

Latin-American Network of University Museums: Statement and official report

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Abstract

Following the 6th International Congress of University Museums and Collections in Mexico City in 2006, the National University of Colombia (the Master's Degree in Museology and Patrimony Management together with the Fine Arts Museum) began discussions with colleagues from other Latin-American museums about the creation of a museum network which might provide a mechanism for regional integration, foster the sharing of knowledge, of experience, initiatives and projects, and communicate information about resources such as collections and museological programs, and set an agenda for Latin-American University Museums.

In May 2007, the first Latin-American Lecture in Museology and Cultural Patrimony Management took place in Bogotá, Colombia. Museum directors from the USA, the United Kingdom, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Colombia were invited to discuss the main topic for this version: Museums, Universities and "Mundialización". This meeting saw the creation of the Latin-American University Museums Network and the formulation of its first strategy and action plan.

Introduction

During the 6th International University Museums and Collections Congress (Mexico City, 2006) I presented to my colleagues from the General Directorate of Visual Arts of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, professors Graciela de la Torre and Rafael Sámano, the idea to create a Latin-American museum network. They embraced it very generously, and the network began to form within the framework of the *First Latin-American Lecture of Museum Studies and Cultural Management: Museums, University and "Mundialización". University museum management in Latin-America* (Bogotá, 2007).

The statement of the Latin-American University Museums Network was written and signed by the directors and staff of the following institutions: the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, the Universidad de São Paulo, the Universidad de Puerto Rico, the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, the Caribbean University, the Universidad de Antioquia, the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, the Universidad del Magdalena, the Universidad de Caldas, and the Corporación Universitaria UNIMINUTO¹. We agreed on the following:

¹ The list of directors and functionaries that signed the Statement of the Latin-American University Museums Network is the following: Graciela de La Torre y Rafael Sámano, from the Dirección General de Artes Visuales, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México; Margarita Fernández Zavala from the Project of Museums Accreditation of the Universidad de Puerto Rico; Camilo de Mello Vasconcellos, Director of the Museo de Arqueología y Etnología de la Universidade de São Paulo; Lillian Irizarry Martínez from the University Museum of the Caribbean University; José Delannoy from the Master's Degree in Museum Studies of the Caribbean University; Edmon Castell Ginovart of the Coordinator of the Museums and Heritage Sistema de Patrimonio Cultural y Museos at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia; William Alfonso López Rosas, Director of the Museo de Arte and the Master's Degree in Museum Studies and Cultural Heritage Management of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia; Yaneth Muñoz Saba, Director of the Museo de Historia Natural de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia; Diego León Arango from the Museo Universitario de la Universidad de Antioquia; René Escorcía Barrios y Wilmer Jesús Martínez Manotas from the Museo de Arte of the Universidad del Magdalena; Esneider Agudelo Arango from the Museo Agrario de la Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia; Helena Pradilla from the Museo Arqueológico of the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia; María Cristina Moreno from the Centro de Museos de la Universidad de Caldas and Gustavo Ortiz, Director of the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo of the Corporación Universitaria UNIMINUTO.

Statement of the Latin-American University Museums Network

Within the framework of the First Latin-American Lecture of Museology and Cultural Heritage Management, the professionals from the Latin-American University museums met in Bogotá, considering that:

- *we share cultural and historical ties, similar contexts and institutional missions, and compatible and parallel challenges within museum studies;*
- *we recognize the great risks to our cultural heritage given the globalization processes of the economy and the cultural industries;*
- *we should take advantage of the richness of our scientific, artistic, documentary and natural collections;*
- *we recognize the strategic value of strengthening the social construction of our memories and senses of belonging to our communities,*

declare our intention of configuring the Latin-American University Museums Network, whose mission will be to generate and support actions and programs of interchange, cooperation and communication between its members in order to align policies and intertwine knowledge and practices that legitimize and spread its work, in an equitable and mobile environment.

The Latin-American University Museums Network will recognize the diversity of its members and try to establish alliances with related institutions with the purpose of contributing to the development of the associated museums.

The signatories of the present statement will show it to their respective university's authorities in order to negotiate the inter-institutional frames that allowed us to achieve the goals expressed here through the specific channels and covenants of every implicated country and legislation.

Given on May the 10th of 2007, in the Auditorium Alfonso López Pumarejo of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

Precedents

The Latin-American University Museums Network is an initiative of the Master's Degree in Museum Studies and Cultural Heritage Management of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Its main precedent is related to the disciplinary, professional and institutional goals that orient this program. These are the foundation of an international academic and scientific dialogue between the professors joined in this post-graduate program and the strengthening of the museums pertaining to the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

In the lecture I gave at the 6th International University Museums and Collections Congress, I explained the situation of my university's museums and the role the Master's program in Museum Studies and Cultural Heritage Management was starting to play in relation to them. In spite of being the protagonists and developers of one of the scientifically and culturally most substantial activities in Colombia on the museum studies level, the museums within the Universidad Nacional de Colombia have been managed under great administrative difficulties, affected by their exclusion from the general university statutes and the development plans on the faculty and central level.

