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THE EU-LAC MUSEUMS PROJECT AND COMMUNITY-BASED MUSEUMS

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EU-LAC Museums project beginnings: defining terms

From September 2016 to January 2021, the European Commission Horizon 2020 project titled EU-LAC Museums: Museums and Community: Concepts, Experiences and Sustainability in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean brought together four institutions from the European Union and four from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) (<http://www.eulacmuseums.net>). By carrying out a comparative analysis of small to medium rural museums and their communities in the EU-LAC region, the project sought to develop the history and theory of museums, communities and their territories. The project achieved this goal by navigating between two impressive historic movements in museum theory and practice—community museums and ecomuseums.

The project partners were tasked with exploring the role of small- to medium-sized local museums in understanding cultural relations between the regions. In designing the project, initially in consultation with ICOM Europe President Luis Raposo and Hugues de Varine, our project theme had its origins in the historic Round Table on the Importance and Development of Museums in the Contemporary World held in Santiago de Chile in 1972 (José do Nascimento Junior, Alan Trampe, Paula Assunção dos Santos, 2012). The subsequent declaration (UNESCO, 1972) and Latin ‘New Museology’ movement put forward the idea of an ‘integral museum,’ a concept emphasising the primary responsibility of museums to meet the needs of their communities. This anchoring of the museum in a new ‘social function’ was integrated into the 1974 ICOM museum definition and has continued to be included to the present day, bringing about a reconsideration of the attitudes, roles and professional practices of museum researchers in relation to their political responsibility (Brown and Mairesse, 2018; De Carli,

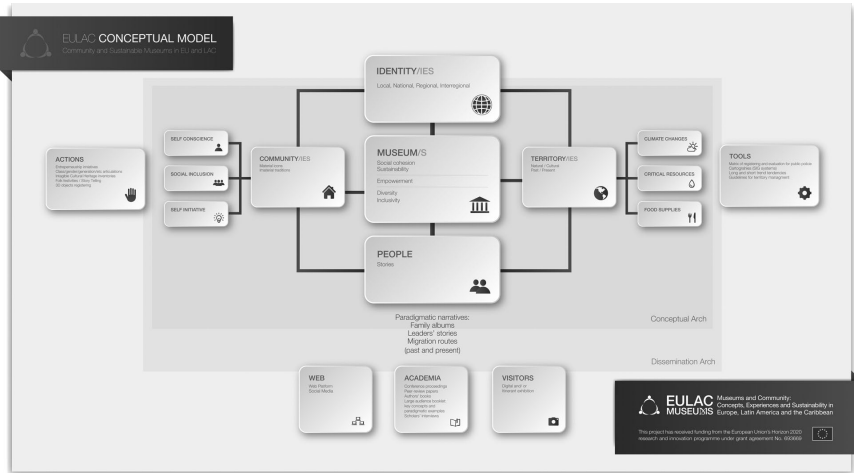


FIGURE 5.1 Initial Conceptual Model for the EU-LAC Museums project. © EU-LAC

2004; De Varine, 2017; De Varine, personal communication, 2000; Mostny et al., 1972; Weil, 2019).

Lisbon, 2016: community-based museums as community-generated initiatives

Our starting point was during the project kick-off meeting held in the National Museum of Archaeology in Lisbon in November 2016. This was the first opportunity we had to meet in person as a consortium, with members from the Caribbean, Chile, Costa Rica, France, Portugal, Peru, Scotland and Spain, to begin discussing what each of us thought a ‘community museum’ was. On this occasion, with the assistance of our advisors Teresa Morales Lersch (Co-Director, *Museos Comunitarios de América* network, and co-author of *Memoria: Red de Museos Comunitarios de América. Experiencias de museos comunitarios y redes nacionales*, 2016) and Ann Gunn (University of St Andrews), we asked our group three simple prompts:

- What are three questions you would ask to determine whether a museum is a community museum?
- Think of three things that a community museum is not.
- What is a definition of a community museum that would be useful to you in your work? Include three main aspects.

This collective process threw into sharp relief the fact that a certain lack of information and context existed in each of the regions and that if we navigated between the concepts of ‘community museum’ and ‘ecomuseum,’ we had the opportunity



FIGURE 5.2 Workshop on defining a community museum, EU-LAC Museums Kick-Off Meeting, National Museum of Archaeology, Lisbon, November 2016. © Karin Weil

to research meaningful initiatives in museums and community empowerment in Europe and LAC. These gaps were areas where we could grow as researchers, facilitators, teachers and trainers.

During this initial meeting and workshop, we found ourselves encountering, for the first time, the challenge of developing modes of research that took into account our differences, prejudices and diversity. From this workshop and the group reflection in Lisbon, we were able to list areas of agreement around the concept of ‘community’ (see Table 5.1).

Each of the aspects mentioned in the process of reflection refers especially to the museum as a space created, managed and in direct relationship with the community in which it is located. Despite the differences in social, cultural and environmental contexts and values, these spaces seek to create options for those communities that do not have space or a voice within traditional museums. In community-based museums, the communities create a place to come together to articulate their sense of identity based on their own stories and memory. However, in this same discussion, it became evident that there was a need to deepen and define (a) a frame of reference around the concepts of territory and its multiple connections, (b) what we understand by community and how communities define themselves, (c) the

TABLE 5.1 Key components of a community-based museum: summary of reflections shared during the workshop held at the first consortium meeting, November 2016, Lisbon

<i>Consideraciones para un museo comunitaria</i>	<i>Considerations for a community museum</i>
1 Gestionado por y para la comunidad local, en el sentido del desarrollo sustentable	1 Managed for and by the local community, directed to sustainable development
2 Basado en una comunidad específica para preservar, mantener y crear patrimonio comunitario	2 Based in a specific community, to keep alive and to create community heritage
3 Surge como una solución para una necesidad comunitaria	3 Arises as a solution to a community need
4 Creado y gestionado por una comunidad más no exclusivamente	4 Created and managed by a community, but not exclusively
5 Un museo que involucre las actividades de la comunidad y su entorno	5 A museum that involves activities of the community and its surroundings
6 Capaz de integrar varias visiones sobre la comunidad y que incluya un proceso continuo y en transformación de la relación entre las varias generaciones que son parte de esa misma comunidad	6 Capable of integrating several visions of the community, and that includes a continuously transformational process in the relationship between the generations in the community
7 Un espacio de intercambio intergeneracional	7 A space of intergenerational exchange
8 Una herramienta para la acción social y territorial	8 A tool for social action and territorial action
9 Una herramienta organizada directa o indirectamente por la comunidad	9 A tool organised directly or indirectly by the community
10 Un espacio para tratar temas que se relacionan con la comunidad misma	10 A site to address topics that relate to the community itself
11 Comunica la historia desde el punto de vista de la comunidad	11 Communicates the history of a place and its people from the community's point of view
12 Actor principal: la comunidad	12 Community: main actor
13 Definición abierta e inclusiva	13 Open and inclusive definition

