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The social museum in the Caribbean : grassroots heritage initiatives and community engagement

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Caribbean Participatory Practices

Community is not a commodity. [Participation] is not cheap. It's not easy. It's the work we feel driven to do to build a museum that is of and for our community.

Nina Simon (2014)

Nina Simon is seen by many in the museological field as the person who spearheaded the practical exploration of community participation in museums. Her experiences as a museum consultant, and her particular interest in making museums more participatory, were bundled in her book *The Participatory Museum* (Simon 2010). While the book considers community engagement and participation theoretically, its uniqueness lies in the vast collection of practical examples from museums which wanted to be more participatory in a specific way and the steps they took to achieve that goal.

As Simon stresses, participation is neither cheap nor easy. Although small projects can be undertaken in short amounts of time and with minimal budgets, her point is that true participation and community engagement takes deep dedication. Thus, while her book contains a collection of practical examples for smaller and bigger participatory projects, building a museum that is truly “of and for our community” will take many projects and a deep investment of time, passion, and commitment. This is the case for museums wishing to engage in participatory practices everywhere in the world, including the Caribbean. Yet, individual projects which are relatively cheap and easy to achieve, can of course lead to deeper community engagement in the long term. It is with this in mind, that this chapter hopes to provide concrete examples for those Caribbean museum staff who wish to find regional practices that can be adapted to their own institutions. While the chapter shows that participatory practices already occur widely throughout the Caribbean, participation is an ongoing process that benefits from continued investment and reassessment.

Thus, this chapter presents a wide range of participatory practices from the Caribbean and discusses how each of these practices may best be applied. It functions as an extensive answer to the sub question “what are the characteristics of contemporary Caribbean museums and how are they adopting and adapting participatory practices?” (see *Research Questions and Objectives*, page 18). This collection of practices does not claim to be complete. However, it does reflect the most commonly occurring methods of community engagement in the Caribbean. The categories according to which the

participatory practices have been grouped were designed for this research. Many of these practices are established in the field of museum studies, which has supported my definition of each practice. However, it is important to point out that these categories were specifically designated for this research based on experiences in the field. In addition, it was part of the fieldwork of the regional museum survey to identify the presence of any participatory practice in each visited museum. In other words, museum staff or another visitor might not identify the same participatory practices in each museum, depending on their definition. The categories of participatory practices range from fundamental, such as ecomuseums, to complementary, for instance in the case of activities or events. Each section begins with a definition and description of the participatory practice as categorized for this research, along with any noted difficulties concerning their application or identification. Then a few specific approaches or key aspects are highlighted and illustrated with examples. All of the examples are from the Caribbean museums that were visited during the regional museum survey 2013-2016 (see *Regional Museum Survey*, page 49). Nearly every museum contained at least one type of participatory practice. There were only eight cases where it was not possible to identify participatory practices with certainty, because the museum was still under construction, closed incidentally for refurbishment, or permanently closed. Besides these cases, only three other museums did not have any participatory practices: *Fort St. Louis* on St. Martin, *Morne Fortune: Apostles Battery & The Powder Magazine* on St. Lucia, and *L'Église du Fort* on Martinique. All of these are open air sites of built heritage with informative text panels, but without on-site staff or non-structural objects. All data used in this chapter was taken from the Caribbean Museums Database of all of the 195 museums visited (see *Index: Caribbean Museums Database*, page 251; see also the online accessible Caribbean Museums Database).

Museum Foundation & Organization

Grassroots Initiatives

Museums in the Caribbean are commonly the result of grassroots initiatives. This means that the initiative for the establishment of the museum (the concept, the creation, and the collection) lies solely or mainly with a community or individual and not with the (local) government, ministries, or existing public institutions (e.g. national trusts). Some of these museums may still be managed by communities or individuals today and are still grassroots museums. Others may have changed ownership or management over time and are no longer grassroots museums. However, their history and origin remains the same. Museums that are the result of grassroots initiatives are generally highly participatory as they have been founded by a community or a community member to answer a perceived lack or a specific need. In many cases, these museums will also incorporate other participatory practices, for instance with regards to their collections or with staffing. Of the museums visited during the regional museum survey, 98 museums (50%) were grassroots initiatives. These initiatives are not restricted to any specific part of the Caribbean or to any linguistic area. Instead, we find grassroots initiatives throughout the entire Caribbean.



Figure 7: A display case made from a jukebox showcases geological collections at Museo Profesor Tremols, Dominican Republic.

Grassroots initiatives in the Caribbean may be the result of a single individual's passion for heritage and history. For instance, *Museo Profesor Tremols* in the small municipality of Laguna Salada (Valverde province, Dominican Republic) was set up by prof. José de Jesus Tremols Acosta in 1965. Passionate about archaeology, history, geology, and local heritage, he had been collecting objects and artefacts for many years before deciding to open his collection to the public.⁹ He realized that many people living in the area had little knowledge of their own heritage and that many traditions, especially related to agriculture, were disappearing due to modernization. He transformed part of his home into a museum space, with self-made shelves, displays cases, and object labels (see figure 7). The museum and its collection have continued to grow over the decades and in this rural area they are important resources for school children and adults alike by providing access to their past, stretching back to pre-colonial times.

Other grassroots initiatives are the result of the efforts of multiple people, for instance a religious community, cultural community, local community, or a community with a shared interest, such as a historical society or artists' collective. In some cases these communities have set themselves up as foundations or non-profit organizations, while others are more informally organized. For instance, the *Santa Rosa First Peoples Community* in Trinidad set up their museum or community center in 1974. The main aim of this first peoples community is to protect their Indigenous cultural heritage, transmit it to younger generations, and teach it to other visitors.¹⁰ The museum space is located on communal lands in a building that is also a community gathering place and office.

A grassroots initiative may be funded or supported by private corporations, thus placing it in the category of 'private museum.' Directors, CEOs, or a board of directors may choose to reinvest the profit from their businesses into the creation of a museum or to extend the reach of their company by expanding into the heritage sector. For instance, the *Museo Bellapart* in the Dominican Republic was founded in 1999 by the president of the local Honda dealership, Juan José Bellapart.¹¹ The museum exhibits Mr. Bellapart's privately acquired art collection but is located within the building of the Honda dealership. Another example of a common practice in the Caribbean are businesses that have expanded their shop or factory with a museum. Rum distilleries are the most common of these private grassroots initiatives, such as the *Distillerie Depaz* on Martinique. The visit often contains a tour of the estate or factory along with displays related to the sugar cane process and its local history. Amber museums, such as the *Museo Mundo de Ambar* in the Dominican Republic, provide information about amber and its inclusions from a natural science perspective. In most of these cases, the museum supports the shop by drawing visitors who then become customers. The majority of these private museums do not charge entrance fees.

Finally, there are a number of cases in which grassroots initiatives have been handed over to the government since their creation. For a number of reasons, most often to

9 Conversation with founder of *Museo Profesor Tremols* (Laguna Salada, Dominican Republic, 21 January 2015).

10 Conversation with guide at *Santa Rosa First Peoples Community* (Arima, Trinidad, 9 January 2015).

11 Conversation with director of *Museo Bellapart* (Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 15 January 2015).

do with practical staffing motivations related to keeping the museum open and operational, a grassroots initiative may be passed on to governmental ownership. This has been the case with the *Musée Schoelcher* in Guadeloupe, the oldest grassroots initiative visited that is still open to the public. The museum was opened in 1887 fulfilling the ambitions of politician and abolitionist Victor Schoelcher to house his sculpture and travel collections (panel texts, Musée Schoelcher). For the longevity of the museum, it became governmental and is now managed by the Conseil Régional de la Guadeloupe.

As mentioned previously, not all museums that have started out as grassroots initiatives continue to be owned in the same manner. In some cases, museums founded by single individuals have expanded and become community projects. Other museums, as stated above, have transferred to governmental ownership. Some community groups may have, since founding the museum, organized themselves in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that may or may not be for profit. However, the majority of the grassroots initiatives, are still grassroots (53%) or private (24%) museums, if perhaps in a different set-up. Only a small percentage of these grassroots museums are now entirely governmental (15%) or have mixed private and public (*i.e.* governmental) ownership (4%).

Identifying a grassroots initiative is, in most cases, fairly straightforward. Many museums have information about their own history which can be found either within the museum itself, in the museum's brochure, or on the museum's website or social media page. Certainly, museum staff can usually also answer questions related to the origin of the museum. Of course, applying the participatory practice of a grassroots initiative is more difficult. Setting up a museum from the conception of the idea to its execution requires persistent effort and hard work. Fortunately, there are many handbooks or step-by-step guides to setting up and managing a museum, for example *Museum Basics* (Ambrose & Paine 2012) or *Running a Museum: A Practical Handbook* (Boylan 2004), both published through ICOM. Therefore, the focus here will lie on best practices to sustain a grassroots initiative, rather than to create one.

One of the major challenges with grassroots museums is sustainability (although for a counterpoint on the value of the ephemeral museum, see the discussion on *Sustainability*, page 198). This is particularly evident with museums managed by individuals, where the museum, its collections, and its narratives are brought to life by the founder. Naturally, this is jeopardized if the founder passes away or is no longer able to manage the museum. To investigate the best practices related to the sustainability of grassroots initiatives, the focus will lie on two aspects: the narrative and the overall operation of the museum.

The narrative is one of the most characteristic aspects of a grassroots initiative. Oftentimes, the museum is the result of a particular interest in collecting or has been set up to tell a specific story. This story might not align with the national narrative visible in governmental museums. In the case of an individual's museum, the narrative is usually strongly linked to that individual and to a personal history. The origins of the collection, the structure of the museum, the object categories, and object biographies may all be entwined with personal stories and choices. Over time, "the collector has literally put a part of self into the collection" (Belk 1994: 321). These stories and the collections are, of course, best narrated by the founder. With community grassroots museums, the narrative is linked to a community history and

perspective. Although community members are very important in portraying their narrative, the museum's narrative might not depend as strongly on personal histories as it depends on a collective history.

Narrative sustainability in an individual's grassroots museum could be achieved by creating a video or audio guide of the founder narrating a visit to his or her museum. For example, Nick Maley, the founder of the *Yoda Guy Movie Exhibit* in St. Maarten, has created a video guide for his museum. Small TVs are placed throughout his museum which loop footage of him pointing out various displays and recalling personal anecdotes related to objects in his collection. This provides a personal connection and tells the narrative of the museum without the need for Maley to always be present. Naturally, this could also be achieved with an audio guide. Thus, it could be useful to conduct oral history projects to collect and preserve the narratives and stories of grassroots museum founders for the future.

