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The Blending of Place and Voice in Ecomuseums: Educating Communities and Visitors in the New Museum

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Abstract:

The concept of the traditional museum as a temple of knowledge has been increasingly challenged with the development of new museum forms. This paper examines the history and applications in the Americas of one such model, the ecomuseum, which arose in the late 1900s in European industrial towns as a way for local communities to navigate their heritage and changing way of life in a post-industrial era. Ecomuseums are grassroots institutions whose goal is to encompass the entirety of the community's political and economic—as well as historical and cultural—reality to constitute the museum, and thus rarely confine themselves to a single museum building. Ecomuseums have come to fulfill a number of roles as educational institutions, historic preservation centers, and seats of community activism, giving community members a voice in self-representation and bridging the past, present, and future. The ecomuseum, in locally negotiating and redefining even the physical parameters of the museum, presents a unique model for democratic heritage preservation and education. While this specific model has been applied to a limited extent outside of Europe, the ecomuseum and other similar manifestations of new museology—which have emerged in Central, North, and South America—have potential for shaping culture democratically within indigenous and ethnic communities and offering valuable awareness of alternative histories to visitors.

On the Big Island of Hawaii, visitors who venture off of Oahu and outside of the capital of Honolulu have a chance to experience Hawaii the way that many Hawaiians live—among the coffee and macadamia nut farms that flourish in the volcanic soil. Most tourists come to the Big Island to experience the natural wonders of Volcanoes National Park or find a secluded green sand beach only accessible by foot, but if they choose, they can also visit Parker Ranch, a museum commemorating the cowboys of Hawaii's colonial past. The museum claims that "the story begins in 1809" when nineteen-year-old John Parker arrives on the island and begins to acquire the first tracts of what—through foreign exploitation of native Hawaiians—will become the largest U.S. tract of land owned by a single individual. What draws visitors to the museum? The advertisement boasts, "Gunplay? High drama? Romance and tragedy? It is all here in the history of Parker Ranch. It is a story of explorers, Hawaiian cowboys, kings and dignitaries, star-crossed lovers, and an heir who became a Broadway actor who established the Parker Ranch Foundation Trust that was created exclusively for health care, education and charitable purposes" (Parker Ranch, 2007).

The rhetoric museums use to describe themselves and their work as educators can be telling. The advertisement for Parker Ranch glosses over the entirety of Hawaiian history that

preceded John Parker's arrival, as well as the fate of any native Hawaiians living on the land that Parker was so adept at acquiring. Sensational language hopes to draw visitors to a Wild West type of scene, where land and love are won by American pioneering spirit, and the noble savage welcomes the invader with open arms. Yet while Parker Ranch presents one specific perspective for public consumption, other museums and historical foundations throughout the Hawaiian Islands offer different perspectives. There is the Dole Pineapple Plantation, the symbol of the American business interest that overthrew the Hawaiian monarchy, historical societies that have colonial re-enactments as well as native Hawaiian artifacts, and museums that have taken huge steps in promoting the Hawaiian language, not only preserving Hawaiian-language documents but also ensuring that they are accessible to native Hawaiians and the Hawaiian public at large (Bishop Museum, 2007).

As museum institutions have come to problematize the notion of a single history (Coldwell-Chanthaphonh & Ferguson, 2008; Schmidt & Patterson, 1995), such a range of perspectives is now commonplace among contemporary museums, where the cultural identities of the present are actively formulated through representations of the past. New museological forms have removed culture from its static position inside the display case of the traditional museum, thereby democratizing the understanding both represented groups and visitors have of heritage and history. The so-called "ecomuseum" is one new museum model that, while growing out of industrial European roots, offers potential in the Americas through its ability to respond to colonial images of indigenous peoples, present indigenous cultures as living and dynamic, and create a foundation of culturally acceptable means for accomplishing future goals.

