

# Lessons Lived and Learned in Developing and Managing a Bi-National Cultural Heritage Sector Project in South Africa\*

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*Abstract: The installation of a new democratic government in South Africa in 1994 opened the door to redress the long-neglected, and often suppressed, needs of the cultural heritage sector of South Africa. Extensive efforts were quickly mobilized to transform practices and policies that erased those of the previously white-dominated, apartheid nation. One multi-faceted bi-national collaboration designed to address transformation needs in the cultural heritage sector resulted in a variety of expected and unexpected positive impacts, identified and implemented a set of principles of partnerships that guided the bi-national work, and set the stage for additional collaborative projects. [Keywords: training, cultural heritage, South Africa, bi-national]*

*There can be no doubt in my own mind that the arts play a crucial role in the life of the people. And it is important that people know that, in being creative, they become more than consumers. They can transcend their often horrendous circumstances and bring something new into being.*

Desmond Tutu [1989:7].

## Introduction

In many cultures and nations, artists and cultural heritage workers have played significant roles in fostering change. For South Africans, art and cultural heritage work have long gone hand-in-hand with the kind of political and social activism that eventually resulted in the establishment of the new democratic government in South Africa in 1994.<sup>1</sup> In a country that had endured colonial and racist regimes, art and culture were arenas of activities that were usually separated by race. Its cultural heritage institutions (museums, libraries, archives, and professional organizations) reflected the policies of the dominant culture in terms of what cultural resources were collected or protected, how these resources were supported and interpreted, who was involved in the allied professions, and even who had access to using the cultural resources. Although artists and cultural workers from all sectors—both within and outside of South Africa—had found multiple ways of using their arts in the struggle against apartheid, as the fight against apartheid intensified, artists and culture workers were increasingly involved and culture became a critical tool in the economic and political strategies employed in achieving democracy.<sup>2</sup> As artist-activist Sue Williamson noted, “Murals, banners, posters, t-shirts—visual expressions of resistance—[became] an important part of the work of

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progressive organizations and trade unions in the mass democratic movement, along with the other forms of cultural activity like plays, dramatic sketches, songs, and poems” (Williamson 1989:9). For the Black Struggle-era artists of the 1960s and 1970s, like David Phoshoko, the art “communicated anger, sadness and even joy that an end to apartheid would surely come.”<sup>3</sup>

As early as 1976, Wally Serote, a leader of the African National Congress, and ten of his colleagues took part in a small conference in Amsterdam that marked the beginning of the cultural boycott of the apartheid system (Campschreur and Divendal 1989: 209). Twelve years later, again in Amsterdam, 300 South African artists and cultural heritage workers and political party members (including Thabo Mbeki, now president of South Africa) met at the Culture in Another South Africa (CASA) Festival and Conference. At this landmark gathering, participants shared their art and exchanged views on the cultural infrastructure of a non-racial and democratic South Africa. As Pulitzer Prize winner novelist and conference attendee Nadine Gordimer wrote in an introductory article in the volume of essays that was published after the conference, “we met in the conviction that a great responsibility devolves on artists and cultural workers to align themselves consciously with the forces of democracy and national liberation in the life and death struggle to free our country from racist bondage” (Gordimer 1989:10). Among the recommendations and resolutions outlined in The Preamble and Resolutions of the CASA conference was “That to redress the scandalous discrepancies and disparities in skills, training and resources that are the direct consequence of racist policies, the democratic artists and culture workers must promote a programme of affirmative action, both now and in the future, to enable black artists to take their rightful place in South African culture” (Campschreur and Divendal 1989:215). A Freedom Charter, developed by conference participants, called for South Africa and the world to know that, “The national wealth of our country, the heritage of South Africans, shall be restored to the people...and all people shall have equal rights to trade where they choose, to manufacture and enter all trades, crafts, and professions” (Campschreur and Divendal 1989:243).

