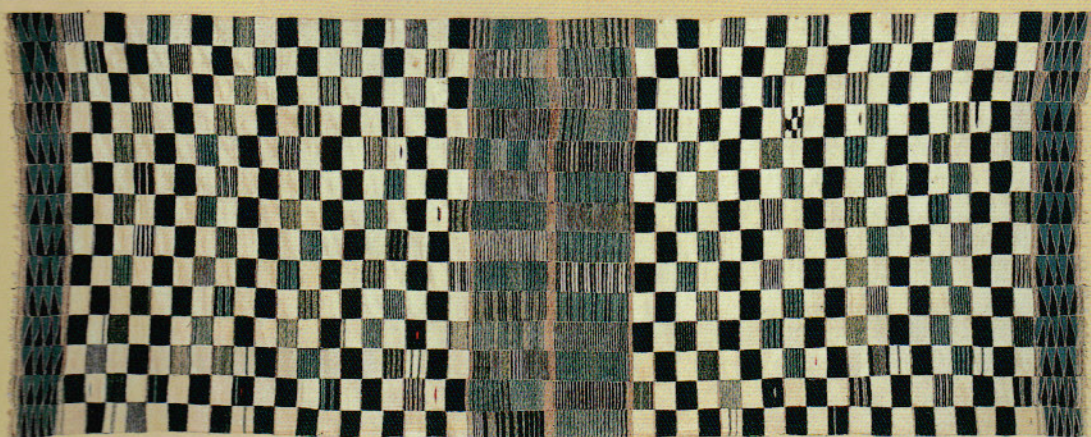


Abhandlungen und Berichte der
Staatlichen Ethnographischen
Sammlungen Sachsen

52



WVB

Staatlichen Ethnographischen Sammlungen Sachsen

2
05

PATRICK EFFIBOLEY, Amsterdam

Alexandre Sènou Adandé Museum and the Intangible Heritage: Some ethical points for community involvement

with 1 figure, 1 table

Introduction

Every year on May 18th, the administration of the Alexandre Sènou Adandé Ethnographic Museum in Porto-Novo (Republic of Benin) invites a *Gelede* mask group to perform for the International Museum Day. Very often, the given group is either from *Daagbe* or *Sakete*, two of the central places where *Gelede* has a longstanding and still strong tradition. The performance attracts many people.

On this single day, there is an opportunity to give life to the collection of *Gelede* masks in the museum. But as this only happens on one day per year, it doesn't really enable visitors to get acquainted to the intangible dimension of the museum's collection.

This paper gives an overview of the internationally growing interest in intangible heritage. It will discuss the need to have a directory of types of intangible heritage in relation to the museum's collections and argues for a larger directory for the whole Republic of Benin. The paper will then bring forward the ethical issues involved when museums have to deal with (living) intangible heritage and finally will propose a strategy to involve the community to which this heritage belongs.

The paper will be structured in the following headings:

1. Intangible Heritage and the increased interest of the museum community
2. Presentation of the museum's collections
3. Importance of Community Involvement
4. Strategy for community involvement

1. Intangible Heritage and the increased interest of the museum community

The convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage defines it as the practices, representations, and expressions, as well as the knowledge and skills, that communities, groups, and in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. It is sometimes called living cultural heritage, and is manifested *inter alia* in the following domains:

- oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage;
- performing arts;
- social practices, rituals and festive events;
- knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- traditional craftsmanship.

In the last decades, the interest of the international scientific community to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage has gradually increased. Individual scientists wrote several papers on this dimension of cultural heritage. The international community also started addressing intangible heritage. As a matter of proof, the International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM) with her sister organization, the International Committee for Museums and Musical Instruments Collections (CIMCIM) attempted first to discuss intangible heritage at an international level. This was supposed to happen in Ouagadougou in June 2000. Unfortunately this event did not finally take place due to organizational problems in the hosting country.

From then on, ICOFOM took the opportunity to gather alone from 26th November to 5th December 2000, for its annual meeting on "Museology and Intangible heritage". Papers by scholars from the five continents were presented. The importance and success of this first discussion on an international level has certainly been that the International Council of Museums proposed to have its General Assembly in 2004 on the issue of intangible heritage.

In 2004, from 2nd to 8th October, the whole museum community under the umbrella of the General Assembly of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) gathered in Seoul (South Korea) to discuss the same issue from different perspectives, relevant for each international committee. The discussions that went on will certainly nourish the museum practice for the coming years.

