

# CULTURE & MUSÉES

Call for Papers  
for a special issue

## **The Social Museum (musée de société) Today, Legacy and Evolution**

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Since the end of the 1980s, many ethnographic museums around the world have evolved in line with political issues and current social and cultural preoccupations (Poulot, 2016). Some of these changes have taken place within the framework of the creation of new national museums, especially where multicultural policies are at work (Van Geert, 2020). In North America, examples include the Museum of Civilization in Quebec, the Canadian Museum of Civilization (now known as the Canadian Museum of History) in Gatineau, as well as new “outlets” of the Smithsonian Institution dedicated to native and African American communities. This dynamic is also noticeable in Oceania with the creation of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington and the National Museum of Australia in Canberra. In Europe, as well, the landscape of ethnographic museums has changed radically in recent history on the basis of institutional realities and issues in each region. In France, the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations (Mucem) has replaced the Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions by opening up to Europe and the Mediterranean. Paris is not lacking in institutions displaying non-Western collections, with the recently created Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac followed by the Musée de l’Homme, following the example of other cities such as Amsterdam, Antwerp, Brussels, Geneva, Hamburg, Vienna and Göteborg.

While these institutions’ missions are vastly different, they are frequently regrouped under the umbrella term “social museums” in French (Chevallier & Fanlo, 2013; Drouguet, 2015, Idjéroui, Davallon & Poli, 2006), Spanish (Alcade, Boya & Roigé, 2011) and Portuguese (de Souza Chaga & Sibylla Pires, 2018) publications. For these authors, these museums are dedicated to the representation of societies, both past and present, from varying viewpoints while at the same time demanding a social and civic role through their grappling with contemporary issues of identity, culture, society and environment. Audiences are thus placed at the heart of these institutions’ objectives through the development of new exhibition evaluation practices centered around visitors and their experience (Candito, Allainé & Côté, 2010; Daignault, 2011; Daignault & Schiele, 2014). New positions within these museums have also come into being, notably “cultural managers”, educators and docents, exhibition project managers and, more recently, those in charge of development, partnerships and digital engagement. Emphasis is placed on an interdisciplinary approach in order to encourage all-encompassing public relations and formerly ethnographic collections are reintegrated into heritage systems in this light (Monjaret, Roustan & Eidelman, 2005). At once the reflection of popular culture, contemporary art or intangible cultural heritage, the objects displayed in museums are seen as being capable of dealing with current realities (Battesti, 2012). This is what objectifies the hypothesis according to which an exhibition is an appropriate medium for sharing this vision with visitors to a social museum (musée de société), starting from the position that an exhibition is no longer an end in and of itself, but rather a means to this same end (Halpin, 2007:50).

Other institutions have developed similar practices, earning them the label of social museums (*musée de société*). This is the case of many eco-museums, museums of popular art and traditions, but also history, archeology and art museums, in Europe as well as America and Oceania. New museums, with displays around social themes and issues, such as human rights (Winnipeg), black civilizations (Dakar), contemporary thought (Barcelona) and sustainable development (Rio de Janeiro), have been created since the beginning of the 2000s. Each of these new institutions has contributed to an increased porousness in the outlines of the definition of social museums (*musée de société*) in 2020. This issue of *Culture & Musées* aims to reformulate this concept in order to better understand its meaning, its uses, but also its most recent evolution within the context of 21<sup>st</sup>-century museums. Thus, we propose going back to the end of the 1980s and the emergence of the first social museums (*musée de société*), such as the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Quebec, in order to exam where this particular concept of the social museum (*musée de société*) is today, its various (new) definitions, its applications and its success around the world.

Authors are thus invited to pursue the three following lines of inquiry:

The first consists in an exploration of the origins of and the initial discourses surrounding this model of the social museum and thus propose a sort of archeology of the episteme. What are its intellectual, but also political, foundations, and in what ways does its approach differ from that of other institutions that could be defined as social museums? Thus, while the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington has been thus defined (Haworth, 2013), it nonetheless follows from an intellectual and museological vein that owes much to Franz Boas in terms of anthropology, to Material Culture Studies, to Actor-Network theory, but also to the anthropology of art, while at the same time influenced by a postcolonial movement and work carried out with native communities developed by Indigenous Studies and Heritage Studies (Alivizatou, 2012; Burón Díaz, 2019: 50-51; Shelton, 2006: 490-491; see also Dewdney, Dibosa & Walsh, 2013: 223-224). In Canada, institutions such as the UBC Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver and the former Canadian Museum of Civilization are also much closer to these theoretical principles (Phillips, 2011: 205-207) and New Museology (Vergo, 1989) than those of the new museology promoted by other institutions also termed social museums, especially in French-speaking (Barroso & Vaillant, 1993) and Spanish-speaking countries (Roigé, 2007). Authors are thus invited to question the reasons and the ways in which the concept of a social museum, synonymous of a specific way of “making a museum”, has become a means of qualifying an approach that differs in many aspects.

