

Thomas Laely, Marc Meyer, Raphael Schwere (eds.)
Museum Cooperation between Africa and Europe

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A New Field for Museum Studies

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Investigating Museum Development in Africa: From Museum Cooperation to the Appropriation of Praxis

Emery Patrick Effiboley

Introduction

This chapter reviews three collective projects that were carried out between museums in Africa and governmental and non-governmental bodies based in North America and Europe. The first was a cooperative project between the Musée de la Civilisation in Québec and several museums in various African countries. The second was a West African Museum Programme (WAMP) initiative with museums on the African continent. The third project was funded by the Netherlands government to support the Musée Historique d'Abomey in the Republic of Benin.

On the basis of these three examples, this contribution demonstrates that there has been no shortage of projects intended to enhance the functioning of African museum institutions, and the quality of their services to audiences over the last sixty years. However, throughout those decades they have lacked a vision about what an African museum is – or should be – in the post-independence era.

Finally, this chapter suggests that, if African authorities and museum stakeholders do not fully assume the full remit of their own responsibilities, these kinds of cooperative projects will not bring about sustainable change to the museum sector across the continent.

Problems and sources of analysis

A museum is a means of presenting cultural heritage that was passed on to independent African states by their former colonial administrations (Gaugue 1999; Effiboley 2014-2015). This colonial aspect of museums in Africa is highlighted by Konare (1995): 'The museum as an institution is inherited from the colonial era, whose main features remain its extraversion and its isolation from the communities it is supposed to serve'. From the 1950s on, the way in which museums have functioned in Africa has remained static – not only in terms of the exhibitions and programmes offered, but also by neglecting to account for the indigenous cultural practices from which the objects and artworks they host derive (Effiboley 2013, 2014-2015). Ultimately, museums today continue to perpetuate the model inherited from Western modernity – one that is clearly out-of-date, given the current views about appropriation and indigenisation. Although this situation is widely accepted, what is less obvious is why and how this is still the case. One reason is that museums have generally only taken the tangible aspect of cultural heritage into account, failing to embrace and document the whole of human endeavour, such as the patrimonialisation of knowledge and know-how (praxis). Changing perspectives in the field of heritage will open up new paths

of enquiry and conceptualisation of purpose for various types of museums: for example, art museums covering different periods in history and specialised thematic museums, such as those on (tele)communications, philately, transportation, eroticism and religion.

Considering the specificity of museums in Africa, how is Euro-African museum cooperation perceived? Why, despite decades of cooperation in the field of museum and cultural heritage, have the image and perception of museums changed so little, if at all? What conditions need to be fulfilled for museums in Africa to change significantly and become no longer seen as appendices of Western modernity and cultural practice?

In order to answer these questions, I will analyse the three projects mentioned above and discuss my findings.

Successful museum cooperation in Africa

Each of the three projects reviewed had different cooperative frameworks and, even if they are not strictly Euro-African, the questions they raise are similar to such kinds of cooperation. The first is *Ingénieuse Afrique*, a project initiated by the francophone Musée de la Civilisation in Québec together with several African museums: the Musée Historique d'Abomey and the Alexandre Sènou Adandé Ethnographic Museum in the Republic of Benin; the Museum of the Civilisations of Cote d'Ivoire, the National Museum of Mali; and the Museum of African Art of Dakar in Senegal (Ferera 1996, 5). The second is the workshop *Ouidah à travers ses fêtes et ses patrimoines familiaux*¹ which was organised by the West African Museums Programme (WAMP), a non-governmental organisation that has been supporting museums in Africa for the past thirty years.² Finally, I will analyse the project which aimed to digitise the Musée Historique d'Abomey's collections in 2000-2002, with support from governmental cooperation between The Netherlands and the Republic of Benin.³

Whereas the first two projects were based on mounting exhibitions, the third relates to documentation, a key aspect of museum work. However, despite its importance, this project did not reach its conclusion, owing to technical problems (the computer provided for the project broke) and administrative problems (the curator in position when the project started was removed and the project was suspended). The project was neither completed nor evaluated. Consequently, the archives of this project are scattered and the digitisation is unfinished.

Before reviewing these projects, it is useful to gain an overview of the partners involved, to highlight what their diversity reveals about the functioning of the African museum sector.

