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Experiences and (hidden) Values of Ecomuseums

The 1970's created a new relation between museums and the society, most of all through the concept of ecomuseum. In the meantime, the society – the context in which museums exist - has changed considerably. While originally responding to the needs of the moment, with their concept of territory, heritage, identity and development, and (local) community as the basic pillar of the process, ecomuseums and the new museology movement anticipated many contemporary theoretical and practical discussions. In the meantime, traditional (classic) museums took over some of the experience from ecomuseums, while ecomuseums themselves evolved and created new forms of manifestation. The intention of this paper is to provide a critical insight into the development and innovations of ecomuseums and the new museology, and show the applicability and usability of this concept in today's changed social circumstances.

Key words: ecomuseums, new museology

Introduction

Why do we consider heritage and care for heritage important? Who defines it and how? What affects and determines our position towards it? Finally, who controls it and how, on whose behalf and to what purpose? Answers to these questions might seem too simple, but still, if we take some time to consider and apply our deliberations to the situations that surround us on a daily basis, we will notice there are always reasons for additional examinations, as well as a need for expert and scientifically grounded explanations. Heritage is a phenomenon that can be explained (at least in part) using a number of scientific disciplines. Museology is certainly one of them. The times of crisis have always provided fertile ground for new and creative solutions. Paradigms are only seemingly

constant. A move into a new paradigm always starts with a crisis and revolution (not necessarily a violent one), but it does not end there – until an individual or a group offers solutions that appeal to the majority of practitioners of the next generation (cf. Kuhn, 2002). One of such accomplishments inside museology or, in a wider perspective, the relation of man towards heritage in general began with ecomuseums.

In 1970s a conscious, mental turning point in the development of the relation between man and the heritage in which they exist (i.e. that surrounds them) was set. Inside historical overviews of the development of museology, some theoreticians believe this is in fact the second revolution, arguing that the first one happened between 1880 and 1920, when a similarity between practical problems that almost all museums share was recognized. In other words, interest in the common field was increased, as well as in museology as the discipline that deals with this field. Although some of the discussions had a theoretical and critical background, the dominant subject was still practice (cf. Mensch, 1995: 133-138), so a museographic turn took place. According to the same author, in the period between 1960 and 1980 a new synergy occurred, but this time as a result of the need to transform the role of museums in the society and insisting upon their active role. This ‘second revolution’ was marked by the creation of a new type of museum – *ecomuseum* – while the theoretical development that followed it created, even if museology was still insufficiently defined, the so-called *new museology*. Due to the importance of the correlation between ecomuseums and the new museology, we will deal with this matter in more detail later in the text.¹ In order to grasp this correlation, it is necessary to get a detailed insight into the very phenomenon of ecomuseums.

Ecomuseums, sources and development

In the year 1971 in central France², in the area of approximately 500sqm around the towns of *Le Creusot* and *Montceau-les-Mines* the world’s first ecomuseum started to be developed. This area has seen major changes after the World War II, mostly because the Schneiders, who had owned industrial complexes the local economy depended upon, were accused of collaboration with the Nazi regime, so their management was moved to Paris. A dislocated management meant lack of interest, which was followed, due to changes in the economy, by a complete neglect and deterioration of industrial plants, and the loss of jobs for roughly 150,000 locals. The answer to this original situation, in line with the regional development policy, came from *Hugues de Varine*, *Georges Henri Rivière* and *Marcel Evrard*, who proposed *The Museum of Man and Industry*, a museum that was to startup the economy again, but also, perhaps even more importantly, help the local population rediscover meaning, their own identity, and

¹ We will also include the questioning of possible changes to the paradigm, i.e. the science itself and an adequate approach to the heritage phenomenon.

² West of the Lyon-Dijon line.

open new development possibilities. The Schneider family's 18th century château was set as the center of the Museum of Man and Industry. Inside it, there is an adequate presentation of the historical development and key features of the region, as well as the everyday life of the local population and their industrial and artistic products. This way, the castle was defined as a starting point for learning about and exploration of the entire region. In the rest of the area, a specific form of a fragmented museum was developed, which means that elements in the landscape and the belonging tangible and/or intangible testimonies were processed by museologists and interpreted *in situ*, at the site of their origin and without moving them into the main building. This enabled an important theoretical and practical breakthrough – from an exclusive focus on the museum building towards the wholeness of the territory the museum is covering. The primary task of the lowest possible number of hired experts was to launch the museum and act as a sort of catalysts to the process, performing only the most demanding technical jobs.³ In the year 1974, when it was completed, it became known⁴ in the museum world most of all due to its collection definition published in the *Museum* magazine:⁵ “Any movable or unmovable object within the community's perimeter is a notional part of the museum. This introduces the idea of a kind of cultural ownership, which has nothing to do with legal ownership” (Varine, 1974: 244). The museum's audience, i.e., users, was perceived in a similar way. It was implied that the museum's audience was made of the entire community - all the individuals living in the territory (defined area) in which the museum exists were considered its active users.

