

# Sociomuseology 3



To understand New Museology in the XXI Century

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# **To understand New Museology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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<b>Introduction:</b>	5
<b>To understand New Museology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</b> Paula Assunção dos Santos	
<b>The new professional: Underdog or Expert? New Museology in the 21th century</b> Wilke Heijnen.	13
<b>Who am I? An identity crisis. Identity in the new museologies and the role of the museum professional</b> Eduardo Giménez-Cassina	25
<b>Lost in the supermarket–The Traditional Museums Challenges</b> Mariana Lamas	43
<b>Societal development and the traditional museum: Applying New Museology to a different context</b> Davida de Hond, Sebastiaan van der Lans, and Marjolein van der Vlies. With contribution of Freek van Kessel, Mercedes Montes de Oca Navarro, (Students of the International Master’s Degree Programme in Museology at the Reinwardt Academy in Amsterdam)	59
<b>Transformative Museology</b> Rebecca Weldon	75
<b>Men change, and museums change</b> Maria Fernanda Pinheiro de Oliveira and Ciema Silva de Mello	87
<b>Museu da Abolição, “The Museum That We Want”</b> Adolfo Samyn Nobre	99



**Introduction:****To understand New Museology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Paula Assunção dos Santos

When I was doing my bachelor's degree in museology at the University of Rio de Janeiro I heard from a teacher that the new museology was already an "old lady". It was the mid 90's, almost 30 years since the world of museums had been shaken by progressive initiatives that fought for the creation of better conditions for local communities to take control of their future by means of work with heritage. Ecomuseums, community museums and local museums had multiplied in countries such as France, Canada, Spain, Portugal and Mexico. They had their own specificities, but shared a lot in common: the concept of the integral museum adopted in the Round Table of Santiago of 1972; a political view based on grass-root approaches and community development; the spirit of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who advocated for the *conscientization* of men, much before the concept of empowerment was developed in the English speaking world. In 1984, a number of people related to these initiatives met in Quebec, where the Movement for a New Museology (MINOM) was born. Other individuals, such as Hugues de Varine, also played a crucial role in advocating for community museology<sup>1</sup>. Various forms of community museology kept growing in the Latin world and elsewhere, as they do today. Some became conservative in their revolution, some carried the name but not

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<sup>1</sup> For more information in English about the development of the New Museology see vol. 2 of Sociomuseology

the spirit, others pushed the boundaries of new museology. A complex world took shape as new initiatives and ideas emerged.

My teacher's idea about new museology being an "old lady" meant to me that it had already become a tradition. At the same time, the critical tone in his remark referred to the fact that a number of people who did not align themselves directly with the new museology also shared many of the views and means of the movement. Much had changed since the 70's.

In the last decades there has been a profound change in the world of museums as well as in new museology. In 1992, the Declaration of Caracas called for the acknowledgement of museums as means of communication in the service of communities. It proposed that museums would become social managers, working with communities to transform reality. Three years later, a publication in Brazil<sup>2</sup> aimed at discussing the impact of meetings such as this one and of others, including the Round Table of Santiago of 1972. It stated that, despite the fact that ideas upon which new museology was based have become influential in museological theory, too few changes had taken place in the daily practice of traditional museums.

I believe that the publication pre-empted the major turning point in relations between museums and society. Towards the end of the 90's, many forces contributed to the opening of a new chapter on participation in museum affairs. The sustainable development agenda, social inclusion policies in the UK, the strengthening of emancipation movements (such as the indigenous movements in North America) and the growing multiculturalism in European countries promoted a new age of transformations in museums. A renewed participation paradigm began to focus on the relations between museums and multiple (some new) stakeholders.

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<sup>2</sup> Araújo, Marcelo and Bruno, Cristina. *A Memória do Pensamento Museológico Contemporâneo Brasileiro*. ICOM Brasil, 1995.

Dealing with stakeholders implied negotiation, influence and sharing of ownership.

These changes meant that the so-called traditional museums (an antagonism introduced by the new museologists themselves) shared many of the preoccupations of the new museology. In different parts of the globe, various ways of interacting with groups in society added further opportunities of using heritage as a resource and as a tool for understanding and transforming the world. In the English-speaking circles in Europe, this is usually labelled new museology too. The term was coined by Peter Vergo in 1989<sup>3</sup> and since then has been widely used with reference to critical practice in museums, which involves work with communities.

It is important to note that the “Latin” new museology and the “British” new museology are not the same. Although often mistaken for each other, they have fundamentally different approaches to social development, as explained in the articles that follow this introduction. However, both are part of the same attempt to take museums into an age of increased democratization of museological tools and heritage processes. There is much to learn in dialogue.

In the new millennium changes continue to happen. Social movements, for instance, are appropriating heritage tools. Networked modes of organizing knowledge and action in society deeply influence museums.

The same way, the modes and means of the “Latin” new museology are also developing in time. The increasing human mobility, immigration and cultural hybridization, for example, represent fundamental forces of change. “Classic” types of new museums such as the ecomuseum multiplied in rural areas, not in urban environments. They were focused on the concept of locality-bounded communities, on local development and on the territory. But what happens when societies become more global, when the territory becomes more fragmented and fast-changing? What happens when the

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<sup>3</sup> Vergo, Peter (ed). *The New Museology*. Reaktion Books, London, 1989.

concept of community and the organization of social action take other forms? What happens when what makes a group of people into a community is not mainly their shared experience in the territory, but their shared condition in society as in the case of minorities? What happens when what drives people to action is mainly the desire to propose a new project of society as is the case with social movements, many times operating in networks?

Is new museology relevant today? Yes. Ecomuseums and community museums grow and multiply. In some cases, as said before, they carry the name but not the spirit. But in many places they continue to strive for community empowerment and for local development. They are not frozen in time and new approaches are being developed in order to adapt to the imperatives of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Also, other means of working with heritage and development continue to be tested.

A very important movement is the conceptualization of sociomuseology, a field of research and practice, which draws from the experiences and principles of the “Latin” new museology. Sociomuseology can be seen as the result of new museology’s maturity. It concerns the study of the social role of museums and heritage as well as of the changing conditions in society that frame their trajectories. Sociomuseology is a way of understanding museums and heritage and a way of acting upon the world. One could say it bears the philosophy of new museology and brings it into a broader context. This is possible because we believe that the solutions proposed by new museology have been above all attempts to respond to existing problems and conditions. It means that its forms and methods are secondary to its goals and principles. In other words: society changes new museology changes.

Today, the idea of sociomuseology is expanding geographically. Three important gateways are the Lusófona University of Humanities and Technology in Portugal, MINOM International and the Brazilian Institute of Museums. Also the

Reinwardt Academy<sup>4</sup>, faculty of Cultural Heritage of the Amsterdam School of the Arts, is having a role in thinking of the “Latin” new museology and sociomuseology in connection with other practices and approaches. The Reinwardt Academy is a fertile environment for this since it has always seen itself as a meeting point of different traditions in the field of museology. This is in great part thanks to the active participation of lecturers in the international field and to the exchange with international scholars and practitioners contributing to our programmes. Besides the bachelors degree in cultural heritage, the Reinwardt Academy offers an international masters degree programme in museology.

At the Reinwardt Academy, we have the conviction that an increasing globalized world calls for exchange of knowledge and for the creation of new knowledge that can fulfil new demands in society. New museology(ies), sociomuseology, social inclusion and ideas on participation have their own specificities and specialities. They can learn from each other. Perhaps with this we can think of tailor-made understandings and alternatives to different and new conditions of working with heritage, people and development that are increasingly intercultural, hybrid and globalized.

For this reason, in the academic year 2009-2010, the master's degree programme offered two workshops which explored the dialogue between new museology and other practices and ideas. They aimed at experimenting and testing the limits of this dialogue.

The 4-week workshop on Professionalism focused on theoretical connections. It explored the meanings of grass-root participation in museological (heritage) processes and the implications for the role of the heritage professional. The workshop focused on the process of participation, which covered different underlying principles, motivations, and historical and theoretical frameworks. Discussions included the historical development and contents of the “Latin” new

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<sup>4</sup> [www.reinwardtacademy.nl](http://www.reinwardtacademy.nl)

museology, the new participation paradigm of the 90's, and the role of social movements. The students were asked to write a final paper on the theme of "Grass-root participation and professional development in the heritage field- possibilities and challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". An important reference was the work of Manuel Castells about the power of identity in the network society<sup>5</sup>.

In the 10-week workshop Project Management focused on practical experiment. The students were asked to work in a real project in cooperation with the Amsterdam Historical Museum. The museum wanted to test the possibility of working with inhabitants of the Dapperbuurt, the neighbourhood of the Reinwardt Academy in an exhibition project about neighbourhood shops. We started from a theoretical framework that combined principles of new museology and grass-root participation, work with stakeholders and communities of practice (CoPs). The aim was to propose a framework for two stakeholders (the Amsterdam Historical Museum and the Reinwardt Academy) to engage in a conversation and hopefully cooperation with other stakeholders in the neighbourhood. The students wrote advice for the museum about the possibilities and implications of working with local communities of practice. For that, they talked with organizations and individuals of the Dapperbuurt by means of interviews, meetings and even working from a market stall.

Three of the theoretical papers were selected for this publication. They were chosen for the quality of their information and for providing new and creative views. Each in their own way reflects the experimental character of the workshops in their proposal to create a dialogue of ideas. For various reasons, the language barrier being a very important one, these different approaches to grass-root participation still remain rather isolated from each other. Therefore, these

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<sup>5</sup> Castells, Manuel. *The Power of Identity* (The information age: Economy, Society and Culture, Vol. 2). Blackwell, Oxford, 2004.

essays are also speculative... and perhaps somewhat provocative.

In addition, five students were also asked to write an essay about their views and experience in the project with the Amsterdam Historical Museum. They looked at the subject from a stakeholders perspective. They explored the idea of negotiating among different epistemological traditions and among different interests when it comes to acting in the city of Amsterdam.

These essays are the result of intellectual experimentation and of speculative minds. They offer valuable information and ways of experimenting with connections. I hope they will also serve as stimulus to further dialogue.

**About the author:**

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## **The new professional: Underdog or Expert? New Museology in the 21th century**

Wilke Heijnen

For a long time, museum's form and function were impregnated with social exclusion, only accessible for a prosperous and educated minority. It held the monopoly on the past and therefore in a way on the present and the future. However times have changed and different perspectives on museum practices have been taken.

In 1989 the British Peter Vergo mentioned as quoted below, a number of possible museologies, including a 'new', and therefore presumably an 'old' type of museology:

"At the simplest level I would define it, as a state of widespread dissatisfaction with the 'old' museology, both within and outside the museum profession; and though the reader may object that such a definition is not merely negative, but circular, I would retort that what is wrong with the 'old' museology is that it is too much about museum methods, and too little about purposes of museums; that museology has in the past only frequently been seen, if it has been seen at all, as a theoretical and humanistic discipline." (Vergo, 1989)

This concept can be denoted as the 'British New Museology'. Simultaneously there is the Latin school of thoughts on new museum practices, that is likewise engaged with the purposes of a museum, applied for social development.

While both visions are abandoning the traditional museology where a collection based institute is the core business, the British and Latin versions have their own range of view. Vergo's theory is about an awareness based institute. Where opening up the museum to a broader audience; access, participation and social inclusion are the focus points. The

Latin school of thoughts is more involved with the idea of development: heritage as a tool for empowerment.

One could say that the Latin New Museology has a social political point of view, where a bottom up approach is fundamental. Whilst the British variant is aiming at a balanced and socially inclusive society and a top down path in this sense is more common.

Both perceive museums' functions as a vehicle for improvement, but their basic thoughts differ. The Latin version carries a strong intrinsic desire for progression while the British is motivated more extrinsically.

These thoughts on New Museology are materialized in two ways: Firstly the existence of new types of museums like ecomuseums, neighborhood museums, community museums, etc. Secondly in the idea of including a wide audience with a more active role. Here access, participation, representation and social inclusion are the keywords.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of the different schools of New Museology, more and more people become aware of the social accountability of the museum and its possibilities within the public domain. Heritage as a tool for social development and the museum in the role of the facilitator. Some people do refer to these shifts as the third museum revolution<sup>7</sup>. Undeniably, there are some changes in our contemporary museum field, that will be explored in this essay and referred to as a new museology in a more holistic sense.

Questions that need to be answered are: Why should the museum 'suddenly' fulfill this role of social accountability? And in extension to this why should heritage be used as a tool? What are the preferred roles of the stakeholders and what are the pitfalls? I shall illustrate these questions with some case

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<sup>6</sup> As discussed in the Workshop 'Professionalism' by Paula Assunção dos Santos; 3 november 2009, Reinwardt Academy.

<sup>7</sup> The first museum revolution took place around the year 1900 where the museum institutionalized and became more professional. The second revolution happened in the 1970's where the function based museum was replacing the collection based museum. (Van Mensch, 1992)

studies and conclude with some thoughts on the third museum revolution. What turn will it take and how far can we go with this participation paradigm?

### **The museum as a humanistic discipline**

Social accountability on a professional level is not a new theory. As we were heading towards the twenty first century in all sorts of social and economical branches there was a growing sense of wanting to be relevant and human, expressed in sustainable enterprising.

But even before, during the second museum revolution, started a process of engaging with society on different levels. The emphasis came to lie on the educational and public function of the museum. Here one can already speak of a raised awareness of the status of the museum and its obligations towards society. Clearly these institutes hold the capacity to create meaning as they physically and metaphorically operate in the public realm.

Gradually the educational accent shifted towards a broader understanding of interaction with heritage and source communities. Involving them in the decision making process of displaying and interpreting their heritage, is now more widely accepted as a moral responsibility. "Source community members have come to be defined as authorities on their own cultural heritage." (Peers and Brown, 2002)

As Edmund Barry Gaither writes:

"Museums have obligations as both educational and social institutions to participate in and contribute towards the restoration of wholeness in the communities of our country. They ought to increase understanding within and between cultural groups in the matrix of lives in which we exist. They ought to help to give substance, correction and reality to the often incomplete and distorted stories we hear about art and social history. They should not dodge the controversy that often arises from the reappraisal of our common and overlapping pasts. If our museums cannot muster the courage to tackle these considerations in ways appropriate to their

various missions and scales then concern must be raised for how they justify the receipt of support from the public.” (1992)<sup>8</sup>

As Gaither states, the relationship between a museum and the public is a two way street. When the museum decides to stay in their ivory tower and not to use their means for social development, how can this be justified? Could we say it is ethically correct not to use the given means for the benefit of the public? And should this choice merely be made by the museum?

Many questions arise when we discuss the role of the museum within the new school of thoughts on participation and social development. Here we should keep in mind that there are three sorts of participation all with their own power structures:

1) The grassroots initiative: Where a Community of Practice<sup>9</sup> has a shared intrinsic motivation for development. For example The Ninsee (National institute Dutch slavery past and heritage) in Amsterdam. This organization is raised from a grassroots movement that stood up and claimed a place for remembrance, which they succeeded in the year 2002. Later the movement evolved into a steady institute for research, education, documentation, representation and facilitation.

2) The top down approach: Where museums head to the public and try to get them involved. Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) has since 2006 a contemporary art and human rights program 'Blind Faith'. This integrated program of

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<sup>8</sup> From the article: "Hey! That's mine: Thoughts on Pluralism and America", written for the 1992 publication 'Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture, edited by Ivan Karp, Christine Mullem Kreamer and Steven D. Lavine. Reprinted in Reinventing the Museum, historical and contemporary perspectives on the paradigm shift.

<sup>9</sup> Called into existence by Etienne Wenger. A Community of Practice holds a number of individuals who share a domain of interest. The members interact and learn together. But also develop a set of tools to address recurring obstacles.

exhibitions, outreach projects, educational events and activities was called into existence to raise awareness and understanding of sectarianism and its related issues which has a high priority issue for Scotland and particularly Glasgow. It focuses on identity, neighbourhood and nation. As the GoMA states 'the power of contemporary art has been proved to raise awareness of difficult social issues'.<sup>10</sup>

In REBELLAND part of GoMA's Blind Faith: writer Magi Gibson and artist Anthony Schrag have been working with several youth groups around Glasgow on matters of sectarianism and its related subjects. The exhibition held in 2007 explored some of the artworks and writings the groups had produced, exposing dated notions around perceived issues of sectarianism.

3) The museum as a steward: An innovative and somewhat paradoxical approach where the museum wants to be in the role of a steward without or marginally being the initiator. The museum is strongly aware of the strength of the bottom up path and positions itself to trigger a similar initiative. The AHM (the Amsterdam Historical Museum) is at the moment involved in such a project. This organization asked students from The Reinwardt Academy to explore the possibilities of a Community of Practice within the Dapper neighbourhood in Amsterdam. The Dapper project (part of the Neighbourhood shops project of the AHM) invites shopkeepers and customers to participate in a Community of Practice. This community could present in the near future a landmark such as a street presentation or an event with the theme 'Neighbourhood shops'. The first type of participation, where the initiative exists within a grassroots movement is typical to the Latin New Museology. The second type to the British school of thoughts. And the last approach is a product of our time or so to say of the 'Third museum revolution'. It could not have evolved

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<sup>10</sup> Website GoMA: <http://www.glasgowmuseums.com>

without the other two. The relationship between institute and community is different in all of these categories, in terms of power.