Throughout the world, museums have become increasingly recognized as sites of power exercised through representation and transmission of interpretations of history (Bernstein, 1992; Davis, 1999; Dubin, 1999; Leask & Fyall, 2006; Peltomaki, 1999). Thus, museums and exhibitions, which were once temples of knowledge, have become battlegrounds of controversy. Visitors not only see the objects on display and the information provided about them, but are also influenced by the way the objects are shown and the position of authority that the museum holds. Furthermore, community members have begun to take increasing degrees of ownership of local institutions, calling upon museums to radically refocus on the interests of those they represent. While traditional conceptions and uses of the museum have often led to oppressive and imperialistic representations, new museological forms—of which the ecomuseum model is one—demonstrate ways in which the museum can expand beyond the display case to illustrate living cultures in transition and embody a more democratic community interest. "New museology" (Davis, 1999, p. 54; Hodges, 1978) describes a range of practices which, since emerging in the 1960s, have involved radically re-examining the role of the museum as representing individual voices in a democratic society; the ecomuseum model is one particular approach grounded in post-industrial cultural politics in Western Europe around the same time. The ecomuseum was originally envisioned as a use for abandoned factory buildings, which—as ecomuseums—became places for archiving and displaying photos and artifacts as well as holding community meetings on politics, economic welfare, and other topics of urgent local interest that bridged the past with the present and future (Davis, 1999; Stokrocki, 1996). In much the same way that compelling arguments have been made for linking multilingualism or other aspects

of multiple or marginalized identities with the exercise of meaningful democracy (Biseth, 2009; Bertely, 2007), new museology rejects the notion that the normative dominant discourses presented by traditional museums can well serve a democratic society. Ecomuseums, furthermore, play with the idea of cultural space and place to become more inclusive of the natural and cultural context for education and preservation, thereby educating about the significance of the body and physical presence in democratic participation (Miller-Lane, 2006; Nancy, 2006). Ecomuseums and other new museological forms consider rights to access and the process of participation (Biseth, 2009; Torres, 1998) as essential to navigating and portraying cultural realities in democratic societies, and expand access and participation in several ways. These institutions portray multiple and subjugated identities rather than focusing on a single, usually colonial narrative. Additionally, new museums expand the physical and spatial area available for the exercise of cultural production within communities.

Colonial Myth-Making About the Other

Historically, museums were the property of a single wealthy patron or collector who had accumulated enough material culture to put on display—the items were in fact owned by a single individual and their presentation subject to his whim (Dubin, 1999, p. 6). As museums grew out of these early curiosity cabinets and "took over royal collections, they also took on a number of royal functions," becoming the classifiers and interpreters of objects and the purveyors of legitimate knowledge (Ames, 1992, p. 17; Conn, 1998). In Bennett's (1995) genealogy of the museum as a Western cultural institution, he highlights the ways in which the first museums defined and enlisted such high culture for social management of the masses through differentiation of class tastes. Imperialist natural history museums in Europe and the Americas depicted human development as progressive and evolutionary, with non-white peoples falling along a "sliding-scale of humanity" that ranged from barbaric to nearly civilized (Bennett, 1995, p. 83). This type of representation not only objectifies, but also appropriates the cultures of colonized others for study and interpretation (Ames, 1992). As such, the objects on display have become problematic emblems of the increasingly contested historical process of collecting and museum-making (Stocking, 1985), not merely artifacts and art objects from a specific place and time.

Many postcolonial critics of museum institutions have noted how natural history museums traditionally regarded indigenous peoples as relics of history and promulgated the myth that their present-day descendants were members of a dying race (Hirschfelder & Kreipe de Montaño, 1993; Monroe & Echo-Hawk, 2004). Museum scholars like French (1994) and Monroe & Echo-Hawk (2004) furthermore observed the ways in which this popular conception resulted in controversial museum practices such as grave looting for human remains and the use of phrenology—the measurement of the cranium—to make claims about the inferiority of indigenous peoples and attempt to justify population decline. The push for repatriation of human remains in the 1960s and 1970s, culminating in the U.S. Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, has fundamentally changed the dialogue about material culture rights in the United States (Monroe & Echo-Hawk, 2004), but has only begin to redress the colonial impact on cultural property, fraught across the Americas and throughout the world. Many museum scholars have argued how, within the colonial formation of the museum institutions, museums have made use of the material culture of indigenous peoples to position the dominant

group in relation to the colonized other, often doing more to authentically portray the values and ideals of the colonizing culture than the indigenous histories and identities on display (Cooper, 1997, p. 403; Hirschfelder & Kreipe de Montaño, 1993; Sanchez & Stuckey, 2000).