In a number of features, the Museum of Man and Industry differed from most or nearly all museums of the time – especially in the already mentioned position towards collections, territory and users, but also in the relations inside the museum and organization of work. Some twenty years later, looking back at his own experience of working on this project, one of its key initiators said: “Nothing, I like to think, has been the same since Le Creusot. It attracted a large number of pilgrims and it bred disciples in a number of countries, who in turn set up their own kind of eco-museum, without always using the name. With hindsight we can see that the real value of Le Creusot was to be a research laboratory, in which new museum theories and practices were developed, argued about and evaluated.” (Varine, 1993). The novelties ecomuseums introduced were revolutionary indeed, but of course the (long) history of museum as an institution also records examples that indicate interesting forms that can be recognized as sorts of proto-forms of ecomuseums.

During the 19th century, many museums were created as the result of actions by various associations that, in order to support their scientific hypotheses, collected tangible culture items. It is rather interesting that they always emphasized the importance of participation of the local population in this process, as well as the benefits for a spe-

³ E.g., systematical research, cataloguing, organization of more complex activities, representing museum's interests to the authorities etc.

⁴ i.e. disputed at the time.

⁵ *Museum* magazine, today called *Museum International*, published by UNESCO.

cific community – museums, just like libraries, were at the time perceived as essential means for educating wide circles of society. Unfortunately, with the start of the 20th century, such an approach slowly started to lose importance and museums were once again transformed into rather closed institutions. Now they were no longer an exclusive privilege of the ruling classes, but hermetical institutions with the sole purpose of serving the needs of scientific research. Decades later, ecomuseums were the first to change this tendency, thus defining today's understanding of the purpose and sense of museums in the society. Parallel with this, two existing museum forms influenced the development of ecomuseums: open air museums and *heimat* museums.

The credit for open air museums goes to Artur Hazelius, who had houses of different type, origin, purpose and age from all parts of Sweden moved to the *Skansen* hill outside Stockholm. With an adequate interior, decorated house lot, demonstration of manufacturing with the 'old' technology in workshops, and organized festivals and costumed guides, this form⁶ attempted to place items in their functional context (cf. Maroević, 1993: 40). As such, it became and remained to this day an inspiration to all the museums of this type, as well as to the creators of ecomuseums.

*Heimat*⁷ museums originated in the 19th century, but their popularity rose between the two world wars. Their heritage is the awareness of the importance of the role of museums in society and their obligation to be active and dynamic. Or, as J. Klersch writes in 1936: "The *Heimat* museum must not be a kingdom of the dead (...). It is made for the living; it is to the living that it must belong, and they must feel at ease there. The living are continually on the move, from yesterday to tomorrow, and the museum must help them to see the present in the mirror of the past, and the past in the mirror of the present. They will thus experience the intimate cohesion of past and present which begets the future. The crucial task of the *Heimat* museum is to serve the people and the present, and if it fails in that task, it becomes no more than a lifeless collection of objects." (Davis, 1999: 47). This is an appeal that can, without major changes, be interpreted as the mission of today's museums as well. Unfortunately, *heimat* museums shared the destiny of historic space and time. As the Nazi regime had intensively used them, just like many other things, for spreading its propaganda, practically erasing the undesired parts of history or interpreting them without any foundation to fit its own agenda, it is also possible to see them as a sort of perverse predecessors of ecomuseums (Crus-Ramirez, 1985: 242-244).

Nevertheless, what defined ecomuseums in the end was the 1960s, when the social context created prerequisites for their development. In mid 1960s there was a highly intensive turmoil generated by disputes and discontent with the situation in the society. At the same time, but with a much higher publicity, frequent ecological disasters, the danger of the arms race and nuclear experiments, impact of industry on environmental pollution, and the daily and more than apparent disappearance of the

⁶ Opened for visitors in 1891.

⁷ *Heimatmuseum* can be translated to Croatian as *zavičajni muzej* (native place museum). The word *Heimat* in fact means *homeland*, but its idea is closer to the term *native place*.

natural heritage and rural landscapes gave birth to a new form of awareness known as *ecologism* or *environmentalism*.⁸ The benefits and authority of the ruling elites were disputed at the ideological level, so urgent and considerable changes were sought after. Along with the need to reform and democratize school system or universities, for example, the issue of social relevance of all the institutions, including museums, was paramount. It became clear that the existing institutions were simply not adequate for the needs of the society they are or should be intended for. In the case of museums, this was best defined through demands that they by all means serve the entire community, and that their rather static role be replaced with a dynamic one, i.e. that they take on the role of the driver of change and development. The existing museum institutions were simply not able to cope with such demands and offer good answers. We could conclude, somewhat ironically, that back then museums were so focused on themselves that they forgot their own heritage and institutional experience.

