



ILAM

INSTITUTO LATINOAMERICANO DE MUSEOLOGIA

*The Productive Museum:
a proposal for change*

Junio de 1997



THE PRODUCTIVE MUSEUM: A Proposal for Change

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INTRODUCTION

The Productive Museum Model was developed as a result of a decade of work to establish a Museum of Popular Culture in the Province of Heredia, Costa Rica. This museum carries out traditional roles of preservation, research, and interpretation, and incorporates, the identification and support of creative individuals who respond to practical and spiritual needs of popular sectors.

This project, was one of many with similar objectives. While the other projects were not creating museums, they were responding to a decline in the production of traditional crafts and the transmission of traditional techniques. Not only were the objects disappearing, but knowledge of manufacturing techniques, and the process of oral transmission, ritual dance, songs, stories, poetry, and beliefs were threatened. Most of the projects included research and recording of aspects of the popular culture, and a few were dedicated to the selection of folkloric samples to present to audiences for their entertainment.

The Museum Project took a different approach: Was it possible to stimulate a reactivation of these traditions, practices and occupations, maintaining them alive in the community? Could new markets be stimulated and developed, so that these occupations could recover a place of value and worth in the community?

These were the initial issues, developing the methodology, analyzing existing museum structures, sharing experiences with colleagues, developing new techniques and models within different cultural contexts, has taken up the past decade.

Many critical decisions were made along the way. Perhaps the earliest was the desire to create a *reproducible* model which could be applied in other regions of Latin America confronting similar problems. Little by little the vision became broader. Could the emergent model be applied by museums working in completely different thematic areas? Could we make a contribution to the advancement of other institutions? Could productive projects be used to generate employment opportunities in developed countries? Could greater resources be generated to support preservation activity on an international level?

We have tested our methodology and structure through the development of temporary exhibitions, a census of traditional trades and occupations, research projects, publications, productive projects and the application of traditional techniques in building restoration.

At the end of this year, these diverse efforts will be brought together with the opening of the permanent site of the Museum of Popular Culture. But that is a different story, and it will have to be told elsewhere.

This working paper presents some significant alternatives for existing museums who wish to re-orient their institutions, defining a broader and more active role for museums in society in the twenty-first century.

DIVERSE APPROACHES AND COMMON PROBLEMS

Museums, cover a broad range of thematic areas, operational models, and ways of doing things. A review of the variety of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Committees might suggest that we have specialized on so many levels that we have little left in common. Yet there is no doubt that we share common preservation and interpretation objectives; have similar problems and have benefited from sharing diverse creative solutions; and every museum has a complex and important relationship with their community.

Our chronic lack of funds, has led us to experiment with a variety of product sales and service activities: Museum shops, cafeterias, restaurants, reproduction items, speakers programs, publications, hall rentals, fundraising events, etc.

These efforts have not generated the kinds of funds most museums had hoped for. Many discovered *they did not know how to run a business*, despite the complexities involved in running a museum. Some contracted-out these services, resigned to receiving a small but steady income. Others sought the expertise which they originally lacked, or hired new staff with experience in small business management, or related disciplines.

It is clear that we have not found a common solution in the area of self generated revenue. Despite recognition that it is a common institutional problem, many museum professionals have never considered it *their problem*. It is something for the director, the board, or management to worry about. Curators, educators, conservators, exhibit designers, technicians, docents, and volunteers, have been expected to get on with their work. Our most creative resource, our own personnel, has participated in budget cuts, but not in revenue generation projects. Worst of all, when a creative idea is implemented and succeeds, it tends to be absorbed by the overall financial needs of the institution, with no re-investment or incentive to generate other creative projects.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AND THE DEBT OF GRATITUDE

One of the things which we have in common, is that we are involved in some kind of *social assistance*. Our relationship with government, and philanthropic funding agencies, is based upon an argument that what we do is *good*, that it has practical and *spiritual* importance, and that it contributes to *mental health*.

Governments, convinced or not by our arguments but aware of the danger of saying publicly *museums are worthless*, give us limited support. We of course complain that these contributions do not increase, do not keep pace with inflation, and worst of all, that they represent our largest single source of income. We rarely examine however, the real tangible benefits offered to our communities, which justify the increases we would like to see, or the financial support which we already receive. Nor do we consider that governments themselves, burdened by massive debt and galloping inflation, are also chronically short of funds.

Arising from the notion of museums as *purveyors of social assistance*, we develop the argument that the community owes us a *debt of gratitude*. The *debt of gratitude* is our institutional incentive to generate donations. Our institutional *raison d'être* is based on the notion that without the museum, future generations, societies and communities will be unable to understand their roots, their environment, their technology, science, art and history.

The *debt of gratitude* is easily cancelled by one of the following methods: Donating an object, making a cash donation or becoming involved in volunteer programs. Visiting the museum does not cancel the debt, it simply reinforces it. Cancelling the debt, implies becoming *one of us*, there may be personal satisfaction and, occasionally, increased status in the community, but most importantly it is the main difference between being a museum visitor, and truly supporting the museum.

We have then three important sectors that we are all concerned about: The general public, who may or may not care if the museum exists; the museum visitor, who has reasons to care a bit more; and the donor/volunteer who cares very deeply for the museum. Unfortunately, those individuals who care very deeply, usually represent a very small sector of the community.

If we review the benefits which museums offer, many of them are suspiciously double-edged. Discounts for members -- presumably increase sales and profits. Informational bulletins or magazines, (paid for by their fees) generally contain invitations and descriptions of museum programs. Volunteer programs (often rewarding for those who participate) -- alleviate the need to hire additional staff.

We celebrate increases in public attendance, and bemoan the drops. We analyze, research and survey our visitors, and have heated discussions over the results. We are outraged because so few visitors share our institutional ideals, they had guests from out of town, they came in search of a washroom, status, a few minutes out of the rain, or out in the open air. When they offer criticism or a complaint, all too often our response is: *What do they know of the complexities and difficulties of museology and museography?... Our work is extremely difficult.* They make a donations, and we respond with platitudes about the thanks of future generations -- their descendants who just inherited the *debt of gratitude*.