relationship between sustainable development and community initiatives and (d) how to address issues of respect, interculturality and social inclusion. The use of the term 'territory' also varied by country. Somewhat like 'the new museology,' the term has been reconsidered not only as a physical and environmental space but also as a form of representation of the social, environmental and cultural fabric. Although in each of the countries, the terms denote the same areas, certainly the ancestral cosmovision of the pre-Hispanic peoples, the sense of belonging, diversity and migration in the Caribbean islands, and the colonial aspects of history

with which a number of EU countries are burdened makes each of these countries perceive the term ‘territory’ differently; however, the concepts of place, meaning, community, social role and processes are used in all of them.

Developing research questions

At the same meeting in Lisbon, it was agreed that each principal investigator would submit ideas based on their own country’s context, and from these, a starting framework was to be proposed. The reflection on and development of these concepts allowed the research team to make regional differences explicit and to build the consortium methodology around a clear and more inclusive theoretical framework in the context of regional diversity.

In general terms, the following questions emerged around the historical, environmental and social contexts of each of the regions involved in the project. Attempting to answer these questions allowed us to incorporate regional differences and the implications of these differences into the development of research carried out in the years that followed.

How do we link the concept of territory? What is its relationship with community-based museums?

Territory—I prefer the word ‘place’—is an essential component of the concept of ‘belonging’, belonging to a landscape, a past; and having a link to the tangible and intangible cultural and natural heritage of a place is an essential component in defining a ‘community’. Places are powerful in that they hold memories and help us interpret or understand our community.

(Researcher from Scotland, Lisbon workshop, November 2016)

Territory and community are an indissoluble binomial.

(Researcher from Peru, Lisbon workshop November 2016)

The community-based museum is a situated museum. It is located in a territory and is sensitive, and potentially incidental, to the sociocultural dynamics that occur in it. As a public space of a cultural nature, it can be a tool for strengthening community relations over time.

The community-based museum needs to pay attention to the ethical dimension of the processes it works on. Like any discourse, the community-based museum is in a position to make a statement, and it needs to keep its messaging consistent.

The main ideas and generalised reflection on this question can be summarised as follows: in each country, the concept of territory is defined differently, as it is a broad concept that considers tangible and intangible heritage. For many, the community is strongly linked to territory, even though some communities are not defined by their territory.

How do we define 'community'? How does the community define itself?

A group of people who agree to acknowledge certain characteristics (cultural, political, etc.) and/or interests in common.

(Researcher from France, Lisbon workshop, November 2016)

The community must be defined from within, listening to and respecting its own discourse of self-determination, territoriality, self-government, worldview, historical memory and the relationships that connect it (communality). [Translated from original Spanish.]

(Researcher from Costa Rica, Lisbon workshop, November 2016)

A community is defined by relationships of belonging and participation in common codes. It is not necessarily associated with a geographical territory.

In most cases, community-based museums are created with reference to a territory or to a territorialised historical experience. In this sense, they constitute an instance of mediation, a link, between the notions of community and territory (a community that may have a relationship with a territory or its history but does not currently cohabit in it).

The community defines itself by identity and difference. This act of definition contains a dynamic potential; in other words, it can mobilise groups towards the fulfilment of common objectives. It can also be defined 'from the outside' by those who pay attention to common features. This responds to a descriptive register that allows for the distinction of characteristics and limits.

What is the relationship between the community-based museum and the concept of development?

A community museum can become an articulating element and even an impulse for territorial development. And this is so, because in a community museum, one can differentiate the basic keys to development: social innovation, the existence of territorial resources and the set of relationships between territorial actors, networks that take on various forms.

(Researcher from Costa Rica, Lisbon workshop, November 2016)

The community-based museum can be a tool to contribute to the development of a territory or a community, since it contains a story about its past and with it a vision about its present and even certain expectations about its future.

Communities can use the museum to influence political decisions that affect their territories. The project proposed to work with local and regional museums and with the international community of museums, taking into consideration that communities are dynamic, self-defined entities that share common codes, needs and characteristics. Community museums can also be tools that contribute to the

development of the community (depending on the objective and activities of the museum), prompting the community to reflect on its own resources, its history and its present situation as it prepares for the challenges of the future. Development can be understood as economic and human (Brown, 2019).

How do we address respect and interculturality?

[...] the museum must be able to inform about the diverse cultural histories existing in a geographical space through time without hiding the relationships or conflict that may have existed between them, that is, in a historical framework that responsibly and respectfully addresses differences in identity. The museums must be guarantors of human rights, of the convention 169 ILO [International Labour Organization] and of all the legal instruments subscribed by the states for the fulfilment, respect and promotion of cultural and social diversity. They must generate conditions for intercultural dialogue and promote actions under a formal framework of respect for indigenous peoples, children, women and the community in general.

(Researcher from Chile, Lisbon workshop, November 2016)

Clear and respectful communication, ideally face to face at regular intervals. Research across regions will also deepen understanding of other contexts, at first hand.

(Researcher from Scotland, Lisbon workshop, November 2016)

The community exists as part of a mosaic of original histories and contexts. To achieve peaceful intercultural relations within and between communities, museums must act in a respectful manner, fostering communication and building bridges between people and communities; it must be a multifaceted space that promotes respect and tolerance of differences.

Next research steps

At various points in the project, we returned to this topic of defining community museums in the process of developing a shared bi-regional research methodology. In 2017, a round table on the topic 'What is a community museum in your region?' was organised during the Carifesta XIII Symposium in Barbados, hosted by the University of the West Indies. The round table garnered perspectives from Jamaica, Barbados and Guyana and included a presentation by the then President of the Museums Association of the Caribbean, Dr Sherene James-Williams.

At the round table, it was explained that community museums take many forms in the Caribbean region, defying a fixed definition and allowing space for adaptation and alternative histories outside the national museum model imported from Europe (see also Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke, 2018).¹ The project compendium *On Sustainable and Community Museums* (Brown, Davis and Raposo, 2019) then

aimed to provide reflections and pedagogic tools to suggest how a community might go about conceiving and creating a new community museum or ecomuseum if they so wished. The book contains salient case studies of community-based museums in each partner country and shares the experience and knowledge of our EU-LAC Museums project advisors—Beatriz Espinoza, Hugues de Varine, Peter Davis and Teresa Morales Lersch—concerning the key concepts and features of community and sustainable museums.