In community museums, narrative sustainability can be realized in a number of manners. For instance, at the *Museo Tula* on Curaçao, members of the Afro-Caribbean community work as tour guides to tell the history of Tula and their community from their own perspective. These guides provide an additional layer to the narrative already present in the museum panels and labels by entwining the community history with personal histories. Also on Curaçao, at *Savonet Museum*, an oral history project led to the production of a documentary film which is shown in the museum exhibition. In this film, various local community members who have lived or worked on the estate recall old ways of life or talk about traditions. As long as the museum succeeds in making its value clear to its community, it should be quite feasible to achieve community investment.

The second aspect of sustainability is the overall operation of the museum. This point is mainly related to staffing and funding. Grassroots initiatives in the form of private museums are generally the most robust in this regard. Especially when the museum is incorporated into a business, such as with the distilleries and amber museums mentioned above, museum staff is employed and paid through the company. However, grassroots museums without such long-term financial support may face operational sustainability challenges.

Community grassroots museums can approach funding and staffing in a number of ways. For instance, *Casa Pueblo* in Puerto Rico is a local community collective that engages in environmental and heritage projects. Their operation is funded entirely by individual donations or out of the revenues from their self-produced coffee beans and their crafts shop.¹² They do not accept donations from governments or organizations, wishing to remain self-sufficient and independent. With regards to staffing, they rely entirely on a rotating schedule of community members who donate their time voluntarily. Grassroots museums can function under a foundation or other formal organization structures, making it easier to apply for funding from governmental agencies or private sources. In some cases it might be useful to collaborate with tour operators or cruise ship travel agents to guarantee a stable influx of visitors. The *Charles Town Maroon Museum* in Jamaica has linked up with tour operators to include their museum as part of the tours into the Blue Mountains National Park.

12 Conversation with founder of *Casa Pueblo* (Adjuntas, Puerto Rico, 29 January 2015).

Staffing and funding issues are arguably most challenging for grassroots initiatives by individuals. Operating these museums, owned by a single founder, may only be feasible if the founder is retired or otherwise with limited opening hours. If the founder passes away, the museum may have to close altogether. Even if the museum is valued by the surrounding community, it is still not always possible to find another person to take over the museum's operation. As such, the best way to ensure the continuation of such a grassroots museum is to plan ahead and involve other people. On Bequia, harpooner Mr. Athneal Ollivierre founded the *Whaling Museum* (or *Athneal's Private Petite Museum*). As he became older, he passed on his collection, his stories, and his knowledge of whaling to his nephew, Mr. Harold Corea, who then continued running the museum after the loss of Mr. Ollivierre. Unfortunately, no sufficient plans were made to keep the museum open after Mr. Corea's death and subsequently the collection is currently unavailable to the public while the local historical society looks for new staff to reopen the museum. Of course, as mentioned earlier, plans can also be made to donate the museum and its collections to a governmental body. Ultimately, the best approach for the sustainability of grassroots initiatives depends on the specific circumstances of each case.

Ecomuseums

The ecomuseum is a specific museum model that can be found around the world (see *Defining the Museum*, page 33). These museums are frequently the result of grassroots initiatives and they tend to focus heavily on a particular community, usually a local community. The main aim of an ecomuseum is "to link the past with the present as a strategy to deal with the future needs of that particular society" (Fuller 1992: 328). In general, it can be said that an ecomuseum is more a community *process* rather than a *product* (Davis 2008: 403; Fuller 1992: 331). Ecomuseums can be identified by four main aspects. First of all, the ecomuseum tends to extend beyond the museum building, encompassing a wider landscape. Secondly, there is a strong emphasis on environmental sustainability. This runs parallel to the third aspect, namely a collective effort towards cultural sustainability or the preservation of culture and its transmission to younger generations. Finally, ecomuseums are heavily invested in the future of their target community and work towards skill development or training.

During the regional museum survey, 19 ecomuseums were visited throughout the Caribbean, two of which were under development at the time of visiting. Seventeen of these (89%) are grassroots initiatives and almost all of these are still managed by a community; four are currently governmentally run and owned. Although the ecomuseum concept originated in France, Caribbean ecomuseums can also be found in the Dutch-, English-, and Spanish-speaking Caribbean. However, only the museums on the French-speaking islands actually carry the name 'ecomuseum' (*ecomusée*). As such, the other ecomuseums were identified according to the abovementioned four aspects. This section will provide examples from these ecomuseums to illustrate the four key aspects and to highlight best practices for each.

The ecomuseum can often be recognized from a distance by its first aspect, which is the extended museum landscape. Depending on the community and the orientation of the museum, this landscape can vary in size, content, history, and use. The *Ecomusée de Marie-Galante: Habitation Murat* on Marie-Galante is set on a former plantation



Figure 8: *Ecomusée de Marie-Galante: Habitation Murat, Marie-Galante, consists of an extended museum landscape.*

estate. The museum extends beyond the exhibits in the reconstructed former great house and encompasses the ruins of a sugar refinery and a windmill, as well as a garden, kitchen, and other auxiliary buildings (see figure 8). The *Museo Tula* on Curaçao is similarly located on the grounds of what used to be a plantation estate. In this case the grounds are incorporated as a natural resource and an extensive walking tour through the gardens and wider landscape links to the museum. In both of these examples, the ecomuseum is created in an existing heritage landscape with ruins and historic buildings. However, it is also possible to set up an ecomuseum in a location and then develop the landscape around it. The *Ecomusée CreoleArt* on Guadeloupe is an example of this second approach. In this case, the museum was not located on a geographically remarkable site or housed in historical ruins. Instead, the ecomuseum landscape developed over time, beginning with a small didactic garden of plants and their uses. As the ecomuseum project expanded, the garden was extended and other cultural elements were included, such as historical dioramas and craft workshops. The *Charles Town Maroon Museum* in Jamaica forms the final example. This ecomuseum was built within the residential area of the Charles Town maroon community. The museum building is located next to an *asafu* yard, which is an enclosed open air space for music and dancing.¹³ Besides the *asafu* yard, a craft workshop, and the museum building with a library, it could be argued that the ecomuseum extends into the surrounding town and encompasses the whole community. The museum, as a result of its activities, programs, and other participatory practices involves, as well as affects, the entire community.

13 Conversation with relative of founder of *Charles Town Maroon Museum* (Charles Town, Jamaica, 26 July 2014).

The second key aspect of ecomuseums is that they strive for greater environmental sustainability. This might be achieved by reducing the human impact on nature, teaching more sustainable methods of agriculture, or learning to live with dangerous natural phenomenon. In Grenada, the *Belmont Estate* has been transformed from a traditional plantation to an eco-farm. Local community members are employed at the estate and work with sustainable agricultural methods. There is a strong emphasis on creating awareness for the value of local produce in an attempt to both boost local production and reduce import. The estate produces fair trade chocolate as well as involves visitors in the process. *Casa Pueblo* on Puerto Rico began as a small collective environmental movement to protect the local community and landscape from the harmful impact of a proposed mining operation (panel texts, Casa Pueblo). After successfully shutting down the mining plans, the community moved on to tackle other issues related to environmental sustainability. Among others, they advocate the use of solar panels and they have developed highly energy efficient LED-lights in a university collaboration. They have also set up a program to teach children about the forest and nature by organizing classes in the forest. *Museo Infantil Trampolín*, in the Dominican Republic, is a museum for children of all ages. Several didactic rooms of the museum are dedicated to environmental sustainability. Through games, videos, and interaction with the guides, children learn how humans impact nature and how we can work to reduce this impact. Two miniature cities show how the future would be different if we continue as we are doing now or if we become more environmentally active. As a final example, the *Centre de Découverte des Sciences de la Terre* on Martinique can be mentioned. This ecomuseum was set up in 2004 at the foot of the Mt. Pelée volcano. Not only is it a geological survey station monitoring the behavior of the volcano, it is also an educational center focused on teaching local populations how to live in such a dangerous area. It shows the benefits of living in this area, while providing tips on how to plan for a possible eruption.

Although it is often assumed that the *eco* prefix in ecomuseums refers to the natural environment, it actually refers to the entire ecology surrounding a given community, including its cultural environment. This brings us to the third key aspect which is the preservation and transmission of culture. This is especially important to communities who feel that their traditions, knowledge, language, and their way of life is being lost. The *Santa Rosa First Peoples Community* in Trinidad has a community center or museum building in which they show craftwork and traditional subsistence strategies, such as the cassava baking process. Their craftwork is mainly basketry or other woven objects, beaded jewelry, and woodwork, and the objects are used as museum displays but are also for sale. This creates a consistent need for new items to be made and enables the community to invest in practicing these craft skills and pass on the knowledge of these skills to the younger generation. Additionally, the community is working on plans to develop their community center into a larger heritage village.¹⁴ In traditional buildings they could have their current museum display as well as a craft workshop. Ideally, they would also like to house a few families in the heritage village so that they can practice traditional subsistence and agricultural methods and teach these to both visitors and younger community members. The *Luba Garifuna Cultural Museum*

14 Conversation with guide at *Santa Rosa First Peoples Community* (Arima, Trinidad, 9 January 2015).

in Belize is similarly devoted to preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge. The founder of this museum is one of the branch presidents of the National Garifuna Council of Belize (NGC) and connects the aims of the museum with the mission of the council. Collaboratively, they have engaged in a number of projects to preserve craft techniques, for instance by recording video footage of older community members practicing crafts that are currently only known to a few people.¹⁵ The NGC and the museum are also strongly focused on preserving other intangible cultural elements such as the Garifuna language, music, and dance. The NGC has, for instance, initiated the creation of Garifuna primary schools where children are taught both in English and in Garifuna. The museum has been involved in assisting with these language programs and in connecting older community members with cultural knowledge and skills to younger community members who want to learn this heritage.

