective that not only researchers but also the general public can access primary research data through *Suquia*.<sup>10</sup> As Andrés Izeta pointed out, open and federal access, a model advocated by most of the Argentinean institutions of memory, implies making available to society not only the object of study in particular but also the discourse generated from it, or in other words “the ways of doing and the ways of presenting” (Izeta, personal communication 2020).

Regarding the interaction with the *Suquia* database, the item search can be filtered by the 19 ‘communities’ mentioned above, date of publication, authors, titles and discipline. After creating a user account one can contribute to the repository by submitting items to the various collections. Unfortunately, this option was not available when the page was consulted. The page was consulted between January 4 and 10, 2021, and at the time it was not possible to access this option. According to Andrés Izeta, when subscribing, one is assigned by default to a group called ‘Anonymous’. This group does not have permission to upload material, which must be authorized by the system administrators. Izeta explains that this is done to avoid inconveniences when uploading items either individually or in batches (Izeta

10 Between 2016 and October 2020, 277.090 searches were conducted. Unfortunately, we have not been able to access data concerning the number of people who visit *Suquia* or/and their profession (Izeta et al. 2021)

2021). Finally, system users can request a digital copy of a particular item from the authors and/or those responsible for the image in question.

Although the thematic emphasis of this repository is archaeology, as mentioned above, we can find 211 objects ascribed to Ethnography and Ethnology. These items are grouped under various labels such as: 'indigenous peoples', 'native peoples', 'ethnobotany', 'ethnoecology' and 'ethnohistory'. In all cases, the descriptors used are: collection, associated documentation, digitization date, author, and metadata. Each object is accompanied by a preview thumbnail, which at the time of consulting the page could not be verified on all objects. In case of standard text files, comma-separated values file, Waveform Audio File or MPEG-1 Audio Layer file thumbnail is not generated. The search system also has different levels of security and access to information, so that in the case of items containing 'sensitive' data, no thumbnails are generated.

The inclusion of documents generated from the objects allows the reconstruction of their itinerary, being able to specify the network of spaces, practices and discourses that were articulated for the construction of their condition of 'study object'. We believe that this 'biography' could increase its potential through the inclusion of descriptors originating from ontologies and/or knowledge systems of the native peoples. Of significant epistemological importance and political relevance, these ontologies appear, in some cases, in attached documents (resulting from the work with the objects), but are not visible on the home page. Another example in which native ontologies are included are two documentaries that show the collaborative and horizontal work between various actors (professionals, native communities, etc.) around the treatment, management and naming of human remains.

## Final Words

Institutions of memory (libraries, museums and archives) are key locations in the existence and dynamics of knowledge. Their material, discursive and human infrastructure is destined to the selection, classification and ordering of the pluridiverse systems of knowledge. In the specific case of museums, these processes are materialized, especially, in the collections, whose objects are a palimpsest that compresses multiple and diverse material, social, political and epistemological dimensions. In this sense, unrestricted access to the collections, objects and documents associated with them gains transcendental political relevance, since it means access to the essential foundations from which museums establish their centralism, authority and discursive power (Das and Lowe 2018; Geismar 2012).

The digitization of anthropological collections has the potential to generate a new space where not only the above mentioned elements can be made visible and

accessed, but also those historically denied or hidden by museological discursive practices: the spaces where the objects circulated and the interrelationship processes by/through which they were signified (Henare et al. 2007; Rheinberger 2000). Without this, digitization may eventually operate as a space of continuity and/or reproduction of the colonial thought regimes in which the museums' discursive authority was founded (Boast 2011; Geismar 2012; Henning 2007).

The *Laboratorio de Documentación e Investigación en Lingüística y Antropología* and *Suqía* contributed significantly to the preservation and promotion of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Argentina's indigenous peoples (*pueblos originarios*). At the same time, they have made available to researchers and a wider audience the knowledge generated from these heritages, contributing to the visibility of narratives on which the museological 'authority' was founded.

The value of these achievements becomes even more significant when considering the limitations of the Argentine scientific context concerning structures, finances and human resources. In the local context they have set a precedent regarding the potential of digital infrastructures for developing an open and collaborative scientific practice. In relation to this, *Suqía* is constituted as "[...] the first open access thematic institutional digital repository in Argentina and South America [...]" (Izeta et al. 2021).

Both examples also contribute to thinking beyond the traditional limits of materiality, which, if we restrict it to the object per se, does not allow us to see its complex biography and the dynamics of the anthropological practices that cross it. In this sense, Izeta pointed out the importance of "...digitization, the recovery of images, recordings, audio, video, field notebooks, sheets. Everything, everything that I believe is recorded in ethnographic fieldwork or what researchers record, is of fundamental importance that they be digitalized, even the institution's historical archives" (Izeta, personal communication).

However, certain issues remain unresolved. My research on these digital repositories evidences the persistence of Western ontological and epistemological hierarchies in the ordering, classification and display of digitized objects. The inclusion of the wide range of practices and discourses associated with these objects would be an important contribution to the establishment of a collaborative digital platform that enables the connection of multiple places, individuals, and histories (Scholz 2017).

Far from detracting from the achievements of these two digital repositories, these remarks seek to contribute to the deconstruction of the epistemological and political limitations imposed by Western museological knowledge systems. Both examples show us that these new technologies of memory can become a nodal point where we can concentrate and articulate information dispersed in different places (archives, libraries, personal documents, etc.). The digital space can become a space where polyphony of voices, heterogeneity of perspectives and pluridiversity

of knowledge systems converge (Christie/Verran 2013; Glass 2015; Hogsden/Poulter 2012; Ngata et al. 2012; Salmond 2013; Scholz 2017). Conceived as a relational place of memory, digitalization can contribute significantly to the democratization of scientific practice and, fundamentally, to the de-westernization of institutions of memory.

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