

Latin-American Network of University Museums: Declaration and Official Report

For: William Alfonso López Rosas*

Goodmorning. Firstly, I would like to thank the organizers of this meeting for the opportunity to speak to you today. Secondly, I feel the need to apologize for my scarce knowledge of English.

In this talk, I would like to share with you the process of the configuration of the Latin American University Museum Network with the double hope of contributing to the discussion of this congress and finding support and alliances for the development of our network.

Introduction

A year ago, within the framework of the International Sixth U-Museums Congress, celebrated in Mexico City, I showed to my colleagues from the General Direction of Visual Arts of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, professors Graciela de la Torre and Rafael Sámano, the idea to create a Latin American museum network; they embraced it very generously and, during last May, within the framework of the *First Latinamerican Congress of Museum Studies and Cultural Management: museums, universtiy and “mundializacion”*. *The U-Museums management in Latinamerica*, began to become real.

The declaration of the Latinamerican University Museums Network was written

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and signed by the directors and staff from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, the Universidad de São Paulo, the Universidad de Puerto Rico, the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, the Caribbean University, the Universidad de Antioquia, the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, the Universidad del Magdalena, the Universidad de Caldas, and the Corporación Univesitaria UNIMINUTO¹ In it, we agreed to the following:

Declaration of the Latinamerican University Museums Network

The professionals from the latinamerican University museums met in Bogotá, within the framework of the *I Latinamerican Congress of Museology and Cultural Heritage Management*, considering:

That we share mutual cultural and historic ties, similar contexts and institutional missions, and compatible and parallel challenges within museum studies

That we recognize the great risks to our cultural heritages, given the globalization processes of the economy and the cultural industries,

That we should take advantage of the potential held by the scientific, artistic, documentary and natural collections managed by our universities,

That we recognize the strategic value of strengthening the social construction of memories and senses of belonging to our communities.

Declare our intention of configuring the Latinamerican University Museums

¹ The list of directors and functionaries that signed the Declaration of the Latin American University Museums Network is the following: Graciela de La Torre y Rafael Sámano, from the General Direction of Visual Arts of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Margarita Fernández Zavala from the Project of Museums Accreditation of the Universidad de Puerto Rico, Camilo de Mello Vasconcellos, Director of the Museo de Arqueología y Etnología de la Universidade de São Paulo, Lilian Irizarry Martínez from the Universit Museum of the Caribbean University, José Delannoy from the Master in Museum Studies of the Caribbean University, Edmon Castell Ginovart of the Coordinator of the Museums and Heritage Sistem at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, William Alfonso López Rosas Director of the Museo de Arte and the Master in Museum Studies and Cultural Heritage Management of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Yaneth Muñoz Saba Director of the Museo de Historia Natural de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Diego León Arango from the Museo Universitario de la Universidad de Antioquia, René Escorcia Barrios y Wilmer Jesús Martínez Manotas from the Museo de Arte of the Universidad del Magdalena, Esneider Agudelo Arango from the Museo Agrario de la Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, Helena Pradilla from the Museo Arqueológico of the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, María Cristina Moreno from the Centro de Museos de la Universidad de Caldas and Gustavo Ortiz Director of the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo of the Corporación Univesitaria UNIMINUTO.

Network, whose mission will be to generate and support actions and programs of interchange, cooperation and communication between its members in order to align policies and intertwine knowledge and practice that legitimize and spread its work, in an equitable and mobile environment.

The Latinamerican University Museums Network will recognize the diversity of its members and will try to establish alliances with related institutions with the purpose of contributing to the associated museums development.

The signatories of the present declaration will present it to their respective universities in order to negotiate the interinstitutional frames that allowed us to achieve the goals expressed here for their solidification through the specific channels and covenants of every implicated country and legislation.

Given on May the 10th of 2007, in the Auditorium Alfonso López Pumarejo of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

Precedents

The Latinamerican University Museums Network is an initiative of the Masters Degree in Museum Studies and Cultural Heritage Management. Its main precedent is related to the disciplinary, professional and institutional goals that orient this program. These are: the foundation of an international academic and scientific dialogue between the professors joined in this postgrad program and the strengthening of the museums pertaining to the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

Precisely in the lecture I made in Mexico last year, I explained the situation of my University's museums, and the role that the museum program was starting to play in relation to them. In spite of being the protagonists and builders of one of the richest scientific and cultural activities in Colombia, at the museum studies level, the museums within the Universidad Nacional de Colombia have been managed under great administrative difficulties, marked by their exclusion from the general university statutes and the development plans at the faculty and central level. Therefore, the goals of the Master in Museum Studies and Cultural Heritage Management in reference to the museums of the Universidad Nacional

de Colombia are:

- To promote the design of plans for financial resources and development for every museum of this university.
- The establishment of museum management methodologies, criteria and standards (such as documentation, conservation, etc.) in order to allow the projection of their collections to all the sites of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, and also their projection at the national and international level.
- The professional consultancy for the design of strategies for the communication, divulgation and formation of audiences.
- To deepen and diversify the permanent spaces for interchange between the Universidad Nacional de Colombia and the colombian nation in order to strengthen the sense of mutual belonging.
- To offer shared services, such as restoration workshops, documentation, specialized training programs etc.