THE MYTH OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND THE NUMBERS GAME

We pay a lot of lip service to community participation, and its importance as a justification for receiving public moneys. Government, and other support agencies (foundations, etc.) have insisted that we play a numbers game. The flute bids us dance, and with our survival at stake, we dance: We begin to count, we count paid visitors, we count school groups, we add up daily, weekly and monthly attendance, we compare periods, we invent new ways of grouping people together (friends, associates, members) we invent categories with implied status (100 clubs, supporting patrons,

honorary supporters etc.). Up to a point, it works! In some cases it might even make sense.

The problem is that we have not agreed on what we are really measuring. Some institutions, too busy or not quite sure how to maintain this statistical base, simply make it up. Others can not resist the temptation to inflate the figures, after all *more is better*. Some museums bear a closer resemblance to a private club, the same people, counted over and over again to maintain a competitive edge in the numbers game.

We do not have a common definition of what constitutes demonstrable evidence of community support. Some argue that attendance figures are valid, others think we should focus on members of governing associations, or of *friends* organizations. Each of these options may have validity, but we rarely ask the question: *Compared to what?*

We could relate attendance to demographic data (population, gender distribution), to occupations, social sectors, tourism statistics, or to the attendance to other cultural institutions. In doing so, we may begin to discover more reasons for our institutions' existence. We have to play the numbers game, but we can take a much more active role in developing arguments as to *what the numbers mean*.

At the root of all of this, there is an argument that *museums must be supported by those who believe in them*. Its a valid argument, but a frightening one. We have to ask ourselves the question: *If the museum closed tomorrow, what would happen?* We hope that there would be an upsurge of community support demanding that it re-open, but the truth is that we do not quite believe it. To survive, we have to be confident that we could face that ultimate test of community support...if the museum closed?

BETWEEN A ROCK AND HARD PLACE.

Over the last few decades, museums have been *restructuring*. The museum announces and defines a transition period, the personnel worries about job security, departments develop strategies for survival. The motivation for most restructuring attempts were financial, funding sources were cutting back, and we had to be prepared. So we restructured in order to *do more with less, or maintain excellence with reduced personnel*. Suddenly a discussion of *contracting out as a means of reducing full time equivalents* was considered vital, even if we were not sure what it meant.

This proposal for change, suggests that we engage in institutional restructuring, but with a major difference, in that the process would be *expansive* rather than *reductive*. To assume greater responsibilities, establish new programs, develop new sources of income, we are going to have to involve more people. The greatest single area of expansion is the development and sale of more products and services. Some generated directly by the museum, and others by surrounding the museum with a variety of small business ventures, cooperatives, cottage industries, etc. Creating employment in productive projects which develop alongside the museum and which share resources an investment for mutual benefit.

To do this, we have to find areas which address concrete community needs while simultaneously addressing an institutional problem. A museum interested in selling high quality local products could become involved in supporting individuals and groups, which have *or can achieve* the skills to produce those products. A museum, aware that many private citizens are restoring their homes, can work with local tradesmen, architectural firms, and building contractors *on a fee for service* basis to improve the quality of the work that is done. Or form a local association of restoration enthusiasts, eager and willing to help others research and elaborate their projects.

Each of these initiatives, has a *financial* component and *tangible benefits* for the museum and for the community. By becoming involved in community development (within the limits of the particular museums theme) the museum supports a new cross-section of the community which *cares very much* that the museum exists. This base, added to our existing volunteer and donor base, can greatly extend our community support, and substantially change the meaning of the benefits we offer *future generations*.

BEYOND THE PRESERVATION OF OUR HERITAGE

The need for a new museum model, arose because we wanted to respond to concrete community needs. Existing museum models (both traditional structures and the new museology) tend to see their responsibility to the community in terms of *accountability*, rather than in terms of *service* or *benefit*. There is a tendency to refer to the community as a base of potential donors, visitors, clients, customers, volunteers, members, and so on, who can be attracted. We forget, that *they* are both the producers and owners of what we collect, and that at the centre of all our programs, exhibitions, research, museum's fundamental role is that of *custodians*. As public institutions, we agree that we must be accountable to the community, but we do not have a consensus (beyond the offering of exhibitions) on what our obligations to *them* are, or might be. To further complicate the relationship, we know that our visitors are not representative of the community; that entire sectors of the community are often *left out*.

Let us begin by examining, our existing relationships with our communities, by reviewing the primary areas of our work.

PRESERVATION - COLLECTIONS AND RESEARCH

There is no doubt that our *collecting activity* is the basis for a strong relationship with our community. They offer us something and we accept it or reject it. Or they throw it away, and like the sea-gulls, vultures and crows circling the city dump we fight over it and eventually rescue it, but unlike *real scavengers*, we plan to *give it back to the community*.

Our collections grow out of control, or they are developed under such strict control, that the community is left scratching its head. *Who would of thought there was a Fork Museum, I offered them a beautiful silver spoon and they said no.*

We have given the object so much importance, that unidentified museum objects take up space in storage, even though no one has the time to research them. Often, we have the barest outline of information about the object, or its use. We preserve rites, traditions, dance, often separated from the ritual knowledge that give them significance or importance. We create *heroic objects*: *So and so slept in this bed...the blankety-blank was signed at this desk, with this pen.*

We are good researchers. Our reference libraries, archives, photographic collections, often built around the need to identify objects, allow us to catalogue, interpret, classify, theorize, demystify, and sometimes contextualize the object, but our exhibits are often objects placed in accurate relationship to each other, but devoid of the original relationship between people and object, or production and object. We sometimes do not know the relationship of the object to the development of the community.

We have well developed aural/oral history research methods, and we preserve information about the community's development, or a particular profession or trade. We participate in the socialization of technical and scientific knowledge, and we develop new methods of participative research and interpretive programing.

The Museum's relationship with the community is usually an *us and them* relationship. They give the objects, recount their experience, share their knowledge, and we give them thanks on behalf of future generations. We give them recognition, increased status in the community, but we exclude them from *our work*. We are *serious about what we do*, we talk about mutual respect but we rarely consider it a basis for joint ventures involving the community and the museum.

PRESERVATION - CONSERVATION AND EXHIBITS

The community *trusts us*, the museum is the best possible place to preserve an object. The name alone makes us experts, we can practically do as we please.

