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

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The Social Museum

Museums are products of their social context, and it is proper that they should be so. It is, however, dangerous to assume that a place is guaranteed for museums in the society of the future. If we accept that their purpose is to be of service to society, then it is vital they be responsive to their social environment in order to remain relevant to changing social needs and goals.

George F. MacDonald (1992: 158; original emphasis)

MacDonald eloquently points out the risk for social museums – their mortality – while at the same time underlining the main ways in which their existence can be safeguarded. The social museum needs to continuously reevaluate itself in order to ensure that it is responsive to its environment and remains relevant as the needs and goals of its communities change. Any museum that places a community at the core of its mission and the heart of its organization needs to make sure that it keeps changing along with that community. Yet, MacDonald's words should not be seen as an impossible challenge for all museums to constantly be in flux. In actuality, it provides comfort in assuring that not all museums have to be fixated on permanence and long-term missions, but that there is room for ephemeral museums to play out their role in the present without a demand for longevity. The landscape of the social museum leaves space for many different types of institutions to exist: some ephemerally, some permanent and ever-changing, but all embedded in their societies.

The core focus of this research has been to uncover the practices and the processes by which museums in the Caribbean are working to connect more closely to the various communities they serve. Whether deliberately or unintentionally, and in differing degrees of success, museums that employ community engagement aim to become more *social* museums. Certainly, all museums are 'social' to some extent. However, the question is to which degree they strive for and succeed in fulfilling the role of an outspokenly social actor.

Building on the results presented in the previous three chapters, this chapter engages in an overarching discussion of Caribbean museums as social museums. This discussion focuses on some of the most noteworthy observations and interpretations made during the course of this research. As such, it aims to answer the research question: "how do community engagement practices and processes affect the role of Caribbean museums in relation to Caribbean society?" (see *Research Questions and Objectives*, page 18). This broad discussion of the social museum in the Caribbean

takes place on both macro and micro levels by switching between regional and local perspectives and highlights both Caribbean characteristics and individual particularities. The chapter divides the discussion into three parts, each in turn approached from three different angles.

The first part focuses on the Caribbean museum scene as a whole by comparing grassroots museums with governmental museums. Firstly, it explores what the location of grassroots vs. governmental museums reveals about which communities these museums are choosing to engage with. Primarily, this discussion contrasts museums located in capital cities with those outside. Secondly, the discussion shifts to examine the differences between grassroots and governmental museums when it comes to the dynamism of the institutions and their ability to change their exhibitions and respond to (changing) societal needs. Oftentimes, dynamism is aided by political and financial independence. Thirdly, the comparison between grassroots and governmental museums is concluded by critically reconsidering the 'problem' of sustainability and introducing the notion of the ephemeral museum. Predominantly a macro level discussion, this first part of the chapter aims to highlight characteristics of Caribbean museums in order to broaden the global museological debate and to shift its typical focus to a grassroots perspective.

The second part is similarly concerned with the Caribbean museum scene as a whole, but zooms in to focus particularly on the various participatory practices employed throughout the region. Firstly, it considers how Caribbean museums are applying multi-vocality through narratives and other participatory practices as a means to target specific communities. This phenomenon is set in relation to the wide diversity of communities present in the region and considers how such multi-vocality supports identity construction, inclusivity, but also exclusion. Secondly, a closer look is taken at which types of museums, such as archaeology museums or natural history museums, engage in which kinds of participatory practices. Here, we unpack why certain museums use certain participatory practices and what this means for their potential to be social museums. Thirdly, participatory practices throughout the Caribbean region are divided by the four main linguistic areas (Dutch, English, French, and Spanish) in order to identify whether museums in each geopolitical sub-region employ participatory practices differently. The underlying hypothesis is that the different histories of these linguistic areas have left a colonial legacy in terms of their museums which may have resulted in distinct 'participatory styles.' As a regional discussion interspersed with local examples, this second part of the chapter aims to critically assess how participatory practices are employed in the region, how this impacts identity formation, and whether differences within the region can be explained by museum type or linguistic area. It is important here to note that the employment of any participatory practice by a museum does not necessarily indicate any measure of impact – practices may be employed unsuccessfully, or at least may be perceived to be unsuccessful by communities.

The third part of the discussion is zoomed in the furthest to assess the processes of community engagement in the Caribbean. Centered largely on the two in depth case studies undertaken in the course of this research, the discussion is mostly at micro level. Although it has implications for the wider Caribbean region, the conclusions drawn in this part cannot directly be transposed to other museums, communities, or islands and countries. Nonetheless, valuable lessons can be learned from these

case studies about the complex process of engaging with communities. Firstly, this part assesses the issue of representativity and how community engagement can be a struggle when participants are not (deemed) representative. Secondly, it explores the essential investment of time, resources, and effort. Often underestimated, community engagement processes need significant investments of time in order to build the necessary amount of trust and mutual understanding for fruitful engagement. Finally, the discussion considers the negotiation process involved in the sharing of power between museums and communities. If either party wants less or more power, conflict can ensue. Conflict may also result from misunderstandings or incompatibilities when it comes to representativity and investment.

As a whole, the chapter presents both macro and micro level perspectives relating to Caribbean museums and their participatory practices and community engagement processes. The reader should take note that although the chapter intends to provide a comprehensive view of museums in the Caribbean region and add to the global museological discourse, neither the data nor their interpretations can be considered all-inclusive.

Grassroots and Governmental Museums

Within the Caribbean, the creation of grassroots museums is a highly noticeable participatory practice, albeit one that has not received much academic attention. As elsewhere in the world, governmental museums such as national museums tend to take center stage in museological and political discussions and inquiries. Certainly, as institutions that (partly) depend on public funding and therefore demand public scrutiny, some of this attention is justified. However, in the act of defining and studying museums, governmental institutions have been given too big a role, perhaps due to their history as instruments of nationalism or as a result of their colonial legacies. As such, museological debates and collections of best practices are missing out on examples of other types of museums, such as grassroots museums, which are set up and run by individuals, communities, or non-governmental organizations. Grassroots museums exist around the world, but are often overlooked or dismissed in museological literature, for instance by applying terms such as ‘museum-like’¹⁷⁸ or ‘amateur museums.’ Although they have been receiving more scholarly attention (*e.g.* Candlin 2016), still greater emphasis can be placed on their characteristics and modes of operation.

Locations

In order to investigate the differences between grassroots and governmental museums in the Caribbean, it is informative to look at the locations of these museums. Upon dividing museums in these two categories of ownership on geographical maps of the region, it became apparent that there are noticeable differences in the placement of these museums (see figures 44-46). Namely, governmental museums are predominantly located in capital cities whereas grassroots museums can mostly be found elsewhere.

178 The term ‘museum-like’ has also been used to indicate those institutions that have deliberately chosen *not* to call themselves museums out of protest, for instance North American Indigenous institutions (Cooper 2008: 138).

On the map, this is most clearly seen in the larger countries or islands (e.g. Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Guadeloupe, Trinidad), due to the fact that the layout is more visible here and relatively more museums were present and/or visited. In these places, governmental museums are strongly clustered in the capital cities. Grassroots museums, although a few can be found in these capitals as well, are mostly located in other parts of the country.

Some more detailed observations of this phenomenon can be made. Governmental museums which are located outside of the capital cities can have been created with outreach as a deliberate intention – such as the *National Museum West* and the *National Gallery West* in Montego Bay, Jamaica, which are each branches of the corresponding national institution located in Kingston. In the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, governmental museums outside of the capital cities are archaeological museums: opened on or next to an archaeological site, the reasons for their non-capital locations are practical. In the Lesser Antilles, we can take a closer look at Dominica and Martinique, which both have mostly governmental museums. In Dominica, due to being (parts of) forts or national parks, several are located outside of the capital city again for practical reasons, whereas the *Kalinago Barana Autê* in the Kalinago Territory is a governmentally owned grassroots initiative (see Chapter 5). Somewhat similarly in Martinique, although many museums were created as grassroots initiatives, several have been passed on to governmental ownership for their continued sustainability and are now managed through the regional government.¹⁷⁹ Thus, a wide range of museums in terms of type, content, location, and related communities are all represented as governmentally owned. Grassroots museums can be found in capital cities, but largely elsewhere. Their appearance is particularly striking on islands where there are no governmental museums, such as Anguilla, Grenada, or Carriacou.

The explanations for the prevalence of governmental museums in capital cities are largely (historically) political. Financially and politically tied to cultural or other ministries, many governmental museums are (part of) national museums, trusts, and parks and thus carry national responsibility for the preservation and exhibition of heritage. Capital cities often being both heavily populated by nationals and frequently visited by tourists, placing museums in these locations allows for them to reach both local and tourist audiences and fulfill their nationally mandated missions. In addition, collections research or conservation can be supported by other public institutions such as universities or libraries. Nonetheless, the existence of grassroots museums elsewhere shows that there is a demand for and support of museum institutions by communities beyond the capital cities. Some of these museums were created to fill perceived gaps in the collections of governmental museums, for instance by preserving rural heritages (e.g. *Rome Museum*, Grenada).¹⁸⁰ Others are intended to reach out to communities inadequately represented in governmental museums, such as cultural (minority) communities (e.g. *Charles Town Maroon Museum*, Jamaica),¹⁸¹

179 Conversation with curator at *Musée Régional d'Histoire et d'Ethnographie* (Fort-de-France, Martinique, 16 March 2015).

180 Conversation with founder of *Rome Museum* (Walker, Grenada, 18 July 2014).

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

or local communities unable to travel to and access museums in the capital (e.g. *Museo Profesor Tremols*, Dominican Republic).¹⁸²

Thus, the creation of grassroots museums is a striking example of community engagement revealed through the location of these museums. Covering topics that are of interest to (local, cultural) communities, representing their narratives and histories, and providing access to heritage in other locations, these museums are deliberately working to fill gaps left by governmental museums and reach audiences who might otherwise be left out. These individuals and communities are stepping in to create museums where governmental museums are perceived to have fallen short. In closing, it can be reiterated that both the audiences and roles of grassroots and governmental museums are dissimilar. Although they may overlap, they position themselves differently in relation to Caribbean society, with governmental museums fulfilling national mandates and frequently adopting wide community engagement practices targeting many communities, and with grassroots museums reaching out to local communities, minority communities, or those not adequately catered to by governmental institutions. Collectively, they have shifted the role of Caribbean museums in relation to society by engaging with multiple layers and levels of contemporary Caribbean communities.

Dynamism

The political context of governmental museums as opposed to the more independent status of grassroots museums also has implications for their flexibility and dynamism, or their capacity to quickly respond to changing societal needs. In part, the limited dynamism of governmental museums is due to their bureaucracy, which not only demands governmental assessment and adherence to national policies, but also may result in slow decision-making processes. Elections and political changes often lead to the development of new policies which museums are then tasked to implement. However, by the time policy planning has concluded, new elections may be around the corner, allegiances swap over, and any planned changes are put to a halt.¹⁸³ Governments may change even twice within the same year, effectively halting any museum progress due to rapid changes in course.¹⁸⁴ Governmental museum staff can become frustrated with these political dependencies and the resulting stagnation. As an example, in one case the simple suggestion of creating a walkway – through grass which was frequently muddy and not accessible to wheelchairs or strollers – had been on hold for 9 years.¹⁸⁵

For the other part, the limited dynamism of governmental museums is the result of their dependency on public funding. In some places with tight governmental budgets, funding for museums is similarly limited. The government of Jamaica, which is struggling with heavy debt-to-GDP ratios, has procured international loans and developed financial agreements which also place their spending under international restrictions and scrutiny. This has direct consequences for governmental museums, for example

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

183 Conversation with guide at *Centro Indígena Caguana* (Utuado, Puerto Rico, 29 January 2015).

184 Conversation with curator at *National Museum & Art Gallery of Trinidad & Tobago* (Port of Spain, Trinidad, 6 January 2015).

