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

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## CHAPTER 7. Discussion: connecting Indigenous heritage collections with communities

### 7.1 Introduction

Departing from Stuart Hall's (1989, 225-226) reflection on the unfixed nature of cultural identity and his recognition of the impact of unique, ruptured, and continued transformation of power relations within the Caribbean, the present research is framed within the overarching discussion of the cultural traumas caused by the colonial experience. Museums, as sites for addressing social justice issues (Cross 2017; Kinsley 2016; Coffey et al. 2015), hold potential for transforming the way knowledge is produced (Ünsal 2019). This knowledge production contributes to the construction of local identity, and if mediated through the communities museums serve, it can help reconcile historical narratives despite the cultural discontinuities experienced in the Caribbean.

The possibility of transformation is particularly relevant for confronting the colonized past of the Dominican Republic when considering how to improve the way people learn about their cultural heritage. However, any attempt to transform how cultural heritage is constructed in modern times cannot happen without recognizing how the notion of modernity was framed within the globalizing power relations brought about by the conquest and colonization of the Americas (Quijano 2000, 533). Furthermore, any transformative approach needs to also recognize the racial superiority conception centered at the domination model imposed that spanned for 500 years. (Quijano 2000, 533-534), The Indigenous people of the Caribbean were quickly considered as the dominated inferior race, that, along with the Africans forcefully brought to the continent, became the enslaved motor of the colonial economy, losing their historical and social identity and forcibly adopting the dominant Eurocentric culture (Quijano 2000, 536-541).

Heritage connections between communities and museum collections represent reconciling bridges between families' stories of elders and what is traditionally learnt at school. Reflecting on personal experience, the researcher considered that it was not until she started working at the Altos de Chavón Regional Museum of Archaeology (which was also the first museum she visited as a child) that she realized daily activities in life at home or in her grandmother's backyard where she grew up were in fact cultural practices that can be connected to cultural roots that stem from the mixture of Indigenous, African, and European heritage. Learning how to set up a small three-stone *fogón* fire pit to cook early morning staples from the family's small *conuco* and brew coffee to filter it through cotton fabric—to

sometimes drink it in small *higüeros*—were some of the favorite chores she learned as a child. With a big family whose most members lived nearby the grandmother's house, she also remembers learning about the family elders from the *campo* through these gatherings since the family cooked dinner for more than a dozen people every night. Washing clothes in the *batea* out in the backyard, river fishing, and re-telling *ciguapa* and *bacá* stories to frighten the children so they would not go out at night by themselves were fun and trivial things that today make her feel connected to the land where she grew up, through the objects today found in museums and those still scattered throughout the country.

As the researcher reflects of her participation in community activities that felt familiar, she particularly remembered being nine years old and seeing scattered ceramic sherds on the sand of the public beach, *Caleta*, wondering why people did not pick up their broken things. She can still recall the grandmother's voice explaining that those were from the *indios* that lived there before they went to live in caves and to the mountains. She remembers being left puzzled since she did not know of any nearby caves or mountains anywhere near the coastal town. She had never made the heritage connection until she started visiting museums as an adult and realized how island's history is a complex web of multiple cultural fabrics that have not been told in an inclusive manner.

Today, as museums face more scrutiny and are being demanded to decolonize as institutions (Shelton 2013, Lonetree 2012; Smith 1999), there is an opportunity for Dominican museums to adopt a critical perspective and turn their collections, exhibition spaces, and programming into connections to the cultural past, present, and future. Hence, the present qualitative study explored how communities can connect with Indigenous heritage collections to critically analyze museum narratives that perpetuate colonial ideas of Caribbean Indigenous extinction that contribute to a disconnection from public and private museums' material culture. The study's objectives were to 1) identify the scope of Indigenous heritage collections in the country and better understand how they were formed, and 2) obtain insight into how members of the educational, heritage, governmental, and local communities are accessing collections to determine how a critical museology approach can help create multivocal engagements and inclusive meeting points for cultural self-determination. Nevertheless, critical museology alone is not enough to address the disconnection that Dominican communities have from their public and private Indigenous heritage collections. Since questions regarding the examination of identity in the Caribbean have been part of the formation of the many nation-states in the region (Hall 1989), the researcher has also

incorporated into the museological framework of the research the concerns of Caribbean scholars that exhort to pushing boundaries for museums to be sites of identity contestation (Cummins 1994; 2004; Ulloa-Hung 2009).

To answer the research questions, surveys, interviews, and participant observation were used to explore the attitudes and types of access to collections different communities have. In this chapter, the findings are compared with the relevant literature while addressing the implications that might empower communities to connect with Indigenous heritage collections through multivocal and inclusive engagements as a first step to critically examine museum narratives in the Dominican Republic. The discussion addresses critical museology as a framework to propose connections that integrate the multicultural and multiethnic community experiences that make up the Caribbean to improve how today society understands and values the legacies of the island's Indigenous heritage, and how these legacies impact identity formation.

## 7.2 Critical museology as a lens for Indigenous heritage collections and community connections

The Nexus 1492 project provided an opportunity to examine the relationships between communities and museum collections in the Dominican Republic. The researched specifically looked at:

- the scope of public and private Indigenous heritage collections in the Dominican Republic and the legislation that impacts its management;

- how the different communities that were part of the research have had and would like to have access to Indigenous heritage collections, their views on these collections and the values they assign to them; and

- how to encourage communities to engage and appreciate the cultural knowledge that Indigenous heritage collections transmit, especially for understanding contemporary Dominican society, and the need for future generations to care for these collections.

The information gathered in this qualitative study related to public and private museums with Indigenous heritage collections and the communities around them. During the research, the population consulted was formed by members of the educational, heritage, governmental, and local communities in provinces that have an Indigenous heritage collection or archaeological site, public officials with current or former posts in heritage

management, nonprofit heritage managers, and private collectors of Indigenous heritage objects. Although there is no uniformly accepted definition of community, considering the flexibility in seeing communities as groups with a common interest (Agbe-Davies 2010), the participant's answers brought light to a panoramic view of how people might connect to when asked to reflect on their interactions with archaeological heritage. Their responses contributed to a better understanding of how people access collections and how communities can engage with these collections to build a sense of ownership and identity, and to raise awareness for the need to increase preservation and protection efforts nationwide.

The community-centered application of a critical museological framework was useful within this aggregate approach for determining viable and actionable possibilities for connection based on the results of the study. This approach helped frame the findings of the research to determine how information can be used to ascertain the scope of Indigenous heritage collections, how people access them, the attitudes they have toward their ability to access the collections, how legislation impacts this access, and how technology plays a role in accessing collections to connect them with communities.

Based on the application of Anthony Shelton's (2013) epistemological positions for a critical museology framework, Alissandra Cummins' (2004) Caribbean museum engagement propositions, and Jorge Ulloa's (2009) call to study the Dominican Republic's archaeological heritage in light of new scientific progress, Indigenous heritage collections and communities in the Dominican Republic have opportunities to connect in the following ways:

a) Identification and scrutiny of narratives and assemblage of collections (Shelton 2013, 9-10)

The disconnect of communities from Indigenous heritage collections starts with the narratives of colonial extinction, which, for centuries, placed the native peoples of the Caribbean outside the historical scope of the nation's making. Centuries of enslavement that fed economic and religious models bled the colonies dry of their Indigenous identity (Laguer Díaz 2013; Hall 1999). The legacies of the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean continue to be represented as part of a distant past (Cummins 2004). Museums with Indigenous heritage collections in the Dominican Republic have lagged in updating their exhibitions to reflect the importance of Indigenous heritage knowledge to modern-day Dominicans (Ulloa-Hung 2009). Openly recognizing these culturally defining omissions is a much-needed first step in laying the foundation for community connections. Identifying how these knowledge gaps

have been replicated and have contributed to erasing the Indigenous narratives behind the European-based assemblages of items is essential in conceiving new assemblages of Indigenous heritage artifacts.

b) Recognition of how private subjective collecting practices have perpetuated the 'truth effect' in museum displays (Shelton 2013, 10-11).

Private collectors have long contributed to the formation of significant institutions that have allowed access to seeing important Indigenous heritage collections to a wide audience. Nevertheless, the permeation of souvenir accumulation and systematic collecting practices (Stewart 1984, Pearce 1994c) that have been naturalized by museums (Shelton 2001; 2013, 10) is still latent in most museums with Indigenous heritage collections in the Dominican Republic. The chronologically linear displays of the scientific classification of Indigenous heritage collections overpowered any knowledge that would mean to integrate cultural identity as part of the historical narrative beyond the veneration as part of museum objects (Ulloa-Hung 2009, 6-7).

