

Museums furthering development in Latin America

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Resumo: Na América Latina, vivemos desafios gigantescos para promover o desenvolvimento concebido como o processo criativo de invenção da história pelos homens, como indivíduos e coletividades, na escala de realização de suas potencialidades, de acordo com Celso Furtado. Nessa perspectiva, a preservação, a revitalização e a valorização do patrimônio cultural nas cidades surgem como formas capazes de promover a identificação da cultura local para o fruir da própria população; de abrir um novo mercado de trabalho vinculado às atividades culturais, melhorando a qualidade de vida de seus habitantes, e de aumentar a circulação de riquezas, favorecendo a área dos estudos básicos. O Economuseu, ou Museu-Empresa, é um conceito criado por Cyrill Simard, da Universidade Laval. Como um espaço de preservação, documentação e comercialização da grande e diversificada produção artesanal e artística regional, constitui-se, também, em uma atração turística. Estou convencida de que nossos países em desenvolvimento têm grandes contingentes de pobres que institucionalizaram a violência como forma de sobrevivência. Esse modelo de museu pode vir a ser um braço promocional de desenvolvimento efetivo dos menos favorecidos de nossas sociedades e não somente mais um local privilegiado para o deleite das elites.

Abstract: In Latin America it has been a challenge to promote development, understood as the creative process of invention of history by the people as individuals and communities in the achievement of their potentials, according to Celso Furtado. With this perspective, preservation, renovation and placing appropriate value on the cultural heritage in cities appear as feasible ways to promote the local cultural identification, for the benefit of the population, in order to open a new labor market connected with cultural activities and to increase the circulation of wealth, fostering basic services. The Economuseum – or Enterprise Museum – is a concept created by Cyrill Simard, from Laval University. As a space for preservation, documentation and commercialization of the wide and diversified production of regional arts and crafts it also serves as a tourist attraction. I am convinced that in our developing countries there are great contingents of suffering people for whom violence is a means of survival. This museum must not be merely an exercise for the upper class, but indeed *sine qua non* condition for the development of the poor in their own places.

Introduction

We know that man has created symbols in the universe in order to survive and organize life in society. Human creativity has become the *sine qua non* condition for the continuity of the species through the centuries and millennia.

However, *Homo sapiens*'s creative genius needs to be permanently stimulated so that he can give appropriate answers to the needs that emerge from his historical setting. Creative genius is always sparked by man's needs. Throughout generations, human thought moves forward beyond its borders.

In each generation, each specific population of a given area of a city accumulates a cultural heritage. This heritage is both material and immaterial. It is the fruit of man's relationship with his natural surroundings, and other individuals in this society, as well as the interpretations of those relationships. It has been given the name of cultural inheritance, when the population becomes aware of society's own value with a perception of the individual identity within the continuous social growth.

One can observe an "intimate relationship" between the creative potential and the development of the human society. In other words, if each segment of the population were able to recognize, document, revitalize, and preserve the inheritance that countless previous generations built with creativity while facing confrontation and challenges to their existence, and also to selectively incorporate the new elements achieved along the human thought development; then there is no doubt that it would lead to a development referred to as "local reality", and not follow the past patterns of countries that have a colonialistic tradition.

The assertion that "who doesn't know from where it comes from, doesn't know where it leads to" is deeply true, and if it is necessary to sail, to preserve is much more important. The conscious way a responsible democratic society reacts to this situation is very important. At this time of economic globalization, there are many demands placed upon the political economists and preservationists to take action. The act of preserving is an essential step in a wider educational proposal in which the subjects are prepared, not only for maintain effective cultural patterns, but mainly as a creative action to bring about new solutions for the emergent problems. This is always referred to as the "cultural inheritance" of the group.

Thus, it's unquestionable that many educational and cultural

institutions play an important role for the society. For example, schools, museums, hospitals, and our own homes.

However, responsible people must discuss previous actions taken before an exhibition takes place, in order to understand the political processes of the historical times during which the crafts were produced and which remain under conservation in contemporary museums.

It's very important to me to reflect on the nature of the collection before exhibiting it. After examining the chronological facts, the unquestionable aesthetic value of a masterpiece is often entwined in a complex interpretation of the history of the population, and the way people have suffered along the way. The professionals are supposed to be attentive to the contextualization of the object to be discussed in their own laboratory work. The degree of truthfulness of the information contained in the documentation section will enable them to organize exhibitions that present a "relative hypothesis" by which both children and adults can create a version of the idea presented, allowing them to see the concepts of the group they belong to and its relation to life on this planet.

I believe that curators of museums and scientists should always be aware of the political context in which the information on a fact or workmanship was established, being very aware of the possibilities of interference in human understanding of ourselves. As Paulo Freire said: "All education is a political act, and the essence of man is within his existence". Kierkegaard also said that "man's consciousness of himself will always be the fruit of his critical perception as well".

The museums are a privileged component of communication due to their size and influence upon the generations of people who have grown up in a world of images. This tremendous power cannot be left solely in the hands of researchers and educators who are only concerned with the immediate contextualization of the object. They need to assume the conscious professional role of re-ordering the facts, like being a type of magician of the objects of life capable of opening the doors of reflection, enabling people to question paradigms, search for new utopianism, and reinvent history.

