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Making Cultural Heritage Significant for the Public. The Role of Researchers in Encouraging Public Awareness and Local Pride

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The municipality of Olavarría, Buenos Aires province, Argentina, has a rich, diverse, and ancient natural and cultural heritage, although this is not well known by the local community. For this reason, an itinerant exhibition was developed to promote public access to scientific information and community awareness concerning the importance of local heritage. This project was the starting point of an integral programme of public outreach and science education, whose main goal is to facilitate intellectual and physical access to academic knowledge by local communities. After seven years of development, several lessons have been learned, including the need to increase stakeholders' participation and the exploration of new strategies of communication in order to engage different segments of the public.

KEYWORDS: cultural heritage, exhibitions, public communication of science, visitor studies, public archaeology

Introduction

As social sciences researchers working at a public university in the city of Olavarría, a medium-size town (Gravano, et al., 2015) located in the geographical centre of Buenos Aires province, Argentina,¹ we have taken on the challenge of making our work results significant for the local community, whose heritage is the object of our research interests.

The centre of Buenos Aires province, and particularly Olavarría, has heritage resources that evidence different processes of the natural history and human settlement in the region, and that could be suitably recreated for dissemination. These resources have been the object of archaeological, palaeontological and historical

research for over twenty-five years by different teams from the National University of the Center of Buenos Aires Province (UNICEN), especially within the Institute of Archaeological and Paleontological Research of the Pampean Quaternary (INCUAPA);² thus, a significant amount of information about the area has been generated. However, this academically produced knowledge, which explores the wealth and diversity of cultural resources from Olavarría, is practically unknown by its inhabitants and scarcely explored in formal and non-formal education.

In 2009, an interdisciplinary cultural heritage programme called PATRIMONIA was established within INCUAPA with two objectives: on the one hand, to investigate heritage processes attending to the diversity of voices and views of different sectors of the community; on the other, to facilitate access to scientific information through participatory strategies that arise from public concern regarding the value of local heritage. In this way, a compilation of scientific information was published to present a substantial part of the research carried out in the centre of Buenos Aires Province. The aim was to offer local communities, educators, and governors easy access to information that could only be found in academic papers (Endere, et al., 2009). In 2010, a grant was requested for outreach activities with the purpose of organizing an itinerant exhibition called ‘Olavarría Before Olavarría: The Contribution of Archaeology, Paleontology and History to Local Identity and Cultural Tourism’, whose objective was to provide the community with an updated summary of scientific information about the local past that allowed it to better understand and value its history.

Eight years after the opening of the exhibition, it is still in use and has prompted multiple activities. The aim of this article is to present the working experiences born from the process of the developing the exhibition and the subsequent projects generated from it, thanks to the interactions with different audiences and interest groups. All this has motivated an analysis of the recreation process of the local heritage and the need to make some reflections that transcend the case study and provide the basis for future heritage enhancement in this or other communities, particularly those which have diverse and contested heritage.

Theoretical framework

The public communication of science is of vital importance in the heritage valuation process, especially when working with heritage that is not noticeable per se and requires expert knowledge for its identification, study, and assessment, as in the case of the archaeological and palaeontological heritage of the centre of Buenos Aires province. In this sense, it has been stated that the work of scientists consists in not only producing knowledge, but also transforming it for its communication, protection, and assessment (Gianotti García, et al., 2005). This process of transformation is essential in order to democratize the knowledge about the past produced in academia and to make it more accessible to the public, fostering feelings of belonging towards this past and the heritage it represents. In this sense, Science Communication is defined as ‘the use of appropriate skills, media, activities, and dialogue to produce one or more of the following personal responses to science (the AEIOU vowel analogy): Awareness, Enjoyment, Interest, Opinion-forming, and Understanding’ (Burns, et al., 2003: 183).

Nevertheless, it is necessary to highlight the fact that the values and social meanings of heritage are not equally shared by all members of a community. In fact, the differences of appropriation depend on the diverse cultural capital and interests of the social actors involved. Previous research carried out by this team has showed that, in the centre of Buenos Aires province, diverse views and assessment coexist in relation to the past and those assets identified as part of the local cultural heritage. For example, when political authorities, cultural agents, tourism entrepreneurs, and journalists were asked for their opinions on important sites of heritage, they identified a number of sites and places which were quite different from those selected by researchers and experts. They proved to have a considerable lack of knowledge of the local historical, archaeological, and palaeontological heritage. According to their visions, cultural heritage was only related to architectural and monumental assets, and the most valued places were linked to natural areas (Conforti, et al., 2013; Conforti, et al., 2016; Endere, et al., 2009).