These objects can not be exhibited because their condition is too critical. You can not get too close because it might be damaged. No eating, no smoking, no drinking, no flash, no parcels or bags. Of course we can make exceptions for the opening reception, for the exhibit poster, because a producer will pay an extravagant sum to use this artifact or recreated environment in his production, or simply because it is *important to the museum*.

We exercise control, and arbitrariness and mystify our *difficult work*. We struggle to create better conditions but too often leave the visitor staring yearningly at the beautiful music box whose sound he will never hear.

The introductory lecture, exhibit labels, exhibit technology, the guide tour, audio-visual programs, all continue to be developed and improved. This is the place where the museum comes into contact with the community -- or the museum visitor. Here, we must justify everything or lose everything (for the vast majority of the public) *this is what we do*.

We are fortunate, our average visitor is educated, professional, urban, knowledgeable, not too critical; she knows there are many kinds of museums and she can adjust her expectations. In a small community museum with excellent exhibits she will say *what an excellent job for such a small community!* If she finds dusty cases, or objects lined up in tidy rows, she forgives us, *this is just like museums I visited when I was a kid*.

Mystery and nostalgia are on our side. A museum can be full of life or as boring as can be, but it remains a sacred place, where one must enter with respect for those who save the objects, and respect for what they represent. If there is dust or cobwebs, it is not ordinary dust but magic dust. The artifact falling apart before our eyes?...it is part of the important work museums carry-out, we preserve the patina, the indications of daily use, springing from a romantic past or from the mystery of another culture, foreign and practically unexplainable.

For every doubt we have an argument, an explanation, and the amazing thing is that we have honesty and integrity, we have convinced ourselves that we are the experts and the public is some kind of necessary evil which must be humored, and which fortunately accepts our version of what a museum *must be*. After all if they do not like what we do, they do not have to come. If they do not want to support us, they do not have to support us. The fact is that many have made that choice, they have not been to a museum since they were in grade school, and had to go.

INTERPRETATION - EDUCATION

Our education programs have been at the forefront (along with exhibition technology) of institutional change over the past few decades, and there is little doubt that museum educators wield a high percentage of internal institutional power.

There is no Curator or Director who has escaped dealing with the growing insistence on establishing educational collections or the use of original artifacts in an education program. Of course museum educators have a great advantage, education is even more sacred than preservation. Preservation can be reduced to going out into the world and rescuing something which is in danger of extinction, dragging it back to the museum, sprucing it up a bit (or not) putting it on a pedestal or in a display case, pondering about it for a few days or weeks, making a label (if all else fails "do not touch" will do), picking a background color, adjusting the lights, scheduling a ceremonial opening, and it is done. Educators on the other hand, have had to figure out what to do with all of this.

Our education programs broaden our community base. The participants, come to the museum under much different circumstances than the general public. Often, there is not a choice, someone has programmed the visit, the individual can not easily get out of it, and besides *it might be kind of fun!* Visiting groups, are not generally permitted to establish their own rhythm or relationship to the exhibit. The usual concern over the 20 or 30 seconds with which the average visitor recognizes our efforts are not an issue here. We have a captive audience and we program their experience.

Educational programs are extremely important, and require substantial resources, so why do we practically give them away? We have endless discussions about the ethics and the morals of charging admission and charging for programs. *As public institutions we should be offering free access to all*, but until we are able to ensure that politicians who believe that, are consistently elected, we are going to have to accept the minimal criteria, that *somebody has to pay*.

Does our community know that we offer a high quality service in this area? As with our exhibitions, there is no doubt that the participants know, but do they represent a significant cross-section of our community. Education programs have been largely developed for grade school audiences, and the parent who knows that his child enjoyed the visit, does not necessarily recognize the extensive resources which made it possible, or how *good* the program really is. We might start by inviting a limited number of our casual visitors, to participate in existing programs. We know how rewarding it can be to *take the school tour* delighting in the children response...perhaps their parents would like the option of coming along?

INTERPRETATION - RECREATION AND SPECTACLE

Some museums have become involved, in a process of reactivation of traditional skills or crafts. *Living museums* offer log building courses, demonstrations of spinning, weaving and natural dyeing. Some have rescued forgotten games or recipes: how to make lye soap, or jam or ice-cream. These activities generate products which are shared by the participants or given away to other visitors. If a fee is charged, it rarely covers the cost of the materials used and the instructors' honorarium. They offer recreation and partial reactivation, the participants learn *about* the skill but rarely become proficient in the productive process. Changing the emphasis of these activities, making the *transmission of information* the primary objective while maintaining the element of fun, would extend the tangible benefits we offer our community. We should try to make museums where one not only *learns about things*, but where one has the possibility of *learning how to do things* which have a direct use in our daily lives.

The programing of *public events*, to attract a broader audience, has become a part of what most museums do. We program talks, cultural presentations, audio-visual trickery, culinary enticements, technical magic or activities which are simply good fun. There is tacit agreement that museums must attract more visitors.

Participants in these activities, often find that the museum is closed, the coffee-shop is closed, everything except for the hall where the activity is carried out, is closed. The argument that people came to participate in the activity, may be valid, but we also have to wonder if they realize that the museum is responsible. Do they make the connections we would like them to make.

One of the biggest motivators for this kind of *special* programming is the notion that museums have to be more competitive. Suddenly, we are in open competition with libraries, theaters, symphonies, video rentals, sports events and even each other.

The biggest worry, are those who pretend to offer *our product* devoid of authenticity, and without an element of serious research: theme parks, living villages erected in the space behind the Ferris-wheel and the moon rocket, pseudo reconstructions of romantic-days-gone-by, or sensational portrayals of exotic and foreign cultures devoid of real people, sentiment or any attempt at understanding or interpretation.

Competing on the basis of *come to us rather than to them*, misses a central issue because it emphasizes competition between offerings ("choose between us"), instead we should be developing our institution on the basis of *market competition and demand*, making it responsive to identified individual and community needs.

Museums developed within broader cultural and recreation centres, compete by offering the museum product in combination with a host of other worthwhile products and options. We may bristle at the notion that we have to deliver what the public wants, and fear the loss of our respectability, purpose, or social validity; but is there really any choice? If the community does not *want what we offer* why should they bother coming?

