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Leiden  
The Netherlands

**From closed museum spaces to inclusive cultural meeting points:  
connecting indigenous heritage collections and communities in the  
Dominican Republic**

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**Citation**

Alvarez, A. V. (2021, December 8). *From closed museum spaces to inclusive cultural meeting points: connecting indigenous heritage collections and communities in the Dominican Republic*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3247080>

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## **CHAPTER 5. Inventory of Indigenous heritage collections in the Dominican Republic**

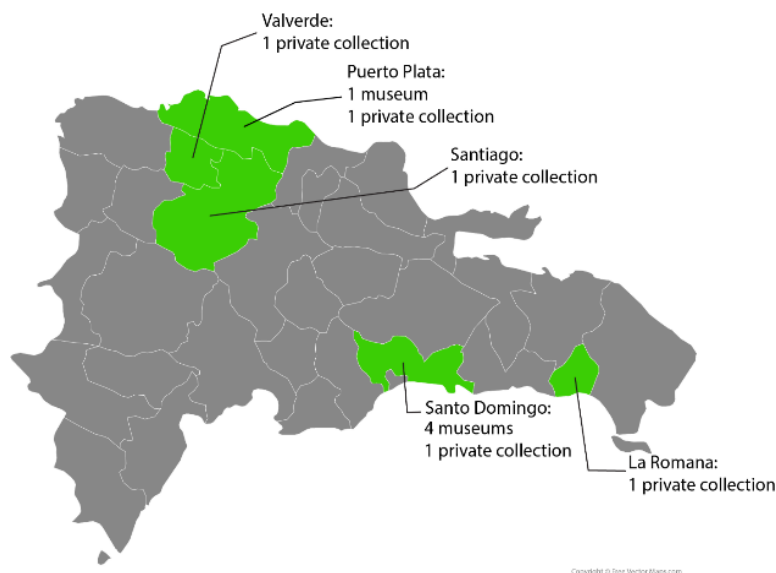
### **5.1 Introduction**

Understanding the scope of Indigenous heritage collections in the Dominican Republic required learning about the number of collections in the country, their history, structures, and the types of access they provide to communities. This chapter presents the results of the inventory of public and private collections of Indigenous heritage. The data came from site visits and the review of documents. The information helped create an inventory to better appreciate the characteristics of Indigenous heritage collections, their geographic distribution, and the institutional context of the museums to explore what could be integrated when considering connections between the collections and communities.

The present chapter offers a window into the development of Dominican Indigenous heritage collections in the public and private sectors in order to understand the context in which they have come to exist, where they are located, how they are managed, and who uses them.

### **5.2 Inventory of Indigenous heritage collections in the Dominican Republic**

The present chapter addresses the dearth of information about the formation of Indigenous heritage collections, which has resulted in collections materializing but not necessarily becoming accessible to the public. The data gathered from a review of the available documentation and on-site visits have allowed me to compile an inventory of collections based on descriptions found on-site and as part of marketing materials, organizational structures, and public programming information. These findings aid in better understanding the collections' management context when considering the different communities that are interested in accessing them. The next sections present the Indigenous heritage collections under public and private custody, where they are located, and how they were formed. The collections are presented by geographic area (Figure 8), and, to the extent that it was possible to determine, in the chronological order of their creation. The inventory of collections includes institutions that are no longer open for visits and also includes information on collections that have not been opened to the public in order to show the broad spectrum of collection practices that are still observable today.



**Figure 8.** Map with the locations of public and private museums with Indigenous heritage collections open to the public, per province. Map by Finn van der Leden, courtesy of Nexus 1492, 2020.

## 5.2.1 Public museums and institutions with Indigenous heritage collections

### 5.2.1.1 *Instituto Dominicano de Investigaciones Antropológicas (INDIA)*

Located in the National District of the capital city, the Instituto Dominicano de Investigaciones Antropológicas (Dominican Institute of Anthropological Research), or INDIA, is a part of the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo, which was established in 1527 by Pope Paulo III (“Historia de la Universidad”; UASD n.d.). The institute was created in 1947 as the Dominican Center for Anthropological Research. It originally had the mandate to “intensify archaeological research in the country, prepare the classification, through technical people, of the archaeological material found in the National Museum, and that of the material excavated and of the existing one in private collections” (Pina 1978). Emile de Boyrie Moya became the institute’s first director in 1947 (Boyrie Moya 1954). He is considered the father of modern Dominican archaeology (INDIA n.d.) and combined an engineering and art background with a love for collecting Indigenous cultural material. He became so involved in collecting that he started excavating with a systematic approach, earning him a reputation as the first Dominican archaeologist to use scientific methodology. Boyrie Moya was involved in numerous excavation projects, published books on some of these projects, and wrote articles on archaeological studies being conducted at the time (Periódico Hoy 2004; Silvestre 2010; Peytrequín Gómez 2019). His private collection has been estimated to include over 7,000 pieces (Periódico Hoy 2004) and is one of the largest private collections ever to have been bequeathed in the country (Museo del Hombre Dominicano 1980, 223).

According to the mission statement currently found on displayed posters, the institute is dedicated to conducting research in anthropology and archaeology, publishing research results, offering university courses, organizing field trips, coordinating cultural studies, and maintaining a reference library based on the book collection of Plinio Pina, the lawyer that compiled the first book on Dominican heritage legislation and a well-known collector of archaeological material in the 1970s.

Upon de Boyrie's death in 1967, the objects were moved to what was then the National Museum, which later became the Museo del Hombre Dominicano (INDIA n.d.). Part of his collection was later moved back to the Instituto Dominicano de Investigaciones Antropológicas headquarters. Records that indicated which objects were selected to stay at the National Museum were not located. The location of documents that pointed to criteria used to determine the objects that returned to the institute was not successful either, evidencing a lack of documentation systems accessible to the public regarding specific information about the history of the collections.

The Instituto Dominicano de Investigaciones Antropológicas is now a dependency of the Faculty of Humanities of the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (Figure 9). Although the collection is open to the public, it is casually visited by students on the campus, who use the facilities as a study hall and to meet with other students. The institute does not keep visitor statistics, and professors from the Faculty of Humanities hardly ever assign research on topics related to the collection on display (personal communication with the receptionist, May 2014). The INDIA publications on research conducted during the 1970s can be found at the university's main library or the Museo del Hombre library. Though an interview with the director of the institute, José Guerrero, was not possible to schedule, the personnel indicated that the management of the institute is centralized through the university's Faculty of Humanities. It does not have an independent budget, and there are no files of its creation process in the faculty archives, the library, or in the general administration.



**Figure 9.** Façade and vitrine display of the Instituto Dominicano de Investigaciones Antropológicas (INDIA). Photos by author, 2016.