Therefore, it is important to denaturalize the idea that heritage is assessed in the same way by the whole society, and that a unique view is held in relation to its importance and how it should be protected. Our proposal fits within a context of broader discussions that have reconsidered the theoretical basis of the archaeological discipline and its social implications (Gathercole & Lowenthal, 1990; Hodder, 1986; Lowenthal, 1996; Trigger, 1996). In this context, heritage is understood as a social construction (Bond & Gilliam, 1994; Prats, 1997), the value of which relies upon the meanings and uses that people attach to it. The acknowledgement and incorporation of the view of ‘the others’ is therefore considered to be an essential part of the work of archaeologists, conservators, and museum professionals.

The interest in the social, political, and cultural contexts where archaeological issues are put forward (Carman, 2012) makes it imperative to listen to the ‘other voices’, apart from those of the researchers (Hodder, 2008; Preucel & Hodder, 1996) and to guide the research methodology to more participatory work with the community (Moshenska, 2008; Tully, 2007). These new theoretical perspectives have contributed to the strengthening of a public archaeology (Schadla-Hall, 1999), which engages with a wide variety of issues not traditionally dealt with in basic archaeological research (Ascherson, 2000; Merriman, 2004; see also Funari & Bezerra, 2012).

From the 1970s onwards, museology had already had a theoretical renovation with the ‘New Museology’, which emphasized the social role of museums, as well as the need to democratize culture and to encourage an open and interactive dialogue among researchers, visitors, and the community as a whole (Doering, 1999; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Loomis, 1987; Vergo, 1989). In the same way as archaeology drew forth the opinion of ‘other voices’, museology emphasized the public role of museums and the need to better understand the visitor profile. In this framework, studies on the public have made a significant contribution to understanding the sociological and psychological reasons of visitors’ leisure preferences (Eidelman, et al., 2013; Falk 2009; Falk & Dierking, 1992; McManus, 2000; Merriman, 1991).

These debates had their counterpart in the development of public archaeology in Argentina (Fabra, et al., 2015), together with claims of indigenous peoples over their own heritage (Endere, 2005; 2014; Jofré, 2010; Korstanje, et al., 2013; Politis & Curtoni, 2011). This has allowed indigenous peoples to participate in the production of knowledge, the design of site management, and interpretation projects

(e.g. Corimayo & Acuto, 2015; Curtoni & Endere, 2015; Hernández Llosas, et al., 2010; Rivolta, et al., 2014).

‘Olavarría Before Olavarría’: a remote past hardly known

The idea of creating a travelling exhibition was based on the concern for decentralizing the university as the focus of scientific production, as well as the city of Olavarría as the place where most cultural events and activities take place. It is worth mentioning that there are ten museums in the municipal district of Olavarría:³ three of them are located in the city itself (on the subjects of fine arts, sciences, and a site museum located in the car workshop of two brothers: one of them was a famous racing car driver and the other an innovative mechanic), and seven in villages within the municipal district, which are all dedicated to the history of the villagers and their families, mostly immigrants, after their arrival in the territory.

Our aim was to circulate the exhibition around the municipal district to make it accessible to a diverse and wide segment of the population, taking advantage of the availability of space within local museums and cultural centres. In this sense, the initial intended audience was the inhabitants of these villages. This choice had a dual purpose; on the one hand, it recognized the importance of local museums as places of communication (Hernández Hernández, 1994) and, simultaneously, we hoped that it would encourage new visitors, reaffirming the social role of these cultural places (see Figure 1). Hence, training workshops were provided for the museums’ staff and, each time the exhibition opened in a new venue, a conference given by scientists (e.g. archaeologists, historians, geologists, etc.) was offered to the general public.

In the exhibition, the most significant milestones of the natural and cultural history of Olavarría before its foundation (during the second half of the nineteenth century) were presented. It is worth noting that the town of Olavarría was created by the national government as part of the fight against indigenous peoples for the control of their lands. The exhibition was called ‘Olavarría Before Olavarría’, as its purpose was to show the lesser-known history of the municipal district, especially as it related to the indigenous past, which extends further back in time and is much more varied and dynamic than the majority of local people think.