Museums of the third millennium will only survive with dignity if they are in tune with the wonderful multicultural world we live in. They must be more and more aware of people's inalienable rights. There should not be a situation in which everyone is trapped in their particular viewpoint, in other words, mutilated by their own

self image, when there is a population quite capable of carrying out this mission of their own dreams.

The Economuseum, a space of preservation, documentation and commercialization of the wide and diversified production of arts and crafts from countries of the Southern Hemisphere, also serving as a tourist attraction

We never can promote the development of a country without the understanding of its cultural economy. It's very clear to us that culture and power have always been joined and that many times the museums have been just an ideological device of the State, perpetuating situations of social injustice by their misleading way of treating and exposing the facts, with or without the awareness of the curators involved.

Social life has always included the trade of consumption goods at different levels, either in communities or in the various organizations of society. In our contemporary society, life quality involves the appropriation by part of the population, and a series of institutions which allow them to have health, education, housing and leisure time. Even the isolated population, and the farmers with constant interference in their natural habitat, started to have similar needs to ours, which could not remain ignored forever. In fact, not to be conscious of such variables, is to contribute to the preservation of the tattoo armadillo. In other words, there is a shameful disparity of quality of life among the innumerable world populations. If the economic globalization has contributed to increase the gap between the rich and poor, it also brings to light a secular wound that one wants to ignore.

There is no utopian way of expressing these issues, but museums have to keep struggling to reach that goal. For that reason, the experiment conducted by Cyrill Simard in Canada is very interesting to me. He is a great specialist in both the history and crafts of the Indian Iroquois and Eskimos. Simard created the concept of the "Economuseum" or, in other words, economy is associated with the Museum. He helped to organize the following units: The stationery unit St.Gilles (of handmade paper); the Atelier Parré unit (wood) and Verrerie (handmade glass in Quebec area); and the Economuseum of 5km. At the time I was there and became more familiar with the proposal. He was an administrator of the

Cultural Goods of the Province of Quebec, an area of Canada that already possessed the trade advantage in tourism.

Back to Brazil, I was determined to develop a project that simultaneously preserves the popular traditions of Brazilian handicraft and at the same time promotes the development of jobs for my suffering people, who live in a country where jobs are scarce. I also wanted to open up opportunities for those people who have poor education. I conducted an university project the following year, entitled “Economuseum for the Traditional Homemade Candy Stores of Altinópolis”, which was an architectural project, designed to integrate culture with commercial activity.

I am making a great effort to educate and encourage entrepreneurs and intellectuals of our Latin American countries to create Economuseums for the arts and crafts. In other words, to create economical cultural trade exhibits in small places with excellent projects and adequate marketing. These projects could become a magnet for tourism in small towns, or even in the great urban centers. The advantage is that the Economuseums would be able to exhibit the local history and crafts, and be managed by the artisans themselves or by cooperatives organized by this group. Those spaces would be places where students, tourists, and researchers can take advantage of the visualization of the production process, and also the makings of a specific craft. There will be plenty of written documentation available, as well as audio-visual aids. Visitors will be able to purchase any object at a low price.

The advantages of the Economuseum for a small or medium size town over any other type of museums are:

- 1- It promotes the local cultural identity by its own population and offers a product to be sold to visitors;
- 2- The accumulated knowledge is preserved with regard to a certain activity of the town through demonstration documentation. As a result the people who live there motivated, to remain in their own towns, reducing the exodus to the large cities, where there is so much crime and poverty which leads to violence;
- 3- The artisan’s job is praised, being an important producer of culture, which guarantees high self-esteem, identity, and social position;
- 4- New job markets will open, linked to the organized and unproved cultural activities, therefore increasing life quality for many of the inhabitants;
- 5- Visitors will have access to a new phenomenon, which is

presented in an innovative and conscious way, making them feel so welcome that they don't want to return to the big City;

6- It increases the wealth of the town with emphasis on customer service;

7- A process of solemnity is inaugurated, so that the specialists of the museums can supervise their projects.

I am convinced that in our developing countries there are great contingents of suffering people for whom violence is a means of survival. The museum I have described must not be merely an exercise for the upper class, but indeed the *sine qua non* condition for the development of the poor in their own places.

At a recent meeting in Costa Rica on Museums and sustained development, representatives of the World Bank and BID spoke out about their interest in financing this type of project in what we call the emerging nations. According to the Brazilian magazine *Veja* of March 29, 2000, within 2 years the investments in tourism and the hotel industry in Chile will have reached about 6 billion dollars. Around 300 new hotels and theme parks are being built, basically for the performances of famous foreign groups. I imagine that in other South American countries also there will be large investment. If we have a lot of tourists coming to these countries, then it's time to invest in cultural tourism. There is nothing more original nor economically profitable for our intangible heritage than the Economuseum.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate what I said in 1999 about the Economuseum to approximately 500 artisans from all over the Northeastern Brazil in the state of Bahia. This meeting was promoted by SEBRAE Nacional, and the reception was very good. It was critical of the government's actions to transform the artisan into a good entrepreneur, including the exportation of Brazilian products. The end may be very praiseworthy, but the means are not always appropriate for the specific traditional craft. I was deeply moved by the way the artisans understood the depth of my analysis, and accepted the proposal of the Economuseum as the one that will allow them to keep on living within the world of entangled relations, and finally eat with dignity without losing honour.