International collaborations among cultural institutions are growing for a variety of political, social, cultural, and economic reasons. Educational and cultural heritage professional associations have been particularly interested in fostering international interaction to share expertise, create networks for communication, and to assemble resources to identify and address needs, whether local or global. The International Council of Museums, for instance, instigated and promotes International Partnerships Among Museums (IPAM), a program that has fostered international exchanges now for almost three decades.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the African-Swedish Museum Network’s “twinning” program has sustained museum partnerships in Africa and other locations.<sup>5</sup> The growing commitment for museums to be more socially relevant and engaged in civic and community work, the push of universities to provide their students with a global perspective, the increased ease of travel, and the rapidly growing electronic communication systems, have set the stage for an increase in bi-national cultural heritage projects.

While international partnerships in the cultural heritage sector have increased, there are unique challenges when organizations attempt to engage with communities that are separated from them by space and culture. Projects that engage cultural heritage organizations in work that goes beyond their immediate communities raises new issues. An examination of the South African National Heritage Project (SANCH) provides a case study to reflect on and begin to answer questions about developing and managing international museum and cultural heritage collaborations.

In 1999, a consortium of U.S. and South African organizations launched SANCH, a multi-year, transnational, cultural heritage training and technology program to develop appropriate professional skills for the collection, documentation, preservation, and presentation of the rich cultural expressions of the peoples in the newly-democratic South Africa. Three lead organizations in the United States based at Michigan State University (Michigan State University Museum, African Studies Center, and MATRIX: Center for Humane Arts, Letters and Social Sciences), and one lead organization in South Africa—the Documentation Centre at the University of Durban-Westville (now the University of KwaZulu Natal), were joined by two other U.S. partners—the Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage and the Chicago Historical Society—and a cadre of South African cultural heritage workers and organizations.<sup>6</sup>

## **Project History**

The installation of a new democratic government in South Africa in 1994 opened the door for South Africans to redress the long-neglected, and often suppressed, needs of the cultural heritage sector of South Africa. The form, organization, and content of heritage resources were derived from colonial and apartheid ideology and perpetuated the hegemony of the white ruling class and an assertion of the white culture of dominance. Heritage resources that had meaning for or served the majority of South Africans—the non-white populations—were marginalized. Most of the existing major cultural institutions reflected colonial perspectives and were governed by white professionals, some of whom clearly were attempting to simply continue their institutional practices and policies and ignore, even actively resist, the mandated changes of how their institutions should be governed, what would be collected, and how it would be interpreted. The expressive arts and cultural contributions that represented the diversity of the country had never been systematically collected or presented at South African cultural institutions. Cultural institutions that had been developed by and for non-whites were under-funded and often situated in what had been the homelands, the rural regions in which non-whites had been forced to live (Coombes 2004; Nuttall and Coetzee 1998). It should be noted, however, that many institutions in the arts, perhaps because culture had an increasingly active role in the struggle, made significant strides towards democratization prior to 1990 and laid the groundwork for the important changes in the cultural sector that took place after 1994. As an example, some art museums made moves to collect and exhibit the work of black artists in their galleries.

Professional training in museum, library, and archival work had been largely denied to persons of color within South Africa, and the nation faced a shortage of skilled practitioners who were appropriately equipped with the skills and knowledge to enter the field of heritage work. Few people of color were members, let alone leaders, of the major cultural heritage associations—the South African Museums Association (SAMA), South African Archival Association, and South African Library Association. Few networking opportunities existed for those trying to transform the cultural heritage sector. Entry-level professionals needed basic skill development and those few persons of color already in the field, whose opportunities for advancement had opened under the new government, needed enhanced skill development.

Extensive efforts were quickly mobilized to transform all sectors of activities in South Africa to

reflect practices and policies that erased those of the previously white-dominated, apartheid nation; the transformation of the cultural heritage sector was a fundamental component of these efforts. South African cultural heritage professionals under the new democratic government began using culture as tools of empowerment, healing, and engagement. Heritage institutions and workers in South Africa, however, found themselves floundering in the aftermath of the cultural ravages caused by over 300 years of colonial and apartheid repression.