Steering Committee meeting of EU-LAC Museums (Antigua Guatemala, 2018)

Having reflected on community and sustainable museums in EU and LAC in the book, and recognising the need to broaden the discussion geographically, the subject of community-based museums was taken forwards into the steering committee meeting of EU-LAC Museums held in Antigua Guatemala in March 2018.² On this occasion, we decided to grapple with the question of definition in a more concrete way and to create a survey on the subject, called ‘What is a community museum in your region?’ This survey was hosted by the University of St Andrews Qualtrics system and attained the university’s ethical approval. It was originally designed in Antigua in collaboration with the steering committee members, and it was subsequently edited by the entire consortium and its advisors, notably Peter Davis. The survey results (analysis to follow) have shown that while the community museum is largely about the story of a local community and is a place that caters to that local community, the community welcomes outside expertise in fostering sustainability as long as there are clear terms and parity of esteem between the entities. In contrast to the ICOM museum definition (2007), community museums give prominence to ‘people,’ ‘place,’ ‘territory’ and ‘identity,’ as well as many definitions reflecting on the intrinsic relationship between the past and the future.³ In short, community museums are an inclusive and dynamic way of appropriating a community’s memory and experiences in the 21st century. They are not only important but also essential for fostering peaceful and resilient societies.

Based on the project research involving community consultations, another milestone was reached when the EU-LAC Museums consortium researchers prepared policy recommendations during two strategic meetings, held first in the University of the West Indies, Barbados (November 2018) and second in Brussels (April 2019). These recommendations were presented to different European Commission and European Union services, including the European External Action Service and the Commission’s Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development, as well as to some invited staff from UNESCO and the United Nations during a policy round table in Brussels in April 2019. These recommendations were subsequently developed into a public report (Brown et al., 2019). This collaborative round table marked a significant moment of recognition that the project could serve as a model for cultural cooperation with LAC.

From theory and practice to policy: EU-LAC Museums policy round table and report (Brussels, 2019)

Reflecting on thematic axes with a balance between the perspectives of Europe and LAC, the report highlights that EU policy can consider and include EU-LAC Museums' project findings. A great deal can be achieved in and through community-based museums, as distinguished from mainstream museums, which are often associated with certain demographics and funding structures that receive state attention and support. Community-based museums offer a lens through which to interrogate both macro and micro, global and local relations. However, community-based museums are often under-represented in policy, while our project findings demonstrate that social engagement and proactive strategies advanced through community-based museums have the potential to challenge and enhance existing EU policy that seeks to contribute to development in LAC, thus making those museums more relevant and sustainable for the future.

Through the vehicle of the policy report, the project consortium aspired to create a bridge between policy and practice, allowing community voices to speak through the project outputs to the policy makers and funders whose priorities are implemented by the project.

The EU-LAC Museums policy report includes, but is not limited to, the following key recommendations:

- 'Community-based museums and heritage initiatives [...] merit more visibility and agency to work through the critical issues affecting human life in different parts of the world.'
- 'Museum activities with social impacts are truly important for cultural diplomacy and should be recognised and supported. In particular, community-based museums have a special role to play as they are, by their very nature, deeply rooted at local level; the engagement of communities is embedded in their core functioning.'
- 'Taking the socio-economic situation of local as well as national areas into account in their strategies, museums and policy makers can contribute to local development. Incorporating museums into local/national development strategies can prove a useful method of medium to long-term partnerships and ensure the meaningful contribution of museums and their policies to local development.'
- 'Policy makers should put the protection of cultural heritage protection (tangible and intangible) at the heart of youth participation and engagement strategies [...].'
- 'Grass-roots understanding should be given the opportunity to inform and affect policy in a bottom-up manner locally, nationally and bi-regionally.'
- 'Museums should be enabled to lay the groundwork for sustainability by recognising the right to self-determination and by making visible the full range of community voices.'

(Brown et al., 2019. Report, p. 19)

Building on the high-level visibility of the project results and recommendations noted above, on 7 September 2019, the 34th General Assembly of ICOM, held in Kyoto, Japan, adopted Resolution No. 5, entitled ‘Museums, Communities and Sustainability,’⁴ conceived as part of the EU-LAC Museums project and submitted by the two ICOM Regional Alliances in Europe and LAC. It marked a historic moment for bi-regional and international cultural cooperation concerning the role of community-based museums in today’s world.

***New ICOM Resolution ‘Museums, Communities and Sustainability’
(Kyoto, Japan, 2019)***

Resolutions adopted by the General Assembly—the decision-making body of ICOM—mark the path of the organisation’s actions and missions in the years that follow. Over the past few decades, ICOM has adopted resolutions supporting community museums and highlighting the notion of museums going beyond the formal definition (for example, ICOM 1997, 2010, 2019). Previously, these concepts included key elements such as the recognition of ‘the importance of museums in promoting harmony, mutual understanding and exchanges between communities locally, regionally and nationally’ (ICOM Resolution 5, 2010, p. 5) and the role of museums as ‘fundamental tools for the individual and collective development of critical minds, of self-awareness, of the sense of citizenship and of community’s identity’ (ICOM Resolution 1, 1995, p. 2). In this same 1995 Resolution, the museum community had already noted that ‘some local museums all over the world which are undertaking innovative activities focusing on everyday topics of community life, trying to challenge traditional models and reaching beyond the limits of exhibition spaces, are facing threats of closure and lack of support from their governing bodies,’ and it urged ‘local and national governments to recognise and support museums as cultural mechanisms in the service of communities, in the valorization of their particular identities, and as unique tools for the collective management of their cultural heritage’ (p. 2).

Resolution No. 5 (2019) extends this legacy by acknowledging and recognising the challenges faced by museums as well as their communities in the 21st century. Indeed, it not only advocates for more support and recognition of community-based museums, which today continue to face threats of closure and lack of recognition, but it also takes community-based museums into account in the global reflections on the definition of a museum and the role of museums in sustainable development.

Following the 2016 ICOM General Conference in Milan, ICOM created a new Committee for Museum Definition, Prospects and Potentials (MDPP) to study the current definition of museums. They explored similarities and differences in values and practices of museums in diverse and rapidly changing societies. Combining wide-ranging dialogue across the membership with dedicated expert forums, the committee addressed the ambiguous and often contradictory trends in society and the subsequent new conditions, obligations and possibilities for museums. The EU-LAC Museums project engaged in this process through its symposium, held

at the University of St Andrews on 25 November 2017, on the topic of Defining the Museum of the 21st Century.⁵ Hosted in association with ICOM's International Committee for Museology, the symposium followed on from one held in La Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris, and dovetailed similar symposia held in the Universidad Nacional de Avellaneda, Buenos Aires (9–10 November) and the Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (16–17 November) (Brown and Mairesse, 2018; Brown, Brulon Soares and Nazor, 2018).