Whereas the museum functions in the first category as a facilitator for grassroots initiatives, it plays a more active role in the second category. Here the institute is consciously trying to involve the public or source communities into projects for the benefit of development. In the last category, it is the museum's wish to work with communities based on the first type of participation. In contradiction the institute applies (as already implied by the word) the principles of the top down approach. Only time will tell if this path is sustainable.

In the above mentioned categories different parties or stakeholders are involved. They all have their own motivation to participate. In one way or the other a museum cannot exist alone, visitors and source communities are needed. Moreover a community of practice can more easily reach their goals with input from the museum.

This cooperation between the traditional power structured museum and a community, does work but only under certain conditions. Both bring in their characteristics. The art of participation is primarily that all stakeholders should be open upon their objectives. Secondly to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of all parties and to apply these in a constructive and accountable way. Additionally a genuine believe in, and motivation for improvement is necessary, both from the community and the museum. The intentions of the museum should be more than attracting new visitors and certainly more than ticking 'the participation box' in the funding request. Where skeptics do question the integrity of the museum within the participation paradigm, we all need to be aware of this pitfall. Open-heartedness from all parties is required for a prosperous cooperation.

The input of a source community is mainly about opening up their (conceptual) territory to the world, on a physical and spiritual level. However a willingness to cooperate with the

authorized museum and being truly motivated are just as important. Their expertise and enthusiasm, their network and having the gift of being unbiased are extremely valuable.

Museums in turn offer know how on the collection, education, exhibiting and hold a wide network as well. They are familiar with organizational and political aspects and know their way around in the economical realm. But more importantly, these institutes make heritage accessible, in both a tangible as an intangible way. However since the core functions and the curatorial authority of the museum have become questionable, the resulting precipitation on the institute should not be underestimated.

As seen above, sharing mutual knowledge in an atmosphere of partnership is crucial in this process.

### **The power of heritage<sup>11</sup>**

What about heritage that for instance ‘can increase understanding within and between cultural groups’?( Gaither, 1992) The traditional discourse on heritage is one dimensional and strongly embedded with caring for the material past. (Smith, 2006) Obviously cultural legacy is much more than the physical expression of an individual, a community or a nation. It conveys stories on different levels and in a variety of timelines. When we work with the concept of heritage it is important to be aware of the plurality of the layers it holds. This multilayeredness, I would like to contextualize within the semantic approach Peter van Mensch denotes in his article ‘The object as a data carrier’. He uses the term *identity* to express a state of being of the object. These states are synchronically the structural identity of an object, its functional identity and its contextual identity. Where these levels of identity, respectively carry certain information on the physical characteristics of the object, information referring to its use and referring to the physical and conceptual environment of

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<sup>11</sup> Respectfully referring to Manuel Castell's The Power of identity, The information age: economy, society and culture.

the object. This model is completed with a diachronic set of characteristics which reflects the information gain and loss during the process of invention, realisation and use of the object. (Van Mensch, 1984)

Where Peter van Mensch formulated thoughts on the identity of an object, I would like to refer to the identity of the individual. Identity as a personal essence of an individual human being.

Identity of a person is, as in 'The object as a data carrier' model certainly not one dimensional. We all are carrying synchronically different identities on various levels. Like our personal biography, genetic identity, social identity, cultural identity, national identity and possibly even online identity.

Heritage conveys the stories of (multiple) individuals, communities, cultures, or nations. And again must be seen within the idea of the multilayeredness. Heritage is as such, more powerful than identity, which is less concrete. There is always a dialogue between the multilayeredness of heritage and the plurality of identity. It can be a resource in challenging cultural and/or social values; and is used to construct, reconstruct, contest, reject and maintain identity. (Smith, 2006)

As Manuel Castell writes:

"By identity, as it refers to social actors, I understand the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes, that is given priority over other sources of meaning. For a given individual, or for a collective actor, there may be a plurality of identities. [...] Identities are sources of meaning for the actors themselves, and by themselves, constructed through a process of individuation."

And:

"The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations. But individuals, social groups, and societies process all these materials, and rearrange their meaning, according to social determinations and cultural projects that

are rooted in their social structure, and in their space/time framework. I propose, as a hypothesis, that in general terms, who constructs collective identity, and what for, largely determines the symbolic content of this identity, and its meaning for those identifying with or placing themselves outside of it.”(1997)

Both Castell and Smith underline the significance of heritage in constructing identity and in providing meaning to human existence. As a consequence the importance and power of the ‘who’ in who is constructing. Heritage can be used as a tool to open up a dialogue on complex issues, or to built a sense of belonging and to create relationships.

### **The new professional**

Apart from the various roles the new professional could play, along the earlier mentioned three sorts of participation; the grassroots initiative, the top down approach and the museum as a facilitator, a point of democratization has been reached. Inevitably we should consider if there still is a role left for the museum professional.

The participation paradigm is engaged in changing relations of power, between source community and the museum. The museum used to control the meaning and value of heritage and therefore in a way identity and the past. Nowadays the exclusive right to deal with man’s heritage is not only in hands of the institute anymore.

Through new media people are getting more used to the idea of participation. The museum professional acknowledges the significance and possibilities of these developments.

Many museums started to use the wide scope and accessibility of internet to gain information directly from their source communities and other (semi-)specialists.

For example the Brooklyn Museum in New York asks their virtual visitors to apply keywords to images to aid with searches in the collection database. They even created a whole community around it where taggers can ‘play tag’ with other so called ‘posse’-members.

And at last some cases that seem to exclude the professional. Web 2.0 plays a meaningful role in the idea of democratization. It empowers people disregarding gender, class, age and background to form opinions on what they think is important. On websites like 'Youtube' and 'Flickr' people are stimulated to collect, select and interpret videos and photos (homemade or other) by their own values. More than that, the web and other new media question who the knowledge holds (for instance the non-professional: 'Wikipedia') and additionally where the power of decision making lies. The Canadian initiative '[murmur]' created by artists, shows the present alteration in control. This oral history project (2002) collects and makes accessible people's personal histories and anecdotes about specific geographic locations. In each of these locations throughout a city a '[murmur]' sign is installed showing a telephone number. Anyone can call and listen to a narration while standing in that exact spot, and engaging in the physical experience of being right there, where the story took place. All members of a community are encouraged to participate in giving voice to a city's biography. The stories are archived on a website.<sup>12</sup> Again it is the non-professional who decides what counts.

Perhaps the new museum professional should be personified in a culture scout/mentor. With a sense for valuable initiatives the museum expert could guide and facilitate sustainable projects. She (or he) can actively offer a collection based expertise and knows her way around in the organizational, political and in the economical realm. The concept of a mentor promotes knowledge sharing and prevents a needless waste of energy, time and money that communities of practices would have used without consultancy. Henceforth the probability of survival of interesting initiatives will be enlarged. As earlier mentioned the museum holds a certain accountability towards public and the object. Yet the institute

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<sup>12</sup> Website initiative: <http://murmurtoronto.ca>

could be likewise responsible for a healthy, innovative and diverse cultural climate, or so to say towards future heritage. Nevertheless, I am not suggesting that the museum should stop practicing its main functions as we know it. We ought to nourish our museum professionals and the skillful way in which they care for our materialized past and its accessibility. I do make a plea for tearing down those ivory walls and opening up the museum. Let the museum be a breeding place where a dialogue between heritage and society can be established.

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After having studied the art of Sculpture and Multimedia followed by Art History, Wilke worked as an independent artist and was involved in organizing art projects and exhibitions. Other activities in the cultural field included the collection management department and the educational team. Currently as part of her Master study at the Reinwardt Academy she is doing research into the concept of public engagement at the Dundee Contemporary Arts in Scotland.

## **Who am I? An identity crisis Identity in the new museologies and the role of the museum professional Eduardo Giménez-Cassina**

Whilst the title of this essay suggests more than one “new museology”, it was rather a *licence poétique* to emphasize the two major theoretical movements that have evolved in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>13</sup>. As a result of the place(s)/contexts where they originated, and for clarity purposes, they have been labelled in this essay as the “Latin new museology” and the “Anglo-Saxon new museology”; however they both identify themselves by just the name of “New Museology”. Even though **they both** shared similar ideas on participation and inclusion, the language barriers were probably the cause for many ideas not to be fully shared by both groups.

The “Latin New museology” was the outcome of a specific context that started in the 1960s (de Varine 1996); being a product of the “*Second Museum Revolution*”(1970s)<sup>14</sup>, it provided new perceptions of heritage, such as “common heritage”. In 1972 ICOM organized the Santiago Round Table,

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<sup>13</sup> There have been at least three different applications of the term ( Peter van Mensch cited in Mason: 23)

<sup>14</sup> According to Santos Primo, this Second Museum Revolution was the result of the **Santiago Round Table** in Chile, 1972, and furthered by the **1<sup>st</sup> New Museology International Workshop** (Quebec, 1984), **Oaxtepec Meeting** (Mexico, 1984) and the **Caracas Meeting** (Venezuela, 1992) (Santos Primo : 63-64)

which advocated for museums to engage with the communities they serve, assigning them a role of “problem solvers” within the community (Primo 1999:66). These ideas lead to the concept of the Integral Museum. The Quebec Declaration in 1984 declared that a museum’s aim should be community development and not only “the preservation of past civilisations’ material artefacts”, followed by the Oaxtepec Declaration that claimed for the relationship between territory-heritage-community to be indissoluble (Primo 1999: 69). Finally, in 1992, the Caracas Declaration argued for the museum to “take the responsibility as a social manager reflecting the community’s interests”(Primo 1999: 71).

Amidst these new concepts and goals, a new type of museum that was described as a “cultural process” was born (de Varine 1996), the ecomuseum, a key player of the new museology. However the term soon became a label often used for content that differed a lot from the original ideas of Rivière and Varine, who coined the term in the 1970s (Rivière 1989).

The concept of “New Museology” appeared in the Anglo-Saxon world following the publication of Peter Vergo’s “New Museology” in 1989. Vergo defined it as “a state of widespread dissatisfaction with the ‘old’ museology” and advocated for less focus on the museum methods and a deeper discourse about the museum purposes (Vergo 1989:3). According to MacDonald, this ‘new museology’ was more humanistic and theoretical, and she points out three main characteristics drawn from Vergo’s theory: firstly, a deeper understanding of the contextualisation and situation of museum objects, as opposed to an inherent meaning. Secondly, an expansion on the sphere of influence of museology as a whole, dealing with matters that previously would not have been seen as part of the field. Thirdly, an increased awareness of the audience and the various perceptions of the museum and the exhibition (McDonald 2006:2).

Even though both movements advocate for the opening-up of the museum as a platform and museology as a science, both tendencies still need to be differentiated for their different political aims and processes. However, both trends acknowledge the core role that heritage plays in cultural identity and the social capacity of the museum as a platform to promote change, subsequently it is of no surprise that often communities use the museological framework as a tool to community and identity empowerment.

There is no doubt that we are living in an increasingly globalized world. Cultural diversity is gradually becoming the foundation of the social reality in the modern world, a menace to many groups of individuals that want to secure their unique identities. They often decide to adopt excluding attitudes in their community, rejecting to deal with the difficulties that result from multiculturalism (Hall 1999:42). Similarly, ecomuseums tend to have an origin in tension areas, producing mobilisation against threats to cultural or natural heritages (Davis 1999 cited in Elliot 2006), often with an underlying intention geared towards the protection of the community's "sense of belonging".

Cuban scholar Marta Arjona believes that it is generally understood that cultural identity is expressed as a consequence and not as an end in itself (Arjona 1986:11). By contrast, some Anglo-Saxon authors point out that there are two understandings of identity: an essentialist approach, in which identity is considered static and fixed, assuming identity as innate biological bonds and characteristics between individuals. A second approach regards identity as a concept that should include notions of contingency and fluidity (Hall 1990 cited in Newman and McLean 2002:57), and thus identity is perceived to morph over time, and presaged through contingency (Newman and McLean 2002:57). Hall goes even further arguing that cultural identity is the product of "diasporic consciousness", in serious need to understand the modern

world, and thus become open and complex, always under construction (Hall 1999:43).

According to these authors, identities can be grouped according to external factors such as ethnicity, race, gender, nationality and social class (Newman and McLean 2002:57), the distinguishing feature of these factors, however, being the acceptance by diverse groups of “self-definition history, dress and material culture” (Kaplan 2006:153).

Arjona argues that the voluntary selection of cultural goods from a community confronts its cultural heritage, and a relationship between the community and that heterogeneous group of items is created; thus the cultural identity is done through and as a consequence of heritage (Arjona 1986:13). It is a similar discourse to Kaplan’s, however Arjona rejects the notions of externally imposed factors<sup>15</sup> that Kaplan, Newman and McLean defend, and advocates for a more intrinsic sense of identity, coming from the individual towards the selected cultural goods that are defined as “heritage” by a specific group. She centralises the notion of identity around the cultural goods (tangible or intangible) that constitute a given group’s heritage and the relationship with the community. In other words, the *selected items* as opposed to the *selection factors*.

Catalonian sociologist, Manuel Castells, talks about three forms and constructions of identity (Castells 1997: 36):

- Legitimized identity: introduced by the dominant society to rationalize their control over social actors, often reflected in various nationalist movements.
- Resistance identity: developed by groups that perceive themselves as stigmatized or in a worse position in society.

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<sup>15</sup> i.e. ethnicity, nationality, etc.

- **Project identity:** social actors, based on the cultural goods available to them, redefine their position in society, hoping to change structures of the society as a whole.

According to these three approaches of building identity that Castells proposes, we will now look at examples of three different identities that used, through grassroots movements, the framework of the new museology as a tool to develop their sense of identity.

### **Legitimized identity: The people(s) of Western Sahara and the National Museum for the Saharian People**

The insurgence of a strong identity often coincides with the rise of nationalist feelings (Newman and McLean 2002). This could very much apply to the nationalist development in Western Sahara that started shortly before the abrupt decolonization from Spain and the invasion from neighbouring Mauritania and Morocco. The Saharian leaders, whilst in the resistance movement, had already coined the term the “saharawis”<sup>16</sup>, an umbrella term to talk about the large spectrum of Erguibat, Ulad Delim, Aarosien (Caro Baroja 1955: 202) and other desert tribes that inhabited the territory. Shortly after the “Green March” of 1976 that culminated with the Moroccan-led invasion, hundreds of thousands of refugees fled to refugee camps in Algeria, where they have been living ever since. The development of a nationalist front, the POLISARIO<sup>17</sup>, led to a renewed sense of identity where the community felt as “Saharawi”, speaking one language, the Hassania Arabic and Spanish, different from the Arabic

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<sup>16</sup> A.k.a. Saharians

<sup>17</sup> “Frente **Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro**” - Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro

dialects and French that were spoken in the invading nations - Mauritania and Morocco.

The National Museum for the Saharian People -NMSP- was built in Rabuni -Algeria, home to the Saharian government -POLISARIO- in exile. This unique situation is double sided: on the one hand it is motivated by the “establishment” -the POLISARIO front-, however this establishment is the result of a grassroots social movement that started towards the end of the Spanish rule. The museum has a physical presence since 1997, and recently it has expanded online, reaching the large Saharian Diaspora, in an attempt to enlarge the participation (<http://www.arqueotur.org>).

This process has empowered the community and has led to the creation of “workshops”<sup>18</sup> where different traditional skills are taught as part of the identity-forming heritage. The NMSP displays objects from day to day life and, through panels, describes the history of the “Saharawis” avoiding any differentiation between the different desert tribes ([www.biblioteca.udg.es](http://www.biblioteca.udg.es)).

In the context of the NMSP, the exhibition is a means to an end, the end being the development of a shared communal identity (Crooke: 176), crucial for the survival of their cause. However, this revised version of the collective history has led to re-enactments of battles and relevant historic events during festivals. This process of ethnomimesis is a powerful tool of social construct (Cantwell).

The NMSP has been working in this new museology format, triggering processes of social dinamization and

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<sup>18</sup> These workshops have resulted in Communities of Practice, in which different members share skills and information to increase their knowledge pool. Examples that I have witnessed include a workshop where women teach each other different camel hair weaving techniques that have been passed down in their clans and tribal groups generation after generation.

communal identity development. These processes can be found in various ecomuseums and community museums throughout the world, but could they still be denominated new museology if not done purposefully? Saharians have been successful in not labelling it -not unlike their limbo-state of state-less refugees-; hence I will not do it. However, according to one of the founder-father of ecomuseums, Rivière, says it could, as he did when he visited a similar example in Gennevilliers in 1953<sup>19</sup>(Rivière 1989:141).