The collector's subjective nature of collecting (Shelton 2013; Owen 2006; Pearce 1994c), although meant to contribute to the typological classification of Caribbean archaeology, shaped Dominican museums that were formed by objects taken out of context through amateur excavations or looting of archaeological sites. To establish connections between communities and these founding collector's legacies, museums need to disrupt the mediated relationships between collectors and objects that have largely gone uncontested (Lonetree 2012). The problematic nature of these relationships has to be addressed by engaging communities in dialogues to reflect how collectors have contributed to rigid heritage interpretations that claim the Indigenous heritage recognized in contemporary Dominican society has only been linked through social memory.

c) Community knowledge versus institutional or legislative mediation (Shelton 2013, 11-12)

Examining the knowledge communities gain by accessing Indigenous heritage collections may be a significant first step in challenging the current channels of knowledge mediation, such as exhibition scripts and guided tours in museums. The in-depth examination of how museums with traditional exhibitions portray the Indigenous past through collections can then be linked with formal education and academic institutions with a broader mediation

structure connecting with the educational community (Ariese 2018). A community's social and economic realities and educational desires must be considered so that the communities can define the terms of their own connections. Understanding the complexities of a community's context can be key to developing effective means to mediate connections. This understanding is important even when communities have little knowledge of the Indigenous contribution to their local history, or if they do not know what the legal implications of having an archaeological collection may be.

d) Deconstruction of traditional displays (Shelton 2013, 11-12)

Even if they are maintained as the central means of connecting collections and communities, school activities cannot continue to take place only within traditional museum walls or modes of display. Mediated exhibitions for different types of communities where different types of strategies are used for interpretation need to be conscious of the different needs that the respective communities have in their desire to connect with Indigenous heritage collections. Furthermore, moving away from the traditional portrayals of contact and colonial period relations that hierarchize European perspectives will aid in breaking away from tendencies to accentuate extraordinary objects (Lyon and Harris 1995). For connections to be integrated into a community's cultural life, the ways in which heritage objects can be exhibited need to consider how communities transfer knowledge in informal settings. Community members need to have the capacity to create connections within their cultural, social, and economic context on their own terms: for example, identifying which heritage experiences communities would like to implement in their local context, whether through online experiences where they could contribute using digital platforms, or creating their own heritage displays in nontraditional spaces in the local community.

A critical museology framework serves as a foundation for disrupting the traditional ways of conceiving museum displays and programming, and in the Dominican museological context, there are implementable and potentially far-reaching aspects of this framework. The scrutiny of current narratives through enriched educational approaches in the already existing relations between museums and communities can be even more productive to address the educational community's concerns. A significant pathway to follow is one of collaborative work to strengthen how students and teachers become aware of the diverse local options for this access. These options depend on the available resources and may be accessed through local initiatives to display archaeological material found in the area as teachers adapt school

curricula to better incorporate how they use Indigenous heritage collections to teach about Indigenous culture.

This framework helps the Dominican Republic embrace the paradigm shift (Weil 1999) that places people at the center of interaction with Indigenous heritage objects and does this with a critical mindset. The deconstruction of formal and traditional heritage structures into more flexible and diverse ones calls for increased accessibility to and engagement with Indigenous heritage collections to design inclusive connections between collections and communities. The state and private collectors have to take a backseat as the concept of custodianship is better understood by communities, collectors, and heritage officials, and managers. A better understanding may facilitate access at different levels, and foster connections with the communities that collecting institutions say they wish to serve. The exhibition-centered format, with top-down approaches to presenting cultural information through collections, can shift faster toward a more engaging interaction with historical narratives in the Dominican Republic if all stakeholders agree on identifying connections to create safe spaces for the discussion of preservation and education.

In analyzing the program offerings for visitors, it was observed that Dominican museums do not follow current museum trends that have moved away from displaying accumulated objects (Hooper-Greenhill 2007; Pearce 1990). When considering connections between museums and communities, the only consistent offering museums have in common is the general tour of collections. The museum staff is too poorly skilled to design educational programs or conduct academic research that could help fulfill their community's educational needs.

Dominican museums with Indigenous heritage collections have failed to renew their exhibitions and heritage policy, and many of them still have exhibition scripts based on strictly classificatory research. This has further contributed to the disconnect with communities by limiting access to cultural information that objects can help convey. The respondents in this study seemed to be concerned more about the missed educational opportunities than valuing the tradition of collecting heritage objects, which was the basis for the formation of many of the public and private museums that hold Indigenous objects today. There does not seem to be an interest in major and ever-changing exhibitions. Still, most respondents expressed a recurrent concern about the need to change decades-old museographies to make it attractive for people to visit museums. This resonates with what the

literature also finds. For Tony Bennett (1998), the criticism of inadequate display practices, inherited from the nineteenth-century knowledge-ordering tendencies, emphasizes content and how content must reflect the knowledge of the constituencies that have historically been neglected.

### 7.3 Critical community connections through improved access

When discussing with collectors what were potential measures to allow better access to their collections, an attitude of reservation or despair in their answers was detected, as all collectors had hoped at one point or another to secure better financial support from the government or the private sector. The collectors that expressed having plans to either open or expand their visiting capabilities seemed more confident of counting on foreign tourist visits than domestic visitors, despite school audiences being the primary public audience of museums in the Dominican Republic. Even those collectors that described the government and officials as untrustworthy due to the state's incapacity to care for its public collections still hope for legislation that can facilitate the creation of museums through tax incentives for the private sector, bringing more collections to tourism-oriented areas in the country as well as to collections and resources that support research and the creation of educational programs.

Collectors and heritage managers hope for more economic support to display or care for collections and for legislation that better protects them and facilitates local and international collaborations. In contrast, public officials hope for legislation that can better monitor private collectors and provide the conditions to improve monitoring capacity. Across the spectrum of concerns, all respondents agree that the lack of political will is an issue that continues to manifest and that no one is addressing publicly or strategically. For better access, most people believe improvements have to take place through the formal educational and cultural structures in government—such as the ministries. As the access to collections can be related to the identification of power relations—social, economic, and cultural (Stylianou-Lamber 2010), the presentation of museum narratives that motivate communities to identify such relations can be a tool to gear critical reflection. Improving the way information about Indigenous heritage is presented to the public through collections is a significant concern in increasing access and was the main point interviewees mentioned when asked what they thought could motivate people to learn more about Indigenous heritage collections. Current and former public sector officials emphasized the need for better educational activities and materials to be incorporated on visits to Indigenous heritage collections.

If museums with Indigenous heritage collections wish to better connect with visitors, developing programs for adults and children to access museum collections (Hooper-Greenhill 2007) must be at the center of creating connections. Workshops on heritage conservation and archaeological knowledge were ranked as the most interesting by respondents. About half of all respondents saw high value in activities related to arts and crafts, cultural events with explanations, dance and theater, and material accessible through the internet. Further, half of the respondents felt that visiting Indigenous heritage collections helped them better understand who they are by having obtained knowledge on the topic.

The majority of participants also indicated a desire to want greater access to Indigenous heritage collections because they perceived it would give them access to more knowledge. When asked what would make respondents feel more connected with Indigenous heritage collections, learning about the origins of the collections, understanding them better, and having access to more research were the most frequent answers. In considering how this could be leveraged to build connections, respondents indicated that catalogs and magazines were the preferred forms for learning resources, and the most convenient digital resources were books and magazines. Having access to object labels and images was not indicated as frequently. Responses point to a significant need to create connections with Indigenous heritage collections that allow communities to feel they own their local narratives. This can increase the sense of ownership of objects that, by law, are considered part of the nation's cultural assets, but that in reality are continuously exposed to looting, destruction, and illegal trafficking. Without a sense of community ownership and a lack of multivocal engagement, Indigenous heritage collections will continue to be seen as vestiges of a remote past, and interest in preservation and protection will continue to be low.

### *7.3.1 Access through geographical decentralization*

Indigenous heritage collections in the Dominican Republic are essential resources that provide valuable information on the history of the original settlers of the island of Hispaniola and the rest of the Caribbean. The collections help illustrate the complex social, cultural, and economic interactions among the groups that first populated the region in a more vibrant way than the outdated literature used to teach Indigenous history in schools. Learning about the scope of the Indigenous heritage collections serves as a platform to better understand how they formed, where they are located, how they are managed, and how different communities are using them.