What all three projects have in common is the point that they originated outside the African continent and were mostly led by external entities and organisations: the Musée

1 In English: *Ouidah through its celebrations and familial heritage*.

2 This initiative is fully documented in A. Adandé (1997).

3 I would like to thank Paul Faber, former curator of the Africa Department at the Amsterdam Tropenmuseum who, despite leaving the institution, was able to gather the archives produced before his tenure at the museum. Otherwise, I would not have been able to easily access these archives, either in the museum at Abomey or in the Direction du Patrimoine Culturel in Benin.

de la Civilisation du Québec and the Tropenmuseum, under the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINBUZA), and the WAMP, a body created by the International African Institute (IAI), which is mainly supported by the American Rockefeller and Ford Foundations. This diversity probably reveals the lack of joint projects among African museums themselves in the absence of a professional umbrella body,⁴ but also a dearth of interest and attention from African policymakers.

The international exhibition project, *Ingénieuse Afrique*, started with an idea that had emerged in Canada. As Ferera stated in the book which resulted from the project,

At the beginning, there was the Museum of Civilisation, a young institution from Quebec which took the initiative to create an exhibition on an aspect of the social and economic life of Africa. On the other side, African museums were interested in an original project and an innovative partnership. (Ferera 1996, 5; author's translation)

The project evolved as follows. Firstly, there was communication between the partners to define the scope of the project, the communication devices to be used, and the museography training required for the staff involved; then collecting the materials to be exhibited, and designing the exhibition itself as well as its touring route across different countries. The partners involved were all satisfied with the outcomes, to the extent that some have called it 'an exemplary project'. The *Ingénieuse Afrique* exhibition was renewed and enlarged for a further staging, *Femmes, bâtisseurs d'Afrique* and the materials collected for this last exhibition were offered to the city of Ouidah.

This was a Canadian initiative where the stakeholders decided to fully involve African partners from the start (Ferera 1996, 5). However, several years have passed since this exhibition and the working relations established among the museum staff on the African continent have not prospered. This is probably because professional museum networks are generally short-lived. Some examples of this brevity are the Museums Association of Tropical Africa (AMAT-MATA), the International Council of African Museums (AFRICOM) and the Benin branch of the International Council of Museums (COBICOM).⁵ It might be that an underlying reason for this relates to the way in which people in charge of museums and cultural heritage perceive their work. Above all, the real problem is the perception that African states and policymakers have about this domain. These stakeholders rarely allocate sufficient funds to museums, which impedes their staffing and operations.

4 Thus, we should be advocating collaborations between museums in Africa if we want to build a cohesive continent, as the regional organisations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA, Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine) and others are doing.

5 For more details, see Muller (1965, 123); Effiboley (2014-2015, 23-24, 36).

Figure 12.1: Two exhibits from the exhibition *Femmes, bâtisseurs d’Afrique*, which were offered to Benin and presented to the *Maison du Brésil* at Ouidah



Photographs: Emery Patrick Effiboley, 2017

The second project analysed in this chapter is the workshop⁶ *Ouidah à travers ses patrimoines et ses fêtes*, which was held from 28 January to 28 February 1995. Organised by the WAMP in partnership with the Direction du Patrimoine Culturel (the state Department of Culture), this workshop brought together museum professionals and scholars from diverse West African countries with several families in Ouidah, who provided information and tangible material attesting to their ancestral heritage, for an experimental exhibition. Explaining the motives behind this initiative, Joseph Adandé wrote:

[the] exhibition and the workshop in Ouidah are part of a general policy of museum development in Africa designed by the WAMP. For this organisation, it has become important that African museums today serve as tools of development for the communities they are in, that they listen to their needs, that they take into account their problems and questions, in order to find tentative solutions or at least stimulate common thought. (J. Adandé 1997, 43; author’s translation)

This exhibition was an opportunity to display and document family heritage, restore those objects which were in poor condition, and show the collected, previously unknown material to the general public.

6 This project was developed with the financial support of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the United States Information Service and local sponsors like Maersk Bénin, Sobebra and CimBénin. For more information, read Joseph Adandé (1997, 42-49).