### **Resistance Identity: The Ak-Chin Him Dak ecomuseum in Arizona**

Nancy Fuller talked in detail about the development of the Ak-Chin ecomuseum publishing an article at the very beginning of the 1990s, one of the first case studies of ecomuseums in the Anglo-Saxon world. Using the label “ecomuseum”, coined more than 15 years earlier by Varine and Rivière, the Ak-Chin Indians of Arizona engaged in a project that expanded over half a decade. Using the concept of “ecomuseums” excited the community, as they “liked the idea

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<sup>19</sup> *“En 1953, à Gennevilliers, village devenu ville industrielle de banlieu, une vaste exposition temporaire d'histoire naturelle et humaine est organisée à l'initiative du Sénateur-Maire, qui m'en confie le programme. La municipalité, les écoles, la paroisse, les grands établissements industriels locaux, la population de toutes générations, dont les enfants et les travailleurs immigrés, y apportent leur concours. A la durée près, c'est déjà un écomusée.”* (Rivière 1989:141)

(“In 1953, in Gennevilliers, a village that became an industrial town, a vast temporary exhibition of natural and human history was organized under the initiative of the mayor, who trusts me with the programme. The municipality, the school, the parish, the corporations, the local businessmen, the population of all generations, even the children of and the migrant workers, add their bit. To this point, it is already an ecomuseum”: Translation by Eduardo Giménez-Cassina)

of being first in the nation to attempt the model”(Fuller 1992:348).

The main drive for the project was to preserve their identity as a community (Fuller 1992:336). The rapid decent of Ak-Chin native speakers was an alarming fact. According to Fuller, it was a decisive aspect to take measures for culture and identity preservation (Fuller 1992:336). This distressing situation led many of the community members to the decision of creating an ecomuseum to deal with these problems (Fuller 1992). Language became so central to the community’s idea of identity that, when a questionnaire asking each family about their expectations of the museum was distributed, it occupied the top position, followed by oral history (Fuller 1992:347).

The project involved all the members of the community in one way or the other. The appointed board for the project decided in October 1987 that they would build a museum (Fuller 1992:348). There was a lot of community participation when deciding what shape the actual building was going to have (Fuller 1992:358) and the museum the Ak-Chin Him Dak opened on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1991 (Fuller 1992:343). It is interesting to mention how Fuller implies that the “ecomuseum started with the inauguration of the physical museum” (Fuller 1992:359), as if this form could only be significant once it transcended a physical and tangible dimension, a very different perception from de Varine’s who sees it as a “cultural process” (de Varine 1996). The Ak-Chin Him Dak followed a model that was based on the idea of ecomuseum, but one is left to wonder to what extent the community thought of the process as the actual outcome rather than the physical museum as the ultimate end. Fuller mostly uses the term ecomuseum for the Ak-Chin Him Dak, though she sometimes refers to it as a “community museum”. This loose use of the term ecomuseum made de Varine to prefer talking about “community museums” (de Varine 1996).

The programme was successful in engaging the community and providing them with empowerment, self confidence<sup>20</sup> and in creating long-lasting relationships with other communities. It indeed helped development, but one is to question whether the use they gave to their “ecomuseum” was appropriate or rather a missed chance. Certainly, using the label of “ecomuseum” opened many doors to the community, and possibly more funding, but was this what the Ak-Chin community needed or wanted? Did they achieve their goal of language fluency among younger community members? Despite seeing their language as the central pillar to their identity, the museum staff had not yet organized language workshops at the time Fuller wrote her article (Fuller 1992:360). Is this to be interpreted as a managerial mistake? As a lack of engagement to the initial proposal from the museum professionals? Or did the needs of the community change dramatically once the enclosed physical museum opened its doors? Only time will tell the success of this endeavour, however one is left to wonder that if their identity was centred around the language, why did the museum professionals not address it in a more straight forward fashion?

The term “ecomuseum” became such a powerful marketing tool, that the use of the label might seem convenient. However, it does not always stick to its original intentions, the foundations that de Varine and Rivière proposed in the 1970s. The term today evokes feelings of ecological sustainability, minorities and grassroots participations; however these notions are not central to the idea of ecomuseum. The Ak Chin community should have worked with the notion that not all museological endeavours involve an exhibition, and target their key problems, in this

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<sup>20</sup> Though, one is to question if the community felt more empowered from the complex irrigation systems that made them famous and they had developed before they engaged in the “ecomuseum” project (Fuller 1992:335)

case the disappearing oral tradition, and develop a strategy to deal with it. Creating a language centre might not have been an extremely popular idea, and would have probably attracted less funding than the label “ecomuseum”, but could have provided the community with a direct answer to their problems. Moreover, an ecomuseum could have been built around a language centre, based on a community of practice of elders that share their oral tradition and aim to pass it down to younger generations. This possibility does not involve the physicality of a space and breaks with the notion that anything museum-like needs to be confined within four walls and have a label next to it.

### **Project Identity: The gay community in the West and the no-museum**

With the exception to the Schwules Museum in Berlin and the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) museums are almost non-existent in most western countries, even in those with tolerant societies where the gay community has been completely assimilated.

This “gap” in the museum spectrum could be argued to be a consequence of the fact that the gay community forges its identity in being part of the larger spectrum of society to survive –core pillar of project identities-, unlike the national/legitimized identities, or the increasing trend of Jewish Museums in the West<sup>21</sup> and the Ak-Chin –resistance identity. As social actors, and based on the cultural goods available to

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<sup>21</sup> Though it could be argued that the Jewish identity in the West has transformed from a project to a resistance identity, in Castells terms, thus the importance of museums as a tool for identity, however I will leave this for another essay.

them, they aim to redefine their position in society, hoping to change structures of the society as a whole.

LGBT-related subjects are the focus of certain exhibitions in city museums, with initiatives that spread from San Francisco, with the LGBT Archives, to Glasgow with the Glasgay exhibit (Vanegas 2002: 104). Most of the times, these exhibits deal with ideas of homophobia or health (Vanegas 2002:99), issues that do not necessarily form part of the “gay identity” *per se*. However, there are clear distinct elements of the gay identity, such as dress codes and meeting places, or literary and musical preferences, but they fail to be present in most exhibits (Vanegas 2002:99), and as Vanegas argues “*The underlying message seems to be that, because lesbians and gay men are defined by their sexuality, they can only be represented by objects relating to sex, an approach that denies other aspects of gay and lesbian culture*” (Vanegas 2002:99)

However, this lack of museums and adequate representation seems to be compensated by other cultural manifestations, such as LGBT community centres and gay parades. Gay Villages can also be considered a larger representation of this idea<sup>22</sup>. Harry Britt, political advocate for LGBTs in San Francisco, argues that “*When gays are disseminated in space, they are not gays due to their invisibility*” (Harry Britt quoted in Castells 1997: 303), stressing the importance of such focal points, when members of the community do not feel alone; arguably a factor to community empowerment and identity forming.

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<sup>22</sup> Castells advocates for associating them to the term “freed areas” as opposed to the idea of “ghetto” (Castells 1997:304) parting from the idea that the homosexual community is drawn to those places from an inner wish, as opposed to being forced to live in there.

These “freed areas” and/or LGBT community centres act as a catalyst for identity forming. Because the gay community does not have a “*heimat*” –it would be like saying that women or blue-eyed people have a motherland- but is part of society as a whole, these physical entities become focal points for the community. Even if certain members of the community do not see themselves identified with them, they do however provide an identitiary framework that often evolves into stereotypes, by which they will be considered by other communities.

The role of LGBT centres –using the loose sense of the term, and including “gay villages”, community centres, meeting spaces targeted for the community such as cafes, bars, clubs, parks and so on- thus often fulfil the role of an ecomuseum in terms of community empowerment and identity forming. They trigger mechanisms that in a way could be labelled as communities of practice: a group of gay men getting together to go shopping, sharing their knowledge of fashion trends in the community or a seminar set up by transsexuals informing others about operations and procedures for transitioning. This notion could include larger aspects, such as a specific way of speaking, the so-called “Gayspeak” pointed out my many among them James W. Cheesbro, or performance art done, for example, by dragkings; can we not say that the only reason these cultural manifestations exist is because they are in an environment –whether oppressed, ignored or promoted- that can nourish them?

More similarities can be found between these cultural manifestations “alternative” to museums -or put simply, not labelled as such- and the principles of the “New Museology”, such as the gay parades. Could they be a form of ethnomimesis? According to the ideas exposed by Cantwell in his book “Ethnomimesis”, they could be, as they re-enact previously learned elements of their “culture” and in the process gain a deeper understanding to their social identity (Clifford 1997)- think of dragqueens, dancers etc. Even though

they do not have the “ethnic” dimension most ethnomimesis processes have, we can definitely speak of a cultural sphere. However, as with most communities, there are of course clusters that react to this portrayed identity that feel does not reflect them, an element that adds on to the complexity of this project identity.

This model could be applied to other social movements. Thinking outside the box (or in a museological context, the white cube) that the new museology broke away from, many similarities between venues where social interaction happens and produces a spin off of community empowerment and identity forming, and ecomuseums can be drawn. It is probable that these communities do not see themselves as part of a museological process, as this was not the intention in most cases, however, if we extrapolate Rivière’s impressions on the French village of Gennevilliers, they are already working within an ecomuseological framework.

## **THE ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL**

The museum is generally thought of as an institution of recognition and identity par excellence (MacDonald 2006: 4). The social value of museums can be understood if so is the process that they play constructing identity by being containers of cultural goods (Newman and McLean 2002:56). With the understanding of museums that the new museologies advocated for, the role of the museum in identity forming became a major element and, thus, did the role played by the museum professional.

When we look closer at the way museums work, we can immediately talk about a selection process; a selection of cultural products for official protection. This process can “recognize and affirm some identities, and thus failing to recognize others”(MacDonald 2006:4). But who makes that

selection? In other words, who should decide what is to be remembered (and, by default, what is to be forgotten)?

The New Museology advocates for participative collecting, involving the community in the process. In a very Anglo-Saxon new museology approach, Crooke campaigns for museums and communities working in partnerships to deal with contemporary problems (Crooke 2008:182), as opposed to the probably more ideological stand of the Latin perception that would advocate for the community *being* the museum. This dilemma goes hand in hand with *how* we should perceive identity: should we view it as something that can be grouped in external factors or rather the relationships of individuals to certain objects?

If the museum and the community are two different actors, the relationship between both is critical. Vanegas talks about the advantages of stressing a “shared identity” between some of the museum professionals and the source group, talking “about ‘us’ rather than ‘them’ when referring to their interviewees” (Vanegas 2002:100). Whilst there is no doubt this framework would work with certain communities -such as LGBT, it would be too idealistic to hope for museums to have in-staff members of each of the communities they work with. A solution could involve hiring members of the researched groups on a project basis, and this arrangement would probably enjoy the benefits that Vanegas refers to. By this token, the role of the professional should be to allow for a situation in which the source community feels confident when selecting their own heritage, and use its professional knowledge to display it in a faithful fashion, according to the message intended by the source community. This can be misleading, but it would also avoid the (community) museum to become an artificial construct that only allows a defined version of reality to transcend.

Identity empowerment is dealt within the context of museums in a myriad of forms, however Hall points out that

“[identity] always moved into the future through a symbolic detour through the past” (Hall 1999:43), a trend that is often visible in community museums throughout the world, with an underlying sense of nostalgia and tradition. According to Arjona, if we think in a framework in which culture is in constant change through hundreds of means, so should the cultural identity, as opposed to “mummifying” traditions of the past to attract tourists (Arjona 1986:18-19). The cultural identity should be a “*spontaneous assimilation of what we were and still are, a coherent empowerment of our origins, that exist side by side with our modern reality*” (Arjona 1986:19)

The role of the professional has a larger area of influence that goes beyond the notion of identity: a lack of sense of belonging is associated with exclusion from society, whereas an individual with a sense of identity is considered the main precursor to inclusion (Woodward 1997 cited in Newman and McLean 2002:57). Inclusion and participation are paradigms that are constantly challenging contemporary museology.

The 1992 Caracas Declaration intended that the role of the museum heritage professional to be that of a “social manager” (Primo 1999:71), a notion that overlaps in the field of sociology. I would advocate for creating a platform in which sociologists, ethnographers, art historians, source communities and other relevant stakeholders meet to discuss their interest. The role of the museum professional should be the managing of this “*Greek agora*” space, a great opportunity for a contact zone that cannot be missed. These relationships and roles will be the great challenges the museum professional will face in the coming years.

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## **Lost in the supermarket –The Traditional Museums Challenges**

**Mariana Lamas**

### **INTRODUCTION**

“I’m all lost in the supermarket. I can no longer shop happily. I came in here for the special offer. A guaranteed personality”. The song by The Clash, released in 1979, “Lost in the Supermarket” describes the protagonist struggle to deal with an increasingly commercialized society and the depersonalization of the world around him. The song speaks about alienation and the feelings of disillusionment and lack of identity that come through modern society.

There are different ways which one can decrease those feelings and promote knowledge, self-awareness and understanding. The museum, when used with all its potential, is one of the ways. But how to do that? That is the question museum professionals ask themselves.

This paper analyses how the traditional museum can use the new museology concepts, and the challenges of this approach, to become a vehicle for community development and empowerment, diminishing the feelings sang by The Clash.

### **1- SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

We live in cloudy times where ideological groupings and blocks of the past are not

easily noticed. The bipolarization between liberal capitalism and soviet communism does not exist anymore. Terms like “liberalism” or “democracy”, “capitalism” or “socialism” no longer stand for coherent systems of ideas. Globalization is the strong signature of the new world order. The promise of technical-scientific progress impels new daily possibilities, but are not able yet to solve the structural difficulties of man’s life, such as hunger, housing, health and education. The environment degradation becomes an increasing problem, but there are still few or insufficient possibilities to retrocede it. If in one hand, the post-war economic acceleration drove to a superior life standard of the middle urban classes, in the other hand, a mass of miserables tries to survive the huge social inequalities of the world (Hobsbawn, 2000).

A brief look on Africa, most of Asia and Latin America reflects a setting in which massive social contradictions reign. Even in the European continent, considered more culturally advanced than the emerging countries, intolerance and social segregation gain more power each day. It is not only the immigrant that concerns the European setting, every time more workers suffer from unemployment and lack of opportunities due to the automation of life and work.

In the USA evident development and production through exacerbate pragmatism mask the unemployment, poverty and inequality of marginalized social groups such as the African-Americans or the Hispanic immigrants that are called “Chicanos”.

We live in cloudy times in which developed countries only intervene (i.e. stop a war, take down dictatorships, etc.) when there is a great possibility of profit and governments do not value human life, quoting Stalin “one death is a tragedy: one million is a statistic”. Times in which the Western societies became more individualistic due to the process of modernization.

Dominique Walton (n.d.) uses the term “mass individualist society” to reflect on the unique characteristics of our contemporary society where two structural realities coexist: it values the individual and at the same time it values

the masses. “The **CRISIS OF SOCIAL BONDS** results from the difficulties involved in finding a new balance within this social model” (Walton). Primary bonds, those we associate with families, villages and trades, have disappeared, and social bonds, associated with class solidarity and membership of social or religious groups, have also weakened. The result is that there is little to distinguish between masses and individuals. Today everything is subordinated to the conflicting duality that weakens social bonds. The price of freedom has been high, and so has the establishment of mass society in the name of equality. “We are all **FREE**, even though the result is a discreet but haunting solitude that also explains the renewed focus on the issue of social bonds” (Walton, n.d.).

In one of the chapters of “The Fall of Public Man”, Richard Sennett (1993) discourses about failure. In his opinion, failure is the greatest modern tabu, it is a current social phenomenon that affects everybody. It is most of the time a confusing experience, and therefore, the solution to deal with such problem needs to be collective. It is through the shared experiences, that one may find the way out. On that account, it is necessary to have a broader sense of community and character to fight the new capitalism, in a society that people are doomed to fail.

Besides that, he great dilemma of the new capitalism: who needs me in a regime where the relations between people are superficial and disposable and the bonds of loyalty, trust and mutual commitment get weaker due to short term experiences? The problem here is that there is history, but there we do not shared our narratives with each other.

No shared narrative leads to no built social identity, no sense of belonging to anything. We live in an information society in which everything is connected, but we keep getting disconnected from one another.

The term “community” is losing the meaning it once had, as Zygmunt Bauman (2001) defines it, a safe, comfortable and warm place where we are never strangers to each other and we are guided by the same wish to improve our life together. Instead, today, in many places, it is used to define a

poor or unprivileged neighborhood, implying a certain inferiority to its meaning and to the group it is being referred to.