The research conducted to identify the scope of public and private Indigenous heritage collections revealed that those accessible to the public vary in both breadth and depth. The collections have primarily been assembled with outdated collecting practices and suffer from under-documentation and lack a geographical context. Almost all of the museums are geographically located in large urban areas, limiting informational and physical access to the cultural knowledge these objects transmit to city-dwellers. These findings can help in addressing broader issues of rural and urban identity formation, facilitating access to the knowledge heritage collections produce, imposing regulation through legislation, and improving education to foster connections between communities and collections that can realistically contribute to significant multivocal engagements and multicultural inclusion. The use of interpretation strategies to mediate these engagements have to be designed with the intent to break stereotypes (Crooke 2010).

The Dominican Republic has had five public and seven private Indigenous heritage collections since the initial attempt to establish a national museum in 1927. The primary public and private institutions are located either in the country's capital or its largest urban areas, despite the fact that the provenance of archaeological collections is not urban, but instead from coastal and mountain excavations or the rural areas of provinces. The centralization of collection displays in the capital or major industrial cities—such as Santiago and La Romana—was a concern to the interviewees. Their discontent reflects a concern about having these cultural resources available only in major cities, which can limit access only to those who can afford the travel expenses. The survey respondents indicated not visiting museums partly due to transportation costs. The geographical centralization of the collections poses constraints of time and distance for visitors, especially the educational community, as it may take at least an entire day for schools to visit the well-known collections.

As the survey responses have shown, more than half of the people consulted expressed having visited a museum with an Indigenous heritage collection, the majority of those being from Santo Domingo. The higher visitation rate in Santo Domingo may be attributed to it having the most significant Indigenous heritage collections in the country (the Museo del Hombre Dominicano and the Sala de Arte Prehispánico); further, transportation is more readily available in Santo Domingo.

The locations of these collections are significant, since time, distance, and transportation were listed as main deterrents by those who had indicated they had not visited

a museum. The concentration of the collections in larger or more densely populated industrial cities, besides the capital city—which also has three minor collections within other institutions—can be attributed to the private effort to enhance cultural attractions to draw tourists. For example, La Romana Province is a hub of tourism with the Casa de Campo Resort and Villas, which manages Altos de Chavón's cultural village which was free to visit to anyone wanting to enjoy a dynamic cultural and artistic civic space? for the 35 years before it became a gated residential area. The Regional Museum of Archaeology was built in Altos de Chavón to enrich the artistic and cultural offerings for high-end tourists. Similarly in Santiago, the Centro Cultural Eduardo León Jimenes also acquired the custody rights of a private collection to make the city a center for excellence in arts and culture in the Caribbean region and attract national and international visitors.

*7.3.2 Access through the documentation of objects*

The documentation of heritage collections is a fundamental part of the development of conservation and management systems. The documentation of objects (which may consist of inventories, catalogues, and information on provenance, acquisition, or archaeological context) contributes to understanding the history and nature of the objects and can be used to determine conservation needs and research aims. The documentation of objects also helps to identify illicit trafficking threats and create educational materials.

In this study, the majority of the public officials, heritage managers, and collectors consulted agreed that collections do not have enough documentation. A review of collection-related documents also indicates that the number of under-documented objects in exhibitions and large storage areas in both public and private collections is an area of difficulty for Indigenous heritage management. The problematic state of collections' historical and archaeological documentation could be related to the documentation standards of former times; most of the collections that are accessible to the public today, as well as those that have closed, seem to have been formed in times when massive accumulation was the norm, and the documentation was of a classificatory nature.

An accumulation tendency is discerned in the description of the legislative mandate for the creation of the Instituto Dominicano de Investigaciones Antropológicas (INDIA). This institute, the first of its kind, was founded with the private collection of its first director, Emile de Boyrie Moya (Pina 1978). Part of his collection was moved back and forth between the institute and the Museo del Hombre Dominicano, leaving no documentation behind.

Even for the public institutions that remain open (Museo del Hombre Dominicano, the museum at the Parque Arqueológico Nacional La Isabela, and the Faro a Colon), the documentation systems of the collections that are under the care of these institutions have not been improved. In the private sector, of the five Indigenous heritage collections open to the public, two of the ones that are overseen by larger institutions (Museo Antropológico de la Universidad Central del Este and Museo Dr. Estrada) have been closed to the public for more than two decades. No official documentation information was found for either collection.

La Caleta, one of the first public heritage sites to be excavated using scientific methods, has been closed to the public since at least 1999. The researcher was not able to find detailed information on inventories of the excavation finds at the Museo del Hombre Dominicano, where part of the collection is supposed to be on display. The researcher did not locate information on which objects from the La Caleta excavations were integrated into the Museo del Hombre Dominicano's main exhibits. When a site visit was done in the year 2000, local community members reported that it had been closed with an iron gate because it had been deteriorating and being looted since Hurricane George in 1998. This was confirmed again in 2019 when the researcher went back to see if the building had been restored.

Records of the objects found during the archaeological excavations at La Caleta in Santo Domingo were challenging to locate. The only place where an inventory from La Caleta's first excavations was located was at the Center for the Inventory of Cultural Goods. The original inventory document was relatively well preserved despite the lack of environmental control systems. The more significant references to these archaeological finds are in articles in the Museo del Hombre Dominicano's annual bulletin, the museum's longest-running official publication. There is even less of a paper trail for the collections that are understood to still be under the custody of the Universidad Central del Este in, the province of San Pedro de Macorís in the east, and the municipal library in Azua in the southwest, which formerly housed part of Dr. Estrada Torre's collection. The poor state of documentation for the three collections that have closed is similar to that of the basic initial inventories of private collections in records kept at the Center for the Inventory of Cultural Goods, as explained in Chapter 5; this is the centralized public institution that is supposed to keep information about all public and private collections in the country.

The review of documents for this study revealed a lack of documentation for most collections, hence a significant void in information regarding the context in which the objects

were excavated. The poor documentation systems most likely reflect the collecting practices of the time. As the value of the collections was increasingly tied to economic and aesthetic factors, their cultural and historical value decreased. Several collectors spoke of the rush they felt to purchase complete objects under the claim to avoid its illicit traffic outside of the country, while disregarding ceramic sherds that usually accompanied the sales pitch as part of a group of pieces found together.

Nevertheless, while lacking in object documentation, the lives of the collectors and their contribution to the nation's cultural enrichment seem to have been better documented. While collectors' biographies do not speak of international conquering adventures, there are similarities to the literature reviewed to learn about the documentation of Caribbean objects. The documentation and valuation of the collections is proportional to the reputation of the collector (Joyce 2013; Chippindale and Gill 2000; Vilches 2004; Sackler 1998). In the case of Dominican Indigenous heritage collections open to the public, all address the life-long interest of the collectors in caring for the objects collected, either through printed text panels or orally during guided visits.

Literature about museum collections with Indigenous heritage from the Americas criticizes the emphasis placed on highlighting more travel tales of those that gathered objects instead of the cultural narratives embedded in the objects that were taken back to Europe as evidence of the exotic places conquered (Vilches 2004; Keating and Markey 2011; MacDonald 2002; Daros and Colten 2009; Owen 2006; Serna 2011). A pattern was recognized on the literature similar to Indigenous heritage collections in the Dominican Republic. Whether it is on institutional brochures or articles about the objects, each publication at some point highlights the life and achievements of the original collector, how the objects were gathered, and how they became available to the public. It was observed from publications and proceedings from museum conferences in the Dominican Republic, that it has been deemed important to know who the pioneer collectors were. There are several presentations in conferences, seminars or commemorating events that highlight how private collectors have contributed to the establishment of archaeological collections for public enjoyment, and how they have also contributed to attracting international collaborators in archaeological research, which eventually aided in the professionalization of archaeological research in the country (Tavares Maria and García Arévalo 2005). However, the focus on the collectors and their search adventures also eclipses the shortcomings of the documentation of Indigenous heritage collections and the potential revision of Indigenous narratives. As

discussed in Chapter 2, studies point out how tales of explorers have eclipsed the documentation of cultural material.

Since the 1970s, heritage legislation has been established for public and private institutions, as well as for private citizens with Indigenous heritage collections, to ensure a minimum of documentation with at least minimal information on collection inventories. After reviewing the documents available at the Center for the Inventory of Cultural Goods within the Department of Monumental Heritage at the Ministry of Culture, it is identifiable that there has been minimal registration compliance on the part of significant public and private institutions that have Indigenous heritage collections. The original inventories of two of the leading private collections, with handwritten notes (Figure 31), were the closest versions of official records related to the inventory of the Museo del Hombre Dominicano.