We have to offer a variety of options for passive and active visitor participation; giving the visitor multiple reasons to come to the museum, and choices of what to do while there. The reason for returning, should not be merely that of repeating *the same experience*, or to trudge the remaining miles of labyrinthine exhibitions, but because there were a number of things *they did not get to do*.

WHAT IS A PRODUCTIVE MUSEUM?

The Productive Museum is based on series of premises, which collectively propose a re-orientation of how we do our work, and a broadening of the present limits of a museum's responsibility towards its community. They articulate *internal* needs, which respond to outside pressures and to a *perception of change* taking place in our external environment:

- I. **A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY**
The need to establish a new relationship with the community, involving a broader range of individuals from diverse social and economic sectors in all aspects of our work.
- II. **A HORIZONTAL ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE**
The need to develop a horizontal organizational structure which encourages team-work, individual creativity and autonomy, reducing internal bureaucracy and top-down authoritarian decision making.
- III. **ACTIVE HERITAGE PRESERVATION**
The need to stimulate an active preservation of Art and Heritage in which the museum plays a participative and facilitating role, sharing rather than assuming a community responsibility.
- IV. **GENERATING TANGIBLE BENEFITS**
The need to expand the tangible benefits offered to our community based on an understanding of individual and community needs, and to stimulate economic as well as cultural growth through our exhibitions, programs and activities.
- V. **WHAT WE OFFER THE PUBLIC**
The need to offer a broader range of options for community participation and expand the possible reasons for visiting the museum.
- VI. **DIVERSIFIED RESOURCE AND INCOME GENERATION**
The need to increase and diversify our financial base and income generation capabilities, in order to maintain and expand our responsibilities, activities and programs
- VII. **A NEW VISION OF WHAT A MUSEUM CAN BE**
The need to re-evaluate, and redefine our vision of what a museum should and can be. Identifying the obstacles to creating significant institutional change.

I A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY

The productive museum proposes that we give priority to initiatives which provide tangible benefits to the community as a primary means of establishing a new relationship with the community.

The idea is not to make the museum into a hybrid social agency, responsible for solving the community's problems (although we can have an impact on community efforts to solve these problems). What is critical, is an awareness of what the community identifies as its major problems. We have to understand the community's needs in order to be able to intercede in specific areas, and offer to share the results of our research or in certain instances our research capability, to the community as a resource.

In delivering tangible and measurable benefits for the community, the museum must not lose the base of support which already exists. Where the existing relationship has a strong element of *community gratitude* the objective should be to generate a perception of *shared responsibility*.

Finding the ways and means by which the museum can have an impact on people's daily lives, goes hand in hand with the recognition that the community, *the people and their ancestors*, is the creator and owner of the objects which the museum preserves, and the community has a right to participate in the decisions which are made regarding the use of those collections, as opposed to a responsibility to support without question what the museum decides. If we accept this view, the rights and responsibilities of membership in a governing association, or a friends organization may have to be reviewed and perhaps expanded. Obviously that right must be channeled through a structure which ensures decision making on the basis of an informed consensus of community demands and proposals.

PRODUCTIVE REACTIVATION

The concept of reactivation is essential to the establishment of a new relationship with the community. For years museums have insisted that *we exist to preserve techniques and objects so that they will be available to future generations*.

It is time to apply the knowledge of our research and documentation, and begin a process of reactivating traditional techniques and products for use here and now. Our information, research and our massive collections must be put to the test, the present *justifications* for our existence are unlikely to guaranty the survival of our institutions.

Productive reactivation is the process of applying the techniques and knowledge of a traditional occupation, and re-establishing it in today's market as a viable way to make a living, or of increasing the income of the individuals involved.

The idea, is to select occupations which produce high quality objects or services, which can compete with their present day replacements, or which can establish a niche within a particular social sector. The growing concerns over *world ecology*, the need to use *re-usable* and *recycled* products, the interest in *appropriate technology*, the rediscovery of *natural fabrics*, of *made by hand* items, and so on, are all indicators of the existence of markets and consumer demand, which suggest that these kind of projects can be successful.

In order to develop these products, we have to begin with an individual, or group of individuals, with the necessary knowledge and skills. In some cases, they are already in business on a small scale. The proposed relationship with the museum can provide the catalyst to expand the market, improve the presentation and the marketing of the product, identify and create new sales outlets, and increase the product's status and appeal.

It is clear that there is a potential for mutual benefit. The museum offers information, research capability, access to training, a possible sales outlet or point of contact for requesting a service or placing an order for a product. Some museum shops have developed this kind of relationship already, on a small scale, with individual artists or craftsmen. The productive group offers the museum, promotion and information dissemination, through identification of the museum with products sold at alternative outlets, a small percentage of the profit from sales, and the development of a broader cross-sectional base of community members who support the museum.

SHARING THE MUSEUM OBJECTIVES AND THEME

While the mission statement, objectives and museum policies have received a great deal of institutional attention, they have been considered by many a kind of intellectual exercise which has little to do with reality. One can work in a museum for three or four years, and never be required, or asked, to read these documents. Volunteers may not even be told that such documents exist, and are rarely asked to participate in a process of institutional evaluation or re-definition.

Whatever the state of these various documents, they will have to be reviewed and updated with the view of establishing the new relationship with the community. They will be the primary reference for the initial selection of possible productive activities.

If the museum's objectives and stated theme are not *understood and shared* by the community, if they are not given the opportunity to *appropriate and internalize* this information, there is little chance of establishing productive groups which develop independently, but maintain a close relationship with the museum. If they are going to re-invest a percentage of their profits in the museum, it is going to be based on a combination of support for the museum's objectives, and on recognition of benefits which they receive from being closely associated with it.

II HORIZONTAL ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND TEAM WORK

The organizational structure established by the museum and *how the work is organized*, is of fundamental importance. Obviously each institution is going to develop its own structure. Our own experience has included *trying on* a variety of structures, and experimenting with various types of decision making, internal communication and division of responsibility.

The *idealized* structure of the productive museum, is made up of equivalent *work units*, which have a high degree of autonomy, to manage their own development, and the responsibility for executing their own programs.

The *work units* have clearly defined responsibilities, which include increasing public involvement and participation in their work, carried out independently in coordination with the Directive and Administrative Management. The museum's public programs, activities, exhibitions, events and products, are the collective result of the combined work of all the units.