The third project attempted to assist with digitising the collections of Benin's Musée Historique d'Abomey, with support from bilateral cooperation between the Netherlands and Benin. Entitled *Object ID*⁷, the project was designed to be implemented in phases, which would be delivered as training sessions. The first phase of training was offered to the museum staff on 14-17 November 2000, on Windows 98 and Microsoft Access 97, using a computer which was made available for the training. The second phase was provided on 27 November to 8 December 2000, by two Dutch specialists who taught participants about digitising museum collections. The following year, the museum staff were given a workshop led by Carel van Leeuwen and Maurice van der Hoff in order to refresh their computer and digitisation skills. Carel van Leeuwen (2001) mentioned in his report issued one year later that few objects had actually been registered and digitised.

After the training given to the museum at Abomey, the plan had been to extend this digitisation to other public museums, such as the History Museum of Ouidah, the Alexandre Sènou Adandé Ethnographic Museum and the Museum of Honmè Palace in Porto-Novo. But, due to several challenges, including maintaining the material, insufficient staff, and a sudden change of museum directors, the project was never completed. Consequently, the anticipated Dutch cooperation that was intended to ameliorate some other problems in the museum sector never transpired. This meant that a series of proposed outcomes, such as providing training in ethnomusicology and documenting traditional musical instruments, support for thematic brochures on the museums, a CD-ROM edition of the Royal Tropical Institute's collection and a project of editing a new and revised version of the brochure did not materialise (Rapport 2000).

Ever since the country lost this significant partner, which had been supporting the cultural sector, museums in Benin have not been able to secure another partner with an equally high level of interest. Neither has the government managed to secure *ad hoc* funds for the museum sector.⁸

Analysis of obstacles to sustaining outcomes on a long-term basis

Following the overview of the three projects, this section analyses the findings that can be drawn from these museum cooperation experiences.

First of all, it is important to note that all three projects achieved their main goal, which was to bring together partners from different backgrounds and, sometimes, different museological cultures, in order to reach a final result. The first project, *Ingénieuse Afrique* enabled

7 *Object ID* was a project between The Netherlands and fourteen non-European countries, such as Benin, Ghana, Sri Lanka, India and Indonesia. During the conference in Zurich from which this book arises, a Ghanaian colleague, Kwame Labi (see Labi in this volume), remarked that many projects – including this one – are usually initiated without consulting the partner museums in Africa. By doing this, they do not necessarily take into account the urgent needs of these museums. However, through the description of *Ingénieuse Afrique*, it is evident that this project was less ready-made, since the idea came from Canada but the African partners contributed substantially to its conception and implementation.

8 About the funding of museums, see Effiboley (2015).

a collection of artefacts and artworks from different places and countries to be displayed in the Ecopole (ENDA Tiers-Monde) museum in Dakar, Senegal (Ferera 1996, 3). The other two projects did not result in institutionalised outcomes or the renewal of museum praxis, but did produce strong and policy-based community involvement.⁹ In other words, the workshop at Ouidah was a real success in terms of local families' participation through their involvement and the objects they lent to the project. These objects have a unique heuristic value that questions the history of the city, as Joseph Adandé wrote:

The Yoruba families lent a set of materials of Ifa divination. These objects show how Europeans at the Bight of Benin tried to adapt the vessels commissioned by African traditional rulers, sometimes providing earthenware models of ritual objects that are usually clay. The Tchiakpè family for instance gave, through these objects, an example of possible changes endured by the servants of the local authorities from a period to another. (Adandé 1997, 46; author's translation)

The pieces, which had never been publicly displayed before, are comparable to what the Musée de la Compagnie des Indes of Lorient in France calls 'objets métissés' on its website – that is, items that were 'designed for Europeans in the zones where European commercial companies were active' (Musée de la Compagnie des Indes, n.d.; author's translation). However, in the case of *Ouidah*, it was the Europeans who manufactured objects for their African interlocutors. This demonstrates another side of African agency – Africans' capacity to initiate things for themselves, which is not usually emphasised in Western scholarship (Effiboley 2014-2015).