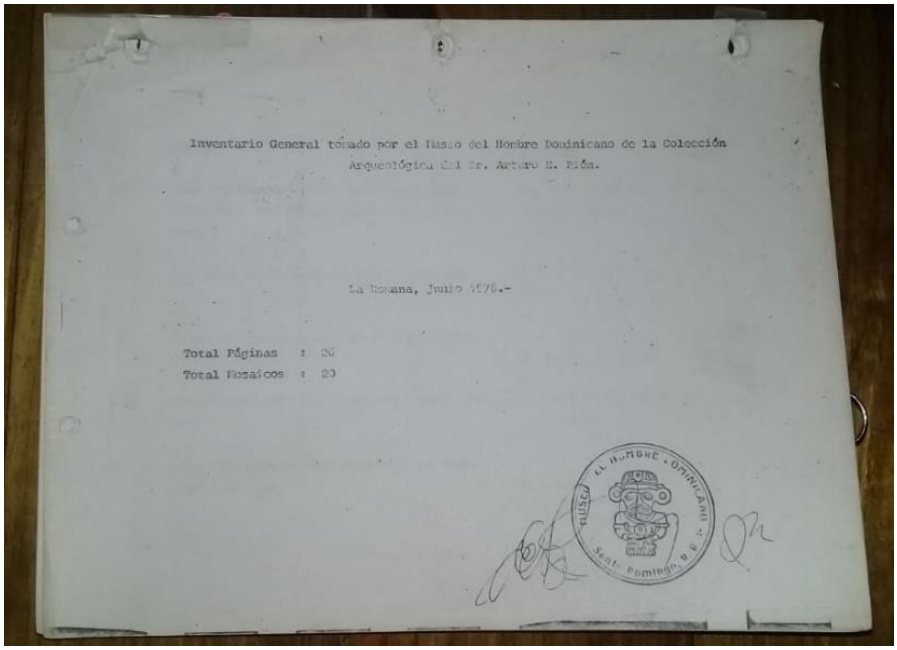


**Figure 31** Page of the first inventory for the Samuel Pion collection done by the Museo del Hombre Dominicano. Photo by author, 2015.

The center's staff mentioned that there was a robust inventory for the Centro León's Indigenous heritage collection—although they could not locate the physical copy. The rest of the inventories reviewed were general lists of objects with very short descriptions. An undated list of objects belonging to the collection of Bernardo Vega, the original custodian of the current collection on display at the Centro León Jimenes. The document text suggests that the Centro León Jimenes created its own inventory system as it received the collection transferred from Bernardo Vega's custody. This type of up-to-date documentation, registered

at the Center for the Inventory of Cultural Goods, constitutes a first of its kind, setting a precedent for heritage institutions that care for collections but are not directly involved in archaeological research.

In the private sector, only the Centro León and the Sala de Arte Pre-hispánico indicated having an updated inventory of its complete collection, also in digital form, and both institutions have conservation personnel. The Altos de Chavón Regional Museum of Archaeology has a partial inventory, as it had not yet finished adding images to its files with object descriptions for objects that were added to the collection after 1981. Funds had never been assigned for the digitization of the entire collection, both in the exhibition and in storage. The only complete inventory with numbers, descriptions, photographs, and measurements is the inventory done by the Museo del Hombre Dominicano in 1978 that was passed on when the Bluhdorn Charitable Trust acquired the rights of the Samuel Pión collection. The 1978 inventory has been digitized and enriched with more descriptive object information.

In the public sector, over several visits to its library to review collection archives, personnel from the Museo del Hombre Dominicano expressed that inventory documents were outdated. There were no available digital files of two known inventories that have been compiled. Only physical files of archaeological objects of Indigenous and colonial production were kept, namely in binders that dated from 1981 and 1989. In subsequent visits to the Museo del Hombre Dominicano library, neither copy was possible to locate. Further inquiry of staff revealed that the copies were kept at the director's office. At the end of 2017, the Museo del Hombre Dominicano began a remodeling project headed by architects from the Office of the Presidency, and museum staff expressed that the objects were being placed in temporary storage hastily. The staff members that were interviewed indicated that there was a plan to update the inventory as remodeling works took place throughout the museum, but no clear plan was shared. One staff member also expressed discontent with what he perceived was a lack of intention to involve the staff in the Office of the Presidency's remodeling project (personal communication with senior staff and museum researcher).

The Center for the Inventory of Cultural Goods seems to have the most documents for inventories of Indigenous heritage collections that date to the late 1970s and early 1980s. It can be considered that this is the only period when collections were cataloged regularly and consistently. The Center had what seemed to be a significant inventory of the excavated

materials found at La Caleta in 1972. The center also had a copy of the 1981 inventory of the Museo del Hombre Dominicano, similar to the one found in the Museo del Hombre Dominicano's library. Since both inventories of Samuel Pión's collection dated from 1979 (compiled by the Museo del Hombre Dominicano), and the 1981 inventory of Manuel García Arévalo's collection was also found at the center.

The deterioration of the pages that comprised the physical documents of both La Caleta's excavation record as well as the Museo del Hombre Dominicano's inventory (Manuel García Arévalo and Samuel Pión's original inventories compiled by the Museo del Hombre Dominicano), reflect the poor conservation conditions that exist at the Center for the Inventory of Cultural Goods, which was last visited by the researcher in 2016. Their office is housed in a colonial building whose construction dates back to the sixteenth century. It lacks climate control units and dehumidifiers in the document storage areas, and even an air-conditioning system for the staff's comfort, which would also generally help in the conservation of documents. The cabinet files were placed near mildew-ridden walls. When the staff was questioned about the conditions, they indicated that they had submitted reports to improve both work and conservation conditions at the center. Still, they had received no formal response from the Ministry of Culture.

The reasons that Roberto Cassá (n.d.) lists for the poor survival of historical records when referring to the colonial history of the country can be related to the current documentation issues that institutions with Indigenous heritage collections open to the public face. Based on the document review to ascertain the inventory of public and private collections, damage from climatic conditions and official administrative carelessness still seem to be significant factors affecting the capacity of institutions to conserve collection documentation. The lack of care and continued negligence to undermine any legislative regulation that might have attempted to create systematic documentation. The loss of the documentation for the Universidad Central del Este's museum due to flooding from Hurricane Georges attests to this. The lack of staff to follow up on the reporting status of collections affects not only the private sector but also the public sector. The unlocated inventory for the archaeological collection at the INDIA, housed by the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, only speaks of the institutional incapacity to keep track of the cultural material in its care, much less collections in the care of private citizens. The lack of trained personnel and funds to have the inventory updated by archaeological professionals has perpetuated the Altos de Chavón Regional Museum's practices of under-documentation.

Although there is no updated documentation for the collections displayed at the Museo del Hombre Dominicano, the 1980s inventories remain a significant source of information. It seems as if researchers have created better documentation systems for inventorying objects found in archaeological excavations done after the year 2000 that usually placed in storage. During conferences or seminars, it was observed that reports of excavated objects have increased. More recent reports found in the museum's library include documentation of objects in storage. These reports have been submitted by the individual institutions or researchers that lead research projects.

Under-documentation places collections at risk. Having poor or no records makes it more challenging to track lost objects due to misplacement, theft, or illicit trafficking. As most public and private institutions with Indigenous heritage collections open to the public have insufficient collection documentation and technology, collection information is not freely available digitally. Collection management systems are in place for some institutions, but databases are not freely available either. This affects the potential for community connections and possibilities for scientific study that can contribute to enriching how communities engage with Indigenous heritage collections.

The confirmation of the conventional under-documentation of Indigenous heritage collections demonstrates the latent need to create a better bedrock for managing Indigenous heritage resources. Creative, academic, scientific, and community-based approaches are needed to provide better context for more productive and impactful use of Indigenous heritage in public and private collections. Any approach would need to include educational and regulatory components to guarantee that communities outside of Dominican urban areas, especially in rural places, can still have access to and connect with the nation's cultural treasures.

### *7.3.3 A thorny legislative path to heritage access*

The second research question of the study was how current Dominican heritage laws hinder or foster community access to archaeological collections. Through the analysis of documentation and interviews with heritage officials, heritage managers, and collectors, it was found that the current poor capacity for legislative implementation and monitoring hinders community access to public and private Indigenous heritage collections. Negligence in the care and supervision of these collections has contributed to their disconnect from the community while permitting the looting and disappearance of objects without consequences.