Following the processes of active listening and collecting and collating alternative definitions, work done by the MDPP Committee, in July 2019, the Executive Board of ICOM voted for a new, alternative museum definition to be included in the ICOM Statutes instead of the current museum definition. Subsequently, in September 2019, the 26th ICOM General Conference, in Kyoto, Japan, hosted numerous sessions, round tables and debates around this topic, after which the Extraordinary General Assembly, on 7 September 2019, decided to postpone the vote on the new museum definition.

In this context, the EU-LAC Museums project, through the Resolution No. 5, made a significant contribution to this global reflection among museum professionals by highlighting the 'vast number of community-led organisations' with a focus on the fact that the latter 'do not currently fulfil the ICOM Definition of a Museum (2007),' while recommending the museum community to 'remain sensitive to local and regional differences and demonstrate awareness of the geo-political dimension of the concept of the museum, especially relating to the resource needs of community-based museums in lower- to middle-income countries.'⁶

It is worth noting that another pressing theme addressed at the ICOM 2019 General Conference was sustainable development. In addition to opening the conference with a plenary session entitled 'Curating sustainable futures through museums,' another resolution was adopted during the ICOM General Assembly on this specific topic. Resolution No. 1 'On sustainability and the implementation of *Agenda 2030, Transforming our World*' was developed by the ICOM Working Group on Sustainability and submitted by ICOM UK and ICOM Norway. This resolution recognises the role of museums in creating a sustainable future and calls for empowering museums, their visitors and their communities in this regard.

The first recommendation of Resolution No. 5 echoes and complements it by underlining that community-led museums further the 'sustainable use [of natural, cultural and intangible heritages] for environmental, social and economic development of communities, towards achievement of the UN 2030 goals and climate justice.'

The impact of COVID-19 on community-based museums

More recently, and responding directly to COVID-19 and other environmental and political challenges faced by project partners during the years 2016–2020, EU-LAC Museums organised a webinar series, 'Community-based Museums in

Times of Crisis' (12 June 2020, 29 June 2020 and 10 July 2020), which involved 21 invited speakers and reached approximately 905 people from 35 countries via Zoom and Facebook. This global online engagement shows how the research into community-based museums developed by EU-LAC Museums has empowered communities and museum professionals to tell their own stories and address challenges facing the preservation of their heritage and cultural identity.

The COVID-19 crisis has not only exposed us to an epidemiological crisis, but also, above all, it has demonstrated how humanity has abused finite natural resources and voraciously appropriated life-sustaining systems that leave no room for nature. These environmental problems have been mirrored—and arguably exacerbated—by social and economic inequalities that have also been exposed by COVID-19, which has made clear that there is a need for people to reconnect with nature and one another. In this way, the concept of 'community' could lead to progress for the common good of communities and the environment. The need for change is urgent.

The work carried out as part of the EU-LAC Museums project connects in many ways with these contemporary challenges faced by society. Our findings indicate that there is an important role for the global museum community. The project has shown that strong bi-regional relationships and mutual learning are key assets to bring to the global reflection on the roles and definition(s) of museums in different regions. During a second round table in January 2021, we proposed and recommended community-based museums as tools through which many of these needs can be addressed.

Our analyses of community-based museums are based on our own experiences as researchers and professionals working in Europe and LAC, and these analyses have been tested widely through debate and promotion in our ICOM networks and survey. Our project has shown that by working closely with communities and linking with local governments, community-based museums can contribute to sustainable development in different contexts and promote development of peaceful and resilient societies.

Survey: 'What is a community museum in your region?' (2018–2020)

By the census date of 19 April 2021, the survey attained 528 responses from 70 countries written in English, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and French (mainly in English and Spanish).⁷ The responses have proven insightful in qualitative terms for the continuing process of honing our research questions as academics and for taking practical steps to increase international recognition for community museums through our partner, ICOM.

In this survey, 16.4 per cent of the participants reached were from the LAC and 13.4 per cent from the EU, with 70.2 per cent of participants coming from the rest of the world. The largest number of participants were from the UK (largely thanks to

the community heritage network in Scotland), followed by Japan (thanks to ICOM Kyoto advertising and dissemination through Japan’s network of community museums), then Costa Rica, Peru, Chile, Portugal, Canada, the United States, Italy (thanks to the network of Italian ecomuseums), Spain, Greece and others. Targeted advertising through project networks of community museums and heritage, as well as through social media and our project webinar series, meant that the survey reached an appropriate demographic, with the majority responding that the ‘organisation/group interested in local or community development’ and that they are part of is a community museum, as shown in Figure 5.3.

In general, respondents engaged well with the survey questions, providing additional comments and reflections where prompted. At times, the specific wording of individual questions or the use of terms such as ‘community’ or ‘sustainability’ was

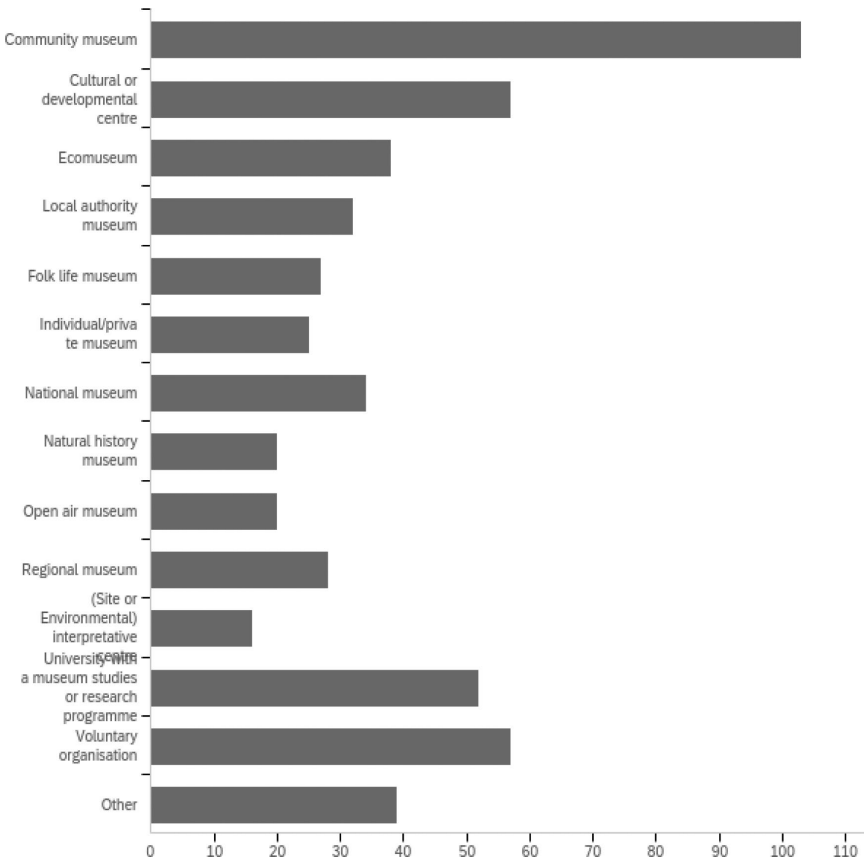


FIGURE 5.3 Survey response to the question, ‘If you are part of an organisation/group or individual interested in local or community development, what is its type?’