Owing to the difficulty of choosing the objects for the exhibition in Ouidah, several families' contributions were not selected by the committee, and one visitor even regretted the 'elitist' nature of the exhibition (J. Adandé 1997, 47). Nevertheless, those families expressed their willingness to be part of a similar project in the future (J. Adandé 1997, 47). In response to that interest, Joseph Adandé wrote enthusiastically: 'Without any doubt, it will happen soon'. This optimistic prediction became true through another exhibition – an initiative by the Porto-Novo-based School of African Heritage (EPA) that presented a show entitled *Aguda: itineraries and identities*, with the same mode of community participation,¹⁰ from 28 November 2001 to 28 February 2002. Afro-Brazilian communities from Ouidah, Cotonou, Agoué and Porto-Novo contributed substantially to that production, providing various objects and household goods, and the exhibition was successful. The issue that arose, however, was that the Ministry of Culture did not manage to maintain the relationship between a museum and its communities that had been inspired by the WAMP. This practice of connecting museums to communities has gradually been dying out ever since.

9 I have previously discussed the issue of community involvement in museums, see Effiboley (2005). The analysis given in that article needs to be enhanced and updated.

10 This exhibition was organised in the context of an international conference, *Aspects du patrimoine afro-brésilien dans le golfe du Bénin*, which took place at the Maison internationale de la culture in Porto-Novo on 26-30 November 2001 and brought scholars together from several countries in Africa, Europe and the Americas.

When considering why this welcome opportunity to enliven African museums failed, the complex family heritage at stake becomes evident. Perceiving this complexity, Joseph Adandé asked what kind of history can be written with these types of objects:

This exhibition raises many issues, among which the most important are related to history as a discipline. The exhibition curator was confronted with a type of story one can write or tell with objects in such conditions. There are still chronological gaps in our knowledge. (J. Adandé 1997, 46; author's translation)

Is it the difficulty in confronting the complexity of family heritage that discourages the Direction du Patrimoine Culturel and prevents it from promoting this kind of relationship between museums and families? Ouidah is well-known as a cosmopolitan city, with conflicting memories at stake. Or does the failure to sustain a relationship with communities stem from the lack of political will and vision that prevents the government from paving the way for museums and cultural heritage in the country to demonstrate their social relevance? In today's global village where people are revisiting knowledge constructed in the modern, colonial and postcolonial periods, when Frantz Fanon's (1963) seminal book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, is re-read with nostalgia, it is no longer possible to rely on one linear and agreed-upon (true) history. Some French-speaking historians call this new approach an 'histoire connectée' (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2013) – that is, a connected history which has multiple perspectives, since every historical discourse reflects the specific positionality of its bearer. As an African proverb states: 'Until lions have their own historians, the history of hunting will be told by hunters'.

So, if Africa lacks its own historians, it is now high time for Africans to revisit the history of their continent which has, so far, been told from other people's viewpoints. It is time to challenge the mainstream history of the continent from different angles and perspectives, in order to deconstruct the master narrative and highlight convergences and specificities of its diverse (or diversified) cultures.

What needs to be questioned is not just the perception of decision-makers in the political sphere, but more broadly the issue of how African leaders perceive museums and their contents – including, to a certain extent – their perception of all Western modernity heritage on the continent. When a new sovereign accedes to the throne, they frequently impact on many domains, in particular the arts and culture of their country. One example from Ancient Egypt involves the pharaoh Amenophite IV. When he came to power, Amenophite IV induced a sort of revolution in the pantheon that transpired equally in the arts. Ernest Gombrich states that

the portraits that he ordered, due to their newness, shocked the Egyptians of his time. In them, nothing remained apart from their stiff dignity and the solemnity of the ancient pharaohs. He had himself represented with his spouse Nefertiti caressing his children under a beneficial sun. (Gombrich 2006, 59; author's translation)

Figure 12.2: A photographed papyrus representing the pharaoh worshipping the sun



Photograph: Emery Patrick Effiboley, 2017

Less far back in the past, the rulers of Dànxiòmè¹¹ Kingdom, from today's Republic of Benin, had also made their mark on the arts, as Mercier and Lombard observed:

The king Agadja [1714-1724] was the first to have the idea of reserving a large part of the artworks produced by certain artisans for his own use and started ordering the manufacture of the thrones and special seats for his ministers. (Mercier and Lombard 1959, 24; author's translation)

Another ruler whose actions had a noticeable impact on the cultural history of the kingdom of Dànxiòmè was Agonglo (1797-1818). He was the first king to ask local artists to draw celebrated episodes from history on coloured material and sew them onto monochrome clothes (Mercier and Lombard 1959, 26).