The history of the creation of Indigenous heritage collections and museums in the Dominican Republic has been subjected to an interrupted road of laws that remain on paper and have seldom seen full implementation. From the first piece of heritage legislation in 1870 to the first comprehensive set of regulations for museums in 2007, 137 years passed before the country had a heritage policy that could be referenced internationally. The latest modification to the constitution, which has had 39 modifications since 1844 (Vargas 2018), explicitly declares the preservation of archaeological heritage to fall under collective rights in Section IV, in which "the state recognizes general collective rights and interests to consequently protect and preserve cultural, historic, urbanistic, artistic, architectural and archaeological heritage" (Congreso Nacional de la República Dominicana, Constitución 2015, Art. 66).

In a more general manner, the current Constitution stipulates that the National Congress has the power to arrange all aspects regarding the conservation of monuments and historical, cultural, and artistic heritage (Congreso Nacional de la República Dominicana, Constitución 2015, Art. 93). The Cultural and Sports Rights section of the 2015 Constitution very eloquently declares that every person has a "right to participate and act with liberty and without censorship in the cultural life of the nation and have full access to and enjoyment of cultural goods and services" (Congreso Nacional de la República Dominicana, Constitución 2015, Art. 64, para. 1). These stipulations did not change from the ones laid out in the 2010 constitution. The amended constitution of 2010 represented a seminal milestone in recognition of state-guaranteed cultural rights, as it contained a significant elaboration of the policy of cultural rights that had been under extensive development (Congreso Nacional de la República Dominicana, Constitución 2010) since the constitution of 1994 (Congreso Nacional de la República Dominicana, Constitución 1994, Art. 101).

The unambiguous and positive recognition of citizens' rights to the nation's cultural life and products, as in the Constitutions of 2010 and 2015, provide excellent legislative grounds to justify the need for better monitoring practices. The heritage law that in effect formed the Ministry of Culture was passed in the year 2000; this also created the National Museum Network, under the General Directorate of Museums, within the Sub-ministry of Cultural Heritage. The National Museum Network developed the first regulations to enable public museums to follow norms and procedures, which included recommendations for private museums (De Peña 2007). The monitoring of adherence to heritage regulations, however, remains minimal.

As explored in previous chapters, current Dominican heritage law defines cultural heritage as comprising of

> all the cultural goods, values, and symbols tangible and intangible that are expressions of the Dominican nation, such as the traditions, the customs, and the habits, as well as the group of goods, including those underwater, material and immaterial, movable and immovable property, that possess a unique historical, artistic, aesthetic, fine arts, architectural, urban, archaeological, environmental, linguistic, sound, audiovisual, film, scientific, technological, testimonial, documentary, literary, bibliographic, museographical, anthropological interest and manifestations, the products and the representations of popular culture (Congreso Nacional de la República Dominicana, Ley 41-00 of 2000, Art. 1, numeral 2).

Furthermore, in its third paragraph, Article 47 assigned the present-day Ministry of Culture as the entity in charge of evaluating existing regulation for the protection of heritage, including the

> […] technical and scientific identification of places in which archaeological goods could be found or that could be contiguous to archaeological areas, it will make the respective declarations and will draft a special plan for protection, in collaboration with the rest of the authorities and institutions at the national level (Congreso Nacional de la República Dominicana, Ley 41-00 of 2000).

The law does not incorporate the word "Indigenous" into its descriptive list of what constitutes heritage goods. In a broad and general manner, Dominican legislation has proven rather abstract in its description of how the state can intervene with cultural matters. Institutions and individuals see the state as ineffectual within the heritage sector. There has been no specific roadmap for tackling how better to engage communities with the country's archaeological heritage. The concept of "Indigenous heritage" has long been disassociated from legislative language. The architectural vision of heritage, as based on colonial architecture, has dominated preservation and protection discussions, and research on the vast archaeological heritage has been relegated (Ulloa-Hung 2009).

Moreover, national news outlets have pointed out how inefficient the state has been in applying the legislation, and the following reasons have been cited:

> lack of effective mechanisms to implement sanctions, lack of a cultural heritage inventory, deficiencies in the application of the legislation when it comes to archaeological heritage, capriciously and poorly done works of conservation, orphaned regulations for the material cultural heritage, no protection for immaterial culture, Eurocentrism, supplanting of skills, centralization, budget issues, and abandonment of Republican-era cultural heritage (Espinal 2016, personal translation)

Yet nothing happens. Since 2009, there have been proposals to modify the legislation to include the recognition of private citizens' ownership of heritage objects, even when heritage is under the safeguard of the state. The efforts have not been successful, as a comprehensive agreement between the different parties' interests has not been reached. A 2017 draft, commonly described as a proposal of a law, went even further in stipulating how swiftly the state could act to intervene to protect and recuperate what is considered to be under the safeguard of the state. Nevertheless, the current regulations are only referenced in printed materials. The topic of governmental regulation in the heritage sector tends to only come to light in theoretical discussions at conferences or in media articles when criticizing the state of some museums. The different heritage institutions have overlapping responsibilities, and the heritage agencies are understaffed and have under-skilled personnel overseeing the implementation and monitoring of the legislation. Heritage institutions have management systems that are obsolete, and there are still significant issues of unclear centralization protocols that have to be considered for the legal registration and conservation of public and private Indigenous heritage collections.

The different Dominican government entities that deal with the conservation, preservation, and protection of the country's Indigenous heritage stand at odds with each other, as there are still no clear regulations explicitly on how and who cares for Indigenous heritage. The Ministry of Culture has under its umbrella several institutions that overlap in duties and lack an understanding of how public and private Indigenous heritage collections are to be managed, and what are the specific responsibilities of each public agency that is supposed to supervise the implementation of heritage regulations.

The concerns related to the legislative aspects of managing Indigenous heritage collections can be recognized in Lyndsay's (2012) legal and moral claims of belonging. The simplicity of the presentation of Indigenous heritage narratives through public and private collections aligns with Lindsay's argument of how objects have been used to manipulate political discourse and how looting has, in some instances, become a glorified act (2012). As recounted in the history of the development of heritage legislation (Chapter 4) and in interviews with participants in the study (Chapter 6), in the Dominican Republic, looting has taken place for decades in spite of all archaeological objects being considered property of the state.

Despite the numerous heritage laws and the regulatory mechanisms that the Dominican government has created, implementation has been poor at best—and, in the case of monitoring, almost nonexistent—for over a century. The deficient implementation and monitoring have hindered access to Indigenous heritage collections on many levels. As the monitoring mechanisms have not been properly put into effect, different communities have had limited access to the knowledge that the study and enjoyment of these collections generate. As the poor implementation and monitoring have remained throughout time, the level of access to collections has remained the same. Neither public nor private collections that exhibit Indigenous heritage objects have been forced to make changes to how they allow people to see objects or how documentation is to be kept or expanded. The stagnant legislation and the lack of action in catching up to museological standards have led to many missed opportunities to address the paradigm shift of focusing less on the classification of objects at museums and more on what people may learn from them. Better implementation and monitoring of heritage legislation can provide opportunities to connect communities and collections through multivocal and inclusive initiatives by having local communities at the heart of the design of such connections.

### *7.3.4 Attitudes toward access to Indigenous heritage collections*

As explained in earlier chapters, for the present research, "access" refers to how people obtain information about Indigenous heritage collections. The access could be physical: through visits to public and private museums or seeing a private citizen's collection in a private space. Access also refers to viewing printed media or digital forms of books, magazines, articles, photographs, videos, or cultural and educational activities related to the island's Indigenous peoples in which objects created by them are featured or discussed.

Survey respondents consider having access to Indigenous heritage collections valuable in understanding Dominican society and history. The more collections are available for access, the more people assume they will learn. The survey responses helped identify the value assigned to Indigenous heritage collections and the types of activities that could motivate members of the educational, heritage, and local communities to learn more about them, feel more connected, and become more engaged to contribute to identity discussion and participate in preservation efforts. According to the survey results, the respondents want better access to Indigenous heritage collections because they think it would give them more knowledge on the topic. They believe that learning about the origins of the objects,

understanding the collections better, having greater access to research, and learning how to care for the objects could help lead them to a better understanding of Dominican history and society.

Survey respondents highly value arts and crafts, cultural events with explanations, materials made available through the internet, and dance and theater activities as possible avenues for connecting Indigenous heritage collections with communities. Further, the top three activities that were of high interest to community members are visiting archaeological sites, learning how objects are made, and learning about Indigenous lifeways. The responses suggest a keen interest in interactive approaches to obtaining more information than what is currently presented in museum exhibitions and collections.