questioned by one or two respondents, especially those identifying as academics, who helpfully qualified their responses in the comments. The majority of respondents, especially those identifying as working for community museums, engaged generously with the free-text questions, yielding useful data for thinking around the characteristics of community museums on a global scale.

In response to the question ‘Which of the following criteria help to define what a community museum is? (Please select any number of answers. Rank your answers in order of priority with 1 being the highest priority),’ the option ‘a geographical territory’ received the most selections, followed by ‘a local sense of community,’ ‘a local sense or spirit of place’ and ‘a shared local history.’ These findings are in harmony with responses to the next question: ‘The purpose of a community museum is to provide (please select all relevant fields).’ The majority selected in response ‘a sense of belonging’ (236 selections), followed by ‘community participation in heritage matters’ (231 selections) and ‘heritage preservation’ (213). Interestingly, ‘collection of objects’ received only 124 selections and ‘lobbying’ had the lowest score, at 50 selections.

Responses to the question, ‘In the community museum(s) that you know, whose/what story (past, present or future) is—or should be—being told? (Please select all relevant fields),’ are illustrated in Figure 5.4. These responses were supported with free-text comments reinforcing the importance of members of the community telling their own story, especially elders, though occasionally comments suggested

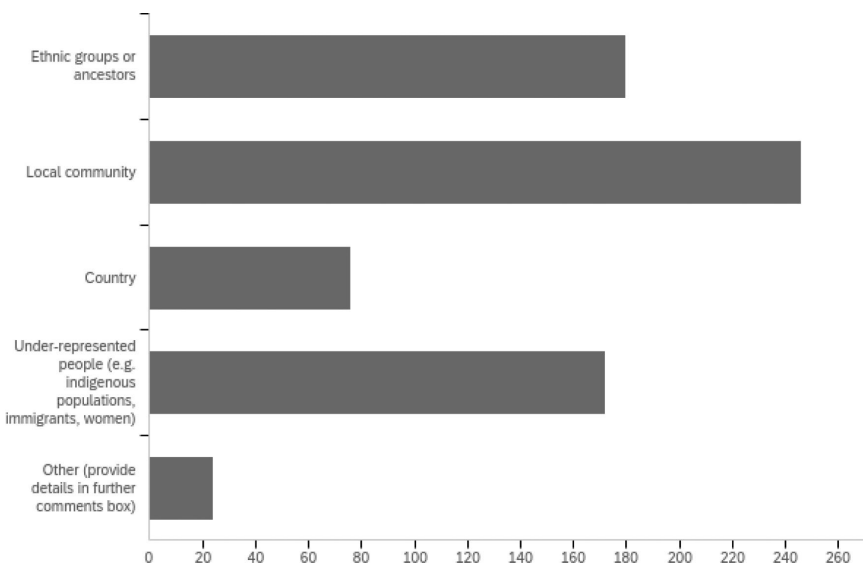


FIGURE 5.4 Survey response to the question, ‘In the community museum(s) that you know, whose/what story (past, present or future) is—or should be—being told? (Please select all relevant fields)’

that a local government or ministry of culture should tell the story if the museum were municipal rather than private or independent.

The question ‘Who is the main public for the community museum?’ had the clearest response of all, building on the evidence that the community museum is characterised as created, governed and used by the local community. The majority, 56.8 per cent, saw the local community as the main public, while 9.8 per cent selected school groups and students, and only 9.5 per cent prioritised tourists. In these free-text comments, many people commented that all options were relevant; the following comment is especially indicative of the answers to this question: ‘The community museum serves the community in focus first, and expands outward.’ One Scottish respondent commented: ‘in [the] Highland region we are pushed more and more to service tourists and I think that this is [to] the detriment of the contemporary relevance and social potential of the museums.’

Answering, ‘Do you think that a community museum should best be run by ...,’ yielded data revealing that respondents thought a combination of community members, local associations, volunteers and professionals should run a community museum, bringing their various expertises together for the local heritage community.

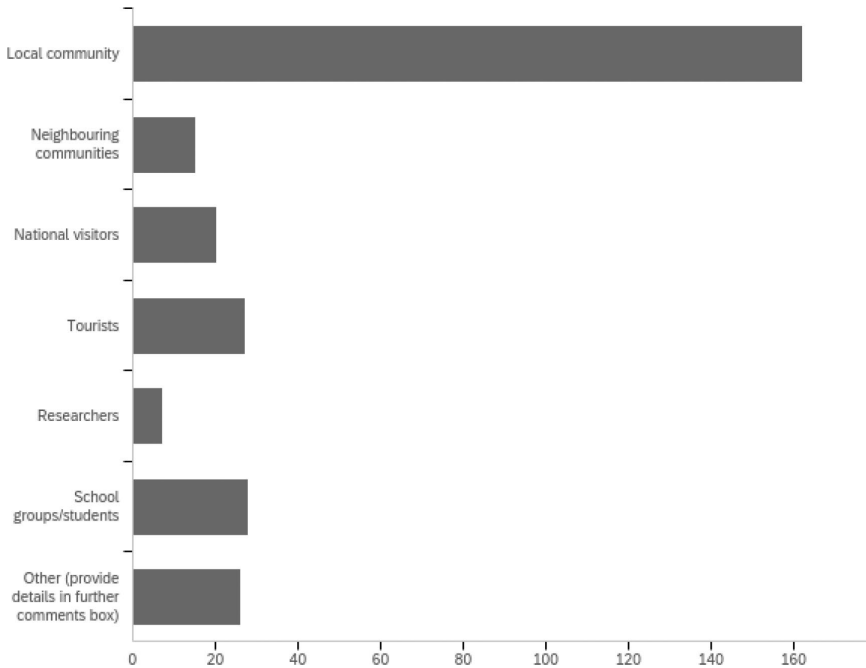


FIGURE 5.5 Survey response to the question, ‘Who is the main public for the community museum?’