Just like the rest of the world in late 1960s, France was also in the midst of social turmoil, intensified by the discovered consequences of a fast postwar urbanization that lead to neglect and decline of the rural parts of the country. One of the proposed political solutions that were supposed to offset the negative effects was designing the development of the local economy as part of regional developmental planning, while at the same time executing conscious actions to protect the environment – the process in which regional nature parks were created as well. French museologist *Georges Henri Rivière*, who had been pointing to the necessity of founding an open air museum in France for a while, saw in the proposed development of regional parks the possibilities for good protection and presentation of the rich cultural heritage. Since he thought that a society is primarily expressed through construction, G. H. Rivière advocated the realization of the so-called *museum of houses*⁹, explaining that “open air museums are museums of houses, detached from their environment and relocated into a fenced space that is used in a museographic manner” (Hubert, 1989: 147). On these bases, three houses and a windmill on *Isle de Quessant* in *Parc d'Armorique* in Bretagne were chosen for the future museum, while *Quessant House of Technique and Tradition*¹⁰ was defined as a point of origin around which a museographic tour of the entire area was formed. This house-museum, opened in July 1968, is by its basic features¹¹ in fact France's first ecomuseum, even though this term did not exist at the time. Another significant project, also connected with regional parks, is a variant

⁸ A number of authors consider these terms to be synonymous, but it needs to be noted that there is a certain difference between them. Ecologism denotes a political doctrine, an ideology based on ecological hypotheses, first of all an important link between man (who is just a part, not an almighty ruler of nature) and the natural world that surrounds them. On the other hand, environmentalism is a form of a moderate, reformative approach that searches for answers to the environmental crisis primarily from the human standpoint, without questioning the conventional, anthropocentric presumptions on the natural world (cf. Ravlić, 2003: 310-325).

⁹ French *musee de maison*.

¹⁰ Which was the name of the building in which the permanent exhibition was located.

¹¹ Especially because of the structure of the center (origin) and its accompanying localities, distributed in the space and connected in terms of their ideas.

of an open air museum that came to life in *Grande Landes* (Gascony Region), where again under leadership of G. H. Rivière the museum of the *Marqueze* area was created in 1969. The museum was formed around a single authentic house dating from 1824. Other houses were then added to it, by relocating them from other parts of the Grande Landes area. Equipped with an adequate interior, the arrangement of houses was carefully planned in space in order to create an image of this part of the 19th century France that would be as faithful as possible. The atmosphere was also supported by placing domestic animals in house lots, and in the course of time also by a controlled breeding of exclusively traditional varieties of wine and other plants specific to this area. At first glance this might seem like a classic open air museum, however, some ideas realized here for the first time surpassed this museum form. This museum was immensely popular and it quickly faced the problem of too many visitors. This was gradually and with a relative success tackled by defining, marking and interpreting new elements in the landscape in order to disperse visitors over a larger space inside the park. By their many characteristics these two museums belong to ecomuseums, even though neither of them used this name. As was mentioned earlier, the first ecomuseum was created several years later - the Museum of Man and Industry in the area of Le Creusot and Montceau-les-Mines. After that, during the 1970s, several other ecomuseums came to life in France. Two were especially noteworthy: *Ecomuseum of the Lozère Mountain* and the museum in the *Regional Nature Park Camargue*. In the year 1971 in the *National Park Cevennes* a project design of the *Ecomuseum of the Mountain Lozère* was initiated. At first, it faced the problem of extreme distrust of the interested parties, but over time, the collaboration between experts and the community reached a solid level, so the main center for visitors was opened in 1983. On the other hand, in 1973 the *Regional Nature Park Camargue* became home to the initiative launched with the idea of realizing two basic objectives: a) explore the local ethnographic heritage that was to become the basis for the future interpretation of the area; and b) a clear need, or a conscious wish, to actively involve as many locals as possible in these explorations and the project as a whole. The second objective was given a very high priority, as it was primarily in the function of bridging the differences and disagreements between the local population and their guests, tourists, who started to visit the nature park more frequently. The project was designed and defined as a kind of informal obligation for the entire local population, which was in this manner consciously encouraged to take an active part in the development and management of the future museum and, as a result, better understand and value its own heritage and the environment in which it exists. This is a goal that can be still, after more than thirty years, applied to a number of areas in our country without major changes, especially because this museum offered a solution that would function in harmony with the challenges brought by cooperation with tourism. Opened in 1978, this ecomuseum, which in the end did not use this name¹², proved to be good and innovative enough to deserve, only a year later, a prestigious award presented by renowned museum experts, becoming the European Museum of the Year.¹³ In early

¹² This is a special problem, which will be discussed later in the text.

