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Rubina Bhatti

Islamia University of Bahawalpur, dr.rubytariq@yahoo.com

Mah-e-Bushra Asghar

Islamia University of Bahawalpur

Hafiza Zaheer Fatima

Islamia University of Bahawalpur

Attia Firdous

Islamia University of Bahawalpur

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Bhatti, Rubina; Asghar, Mah-e-Bushra; Fatima, Hafiza Zaheer; and Firdous, Attia, "An Assessment of Community Inclusion in the Activities of Bahawalpur Museum, South Punjab Pakistan" (2012). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 717.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/717>

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Library Philosophy and Practice 2012

ISSN 1522-0222

An Assessment of Community Inclusion in the Activities of Bahawalpur Museum, South Punjab Pakistan

[Dr. Rubina Bhatti](#)

Department of Library & Information Science
The Islamia University of Bahawalpur

Ms. Mahe Bushra Asghar

Lecturer

Department of Library and information Science
The Islamia University of Bahawalpur
South Punjab, Pakistan

Hafiza Zaheer Fatima

MPhil Scholar: Islamia University of Bahawalpur

Attia Firdous

MPhil Scholar

Islamia University of Bahawalpur

Introduction

A museum is a repository containing historical records, often unique or unpublished, which are intended for long-term preservation. It is a non-profit organization committed to preserving the historical record of a place, institution, people, activity or thing.

Museums, as institutional repositories of natural and cultural heritage, have a significant role to play within the community, a role which is advocated - or at least acknowledged - by society at large. The general mandate of museums to preserve and promote the intellectual and cultural heritage and enlighten society as to its heritage is a valued service despite being an enormous task (Mckellar, 1993).

Public heritage in museums facilities comprise physical assets that a community intends preserving indefinitely because of their cultural, historic, recreational or environmental importance. They are often referred to as "community assets", and this name encapsulates much of the nature and purpose of such facilities. They are maintained by the government for cultural, heritage, recreation and other community purposes rather than for the purposes of government administration or income generation (Barton, 2000).

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are:

- To explore how Bahawalpur Museum is contributing towards the social and cultural growth of its community
- To identify its policies and procedures in community inclusion for maximum accomplishment of its objectives and benefits to the community
- To know the community's perception about museum's community-based activities
- To find out and suggest possible measure for further improvement

Research Design

The study employed six methods for data collection: (i) a document search; (ii) personal communications; (iii) the researchers' participation; (iv) a guided tour to the museum (v); a structured interview with Director; Bahawalpur Museum; (vi) and semi-structured interviews with local community members. Detailed structured interviews aiming to collect data and solicit qualitative information and suggestions for improvements was conducted with Director, Bahawalpur Museum and other staff members. Museum brochures, Leaflets, Pamphlets, Programmes & Events circulars and a guided tour to Galleries of museum were used for data collection.

Researchers also conducted semi-structured interviews with two hundred randomly selected community members i.e., business community, house wives, teachers, students from school to university levels, journalists, doctors, local television and radio artists and other society members.

Review of Related Studies

The literature shows that the British Museum UK has established a Clore Education Centre that enabled the Museum to expand its educational role. Its two auditoria are home to a daily programme of lectures, film and videos, as well as conferences, concerts and other performances related to cultural festivals or special exhibitions. Five additional multi-purpose rooms are also used for other programmes ranging from informal 'drop-in' sessions to courses for the general public and teacher training (the British Museum website).

The National Programme for Community-Based Museums Mexico (PNMC) supports community-based museums, highlighting the importance of community members as culture generators and carriers. The community museum is not only a place that harbors objects of the past, but also represents the possibility for community members to appear before others as subjects with history and participate in the course of both regional and local events. The creation process of the museum is also a collective process of reflection and acquisition of an idea of continuity and transformation (Mexico Community-Based Museums website).

Objectives of the Mexico Community-Based Museums Programme:

- Enables and advises on the technical aspects and practices of the Museographic process
- Generates links between communities and their cultural heritage, which allows for the formation of respect-based relations.
- Promotes the development of projects initiated, managed and sustained by the community.
- Fosters the participation of rural and urban, indigenous and mestizo communities, in the research, conservation and dissemination of their own cultures, fostering their appropriation of this new cultural institution in order to strengthen their organization on cultural themes.

Strengthens cultural initiatives, during and after the creation of museums in each participating community.