#### 5.2.1.2 Museo Panteón Yacimiento Arqueológico de La Caleta

In 1972, the main area near the well-known beach of La Caleta was declared Museum Pantheon and Archaeological Site after many complaints that, for over 30 years, people had been digging up and taking objects found near the pre-Columbian gravesites, where over 300 skeletal remains had been recovered, along with other objects related to the funerary rites of Indigenous Caribbean people (Herrera Fritot and Leroy Youmans 1946) (Figure 10). An archaeological excavation thus took place, headed by the Ministry of Environment and Parks. In 1974, a museum, restaurant, and parking lot were built to contribute to the economic development of the La Caleta community by creating infrastructures that could be used for tourism (Periódico Hoy 2010). Local development was poor in the community of La Caleta, and as early as the 1980s, signs of deterioration were noted by the local community. By the 1990s, the building looked abandoned. The site is now unmarked, and the building that was constructed to guard the human remains from environmental damage has no roof, but barred doors remain in place to stop people from going into the grave area.

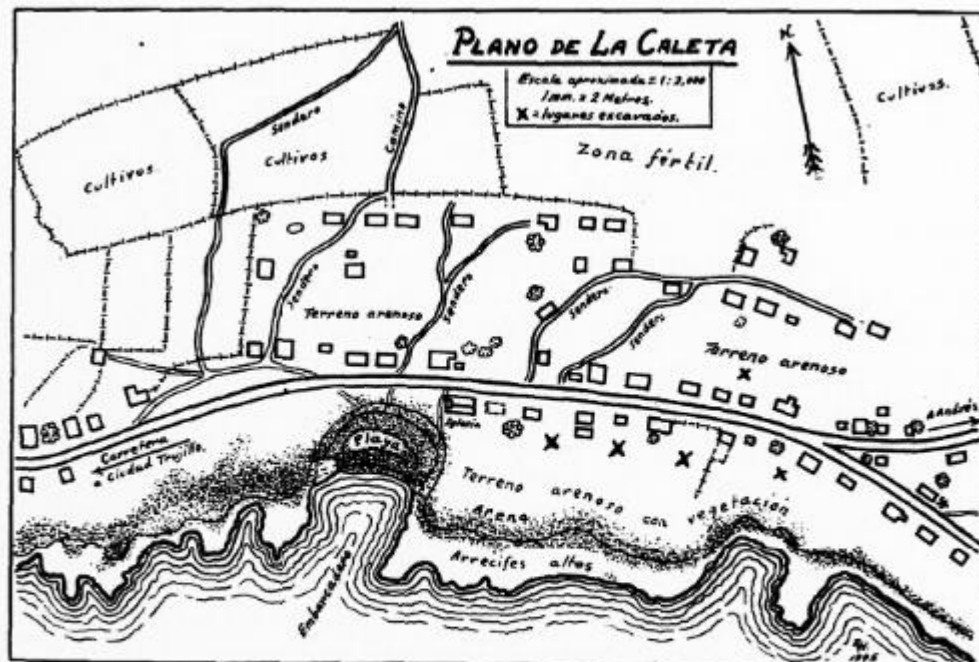


Fig. 2.— Plano del pueblo actual de La Caleta.  
Las cruces indican los lugares de las excavaciones principales.

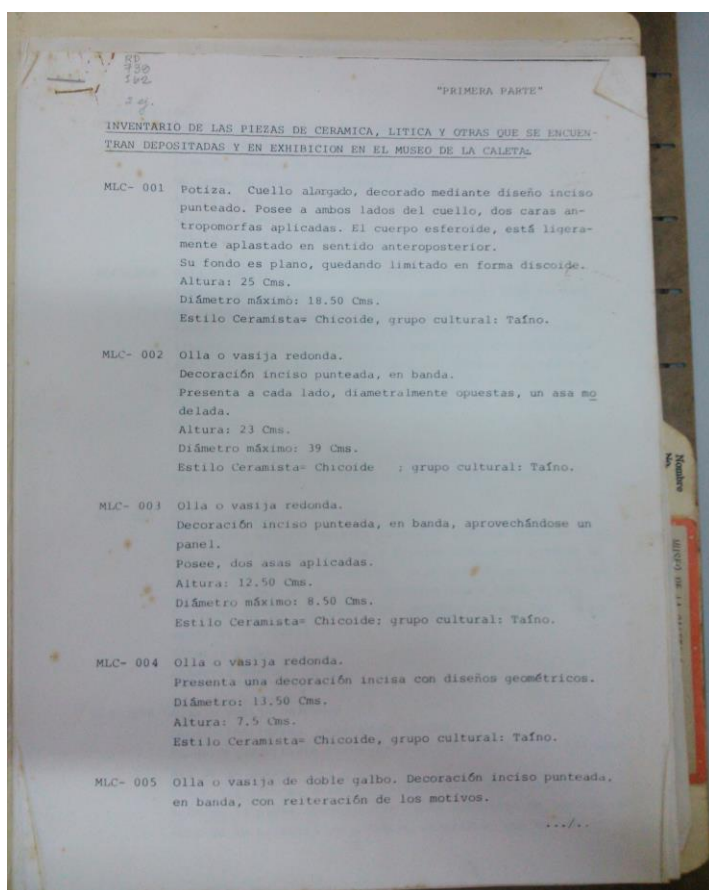
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**Figure 10.** Map of the La Caleta Town reflecting the main excavation sites. Map source: Herrera Fritot, R. and Youmans, C. L. 1946. "La Caleta: joya arqueológica antillana." La Habana. Editorial LEX. <https://dloc.com/UF00075427/00001/1x>.

In the year 2000, the ruins of the museum became one of the sites placed under the management of the newly formed Ministry of Culture, but so far, no restoration work has taken place. An unidentified structure in a crime-infested area is all that remains (Figure 11). The only accessible institutional record found during a site visit to the Center for the Inventory of Cultural Goods indicated was an inventory list of the types of objects that once were on display at La Caleta (Figure 12). The list shows the museum's initials, a brief description of objects, measurements, and the classification period. Some of the objects that were on display are now found at the Museo del Hombre Dominicano, unmarked.



**Figure 11.** Roofless and windowless remains of a building that was constructed to protect the Indigenous graves found at the La Caleta archaeological site. Photo by author, 2018.



**Figure 12.** Partial list of the original 1972 inventory done as part of the documentation for objects excavated at the La Caleta archaeological site, on file at the Centro de Inventario de Bienes Culturales. Photo by author, 2016.

### 5.2.1.3 Museo del Hombre Dominicano

The Museo del Hombre Dominicano (Museum of the Dominican Man), located in the capital city of Santo Domingo, was created by the National Congress (Ley 318 of April 1972), and it opened to the public in October of 1973. It has one of the largest collections of



Indigenous heritage in the Caribbean, with approximately 5,000 objects as part of its permanent exhibition (Francisco 2007).