¹³ The European Museum of the Year Award is presented by the European Museum Forum, an NGO composed of distinguished European museum workers, practitioners and theoreticians.

1980s, the number of newly founded ecomuseums in France increased rapidly, while the ecomuseum concept was spread across the world, first of all in the French-speaking Canada¹⁴ and Scandinavia.

The development of original French ecomuseums can be perceived through three basic stages. The first one lasts until 1971, with *Armorique* and *Grandes Landes*. It is primarily marked by a clear connection with nature parks and an emphasis on the spatial dimension. The second stage lasts approximately between 1971 and 1980 and introduces the dimension of time, defined territory and participation of local communities in the realization of projects (*Le Creusot*, *Camargue* and *Cevennes*). The third one starts after 1980 and is marked by an even stronger role of the local community and a further emphasis on the goals and methods of a defined efficiency of planned regeneration of areas. A fast growth rate of new ecomuseums is characteristic for this last stage (cf. Hubert, 1989: 146-153). Roughly at this time, from the state of clear differentiation, or even museum heresy as some believed, ecomuseums became a generally accepted concept in the museum practice. This is the result of changed social circumstances on one hand, and the acceptance of ecomuseum ideas (although usually adapted as necessary) by the so-called traditional or classic museum institutions on the other.

The recent period did not bring any major breakthroughs in the development, but was marked by a further expansion of the concept. According to P. Davis (cf. Davis: 1999; Davis: 2007), there are around sixty ecomuseums in France today, with more than three hundred institutions or projects worldwide being described as ecomuseums. Since May 1992, when the first international conference was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, representatives of ecomuseums have been meeting on a regular basis, exchanging practical experiences and theoretical insights in the ecomuseum movement. Regarding the recent period, it needs to be noted that ecomuseums, with their specific way of acting, are one of the first promoters of the ecotourism movement, as well as of sustainable and heritage tourism. This is yet another clear proof that since their very beginnings, ecomuseums have anticipated certain values that became generally accepted in the past 10-15 years. A similar thing can be said about their respect for intangible heritage,¹⁵ and we tend to believe that the ecomuseums concept can also be adapted to universal heritage values - in other words, that it is adaptable to different perceptions and values of heritage created inside different cultures, thus overcoming the 'classic' museum form, which is and will always be dominantly Eurocentric, and as such acceptable only in the western culture domain.

¹⁴ Already in the late 1970s.

¹⁵ Here we will not get involved in a theoretical discussion on the essential intangibility of any heritage, including the one we unambiguously denote as tangible; instead, we take intangibility as defined by UNESCO.

Ecomuseum definitions

It is not easy to define ecomuseum simply and in few words. Ecomuseum simply has to be experienced. However, since active participation in creating and developing an ecomuseum, and thus introducing the required own adaptations based on local needs, is not always possible, definitions are still the necessary starting point. Nevertheless, the same as theories, they exist to question and clarify in advance the meaning of the action we undertake, thus helping us define our goal and directing us on the right path. Ecomuseum definitions we present here have exactly this purpose and their specific expression reflects the needs of their authors to describe the essence and significance of this museological action, as well as the destiny of ecomuseums, which were in their historic development often met with enthusiasm, but also lack of understanding for the (museum) environment in which they existed. Three definitions formulated by one of the key players in creating the ecomuseum - Georges Henri Rivière – are the most important, and they also mirror their development.¹⁶ The first one originates in the year 1973 and is composed of two parts. In the first one, ecomuseum is defined as the ‘new genre of museum’ that is based on interdisciplinarity (especially ecology), organic bond with the community in which it exists, and participation of this community in its constitution and operation. The second part defines the very structure of ecomuseums. As *musee eclate*,¹⁷ it is composed of the primary coordination body and secondary bodies, branches or antennas. This definition saw major changes and amendments in the year 1976 (the so-called second definition). On January 22, 1980 G. H. Rivière suggested the third definition, which completely left out the word ‘museum’, replacing it with terms such as ‘expression’ or ‘interpretation’.¹⁸ The definition is as follows:

”An ecomuseum is an instrument conceived, fashioned and operated jointly by a public (e.g. local) authority, and its local population. The public authority’s involvement is through the experts [staff], facilities and resources it provides; the local population’s involvement depends on its aspirations, knowledge and individual approach.

It is a mirror in which the local population views itself to discover its own image, in which it seeks an explanation of the territory to which it is attached and of the populations which have preceded it, through the discontinuity or continuity of generations. It is a mirror that the local population holds up to its visitors so that it may be better understood and so that its industry, customs and identity may command respect.