With some (Cobb, 2008; Morphy, 2006) questioning the notion that colonialism has ended in countries where indigenous populations continue to inhabit a marginal legal and political space in relation to former colonial powers, the colonial history of the museum institution is hardly itself a relic. Museums, in making culture tangible and visible, have often been seen as solidifying and even ossifying cultures in time rather than depicting an ongoing way of life (Dubin, 1999). Whether in the American Southwest, where the historical moment of Plains Nations people depicted in museums has been reduced to minimize the visibility of frontier conflict with white men (Beier, 1999) or at the Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawaii, where seven different Polynesian cultures are packaged for quick consumption by tourists (Polynesian Cultural Center, 2007), museums are still today used to fit the culture of the "other" into well-defined and quantifiable parameters. At the same time, the financial benefits actually seen by indigenous people for participation in such tourism ventures is minimal at best, with most profits being redirected towards corporate connections and surrounding non-native owned hotels and entertainment industries (Wallis, 1994). Other sources of funding, especially when obtained by non-native controlled museums, may not only compromise the message and intent of the museum, but in fact be highly objectionable in themselves. Hendry (2005) documents one case of a Cree group in Northern Alberta, Canada, who were outraged to discover that a Cree exhibit in a local museum had in fact been funded by an oil company with whom the tribe was engaged in a dispute about land rights (pp. 51-52). While the Cree group had agreed to and assisted in formulating the exhibit, the sponsorship of the oil company significantly undermined both indigenous intent within the exhibit and the indigenous claims within the dispute, because they had unknowingly accepted the company's funding for cultural enterprises.

While outstanding examples of the contentious relationship between museums, indigenous peoples, and the public exist, these types of antagonistic relations are perhaps the historical rule rather than the exception. Indigenous peoples all over the world have been engaged in an ongoing process of contesting the ability of white anthropologists or collectors to speak on behalf of their cultures. Appropriation of cultural property is a complex and often ambiguous issue that pertains to not only the taking of material objects for display in museums, but also the use of art forms, scientific knowledge, and other types of intellectual property (Ziff & Rao, 1997). Lavine & Karp (1991) have suggested that every museum exhibition, regardless of its overt subject and goals, inevitably draws on the ideologies and cultural assumptions of the decision-makers behind it, even as it may attempt to present the history and culture of another group entirely. The display of culture is itself an enterprise rife with contradictions and controversies, and this friction between stakeholders as well as between new and traditional museum forms can be viewed as a "war of position" (Buntix & Karp, 2006, p. 207) or culture war (Loukaitou-Sideris & Grodach, 2004). Within this culture ware, many present-day groups struggle to assert their sovereign rights and reinvent ways to live as indigenous peoples in a modern world that continues to situate indigenous identity in the past (Clifford, 1988). The practice of traditional museums treating indigenous peoples

as outsiders and relics has made the use of museums by indigenous peoples quite complex, and "it is not without ambivalence that tribal people [in the Americas] have set up buildings to house collections, launch exhibits, and emulate the very institutions that have so boldly relegated American Indians to the status of flora and fauna of the 'New World'" (Cooper, 1997, p. 403). The tourism industry has added to the already problematic colonial history of museums, with touristic enterprises often working within narrow boundaries of cultural images and sometimes reinforcing stereotypes, while also contributing to the erosion, degradation, and appropriation of the very resources that attract visitors (French, 1994; Hoxie & Nelson, 2007; Witz, 2006). Visitors to traditional museums are, in many cases, offered the opportunity to discover neatly packaged representations of cultural difference, and thus renew the colonial enterprise in the act of visiting (Witz, 2006).

