

Beauty and Limitations of Museums as Tools for Social and Cultural Reawakening in Nigeria

Oluwole Ajayi

Introduction

Museum has been described as a powerful cultural centre for the community, a powerful institution which has a lot to add to the development of any nation. It is man-made feature that exists to converse historic collections and commemorate past events for tourists consumption (youell, 1998). Examples of these are louvre Museum in paris, France; Esie national Museum and Ife National Museum (both in Nigeria). As a tourist attraction, it has a lot to do in promoting and ensuring sustainable tourism. It is a common feature in developed countries where several of them may be found in one town no matter the size of the town (Aremu, 2001). Museum offer much benefits to their visitors, their communities and the society as a whole. Museum as educational and institutional establishment, offers unparalleled opportunities for self-directed learning and exploration by people of diverse ages, interest, background and abilities. They are public gathering places where visitors can be entertained, inspired and introduced to new ideas.

The development of museum can be traced back to pre-Arab and European times. During these periods, various cultural materials of rituals, religion and political importance were fashioned, conserved and preserved in temple or traditional shrine in the palace of kings and chiefs (Murrey, 1996). Apart from housing such cultural materials like ivory barrage and wooden objects, these institutions (temples, shrines and palaces) were preserved as monuments in their rites.

Museum as institutions are dedicated to helping people understand and appreciate the natural world, the history of civilization, and record of humanity's artistic, scientific and technological achievements (Gary, 1986). More so, museum collect objects of scientific, artistic or historical importance care for them, study, interpret, and exhibit them for the purpose of public education and the advancement of knowledge.

In Nigeria, the development of modern museum began during the colonial period in 1927 (Izuakor, 1998) as a mean towards assessing effects of colonial education on local arts and the subsequent emergence of a formally recognized body known as National commission for museum and monuments (NCMM) established via decree 77 of 1999. Since its establishment, NCMM has been striving for optimal services hence the expansion of its scope and operations to provide Museum services in 31 states of the federation and managing over 33 national monuments. As expected of every virile institution that has mandate of acquiring, conserving, researching, communicating and exhibiting the cultural heritage, for the purposes of study, education and

enjoyment, museums in Nigeria have been making modest contributions along with their peers across the globe. The beauty of museums in social and cultural reawakening revolves around the primary functions of the Museums in the course of realizing the objectives of their establishment.

Museums and their Roles in Sustenance of Nigerian Arts and Culture

Nigerian museums were built to collect, preserve and present for purpose of education those desirable aspects of Nigeria's past and contemporary cultures (Emmanuel, 1977). Museums in Nigeria are endowed with competent hands but lack the necessary tools to work with, however, the major problem confronting museums in the course of discharging their primary responsibilities is funding. This situation is not peculiar to Nigeria because contemporary museum development (all over the world) has been much influenced by changing policies in public sector finance (Lewis, nd). In many countries the contribution of public fund to museums has remained static or has fallen, so that museums' governing bodies and directors have had to seek funding from alternative sources. This not only has affected the way museums are organized but also has accentuated the need for marketing and fundraising expertise.

Beauty of Museums as Tools for Social and Cultural Reawakening

In the course of this paper, the activities of Museums in Nigeria have been classified into five areas for the appreciation of this beauty. It is within these classified groups that the broad groups that the focus of this paper will be discussed. The limitations are direct contrast of this, and are based on the exploration of the challenges confronting Museums in Nigeria.

Collection of Artifacts

Museums have put much more effort into collecting the tangible and intangible evidence of people and their environment in recognition of the fact that it is this material which best represents the lives of the majority of the population. This has an academic underpinning, as well as bringing the additional benefit of enabling museums to show their relevance to people who previously were underrepresented, and perhaps therefore uninterested in museum displays (Fleming, 2005).

A museum is distinguished by a collection of often unique objects that forms the core of its activities for exhibitions, education, research etc. this differentiates it from an archive or library, where the contents may be more paper-based, replaceable and fewer exhibitions oriented.

Exhibition of Artifacts

An exhibition is traditionally the space in which artifacts meet an audience. The exhibit is universally understood to be for some temporary period unless, as is rarely true, it is stated to be a permanent exhibition. There have been a number of changes here, many of them the subject of technology in order to breathe more life into certain subjects. Exhibition design and presentation technique excite revulsion, especially where interactivity, or sound and lighting effects, or film, are employed, presumably because all these interpretive techniques are believed to detract from the serious issues represented by objects. Exhibitions have the potential for a deeper understanding

and appreciation of a people's past from which could the potential for a deeper of a family, of a village ...or a nation. Through exhibitions, the museum visitors become involved emotionally and physically. In the words of Izuakor (1998), this assists the users, which includes the researchers tremendously because exhibition makes a deeper understanding and appreciation of the subject matter and removes vagueness, unscientific presumption and stereotypes.