Another aspect that underpinned the development of the exhibition was the 2010 national celebration for the bicentenary of the May Revolution, whereby the process of independence from Spain began and an independent Argentinian nation arose. In the context of this anniversary, it seemed suitable to us to highlight the indigenous past, which is often marginalized, both in national and local history. On the other hand, the decision to include the area’s natural history was grounded in the need to enhance another heritage, both valuable and unknown, mainly represented by fossils of extinct mega-mammals, found as a consequence of mining activities carried out in Olavarría.

In order to develop this exhibition, an interdisciplinary team that was previously trained by an experienced museologist was formed. This ensured that a reflexive and critical approach to exhibition development was adopted. The final exhibition consisted of seventeen portable panels (fourteen relating to specific themes and three



FIGURE 1 Schoolchildren visiting the exhibition. San José Cultural Centre, Olavarría, 2010
Source: Authors

consisting of timelines). The contents were organized by three principal themes. The first was local cultural and natural heritage, since the exhibition enables its viewers to know the past and to value material evidence and intangible cultural expressions as assets that should be preserved for present and future generations. The second was temporality, in order to represent local ancient history and its dynamism. For this reason, three timelines were designed to organize and contextualize the information developed throughout the exhibition. The third theme was the contribution of archaeology, palaeontology, and history to the construction of knowledge about the past. Methodologically, different didactic, museological, and communicational strategies were employed to facilitate the understanding of complex conceptual contents. In this way, it was decided to start from the known — the present — to reach the less known — local past — and to organize the exhibition script with different levels of information, using short texts, simply written and avoiding the use of technical language. The collaborative work with a graphic designer and an illustrator helped to improve the visual impact of the exhibition, making it more accessible to visitors of all ages. Likewise, new images were produced to represent scientific information that avoided social and gender stereotypes about indigenous peoples and their material culture (Figure 2).

During this stage, a formative evaluation was carried out to understand the needs of our potential audience during the design process, to identify any problems, and to polish the final script by agreeing on the use of certain terms and images. In order to determine the degree of understanding of the panel texts, they were shown to sixty people. An equal number of women and men of different ages (over eleven years of age) were selected, with different occupations and educational levels.

This evaluation was also used to seek the opinions of indigenous people regarding sensitive and contested issues, such as conflicts with the national army, and the way they wanted to be referred to and represented in both text and image. We consulted two indigenous people, one of them a direct descendant of a chief who played a leading role in local history, with the aim of avoiding involuntary discriminatory connotations. They gave their opinion on the historical narrative and the use of certain terms, and gave their consent for the images reproduced or specially created for the exhibition. Based on the opinions, comments, and suggestions received, some modifications were made to the preliminary script. For example, due to the complexity involved in understanding the timescale, it was decided to convert all radiocarbon ages to calibrated ones. The expression 'lithic instruments' was replaced by 'stone tools', because the first was associated with musical instruments. Another instance was a request not to use the category 'tribe' as a form of indigenous organization, since in schools it has a pejorative connotation, and to replace 'adorning' by 'painting' their bodies. The indigenous representatives also suggested modifications to the section where it is explained why native communities are called 'indigenous peoples', and they asked that they should be referred to as 'original peoples'.

The results of these studies helped to polish the exhibition texts as much as to agree on the terms and images used to describe the historical events. Bearing in mind their opinions and the cultural diversity of the region, where indigenous peoples and European immigrants coexist, the possibility that there are other 'views' regarding regional history and heritage was made explicit, although only knowledge produced through scientific research was exhibited.



FIGURE 2 Scene of *Pampas* hunter-gatherers group. Original drawing by Manuel Carrera Ávila

Source: Authors

Exhibition development

The decision of what to include in the fourteen thematic panels was informed through questions concerning the most significant moments of local history, following a chronology that goes back 800 million years. However, the exhibition did not start at this point, but at the end of the nineteenth century, which is the part of local history better known by the local inhabitants. At that time, Olavarría was a village, dedicated to agriculture, livestock, and mining activities, and made up mostly of a white and immigrant population of European descent. Therefore, a shared representation of the past in the collective imagination was drawn upon before a subsequent, deeper approach that embraced the natural and cultural processes that gave birth to the ‘other Olavarría’. In order to describe the district’s natural history, the exhibition focused on three stages of the evolution of life in the region, whose existence was recorded in local fossils. The first and the oldest fossil in the region corresponds to the remains of unicellular organisms found in the local palaeontological records. The two subsequent fossils correspond to episodes of the history of mammals in South America, such as the characteristic taxa involved in the Great American Biological Interchange, five million years BP, and the mega-mammal extinction during the Pleistocene (Prado & Alberdi, 2017).