185 Conversation with guide at *Centro Indígena Caguana* (Utuado, Puerto Rico, 29 January 2015).

by suspending the hiring of new staff.¹⁸⁶ Even when financially capable, governments may be reluctant to fund governmental museums, particularly those which have been perceived as stagnating, as they do not observe the museum having enough impact.¹⁸⁷ Museum staff expressed similar sentiments throughout the region that culture seems to come last in government spending. As noted in Puerto Rico, Caribbean culture “is lived by the people, but not preserved by the government.”¹⁸⁸

This is somewhat ironic, particularly considering the increasing investments in tourism and tourist development. To name a recent example, this has led to a public conflict in St. Lucia between the government and the Saint Lucia National Trust in 2017¹⁸⁹ (Seon 2017). Seen by many as a punishment of the Trust for opposing the construction of a dolphin park and their criticism of a Chinese-sponsored multibillion-dollar development project, the government of St. Lucia cut the entire subvention of the Trust to \$0 for the 2017-2018 budget. The Prime Minister stated that this cut was not due to any conflict, but rather the result of a tight governmental budget in which every cent has to be justified and that government had decided no longer to pay for the recurrent expenses of the Trust. The opposition party has been vocal in opposing this cut, describing the decision as “vindictive” (Seon 2017). The Trust released a statement reaffirming their achievements since 1972 and future plans for the conservation and protection of St. Lucia’s natural and cultural heritage, calling the decision “an unprecedented, unjustified and exceedingly unfortunate measure” (Saint Lucia National Trust 2017a: 3). As a direct result of this financial cut, the Saint Lucia National Trust had to announce the immediate closure of the *Walcott Place* museum which had only just been completed and opened to the public in 2016 (Saint Lucia National Trust 2017b; see figure 57). This example highlights the dependency of governmental museums and the immediate effect that a change in government or funding might have on such institutions.

As a final point relating to the funding of governmental museums: although they may benefit from public funding, they may be restricted (partially or entirely) from accessing private funds. Particularly concerning corporate sponsorship, governmental museums may not be allowed to accept such funds as they need to remain ‘neutral’ institutions. Governments may need to maintain their independence from private corporations as far as to disallow sponsorship of or even donations to governmental museums (e.g. *Museum of Parliament & National Heroes Gallery*, Barbados).¹⁹⁰

The situation for grassroots museums is vastly different, both organizationally and financially. Run by individuals, communities, or non-governmental organizations, they do not operate as governmental institutions. However, their relationships to government may take many different forms. On one end of the spectrum are museums which are fully autonomous and are managed on every level by individuals

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

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

188 Conversation with archaeologist at *Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte* (San Juan, Puerto Rico, 28 January 2015).

189 Conversation with accountant at *St. Lucia National Trust* (via Skype, 4 May 2017).

190 Conversation with facilities coordinator at *Museum of Parliament & National Heroes Gallery* (Bridgetown, Barbados, 15 October 2015).



Figure 57: Walcott Place, St. Lucia, while under construction in October 2015.

in private capacities. On the other end of the spectrum are museums whose owners, staff, or board may contain individuals who are (also) politically active. Some of these grassroots museums may have complicated organizational structures while others lie in the hands of a sole individual. In practice, most grassroots museums enjoy greater independence than governmental museums, giving them opportunities to more easily implement new ideas and more rapidly respond to community needs. Thus, many of these museums tend to be quite dynamic in the sense that they are continuously developing their exhibitions, their facilities, and their programs. Even if in some cases the exhibition galleries might appear to be static on the whole, in reality new objects and new information may be added on a regular basis without the need to change everything at once.

Financially, grassroots museums may at first appear to be disadvantaged as opposed to governmental museums, as they do not directly receive public funding. However, as the previous paragraphs showed, public funding can also come with particular restrictions and disadvantages. Although the running costs of grassroots museums are generally not governmentally financed, they still may receive recurring or incidental governmental support. For instance, grassroots museums may be located in buildings, monuments, or parks which are governmentally owned or rented. Grassroots museums may also apply for governmental funding for specific projects or events, such as new developments or programs. In these cases, funding will be sought on the basis of grants and other funding parties, such as private or corporate funders, may also be approached. Generally, such governmental funding will only be accepted if it is not contingent on political interference in the museum's functioning.

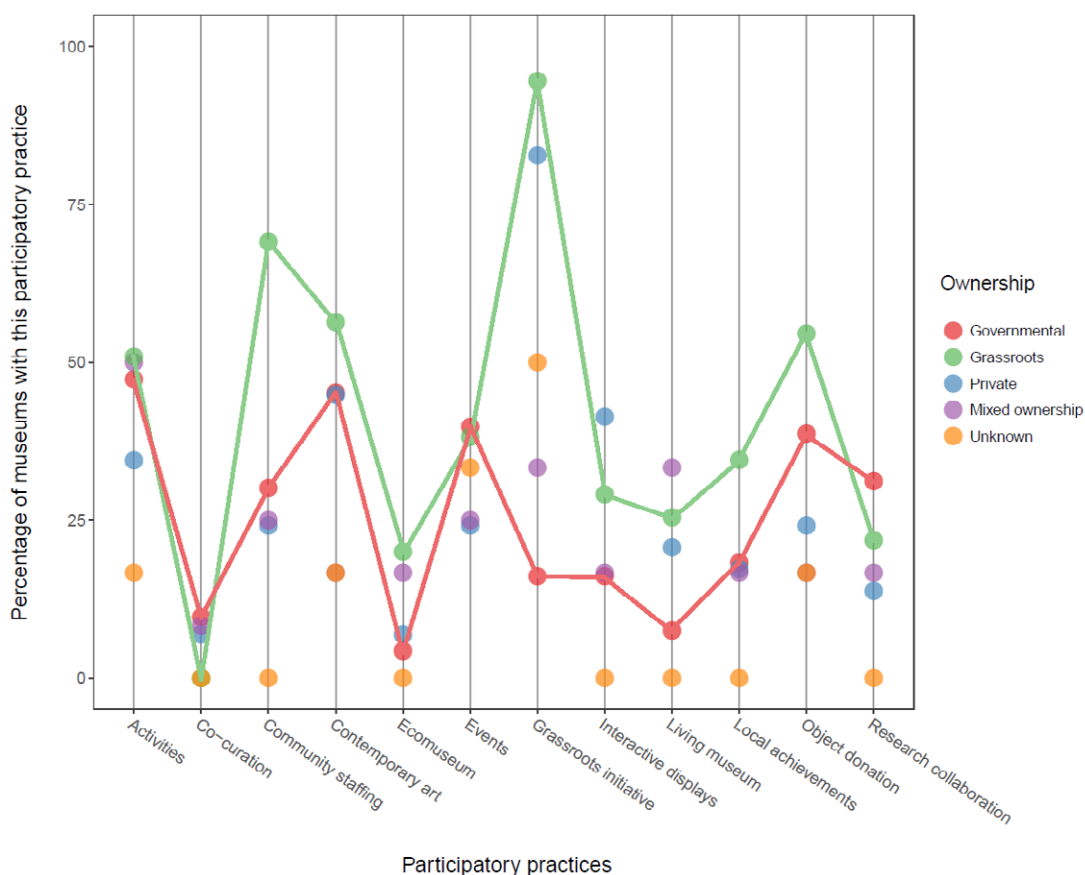


Figure 58: Percentage of museums which have any of the participatory practices, highlighting governmental museums vs. grassroots museums.

In fact, grassroots museums may also have deliberate missions to remain fully financially independent. *Casa Pueblo* in Puerto Rico refuses to accept any donations from governments or organizations.¹⁹¹

The organizational and financial differences between governmental museums and grassroots museums and their resulting differences in dynamism can be seen in the types of participatory practices which these two categories of museums employ and also in the frequency and speed at which they are able to alter or implement such practices. To begin with a closer look at the participatory practices of governmental museums, on first glance it is apparent that governmental museums employ relatively fewer participatory practices across the board (see figure 58). Upon closer inspection, we can see that governmental museums are rarely grassroots initiatives, which is to be expected as most of them were governmentally founded. Perhaps more surprising is that they less frequently exhibit local achievements, possibly due to their mission to appeal to a wide audience and therefore refrain from celebrating individual achievements. In addition, the ecomuseum concept (see *Ecomuseums*, page 73) is rarely

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

adopted by governmental museums, probably also due to the ecomuseum's inherent focus on a particular community and its needs. Also noticeable is that governmental museums relatively contain fewer interactive displays, which could be a result of funding (either the amount of funding or the restrictions on what funds can be used for). Instead, governmental museums direct their community engagement endeavors towards a few specific participatory practices. Often unable to overhaul exhibitions on a regular basis, governmental museums respond to changing societal needs by implementing and changing activities and events. These practices which engage with communities during the museum visit, as opposed to being part of the organization of the museum or the collecting and exhibiting processes, are more temporary and flexible. Of particular note is governmental museums' frequent collaboration with others (such as universities) in terms of research. Possibly due to their governmental ties, they more often engage in collections research or public research, exhibiting those results within the museum.

On the other hand, grassroots museums are overall and relatively more participatory. Expectedly, this is most dominantly seen in the practices which relate to the foundation and organization of the museum, such as the categories 'grassroots initiative,' 'ecomuseum,' and 'community staffing.' Relatively high degrees of participation can also be seen in practices relating to collection and exhibition processes, such as the exhibition of work by contemporary artists. Grassroots museums also more frequently exhibit, or at least more transparently credit in their exhibitions, objects donated by the public. Equally many grassroots museums engage their communities through activities and events as governmental museums. In actuality, there are only two categories in which grassroots museums relatively less frequently employ participatory practices: research collaboration and co-curation. The former may be due to them having fewer ties to governmental research institutes. The latter is due to the definition of co-curation as being exhibitions created as a collaboration between a museum and community members (see *Co-curation*, page 92). As grassroots museums are run by community members, in effect the process of the creation of their exhibitions is not in the same way a collaboration between 'outsiders' and 'insiders' and thus this category has been left blank for these museums.

In summary, the differences in dependencies of organization and funding of governmental museums vs. grassroots museums has distinct implications on the dynamism of these institutions and their ability to adapt to changing needs of Caribbean societies. This is visible in the different participatory practices employed by these two categories of museums, whereby governmental museums predominantly engage with their communities temporarily through activities and events, unlike grassroots museums which engage with their communities throughout all aspects of their work. Thus, the participatory practices employed across the board by grassroots museums allow them to respond to community needs in a plurality of ways: whether there is a desire for different staffing or a request to exhibit newly donated objects. Governmental museums often find themselves in less flexible situations, thereby directing their community engagement efforts towards activities and events that take contemporary needs into account.

