

MUSEUMS IN THE STREET: CULTURAL CREATION IN THE COMMUNITY

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Museums are evolving and redesigning their place in society with a wide range of interests and functions, taking new forms since the relation to and communication with their constituents is increasingly challenged. Therefore, museums are organizations that need to have a strong purpose clearly stated in their mission to better take advantage of the potential development that could come with social change. As museums re-imagine their role, questions arise regarding the purpose and goals of the museum itself. It has been argued that museums are responding organically to the development of society as it demands more of education and cultural guidance, assisting as fundamental information deliverers complementary of educational organizations.

And if museums are organizations of information, part of their purpose is the communication of such knowledge. Research about the objects museums hold create the opportunity for new meanings to be considered and the furthering of creative presentation techniques. The development of good communicative tools, techniques, and ideas is a fundamental part of museums. Museums are organisms of meaning.

As museum professionals, we know museums are special for guarding unique object collections that hold complex layers of meaning making its preservation, conservation and communication necessary in society. Museums are then necessary pieces in a healthy society, not only as complementary educational organizations but as holders of human knowledge.

Many museums collaborate with governmental agencies, other museum associations, educational institutions, specialist societies and foundations, the tourist industry, and the private sector. These institutional collaborations in programming also provide a bridge for organizational comparisons. Museums are increasingly compared to business models for success and development. Socially, the role of museums is being questioned as there is a demand for their participation in fulfilling the needs of society.

New creative approaches have come about due to the inclusion of several new disciplines in ways to think of museums in society. Interdisciplinary thinking gives museum professionals alternative approaches to questions as language techniques are refined to better get meaning across to different audiences. Bridging disciplines supports holistic thinking and an open view towards meaning and knowledge. Furthermore, as globalization permits sharing of ideas and operational successes, communication solutions are being shared to better address a variety of subjects.

A successful museum will operate when efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and empowerment are balanced in a dynamic equilibrium. Museums should have a clear mission to carry out using resources appropriately to communicate meaning across a greater number of constituents. This will provide the opportunity for understanding, adopting, and appropriating the knowledge cared for by museums by a greater number

of people. Knowledge could potentially become a tool to better understand and create reality, strengthening the building of collective leadership.

The anterior process takes place in many museums through the outreach programs. A number of outreach programs have been proposed tailored to specific museum environments. There is much learning to be done of past experiences. Following, is a list of considerations that may be of help for cultural organizations when thinking about connecting with their public through cultural programming sometimes outside of the museum setting. Museums can increase the potential of all outreach programs by systematically adopting a similar checklist constructed to follow the purpose of the individual museum.

1. Allowing the cultural institution to better know its public;
2. Providing alternative venues for the museum to be known;
3. Increasing visibility of the cultural talents in the area;
4. Promoting the creation and exposure of current ideas;
5. Supporting an environment of cultural awareness;
6. Educating the public encouraging an active and creative society;
7. Strengthening the community by bridging several institutions;
8. Raising the quality of life of current and future generations;
9. Producing a greater collection for the museum; to
10. Become part of the cultural heritage of the nation.

How can these be achieved? – One proposal: Museums in the street: Cultural Creation in the Community. This proposal allows targeting special groups in a specific community and exposing the museum in alternative settings.

For instance, a university museum decides to create a program that would better include a targeted population group of their community in the use of the museum's resources. A project is conceived to promote cultural creation within such community and expose the museum in alternative settings.

A feasibility study is conducted of the cultural needs and resources of the area to study by identifying the social network through which the specific community operates. Creative leaders and artists are located and invited to participate in the project. A number of art work, performances, and demonstrations are organized in coordination with several social organisms including educational institutions, social service agencies, government agencies, religious centers, and community organizations. Social festivities can serve as a base for cultural demonstrations.

For instance, the Latin population in the United States has been celebrating the Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) year after year. This important millenary and culturally specific celebration has served as a doorway to better understand and connect with the Latin community.