Learning

Museums have always dealt in learning. This is clear from any number of stories about the motivations of those who founded so many museums in the 19th century. It's just that there has been a massive shift from passive learning to active learning as museums have, albeit belatedly, given more authority and responsibility to education professionals, and as we have moved from instructions to involvement. It is in view of this that Institute of Museum and Library Service (1996) made cases for schools to articulate real educational needs by making use of museums' collection and exhibition as educational materials. The position is that the museum program becomes essential when integrate what the museum has to offer into a curriculum package in order to make the concept of curriculum more vivid. The workability of this was demonstrated by Ifejiagwa (2002) in the use of folklore and folk dance as museum education service.

Advocacy and Partnership

Museums are social constructs as well as the repository for the recovered artifacts. It is not difficult to accept the view that the museum is a data bank of source of information and knowledge. The fact however remains that the museums are ethically bound to assume their place in the mainstream of contemporary life by not sitting eccentrically on the margins. The implication of this is that the museums have the duty of networking with, and advocating the societal value to, other sectors of society. The museums in Nigeria are not found wanting in this course in spite of the numerous challenges facing them. Typical examples of this are various seminars, conferences and academic get-together for the professionals to come together for appraisal of museums and their works over year during World Museums Day on 18 May of every year.

Social Change

Museums are no strangers to the concept of change. Indeed, much of the museum studies literature from the last decades is based upon the assumption that museums are now operating within a turbulent and rapidly changing environment, requiring new approaches to their management, new sources of funding and new and evolving working practices (Robert and Gerald 2005). This is an assurance that when necessary steps are taken museums could effectively perform a creditable role in ensuring non-turbulent social change that will usher in even and sustainable development in the society. This does not mean that the museums had to start to shop for any specific method towards achieving this goal; rather they only need to reposition their approach towards actualizing their primary duties to the society for the realization of social change and development.

The area in focus here is through its role as medium of education, a role increasingly seen as central to museums. Museums therefore have much to offer in terms of bringing about social

change through learning process engendered by the information derivable from artifacts on display. Museums which commit themselves to serving broad audiences, primarily through promoting learning, will, slowly but surely, impact on those people's lives. The ultimate value of museums in promoting social change is through learning through the use of collections where appropriate, but not regarding them as an end in themselves.

Going by the foregoing, one will wonder how they affect social and cultural awakening among the populace. An answer to this was provided in the work of Lawal (2013); it was fallout of the dossier and data collected over a period of 7 years as lecturer on culture and museum studies in the federal college of wildlife management, new Bussa, Niger state. According to this scholar, every time the students went on educational tour, he had develop the tradition of making inquiry from the students on tour on their impressions of artifacts in the museums they have visited and effects as documented by Lawal (2013) showed that the visitations have made them to know how close they were to their neighbours in terms of cultural similarities. In the words of one of his respondents for instance:

I have been reading about terracotta, I thought it was an exclusive preserve of the NOK people alone until the educational tour that took us to Esie Museum in Kwara State in 2009.

Another revelation was presented thus:

Information about the discovery of NOK culture through accidental discovery by the miners in Jos metropolis and discovery of stone images in Esie is a food for thought on the possible heritage that may be lying untapped in our immediate environment. Look at the case of groves scattered around Ile-Ife (under the management Ife Museum), virtually all of them were discovered accidentally as well. On the basis of this, the experience I gathered through my involvement in educational tour to Museums both at national Diploma and higher National Diploma levels had enabled me to understand my immediate cultural environment and how to protect it.

Other respondent stated that:

Involvement of foreigners in visitations to these Museums and the enthusiasm being shown in the process is a manifestation that we don't value our culture and cultural environment when compare numerical strength of domestic tourists. It is therefore necessary that we need to know the value of our cultural practice and how these practices help in uniting people. At the same time helps in developing interest in our cultural environment.

The submissions of some students that went on educational tour to museums centered on appreciation of cultural identity. According to one of them:

The experience gathered during my first visitation to museums at Illorin while on educational tour and my subsequent visits have shown how people from other

cultures are showing interest in our cultural heritage. It is also made it clear that enhanced it makes other people know of our existence as a cultural entity. The study of culture exposes dynamic nature of man and his culture.

The appreciation of the efforts of our fore bearers was another factors mentioned. According to one of them:

Museums have enabled me to appreciate the efforts of our forefathers as it pertains to developmental processes. Such appreciation manifested when I visited Ife Museum in 2007 and saw the figurines on displayed. After careful examination of these artifacts most importantly the tiny nature of the artifacts, the first critical issue that bothered my mind was how the carvers were able to go about their works to that detailed level in spite of limitations that abound in the society then. This thus becomes a challenge for me after the visit that we in contemporary era need to be up and doing in order to attain excellence most especially with daily improvement in advancement of technology.