Sustainability

A demand for sustainability particularly plagues grassroots museums, many of which have been accused of not being sustainable. In some cases, this perceived problem of sustainability is due to a lack of consistent sources of funding or of long-term plans. For the most part, however, the problem is placed with the staffing of these museums, particularly those with only a handful or a single member of staff. The arguments in any of these cases are easily made. Grassroots museums that function on the basis of ad hoc funding may at any moment run into financial trouble, leading them to closure, with the future of their collections uncertain. Similarly, if such a museum does not have meticulous long-term plans, specifically for the conservation and preservation of the collections, objects may deteriorate irreparably and, in the absence of comprehensive catalogues, knowledge of the collections may be lost. Of course, the previous section has shown that the sustainability of governmental museums cannot be guaranteed either.

Nonetheless, it is the sustainability of the ‘human resources’ of these museums that is seen as the most problematic. Particularly for grassroots museums run by individuals, what will happen to their collections and their museum when they pass away? Certainly, accessibility can already be an issue with these museums if their owner is temporarily unavailable to open the museum – like when *Sur la Trace des Arawaks* in St. Martin was closed during the maternity leave of the owner in 2014. Naturally, the death of the owner places the museum in great uncertainty. Questions arise over the inheritance of the collection and whether any friends or family members are willing to take over the museum. The *Whaling Museum*, known first as *Athneal's Private Petit Museum*, was founded by local harpooner Athneal Ollivierre on the island of Bequia. Upon his death in 2000, the museum passed to his closest friend and nephew Harold Corea, who was also a whaler and had been an actor in, or at least heard, all of the stories of the collection. Following Mr. Corea's subsequent death, the future of the collection became uncertain. At the time of visiting (2015) it had been moved to the *Boat Museum* in Bequia and efforts were underway to find a volunteer to keep the museum open.

If no relatives or community members are interested in preserving the collections or keeping the museum open, other solutions may be sought. As mentioned in the opening of this chapter, several grassroots museums in Martinique have changed ownership and been passed on to the government to assure their long-term sustainability. For instance, *La Maison de la Canne* was created in 1987 by a foundation who wished to preserve the rapidly disappearing sugar cane heritage on the island. In light of the aging of the foundation's members and in order to ensure its accessibility and sustainability, the museum was donated to the regional government.¹⁹² In the case of *Museo Profesor Tremols* in the Dominican Republic, it is the local community who has taken an interest in the future of the museum and its collections. Plans were being developed in 2015 to catalogue the collections and the community suggested moving (parts of) the collections to a new purpose-built building. The underlying idea was that such a move would improve the accessibility of these collections – which are now

192 Conversation with curator at *Musée Régional d'Histoire et d'Ethnographie* (Fort-de-France, Martinique, 16 March 2015).



Figure 59: The objects in *The Old House*, St. Martin, became vibrant through the narratives of the founder and in dialogue with visitors.

located in the home of the owner – and ensure the longevity of the museum which the community deems highly valuable. In yet again other cases, collections may be sold or auctioned off and the museum simply closed.

Thus it is particularly the lifespan of people which is primarily noted as the ‘problem’ for the sustainability of grassroots museums. Therefore, the ‘solution’ is mainly proposed in terms of cataloguing collections, changing the museum’s ownership, or moving the collections. However, I would argue that it is in fact not only impossible to preserve these individually-owned grassroots museums, but perhaps even undesirable. The reason being that the owners and founders of these museums are their essence; in their absence the main value or purpose of the museum may vanish.

To illustrate this argument with an example, the late Pierre Beauperthuy of *The Old House* in St. Martin – who was tragically murdered in 2015 in the home which was also his museum – had been essential to animating his collections. Known around the island and to many visitors as an extraordinary storyteller, it was his memories, his narratives, and his life that formed the essence of the museum. Without him, his museum could have been mistaken for an indoor garage sale: a house full of furniture and objects, stacked on top of each other, some items on the floor, everything covered in dust (see figure 59). Framed sepia photographs are placed on chairs, mothballs are on the bed under a mosquito net, and the display cases filled in 1999 have since been covered by so many new objects that their original contents are difficult to see. While this image may be a visitor’s first impression, it does not convey the essence of the museum and it is certainly not the image with which the visitor will have left. Mr. Beauperthuy welcomed every visitor personally and inquired where you are from, adjusting his narrative to topics that might be of relevance to you. He would enthusiastically plunge into the

history of the house, his childhood home, and his family tree, tracing his lineage to Pierre Auguste Beauperthuy who had been sent to St. Martin in 1843 by Napoleon III to set up salt works.¹⁹³ As he guided you through the small rooms of his home, the objects gained depth and meaning through his narrative. He opened drawers and showed hidden items, letting you touch certain things, inviting you into their hidden meanings. By the end, you are left in awe of Mr. Beauperthuy's life, his extraordinary experiences, and his stories. Before leaving, he would ask you to sign his guestbook as he has asked every visitor, including members of royal families – “perhaps one day, you will be famous too!” he laughed.

During the course of the visit, it becomes apparent that the museum is a valuable part of local heritage. In truth, despite reports of Mr. Beauperthuy's collection having been the reason for the armed robberies, it is the founder himself, rather than his collection, who is the most valuable part of the museum. How could one attempt to preserve a museum whose essence lies not in its objects but in its owner? A museum that is animated, which comes alive, thanks to the narratives of its creator and his or her dialogue with the visitor? Certainly, one could collect an oral history of the owner, preserving video or audio footage of a guided tour of the museum (see *Grassroots Initiatives*, page 68). Or, one could catalogue the collections and try to recreate the museum, possibly in a different location. But in any of these cases, the essential value and purpose of the museum would change to such a degree that perhaps it cannot be considered the same museum.

It is these considerations of the ‘problem’ of sustainability for grassroots museums that have led me to critically reconsider the role of museums in the Caribbean – and elsewhere. Traditionally, since the formal modern development of museums as extensions of the nation state, their purpose was heavily focused on longevity, permanence, and the conservation of heritage for future generations. Although museums certainly have very significant roles to play in the present and for contemporary societies, their long-term purpose is automatically assumed and in some cases prioritized. These museums have vast collections in storages, of which only a small percentage is permanently on display, with other objects temporarily gaining exposure. In the ICOM definition of the museum, the term ‘permanent institution’ is prominent, advocating for sustainability as a priority.

Yet, perhaps sustainability does not need to be a priority for all museums: perhaps there are those, such as grassroots museums founded by individuals, whose purpose and role lies almost exclusively in the present. I propose calling them ‘ephemeral museums’ to signify their relatively short-lived existence in a single form. This is certainly not to say that their collections are worthless for the future and should not be preserved. Rather, that the museum as an animated entity, comprised of the landscape, collections, owner, and narratives, ceases to be when one of these parts is lost. The museum as it was has played its part and thinking it can be preserved intact would be missing the point. While one could preserve parts of the ephemeral museum, such as the collections or the museum building, the result would be a new museum, with a new purpose and a new societal role. Ephemeral museums may be particularly suited to engage with communities who might otherwise feel disassociated from the more

193 Conversation with founder of *The Old House* (Quartier D’Orleans, St. Martin, 2 February 2014).

traditional museum concept. In comparing governmental museums and grassroots museums, their temporality should be reconsidered, implying differences in their societal roles which can work complementarily. Specifically for grassroots museums, the need for sustainability can be critically examined and in the case of each museum one can consider whether it has fulfilled its societal role or whether continuation of parts of it in a different form is desirable. As such, governmental museums and grassroots museums may have different roles to play in contemporary society and for future societies.

Participatory Practices

The diversity of the Caribbean and her people draws frequent attention and is often mentioned as one of the particular characteristics of the region – including in this research. Thus one of the first aims of this research was to see whether the diversity of Caribbean communities was reflected in Caribbean museums and their participatory practices. In this section, the discussion will keep a regional perspective but will focus on regional trends in the adoption and adaptation of participatory practices, rather than the broad comparison made in the previous section between grassroots museums and governmental museums. It should be reiterated, though, that the noted presence of a participatory practice in any given museum does not necessarily imply its success or its impact.

Multi-vocality

Multi-vocality – the inclusion or presence of multiple voices – has been debated within museological literature for a number of decades. Particularly related to community engagement literature, and part of the landscape of the New Museology, multi-vocal exhibitions are often advocated as a way for museums to step away from authoritative, master narratives and showcase how histories and heritages are complex and multi-faceted. The goal of such multi-vocal exhibitions is to ‘impartially’ present multiple perspectives, to allow visitors to make their own interpretations, and to include multiple communities or audiences within the museum narrative.

Such multi-vocal exhibitions can also be found in the Caribbean, where the voices of multiple communities can be ‘heard’ within the same museum. Quite literally showcasing the voices of multiple local communities within one museum, is the exhibition *Nos communes d’hier à aujourd’hui* [Our municipalities from yesterday to today] at the *Ecomusée CreoleArt* in Guadeloupe. This exhibition consists of a long row of 32 identical wooden cabinets, each of which corresponds to one of the municipalities of Guadeloupe. Each municipality was contacted to fill their cabinet with information and items characteristic or important to them and to decorate and design the inside of the cabinet as they wished. Thus, outwardly identical, the cabinets are all unique. Some municipalities have created their cabinet with school groups or local historical societies, in other cases a local mayor has taken a leading position, yet others have sent objects and asked the museum to arrange them on their behalf. Many cabinets contain short histories of the municipality with photographs, objects, or local products, and encourage people to come and visit. Although perhaps not as literal, other examples of multi-vocal exhibitions can be found in which the main narrative is complemented

by the stories of local community members or in which academic specialists such as volcanologists, archaeologists, biologists, or others are quoted.

There is also the possibility of museums with single narratives to encourage the inclusion or indeed intervention of other voices. Although certainly not 'objective,' the main panel texts in the *Musée Schoelcher* in Guadeloupe are written as a rather linear narrative by an anonymous curatorial voice. This narrative, quite chronologically, tells the tale of Victor Schoelcher, the founder of the museum's collection: from his family life and his collection of plaster casts of famous marble statues, to his travels around the world, and concluding with his political activities towards the abolition of slavery in France. Opened in 1887, the museum's core collection remains the same, although its displays, objects on loan, and narratives have been changed. It is particularly Schoelcher's involvement in the French abolition of slavery that the museum's staff has identified as a topic demanding exploration from multiple perspectives. Thus, at the time of visiting (March 2015), the main museum exhibitions were subject to an intervention by Guy Gabon. Her contemporary art exhibition, *Carte Blanche*,¹⁹⁴ consisted of multiple artworks, each grappling with the legacies and traces of slavery, the slave trade, and colonization, as well as with the fragility of these traces due to the threat of forgetfulness (panel texts, Musée Schoelcher). As most of her artworks were made in situ, they are also inspired by her conversations with museum visitors (Virassamy 2015). In addition, the museum is part of the UNESCO supported *Route de l'Esclave*, which visitors can follow throughout Guadeloupe. The sites on this route are marked with special panels and the route as a whole is complemented by a booklet, as well as a series of short YouTube films. Thus, while the museum's panels tell one narrative, this voice is complemented by that of the UNESCO slave route project and by annual artistic interventions.

Multi-vocal exhibitions may also contain the voices of multiple persons from the same community. As communities are not homogeneous, museums may struggle to represent a community within their exhibition. One example, already mentioned in a previous chapter (see *Co-curation*, page 92), was the co-curated temporary exhibition *Rastafari* held at the *National Museum Jamaica*. This exhibition contained two sets of panel texts, one written by curators and one written by Rastafari in their own words and tone. Besides the existence of two clear perspectives, visible to the visitor in the form of these panel texts, additional narratives were told by the Rastafari who volunteered as exhibition guides. The Rastafari community had disagreed on numerous occasions throughout the exhibition-making process, due to their diverse perspectives and opinions. Some community guides preferred the Rastafari panels, while others used the curatorial panels as part of their own narrative during their tours.