The national government was particularly instrumental in fostering change within the cultural heritage sector; from the nation's highest level of governance came commissions, incentives programs, and mandates to transform the cultural heritage practices of the country. On November 4, 1994, the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology Ben Ngubane appointed an Arts and Culture Task Group that completed a first major report in June 1995 (Ngubane 1995). Then, in 1996, the South African Department of Arts, Culture, Science, and Technology (DACST) released a draft report, entitled *White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage, All Our Legacies, All Our Futures*. The report identified such key underlying values as that the participation in, and enjoyment of the arts, and cultural expression, as well as the preservation of one's heritage are basic human rights; they are not luxuries, nor are they privileges as we have generally been led to believe. The report noted that the Bill of Rights of the Constitution states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes artistic creativity.... [and] Everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice" (DACST 1996). Furthermore, the report noted that, "It is the role of government to facilitate the optimum conditions in which these rights may be enjoyed and practiced... Arts and culture may play a healing role through promoting reconciliation. Our approach to culture is premised on international standards in which culture is understood as an important component of national life, which enhances all our freedoms.... [We] have the responsibility to pursue and implement internationally agreed and accepted norms and standards in various sectors of our society, including arts and culture" (DACST 1996).

The new DACST became an active force for cultural policy development, training, and cultural transformation. This was best expressed in a departmental report: "The vision of DACST is to realize the full potential of arts, culture, science and technology in social and economic development, in nurturing creativity and innovation, and in promoting the diverse heritage of our nation. The mission of the Department is to support: the arts, culture, and heritage, by valuing diversity and promoting economic activity; the linguistic diversity of our country, as a resource in empowering all South Africans to participate in their country's social, political, and economic life; and the equitable development and preservation, conservation, promotion and cherishing of our collective history, national symbols, and heritage" (Ngubane 2002:3).

The transformation activities within the cultural heritage sector were, however, difficult. The lingering presence of many historical, long-standing societal, economic, and cultural apartheid-era practices created a context in which change in the cultural heritage sector came slowly. While the new government and some institutions of higher education began to immediately address these training needs, it was clear that the needs for skill development far outstripped the capacity of the government, higher education, or professional associations to quickly and effectively deliver services. There were many reasons for why the sector was not ready to provide training, including lack of funding to initiate new programs. One of the most significant reasons, however, was that the

culture of suspicion that characterized apartheid society continued to pervade the nation and the cultural heritage sector. Attempts by individuals within South Africa to encourage greater communication and collaboration between institutions to address the cultural heritage sector deficiencies were met with resistance and suspicion.

One strategy for facilitating collaboration across the heritage sector was put forward by Narissa Ramdhani, then the director of the Documentation Center at University of Durban Westville and archivist, African National Congress. As a South African exile, she had completed graduate studies in archival management and had worked in archives in the United States. She thought that external agencies, such as those in the U.S., could help seek funding, provide training, and facilitate dialogue among cultural heritage workers. She knew, though, that given the landscape of distrust and the quickly changing political dynamics, the choice of an international partner to work with South African organizations would be a politically sensitive issue. When Ramdhani was brought together in a meeting in Durban in the summer of 1997 with Marsha MacDowell and Kurt Dewhurst, both museum professionals from Michigan State University (MSU) working in South Africa, the seed for MSU to become the primary partner was planted.<sup>7</sup> MSU was a potential partner that had a number of significant assets: the institutional commitment to engage in extending its resources to address worldwide problems; one of the world's major centers for African studies outside of Africa; an award-winning humanities technology center developing tools for research and education and delivering cutting edge training, including in South Africa; and a university museum that was well known in the United States for its innovative and engaged research and educational programs. Most importantly, MSU had a long, deep engagement in anti-apartheid activities.

During the years of apartheid, MSU-based faculty, staff, students, and affiliates were particularly active in anti-apartheid efforts and their efforts led to MSU being the first American university to vote to divest of all stock holdings of corporations with economic interests in South Africa. Further activism on their part led to the divestiture of the State of Michigan's holdings in South Africa—the first state government to do so—setting in motion the wave of divestitures across the United States that ultimately played a key role in the economic pressure levied against the apartheid government. The contacts initiated during this critical and tumultuous period of South African history between individuals at MSU and at various South African agencies (especially those now called “previously disadvantaged tertiary educational institutions”) continued to be sustained after the negotiated transition from an apartheid state to a democratic government, a transition that characterized South Africa's unique political achievement.