The museum is housed in a four-story building that is part of Cultural Plaza Juan Pablo Duarte, named after the republic's main founding father. Other cultural institutions in the plaza include the National Theater, the Cinemateca, the Modern Art Museum, and the History and Geography Museum (closed due to major deterioration). The National Library and the Museum of Natural History, which are also in the Cultural Plaza, have re-opened after a long closure due to contamination brought about by the floods during Hurricane George, as the cleaning equipment used to clean the mold-infested building was shared between the museum and the library.

The building that houses the Museo del Hombre Dominicano's archaeological and ethnographic collections was designed by architect José Antonio Caro Alvarez, who became the museum's first director, and who was also part of the first archaeological commission established in the country. The first collections displayed for the opening of the Museo del Hombre Dominicano came from the now-defunct National Museum, which was formed in 1927. The Museo del Hombre Dominicano also received significant object donations from private collector Emile Boyrie de Moya (Vega 2004), whose collection also formed part of the Instituto Dominicano de Investigaciones Antropológicas, described earlier in this section.

The museum was created under the mandate to oversee everything related to anthropological, ethnological, and pre-Columbian archaeological research (Congreso Nacional de la República Dominicana 1972, Ley 318). The creation of the Museo del Hombre Dominicano led to a boom in Dominican archaeological research between the 1970s and 1980s, which included excavations, field training for researchers, and publications (Curet 2011).

For many years, the institution served as the leading cultural entity in the country. It had an active research department that organized activities including workshops, conferences, research publications, temporary exhibitions, and carried out international projects. The museum also had programs for the scientific community as well as local community programs in different provinces, and even cultural activities specifically for the staff. The Museo del Hombre Dominicano also developed a newsletter; this publication became one of the most important news sources on the cultural scene of the Dominican Republic regarding archaeological, anthropological, and ethnographic research, with a strong emphasis on



Indigenous heritage research. The newsletter also included a summary of cultural activities taking place in the academic and museum fields.

Since its opening in 1973, the museum has been open to the public for a very accessible fee and offers discounts to schools. For public programming, it has offered guided tours, audio tours, periodic lectures, and publications, as well as occasional temporary exhibitions. Nevertheless, the design of the archaeological exhibition room has not changed in over 40 years. For the past ten years, the research departments in archaeology, anthropology, and folklore have been as dilapidated as the outdated library, and the auditorium has been underused, as the organization of events has lagged behind. The newsletter, a popular publication for decades, now only publishes periodically, when the administration gets partial private sponsorship for its printing, and its distribution has been reduced to giving away a few free copies as well as to the sale of copies at the reception desk.

The general inventory of the archaeological collections, done by Luis Rijo and Harold Olsen Bogaert in 1981, is the most complete documentation of the museum's collection history. However, the Indigenous cultural material is not as well documented as the colonial objects. Part of the archaeological collection came from the National Museum, where the registration methods for the incorporation of artifacts lacked proper documentation, which contributed to the gap in information on the origin of the heritage objects and how they were obtained.

The Museo del Hombre's catalog begins with registration information on the Indigenous cultural material but offers poor information on the provenience of the objects collected or excavated. The objects of Spanish origin, on the other hand, have very detailed card labels that include good photographs and drawings, as well as better details of excavations related to where these objects were found (Soto-Ricart and Rodríguez 1989). Furthermore, the only master's thesis study found on the Museo del Hombre Dominicano is a descriptive thesis that details how the museum functions and the legal mandates that support it (Olsen Boegart 2000). In 2006, the Museo del Hombre Dominicano received a grant from the United States Embassy through its Ambassador's Cultural Funds to improve the lobby presentation and update the permanent collection inventory (Embajada de Los Estados Unidos en la República Dominicana 2017). Nevertheless, it was reported by a staff member that the inventory work was not completed (interview with museum staff who did not wish to be recorded, 2018).

Despite the museum having 46 staff members (Ministerio de Administración Pública 2014), there was no record of activities for the local community surrounding the museum. The official visitor statistics place the number of people that visited the museum at about 36,000 in 2013, with 88% of visitors coming from the school system (Ministerio de Cultura 2014).

In 2017, the Museo del Hombre Dominicano was closed due to the building's deplorable internal condition and the collection displays. The elevators did not work before the closure. The air-conditioning system had been broken for years, and extensive maintenance complaints had been presented to the Ministry of Culture (personal communication with management staff, 2014). The staff on payroll was facing challenges implementing administrative tasks, museum education programs, and audience interaction long before its official closure for renovation. The bureaucratic centralization of the administration and major budget reductions pushed the Museo del Hombre Dominicano into an almost inactive state, diminishing the museum's capacity to design or participate in major heritage research projects. As salaries for the museum researchers are low, very few are able to work on research projects, and even fewer have managed to work on publications, as many have had to find parallel employment or consultancy projects to make ends meet (personal communication with researchers, 2006, 2010, 2014).

After extensive media coverage (Calderón 2009; País Distinto 2017; Acento 2017), including a claim by the people's public defender about the deteriorating conditions of the building and the collection display (Listín Diario 2017), the museum closed its doors for a renovation project. The plans for the remodeling project were presented by the Ministry of Culture in 2018 and led by architects from the President's Office, working with the Presidential Commission to Support Province Development (Santana 2018). Even after elections in 2020 and another party took office, the museums were still closed for renovation.

Despite the good news of the remodeling efforts, there were complaints about how the remodeling had been handled both at the museum itself and at other spaces and other museums in the Plaza de la Cultura. The media has denounced the workers' cutting down of trees and covering the area with construction materials (Rivera 2019), showing disregard for safety measures. Internal complaints include the museum's staff not being apprised of any exhibition design plans, being tasked at the last minute with devising exhibition scripts, and the lack of experienced personnel compiling inventories that are needed to update collection

documentation, as the supervisors of these tasks are working remotely (conversation with museum staff members who wished to remain anonymous, 2017).

At the end of this dissertation research in 2019, the Museo del Hombre Dominicano was still closed. There have been reports, through informal conversations, that the remodeling of the infrastructure has been completed, including new elevators and a new air-conditioning system. As for the new exhibitions' design, it is still not clear when it will be done, nor which experts have been involved in the development of curatorial and museographical plans.

#### *5.2.1.4 Faro a Colón*

The monument known as Columbus' Lighthouse opened to the public in 1992 amid a series of worldwide events commemorating the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean. The idea of constructing the lighthouse was first mentioned in 1852 (Portal Educando n.d.). The building was initially conceived as a mausoleum to house Columbus's remains, and a contest was held between 1938 and 1930 to select the design proposal (García 1929; Gonzalez 2007). Construction of the cross-shaped monument began in 1948, and it was inaugurated in 1992, compulsorily in time for the international celebrations, and amid fierce protest against the project's colonial symbolism and its staggering cost of 70 million dollars (French 1992). Half a mile long and ten stories high, the lighthouse now houses the contested mausoleum of Columbus's human remains and exhibits a few archaeological objects that were found underwater, particularly at the Manantial de la Aleta (La Aleta Spring) in the Eastern National Park. It also exhibits ethnographical objects from different countries in Latin America donated by different embassies (Navarro 2019).

