

The Role Of Museums In Rapidly Growing Cities: A Zambian Case

By

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1.0 Introduction

Growing cities are regarded as arenas of accelerated social transformations and they can be circumscribed as the niche in the urban landscape where numerous institutions are acting. Given the unprecedented urban explosion in the growing cities of Third World countries today, the magnitude of the task ahead of museums should not be underestimated. According to the United Nations' estimates, the number of urban dwellers in such countries was expected to be doubled by the year 2000. A second doubling was expected to occur in the following twenty-five years. At the beginning of the 21st century, it was presumed that low-income people in Third World cities, many of them crowded in mega-cities, would become the new majority among the world's population.

In 1990, an estimated 1.4 billion people lived in urban centers in the third world, Zambia inclusive. Of these, at least 600 million were estimated to live in 'life and health threatening' homes and neighborhoods because of the inadequacies in the quality of the housing and in the provision of infrastructure and services associated with housing and residential areas (such as piped water supplies, provision for sanitation, garbage collection and site drainage, paved roads and pavements, schools and health clinics)". (Arrossi, 1994, p.3; see also Hardoy, 1990).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the conference theme on the role of museums in growing cities, which are considered as arenas of accelerated social transformations where numerous institutions are acting. It does not purport to review systematically the abundant literature on the theme. In framing priority conference areas, a broader conceptual framework on how social transformations now affect rapidly growing cities, and in the future will pose challenges to the museum field will be highlighted. Without claiming to be exhaustive, and without my own bias, this paper pursues the reflection of the current prevailing situation in Zambia and constitutes but a stage in the process of collectively defining the challenges facing museums in growing cities. >

The paper is organized in three parts. Part I sets the scene: the characteristics and the thorns of rapidly growing cities in the name of urban civilization. Part II attempts to sketch major museums' roles in their sustainable management now and in the future that tend to shape and present continuous challenges to decision-makers, and thereby to international transdisciplinary comparative research. Part III asserts challenges at stake for museums.

2.0 Characteristics and the thorns of growing cities

Cities in Zambia and elsewhere are considered to be mirrors of society, reflecting maldevelopment and the price of modernity (Touraine, 1992). The predominant picture here is one of fragmented society, characterized by phenomena of social exclusion, spatial segregation and mounting urban violence. The form that economic growth and social change have taken for example in Lusaka and other cities has been critical to the emergence of new problems. The prospects for the growing cities like Livingstone, Ndola, Lusaka, Kitwe and so on will, to a great extent, depend on local solutions found for these global problems such as pains of IMF structural adjustment, institutional reforms and many others. It is clear, however, that the urban problems, as well as the environmental concerns, cannot be singled out from the broader context of social and economic styles of development affecting rapidly growing cities.

In view of this, one may argue that it is not reasonable to expect that complex and, in many cases, unique thorns will be met by merely copying ready-made models, even though these models may have shown their efficiency under other latitudes and in different contexts. It is logical to conceptualize that rapidly growing cities are like people. They belong to the urban species but they have their unique personality. The response for rapidly growing cities to the urban challenges/thorns must take into account the singular configurations of natural, cultural, and socio-political factors, as well as of the historical

past and tradition of urbanization. Instead of proposing across-the-board, homogenizing solutions, the diversity of rapidly growing cities should be considered as a cultural value of paramount importance (Sachs, I., 1994, p.332). Hence the need to seek innovative approaches.

The speed with which urban populations have grown in Third World rapidly growing cities has far outpaced the institutional capacity to manage it. The central characteristic of the urban problem is not the scale of population growth but the scale of the mismatch between demographic change and institutional change (Arross, 1994). For instance, the mushrooming of squatter camps/shanties is one classic example in cities like ours. Today, our rapidly growing cities have emerged as strategic territories for a broad array of social, economic and political processes central to the current era: economic globalization, international migration due to influx of refugees, the emergence of the producer services and finance as the leading economic growth sector, the new poverty, among others, and as strategic sites for their theorization (Sassen, 1991 & 1994). This return of the growing cities to the fore of the social science's agenda can be seen as the representation of the social question in urban terms, the projection of the cleavage between marginalization and integration (Dubet, 1994; Rosanvallon, 1995).

