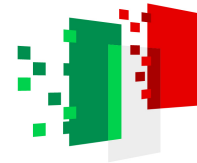




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e della Ricerca**



TOUCHWELL: A Project to Employ Archaeological Museum Collections for People's Care, Welfare and Wellbeing

Elena Corradini, Sara Uboldi, Francesco Gherardini, Elisabetta Genovese

Borderless Museums Conference
18-21 may 2025
Gorizia-Nova Gorica

Research background

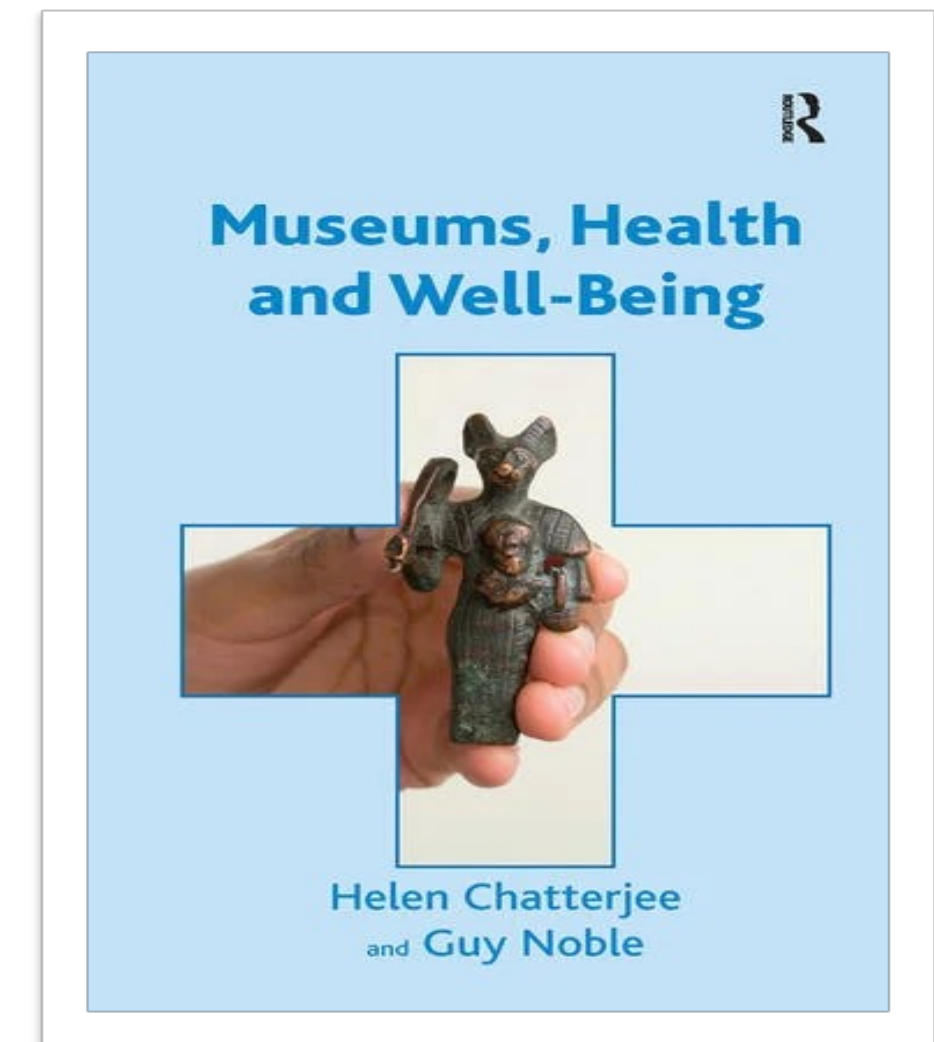
A growing body of research provides evidence of positive associations between the participation to cultural and creative experiences and health and well-being benefits.

The therapeutic potential of museum objects is recognised as an important dimension of museum practice.

Handling museum objects can support mental and emotional wellbeing and becomes a potential tool for intercultural dialogue to support community development.