Cultural sustainability and teaching cultural practices ties in closely to the final key aspect of ecomuseums, namely the focus on community skill development. In some cases, as demonstrated in the examples above, community skill development is tied to cultural sustainability. However, there are other cases where community skill development is not necessarily related to cultural transmission; *Liberty Hall* in Jamaica provides an example of the latter. Liberty Hall is dedicated to the legacy of National Hero Marcus Garvey, the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914 (panel text, Liberty Hall). The museum continues in the spirit of Marcus Garvey and works on community development through education and inspiration. Several educational programs are run through the museum, many of them serving as outreach activities in communities where people may not be able to visit the museum. One of the museum's programs is for literacy and targets school-going children, another has an adult audience and teaches computer skills. The museum dedicates a large portion of its work to such community skill development as a way to improve the quality of life of its community members. Certainly, the examples of ecomuseums mentioned above which are working for environmental or cultural sustainability also involve community skill development. One may think of sustainable agricultural methods, recycling, energy preservation methods, cooking recipes, traditional food production practices, and, of course, the development of craft and language skills. Going back to the definition of the ecomuseum mentioned above, it is not surprising that community skill development is such an integral aspect of the museum's work. After all, the ecomuseum is a long-term community process which requires constant dedication and development.

Living Museums

Living museums are museums in which a significant part of the museum's narrative and content is relayed through living agents. These people could be employees who work in the organization attached to the museum or inhabitants of a heritage site or house museum. They may also be community members involved in the museum's practice, for instance community members demonstrating crafts within the museum space. Considering the fact that there is such a great diversity of living museums, there

15 Conversation with founder of *Luba Garifuna Cultural Museum* (Belize City, Belize, 29 October 2013).

is no straightforward single participatory practice. Thus, this section will focus on four groupings of these types of museums: places of residence, religious sites, ecological sites, and places of work. Living museums which contain craft workshops or showcase other forms of intangible heritage through community participation are also discussed in three other sections of this chapter: *Ecomuseums* (page 73), *Community Staffing* (page 79), and *Interactive Displays* (page 95).

The first category of living museums is places of residence, such as city centers inscribed as World Heritage Site, heritage tours in villages, or museums located within an individual's home. Although the sizes of these places may differ significantly, they have in common that each of these sites contains more or less permanent habitation. This means that there are unique possibilities for interaction between visitors and residents. On the one hand this can enhance the museum experience for visitors because they can engage with people living on the site who are personally involved in that particular heritage. On the other hand, community members can choose to pass on their personal stories and community heritage to visitors without having to leave their homes and yards. The dual village of *Christiaankondre & Langemankondre* in Suriname is an example in which an organized heritage tour is embedded into the local community and its place of residence. A visit to these villages is guided by one of the community members who will lead a walking tour through the village, its gardens, and the communal buildings. This several hour tour provides many opportunities for visitors and community members to interact, for instance in the school, the store, the clinic, or any of the residencies along the way. This allows for the transmission of a multi-vocal community heritage narrative. The tours organized in Dominica in the *Touna Kalinago Heritage Village* operate in a similar manner. Here the tour ties more strongly to the residences of particular households that are visited one at a time. In each house, the visitors are invited into the yard and a specific cultural tradition is demonstrated and discussed. Such living museums are often great for showing and telling heritage that is embedded in the present and by providing a platform to answer visitors' questions. Community interaction is less structured and more spontaneous in World Heritage listed city centers, but these places also have the potential to provide multi-vocal heritage perspectives. Finally, personal interaction vitally characterizes the entire museum visit for museums located in homes.

Religious sites are the second grouping of living museums and refer to a museum or interpretation center combined with a religious building such as a synagogue, church, or temple. This category also includes archaeological sites where religious practices are performed. Unlike with places of residence, there is not necessarily a permanent presence of community members. When community members are present, this is generally for a brief time but for a (highly) significant event. Depending on the museum, visitors may be a part of or witness such events which might otherwise be restricted for non-community members. It is possible that visitors are asked to dress or behave in a certain way, requiring visitors to some extent to assimilate with the community. This is a highly participatory practice in which visitors temporarily participate in the community. For instance, the *Synagogue Mikvé Israel-Emanuel and Jewish Cultural Historical Museum* in Curaçao allows visitors to enter the synagogue as well as the museum. However, men entering the synagogue are required to cover their heads and *kippot* are provided at the entrance. Visitors are also restricted with regards to which

events they may attend. While the Shabbat on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings is open to attendance by (appropriately dressed) visitors, Jewish Festivals are off limits except on the first day. This allows participation in religious and cultural events of the local Jewish community within limits set by the same community. In Puerto Rico a slightly different participatory dynamic can be found in two Amerindian archaeological sites: the *Centro Ceremonial Indígena de Tibes* and the *Centro Indígena Caguana*. Both of these sites contain ball courts and are associated with the former Indigenous population of the island, the so-called Taíno. There are currently growing communities in Puerto Rico which self-identify as Taíno (for a debate on this issue of identity, cf. Forte 2006; Haslip-Viera 2013). These so-called neo-Taíno communities wish to retain Taíno traditions, use their iconography, and perform religious and cultural ceremonies, ideally on actual pre-colonial Amerindian sites (Oliver 1998: 214-216). Since both sites are managed governmentally, neo-Taíno groups must ask for permission to perform ceremonies or rituals on the archaeological sites.¹⁶ It seems that in most cases this permission is granted, generally during the regular opening hours of the archaeological park. As such, other visitors are able to participate in these ceremonies and interact with this cultural community if they desire.

Ecological sites such as heritage farms, national parks, marine parks, and eco-tourism sites are the third grouping of living museums. These sites are characterized by a high level of engagement with the natural environment, often mediated through guides or employees in the park, farm, or site. On eco-tourism sites or heritage farms there tends to be a high amount of participation in the agricultural and production process. This active participation is coupled with engagement with the employees working on the site who guide visitors on the estate and answer questions. This provides unique natural knowledge and awareness of local traditions related to agriculture and cooking. National and marine parks have a strong focus on creating awareness for the protection of natural environments and species. This awareness is mediated through guides and rangers who show visitors both the beauty and fragility of nature. The *Underwater Sculpture Park*, just off the coast of Grenada, forms a unique example (see figure 9). This park was the initiative of artist Jason de Caires Taylor, who created concrete sculptures and submerged them in a bay that had been damaged by hurricane Ivan in 2004. His idea was to stimulate the reef to recover from the hurricane by providing the reef with new surfaces to grow on. Now, the bay is a marine protected area and visitors dive, snorkel, swim, or boat to the sculptures under mandatory guidance and are taught to protect the reef and marine life. Visitors thus actively participate in the protection of this particular living environment during their visit.

Places of work are the final category of living museums discussed here: museum factories, shops, distilleries, police stations, or military bases. Although again there is a great amount of variety in these living museums, a visit to them is greatly characterized by the employees working there and the limitations of each particular working environment. Although many of these museums have ample opportunities for engagement between visitors and employees, this interaction can be restricted or guided by rules. For instance, in some working environments it may not be possible or safe to

16 Conversation with guard at *Centro Ceremonial Indígena de Tibes* (Ponce, Puerto Rico, 28 January 2015).



Figure 9: When diving in the Underwater Sculpture Park, Grenada, visitors participate actively in protecting the reef.

interrupt employees with questions. In other cases, such as with the active military base of *Fort Saint-Louis* on Martinique, parts of the site may be entirely off-limit to visitors. Here, visitors are restricted to the historical parts of the fort and there is no interaction with the modern military base and its employees. However, in many other cases it is possible to observe ongoing production processes. The *Distillerie Depaz*, also on Martinique, allows visitors to follow a clearly marked path through the factory and other production areas and watch the rum production process in action. Such demonstrations are very common in this category of living museums and provides a specific type of participation. Naturally, this participation is increased in those places of work where it is possible to engage directly with employees, which is most common for museums with shops, such as the *Chocomuseo* in the Dominican Republic. Here, engaging with visitors is the core job and there is a high level of interaction. Focus lies less on production and more on the final product, so rather than see a demonstration of the process, visitors are allowed to taste or test the product. Ultimately, it is activity and human interaction that typifies these living museums.

Community Staffing

Any museum needs staff, of course, even if this is just one person. However, museums about a particular history, heritage, or culture benefit if they are staffed partially or entirely by members of that same community. In some museums, particularly grassroots museums, community staffing is often self-evident. However, in other museums, community staffing is not as common or may only happen in certain

positions. It is certainly not always easy to identify whether a museum has community staffing, especially as a visitor and outsider. In practice, this meant that for the regional museum survey it was often only possible to identify community staffing with certainty in the front-of-house positions. In some cases, community staffing was confirmed by the staff directly, or apparent through the museum's website or on exhibition labels. An additional challenge is that identity and community belonging can be determined differently by community members or outsiders. In total, 76 (highly likely) cases could be identified in which museums had community staffing, although a higher number is certainly possible. Still, not all museums have content that is specifically tied to a specific community and in these cases the communities targeted by the museum may be so diverse that they can be reflected in the museum staff without being overly apparent. This section will discuss a number of best practices related to community staffing. Staff here encompasses all persons working at a museum, regardless of whether this is paid labor.

One of the most obviously engaging ways of incorporating community members into the museum is by appointing them as guides. This has the clear benefit that community members are often best equipped to tell the community's history and traditions from a personal perspective. This approach resonates with visitors who connect on a personal level with their guide and can feel more involved in the museum and its content. *Kura Hulanda Museum* on Curaçao – which focuses on the African diaspora, its great civilizations, and the history and legacy of slavery – has a number of community guides who offer to take visitors through the museum. They speak about their own place in the African-diaspora and their personal experiences. This incorporates multi-voicing in the exhibition spaces and allows community members to be an integral part of the museum and participate towards creating the museum narrative. For visitors, it increases participation by providing a place for discussion, learning, and interaction with community members.

For museums that include intangible heritages, a good approach can be to include community members as performing staff. This is the case at the *Charles Town Maroon Museum* in Jamaica where community members demonstrate music, song, and dance in the museum space. Visitors are strongly encouraged to join in with the dances and are taught some of the basic steps. This provides a unique window for participation between visitors and community members. The *Museo Tula* on Curaçao also involves community members to relay intangible heritages. The museum is an initiative of the local Afro-Caribbean community and preserves and teaches their syncretic¹⁷ traditions while focusing on the history of Tula's slave revolt. Although they also have community members working as museum guides, they have expanded their inclusion of community expertise by employing community members in the museum's kitchen to cook Afro-Caribbean meals and snacks. When visitors pay their entrance fee to the museum, they can choose to add a warm lunch to their museum visit.