The building is located on the eastern side of Santo Domingo Province and is open to the public for visits during the week and weekend. Even without any activities for the public—beyond people paying to see the mausoleum and the few exhibition rooms that are still open—the lighthouse reported 98,000 visitors in 2013 (Ministerio de Cultura 2014). This is considered a highly visited cultural institution despite the deterioration of the infrastructure and rising crime in the area.

The lights designed to show a cross in the sky are no longer used due to cuts in operating funds. The lighthouse has limited staff, and very few activities are organized for the public. There is little information on the different exhibition rooms. Despite efforts, the inventory for the archaeological collections was not located at the Center for the Inventory of

Cultural Goods. In addition, there is no official record of what is on exhibition at the administrative offices of the lighthouse monument.

#### *5.2.1.5 Museo del Parque Nacional Histórico y Arqueológico de Villa de La Isabela*

Inaugurated in 1992 as part of the 500-year celebration of Columbus' landing in the Caribbean, the museum is located inside the National Historical and Archaeological Park of La Isabela Village, in Luperón, Puerto Plata Province. The Park was declared a national historical landmark in 1969 (Ley 462-69) and is known as the site of the first European village in the New World, where Christopher Columbus established a post in 1493. The archaeological and historical park covers 8 acres, but only 4 acres are open to the public. Inside the park, tourists can walk through the archaeological remains of the first colonial structures and a graveyard. The visit covers Columbus's house, a storage area, military structures, a church, and a watchtower. Though the Europeans settled near areas populated by Indigenous people, there are no visible remains or signage along the archaeological trails that suggest this co-existence based on archaeological or historical studies (Caro Alvarez 1973; Moya Pons 1992). The archaeological site is open to the public every day for a fee that goes to the park's administration. However, no precise information was identified despite looking for visitors' information at the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Environment on how many people visit the park annually. The archaeological remains have minimal signage and lack significant descriptions for visitors to understand the development of the site throughout history (site visit, 2015).

Although archaeological material and human remains from the site had been recovered through several excavations (Veloz Maggiolo 1980; Caro Alvarez 1973; Luna Calderon 1986), the museum's collection was created with objects from local private collectors and those excavated by the University of Florida and the National Parks Directorate (Deagan and Cruxent 2002).

There is a marked architectural separation between the site as a heritage trail and the museum as the space where objects are displayed. Inside the museum building, there are panels with text and images and large cases with objects and the imprints of missing objects. Next to the one exhibition space that remains open, there is a library and lodgings for researchers with approved projects related to the site. Both structures have long been in disuse, as research related to the site is almost nonexistent, and the buildings have been affected by the weather.

The museum and the site are under the Ministry of Culture's managerial supervision, after having been under that of the Ministry of Environment for decades. The Ministry of Culture has no budget for the museum's conservation efforts or for personnel other than the curator to carry out cultural activities (personal conversation with the museum curator, January 2015).

The museum's two original exhibition rooms reflect the passage of time and show signs of deterioration. Despite closing to the public several times, the archaeological objects have continued to remain on display throughout many administrations. Nevertheless, many of the objects in the vitrines and in storage have deteriorated. A visit to the curator at the time in February of 2015, revealed that there was only one exhibition room where most of the collections were displayed. All of the objects in display cases were moved to one exhibition room after a major storm because the second exhibition room was turned into storage for toilets, sinks, and furniture that was salvaged from the researchers' living quarters. Despite the well-documented archaeological research that has taken place on the site, and the numerous plans that have advocated for better conservation and management (Prieto 2012; Flores and Prieto 2014; Flores and Prieto 2015), the site continues to face preservation challenges, and the museum space has taken a back seat among the priorities of past and current strategic governmental management attempts.

The museum has been closed to the public for several years because of the deterioration of the collection displays. The cases had been damaged by rain and humidity, as well as from poor maintenance during periods where there was no director. Archaeologist Diana Peña temporarily served as curator of archaeology. She was hired to continue developing a partial inventory of the materials excavated by the University of Florida. Though reports of the excavation conducted by the University of Florida recount the history of the site and offer an inventory of excavated objects, there are no available inventories of the objects on display in the exhibition rooms on site (personal communication with Diana Peña, January 2015). Information on the museum's collection was not located at the Center for the Inventory of Cultural Goods. This governmental institution is supposed to have inventories of all national archaeological collections. In 2007, the Ministry of Culture developed a plan, financed by the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation, to preserve the site and restore infrastructure for people to visit on a large scale; in 2011, though the money had been released, the plans remained unimplemented (Agencia de Cooperación Española n.d.; Ministerio de Cultura 2011). In 2013, architect Esteban Prieto Vicioso

designed the “Plan for the creation of value and sustainable management of the La Isabela Historical Park.” This plan was also designed with funding from the Spanish Cooperation Agency and obtained support for implementation through governmental decree 38-17, making it the first plan to be officially approved.

Nevertheless, as time passed by, the curator had living quarters with no running water. She had to sleep with a guard dog in her room due to crime in the secluded area where the museum is located, and her salary was seldom paid on time (site visit and informal conversations with the curator, February 2015). At the end of this dissertation research period, the curator had quit and left La Isabela due to poor working and living conditions. Despite the then president, Danilo Medina, visiting in 2017 along with representatives from the Ministry of Culture—when the local community was promised that the rescue projects would finally be implemented, and a presidential decree was issued to approve the development strategy to rescue the site and implement the plan as a sustainability project (El Caribe 2017)—the community continues to wait.

#### 5.2.2 Public Indigenous heritage collections today

The state has managed five museums with Indigenous heritage collections. These museums fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture, and four remain open to the public. The oldest of these was the National Museum, created in 1927. However, the National Museum ceased to exist in 1973, giving way to the Museo del Hombre Dominicano. Hence, the oldest museum with an Indigenous heritage collection that has continually been open since 1947 is the Dominican Institute of Anthropological Research, managed by the only public university in the country. The last museum formed under the State’s care and built on a site with significant Indigenous settlements and colonial structures was the one located at the La Isabela National Park for the quincentenary celebrations of Columbus’ arrival to the island.

Even when their mandates specifically call for it, public museums seldom conduct research on their own. With the exception of the Museo del Hombre Dominicano, all public museums with Indigenous heritage collections either have a small staff or are understaffed. Moreover, the majority of the staff at public museums has limited training in the care of collections or comprehensive knowledge on the history of the island’s Indigenous people beyond what is printed on the labels of the exhibitions.

The displays for Indigenous heritage items in public institutions are old and deteriorating. The majority of collections lack updated documentation. Even for the public collections that have been enriched through scientific archaeological excavations, access to the documentation at the museums is cumbersome and only possible when there are institutional researchers present to help identify which publications cover which excavations. Nevertheless, most public museums have readily available information on the collectors or archaeologists that contributed to the collections' formation or growth.