Today, these professions still exist and are an important feature of the workshops currently running at the site of Abomey's palaces, where the Musée Historique is situated today. This example helps to explain the influence that political decisions have on the development of a country's arts and cultural sector. Another example whose legacy remains, but which is not mentioned in the relevant literature, is that of President Léopold Sédar Senghor. During the first *Festival mondial des arts nègres* in Dakar in 1966, he launched (the concept of) the 'Musée dynamique' – a museum that displayed a temporary exhibition of artworks from several countries in Africa. In doing so, he established a tradition that has since been adopted by French presidents (Effiboley 2014-2015). This museum was closed, and the building transferred to the judiciary administration under Abdou Diouf's presidency in the mid-1980s.

In today's Republic of Benin, it is difficult to identify any distinctive government policy action in the field of the arts and culture that has made a structural difference. No past president dared to visit a museum or open an exhibition at the height of their prestige. None established a new museum to house the artworks they considered to be the country's most valuable. For the ten years that former President Thomas Boni Yayi was in power (2006-2016), he always arranged a trip outside the country so that he would not be there to celebrate or give a public speech on 10 January, the day devoted to traditional religions in Benin. Research into archives and the local press indicates that President Emile Derlin Zinsou, in office for just under a year (1968-1969), was the only one who dared to interact publicly in such a setting, during the December 1968's Djahouhou ceremonies¹² in Abomey.

Not only did he attend, but he also agreed to be carried like the kings of Dànxiòmè in a hammock, an image which was captured by the press. His reasons for doing this are uncertain, though – it might have been to attract public attention in the hope of benefitting from it electorally later on, since voters would know the circumstances under which he came to power. However, this interaction – that could be perceived as an attempt to gain sympathy – did not prevent him from being overthrown in a military coup in December 1969. But he

11 Dànxiòmè was the original name (as transcribed in the International Phonetic Alphabet) of the kingdom which was conquered by the French army in 1893 and from which the colony of Dahomey was created, by the decree dated 22 June 1894, published in the *Journal officiel de la Colonie du Dahomey et dépendances* (1894).

12 The *Djahouhou* is a special royal ceremony that takes place in Abomey, with libations performed to honour their ancestors.

seems to be the only president to have performed this kind of interaction with Benin's traditions publicly. Few other past presidents have given any kind of symbolic gesture, except for President Nicephore Soglo, who established the celebration of traditional religions on 10 January every year, as a way to counter-balance the apparent hegemony of Christianity and Islam. Apart from the president, who can set policies about culture and traditions, it is often the case that the minister in charge of the Department of Arts and Culture, which includes museums, does not set foot in a museum for their entire term of office.¹³ It is difficult to ascertain how political leaders and administrative authorities perceive museums, or any governmental project designed and implemented permanently in the sector. These authorities are probably victims of the colonial mindset, which avoided engaging publicly with the cultural heritage landscape.

This state of affairs might explain what those scholars reflecting on postcolonial studies (e.g. Mignolo 2002; Grosfoguel 2011; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Wenzel, 2017) call the 'concept of coloniality'. Clarifying this concept, Ama Biney wrote that 'it remains a reconfigured form of domination, control and exploitation of the rest of the world in authority, economics, knowledge, subjectivity, gender, sexuality and nature by the countries of the North over the countries of the South' (Biney 2016, 3).

This state of being, which I have translated from the French word 'colonialité' (Effiboley 2014-2015), means thinking almost like a French person. For instance, if an individual's mind is set – I mean, if they are educated – in the French language, they will think, behave and consume in relation to the mental structures of that language. The same is true for those Africans who speak English, Portuguese or Spanish. As a result, this mindset establishes a kind of mental distance – which I originally called a 'distance mentale' in French (Effiboley 2017) – from other Africans on the continent. Thus, they are victims of extraversion and, ultimately, they become strangers to one another. They ignore each other. They do not trust each other and cannot collaborate on a long-term basis, in order to accomplish significant projects. They are, in a way, divided. They almost feel obliged to refer to their former colonial masters as intermediaries for brokering inter-African relationships. The current structures that are embedded in commercial and global interactions aggravate the situation even more – as shown by the fact that it costs less to make a telephone call from Africa to the West than between countries in Africa.¹⁴ These kinds of things maintain a mental distance between populations on the continent.