It is an expression of man and nature. It situates man in his natural environment. It portrays nature in its wildness, but also as adapted by traditional and industrial society in their own image.

¹⁶ Definitions given here are cited from Hubert, 1989: 151.

¹⁷ Eng. fragmented museum.

¹⁸ In this way, phrases such as “museum of man and nature”, “museum of time” or “museum of space” will become “expression of man and nature”, “expression of time” or “expression of space”.

It is an expression of time, when the explanations it offers reach back before the appearance of man, ascend the course of the prehistoric and historical times in which he lived and arrive finally at man's present. It also offers vistas of the future, while having no pretensions to decision-making, its function being rather to inform and critically analyze.

It is an interpretation of space – of special places in which to stop or stroll.

It is a laboratory, in so far as it contributes to the study of the past and present of the population concerned and of its environment and promotes the training of specialists in those fields, in co-operation with outside research bodies. It is a conservation centre, in so far as it helps to preserve and develop the natural and cultural heritage of the population. It is a school, in so far as it involves the population in its work of study and protection and encourages it to have a clearer grasp of its own future. This laboratory, conservation centre and school are based on common principles. The culture in the name of which they exist is to be understood in its broadest sense, and they are concerned to foster awareness of its dignity and artistic manifestations, from whatever stratum of the population they derive. Its diversity is limitless, so greatly do its elements vary from one specimen to another. This triad, then, is not self-enclosed: it receives and it gives.”

This nearly poetical definition can be fully justified. Ecomuseums are not solid homogenous forms, they change and adapt depending on time, space, and most of all, population, the community in which they operate and its developmental needs, so the definitions are also always evolutive.

Along with G. H. Rivière, other main characters in the movement also offered their definitions of the 'new' museum, always trying to emphasize its main features or specific parts they saw as especially significant. Here we will mention some of the most notable ones.¹⁹ Pierre Mayrand in 1982 noticed that “eco-museum is a collective, a workshop extending over a territory that a population has taken as its own ... it is not an end to itself, it is defined as an objective to be met”. A. Desvallees in 1987 suggested that if G. H. Rivière's definition was to be accepted, then an ecomuseum must be a museum of identity (because of the mention of time, space and the mirror, i.e. reflection) and a museum of territory, where the prefix *eco* symbolizes the importance of both natural and social environment an ecomuseum is placed in. René Rivard in 1988 compared a traditional museum consisting of a building, collection, experts and audience with an ecomuseum consisting of territories, heritage, memory and community/population, while Mark Watson in 1992 in the *Encyclopedia of Industrial Archaeology* says: “An ecomuseum is a project that allows the population of an area to discern its own identity through its buildings, ecology, geology, as well as through documents and oral history and to make the studying of those a common action, and not something limited only to educated experts “ (225). Peter Davis, searching primarily for common indicators of ecomuseums concludes: “(...) the one characteristic that appears to be common to ecomuseums is pride in the place they represent. (...) ecomu-

¹⁹ Definitions have been quoted from (1999), except from those with a specific source given.

seums seek to capture the sense of place – and in my opinion it would appear that this is what makes them special (...).” (1999: 238-239). In May 2004, thirty years after the creation of the first ecomuseum, participants in the *Network of European Ecomuseums* workshop in Trento, Italy, defined ecomuseum as a dynamic way in which a specific community conserves, interprets and manages its own heritage through sustainable development. According to this definition, an ecomuseum is always based on agreement, i.e. consent of the community it operates in. The latter is probably the easiest to understand and almost implicit. Conservation, interpretation and management are today the functions that are understood when we talk about museums. The terms ‘heritage’ and ‘sustainable development’ should imply ideas that need no additional explanation. Space or, figuratively said, the door to consent of the community is partly opened with a focus on the user, who has over the past decade become the key subject of museum interest, even though user and community are not the same and there is still room for improvements. An exceptional importance of ecomuseums lies in the fact that all these values that are today implicit had been anticipated thirty years ago, by integrating in their operation the awareness of the totality of heritage and the need of using it for (sustainable) development, based on the needs of the local community as a whole.

Contribution of new museology

How important a role does theory play and was it really preceded by practice of ecomuseums? At first glance it might seem so, because more intensive theoretical debates, analyses and attempts at museological syntheses of this movement happened only several years later. However, practice and theory happened simultaneously (Šola, 1999: 20-23). Just as in the case of the development of ecomuseums, new museological reflections originated as the result of the processes taking place during the 1960s, which called for a more intensive care for the environment, social responsibility and an active role of museums, connected with a development policy (Varine, 2009). As early as 1968, in the final resolution of the ICOM general conference²⁰ it is required that “museums be recognized as major institutions in the service of development, because of the contribution they can make to cultural, social and economic life” (Davis, 1999: 52). Similar suggestions were also heard at the international symposium held in November 1969 in Paris²¹, and at the ICOM tenth general conference in 1971²², where museum workers were also presented with a request to take a further and continuous evaluation of the needs of their users. The roundtable held on May 20-31, 1972 in Santiago de Chile, Chile, and sponsored by the UNESCO was a turning point. This summit was originally planned as a discussion on the role of museums with regards to social and economic needs of the people of Latin America with four key top-

²⁰ In August this year, the 9th general conference of the ICOM was held in Munich, Germany.