Even though respondents indicated that their primary access to Indigenous heritage collections has been through mandatory school visits or guided tours, the majority also indicated wanting to access more collections to acquire more knowledge on Indigenous heritage. Because most of the exhibition scripts were designed between 10 and 40 years ago, the diversity of Indigenous heritage is not adequately portrayed in the current exhibitions. Respondents see them as having outdated information. Therefore, their wanting access to more Indigenous heritage collections suggests that they assume they will obtain more robust information about Indigenous history.

The interviews revealed that while the majority of participants have a professional academic background, their interest in heritage-related work stems from a childhood or early adulthood interest in history or culture. They often shared memories related to early experiences with heritage objects, museums, or oral histories told by teachers or parents. Exposure to heritage collections in the respondents' early education years had the long-term effect of their forming emotional connections with these collections and may have influenced their later interest in heritage-related work. The early relationship with such objects is reflected in literature on the psychological and social reasons for collecting (Pearce 1999; 1992). Early heritage-related experiences also seemed to have been vital for public officials whose posts were related to heritage management, even when their posts were politically assigned.

In the cases of the collectors consulted, most of them began collecting artifacts in their youth after hearing from parents or teachers about Indigenous histories and the sherds that are still found on public and private land in most provinces in the country. Some even

indicated that they were still in possession of the first objects they had found. The literature regarding psychological reasons for collecting supports these findings too. For example, Susan Pearce (1992, 92) addresses how "collections are a significant element in our attempt to construct the world, and so the effort to understand them is one way of exploring our relationship with the world". Early connections with objects seem to have been an essential part of deciphering cultural meaning for the people interviewed. Therefore, early exposure to Indigenous heritage objects signals opportunities to better understand and connect with local history. All the collectors expressed having the desire, since the time they started collecting, for a publicly accessible museum for their collections. The desire seems to have continued into adulthood, as half of the collectors consulted had invested their resources in either institutionally forming museums or turning their personal and family spaces into exhibitions, for the most part free of charge to those interested in visiting. The collectors interviewed who have not opened their private collections to the public expressed the hope of finding the financial support to be able to open a museum. All the collectors with open exhibitions also wished to have more economic support to improve the conditions in which their collections are shown.

The interview participants' strong emotional links with the history of the objects seemed to drive their collecting practices. Several collectors indicated still having an interest in collecting, and expressed the duty of protection they feel, as they view their collecting practices as a way to prevent objects from being taken out of the country illegally. The poor level of implementation of the country's heritage legislation also contributes to such a view, as the focus of care within the archaeology and museum fields continues to be on objects and not on the study of the context of these artifacts. This ostensibly patriotic motive seems to undermine the damage to the archaeological record that the purchase of these decontextualized objects does. The collectors do not seem to acknowledge that significant historical information is lost when the objects are taken out of their archaeological context. Contextless objects are deprived of details that can enrich the Indigenous narrative that the study of archaeological sites reveals. Although the majority of collectors expressed at least a basic knowledge of the legislation in terms of their role as custodians, not owners, of the objects, it seemed that even those who were no longer collecting would keep doing it if they had the resources. By contrast, those who continued to collect wished for an even higher capacity to collect. They see their role as that of protectors rather than liabilities to the heritage market cycle.

The patterns that emerged from interviewees' concerns may hold insights as to what could be given priority for improving the attitudes of members of the educational, heritage, governmental, and local communities toward collections access. The interview responses showed that the most common concern was the protection of Indigenous heritage collections—from theft and illicit trafficking, inadequate monitoring, insufficient inventories, and destruction of sites due to looting and urban or touristic development, as respondents acknowledge the destruction of valuable heritage information. Another frequent concern of the interview participants was education, as all respondents believed that there is a pressing need to improve how Indigenous heritage is taught, based on the use of outdated materials in schools, outdated displays in museums, lack of research, and poorly trained teachers. The participants expressed concern over the value people assign to Indigenous collections; their responses signaled a need to make it more evident how vital collections are toward understanding Dominican society. The lack of political will to implement heritage legislation, enact protection measures, and have adequately trained heritage professionals overseeing the care of collections could wrap up a five-point heritage plan to connect communities with Indigenous heritage collections by improved efforts in protection, education, value, personnel, and political will. The literature covering the interplay of education and heritage (Con Aguilar 2018 et al.; Lindh and Haider 2009) demonstrates the adjustments that must be made both in the classroom—incorporating effective and low-cost teaching strategies to create better connections between curriculum content and local heritage— and in museums, through improved documentation efforts to incorporate better object displays and other communication strategies into the museum education approach.

### 7.4 Ways of accessing Indigenous heritage collections through multivocality and inclusiveness

The third research question of the present study focused on learning how communities access Dominican Indigenous heritage collections. Results showed that most collections are accessed through the traditional model of school visits and primarily contemplative guided tours. The traditional school visit is led by a museum guide who tends to restate the information printed on the panels and labels of the display cases, which proceed in chronological order. Students and teachers are usually passive listeners.

In the Dominican Republic, the Ministry of Education encourages visits to museums through curriculum-based lesson planning for the fourth through sixth grades. The participation of schools is generally limited to guided tours as part of mandatory school visits;

guided tours were the activities cited by most survey respondents, especially for the National District and the provinces of La Romana and La Altagracia.

Survey respondents believed that the main challenges in making Indigenous heritage collections more accessible relate largely to finances, followed by personnel issues and helping people understand the value of Indigenous heritage collections. Surprisingly, the survey respondents did not perceive exhibition design to be as much of a challenge as the interview participants did. As interview participants qualified museum displays as outdated and static, it was expected that survey respondents were also considering the design of exhibitions to be a challenge.

No museum in the Dominican Republic is capable of sustaining itself economically without public or private subsidies for people to enjoy their exhibitions or participate in educational programs. Museums are able to open to the public due to a combination of inadequate subsidies, donations, fees for entrance and participation in activities, sponsorships, and voluntary work, but usually operate at a loss. Private museums tend to be funded by collectors or foundations that act as administrative umbrellas. This is a significant factor in maintaining operations to serve the public, including the stable influx of school visits on annual excursions as part of history-related holidays. There is very little chance that any of the Indigenous heritage collections open to the public today will, in the coming years, be able to afford new museographical presentations on their own, in which current museological tendencies and theories can be incorporated into new displays.

Most public or private institutions with Indigenous heritage collections open to the public in the Dominican Republic provide free entry or charge low entrance fees. Only the collections under private care seem, over time, to have sustained their programmatic offerings to facilitate educational access beyond guided tours, creating programs for families, publications, conferences, and teacher training and other educational resources on how best to conduct a school visit. The private sector has more stability of management, as collectors tend to maintain economic support over time for the continued display of their exhibited collections. The directors of private collections tend to stay in their posts for longer terms than politically assigned heritage management posts. (These terms usually vary: new directors of public museums are appointed either every four years, or several times during a party's governmental term.) The high turnover of politically assigned public posts in the

heritage sector tends to negatively impact the continuity of programs through which communities generally access museums beyond school tours.

The heritage sector's low wages for publicly run collections and politically appointed positions are reflected in the poorly trained staff. The centralization of administration through the Ministry of Culture, a ministry that has been widely known for poorly funded budgets and department heads who lack the proper training to oversee their departments, does not contribute to the development of the staff's capacity to help regulate the custody or protection of Indigenous heritage or care for the preservation of the collections it oversees.

*7.4.1 Access through the establishment of institutions*

Based on the review of the collection documentation, a collecting boom occurred in the Dominican Republic from the late 1940s to the early 1990s. Most museums were established between the 1970s and early 1980s when fieldwork in the country did not use the latest scientific standards to excavate and collect archaeological artifacts. During this time, collectors created structures to make their private collections accessible to the public. Other collectors donated or sold the rights to custody of their private collections to established public institutions that receive visitors. These practices became a widely accepted cultural phenomenon in the Dominican Republic and can still be perceived today. There was a decline in the creation of publicly accessible Indigenous heritage collections after the forgery scandals that affected both public and private institutions.

Accounts affirm that the forgery scandals also affected scientific and academic archaeological research in the country. The Museo del Hombre Dominicano began to carry out less field research, negatively impacting the potential for academic development in the field. The stagnated academic development eventually led to a drop in professionals in the archaeology field with a formal education in the Dominican territory, and the closure of the only archaeology program at the university level. It is safe to say that this chain of events has further limited the country's capacity for professional development in archaeology. Hence, the reduction of the state's capability to support the protection of archaeological sites and the implementation and monitoring of heritage legislation that can potentially increase the chances of better preserving Indigenous heritage sites and collections.