- Gears museum activities towards community development initiatives; according to the needs and interests of each region.
- The Anacostia Community Museum (Founded on September 15, 1967) arranges various programmes for community development as its mission is:

" to challenge perceptions, broaden perspectives, generate new knowledge, and deepen understanding about the ever-changing concepts and realities of 'community' while maintaining its strong ties to Anacostia and the D.C. Metropolitan region"(Anacostia Community Museum website).

ACM has been a leader in providing a numerous formal programs including exhibitions, research, tours, lectures, performances, and demonstrations, the Museum has afforded unique learning opportunities through its Museum Academy Program, which offers after-school and summer cultural enrichment programs, career awareness days, and internship components for children in the District of Columbia. ACM is devoted to provide the platform to the community through exhibitions, programs, research and further developing collections, that evaluates the development of communities and provide provocative insights on future possibilities; to employing radical approaches in the museum and through outreach activities to present social and cultural issues that impact communities; and to be the convener of stakeholders and collaborations around shared community issues (Anacostia Community Museum website).

The literature shows that museums arrange public programmes in order to expand the understanding and appreciation of community history through lectures, seminars, exhibitions, cultural performances, hands-on activities, and special events for people of all ages. The Museum produces interpretative materials including exhibition guides, activity kits, and subject-specific curricula.

Bahawalpur Museum: Introduction

Bahawalpur Museum was established in the year 1976. That is an autonomous body functioning under the administrative / financial control of the Board of Governors headed by District Coordination Officer, Bahawalpur. The Director of the Museum is responsible for its smooth functioning and effective management.

Bahawalpur Museum has a fine collection of coins, medals, postage stamps of former state of Bahawalpur, manuscripts documents, inscriptions, wood carvings, camel skin paintings, historical models and stone carvings etc. of Islamic and pre Islamic period. There is a complete set of medals of all classes issued by the ex-state to its military officers/ civilians and to other important citizens of ex-state (<http://www.bahawalpur.gov.pk/muse.htm>).

Mission Statement

The mission statement of the museum is:

"To make the museum the centre of excellence in the country on account of culture".

Objectives of the Bahawalpur Museum

The objective of Bahawalpur is to keep the archaeological objects of Bahawalpur region. Technological material is also kept in the museum. It represents the civilizations and cultures of different communities. The main objective of museum is to promote the culture. Bahawalpur Museum also preserves the rapidly disappearing Socio-Cultural Heritage of the Cholistan and Southern Punjab

Main objectives are the following:

- To preserve the historical, cultural & archaeological heritage of the country and the region.
- To house, protect and conserve the archaeological, ethnological and historical objects.
- To study and research on archaeological sites and objects related with the civilizations.
- To create awareness among the people, stake holders about preservation/conservation and importance of heritage.
- To involve the community in the museum and to make it more effective medium of education.

Collection of Museum

There are more than 5,000 objects are in the museum but it changes statistically with the passage of time.

Functions of Bahawalpur Museum

- Research & Education
- Explore the Cultural Heritage
- To carry out the Seminars / Symposiums and Exhibitions
- To inspect the Antiquities and other Exhibits related to the Cultural Heritage.

Galleries of Bahawalpur Museum

There are eight galleries in the museum:

- Pakistan Movement Gallery
- Archeological Gallery
- Islamic Gallery
- Quran Gallery
- Regional Cultural Gallery
- Coin Gallery
- Bahawalpur Gallery
- Cholistan Gallery
- Community-based activities of Bahawalpur Museum

The Bahawalpur Museum carries out a variety of activities, strategies and methodologies in the process of supporting community-based museums:

- Three days Bahar Festival consisting upon following activities.
- Seminars on Archaeology, History, Culture and education.
- Model making, Painting, Drawing, Dry & Fresh Flowers arrangement competitions among the students.
- Traditional & Gloves puppets show
- Mehfl-e-Mushaira among local and regional poets.
- Variety programmes((Camel Dance, Jhoomer, Luddi, etc.).
- Food Street.
- Loc Music (Local/ Cholistani Music).
- Drama by the local TV and radio artists
- Seminar on International Museum Day
- Photographic Exhibitions on different topics
- Consultation with community in planning process

The interview responses revealed that for whole community inclusion, staff of the Museum with their continuing efforts promotes the participation of rural and urban communities for recognition, preservation and dissemination of their own cultural

heritage. In the planning process of community-based activities, the consultation is made with intellectuals, educationists, journalists, researchers, students etc. to make the programme more effective, successful and productive.

Funding for Community-based Events

The museum does not receive grant from any government or local body to organize the festivals. It depends on the Friends of Museum's donation and the community who involve in these activities.