The *Heritage in Hospital* protocol developed by University College of London (UCL), which involves in particular the collections of British Museum, provides a series of data on the real and measurable benefits that arise from the experience of handling a selection of cultural assets.

In particular, the experimental results report effects in terms of supporting for psycho-emotional wellbeing, stimulating creativity, distracting from the daily routine of the hospital environment, developing self-awareness, promoting knowledge, including intercultural knowledge, supporting relationships and socialization.



Chatterjee, H. J., Noble, G.: *Museums, Health and Well-being*. Routledge, London 2016

Research background



Fancourt, D, Finn, S. What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review. Health Evidence Network synthesis report, No. 67. WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen 2019.

Museopathy: Exploring the Healing Potential of Handling Museum Objects

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Sonjel Vreeland**
Guy Noble***
University College, London

Abstract

To coincide with emerging arts and health practices, University College London Museums & Collections and University College London Hospitals Arts partnered to create a pilot project, entitled "Heritage in Hospitals", which sought to assess whether handling museum objects has a positive impact on patient wellbeing. Quantitative data from 32 sessions conducted with patients in May through July (inclusive) of 2008 demonstrated, on average, an increase in self-reported measures of life satisfaction and health status after handling museum objects. Constant comparative analysis of the qualitative data collected from the sessions revealed two major recurring themes: "impersonal/educational" and "personal/reminiscence". The first theme included instances where handling museum objects allowed patients to access truths about the objects ascertainable solely through touch (such as gauging weight, texture, temperature, and spatial relation to the body), to verify what was seen, to facilitate an intimate and imaginative connection with the museum objects and their origins, to investigate and explore the objects, to permit an interaction with the "rare" and "museum-worthy", and to assist with aesthetic appreciation. The second theme illustrated the project's potential to assist with counselling on issues of illness, death, loss and mourning, and to help restore dignity, respect and a sense of identity (particularly among elderly patients) by providing a springboard for reminiscing and the telling of life stories in a highly institutionalized setting. This paper contextualizes the project, explores the implications of the project's methodology and its findings, and provides questions for future research.

Key words: wellbeing, hospitals, reminiscence, handling, objects

Introduction

The idea that museum objects are medicinal is not particularly strange or new. In 'Museum Manners: The Sensory Life of the Early Museum' Constance Classen writes that some objects made their way into late 17th and early 18th century museums precisely because of their medicinal use: 'Characteristic museum pieces which were also items in contemporary pharmacopoeia included not just specimens of plants and animals, however, but also such things as mummy flesh and even fossils and stone axes – which would be taken in powdered form. The rare and wondrous qualities that made an object a likely museum piece might also make it strong medicine' (Classen 2007, p. 905).

The pilot project 'Heritage in Hospitals' created jointly by University College London Museums and Collections (hereafter referred to as UCL M&C) and University College London Hospitals Arts (hereafter referred to as UCLH Arts) proposed a novel research project: to take museum objects to patients' bedsides and to assess whether handling museum objects has a positive impact on patient wellbeing. While several museums are currently widening the scope of their outreach activities by bringing loan boxes into hospitals and nursing homes (Chatterjee, 2008), little evaluation work has been done to measure the impact of these sessions. Concurrent with research projects that seek to clinically demonstrate the health benefits of incorporating the visual and performing arts in hospital settings, the results of this research can

museum and society, Nov. 2009. 7(3) 164-177 © 2009, Helen Chatterjee, Sonjel Vreeland, Guy Noble. ISSN 1479-8360

Chatterjee, H. J., Vreeland, S., Noble, G.: Museopathy: Exploring the healing potential of handling museum objects. *Museum and Society*, 7(3), 164–177, 2009.

Research background

Within clinical contexts, the studies have shown that sessions based on **handling museum objects** can support positive emotions, self-esteem, and social interactions.



Camic, P. M., Chatterjee, H. J.: Museums and art galleries as partners for public health interventions. *Perspectives in Public Health*, 133(1), 66-71, 2013.