Archaeological research on pre- and post-Hispanic occupation of the area served as a basis for the contents of the subsequent panels, the first of which describes the human groups that inhabited the region 10,000 years BP and coexisted with the extinct megafauna. The lifestyle of 3000 years BP, technical and artistic innovations, as well as the intensification of exchange networks between native groups, are explained in the following panel. Then, the changes that occurred with the arrival of the Spaniards and the transformation of the indigenous way of life from the adoption of cattle and horses are presented. The following two panels show how ‘white’ society advanced the frontier through the building of forts and the subsequent conflicts with the indigenous peoples. The historical account ends with the foundation of Olavarría in 1867 in the lands disputed by the national army and the indigenous tribes. The result of this dispute was genocide of the indigenous peoples (see Delrio, et al., 2010; also Pedrotta & Lanteri, 2015). During the following years, a substantial arrival of immigrants led to important transformations in the region. Hence, the historical journey returns to the ‘modern’ Olavarría, born from a cultural melting pot of white and Creole settlers, immigrants from different countries, as well as indigenous peoples. The last panel consists of a reflection on the idea of heritage that links the exhibition narrative, emphasizing that material culture as well as memories, knowledge, beliefs, and traditions all combine to form ‘our’ culture heritage. Finally, it is pointed out that not only should monumental assets be considered heritage, but also the simple, daily, and local things.

Visitors and stakeholders

The exhibition opened in its first venue on 12 November 2010. It was extensively covered by the local media before, during, and after its presentation. The exhibition was launched with a press conference in the presence of municipal and university authorities. Eleven press releases were published in the local newspaper *El Popular*, including a cover story as well as fifteen articles in the local digital newspaper INFOEME and a full review in a monthly newspaper. The exhibition was

the topic of several articles published on the internet on different websites to disseminate news, including that of the local AM Radio. The diffusion through social networks was also important. In order to diversify the means of access to a wider audience, a Facebook group was created entitled 'Olavarría Before Olavarría', and users were invited to access the news and events concerning the exhibition (in November 2010 the group had 242 subscribers). In addition to this publicity, the institutional communication made by the University and the Faculty of Social Sciences can be added. The exhibition was also the theme of a note published by the National Council of Scientific and Technological Research (CONICET) on its website.

In sum, 'Olavarría Before Olavarría' was on display for 140 days between 2010 and 2012 in the different localities of the municipality of Olavarría and other cities of the province. The entry was free and programmed guided visits were offered. It received at least 2913 visitors. The impact of any scientific communication is an important part of the evaluation process, since it outweighs the mere descriptive stage and raises questions and concerns that enable the organizers to improve it or develop new activities in relation to it. Following the exhibition opening summative evaluations were carried out through written questionnaires, analysis of visitors' books, observations *in situ*, and tracking studies; several studies were conducted which involved approaching potential and actual visitors (cf. Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Pérez Santos, 2000; Screven, 1990). These techniques enabled the researchers to understand the demographic profile of the visitors and provided an approximation of the behavioural and affective impact of the exhibition. In some cases, these evaluations helped to identify the need to employ corrective measures during the course of the exhibition, such as changing the location of panels following the visitor route (Chaparro, et al., 2013a; 2017).

Visitors could access the exhibition without an admission ticket, so the total number of attending public could only be quantified during the first presentation of the exhibition in the city of Olavarría, where permanent guides were provided. A minimum number of 2913 visitors was recorded, which comprised the sum of the visiting public (1078) and students of primary and secondary schools (1835). To record visitor opinions, a semi-structured questionnaire was employed, with closed, multiple-choice questions and other open questions. The questionnaire was anonymous and randomized, and was answered by the visitors themselves without the intervention of the interviewer to reduce the possibility of social desirability bias (Pérez Santos, 2000). Participants completed surveys at the end of their visit. A total of 260 surveys were completed: 83% by adult members of the general public (N = 166) and teachers (N = 50), while the remaining 17% were completed by students (N = 44). The results of this survey were not intended to provide a statistically representative sample, but provide qualitative indicators regarding general trends that may help to understand the complex communication processes involved.