In the search of increasing the availability of alternative spaces, the Día de los Muertos presents an interesting opportunity to collaborate with other social based organizations. Communities have organize communal exhibits supporting the creation and exposure of current ideas as the ancient tradition brings many issues of contemporary view towards life and raises questions of quality of living in modern society. Events have taken place in a public park where artists organize an installation with a traditional offering,

simulating the adornments placed at a cemetery, with a combination of contemporary objects juxtaposing the past, the present and the future in a continuous dialogue with the public. Live music has been played and poetry read to follow with the tradition. Guests have had the opportunity to visit with the artists and shared their personal stories in a process coordinated by the museum. The experience could be furthered at a museum discussion where artists, audience, and curators together give a closure to the cultural concepts in relation to the museum's collection and community.

As museums expand the definition of 'education' there is a need to consider alternative models of explanation, such as oral history, mythology, family folklore and other ways to create the context in which stories are told --the story of each museum. How do museums go about fostering their community's narrative construction? The question in museums is not only how to better explain the story of the given object, but also how can museums better create and inspire the context for the public to construct an interest to relate to those stories?

Museums are indeed places of stories. The support of community involvement in the reviving of stories from the collection promotes the creation and exposure of current ideas that can be included in the scholarship of the organization, not only of the subject at hand but also to develop exhibition design, educational models, and overall operations.

The Old Town History Project in Portland Oregon presented a multi-screen media installation by local artist Rose Bond, evoking the stories inside a building layered with human interaction during the XIX Century. The piece "Illumination No. 1" was projected from the interior first floor during a three-day period. The 10-minute animation was looped for duration of an hour for all passer byes to enjoy.

Through the promotion of contemporary cultural creation and awareness the museum becomes much knowledgeable of its environment, not only in relation to their targeted audience but also the general make up and social network of its community. From the strengthening of its social ties with schools, churches, and other community centers, the museum learns of better ways to reach a wider segment of society to communicate organizational goals. The museum can potentially inspire new energy for cultural creation and awareness empowering their immediate community.

The museum validated the conception of contemporary cultural objects by supporting its creation through similar projects. Art works produced from such projects could become part of the museum's collection, in previous agreement with the artists participating, creating new systems to collect, conserve, preserve, and exhibit them. The inclusion of contemporary pieces related to the museum's theme can open new doors for explaining the collection in a current language. High school students can be part of a series of talks about the significance of the objects collected in relation to contemporary life within the community. By understanding the knowledge from the museum, the students are able to adopt and pass on the information as part of their cultural knowledge furthering the museum intention of disseminating the information from its collection.

Contemporary society demands the availability of information in an accurate manner, including that which museum house. It is then an increased necessity for museums, as information service organizations able to empower communities and economies, to make their knowledge accessible to society.

Museum programmers and educators are increasing their participation and responsibility in the educational experience by promoting also pleasure and excitement. Effective public programs should be proactive and provide more than a reading of the past, but also the way society relates to it. This creates and improves the museums' environment making information more accessible for the community and guiding society to find ways of addressing the critical needs of the present.

Conclusions:

Museums are organizations closely related to their social environments and vary greatly in name, shape, size, and mission. The general purpose of most museums has to do with the creation, interpretation, and diffusion of unique information through creative educational displays and activities. There is much learning underway in the preservation and creation of current and valid ways to increase the impact of the museum and their collections in society. New projects are being created as exploratory alternatives that promise useful in better knowing potential audiences and new art tendencies that may contribute in making museums more dynamic.

Information is at the heart of the museum, and as collectors, interpreters, and presenters of that information, a comprehensive and systematic program to communicate humanity's knowledge must be carefully considered, studied, and designed. Each museum has the virtue of being different from others, partially because of the nature of the information housed within. The organization should not anticipate the availability of one programming model designed to fit every organization successfully. The primary challenge is the conception and design of a system that will best fit the needs, resources, and desires in relation to the museum's social environment.

Museums should then share the building of a future with a global social, economic and cultural society providing the leadership as well as a documentation base. This places an immense responsibility of museum workers, who need to have a broad view of the world as well as the tools to present issues to the public in an accessible and always responsible manner. As with all organizations, museums are now reinventing themselves in the developing cycle of society. An important challenge remains for museums to communicate with their constituents, adjusting and actualizing their mission and purpose to preserve their place as leading managers of humanity's heritage.

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