In Clifford's (1997) discussion of museums as "contact zones" (p. 192), he explored the possibility of traditional museums becoming more open and responsive to true collaboration with source communities to restore the present-day relevance to objects on display, and reminds us that even museum displays that injure and objectify can be sites of subversion and reciprocity for those represented. No institution that takes on the loaded image of the museum can be free of its colonial legacy, yet neither are new museums confined to it (Clifford, 1997). These politics of heritage and power imbalances inherent in museums are many, as have been the attempts to disrupt and redress them in new iterations of the museum institution. The objects on display in the museum serve as symbols of knowledge and power, while the museums that hold them are gatekeepers, regulating and legitimating culture (Heumann Gurian, 2004; Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1991; Luke, 2002; Weil, 2004). But because museum environments enable social and symbolic capital, imbalances of power also can be refashioned into institutions that promote cross-cultural understandings of historically racialized differences (Bennett, 2006; Buntix & Karp, 2006). The many new types of museums that developed in the latter part of the 20th century constituted a democratization of heritage to respond to increasingly diverse demands from society, and new museum forms came to serve many roles not previously envisioned for their traditional counterparts: "Temples of civilization, sites for the creation of citizens, forums for debate, settings for cultural interchange and negotiation of values, engines of economic renewal and revenue generation, imposed colonialist enterprises, havens of elitist distinction and discrimination, and places of empowerment and recognition" (Kratz & Karp, 2006, p. 1). The ecomuseum was just one of these new visions of the museum, with a set of roles unique to its development.

Defining the Ecomuseum

Before discussing the past and potential uses of the ecomuseum as a model for community heritage preservation and education, it is necessary to understand the characteristics that ecomuseums share with other new museological forms and what distinguishes these museums from traditional museums. The term "ecomuseum" is translated from the French "ecomusée," with the prefix "eco" representing a shortening of the term "écologie" (Davis, 1999). Rather than emphasizing environmentalism, as readers of the English translation might expect, the ecomuseum model was designed to incorporate a broader context and sense of the human environment than was typical of museum display cases, which isolated objects in a collection out of their cultural context. Rivière

and de Varine coined the term in 1971 as the ecomuseum movement was beginning, and envisioned the ecomuseum as a more holistic interpretation of cultural heritage (Davis, 1999). Some of these same goals were, of course, shared by a variety of other institutions falling under the diverse umbrella of new museology (Davis, 1999, p. 54; Hodges, 1978). Other types of museums sharing similar philosophies about knowledge and culture, and similar goals for representing subjugated identities and reforming museums as democratic institutions went by other names: local museums, community museums, neighborhood museums, ethnic museums, postmodern museums, revisionist museums, and others (Hudales, 2007; Loukaitou-Sideris & Grodach, 2004; Munson, 1997). New museology has also come to mean an approach by museum professionals in traditional museums that involves more inclusive and collaborative work with communities (Krouse, 2006). For the purposes of this paper, however, ecomuseums will be examined as one specific type of new museological form because of the emphasis of the model on community-generated and place-based democratic participation in cultural formation.

The ecomuseum, as one new museological form, has been constructed as a center for a community to gather and display heritage, formulate identity and representation, and develop collaborative solutions for community issues. René Rivard created conceptual models for comparing the traditional museum (building + collections + experts + public) with the ecomuseum (territory + heritage + memory + population), and distinguished between museums of ecology such as natural history museums, ecological museums such as field centers and nature parks, and ecomuseums, which Rivard described as human presence in conjunction with their environment (Davis, 1999, p. 69). As Hodges (1978) described, "The new museum is a concept, not a place" (p. 150). Ecomuseums typically consider both the museum building itself and the surrounding human and natural environments to constitute the ecomuseum, and while they are open to visitors, their primary purpose is to serve community interest rather than draw tourism or generate revenue.