²¹ Organized by ICOM; the symposium was named “*The Museums and the Modern World*”.

²² Held in Grenoble and Paris, France.

ics: 1) museums and cultural development in a rural environment, with a possibility of agricultural development; 2) museums and environmental issues; 3) museums and scientific/technological progress; and 4) museums and lifelong education. The key conclusion of the summit was a clear stand that the bond with communities in which museums are located and which they serve to is a must, because only such a bond will inspire both museums and communities to a high-quality reflection and conservation, which will then, as a result, encourage economic progress in a specific area (Davis, 1999: 53). The roundtable in Santiago also resulted in an idea of a new form of museum, called *integrated museum*,²³ integrated in the sense of a bond with the society and the environment that surrounds it, but also in the sense of its integration with all the other organizations or institutions of the society that serve and help the development the local community. A part of the adopted declaration confirms that: “the museum is an institution in the service of society of which it forms an inseparable part and, of its very nature, contains the elements which enable it to help in molding the consciousnesses of the community it serves, through which it can stimulate those communities to action by projecting forward its historical activities so that they culminate in the presentation of contemporary problems (...) The transformation in museological activities calls for gradual change in the outlook of the curators and administrators and in the institutional structure for which they are responsible. In addition, the integrated museum requires the permanent or temporary assistance of experts from various disciplines, including the social sciences.” (Davis, 1999: 54). Unfortunately, neither the declaration, nor the ideas coming from this meeting, was met with understanding and willingness by the majority of prominent museum workers to accept and apply them in practice. Following the summit in Santiago, at another seminar organized by ICOM called *Museums and Environment*²⁴ the role of museums was assessed additionally, this time directly in connection with environmental issues. The very neologism ecomuseum, which was publicly presented a year earlier for the first time²⁵, i.e. representatives advocating this idea, took on an important role in this discussion and in conclusion the seminar defined ecomuseums as specific environment museums (Hubert, 1989: 150). Further museological discussions over the ecomuseum movement were developed at ICOFOM conferences, first in Ciudad de México, Mexico, in 1980, and then in Paris, France, in 1982, where special attention was paid to the role of museums and ecomuseums in the society, although dominantly in the context of practice, and the relation between museology and new museology. While museology itself was not fully defined or recognized as a separate scientific discipline at the time, some committee members insisted on placing the second term (new museology) in the highlight of the committee’s operation, which lead to major differences and disputes. A similar thing happened at the ICOM general assembly in 1983 in London, when Canadian Pierre Mayrand proposed forming a workgroup, the so-called *social*

²³ Eng. *integrated museum*.

²⁴ Held September 25-30, 1972 in Bordeaux, Istras, Lourmarin and Paris, France.

²⁵ Created by Hugues de Varine and presented by French environmental minister *Robert Poujad* on September 3, 1971 in Dijon, on the occasion of receiving museum representatives from across the world gathered at the ICOM 10th general conference.

museology. ICOM's newly elected leaders rejected this proposal, explaining that it could create further confusion in relation to museology, which was itself still seeking a fuller affirmation. Still, it was decided to trust P. Mayrand with organization of a provisional workgroup and the preparation of a special meeting on ecomuseums and new museology as part of the ICOFOM summit planned for the following year. Since this meeting was never held (also thanks to obstructions by a part of ICOM's leaders), driven by the failure from London and a feeling of being systematically ignored, members gathered around the provisional workgroup decided to organize the *First International Workshop on Ecomuseums and the New Museology* on their own accord, which was held in 1984 in Québec, Canada. The main product of this workshop is the so-called *Quebec Declaration*, which explicitly underlines that "museology needs to advance its sources through multidisciplinary, modern means of communication used in all cultural actions, and modern methods of management that involve the user. While conserving the material achievements of past civilizations and protecting the achievements characteristic of the aspirations and technology of today, the new museology – ecomuseology, community museology and all other forms of active museology – is primarily concerned with community development, reflecting the driving forces in social progress and associating them in its plans for the future" (Mayrand, 1985: 201). The new museology actions were continued in November 1985 in Lisbon, Portugal, with the *Second International Workshop on Ecomuseums and the New Museology*, where, after unsuccessful attempts of founding a committee inside the ICOM, the international movement for new museology - *MINOM*²⁶ - was founded. In the paper published in the *Museum* magazine, P. Mayrand presented his view of differences and the necessity of parallel action:²⁷ "the reason can lie in the belatedness of the museum establishment to keep pace with many contemporary – cultural, social and political developments ... but, in our opinion, the main reason is the monolithic nature of the museological establishment, the superficiality of the reforms which it proposes and the marginalization of any experiment or viewpoint which might be described as at all committed", and therefore "taking into account the ideas that originated from the round table at Santiago which were tacitly put away, the declaration [Quebec declaration, D.B.] completely reaffirms the social mission of the museum as the new starting point and the precedence of this function over the traditional museum functions of protection, the building, object and audience ... from Santiago to Lisbon we are the witnesses of the transition of museology towards social and political consciousness and conscientiousness" (Mayrand, 1985: 200). Despite the above declarations and actions by its representatives, and apart from being recognized by its insistence on the bond between museums and communities they operate in, and the emphasis it places on the social and developmental role of museums, the new museology remained rather undefined at the epistemological level. Peter van Mensch (Mensch, 1995: 135-136) says that new museology as a term originated in three different times, three different places and three different meanings. According to his research, it first appeared, almost without attracting any attention, during the 1950s in the United States