While there are many Caribbean examples of multi-vocal museums – museums which exhibit voices from multiple communities, or multiple voices from one community, or otherwise complement the museum narrative with external interventions – many of these are not aimed to present strongly conflicting perspectives. Rather than presenting contentious perspectives and encouraging the visitor to pick a side in the

¹⁹⁴ *Carte Blanche* is an annual exhibition grant created and funded by *Musée Schoelcher*. Since 2010, each year a different local artist is granted *carte blanche* to engage the permanent exhibition of the museum in a temporary intervention.

debate, most of these multi-vocal exhibitions seem intent to make people feel included rather than risk them feeling confronted.

In addition to these examples, one could interpret multi-vocality to include those museums which present single narratives of communities who have otherwise been underrepresented or misrepresented in (national) museum narratives. Elsewhere, such museums have been criticized for their *lack* of multi-vocality and their espousing of single narratives without gratifying alternative viewpoints (e.g. the *Museum of Free Derry* in Northern Ireland, Crooke 2011b: 34). However, this criticism has been contested by Fiona Candlin who states that while these museums may be presenting their narratives from a single perspective, unlike traditional master narratives they are often transparently partisan and do not pretend to be objective (Candlin 2016: 88-91). In fact, where communities or heritages have been traditionally not represented, underrepresented, or misrepresented, such museums which tell these 'alternative' narratives, may in fact be supporting multi-vocality in the wider museum sphere. What's more, if these museums had attempted to develop their exhibits from a balanced, multi-perspective approach, they could risk perpetuating oppression.

Multi-vocality by presenting these kinds of 'alternative' histories in Caribbean museums is most commonly the result of grassroots initiatives. Many of these museums have been created purposefully to preserve and/or present heritages and histories that are not (aptly) included in other (national) museums. In some cases, the mission of the museum might be to improve the visibility of a minority community or to alter a dominant narrative. For example, while most museums in Jamaica – particularly the national museums – explain how maroon communities resulted from the co-habitation of escaped enslaved Africans with Amerindian groups concealed in the interior, staff at the *Charles Town Maroon Museum* emphasize that their ancestry does not include Amerindians although they did learn many things from them.¹⁹⁵ Such narratives may be important for visitors and staff alike in affirming identities and sharing information which they have not readily been able to access elsewhere. Particularly for communities who have been underrepresented in the past, such knowledge may be important to community members for positioning themselves in relation to others. As one visitor wrote elsewhere in Jamaica, "next time someone drop a racist remark I can drop some facts on them" (guest book entry, National Museum West, July 2015).

Some museums which present 'alternative' histories may have more outspoken political intentions, for instance to advocate for increased rights for their community or to seek justice for past crimes. An example of a highly contested and political 'alternative' narrative is told at the *Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana*, Dominican Republic. With a mission to promote awareness of the struggles of Dominicans during the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo (assassinated in 1961), the museum tells a highly contested history which was hushed for many decades (De Peña Díaz 2013). The museum complex includes former torture cells and its exhibitions speak openly of murder and genocide, such as the massacres of Haitians. The museum takes a strong position as a human rights advocate and memorializes the victims of the dictatorship, encouraging visitors to provide information about friends or family members who were affected.

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



Figure 60: The multilingual displays of Museo Tula, Curaçao, begin at the museum entrance.

Considering such a history which was politically suppressed for many decades, it seems hardly surprising that the museum cannot be neutral in its retelling of these histories. Although it presents multiple voices through its extensive panel texts and other media which contain detailed research, the museum does not actively encourage alternative or opposing viewpoints. Nonetheless, this should not be grounds to criticize the museum as lacking multi-vocality. Indeed, such a museum “assists in the process of creating multiple perspectives because it supplants and challenges existing unilateral accounts” (Candlin 2016: 90).

Beyond the content of the narratives which are told in panel texts or tours, their form, *i.e.* the languages used, can also support multi-vocality. These languages may reveal which communities are targeted by the museum. Some museums may ‘speak’ only in one language, focusing on a local or tourist language. Others may be bi- or multi-lingual, varying in their panel texts, guides, or audio tours. Some museum displays may be in local or creole languages, highlighting the close ties to a local community. In Curaçao, the *Savonnet Museum*’s panels can be read in all three official languages, Papiamentu, Dutch, and English, plus also in Spanish. The island has a very high degree of bilingualism, with many people able to converse in two or even more languages, although Papiamentu is most widely spoken as a first language. Other museums on the island reveal their narrower intended audiences through the languages used. The *Curacao Maritime Museum*, aimed primarily at (Dutch and other) tourists, has panels only in Dutch and English. On the other hand, *Museo Tula*, whose mission is to represent the local Afro-Caribbean community, has panels in Papiamentu with some of them accompanied by English translations (see figure 60). Certain colonial documents related to slavery are presented in the original Dutch. As a final Curaçaoan

example, the *Octagon Museum* about the history of Simón Bolívar has bilingual panel texts in English and Spanish, as the museum is frequently visited by Venezuelans.

Beyond narratives, museums may support multi-vocality through the use of additional participatory practices, such as the exhibition of donated objects from members of communities, the development of a diverse range of activities, or by supporting local artists in exhibiting their work and their contemporary critiques of society. Certainly, grassroots initiatives and community staffing are fundamental participatory practices which can support multi-vocality throughout much of the museum's work. In addition, multi-vocality can also be achieved when museum displays are activated strongly through dialogues between staff and visitors. In these cases, visitors "play an active part in establishing the exhibition narrative" (Candlin 2016: 45), temporarily adding their voices to those of the museum. This type of multi-vocality will be different with each visit.

As a final note, although Caribbean museums can be multi-vocal in a multitude of manners and to varying degrees, they are not per se *inclusive*. Certain museums may so strongly advocate specific community voices, that other (opposing) voices may be unquestionably excluded. In other cases, dissident voices may be present but only peripherally so. Nonetheless, from a regional perspective, many Caribbean museums have adopted multi-vocality in their narratives and other aspects of their work and thus Caribbean museums as a whole can engage with more parts of Caribbean society. Although certain communities may be excluded from certain museums, taken on the whole the Caribbean museum sphere has become more multi-vocal and more inclusive, not least due to its many grassroots initiatives.

Museum Types

Here we will look in more detail at which types of museums employ which participatory practices by highlighting a few expected as well as some unexpected examples. All museums studied in the course of the regional museum survey were divided into seven museum types (see *Regional Museum Survey*, page 49). These categories are: archaeology, art, built heritage (e.g. forts), history, mixed content (for those museums which have more than one focus), nature/science, and popular culture (e.g. film, music, food). In charting the relative frequencies of the participatory practices employed by museums of each type, for instance how many percent of art museums engage in co-curation, some trends can be visualized (see figure 50). This visual representation can be assessed in more detail as to why certain museums types are participatory in certain ways.

To begin with a few correlations that were expected due to fieldwork observations or which make sense due to the definitions of the categories. For instance, of all visited museums of the 'art' type, 100% of them employ the participatory practice 'contemporary art' by collecting and/or exhibiting these kinds of artworks. Based on the definitions of the 'museum type' categories and the participatory practices, this was to be expected, although it is still interesting to see that even art museums with largely historical art collections engage with contemporary artists. Another observation made during fieldwork can also be supported by this data visualization, namely that popular culture museums are predominantly (in 75% of the cases) the result of grassroots initiatives. It seems that even if governmentally created museums include popular culture,

it does not typify the institution as a whole. Museums which focus on rum, cacao, cigars, sports, music, or films are mostly private or grassroots museums.

Trends can also be discerned which reveal certain types of museums to be generally 'more participatory' while others are 'less participatory' (see figure 61). In this image, lines have been drawn to highlight the relative percentage of participatory practices employed by built heritage museums and by mixed content museums. Overall, built heritage museums very rarely adopt participatory practices, with the exception of being 'living museums.' This type of museum consists mainly of tangible heritage sites, such as forts, religious buildings, ruins, or historic city centers. While some of these sites may contain or be connected to exhibition spaces with objects on display, many of them only provide information on panels or in the form of audio tours. It is primarily the structures themselves – the church, the fort, the houses – which are on display to the public. Thus, in many ways, it makes sense that these types of museums or heritage sites do not have donated objects on display (since they rarely have objects on display at all). However, built heritage museums could strive to pursue more engagement with communities through activities, events, or interactive displays, for instance. Built heritage museums do engage with communities in a particular way that is more rare for other museums types, namely as living museums. Historic city centers are prime examples as they are literally being lived in: visitors to such a site might easily approach residents and engage in dialogue with them while owners or managers of this type of built heritage need to be in regular contact with residents.

On the other end of the spectrum, when seen over all the participatory practices, mixed content museums are quite participatory. It is difficult to make generalizations about this type of museum, as the museums are so diverse: from small house-museums to large, national institutions. Nonetheless, these museums are characterized by their relatively frequent inclusion of participatory practices and this may in part be due to their diversity in collections and content. For instance, some of these museums have chosen to add contemporary artworks to their displays, even if the remainder of their collections are not specifically focused on art. Many mixed content museums engage in activities and events, possibly to explore their diverse collections with different audiences or to bring the different aspects of the museum into public view. However, they more rarely engage in research collaborations with, for instance, universities or other institutions. Perhaps due to the diverse nature of their collections, these mixed content museum might not be able to dedicate their staff to researching only a segment of these collections. These museums also have a large amount of donated objects on display and in fact in some cases these donations may actually be the reason for the museum's broad focus. The *Musée du Rhum: Musée Universel* in Guadeloupe is a quintessential example. Located at the distillery Reimonenq, the museum was opened in 1990 as a rum museum and expanded with an additional gallery containing reconstructed distillery equipment in 1992. Following the donation of entomologist Fortuné Chalumeau's extensive collections of specimens, the museum added an impressive insect gallery. Similar expansions were made in 1997 with the addition of a gallery on local trades and crafts as well as a model ship gallery. As a result, the 'museum of rum' became a 'universal museum' in name as well as in focus.