Following Sennett's question, how to reestablish the sense of community? How to build our narratives together in a capitalism system that values the disposable, the unsteady, the short-term, and above all, the individualism? The answer to this question is tricky, there is no easy and instant (that we are so used to and like so much) solution. The more radicals ones would say that we need a revolution. The pessimists would say that there is no solution. The politicians would say "let's change it" when they really mean "no way." The common sense would say stop complaining, that is the way things are, just get used to it. The museums professionals would say I might have a solution.<sup>23</sup>

## **2- CAN MUSEUMS SAVE THE WORLD?**

Before going on, it is important to address this question. Museums cannot save the world, although some museum professionals really wish it could and some do not actually say it, but act like it is possible. Museums are not disguised knights in shining armors waiting around the bush for the maiden in a scrape to cry for help. The museum professionals should be aware of what the museum can and should do and what is its limitations. For instance, the museum should be an extension of the school and not substitute it; you cannot have everything in whole wide world museum as Grover from Sesame Street visits and one single museum cannot not reach out to all types of people.

From knowing its limitations, emerges the question: what museums can and should do? The museum definition proposed by ICOM(International Council for Museums) is:

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<sup>23</sup>Disclaimer: I'm not saying by any means that the museum professionals are the only one with an answer. I'm just trying to make a point.

“A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment”. (ICOM Statutes, adopted by the 22nd General Assembly in Vienna, Austria, 24 August 2007)

Analyzing this definition in detail, museums are indeed open to all sorts of public, the actions of acquiring, conserving and researching are well put into practice. There are plenty of theoretical frameworks and step-by-step guidelines concerning conservation and acquirement of objects. Of course, each of these subjects is not problem free, they have different challenges to overcome. Research has always been a function of the museum, in fact, some museums are known for their researches and researchers. About communication and exhibitions, there were improvements with the usage of new technologies and concepts, but museums still need, though, to figure out how to present different opinions and interpretations. Education has improved since the 1960's and the second museum revolution, new theories were put into practice and educational programmes were developed.

The balance between these functions results from the policy adopted by the institution, some have a better use of their collection, while others have stronger education programs and others have a role model storage room.

What is trying to be said is that all these functions in a way or another have been carefully thought of, each function has its own professionals, these are put into practice by most of the museums and in a lot of cases have been successfully. But when we talk about “in the service of society and its development”, it's quite different. It is like the drunk uncle at the Christmas party that the family pretends is not there, because if they pretend long enough, he might pass out on the couch. Fortunately, the societies that the museums serve are not disappearing anytime soon, so traditional museums

eventually will have to get down from their ivory towers and deal with the people. Since some museums professionals and museums are already doing it, the other museums might learn from their experiences.

### **3. IT ALL COMES DOWN TO THE SAME OLD THING – NEW MUSEOLOGY**

For thirty years museums professionals have discussed about the social function of the museum. Many meetings and round tables were made to debate about it and endless letters and declarations which define what must be done in order for museums to be socially active and describe the process in step by step were published. During those discussions a new paradigm for museums emerged, new museology<sup>24</sup>. The focus of the museum shifted from the objects/collections to the people/community. It is based on a reversed hierarchy, in other words, any museological methodology should start from the needs of society.

Community development and the principle of community participation in decision making process lie in the center of the concerns of the new museology. The objective is to contribute to the development of a community by reinforcing a sense of cultural identity (Van Mensch, 1992). In these context, presentation and preservation of the heritage is seem as a social action and change. It should be considered and developed within the context of community improvements.

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<sup>24</sup> According to Peter van Mensch (1992) the term “new museology” was introduced in the museological literature at least three different times. The term was first used by Benoist to discourse about the developments of art museums in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1980 the term “muséologie nouvelle” was introduced by André Desvallés in an article about museology for the *Encyclopedia Universalis*. The term was introduced in the UK by Peter Vergo in 1989 when he published his book *The New Museology*. “The use of the term was always connected with the changing role of museums in education and in the society at large”.

According to Judite Primo (2008), the new museology conceives a broader field of action for museology in which, besides the problematic of the collections, there is a concern with society's issues and the role of the museum professional in this process. The individual becomes the active subject and society transformer. New museology is in one hand the attempt to adjust to the contemporary society and in the other hand an answer to communities' needs.

In Cesár Lopes's (2003) opinion, founder of MINON (International Movement for a New Museology), new museology is a concept that started in Latin America connected to the experience of museums in service of development. It's a program for development that tries to involve people. The "new" professionals than realized that in order to promote development, it was necessary to recovery heritage and that this recovery had to do with the recovery of people's identity and community involvement. It was understood that the museum had a new function to perform.

As time went by "an increasing dichotomy between the new and the traditional museology took shape as new museologist firmer their politic position against what they accused of being an impermeable and monolithic museological environment" (Dos Santos, p. 53, 2008). Of course this was the point of view of the new museology, but the traditional museums showed to be rather impermeable to the speed and dimension of the changes proposed by those related to the new museology.

Until the 1990's the proposals of the new museology were restricted to the new concepts of museums that emerged with the movement from the late 1960's: neighborhood museums, the most well-known and also the first museum of this type is the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum in Washington DC; ecomuseums which came to life with the experiment of the Ecomuseum of Le Creusot; and the integral museum which intends to provide the community a integral view of its material environment and culture, it's a dynamic instrument of social change and community development. It is committed to the present and directly connected to the future.

This concept of museum was introduced in 1972 in the Declaration of Santiago, one of the precursors of the new museology.

In the 1990's what we see is a boom of projects relating to communities in the traditional museums. Suddenly the word "community" became the biggest hype in the traditional museums world. In some countries, specially in the UK, for museums to obtain better funds it had to mention in their mission statements anything related to community and grass root participation. Despite some traditional museums efforts, from the 1990's until today, when looking at the big picture, it is still a small number of museums that are trying to involve the community into their projects. The education and leisure roles of the museum are more recognized than its social potential. Until today museums usually are considered as institutions whose aim is cultural rather than social. Besides that, most of the museums seem not to recognize or ignore their social function.

There are many reasons why the traditional museums have adopted this posture. One of them is museums, apart some exceptions, have always come across as elitist. Therefore, a place for the elite where the elite's perspectives of things are portrayed and the official history is represented, so it has no interest to show anything that is not consistent with that. The political setting in which the museum is inserted, may limit the professionals actions, i.e. they have the desire to work with the community, but cannot due to political interests. Another reason is the lack of interest of the museums professionals in promoting a more democratic and diverse museum have also a great impact in the fulfillment of museums' social function.

#### **4. I AM HE AS YOU ARE HE AS YOU ARE ME AND WE ARE ALL TOGETHER**

Before doing anything, the traditional museum should get rid of the "traditional". Traditional means something old-fashioned, stuck in time, static, prisoner of the past, out of

touch with the present, not at all adjectives used to describe the traditional museum. Traditional museums are usually described as refreshing, exciting, in sync with the present, towards the future. In Cazuza words “um museu de grandes novidades”<sup>25</sup>. Right?

Independent of which side of the fence one might place himself or herself, it could also be on the top of the fence, one thing is for sure traditional museums have a long way to go towards community participation and development.

In the past years, with the boom of “community”, one could notice several initiatives from traditional museums to involve more actively the community in their projects. There was an increase in the use of advisory boards, focus groups (with members of the particular community) and display of personal stories in exhibitions. Actually, it seems like that is the way the traditional museums found to work with the community.

Despite some successful cases, it is certainly a challenge for the traditional museum. The first question that arises when trying to work with a community is: which community? Which community should the museum work for and with? A national historical museum, for example? When we talk about ecomuseums and community museums the community is already pre-determined and since it is a bottom-up initiative one presupposes that the community is interested in being part of the project. Should then the traditional museum choose a particular community? If so, what is your criteria to choose? Once you choose a certain community to develop a project with, you are excluding all the rest. Returning the ICOM definition of museum “institution in the service of **society**”. One community does not represent the society, it represents a part of society. But as said in the beginning, museums have limitations, there cannot be a

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<sup>25</sup> Cazuza was a Brazilian singer and song writer, whose words translate as “a museum of great novelties”.

everything in the world museum that is able to reach out all types of people.

Museums have to make choices and these choices depend on funds, stakeholders, sponsors, political context, museum director, museums professionals, etc. So museums have to choose which community, the same way they choose everything else like exhibitions themes, conservation procedures, objects to collect, objects to deaccession, educational activities, among others. The choice of the community is subordinate to the same elements and related to the museum's agenda.

The second question that arises is: if we live in times when people do not know who they are, how can the museum represent them? The museum offers the visitor different ways of perceiving the world, and of living in the world. Museum experiences allow us to flirt with alternative ways of being. When visiting an exhibition visitors search for features of their personal lives, both actual and imaged selves, during their exploration of objects in the museum their searches may lead to confirming, disconfirming, elaborating understanding of their own identities (Paris and Merces, 2002). When working with a particular community, through the museum its members solidify the connections among them and find out what they have in common, reaffirming their roots and values, locating them in society, culture and history.

The third question that arises is: how can traditional museums promote community development? At first the word "development" may seem too much for the museum to do, but there are several ways a museum can promote community development. It can help the community to overcome a problem, coming up with different solutions, putting things into a new perspective; providing confidence to the community and legitimizing it; it can incentivize the community to take action to improve its quality of life; it can fortify the bonds between the members of the community and reaffirm their identities making them feel more secure about who they are; and give them a chance to tell their own version of their history to "outsiders" which empowers them.

The fourth question that arises is: How will the museum be able to keep up with the community changes? Communities are always changing themselves and museums are known to be static and have a hard time trying to update themselves. In this context the difficulty that faces the traditional museum is that, differently from the ecomuseum and the community museum, most of the time it is not located in the community, so it is not part of peoples every day life. Though it is not a condition to able the museum to keep up with the changes, it would certainly make it easier. The museum, then, should stop being frozen pieces of history and it should become a stream, a sequence, a continuum of past, present and future events. In order for this to happen the museum should not be afraid to make a statement and display controversy, which involves most of the current issues. Controversies enrich the dialogue and the museum experience.

The fifth question that arises is: should the relation between the museum and the community be short-term or long-term? It depends on the project and the museum's intention. Usually it is short-term, it would be almost impossible for the museum to get funds to maintain projects with several communities at the same time and for a long period. It's important for the museum at the beginning of the project to be honest about its expectations, so the community does not feel deceived and used by the museum like it is just part of the museum's social diversity agenda. However, the museum can maintain the relation in an informal way, updating the community about its events and projects and invite them to participate, starting volunteers programs, keeping updated about what is happening in the community. This kind of relation is important because allows the museum to find out if the work with the community promoted any changes and developments. The idea here is that working with a community is not a check from the list of things that the museum needs to do. It is to build a relation that makes people feel that they are part of the museum, they are represented there and become frequent visitors.

The sixth question that arises is: how should the museum professionals be like? How their profile should be? As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons that traditional museums do not engage with the community is its professionals. In order for you to change the museum professional, you need to change their training. What is important is to shape a professional that is aware of the current issue, wants to work the communities, knows the potential of the museum as a cultural heritage institution, is open minded, does not make assumptions, tries to put the theory into practice, continues learning (it is not only the museum that needs to update itself), has knowledge of diverse groups within society, acts according to the codes of ethics, has knowledge of the issues involved in museums as learning centers and has knowledge of the museum and its role in the society.

## **5. POWER TO THE PEOPLE – THE TETRA-PARTITE MUSEUM MODEL**

Having in mind all the challenges that the traditional museum face when trying to fulfill its social role, it's been proposed a new museum model that would help the museum to overcome these challenges, become an active participant instead of a passive collector better engage with its visitors (they are now part of the process, not only passive receivers) and be able to represent different opinions and interpretations. However, first it's suitable to discourse about the bi-partite and the tri-partite model.

In the 19th century due to the massive growth of the collections, the bi-partite museum model was introduced. It consists of dividing the museum's collection into a display collection and a reserve collection. The exhibition's organization followed a scientific system rather than objects arranged according to scientific principles. The tri-partite is an attempt to combine educational purpose and taxonomic strategy, it consists in the division of the collections into three

parts: exhibition, storage and the open storage or visible storage (Van Mensch, 1992).

The tetra-partite museum model is an attempt to promote a participative approach and a forum for discussions. The visitors can intervene in the exhibition. They can add information to the objects labels, rearrange the order of the exhibition, suggest other objects to display and new approaches of the theme of the exhibition. It's advisable to have a follow up to find out and understand why the visitor made those certain changes and to know his/her opinion and suggestions about the new approach.

In the tetra-partite model there is an inversion of roles, the visitor becomes the curator and the museum becomes the visitor.

Certainly this museum model would find a lot of resistance, since the museum is afraid to lose its authority. Some will say that the public has no proper training know-how knowledge to be given such position. Maybe the public doesn't have training and knowledge, but the museum should not underestimate it. If the museum works in service of the society, one would assume it is essential to know what the society wants and needs and that the society should have a voice.

Other possible critic is that with this model the museum would become a chaos and the objects would be in risk. It is not necessary to use the model in the whole exhibition, it can be just a room or two. In fact, it could be a temporary exhibition. The objects displayed in these rooms would have to be replicas so there is no risk of improper handling and damages to the object.

The tetra-partite model will not work for all types of museums and all types of visitors. Every situation is different, every visitor is different and every museum is different and it requires different actions and measures. What might work for a visitor, may not work for another and that makes it difficult to come up with a certain method for a relation between them. It's up to each institution to figure out what works best for it and how to implement it.

This model could change the way visitors see and behave in the museum. Usually people do not believe in politicians or law enforcement, but they do believe in museums. When they come to a museum they are not aware that what is being displayed is not neutral, that is involves choices about what to forget and what to remember and political positions and that the museum usually only show one side of the story. This model can make the visitor be aware of these issues and assume a critical position when visiting museums, once they will encounter different informations and interpretations about the objects and they will have the power to decide how to display the exhibition.

## **6. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In a world that values the disposable, the unsteady, the short-term, and above all, the individualism and is losing its sense of community, the traditional museum needs to step up and fulfill its social role. A way to do it is to adapt and use the new museology's concepts promoting social inclusion, community participation and development and people's empowerment.

In recent years there was a movement of museums into this direction. Many articles and books have been written about it, but when trying to put it into practice museums encounter challenges on how to implement the concepts and make it a reality.

The tetra-partite museum model comes as a solution to some of this challenges and an attempt to make the museum aware of the visitors' desires, needs and wants and take into a more participative approach.

Going back to the question asked earlier, can museums save the world? No, but they can definitely change it. As The Beatles used to sing: "You say you want a revolution, well, you know, we all want to change to world". Including the museum professionals.

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## **Societal development and the traditional museum:**

Applying New Museology to a different context

Davida de Hond, Sebastiaan van der Lans, and Marjolein van der Vlies

With contribution of Freek van Kessel, Mercedes Montes de Oca Navarro<sup>26</sup>

### **Introduction**

*The Dapperstreet*<sup>27</sup>

*...Anything is a lot, when you expect so little  
Life keeps its wonders hidden  
To suddenly reveal them in a divine state.*

*I thought about all this,  
Soaking wet, one drizzly morning,  
Simply happy in the Dapperstreet.*

The Dapperstreet is part of a neighbourhood often referred to as “East”, situated in the eastern part of Amsterdam. It is a lively and vibrant multi-cultural part of the city. It has a daily market with food from around the world, but is also known worldwide because of the murder on Theo van Gogh, the Dutch film director who was killed there in 2001 because of his

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<sup>26</sup> Students of the International Master’s Degree Programme in Museology at the Reinwardt Academy in Amsterdam

<sup>27</sup> Poem by J.C. Bloem, *The Dapperstreet* (Het Verlangen, 1921). Translation by Davida de Hond.

critical and provocative statements on the Islam. Thus it can be concluded that it is certainly a neighbourhood with its own problems but, as can be read in Bloem's poem, a place to call home and long for.

### **The context**

The Amsterdam Historical Museum (AHM) has for some time been working on different projects that aim towards giving the city of Amsterdam and its current inhabitants a more prominent position within the museum. Through exhibitions, presentations and other activities, the museum wants to establish a closer relationship with its surroundings. An example of this is the project 'Het geheugen van Oost' (The Memory of East, a neighbourhood in Amsterdam). In this project, stories and pictures of people living in East are collected and presented on the Internet. The website started as a cooperation between the AHM and a diversity of socially engaged organisations. As can be read on the website, 'The Memory of East strives towards stimulating social integration and participation of diverse target groups in the east of Amsterdam'.<sup>28</sup> The website is currently run by volunteers, and these also provide for guided tours through the neighbourhood in which the stories presented on the Internet are told.

At the moment, the AHM is working on a new project in which it seeks participation from the community of Amsterdam: 'Buurtwinkels' (neighbourhood shops). The project shall be a part of a bigger international European project, entitled *Entrecult*: 'Entrepreneurial Cultures in European Cities'.<sup>29</sup> This project focuses on entrepreneurship and European citizenship in different ways in several European cities.