2. Presentation of the Museum and its Collection

2.1 *History of the Museum*

The Alexandre Sènou Adandé Ethnographic Museum (MEASA) was created in 1966 with the collections of the former "Institut Français d'Afrique Noire" (IFAN) whose local center was based in Porto-Novo. The aim of IFAN was to collect the material culture of the social groups in Dahomey (the present Republic of Benin) for the purpose of research in order to enhance French colonial power. When the country became independent in 1960, the new authorities decided to keep the collections and turn them into a museum open to the public. In 1992, the museum was named, Alexandre Sènou Adandé Ethnographic Museum, in remembrance of the contribution of this Beninese scientist to the knowledge of the local cultures.

2.2 *Presentation of the collection*

The Alexandre Sènou Adandé Ethnographic Museum has about 1280 objects, which have been collected since the 1940s. The collection is made of the following pieces: *Gelede* masks, weapons and traditional guns, ritual and household objects, ceramics, fishing and hunting tools, musical instruments, and an assorted collection of *Ifa* objects.

The collection of the museum contains no elements of the rich intangible heritage that can be related to the collection like the masquerade dances, songs, ritual dances, and family litanies. This collection reflects the object-centered museum policy where only material evidence of the past was collected, and conserved in museums. This narrow way of dealing with cultural heritage has been guiding the field for several decades, affecting museums in Africa, the Alexandre Sènou Adandé Ethnographic Museum of Porto-Novo, in particular. While the museum was hosting the above-mentioned objects, the intangible heritage that could enliven them was, in fact, documented and kept aside. For example, the Agence de la Francophonie (ACCT) financed a project, *Etudes et Recherches sur le Patrimoine Chorégraphique et Musical de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* (ERPACMAO) that involved four West African countries: Bénin, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Sénégal. That project documented intangible heritage throughout the whole region, notwithstanding the fact that the project was kept completely separate from the museums, even though both of these organizations belonged to the same Ministry of Culture. Nowadays, the museum professionals are far more aware of both tangible and intangible heritage and the need to link them for a better understanding of the past. In addition to this awareness, the 21st General Assembly of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), held a meeting on October 8th 2004 on the theme "Museums and Intangible Heritage",

"... endorses the 2003 UNESCO Convention on the protection of Intangible Heritage; urges all governments to ratify the convention; encourage all countries, and espe-

cially developing countries where there is a strong oral tradition, to establish an Intangible Heritage Promotion Fund; invites all relevant museums involved in the collection, preservation and promotion of the intangible heritage to give particular attention to the conservation of all perishable records, notably electronic documents; urges national and local authorities to adopt and effectively implement appropriate local laws and regulations for the protection of the intangible heritage; urges regional organizations, national committees and other ICOM bodies to work closely with the local agencies in the development and the implementation of such legal instruments and in the necessary training of staff responsible for effective implementation.” (ICOM RESOLUTION No. 1, 2004, 1)

The decision of the International Council of Museums to support this initiative of UNESCO should encourage the full involvement of museums and their professionals in order to achieve the goals of the convention. On the basis of the features of the ICOM Resolution, what can be the steps to be taken by the Alexandre Adandé Ethnographic Museum in order to work positively in the preservation of the intangible heritage?

Table 1: Different Examples of Intangible Heritage Related to the Collection of the MEASA Porto Novo

Museum Tangible Collections	Related Intangible Heritages
Gelede masks	Making techniques, songs, dances
Musical instruments	Making techniques, related rituals, specific playing requirements, beliefs
Ritual and household objects	Making techniques
Collection of <i>Ifa</i> objects	Rituals, beliefs in divination passed on from one generation to another
Ceramics, fishing and hunting tools	Making techniques, gender related issues
Weapons and traditional guns	Making techniques, family litanies, beliefs

The Proclamation of the “Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity”¹ by UNESCO in 2001, and the Resolutions of the 21st General Assembly of the International Council of ICOM held on 8th October 2004, give the framework in which the international community of museums and heritage specialists has to implement the different actions to preserve humanity’s intangible heritage.

Before discussing the steps the Alexandre Sènou Adandé Ethnographic Museum has to take regarding intangible heritage, it is important to overview this international framework. The proclamation of the “Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage

1 The proclamation of the “Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of the Humanity” in 2001 is an international recognition of the *Gelede* masks as a longstanding tradition from Benin, Nigeria and Togo, and the first attempt on the international level to preserve the Intangible Heritage.

of Humanity” designed an action plan to achieve the above-mentioned proclamation. This action plan suggested revitalizing

“... the *Gelede*, multi-purpose community centers are proposed, to be used for performances and to train craft workers and researchers. The first step will be the compilation of a database using an inventory of the best *Gelede* groups, masks sculptors and craftspeople. Likewise, audiovisual support material will need to be produced to make a lasting recording of the rites and dances. This will enable a sound and image archive to be built up. Work will also undertaken to put in place a legal framework, drawing up a text assuring the protection of the intangible heritage, including a national list of protected assets, and measures to protect the communities. (...) Finally, national and international festivals as well as exhibitions and sales of craftwork will be organized to revitalize this form of expression.” (ICOM Newsletter Vol. 57, 2004, No.3, 16)

This action plan is based on international standards and needs to be closely examined, taking into consideration the MEASA and other museums in similar situations.