Stokrocki (1996) describes the ecomuseum concept by suggesting, "Usually we think of a museum as a storehouse of art objects, a temple of goods, and culture in a box. In some communities, people regard the museum building itself as only a meeting place and the environment or community as the museum—an ecomuseum" (p. 35). From this concept of an ecomuseum as an institution not confined to the walls of the built environment, ecomuseums create an environment that nurtures democratic and reciprocal relationships; not only is the built environment of the museum seen in interaction with the broader community, but the heritage of the community's past is also seen interacting with the voicing of present and future concerns. Because the definition of an ecomuseum rests more on the origin and function of the museum rather than its physical characteristics or the objects it contains, the concept of the ecomuseum has been widely interpreted all over the world in contexts that vary significantly from the original industrial focus. Furthermore, the ecomuseum as a model can be used to examine how new museology has functioned to further understanding democratic participation as essential to preservation and education, and the voicing of subjugated representations as essential to democracy. While ecomuseums arose largely in European industrial settings, innovative uses of the same concept can also be seen in locations such as nature parks and Native American reservations, illustrating thereby the freedom that exists within the model to reinterpret the role

of communities and individuals in representing their cultures and themselves as both historically rooted and dynamic.

Historical Origins of the Ecomuseum

In the 1960s and 1970s, the backdrop for the development of ecomuseums was provided by new museology and an overall goal in museum reform of transforming museums into places of learning that were more accessible to communities and more democratically responsive to public service initiatives (Davis, 1999, p. 54; Hodges, 1978). The setting for the formation of the first ecomuseums was a post-industrial world in which shifts in manufacturing economies had left many factories defunct, while the communities that had been established around those factories struggled to define themselves in a new economic and political situation (Stokrocki, 1996, p. 37). Some of the first ecomuseums were founded in industrial towns throughout Europe, mainly in France, but also made an early appearance in Germany and Italy. One response to the question of what to do with the abandoned factory buildings was to turn them into museums to house local artifacts. Another adaptive use of the factory buildings was to hold community meetings, where members of the community came to exercise citizenship and voice their concerns about the growing economic, political, and environmental issues that had resulted from the rise and fall of the industrial presence. Together, these two uses created the foundation for some of the first ecomuseums.

While ecomuseums today perform a variety of functions worldwide and interact differently with host communities and tourists depending on their specific location, most of the first ecomuseums were European and located in industrial towns (Stockroki, 1996). When the period of industrial growth subsided, factories closed and were left abandoned, and the communities that had been built around the factories were thrust into an uncertain state economically, politically, and culturally. In the 1980s, French socialist cultural policy reforms focused on reformulating French national identity to favor working-class community values, and interviewers went door-to-door in the Saar region on the French-German border to get community members' perspectives on the economic and political effects of the closing of local factories and coal mines (Stockroki, 1996). The product of the interviews was *La Maison de Cultures Frontieres*, an ecomuseum housed in an abandoned factory building, and home to photographs, archives, and eventually even street performances (Stockroki, 1996). This archetype of the ecomuseum model served several revolutionary functions. In restoring relevance to the factory building itself, the ecomuseum facilitated transition from industrial and post-industrial livelihood; in archiving local community members' own artifacts, the ecomuseum democratized the historical representation put forth in the display. Most significantly, however, the ecomuseum transformed the factory building into a platform for the voices of the working-class people who continued to call the community home after the disappearance of industry, serving thereby as a democratic institution for members of a society whose circumstances granted them little opportunity to exercise autonomy and voice. Ecomuseums thus began as grassroots efforts of working-class citizens of France and other European countries who needed a forum for their struggle for equality in a post-industrial world. By using abandoned factory buildings, industrial communities were able to maintain a connection with their past and the built environment that was so closely linked to the community's livelihood, becoming "museums of time as well as museums of space" (Davis, 1999, p. 4). In preserving and creating adaptive uses for the

defunct factory buildings rather than abandoning them, ecomuseums instilled a sense of pride in their industrial heritage in community members, rather than expecting a community to redevelop an identity from scratch in a new post-industrial setting. The most important goal and function of the ecomuseum movement, however, was to give a voice to working-class individuals struggling to navigate significant lifestyle transition with the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial economy; this had the effect of branding the ecomuseum as a philosophically democratic institution positioned as both instructive of and responsive to community interest.