The results of the surveys carried out on the general public (N = 216) indicated the attendance of people of all ages, although young adults between 21 and 30 years old (22.7%) and adults between 41 and 50 years old prevailed (21.8%). It is worth mentioning that the majority of people over 21 years of age (60%) were women. Most of the attendees (25.5%) visited the exhibition in the company of a family group (with children) or in a couple (23.6%), the rest were part of a school group (24%), visited

with friends (13.4%), were alone (12%), or were recorded as other (1.5%). Attendance in family or accompanied groups was mainly observed on weekends. A high percentage of attendees had a tertiary (37%) or university (36%) degree. This could indicate that, even though the exhibition was intended for wider audiences, both the theme and the venue, or even the idea of attending a cultural centre, is not particularly attractive for certain segments of the public (see also Chaparro, et al., 2017). The survey included a question asking how the public learned about the exhibition, and elicited the following answers (in decreasing order): 'because I usually come to the cultural centre or museum' (22.69%); 'it was recommended to me by a friend or relative' (20.83%); 'through the written press' (14.15%); 'news on the internet' (10.65%), 'by personal invitation' (11.11%), 'on TV' (6%), 'through the radio' (4.63%); 'posters in public places' (3.70%); 'Facebook' (3.70%); 'email' (2.31%).

The sections of the exhibition that the visitors most appreciated were those of 'The first settlers', 'From the world of the border to the foundation', and, to a lesser extent, 'The first fossils'. However, this last section was the one that most attracted children. Among the most positive aspects noted by attendees were the clarity of the exhibition's contents, the topics addressed, and the design of the panels. Based on the analysis of the open questions and those concerning valuation, it can be seen that the exhibition provided the respondents with a positive outlook on local history. Most of them selected the options that considered the exhibition 'helped them to appreciate the heritage of Olavarría', 'generated a sense of belonging' and 'allowed them to know the form of life of our ancestors'. Others responses (open questions) included the possibility of accessing an almost unknown past, as well as feeling proud of community history. Furthermore, the visitor book highlights visitors' desire that the exhibition be held for a longer period of time, or permanently (Chaparro, et al., 2017).

Another important aspect to note is that the exhibition attracted frequent museum visitors, who constituted the majority of respondents (73.8%), but also some for whom this was their first experience of an activity of this type. For example, 34% said that it was the first time they had visited the local museum where the exhibition was on display, and 13.4% indicated that they did not commonly visit museums and exhibitions. This demonstrates that the exhibition attracted new audiences. This is a key point because, if the first experience of an exhibition is positive, it helps to create habits of attendance at cultural activities.

The studies conducted on visiting schoolchildren were the most exhaustive. Over the course of the exhibition, 80 guided visits were given to 1680 students and 137 teachers from 38 schools. Educational material was also provided, including handouts and a bibliography for teachers. The research team collected 95 surveys that were distributed randomly among the groups of students who attended the exhibition. The exhibition had a very good reception among primary schoolchildren, as well as teachers, who stated that it gave them new information about local history; they were also interested in continuing work between schools and the university. However, adolescent students (aged 12–20) showed a major level of dissatisfaction. They were asked if they liked the exhibition, and one in five (18.1%) said they liked it a little or not at all. When asked what they did not like (open question), most of them did not provide any answer. However, some students specified that

they did not like the information or that it was too long or boring. Another question that indicates the degree of satisfaction was if they would recommend the visit. In this case, 18.2% of the students selected the answer 'I do not know', and 6.8% admitted that they would not. This score is coherent with the one previously analysed. Even when the great majority of them would recommend the exhibition, it is important to note that, of all the age segments consulted, the adolescent audience showed the greatest dissatisfaction. This may be because they were sincere in their responses and very critical of its classic exhibition style. Thus, they did not hesitate to highlight their disagreements or dissatisfaction with the question of whether they liked it and why they did not like it. This age group usually has very specific interests and an exhibition of this type may be an unattractive proposal for them. The explanations provided during the guided tour were considered not interesting, either. This motivated an internal debate between PATRIMONIA team members concerning the possibility of exploring the use of visual or interactive devices with which students are more familiar, in order to generate activities they could share with their friendship group away from school activities (Castro, 2010; Chaparro, et al., 2013a; Holguin & Baquero Martin, 2010).

Nevertheless, when asked about the contents of the exhibition, most of the students surveyed (75%) expressed that they knew 'something' about it. When they were asked what they did not know (open question), many of them did not answer. Among those who did, they claimed not to know the existence of fossils of 'ancient animals' (extinct mega-mammals) or the foundation of Olavarría, the origin of its name or the fact that the region had been covered by water millions of years ago. That is to say, they ignored many key aspects of the natural and cultural history of the region. When asked 'what does this represent for you?', the answers were interesting because they expressed pride in that past; others valued 'the past as rich and diverse', and others felt 'nostalgia for ways of living that no longer exist'.