Public museums with Indigenous heritage collections tend to be in larger cities or cities with important tourism sectors. Santo Domingo, the capital city, has the majority of the public Indigenous heritage collections. Lastly, all public museums with Indigenous heritage collections offer limited public programming on-site, and no programs are offered outside of their geographic zones.

## 5.2.2 Private museums with Indigenous heritage collections

### 5.2.2.1 *Sala de Arte Prehispánico – Fundación García Arévalo*

The García Arévalo Foundation was established as a nonprofit association by presidential decree in 1971 (Decree 1155, Pina 1978). The collection, under the care of Manuel García Arévalo and his foundation, has been on display since 1973 and is comprised of some 1,200 archaeological pieces, including objects made out of wood, ceramics, bone, and stone (Lopez 2011). As it is commonly known, La Sala de Arte (The Art Room) is located inside a beverage factory and distribution center in one of the busiest business districts in the city of Santo Domingo. Originally, the Sala de Arte had its corporate-sponsored home in the Embotelladora Dominicana (Dominican Bottling Company), presided by García Arévalo until the business had the majority of its stocks purchased by Brazil's beverage leader AmBev (Aristy Capitan 2017).

The visit to the Sala de Arte has always been free of charge, accessible to visitors only by appointment during the week, but no current or reliable public visitor statistics have been found in any governmental reports. Its programs include guided tours and periodic publications on topics in Dominican history and Caribbean anthropology and archaeology.

This foundation was formed by private collector Manuel García Arévalo, who is the main funder of the Art Room's operations. He is also a renowned businessman and a historian who became well known as a young adult for denouncing the illicit trafficking of



archaeological objects and violations of archaeological sites (Lopez 2011). The García Arévalo Foundation has sponsored publications on topics dealing with Indigenous heritage research and related discussions, while its president has also published his own writings on the development of the Indigenous history of the island, its conquest, and the Indigenous legacy in contemporary Dominican culture (García Arévalo 1988a, 1988b). He sponsors the publication of other writers on the topics of his interest and coauthors books with other well-known historians in the country. The foundation also undertakes the printing of the Museo del Hombre's newsletter and partially funds the Museo del Hombre Dominicano's international conferences on anthropology and archaeology. Through his participation as a key presenter at archaeological events, his publications, and his monetary support for cultural initiatives in the history arena, García Arévalo is considered an important sponsor of activities relating to Indigenous heritage collections.

The museography of the Sala de Arte was designed and constructed over 40 years ago. However, the foundation staff is well trained in conservation, and the displays have been able to survive intact due to consistent maintenance. The staff is also sufficiently well versed in the history of the collection to give guided tours. The only public document available with detailed information on the archaeological objects under García Arévalo's care is the original inventory list, made in 1980 by the Museo del Hombre Dominicano and registered at the Center for the Inventory of Cultural Goods.

#### 5.2.2.2 *Museo Arqueológico Regional Altos de Chavón*<sup>3</sup>

The Regional Museum of Archaeology, located in the east of La Romana Province in Altos de Chavón, opened its doors in 1981. The museum housed the collection of Samuel Pión, (Figure 13), a collector who had 3,000 objects and fragments on display at his home. For over 40 years, Pión purchased and gathered objects, as was common during the 1960s and 1970s, from different known archaeological sites located in the eastern region of the Dominican Republic. It even became a weekend family activity to go digging for objects to enrich his collection (personal communication with a member of the Pión family, 2002).

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<sup>3</sup> The researcher was the director of this museum for 19 years. Throughout her administration, she was able to obtain greater access to anecdotal information about the creation of the museum. She was also the creator of several projects implemented for school audiences.



**Figure 13.** Collector Samuel Pion showing Cohoba wooden idol with part of the collection on the background at his home before 1979. Photo courtesy of the Altos de Chavón Regional Museum of Archaeology, 2018.

As Píon's collection was a cultural landmark in the city of La Romana, the Bluhdorn Charitable Trust obtained custody of the collection through a sale in order to make it part of the then newly conceived cultural offer within the developing eastern region tourism industry. A museum was built to house the Pion collection in what became known as the cultural and artist village of Altos de Chavón. The cultural and artistic village was part of the largest private cultural initiative in the Dominican Republic at that time, established within the luxury resort of Casa de Campo, managed by the multinational company Golf+Western. Altos de Chavón, commonly known as the city of artists, was designed by Antonio Caro (the same architect that designed the Museo del Hombre Dominicano) and built by set designer Roberto Coppa. The destination was created to offer a high-quality cultural experience for national and international visitors to learn about Dominican culture and exchange cultural and artistic practices.

The museum opened in 1981, during the first stage of the village's construction of the village. The first directors of the museum were Manuel García Arévalo and Patricia Reid Baquero, two of the leading figures working to improve Indigenous heritage discussions in the country in the early 1980s. They organized conferences, lectures, and cultural activities just outside of Santo Domingo.

The Altos de Chavón Cultural Center Foundation is the umbrella organization that oversees the operation of the museum. The foundation also oversees a school of design, with

a campus in Santo Domingo, an artist-in-residence program, and an art gallery. Dominique Bluhdorn, the daughter of the man who conceived Altos de Chavón as a cultural hub for the Caribbean, runs the foundation. She has sustained her father's initiative to contribute to the development of the arts and culture of the Dominican Republic, supporting the foundation for over 30 years.

In 1998, the museum organized one of the largest and most important conferences on Caribbean archaeology in the country, sponsored by the Organization of American States (Veloz Maggiolo 1998). Over the last 15 years, the institution has focused its resources on designing outreach programs and activities for the education community that go beyond museum visits, offering professional development for teachers to improve how Indigenous Caribbean history is taught in schools. They also aim to improve how adults and children learn about Dominican culture, using strategies based on working with objects and hands-on experiences involving arts education. The museum works with grassroots and cultural organizations as well as with public and private schools in urban and rural areas. The museum has established corporate responsibility programs to secure funding for public schools' participation in the museum's programs and for the design and implementation of educational projects.

From 2001 to 2009, the museum participated in cultural exchange projects with museums from Sweden, Africa, Asia, and Latin America through the Samp Intercontinental Museum Network (Samp 2009). Samp projects, funded by the Swedish International Development Agency, required participating institutions to incorporate local community members into their project teams (Azcarate and Balfors 2011). The museum and the network organized international activities and capacity-building workshops for local participating members and museum staff at all levels to improve project management. In 2006, the institution refurbished its museography based on the needs of school audiences. The museum script was revised, objects curated, and illustrations developed to make information on the Indigenous history of the island more accessible to students and tourists; a series of programs were also designed to provide teachers with didactic tools to improve how Indigenous history and culture is taught in schools.

The museum opens every day, and the educational offerings to the national audience continue to focus on programs for students, teachers, and families. A small staff trained in audience development holds activities that include exhibitions, workshops, summer camps

(Figure 14), a discovery room for children, a museum-in-a-box unit to visit schools all over the country, a museum-on-the-web initiative, a catalog of the collection, and a reference library in Caribbean archaeology and Dominican history.



