

CONFERENCE, 2008 Bogotá, Colombia

Historic House Museums as a Bridge between the Individual and the Community

(NOTE: Papers are arranged by year and alphabetically by country)

ICOM-LAC - "Outlook to the Historic House Museums in Latin America as Institutions that generate Identity for the Community"

Beatriz Espinoza, President of ICOM-Latin America and the Caribbean

The objectives of DEMHIST, ICOM international committee for house museums are: conservation, restoration, security, communication with professionals, visitors, and communities, as well as the improvement of management and relationships with communities. Historic House Museums unite two worlds: they are intimate places and at the same time public exhibition spaces.

The memory of a community creates its identity. A museum has to satisfy the demands of a population by offering knowledge about heritage. The actual social, economical and cultural changes are challenges for museum studies.

Are House Museums in Latin America recognized and valued? Some historic houses find themselves in slums, the rooms are rented, overcrowded and not used according to their original purpose - they lack the respect of the community. The conservation of Historic House Museums may as well be a problem due to the lack of legislation and incentives for preservation. Communities and museums must take joint actions as to have locals and foreigners acknowledge their importance. The answers can be interdisciplinary work and social inclusion and must rely on oral tradition, community memory and the ways houses and their contents were used and lived in.

PERU – "Historic House Museums during three of Peru's Historic Periods"

Ana Maria Lebrun, Director of Historical Heritage and Museum Administration

The National Cultural Institute looks after 46 museums, only one of which is a House Museum. Most of the Institute's museums are site museums. The Viceroy House or Quinta de Presa in the Rimac district, former residence of the Marquis de Presa, an important dwelling with a mill and a garden, is still a project. It could house exhibitions.

It is important to involve communities to stop illicit traffic and promote local consciousness of heritage values and, as part of this effort, keep traditions alive through the support of local crafts.

U.S.A. – "Colombia's Cultural Pillars at the beginning of the Republic"

Robert T. Conn, Associate Professor of Wesleyan University

The lecture dealt with the legacy of Simon Bolivar in Colombia. Bolivar was the comrade in arms and the co-head of state with Santander. They had a dispute on 'panamericanism'.

Bolivar's conservative legacy is the tradition of a strong government and collaboration with the church, but he left a liberal legacy, too. Bolivar not only stood for dictatorship, Santander not only for constitutionalism.

U.S.A. – "The legacy of Santander"

David Bushnell, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Florida

General Santander was the organizer of the Republic as a state of law. He was Vice-president of Colombia, president of Nueva Granada, and many decrees and laws passed during his period of government. Education is one of the areas where his legacy is larger, namely with wide-spread creation of schools at all levels of teaching, as well as universities, and curricula reform. He is also responsible for the creation of the National Museum of Colombia.

DEMIST, "Categorization Project"

Rosanna Pavoni, Museum and Art Consultant, School of Cultural Heritage Sciences, Insubria University at Como, and University of Pisa

Hetty Berens, director of Netherlands Institute of Architecture

Julius Bryant, Keeper of Word & Image at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London

The project was launched in 1999 in order to enhance the value of Historic House Museums. The information collected and following systematization aim at facilitating comparisons to create networks and to face problems of sustainability, given the differences of contents, strategies and communication among Historic House Museums.

The first questionnaire was presented in 2000 of which 147 forms were completed. Based on the analysis of the data collected, in 2006 a first approach was proposed, with six categories contemplated. In 2007 it evolved to nine categories: from personality houses to humble homes.

The data collected from questionnaires, websites and visits poses a lot of questions as most house museums may fit in different categories.

The categories obtained from this first phase were 'tested' in the Netherlands by Hetty Berens: with an overview of 177 Historic Houses, only 50 are registered as museums.

The nine categories were applied to the existing institutions, e. g. Anne Frank House, is a personality house and a historic event house, as well as a documentation centre; Mart van Schijndel House is a house of beauty, a collection house and is used for events not as a museum; Van Zessen House, from the 1920s, is a house of beauty.

A diagram of the distribution of different categories was presented, where 1/5 of the museums could be placed in two or more categories.

The results are available on the web site and discussion is welcome.

Questions raised by Julius Bryant: Will Colombia create a national network of House Museums? Who or which organisations will lead? Who can do the categorization in Colombia? Can Colombia suggest more categories? Can Colombia identify its own exemplar house museum?