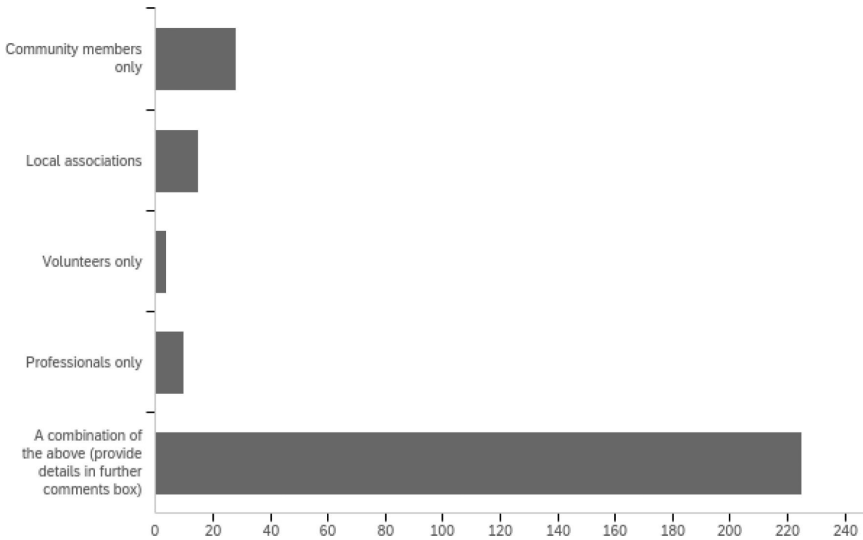


FIGURE 5.6 Survey response to the question, ‘Do you think that a community museum should best be run by...?’

For example, one free-text response read: ‘Community members provide the substantive material, professionals help to curate and preserve for promotional and archival purposes, volunteers help make it sustainable over time.’ Another stated:

I think it helps to be as professional as possible, but what that means will vary by context. An all-voluntary museum can be more professional than one with paid staff if they have the right expertise on the board and amongst the volunteers. And while its best to have most of the board drawn from the community being represented, some fresh eyes and fresh perspectives can be hugely beneficial.

Several responses in Spanish agreed:

Comunitarios que estén capacitados como profesionales del patrimonio.

Un museo comunitario es un pacto entre todos los agentes implicados.

Se necesita a los miembros de la comunidad que la conocen, las asociaciones que pueden apoyarlo y los profesionales para darle el contexto y organización.

Respondents made clear through the free-text comments that they saw the need for community agency, supported by professionals where useful, although a minority felt that museum professionals should be in charge, with input from the community. This comment in Italian is indicative of that view: ‘la gestione in senso stretto

deve essere svolta da soli professionisti, ma appoggiandosi anche ai membri della comunità e/o a volontari’.

The debate was then continued through the next question, ‘What makes a community museum sustainable? (Please select any number of answers. Rank your answers in order of priority, with 1 being the highest priority).’ ‘Capacity building for staff/volunteers/community’ ranked highest at 25 per cent, followed by ‘substantial start-up funding’ at 13 per cent, and ‘formal community agreement’ and ‘competent organisation and financial administration,’ both at 12 per cent, as visualised in Figure 5.7.

Clearly, the biggest need for local communities is investment in capacity building on the ground, as well as a defined system of governance made in the community. Once this structure is in place, the participants were very open to external engagement, especially on the international level. For example, 88.9 per cent of respondents thought that ‘community museums should engage with international cultural institutions, networks and activities,’ with 2.3 per cent responding ‘no’ and 9.1 per cent indicating ‘don’t know.’ A large number of respondents (222) completed the free-text question ‘In what ways should community museums engage with national cultural institutions, networks and activities?’, demonstrating an overwhelming positivity towards this type of engagement. In general, respondents saw this type of activity as useful for, among other things,

- the value of networks for strengthening community museums (especially networks between community museums themselves, which national cultural institutions can engage with),
- creating equality in partnership working,
- recuperation or preservation of indigenous community histories,
- sharing between national museum priorities and community voice,

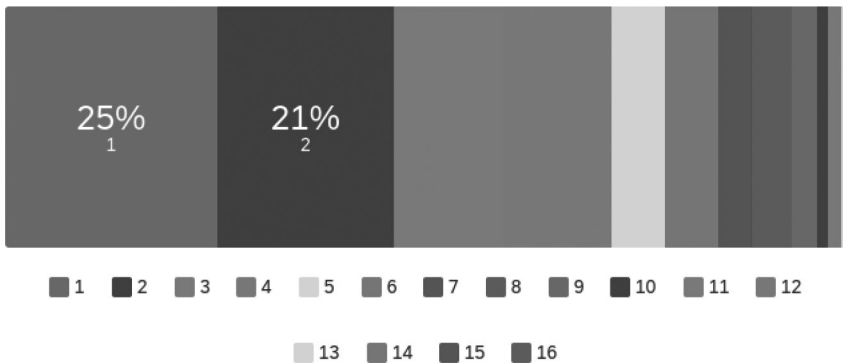


FIGURE 5.7 Survey response to the question, ‘What makes a community museum sustainable? (Please select any number of answers. Rank your answers in order of priority, with 1 being the highest priority)’

with public policy.’ These latter values echo strongly those of the Latin American *Museos Comunitarios* movement through greater awareness of networking and support mechanisms. Several comments also mentioned the role of engagement in the promotion of European citizenship.

These findings on the perceived value of networks and visibility were made even more granular in the light of responses to the next question, which revealed that almost half of the respondents did not benefit from these types of actions, highlighting a clear need for capacity building and networking in the sector. Asked ‘If you are involved in a community museum, have you experienced collaboration with other community museums nationally or internationally?’, 51.3 per cent answered ‘yes,’ and 48.7 per cent ‘no.’ As a follow-on question, participants were then asked if they would consider the possibility of twinning with another community museum (in the way in which cities have twins), and 83.7 per cent said ‘yes,’ and 16.3 per cent ‘no.’ However, free-text comments warned about the capacity of time and resources available for other activities in a volunteer-run organisation and also a potential lack of interest among community members to look elsewhere.