Additionally, the professors asociated with the masters program also have the purpose of stimulating an administrative re-structuring of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia so that it will be possible to create a Direction of U-Museums, wich would be in charge of the following tasks:

- Consolidate and promote the museums and collections heritage of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.
- Design development plans for the museums, collections and material heritage of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.
- Formulate political frameworks for the museums heritage management at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

- Evaluate the management of the University's museums.
- Set up the lines of scientific investigation and the growth of the University's collections.
- Democratize the access to the university cultural heritage with the general public.
- Support and promote the qualification of the U- Museum's staff at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.
- Establish the collection's control and mobility protocol for the U- Museums at the University.
- Design plans for the protection and safety of the u -museums and collections.
- Coordinate the conservation, restoration, enlargement or museological adaptation of the museum's buildings and sites in order to improve the preventive conservation of their collections.
- Negotiate with the University Directors to achieve funds for the u-museums and collections management.
- Coordinate the communication with the Colombian Museums National Network.
- Support the communication processes between museums.

So, after a year and a half of existence, the Master's founding group have achieved the inclusion of the U.museums within the General Development Plan for the University's Bogotá Site and, as a consequence of this, has obtained approximately eight hundred thousand euros to invest until 2009. In the current university's development plan, several programs were designed in order to qualify the u museum's management.

Also, we insured the u-museum's application to the Cultural Grant Aid of Japan Embassy in Colombia which offers annually up to 50 million Japanese yen. Should the university application be selected, these resources would be mainly destined for the purchase of preventive conservation equipments, given the fact that one of the most serious problems that currently concerns us, is the collection's conservation at all our u-museums.

Another meaningful precedent of the Latin American University Museums Network was the result of the UMAC's 6th International Conference *New roads for university museums*. Some of its conclusions include:

- Leave behind the endogamic dialogue to be inserted in the global context without losing the university museum identity.
- Start at the top (university level) and not at the bottom (museum/collection)
- Analyze the particular museum's situation in the framework of your university (What does the university want? Why does the university need collections? Where does the university want to go?)
- Look for economic strategies, important partners and other people who can support and promote your projects.
- Develop an Academic Advisory Board
- Strengthen the bonds inside the university
- Map the museums and collections.
- Start cooperation with colleagues from faculties, other museums and collections inside and outside the university.
- Join national and international networks.

- Become a part of the long term strategic plan of the university.
- Become a place of unexpected juxtapositions and a place of visions.
- Become a place where audiences and collections interact and establish dialogues.
- Promote a contemporary use of university collections in addition to the traditional research and teaching uses.
- Try to involve as many stakeholders as possible in the museum life (faculties, colleagues, students and surrounding communities).

In this framework, the conceptual scenario for the Latin-American Network of University Museums was particularly rich. In this way, the discussion of the principal proposal was open.

Discussion of the proposal

The discussion about the Network's aims, goals and perspectives is currently in development. Particularly, the colleagues from the Universidad Autónoma de México, the Universidad de Puerto Rico and the professors associated with the Master in Museum Studies and Cultural Heritage Management of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, are committed to presenting this proposal to the academic and administrative authorities of every university. During the period from May until now, we have been showing the Network's project, and its declarations to the directors and the collegial councils concerned in order to consolidate this initiative as part of the university's institutional project.

Although the the network has not yet met to discuss its goals, these might be more or less the same as those established for the First Latinamerican Congress of

Museum Studies and Cultural Management: museums, university and “mundialización”. *The U-Museums management in Latinamerica* , that is to say:

- Build an environment for the discussion about the functions and cultural scenarios influencing the latinamerican u-museums.
- Examine the current state of the university museum practices in the region.
- Open a space for the discussion about the role of the u-museums and the arts and sciences socialization processes within the Latin American universities missionary functions (teaching, investigation and extension).
- Recognize the u-museums functions within the informal education processes and dynamics, within the latinamerican cultural context.
- Explore the history of the notions of university museum and university collection and the peculiar history of the latinamerican u-museums.
- Open a meeting space to plan several multilateral cooperation projects in the framework of the museology and cultural heritage management in the region.

We should add to these strictly academic goals, others, related to the mobility of professors and students, as well as to the collections and exhibitions circulation within the framework of a regional university integration. All these depending on, of course, the declartion signatories and the help of those who decide to join us during the next months.