The Buurtwinkels project is focusing on the heritage of neighbourhood shops and its customers in the city. The theme of this project is chosen because everybody shops and neighbourhood shops are places where different people meet

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.geheugenvanoost.nl/> 14th of May, 2010

<sup>29</sup> [www.eciec.eu](http://www.eciec.eu) 14<sup>th</sup> of May, 2010

and all kinds of social contacts are being made. Neighbourhood shops are, as we may say, a mirror of society. The AHM has launched a website where, among others, shop owners and customers can post pictures and stories connected to the neighbourhood shops.<sup>30</sup>

In the course of 2010, different activities will be organised in the neighbourhoods of Amsterdam. The culmination of the project will be in 2011, when a large exhibition will be organised at the AHM presenting the outcomes of the initiatives taken regarding the heritage of neighbourhood shops. By realizing the *Buurtwinkels* project, the AHM is working together with different organisations and institutions such as housing co-operations and the University of Amsterdam. One specific part of the project is done in close cooperation with the Reinwardt academy (RWA). The AHM has approached the academy because it is seeking new ways to engage the inhabitants of Amsterdam, in this case the inhabitants of the Dapperbuurt, a neighbourhood situated in the east of Amsterdam.

The AHM has asked the master students of the RWA to do research on forming a so-called Community of Practice (CoP), which can be described as a group of people that shares common interests or goals. Concerning the *Buurtwinkels* project in the Dapperbuurt, the AHM wants to approach working with communities in a new way. The museum seeks to find out whether and how it is possible to work from a more bottom-up approach, thus giving its community more influence or power, as you might say, in deciding the content of the *Buurtwinkels* project in the Dapperbuurt.

The method of working with a CoP has been chosen in order to create a 'working group' that will be deciding on the content and execution of the project. We, the students of the RWA, were asked to do research on who should be part of a CoP and how to compose such a group. In doing this, the students

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<sup>30</sup> <http://buurtwinkels.ahm.nl/> 14th of May, 2010

where confronted with different dilemma's. What is the role of the different stakeholders involved in the project? Can the AHM be part of a CoP and will this effect their desired bottom-up approach or should the role of the museum be limited to acting as a facilitator, thus executing the ideas born within the CoP? Working in three groups, the students gave their advice to the AHM. Based on the different outcomes of the three research groups, this article will reflect on how and if their findings and New Museological principles can be applied to the *Buurtwinkels* project.

### **Multiple-perspectiveness, Negotiation and Intention: What's in it for me?**

The different stakeholders that participate within this project need to be distinguished and at the same time the reasons why they want to invest in and undergo this process. There are several perspectives that need to be looked into, in order to fully grasp the potential, but also the possible pitfalls of this approach and the limitations the parties involved in the project have. So therefore every stake- and shareholder within the project will be introduced from its own perspective and showcasing the intentions and ground sets that each of the parties have and had (and had to have due to institutional constraints) during the process of the project and will help to see where the project can go from here, after the involvement of the Reinwardt Master students.

### **The AHM**

The AHM is the city museum of Amsterdam and housed in the centre since the year 1975. It is a collection-based museum, with as a core the history of the city of Amsterdam. It is a traditional museum, where the museum professionals acquire the collection and decisions regarding the collection and exhibition lie very strongly with the curators.

It is not the case that the museum never worked with(in) the neighbourhoods of Amsterdam. In 2003 they made a publication called "Blauwdruk" or "Blueprint" where several

projects had been discussed on involving society in the museums practice. This was experimental too, but on a short-term basis and it has not changed the organisation into a less hierarchy-based institution.

Since 'blueprint' there have been projects that focussed on society itself and with a slight participatory focus, but not to such lengths as is now proposed by the New Museology theory.

In it for:

- Short-term projects
- Theory
- Input
- Experimental exhibition; with certainties

The restraints of the museum have become clear throughout the process and have influenced it. There are certain ways of how the museum can use its budget and the institution needs to have certain goals it needs to achieve, in order to keep getting funding from their sponsors. The employees of the museum have been working in a strong internal discourse, this has made them used to one way of working, and this also leads to constraints.

Changing an organisation is very drastic and resource and time consuming, which the museums organisation does not have. This provided challenges because where does the museum only use the inhabitants as a free-story provider and where does it become a CoP, without becoming the “social-workers” they are often afraid to become.

### **The Reinwardt Academy**

The RWA, Academy for Museology, resides in the Dapperbuurt in Amsterdam. It has a Bachelor program on Cultural heritage and a Masters program which focuses on Museology, a more theoretical and policy approach to the

subject matter concerning museums and heritage. It also has a 'knowledge circle' in which several researches on subjects associated with Museology and museums are brought together. It seeks for a new approach on Museology, multiple perspectiveness within the profession and advocates for a more inclusive approach to heritage, by involving society itself. Therefore New Museology is perceived as important to research and include and introduce in "daily" practice of more traditional institutions, such as the AHM: Seeking to what extent New Museology theory is implementable and focusing on theory and practice within a traditional museum.

In it for:

- Long-term relationships
- Practice
- Output
- Experiment and articles; with room for uncertainties
- Long-term projects

### **Inhabitants of the Dapperbuurt**

In it for:

- ?

Their can be several phrases stated such as better living environment, sense of place, sense of belonging, integration and so on. But what do the people in the neighbourhood really want? And do they want something at all from this project? This is something that cannot be addressed by us or the institutes involved in the projects. What can be said is that all inhabitants willing to participate want a nice place to live and connect with their roots in the neighbourhood and getting to know their neighbours.

### **Master students of the Reinwardt Academy**

We, the writers of this article and the rest of our class, do our Museology course at the RWA. In this context we have done

this project. But we do not represent the institute and do not have any long-term visions on what the RWA should be. We are somewhat part of the Dapperbuurt, because the RWA stands in this neighbourhood, but neither of us lives here. Therefore we do not have direct ties with the neighbourhood as an entity. The AHM is the furthest away from our context; therefore we can be critical about their intentions of working with 'New Museology' and our ideas on the feasibility of this approach. But the case is that this was an assignment, given to us by the RWA and the AHM, so we had to cross a threshold before saying what we really felt during this process. We had to let go of the fact that the museum would judge us on our project initiatives. We were the ones to get in contact with the people living in the Dapperbuurt and, each group with their own approach methods, talked to a good share of people. We became a link between both the RWA and the AHM. The different people from the Dapperbuurt we had contact with saw us as independent, so they shared what was on their mind and were honest.

## **Project**

What is necessary to make it work?

In working with a CoP, there are certain things that the AHM has to keep in mind. By initiating this project, the museum already has made it clear to the community that there will be some form of cooperation in the near future.

By placing 'community' at the heart of the museum enterprise, 'it will be possible to overcome the role of museums as hegemonic institutions. In giving voice to the powerless a process of self-discovery and empowerment will take place in which the curator becomes a facilitator rather than a figure of authority'.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Witcomb, A., 'Re-Imagining the Museum. Beyond the Mausoleum London' In: Watson, S.,(ed.) *Museums and Their Communities* (Oxon 2007) 133

It is important that the AHM has this notion in mind when starting to negotiate with the community. A starting point, from this perspective, would be recognition of the different interests involved. At one level we have the community of the Dapperbuurt, which interests have not been defined to the core, but which will have a focus on an interest in defining and interpreting their cultural heritage, and in this case their neighbourhood shops, for themselves and others. At another level we have the interest of the heritage profession, with their values of the importance of preservation and the proper documentation and interpretation of collections. It is important that the AHM and the Dapperbuurt community discuss these differences in order to come to a mutual understanding. Curators, educational programmers, gift shop managers and administrators should all 'ideally have some involvement in this collaborative project and be prepared to think through the implications of this relationship as well as to support this project administratively'.<sup>32</sup> Their participation heightens awareness amongst the people in the AHM of 'the legitimacy and importance of cultural protocols when developing new relationships'.<sup>33</sup> One of the most important elements of new relationships between museum and source communities is the extent to which they promote learning and growth for the museum profession.

Bringing community members of the Dapperbuurt into the AHM will turn this dominant-society institution into an arena for cross-cultural debate and learning, and can lead to extraordinary exchanges of knowledge as well as opportunities for people from all walks of life to begin to understand the views of someone from another cultural group.

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<sup>32</sup> Peers, L.L., Brown, A.K.,(ed.) *Museums and Source Communities* (London 2003) 10

<sup>33</sup> idem.

In order to let the project in the Dapperbuurt succeed it is important that the AHM sees itself as part of the process rather than something that is closely defined in terms of mechanistic functions such as conservation, display or education. By concentrating on the inputs and outputs of this process the focus moves on to what the museum aims to achieve and the process or activity can be tailored appropriately. Traditionally museums have concentrated on the outcome, the display or educational activity, without having a focus on the actual process and impacts on society. The greatest problem with such an approach is that it is very difficult to determine whether a particular activity has succeeded or failed.

For this analysis people are seen as the most important input into the museum process. The relationship museums have with users defines their reason for existing. This relationship enables museums to contribute to their users' sense of identity and encourage them to be better citizens. It allows them to make and reconstruct their identities and possibly encourages them into a particular course of action. It is this effect upon people that is the outcome of the museum process. 'In the context of the process model, collections, buildings and staff are the resources used by the museum process and have no independent meaning. The objectives of museums must be couched in terms of the influences that they have upon people' (Newman & McLean, 65). It is through this approach that museums can contribute to include communities.

### **Power shift; a turning point in the process**

This is something that is interesting to zoom in on. When it came to power, or better said the sharing of power and decision-making the discussion got more heated and the question arose whether the approach the AHM took was the way to go. Only the representatives of the RWA were pleasantly surprised with the discussion that took place. It seems that traditional museums, such as the AHM, really

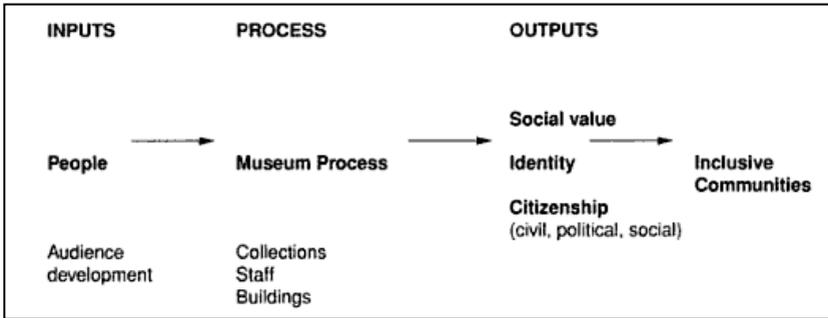


Fig. 1.1 The contribution of museums to inclusive communities

want to be groundbreaking and do something new, but not change their organisational constraints in order to really carry it out. There are several examples that can be given to provide arguments for this that we have felt during the project, but at this time we have chosen for the most exemplary one: Thé definition;

A neighbourhood shop cannot be part of a chain of stores (i.e. McDonalds, El Corte Ingles or Wal-Mart), have no more than five employees and has to have four walls.

The curator and staff made this definition for the exhibition that will be made in (and with) the neighbourhood. But there are several problems that arose concerning this definition:

- The definition itself; making a definition in a project which should be aimed on active involvement and grass-root initiatives, without involving the members of the neighbourhood itself is uncalled for and inappropriate. It shows that the true fundamentals of New Museology and the theory behind it are missing and that the intention of dividing decision-making is not something that is wanted throughout the organisation and employees involved.
- A neighbourhood shop cannot be part of a chain; in this definition there are several neighbourhood shops within the

Dapperbuurt that cannot be part of the project, because they are part of a chain of stores. An example on why this is simply wrong within the Dapper-context is the FeBo, a chips and snack shop chain in the Netherlands. Mr Levering has been the owner of the store for thirty years. He is chairman of the entrepreneurial representation committee in the neighbourhood and spokes person for numerous inhabitants. In interviews with him he stated to have filled in municipality forms, dealt with money and marriage issues and solved other problems of and with people living in the neighbourhood. He is widely trusted and appreciated. He also lowered his coffee prices, so that his shop could stay the meeting point of several groups living in the Dapperbuurt. This has to be a neighbourhood shop: a place of interaction and reaching out, not only with a commercial interest.

- No more than 5 employees; Within the Dapperbuurt there are several stores that have more than 5 employees, but still could be seen as a neighbourhood shop. It seems that this criteria was built into the narrative of an idyllic image of a neighbourhood shop, where an old pension-aged couple are running a shop that has been in the family for decades, an image that does not exist anymore on the scale it did in the '50's in the Netherlands. It does not seem fit to make the amount of employees part of such a definition. When the people living in the neighbourhood give meaning to a place with 20 employees, it should be taken up in the exhibition and not be excluded from the start.

- Has to have four walls; the centre of the Dapperbuurt is the Market, which won the "best-market-award" in 2009. The market stands do not have four walls so, according to the definition given by the AHM, this implies that they are not included within the framework of the exhibition. There has been resistance from the neighbourhood to this part of the definition, because the market is the centre of the neighbourhood. Market stands simply are shops that are being built up again every day. But this is the only different with the other shops in the neighbourhood. This was a point of friction between the different stakeholders of the project. The

members of the Dapperbuurt, which we had contacted, were even refusing to work with the AHM if they used and implemented the given definition within the project.

### **Conclusion. Is it possible?**

Engagement with the concept of community will prompt the AHM to revisit their museum space and question their identity, role and social value. By encouraging this idea of community participation in museum activities, the AHM plays with the notion of democratizing the history of the city of Amsterdam and the museum space. It is linked with bringing in new voices, new histories, and new people. The AHM has to be aware that this approach will challenge the authority of the curatorial and research expertise of museum staff. The success of the 'new' relationship between the AHM and the Dapperbuurt will depend on how these two sides are willing to participate and cooperate with each other.

In addition, if the AHM decides to continue with this project, they also have to ask themselves whether the CoP they are working with is representative, whether its members are accepted by the inhabitants of the Dapperbuurt, and 'how the balance of authority between the community and museum expert is best struck'.<sup>34</sup> In the outline of the *Buurtwinkels* project, it has been shown that applying New Museological principles might result in social development such as creating relationships between people with different social backgrounds. However, one can say that throughout this article one single word claims a key position: power.

The way the AHM has decided to start its project can be seen as a combination of the two versions of New Museology: the British and the Latin one. The Latin version of New Museology

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<sup>34</sup> Crooke, E., 'Museums and Communities'. In: Macdonald, S., (ed.) *Companionship to Museum Studies* (Oxford 2006) 184

is characterised by Grassroot-initiatives and museums that either arise because of these initiatives, or facilitate wishes, ideas or projects by persons or communities. The British version on the other hand aims towards the museum as both facilitator and initiator, but strongly focuses on including its surroundings. These are the difficulties caused by power this term that pose serious challenges for the AHM.

The AHM can be seen as the initiator of the *Buurtwinkels* project. The museum has decided on the theme of the project, not the community living in the Dapperbuurt. As such, grassroot-initiatives do not form the basis of the project. On the other hand, the AHM has been outspoken about its wish to serve as a facilitator: the content and project will for the largest part be created by a CoP that consists of people connected to the Dapperbuurt and not by professionals working in the field of heritage.

Connected to the problem of the AHM being an initiator and facilitator at the same time is the question of what exactly is the goal of the project. For the AHM, the goal is to be more visible in the city of Amsterdam, to experiment with new forms of exhibition making, how to apply Museological theories and working with a CoP. It is clear that these goals are rather inward looking. This results in difficulties reaching the inhabitants of the Dapperbuurt: what is in it for them?

In order for the *Buurtwinkels* project to become a success, both on a short- and a long-term basis, the AHM and the inhabitants of the Dapperbuurt will have to create a common goal in order to work on an equal basis. Will the goal be working towards a beautiful exhibition, or is it also possible for all stakeholders that the process of working together can result in positive outcomes, regardless of what the final look of the exhibition will be?

In order for the chosen method of working on giving shape to the *Buurtwinkels* project, it is crucial that all stakeholders can agree on method, goals and outcomes. Mutual respect and

understanding have to be key terms, as well as always communicating directly with each other. This will result in working with non-professionals without giving them the feeling that their qualities were underestimated and they were being used, only for a good result and subsidy for the museum.

If the preconditions given above will be implemented successfully, the *Buurtwinkels* project has the potential of growing towards a for the Netherlands innovative and new form of working with heritage. The project might serve as an instigator for new ideas and concepts that are born from grassroot initiatives. In fact, this might be the biggest potential of the project: to make people aware that heritage is not something that is only to be found in elite museums, but is something of us all that it can be a meaningful tool for bringing people together.

#### **About the authors:**

Davida de Hond (1987), The Netherlands. She has her BA degree in Cultural Heritage and is currently doing her MA degree in Museology. Her BA thesis focussed on social technology and societal relevance of heritage institutions. She choose for the heritage field because it beholds key-ingredients for well being and quality of life.