13 I am not suggesting that ministers should actually work in a museum – but that, if they have the political power they are entitled to, including access to funds, they should have the means to get things done and change the state of affairs in the sector.

14 While a phone call from Benin to France, the USA or Canada costs an average of one CFA franc per second from the country's telephone companies, calls from Benin to Côte d'Ivoire, Togo and Burkina Faso cost double that. More astonishingly, a call from Benin to neighbouring Nigeria is even more expensive. These figures are taken from an advertising campaign run by the telephone company Moov in December 2016 along the big roads of the main cities. This company and its rivals – South African MTN and Nigerian Glo – are earning billions of CFA francs while the national provider, Libercom, has been deliberately left to wither away. On 21 June 2017, the government of Benin decided to put an end to this lethargy by dissolving the company altogether.

Figure 12.3: Signs in Porto-Novo (left) and Cotonou (right) illustrating extraversion at work



Photographs: Emery Patrick Effiboley, 2017

When President Patrice Talon was inaugurated in April 2016, there was some hope that he would reverse these trends, but this optimism may turn out to be misplaced. Instead of empowering the government's administrative structures, he has chosen to establish agencies that are mostly responsible to the president himself. The National Agency for the Promotion of the Heritage and Tourism (ANPT), in charge of the cultural heritage sector, is accountable solely to the president. There are two problems with this management strategy: firstly, it offers no support to other, already-existing bodies and, secondly, it means that its longevity is at risk, as the agency might disappear once the president leaves office. This looks like a hidden form of privatisation that will hinder institutional empowerment and human resources.

Meanwhile, the state-owned museums lack personnel¹⁵ and funds, and some of their collections are either in poor condition or incompletely documented (Effiboley 2015). These circumstances render museums unable to sustain the knowledge and know-how acquired during cooperative projects. A good example of this is the computer that stopped working in Abomey, meaning that the project to digitise its collections has never been resumed.

All of these issues together make it vital for a policy for arts and cultural affairs to be devised in Benin, which would enable the effective protection of cultural heritage and, more importantly, education in cultural heritage.¹⁶ The educational programmes taught in secondary

15 The cultural sector suffered the most from the Structural Adjustment Programme which the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank prescribed to the government of the Republic of Benin from 1986 to the late 1990s. Amongst other measures, they demanded cutting the number of civil servants by half and prohibited the recruitment of new staff. This state of affairs has prevented the transmission of praxis. After dismantling many countries' economies in the Global South, these institutions apologised in an article (Ostry, Loungani and Furceri 2016).

16 Nevertheless, I admit that the real problem in our formerly-colonised countries is that we do not have fully inclusive policies. I mean, first and foremost, a health policy that gives everyone access to treatment and medication in the case of illness; an education policy that embraces all domains of

schools up until the early 2000s barely addressed African arts and heritage, and only the history syllabus for Third Form pupils included a lesson on African art history. Even that lesson was so advanced that none of the teachers could teach it, as many of those I interviewed – who are now retired – explained. It is, therefore, understandable that citizens who have not been sufficiently exposed to African art and heritage cannot defend it with the necessary vigour and conviction. In this context of general ignorance about art and heritage, the best hope is to design and implement education policies that will prioritise comprehensive teaching in these areas. This is one of the key conditions needed to produce future citizens who understand the value of culture and will become its future managers, patrons, promoters, critics and publics. But the problem is whether we still are in an era of voluntaristic public policies at a moment when nation-states are becoming increasingly privatised.¹⁷

The accountability of the ever-weakening public authorities is one issue, but it is also extremely important that people working in the cultural heritage sector become aware of their own responsibility as ‘keepers of the temple’ – heritage guardians – who should rebuke the authorities where there is oversight, carelessness and, sometimes, amnesia. They should also make sure that good practices become the norm in this sector. Clearly, this is not possible without a strong associative life for professionals in the museum and heritage sector. The Benin Committee of the International Council of Museums (COBICOM), constructively played this guardianship role in the past decades, but has now fallen into lethargy. Nevertheless, one should not point all the blame at the COBICOM. The situation of professional associations across the whole continent is not much different. From the Museum Association of Tropical Africa (MATA/AMTA) in the 1960s to the International Council of African Museums (AFRICOM) – which closed its doors in Nairobi, Kenya in 2015 (Effiboley 2014–2015) – the problems have always been the same: lack of personnel, lack of funds to run the museums, absence of a clear policy and low levels of involvement in professional membership bodies.