In this turbulent sea of change, the urban thorns of rapidly growing cities constitute perhaps the most difficult, yet crucial, component of the sustainable human development. Environmental problems in the rapidly growing cities of Africa, Asia and Latin America are a global problem such as global environmental problems of pollution of the air and water. Emissions into the air do not merely affect the quality of air, but also strongly contribute to the pollution of land and drinking water. The rapid process of urbanization in rapidly growing cities leads to a number of environmental problems. Some of these are associated with poverty while others are more of a consequence of greater prosperity. In both cases the situation is made difficult by the fact that development is taking place so rapidly that the available human, financial, material and institutional resources are inadequate to handle the problems. The consequences are serious, in certain cases not only locally but also at the global level.

As regards the issues of social transformations in this emerging urban civilization, rapidly growing cities are the locus or crucibles, where major social problems are played out daily and magnified, but also locus of most creative change. In a growing city like Lusaka or Livingstone one finds major conflicts and contradictions of a society undergoing a deep mutation.

The cases of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic in our cities are by definition, and tradition, "cosmopolitan". Perhaps the most dramatic change which urbanization brings about is the throwing together, in small, geographical areas, of people from different cultures and backgrounds. As underlined by Mario Polèse, this represents the chief strength of the rapidly growing cities, as centers for social innovation (urban culture). The collision of cultures can be both a source of creation and of conflict. Rapidly growing cities therefore, become powerful tools for promoting positive social change. However, by bringing strangers together in rapidly growing cities, urbanization provokes tensions. Values and perceptions collide. How society deals with these tensions is perhaps the most difficult challenge of all. To counteract nationalist tendencies, consolidating social integration with respect to ethnic and cultural diversity, and yet inciting them to blossom, is a major public policy challenge facing rapidly growing cities today and tomorrow. Many of the social problems of contemporary rapidly growing cities depend on the coexistence, competition and superimposition of the "urban layers" - inhabitants, commuters, users, businessmen - and lead to *de facto disenfranchising* of the urban dweller.

Thus roses of multiculturalism in rapidly growing cities bud, bloom, and fade away. Rosebuds give us the promise of new beauty about to arrive, and when the flowers are in full bloom, their contribution of beauty to our lives has to be experienced to be fully appreciated. Multiculturalism is not a rose that will fade away in Zambian rapidly growing cities and elsewhere but it breeds seeds for loss of identity to those born and brought up in such cities. What remains of such individuals is what may be called "the twilight of ethnicity" which may lead to cultural thorns.

The last decade has seen a growing literature on the phenomenon known as 'globalization' and the impact on rapidly growing cities is the major structural trends of our epoch, that is, the formation of a global economy and of the new techno-economic paradigm. According to Saskia Sassen (1994, p. 43), "we are seeing the emergence of a new type of urban system at the global and transnational regional levels: these are systems wherein cities are crucial nodes for international co-ordination and servicing of economies that are increasingly international". Globalization, exclusion of multiculturalism and ethnicity, ecology, science and technology, is driving social transformations in rapidly growing cities (in various forms and degrees of intensity), presenting a series of continuing challenges to people and to decision-makers. This cannot be underestimated as another crucial transformation with profound effect on rapidly growing cities such as demographic and migratory trends - gender struggles, family formation and dissolution patterns, population structures and growth of the economically active population, changes in the structure of employment accompanied by growing unemployment, fiscal restraint; changing equilibria between population and territory and so on. These rapidly growing cities now function as command points in the organization of the world economy; as key locations and market-places for the leading industries of this period - finance and specialized services for firms - and as sites for the production of innovations in those industries. The ongoing process of globalization can be seen as "a narrative of eviction" (Sassen, 1994) of the symbolic meaning of places and people's quality of life, as if the place where we live no longer matters.

As territories where social transformations take place, rapidly growing cities need to be monitored and studied from a

broad social science perspective. In this context the following three major tasks for most rapidly growing cities need to be underlined:

To study simultaneously the different facets of the social transformations at work, that is, to study the city as a territory where the multicultural and multi-ethnic, the ecological and the technological problems abound, but also as a territory mastering many of the social transformations of the future;

To build a transdisciplinary knowledge base involving urban studies and planning, political economy of development, anthropology, economics, organization theory, sociology of organizations, history, behavioral sciences, linguistics, and architecture - the territorial-theoretical nexus;

To foster international, transdisciplinary comparative research and co-operation between urban research communities, as well as to convey scientific information and knowledge to users (policy-makers, citizen movements, NGOs, trade unions, etc.).