*7.4.2 Access through education*

Interview respondents believed that Indigenous heritage collections have always been accessible to the public through museum visits, especially for the use of the education community. The majority of interview participants also believed, however, that the pedagogical visits were deficient due to the traditional nature of the visits and outdated museographies. This shows that the idea of access is directly related to physical access to collections on display via exhibitions.

The present study shows that there is ample support for strengthening access to Indigenous heritage collections through educational efforts. The support for improved didactic strategies to address the Indigenous history of the island of Santo Domingo is corroborated by Eldris Con Aguilar's (2019) study on this topic. During the inquiries conducted as part of the research, all interview participants mentioned educational issues as an area of concern, and survey respondents found learning and better understanding the collections to be important pursuits. The respondents' beliefs on how collections are accessed and how education can be made better correspond to their opinions on what could motivate people to learn more about Indigenous heritage collections.

Most of the respondents' answers indicate that better educational tools are needed to get people more interested in learning about Indigenous heritage through collections. The responses reflect a need to include what may be classified as the 'basic strategies' generally found in museums. Educational offerings in museums with these types of collections are primarily limited to guided tours, mostly on mandatory visits, and build on colonial narratives about the country's history found in the textbooks about Dominican culture used in formal education (Con Aguilar and Hofman 2019). Based on the survey responses, basic strategies were listed as the elements needed to be in place to create connections with heritage collections: engaging explanations, exhibit design, educational materials, publications, videos, and overall communication.

The emphasis on educational measures in the responses can be linked to Weil's (1999) paradigm shift, which focuses more on services to the public than strictly on object-based interactions. Hooper-Greenhill's (2007) take on education, and the different interpretive communities that may be involved in museum interpretation activities is similar. Furthermore, the assignment of meaning to objects as part of interpretation strategies and the possibilities of object-less interpretations as museum strategies (Davis 2007) serve as guiding

light to address the respondents' education-based concerns. Highlighting these concerns can lead to raising public awareness for the need to preserve heritage collections and archaeological sites and improve the way people learn about Indigenous history.

Another opportunity seen among the possibilities for connection through education is the incorporation of oral history into heritage curricula, as well as programs designed to help interpret objects in museums with Indigenous heritage collections. As Pesoutova (2019) has demonstrated, concepts of medicinal histories and healing landscapes may contribute significantly to the revision of Indigenous transculturation and a broader understanding and appreciation of the Indigenous legacy within Caribbean culture. The symbolism found in agricultural, medicinal, and ritual resources may hold the key to creating connections between communities and collections that will guarantee a stronger commitment to preserving and protecting local cultural resources from the past. Multivocal and inclusive community empowerment is necessary for any connections to contribute to the incorporation of these Indigenous histories in today's multicultural and multiethnic society with its many cultural backgrounds and diverse histories.

According to participants interviewed and surveyed in different communities, better connections with Indigenous heritage collections can be made by improving the educational content that teachers have to use to teach about the Indigenous heritage of the country. The majority of respondents indicated that both formal and informal education initiatives are a significant channel for such connections. Formal education reforms are widely demanded, and critiques denounce how museums have not been proactive about their educational programming. As respondents equate greater access to Indigenous heritage collections with acquiring greater knowledge of them, the museums' inability to present a complete picture of Dominican history hinders access. The survey responses suggest that people recognize a higher cultural diversity of Indigenous people beyond what is found in the collections currently opened to the public.

A critical—and perhaps decolonizing—look at how museums have presented Indigenous heritage narratives through exhibitions and how the formal school system has done the same through books and curricula is a significant first step in creating connections for a better understanding of Indigenous societies' contributions to society today. Understanding better the value of Indigenous heritage collections may be one of the most important conduits for connecting communities that can help foster multivocal and inclusive

actions. The formal educational system can be a bedrock for the establishment of appreciation structures that encourage early engagement for the young members of the educational community—the main source of museum audience in the Dominican Republic.

*7.4.3 Access through displays*

Communities have been accessing Indigenous heritage collections through public and private museums that have tended to present large displays of accumulated objects in showcases. The general tendency of archaeologists to use excavated cultural material as the primary historical evidence for informational discourses prevailed up to the 1950s. Displays tended not to examine objects in relation to society (Pearce 1990). The presentation of the Indigenous heritage collections at most of the public and private museums in the Dominican Republic also took its cue from this scientific influence of the times, which has even trickled down to museums formed in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, the emphasis placed on definitions of cultures, chronologies, and migrations continues to be evident in Dominican archaeology (Curet 2011). This emphasis can also be recognized in the exhibition design of all the museums created from 1972 to the present. The majority of museums have chronological displays that highlight the academic and scientific discourse of the 1970s, where the objects were the center of attention in the visual narratives. At least for the public museums with Indigenous heritage collections, this tendency to display collections based on chronology remains to this day. This general vision corresponds to a traditional attitude in archaeology and anthropology by which the role of museums with Indigenous heritage collections is to exhibit the objects of these Indigenous cultures when they made them (Chan 2010; Pearce 1990).

The respondents of the surveys and interviews seemed to be less tolerant of static and unattractive exhibits and have high expectations of museums moving to media-oriented exhibitions. Particularly for heritage managers and public officials, the need to have attractive displays was on par in importance with the need to have more solid educational offerings.

*7.4.4 Access through the hills*

While conducting the research, opportunity to participate in the observation of activities in the Loma de Guayacanes, Loma de El Flaco, and El Carril communities were seen as examples of how critical museology could forge local connections and engagement with Indigenous heritage objects. The observations of activities in the early part of the project—the first community meetings and on-site visits to archaeological excavations—

revealed cautious reactions from residents. Local community members exhibited tension in their questions and interaction with local and international researchers. Some showed signs of social withdrawal by merely listening and keeping their distance. Even a local public official disagreed with what was being presented and showed antagonism by openly expressing that many people in the community thought that the excavation work was targeted toward searching for gold. Although some influential local community leaders denied having those thoughts, most of the attendees at the initial meetings were silent and reserved (notes on first community meeting, August 2013, El Molino, Loma de Guayacanes).

As the community meetings and informal gatherings with neighbors became a regular occurrence for researchers and the local community, the interactions began to steer toward asking questions and providing opinions on the part of local community members. As local inhabitants' informal interactions with the project team members increased, the feelings of familiarity mollified the shyness initially observed. Local participants wanted to know why the project was interested in their geographical area. Once they understood the location's historical importance, local inhabitants began sharing local tales and family histories. On several occasions, these conversations led to site visits related to local historical accounts, and local community informants to eventually participate in the project's audiovisual documentation.

The participation of the local communities of La Loma, El Carril, and Cruce de Guayacanes in the Nexus 1492 project has allowed for observing the early disconnect between the local community members and the past hidden beneath the soil of different archaeological sites. As the landscape changed in the centuries after the colonizers blazed through the mountains, imposing new economic and religious models, the evidence of the original creators of Indigenous cultural material became literally and metaphorically covered in layers of soil and cultural transformation. Cow feeding plots and modern cemeteries have covered the sites, and heritage objects have been buried in the different layers. At times, municipal roads have been laid through the middle of large Indigenous settlements that have been silenced by the passage of time and have faded from the collective memories of the communities as the last living links to the Indigenous past pass away. Their stories have never made it into schoolbook discussions about modern Dominican culture, a fact that reflects how the prevalence of the colonial vision of Indigenous heritage remains.

As open field visits became a regular event in the communities, the discussions about the objects increased, as the locals expressed great curiosity about the value of the excavated cultural material. These interactions became the collaborative engine that drove the local community to determine its involvement. Community leaders, neighborhood associations, local government officials, and individual community members became regular participants in project activities, openly voicing how they were connecting the knowledge the project helped uncover with their own understanding of local history. At the beginning of the project, members from consulted residents in the Valverde province believed that the area's only link to Indigenous history was related to the Paso de Los Hidalgos—the trail Spanish invaders/colonizers/ followed cutting through different native settlements—and that it was only at museums that they could see Indigenous objects. Most had to visit the museums in Santo Domingo to learn more about Indigenous culture.

Eventually, field visits to the excavation sites, the collaborative development of exhibitions on the scientific and cultural knowledge obtained from research in the area, and informal heritage discussions led to a deeper understanding of the community's history. As the idea of Dominican national history has developed within a larger narrative of civilization being brought about by conquest, local narratives have remained in obscurity. The incorporation of Indigenous history into that of the local community is crucial. It was important to observe community members' reactions to learning that the area has been continuously populated since AD 800. This moment served as a turning point for many local residents, who only then understood the longevity of their local community's connection with the landscape. By the end of the project, it was appreciated that a sense of pride had formed in local community members' cultural presentations during the annual community days. This led to an organized attempt to open sharing spaces to combine the exhibition of archaeological objects with their religious singing and demonstrations of oral and craft traditions.