**Figure 14.** Altos de Chavón Regional Museum of Archaeology’s 2013 summer camp participants learning about Indigenous hunting and food gathering practices. Photo by author. 2013.

In the period when tourists and nationals could freely visit the Altos de Chavón complex, it reached a visitation rate of nearly 100,000 people per year, with approximately 27% of visitors coming from the school system (internal visitation records, December 2014). The museum’s visitation rate dropped after the Casa de Campo Hotel began charging admission to the complex to cover maintenance costs in 2015. An even more significant decrease in student visitation rates occurred after all schools began being charged USD \$2.00 per student admission in 2017. The museum staff took advantage of the increased coordination that had to take place after the entrance charge was implemented, as the schools had to plan their visits in advance, and staff had to work on more structured educational tours with teachers based on lesson plans and specific interests.

This museum has a poor documentation system. The only official archives on file are the inventory list and contact sheets of the collection initially produced by the Museo del Hombre Dominicano in June of 1979 when it was still displayed at Samuel Pión’s home. However, no accession information has been located. There are no records of purchase or custody transfer beyond the Museo del Hombre Dominicano’s original 1979 inventory of the Pión collection. The collection has objects without registration numbers, and no records have

been found regarding later acquisitions. There are also numerous objects in storage with no markings. This suggests that there was an informal policy of purchasing cultural material and accepting donations without the basic documentation practices to record the purchases. With a new directorship, the position as director of the museum, all purchases were suspended.

A basic inventory of the objects in storage was done in 2002, with students and faculty from the Underwater Archaeology program at Indiana University. A copy of the inventory was deposited at the Center for the Inventory of Cultural Goods to complement the original inventory of Samuel Pión's collection. Several attempts have been made to update the inventory of the collections in exhibition and storage, but all attempts have been put aside due to the costs involved in hiring an archaeologist to have the collection professionally inventoried.

In terms of educational services, the museum has prioritized the development of educational programs for over 20 years. The museum was one of the first in the country to develop teacher guides focused on prehistory and archaeology, corresponding to the teacher training workshops implemented by the director at the time, Angel Caba. Caba worked alongside the well-known Dominican archaeologist Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, author of the publication *Prehistoria para Maestros*. To expand the educational services, the museum also secured private funding to develop the series *Mirándonos en el espejo del tiempo* ("Looking at Ourselves in the Mirror of Time"), aimed at instructing teachers and students on how to use Indigenous heritage collections as an extension of the classroom and to supplement the national curriculum for social studies. The series' teacher guide has a summary of Indigenous history as well as activities to do with students before, during, and after visits to any Indigenous heritage collection in the country. The series also offers a teacher training workshop on incorporating Indigenous heritage topics in the classroom and connecting them with other subjects besides social studies. The third product in the series consists in a documentary of an archaeological site in the eastern region of Macao being excavated by a team from the Museo del Hombre Dominicano, which offered snapshots of Indigenous heritage and of how archaeology was practiced in the country; this audiovisual educational resource was directed at students from the fourth through sixth grades of basic education.

The fourth resource developed for the series was the Valija Didáctica (Figure 15, museum-in-a-box): this nationally traveling exhibit uses boxes with replicas and attractive visuals to engage children in the classroom. The museum-in-a-box resource was part of the

educational project that eventually helped in designing a training workshop on how to integrate heritage education for high school level social studies. The training targeted university students seeking to obtain a bachelor's degree in education with a concentration in social studies. The initial workshop was done in coordination with the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo and focused on integrating Indigenous heritage collections into classroom lessons, connecting its contents with language arts, mathematics, science, and history.



**Figure 15.** Students interacting with the boxes and artifacts from the Altos de Chavón Regional Museum of Archaeology's Valija Didáctica. Photo by author, 2017.

#### 5.2.2.3 Museo Regional de Antropología – Biblioteca de la Universidad Central del Este (UCE)

This museum is part of the library of Eastern Central University, located in the province of San Pedro de Macorís. The collection is composed of ethnographical objects from the province, as well as Indigenous heritage material very similar to that displayed at the Altos de Chavón Regional Museum of Archaeology. This museum also opened its doors in the early 1980s, but the exhibition space is in a very deteriorated state and has not been open since at least 1998 (site visit, 2010).

The collector who gathered these materials was José Hazim Azar, the owner of the university. Harold Olsen Bogaert of the Museo del Hombre Dominicano has inventoried the collection (personal communication with Harold Olsen, 2010); however, the university does not have a copy of the inventory in its library or administrative offices. Information about this collection could not be located at the Center for the Inventory of Cultural Goods either.

According to the university's website, the collections in the museum are still being used as part of classroom assignments on general anthropology, one of the courses required

by the Faculty of Medicine (UCE 2015). Nevertheless, academic coordinators at the university were contacted but could not confirm whether the collection was being used by students and instructors.

#### *5.2.2.4 Museo Dr. Arístides Estrada Torres – Biblioteca Municipal y Centro Cultural*

In 1982, the Dr. Aristides Estrada Torres Museum, located in the province of Azua, in the southwest of the country, was created as one of three main cultural venues sharing the same building, the others being the library and the cultural center. The museum is no longer open to the public, but it had a small collection of archaeological objects, gathered by the medical doctor Aristides Estrada Torres. The collection was described, in one of the newsletters of the Museo del Hombre Dominicano, as having about 1,000 objects and was believed to be the country's second-largest private collection, after that of Emile de Boyre Moya (Museo del Hombre 1980). Only part of the collection was on display at the museum in 2002, which could be accessed from the third floor of the building. There were no publicly accessible records about the collections in the library's archives (notes from a site visit made in 2002).

The building that housed the museum, the library and the theater underwent a major renovation in 2012. The library and the theater became part of the Cultural Center Hector J. Díaz. The museum was slated to reopen in the future and be housed on the third floor of the remodeled center, but by the end of this research, information that could confirm its reopening or what happened to the collection was not obtained.

#### *5.2.2.5 Sala de Antropología Signos de Identidad – Centro Eduardo León Jimenes (Centro León)*

Located in Santiago Province, the Centro León opened in 2003, with extensive cultural programming and three exhibition spaces that included a collection of anthropological, ethnographic, and archaeological objects; an art collection that originated with the first visual arts biennale in the Dominican Republic in 1964; and a space for temporary exhibitions (Centro Cultural Leon Jimenes n.d.). In addition to the museum exhibitions, the center has digital library services, a cafeteria, a store, an amphitheater, and classroom spaces where diverse cultural activities take place. The archaeological objects that introduce the "Signs of Identity" exhibition originally belong to the collection of Bernardo Vega, one of the directors of the Museo del Hombre Dominicano and a well-known politician, economist, and collector of Indigenous heritage materials.