Another important characteristic of rapidly growing cities is technological and science advancement. Acknowledging the growing importance of science and technology should not lead to celebrate the marvels of what they offer to mankind and growing cities' future. Science and technology are a social process among others, hence the need to refute urban management anchored on the mystification of the "technological fate" (Salomon, 1992).

In a nutshell, I would say there are confronting daunting thorns/challenges in rapidly growing cities continuously altered by the constellation of political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, scientific, and technological changes. To face these formidable challenges cities are faced with a dilemma: either to reaffirm blind faith in the power of economic growth, synonymous with modernization and progress. There is a hidden assumption that the gains of economic growth will "trickle down" to the poor and make cities fit to live in; or cities strive for explicit societal development subordinated to values of social equity, ecological sustainability, economic efficiency, political participation, and cultural pluralism and integration.

2.0 Roles of Museums in Rapidly Growing Cities

Museums in rapidly growing cities are actually undergoing what may be termed as "social metamorphosis", which is unavoidable in this epoch. Henceforth, there is urgent need for an initiative to explore a potentially expanded civic role for museums within their communities. The centerpiece of museum roles in the first place may consist of a series of dialogues, each envisioned as a focused "laboratory" involving people who are concerned with the day-to-day business of linking communities and museums. Three goals from these dialogues include:

Exploration of expanded civic role for museums in building social capital and contributing to community life;

Discussion of creative strategies for effective community-museum engagement;

Establishment of a framework for continuing conversations about community-museum relationships.

In addition to the above, three strategic roles of museums in growing cities like the ones mentioned in the preceding section of this paper include:

Positioning of museums as major players in the livable communities movement by strengthening and developing Associations of Museums with high-level relationships with national civic organizations such as Women for Change, Young Women Christian Association and other Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs);

Supporting development or implementation of strategies by government, co-operating partners and other civic organizations for museums that wish to actively pursue and expand civic role;

Supporting Associations of Museums' role as advocates to funders and public-decision makers to insure that museums have resources to explore/implement their civic mission. This means acting as a liaison between the association and key opinion leaders both within and outside the museum field to strengthen Associations of Museums' relationships with other national civic organizations and to advocate for resources for museums to pursue their civic missions. The current position of museums in Zambian growing cities is that they work in isolation and very few of the political leaders, NGOs and the public understand the role of such institutions let alone politics.

Target related researches, exhibitions and publications of research findings aimed at bringing out the ills of growing cities.

The educational role of museums in growing cities may be considered as a role in transition. It is therefore, advisable that museums adopt a deliberate move in the areas of:

Direct teaching and mobile museum services.

Programs for teachers (Teacher orientation is important).

Adult education, which should often center on special topics and skills, ranging from lectures to workshops.

3.0 Museum Challenges in Rapidly Growing Cities

For those who study or are interested in the Zambian past, there are issues that have stretched the interpretive parameters and challenged the colour and tenor of the museum profession's historical presentations. Not least, the concept of museums as repositories of a country's cultural heritage. This concept is certainly not new to this century, and the importance of the esprit de corps and of national pride has long been recognized by political leaders as a vehicle for focusing national effort or appealing to the "hearts and minds of the nation" in periods of crisis. Zambian museums in all rapidly growing cities where they are found have recorded cultural history used as symbols, rituals and institutions to rally support or to define, for themselves, the national character within the image of their times. But how are national heroes made, and how do Zambian museums contribute to the development of a sense of national identity from the disparate artifacts they have in their collections? What are their responsibilities to the nation's people and to the rapidly growing cities in these changing times? These are some of the issues posing great challenges to Zambian museums today.

As a consequence of the role Zambian museums play, the public has experienced exhibitions that explore, folk culture and other traditional practices, representations of Art, and stages of human development. The research and exhibition aspects of both historical and contemporary Zambian life in museums has contributed a vibrancy and relevance that has invigorated many of the nation's cultural institutions, though it has not fully sparked useful collaborations between museums and communities.

Nevertheless, while there have been great changes in what museums interpret, it is too soon to be satisfied with the professionals' efforts in exploring Zambia's cultural heritage. Often the rhetoric of change fails to match the realities of examining the complexities, interactions and difficulties of life in rapidly growing cities. There is no easy marriage between Zambian museums and academic scholarship in the country, as such this has not provided museum curators and directors with new tools, new challenges and new possibilities. As a new generation of scholars can hardly be trained in the specialized fields, which enable them, enter the museum field, there are no new questions and interests that can stimulate research, collecting, and exhibitions in the country's heritage from the perspective of the community. It is a process still in progress today.