Scholarly Review

Object Handling for People With Dementia: A Scoping Review and the Development of Intervention Guidance

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Among the various psychosocial interventions aiming at improving behavior, quality of life, and the well-being of people with dementia, one that has attracted recent attention has been object handling. This scoping review synthesizes available studies on object handling for people with dementia, their effects, and methodological characteristics and describes its components and likely domains.

Research Design and Methods: The search was conducted using CINAHL, PsycINFO, MEDLINE, PsycARTICLES, Academic Search Elite, and Art Full Text, plus review of reference lists and hand search. Data from the studies included were chattered and reported in narrative form.

Results: Eleven studies were included; of which, 9 described a group intervention and 10 investigated the distinctive value of heritage items. Studies used a mixed-methods or qualitative design and varied in their procedures, including number of sessions and length of intervention. Most studies reported positive effects on well-being, mood, and emotion in those with dementia. Qualitative investigations revealed that the co-construction of an object's meaning facilitated new learning, social inclusion, and change in attitudes toward dementia. From the review and stakeholder consultations, a definition of object handling is proposed, which includes three components: presenting, receiving, and responding.

Discussion and Implications: The findings suggest that people with dementia may benefit from object handling interventions as a means of improving well-being, mood, and social inclusion. The review highlighted a variety of approaches used and a small number of studies were identified under the term of "object handling." Further studies are needed to examine the complexity of object handling, its impact within dementia care settings, and that explicitly use the term "object handling." Given the focus to date on heritage, archive, and museum objects, more studies involving the handling of everyday material objects are needed because these are by definition highly accessible.

Translational Significance: An increasing number of studies have used object handling as a psychosocial intervention in dementia care. However, there is inconsistency in how this term is applied. This review explores the literature on object handling and dementia. The evidence suggests that people with dementia may benefit from object handling interventions as a means of improving well-being, mood, and social inclusion. The paper proposes guidance based on an atheoretical model to describe the components of object handling. The findings, definition, and model are recommended for use in future studies of object handling and dementia.

Keywords: Dementia care, Heritage items, Nonpharmacological interventions, Object handling, Psychosocial interventions

D'Andrea, F., Denning T., Tischler V.: Object Handling for People With Dementia: A Scoping Review and the Development of Intervention Guidance, *Innovation in Aging*, 6, 5, 2022

Reserch background

From the analysis of the field literature in English-language, this direction of studies and experimentation on **handling of museum objects is well increased in North America, Europe and Oceania** [Lewitt, R. S., Manyukhina, Y., Bangpan, M., & Wyse, D.: Early Years Learning at the Science Museum. Rapid Evidence Assessment. Final Report for the Science Museum Group and Helen Hamlyn Trust (2019)].

This report is based on a review of 43 peer-reviewed publications, which present the findings of qualitative and quantitative studies conducted in science museums, science centres, natural history museums, art galleries/museums, and children's and national museums that house Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths STEM-related collections and exhibits. The review addresses the following Research Questions:

1. How do young children aged 0-8 years engage with museum objects related to Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM)?
2. What innovative ways can be found to enhance young children's curiosity and engagement with museum objects related to STEM?

<https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/625969/>

Touchwell Project

TOUCHWELL Project approved and financed by the Ministry of University and Research (MUR), within the framework of PNRR-National Recovery and Resilience Plan for research projects of relevant national interest, **aims to develop knowledge, digital technologies and tools to promote cognitive, physical and sensory accessibility of the archaeological heritage within a cultural welfare system, providing data on the impacts that culture can have on elderly people and on people with disability in care contexts, in a holistic and salutogenic perspective, influencing social and cultural policies.**

UNIVERSITIES INVOLVED

- University of Modena and Reggio Emilia coordinator
- University of Siena
- University of Pavia

MUSEUMS INVOLVED

- Museum of Archaeology of University of Pavia
- National Archaeological Museum of Arezzo
- Civic Museum of Modena
- Civic Museums of Reggio Emilia
- Civic Museum of Casteggio and Oltrepò Pavese (Pavia)





TOUCHWELL



AIM

To consider the potential of engaging with archaeological finds as an activity to support health and wellbeing in Mental Cognitive Impairment and Dementia's people, disability people and citizens.