MEXICO - "Cultural Heritage in Mexico"

José Ruiz de Esparza

The Legislation, Regulations and Use of Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City were presented. The Castle serves as the National Museum of History, and stands in a public park with different monuments of the 1847 war heroes. The grounds also have a zoo, an anthropological museum, as well as land where visitors can exercise. There is also a pre-Hispanic temple with an astrological installation, a throne, statues of governors and a tunnel found during excavations under the castle and is used as escalator for the handicapped. One can find a fantastic view of the Historical District of Mexico City from the Colonial Period, a forest used for riding and hunting and modern wall paintings of political and historical depictions.

MEXICO – "Legislation, regulation and use of Mexican Cultural Heritage"

Rosana Calderón Martín de Campo and Aurora Cortina, Nacional Bureau for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage

Due to its vast cultural wealth, Mexico has a great universe of archaeological and historical assets, movable and immovable. In the search for national identity, the country experimented meaningful changes in its social and political structure, generating a legal backbone through heritage protection and conservation laws.

The formation of the National Museum was ordered in 1825, when every object that could give information about the origin and progress in science and arts of the country was gathered and classified. During the Mexican Revolution, a decree ordered the creation of the National Institute of Anthropology and History –INAH-, as well as that of the National Museum of History in the Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City. The INAH objectives are: research, conservation and diffusion of Mexican archaeological and historical heritage.

GUATEMALA – "Historic House Museums in Guatemala"

Beatriz Quevedo, Director of Casa MIMA

Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala –today Antigua Guatemala- was the capital of Central America in Colonial times but was destroyed by an earthquake in 1876 and transferred to where it stands today as the capital of Guatemala. Another big earthquake hit Guatemala City in 1976, which awakened the need for preservation and the creation of legislation to protect Cultural Heritage.

As examples of preservation, eight Historic House Museums were presented: César Brañas House, turned into a public library; Coffee House Museum "Our Aunt's Home", a House Museum with a Coffee Shop, Casa MIMA, a House Museum in the Historical District of Guatemala City, depicting life in the Republican Period, Metropolitan Cultural Center and Ibarguén House, both of which house the Municipal School of Visual Arts and are attended by elder people in the morning and children in the afternoon; House in Castillo Brothers Street, a restaurant in a Historic House; Popenoe House Museum in Antigua Guatemala depicting Colonial times; Monastery of San Juan del Obispo, still lived in by Bethany nuns and where religious retreats take place, and House Museum Margarita, which is in formation.

There are many houses and collections, but there is a need of support through legislation and fiscal incentives. The idea that these houses should be placed for public service is vague. There is need for economical resources namely funding by national government and municipalities. Meanwhile some responsibility has been taken by schools and universities but there is still a lot to be done.

COLOMBIA – “Historic House Museums as Cultural Centres of Colombia”

David Rubio, President of the Historic House Museum “Moor’s Patio”

There are quite a number of museums in the 28 departments of Colombia. Though museum concepts are known in Bogotá, in the provinces, House Museums function more as cultural centres. House Museums are classified between private and public property in capital cities and villages and are used as instruments for popular education.

Santa Fe is the birthplace of Policarpa, and has developed around a convent. It has three museums: House Museum de Pola, which is a memorial to Policarpa, an Independence heroine. This house is used for ceremonies. There is Spoleta House and House Museum “Moor’s Patio”, which opened in 1996 and is used for festivals and meetings.

These museums need official support because here is no tourism.

These ‘House Museums’ are used as cultural centres as they are community property and benefit the community. They have economical difficulties with budgets that are more than tight even though they provide for community events and programs. The space they have is protected by law which makes them difficult to adapt. Encouragement is badly needed, as well as solutions.

TOURS

- Bogota: House Museum Francisco de Paula Santander, National Museum of Colombia, Botero Museum, Mint House, Bolivar Farm House,, San Francisco Church, Tercera Church, Independence House Museum, Silva Poetry House, Colonial Art Museum , Archaeological Museum , Marquis of San Jorge House, Colombian Regional Costume Museum , Military Museum, Nineteenth Century Museum, Santa Clara Church Museum, Police Museum, Ricardo Gomez Campuzano House, Enrique Grau House, El Chico ‘Mercedes Sierra de Pérez’ Museum.
 - Salt Cathedral of Zipaquirá, House Museum Quevedo Zornoza.
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