Yet far too often museum exhibitions in our cities today and other rapidly growing cities fail to convey this rich diversity or to explore the meaning of multiculturalism. It is essential that the Zambian museums in rapidly growing cities like Lusaka, Livingstone and Ndola expand both the subjects and the perspectives of their public presentations. This is only possible by resisting the rush to monolithic depictions of the past and by beginning to better understand the conflicts, negotiations and the shifting coalitions that have historically characterized multicultural communities.

By choosing subjects for exhibition such as labour practices, gender roles, global practices, HIV/AIDS, environmental problems and indigenous religions, the country's cultural institutions will be more likely to provide a richer, more complex and more complete lens into the multifaceted Zambia's present and past. Presently, no museum wrestles effectively with issues of violence, street kids, environment, HIV/AIDS and the devastating effects of generations of poverty and discrimination. I am not arguing that museums should focus only on the harsh and unpleasant, or depict people solely as victims of history. Zambian museums must do a better job of mirroring the willingness of academic scholarship to examine the complexities and ambiguities of people's way of life. However, this will require a three-way partnership between the public, the museum and the professionals, a partnership that has not fully developed in our country's museums as a whole, although more opportunities now exist than in the past. It is now appropriate that museums rethink and expand these traditional paradigms in order to convey the full complexity and richness of rapidly growing cities' life. Indeed to explore the urbanization of the rapidly growing Third World cities.

Some new Zambian museums like Lusaka Museum have not clearly begun to shift their involvement with local communities into a new paradigm that recognizes the importance of developing long- term and mutually reciprocal relationships. Movement in this direction is crucial because it is not easy to tell an evocative and nuanced history without the knowledge of the living community. This paradigm of shared responsibility recognizes the difficulties and the benefits of community influence in the development of exhibitions, programmes and collections. This is not to suggest that curators abrogate their scholarly and professional obligations. Rather that they embrace a new way of thinking that accepts the notion that strong exhibitions and programmes often grow out of balancing the tensions between community memory and academic knowledge.

However, new museum-community paradigms are not enough. Interpreting city culture or life, indeed Zambian cultural heritage, can benefit greatly from the creation of an internal environment within museums that encourages innovation, creativity, and respect for differing cultural perspectives. This is lacking presently in our museums in rapidly growing cities. Interpreting Zambia's heritage in growing cities in new ways could mean an explicitly interdisciplinary approach to both the present and past that enriches the traditional processes and visions of professionals. So far the implementation of this partnership is not in existence. Even more significant is the willingness of the cultural entities to stretch the parameters of traditional museum interpretation.

The changing social, territorial, and cultural reproduction of group identity we are seeing today in rapidly growing cities is a significant factor as groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure ethnic projects or goals. The challenge for museums is to have a new synthesis, a new integration that encourages visitors to see those exploring issues generally, and multicultural issues specifically. Museums in this case can then perform a valuable service as institutions of self-discovery. This can be done by demonstrating how issues of migration and technological advancement have touched, shaped, and formed, historically, the experience of all Zambians. The key to this new integration is the creation of exhibitions and educational programmes that reflect the interaction amongst diverse Zambian peoples and the broader society. This is only possible if museums can take up the challenge. The presentations must explore the clashes, conflicts, compromises and cultural borrowing that is at the core of the Zambian present and past. By examining how people have struggled and negotiated throughout history, these programmes and exhibits can better contextualize the contemporary situation of museum visitors. The audience is then treated to a richer, more complex and ultimately more satisfying cultural experience. There are many challenges to crafting effective exhibitions and programmes that explore and interpret cultural identity. Not least of which are the many different meanings that the city people can glean from that experience. If Zambian museum professionals continue to take risks, explore difficult questions and create a more inclusive understanding of these cities' past then the museums can truly become in the words of the pioneering John Cotton Dana, "places of value and of service to the communities in which we live."

