



Best Practices Database

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Enjoying the museum: A peace project in times of war, Medellin *Colombia*

Best Practice

New for 2002

Categories:

Children and Youth:

- 0-9 years
- 10 years to adult
- recreational/ cultural programming

Social Services:

- education
- recreation

Civic Engagement and Cultural Vitality:

- community participation
- expression and animation
- social and cultural vitality

Level of Activity: City/Town

Ecosystem:

Summary

Every day, as we face the crudeness of a violent country, where social injustice produces all kinds of exclusions, we ask ourselves how we can change this reality. We at the Museo de Antioquia understand that the first step is to fulfill our social duty. Being so fortunate as to have the opportunity to hold this valuable community heritage, we have come to realize that our duty requires that we put this heritage into service for the integral development of the community.

Thus we created 'Enjoying the Museum', an institutional project that comprises all the areas of this institution and which is, in reality, our daily life. Through this program the Museum makes its premises, resources, and programs accessible to all people so that they develop a sense of ownership and turn it into a motivation for self-improvement. The project intends to broaden our capacity for summoning people, motivating our audiences to come to the Museum by creating more pleasurable conditions, akin to all publics, following social-inclusion criteria. We want our people to feel their roots and make them part of their daily lives.

In other words, we offer citizens the possibility to take hold of what they own through the pleasure of enjoying it, more than through formal knowledge. It is because we are convinced that only after we have enjoyed something can we begin to learn about it, that we offer a Museum for pleasure not for learning. And we do so knowing that permanent contact with the arts and cultural expressions positively influence behavior and cognitive capacity of all individuals, thus improving their living condition

Narrative

Situation before undertaking new initiative:

In the 1990s the institution went into a crisis: Economic resources were insufficient; there wasn't even enough to pay for public utilities or salaries. There was not enough space to exhibit the art collection. There were very few visitors due to progressive deterioration of urban surroundings caused by invasion of public space by informal commerce, increased traffic, presence of dispossessed people, and prostitution practices carried out right against the facade of the Museum. Thus, the new administration decided to completely reform the institution.

Establishing new priorities:

Headed by the new director of the Museum, the work-team established two basic priorities:

- * Finding new premises where a significant part of all art collections, which tell of the historical and artistic development of the region, could be exhibited with dignity, and

- * To make not only the works of art but also the Museum premises serviceable to the community.

We decided to put emphasis on all children to come but mainly those from less privileged sectors that are usually marginalised from quality recreational and cultural activities. Our aim being that they, the children, be able to incorporate both possibilities (cultural and recreational activities) into their daily lives.

Formulating objectives and strategies:

They were defined by the work-team.

Our main objective is to fulfill a social function: Put the arts, culture and history represented by the heritage we are safekeeping, into service for the community. That is why we created "Enjoying the Museum", a social program destined to maintain the presence of all our audiences in their Museum, and their participation in all its activities, emphasizing the presence of children and low income families. We do not work for closed elites but for an entire population that is suffering, in one way or another, from violence and official abandonment. We do this through recreation and pleasure as a way of coming closer and heading towards integral development.

Mobilisation of resources:

We started off with the "Botero Donation", almost 200 works of art donated by artist Fernando Botero, which enriched our collections, raised the interest of society towards the Museo de Antioquia and gave way to the Plaza Botero, a high quality public space, for all citizens, and which serves as anteroom, or foyer, for the Museum. Plaza Botero has also given impulse to the process of urban renovation of the deteriorated downtown area of Medellin.

The Municipality gave the former Municipal Palace to the Museum and financed its remodeling and the construction of Plaza Botero.

All other economic and technical resources, from equipment to furniture, from paying for its functioning to financing free social programs, have been exclusively managed and sought for by the Museum. Facing an almost non-existent government participation, we implemented a social marketing plan that sells services, offers arrangements and attractive projects to private enterprises and other organizations. The institution directly pays personnel salaries (50 people, mostly in operational jobs). We make an effort to hire people who have been affected by the current social problems in the surrounding areas of the Museum, mainly the destitute and prostitutes. We started out with three working positions and hope to open other vacancies in the near future.

Process:

Once we had overcome our limited budget and governmental indifference, we found out that our most difficult task was going to be to convey a different meaning of the word "museum." We wanted our Museum to be different from what was traditionally understood as museum.

In other countries, or in our own intellectual and artistic circles, it is logical to assume that museums safeguard national heritage and that placing it in service for the people contributes effectively to

development. But in a stratified society like ours, the relationship to art goes to social or cultural elites and becomes excluding, inclusively creating a new language that makes it inaccessible to others. Thus, the majority of our people consider museums as boring, elite, remote, inaccessible places where they don't fit.

Overcoming this myth, opening the museum to all people, and demonstrating that contact with cultural manifestations are necessary and even more urgent in a society like ours, have become our main challenges.