The question ‘Why do you think that community museums are important? Please comment below on the attributes that they have and what they might achieve that more traditional museums cannot,’ attracted answers mainly focused on community voice, storytelling and local history, genealogy, traditions and artefacts, as well as agency over these attributes. In general, the comments demonstrated the belief that, because community museums are close to the local community, they create the best conditions for bringing people together to build community agency and collective endeavours, especially around ideas of identity and among under-represented groups. These attributes are contrasted with ‘traditional’ museums, which have, according to one response in Spanish, ‘high state or private subsidies and are subject to governments of the day and budgets conditioned to the type of discourse that is established.’ Another summarised (in Spanish): ‘Unlike traditional museums where pieces of materials that were produced by people are exhibited to create a connection with visitors, community museums involve people in the community.’ And in English, another responded:

They are less intimidating and ‘authoritarian’ than the nationals, and communities often feel connected to them rather than excluded by them. They usually link to local and regional shared places, identities, and even things in living memory, giving a very close and tangible sense of belonging.

And again, ‘They closely connect with the grassroots, with the owners and creators of heritage. Community museums also offers [*sic*] a platform for previously marginalised [*sic*] and excluded voices to be heard in museums and museology.’ A respondent in French also pointed out that, while traditional museums may seek to transform the macrocosm into a microcosm, community museums do the opposite, by transforming the unique character of the community into heritage, thus

on how, in contrast to traditional museums whose collections are sited inside a building, an ecomuseum can increase an area's attractiveness as a location to live, visit, work and invest in. These findings affirm the definition of a community museum that our project advisor Peter Davis formulated in 1999 that a community museum is a local museum based in the communities of interest that govern it: 'that is, a small museum with limited collections that serves those people in a defined geographical area' (Davis, 2011, pp. 36–37). Davis explains how such a museum can provide a 'sense of place' for local identities, having affinities with the ecomuseums where local people designate their own territory, encompassing aspects of landscape (geology, scenery), built heritage (architecture), natural heritage and intangible heritage (dialect, songs, stories) (Davis, 2011, p. 81. See also Davis, 2008). The final free-text question of the survey, 'Can you offer a definition of a community museum?', is so topical today in the light of ICOM debates around the museum definition that it merits close analysis of both the geography of the answers and the most frequently used words in the definitions offered.

Notable in the definitions offered is the prominence of the words 'people,' 'place,' 'space,' 'culture' and 'future,' contrasting with, for example, the 2007 ICOM museum definition.⁸ Other than the words 'heritage' and 'intangible,' most of the words from the survey responses were absent in the ICOM museum definition.

Conclusion

By creating a space for people to connect with their culture and tangible and intangible heritage, and by finding a balance between understanding the past for building a future, community museums are well placed on the international stage to answer many societal questions from the grassroots. It is for this reason that, in our first EU-LAC Museums Policy Round Table report, the team recommends that 'Community-based museums and heritage initiatives [...] merit more visibility and agency to work through the critical issues affecting human life in different parts of the world' and that 'Museums should be enabled to lay the groundwork for sustainability by recognizing the right to self-determination and by making visible the full range of community museums' (Brown et al., 2019). Resolution No. 5, adopted on 7 September 2019 at the 34th General Assembly of ICOM held in Kyoto, Japan, further reinforced this point, building on past ICOM resolutions (1995, 2013, 2019). The resolution, drafted by EU-LAC Museums supported by ICOM Europe and ICOM LAC, highlighted the 'vast number of community-led organisations' and the fact that these 'do not currently fulfil the ICOM Definition of a Museum (2007),' while recommending that the museum community 'remain sensitive to local and regional differences and demonstrate awareness of the geo-political dimension of the concept of the museum, especially relating to the resource needs of community-based museums in lower to middle income countries.'

Defining may always prove contentious, but in the process of discussing differences in relation to a space for community museums, however they may be defined, has opened to inform discussions around ecological museology in an age of decoloniality through needs-based and co-produced participatory research practices, interviews in the field and the EU-LAC Museums survey.

Appendix

In what follows, a number of the proposals are listed where the respondent named their country and occasionally the community with which they identified. They are all reproduced verbatim, without correcting any spelling or grammar, and English translations are included directly following the original response where relevant. The proposals are listed by region to compare and contrast regional responses.

Europe

Bernera, Isle of Lewis, Scotland: ‘A local run museum that collects and preserves local heritage, be that history, archive documents, traditions, stories or artefacts. The collection should be available for the local community and visitors/researchers from further afield to see and access so that they can all learn more about the community and place. Where volunteer run it should always try to use the best practice for preserving and presenting the collection and be able to make use of new techniques where possible. A museum while showing the past must not be stuck in the past itself.’

Isle of North Uist, Scotland: ‘Celebrates, affirms and sustains all the languages and modes that make communities distinctive and help them to survive and develop organically and holistically.’

France: ‘A community museum is a place that reflects the history, habits, culture and ways of life of a specific area, or a specific group of people, allowing to connect people through stories, memories and objects of a common past, present and towards a future to build.’

Thessaloniki, Greece: ‘A community museum exhibits material culture of specific identity groups usually determined of a specific geographic area. They include all kind of collections that depict the community, so they really can be very dynamic. Community museums function as a place where local people can gather.’

Valdostana, Italy: ‘Un museo diffuso che preserva e condivide il patrimonio immateriale e materiale della comunità.’

Comunità di Salbertrand (TO), Italy: ‘Condivisione di luoghi, saperi, modalità di gestione di risorse, conservazione e valorizzazione del proprio patrimonio.’

Comunidad Valenciana, Spain: ‘Museo que nacen de la comunidad y no de una administración.’ (‘Museum born from the community and not from an administration.’)

Caribbean

Village Artistique de Noailles, Croix-de-Bouquets, Haiti: 'Musée appartenant à une population et géré par celle-ci avec l'aide de professionnels.'

Diego Martin, Trinidad: 'It is a community-owned place that organises and celebrates the objects, stories, and artwork that is important to the residents of a community.'

Lethem, Guyana: 'A Community Museum is a place of artefacts, physical and virtual, that reflects the local cultures of a socially inclusive demographic and geographical boundary.'

St James, Jamaica: 'Space to share tangible and intangible cultural heritage and stories in the past [sic] present and enable reflection and discussion on positive change [sic] for future.'

San Fernando, Trinidad and Tobago: 'A formal or informal museum that reflects the history and heritage of a particular community or community groups whether localised or dispersed.'

Latin America

Bolivia: 'Museo Comunitario. Es un espacio cultural creado por los miembros de una comunidad, en el sentido no restringido de su significado, donde se construye autoconocimiento colectivo, propiciando la reflexión, la crítica y la creatividad, reafirmando los valores materiales y simbólicos de su Patrimonio Cultural, reconocido según sus usos y costumbre.' ('Community Museum. It is a cultural space created by the members of a community, in the unrestricted sense of its meaning, where collective self-knowledge is built, fostering reflection, criticism and creativity, reaffirming the material and symbolic values of its Cultural Heritage, recognised according to its uses and custom.')