The museum's traditional emphasis has always been on objects rather than information meaning that collections have been separated from their related real context and documentation. This curatorial tradition, neatly detaching most objects from their historical context, which created them, is beginning to change with the view of the growth being experienced by cities. Museums have always embraced an object-centric view of the world, but they should now adopt the World Wide Web, which enables curators to put their collections back into context and so to create an idea - centric universe of human understanding. If the current situation is to go by no museum has a Website in our rapidly growing cities (Lusaka or Livingstone). This has lead most museums not to be able to display all their collections but only a fraction with brief labels provided on the walls serving more to mystify than satisfy both public and professional curiosity. Museums in rapidly growing cities should consider the development of images as the primary means of communication based on enabling technology, the ability to connect people to their educational, social or cultural community, and involving them in a participatory relationship, which enhances their experience and capacity for growth. In this way museums will offer a potential audience of previously unimaginable proportions.

The Web can break through many limitations. It can provide virtual, and thus virtually limitless, space to display artifacts now tucked away from view. It can link each object to others of the same era, to background information, to commentary, to other objects it later influenced, and to those specimens and historic events which may have influenced its creation. The Web also gives visitors an insight into curatorial techniques and dilemmas. Rather than imposing the structure of the in-house exhibit, multimedia allows the visitor to make his own choice, a perhaps more compelling and challenging experience in rapidly growing cities than ushering passive viewers through the static virtual exhibit.

In terms of marketing strategies, the Web is one of the most effective means of information dissemination and retrieval systems ever developed. It has the ability to combine research with outreach, and is the nearly ideal solution to information distribution. Web sites can provide information on a museum's operations, describe collections, and include virtual exhibitions and topical pages that present materials from the institution's collections, as well as research information such as bibliographies and links to other museums and other on-line resources. It is becoming as important to make museum information available electronically as it is to keep a museum physically open, or to make collections available to the scholarly community. This foray into the electronic world can raise public awareness and appreciation of museum resources in rapidly growing cities by providing improved information and visual access and increased interactivity.

Of the greatest challenges facing Zambian museums in these rapidly growing cities is that of the capacity to mitigate other challenges in terms of financial and material resources. This is attributed to lack of capital funding from the government, the financier of museums. A big museum like Moto Moto receives a grant only to pay full salaries though not always does it pay full salaries and nothing is left for investment in other urgent need areas. Understaffing in need areas hampers the capacity of the museums. A classic example is that of Lusaka Museum where there is one senior curator while the rest of the positions remain unoccupied. The question arises, how specialized is this senior keeper/curator to do the work of the Ethnographer/Anthropologist, Archaeologist, Conservator and other specialists? This museum is located in one of the most rapidly growing cities of the country and worse still the senior keeper has no assistants.

The museums' human resource in rapidly growing cities may not have the know-how and skills in their new unfolding roles. Take for instance in the area of World Wide Web operations. The know-how and skills can only be acquired through training or re-orientation of museum professionals as new challenges arise in their respective fields. I want to agree with the President of Zambia, Mr. Mwanawasa during the opening of the Ninth Assembly in February, 2002 when he said in his remarks " there is, therefore an urgent need to adopt and implement bold measures to deal with the long standing problems of poor salaries and conditions of service for our civil servants. He further said that we cannot expect them to deliver if we do not give them competitive conditions of service." This applies to the museum circles that if the professionals are to deliver they need to be trained, re-oriented and be provided with tools in terms of finances to meet challenges of rapidly growing cities.

Thus solutions to these challenges require a multiplicity of skills, expertise and finances, which are insufficiently available. It should also be realized that there is a key role for the state to make strategic interventions if museums in rapidly growing cities were to play a meaningful role in meeting the challenges of national development. Museums have strong heritage preservation capabilities but it is stymied by weak financial base. The current position in the Zambian museums based in these rapidly growing cities is unpleasant in that museums are told to generate their own income. The question still remains how and from where? Such a demand is as good as someone talking of using a Metropolitan train or trolley bus to move from one end of the town to another. This is an imaginable impossibility because there is no infrastructure so is the case for the museums today in Zambia. There is no strong fundraising base for most of our museums to generate the financial resources required but there is an endless urge towards this. No wonder meeting targets in our poor museums has become a nightmare.

There is need to move the depiction of rapidly growing cities and role of museums in such areas to a higher interpretive level. A level that embraces a more holistic and diverse view of experiences, that recognizes the need for new paradigms and alternative structures that shape both the product of museums and the process of exploring the tumultuous past in museums, and that makes culture meaningful and useable for all Zambians. If museums are to meet these challenges it means translating them into a plurality of local ecosystem-specific, culture-specific and even site-specific solutions, devising new resource-use patterns and management procedures, requiring new mindsets, attitudes and values. Museums in rapidly growing cities are therefore, museums of turbulent times.

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