Sebastiaan van der Lans (1980) has obtained a propaedeutic degree in Art School and is a Bachelor of Arts. He is currenty following the international Masters Degree Programme in Museology at the Reinwardt Academie.

In 2006 I finished a BA in Communication and Information Sciences, in 2007 I finished a BA in English Language and Culture and in 2008 I received my MA in American Studies. I am specialised in American cultural history after WW II. Right now, as part of the Master of Museology at the Reinwardt Academy, I am interning at The American Museum in Bath and working on an exhibition about slavery.

Freek van Kessel holds a BA degree in Cultural Heritage from the Reinwardt academy in Amsterdam. He wrote his BA thesis on the changes in function and meaning of botanical gardens throughout history. At this moment he is doing an internship at the Centre for International Heritage Activities for his master's degree program in Museology.

Mercedes Montes de Oca, graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Art History in 1993 then continued the PhD studies on Aesthetics and Critics at the Literary University of Valencia, Spain. During that time she was involved in several projects of the University and other Institutions related with Art, heritage and photography, mainly in Spain. Since 2003 Mercedes lives and works in Netherlands. She is currently enrolled at the Master of Museology at the Reinwardt Academy and particularly interested in concepts of cultural rights, representation and identity in relation with the role of the museums in a multicultural and globalizing society.



## **Transformative Museology**

### **Rebecca Weldon**

“...we have to take into account the fact that museology and museums are two completely different things.” Martin R. Shärer<sup>35</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, growing populations produced a growing body of heritage. The transmission of this heritage to succeeding generations coalesced into three major modern institutions: universities, library/archives and museums. Traditional systems of social and cultural memory had become overloaded and therefore evolved conceptually. This evolution took place within the primary context of a naturally occurring museology through the process I call *museogenesis*.

The term museogenesis refers to the origin and development of museological thought in a specific cultural context. By museological thought, I refer to ideas and theories surrounding the parameters of “the natural and cultural heritage, the activities concerned with the preservation and communication of this heritage, the institutional frame-work, and society as a whole” (Mensch 1992). This broadly inclusive definition relates museology to another broadly defined concept: cultural context. By cultural context, I refer to the “webs of significance and systems of meaning which is the collective property of a group” (Geertz 1973).

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<sup>35</sup> ICOFOM Study Series – ISS 34, 2003, ISS 34\_03.pdf, p.7

The process of museogenesis has structural, descriptive, experiential and linguistic components. Its structure is linked in each context, to ethical and hierarchical conceptions relating to memory, its knowledge and accessibility. The descriptive component is revealed by collection, i.e.: what is preserved. How this preserved heritage is used by its owners speaks to the experiential side of museogenesis and, finally, the process of museogenesis informs this transformation of heritage with linguistic association: new terminology describes the newly created form.

I have described this process in a paper entitled “Museogenesis in Siam”<sup>36</sup>. It is not my intention to reiterate the results of that research, which, I believe, identifies and describes the process. My intention here is to carry this thinking forward and consider the implications that museogenesis has for the field of theoretical museology, working toward a conceptual approach which I name *transformative museology*, based within the human function of memory as expressed by the process of museogenesis. This means the expression, both tangible and intangible, of the structure of heritage, redefined in the primary context and emerging in new forms to which future generations of museologists will develop and apply techniques, continuing and deepening the relationship between museums and society.

The first problem that is posed by this concept is identification of the ongoing process of museogenesis in the current context; one must know where to look in order to find the clues. It is very important, therefore, to look into the past and see how concepts of heritage have been expressed and how they have evolved. In a practical sense, this cannot be separated from the tools available to humankind at any given

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<sup>36</sup> 2004, Final paper, course in Theoretical Museology, Reinwardt Academie, Amsterdam,

time: conceptual thought and technologies. By the same token, the museologist must understand how the use of these tools describe and modify the concept of heritage. Importantly, previous paradigms function as elements in the *museological matrix*<sup>37</sup> within which the process occurs, including the institutional framework. For this reason, the effect of current institutions on museological thought must be evaluated on a regular basis in order to allow for the discernment of both congruence and conflict.

This transformative approach to museology is already evident in many functions of museums today. For example, the communication function offers methodologies to study the visitor. The ontological function of examining the nature of being of the visitor within the museum, however, is often compromised by these same methodologies. The realist approach dominates because it is linked to technical functions of the museum, functions which describe the object of knowledge as having certain properties. The communication process is, therefore, designed to communicate them. Visitor studies, subsequently, investigate the success of the communication. Failure to communicate suggests that underlying realities of heritage imply a much more complex process. Therefore we, as a result of this experience as museologists in the museum context, have moved toward a conceptualist approach that incorporates the culture of the mind and deals with the hazy field between realism and cognition. Science centers, in particular, have been challenged and transformed by dealing with this problem.

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<sup>37</sup> Concept developed by Gabriel Gaytan-Ariza, 2002, unpublished research during fellowship in museology at Rai Mae Fah Luang, a museum operated by the Mae Fah Luang Foundation, Under Royal Patronage in Chiang Rai, Thailand. His groundbreaking elaboration of the processes and functions of the museological matrix reflects the cultural context of the museum's particular form.

Where the problem is less evident and more difficult to pinpoint is in the realm of theoretical elucidation of and procedural response to ethical challenges that come into play in a globalized world. Creation of meaning and, by implication, promotion of equity, lay twinned at the heart of this issue, having individual and social ramifications. Because the museological matrix is dynamic, undergoing transformation through the process of museogenesis, the creation of forms that are expressive of meaning is informed by the primary social context. These forms evolve through a series of stages, beginning with an idea linking ethics, value and use of heritage, concretizing with the development of structural, descriptive, expressive and linguistic components and formalized through application upon the museological matrix itself. Herein lays the dynamo that impels transformation.

As the primary context of heritage expands in dynamic interaction with the museological matrix, human diversity comes into play. Knowledge preserved serves the expansion of knowledge and thought. Technological development, in forms from books, to television to the internet ensures that knowledge is increasingly accessible to all. Knowledge accessed enters local realms of thought and experience through an explorative process encouraged by international paradigms of equity inculcated in fundamental structures that govern development in this globalized age. The peculiar identity of museological forms around the world is based in and created by philosophical paradigms that are part of our diverse global cultural heritage from the broad base on the ground to the apex of the museological discourse and derived from concrete implementation of museological thought at all levels of this structure.

### *Ethical imperatives*

Museologists must move out of the schismogenetic context of the current museology discourse and return to the primary context as observers so to record how museological thought is currently operating within society (and societies), not as a

discourse, but rather as a cultural trait identifiable as an essential tool for knowledge exploration, meaning creation and source for the evolution and transformation of models of action in the field. The object of study should be the process of differentiation of museological thought and its outcomes. This differentiation might be said to have three basic outcomes in the museological field:

- Complete fusion with new forms
- Elimination of either old or new forms
- Persistence of differentiation between forms in dynamic equilibrium

Ethical issues will, predictably, focus upon preservation of diversity in the use of heritage by human beings on a global scale. Heretofore embedded at the heart of the museological discourse have been the either/or issues of technique vs. discipline, institution vs. theory, professionalization vs. innovation. In fact, museology has special characteristics precisely because it links the manifestation of material culture with human thought, technology with meaning, scholarship with creativity. Museology is not an either/or discipline; it is inclusive as well as diverse, causing some to question whether it exists at all as a definable area of study. Ironically, preservation of these linkages is an essential professional duty of those committed to the discipline. Not only would the discipline not have evolved without the participation of scholars from all areas of knowledge; the elaboration of fundamental tasks and ethical responsibilities embodied in museum work would have been impossible without them. By the same token, the discipline has been essentially characterized by its attention to the study of all properties of the object, facilitating the incorporation of cognitive and technological insight into the functioning and subsequent definition of museological forms.

To conclude, through this dynamic process, museology has now come into its own as a separate discipline, owing to its

creators the same respect each human being owes to its forebears. It is embedded in its cultural context and its identity is created through webs of meaning and significance created by the exploratory fusion of material culture and thought on the part of both museologists and participants in museological forms. This synthetic and dynamic approach requires not only the preservation of what has been learned, but, the continual evaluation and assessment of technique and application within an expanding context.

### *The meta-museological context*

Global museological differentiation has been mediated in the post-WW2 period by a series complementary relationships producing dependence (Ex.: access to archaeological sites for sharing research, attendance of conferences in return for access to collections), promoting respect and submission (Ex.: legal conformity in the fight against trafficking in antiquities in exchange for recognition) and cooperation (Ex.: application of standard models in return for access to workshops, conferences, research, grants, other funding, etc...). While this approach has been successful for the last 50 years, it contains within the seeds of fragmentation, the appearance of which we can see in the differentiation of contemporary museological forms developed on a global scale that exist outside what we might call the standardized institutional framework.

As a result of this, the museological discourse has been characterized by a huge diversity of views emerging from the reality on the ground. Museological communication, i.e. regular, democratically structured, meetings of international, regional, national agencies within a context of tolerance has, ultimately, concretized diverse perspectives within the discourse, evidenced in the increasingly theoretical nature of narratives within subsets of participation. The above factors are creating, precisely because of their reciprocity, defensive, competitive relationships, producing schismogenesis around differentiations. While some may view

this as divisive, it is more useful to see this as an element in the process of museogenesis, as a fundamental trait of museology, as a tool for the exploration of the museological matrix across cultures.

### *Museogenesis in the global context*

The nature of museogenesis is such that it is operational in the museological matrix based within the primary context. Since the primary context evolves and produces a wide variety of museological thought, it also provides creative energy essential to the functioning of the matrix, facilitating innovation and change in some institutions as well as contributing to the reduction in relevance in others. Knowledge synthesis is based in and essential to the human function of integrating diverse thinking for creative outcomes. The impulse to museological thought is directed in many different directions. Sometimes it gains momentum by being shared by a significant group and sidelines those participating in the so-called “mainstream” museological discourse. This is not to say, by any means, that the achievements of the past in the museological field lose their value; however, they may lose relevancy. Contemporary forms may come to represent significant competition for audiences; models of existing functions may become transformed and integrated into new forms; they may also continue to exist in a stable, unchanged form. Accordingly, they may be discarded as time goes by. By and large, this is determined by their continued relevancy to evolving museological thought in the primary context, of which all, even we museologists, form a part.

Since there is an inherent relationship between museological thought and the concrete forms it takes and, given that many of the currently accepted templates developed in the West are now spreading through the rest of the world in a global process of cultural change, I take up hypothesized elements necessary for identification of the process of museogenesis in the global context:

- A structural aspect of unity: museogenesis is classificatory, descriptive and reflective of the hierarchical values and social relationships in a particular society. These values and relationships change through time and may represent fusion with, rejection of or synthesis with accepted forms.
- The affective aspects of unity: meaning is created in the new form producing affective behavior which characterizes its experiential aspect. Everything from architecture and management to communication and preservation reflect these affective aspects and are rooted in cultural identity.
- Chronological and spatial unity: museogenesis produces structural, descriptive, affective and linguistic elements in sequence and within the confines of the new form.
- Sociological unity: museogenesis produces forms that are either integrated into or discarded within the sociological context over a period of time. In other words, their continued existence is related to categories of social meaning and relevance.

### *Legitimation*

The evolving nature of museological thought is exemplified in its relative position in legal and political structures. While worldwide, international, initiatives exist to define and organize the conceptual manifestation of the museum, there is something unique about the museological collection and its use in contemporary life. Evolving toward a consensus of preservation, it takes some time before it is even considered worthy of attention from the legal and political perspective. Perhaps this has some relation to the fact that, while in the private field it is somehow respected for what it is, in reciprocal relationship to what it is not yet, but, may become in the future.

In this sense, the legitimating process in the case of museological forms is linked to that of creativity and governed

by issues of equity, from the protection of freedom of thought and expression to the prosecution of antiquities dealers and copyright infringers. By the same token, moving through the diverse list of existing forms, those linked to structures of national or international political and social power are more exhaustively identified and regulated according to generally accepted standards. Legitimation, therefore, is an important indicator of relevancy, whether for elimination, persistence and/or integration and, as such, may be used as a predictor.

*Where do we go from here?*

- What is the nature and description of the problem? The object of study for transformative museology is the process of differentiation in museological forms and attendant outcomes in the museological discourse.
- Identify and define museological forms developed by participants in the museological discourse through a brief historical overview and survey of current developments
- Definition of the currently evolving meta-museological context. Describe congruence between global paradigms of cultural change, development and recent narratives of museological experience within the context of the museological discourse.
- Relate this to values given to and use of museological thought in diverse cultural contexts. Focus upon the evolution of institutions for heritage preservation, cultural centers, commercial uses of heritage for tourism, incorporation of cultural studies in educational curricula.
- Identification of structural, descriptive, expressive and linguistic elements.
- Systematize the relationship between primary context, museological thought, museogenesis and emergence of museological forms.
- Identify elements of transformative museology that are operative within the museological discipline. Identify

structural, descriptive, expressive and linguistic aspects of the discipline.

- Show how the linkage between the museological discourse, museologists and professional application within museums provides a window upon the functions of the museological matrix.
- Show how diversity of views within evolving global paradigms accounts for the functions and the evolution of the discipline itself.
- Discuss the import of this and how the dynamic interaction between theory and application has created the field, accounting for, first, its development within the museum, secondly, its linkage to heritage preservation and, thirdly, its developing relationship with technology, cognitive science and questions of being.
- Propose steps and procedures to implement transformative museology as a professional analytic and predictive tool for museologists.

### **About the author**

Formerly curator for the Mae Fah Luang Foundation, Under Royal Patronage, I work as a museologist in Chiang Rai, Thailand. My current projects include organizing and training an entirely volunteer staff at a local temple museum and the conceptual design of a museological cooperative based in hill area villages.

### **Statement:**

Someone once said that if one were required to write a job description for what I do, it would be impossible. Working in museums within the Golden Triangle has fostered resourcefulness, based upon the task at hand and the available means for a successful outcome. My perspective upon museology is practical, for the forms with which we are familiar in the West are not always what work in the East. I base my optimistic attitude in the belief that every culture has a methodology for management, documentation, preservation and communication, methods that can be reconciled with global standards and justified in the realm of ethical behavior. They contribute to the ongoing transformation of the present into the future and are fundamentally linked to the creation of culture.

Mae Fah Luang Foundation, Under Royal Patronage  
Rai Mae Fah Luang Museum (1998-2008)  
[http://www.maefahluang.org/mfl\\_art\\_cultural\\_park.php](http://www.maefahluang.org/mfl_art_cultural_park.php)

Also on Virtual Collection of Masterpieces: under Museums/Thailand  
<http://masterpieces.asemus.museum/>

The temple museum project (Wat Phra Kaew 2008-Present):  
<http://www.watphrakaew-chiangrai.com/eng/museum.php>



## **Men change, and museums change**

Maria Fernanda Pinheiro de Oliveira and Ciema Silva de Mello

Translated by Ana Cunha

“The object is the continuation of the  
subject by other means”  
(Boaventura Souza Santos)

This text was written for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Seminar on Social Museology, which took place at the Museu do Homem do Nordeste [Museum of the North-eastern Man], in Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil, in May 2010. It is important to explain that the Seminar on Social Museology is a monthly cycle of theoretical debates organized with the aim of gathering the necessary contributions to put together a new museological model which can indeed be compatible with the practice and its end activity – to institutionally represent the culture of the north-eastern region – and also with the practice of the role of social agent henceforth given Museums by New Museology in Brazil. To these objectives one can add that of legitimizing the museum before its peers and the museological community understood here as partners of its end activity, which is that of representing the North-eastern Man, a task that can only be feasible if socialized.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> In this setting, it worth noting the fact that today MUHNE is, strictly speaking, the natural unfolding of its conceptual restructuring, which denotes its affinities with social museology visible in the model already concluded of the new long term exhibition. In it, contrarily to previous displays, there is the concern to include in the circuit – realistically – the conflict and exclusion

Men change, and museums change. The title chosen for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Seminar, based on a poem by Luis de Camões, reflects museology today: social museology, action museology, which favours man, his doings, since without them there would be no object inside museums, and not even museums themselves. Still, this hasn't always been like this, since for a long time museums were conceived as distant, aristocratic institutions, obsessed with gathering and taking objects without due interpretation of their collection, mechanically bringing together histories of heroes, of military achievements, and exalting nations, as if they were homogenous, as if they had no conflicts, struggles and changes. Today, on the contrary, we think of museums as processes, in an organic relation with their social context. But this change in approach was not achieved from one day to the next. Strictly speaking, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mainly in the second half of the century, various documents were drawn from conferences, seminars and meetings organized to think, or rethink, Museums' function. In 1972, the Santiago Declaration considered museums as places that may contribute to make communities act, placing museums' activities in a historic framework which would enable an understanding of current problems. The Meeting of Santiago do Chile also addressed the political role of the museologist and the acknowledgement of citizens in the whole process of preserving, understanding and disseminating their heritage. In 1984, the Quebec Declaration recognizes New Museology and subsequently, in 1985, the International Movement for a New Museology, MINOM, was created. Also in 1984, the Oaxtepec Declaration based the museological notion on the heritage – territory – population triad. In 1992, the Caracas Declaration

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previously dissimulated or even absent from the region's museological space, still for the greater part taken up by a museology of consensus. Indeed, maybe the greatest virtue of the new exhibition is the quality of its exhibition narrative punctuated by images like that of children's physiognomy viciously aged by infant labour.

updated the principles of the Santiago Declaration, by revising its precepts and thinking of museums as useful tools to achieve balanced development, greater collective well-being and strengthening peoples' cultural identity.