The urgent need for communities to utilize both tangible and intangible heritage in forging cultural identity is not unique to industrial towns, however. New attitudes towards the role of preservation in community development stemming from the new museology indicate a looking to the future as well as the past, and in so doing set social and political as well as preservation goals (Davis, 1999, p. 17). Numerous preservationists and scholars have noted the importance of community involvement and living culture in creating an effective museum of any type. In examining museums' roles in developing national identities in the Caribbean, Cummins (1994) noted that little experience of living culture in any museum results in a lack of meaning to both the visitor and community the museum is supposed to represent (p. 199). Newton (1994) furthermore noted that while museums are supposed to represent the identities of their constituents, identities change over time. In the new museology communities are required, therefore, to assess their identities before, during, and after the construction of museum exhibits that are supposed to represent them, and furthermore use museums in tandem with social change and development to reflect an accurate and living picture of the community. With ecomuseums providing just one of many models of new museums that operate with community interest, development, and education as their focal point, the ecomuseum movement marks one of many shifts towards the "democratization of heritage" (Leask and Fyall, 2006, p. 53) taking place worldwide, as communities emphasize intangible values and the conservation of diverse types of heritage, and take on a new role in world heritage.

Preserving Dynamic Culture and Rethinking Stakeholder Interests

The rethinking of museums as facilitating the preservation of culture through living practice and expression is a radical change in the fundamental concept of the museum (Clavir, 1996). What we may come to view as more accurate or authentic museums today, however, are doing just that—moving away from the tendency to merely present material culture and towards the ability to refurbish and nourish a living culture. This radical change has come gradually, through the good sense of repatriation of material culture (Hendry, 2005), consultation of indigenous groups in shaping representation (Peltomaki, 1999), and finally the facilitation of self-representation (Clavir, 1996). Preservationists in the new museum are being asked to accept that culture is dynamic, cultural meanings change, and contexts for validity shift. While some museums, like the newly renovated Plains Indian museum of the Buffalo Bill Historic Center, have already espoused a goal of telling significant histories through a focus on living culture and contemporary contexts (Buffalo Bill Historic Center, 2007), it is the use of the ecomuseum model specifically that has generated one of the most interesting cases in the United States, the Ak-Chin Indian Reservation, located in the Sonoran Desert, 40 miles south of Phoenix, Arizona (Stockroki, 1996). The *Ak-*

Chin community points to one specific building, the *Him-Dak*, as their meeting place, but regards the entire reservation—from the objects and buildings to the mountains and people—as their museum (Stockroki, 1996). The *Him-Dak* serves as a place for *Ak-Chin* tribal members to discuss any issues that affect the reservation and the community, as well as to store and restore artifacts, keep a library, house a newspaper, and socialize (Stockroki, 1996). The building itself is not only a museum, in that "besides storing and studying artifacts in their archives, the *Him-Dak* promotes cultural identity, education, and dialogue between the generations of the *Ak-Chin* and other tribes" (Stockroki, 1996, p.41).

The need for an ecomuseum to comprise such comprehensive utility has grown out of an interesting amalgamation and transformation of culture in the *Ak-Chin* community. From its early days, the *Ak-Chin* tribe was composed of people from two different tribes, the Tohono O'odham and Pima, that banded together for protection against a common enemy—as a result, many *Ak-Chin* community members struggled to reconcile their cultural heritage, feeling "isolated and torn between their two tribes of origin" (Stockroki, 1996, p. 43). Because of this complex heritage, members of the community wanted a place to discuss issues of cultural identity and nurture a living community culture that fostered shared identity. The community additionally confronted economic and political issues in an effort to preserve their agricultural base. The *Ak-Chin* reservation community traditionally subsisted as an agricultural community growing cotton, barley, potatoes, alfafa, and corn, but efforts to preserve traditional agriculture in arid land required that the *Ak-Chin* people negotiate with the local government to procure water rights for farming. Throughout the water rights negotiations, the community needed the *Him-Dak* as a meeting place to discuss the negotiation process (Stockroki, 1996).