In 1998, supported by MSU, MacDowell and Dewhurst began consulting with individuals who Ramdhani had identified across the cultural heritage landscape to gather more input on needs and to begin exploring what strategies might be used to address those needs. During this same period, colleagues at MSU's MATRIX and the African Studies Center were working in South Africa to strengthen and expand linkages between MSU and South African higher education institutions, particularly those interested in developing technology capacitation.

When, back in Michigan, the key individuals from MATRIX, MSU Museum, and African Studies met to share findings of their separate but related projects in South Africa, they began to see convergences of interests and needs and, consequently, began to work with Ramdhani to bring

together other U.S and South African colleagues to focus energies together. Thus a transnational, collaborative, multi-partner project was hatched.

## **Needs Assessment**

One of the first acts of the collaborators was to form a bi-national team, consisting of the MSU partners and individuals representing the broad array of museums, archives, cultural heritage, and higher education institutions across South Africa, to lead the development of a survey to assess needs. The intention of the survey was to compile information on, specifically, the needs for South African heritage sector training, research, outreach, networking, and education efforts, and to identify the most promising areas of potential transnational cooperation. The survey was then sent to as many cultural heritage sector stakeholders in South Africa as possible.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to MSU, the bi-national team next convened a gathering of South African cultural heritage stakeholders to review the results of the needs assessment; to refine, amend, and prioritize the needs; and then to outline strategies to address the needs. Two U.S. partner organizations—the Chicago Historical Society and the Smithsonian Institution’s Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage—experienced in community-based collaborations were invited to join the project and attend the gathering.

The gathering, entitled “International Partnerships for South African Culture, History, and Education,” was held November 2-5, 1999, in Durban, South Africa. The gathering was originally designed for 40 participants but over a hundred qualified participants applied to attend and ultimately over seventy participated. It was a landmark event, for it brought together—for the first time in South Africa—a truly diverse group of individuals who felt they had a stake in the future of cultural heritage work in South Africa. In addition to the members of the bi-national team, the gathering included delegations from historically-disadvantaged as well as established cultural repositories, museums, archives, and universities: foundation staff from the Mellon and Ford Foundations; representatives of political parties; and governmental leadership from the South African Parliament and the National DACST.

## **A Document of Cross-sector Cultural Heritage Needs for South Africa**

Perhaps the most significant activity that took place at the Durban gathering occurred early in the meeting as a result of animated and heartfelt exchanges. South African participants were wary of bi-national partnerships and raised concerns about the danger of exploitation by Western institutions and countries, a fear that evidenced the memory of apartheid collaboration between racist regimes and Western countries. The American participants were especially sensitive to this concern and cautious about compromising the integrity of MSU given its track record of anti-apartheid activism.

It quickly became very apparent that without some agreed upon “principles of partnership,” our bi-national relationship would never realize the potential that members of the team sought. Thus, meeting participants debated and established an agreed-upon statement comprised of a series of shared principles and values; these “principles of partnership” guided all further activities of the bi-

national partnership.<sup>8</sup> Four areas of concern—equity, communication, impact, and infrastructure—were addressed in the “principles” statements:

- 1) At the heart of successful collaborations there needs to be reciprocity or direct benefit to both parties. Ideally, these reciprocal rewards, while not often the same, will enrich each partner in expected or unexpected ways.
- 2) The most successful collaborations bring all relevant stakeholders to the table to launch and implement the collaboration. This requires thinking broadly to identify potential participants representing a diversity of cultural background, race, gender, and sexual orientation—as well as geography and discipline within the cultural heritage sector.
- 3) The best collaborations usually have an impact beyond the individual training project; they should build new collaborative opportunities, reach large audiences, and serve the communities involved in the project.
- 4) Whatever the product of the collaborative project, it should result in the empowerment of those involved, the development of skills, the transformation of participants’ organizations, and the building of new capacity within individuals and organizations.
- 5) There should be agreement on the framework for the partnership: the structure of leadership, frequency of meetings, sharing of minutes/communications/results of planning, procedures for mediation in the case of conflict, and a clearly defined leadership team.
- 6) Those involved must have a commitment to collaboration and a belief that more can be achieved by working together than working alone.
- 7) There must be recognition that individual participants in collaborative projects also represent institutions, and that the development of knowledge and skills for individuals is a means to capacitate their respective organizations.
- 8) There is a real need for transparency: open and honest expression of aspirations and expectations, as well as a process to ensure ongoing review and evaluation. Real transparency takes time, energy, and a desire to build a sense of trust and respect.
- 9) Regular communication, establishment of timelines, respect for deadlines, and willingness to share concerns and credit are a fundamental part of successful collaborations.
- 10) Continual consultation must take place not only within organizations but also across participating organizations. New relationships demand investments of time, energy, and goodwill.

