Promoting Community Participation in Museum Activities

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Participation and Collaboration

- What do we mean by participation and collaboration?
- Why is it important? What are the benefits?
- How do we make our work participatory and collaborative?
What is participation?

- Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect them. “ (World Bank Participatory Learning Group)
The Kayan Mentarang People’s Museum Development Program
Culture and Nature Conservation
Participatory approaches to development

- Emerged in the 1970s after seeing how top-down, macro level approaches often failed. Saw local culture and traditions as obstacles.
- Seen as means of empowering people to take control of their own course of development.
- Way of making alien institutions, technologies and practices more compatible to local contexts.
- Builds on knowledge, skills, resources of local people.
Participatory approaches

• Are based on democratic principles aimed at bridging the gap between outside experts and professionals and local people
• Knowledge, skills, resources of people have value along with those of experts
• Shows how when people have greater say in and control of projects they are more effective and sustainable
Benefits

• Can help to empower community members to be able to take actions on their own behalf
• Creates self-reliance
• Helps create a sense of belonging to and “ownership” of a project
• Makes projects/activities sustainable in the long run
• Can be more cost effective
Participation is a *collaborative process* and *commitment to* the deliberate and appropriate *sharing of power*: power in defining how decisions will be made, setting priorities and establishing whose interests will be served.
Participation should be included in all phases of a project: conceptualization, planning, implementation, and evaluation.
It is important to remember that there are different levels and degrees of participation and collaboration. The degree to which your museum, activity, or project is participatory and collaborative depends on what degree community members are involved, the levels of trust achieved and the sharing of authority, power, resources, and opportunities for capacity building.
Levels of Participation

- **Information sharing**: project managers share information with beneficiaries
- **Consultation**: create opportunities for feedback from beneficiaries to project managers, allowing people to contribute to the design of a project
- **Decision-making**: beneficiaries make decisions together with project managers
- **Initiating actions**: beneficiaries not only make decisions and take action but they initiate them themselves

- Samuel Paul. “Community Participation in Development Projects”
Collaboration Continuum

Networking > Coordinating > Cooperating > Collaborating > Integrating
• **Networking**- exchanging information for mutual benefits. Requires minimum organizational involvement, trust, sharing of authority, power, resources

• **Coordinating and cooperating**- exchanging information and altering program activities for mutual benefits to achieve common purpose. Requires more organizational involvement, higher level of trust, more sharing of authority and resources

• **Collaborating**- exchanging information, altering activities, sharing resources and enhancing each other’s capacity for mutual benefit to achieve common purposes and goals. Requires greater degree of organizational involvement…

• **Integrating**—all of the above and merging organizations
“Collaborative projects are highly culturally dependent. What works for one partnership might not work for another.” Nina Simon, The Participatory Museum. 2010 www.participatorymuseum.org
Kinds of participation in museums

- Consultation
- Advisory groups
- Visitors (passive or active)
- Co-curation and co-development
- Community outreach
- Community members creating their own museum and representing their own cultural heritage based on their values, worldviews, needs

Vietnam Museum of Ethnology
Exhibition on Toi Bao Cap:
Subsidized Times. Everyday life
And post war rationing. 1975-1986
Museums must be useful to communities and meet their needs and interests for them to be sustainable without outside support. Community members can participate in museum activities and operations but museums must also be active participants in community life.
Cultural work meeting basic human needs through the use of appropriate technology.
Appropriate technology

• must match both the user and the need in complexity and scale.
• by definition is small-scale and its use is intended to foster self-reliance and responsibility.
Summary of Common Elements of Participation

- Collaboration
- Shared decision-making
- Information sharing
- Creating conditions for participation
- Building trust with a community through sustained interaction, dialogue and communication
- Willingness to be adaptable and flexible
- Being accountable
- Reciprocity
- Consensus building
- Ensuring the ‘voiceless’ are heard
- Use local knowledge, expertise, and institutions
- Cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity
- Have knowledge of local social system/hierarchies
How do we identify participants?

• Ideally through experience working together, and first-hand observation and participation “in the field”
• Networking, talking to people, making contacts
• Circulate information about the project in a community through various media
Obstacles to participation

• Dealing with social, political, cultural hierarchies of power and authority
• Competition among groups for resources
• Facilitating access to and distribution of resources like funding, opportunities, etc.
• Others?