Community members can also be incorporated into the staff as caretakers of the museum or heritage site. At *Lamanai Archaeological Reserve* in Belize, members

17 There has been extensive academic debate about the meaning and use of the term *syncretism*. Here it is used to echo one of the staff members who referred to her culture as syncretic, as a mix of African and Caribbean elements.

from the local community who self-identify as Mayan have been offered training through the National Institute of Culture and History (NICH) and its Institute of Archaeology. Interested community members have learned about archaeology, history, biology, geology, and other subjects relevant to the Archaeological Reserve. They are now responsible for guiding visitors through the site and protecting both the visitors and the archaeological remains. Only these caretakers have the authorization to guide visitors on the site which are their ancestral lands. Because they are personally invested in the archaeological remains and their preservation, they are very careful to protect them. A similar situation can be found at *Parque Nacional Histórico La Vega Vieja* in the Dominican Republic, where colonial archaeological remains are maintained and cared for by members of the local community. Family members living around the site are responsible for admitting visitors as well as protecting the ruins, either from careless visitors or looters. A third example can be found at the *Underwater Sculpture Park* just off the shore of Grenada, mentioned previously. Although the park does not have any staff as such, a non-profit group of volunteers was formed to maintain and rejuvenate the sculptures. They actively work to seek sponsorship for the replacement and renovation of existing sculptures or the creation and submersion of new installations. Of course, in addition to this, a large group of people are part-time caretakers of the site, such as all the dive instructors, fishermen, tour operators, and others who take visitors to the site. During the visit, they are responsible for the visitors under their supervision and must make sure that no one damages the reef, the marine life, or the sculptures.

It is also possible to include community members into the museum as part of an art installation or artist in residency program. This kind of artistic staffing tends to be temporary and project based. *Centro León* in the Dominican Republic organizes an annual art competition in which they are very attentive to meet the artists' wishes. They have a large gallery in which winning submissions are exhibited as envisioned by their makers. In 2014/2015, one of the artists wished to continue making similar artworks within the gallery.¹⁸ Centro León agreed and the artist set up a workbench with materials and tools next to his submissions. He regularly worked within the gallery and interacted with visitors. *The Priory* in Grenada, which is still under development, will convert this beautiful home into a center for art and culture. One of the most popular plans is to invite artists to take up residence and work freely on their art for a number of months. Their resulting works will then be exhibited within The Priory itself.

Certainly, community members can be a part of the regular museum staff: as curators, educators, collections managers, directors, or in any other position. Any appointment of community staff will of course incorporate their community perspectives into that particular aspect of the museum work. A curator from the community may influence an exhibit by using the community's language, tone, or highlight community interests. On Curaçao, Dutch, English, and Papiamentu are all official languages and a large part of the population is bi- or multi-lingual. However, most museums choose to present their exhibitions in Dutch (the language of government) and English (the language of visitors). At *Museo Tula* (also discussed above) many labels are presented only in Papiamentu (the first language of the majority of the local population) or with

18 Conversation with coordinator of exhibitions at *Centro León* (Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic, 23 January 2015).

Dutch or English translations in second place. This choice of language reflects the curators' ties to the local community and the museum's place within it. Of course, beyond the language, the contents of the exhibition are also intimately tied to the Afro-Caribbean community. Educators may develop programs and activities that specifically attract members of their community or work towards tackling their specific issues. As mentioned earlier, *Liberty Hall* in Jamaica has specific programs that target children's literacy. They also work with adults to increase their computer skills, enabling them to not only maintain social ties, but also to gain practical skills such as submitting online job applications. Besides the abovementioned, there are of course many other examples of community members working as museum staff.

Museum Collections & Exhibitions

Research Collaboration

Research collaboration between community members and a museum is another way for the community to contribute directly to the creation of exhibitions and knowledge. This kind of collaboration could be identified as a method of crowdsourcing, in which the goal is to collect knowledge or data. As summarized by Mia Ridge, "crowdsourcing is emerging as a form of engagement with cultural heritage that contributes toward a shared, significant goal or research area, by asking the public to undertake tasks that cannot be done automatically, in an environment where the tasks, goals (or both) provide inherent rewards for participation" (Ridge 2013: 437). Of the museums visited, 48 examples were found in which such research collaboration had taken place. Naturally, there may have been many more cases, but the results of this research collaboration may not have been on display at the time of visitation.

When museums seek out research collaboration with community members, they may be interested in the specific personal knowledge or experiences of individual people. In many cases, personal stories or experiences may be used to enrich and personalize exhibitions, or oral histories may be collected and kept in the museum's archives. The *San Nicolas Community Museum* in Aruba has a collection of artefacts, most of them dating to c. 50-100 years ago.¹⁹ Many of these objects have been bought or donated following the death of local residents. The museum focuses heavily on collecting personal stories related to these objects, for instance by asking relatives for information about the previous owner of the artefact. In this way, they aim to construct object biographies based on personal knowledge or experiences from local community members. This is long-term research, just like the crowdsourcing project run by the *Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana* in the Dominican Republic. This museum uncovers the hidden, conflicted, and bloody history of the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo (1891-1961) and a turbulent time in the recent history of the country (De Peña Díaz 2013). Throughout the exhibition, forms can be found that encourage people to write to the museum with their personal experiences of the regime. As the dictatorship was characterized by secrecy and misinformation,

19 Conversation with manager of *San Nicolas Community Museum* (San Nicolas, Aruba, 21 January 2014).

the museum aims to voice the events as they really happened (panel texts, Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana). Certainly, they gain much credibility by telling the story through first-hand accounts. In addition, they can also provide comfort to people whose stories are now being heard and whose grief is now accepted (guestbook entries, Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana).

Museums may also collaborate in seeking personal knowledge or experiences on a more short-term basis. The *University of the West Indies Museum* in Jamaica engaged the visiting public for a temporary project called *Freeze Frame*.²⁰ Within the museum, a video from 1953 about campus life was shown. Visitors were asked to write the names and some information about any persons they recognized in the footage on paper copies of stills from the film. The museum relied on the personal knowledge of visitors, and of alumni and their relatives in particular, to add more knowledge to the video. As such, many people who had been anonymous figures in the film were identified. Visitors were also encouraged to recount experiences they may have had of particular places on the campus and to write these down too. Temporary research collaboration also took place at *Savonet Museum* on Curaçao. For the creation of the museum, which was opened in 2010, an oral history project took place to preserve the specific knowledge of people who had lived on or around the estate. In video interviews, these former inhabitants talked about the work they used to do as well as their knowledge of the land and its plants and animals. The video is shown in the exhibition in several fragments.

Community members may also collaborate with museums in providing data beyond what the museum could collect on its own. In some cases the research may have taken place externally at the initiative of a university or organization, but the results are displayed within a museum. At the *National Archaeological Museum Aruba*, the local population is on display in an exhibition about identity and genetics. DNA studies of the population have been able to determine the different genetic percentages of Aruban ancestry, for instance, that “Arubans are 40% Amerindian” (panel text, National Archaeological Museum Aruba). Besides demographics, another common collaborative research area concerns archaeological excavations. Excavations are usually led by a group from the scientific community but often take place in collaboration with a museum where the finds will ultimately be stored and exhibited. In some cases, the wider public may be invited to assist with the excavation. In Puerto Rico, both the *Centro Ceremonial Indígena de Tibes* (opened in 1982) and the *Centro Indígena Caguana* (opened in 1965; see figure 10) are archaeological sites that have become museums which may be visited by the public. In each case, the museum consists of an open air part with the visible archaeological structural remains, as well as a museum building with artefacts. These museums have collaborated over a number of decades and excavation seasons with many different members of the archaeological and scientific communities. The museum stores, houses, and displays the finds and is concerned with conservation and education. Scientists contribute to the museum by engaging in further excavations or research, uncovering artefacts, or adding new knowledge to the museum’s repository. Data collection also takes place at *Yotín Kortá: The Money Museum* on Curaçao, which encourages students of any age

20 Conversation with curator at *University of the West Indies Museum* (Kingston, Jamaica, 31 July 2014).



Figure 10: The site at Centro Indígena Caguana, Puerto Rico, was first excavated in 1915 and opened to the public in 1965. Archaeological investigations continue to contribute objects and information to the exhibitions.

to come and research their collections and archives. If these school students present an oral report or write a short paper, they are asked to share this with the museum and these reports are collected on the museum's website. In this way, the museum encourages young students to do research in their archives and to add their findings and knowledge to the museum's repository.

Finally, it must be stressed that research collaboration will require that ethical considerations be taken into account. In every case, but especially regarding sensitive matters, genetic materials, or information that might be in any way harmful, participants' consent is vitally important. Additionally, transparency of the use and display of data and information is imperative. It may be desirable to collect data anonymously and to protect the donor's identity when disclosing any information.

Object Donation

Community members may also participate in the museum process by contributing objects towards the museum's collections. Whether the museum actively encourages community collecting or only accepts incidental donations, it is necessary for the museum to have a collections management plan and for staff to be committed to the long-term safekeeping of these objects. It is essential to have a policy on how these items will be handled, catalogued, stored, and possibly exhibited. It must also be decided if the objects require any conservation or special care. If there is a possibility that the object(s) may be put on display, this should be discussed with the donor, if feasible. Unless the donor wishes to remain anonymous, it is good practice to place the donor's name on the object label. Besides showing gratitude and personally crediting the donor for their contribution to the museum's collection, this has added benefits. At

the basic level, it indicates to visitors which objects have been donated and which are part of the museum's own collecting endeavors. Perhaps more importantly, it may also encourage additional donations: by showing visitors what kind of objects are valued by the museum, people may be inspired to consider the potential public value of their own property. Secondly, if donations are well cared for in a museum environment, this may encourage possible donors to bestow objects for better safekeeping than they can provide at home. Of course, in some countries there are laws which state that certain types of objects must be handed over to a museum: this is often the case with archaeological finds. However, this section will only consider voluntary donations. A minimum of 76 cases of object donation were identified although it is more than likely that the actual number is higher, as donated objects on display are not always indicated and donations may also be kept in storage.

It is possible to separate object donations into a number of categories. First of all, we can distinguish incidental donations from active community collecting. Incidental donations cover those cases in which one or more objects are donated to the museum on the initiative of the donor without the museum placing a specific request. This type of donation is sporadic and generally the museum decides whether or not to accept the donation. The donor may be an individual or a group of people and the donation may comprise of one object or an entire collection. At *The Wall House Museum* on St. Barthélemy such an incidental donation is on display. The island is currently an overseas collectivity of France, but belonged to Sweden from the concession in 1785 until it was returned to France in 1878 (panel texts, *The Wall House Museum*). There is still Swedish heritage on the island and the ties to Sweden are visible in the museum in the form of a Swedish flag. It was made by artist Marianne Lundahl as an exact copy of the flag which was flown on St. Barthélemy 1819-1878 (object label, *The Wall House Museum*). The replica was donated in 1996 and is displayed with labels in both Swedish and French.