Training of Museum Staff

Staff of the Museum participate in all the activities enthusiastically. At least three months before organizing the public programme, official meetings for planning and organizing these activities are held. Duties are assigned to different staff members considering their qualification and capabilities to make the programmes a success.

Knowledgeable, trained and enthusiastic staff is the key to success of any programme. But it is an area of weakness that the Museum doesn't conduct any formal training in-house. However, the staff members are encouraged to attend trainings, workshops and conferences conducted by the government.

Collaboration with Other Institutions

Invitations (letters, personal visits, etc.) are sent to different institutions. Most of them participate in these activities. But there is no formal collaboration with other institutions.

Promotional Strategies

To publicize and attracting the community, different strategies are used like, telephone calls, personal visits, advertisement through cable, flyers, banners, pamphlets, etc.

Successful profit and non-profit organisations develop a variety of creative and innovative promotion strategies such as positive public relations, eye-catching displays, well-designed publications (e.g. flyers and newsletters), interactive web sites, advertising, direct marketing, friends' groups, contests, good media relations, public presentations, blogs, wikis, podcasts, and other new technologies.

Future plans

- As the Museum's mission stated above is to make the it a center of excellence, for this its futures plans are;
- To initiate classes of fine arts at post graduate level.
- To establish a craft bazaar in the Museum for cultural manufacturing and sale (Interview).
- Completion of Sir Sadique Muhammad-V Memorial Gallery in which the history/legacy of the princely State of Bahawalpur (defunct) will be depicted through available evidences, models and pictures including imaginative paintings.
- Completion of Front Evaluation which include art gallery in which paintings and calligraphic manuscripts throughout the country would be displayed (Brochure of Museum).

Recommendation/Suggestions

The Bahawalpur Museum should increase public engagement through research,

educational activities and publication, seminars, information literacy and adult education programmes that should be inclusive of a broad range of communities.

The study suggests that the management of the Museum should focus on collaborating with the public libraries, university and college libraries and library schools - both formally and informally, through attending relevant committees and boards, and through departmental contacts and contacts with individual academic staff. Staff the Museum need to be more proactive, to practice their skills of positive collaboration and to advertise the Museum's strengths more actively to the community.

Due to lack of co-ordination of effort among Bahawalpur Museum, Public Library, Islamia University of Bahawalpur Library and Library School, the community simply did not get out of the best of community based programmes. For this it is recommended that the Museum should involve the above stated stake-holders in the planning process and support each other for common purpose of the advancement of education, dissemination of information, research, and off course for healthy entertainment facilities.

In the coming festivals, the Public Library of Bahawalpur should participate actively and encourage the public, especially house wives, business community, farmers, Cholistani people to get the library cards, desirably for free or on nominal charges. The Islamia University of Bahawalpur Library should also make display of new arrivals in the Library, or the publications of interest to the common public and communicate about provision of efficient, user-oriented and excellent library and information services offered by the University Library for furthering the cause of education for all in Pakistan.

New information and communication technologies should be used for expanding the impact and strengths of various activities for engaging the wider range of communities. New technologies i.e. Wikis, Flickr, Podcasting, You-Tube, social networking sites (MySpace, Facebook), Web 2.0. may be used. These technologies may also be used for marketing, fundraising and advertisement.

There is no sufficient budget for community-based activities. Non-profit organisations like museums that target their local community often overlook some very simple easy and cost effective ways of fund raising.

The study also identified the need for more space for different galleries. There should be separate cabins for researchers. There should be a full time librarian in the museum. The other Museums of Pakistan should also focus on arranging community based activities.

Conclusion

Through community inclusion, the main objective is to cultural heritage as a source of national strength and as an opportunity for community development. Bahawalpur museum is not only preserving the intellectual & cultural heritage of the region but it is representing the Cholistan culture in a very effective manner by formulating and implementing various policies and procedures for cultural conservation and growth. The specialty of this museum is that it arranges many activities for the local community of Bahawalpur. The participation of community and their perception about these programmes reflects the positive impact of Museum.

Leadership plays a very vital role in the functioning of a service and non-profit organisation like Bahawalpur Museum. Its present Director appears to be a very dedicated and determined personality aiming to educate the community formally and informally, and believes on the inclusion of community in order to achieve to mission and objective of its organisation. Proper planning and team work is the basic element of the successful implementation of all the developmental plans.

The Museum needs to emphasize the research activities for continually recognition

of its contributions and impact on local and national cultural heritage. The Museum will continue to work with community partners to document and preserve heritage, identify and collect significant material culture, present interpretative exhibitions, develop educational and information activities and publications.

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