We have seen that built heritage museums are generally low in their employment of participatory practices, whereas mixed content museums are overall highly

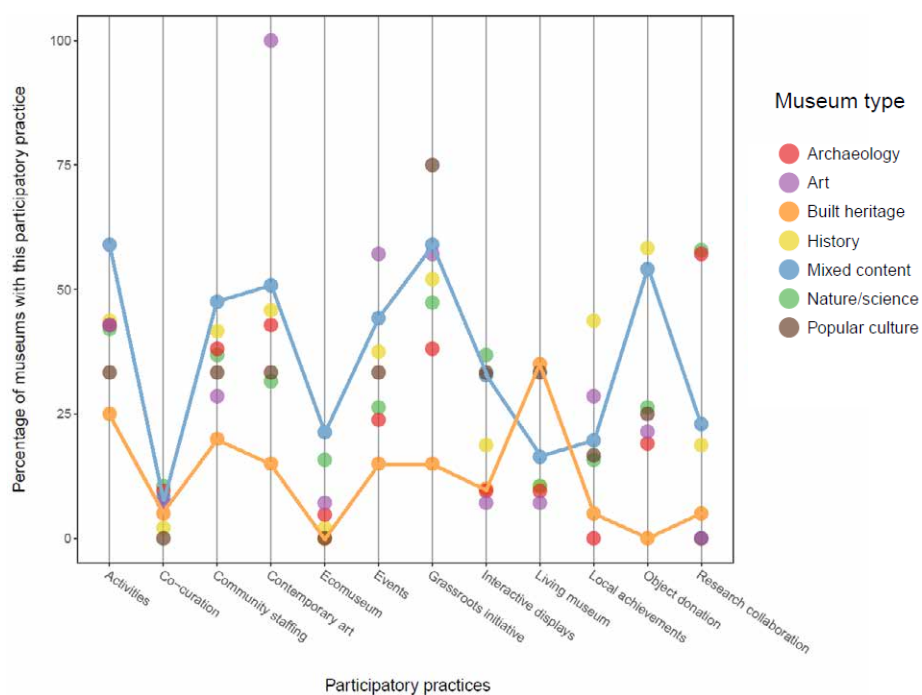


Figure 61: Percentage of museums which have any of the participatory practices, highlighting built heritage museums vs. mixed content museums.

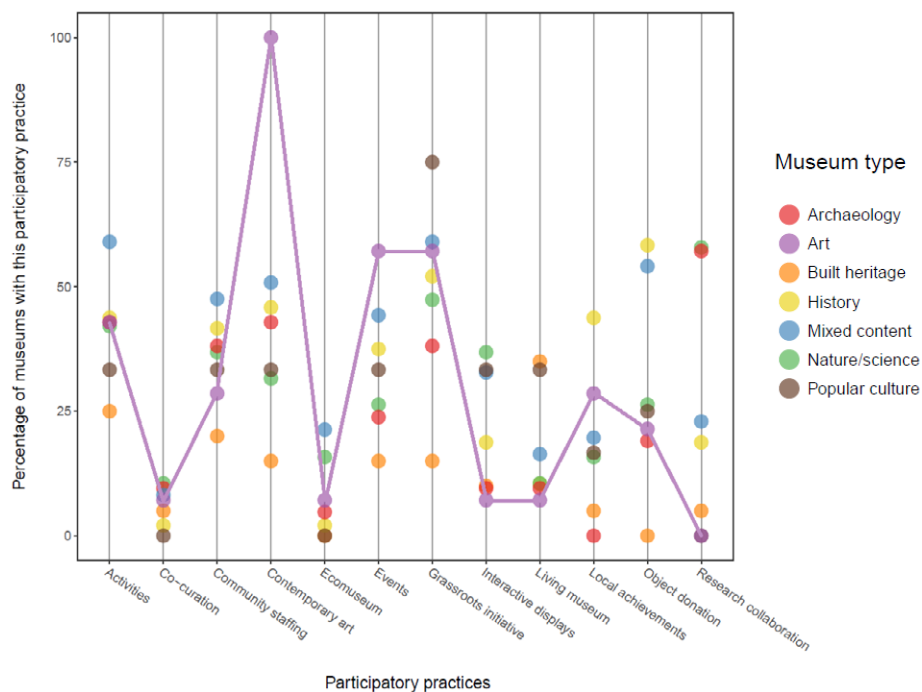


Figure 62: Percentage of museums which have any of the participatory practices, highlighting art museums.

participatory. Other museum types seem to have very specific participatory styles whereby they employ certain practices heavily and others exceedingly rarely. A closer look at art museums and archaeology museums highlights this specificity of participatory practices. Art museums reveal a preference for certain types of participatory practices, even when disregarding the obviously high presence of ‘contemporary art’ (see figure 62). For instance, many art museums host events and they exhibit local achievements, primarily by celebrating the lives and works of local artists. However, art museums very rarely contain interactive displays or engage in research collaborations with institutions – at least, such collaborations are not transparently visible to the visitor. Such preferences for specific participatory practices may reveal differences in curatorial practices. Curators in art museums may prefer their galleries to be free from interactive displays, directing visitors to enjoy the collections in specific ways. Instead of interactive displays, visitors may be encouraged to take part in activities or return for events such as fundraisers or exhibition openings.

Archaeology museums also have very specific preferences for their use of participatory practices which are quite different from art museums (see figure 63). Unlike art museums, archaeology museums to a high degree engage in research collaborations with institutions, the results of which are showcased to visitors. Many archaeology museums rely on past or ongoing archaeological fieldwork and research for the creation of their collections and to update the information in their panels. While some of these museums conduct archaeological fieldwork directly, others are in close contact with universities, national trusts, or commercial archaeological companies. Many archaeology museums also exhibit contemporary art, which might seem surprising at first. However, if one considers the frequent presence of illustrations, sculptures, dioramas, and other artworks which are added to archaeology museums to visualize past cultures, the use of this participatory practice makes sense. Yet, archaeology museums more rarely organize events and strikingly few contain interactive displays. The latter may be partially explained as a matter of funding and the prioritization of funds, with the majority of archaeology museums (62%) being governmental institutions.

In sum, the prevalence of participatory practices differs based on the type of museum, such that it is more likely to find interactive displays in a nature/science museum than in an art museum, or that community members have the opportunity to attend events at most art museums but only at a small amount of built heritage museums. Certain museum types, such as mixed content museums, are relatively highly participatory with regards to all practices, while others, like built heritage museums, are much less participatory. In other cases the museum’s type, and thus its collections and the curatorial culture of its staff, lead to distinctly specific participatory styles in which some practices occur frequently and others are largely disregarded. Naturally, museums can always (re-)consider whether such a focus is suitable depending on their collections, resources, mission, and the communities they wish to engage with.

Linguistic Differences

Using a similar relative representation of the data, participatory styles can also be identified, albeit tentatively, when dividing the museums’ participatory practices into the four linguistic areas of the Dutch, English, French and Spanish Caribbean (see figure 52). As mentioned in Chapter 2, these linguistic areas delineate geopolitical

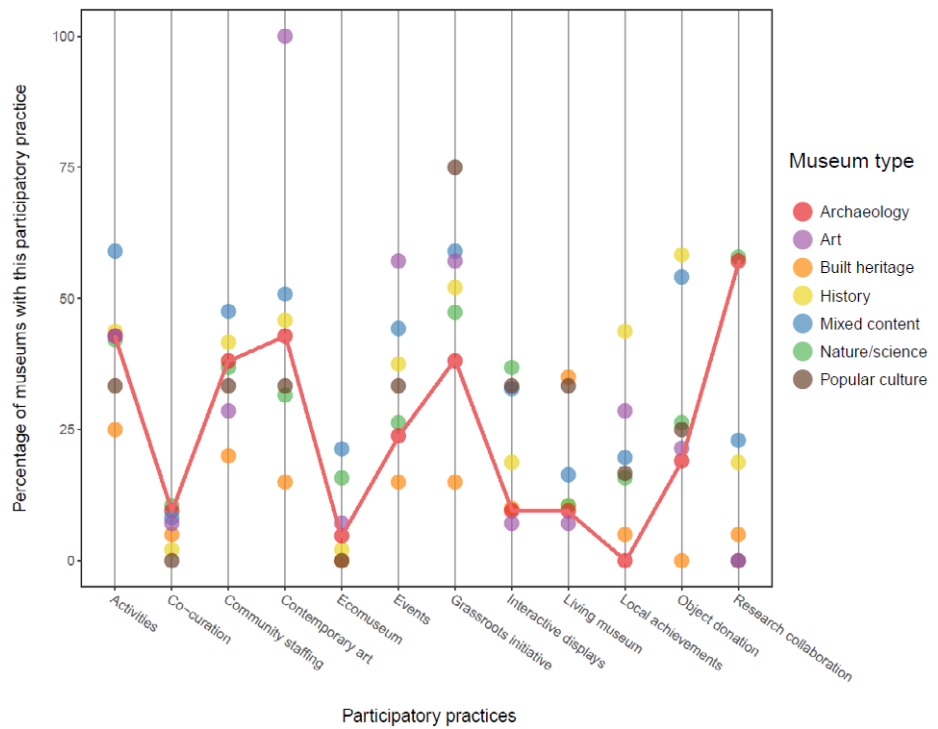


Figure 63: Percentage of museums which have any of the participatory practices, highlighting archaeology museums.

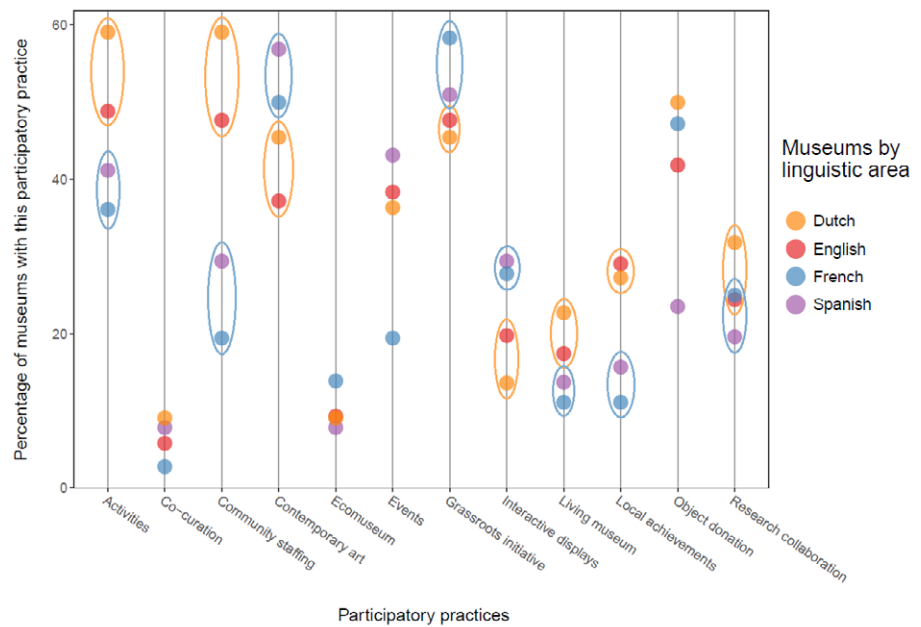


Figure 64: Percentage of museums which have any of the participatory practices, highlighting pairs of Dutch-English museums vs. French-Spanish museums.

sub-regions which can reveal colonial legacies in all aspects, including in museums. A separation of the data by linguistic area shows, for instance, the percentage of museums in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean which have interactive displays. It should be emphasized that the figure represents relative frequencies of these practices, in order to better compare the museums according to these four linguistic areas. In actuality, the sample is overrepresented by English (86 museums or 44%) and Spanish museums (51 museums or 26%), whereas the French (36 museums or 19%) and Dutch museums (22 museums or 11%) are underrepresented. It is possible that due to these absolute differences in museums per linguistic area the relative results can be biased. Similarly, it should be remembered that this data might be subject to bias due to my language skills (of which French and Spanish were weakest) which may have resulted in erroneously not recognizing the presence of certain participatory practices. Beyond these possible biases, the participatory style was certainly also influenced by the different types of museums visited in each linguistic area, as well as the sizes of the countries and islands and their respective amount of museums. Although many museums were visited in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, these were confined to only two places – the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Multiple islands and countries were visited in the English-speaking Caribbean, but most of them had fewer museums on average. This, of course, can affect the roles of these museums, as well as the communities they engage with and the participatory practices they employ.