²⁶ MINOM is the acronym for *Movement International de Museologie Nouvelle*.

²⁷ Note: The MINOM is today an official associate committee of the ICOM.

as an attempt to revitalize the educational role of museums; then in the 1970s in France as a new way of perceiving the role of museums in the society²⁸; and finally in late 1980s, exclusively in the United Kingdom, as an attempt to raise the quality level of museum communication. Nevertheless, according to available data (cf. Davis, 1999: 54), it seems that the very term ‘new museology’ first appeared in a published form in 1980 in a paper by Andre Desvallees in *Encyclopaedia Universalis*. This happened accidentally, because the attribute *new* was supposed to semantically indicate only a supplement to the earlier term ‘museology’. Although it is possible it was never an intention to create the neologism, the abstract that described it won over new followers, including all the derivatives that were created up until then, such as museological community, social museology, active museology, ecomuseology, popular museology etc. According to P. van Mensch, this relative confusion of so many terms is easily explainable: “in new museology the museological goals are directed towards the development of the community, hence the term social museology. The representation and preservation of heritage was considered in the context of social action and change... The people of the community themselves have to take care for their heritage, hence the term popular museology ... the concept of the museum is not confined to the building. A museum can be anywhere, and it is anywhere and everywhere within a certain territory. For this concept of the museum the term ecomuseum was invented, hence the term eco-museology” (1995: 136). Peter Vergo recognizes new museology as “a state of widespread dissatisfaction with the ‘old’ museology, both within and outside the museum profession in that it is too much about museum *methods* and too little about the purposes of museums” (1989: 3), even though the almanac of essays with the same title edited by himself deals exclusively with presenting museum items and comments on improving the role of museum communication with users.²⁹ Peter Davis (1999: 58) presents an interesting perspective – that new museology should be perceived in a wider context of a general interest for heritage, cultural identity and property relations, i.e. inside the relations of ownership of the heritage. Summarizing all of the above, we could conclude that the key features of new museology are primarily defined by dissatisfaction with traditional museums, their practice of inertness in relation to problems of the society they exist in and the need to change it, but also the wish to improve and design a better concept (with a clearly pronounced practical application) that will enrich museology and give it a new meaning and role. Or, in other words, new museology is a group name for a new theoretical reflection on the role of the museum as an institution in society, but also a correlation between man and heritage in the complexity of realities they exist in, with an emphasis on the necessary applicability of theory in everyday practice.

However we might interpret them, ecomuseums and the new museology have marked an important turning point in development, by questioning the man-society-heritage relation, even though its original advocates failed to make a critically required theoretical synthesis in the sense of redefining the existing or formulating a new scientific

²⁸ An in relation to ecomuseums.

²⁹ As a significant representative of the third tendency within new museology as defined by P. van Mensch.

ic discipline³⁰, i.e. the very phenomenon of studying. Ecomuseums shed the concept of museum as a building/institution³¹, while the concept of a museum item as the central phenomenon was replaced with the concept of the totality of heritage. Looking from a scientific development perspective, in this manner they pointed to the possible anomalies of museology. While certain ideas and even partly developed theories were somewhat formulated in this direction³², many challenges still lie ahead - structural definition of the fundamental subject of study and a comprehensive theory that would explain it seem like the most significant ones. The analysis of heritage as a true phenomenon was merely initiated with the ecomuseum practice and new museology. With the required input of traditional scientific disciplines relating to museums, today communicology and public media, sociological rural, urban and regional studies, geography (which was often neglected in this segment), economy, especially through management and marketing, and even other disciplines which remotely deal with or research the content of heritage and identity, can provide a special and exceptionally valuable contribution. The overlapping of the basic subject of study between seemingly distant scientific areas or branches, a convergence that is happening at a practical level, and partly existing articulations aimed at synthesis, indicate that a new scientific discipline is not such a distant future. It is true that in new museology as a theory, or in ecomuseums as pragmatic forms, we will not find enough elements to conclude we have already reached that level, but at the same time we will not be wrong in pointing to them as the key potential of what we believe will develop into a new, clearly interdisciplinary science of heritage.

