

in less than 1000 words...

## How local museums work...

It is the fundamental practices of museology – creating and keeping collections, investigating and exhibiting, all run by heritage professionals – that distinguish the real work of museums. Functions such as marketing, seeking new audiences and community outreach activities are a kind of complement that does not change the nature of these organisations. This definition applies to all these institutions, whether they are very large museums comparable to multinationals, like the Louvre or the Hermitage, or small local museums.

But the thing that differentiates these two types of organisation above all else, apart from their size, is the fact that small local museums very often preserve collections which are vital for safeguarding cultures and maintaining the identity of the territory where they are located. Led by passionate professionals, these local museums utilise their imagination to run many intelligent and creative dissemination activities.

The great majority of these museums are attached to local or regional public authorities. They are obliged to implement strategies aimed at expanding their collections, visitor numbers and activities while at the same time suffering from an endemic lack of funding. Associations, foundations and other private organisations find themselves in the same situation, albeit exacerbated by their need for profitability. Museums have looked for alternative ways of financing themselves through entry fees and parallel commercial and restoration activities, without any real success. People no longer dare to speak about the mirage of patronage and sponsorship, which is a charade.

## In an outlying region ...

In a region distant from decision-making centres, or trade and market hubs, all the difficulties faced by small organisations are greater. Direct dependence on local authorities forces museum heads to run their activities according to the date of the next elections. This generates a cyclical instability familiar to a large proportion of local museums. In these circumstances it is difficult to see a master plan through to completion, to manage the task of enriching collections properly, or to pursue coherent research projects in the long term.

In recent years the burden of managerial and organisational issues has weighed increasingly heavily on museums' day-to-day administration. New administrative, financial and people management skills are required of museum heads, who often run their museum single-handedly. As a result, curators' management role is being called into question, and preference is being given to managers proper, or to private companies specialising in services management. These kinds of governance, which are primarily economic and financial in nature, meet elected representatives' expectations in terms of budget performance, staff management and tourism responses, but fail to answer the heritage professionals' criteria of excellence, protection of collections, and respect for scientific considerations in the language used to disseminate knowledge.

## What is their role within the local community?

Museums generally have a clear idea of their role in relation to society and the importance of their local presence. They are conscious of their responsibility for consolidating social cohesion while also fostering a sense of involvement in the local area and contributing to the education of the population as a whole. For them, in their outlying location, it is a question of survival to offer access to heritage as a source of knowledge, inspiration and creativity.

Such museums therefore develop activities intended to raise heritage awareness among young people, from schoolchildren to university students, through motivating practical heritage work and also new kinds of initiatives run jointly with education centres.

## How can Strategy 21 help local museums?

- ✓ Make heritage more accessible in physical, cognitive, social, emotional and digital terms.
- ✓ Boost awareness of the values of Europe and of European society, through collections that bear witness to this universal culture.
- ✓ Provide a model of social justice, as a meeting place and a conduit for intercultural dialogue, peace and tolerance.
- ✓ Support and promote the heritage sector, which creates jobs and economic activities, by enhancing the status of traditional and emerging heritage professions and professionals.
- ✓ Work to ensure that local authorities and tour operators regard heritage as a tool for the differentiated development of sustainable cultural tourism.
- ✓ Integrate new technologies into the day-to-day running of museums, from preventive conservation to interpretation activities.
- ✓ Provide optimal and continuous training to heritage professionals and non-professionals.

## A real-life example: the museums of the Canaries

### The Network of Canarian Museums:

The Canary Islands, which are located off the coast of the Western Sahara, a few thousand kilometres away from the “Old Continent”, form an integral part of the European Union. Remoteness, insularity and a fragmented territory are the characteristic features of this ultra-peripheral region. The sixteen million tourists who visit it every year are the archipelago’s main economic resource. Since it is the sun, the beaches and relaxation that they come for, culture and visits to museums do not form part of their plans. However, many local authorities have sought to encourage the holidaymakers not to stray by setting up permanent exhibitions. These bodies are seeking to meet an immediate need by taking a McDonaldisation approach to heritage and culture in general. A Network of Canarian Museums has been created under the aegis of the Directorate-General for Cultural Heritage of the Canarian Government, and brings together 25 public and private museums offering visitors the experience of a consistent museography of their collections. The aim, in the medium term, is to ensure a participatory strategy for the practical governance of the museums and their heritage. In the long term, the regional authority plans to encourage and support this network, even through a public-private partnership, with a view to meeting research and innovation needs.

### Archaeological Museum of La Gomera:

The Archaeological Museum of La Gomera is located on one of the three western islands of the Canarian Archipelago. This means that it lies at the geographical, economic and social margin of this ultra-peripheral region. This museum introduces visitors to the culture of the island’s former inhabitants. Using the results of research and archaeological excavations, the museum gives a condensed view of how the earliest populations settled on the island, their way of life, the characteristics of their social organisation, their culture and their beliefs. Just one person runs the museum, assuming all the related duties from its management to the scientific conservation of the collections and implementation of the interpretation activities. To establish and sustain high-quality programming, the only solution available to this museum has been to incorporate participatory mechanisms into its heritage management approach and day-to-day operation, relying on a multi-disciplinary and inter-generational strategy which helps it take on board democratic practices while encouraging excellence.



[www.coe.int/strategy21](http://www.coe.int/strategy21)



[Strategy21@coe.int](mailto:Strategy21@coe.int)

Author:

Copyright permission requests: [Strategy21@coe.int](mailto:Strategy21@coe.int)

© Council of Europe

Museo de Artesanía Iberoamericana de Tenerife

Author:

Copyright permission requests: [Strategy21@coe.int](mailto:Strategy21@coe.int)