Nonetheless, even when keeping these biases in mind, it is certainly interesting to note that this representation of the data shows a difference in participatory practices per linguistic area. In particular, one could very tentatively speak of a Dutch-English participatory style and a French-Spanish participatory style, as the dots symbolizing the participatory practices of museums per linguistic area mostly occur together in these two pairs (see figure 64). To look at this image in more detail, it appears that relatively more Dutch and English museums organize activities, have community staff, are living museums, celebrate local achievements, and engage in research collaborations. On the other hand, more French and Spanish museums are exhibiting contemporary art, are the result of grassroots initiatives, and have interactive displays.

The remaining four participatory practices do not clearly show these same linguistic pairing. Co-curation and ecomuseums are both relatively rare practices, for which differences in presence might be more due to opportunity rather than for any other reason. Although, the slightly higher occurrence of ecomuseums in French-speaking areas might be due to the French origin of the concept and a greater familiarity with it. The final two categories that do not show these linguistic pairings, both have clear outliers: relatively few French museums organize events and relatively few Spanish museums exhibit object donations. These two outliers are interesting points for discussion. Possibly the former might be because some of the French museums are managed collectively through the regional government and events are organized collectively – it may also simply be a lack of transparent information on the presence of events. The latter outlier may be due to cultural, curatorial, historical, or legal differences. Perhaps these museums have such extensive collections as a result of colonial legacies that they do not encourage object donations – or maybe donated objects are not always marked as such in the exhibition space for curatorial purposes. Apart from these four categories, the remainder seem to show patterns of participatory styles.

What might be the reasons for linguistic pairs of participatory styles? Could more French and Spanish museums include contemporary art in their exhibitions simply because more French and Spanish art museums were visited? No, an equal amount of 8% of museums visited in the English, French, and Spanish-speaking areas were typified as art museums, with none categorized as such in the Dutch-speaking Caribbean.¹⁹⁶ Yet, 37-57% of all museums included contemporary artworks in their exhibitions or collections. Thus the answer must be more complex than a simple correlation with the amount of museums of a certain type visited and might be influenced by cultural differences, perhaps in the amount of support given to contemporary artists.

Similarly we may wonder why French and Spanish museums more often have interactive displays. An initial hypothesis might be that it is due to differences in funding, particularly in the funding necessary for digital interactive displays. Certainly, relatively many of the Spanish museums are private institutions which may have more access to funds. However, the category of interactive displays also contains many non-digital forms of interactivity such as experimentation, demonstration, or tasting, none of which necessarily depend on heavy funding. Thus, this difference may well also be caused by curatorial or cultural differences.

In the case of the prevalence of local achievements being included in Dutch and English museums, this seems most likely to be the result of a different relationship between museums and communities, with relatively more Dutch (36%) and English (33%) museums having grassroots ownership. The difference might also be amplified by cultural differences which direct the extent to which local individuals are celebrated publicly.

In sum, although there are many caveats to be made, and possible sampling or researcher biases, a tentative hypothesis can be suggested that different participatory styles exist depending on the museum's location in the Dutch-, English-, French- or Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Although more research is needed to support this interpretation and to uncover the underlying reasons for these differences, they could partially be due to diverse colonial legacies, curatorial training, museological traditions, cultural specificities, or directed by the particular communities museums are attempting to engage. As a result of these distinct participatory styles, the role of Caribbean museums in Caribbean societies might similarly differ in each of the four linguistic areas, with both the styles and roles more closely comparative between Dutch-English museums and French-Spanish museums.

Community Engagement Processes

The previous sections of this chapter have taken a regional perspective on characteristics of Caribbean museums and their participatory practices. In this final section, the discussion zooms in to a micro level in order to more closely consider the dynamics of community engagement processes. Whereas it is one thing to observe which participatory practices are employed by a museum, it requires a different approach to grasp the underlying dynamics that are involved in the conception, development, implementation, and evaluation of community engagement projects. Such an understanding

196 Of course, 'mixed content' or other categories of museum types also contain art, but this analysis refers to those museums which were categorized as 'art' museums.

of dynamics tends to take longer, as multiple parties are involved over a period of time, constantly influencing the course of the process. These sections concerning the processes of community engagement will focus on the two case studies undertaken in the course of this research: the *Kalinago Barana Autê* in Dominica and the *Bengal to Barbados* exhibition project at the *Barbados Historical Museum & Society*.

Representativity

Both case studies were similar in the sense that the communities in question were relatively small (both consisting of roughly 3000 persons) and form a minority group within the overall population of their respective countries.¹⁹⁷ One might think that with such relatively small communities their representation would not be particularly difficult. At a first glance it seems possible to identify these communities, pick a few 'key' members, and invite them as representatives to work on a community engagement project, such as a new museum or exhibition. In fact, the representativity of communities, even in the case of communities of such relatively small sizes, is considerably more complicated and prone to lead to conflict if not well handled. Representativity needs to be carefully considered as heritage is often important to all members of the community and thus any heritage project needs to ensure that it is of benefit (whether tangibly or intangibly) to the community as a whole rather than only for a select few.

The *Kalinago Barana Autê* (KBA) is a museum located in Dominica's Kalinago Territory which was conceived initially by the community but then funded and developed by the government (see Chapter 5). It is currently owned by the government, although it is managed and operated locally. The initial creation of the museum, although proposed by members of the community, was largely undertaken by non-community members. The proposal was developed by the Ministry of Tourism and the project was completed primarily through private tender – to the disappointment of many community members who argue to this day that they would have never constructed it like that. With the appointment of a manager from the community in 2002, much of the responsibility for the KBA shifted to the community, who have been in charge of all day-to-day operations of the museum since its opening in 2006.

The Kalinago community can be represented through a number of groups. Politically, primarily on a local level, the chief and council represent the Territory, although there are some issues with their degree of independence in this regard. On a national political level, the Ministry for Kalinago Affairs works to represent the community. Culturally, the community knows several groups of representatives, such as the Karina Cultural Group or the Kalinago Dancers. None of these groups of representatives alone would be suitably representative of the Kalinago community as a whole in relation to the KBA. The existence of the KBA affects and impacts the lives of community members in too many different ways: *e.g.* for the preservation of heritage, as a community gathering place, as a tourism attraction, as an economic resource, for employment, for the sale of products and produce, for education, and for leisure. Thus, the personal interests of

197 Just about 4% of the population of Dominica is considered to be Kalinago according to the community's population estimates, slightly less per the most recent census. Just over 1% of the population of Barbados forms part of the local East Indian community according to the census (see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 for detailed data).

some representatives might not align with, or even be detrimental to, those of other community members.

To find a balance, it was clear that no single or handful of community representatives would be sufficient for the operation of the KBA. Instead, what seems to work better, is to have a wide network of representatives who are connected to the museum through various relationships – from those working as guides, to the volunteer dancers who come in for bigger tour groups, the nearby baker who sends down freshly baked cassava bread, the crafts persons who work on the site, or the many community members who grow vetiver to thatch the buildings when maintenance is needed. This web of representatives can be frequently engaged in discussions about the museum and updated about new plans or changes. Through the familial lines of the community, word tends to travel quickly and by engaging such a wide web, the community is able to be represented more aptly and more frequently. To balance all these representatives and to maintain this web of relationships, a manager or core staff team is critical. In the past, the position of manager of the KBA led to some conflict within the community, with individuals expressing envy of the person who was lucky enough to benefit from the museum directly through employment while most other community members benefit indirectly or in other (less tangible) ways – or indeed insist they do not benefit at all. With the new management team appointed in 2016, hopefully some of these concerns have been mitigated as now multiple people – representing different interests and families – are employed in the managerial team.

The *Bengal to Barbados* exhibition project was initiated in 2015 by a member of the local East Indian community and author of a book on the 100 year history of this community in Barbados (Nakhuda 2013; see Chapter 6). The *Barbados Museum & Historical Society* (BMHS) was asked to partner with the community, co-curate the exhibition, and to host it within the museum. The exhibition was initially due to open in the summer of 2016, but was delayed as more time was needed for its development. Although the museum was keen to place as much responsibility and decision-making power with members of the East Indian community, they in turn preferred relying on the expertise of the museum staff.

As a community, the Barbadian East Indian community is noticeably fragmented. Originating largely from five different strands of migration, most of the community is split into two pillars: Gujarati-Muslims and Sindhi-Hindus. Yet, even such a split does not reflect the heterogeneity of the community. Depending on religion, profession, age, and gender, the status of community members differs vastly – both within the community and within Barbadian society as a whole. Recognizing this heterogeneity, an Exhibition Planning Committee was formed to contain individuals from different parts of the community, hoping to be able to address the ideas, heritages, and concerns of the wider community in this manner. At the start of the project, the Exhibition Planning Committee met monthly at the museum. Unfortunately, several committee members were regularly unable to attend these meetings during working hours, thereby not being able to represent their (part of the) community at all. Even when present, not all committee members were able to make themselves heard. As the project progressed, the committee realized that even its members would not be able to represent the diversity of their community.

Noting representativity as a main point of concern which affected all aspects of the exhibition – who it was for, what the narrative would say, which objects would be exhibited, what events would surround it, where it would end up after closing – the committee looked for solutions. The pace of the co-curation project was reduced to provide time to enable more community members to be involved (discussed in more detail below). Alongside the Exhibition Planning Committee meetings at the museum, which had set agendas to monitor the project's progress, larger community meetings were proposed. Focused on a theme (*e.g.* exhibition content) these meetings are to be held in community gathering places in evenings or weekends, open for all interested community members to discuss their ideas and provide feedback on the exhibition plan. The idea was that each event could be held at a different meeting place, thereby possibly attracting different segments of the community. The committee proposed that these wider community meetings could also be used to decide on events to be held alongside the exhibition and other participatory elements. Although these changes were not implemented until after my fieldwork, they will help to increase the representativity of the exhibition creation process. Unfortunately, any assessment of impact of these changes was not yet possible. As a final suggestion, the representativity of the Exhibition Planning Committee could be improved by museum staff meeting with community members individually to discuss plans. This could support the involvement of community members who felt that others were monopolizing the committee meetings, barring them from being able to participate fully.

In summary, although both case studies were related to relatively small communities, representativity was no simple matter in either case. A few community representatives, with their own personal interests, are not able to sufficiently represent the community as a whole, leading to other community members not benefitting from the heritage project. In the case of the KBA, a wide web of community members are tied to the museum through different relationships and with different interests – they are involved frequently in the museum, communicating outwards to other community members and inwards to the management team. Thus, more people have a stake in the museum and can notice its benefits. At the BMHS, the representativity of the East Indian community within the Exhibition Planning Committee was low. By planning meetings with larger groups of community members, on their own terms and at their own venues, more people could be involved in the exhibition project, improving its visibility and its value. What seems to have worked elsewhere in the region in the development of new museums, is the consultation and collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders. Although now closed due to unfortunate circumstances noted earlier in this chapter, *Walcott Place* in St. Lucia was developed in conversation with international literary communities, local artists, neighborhood residents, as well as social services and cultural organizations.¹⁹⁸

Particularly in the Caribbean, with its diversity of communities and heterogeneous societies, representativity is a key issue in community engagement processes and one which requires significant effort to ensure a wide representation of the communities concerned. This is crucial as heritage projects such as museums and exhibitions may affect a community in terms of identity, political influence, rights, recognition,

198 Conversation with Attaché to the Prime Minister of St. Lucia (Castries, St. Lucia, 21 October 2015).

resources, education, or sustainability. In the case of misrepresentation, communities may suffer from museums or exhibitions intended to benefit them. By improving the representativity of community engagement processes, Caribbean museums have the opportunity to be of greater benefit to their communities and Caribbean society.