Current projects illustrate the *Him-Dak's* unique role as built environment within an ecomuseum and clarify the distinction of the goals and purposes of ecomuseums from those of traditional museums. The *Him-Dak* is a democratic educational resource engaged with the community's needs and desires, offering a Head Start program for early childhood education, a language class to *Ak-Chin* tribal members and non-*Ak-Chin* community members, a storytelling and reading program, a summer photography course, and weekly lessons in traditional basket-weaving (Stockroki, 1996). Such educational programs are an opportunity for service and outreach to the *Ak-Chin* and non-*Ak-Chin* community, but at the same time they are positioned to preserve and revitalize cultural knowledges and values. The *Ak-Chin* community has also continued its focus on cultural identity issues and sought to broaden discussions of cultural identity to include other indigenous groups, partnering with an Inuit group and a group in Mexico City to create cultural exchange exhibits. The *Him-Dak* also engages in archival and heritage work for its local community, one such venture being an oral history project funded by a grant from the county division of parks and recreation (Stockroki, 1996).

Because of its important role in the community, the staff members of the *Him-Dak* have devoted a great deal of effort to the growth and development of their ecomuseum. The staff has engaged in professional development with the local Arizona Community College, creating a flexible, non-traditional Associate of Arts degree program enabling them to work full time and attend classes in the evening on museum education topics (Stockroki, 1996). With such

attention to future growth and professional development, the ecomuseum is able to occupy an influential role not only as a mediator of change over time, but as an avenue for relationships between the *Ak-Chin* community and the surrounding area that enable democratic participation while also reflecting the importance of traditional lifeways. As Stockroki notes, "The museum offers some economic livelihood for staff members, perpetuates traditional farming and basket-making skills, and documents historical life…Some *Ak-Chin* people, who live off the reservation, feel that the museum connects them to the land" (p. 43). The ecomuseum also undoubtedly benefits the many non-*Ak-Chin* people who visit—whether to participate regularly in one of its many educational outreach programs or just to visit for a few short hours.

Many other examples of innovative uses of new museum forms and organizational strategies similar to the ecomuseum models can be found throughout the Americas. Clifford (1991) examined museum representations of Northwest Coast Indians in Canada, including those found in the U'mista Cultural Centre and the Kwagiulth Museum, and noted the significance of the local meanings enmeshed in the tribal museums' displays. These museums, like the ecomuseum model, shift objects from artifact to memorabilia in the display of living individuals' remembered pasts, and Clifford observed their democratizing role in fostering "a certain national or global participation," despite their local focus (1991, p. 225). Kaeppler (1992) similarly echoed the primary purpose of the ecomuseum model in her observations of native Hawaiian representations in native-controlled museums, which seemed to "assist in the forging of cultural, ethnic, or natural identity, and can serve as a link to the future that recognizes its roots in the past" (p. 473). Hendry (2005) also noted this future-focus and the tremendous variety of forms it can take, and selected a number of indigenous-controlled institutions for study, including the Woodland Cultural Centre, community museums and *casas de la cultura* in Mexico, the Seneca National Museum, the Red Lake Nation tribal information center, and the First Nations Confederacy of Cultural Education Centers. As Hendry noted in all his examples, and as the ecomuseum model also suggests, communities "emphasize first the need to understand themselves, to value and retain their own rich sources of identity…[and] are often willing to share their cultural treasure with outsiders as well" (Hendry, 2005, p. 103).

In addition to the ecomuseum's goal of preservation of history as a foundation for the future, new museum institutions in the Americas have also taken on the ecomuseum's focus on living communities. For instance, the Makah Cultural and Research Center features exhibit representations that are also actively used by living communities (Pierce Erikson, Ward, & Wachendorf, 2002). The alternative display structure embraced by the ecomuseum model has also been found elsewhere—for instance, Ybarra-Frausto in her work on Chicano Art (1991) notably pointed out that posters and barrio murals constitute legitimate forums for display, struggle, and critical engagement with culture and its representation in the era of the new museum. Perhaps the most exciting evolution of the new museum already found in the Americas, however, is international networking across local heritage projects, with the Union of Community Museums of Oaxaca, Mexico as one example that establishes pan-American networks of village heritage projects (Camarena & Morales, 2006).