Exploring

1

Research methodology

2

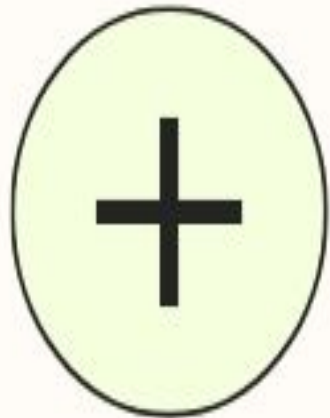
Evidence for the impact
of the cultural intervention

3

Best practice



Developing



Developing Archaeological Handling Session Protocol;
Ethical Clearance;
Designing handling sessions;
Data collection methodology

I. DEVELOPING HANDLING SESSION PROTOCOL



For individuals with cognitive impairments, such as dementia, engaging with tactile objects can trigger memories and stimulate cognitive processes. The physical act of handling artifacts or 3D heritage objects can evoke personal and historical memories providing a form of reminiscence therapy that can improve cognitive functions (Falk and Dierking 1992; Dodds e Jones 2014)

Neuropsychological evidence have suggested that there is a close relationship between touch and emotional system and motivational areas in the brain which could explain the sense of wellbeing that may be evoked through touch (Chrutch et al. 2008; Lanceley et al. 2012; Thomson et al. 2018).

The researchers found that manipulation of heritage objects can also have a positive effect on the volunteers facilitators psychological wellbeing in terms of communications skills, creative engagement and use of interpersonal skills (Cowan et al. 2019; Ritchie 2022).

I. DEVELOPING HANDLING SESSION PROTOCOL

based on the manipulation and exploration
of archaeological finds reproductions
to collect data on the impact
that they can have
on elderly people and on people with disability



II. ETHICAL CLEARANCE

- Detailed description of the project and tools
- list of centers with their respective contact persons

approved by a Ethics Committee

set up for the project by the Local Health Authority of Modena.

Its main function is to assess the ethical and scientific aspects
in order to protect rights, safety and well-being of the people involved.





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III. DESIGNING HANDLING SESSIONS

SELECTION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS FROM MUSEUMS

REALIZATION OF REPRODUCTIONS

THE PROJECT USES

1) EXPERIMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY

2) DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

The digitisation of the archaeological finds involves the use of a 3D scanner, which allows the digital 3D model to be reconstructed without touching the find itself.

The 3D scanner uses two different technologies,
one based on white light
the other based on blue laser
which do not damage or alter the find
and are not dangerous to humans.





III. DESIGNING HANDLING SESSION ACCESSIBLE INFORMATIVE TOOLS CARDS FOR THE REPRODUCTIONS OF ARCHEOLOGICAL FINDS

Explore the Archaeological Find Reproduction

What do you **feel** when you touch the
object?

What do you **find interesting**?

What does it **remind** you of?

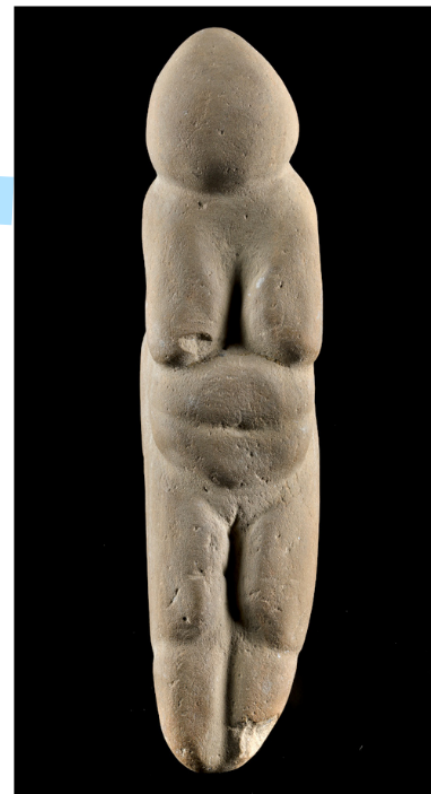
How does handling this object make **you**
feel?

What **attracted you** to this object?

What do you **think** this object is?