In 2010 it was therefore in the wake of this process that in North-eastern Brazil we seriously undertook the task of reflecting on transformations and changes. With the aim of adapting Museums to the emerging realities derived from growing urbanization, from the inevitable globalization and all the changes caused by the acceleration of social movements. In this setting, how could conflict be depicted museologically, how could exclusion be depicted museologically?

It goes without saying that there is no ready model or comfortable instructions manual or notes on counter indications, side effects, etc.; therefore, we felt the constant need to debate, exchange, socialize, know, do. To desacralize museums – solemn, intimidating, legislators – and transform them into democratic spaces. To think and practice a social museology. Indeed, a museology required by the law in force in the Museums Statute, approved in January 2009, which speaks of museums as tools for inclusion and social cohesion. The Museums Statute was only possible due to the creation in 2003 of a National Museums Policy, since it was from this policy that museums gained a central role in the political and cultural scene of the contemporary world. They stopped being regarded as places where relics of an abstract, remote past are kept, where motionless objects are amassed, or simply as depositories of old things. Museums today must be perceived as complex social practices, which are developed in the present, with the present and for the future, as centres involved with creation, communication, production of knowledge and preservation of cultural goods and manifestations.

Let us take as an example the Museum of the North-eastern Man. The Museum, created by Gilberto Freyre in 1979, is an

anthropology museum with a culturalist bent, whose principles promote daily life as an ideal focus from which to observe social reality. Now, as we know, anthropology hesitates before broad generalizations because it knows, from experience, that exceptions deny the rules. This is reason for which so far the Museum of the North-eastern Man has prudently abstained from pointing out what its protagonist is, who the North-eastern Man is, since the diversity of its collection is enough already to demonstrate that there is no northeast but rather northeastS. From the gold sugar bowl to *viramundo*, a punishment and torture instrument for slaves. From the ox cart to the carriage. From the blazoned tableware to the clay *quartinha* [water jug]. From the Gobelin tapestry to the modest embroideries of the São Francisco river-side communities. From the chests of sugarcane plantation lords to the *matulão*. We are talking about 52 million *nordestinos* [north-eastern people], from Bahia to Maranhão, and it would naïve, to say the least, to believe that they are all susceptible of being assimilated to stereotypes of regional culture inherited from the rural, pristine setting of the *canavieiro* period. The north-eastern region populated by canes, and only secondarily by men. And in places where there were no canes, there was drought. And the very inevitable parade of misery: hunger, vagrancy, exclusion. The hordes of “poor cousins” of the nationality, herded together, like cattle, in the open trucks, so called “*pau-de-araras*”, on their way to the South. Correction: to the periphery of the South which receives them on condition that they accept to clean, docile and resigned, the toilets of the wealthy Brazilians. The north-eastern migrants are unfortunate enough to be exiled in their own land.

Still, the real Northeast is in fact very different from the narrated, fictional Northeast, people by pious people, migrants and smugglers, and folklorized in a biased manner, depicted by the media as a resistant region, even hostile to history’s accelerations. The flesh and bone Northeast both cultivates its traditions and exports technology: dances *maracatu* and surfs

the internet. Here in the northeast, as indeed everywhere, the effects of globalization are felt.

We can attest to that because in the Museum of the North-eastern Man, the criteria to analyze and interpret the region are driven by the direct observation of reality and not extracted from a rigid paradigm, the limits of which would force us to shrink and/or suppress facts in order to forcefully fit the Northeast into the theory. Because it is one thing to preserve the memory of the Northeast, or rather the memories of the Northeast, and quite another to artificially stimulate the tradition to the detriment of social changes that are visibly underway in the region.

To praise the Northeast of consensus is to contribute to enhance, as Jeudy would put it in his book *Memoires du Social*, the ideal of the “rosy” memory, where conflicts and oversights, errors and accidents end up being excluded. This logic of ideal preservation is fixed on the illusion of continuity and pureness, offering us a clean construction of the present through a neutral image of the past, omitting one of the characteristics of memory: that of being understood as action, and not as something given, static, crystallized and with a single meaning.

The Northeast of consensus prevents one from seeing the Northeast of conflict, the Northeast of social movements. It was for that purpose, to museologically depict conflict, exclusion, resistance, with a view to fostering social cohesion, that the Museum of North-eastern Man – a federal museum, connected, through the Joaquim Nabuco Foundation, to the Ministry of Education – took the initiative to transfer itself symbolically to a private area with the purpose of socializing with the community the practice of its end activity: - to represent the cultural wealth and diversity of the North-eastern region.

The Multiple Museum project, as that itinerancy is called, has one purpose, maybe a very simple one, that of increasing its

capital so as to make up for the demand of legitimacy from a museum created to be the institutional representation of the Man of the Brazilian Northeast. Just as in MUHNE, the task of museology is mainly to recover and reinstate in objects the memory of real men, from whom they derive. And, since it is not possible to enclose the real Northeast within the four walls of a building, the Museum travels. It moves. It identifies subterranean memories, even clandestine memories. It settles in exclusion areas. It tours the nine states of its region, looking out for variety. It talks. It listens. And it returns to Recife, its headquarters, multiplied. It carries in its luggage not the object that was plundered or negotiated for a vile price, but the LIVING experience of the Other, which will be reintegrated – reactivated – in the collection. Its objects, once returned to their story, may in fact enable the museum to emancipate from its stereotype and convert into a living, peopled, area. Stirred by the experience of the present.

Embodied in real men, and revitalized by the – genuine – assimilation of their differences, the purpose of the Multiple Museum is to settle every two months in areas that for a long time have remained outside Museums' representations: prisons, public markets, ports, native communities, fishermen colonies, landless workers' settlements. Now in Bahia, then in Piauí, later in Sergipe. And, following its itinerancy, further multiplied in these areas, and legitimized by the exchange with those it represents, they return to Recife, and they settle, this time with full consent, in the headquarters of the institution, the vitality of which is after all to represent them.

In the fifty two million people of the Brazilian northeast, there is no “north-eastern man”, but there are, rather, north-eastern men. Multiple, distinct and often, by virtue of cultural diversity, dissident from one another. In the museum objects only matter to the extent that they are filled with their story, without which they become... empty shells. And by the regular practice of what we have been calling “rehabilitation of otherness”, in the sense that the represented Other will have the final word when

the time comes to decide what will remain – as memory worth preserving – in its institutional representation in Recife. It is not that the past will be disfigured to focus on the urgencies of the present, but it will be up to the flesh and bone north-eastern men to choose if they prefer to be represented as they are today, or as they have been represented in their dominant fiction, in a narrative where the Northeast remains confined to an imaginary territory, where there seem to be only drought-stricken defenceless and nomads. When in truth we know that despite the remains of the Colonial Adventure that still linger in the region, the Northeast was never the setting of literary smugglers and pious men. In the Northeast there is rain. There is change.

Today the Multiple Museum is in Itabuna, south of Bahia – geographical boundary of the north-eastern region. The Museum of the North-eastern Man moves its discourse, its objects, its representations in photos and banners and panels and settles inside a “*terreiro*”: an African-Brazilian cult house. And this was only possible due to a symmetrical communication between the community and the museum. In April, part of the Museum’s staff travelled to meet the “*terreiro*” community in Itabuna, where meetings were held, work presented, parties for *orixás* [deities], shared lunches, conversations and a great deal of experience-sharing. There was such an effective integration between “the people from the museum” and the “people from *terreiro*” to the point that discourses and tasks blended and we could no longer locate one and the other. The Museum inauguration ceremony inside the “*terreiro*” gathered the local community, the “*terreiro*” community, authorities, unveiling of a plaque, national anthem, speech, party, *orixa* food and a lot of spontaneity. It was, in its own way, an exemplary civic festival. Brazil spontaneously celebrated by Brazilians.

In Itabuna, the official authorities were, strictly speaking, simple guests of the true authorities: anonymous Brazilians, spontaneous artisans of nationality. Gathered there we found

the kind of Brazilians that make Brazil... Brazil, and by extension, the Northeast... Northeast. In Itabuna we could clearly see that Brazil was never orthodoxically the West. We are perhaps a deviation, a dissent of the West. Cartesian only when it suits us, since, by virtue of the loyalty to Enlightenment, we do not deprive ourselves of other rationalities, like those we inherited from the African people.

To someone who has never entered a “*terreiro*”, it is difficult to imagine an area where, despite the number of academics and cybnauts – starting with the priest himself, Master in Vernacular Letters, taught by the greatest 20<sup>th</sup> century Brazilian grammarian, Celso Cunha – the world remains indifferent to the rustic and persistent dichotomies of the West: nature versus culture, body versus spirit, sacred versus profane. Inside a *cambonblé* [African-Brazilian religion], the world is continuous, compact, whole. The metaphysics passes, naturally, through the lives of people who transform themselves, with regularity, precision and method, into deities, which – it should be noted – does not imply that they do not pay their taxes and are not stricken by a cold or a belly ache.

Once the “official” ceremonies were over, the Museum remained there and the “*terreiro*” community uses it today as a tool to disseminate its culture, as instrument of knowledge, of the fight against prejudice. The “*terreiro*” performs the everyday tasks of any traditional museum: it opens its door to any visitor, schedules school visits, monitors, builds a discourse from the reality of its living, without any type of intervention from the headquarters; and goes far beyond that, they do not differentiate the “museum” from the “*terreiro*”. In the words of Ruy Póvoas, *babarolixá*, supreme priest, chief authority of the “*terreiro*”:

*Such space, given its nature, is a living museum, a kind of miniature Africa, challenging time and all its implications, material, conceptual and above all, to locate us in a time*

*of the present, those connected to communication via the internet. (...) From what I know, no terreiro in Brazil has been created from previous planning. People's doing and living give rise to terreiros, while the terreiro itself guides people in their living and doing. In the terreiro, heritage is built from various assets that are at stake, but they are all part of a place: the land/territory, the plants, the animals, the people, the invisible ones. And it's the orixa who governs everything. It all becomes heritage when the property is consecrated as a whole.*<sup>39</sup>

If the “terreiro” is a Living Museum, consequently the Museum of the North-eastern Man is one too. No longer a piece of clipping, a representation, but life such as it is. What a difference between this setting and the conventionally museological facilities in general, still today, in anthropology museums, with their rows of lifeless objects exhibited as curiosities, remains of meritless and/or inferior cultures! Or euphemistically rehabilitated as “First Arts” by Western Art.

The old lady with her close-cropped white curls submerged in her petticoats is D'Oxum: the deity of freshwater, of fertility, of beauty. Soon she will be dancing with the youthful grace of a young girl and, as she walks by, the faithful will bow, imploring the blessings that will be granted to them in the guise of a pirouette, light, oh so nimble, since among the African gods dancing is a superior form of praying.

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<sup>39</sup> I am speaking of the 2nd Meeting of the Museology Seminar of the Museum of the North-eastern Man. Ruy do Carmo Póvoas is Babarolixá do Ilê Axê Ijexá Orixá Oflufon, Master of Vernacular Letters by the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Professor of Portuguese Language at Santa Cruz State University – UESC. At present he coordinates Kâwé - Centre for Regional African-Bahia Studies of UESC.

It is in this environment that the Museum is immersed. Not the official one, solemn, circumspect, like the physiognomy of curators, but its double, embodied in flesh and bone people. They are the Museum. The Museum is the community of Ilê Axê Ijexá Orixá Olufon. And the community takes on its new role naturally and with haughtiness. It is not subservient; it is not, there, staging an ethnographic show to impress the anthropologists present. For the community, the notion of heritage does not exist, since it is literally superfluous. Culture is alive, it is preserved, it reproduces like a plant. To imagine a world in which life and the memory it engenders need special care to be preserved is... ridiculous. In Continental Africa and in the Africa ritually recreated in Brazil nobody goes out to walk, for instance – people simply walk.

The old priestess D'Oxum would feel insulted if anyone considered her 'living heritage'. She is alive. She is useful. She presses her petticoats, cooks what she eats, watches over her grandchildren, teaches the young what she learned from the elders. She is not tolerated: - she is cherished. She is not worthy for what she has, she is worthy for what she knows. Her culture does not reward the good with money, it rewards them with longevity. This is not the West.

On the other hand, it is not the Museum's function to legislate on the issue of relativism, and to issue an expert opinion – in favour or against – Man's universals. For the time being, anthropology does not authorize any man to assume that he holds more humanity than these fellowmen of his. A Brazilian animist is no less human than a protestant Swede. However, from the point of view of the Museum, when there is commitment, it is possible to "reanimate" objects: all we have to do is give them back their story.

By undertaking its itinerancy, the MUHNE has taken on towards itself and towards those it represents the following commitments: incorporate in the collection the meaning of the origin of the objects, understood here broadly and honestly as

a continuation of their artisans and users. Real men. And what is Social Museology if not that: - to embody the Museum in flesh and bone people?

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## ***Museu da Abolição*, “The Museum That We Want”**

Adolfo Samyn Nobre

Translated by Ana Cunha

### **Introduction**

*Museu da Abolição* [Abolition Museum] was inaugurated in 1983 in the city of Recife, one of the largest cities of north-eastern Brazil, located in the state of Pernambuco. This state has a special place in the history of the country: it dates back to the colonization efforts, to the first interactions between Europeans and native peoples and the exploration of sugar cane production. Today, the region embodies not only Brazilian cultural wealth and diversity, but also the great social challenges of contemporary Brazil.

The name of the museum is a reference to the Abolition of black slavery in Brazil at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A museum addressing abolition means more than addressing a historic fact. It means dealing with ideas on slavery, freedom, resistance, injustice. There are no museums isolated from society, whatever their social function. For a museum such as this one, which was created with the responsibility for a theme that echoes so strongly in the lives of men and women, the challenge of finding its place in the world has always been present.

The museum’s trajectory reflects this adaptation effort extremely well. Conditions imposed by different forces in society have contributed to the institution’s rocky biography, both regarding the conceptual approach and its working conditions. The museum was created by a federal decree-law in 1957. However, it was inaugurated only in 1983 with a

temporary exhibition of official documents about the abolitionist process. The inauguration of the museum may be seen as the first proposal of an institution still weakened by lack of staff and structure. At the same time that this first narrative proposal for Abolition was being organized, an attempt was made to delineate a more coherent museological project in the long run.

The temporary exhibition lasted until 1990. In that year the new government imposed a reform which included eliminating the function of the state in the cultural area. Budgets for upkeep and for hiring staff were extinct, making it impossible for services like security and service to the public to continue. The museum was closed to visitors until 1996.

Its reopening, in 1996, introduced a new museum project. The collection, largely on loan, had been returned during the period when the museum had remained closed. Objects on display depicted the daily life of lords and slaves, religious syncretism, the traffic of black people. The temporary exhibition rooms aimed at bringing into the museological context references that were contemporary to the African-Brazilian culture. The goal was that associations between visitor and the narrative took place in the cognitive and in the emotional fields.

At the time, the museum had 2 clerks and one secretary. The attempts to bring the museum closer to society faced two known challenges: the anthropological, social and museological limits of representation strategies; and the institution's lack of structure. As a result of the difficulty in hiring professional services, the museum was once again forced to suspend service to the public in 2005.

The mishaps of the Abolition Museum are representative of other Brazilian museums. In the same way, the museum's biography depicts the effort of its players to deal with society's constraints. These constraints are translated into policies (or lack thereof) but also into society's perception of the museum's function and relevance, into the use (or lack thereof) which is made of the museum as resource and tool.

The Abolition Museum, closed or open, used, misused, or not used, is an institution inserted in society. It bears a legacy and a topical theme, one which has great social weight. It also bears a history of shortages and hardship. This, however, does not mean that it has remained stationary in time. This was certainly not the case in 2005, when a new renovation strategy was begun, which sought directly in society the support and the possibility for the museum to find a new place in the world. This was possible thanks to important changes in Brazil, among which the creation of a museums policy in 2003, which is at the same time recognition and instrument of democratization in the processes of creating and managing museums. The museums policy is, in turn, part of a larger context: that of the multiplication of the use of memory and heritage institutions as social, cultural, political and economic tools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The movement that began with the Abolition Museum can be seen as a response to the institution's specific needs. It can be seen as a load of difficulties that ended up allowing conditions for transformation to be created. It can also be seen as the will to be relevant, from larger movements in society which pressed and supported the museum's existence and the practice of its functions. To change, the museum resorted to its rightful owners. It sought to involve museum professionals, the population and various social groups in the discussions on its future.