Investment

Continuing the focus on the process of community engagement, this part is directed at the investment – of time, effort, resources, dedication – needed to carry out such a project most successfully. Insights are again drawn from the two case studies. Community engagement projects can run into various risks if the necessity to deeply invest in them is underestimated or neglected. For instance, community engagement projects may need to adjust the expected outcomes of the project halfway through when it turns out that they cannot be achieved after all. A particularly common limitation for museums is the time pressure to produce exhibitions, events, or programs. Under this pressure, community engagement projects might be pushed to make deadlines, hindering the organic development of the project, and finally cutting short any longer-term outcomes in favor of immediate goals.

Investment is needed throughout all stages of the project. The *Bengal to Barbados* exhibition project undertaken by the *Barbados Museum & Historical Society* (BMHS) and the East Indian community in Barbados showcased the early stages of a community engagement project. Here, the investment of time was particularly crucial in order for the museum staff and East Indian community to gain a better understanding of each other. During the first few months of the project, it became clear that both parties had underestimated the time needed for this and thus the timeframe of the project was significantly extended (by nearly two years) in order to adapt. Time was needed for BMHS staff to understand the complexity of the East Indian community, to identify a group of representatives, to collaborate with a wide range of community members, to learn the community's history, and to grasp the expertise and skills of its members. At the same time, the (representatives of the) East Indian community needed to invest time to understand the BMHS as an institution, its history and its staff, as well as the particular expertise and skills it could contribute to the project.

This investment of time at the beginning of a community engagement project is crucial to fully appreciate what respective parties can contribute throughout the process and what their aims or anticipated outcomes are. It became clear that for the East Indian community members invested in the exhibition project, the exhibition was just one step in a longer process. For instance, they envisioned the exhibition to lead to the creation of a community museum, which could be built around the objects selected for the exhibition.¹⁹⁹ While this East Indian museum was being built, the exhibition could travel to different community centers and locations. It would be one step in gaining exposure for the community as part of Barbadian society, helping them to raise awareness of their history and heritages. Of secondary importance was the opportunity to celebrate their own heritage as a community. It should be remembered here that the East Indian community members surveyed in the course of this case study were deeply divided on the importance of the exhibition project. Thus, this long-term view was

199 Meeting with Exhibition Planning Committee (Bridgetown, Barbados, 21 March 2016).

characteristic for those who were already supportive of the exhibition's importance, whereas others who felt that the exhibition itself was not so important also did not envision it to grow into a longer process of community building.

The BMHS had different aims with the exhibition project, as they did not initially envision their own involvement to extend far beyond the closing date of the exhibition. In the original plan, the exhibition would be open to the public for three months, after which its materials would be returned to the community. Following the closing of the exhibition, a few more events or public programs would be planned around different religious feast days until the end of the year. The aim was primarily educational for the wider Barbadian society in order to “dispel myths.”²⁰⁰ For the BMHS as an institution, the intended outcome was to test run a co-curation project and to see “how open we can be.”²⁰¹

Clearly, the East Indian community members and BMHS staff brought different views of the aims of the exhibition project to the table. However, these differences were not immediately apparent until time was invested into the project, building trust and respect between all participants, enabling them to speak more openly of their goals. It became clear that the initial aims of both needed to be reconsidered and adjusted, developing collective outcomes to work towards. The duration of the project was greatly extended, allowing representativity to be improved and also supporting longer-term goals. A longer project time was beneficial for the East Indian community members involved, assisting their aspirations to improve the position of their community in Barbadian society. It was also intended to advocate for the benefits of the exhibition project within the East Indian community to hopefully gain wider support of the project within the community itself. BMHS staff needed to adjust their expectations of the exhibition project and its place within their exhibition schedule due to the extended duration, challenging them to let go of their ‘curatorial rigor’ and work more flexibly. This enabled them to place the exhibition project in different terms and to consider it as a step in the development of a longer relationship. Following on this first investment of time, it also became clear that BMHS staff would have to take up a bigger role in the exhibition project, as the East Indian community preferred to defer to their museological expertise in more matters than had previously been anticipated. Thus, the museum needed to invest more resources and staff hours than had originally been planned. All in all, the scope of the project had been underestimated and the aims of the participants were not fully understood. Therefore, more time, effort, and resources had to be committed to this community engagement process and adjustments were made to ensure that the process would be fruitful to all participants.

Reevaluation was also needed in the case of the *Kalinago Barana Autê* (KBA) in Dominica, which presents a case study of a later stage of a community engagement process. With the first ideas for the museum surfacing in the Kalinago community in the 1970s, the project had already been on-going for a long time before the museum finally opened in 2006. Even after its opening to the public, plans needed to be adjusted as the community engagement process continued to develop. These readjustments of investment were related to the changing relationship of ownership of the KBA between

200 Meeting with deputy director of *Barbados Museum & History Society* (via Skype, 7 February 2016).

201 Meeting with deputy director of *Barbados Museum & History Society* (via Skype, 7 February 2016).

the Kalinago community and the government of Dominica through its Ministry of Tourism. In the early stages of the project, when the KBA was a concept in the minds of Kalinago community members, it was only a community project. Involvement of the Ministry of Tourism came later, when the necessary financial investment could not be made due to the communal land ownership of the Kalinago which limits financial loans. In essence, the need for financial investment transformed the grassroots museum project into a community engagement project. This change led to adjustments in all aspects of the project, with the Kalinago community investing time and resources into planning the museum, providing materials for its construction, and expanding the production of crafts for sale. The Ministry of Tourism invested time and resources in project planning, commercial tender of the museum site, and the construction of an access road. During this period of the planning and construction of the KBA, ownership over the project had shifted away from the Kalinago community to be shared with the government of Dominica. This shifted back a bit when a community member was appointed manager of the museum, enabling the community to reinvest itself through the day-to-day operation of the museum.

Since the opening of the KBA, the government of Dominica has noted that it wishes to place ownership of the museum with the Kalinago community, once certain criteria have been met.²⁰² These criteria are related to the financial viability of the KBA, as well as to the sustainability of its management and ownership. So far, the government has maintained that it cannot confer ownership of the KBA to the Kalinago community and has moved up the date for such a change several times. The Kalinago community itself is divided on the matter of ownership of the KBA, some adamant that it must be community owned, while others have pointed out that community ownership might be (financially) detrimental to the KBA. In the interim, the government and the Kalinago community have renegotiated their relationship multiple times, alongside reevaluations of the project and adjustments.

The current stage of the KBA community engagement process shows the need for a transparency of investment and of benefits received. As transparency has been somewhat lacking, participants in the community engagement process are misinformed of the investments made, and the benefits received, by the government and the Kalinago community respectively. Some Kalinago community members assume that government financially benefits from the KBA and would prefer any financial surplus to remain in the community. On the other hand, the manager of the KBA asserts that the KBA breaks even most months, or is in fact supported by government in times of financial shortfall due to high maintenance costs or lower revenues.²⁰³ Both the government (as owners) and the Kalinago community (as managers) could improve their transparency in this regard. For instance, government could be better informed of the investments made by the community in maintaining the site and the benefits for the community in terms of the KBA as a social gathering place, a cultural hub, and a financial resource. On the other hand, the Kalinago community could be notified of the investments of the government in terms of financial and infrastructural support, as well the benefits of the KBA for the state as an educational resource and a guardian of cultural heritage.

202 Interview with manager of *Kalinago Barana Autê* (Kalinago Territory, Dominica, 15 August 2015).

203 Interview with manager of *Kalinago Barana Autê* (Kalinago Territory, Dominica, 15 August 2015).

As the community engagement process continues and reevaluations cause changes in investment, transparency remains crucial.

In sum, throughout all stages of a community engagement process, participants need to invest their time, effort, resources, and dedication in order to continue to work towards collective outcomes. In the beginning, the investment of time is crucial for parties to identify representatives and for participants to gain mutual understanding and build trust, thereby being able to share their respective aspirations for the project. Time is also needed to possibly expand the duration of the project in order to develop a long term relationship that continues to be beneficial after initial project aims have been achieved or to develop follow-up projects. As the community engagement process continues, it is necessary to keep reevaluating it, readjusting the investments made, and renegotiating the relationship of the participants. At all stages, transparency is crucial in order to support these investments and any resulting benefits. By investing deeply into community engagement processes, Caribbean museums can develop long-lasting relationships with communities, deepening their commitment to Caribbean societies, anchoring their institution within their society, and supporting communities in achieving communal goals.

Negotiation & Conflict

Community engagement processes benefit from greater representativity and deep investment. In discussing these two topics, it was already apparent that a (perceived) lack of either can result in tensions between participants. Such tensions need to be negotiated carefully in order to avoid them leading to conflict. This final section looks more closely at this need for negotiation and the potential for conflict by again revisiting the two case studies. In doing so, one should keep in mind the issues related to representativity and investment, although the focus here will lie on additional potential sources of friction, such as a power imbalance, a lack of valuation of expertise, or uneven access. It will highlight a few examples from the two case studies which reveal the presence or risk of such friction, and how this was then negotiated or whether it led to any conflict.

In both case studies, one can identify differences in power – political, economic, influential – between the government (or the governmental institution) on the one hand and a relatively small local community on the other hand. This is not to judge the existence of these power differences, but it is important to be aware of them in order to assess how power is balanced, shifted, or countered in the course of community engagement processes (*cf.* Perkin 2010). Certainly, the risk is that if power is extremely unbalanced, exploitation or manipulation of participants may occur instead of collaboration (Boast 2011; Clifford 1997).

In the case of the *Bengal to Barbados* exhibition project, the *Barbados Museum & Historical Society* (BMHS) set out on the project with the intention to defer significant decision-making power to the East Indian community. Although BMHS staff asked the representatives of the East Indian community to decide on many specific details of the exhibition project – *e.g.* objects, themes, texts, events, and programs – most of the underlying, foundational decisions were made by the BMHS staff directly. These foundational matters – such as the exhibition time and duration, the venue, the available space for the exhibition, the time available for programs and events, as well as the

usable resources – are core decisions which narrow down any further options and are thus essential for the decision-making process as a whole. For instance, deciding on the venue had direct implications as to how many objects could fit into this space, whether audio-visual content could be shown, and whether it would be in a location that was relevant and accessible to the East Indian community. Whereas BMHS staff wanted to place most of the decision-making power with the representatives of the East Indian community, they did not seem to have deeply considered the implications of the fact that they were making these foundational decisions. This certainly could have been a source of friction and possibly led to conflict in any community engagement project. However, in this case, representatives of the East Indian community communicated clearly at an early stage that they wanted *less* decision-making power, and in fact asked BMHS staff to shift the power balance *more* towards the institution. Thus, most decisions were negotiated collectively in order to agree on who would be in charge of which aspect of it – *e.g.* BMHS staff would write the panel texts and the representatives of the East Indian community would decide on their topics beforehand and review them afterwards. Through this continual negotiation, the power balance was constantly checked and adjusted, ultimately reducing the risk of conflict.