### 7.5 A cultural house for the contextualization of access to local Indigenous heritage

At the end of the Nexus 1492 project in 2019, the local community within the Cruce de Guayacanes embarked on a project to open a cultural space that would be run by volunteer community members. The project has come to be known as the *casa cultural* (cultural house). The *casa cultural* ties in with the critical museology approach of collections assemblages being designed by local narratives. Combining object displays that reflect the historical

context of the Indigenous past as unearthed by the Nexus 1492 project with stories from the contemporary community allows the community to mediate their own local history. The community's wish to have replicas of the objects found in nearby excavations attests to their understanding of the need to preserve and protect cultural material. They see the house as an opportunity to integrate local stories about their Indigenous past into their community life.

The documentaries produced as part of the Nexus 1492 project (https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/Nexus 1492/documentaries) have highlighted many of these local stories, relating them to current religious celebrations, traditions, personal accounts, local craft products, as well as to medicinal practices based on plants, including those used by the Indigenous population. The creation of the *casa cultural* can be considered part of the deconstruction of traditional exhibitions, as proposed by critical museology. Technology can play an important role in transforming this project into a virtual cultural house as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to affect poor rural communities in the Dominican Republic. The access to local narratives through virtual engagement and digital resources may prove transformative, as the distance is reduced, and information can be provided at the convenience of younger and more technologically savvy generations.

By the conclusion of the project research, the initial adverse reactions had primarily been replaced with more engagement and sharing between local community members and research project members. The researcher's presence in the local community during her stay at the project's archaeological center in Loma de Guayacanes and her welcomed participation in regular community activities or celebrations during fieldwork months were signs of acceptance in the area. As the project years went by, local community members showed more regular participation in activities and gatherings (notes on informal conversations with El Molino, Loma de Guayacanes residents, 2016–2018).

Observations revealed that local community reactions gradually became more positive, as expressions of solidarity were evident at the community-initiated gatherings were done to celebrate and highlight the work done through the Nexus 1492 project. The gatherings held between 2013 and 2019, the six years of the project where team members were actively excavating, provided opportunities to identify how reactions had evolved positively throughout the project. These reactions were noted through social familiarity in the interactions of project members and local inhabitants, free expressions of opinions, jokes,

demonstrations of satisfaction, circulating information learned from project activities, and the incorporation of opinions and clarified information from local community members.

### 7.6 Integration of Indigenous heritage beyond traditional museum borders

In his attempt to operationalize critical museology within the context of Indigenous heritage collections and community connections, Anthony Shelton (2013) finds that this approach to museology

> is also crucial for developing new exhibitionary genres, telling untold stories, rearticulating knowledge systems for public dissemination, reimagining organizational and management structures, and repurposing museums and galleries in line with multicultural and intercultural states and communities (7).

Shelton's approach allows for an exploration of how communities in proximity to archaeological sites can integrate the cultural knowledge derived from archaeological research with local cultural manifestations.

This idea suggested an inquiry to identify the extent to which critical museology could be used as an underpinning to connect communities and Indigenous heritage collections. Specifically, testing the idea of going beyond the museum's physical structures in Laguna Salada was of applicable interest. The proximity of the Loma de Guayacanes and El Carril communities to Nexus 1492's archaeological research sites proved to be ideal for such an inquiry, since the communities are situated near El Paso de Los Hidalgos in Valverde Province, northwestern Dominican Republic.

As an integral part of the project's development, creating community connections has been instrumental in raising awareness of the area's rich historical context as the initial hub of the colonial forces expanding into the Americas. At the national level, direct access to significant Indigenous heritage collections is mostly found either in the capital or in major tourist areas in the country. The immediate access to collections in the Valverde area is limited to one private collection that is based in a former math professor's home and is mostly accessible to the schools in the area.

The literature acknowledges museums' need to empower audiences through critical reflection as well as the need for more substantial community engagement or interactions to be able to connect objects with their embedded cultural knowledge (Ariese 2018; Chan 2010). Exploring local histories as part of interpretation repertoires (Crooke 2010) also helps contextualize activities that involve community members over a sustained period, in which

the landscape, traditions, and local heritage objects that give rise to defined cultural manifestations can incorporate newly understood facets of history.

### 7.7 Technology for access and protection

The present study shows that digital resources are considered a viable way to access information about Indigenous heritage collections in the future. Museum research on technology shows that digital resources have allowed access for new audiences (Burton Jones 2008) and considers digitalization as providing connections between people and objects beyond the physical realm (Hogsden and Poulter 2012).

Despite the technological limitations of the Dominican Republic in terms of internet connectivity, as studies have indicated, most respondents reported using a computer at home and getting internet access through their home computer or via a mobile phone (Cruz Campusano 2014; Dominguez and Lara 2016). Previous studies have shown that teachers tend to know more about social media, website navigation, and the use of electronic mail (Cruz Campusano 2014). Survey respondents suggested that teachers agree that social media and electronic mail are the best ways to obtain information. The high percentage in the use of these technologies among the students who responded to the survey could be due to age. Television was considered the third-best way to obtain information about cultural activities and it was used by older respondents.

Furthermore, respondents listed the most convenient digital resources as digital books, databases, and magazines, in keeping with the preferences expressed by younger audiences. The majority of respondents indicated that having the information in a digital format for free was either “important” or “very important.” It was also deemed important to have photographs of the objects in collections in digital form. Other important assets to have in digital format were scientific research on the collections and a map of the collections as cultural resources. Surprisingly, only a few of the respondents listed it as important to have inventories in digital form. These responses indicate that technology represents opportunities for the dissemination of information, whether it is used for marketing or for learning, when regularly incorporated as a classroom resource. Significant digitization and digital engagement projects could be justified as a way to connect with wider audiences.

Studies in the scholastic literature show the potential of technology to expand access to Indigenous heritage collections through digitization as a means to create connections with

the collections (Hogsden and Poulter 2012; Srinivasan et al. 2010; Scheiner 2008). With the descriptive inventory of collections in Chapter 5, the collections' geographic distribution serves as a basis for mapping collections found in different communities along with educational resources that may act as connecting hubs to archaeological sites. Studies on cultural mapping have demonstrated the usefulness of heritage information for planning and educational purposes (Bastias 2013; British Columbia 2010).

Technology use is not meant to be a substitute for creating connections to heritage objects and learning directly from the wealth of historical and cultural information embedded in museum objects. Results obtained through the survey and interviews show technology as a more viable road to accessing heritage information as the country provides better technology infrastructure to its citizens. Connecting digital information about the collections with digital educational resources can also serve as one of the main avenues for accessing cultural knowledge for residents of provinces far from the collections or archaeological sites open to the public. As technology use increases in the Dominican Republic, especially within the school system, the digitization of Indigenous heritage collections may become one of the most efficient tools for connecting communities with heritage information. Knowing where Indigenous heritage collections are and what types of resources are found in different geographic offers can be a powerful planning asset for schools and teachers in addressing the history of the island's original settlers. Mapping collections and resources can produce a catalog of cultural information available to communities wishing to connect with Indigenous heritage collections at new levels. As survey and interview respondents have indicated a desire to learn more about the collections in order to better understand Dominican society, new options for accessing information may bring about a transformation in how communities interact with the cultural knowledge that Indigenous heritage collections possess.

Another layer of benefit to using mapping of collections as an educational resource could be linked to the communication of legislative information. Including heritage legislation information in technological mapping efforts may help increase awareness of the law among the different communities that desire more access to Indigenous heritage collections. Having information on the laws and regulations—how they can be applied for heritage protection—may help increase the knowledge of how Indigenous heritage collections under public and private care are to be managed and protected. The use of social media, as well as sharing and collaborative digital platforms, can help public officials, heritage managers, and collectors better communicate information about collections.

Virtual experiences may be linked with virtual spaces to generate new ways of learning about Indigenous heritage collections, even in the face of the geographical distances that tend to limit physical access. Nexus 1492 is working on a digital platform to develop an exhibition of the successful results of the different studies carried out within the scope of the transdisciplinary project. The transformation of the exhibition “Caribbean Ties” into a virtual interactive tool (https://web.virtualcarib.com) may prove to be the most dynamic way to reach local communities as technology continues to improve through mobile connectivity, even in rural places. The virtual space can become a hub for accessing heritage information and scientific studies conducted in the different communities that have embraced the project. This space is seen as a resource that may address precisely what the communities consulted in the study want: to understand the collections better.