The museum operations are governed by a coordinating council which is made up of the director, administrative manager, and each of the work unit coordinators.

This council coordinates the planning and execution of the annual program plan, and all of the activities related to the diversified funding base, the implementation of preservation programs, dissemination and publicity, productive reactivation and the integration of the community.

The *work units* (which can be referred to as centres or departments, based on the needs of each institution) have delimited areas within which they carry out their work. Thus they can operate independently or cooperate with other units based on the annual museum work plan; the development of specific products or services to produce income; and the establishment of direct benefits for the community through involvement in productive projects.

We have defined the responsibilities of the *work units* as follows:

- A. Diagnosis of the socio-economic realities and problems in the community, within the central theme of the museum; selection, creation and follow up of productive projects, and registration of the sectors involved.
- B. Visitor Services; coordination of multiple offerings at the museum site: museum promotion, public relations, advertising and extension activities.
- C. Documentation, exhibitions, collections, historic and contextual research, audio-visual productions, archives and information/communication services.
- D. Conservation and artifact restoration, or treatment of living specimens, and selection and confection of reproductions.

TEAM WORK.

Both the coordinating council and each of the work units, carry out their work as a unified team. Each work unit is responsible for forming their team, made up of permanent salaried personnel, and collaborators from the community (including informants, retired resource personnel, volunteers, students, operating productive groups, etc.). Each work unit coordinator is responsible for the selection and participation of team members and collaborators, and for maintaining and encouraging the team's operation.

In order to create efficient working units with a high degree of responsibility and commitment, all participants must have a broad and up-to-date understanding of the museum's policy, as well as of short and long term objectives and plans. Personal and professional identification with these objectives is necessary, to ensure individual liberty of action, and the development of creative initiatives.

In summary, the teams within each working unit will strive to maintain:

Ample horizontal communication which encourages understanding and respect of all members.

Open and sincere interpersonal relations.

Participation and integration of all members in relation to the work programmed for the museum as a whole; and a constant review evaluation, corroboration, and implementation of concrete proposals.

Decision making by consensus.

Respect and tolerance of other member's proposals, sharing of leadership skills and encouraging personal development as essential to institutional development.

Delegation of functions and responsibilities within each team recognizing individual triumphs and sharing errors and incorrect decisions.

Motivation through the use of professional skills, acknowledgement of personal efforts and encouraging personal initiative and providing incentives for creative proposals, recognizing opportunities for increased self-definition and self-esteem.

Finally, the museum must include as part of its annual planning process a permanent element of professional development for all team members including internal workshops and courses as well as access to external offerings.

III ACTIVE HERITAGE PRESERVATION

The preservation of our heritage by means of saving, conservating and exhibiting collections is inherent to every museum. The productive museum is one step ahead by proposing an "active preservation" of the heritage by :

- involving the community in the detection and dissemination of their own cultural properties;
- giving priority to information concerning the subjects of the museum as most important element for obtaining or increasing the collection.

Information dissemination, through productive projects, accompanying all products sold by the museum or its productive groups, will help to generate a transformation of the community perception of what the museum is for. Reminding the community that it does not act for them in the preservation of art and heritage but rather that it acts with them in response to a shared responsibility.

The necessity to obtain and share information is an essential component of the productive museum. This can be reached by establishing data banks and archival management systems that also allow artifact information access. In this way not only historical antecedents can be related to each artifact but also specific information on productive activities, manufacturing techniques, resource management and information on related occupations.

By putting all the information about an artifact together, like the practise or tradition, the detailed description about the history, use or function, as well as information about the possible manufacturers, inventors, users or people who can still tell something about the object, we generate a data bank which allows us to make better exhibitions. Moreover, we can choose between several options to present to the public or to attract new sectors towards the museum.

Information management and dissemination are among the most critical components of the productive museum. This implies the ability to maintain access to information, not only for the various work units but also to provide access to interested people who just want to satisfy their interest in a certain subject or to outside researchers who want to deepen or complete their investigations, etc.

The access to this kind of information will take place by selling services and products of the museum or an exchange between individuals or institutions because of which the data bank will increase which results in an increase in identification, knowledge and therefore enrichment of our heritage.

IV GENERATING BENEFITS FOR THE COMMUNITY

Existing museums have an intimate and extensive relationship with their communities, in some cases because their theme has a historical focus or it relates to the basis of the community's economic production.

The Productive Museum must work to develop the human potential of these communities, establishing programs which utilize community expertise and stimulate productive projects within its thematic area. Many museums have developed some productive programs, but the responsibility for the execution of the project, as well as any resulting profits, have been of and for the museum.

The Productive Museum proposes to support and generate within the community the reactivation of productive activity; establishing cottage industries, family businesses, cooperatives and other productive groups, engaged in production or delivery of services which relate to the museum's theme.

Expanding its economic impact on the community by encouraging and facilitating productive projects which generate income for the participants. The expanded benefits to the community offered by the productive museum are :

- a. Active participation in productive groups and projects, generating new products and occupations and increasing individual incomes.
- b. Individual participation in concrete productive activities and increased markets both within and outside the museum.

- c. Access to public reference and referral services, inclusion in published directories and advertising programs developed using the official register of trades and occupations (census) of the museum.
- d. Access to training courses and sharing of information resources and techniques of specific occupation (or productive project) as well as on methodology for group organization and planning, as it relates to their group, family business, or cooperative.
- e. Increased access to high quality products, and services, manufactured and offered on a local or regional level, and available through the museum and at a variety of other outlets.
- f. Increased access to information on the use and manufacture of local products and services of traditional origin, presented in the context of present day utility and historical relevance.

Productive project participants receive an economic benefit, not derived from employment by the museum, but rather as a result of the development of a private enterprise or business which is their own responsibility. The degree of commitment and involvement of each individual may vary, depending on their interest, and need. Benefits are not only of an economic nature, but include self-esteem and increased confidence, derived from involvement in a creative activity generating high quality products and services.

The general public receives a qualitative and quantitative benefit through access to these products and services available to them through the museum, and at other diverse outlets throughout the community.