Besides a power imbalance, there is also a risk of conflict when devaluing the expertise and knowledge contributed by participants in a community engagement project. In all collaborations, participants bring a different set of skills and knowledge to the table in order to achieve common goals. This may lead to friction or conflict if participants feel that their expertise or knowledge is not valued, and that therefore their voices are not being heard and their contributions disregarded. Such a devaluation of expertise and knowledge is a common source of contention in community engagement processes, when participants are purposefully invited in, but later feel that they have only been involved in a tokenistic manner (*e.g.* Fouseki 2010; Fouseki & Smith 2013; Lagerkvist 2006).

In the case of the *Kalinago Barana Autê* (KBA) in Dominica, a devaluation of Kalinago expertise and knowledge during the construction of the museum became a long-term source of friction. The original construction of the museum buildings had been tendered and thus the site was not built by the Kalinago, but by people from outside the community. Although the museum plan was designed to resemble traditional Kalinago dwellings through the use of traditional materials and designs, Kalinago expertise was not consulted for the collection of these materials nor for the actual construction. Several community members noted that the wood for the buildings had not been harvested at the right time, making it weaker and more prone to deterioration, requiring frequent, costly maintenance. Kalinago community members had unique expertise which would have been useful (even essential) for the construction of the KBA. Unfortunately, this expertise had been overlooked at the time resulting in this simmering conflict. Remaining a point of friction over the years, during this research the story was brought up as a bad example multiple times. However, it was generally raised constructively, as an example of how things had gone wrong in the past with the KBA and why it was important now to carefully consider the construction of the site and its maintenance for future sustainability. Such discussions were possible in part because the balance of power had shifted in the interim through the appointment of the local management team. This shift has resulted in the Kalinago community having

more influence on the operation of the site and its maintenance, thus giving them a stronger voice in the matter and logically placing greater value on their own expertise. The end result of this changed balance of power was thus also a change in the valuation of the knowledge of the community, thereby reducing the extent to which the past construction of the museum could remain a source of contemporary conflict.

Finally, conflict may be the result of uneven access to the community engagement process. Such uneven access may be due to physical or other practical barriers, for instance because of the working times, language used, or meeting locations. Perhaps more problematically, uneven access may also be the result of underlying social barriers, such as discrimination. In many cases, participants may be unaware that others are experiencing inaccessibility, especially if this is due to social barriers. This may be a particularly shocking discovery to community engagement participants when they are operating under the assumption that they are doing everything they can to be accessible and non-discriminatory (Lagerkvist 2006).

Representatives of the East Indian community in Barbados experienced practical barriers keeping them from fully participating in the *Bengal to Barbados* exhibition project as the Exhibition Planning Committee meetings were held in meeting rooms at the BMHS on weekdays, during regular working hours. Community representatives had to choose to go out of their way to the museum, as well as find ways in which to compensate for missing work hours. Not all were in the position to be able to do so. Certainly, this problem was discussed among the Exhibition Planning Committee – but only with those present. Although alternatives were suggested, BMHS staff could not work on the project outside of working hours, so ultimately the time stayed the same and while ideas were entertained of changing the location for some of the meetings, these had not yet been implemented.

Social barriers were problematic for a number of reasons, some of which had to do with internal tensions within the East Indian community, others with the position of the community within Barbadian society. BMHS staff was weary early on of the gender imbalance within the Exhibition Planning Committee and felt that women were not only underrepresented but largely silent during meetings in the presence of men.²⁰⁴ BMHS staff felt that East Indian women were positioned in an inferior role within the East Indian community and, thus, tried to work deliberately towards their inclusion. However, the idea that the East Indian community is repressive to women was countered by Haajima Degia who opposed these victimizing stereotypes, instead arguing that the Gujarati-Muslim's "diasporic identity was to be created and shaped by women" (Degia 2016). In fact, she argued that women play and played a vital role within the East Indian community, working in the household, agriculture, and business, although their actual contributions are often only modestly revealed to outsiders. Through the process of migration, "traditional gender roles which in the homeland had occurred [...] had not been maintained here in Barbados" (Degia 2016). These statements called attention to the fact that BMHS staff had been operating under the assumption of prejudices, which were more informed by stereotypical thoughts of Muslim women in general, than related to actual insight into the Barbadian East Indian community. Thus, whereas BMHS staff felt that they were being particularly

204 Meeting with deputy director of *Barbados Museum & History Society* (via Skype, 7 February 2016).

inclusive to East Indian women and improving their access to the community engagement process, their positive discrimination was seen very differently by women within the community. These women noted that staff was perpetuating stereotypical prejudices and consequently felt misunderstood, increasing their effort needed to access the community engagement process. By attending Haajima Degia's lecture *A History of Gujarati-Muslim Migration to Barbados* (Degia 2016), Kevin Farmer of the BMHS was able to adjust his perceptions and begin renegotiating how to successfully improve accessibility for East Indian women, based on their needs.

Power balance, valuation of expertise, and accessibility are all aspects of the community engagement process which need to be negotiated and renegotiated continuously. In many cases, these issues can be intertwined as these examples have shown: a power imbalance may lead to a devaluation of expertise, thereby promulgating uneven access and so on. If poorly negotiated, any or all of these issues may become sources of friction and lead to conflict, resulting in the community engagement process to fail for (some of) its participants. As community engagement is a long-term process, negotiation needs to be continuous. The chance of successful negotiation is improved by better representation of the communities involved and a deep investment of time, resources, and effort. By engaging in community engagement processes, Caribbean museums have had to shift their role in relation to Caribbean society. Museums and their staff can no longer present themselves as a neutral party or arbiter, but rather have to enter into negotiations as subjective entities and individuals. This embeds museums into society as more social, subjective institutions, a change which is supported by the wide-spread presence of grassroots museums in the region.

Summary

Museums throughout the Caribbean are adopting and adapting participatory practices and community engagement processes to connect more deeply to the various communities which they serve or which they are a part of. Highly deliberately or largely unintentionally, these museums are positioning themselves as ever more social museums, aiming to directly benefit society through their work. How have these community engagement practices and processes *actually* affected the role of Caribbean museums in Caribbean society? This chapter formed an overarching discussion around this question, focusing on some of the most noteworthy observations and interpretations made in the course of this research.

Starting on a macro level, it explored the regional museum scene by looking at the different roles that governmental museums and grassroots museums can play. Revealing how governmental and grassroots museums are often physically located in different places – *i.e.* capital cities vs. elsewhere – it showcased how both kinds of museums function complementarily not only in terms of content but also to reach different audiences. Whereas governmental museums often have national mandates and reach out to a wide range of communities, grassroots museums may target particular communities that are otherwise left out or underrepresented. Collectively, they are able to engage with multiple layers of society. In terms of the dynamism of these museums, or their ability to flexibly adapt to changing societal needs, there are clear differences depending on funding and organization. With governmental museums being politically

dependent and often experiencing funding restrictions, their community engagement practices are typically temporary: *e.g.* activities or events. Grassroots museums, however, enjoy greater independence even if they may seem financially disadvantaged. In these museums, community engagement practices occur more frequently and across all aspects of the museum's work. While both kinds of museums are able to respond to changing societal needs, governmental museums have a more transient role in this sense, as their core aspects (*e.g.* organization, exhibitions, staff) change more slowly. In terms of sustainability, governmental museums generally have long-term missions and aim to ensure their value for many future generations. Of course, in practice, these museums may also encounter political or financial difficulties, possibly leading to closure. Particularly with individually-owned grassroots museums, their lack of sustainability is often raised as a 'problem'. Here, I have argued instead that these 'ephemeral museums' have a role to play in the present, rather than in the future. These museums and their collections are activated by their founder or owner, who gives them meaning. Once this agency is lost, the museum ceases to be in its current shape, possibly able to reform into a new museum. Together, governmental museums and such ephemeral museums play out strong social roles for present-day communities as well as future generations. In general, the locations, dynamism, and sustainability of governmental museums and grassroots museums differ, but complementarily work to engage with different parts of Caribbean society.

Zooming in to investigate Caribbean museums more individually, the participatory practices employed throughout the region were discussed. The practice of multi-vocality was examined by looking at several ways in which a museum can incorporate multiple voices. For instance, through exhibitions with voices from multiple communities, voices of different members of the same community, or by inviting an intervention into the museum space. In these cases, the goal is just to include many voices, not necessarily to encourage debate or present conflicting views. Another approach is to present histories which are not, or cannot, be told in mainstream museums. These histories may present views that are not shared elsewhere or political opinions which may not (be able to) receive national support. While Caribbean museums may not always be inclusive, the use of multi-vocality in various ways has made them more inclusive overall to a wider range of communities. Also, the participatory practices employed in the Caribbean depend on the type of museum. Some museum types, such as those with mixed content, are highly participatory when looking across the board at all participatory practices. Others, such as those in the category of built heritage, very rarely engage in participatory practices of any kind. Yet again, other museum types have a clear style whereby certain participatory practices are preferred over others – *e.g.* archaeology museums often engage in research collaborations, but rarely host events or have interactive displays. These participatory differences depend on the museum's collections, setting, staff, and so on. Ultimately, museums of different types are engaging with communities in different ways, fulfilling different social roles. Beyond the type of museum, there also appears to be a difference in participatory style between museums in the Dutch- and English-speaking Caribbean, and those in the French- and Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Although more research is needed to support this hypothesis, it may well be that colonial legacies, cultural differences, curatorial training,

or museological traditions have resulted in distinct differences in participatory styles. If so, the social role of museums will also differ depending on linguistic areas.

Finally, on a micro level, the discussion veered to the process of community engagement by exploring the two case studies undertaken in the course of this research. Representativity was a key issue in these community engagement processes, even in the case of relatively small, local communities. Through significant effort, a wide range of participants should be involved in or tied to the community engagement project in order to cover differing perspectives and expertise. If representativity is not sufficiently sought, the project might head into serious problems and participants may feel exploited. An investment of time, effort, and resources is needed throughout all stages of the project in order to identify representatives, build trust, develop mutual understanding, and construct a deep relationship. Only with such a deep investment can a community engagement project hope to work towards collective goals for the longer-term. Any such project needs to be constantly reevaluated and adjusted as the process continues, coupled with a transparency of investments made and benefits received. By investing in such processes, Caribbean museums anchor themselves within society through long-term relationships. Conflict may arise from various sources, including a lack of representativity or investment, which are often interrelated. Thus, negotiation is constantly needed to ensure there is no imbalance of power, lack of valuation of expertise, or uneven access to the process. Such negotiations are certainly improved by better representativity and deeper investment into the process. Within these negotiations, museums must take on subjective roles as participants, rather than of neutral arbitration, thus placing themselves also into society as more subjective entities.

Although Caribbean museums can still do more to improve their community engagement practices and processes, and particularly to investigate their societal *impact*, it is clear that they have changed their societal role. The existence of both governmental and grassroots museums throughout the region has enabled Caribbean museums to target more layers of society, to respond in different ways to changing needs, and to work for both present-day communities and future generations. Through adopting different participatory practices, Caribbean museums are able to represent more layers of society and to engage with communities uniquely, depending on the museum's type and the linguistic area it is in. Caribbean museums differ in their societal role depending on their content and place, as this influences the participatory practices they employ. Finally, through community engagement processes, Caribbean museums have developed more ties to individual members of Caribbean society, and ensured that their institutions are anchored deeply into society for the long-term, acting as subjective participants within it.