For instance, there is a special drum called *Sato*, which is exhibited in the museum’s gallery of musical instruments. Only orphans play this drum and it is used exclusively for funerals. The drum is not played alone like other types of drums such as the *Kpezin*. In Benin, tradition states that whoever’s father has passed away should play the *Kpezin* with the left hand, while those who lost their mother play it with the right. This regulation about *Sato* has been respected within the communities for several decades. During guided tours, the guide is supposed to introduce that drum to the visitors and explain all these customs attached to it.

The same remark applies for the *Gelede* masks which are tangible heritage. However, a mask is not just a tangible object as any other object. What makes it specific are the ideas behind the mask: the circumstances that presided to its creation, the meaning and rituals attached to it, and the related dances and ceremonies. Discarding all these, the mask does not have its “holistic identity”.

More importantly, all of these non-material features make the mask a heritage, which can only be passed on with the help of the community these masks belong to.

Another example is the *Oriki*, or family litanies. The *Oriki* always refers to a family or a clan. It is usually “claimed” by an important person in the family such as the grand aunt or the grandmother as a greeting, or to congratulate a child who did something very good. According to OLOYE OLUDARE OLAJUBU, the *Oriki* expresses the identity of families or clans, illustrating and explaining their origins, activities, and social rank.

Coming back to the museum collection, it is important to mention that very often the craft workers belong to a family that is sharing this cultural element. From then on, it is possible in the frame of the museum activities, to combine the display of tangible elements like masks, with this intangible heritage to provide broader information on a group of practitioners of a community.

2.3 *Museum's Governing Body*

Although the topic of this paper doesn't have a real connection with the governing of the institution, the intended improvement, especially the need to involve the community in the museum's activities, calls for a brief discussion. In fact, the MEASA is a national museum under the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and the museum receives its budget and staff from the ministry as well.

The governing body consists of the Director, who is in charge of the management of the museum and its collections; the Deputy Director, who is in charge of the education service; the Information/Documentation Officer, who takes care of the collection information and library; and the Secretariat, who is in charge of administrative tasks.

In regards to the requirement to involve the community in the museum, the governing body should reflect that need. For that reason, the following changes are proposed. First of all, the museum has to involve the community. Secondly, two new positions will be created, the Community and Outreach Officer and Public Relations and Fundraising Officer (see the proposed organization chart of the museum at the bottom).

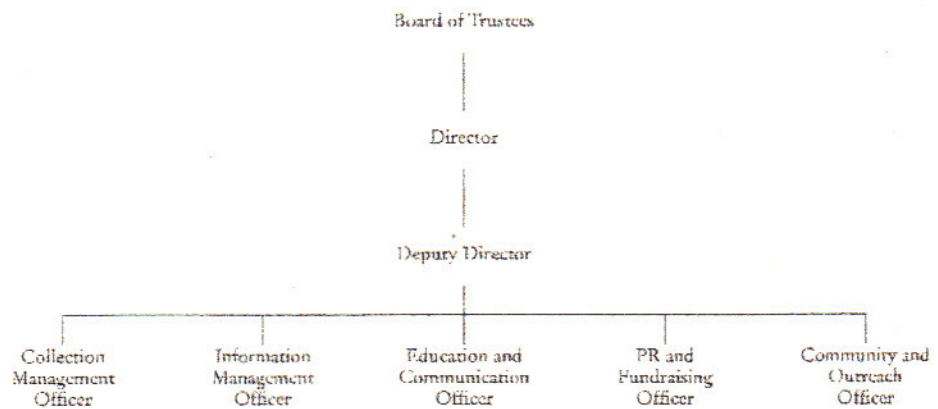


Fig 1: Proposed Organization Chart of the Museum

2.4 *Museum Programmes Regarding Intangible Heritage*

In line with the Table 1 which gives an overview of the different intangible heritages related to the museum's collections, my proposal for the improvement of the programmes of MEASA in the future is as follows.