V WHAT WE OFFER THE PUBLIC

The Productive Museum must maintain a broad range of public offerings, of a high quality and where possible incorporating a tangible benefit. As we increase our commercial relationship with the visitor (through the sale of varied products and services) we will have to ensure that the museum is not seen as simply a sales outlet. This will be achieved by accompanying the products with detailed information on the artists/artisans involved, the type of materials used, and a description of the technique used in its production; the objects original use, and where the use has altered, a description of its historical evolution.

The productive museum will in no way eliminate the important aspects of programming in which the public participates as a spectator, but will explore ways to increase active participation in museum programming and activities, seeking new ways to attract the visitor, as well as encouraging his *periodic* return.

The different working units which make up the productive museum will share the responsibility of putting forward proposals to the coordinating council, related to products and services which will be offered by the museum. Ranging from the more usual museum publications, the rental of thematic exhibitions, objects or works of art, to more innovative proposals for contract consulting services, conservation treatments, and manufacture of quality reproductions. Mechanisms to encourage creative brainstorming, and pre-market analysis, within each unit and between units will have to be explored and implemented.

One of the impediments to this kind of activity within our institutions has been that increases in revenue have not necessarily created corresponding increases in departmental expenditures. The horizontal organization structure will require corresponding budget incentives which ensure that a percentage of new income generated by each working unit can be re-invested to finance new proposals, projects and initiatives of that unit.

We have to evaluate the present museum site, the collections, and the opportunities for adapting the use we presently give our buildings and grounds. Are there spaces which are under-utilized on week-ends because they are presently used only by museum personnel who work Monday to Friday? Can we establish satellite centres, perhaps along with other cultural institutions, or establishing a long term relationship based on trading space? Should we join with several other institutions in creating joint collections storage facilities, or research and documentation centres, conservation laboratories? Maybe several museums together could develop a productive project which makes quality reproductions from a certain era? Can the present facility be expanded to house a small theatre, or a week-end craft market.

Are we maximizing the use of the existing resources? Are we sharing ideas? Maybe a productive project that had too much competition in our area, would work well in another part of the country?

Along with the inevitable headaches, and conflicts which sooner or later arise, there is always the potential for improving the present site. Maybe we have to invite colleagues from other disciplines who will bring a fresh perspective and new ideas?

VI DIVERSIFIED RESOURCES AND INCOME GENERATION

This is nothing new. Some years ago, the goal was to establish a 30-30-30-10 percent relationship among different funding sources. The first 60 were generally made up of different levels of government and the final 40 of a combination of admissions, fundraising, and wishful thinking that was usually not achieved and created the mid-year recast budget cut-backs and blues.

Part of the problem was that the formula did not really represent a departure from the norm. We think that *financial independence* requires that no more than 15% of the budget come from a single source, and if possible even less.

With this in mind, we have elaborated an *idealized* balance for the productive museum to strive for:

ITEM	SOURCE AND USE
Permanent funding	
Source A	15% Municipal, State or Provincial Governments, Foundation of Private Enterprise. <i>Operation</i>
Source B	15% Federal or National Government, Foundation or Private Enterprise, <i>Operation</i>
Specific Support	15% All levels of Government, Foundations, Public Institutions, Private Support. <i>Capital improvements, remodeling temporary exhibitions, pilot projects, expansion, etc. (carried out within one fiscal year).</i>
Sale of Services exhibit rentals conservation treatment, consulting, specialized directories, etc.	15% Institutions or private enterprise, other museums, general public. <i>Operations, Investment in new products</i>
Sale of Products	15% Productive Projects, Publications, Museum Store, reproductions, etc. <i>Operation, Investment in new projects</i>
Admissions, registration access to diverse offerings on site educational programs programs, speakers, etc.	5% General Public. <i>Operation</i>
Fundraising	10% Special events and activities, Members, Campaigns. <i>Operation.</i>
Donations, estates, interest exonerations,	10% Interest on investments, museum foundation, tax rebates and miscellaneous, <i>Operation.</i>

This does not suggest that the amounts presently received from various levels of government would be reduced, Rather it implies an increase in overall operations to achieve the proposed diversified funding base. Most museums would begin the process with a large percentage of their income in the first three categories. Depending on the

present situation, the process of establishing a diversified funding base would have to be planned and implemented over a five to ten year period.

VII A NEW VISION OF WHAT A MUSEUM CAN BE

If the previous individual premises require a change of emphasis, institutional restructuring, program amplification, and re-definition of responsibilities. Collectively they imply a change of attitude, and expanded definition of the work which we carry out as institutions.

Some museums do not have the freedom of action to carry out this kind of change, even if they have the will to do so, because of existing bureaucratic or constitutional structures. Others will be limited by the will of existing directors or individuals in tenured positions. Collective agreements, existing contracts and agreements with other museums, cultural institutions or colleges and universities, may present both obstacles and opportunities to the possible implementation of the productive museum model.

For some institutions and individuals, it is a new direction which they will not want to explore. Others may wish to generate a debate on whether it is a direction and change that is appropriate, and/or compatible, with our more traditional roles and functions. No doubt some museums may elect to experiment with one or two of the premises, without committing themselves to a complete acceptance of the model.

We hope that some institutions will seriously examine the possibility of its comprehensive implementation, and that an exchange of the experiences of testing and adapting the model, can generate a debate which permits its development and refinement for successive application on an international level.

We began with the assumption that there is a need to change the institutions known as *museums*, and that while the model can certainly be applied to the development of new institutions, that it is better suited to existing institutions with an established base of community support, an established purpose, thematic collections, and a developed infrastructure.

The proposal implies more than a series of changes which take place *inside* the institution, but it also requires greater collaboration with colleges and universities, the definition of new relationships with government and private enterprise (at local, regional, national and international levels), and a new basis for generating public support, and establishing new alliances with other cultural institutions. Like the well known epigram it involves *risk and opportunity*.

Without the involvement of all economic and social sectors of the community, we can not achieve a balance of institutional *subjectivity*. Academic theorists, students, artists, artisans, professionals, popular sectors, and more, must be involved in a continual process of evaluation and re-definition of the work, and the reason for the work, that we do.

THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

No matter how attractive the premises of the Productive Museum may be, no museum would consider changing its organizational structure, and the way it carries out its work, without researching the possible usefulness of the model in relation to the realities of its own thematic focus and community.