Once these principles were established, gathering participants articulated and prioritized a list of needs across their various sectors: a) documenting and preserving cultural resources within South Africa (including intangible heritage); repatriating resources from outside South Africa; and facilitating access to resources resting outside the country; b) creating a comprehensive set of training programs, linked to South African technikons and universities, for emerging museum and

cultural heritage workers; c) assisting with the transformation of the existing and emerging professional organizations for museums, archives, libraries, and cultural centers; d) reaching new audiences beyond the walls of traditional heritage institutions; and e) using technology as a tool to address audience expansion. This list of needs laid the foundation for goals of a bi-national collaborations, in short to foster: 1) preservation and presentation of living cultural heritage and intangible heritage; 2) skill development and capacity building for all those involved in the project; 3) support of new research and making this research accessible to the communities where the work is done as well as to the larger public audience; and 4) shared management structures for planning and implementation of the projects.

### **SANCH Project Activities**

With major support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Ford Foundation, the SANCH project developed a series of strategies to address the identified needs. These strategies, enacted between 1999 and 2004, involved: a summer institute held in the United States; technical assistance workshops and an annual colloquia held in South Africa; a series of collaborative learning projects between U.S. and South African partner organizations; individualized consultations, technology training workshops, and technical assistance in South Africa; and the development of electronic cultural heritage content and listservs to facilitate shared information on international cultural heritage work. The training program, based at MSU, also featured practical educational experiences at other partner museums/cultural centers, including: the Charles Wright Museum of African-American History, the Motown Museum, and the Dexter-Elmhurst Community Center in Detroit; Ziibiwing Center for Anishnabe Lifeways in Mount Pleasant, Michigan; the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage and the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.; and the Chicago Historical Society. The training program brought together resources from MSU as well as other South African and international experts to provide cutting-edge learning opportunities at the colloquia and in workshops.

By the end of 2004, the South African National Cultural Heritage Project had worked directly with over 300 South African heritage professionals, museum administrators, curators, teachers, university professors, network technicians, and instructional technology personnel. A new national network of cultural heritage workers was established, linking the American cultural heritage sector via Internet technology representing national, regional, and local cultural organizations.

### **Lessons Learned and Lessons Lived**

When this bi-national project commenced, each of the partners brought to the table experience working in collaborative activities and in the heritage sector. As this project unfolded, new experiences were shared that were unique to this collaborative endeavor and, through those “lived” experiences, the partners learned. Some of the “lessons learned and lived” have relevance for all engaged in the development and management of international, bi-national projects. These include the following:

1) *Importance of establishing core principles of partnership*

The early effort to develop a mutually agreed-upon set of core principles of partnership proved to be critical to setting the stage for open dialogue and for resolving conflicts in developing programmatic components. By returning to these principles, the bi-national executive committee was able to effectively implement the programmatic components, select participants, identify locations, and formulate approaches to promoting the training components and attract participants.

2) *Importance of including diversity of stakeholders*

South Africans were particularly concerned about including participants who represented diversity in terms of cultural backgrounds, geographical distribution, size of institution, and level of prior experience. Because the roster of participants sometimes had to be approved by the Department of Arts and Culture, the process of selection of participants was sometimes slow and complicated.

3) *Limited national perspective of South African cultural heritage workers*

Many of the new cultural heritage workers had limited formal training or work experience in the cultural sector or travel experience outside of their region. By staging the training in various locations across the country, creating opportunities, and often incorporating visits to cultural institutions, participants were able to develop a deeper understanding of the national cultural heritage sector. It was of significant value to participants to meet one another, establish informal new professional networks, and travel within South Africa to formalize relationships with other cultural institutions and resources.