Comunidade Vozes de Mestres, Brazil: 'Um lugar comum, com pessoas comuns, a contarem suas histórias comuns, sua cultura, seus modos de fazer, ser em todas as áreas, de forma simples e verdadeira.'

Comunidad vulnerable, Colombia: 'Museo Comunitario, es el arte para y por la Vida.' (Vulnerable community, Colombia: 'Community Museum, is the art to and for Life.')

Colombia: 'Museo comunitario es un espacio de expansión patrimonial material e inmaterial local que permite la participación de la comunidad en temáticas, objetos y acciones.' ('Community museum is a space for the expansion of local tangible and intangible heritage that allows community participation in themes, objects and actions.')

Placilla de Peñuelas, Valparaiso, Chile: 'Museo comunitario es una institución al servicio de su propia comunidad que permite a través de la autogestión, asociatividad y redes de apoyo local, nacional e internacional, desarrollar proyectos y acciones para cuidar, educar y difundir el patrimonio e historia de la propia comunidad con la comunidad. Es un espacio abierto, inclusivo y democrático.' ('Community museum is an institution at the service of its own community that

allows, through self-management, associativity and local, national and international support networks, to develop projects and actions to care for, educate and disseminate the heritage and history of the community itself with the community. It is an open, inclusive and democratic space.’)

Antigua, Guatemala: ‘Es un museo que aporta a la comunidad. espacio donde los integrantes de la comunidad construyen un autoconocimiento colectivo, propiciando la reflexión, la crítica y la creatividad. Fortalece la identidad, porque legitima la historia y los valores propios, proyectando la forma de vida de la comunidad hacia adentro y hacia fuera de ella. Fortalece la memoria que alimenta sus aspiraciones de futuro.’ (‘It is a museum that contributes to the community. Space where community members build a collective self-knowledge, fostering reflection, criticism and creativity. It strengthens identity, because it legitimises history and their own values, projecting the community’s way of life inwards and outwards. It strengthens the memory that nourish their aspirations for the future.’)

La Merced, Ecuador: ‘Son espacios que han sido creados en asambleas de la comunidad en busca de un beneficio de asociación y representación de su pueblo a la sociedad en la cual no se ve representada, con el fin de promover sus costumbres, tradiciones, memoria oral, saberes que han sido transmutados en la historia de la comunidad que busca continuar con su legado.’ (‘They are spaces that have been created in community assemblies searching for a benefit of association and representation of their people to the society in which they are not represented, in order to promote their customs, traditions, oral memory, knowledge that has been transmuted into the history of the community that seeks to continue its legacy.’)

Altiplano, Peru: ‘A heritage-focused space that focuses on decentralised groups of people and decentralised cultural narratives and includes a high level of community participation.’

Caracas, Venezuela: ‘Aquella institución organizada en un espacio con una colección que representa a su comunidad, un espacio para la educación y el crecimiento de una población que se encuentra más lejos de las ciudades principales.’ Another from San Vicente, Nicoya Costa Rica: es el escenario vivo de un territorio, con tradiciones y diario oficio de sus habitantes.’ (‘That institution organised in a space with a collection that represents its community, a space for education and the growth of the population that is further from the main cities.’)

Asia-Pacific

Tuwali tribe of Ifugao, Philippines: ‘A community museum is an important tool for the collection, preservation, and exhibition of material and non-material culture of a group of people which can be opened for innovation as to its handling so it can reach out to wider patronage.’

Municipality of Murcia, Negros Occidental, Philippines: ‘Community Museum is a living cultural hub that is being maintained [sic] by the locals and is being shared to other communities for mutual knowledge and understanding.’

Urban, India: 'Community museums can be defined as the place of conservation and preservation of local traditions, customs, history and heritage involved in documentation, display and dissemination of the same with an aim to generate interest and livelihood enough to support and sustain these communities and their heritage from vanishing through appropriation and assimilation.'

Suwon, South Korea: 'A place that embodies the values of people, life, and places'

Academic museum and museums practitioners, Thailand: 'Museum that runs by community member. Inclusive all members to be engaged.'

Africa

City, Egypt: 'Community museum is the museum in which all local culture, intangible heritage, crafts and hand made could be shown and preserved for purposes of tourism or studying and developing.'

Tirana, Albania: 'Community museums are important because depending on the mission, goals and visionary projects they may have the easiest and most practical way to encourage, educate and inspire people. We need to help the community understand the value of community when they collaborate with each other this way many problems can be solved easily.'

Songhoy, Mali: 'Le musée communauté est le lieu de préservation de la mémoire de l'identité d'une communauté.'

Oko-Anala, Nigeria: 'A community museum is an exhibition center that shows a specific cultural identity of a particular people.'

Nemana, one of the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site's local communities, Zimbabwe: 'A museum established by the community, about the community and for the community.'

North America

Ontario, Canada: 'I have worked in community museums for over 35 years. I would not dream of offering a definition.'

Région du Kamouraska au Québec, Canada: 'Une institution culturelle auto-gérée qui est animée par le désir de créer du lien localement sur une base humanitaire.'

Tequesta, US: 'A Museum focussed on local history, tradition, crafts, and or culture. In our case, the preservation of extinct peoples, battles, following growth with inclusion of local celebrities.'

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Notes

- 1 'What is a Community Museum in your region?' Carifesta, 2017, The University of the West Indies, chaired by Karen Brown.
- 2 EU-LAC Museums Steering Committee meeting held in Antigua Guatemala, March 2018, consisted of Karen Brown (Project Coordinator), Jamie Brown (Project Youth Programme Worker and Administrator), Lauran Bonilla-Merchev (then President of ICOM Costa Rica), Samuel Franco (then President of ICOM-LAC), Luis Raposo (President of ICOM Europe) and Gustavo San Roman (Professor of Cultural Identity, University of St Andrews).
- 3 See the updated ICOM Museum Definition (2022) here: <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/> (Accessed 14 September 2022).
- 4 Find more information about the 34th General Assembly here: <https://icom.museum/en/news/resolutions-adopted-by-icom-34th-general-assembly/>
- 5 Find more about the Defining the Museum of the 21st Century conference here: <https://mgcistandrews.wordpress.com> (Accessed 12 August 2020).
- 6 Quote from Resolution No. 5.
- 7 Participants came from the following countries: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Republic of the Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hong Kong (S.A.R.), Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kiribati, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Federated States of Micronesia, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.
- 8 ICOM museum definition (2007):

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

(ICOM, 2007)

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