In relation to the visitor tracking, it was observed that all types of public visited the exhibition for a short period (less than 15 minutes) and there was generally a tendency to go around without paying attention to the suggested route. These results are in agreement with previous studies carried out in different museums around the world (Hooper-Greenhill, 1997; Schmilchuk, 1996; Verón & Levasseur, 1983; Zabala, 2006).

Professionals, heritage managers, journalists, and other stakeholders involved in the exhibition process were also interviewed so as to gather their views and opinions about the experience. The interest in the contents regarding the local unknown past was the aspect mostly highlighted by journalists, while teachers praised the employment of appropriate pedagogical strategies. The fact that the school visits were guided by undergraduate archaeology students was also praised as much as the use of a simple language to build a dialogue with children. Museum staff and managers — with whom we worked to organize the exhibition display in each venue — recognized the importance of the experience, especially the interaction and exchange among researchers and visitors, both in the exhibition and during the conferences given in each town. They also stressed that this sort of event was quite unusual in Olavarría.

When asked, representatives of the indigenous groups claimed a greater participation in the creation of this kind of production. That is the case of Víctor Hugo

González Catriel (head of a Mapuche Tehuelche Community named ‘Peñi Mapu’ and member of the Provincial Indigenous Council), who requested not only to give his views through interviews about the experiences of his people during the ‘Conquest of the Desert’, but also to be part of the team to generate more integral proposals that bear in mind the current interests of indigenous people. He commented to the research team that ‘in many cases, science can be one of the means to show ethnic pre-existence and become a useful tool which enables the implementation of the acquired rights’. Considering this request and all the legal and academic advances achieved concerning indigenous rights in the last few years (see Endere, 2014), it was decided to redefine the working methodology for future team projects to guarantee his and other indigenous peoples’ participation.

After the exhibition: emerging projects

The most critical aspects of the survey responses were taken by the team as a basis to set new lines of action, giving rise to several proposals of public communication of archaeology and heritage, all related to this exhibition.

In the first instance, a documentary film was developed (Chaparro, et al., 2013b) to satisfy the demand of local schools to have informative and didactic material for further work in class relating to the exhibition contents. The main objective was to record the museographic experience by means of a video that could reach those audiences that do not usually go to or cannot visit museums. In this documentary, scientific information is explained in greater detail, while heritage sites are shown and researchers working at INCUAPA are introduced. Likewise, the film allowed us to show how the exhibition was created and to present its social impact, including stakeholders’ opinions. Although at the beginning it was produced as response to the schools’ needs to have material available for classroom work, the final result was a 27-minute documentary film, divided in three parts, and adapted for TV. It was made at the Center of Multimedia Productions from the Faculty of Social Sciences, UNICEN. It was broadcast several times by the local TV channel and it was also distributed in the schools around the region. Currently, it is available on the internet.⁴

Secondly, in 2014, thanks to a proposal made by the local government of Olavarría, it was possible to present the exhibition ‘Olavarría Before Olavarría’ in a semi-permanent format, responding to requests made by visitors. It was necessary to adapt the script and to redesign the exhibition at a bi-dimensional scale in order to display it at the Municipal Museum of Sciences, Olavarría, from March to September 2014. The exhibition was organized in three rooms, called ‘The time of the fossils’, ‘The time of human settlement’, and ‘The time of the Foundation’, respectively. A good number of fossils and archaeological pieces recovered from several excavations in the region’s sites were exhibited, addressing the public’s suggestions during 2011. The exhibition was complemented with the documentary film and different workshops for primary and secondary schools. Likewise, guided visits and a number of conferences given by national and regional outstanding researchers were freely offered to the general public. This new version of the exhibition became more attractive and dynamic due to the possibility of employing more infrastructure

and exhibition resources, which allowed visitors to experience regional heritage resources in a different way. The exhibition had a very good reception among local inhabitants and received visitors from neighbouring towns (Figure 3).

Currently, a new media support for the dissemination of the exhibition's contents is being developed. This consists of a sound documentary based on a micro-fiction that will be broadcast via the university radio, as well as in new multi-platform formats. The difficulty and novelty of this project lies in transforming the visual language into a more abstract one. For the making of this project there is no funding. Therefore, it was developed in the framework of a thesis to obtain the degree of BA in Social Communication (Baier, 2017).

Two different projects were developed, with the aim of addressing the problem of the scarce interest that the adolescent students had displayed towards the initial exhibition.