Museums possess the information base and the resources to become centers which stimulate, develop and facilitate the information of productive groups dedicated to productive reactivation. In some cases, new ways of accessing existing information will have to be developed. If we are not conversant within the methodology for conducting feasibility and marketing studies, in a business context, we have ample access to resource people with the skills and expertise.

Every museum has had the experience of trying to *reproduce* the success achieved by another institution, implementing a program or activity, similar to one carried out in another region or country. The relative success and failure of these endeavors, and the seriousness of our work, produce and understandable caution with respect to change.

With this in mind, we have tried to identify the fundamental elements, which we consider essential to the process of becoming a productive museum, ensuring that we have an understanding of different sectors of our communities with whom we can develop these initiatives, creating informational data bases which permit decision making related to productive projects, and the development of complementary public programs.

The previous proposal cannot be carried out in a short period of time because they are permanent activities which are the foundation of the implementation of the model. However, a lot of museums, which can be considered rudimentary, have the mechanisms to incorporate information about their own communities and to establish a basis of representative information of a sector or a theme.

Because of this, a permanent activity can be established, which enables the start and realization of productive reactivation projects.

IDENTIFYING WHO WE WORK WITH

The greatest resource available to the productive museum, is the individual with knowledge of techniques required to produce traditional products and services. Obviously, we cannot even consider a productive project involving, for example, shoemakers, without

first identifying a small group of people who possesses the basic information, equipment and techniques of production. Only having established a base group, we can pretend to set in motion a project of productive reactivation.

In order to access this resource, the museum will have to carry out a census of these individuals, and establish storage and retrieval systems for this information. The individuals included in the census will vary in relation to the museum's theme, the size of the community, and the network of other institutions which can utilize similar information, and prepared to collaborate in its compilation.

A population or occupational census carried out by government and industry may provide a starting point with the museum expanding the information and bringing it up to date. In some cases the individuals involved in a particular occupation will refer us to others working in the same areas. Associations of retirees, special interest clubs, etc., may provide initial contacts for particular occupations which have not been previously researched.

While many museums have had access to this type of information, it has rarely been seen as having significant value, if it has been recorded, it often takes the form of an anecdotal record, part of the historical romances we encounter in our work.

Let us take for example the case of a woman who prepares a delicious conserve, based on a recipe jealously guarded by her family for generations. With luck, we can try the product, we can send a sample to a laboratory to determine the ingredients and even convince the informant (under some agreement of confidentiality) to give the museum the recipe in order to safeguard it against its possible eventual loss. The most likely outcome, however, is that the information will be filed under Traditional Recipes-Publications so that a future colleague, (who has not tried the product and may have some difficulty with a line which reads "place on low heat until it achieves the right consistency"), can make a decision as to its inclusion in the museum's next publication.

We rarely determine the economic conditions of the woman and her family, and an exploration of the possibilities of the product being produced and marketed by a small cottage industry is simply not our job.

A living museum, for example, may have a working bakery which produces a selective sample of traditional products (bread, rolls, etc.) based on recipes and techniques from a certain era, but they have not explored the extensive marketing of this product. The "baker" is often not creatively involved in the process of production, he does not even

think of himself as a "baker". He could be a university student, or he might even have once been a baker, now retired who will tell the visitors: "I used to be a baker".

He is a salaried museum employee or part of a volunteer program, he is an interpreter surrounded by other interpreters of past occupations and products, involved in delivering a historic experience for the museum visitor. No matter how detailed this experience may be, our visitor is unlikely to return within the next three to six months so that he can have another piece of fresh baked bread, with fresh churned butter and organically grown preservative-free blackberry jam.

The concept of productive reactivation suggest that we make direct alliances with these kinds of businesses. Why not establish a relationship with a small local bakery, a health food store chain, a dairy producer, a small jam and jelly making cooperative? Or even support their formation if one of the elements does not exist? The product can be sold accompanied by informational material which tells the consumer about the history of the product. It can also cover ecological themes and it can stimulate the preservation of and increase the appreciation for the regional heritage.

What about the people who work directly in these productive projects, who are making a living, or supplementing their income producing a quality product? They may be willing to take on interpretive roles within the museum, after all it is a significant face-to-face opportunity to market their product. It could be interesting for the visitor too, to talk with someone directly involved in a process of traditional production.

Why not develop a museum where one could do all ones basic shopping? Where the greengrocer, baker, general store and meat market offer you high quality products with good-old-fashioned service.

We complain because private enterprise does it badly with no authenticity, why isn't some museum trying to do it well? Why shouldn't it be possible to place an order for a pair of hand-made-shoes, or a period tailored suit, or a traditional toy; high quality products made by local craftpeople who have an ongoing relationship with the museum while maintaining a low overhead sales outlet. How about a shave and a haircut, a shoe-shine or a repair to an old coat of grandfather's which is still used?

It does not have to be a living museum to carry out many of the above ideas, any museum could seek to establish itself as the best resource and reference centre for a series of traditional occupations. If you want a reproduction wooden bracket, someone who still knows how to plaster, make terra-cotta tile, a stonemanson, a picture framer, a landscape painter, a farrier, an architect, a contractor, etc., maybe the museum can become the

place to go for access to information as well as referral of services and traditional products.

REACHING AGREEMENT

The identification of possible themes or aspects which can be developed into productive projects, begins with a clear definition of the museums theme. Ensuring that all such projects bear a relationship to the museums preservation objectives.

Existing businesses and similar products, within the community or region, which will compete with the project will have to be identified. Projections of the possible consumer markets, alternative outlets and relationship with, or need to develop, additional productive groups will have to be made.

Depending on the diverse expertise of museum personnel, it may be necessary to seek outside advice and assistance to carry-out the necessary market research and feasibility studies.

We begin with proposals which intuitively feel right and seem to have a chance of succeeding. As each workunit of the museum broadens its base of involved community support, and the first productive projects go into operation, this intuitive pre-testing will become easier and more accurate, based on more individual perspectives and collective experience. There is little point in wasting resources, to study the feasibility of a proposal which drags along with it, its own sense of impossibility.