This process of change has been gaining stronger roots in the active and direct participation of society. The following sessions aim to explain the development of this process, translated into the action plan for the Abolition Museum entitled "The Museum That We Want".

### **"The Museum That We Want"**

The first permanent exhibition of the Abolition Museum, inaugurated in the 1990s, had already made an attempt to bring society closer to the discussions regarding the role of the museum. During the planning stage of the exhibition, mail consultations were made to various leading people and

entities connected with the African-Brazilian theme. About 200 letters were sent, and a little over 20 replies were obtained.

In 2005, the museum adopted a different strategy. A decision was made to organize a seminar, where the possibility of debate and interaction might provide better and more contributions to the transformation process that was intended. Thus, in March 2005, the museum staff, at the time made up of its director Evelina Grunberg and the technical expert Simone Novaes, organized a seminar “The museum that we want” with the aim of rallying the community of the Pernambuco state so that, together with technicians and experts, a new institution could be rethought.

The seminar had widespread participation of the various sectors of society, mainly social movements and entities connected with black movements. Some of the issues that drove the debates were: should the museum reopen or should its extinction be requested since it did not respond to social demands as regards its discourse and nomenclature? If the understanding was in favour of reopening the Museum, how should it render its services to society? And also, in case it reopened, should it keep the name “Abolition Museum”?

An important issue for future plans related to the occupation of the museum’s building, known as Sobrado Grande da Madalena. From 1976, the Abolition Museum operated in a limited area of the building, sharing the space with the Regional Supervisory Board of the National Historic and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN), which also held the charge of the museum. During the seminar “The Museum that we want”, participants drafted a document which claimed the need to occupy the house integrally, considering that it had been compulsory purchased to house the museum. Occupying the whole *sobrado* would give the museum autonomy to define its working hours, until then subject to the Supervisory Board’s schedules, as well as symbolically attest to the importance of the topic in question.

From the seminar, a taskforce was created with the aim of advancing discussions and define paths for the museum. The taskforce was constituted by representatives of various

segments of society, among which cultural and religious institutions, museum professionals and teachers. They met weekly for four months. During the process, surveys, questionnaires and research were conducted to diagnose demands and make proposals for the future.

In June 2005, the taskforce submitted the reformulation document for the Abolition Museum. The document comprehended a diagnosis of the museum's situation and provided guidelines for the creation of a new museum:

1 – the museum should be reactivated with a new structure and with the full occupation of Sobrado Grande da Madalena;

2 – the museum would continue, with the name “Museu da Abolição” [Abolition Museum];

3 – the Abolition Museum would have a new identity: a new mission, objectives, profile and goals.

The new mission of the museum was defined as:

“To render services to the society by recovering, enhancing, and recognizing the material and immaterial heritage of African descendents, contributing to strengthening the identity and sovereignty of the Brazilian people”.

From then on, the action plan “The Museum that We Want” became the museum's main strategy to implement its mission. At the same time, significant changes were underway within the institution itself. In 2005, the first public selection process was carried out by IPHAN and in 2006 the museum welcomed one more museology professional, which increased its permanent staff to three members. In the same year, elements of the taskforce and other representatives of social movements, political and religious institutions founded the Association of Friends of the Abolition Museum.

In 2007, considering the professionalization actions included in the national museums policy, the Museological Plan for the institution was drawn. This is a strategic management plan, which Brazilian museums have been encouraged to adopt since the implementation of the

museums policy in 2003. The Museological Plan for the Abolition Museum included the diagnosis, surveys and proposals drawn by the museum's taskforce in its reformulation document for the museum. In that same year, an important administrative change took place in museums so far operating under the charge of the regional IPHAN offices, as was the case of the Abolition Museum. The Department of Museums and Cultural Centres was created within the Heritage Institute. The department was then responsible for operational management of regional museums so far directly subordinated to the various regional offices of IPHAN. Its creation was a fundamental step towards establishing the Brazilian Institute of Museums in 2009 and towards strengthening integrated actions which would comprehend various Brazilian museums. For the Abolition Museum, this change represented a huge step in the development of its administrative structure, since it gained some autonomy as regards managing its own resources and processes, and it became part of a wider network of museums.

### **“What the Abolition did not abolish”**

The next step in the process of reformulating the museum was the organization of the campaign exhibition “What the Abolition did not abolish” in March 2008. The goals of this campaign exhibition were: to show the public that the Museum was open to a critical view of the issue slavery/abolition/freedom, at the same time that it brought society closer to the construction of the museum, by requesting visitors that they leave suggestions and proposals for the Abolition Museum. The exhibition lasted six months. It marked the reopening of the museum, closed since 2005. It served as a campaign in favour of society's participation in drawing proposals for the museum and its long-term display<sup>40</sup>. The campaign exhibition had the following objectives:

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<sup>40</sup> There is a tendency in Brazil today to name permanent exhibitions long-term exhibitions.

- 1) To demonstrate to the public that the institution favours and fosters debate and a critical view of its social role and of Abolition as a historic fact, its antecedents and its consequences in shaping present society and in the social imagining on slavery in Brazil;
- 2) To present the topics of slavery, resistance, abolition and freedom in such a way as to demonstrate that the museum can be a dynamic and participating forum for reflection and debate on current issues. The topics involve issues such as prejudice, racism, social exclusion, class fight and forms of resistance. Thus the museum aims to work on society's perception of its past and present, enabling the transformation of present reality;
- 3) To call upon people from various institutions and social movements, besides the initial taskforce, professionals in the museum and in the cultural areas, representatives of public bodies, and representatives of religious institutions, to participate in debates to prepare a long term exhibition for the Abolition Museum.



During the campaign exhibition, suggestions and proposals for the museum were collected. Visitors/participants left suggestions in cards in a “collect area”, an integral part of the exhibition.

(image)

Suggestion collect area of the exhibition “What the Abolition did not abolish”.

The museum team analysed 1,050 cards collected between January and July 2008. This totalled 1,602 submissions, since some cards contained more than one suggestion. Reactions were classified into seven categories: theme, collection, activities, infrastructures, dissemination, criticism, praise and various messages.

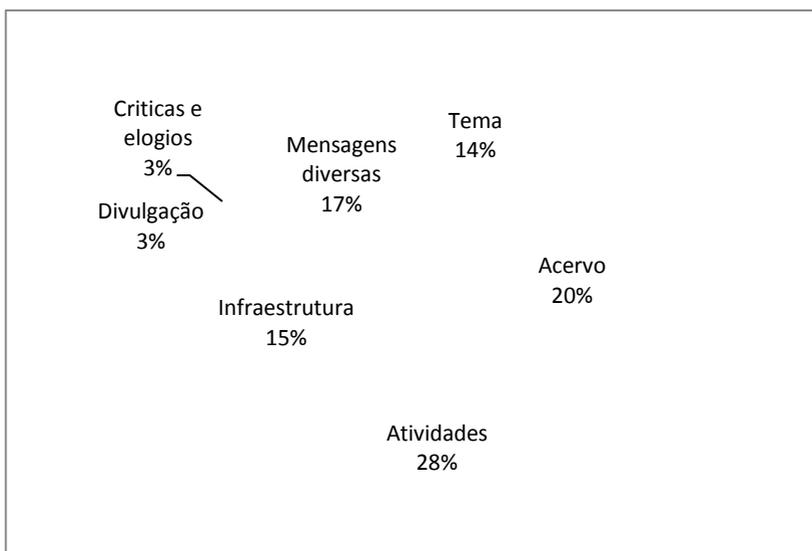


Chart: Distribution of visitors' contributions by categories.

Visitors' responses provided an important source of consultation on society's expectations and wishes vis-à-vis the future Abolition Museum. Various themes were proposed, related with historic and contemporary issues, such as slavery, resistance, racism, religion, dancing and art. The vast quantity of messages that suggested activities for the museum revealed the public's desire for a living, dynamic museum, which promotes cultural events, debates and workshops related to dancing, drama, music, *capoeira*, handicraft, graffiti, cooking, among various other topics. It is interesting to remark

that the set of responses connects the existence of a living museum to the concern with the collection, understood as a resource for various possibilities. A relevant amount of reactions also pointed to the creation of theme rooms related to the contemporary approach of Abolition themes (art, reading, video, literature, computing, etc.) and to the improvement of public services, including educational activities, expansion of the area, cafeteria and library. Most responses classified under “various messages” emphasised the will to fight against prejudice and racial discrimination, against contemporary forms of slavery, against violence, for freedom and for the enhancement of black culture.

Just as importantly, or maybe even more so, the participation of a diversified public – of students, parents, teachers, activists, professionals, producers and practitioners of culture – reinforced the conviction of the Abolition Museum’s players that it is possible to reflect upon the future of the institution from an active culture of participation and appropriation of the museum by society. With the collection it was possible to feed new processes.

### **Reflecting collectively on an exhibition**

After the campaign exhibition “What the Abolition did not abolish” was closed, another project was started, the Participative Organization for the Long Term Exhibition of the Abolition Museum. The goal of the project was to think and define the proposal for the museum’s new exhibition collectively.

From August to November 2008, about 30 people participated in 10 group discussions. The rounds included debates and conversations with specialists on topics related to the Abolition theme and to museums. The meetings were video recorded and registered in minutes available on the Internet<sup>41</sup>, where they could also be read and commented. On

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.museuabolicao.blogspot.com> (10 June 2010). In Portuguese.

12/11/2008, a plenary session approved the macro plan for the long term exhibition of the museum.<sup>42</sup>

During the same period that the debates on the exhibition already advanced the symbolic occupation of the whole Sobrado Grande da Madalena, the actual removal from the house of the Regional Supervisory Board of IPHAN was agreed upon. This move was scheduled for end of 2008; however, the final move from the Supervisory Board occurred only at the beginning of 2010.

Located between two important landmarks (the definition of the macro plan for the exhibition and the removal from the house of the Supervisory Board of IPHAN), the year 2009 was crucial to the course of the reformulation project for the Abolition Museum. In January 2009, the Brazilian Museums Institute (IBRAM) was created. The institute was then charged with the administration of the museums from the old department of Museums and Cultural Centres of IPHAN. The creation of IBRAM strengthened the National Museums Policy, consolidating the measures to organize the museological field in Brazil.

Despite the progress implied in the creation of IBRAM, working conditions at the Abolition Museum, as well as in other museums of the new institute, still faced serious challenges. The Museums Institute undergoes an important period of internal organization. The possibilities brought about by the revolution in the field of museums in the past years generated a huge demand for the implementation of projects. The fruits of the National Museums Policy impose an overload on the working of the new institute and this is reflected in the management of its museums. Besides, institutions similar to the Abolition Museum face the difficulties of breaking away from IPHAN's administrative structure.

After defining the macro plan for the long term exhibition, the museum's team submitted two large scale projects to IBRAM: one for setting up the long term exhibition

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.museuabolicao.blogspot.com>. In Portuguese.

and another to reform and adapt Sobrado Grande da Madalena, which was now the full property of the Abolition Museum. The exhibition project included hiring professional services to prepare it in detail, respecting the macro plan and considering the continuation of the participative process. The tender on the project fell through due to technical-administrative problems and it was not possible to hire any company for this purpose. The project to reform the building was started in April 2010 and still faces some legal obstacles to its implementation.

The period is also one of significant changes in the museum staff. After the former director retired, the institution has again 2 permanent workers. Cleaning and security services are outsourced and for the most part managed by IPHAN's Supervisory Board. The work of interns and volunteers is crucial to manage service to the public<sup>43</sup>, to implement exhibition plans and other projects in which the museum participates together with other Recife museums.

Despite the hardships, the inauguration of the new long term exhibition is scheduled for 20 November 2010, National Black Awareness Day.

It is a huge challenge and it tests the museum's ability as well as the ability of the Museums Institute, of the Association of Friends and of all its partners, to rally the necessary strength to carry out this endeavour. The response to this challenge comes from the management of a cooperative venture, which aims to carry out the organization of the exhibition in a participative spirit increasingly rooted in the museum's life.

### **Creating an exhibition cooperatively**

The project which started in 2005 faces today its greatest ordeal: the organization of a long term exhibition which can attest to a process that aims to congregate society

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<sup>43</sup> Since its reopening in 2008, the museum has kept an operating temporary exhibition room.

around the debates on the construction of memory and heritage in the Abolition Museum.

The practical difficulties which the museum faces need to be shared with various partners. Not only with the professional team, with the Association of Friends and with the Museums Institute; but also with the participants in the group discussions, with other museums, with the university, with social and religious movements, with schools and teachers. In the same way, the intention is that solutions be shared and negotiated during the organization of the exhibition and, why not say it, of the museum itself.

The new stage of the project is not limited to a consultation. The Abolition Museum invites the players in the process to create the contents and the form of the exhibition together. The themes of the six rooms of the long term exhibition are based on the macro plan approved at the end of 2008. The proposed methodology comprises two rounds for installing the exhibition:

- 1- First round: each week will focus on one exhibition room. The week will begin with a group discussion to define the contents of the room, based on the macro plan and with the participation of specialist and guest consultants. On the following days, two work groups, one on exhibitions and the other on education, will develop their proposals for the rooms. Each group will be coordinated by a professional in the area and will have the active participation of any interested person. At the end of the week one model of the exhibition will be assembled in the room, using simple techniques and low-cost materials. The model of each room will be open to visitors, so that everyone may intervene and suggest improvements and changes. Moreover, as each new room is considered, the previous room can be changed so that little by little a sketch of the exhibition can be built.
- 2- Second round: from the complete sketch, a second passage on the exhibition aims to refine contents

and build the definitive modules using high quality materials. The proposal is that this be done by a small group of experts in the themes of exhibition, museologists, designers and representatives of the various sectors of society which participated in the process.

The proposal is pioneering in the sense that it aims to openly face the power relations that exist inside and outside the museum. Seen in this way, the process of assembling the exhibition seeks to serve as a museological experiment, in which the exhibition's function is neither to represent a closed discourse nor to raise queries. The proposal is that the exhibition works as an open communication channel and is able to display part of the conflicts in real life.

One piece of evidence of these conflicts can be seen in the exhibition's macro plan itself, which mentions the historic and present relation of the African continent with Brazil, as well as the black struggles and resistance movements. Reflecting teachers' ample participation during the discussion groups organized in 2008, the macro plan follows a rather didactic approach and it is clear that many of the participants imagined the museum as an instrument that could complement school work. During the development of the contents of the rooms, the goal is that the macro plan be adopted as a starting point. Nevertheless, this does not reject the possibility that the participants, many with different views on Abolition themes and on the museum, criticise and re-interpret the themes indicated in 2008.

Rather than bring the museum closer to its public, the process aims to make all those interested in the themes addressed by the Abolition Museum participate in the creation of this new narrative for the museum in an active manner. This narrative, related with essential topics for the practice of citizenship in a dynamic complex metropolis such as Recife, now represents the conflicts and disputes inherent to the

creation of memories that permeate daily life and can now be made explicit in the museum.

In order for this to happen, it is necessary that the very logic of exhibitions provides the necessary opening to avoid reifying issues and the need to reach a consensus. An exhibition, rather than be the documentation of a conflict, has the ability to be an open window into the dynamic of representations and discourses that exist in society. The project will attempt to do that by bringing this debate to the field of museological representation, allowing the players to be the active builders of the exhibition.

On 20 November 2010, the unfinished final version of the long term exhibition of the Abolition Museum will be inaugurated. It is understood as unfinished because we see it as being in permanent transformation. For this to be possible, in exhibition workshops we aim to propose solutions for the exhibition that allow the public to intervene constantly, artistic interventions, and other channels that enable constant renewal and bring to light the dynamics and conflicts in the construction of memories on Abolition.

We aim that the control over exhibition production processes be shared as well. Besides funding from the Museums Institute, the Abolition Museum looks to its local partners for support to put together parts of the exhibition. The museum aims to work in favour of strengthening a culture of solidarity, which enables the museum's appropriation by society.

In a museum where the concept of participation is not limited to consumption, challenges take on a new dimension. Yet we believe that it is thanks to this dynamic that the museum has been able to face most of its challenges. Transforming hindrances into opportunities, this is the museum's proposal. And understanding the demands and possibilities in the field of heritage, today the Abolition Museum is committed to the strength of cooperative experimentation.

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Museologist, BA in Museology by the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro – Uni-Rio (1999) and MA in Social Memory and Document by the same university (2003) with the dissertation “Darning the web of memory: study on the construction of identities in Bairro Maré [Maré Neighbourhood]”. Today he holds the position of director (since 2009) of the Abolition Museum/IBRAM/Ministry for Culture, chairs the Consulting Board of the Brazilian Museology Association (ABM) and the Pernambuco Museums Forum (FMP).



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