So as to meet these challenges, we offer permanent free entrance to all children under 12 years of age and all people belonging to the lower socio-economic statuses 1, 2, and 3. Besides, we subsidize general public entrance fees (two dollars and fifty cents) and students (one dollar fifty). Also, 85% of our cultural activities are free.

However, we know this is not enough. Thus, we have implemented other strategies designed to lure different audiences, leading them to feel "trapped" by the joy and fun of being here, so that they end up making regular visits to the Museum as part of their recreational-cultural activities.

These strategies are:

- * Know us so you can enjoy us - This is a profound historic-artistic register of our collections.
- * Museum School - Teacher training programme
- * Touring the Museum - Free or guided tours for children and adults
- * Restless Museum - Temporary exhibits
- * Playful Spirit - Calendar of activities at the Museo de Antioquia
- * Museum out on the street - Traveling exhibits
- * Children in Harmony - Activities for vulnerable children
- * Time for recreation - Activities for senior citizens
- * Playground - Activities for children on vacation
- * Just for pleasure - Radio program
- * This Sunday the Museum belongs to... Programme for neighborhoods: This is our main programme. Every month we choose a sector or neighborhood, preferably low income or seriously affected by the current violence. Together, with its community leaders, we decide on a number of tickets to distribute and way of distribution, and on the artistic programme, including artists from the chosen neighborhood. Then we bring them to their Museum for one day and let them know that this space belongs to them and is here for them to enjoy. We also include middle and upper class neighborhoods because our proposal is necessary for the whole of our society. Besides, in our upper classes there is no tradition for spending free time in association to cultural activities nor is there any awareness that these cultural-recreational activities improve the quality of life.

Results:

In less than a year the Museo de Antioquia became the most visited museum in our country. Surveys show that most visitors are from our own country, Colombia, something remarkable within the world of museums.

It is too soon to be able to demonstrate the impact on the museum-community relationship, but qualitative surveys done on type-groups show that there is great satisfaction with our services and, most important for us, that there is a feeling of well-being which visitors wish to repeat and make part of their regular lives.

Another result which is just as important, is that the Museo de Antioquia and Plaza Botero have become meeting places for all socio-economic sectors of Medellin. The Museum and the Square integrate the city because all these sectors come together under equal conditions. The strategic location of the Museum and its Square in the downtown area of the city contributes to this convergence of zones into which Medellin is divided not just for administrative purposes but also by barriers placed by ignorance, indifference and intolerance.

Measure taken to strengthen our programmes include; establishing bonds and making agreements with

other institutions and enterprises that help us develop the programmes. Some help us by donating equipment and materials, others offer human resources, and still others economic support. The response increases day by day.

There is one very tangible impact and that is the urban change that the Museo de Antioquia and its Plaza Botero have brought about to their surroundings. From one of the worst most hectic areas of downtown Medellin, the sector has turned into a very pleasant one, reactivating the economy and attracting those who used to avoid the area.

"Children in Harmony" enables us to evaluate "Enjoying the Museum". For this whole year, 20 young girls from the Mother Margarita home, which works with and shelters minors in danger of becoming prostitutes, will participate in a pilot programme designed to apply our methodology and register any changes that might occur in different development aspects of each one of the girls.

Sustainability:

* Financial: We try to keep the number of our staff and personnel down at a minimum, just what is required to function. We practice an austere policy without reducing the quality of our services or resources. We have undertaken several commercial activities such as renting space, selling services (restoring works of art, framing pictures, organizing events), and selling copyrights. We also opened a café and a Museum store, which is currently the most successful of its type in the country. Entrance fees represent 10% of our operational costs.

Soon our Museum Friends Society will come into existence. Besides, we offer every programme to a possible sponsor who in return receives advertising or social benefits. We are persistent before appointed official authorities to make sure that the government fulfills its legal obligation of buying services for an equivalent of 40% of our annual operational costs. We are committed to obtaining the remaining 60% through our formerly mentioned activities and hard work.

* Social and Economic: Our main purpose is the inclusion of marginalised and conflicting sectors of society. Children are the main target of our programmes. By doing so, we can guarantee a better projection of our objectives in the new generations of adults.

* Cultural: Our resources are destined to the preserving our heritage and to putting this heritage into service for the community, acknowledging our value as Antioquian-Colombian-Latin American culture. This is why all groups that visit the Museum are welcomed in the same manner, with warmth and respect, and without distinctions of origin, education, or economic status.

* Environmental: Even though our main objective is working with the arts we try to create awareness of the need to care for and preserve our environment. This coming June, we are going to dedicate one whole week to one of the regions in our country that is suffering from serious environmental damages- The tropical rain forest of the department of Chocó³, on the Pacific coast, affected by mining and wood cutting activities. We also motivate the children that come into contact with us to recycle and use recycled materials.