The productive museum will have to develop strategies to stimulate and expand the potential market for these products, in some cases a strong market may exist and dissemination of the availability of the new product or service may be sufficient. But the museum will also have to become involved in market simulation and the promotion of the availability of the new products and service.

Depending on the proposal, you will have to identify possible participants and often from the base of the productive group before proceeding to an in-depth study. The relationship between the museum and each productive group (even if you approach an existing business or cooperative) will vary in each case. The museum can not assume the role of saying: Here are the numbers, and here is how you do it.

One of the great risks, is that having initiated the formation of the group and developed the basic idea for the productive project, that the group elects to develop it on its own. As such, the formation and motivation of these productive groups must involve them in an

process of appropriation of the museums aims and objectives, the advantage of parallel development, the relative benefits to the group and to the museum, the importance of sharing information, and the advantages of being able to negotiate the relative investment made by the group and by the museum.

Regardless of the above, both the museum and the productive group should maintain the right to sever the relationship, subject to a negotiated term of notice of intent. The objective is to establish independent operations which cooperate for mutual benefit, and not dependent relationships.

The museum will advise the productive groups on available options for their internal organization, while at the same time encouraging self-definition and selections of the types of training which they require. The definitions of the responsibilities and commitments which must be assumed by the group members can be facilitated by the museum, but not imposed.

Recognizing that productive groups may include existing small businesses, family enterprises and groups created by the museum, a attention will have to be paid to the negotiation of relative amounts of working capital investment which will be made by the museum and the working group, respectively. While the museum may at times provide certain types of infrastructure or working space, the productive group may have to seek loans and/or donations to cover the initial period of the operation.

The support and direct involvement of the museum will vary during the developmental stages of each productive project, but the common objective will always be to establish negotiated agreements (once the group achieves relative economic stability) and contracts between the productive group and the museum, clearly establishing the relationship and relative autonomy of operations within the museum site and with other clients and markets.

LOOKING FOR TRADITIONAL SOLUTIONS

If we are going to respond and make decisions, based on community needs, we must begin by identifying those needs based on a rigorous process of research and diagnosis. If we want to explore the possible reactivation of traditional responses and solutions to these problems, we must research and recuperate this knowledge.

A marine biology museum for example, or one of several museums which interpret an aspect of the exploitation of marine resources, could be concerned that the technology

used in fishing for tuna kills many dolphins; and that this fact creates a major problem for the industry. Ecological groups lobby governments to prohibit the importation of the product, and simultaneously promote a consumer boycott. The museum research shows that new technology (which allows dolphins to escape the nets) is not well developed, and many of the dolphins are still killed. Simultaneously, the museum discovers that using smaller boats and *less efficient* traditional methods, presents a viable market option (i.e. individuals participating in the boycott, because of the killing of dolphins, are willing to pay more for a product which uses more *appropriate technology*). A small fishing cooperative is able to adapt their boats to the traditional technology at relatively low cost, a local cannery is willing and anxious to get back to full production, and a small export business is willing to export and promote the product. A number of the ecological groups, are willing to become involved in the promotion of the product, and support arrangements for booking a travelling exhibition and audio-visual information package (produced by the museum) encompassing the entire process of research and productive project implementation.

The museum's research and diagnosis permits three existing productive units (the fishing cooperative, cannery and export business) to become involved as *productive groups* supporting the museum's objectives by investing/returning a small percentage of their profits to the museum. The new connection with an international network of ecological groups gives the museum a broader base for future research and new distribution channels for their travelling exhibits.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The Productive Museum Model does not offer a quick-fix to our present institutional problems: It requires an investment in long term planning and review of the museum's central theme and institutional objectives. It involves varying degrees of institutional restructuring, and changes in the way we define museum responsibilities. It proposes the permanent accompaniment of community initiatives which complement our work, and the promotion of the concept of *shared responsibility* with the community toward preservation of our natural, cultural and artistic heritage.

We have suggested that implementation of the productive museum model will require an *expansive* restructuring of the institution. It should be stressed that this does not necessarily mean an increase in salaried personnel. We must first re-define the meaning of personnel beyond existing staff and volunteer structures. Individuals involved in productive projects, as well those individuals carrying out specific product elaboration and service delivery, will have a variety of different relationships to the museum. It also suggests that we explore other available options to expand our human resources; such as negotiated loans of personnel from private enterprise, educational institutions and different levels of government; exchanges, loans, and fee-for-service access to personnel resources, research information, both within the cultural sector and to government and private industry; internships and students working on combined credit and/or student assistance programs, on both a full and part time basis.

While many of our proposals have been directed towards the *tangible benefits* which can be created for the community, it should also be stressed that there are a series of measurable benefits for the institution: An increase in visitors is bound to result from the museum's involvement of a greater cross-section of the community, as well as through the new perception of the museum as a partner in a community process of preserving natural, artistic and material heritage. Offering a larger variety of options, products and services to the public, both directly and through productive groups, can offer substantial revenue generation. The census information, as well as supporting productive group formation, will offer a wealth of qualitative and quantitative information for other museum research projects. In the long term, there is the benefit of a changed perception of what a museum is, and what it can do, which is of vital importance to those of us who breathe, eat and live in the belief that museums have worth and value for the present as well as the future.

There is certainly an awareness on the part of the authors that our proposals will have to be extensively modified, expanded and refined, to meet a particular museum's needs, and the divergent cultural and economic conditions in which the model may be applied. Such an all-encompassing proposal, runs the risk of being rejected out-of-hand, of generating great interest or mild curiosity. We look forward to the multiple responses with a mixture of dread and excitement.

We are interested in receiving criticism, and suggestions directed toward the improvement and refinement of the model, or which identify areas which need greater clarity, expansion or thematic elaboration. We are particularly interested in establishing contact with institutions and individuals who have developed similar or parallel models or projects. Sharing the experiences of other institutions initiatives and/or pilot implementation programs. What obstacles, problems and successes have been encountered?

Finally we would invite you to contact us, and should you be coming to Costa Rica, to visit the Museum of Popular Culture, from which the present model originated, and where its implementation will continue. We welcome ideas and proposals from individuals and institutions who wish to become involved in the ongoing practical and theoretical exploration of alternatives, that refocus the museum, and ensure its survival and development in the midst of changing global pressures and an ever more complex global environment.