In regards to the variety of the museum collections, the museum could set up different programmes to enliven them. The *Gelede* masks comprise the majority of the museum collection, so there will be a special focus on this. First of all, the museum will establish monthly performances of *Gelede* groups and special ones on request by groups of visitors. This type of activity will give the visitor more information and insight in the artefacts.

Secondly, educational programs will be designed in cooperation with the *Gelede* group members for school groups to maintain the transmission of the constructing techniques, as well as the related dances and songs. In addition, the other types of intangible heritage identified earlier, like the construction of different materials and related rituals will be included in the museum services. Audiovisual recording will also be made and part of these records put on the Internet for worldwide visitors.

As far as the rest of the museum's collection is concerned, programs should also be made to involve the musical instruments, ceramics, fishing and hunting tools as well as weapons and traditional guns. For these, it should be interesting to invite community members to perform.

3. Importance of Community Involvement

3.1 *Significance of community involvement*

The involvement of the community in the design of museum programs as well as in the management is an important step for museums and cultural institutions to take.

The community involvement helps to create a framework where community members/representatives could present their needs and wishes to the museum staff with regard to the museum's exhibitions and other programs. It also makes it possible that they could be asked to contribute to the funding of the institution, even with the little amount of money they may have. They need to be given the right to be part of the governing body of the museum in order to bring forward their opinions on the mission of the museum, its collecting policy as well as other issues related to the management of the institution.

This is an important step for museums in Benin and in Africa in general since a museum is in the service of the community and that cannot be effective without a dialog with community members. This is the reason why STAN CARBONE suggests the concept of "dialogic museum" where:

"Exhibit development should be a collaborative enterprise, a means by which intellectual horizons are expanded, where a variety of perspectives are welcome, and where debate and discussion are at the heart of discerning an appropriate methodology and iden-

tifying themes that do justice to the contradictions of community history".
(www.utoronto.ca/mouseia/mert/journal/may2001.#III)

More importantly, CARBONE thinks the philosophy of dialogic museum:

"... must encapsulate the range of museum functions: from programming to management practices. With regard to the latter this should not be merely confined to ensuring greater ethnocultural diversity or equal gender representation within management and staff but also a commitment to the humanistic and democratic principles of a dialogic museum." (www.utoronto.ca/mouseia/mert/journal/may2001.#III)

3.2 *Relevancy of community involvement*

The involvement of the community in museum projects, activities and management is increasingly important and very relevant. This relevancy found its root in the fact that the cultural heritage is part of the culture of the given community, one of the characteristics of its identity.

The museum and the museum professionals are only stewards of cultural heritage. The first has the mission to preserve the cultural heritage and offer the needed security to preserve this heritage, while the second are trained to implement the aforementioned mission. They have the skills, the know-how. Nevertheless, the community still has the ownership of the heritage.

In addition, within the frame of capacity building of community members, there is a need to help the latter so that they can help themselves. Currently, seeing community taking care of their own heritage or being closely is a futurist idea in the context of museums in Benin and most of the African countries. But this has to happen in the future.

More importantly, the intangible heritage is a living heritage. It is basically kept by community members like the storytellers, the craftsmen who got the knowledge and wisdom from their relatives or masters. This is the traditional way of knowledge transmission. But since there are some other competing knowledge transmission centres like school, apprenticeship, the traditional one is left over.

4. Strategy for community involvement

4.1 *Principles for community involvement*

The community involvement is part of the social changes occurring in the museum domain and in society in general. In the museum field, the new tendency is to address the daily issues of the community, to raise its awareness and let its members feel owners of the cultural heritage in the museum's domain. For instance, the International Museums Day of 2002, on the theme "Museums and Globalization" is part of this new thinking. Museums and museologists dealing with HIV/AIDS or development issues are also rel-

evant. This is so relevant because this pandemic affects millions of people. And the social role of museums is to contribute to awareness raising about all the concerns of the community members. This approach that has been called the “new museology” and is different from the traditional one, which focused more on the preservation of the heritage rather than applying its efforts directly to the community. The new approach includes several variants :

“... ecomuseology, community museology and 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.” (Declaration of Quebec, Museum, XXXVII, 1985, 201)

HUGO DE VARINE, one of the defenders of the new museology, defined the community museum,

“... as one, which grows from below, rather than being imposed from above. It arises in response to needs and wishes of people living and working in the area and it actively involves them at a very stage while it is being planned and created and afterwards when it is open and functioning. It makes use of experts, but is essentially a co-operative venture, in which professionals are no more than partners in a total community effort.” (www.assembly.coe.int/Museum/ForumEuroMusee/conferences/tomorrow.htm)

The Alexandre Sènou Adandé Ethnographic Museum of Porto-Novo is neither based on the ecomuseum approach nor the community museum approach. Given that the museum has been established as a result of the desire of the French colonial power, it is clear that the community didn't have any decision in the setting-up of the museum. Moreover, the needs and aspirations of the community have not been taken into account while establishing the museum. Hence, it is actually worthwhile in this era, when museums have concerns about their social mission, to address issues of daily life of the people in order to try to captivate the attention and the interest of the community. Involving the community in the Alexandre Sènou Adandé Ethnographic Museum (MEASA) in regard to its intangible heritage requires addressing some basic points that will be reviewed in the following lines.