In 2013, a TV drama/romance mini-series was created, funded by CONICET. It consists of four episodes and is called 'Lucía. A mini-series that challenges the stories about our identity' (Chaparro & Conforti, 2015). It was released in June



FIGURE 3 'The time of the fossils' room, Science Museum, Olavarría, 2014
Source: Authors

2015. The story tells of the difficulties facing a young couple who travel throughout the region to produce a documentary about archaeology and end up discovering issues related to their family past. Identity was the link used to bond the barely known remote past with the search for personal roots, thus attempting to strengthen the regional identities within the province of Buenos Aires. The main purpose was to make visible the indigenous peoples who inhabit, and used to inhabit, the centre and south of the province of Buenos Aires, through the presentation of both scientific and indigenous knowledge. Attending to the indigenous claims for greater participation, some representatives from the indigenous peoples were called upon to participate in this project. In the final product, these stakeholders — who have been marginalized for decades in the official history of Argentina and who have obtained legal and public recognition in recent years — became not only visible but also played an active and meaningful role.

The contents dealt with in 'Lucía' start from the initial human settlement to the inter-ethnic relations with white settlers, including the fight for territory between the indigenous peoples and the national army during the nineteenth century, and the current indigenous claims in the province of Buenos Aires. The articulation of an artistic and a scientific script in which researchers and members of indigenous groups participated was addressed. The latter group told their stories in first person, transmitting their ancestors' memories and current claims concerning their lands, heritage, and their 'silenced' past. The combination of knowledge produced by academia, together with that generated by the indigenous peoples, enabled the series to challenge traditional views, such as the concept of national identity that emanates from the idea that 'Argentines came in ships' (i.e. they are all European immigrants).

Four descendants of indigenous peoples decided to become part of the group of specialists, participating through interviews and, together with the scientists, exchanging opinions about the general script and the final recorded version of their interviews. Thus, Víctor Hugo González Catriel decided to explain in the first person the process of land usurpation, whose ancestors were victims, and their current claims, including the request for the restitution of the human remains of chief Ciapriano Catriel from the Museum of the Patagonia, in Bariloche, Argentina.⁵ Verónica Cestac, from the tribe of chief Manuel Grande, who used to live in the neighbouring region of Azul and Tapalqué, discussed her knowledge of the manufacture of the Pampa knitting maternally inherited. She also explained the process of learning ancient knowledge, shared with her grandmother, including the technique, symbols, and the idea of reciprocity. Delia Caniumir, from Tandil, who belongs to the Mapuche-Tehuelche-Querandí peoples, decided to explain her own method of searching for and rebuilding her diverse identity, through contact with her grandparents. This allowed her to recover part of the cosmology of these peoples, as well as ways of doing things in daily life and the kinds of relationships this fostered with other human and non-human beings. Lastly, Mirta Millán, belonging to the Urban Community Mapuche Pillán Manqué in Olavarría, decided to participate in a scene (a coffee talk) with an anthropologist, where they exchanged opinions on the history of 'Indians' and white peoples in the nineteenth century and the current issues surrounding ethnicity. The former tells the experience of her own family and ancestors, and the latter provides its knowledge based on the ethno-historical sources. This scene of dialogue, debate, and consensus-building

between two women, one a researcher and the other an indigenous leader, was the close of the mini-series.

To make 'Lucía', an interdisciplinary team was established, made up of researchers, scriptwriters, cinema directors, musicians, actors, graphic designers, and technicians in image and sound. An inter-institutional articulation and support of many public and private organizations from the regions was also required. Scenes were filmed in museums, heritage buildings, and a number of palaeontological, historical, and archaeological sites in six municipal districts of the province (Chaparro, et al., 2018).

In order to make the scientific script of the original exhibition more attractive to the adolescent public, a new project is being developed. For this reason, a study about the interests, uses, and preferences of teenage students and their teachers was made in the city of Olavarría, in order to define its modality. This study enables us to identify the curricular content to be developed and the technological devices we should use according to their preferences. The young students, potential beneficiaries of our project, pointed out that the electronic device they most use is the mobile phone. Regarding the theme, human evolution was chosen, as it is a core element in the school curricula: the most interesting for those students and the most difficult to teach in class. Therefore, the idea of developing a virtual game for smart mobiles was deemed the most relevant option. Its implementation is due for the end of 2018, when a pilot test will be carried out with the selected school. The project funding comes from a grant given by UNICEN for dissemination activities (Giacomasso, et al., 2017).

After analyzing all these activities, it can be observed that the team have acquired some experience during the last eight years, which has been embodied in the use of multiple strategies of scientific communication with the aim of promoting archaeology and heritage to the broadest audience at a local, regional and national level.