The objects donated to the *Ecomusée de Marie-Galante: Habitation Murat* on Marie-Galante have a different collection history. When the museum existed only conceptually, the local community was asked to donate objects to create the museum's collection (panel text, *Ecomusée de Marie-Galante: Habitation Murat*). Between 1976-1980, object collection took place throughout the island based on a collection plan: community members were requested to donate items related to the home, work, celebrations, music, and medicine. Particular urgency was expressed to donate objects which reflected ways of life that were rapidly disappearing from the island. The museum could not have been created as was envisioned without the active and large-scale community collecting of artefacts. As basically the entire collection was donated, labels do not identify individual donors. Instead, a panel explaining the history of the museum expresses gratitude to the entire population of Marie-Galante for their past and continued donations.

Secondly, we can differentiate donations of single objects from the donation of entire collections. At the *St. Maarten National Heritage Foundation Museum* many examples can be found of single object donations. For instance, the "very old ship lantern donated by Mr. Al Deher," the clock "donated by Judith Codrington," or the "VOC coins dating 1736-1792 donated by Simone Halley and family" (object labels, *St. Maarten National Heritage Foundation Museum*). A donated object may also have

been made specifically for display at the museum: “This small piroque [dugout canoe] was carved from a gommier tree in the interior of Dominica for our museum by a Carib Indian with the name of Chalo in 2005” (object label, St. Maarten National Heritage Foundation Museum). Depending on the object, it is not necessarily challenging to manage and maintain individual donations, as they can be catalogued rapidly. However, it may not always be easy to place them in the right context, or they might require significant conservation and care. In addition, if the museum receives many single donations, it can become more difficult to find space for all of them and to manage and display each of them in accordance with the wishes of the donor.

Donations of entire collections can prove to be more challenging to a museum, although they may also be considered more valuable thanks to their cohesive narrative. Yet, when an entire collection is donated, it might require a whole room to be dedicated to, or even built for it, if the collection needs specific maintenance or conditions for preservation. On the other hand, it is possible that the collection is already catalogued and labeled for display. Naturally, a collection as a complete unit can provide significant extra depth to the museum. The *Musée du Rhum: Musée Universel* on Guadeloupe began as a museum of rum distillation and has expanded with a number of different exhibitions on various topics since its opening in 1990, now calling itself a universal museum (panel text, Musée du Rhum: Musée Universel). Perhaps most expansive was the addition of the collection of natural scientist Fortuné Chalumeau in 1994. This collection consists of hundreds of preserved insects and butterflies, neatly pinned on cushions and displayed in hanging frames. The collection is vast and is housed in a separate room. Because of the fragile nature of the artefacts, the room is kept under strict climate control, requiring long term financial support.

As in this latter case, donations may not naturally fit within the original scope or content of the museum. However, by accepting and displaying these collections, the museum can expand upon its reach and its appeal. A comparable example can be found at the *National Museum & Art Gallery of Trinidad & Tobago*, which has an extensive art collection as well as exhibitions of archaeology, history, social history, petroleum, and geology. The museum also has a room that is the Sports Hall of Fame, established by the WITCO Sports Foundation in 1984 (panel text, National Museum & Art Gallery of Trinidad & Tobago), extending the scope of the museum to include sports history. A similar situation is the case at the *Musée Départemental d'Archéologie et de Préhistoire* on Martinique. The museum's collections are archaeological and ethnographic, focusing on the Amerindian past of the island and the rest of the Caribbean. However, a section of the museum is dedicated to a collection of 62 pieces of pre-Columbian gold jewelry from Colombia donated by Mr Alain Ho Hio Hen (panel text, Musée Départemental d'Archéologie et de Préhistoire). The gold jewelry, although from a similar time period, comes from South America and differs from the Caribbean exhibitions. The panel text explains that this collection invites a deeper understanding of the Americas as a whole and closer ties to Colombia in particular.

While donations can result in some eclecticism within the museum, it is also possible that they fit perfectly within the museum's content and scope. This is more likely to happen with donations that have been requested by or occur on the initiative of the museum. The recently opened *Museo de la Alta Gracia* in the Dominica Republic is dedicated to the history and veneration of the Virgen Alta Gracia. It is

closely connected to the Basilica Higüey, where the Virgen Altagracia is worshipped, which is located on the same grounds. Part of the museum tells this specific religious history and displays objects related to this past. However, another part of the museum focuses on today's veneration and the objects that are used in ceremonies or offered by the public, so called *ex-votos*. These *ex-votos* are often valuable items, such as jewelry or objects made of precious metals. Individuals donate these objects to the Virgen in the Basilica, and make a sacred vow if their wish is granted, or in gratitude after their wish has been fulfilled. Periodically, some of the objects amassed at the Basilica are, in turn, donated to the museum. For the donors, the value of the object lies in the act of the donation; what happens afterwards to the material object is less relevant.²¹ So, in this case, the museum takes initiative to, albeit indirectly, collect objects from the community. The objects selected in this way by the museum form an integral part of the museum's exhibitions.

Finally, it is also possible that the donation of a collection, for instance to a (local) government, leads to the creation of a museum. This was the case with the *Musée Schoelcher* in Guadeloupe. Viktor Schoelcher donated his collection of statues and reliefs, as well as objects he had collected on his many voyages, to the Conseil Général of Guadeloupe in 1883 (panel text, Musée Schoelcher). The donation was accepted unanimously and the municipality of Pointe-à-Pitre proposed a location. The museum was inaugurated on 21st July 1887 and exhibited part of Schoelcher's donated collection which contained 980 pieces. The donation was considered so valuable and so extensive that it not only warranted exhibition, but indeed required its own institution. Today, the museum is still open to the public and displays part of this original collection, although it has grown with additional donations, purchases, and loans.

To summarize, object donations can be valuable assets to the museum: by growing the existing collections, extending the scope of the museum, anchoring the museum more strongly within the community, or even by being the *raison d'être* of the museum's existence. For community members, object donation may increase their perception of the value of their heritage, it may safeguard fragile objects, it may tie them more strongly to their museum, leave behind a personal legacy after an individual's death, or create a sense of pride at having property on display in the museum. Fiona Candlin has noted that "simply accepting and housing objects *is* a public service" (Candlin 2016: 115). However, it must be reiterated that accepting object donations should not be taken lightly. If a museum accepts a donation, it takes on the responsibility for that donation for the long-term. This means that the museum is responsible for the safety, security, preservation, and use of the object. A collections management policy is necessary to make sure the donations are taken care of. Such a policy is also useful to set criteria to determine which objects the museum will or will not consider accepting. The *National Museum & Art Gallery of Trinidad & Tobago*, for instance, has such a policy on their website along with a donation form. ICOM's *Code of Ethics for Museums* (ICOM 2017) is also a good starting point to setting up guidelines and rules for object donations and collections management.

21 Conversation with director of *Museo de la Altagracia* (Higüey, Dominican Republic, 20 January 2015).

Contemporary Art

Museums may wish to collaborate with members of the artistic community by including and exhibiting contemporary art. Beyond representing a local or regional community, artists may also incorporate other identities into their work, reflecting particular social, political, or other interests. Artists, who speak through their work, can visualize the interests, issues, and emotions of the communities that they are a part of. As such, the inclusion of contemporary art may be a way for museums to visually, or in other media forms, include community voices in their exhibition spaces. Of course, contemporary art can be included on a small or large scale, there is a difference between commissioned pieces or freely inspired works, and there are other criteria which influence the level of community engagement achieved by this practice. Of the museums visited, 89 contained contemporary art within the public spaces of the museum. For this study, contemporary art was identified if: it was termed 'modern' or 'contemporary' by the museum itself, if it was made by a living artist, or if it was made in the last 100 years.

There are a number of common ways in which contemporary art is included in Caribbean museums. First of all, an artist might be commissioned to provide work that illustrates objects that are on display in the museum. This can commonly be seen in archaeological museums, where the purpose or use of some of the objects may not be self-explanatory to the visitors. Illustrations or paintings of the objects can be used as a didactic tool. This method for the inclusion of contemporary art has been applied in the *Museo Arqueológico Regional Altos de Chavón* in the Dominican Republic. Dominican artist Boris De Los Santos was hired for a series of illustrations to accompany the refurbished exhibitions. The idea was that these illustrations would help visitors follow the narrative without relying on text, especially for visitors whose native language is not Spanish or English, or for younger children. The illustrations turned out to be so successful, that the director decided to build the exhibitions around them.²² The founder of *Rome Museum* on Grenada, Mr. Joseph Rome, is a sculptor who has created a number of wooden pieces to illustrate objects in his museum. Among others, he has made several wooden feet which show certain illnesses or wounds that were commonly contracted in the bush and he uses the sculptures to illustrate various traditional bush remedies. The *Bob Marley Museum* in Jamaica is a similar example of visual art used to illustrate the main exhibits – of course, in addition to the major role his music plays. The museum is housed in the artist's former home, as well as in some newer buildings on the grounds. In the outside areas, the focus resonates in a series of large painted or photographic murals featuring images of Bob Marley and Rastafari symbolism. The use of these artworks on the walls effectively projects the message of the museum beyond its exhibition spaces and illustrates the theme and style of the museum to the outside world. Beyond illustration, art works may also be commissioned for various production purposes: exhibition design, website design, or a logo. Approaching artists from a local or other community may be a good way to make sure these designs reflect the community which the museum is a part of.

Naturally, a part of the museum can be dedicated to contemporary art, with permanent space for (rotating) contemporary art or by temporarily installing an art

22 Conversation with director of *Museo Arqueológico Regional Altos de Chavón* (La Romana, Dominican Republic, 18 January 2015).

exhibition in a gallery that is not reserved for art. The *St. Vincent and the Grenadines National Trust* has an area available as public exhibition space, which is usually occupied by display cases with archaeological materials recovered on the islands served by the trust. At the time of visitation in 2015, a photo exhibition by Robert Charlotte was just opened, featuring portraits of Garinagu. These large photos were hung throughout the room, spread between the archaeological artefacts. Although the space was not originally set up for such an exhibition, it could be adapted on a temporary basis. A temporary location for art was also created at the *Museo Virreinal Alcdzar de Colón* in the Dominican Republic. Here, paintings by a local artist were propped up on easels in an open gallery on the second floor. In other museums, a gallery that is used for all manner of temporary exhibitions could also house contemporary art every now and then. If space for the inclusion of contemporary art is allocated on a temporary basis, it is important to assess whether this space is actually suitable for this purpose. Contemporary art may require different security measures, lighting levels, or larger viewing distances.