The center, which is open during the week, has an affordable general entrance fee and discounted fees for students and children. It has about 67,000 visitors a year (personal conversation with former director Rafael Emilio Yunen during a site visit in 2012). Its programming includes guided tours, temporary exhibitions, presentations, video projections, conferences, and workshops.

The Centro León is supported by the National Beer Company, which is owned by the León Jimenes family business consortium, who are long-time patrons of the arts in the Dominican Republic. This is the only known private institution in the country to have hired a consulting firm to design their collection space; through a biannual arts contest that has been sponsored since the 1960s, they selected the firm that would undertake the decade-long project to build a structure to house the León Jimenes family art collection. The firm Consultores y Asesores Profesionales (CAP)—headed by Rafael Emilio Yunén, who later became the center’s first director—transformed the idea of developing a museum into a major cultural center that aimed to serve the Caribbean (Yunén n.d.). The center has a large staff that is trained in educational and cultural program design. The catalog and detailed inventory of its archaeological collection is available to researchers on-site. However, at the time of a visit to the Center for the Inventory of Cultural Goods, no Indigenous heritage collection inventory was located to reference the transfer of custody to the León family’s custody. Bernardo Vega’s original inventory found at the Center for the Inventory of Cultural Goods was the only document with general information that could be associated with the Centro Leon’s Indigenous cultural material from the island.

This cultural center has also developed a focus on creating educational resources to support the use of its Indigenous heritage collections and their conservation and scientific study. Visitor guides, publications, detailed inventories, and state-of-the-art storage facilities with trained staff are some of the assets that set this institution apart.

The Centro León has also been instrumental in the public dissemination of the Nexus 1492 project results, having been host to two important exhibitions that presented the results of local and international researchers who have worked both in the country and in other Caribbean islands (Centro León 2015).



### 5.2.2.6 Museo de Laguna Salada – Profesor Tremols

The Museo de Laguna Salada is a locally known collection assembled by Professor José Tremols. The objects are displayed in the former public school teacher's home, located on Laguna Salada's main road in Valverde Province.

The collection comprises everything from minerals and family objects to trees planted in his backyard. He started collecting in 1965, initially gathering objects of sentimental value, like the bullets his brother took with him when he fled the militarized capital or personal items that belonged to his father. As he visited museums in other parts of the country during his teaching career, his interests in geology, paleontology, anthropology, and archaeology grew, and his collection grew with them. A significant part of the collection is made up of objects from local archaeological sites that he obtained on numerous digs (Figure 16). Tremols found the sites during extensive nature walks and based on information from his large network of fishermen friends that knew he liked to collect. Although he recognizes that he purchased archaeological objects, he acknowledges that most of the artifacts were obtained from excavations he himself undertook. The collection is not inventoried, although he claims to know each object's provenance.



**Figure 16.** Display vitrines of Profesor Tremols' collection at his home in Laguna Salada. (Photo by author, 2017).

He first set up two bedrooms in his house to display his collection for educational visits after he retired from teaching. The collection has expanded to the yard, where tours begin. The visits have always been free of charge, and visitors have, for the most part, consisted of school groups. As he is almost always in the area near his home, when school groups arrive, the neighbors notify him if a group happens to arrive when he is not at home. Reservations for guided visits can also be made by contacting Prof. Tremols (as he is

commonly called) by mobile phone, as he does not have a phone in the house. The site does not have an electrical backup system to shield it from the frequent electricity interruptions; nevertheless, the groups are always still accommodated since he has enough objects in the backyard that allow him to speak about the entire collection.

Through a local ecotourism initiative, in 2016, Prof. Tremols received support from local community activists and political figures to submit the request to build a museum to house his collection as part of the Ministry of Culture's Cultural Projects Contest. Several government officials, including the then-minister as well as representatives of the Vice Ministry of Heritage, the National Museum Network, and the Ministry of Tourism, informally communicated that his project would be carried out.

Local community members report that land has been identified for donation by the municipality and that it has been measured for boundary determination: actions that precede the issuance of a property title. Unfortunately, in the researcher's last conversation with Prof. Tremols, in 2019 (Figure 17), none of the plans for construction had materialized. He confirmed that he was still welcoming school groups at his home.



**Figure 17.** Profesor Tremols posing on the motorcycle he used on trips to locate Indigenous heritage objects. Photo by author, 2017.

#### 5.2.2.7 Museo Taíno César Estrella Bruzzo

César Estrella Bruzzo has been collecting artifacts since the 1960s and has turned his paternal home—located in Guanatico, province of Puerto Plata—into a private museum (Figure 18), open to the local community. Tourists have been the target audience of the museum to ensure a sustainable income, though group tours coordinated by tour operators are

not being arranged until the infrastructure is ready to provide restroom services capable of handling tourist groups.



**Figure 18.** Façade and display cases Museo Taino Cesar Estrella, known by the local community as the Guananico Museum. Photos by author, 2016.

School-aged visitors are the most common public attendees and are guided through the island's geological evolution, Indigenous history, colonial times, and pre-republican period. The exhibition ends with anecdotes about Estrella's collecting interests and family history. Vitruines, located in all the rooms of the house, display fossils and stone objects created by the hunter-gatherer groups found along the northwest coast, shells, and animal bones. Amulets and more elaborate objects created by the later Arawak groups that populated the island are shown in display cases and on walls. Pictures and drawings illustrate Indigenous life. Photographs of objects and family members are also part of the visual narrative of the house.

Estrella systematically searched for archaeological objects for decades and developed a field note archive, along with photographs, that helped produce an inventory of the collection with the help of an archaeologist. With the information he gathered on his digs and the inventory done by the archaeologist he hired, they created a brochure used by the museum guide, who has worked with Dr. Estrella for over 15 years, searching for objects. Although he also acknowledges having purchased objects, he claims many of the objects he did not find himself were instead donated to him, because friends and colleagues know he collects items and maintains the museum. He claims his urge for collecting is comparable to an illness and has professed to have a strong passion for preserving artifacts, claiming to have invested years of his work salary to rescue and prevent objects from leaving the country through illicit traffic.

According to Estrella's accounts, the Ministry of Culture provided very little support when he approached them to request information and advice on how to open the museum. He claims he was given only a list of prerequisites for officially opening, which has only contributed to delaying the service he wants to provide to tourist groups through tour operators. He now has his library available to the public, as well as informational posters, a brochure, and a Facebook page with basic information for those interested in visiting.

### **5.3 Commercial and private display practices**

The Dominican Republic also has nontraditional platforms that showcase the collecting practices of people interested in the country's Indigenous history. Collectors, defined as people who look for specific kinds of objects and select them to satisfy an urge (for pleasure, information, prestige, or investment) (Kersel 2012; Wendel 2007; Sackler 1998; Appadurai 1994; Baekeland 1994; Pearce 1994a; 1994b; 1994c), have underpinned the trade in antiquities in the Dominican Republic since at least 1903 (Pina 1978). Although they have no physical or institutional structures for displaying their collections, some collectors open their houses to students or allow scientists to study their collections. Collectors also view their purchases of antiquities as rescue efforts to prevent the sale of objects to foreign markets (observation based on personal conversations with private collectors throughout the researcher's employment at the Altos de Chavón Museum).