Final comments: some lessons learnt

'Olavarría Before Olavarría' enabled the research team to make visible a heritage that was not generally known by local inhabitants in the municipal district. In this sense, it consisted of an unusual proposal for the region, since a thematic exhibition of this kind concerning local archaeology, palaeontology, and history had never previously been presented.

From the analysis of the surveys, it was observed that the school visitors are of key importance, as they constitute a 'captive' public. Therefore, it is significant that the first experiences are satisfactory and may help to encourage visitors to become regular museum attendees. The exhibition was also employed as a means to attract 'other publics' not usually interested in this kind of museum activity. For example, during the Science Week of 2014, a national event organized annually by the Ministry of Education, a special guided visit to the exhibition was prepared for elderly visitors as part of collaboration between the university and the Program UPAMI for retired people. Nowadays, the travelling exhibition is often borrowed by schools or displayed at cultural events as a complement to other exhibitions.

All these social demands show that the exhibition is still relevant, despite meeting its proposed objectives a long time ago, and it responds to a public need for cultural

products relating to local history that are otherwise lacking. That the exhibition is still popular can generate the illusion that all the initial objectives were satisfactorily achieved. However, visitor studies show that we have only started on a long journey. If 'the past is a foreign country', as Lowenthal (1985) has suggested, approaching the past of particular communities and making it significant constitutes a long-term objective that can only be partially met through systematic actions sustained in time.

In this sense, we believe that heritage interpretation is a value-oriented and dynamic process, based on participation and negotiation among different interest groups. In this context, the role of researchers should be characterized by permanent feedback among those groups — particularly local and indigenous people — trying to strike a balance between their interests and values, the empowerment of local communities, and the guarantee of their participation in all stages of the process.

The exhibition 'Olavarría Before Olavarría' was designed bearing in mind the previous studies on the public and the opinions of some indigenous referents. Besides, summative and formative evaluations were made to identify problems, modify, and reflect on them, as well as to define future actions. The most critical aspects of the evaluation, especially those mentioned above, such as difficulty with the young public and the questioning for a greater participation made by some of indigenous groups' members, were not only considered but they also generated the challenge of overcoming them through new proposals and changes in the working methodology. New channels of communication were developed to address different publics. As a result of this, a documentary film, a TV mini-series, a micro-fiction, and a mobile phone application were produced. Crucially, diversity of views and voices were taken into account throughout the planning process.

In sum, through the 'Olavarría Before Olavarría' exhibition and subsequent projects relating to the public communication of science, the primary aim was to get local communities more interested and involved in cultural heritage. It is expected that the interaction among members of the community, scientists, and heritage stakeholders acts as triggers to make local heritage more significant and to help in its long-term preservation. Likewise, it is also hoped that the results obtained contribute to improve the social impact of scientific research.

Finally, we hope that the challenges we have faced in developing the framework of this case study will help to inspire and encourage new experiences, mainly in countries that deal with contested cultural heritage, which is not only unknown but also rejected by, at least, some part of the society. Nevertheless, we are conscious that to make the past intellectually accessible to the different members of a community is just the first step; then, it is necessary that each of them appropriate that past and integrates it to their own history. As stated by Layton & Thomas (2001: 18), the memories that heritage evoke 'are not a transparent record of the past, so much as personalized interpretations of experience', although it does not imply that they are in any sense inauthentic.

Notes

¹ Argentina is a federal country made up of 24 provinces, which are in turn divided into towns. In the province of Buenos Aires, the territorial unity that

corresponds with a political entity of a town is called 'town'. The town of Olavarría has a surface of 7715 km² where 100,000 inhabitants live. The

- head is also called Olavarría, with a population of 89,721 inhabitants and seven villages (INDEC, 2010).
- ² INCUAPA is an Executing Unit of CONICET (National Council of Scientific and Technological Research) and UNICEN (National University of the Center of Buenos Aires province) located in Olavarría.
- ³ The Ethnographic Museum Dámaso Arce was opened until 2014. There, information about pre- and post-Hispanic cultural diversity can be found, although there is scarce information about Olavarría (Chaparro, 2017).
- ⁴ The film can be accessed via the UNICEN website: <http://soc.unicen.edu.ar/index.php/extension>.
- ⁵ The human remains of the chief Cipriano Catriel and his 'poncho' (blanket) were returned to their descendants by the Museum of the Patagonia, which is part of the National Parks Administration, in May 2018.

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