Issues related to the suitability of a space may be avoided by dedicating an area permanently to the display of contemporary art. In *Het Curacaosche Museum* on Curaçao, a number of hallways have been reserved as art galleries. Local artists can display their artworks here on a temporary basis and paintings are frequently rotated. This gives local artists the opportunity to showcase their work. By changing the artworks frequently, the artistic community is able to keep participating in the museum. In the Dominican Republic, *Centro León* encourages deep participation of local artists by hosting an annual art contest, mentioned previously. The museum has two massive galleries dedicated to art: one with key pieces from past years of the competition, another for the winners of the current edition. The artworks on display in the gallery of former entries are curated by the museum staff around their selection of themes and works. On the other hand, the gallery with the current winners is curated in close contact with the respective artists, some of whom spend months in the exhibition space creating their pieces, perhaps directly onto the gallery wall.²³ For those artists who have been selected by the committee, there is a high level of participation with the museum while they work on creating, curating, and installing their work in the gallery.

Certainly, there are also museums that are dedicated entirely to contemporary art. Some of these museums might also be ‘galleries’ in the sense that they have art for sale as well as for display. The *Galería Botello* is an example in Puerto Rico: set up in 1953 as a for-profit gallery by artist Angel Botello, it is now also partially a museum. It has a number of pieces for sale by local artists, but also displays some of Angel Botello’s works as well as other well-known local pieces. At the other end of the spectrum one can identify large art museums such as the *Museo de Arte Moderno* in the Dominican Republic. Sprawling on four enormous floors, the museum is able to display contemporary art in both permanent and temporary galleries, and in various media. The inclusion of contemporary art in this museum reflects engagements with a wide range of artistic communities over several decades.

23 Conversation with coordinator of exhibitions at *Centro León* (Santiago de los Caballeros, Dominican Republic, 23 January 2015).

Local Achievements

This section considers those museums that exhibit the noteworthy achievements from members of their local community. Although many museums recall important community events or achievements, they do not always celebrate individual community members personally. In the museums visited, 44 cases were identified of community achievements being included in the museum's public displays. This participatory practice can anchor the museum more strongly within the community in a number of ways. First of all, it openly pays tribute to community members for valued deeds. Secondly, these exhibits may be a source of pride to the community. Thirdly, it can be an inspiration to community members who may also want to be exhibited. Finally, it localizes the museum by making it of particular personal interest to members of the community. In addition, visitors from outside the community may learn more about, and increase their appreciation of, the community.

A museum may choose to celebrate contemporary local achievements or commemorate historical accomplishments. The *Heritage Collection Museum* on Anguilla, which narrates the history of the island and its people, also includes achievements of the local community from recent times. The museum contains many photographs showing the more recent history of the island. Among these photos, there is a section dedicated to local centenarians: Anguillans who have reached their 100th birthday. This small wall of fame celebrates the oldest members of the local community. Contemporary achievements are also displayed at the *Museum of the Trinidad & Tobago Police Service*. Roughly half of the museum space is dedicated to a chronological exhibition of the history of the police service and the islands, centering on the succession of the commissioners of police. Each commissioner is featured in a portrait with his name and years of service as commissioner inscribed below. These portraits are surrounded by images of political or military events that took place in the same time period: royal visits, group photos, big sporting events, or riots. The history of the country is placed in direct connection to the personal achievements of the commissioners, sometimes accompanied by personal items such as insignia or pieces of their uniforms.

Historical accomplishments are a common feature in museums anywhere in the world, but here we will consider those by individual community members that are exhibited in the museum. In Jamaica, the *Shaare Shalom Jamaican Jewish Heritage Centre* tells the history of Jamaican Jews and part of the exhibition consists of a series of panels titled 'Jewish Achievements/Contributions to Jamaican Society' (panel text, Shaare Shalom Jamaican Jewish Heritage Centre). These panels relate the individual achievements of Jamaican Jews since the 17th century in the areas of industry, commerce, the arts, education, professions, and public service. Also on Jamaica, the *Charles Town Maroon Museum* pays tribute to historic achievements by maroons (see figure 11). The maroons were principally enslaved Africans who escaped from plantations or from slave ships into the interior of the island (panel text, Charles Town Maroon Museum). With the help of, and together with, Indigenous survivors, they established new societies. Fighting for their freedom, survival, and to repel the colonizers, they often found themselves in conflict and hardship. In the museum, panels discuss personal accomplishments of the "Maroon Heroes," often related to military strategy and battle.

By including community achievements, museums may wish to draw attention to otherwise unsung or unknown individuals. At the *St. Maarten National Heritage*



Figure 11: The maroons' resistance to slavery is also shown on the outside of the asafu yard of the Charles Town Maroon Museum, Jamaica.

Foundation Museum a stairwell has been turned into a community hall of fame. Portraits of local community members are posted on the wall along with extensive biographies including their accomplishments. Most of these achievements are related to the improvement of conditions on the island. For instance, the biography of a midwife commends her for her many years of safe deliveries. Other people on the wall have worked in education or religion. Such a wall of fame can have a strong impact on the community, awarding specifically those people who have spent their lives working in the interest of the community. Other museums might take the opposite approach by claiming popular or well-known individuals as belonging to the community connected to the museum. For instance, the *Coyaba Gardens & Museum* on Jamaica has a panel titled 'Famous sons of St. Ann' (panel text, *Coyaba Gardens & Museum*), dedicated to two famed individuals who were born in the parish of the museum. The museum tells the lives and achievements of these two parish members: 'National Hero Marcus Mosiah Garvey and Robert (Bob) Nesta Marley.' By pointing out that they came from *this* parish, the museum effectively adds their fame to the narrative. A similar narrative can be found at the *West Indies Cricket Heritage Centre* on Grenada. The museum has an extensive collection of bats, kit, uniforms, photographs, and memorabilia from famous members of the West Indies cricket team. The museum has chosen to include achievements from team members from the entire West Indies, not only Grenada, and it connects itself to a regional community.

Finally, there are also museums that are dedicated entirely to the accomplishments and life of a single individual, which generally reflect a narrow yet deep engagement. Jamaica's *Bob Marley Museum*, mentioned before, is a well-known example. The museum is dedicated to his life, career, and music, showcasing his platinum records,



Figure 12: *Mind's Eye: The Visionary World of Miss Lassie, Grand Cayman*, is dedicated to the preservation of the home and other artworks of Gladwyn K. Bush.

awards, and newspaper clippings from around the world. The museum was founded by his wife with the aim to preserve and carry on his legacy (panel text, Bob Marley Museum). Several other museums can be found in the Caribbean that are dedicated to the accomplishments of a single individual. The *Casa Museo General Gregorio Luperón* in the Dominican Republic, is centered on the political and family life of Luperón. As military and political leader, he was instrumental in the restoration of the Dominican Republic in the 19th century. The museum focuses mainly on this political history, although it also includes some personal and familial artefacts and narratives. It is strongly tied to the local municipality where he was born and where they feel most proud of his legacy. A third example is the *Musée Municipal Saint-John Perse* in Guadeloupe. Set in a historical house, the museum exhibits the life of diplomat and Nobel laureate poet Alex Leger, whose pseudonym was Saint-John Perse. Leger grew up in Point-à-Pitre and the municipality decided to honor his literary and diplomatic achievements by creating this museum (panel texts, Musée Municipal Saint-John Perse). *Mind's Eye: The Visionary World of Miss Lassie* on Grand Cayman, preserves the extraordinary painted home of visionary intuitive artist Gladwyn K. Bush (see figure 12). The foundation who owns the museum also works to retain her artworks in Cayman by restricting their sale abroad – by doing so, they hope to locally preserve her work.

Co-curation

Co-curated exhibitions are those which have been created through collaboration between a museum and the members of one or more communities. Most commonly, the

resulting exhibitions are temporary rather than permanent. Although it is possible for such a collaboration to take place between the museum staff and a single community member, for instance an artist whose work will be exhibited, it is more often a collaboration between a group of people. Co-curation tends to require deep commitment and engagement, both from museum staff and community members. Projects may take months or years of work, even if the resulting exhibition is only open to the public for a relatively short time. In many cases, the initiative lies with the museum who has decided to involve a community in their exhibition process. As co-curation tends to require more of a commitment than most other participatory practices, it occurs more rarely. In the museums visited, only 12 examples of co-curation were identified, although certainly more museums have created co-curated exhibitions in the past or may have been working on one behind the scenes. If done well, co-curation can give community members a voice in all aspects of the exhibition process and can result in a high level of participation. However, there is also a danger that participation may be perceived as an empty promise or a box-ticking exercise. This section will focus on four important aspects of the co-curation process: the power balance, representativity, multi-vocality, and the time frame. Each aspect is illuminated using the same example, chosen because of the conversations with the museum director and a community member, which provided a greater understanding of the processes leading to the exhibition's creation. Most of these aspects are not openly visible in the exhibition space, so insider knowledge of the process is needed in order to provide these examples. Critical discussions related to power balance, representativity, multi-vocality, and the investment of time can be found in Chapter 7.

When we invite in outsiders, of any kind, we have to do it on their terms. Not ours. It's their key. It's their door. They have given us the gift of their participation, and they deserve our interest and respect. Even if that requires learning new ways of working, speaking, or connecting.

Nina Simon (2016: 75)

The power balance between museum staff and community members can lead to problems, conflict, or friction if not approached carefully (see *Community Engagement*, page 39). Usually, the power balance favors the museum staff, especially when they have already taken the initiative to invite community members to participate in co-curation, and it takes purposeful effort on the side of the museum staff to share power with community members. If not, community members fall into an advisory role, while museum staff has all the decision-making power. In such collaborations, if one side feels that they are not allowed to actually contribute in a meaningful way, they will rapidly perceive the process as a waste of time and effort. As co-curation usually occurs on a voluntary basis or with minor compensation, participants must get satisfaction out of the project itself. Secondly, it is also important to decide on which aspects of the exhibition process community members will be participating in. For instance, are community members engaged from the start in deciding the topic of the exhibition or only at a later point? Will the co-curation project encompass object selection, content creation, narration, design, layout, marketing, mounting, or guiding visitors? The *National Museum Jamaica* co-curated an exhibition called *Rastafari*

together with members from several Rastafari communities. Community members were not involved at the very beginning of the process, as the museum had already decided on the exhibition topic.²⁴ However, community members were involved in the consecutive stages of the exhibition process and some of them were also active as guides within the exhibition space once it opened to the public.