However, it will be difficult to reverse, or even curb, the declining trend in empowering cultural heritage and museums in Africa¹⁸ unless an in-depth awareness about cultural

activities (not only the Westernised education system); and a national production policy to enable the active population to contribute to the wealth of the whole community, a kind of distributive justice. These are the main steps needed to achieve cohesive countries where everybody can expect to feel at ease.

- 17 In the Netherlands in the 1990s, the Deltaplan was an exemplary museum policy which was recognised internationally but has been dismantled because of economic austerity since the beginning of the 2010s. The African collections, assembled during the era of conquest and colonialism, are being sold off, regardless of the ethics that bind museums worldwide (Franck 2013).
- 18 From this perspective, it would be interesting, for instance, to include a compulsory module on African studies for all students in African universities, especially the Francophone ones – from mathematics, physics and other related disciplines, to social and human sciences – to help them acquire this historical and patrimonial awareness. This kind of consciousness enabled Zebulon Velakazi, professor of theoretical physics at the University of the Witwatersrand, to link his research to measurement techniques in Ancient Egypt, in his inaugural lecture on 29 May 2016 (Velakazi 2016). In order to understand the reappropriation and repackaging of knowledge and become aware of how the West created its hegemony, see Jacques Attali (1982).

heritage is taught at primary and secondary schools and augmented by university degree programmes and in other professional settings. That is why it is so important to reinforce the contents of educational programmes about African arts and heritage and, more generally, about African indigenous knowledge and cultures. To achieve this, it is essential to generate a convergence of thoughts and actions among teachers at all levels of education, on the one hand, along with robust collaboration between the government education and culture departments, on the other.

Conclusion and a way forward

To conclude, this chapter has shown that, despite the short-term success of individual cooperation projects, an appropriation of good praxis and the long-term institutionalisation of results are both needed to create a lasting, beneficial impact on the museum sector in Africa. The projects discussed demonstrate how key stakeholders were unable to fully embrace their roles or assume their responsibilities, and how policymakers failed in their duties. Thus, it is extremely important that the knowledge gained through initiatives like this must be transferred to public policies. If this does not happen, future similar cooperation projects will continue to be incomplete or ineffective. In the case of *Ingénieuse Afrique*, the project's outcome was turned into a new ecomuseum in Dakar, Senegal – a positive, long-term effect. This has enriched the museum field in Dakar and in Africa more widely, with a museum resulting from an international collaborative endeavour. This kind of initiative sometimes suffers from the lack of a sense of national rootedness. In the case of the *Ouidah* workshop, the organisers should have capitalised on the excitement it created among local families, to enable follow-up activities such as creating a community centre for the town, establishing a community involvement policy and, maybe, even expanding such a policy to the national level. The project to digitise the collections in Abomey ground to a halt before it could be completed. The unfinished character of that project shows how far cooperation projects in the museum and cultural heritage sector depend on a widespread awareness of the practical value of cultural heritage. This awareness will serve as a stimulus to all parties involved in the development of cultural heritage: a more demanding civil society, professionals who take the full remit of their responsibilities more seriously, public authorities who are more dedicated to the sector, and potential patrons who will start viewing museums and culture as a good field to invest in, to increase their individual prestige and political influence. These patrons will be able to contribute their valuable wealth to institutions in Africa.¹⁹

Without these concerted efforts and willingness, museum cooperation projects will be, at best, short-term successes and, at worse, a complete waste of time, and the international

19 For the time being, African patrons continue to be very generous towards major museums abroad. For instance, the London-based Tate Gallery has received support from wealthy Nigerians in recent years, while museums in their home country often suffer from a lack of funds (Effiboley 2014–2015). In Benin, Lionel Zinsou has set up a foundation, but this initiative is part of a French policy which created similar organisations in France (see Institut Montaigne 2002). No wealthy Beninese who has made their fortune locally provides such support on the ground in their home country.

partners will not be able to do anything to salvage institutions and allow them to flourish in the long-term.

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