Lessons learned:

We learned beyond our expectations, that people respond positively to culture and art, demand more and seek a sense of ownership. This is especially true in marginalised, violent societies like ours. It is neither apathy nor disgust that keeps marginalised communities away from cultural manifestations and art but lack of knowledge (even in the middle and upper classes who sometimes do not understand its meaning), exclusion (traditionally of some sectors), indifference and negative attitudes coming from governmental institutions.

Children protesting because they don't want to leave the Museum, "we want to sleep here," or crowds standing for hours, listening to a concert on Plaza Botero, making it unending because they always shout "otra" (encore), are only some examples of what can be achieved when communities are offered opportunities. That is why we cannot underestimate the receptivity of an audience and the role of art and culture in the improvement of quality of life.

We have proved that pleasure and enjoyment are the way to reach those people who have never had access to these artistic-recreational-cultural expressions.

We also learned that it is possible to create profitable enterprises in the world of culture, without sacrificing excellence or the will to serve. It is hard work but private companies do respond when offered socially and economically profitable projects. It is necessary for the cultural sector to understand that resources will not come magically there is need to work hard in order to survive.

Transferability:

"I came to see if what is said of the social work done by the Museo de Antioquia is myth or reality."

Agustin Arteaga
Director of Malba,
Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires,
January 2002.

Although it is still very new, the project "Enjoying the Museum" is becoming well known in the world of Latin American museums. Several institutions from different cities in Colombia and Latin America have expressed their interest in getting to know our methodology in both social and economic fields.

The economic sustainability of the Museo de Antioquia is bewildering to other Colombian cultural institutions. Probably because most of them have also been victims of governmental indifference and are used to living in a permanent state of economic crisis. This impact, however, is more perplexing to European cultural representatives or museum managers who are used to, periodically, receiving State funds in order to function properly. We have demonstrated that there is another way of financing cultural space and activities. Cultural institutions can generate their own economic resources simply by valuing the services they render and offering them to those who can afford to pay for them. The Museum Store, specialized guided visits and our parking services are examples of this type of successful undertakings.

Besides, we have also demonstrated that the private sector is and will be interested in this type of entities if projects are presented to them in an attractive way, emphasizing the social benefits of the initiatives in which they are to invest and clearly showing the profits, in services and advertising, they will obtain. Certainly, a key factor in this issue is the recognition that has been given to the Museum for its achievements in the field of social integration. For this the Museum has been acknowledged not only in Colombia but also worldwide and has become a city reference. This of course becomes added value to the institutional image of companies that wish to join their names to Museum projects.

We have made our know-how, the way we work, openly available for all institutions that wish to find out about it. We offer it without reserves, gladly sharing every single detail of the planning and undertaking of all our social, cultural and economic projects. For this we use all available resource, for instance; We participate in seminars, offer consultancy, and let ourselves be known through public media. We also wish to establish inter-institutional agreements with other museums and entities in order to give our programmes continuity.

The fact that our process is so recent makes it difficult to assess what has actually been fulfilled, but we do know, for example, that the Museo Nacional in Bogota, the oldest in Colombia, is interested in implementing the neighborhood program "This Sunday the Museum belongs to". The same is true for La Casa del Teatro in Medellin, an institution dedicated to theater. This makes it clear that the social programs of the Museo de Antioquia are applicable to other institutions and not just to ours in particular. The philosophy and principles comprised in "Enjoying the Museum" are valid for any type of cultural or educational institution. More so, we have confirmed that the development of a social mission and going the "fun" way to reach audiences that are alien to the activities of an institution, are effective principles for any type of organization, be it private or public, for profit and non-profit making institutions, regardless of its activities.

When private enterprises, companies and industries decide to sponsor our projects and our projects acquire an integrating character, making people and society interested in getting to know them and

participate in them, then we are filled with great satisfaction, knowing that our social mission has been transferred to the hearts of those who believe in u

Key Dates

November 29, 1881: The Museum was founded.

1997: The current process of urban, architectural, and institutional renovation was started.

2000: Arrival of the 170 works of art donated by artist Fernando Botero.

October 15, 2000: The new premises were inaugurated. Children take over.

January 26, 2002: Inauguration of Plaza Botero.

November 11, 2001: The neighborhood program “This Sunday the Museum belongs to...” began.

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Type of Organization: Non-governmental organisation (NGO)

Partners

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Type of Organization: Private Sector

Type of Partner Support: Financial Support

PUBLIC COMPANIES OF MEDELLIN

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Type of Organization: Para-statal

Type of Partner Support: Financial Support

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Type of Organization: Private Sector
Type of Partner Support: Financial Support

Financial Profile

| Year | Total Budget In US dollars | Portfolio of products and services (% Of budget) | Products and services compared by local and regional government (% Of budget) | Products and services compared by national government (% Of budget) | Products and services compared by private and individual enterprises |
|------|-------------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| 1997 | 181,800 | 20% | 8% of budget | 2% of budget | 10% |
| 2001 | 1,034, 000 | 100% | 4.5% | 0% | 95.5% |

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