Conclusion: Placing Ecomuseums within Alternative Tourism

Alternative tourism, the broader umbrella encompassing cultural tourism and most forms of new museology, describes any form of tourism that is consistent with natural, social, and community values and shared experiences between visitors and community residents—a fundamentally democratic approach to preserving and educating within communities. As new museology has grown in the Americas, most of the institutions wishing to attract alternative tourism have referred to themselves as ethnic museums, tribal museums, neighborhood museums, or community museums. These institutions expanded rapidly in recent decades; the American Association of Museums reported that 26% of the new museums that opened between 1998 and 2000 in the United States were devoted to specific ethnic and cultural groups (Loukaitou-Sideris & Grodach, 2004). Despite the distinction in name, however, ethnic museums are quite similar to ecomuseums in their composition and purpose as "institutions formed by members of ethnic groups to collect, exhibit, and interpret the history, art, and culture of their communities" (Loukaitou-Sideris & Grodach, 2004, p. 53). Ethnic museums, like ecomuseums serve as interpreters of a specific group's culture and history—they "seek to *inform and educate* a larger public about the culture, develop its *awareness* about matters of ethnic heritage and history, and *interpret* and translate the culture and history to outsiders" (Loukaitou-Sideris & Grodach, 2004, p. 59). Thus the participatory, community-centered cultural production featured in ecomuseums has become more common throughout the Americas and has much room to continue to grow. While ecotourism has drawn the overwhelming majority of publicity within alternative forms of tourism, the ways in which ecotourism promotes environmentally and economically sustainable tourism ventures seems complemented by the way in which ecomuseums and similar models promote culturally sustainable tourism. By assisting communities in fusing heritage preservation and lived culture, ecomuseums and other venues for new museology avoid fixing a culture in time and forcing it into obsolescence—instead allowing communities to democratically pursue sustainable cultural preservation that can also adapt to changing community needs. As alternative tourism grows in popularity to meet evolving cultural demands, ecomuseums should be increasingly examined as locations that thrive on educating across distinctions between communities and visitors, as well as navigating heritage and shared transformations across time.

Ecomuseums, as well as local museums that share many of the features of the ecomuseum model, have become diverse spaces in which colonized groups can contest the legitimacy of the displays in traditional museums (Hoxie & Nelson, 2007), disrupt received images from the mainstream (Wallis, 1994), and contend with hybrid identities resulting from colonized pasts. Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (2006) has argued that if we view culture as a social construction, museums become important spaces of self-fashioning and identity formation, and the ecomuseum model democratizes such identity politics. While a significant portion of touristic visitors are apt to question and dispute self-representations as inaccurate or, perhaps ironically, inauthentic (Hendry, 2005), museum models that prioritize the represented community's present and future interests hold less of a risk of commoditizing or reducing culture for touristic consumption.

New museums emphasize the ongoing lives of real people, and as such offer desirable opportunities to many local groups, but particularly indigenous peoples who have often

been depicted in natural history museums as inhabiting the past rather than the present. In presenting alternative visions of heritage and in promoting represented peoples as authors of their own histories, ecomuseums democratize not only the heritage of those whose cultures are on display but also the museum education provided to visitors, who have the opportunity to critically engage with the display and its construction as a kind of knowledge technology. New museums furthermore democratize heritage beyond the local or national contexts for democratic political participation. Rather than being confined to participation within their particular national borders, many of the people involved with new museums have also become part of broader international movements of institutions with similar goals of representing subjugated histories (Morris, 1994; Pierce Erikson, Ward, & Wachendorf, 2002). With local heritage increasingly becoming a part of global histories, new museums do not merely foster participatory heritage preservation and display for local communities in the Americas, but engage both the source culture and the visitor in an internationally relevant dialogue about how all histories—and futures—are imagined.

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