Representativity may be a complex issue when co-curating an exhibition: who is representative for a community? It is entirely possible that the museum might approach individuals who are not supported by their community, or that the community actually consists of several sub-communities who may have different or conflicting opinions and desires. Internal disagreements or conflicts are a common characteristic of all kinds of communities (Lavine 1992: 145). Ultimately, it is important to be aware of the fact that participation always occurs between individuals: individual members of staff and individual community members (Watson 2007: 18). In the case of the Rastafari exhibition, finding representative community members was a challenge.²⁵ Several different Rastafari communities exist in Jamaica that do not necessarily see eye to eye. The museum attempted to contact community members from several of these communities, in order to represent most of them. However, community members did not always want to work together, choosing instead to liaise with the museum staff rather than to collaborate with each other. This made the co-curation process rather lengthy as it took a long time to reach consensus on many issues. In this respect, it may be easier for a museum to engage with a community that is organized into a foundation or an society, which may already have a structure implemented for decision making as well as a hierarchy of power.

This brings us to the third aspect, namely multi-vocality. For many museums engaging in co-curation, one of the main goals is to include other voices into the exhibition space besides the curatorial voice. A simple way might be to include quotes of community members within the design of the exhibition, but one may also think of community members recording the audio guides. When community engagement occurs throughout the museum process, the voices of community members ideally become embedded in every aspect of the exhibition, including the objects, design, and narratives. Within *Rastafari* it was decided to physically represent this multi-vocality by presenting the main narrative in a series of parallel panels. One series of panels was worded by museum curators, while the other was written by Rastafari community members. Due to the particular Rastafari use of language and tone, the museum staff found it necessary to include their curatorial version. As mentioned above, not all community members were in agreement with each other about various aspects of the exhibition, including the panel texts. Some of them chose to voluntarily work in the exhibition space as guides to tell another narrative to balance it out. One of these guides expressed that it was great that this exhibition existed, because people could learn the full version of the story, and not the way it was told in other places.²⁶ He also said that it was very important that the museum decided to make this exhibition to

24 Conversation with director of *National Museum Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica, 24 July 2014).

25 Conversation with director of *National Museum Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica, 24 July 2014).

26 Conversation with guide at *National Museum Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica, 24 July 2014).

speak for and amplify the voices of the Rastafari who have been a marginalized group in Jamaican society.

The final aspect of co-curated exhibitions has to do with the time frame. At a bare minimum, co-curation already requires a significant investment of time by museum staff and community members alike. If a large group of community members are involved as representatives, decision-making can be slow. In addition, community members and museum staff must take the time to learn about, understand, and trust each other. This is essential for co-curation, although it is often approached by the museum as optional. Community members need time to learn the museum process and understand what is or is not possible. Staff members need to listen to the community to understand what issues are important to them and to learn what their goals are with the exhibition. To make the co-curation project work best, it is moreover important for staff and community members to trust each other. Building trust may take a very long time, particularly with communities who may have had bad experiences with (governmental) organizations or who have been marginalized. It is necessary to make sure that the museum dedicates sufficient time and resources to the co-curation project: first to build trust with the community, then to collaborate together on the exhibition, and finally to continue the engagement after the exhibition is completed. This last step is particularly important to make sure that community members have achieved both their short-term and long-term goals with the exhibition and to maintain a good relationship for possible future collaborations.

Museum Visitation

Interactive Displays

The previous sections of this chapter were concerned with participatory practices that largely take place outside the museum visit: the museum's foundation, staffing, co-curation, or contributions to exhibitions with objects, research, art, or achievements. Interactive displays, however, accommodate participation during the museum visit. For this reason, interactive displays are often the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of museum participation. We tend to think of interactive displays as computer screens or tablets that allow visitors to interact with the exhibition through a game or information database. However, there are plenty of other, non-digital ways for visitors to actively participate in the museum experience. This section will discuss interactive displays in the broadest sense covering opportunities for visitors to interact with the museum and its staff during the visit. Of the museums visited, 46 cases were found in which such visitor activity was supported by the museum. Once again, this is a conservative number: more museums support interaction, but not always on a permanent basis in the galleries. Some museums might have more infrequent participation, in the form of activities or events. The following examples have been grouped into a number of types of interaction: demonstrations, experimenting, listening, tasting, playing, researching, and farming.

Under the grouping of demonstrations, one can think of staff demonstrating the use of objects or craft-making to visitors. Depending on the interaction between visitors and demonstrators, this may be more or less participatory. In some cases, visitors

may be encouraged to follow the example of the staff and try their hand at crafting or other activities. The *Kalinago Barana Autê* in Dominica demonstrates traditional subsistence methods of the indigenous Kalinago people, such as a sugar cane press, a cassava grater, and the baking of cassava bread. Visitors learn about making and using objects that are part of the Kalinago traditional way of life. By interacting on site with members of the Kalinago community, they can learn even more about their culture and heritage. Mr. Rome of *Rome Museum* in Grenada has many items to demonstrate, mentioned also before. Some of these objects were used traditionally by people living in the bush, such as a pit latrine, a mud earth oven, or a coconut comb. Others are electronic appliances that are no longer commonly in use, such as old radios or gas pumps. He has also made a number of sculptures that represent wounds or illnesses occurring in the bush. With these sculptures he demonstrates traditional medicines and remedies. The *Ecomusée CreoleArt* on Guadeloupe provides space for half a dozen workshops for various demonstrations. There are not always live demonstrations in these workshops, but if the crafts(wo)men are not present there is a video that shows the same processes. These workshops show a variety of activities related to traditional subsistence strategies on the island as well as several professions and household chores: cocoa processing, making wooden toys, shoemaking, cashew nut roasting, and doing the laundry or the dishes outdoors.

Interaction in terms of experimenting most often occurs in museums that have natural or scientific content. At the *Bank of Jamaica Money Museum* and at *Yotin Kortá: The Money Museum* on Curaçao visitors can test the validity of their own bank notes under UV light. At *Yotin Kortá* there are also a number of cases in which visitors can compare real bank notes to forgeries and find the differences. The *Centre de Découverte des Sciences de la Terre* on Martinique has set up a small station where visitors can learn to identify various geological materials. A number of samples are placed around a microscope and an information sheet helps visitors to classify these samples. Knowledge-oriented visitors are often interested in not only learning what something is, but also how to identify it or recognize it by themselves. Museums may provide the means and the setting to teach this kind of skill. It might also be possible for visitors to engage in small experiments as research collaboration.

Visitors commonly engage in listening activities in museums, some of which may be more participatory than others. Naturally, when visitors follow a guided tour, a large part of their visit will concern listening and communicating with their guide. Listening activities may also take a digital form, such as with audio guides or headset installations. These activities give visitors more freedom of choice regarding which content they will engage with. For instance, the *Museo Casa de Tostado: Museo de la Familia Dominicana Siglo XIX* is a historic home with period room style exhibits. By using an audio guide and no written labels, the museum can provide information in several languages and keep the atmosphere of the home as authentic as possible without marring the walls with texts. Visitors can choose in what way they interact with each room and its objects: by immersion through observation or with guidance from the audio tour to look at particular things. Other audio guides may provide visitors with the option to learn more about certain topics or objects. Listening activities may also occur incidentally throughout the museum, rather than consistently in the form of a tour. At *Centro León*, also in the Dominican Republic, the atmosphere of certain exhibition spaces is

enhanced with soundscapes. One exhibit, related to the market place, comes to life: when you move one of the vendors, they start calling their wares. In this example, it is the action of the visitor that starts or stops the audio. Visitor participation is thus essential to get the audio experience.

Tasting might not seem like a common sensory activity in a museum. However, in the Caribbean, due in part to the large number of hybrid museums, tasting and product testing is a regular occurrence for visitors. One may think, first of all, of the many rum distilleries. Some of these estates have separate shops with a tasting counter, such as the *Westerhall Estate* on Grenada or the *Domaine de Séverin* on Guadeloupe. Other distilleries might have rum tasting available within the museum space. Besides rum distilleries there are plenty of other products to taste, such as chocolate or cocoa tea at the *Chocomuseo* in the Dominican Republic. At *La Aurora Cigar World* in the Dominican Republic, visitors are encouraged to smoke or ‘enjoy’ a cigar during their visit of the factory and museum. The *Kalinago Barana Autê* in Dominica, also mentioned above, offers visitors a taste of cassava bread as well as herbal tea. All of these examples provide visitors with a sensory experience to better understand the products showcased in the museum and the processes that go into making them.

Museums are incorporating more games into their exhibitions, not only for children but also for adult visitors. Playing within the museum space may help visitors engage with the museum’s content in a different way. In addition, playing may make the museum visit a more social activity by setting up visitors to play together or against each other. At the *Centro Cultural de las Telecomunicaciones* in the Dominican Republic, part of the exhibits are about computers, robotics, and future technologies. As an interactive display they set up an Xbox game console with a Kinect motion sensor. Visitors can play a racing game while attempting to steer the car with the movement of their bodies, rather than using a hand-held controller. Visitors, including adults, were drawn to this activity, because they were intrigued to test this technology. Within the context of this museum, it showcased the direction in which technology is headed and the versatility of applying such technologies. However, playing does not have to be digital. The *Museo Infantil Trampolín* in the Dominican Republic is a museum geared towards children that incorporates many games (see figure 13). The prehistoric section has visitors play an archaeological and paleontological game by placing fossils and artefacts in the right places on a stratigraphic wall. In the section concerning the human body, children can climb up a wall representing human skin on a gigantic scale, while holding on to the massive hairs. The *Centre Spatial Guyanais* in French Guiana also has a number of games, especially for children visiting in school groups. A whole floor is dedicated to children’s activities: tables for coloring and drawing space shuttles, LEGOs for building space shuttles, and big space-themed board games on the floor to play collectively. Playful interaction can be helpful to understanding, and engaging with, the museum’s content.

