New museology, communities, ecomuseums

Peter Davis
Newcastle University, UK
Outline

- Origins of New Museology
- Community museology and the integrated museum
- New museology and ecomuseums
- Ecomuseum principles
- Ecomuseums and ICH – some examples
- Postmodern new museology
Defining Museology

- ICOM: ”Museology is the branch of knowledge concerned with the study of the purpose and organisation of museums. It has to do with the study of history and background of museums, their role in society, specific systems for research, conservation, education and organization, relationships with the physical environment, and the classification of different kinds of museums”
Defining Museology

- The Reinwardt Academie, Amsterdam, suggests that "Museology covers the complete range of, and working with, cultural and natural heritage".

- What does this imply?
New Museology

- The 'old museology’ has not been discarded.
- The 'first museum revolution’ at the end of the 19th century saw the development of accepted practices of curatorship, conservation, documentation and education which are still implemented.
- The 1960s and 1970s – social unrest, political activism, environmentalism, postmodernism – witnessed the re-evaluation of the purpose of museums, leading to the 'second museum revolution’ and a 'new museology’
The original ’new museology’

- The Round Table of Santiago, Chile, 1972

- Emergence of ’community museology’ and the ’integrated museum’ – museums linked to a social purpose, regeneration and development, often in poor urban or isolated rural communities. They are seen as a more democratic vision for museums, with choices being made by local people.

- Experimentation in Mexico, Brazil, France
In 1980 the French museologist André Devallées wrote a piece for the Encyclopedia Universalis promoting this new ‘social development’ vision for museums under the title ‘Nouvelle Muséologie’. Although he had not meant to coin a new word, it stuck, at first in French-speaking countries, then being adopted into Spanish and Portuguese – but not at first in English. So in much of the world this is what is meant by new museology – the theory and practice of museums linked to development agendas.

1985 - ICOM establishes its International Committee for New Museology (MINOM) which is still very active
New museology and Ecomuseums

- In 1971, Hugues de Varine also invented a word to encapsulate the idea of creating museums, using local heritage and driven by local communities, to aid development.
- The word he invented was ‘ecomuseum’ – specially developed for use by the French Minister for the Environment when he spoke to an ICOM conference in Dijon, France.
- So, two Frenchmen, two new words, same meaning. Ever since, in many countries, the terms new museology and ecomuseology are applied to community heritage projects concerned with social and economic development.
History

- The ‘ecomuseum’ movement originated in France in the early 1970s initiated by George Henri Rivière and Hugues de Varine
Defining the ecomuseum

- Museum = building + collections + experts + techniques: Ecomuseum = territory + heritage + memory + population (Rivard)
- An ecomuseum is a dynamic way in which communities preserve, interpret and manage their heritage for sustainable development. An ecomuseum is based on a community agreement. (Long Network)
- An ecomuseum is a community driven heritage project that aids sustainable development (Davis)
Graphic representation of the ‘traditional’ museum
Davis 1999 (after Rivard 1984)
Graphic representation of the ecomuseum
Davis 1999 (after Rivard 1984)
So ecomuseums are:

- About place, they are not confined to a museum building; they incorporate and celebrate ICH
- Able to select aspects of heritage from their territory to conserve and interpret
- Are a radical departure from the authorized discourse on museums, a form of alternative museology
3 main pillars of the ecomuseum ideal

**Sense & spirit of place** - through an holistic approach to heritage resources in their environments

**Community involvement** - public participation and the ‘democratisation’ of processes

The ecomuseum ideal is *malleable* and should be responsive to unique contexts
21 key indicators/principles of the ecomuseum

1-6 = democratised participation
7-12 = ecomuseum functions and ways of working
13-21 = what an ecomuseum might achieve

Instituto Ricerche Economico Sociali (IRES)
Piemonte, Italy

(Corsane et. al. 2007)
Ecomuseum & Community Museology
Principles

1. Originated and steered by local communities
2. Allow for public participation in a democratic manner
3. Joint ownership and management - double input system
4. Emphasis on process rather than on product
5. Encourages collaboration with network of partners
6. Dependant on substantial active voluntary efforts
7. Focus on local identities and sense of place
8. Encompasses a 'geographical' territory, which can be determined by different shared characteristics