Instead of conclusion, or value of ecomuseums

Ecomuseums created in France in the early 1970s, are a special materialization of a new way of looking at the relation between the society and environment in which they exist. Insisting upon a developmental component is their immanent determinant. While their practice sometimes used some of the already existing institutional experiences, ecomuseums possess an important distinctive function of a new approach, thus creating a kind of a developmental paradigm – of museums themselves as institutions of the society, but also a theoretical deliberation of the correlation between man and the totality of heritage. Even after more than thirty years after their creation, they are still being considered an innovation by many. The irony is, as often happens in life, that despite all their accomplishments, ecomuseums are still most famous by their name alone. There is no doubt, as the author himself has admitted, that the neologism was created as a compromise at the time the word museum was rather unpopular, so the prefix *eco* served to give the newly created museum form the necessary political and social credibility. Unfortunately, as late as forty years lat-

³⁰ Independent or interdisciplinary.

³¹ The new museology even sheds the need of an institution.

³² Compare, e.g.: Šola, 2003: 301-319 and Šola, 2005: 5-7.

er, many still fail to understand that this prefix does not imply an exclusive focus on the issues related to the natural heritage or rural areas.³³ The original intention of its use indeed stems from the meaning of ecology, which has its root in the Greek word *oikos*³⁴, but unlike superficial interpretations that followed, the use of the word *ecology* in the case of ecomuseums implied a true reflection of the development of cultural and economic life in a specific area defined by conditions and restrictions of the natural environment (Engström, 1985: 206). Another problem of the original concept of ecomuseums, again, ironically, considering its initial development, was created as the result of the trendiness they had caused at some point. The use of this term³⁵ has often meant a safer and easier provision of funds needed for establishing a new museum or its operation. It also has to be said that the forms we call true ecomuseums³⁶ did not even use this name, sometimes as a resistance to the general trend, but also because of the understanding that practice and form of operation based on identity cannot always simply be copied to a different location. Taking into consideration all the variants to be included under one term, whatever name we may give it, all the phenomena and practices that have happened over the past forty years as a result of the new way of thinking, it is possible to extract several significant and common characteristics. The basic indicators of ecomuseums are:

- adopting, or spreading over the territory that is not necessarily defined by conventional borders;
- accepting the policy of dislocated, fragmented localities that is connected to an *in situ* conservation and interpretation;
- departure from the conventional perception of ownership; conservation and interpretation of a locality is carried out through bonds and collaboration;
- empowerment of local community – by involving the local population in museum activities and in creating their cultural identity;
- presence of interdisciplinarity and holistic interpretation.³⁷

An ecomuseum therefore implies a clear interdisciplinary approach, it possesses a firm regional characteristic (it is defined by boundaries of identity and culture, rather than administrative borders) and, of course, implies involvement and collaboration with a local community that necessarily participates in its planning, operation and management – it is the real curator of an ecomuseum.

Finally, looking back on their development so far and considering the future of ecomuseums, we can accept the view of Tomislav Šola, who says that ecomuseums have “united in a compact way theory and practice ... because it (creating ecomuseums) means

³³ Including the co-type of natural museums or ethnographic museums.

³⁴ In the meaning of household, house, family.

³⁵ Interpreted in the sense of a usable tool for the preservation of natural heritage.

³⁶ Perhaps it would be more correct to say: different forms of heritage actions that with its practice and theoretical deliberations overlap with the ideas relating to original ecomuseums.

³⁷ Listed by: Davis, 1999: 228.

to follow a philosophy, mental and social behavior transformed into a professional methodology that has always implied a recognizable approach. ... (Therefore) an ecomuseum cannot be a model, but rather a way of listening to / comprehending an institutional mission and responsibility in realizing objectives of a common ideal. ... ecomuseum theory, if understood correctly, represents a complete turning point, the mental change so eagerly awaited that it gives a dominant light and inspiration to the museum world. An institutionalized museum in its finality is a complete awareness of individual and group identities, a way of cohabitation with the past, awareness of the value of a specific identity. These values should be known, preserved and cherished with love, in order to discover continuity within inevitable changes" (1999: 20-23).

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