4) *Need for an international view*

Few South African cultural heritage workers were aware of international cultural heritage policy issues, including those related to intellectual property rights, intangible cultural resources, ethics in fieldwork, collection management practices, and digital standards for documentation of oral history. These became foci for colloquia, information sharing, and training. There was also a growing awareness that measures must be taken in defense of intangible patrimony, especially when working internationally, to respect cultural diversity in the face of globalization.

5) *Lingering distrust of communications/media*

Many post-apartheid South Africans retain a profound distrust of sharing personal communications via e-mail or phone. While extensive listserv resources and networks were originally seen as a strategy of the SANCH project to address needs, the SANCH team found that many participants were reluctant to share personal reactions/requests via the listservs.

#### 6) *Changing roles/competition*

The lack of funding in the cultural heritage sector in South Africa fostered intense competition for opportunities to participate in programs or collaborative projects. In addition, the rapidly changing employment opportunities in cultural organizations and the private sector led to considerable turnover within the cultural sector.

#### 7) *Readiness*

There was a greater range of skills and experience among participants than we had anticipated. Therefore, we had to tailor training workshops and experiences for a wider range of capabilities for both entry-level and more advanced participants.

#### 8) *Communications*

The distance involved in such an international project required a deep commitment to regular communications among the bi-national team via the Internet and telephone. While electronic “broadcast” communications were employed to keep key participants informed about project activities, we generally found that electronic communications had to be supplemented, at times even replaced, by more personal forms of communication including phone calls and face-to-face interactions.

### **An Assessment of the Cultural Heritage Sector at the End of the SANCH Project**

While the SANCH activities were being planned and implemented, cultural heritage work, meanwhile, continued to become more central to governmental policy work in South Africa. In 2002, Dr. Ben S. Ngubane, Minister of Arts, Culture, Science, and Technology wrote, “Worldwide, culture has been recognized as a potentially strong contributor toward job creation and economic growth. However, crafts, music, publishing, and film have complex value chains. There are spectacular successes and dismal failures on the international scene that we need to study... In general, culture and knowledge form the essence of all societies. What people know and how they express this knowledge is what makes them unique” (Ngubane 2002:1).

South African Museum Association (SAMA) and other professional associations in the cultural heritage sector have also been spearheading transformation activities. One example is SAMA’s approval, in 2006, of *South African Museums Association Professional Standards and Transformation Indicators*, a document outlining museum standards for measuring institutional progress.<sup>9</sup> In April 2004, SAMA was awarded a grant of R5 million by the Department of Arts and Culture to fund training to facilitate the transformation of South African museums (SAMA 2006).

The period from 1994 to the present has been one of tumultuous change for the cultural heritage sector. Established museums have been called upon to transform their exhibition policies, acquisition policies, and their professional staffs. New “legacy project” museums, monuments, memorials, and cultural programs have been launched with national funds to broaden the cultural representation of

those not included in the existing cultural institutions or heritage landscape. Progress has been in some instances remarkable, in other cases slow and faltering, but the net result has been a growing global dialogue on cultural heritage policy in which South Africa is a central player. This has been due to the profound international interest in social change in post-apartheid South Africa and to the active involvement of South African cultural heritage professionals who continue to share their experiences in professional meetings, in public settings, and in the broader media coverage of this period.<sup>10</sup>

## **Assessing the SANCH Bi-National Project**

This major bi-national project was a very ambitious undertaking and has led to new international collaborations with both original and new partners resulting in new electronic educational resources, exhibitions, documentation projects, training initiatives, conferences and gatherings, curriculum, and the first study-abroad program focused on South African museum studies and cultural heritage offered in Africa by an American university.<sup>11</sup>

## **Final Thoughts**

In closing, the authors, two American and one South African, offer reflective comments on the impact and importance of this complex, collaborative project that express viewpoints from their respective national perspectives.

### *A View from Two U.S. Partners, C. Kurt Dewhurst and Marsha MacDowell*

As cultural heritage workers in the United States and members of the bi-national SANCH project team, this collaborative project provided significant opportunities for professional development for us personally as well as for the members of our project team, including our own museum staff. Along the way we encountered numerous issues, including contested power relationships between institutions and individual participants, misunderstanding and distrust of motivations for engaging in collaborations, lack of clarity about mutual rewards in collaborative activities, and varying skill levels and capacities for project management. Despite the difficulties inherent in this bi-national project, the development of and adherence to the principles of partnership, a commitment to the potential positive benefits of partnering, and the cultivation of patience, flexibility, careful listening, relationship-building—and ultimately—a trust between partners were the keys to realizing success.

