

Third International Conference of Ecomuseums and Community Museums

10th International Workshop of MINOM

Rio de Janeiro, 13 – 17 September 2004

Central Theme: Community, Shared Heritage and Education
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Introduction

The second international conference of ecomuseums, held in Santa Cruz (Rio de Janeiro) in May 2000, started a discussion on the sustainable character of museological initiatives based on the community and its local heritage, both natural and cultural. That conference examined aims, strategies, participatory methods and the concept of an *educator/liberator* museum.

This third meeting will continue to explore this concept, but will also discuss the following questions:

- **how** can people identify, classify, preserve, systematise and analyse their own common heritage? Being a result of continual change and a bearer of different meanings, heritage is difficult to define and quantify.
- **in what ways** can heritage become an effective instrument for local development? Can a museum shape and release creative forces that allow a community to fully exercise citizenship?

Managing information gathered within the living culture of communities and using it for development are some of the tasks of a community museum; it performs them by adopting a new and original interpretation of the aims and missions of the traditional museum. The latter are usually defined as the acquisition of collections, their conservation and presentation to society, facilitating the relationship between object and public through the dialogue of exhibitions. Considered as an educational practice, but not necessarily formal or organised, yet always meaningful from a pedagogical point of view, the ecomuseum (or community museum) process is developed parallel to that of traditional museums, without competing with them. We touch here one of the challenges met by the museum in today's world, and a very important one, that of **community participation**. If, as in traditional museums, the ecomuseum pursues the spiritual and cultural enrichment of its visitors, it offers interactions between heritage (cultural, natural, intangible) and education.

The goal of our conference is not only to detect and describe good practices or exemplary failures encountered during experiments of this kind, but also to analyse them. It is important to study their strategies and to make successful tactics known to enable other communities to create and develop their own museums along similar lines and principles.

Sustainable management of a museum conceived as a community-based structure serving as a development tool is a collective challenge and an exercise in sharing the common heritage. Its promoters impose this challenge upon themselves, as they seek ways of sustaining the process, to employ the heritage more effectively (**for what?**), by distributing costs and energy (**with what?**) and search for a sustainable museum (**with whom?**). The ecomuseum not only aims at creating "cultural consumers", but also to find new ways for heritage-sharing, so enabling each citizen to take part in the growth and the transformation of heritage, so creating strong links between the community and its territory.

Might not such a sharing of heritage be the real educational issue, geared to the liberation of all positive forces within the community?

An international interactive programme among ecomuseums and community museums

This 3rd encounter of ecomuseums and community museums intends to respond to the intentions of the promoters of new museologies who want to exchange ideas about their various experiences and to look at solutions for the difficulties they find in sustaining the life and activities of their museums. Consequently we appeal to people conserving sites with similar characteristics, in Brazil, in Latin America and elsewhere, whether those sites/museums are at an initial stage or already developed, to bring their contribution to this conference, where we will discuss the concept of a museum **of** the people, **with** the people and **for** the people, the museum as an actor of local development.

Pre-conference workshops

On the initiative of specially motivated colleagues, a network of discussion and exchange is being created, in order to propose interactions between regional workshops in Latin America, in Europe, in Asia, and if possible in North America and in Africa. A list of these workshops will be circulated later, as soon as they have made known their intentions.

Each workshop will be set up, whether at national, regional or international level, by a colleague who gathers around him several professionals interested in this concept of community-based heritage sharing, to serve development and education. They will define together a theme for discussion and testing, using the experience obtained by each one in the course of his/her own project and institution.

During the first 6 months of 2004, they will work on this theme, to gather observations, suggestions, and opinions to produce one or several papers, to be presented by one of them who has been elected as speaker, to the international meeting in Rio de Janeiro.

All this can be done through the Internet or in actual meetings, if they can find the necessary means or if other opportunities, like a national or international professional meeting, occur.

At the Rio meeting, in September of this year, each workshop "speaker" will present in plenary the group's conclusions, both orally and in writing. This report will be discussed and the minutes of the debate will eventually be added to the original text, for further distribution or publication.

Some suggested topics

To help colleagues who would like to follow the above proposal or for those who only intend to attend and speak at the international conference, we give below a short list of topics, which is, of course, not exclusive, and other ideas will be welcomed.

- Why should we, and how can we, share our heritage?
- How, and with what means and partnerships, can we ensure the durability of the community museum or the ecomuseum?
- How can we make an inventory of heritage through an ecomuseum or a community museum project?
- What is our future heritage to be? Are there aspects of our contemporary environment that we should treasure?
- Who builds, creates or fabricates the heritage of the future?
- What is 'a museology of liberation' and how can it make a contribution to a more democratic vision of the heritage of the future?
- Heritage and Education: can they be interactive and/or complementary?
- What procedures and processes can ensure the sustainable nature of ecomuseums?
- How can ecomuseums interact with the concepts of cultural tourism or green tourism? Should they?
- Can ecomuseums be a part of sustainable tourism? Is there a link between sustainable tourism and sustainable community museums?
- How do local communities benefit from the democratisation or liberation of museology?
- And others ...

Each workshop, acting as a "think tank", may select one of these subjects, or any other, provided that it remains within the general framework of the conference theme.

The objectives of the Rio conference

- to present the reports prepared by the pre-conference workshops, and discuss them, in order to later distribute widely the conclusions of the debates
- prepare together the draft of a practical handbook about management methods (conception, realisation, relations to development, evaluation, etc.), for ecomuseums and community museums.
- receive proposals for other sites and new themes, which could be considered for the next international encounters, every 3 years, with a special emphasis on solidarity with small museums and innovations in new museology.

Organisation of the Rio Conference

The meeting will be divided into three phases, over five days, in September 2004:

At the Palácio Real e Imperial de Santa Cruz (antiga Sede da Fazenda de Santa Cruz/ atual Batalhão- Escola de Engenharia Villagran Cabrita), for three days (September 13 -15 th)

- the **3rd International Conference** (EIEMC III), on "Community, Shared Heritage and Education", which will include the presentation and discussion of workshops reports. It will include a presentation on participatory methods for the inventory of the community's cultural and natural heritage which has been developed by the Santa Cruz Community Ecomuseum.
- the **10th MINOM International Workshop**, under the theme "Culture and Participatory Democracy", during which various sub-themes will be introduced and discussed, such as "lexicology of the new museologies", "community organisation", "new exhibition themes and methods adapted to actual community needs"; it will be followed by the General Assembly of MINOM.

At the University of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), the School of Museology, Heritage and Tourism will hold in the Paulo Freire Auditorium (September 16 th and 17 th)

- a **Seminar** on "Heritage of the Future".

Practical information

It is not yet possible to define precisely the location or the costs associated with these various events.

The information will be sent, as soon as possible, to the persons who will indicate their interest, either to work on a preliminary workshop, or to attend the Rio meetings.

These persons are requested to complete the following form and to send it back, by fax or e-mail, to the Santa Cruz Ecomuseum.