Limitations of Museums as Tools for Social and Cultural Reawakening

In view of the issues illustrated above, it is apparent that museums in Nigeria are living up to the task in their mandate of providing valuable intangible benefits as sources of national, regional and local identity. Thus justifies their capabilities in reflecting both continuity and changes, to preserve and protect cultural and natural heritage while vividly illustrating the progression of the human imagination and the natural world. However, such capabilities have been drastically curtailed due to series of challenges they are experiencing, which include:

Funding Problem: In the words of obi (2000), the question of funding has been a long standing problem facing the museum with the result that most of its functions are not properly performed due to low funding. This was corroborated by Akinade(1998) in his submissions that museums lack adequate financial resources for the prompt and regular collection, conservation and display of museum pieces and for the execution of other traditional role as well as for the provision of adequate facilities for the museum personnel.

Effects of Two Dominant Foreign Religions: Both Christianity and Islam enthusiasts regarded all forms of sculptor as idolatry. In recent time religious bigots see existence of museums and the visits therein as propagation of idols worship. However, an anonymous writer (on the internet) who was responding to whether Art Museums are idolatry propagation or the visit therein entails idol worship vividly provide insight into the reality between idolatry and the focus of museum.

This has greatly affected the dispositions of many people to museums; many have stayed away from museum because of the fear of being branded as Atheists. Meanwhile, the scholars belief that idol worshipping become established when idols are worshipped and seeing as gods by the people; that museums as its contents are the artistic representations of the deities that people are worshipping not idolatry propagation. To a great extent there is logic in this when considered the definition of idolatry by Wikipedia (2013), which sees it as a pejorative term for

the worship of an idol, a physical object such as a cult image, as a god, or practices believed verge on worship, such as giving undue honour and regard to created forms other than God. According to this writer:

For the first 1600 year of Christianity, most people couldn't read or write. Every stained glass window and statue in medieval churches told a story. Illiterate people could look at the stained glass pictures on the windows of the churches and understand the story. So not only were the statues and paintings beautiful and reverent, but they were also very functional. They told the bible story and the priest could point to them during his homilies. Stained glass windows, for them, teaching tools and reminders. If we walk around any classic sanctuary and we'll see the statues, each saint holding his symbol.

A well trained Christian could learn the stories of all those saints, and pass them along to his children. A well trained Christian, could learn the stories of all those saints, and pass them along to his children, even if he couldn't read. This also explains the classic format of the windows; a large central picture surrounded by a host of smaller vignettes. With proper explanation, one could learn the whole story of, say, John the Baptist, along with all important tie-ins to the life of Christ. These were not false images to be worshipped, but reminders of the story of salvation (accessed at <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080717122125AAzUhnx> on 29/04/2013)

Effects of Modernization: There is growing apathy attached to monuments and other historic sites by Nigerians, most especially the younger generation. The current generation would rather spend time with works of art created through computer applications and other computer programs than spend time appreciating museums and what they stand for. To compound the whole issue, museum managements find it difficult in adopting modern technological devices in their services due to inadequate funding.

Shift in Priority by the Populace: Looking from the standpoint of its importance, many would expect this epitome of Nigerian history as exemplified by the museums to be preserved as carefully as possible. Unfortunately, the shift in priorities by our current generation, coupled with the sometimes disadvantageous toll of modernization, has served to erase the attention given to this wonderful remnant of Nigeria's historical roots are phenomenal.

Recommendation

Improvement in Funding of Museum: Consistent underfunding of museum activities over time has made it glaring that government is not willing and able to provide adequate funding for museums activities, efforts should be made to source for funding from corporate bodies and private companies.

Promotion: The need for marketing department in museums has not been given the needed consideration. This lack of professionalism, even when there were the resources to do the job

properly, was typical of the low priority given to museum audiences. This essentially informs the skewed nature of appreciation of museum low appeal of traditional museum to a minority of the population when it was such a well-kept secret.

Media Involvement: One of the most important things that needed to be known is about building new audiences through the power of the local media. These media are within our reach, they are ever ready for editorial content, and they are read, listened to or watched by all the people we want to attract to our fortunes to our museums. Forgoing an effective relationship with these media is a core requirement of the modern museum.

Public Enlightenment: There is the need for the sensitization of Nigerian populace to be more involved in promoting our traditional institutions and cultural Values and to see this as viable avenue for making legitimate money. Also, museum studies should commence in universities; Museology, as a unique scientific management skill, and museum studies should be listed on the curriculum this will facilitate the training of professional personnel that can match up to today's challenges for effective and visible progress in the museums.

Creation of Modern Religion Corner: In view of the fact that religion is part of culture, there should Modern Religion (Christianity and Islam) corner 'in every museum to showcase the contemporary and historical past of these religions. This will help in educating the public better on religious activities in Nigeria on one hand, and reduce rate of religious bigotry and attempt at blacklisting Museum as efforts at evangelizing for the idol worshipping on the other hand. For this to be effective, these modern religious corners should not include the ugly incidents like religious brigandage such as Boko Haram insurgence and Maitatsine riots. The possible effect of this is a change of heart on the part of the anti- Museums elements and finally a change heart as well as improved patronage for better outcome in the fortune of these cultural edifices.

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