The project expanded our own worldview, provided reflective comparisons on our own work, and laid the groundwork for new, related projects. The project has led, for instance, to the development of several exhibitions, developed in collaboration with South African partners and hosted at the MSU Museum, including “Siyazama: Traditional Arts, Education, and AIDS in South Africa” and “Workers’ Culture in Two Nations: South Africa and the United States.” Both of these exhibitions are expected to travel in the United States and in South Africa. The MSU Museum also acquired two print portfolios—“Images of Human Rights” and “Universal Declaration of Human Rights: International Print Portfolio”—organized by Artists for Humanity

based in Durban. These exhibitions are now touring in North America through the MSU Museum Traveling Exhibitions Service, and the museum is working with Artists for Humanity to make the portfolios available online as virtual exhibitions. In 2006, MSU launched a summer study abroad program called “Expressive Arts, Cultural Heritage, and Museum Studies in South Africa”; many South African cultural heritage workers have suggested topics to be covered in the courses and are engaged as lecturers in the program. In fall 2007, four partnerships between a museum in the United States and a museum in another country were awarded funding through the new “Museums and Community Collaborations Abroad” program of the American Association of Museums and the United States Department of State. Under this program, the MSU Museum and the Nelson Mandela Museum are launching a three-year collaboratively developed program of activities that will benefit both countries. In addition to these activities, other MSU-based partners in the original SANCH project have initiated projects of international significance.<sup>12</sup> Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the principles of partnership that became such a core element of the SANCH project have now become a regular feature of collaborations of all kinds taken on by the MSU Museum.

We have come away with a deeper appreciation for the potential of museums as sites for contestation, community building, and engaged dialogue. We have a profound respect for those individuals and agencies doing the hard work of tackling transformation as well as a sound grasp on the complexities and challenges of bi-national projects.

*A View from a South African Project Partner, Narissa Ramdhani*

As a South African cultural heritage worker and member of the bi-national team for the SANCH project, I have observed that, twelve years into a new democracy, the initial perspectives of workers in the South African cultural heritage sector have undergone a vast transformation that differs considerably from those early years when we approached our American partners. As cultural workers, we believe that history leaves every country with a tangible cultural heritage, be it archeological, historical, sociological, or ecological, that contributes to the diversity of contemporary culture. Today we believe it is our responsibility to discover, preserve, and transmit both tangible and intangible cultural heritage to future generations. This is an exercise in nation building and healing that involves taking ownership of cultural heritage and leveraging it for developmental needs. One of the milestone achievements of South Africa’s first democratic government was the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) aimed at uncovering the atrocities of the apartheid state and forgiving those who had transgressed against humanity. In addition, the TRC also recommended the renewal of the soul through heritage preservation and programming.

This background shapes the emphasis on heritage and history in post-apartheid South Africa. As part of the healing process, we are working towards the implementation of the recommendations of the TRC. This is a new initiative that is further tasked with the protection and promotion of an important part of our heritage and is further indication of our desire to heal the souls of a very wounded South African nation and thus contribute to the creation of a just and peaceful society.

## Notes

1. This article has evolved out of papers presented by the authors at the AFRICOM Conference and 2nd General Assembly, Cape Town, South Africa, October 4-7, 2006.
2. For more information, see Williamson 1989, Atkinson and Breitz 1999, Younge 1988.
3. Interview with David Phoshoko, September 12, 2006, Interview Collection, Ifa Lethu Foundation, Pretoria, South Africa.
4. "International Partnerships Among Museums (IPAM) provides museums the opportunity to undertake a project with an international partner and establish lasting ties in another part of the world. IPAM is an institution-to-institution exchange program administered by the American Association of Museums (AAM) with primary support from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State" (<http://www.aam-us.org/getinvolved/ipam/>, accessed April 23, 2007).
5. For more information, see the African-Swedish Museum Network (<http://www.samp.org/>, accessed April 23, 2007) and Swedish African Museum Network (<http://www.districtsix.co.za/swedish%20african%20museum%20programme.htm>, accessed April 23, 2007).
6. For more details on the history and development of this project, as well as access to the Final Report of the South African National Heritage Project (SANCH) (September 2004), go to <http://www.sanch.org/>, accessed November 20, 2007.