Therefore, the goals of the Master's Degree in Museum Studies and Cultural Heritage Management in reference to the museums of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia are:

- To promote the formulation of financial resources and development plans for every museum of this university.

- The establishment of museum management methodologies, criteria and standards (such as documentation, conservation, etc) in order to allow the public circulation of their collections to all the sites of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, and also their public circulation at the national and international level.
- The professional consultancy for the design of strategies for the communication, divulgation and formation of audiences.
- To deepen and diversify permanent spaces of interchange between the Universidad Nacional de Colombia and the Colombian nation in order to strengthen the sense of mutual belonging.
- To offer shared services, such as restoration workshops, documentation, specialized training programs etc.

Additionally, the professors associated with the Master's program also have the aim of stimulating an administrative re-structuring of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in order to make possible the creation of a directorate of university museums in charge of the following tasks:

- Consolidate and promote the museums and collections heritage of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.
- Formulate development plans for the museums, collections and material heritage of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.
- Formulate political frameworks for the museum's heritage management at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.
- Evaluate the management of the university's museums.
- Set up the lines of scientific investigation and the growth of the university's collections.
- Democratize access to university cultural heritage for the general public.
- Support and promote the qualification of the university museum's staff at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.
- Establish the collection's control and mobility protocol for the university museums at the university.
- Design plans for the protection and safety of the university museums and collections.
- Coordinate the conservation, restoration, enlargement or museological adaptation of the museum's buildings and sites in order to improve the preventive conservation of their collections.
- Negotiate with the university directors the granting of funds for the university museums and collections management.
- Coordinate communication with the Colombian Museums National Network.
- Support communication processes between museums.

After a year and a half of existence, the Master's founding group has achieved the integration of the university museums into the General Development Plan for the University's Bogotá Site and, as a consequence of this, has obtained approximately eight hundred thousand Euros to invest until 2009. In the current university's development plan, several programs were designed in order to qualify the university museum's management.

Also, we applied for the Cultural Grant Aid of the Japanese Embassy in Colombia which offers up to 50 million Japanese Yen annually. If the university application is successful, these resources will be mainly destined for the purchase of preventive conservation equipment, given the fact that one of the most serious problems that currently concerns us is the collections' conservation at all our university museums.

Another meaningful precedent for the formation of the Latin-American University Museums Network were the results of the UMAC's 6th International Conference *New roads for university museums*. Some of its conclusions were:

- to open up the isolated dialogue in order to integrate it into a global context without giving up the university museum identity;
- to start at the top (university level) and not at the bottom (museum/collection);
- to analyze each museum's situation in the framework of its university (What does the university want? Why does the university need collections? Where does the university want to go?);
- to look for economic strategies, important partners and other people who can support and promote projects;
- to develop an Academic Advisory Board;
- to strengthen bonds inside the university;
- to map the museums and collections;
- to initiate cooperation with colleagues from faculties, other museums and collections inside and outside the university;
- to join national and international networks;
- to become a part of the long term strategic plan of the university;
- to develop into a place of unexpected juxtapositions and a place of visions;
- to become a place where audiences and collections interact and establish a dialogue;
- to promote a contemporary use of university collections in addition to traditional research and teaching uses;
- to try to involve as many stakeholders as possible in museum life (faculties, colleagues, students and surrounding communities).

In this framework, the conceptual scenario for the Latin-American Network of University Museums was particularly rich. In this way, the discussion of the principal proposal was open.

Discussion of the proposal

Discussion on the Network's aims, goals and perspectives is currently underway. Particularly, the colleagues from the Universidad Autónoma de México, the Universidad de Puerto Rico and the professors associated with the Master's Degree in Museum Studies and Cultural Heritage Management of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia are committed to presenting this proposal to the academic and administrative authorities of every university. Since May 2007, we have been presenting the Network's project and its statement to the directors and the collegial councils responsible in order to consolidate this initiative as part of the university's institutional project.

Although the network has not yet met to discuss its goals, these might be more or less the same as those established for the *First Latin-American Lecture of Museum Studies and Cultural Management: Museums, University and "Mundializacion". University museum management in Latin-America*, that is to say:

- to build a frame for the discussion of the functions and cultural scenarios influencing the Latin-American university museums;
- to examine the current state of university museum practices in the region;
- to create a space for discussion on the role of the socialization processes of university museums and the arts and sciences within the Latin-American universities missionary functions (teaching, investigation and extension);

- to recognize the university museums functions within the informal education processes and dynamics within the Latin-American cultural context;
- to explore the history of the notions of university museums and collections and the particular history of Latin-American university museums;
- to create a forum to plan several multilateral cooperation projects within the region's museology and cultural heritage management.

We should add to these strictly academic goals others related to the mobility of professors and students as well as to the collections and exhibitions circulation within the framework of regional university integration. All these depend on, of course, the statement signatories and the help of those who decide to join us during the next months.

Contact

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