The second line of inquiry concerns the influence of the social museum model in the world. What professional networks have facilitated its propagation? What museums have been inspired by it, and to what extent? How has this notion of a museum been adapted to reflections of museums specific to each context, in the same way New Museology resonated in places such as Portugal, Latin America and Quebec because of its political ambitions (Gunter, 2019). Does this approach indeed have global impact, or is just a French Quebec model relatively unknown in other cultural contexts? By shifting one’s view from French-speaking contexts, it is remarkable that in Museum Studies and Heritage Studies, this concept of the social museum is largely absent, as it was from New Museology in its time. These questions show a willingness in this issue to cross different museological texts and thoughts that are often limited the analysis of their own linguistic and cultural context, basing themselves on the same examples. It is only recently that authors in an Anglo-Saxon milieu have begun exploring these museum models and their links and influence with French and Spanish-speaking references (see Shelton, 2003: 8; Lorente, 2016: 56; or Black, 2012: 203-204). In the same way, there are still very few French authors that refer to key works of Anglo-Saxon critical museology, especially those undertaken in the renovation of the Glenbow Museum in the 1990s, despite the fact that they are very close to the social museum model in terms of curatorial redistribution and a willingness to work in a more horizontal and interdisciplinary manner on overarching themes (Janes, 2013).

Finally, this issue’s third line of inquiry invites authors to study new practices that have emerged thanks to this social museum model. How are institutions influenced by the social museum approach heading in new directions, especially in light of different practices in line with “operational museology” (Shelton,

2003), at the theoretical base of their “narrative” as a museum, in terms of new collection acquisition policy and participative practices being put in place (Golding & Modest, 2013; McCall & Gray, 2014), but also in terms of audience knowledge and the museology of reception (Black, 2012; Catlin-Legutko & Klingler, 2012). While the world itself has evolved greatly since the end of the 1980s, and the very definition of museums is undergoing deep transformations today (Brown & Mairesse, 2017), what issues is this museum model today facing and what new museological methods and principals are emerging? Moreover, while each generation questions the existence of museums as an institution, searching for renewed meaning in heritage work (Eidelman, 2017: 8), how have museologists and heritage and culture professionals, but also politicians, taken hold of this concept in 2020? How has its components evolved over the course of the last few decades, and what trends are emerging today?

Authors are invited to deal with these various questions through papers employing a comparative approach between museums and sociocultural context. Studies of a given regional or continental context will also be considered. Finally, case studies may also be presented as long as they are understood in a context wider than that of the isolated example and propose answers to the questions listed above in this call for papers.

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**Proposals (in French) should include:** a title, 5 keywords, 5 references used in the article, as well as the names, email, position and institution (university, laboratory) of its author. Included should be details of the disciplinary or interdisciplinary approach adopted, the issues at stake, the field or corpus, the methodology employed and a preliminary projection of results.

**Timeline:**

November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020: Publication of call to papers

January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021: Deadline for proposals

February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021: Acceptances and refusals are sent to contributors

April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021: Deadline for finished articles

May, 2021: Double-blind peer review

June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021: Peer reviews returned to authors

September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021: Deadline for final changes.

June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022: Issue publication

Please send proposals (between 5,000 and 7,000 characters) before January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021 to:

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*Culture & Musées* is a double-blind, peer-reviewed journal devoted to publishing new research on cultural institutions, audiences and mediations. It aims at a wide readership of researchers, students as well as museum and cultural heritage professionals.

The journal is supported by Avignon Université and UGA Éditions. *Culture & Musées* is published with the support of France's Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Direction générale des patrimoines – département de la politique des publics, and Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur.

It has been indexed by the INIST and Arts and Humanities Citation Index & Current Contents databases, as well as the Arts and Humanities (Thomson Reuters). *Culture & Musées* is also indexed by the HCERES in the 71<sup>st</sup> CNU Section (Information and Communication Sciences).