The SANCH project received financial support from these units at MSU: College of Arts and Letters, African Studies Center, MSU Museum, Office of the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies, Office of the Provost, International Studies Center (South African Initiative Project), and MATRIX: Center for Humane Arts, Letters, and Social Science Online. The core leadership team at MSU consisted of Mark Kornbluh, John Eadie, Christine Root-Wiley, David Wiley, Bob Vassen, Marsha MacDowell and C. Kurt Dewhurst, with invaluable input from Melanie Shell-Weiss, Jackie Shoppell, Joan Eadie, and other colleagues at MATRIX and the MSU Museum. After the first year, they were joined by Peter Knupfer, who served as manager of the project in the last two years.

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The staff of the Documentation Centre and the Library at the University of Fort Hare provided a rich introduction to the cultural heritage of South Africa through their important collections. We also benefited from the chance to work with Margaret Hedstrom, the School of Information at the University of Michigan, while at the University of Fort Hare. We especially want to thank Narissa Ramdhani, Janet Pillai, and Mandy Gilder who were among the first South African cultural heritage professionals who shared their knowledge and network of colleagues with us.

7. In 1997, a team of South African cultural workers at the Documentation Centre and Museum at University of Fort Hare in Alice, South Africa approached MSU, seeking assistance in addressing a number of needs related to their art and ethnographic collections, liberation archival material, oral history/fieldwork collections, and related public programming. Based at one of the historically-disadvantaged tertiary universities (and the alma mater of many key South African leaders), the Documentation Centre was seeking to find an international partner—preferably university based—with a commitment to Africa, experience in conducting fieldwork on living cultural traditions, experience in cultural policy and planning work for museums and archives, experience with documentation and presentation of intangible cultural heritage, and training students in skills needed to work in new South Africa’s changing cultural heritage sector. With support from MSU, the authors, Dewhurst (as director of the MSU Museum) and MacDowell (as coordinator of the Michigan Traditional Arts Program and a faculty member in Museum Studies), traveled to Alice, a small town located in South Africa’s Eastern Cape Province, an area once a designated homeland for people of color under apartheid. After MacDowell and Dewhurst provided assistance to the staff of the University of Fort Hare’s Documentation Centre they were asked by UFH staff member Janet Pillai to meet with Ramdhani in Durban. Ramdhani, in turn, introduced MacDowell, Dewhurst, and other members of the MSU team to key South African cultural professionals in government, museums, archives, and universities.

8. At the Durban conference, SANCH member David Wiley shared a set of “principles for partnerships” that he had used in previous collaborative activities. The SANCH team used his “principles” as a basis for the SANCH project but also included elements derived from other conference participants’ experiences in collaborative activities. The resulting set of “principles in partnerships” was critical to the SANCH project and could easily serve as useful principles in the development and implementation for any collaborative projects.

9. “These early attempts (1920-1993) at setting standards were aimed mainly at collections management as the concern then was for the preservation of collections. With the birth of the new and democratic South Africa in 1994, SAMA’s Accreditation Committee started to broaden the scope of minimal standards to incorporate museum libraries and research and to place a greater emphasis on public services, equity, and multiculturalism” (SAMA 2006:1).

10. For a perceptive critique of the current state of transformation in South African museums, see Durbin 2006.

11. A MSU Study Abroad Program “Expressive Arts, Cultural Heritage, and Museum Studies in South Africa” was offered for the first time in 2006. The authors, MacDowell and Dewhurst, serve as lead faculty for the program, but South African cultural heritage specialists are responsible for guest lectures. The course thus provides students with content seen from both a U.S. and a South African perspective. For more information, go to <http://studyabroad.msu.edu/programs/safricaculther.html>, accessed November 20, 2007.

12. African Online Digital Library (<http://www.aodl.org/>, accessed April 9, 2008) and *South Africa: Overcoming Apartheid, Building Democracy* (<http://www.overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/>, accessed April 9, 2008).

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