Other private collectors, including those with significant collections in their care, either do not wish to exhibit their collections for fear of appropriation by the state or have not managed to create a museum project to showcase their collection with private sector support. Some high-end collectors, primarily located in urban cities, have purchased a range of objects that include ceramic pots and plates, pestles, mortars, hatches, grinders, stone sculptures, objects they believe have been part of ceremonial rituals, and finally, frequently photographed amulets. During interviews, some collectors expressed an interest in collecting to prevent the objects from being taken out of the country illegally.

Occasional collectors, who can be found worldwide in both rural and urban settings, tend to collect ceramic fragments and small stone artifacts. This tendency was recognized locally every time every time the researcher had an opportunity to meet Indigenous heritage collectors. Collectors from urban areas always pointed out that their interest in collecting could relate to childhood experiences when they found ceramic fragments and small stone objects. Collectors from rural areas tended to indicate they find these items in agricultural

land and keep them because they remind them of old family stories about the Indigenous people.

Restaurants and hotels are nontraditional settings for the display of cultural material. In these commercial venues in different parts of the country, decorators use archaeological objects in their establishments for the enjoyment of customers. Objects found in these settings include fragments of ceramics, stone pelts, and mortars, and pestles. The display of these collections, usually small, varies from objects being placed in vitrines to being mounted on walls or simply displayed openly, scattered throughout hotel lobbies or restaurants.

Other spaces where displays of Indigenous heritage collections or exhibitions on the topic can be seen include nonprofit unincorporated citizen-run organizations and commercial businesses that specifically aim to attract or serve tourist groups. Small displays of Indigenous heritage objects are found in some of these businesses as decorations for their customers to enjoy.

#### *5.3.1 Museo de Arte Taíno*

This gallery-like space, located in the historical sector of the city of Puerto Plata, has an exhibition of objects to illustrate the country's Indigenous history for tourists. It opened in the 1980s to serve increasing tourist demand as cruise ships began arriving in the city. The researcher visited the gallery in 2001. However, after phone and research about the city's events it could not be confirmed if the space was still open to the public.

#### *5.3.2 Conquista Park*

This thematic park presents the Dominican Republic's history based on diorama storytelling, from the day before the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the first encounter scenarios. Although a free on-site Taíno artifact museum visit is advertised (Conquista Park website 2018), during a site visit, the researcher was able to confirm that the objects displayed in the museum area are, in fact, copies. The current owner also indicated during a short conversation that the objects in vitrines were copies purchased from various sources.

The dioramas used are originally from the Taíno Park that was located on the Nagua-Samaná highway in the Samaná Province, a tourism hub largely visited by Europeans. The Park was created by a long-time French resident of Las Terrenas. After the original owner passed away, the dioramas and the collection were acquired by another French national living in the Dominican Republic. The new owner commented during the informal conversation,

that he had been living in Puerto Plata since the 1980s and moved to La Altagracia Province after purchasing land to install Conquista Park on the then newly inaugurated Autopista del Coral (the Coral Highway), the highway connecting to most of the all-inclusive and high-end touristic resorts in the country.

As listed on its website, Conquista Park has 247 life-size sculptures representing 27 scenarios that depict Indigenous life and the encounter with the Europeans. The site offers self-guided audio tours in six different languages and also advertises guided tours for school groups. As this research ended, the Park was moving to a more strategic site in Bayahíbe, still within the La Altagracia Province. The move places the park closer to the all-inclusive hotels in the municipality, which maintains one of the highest international tourism occupation rates in the country (InfoTour 2019). This strategic move can be interpreted as a continued effort of the private sector to capture international tourists in a zone that is already well known for its white sand beaches.

#### *5.3.3 Museo Taíno Sabana Grande de Boyá*

This private-sector initiative is listed as part of a local development plan to establish an ecotourism route, spearheaded by the Touristic Cluster of the Monte Plata Province, an economically deprived area in the Dominican Republic (Diario Digital RD 2019; Museo Taíno Sabana Grande de Boya 2018). The museum seems to be located near the town's central park, but the researcher was not able to confirm its location or obtain information regarding the details of the collection despite phone calls made to the municipal office in Monte Plata. A YouTube page links to a video where part of the collection can be viewed, along with crafts and historical objects displayed with the Indigenous heritage collection.

#### *5.3.4 Museo Taíno Magua Ojo de Agua, Salcedo*

A grassroots community initiative spearheaded by a group of young activists, this museum project, located in the Hermanas Miraval Province, was presented to the Ministry of Culture's National Contest for Cultural Projects, and was listed as pending execution for the third annual call of the contest (Ministerio de Cultura, 2018). As it stands, concrete signs of execution include the presence of a wooden house in Ojo de Agua, Salcedo—where the museum will house collections—and a Facebook page with basic information about the project. The volunteers behind the project post their periodical activities, like workshops or meetings, on social media.

#### **5.4 Private Indigenous heritage collections today**

There are more museums in the private sector that feature exclusively Indigenous heritage collections, while public sector museums generally have collections related to other periods of Dominican history as well.

There are five private museums with Indigenous heritage collections open to visitors. Two other private museums have been closed to the public for over 20 years. The three largest private collections open to the public have accessible documentation at the Center for the Inventory of Cultural Goods. To a large extent, the documentation consists of basic inventory lists that do not necessarily reflect how the collections have grown over time. The Centro León and Dr. Estrella's collections have had archaeologists actively conducting research on their Indigenous heritage collections or enriching the inventory information available to the public. The two museums that remain closed have not deaccessioned their Indigenous heritage collections or given them away. They just have stopped receiving visitors because their displays are not in an acceptable state for public view.

In terms of the locations of the Indigenous heritage collections under private care, three of these institutions are situated in either large, tourism-oriented provinces or in populated industrial zones. The two publicly accessible collections that remain in the collectors' family homes are in rural areas but also have hopes of eventually receiving tourist groups from nearby provinces that focus on tourism.

#### **Summary**

This chapter presented the results of the inventory of Indigenous heritage collections based on information obtained from site visits, documentation available at the different institutions, and information found digitally via the internet, as noted in the methodology. Through the creation of an inventory of Indigenous heritage collections in the Dominican Republic, an opportunity to understand the scope of the collections at a national level was provided. The inventory is a way to assess which collections have closed to the public, which ones currently exist, and what they are comprised of. The development of this inventory permitted to understand the ways in which the open collections have been made available for visitation and gathered a basic understanding of how they are managed.

Chapter 6 presents the findings from surveys, interviews, and participant observation regarding attitudes and access to Indigenous heritage collections.