The Venus of Chiozza



Civic Museums of Reggio Emilia.

Characteristics

The Venus of Chiozza is made of **yellowish sandstone**. Its shapes refer to **the cult of the Mother Goddess**.

Its characteristics are such that it dates back to the **Upper Paleolithic**. Scholars have hypothesized that Neolithic people collected the Venus, perhaps in the high plain, and then brought it to their **village**.

The Prehistoric Venuses

The Venuses of the **Upper Paleolithic** are round, full-bodied statuettes carved in stone, bone, or ivory, depicting **female figures**. Around 140 of these have been found across Europe, from the Atlantic coasts to Siberia. They share common features, such as the **accentuation of female characteristics** like the breasts, belly, and buttocks, almost certainly to symbolize fertility and to be connected with the **cult of the Mother Goddess**.

The discovery

The scholar, Luigi De Buoi, who found the Venus of Chiozza, said:

"On September 11, 1940, while I was wandering among the old clay and pebbly waste material dumped to the east of the quarry, where the rains wash away the clay and often reveal fragments of flint and jasper, I had the **unexpected fortune of finding**, among some pebbles from the quarry, **a statuette about twenty centimeters long**".

IV. DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

For quantitative analysis

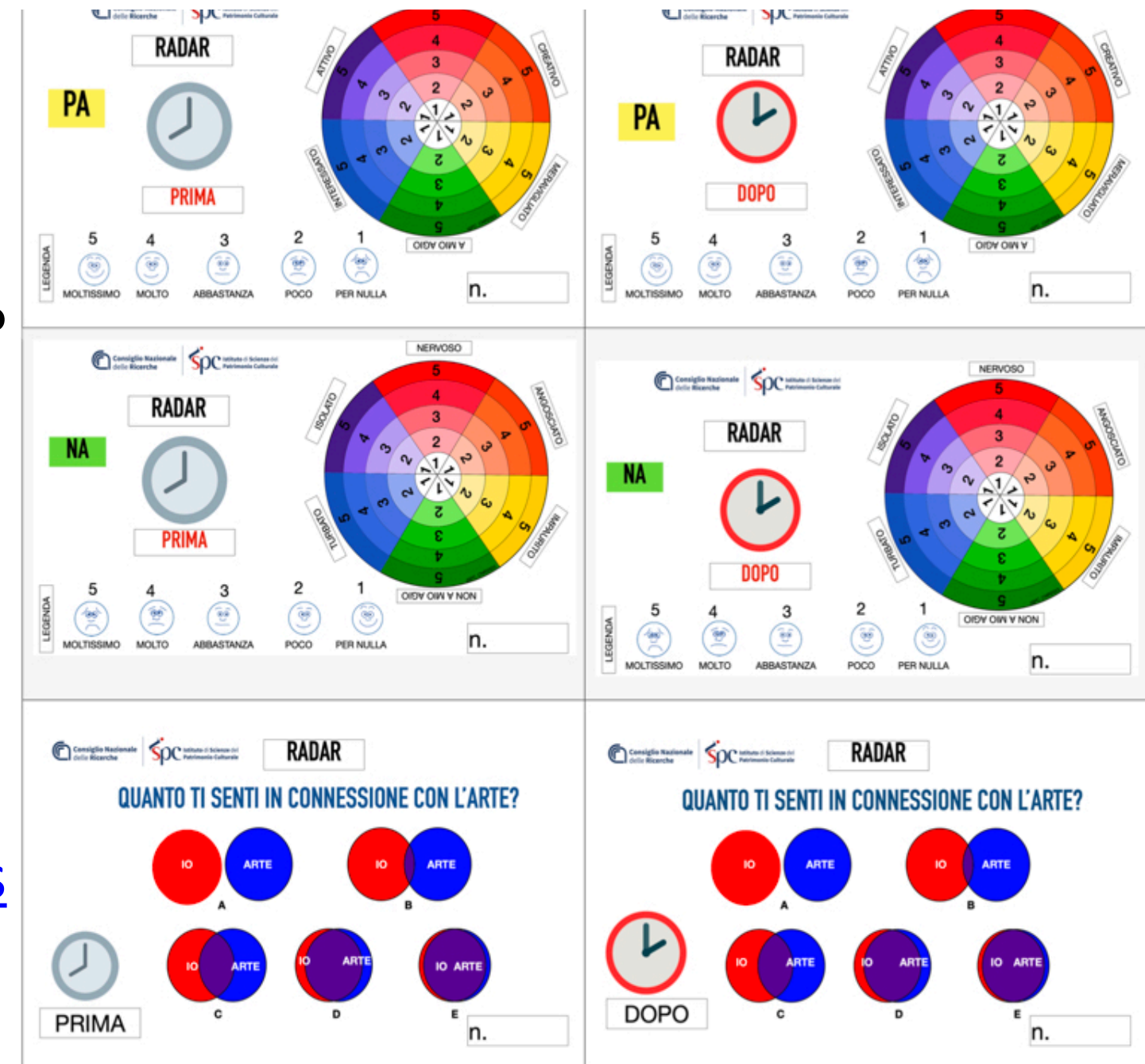
RADAR toolkit

[https://iris.cnr.it/handle/20.500.14243/460639?](https://iris.cnr.it/handle/20.500.14243/460639?mode=complete)
mode=complete

For qualitative analysis

ATLAS.ti

a [computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software](#) that facilitates analysis of [qualitative data](#)



IV. DATA COLLECTION METHODOLOGY

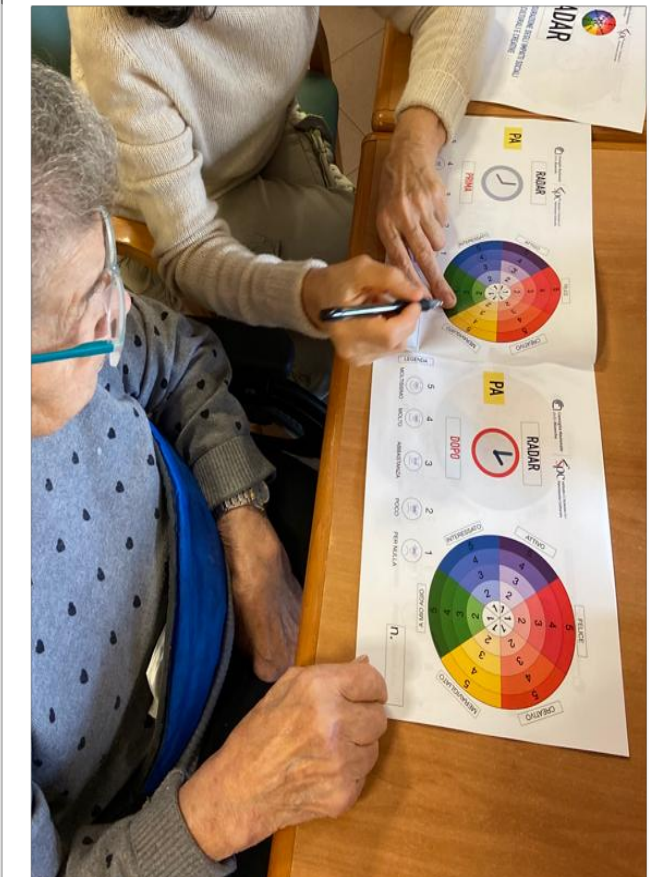
Radar toolkit

Quantitative analysis

Developed by the Institute of Cultural Heritage Sciences of the National Research Council ISPC-CNR

to evaluate the impacts, in terms of self-perceived well-being and values and meanings given to cultural experiences.

Realized to assess visitors' perceived connection with cultural heritage.



IV. DATA COLLECTION METODOLOGY

Atlas.ti Qualitative analysis

**Qualitative approaches such as interviews, focus groups
during the meeting manipulation sessions with elderly people or with people with dementia**

Questions to stimulate dialogue during the meeting manipulation sessions

What do you feel when you touch the object?

What do you find interesting?

What does it remind you of?

How does handling this object make you feel?

What attracted you to this object?

What do you think this object is?



Thanks!

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