9. Covers both spatial and temporal aspects - diachronic rather than simply synchronic
10. Fragmented 'museum' with network of hub and antennae of buildings and sites
11. Promotes preservation, conservation and safeguarding of heritage resources in situ
12. Equal attention given to immovable and movable tangible and intangible heritage resources
13. Stimulates sustainable development and responsible use of resources
14. Allows for change and development for a better future

15. Encourages an ongoing programme of documentation of past and present life and interactions with environmental factors
16. Promotes research with different inputs - from local 'specialists' to academics
17. Promotes multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approaches to research
18. Promotes a holistic approach to interpretation of culture/nature relationships
19. Illustrates interconnectedness between: nature/culture; past/present; technology/individual

20. Provides for an intersection between heritage and responsible tourism

21. Brings benefits to local communities e.g. sense of pride, regeneration, and economic, social and cultural capital
Ecomuseum principles and ICH

- The following principles are particularly relevant to the conservation/continuation of ICH:
  - 5 – encouraging collaboration
  - 7 – focus on local identity
  - 12 – specific reference to ICH
  - 21 – focus on local pride and sense of place
Ecomuseums and ICH - examples

- Soga, Guizhou, China
- Santa Cruz, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Hirano Cho Ecomuseum, Osaka, Japan
- Carmagnola, Italy
Documentation Centre of Ecological Museum of Suojia Liuzhi Guizhou China
Ecomuseu do Quarteirão do Matadouro, Santa Cruz, Brazil
Samba School

Ecomuseu do Santa Cruz,
Brazil
The Hemp Ecomuseum, Carmagnola, Italy
"Theorists of new museology, who regard museums as social institutions ... advocate integrating museums more closely with the multicultural social groups which these critics believe they should represent and serve. The new museology specifically questions traditional museum approaches to issues of value, meaning, control, interpretation, authority and authenticity” — Dierdre Stam

From the mid-1980s postmodern museology begins to accept these values, and a more widespread adoption of new values and working practices also assumes the title 'new museology'.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modern</th>
<th>Postmodern</th>
<th>New museology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>Access policies, outreach; social role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td>Networking &amp; consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Conservation ethic; care of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Futuristic</td>
<td>New approaches; social and environmental aims; new technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural dominance</td>
<td>Cultural difference</td>
<td>Cultural celebration; cultural inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralisation</td>
<td>Decentralisation</td>
<td>Site museums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>Reality</td>
<td>Honesty and ”truth” Multiple voices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Postmodern or New museology = key changes in ’Western’ museums and museum practices

- Challenges the idea of what is valuable and how this is judged
- Questions the ethical aspects of museum activities and their collections
- Challenges the political stances or versions of history(ies) adopted by museums or exhibitions
- Shift away from the Curator as the sole source of authority and expertise
- Questioning who has the right to represent others/oneself
- Recognition of the importance of the non-material to the historical record (oral history, intangible heritage)
- Expansion of the idea of acceptable museum content (film, photography, role-play, live interpretation)
- Re-evaluation of the relationship between objects and the historical record
Postmodern or new museology

- Challenges the spatially-bounded concept of the museum – does it have to be a physical or single space? What about the virtual museum or the ecomuseum?
- Recognition of the ongoing, contingent and subjective nature of the historical record
- Increased attention given to stakeholders and participants
- Greater awareness by certain external groups of the authority and utility of the museum as a ’public’ space
- Changes to the balance of power between museums, individual collectors and the public
- Greater sense of the museum as answerable to its public funders
- Diversification of publics and audiences
- Diversification of roles museums are expected to play
Summary

- The original new museology or community museology encouraged new approaches to museums, giving them a social role, especially in poor rural communities.
- Ecomuseology was a way of implementing these new ideas. The focus in ecomuseums is on democracy, process, heritage and community within a defined place.
- Postmodern new museology, seen now in most ’Northern’ museums, has incorporated a changes about the roles of all museums and their strategic and operational practices.