Researching or finding additional information beyond that presented in the exhibitions might also be interaction provided for visitors. Some museums contain reference libraries or archives that are publicly accessible. In other museums, there may be multi-media screens or documents that visitors can access for additional information. The activity of researching additional information lets visitors engage more deeply with the content of the exhibition. A digital solution is present at the *Museo de las Américas*



Figure 13: Interactive displays in the human body gallery at the Museo Infantil Trampolín, Dominican Republic.

in Puerto Rico. In the first exhibition space, dedicated to contemporary and past Indigenous populations of the Americas, sculpture casts of individuals from different Indigenous cultures are on display. Within the same gallery, video touch screens are installed where you can click on each sculpture to learn more about that cultural group. The screens also show a bibliography or provide further information on a number of subjects, such as the prehistoric settlement of the Americas. Similar screens are installed in the *Museo Nacional de Historia Natural* in the Dominican Republic. In 2006, interactive and digital elements were incorporated into the museum's galleries to enhance the visitor experience and to be able to provide more information to those who are interested.²⁷ Among others, the physical exhibition of taxidermy birds is now extended with digital information about each species. Analogue research interaction is facilitated within the *Tobago Museum*. In several of the exhibition rooms, tables and chairs are set up with research binders with copies of historic documents. Many of these are related to the plantation-era on the island, listing the estates and their inhabitants. Visitors interested in historical or genealogical research can take their time to go through these documents for their own research.

Finally, a number of museums related to nature and agriculture support farming activities. As with the examples related to tasting, this kind of activity mainly occurs in hybrid or ecomuseums where gardens or farms form part of the museum landscape. At *Finca la Protectora* in the Dominican Republic visitors can learn ecological farming methods. Coffee, banana, and other crops are grown on the site and farmed together

²⁷ Conversation with curator at *Museo Nacional de Historia Natural* (Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 14 January 2015).

with visitors so they can gain a stronger connection to the land and its produce. It is the aim to connect these farming activities to heritage hikes in the area to also understand the archaeological past of the land. Cocoa is produced at the *Fond Doux Estate* in St. Lucia. Although visitors are not involved in the farming of the cocoa, they may contribute to part of the processing of the cocoa beans. Schoolchildren may visit the *Ecomusée CreoleArt* on Guadeloupe to work in the traditional gardens known as ‘*jardin créole*’ and learn farming skills. This type of activity provides another dimension to the museum visitor, often a very active one, in which visitors actively contribute to the museum and shape its landscape.

Activities

Activities and events are the final two participatory practices discussed in this chapter. As with the interactive displays discussed above, they provide community engagement integrated into the museum visit or as part of an exceptional museum visit. Activities are characterized by action, often occurring on a regular basis. One may think, for instance, of monthly programs that the museum offers. There is usually a high level of interaction between participants and museum staff. 90 museums were identified where activities were organized. Of course, more museums probably organize activities, but these may not have been visible during this regional museum survey.

Perhaps the most commonly known museum activities are those related to visiting school groups. These educational activities may be adjusted to the age of the students or their curriculum, while remaining in line with the content of the museum. The *Musée Départemental Edgar Clerc* on Guadeloupe focuses on the archaeological past of the island. A special activity room lies between the two main galleries. At the time of visitation, a school group was crafting with clay in this room. The goal of the activity was to make a modern object, but to decorate this in an Amerindian style that the children had seen in the museum galleries. This combined elements from the museum and its Amerindian collection while encouraging children to make something that they might be able to use in the present. The *University of the West Indies Geology Museum* in Jamaica also has a special activity room for school groups. Based closely on the curriculum of the schools, the museum provides different programs for children of different ages, relating geology to the environment, recycling, or mining.²⁸ The museum also provides excursions or activities for university students to learn about geology outside the museum.

Museums also provide activities for many other communities and target audiences. The *Museo Bellapart* in the Dominican Republic has an activity planned every Saturday. The program is rotated weekly, so that it always targets a different community: children, teenagers, adults, or those with reduced mobility.²⁹ The activity itself is also different each time: one month the teenagers might work with graffiti, next month with photography, and after that with digital art. As such, the museum aims to continuously draw in members of these four targeted communities to develop their interest in art

28 Conversation with director of *University of the West Indies Geology Museum* (Kingston, Jamaica, 21 July 2014).

29 Conversation with director of *Museo Bellapart* (Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 15 January 2015).

as well as their skills. Museums may also provide special tours as activities. The *San Juan National Historic Site: Castillo San Cristóbal* in Puerto Rico provides special tours on a weekly basis. One of these tours focuses on exploring the tunnel system of the fortress while another tour is held after opening hours by lantern light. Not geared to any specific community, various workshops can be completed at the *Chocomuseo* in the Dominican Republic. Those interested can enroll in a workshop to learn about the cocoa process and how to make their own chocolates.

Although many museum activities take place in and around the museum building, museum staff may also engage in outreach activities. While their exhibition space was closed for refurbishment, the *Central Bank Money Museum* on Trinidad decided to experiment with community outreach. With a box containing some of the museum's objects, staff approached communities outside the capital to talk about money, trade, and banking.³⁰ They also approached the local community of Port of Spain by setting up a stand during a major event on the Savannah. The community's feedback was so positive to both of these pilot tests that plans are underway to expand the museum's outreach activities into a regular program. Such a program is already implemented by the *Jamaica National Heritage Trust*. As guardians of the island's heritage, the trust has vast storages of archaeological artefacts, but many of them are not exhibited by the trust or by the connected Institute of Jamaica. Instead, the staff uses some of these artefacts, taking them around to schools and showing them to school children.³¹ Oftentimes, the schools are the ones who call the trust to request an outreach activity on a specific subject, such as the Amerindian past or the legacy of slavery. The trust also engages children in exploratory excavations to pique their interest in the archaeological field. Outreach activities are a good way to involve community members in the museum who might otherwise not be able to visit the museum or do not think they have an interest in doing so.

Events

Unlike activities, events are occurrences or happenings that are generally incidental in nature, such as an event for the opening of a new exhibition. Visitors to events may participate uniquely in the museum visit, for instance by being at the museum after hours or in parts of the museum otherwise restricted from visitors' view. Community members may also be asked by the museum to perform as part of the event. The regional museum survey found 70 museums which hosted events, although again a higher amount is likely.

Museums may choose to organize events for the public within the museum space. *Centro León* in the Dominican Republic organizes a weekly 'videocafé' on Friday evenings. Anyone can come to the museum's café and the lawn just outside to watch music videos that are projected on the wall of the building. Every week the focus of this event is on a different artist or musical style. This kind of event draws community members to the museum who might otherwise not visit the museum. Public events usually take place more infrequently. The *Santa Rosa First Peoples Community Museum*

30 Conversation with curator at *Central Bank Money Museum* (Port of Spain, Trinidad, 7 January 2015).

31 Conversation with archaeologist at *Jamaica National Heritage Trust* (Kingston, Jamaica, 23 July 2014).

on Trinidad organizes events to celebrate Indigenous Heritage Day on 14th October.³² On this day, they organize a communal breakfast, a craft fair, and a musical evening. They invite Indigenous and first nations communities from other countries as well as hosting over a thousand school children for the day. As such, the museum also supports interaction between various communities. The *Grenada National Museum* organizes and hosts a cultural event every first Friday of the month in the evening.³³ For these events, various members of the local community may be invited to perform, to lecture, or to enhance the event in another way. These monthly events usually draw the local community to attend and interact with each other within the museum space. Museums may also choose to host private events within their facilities. Many museums are housed in historical buildings or in beautiful settings and form perfect locations for weddings, parties, or other ceremonies. Hosting such private events may not only be a source of income, but can also turn the museum into an important community place. Museums may also host events specifically for (potential) funders and donors, providing a unique opportunity for interaction with the museum and its staff. Finally, living museums may already be engaged in events in which museum visitors might be allowed to participate. As an example one could think of religious services held in churches, synagogues or temples that are connected to museums and heritage centers. While some of these services might not be accessible to outsiders, others may welcome visitors if they follow certain rules. Participation in such events engages visitors with the specific religious community in a way that is often felt as highly meaningful.

Besides cultural events, museums may also organize scientific events for visitors. The *Museo del Hombre Dominicano* in the Dominican Republic is a very active participant in the local and regional archaeological community.³⁴ Every year, the museum organizes a symposium to attract scholars from around the world to present their current archaeological research. In addition, the museum also hosts smaller weekly conferences to discuss new research or new exhibitions. In this way the museum brings its research staff in frequent contact with other members of the scientific community to improve participation in scientific projects and archaeological research. A different type of scientific event is organized at the *Centre Spatial Guyanais* in French Guiana. Here, visitors have the possibility to observe the launch of a satellite from a special observation area close to the launch platform. Of course, this is a special event for which people have to apply beforehand for security reasons. During this event they interact with the staff monitoring and observing the launch event.

Summary

Caribbean museums are so diverse it is impossible to characterize them or define them according to only one aspect. Couched in the specific history of museums in the region, this diversity has partially been influenced by colonial legacies and cultural, museological differences. Even more so, this specificity is due to the differences in

32 Conversation with guide at *Santa Rosa First Peoples Community* (Arima, Trinidad, 9 January 2015).

33 Conversation with director of *Grenada National Museum* (St George's, Grenada, 13 July 2014).

34 Conversation with director of *Museo del Hombre Dominicano* (Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 16 January 2015).

the communities which are at the heart of these museums and/or their missions. As we have seen, nearly every Caribbean museum is participatory to a greater or lesser extent and it is this community engagement which defines part of its character. Yet, as the introduction to this chapter emphasized, museums that wish to remain dedicated to their communities need to continuously commit to engaging, and therefore can benefit from regularly reconsidering and adjusting their participatory practices.

Thus, the aim of this chapter was twofold. Primarily, it sought to answer the sub question: “what are the characteristics of contemporary Caribbean museums and how are they adopting and adapting participatory practices?” (see *Research Questions and Objectives*, page 18). Secondly, it aimed to provide a collection of Caribbean participatory practices as a resource to museums in the region. The regional museum survey formed the core data for this chapter; of this survey an index of museums included can be found in the appendix and the full Caribbean Museums Database is accessible online. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, at least one type of participatory practice was identified in almost every museum visited during the regional museum survey. Community engagement is thus applied by museums in the Caribbean very frequently and with great variety. This chapter presented twelve categories of participatory practices that range from the foundation and organization of the museum, to collection and exhibition processes, as well as participation during the museum visit. Within each of these twelve categories, a wide range of examples was presented to showcase how each community engagement method can be applied in numerous ways depending on the institution and its connected communities. Previously, participatory practices were described mainly with examples from European and North American museums, most notably in Nina Simon’s influential book *The Participatory Museum* (Simon 2010). However, this chapter has expanded on this museological discussion by showing through which participatory practices Caribbean museums are engaging with their respective communities. A critical discussion of these results, from both a macro and a micro level perspective, is found in Chapter 7 and is based on the visualizations which show the social museum in the Caribbean in a series of regional overviews (see figures 44-56).