4.2 Community involvement Policy

The involvement of the community in the museum's activities and others issues require a formal agreement of all the stakeholders: the museum staff, the representatives of the national and local governments and the elected members of the community.

The involvement is first to choose some representatives of the community to be part of the board of trustees and to bring different groups of the community in the activities like performances, lectures. The choice of community members is very sensitive. It re-

quires fairness in order to have full involvement of the whole community and prevent a feeling of segregation. The representatives have to be chosen by the people themselves for a period of four years non-renewable. And before having the seat on the board, they have to be trained on their role. All these requirements should be inscribed in the community involvement policy.

The objectives of the policy are to state, on one hand, the role of the community as a whole and the individual members in the preservation of intangible heritage of the museum but also in all the museum's activities. On the other, the policy should make clear the mission of the board members to avoid conflicts of responsibilities. First of all, the policy should mention, on one hand, the different sub-groups in the urban community from which the representatives will derive from.² On the other, the museum has to ask the cooperation of all the craftsmen relevant for the collections in order to get everybody involved in the museum strategy to achieve its mission of preserving the intangible heritage. Secondly, the policy will inscribe the role of the community in the funding of the museum's activities.

4.3 *Community role in the museum funding*

The community, whose heritage the museum preserves, should also contribute in the funding of museum activities. This is important for raising awareness and responsibility of the community about its own heritage. After this step, the community will be interested and feel the need to contribute to these activities. From then on, the museum has to establish a fund-raising strategy to get the community members involved in the funding. The strategy will be based on two steps. The first step will be to establish a list of all potential donors without neglecting anyone and send them on a yearly basis the set of activities designed by the museum and ask for their contribution, either financial or material.

Currently, the funding of the museum is exclusively provided by the national government. Hence, this state of fact doesn't give the opportunity to the museum to cover its needs. But given that there is already a national fund for culture and leisure, it is possible for the museum professionals to encourage the national government and the local one to establish a fund for the preservation of the intangible heritage. The experimental may start with the MEASA for one or two years and will be expanded to other national museums.

2 In the case of the MEASA, the sub-groups are mainly the Goun, the Yoruba, the Afro-Brazilians, the Tori, etc.

Conclusion

The integration of intangible heritage in the activities of MEASA will require the adoption of a community involvement policy as well as extra funding sources from the community side. If the changes are well implemented, it will raise awareness about the importance of intangible heritage and will serve as a model for the other museums in the country. It will also contribute to a better preservation of cultural heritage that will empower the community and may bring some changes in their daily life standards.

Summary

This paper is a contribution to the ongoing discussion on intangible heritage within the museum community. It gives an overview on the increased interest by museum professionals.

The author bases his analysis on the collections of the Alexandre Sènou Adandé Ethnographic Museum in Porto-Novo (Republic of Benin), making a link between the collections and the related intangible heritage. He stresses the importance of community involvement in the preservation of intangible heritage and describes the role the community has to play. The paper ends up with some suggestions for museums to preserve intangible heritage.

Zusammenfassung

Der Aufsatz ist ein Beitrag zur Diskussion über die Behandlung des „Intangible Heritage“, des immateriellen kulturellen Erbes, im Museum und gibt einen Überblick über den Stand der Diskussion bei den Museumsfachleuten zu diesem Thema. Der Autor bezieht sich in seiner Analyse auf die Sammlungen des Ethnographischen Museums Alexandre Sènou Adandé in Porto-Novo (Republik Benin) und stellt eine Verbindung zwischen den Sammlungen des Museums und dem damit verbundenen immateriellen Erbe her. Er betont, wie bedeutend die Einbeziehung der Gemeinschaft beim Erhalt des immateriellen kulturellen Erbes ist und beschreibt die Rolle, die die Gemeinschaft dabei spielt. Der Autor macht schließlich Vorschläge, wie das geistig-kulturelle und immaterielle Erbe einer Gemeinschaft im Museum bewahrt werden kann.

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