Cultural Mediation striking out on new paths: Learning from Brazil

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I - Introduction

The title of my speech was suggested to me and I readily accepted it. As I began to write it, however, I realized just how pretentious the "Learning from Brazil" addendum was. But at the same time, I thought that the experience of living in a different society from the German one could contribute to the reflections that this meeting intends to discuss.

While Germany, once unified, became extremely efficient, being a rich country, one of the most successful of the globalized economy, and whose economic success allowed to create a solid State of Social Welfare, which includes an excellent educational system, Brazil is a heterogeneous, complex country, with so much social inequality, and at the same time subject to global influences, as are developed and rich countries.

Globalization has long struck us economically and culturally. Television is present in our homes, from north to south, with its programs - especially soap operas - that tend to lead us to a kind of globalized culture. The Internet is a reality, as accessible as today's television set. Today there is more international communication via the Internet than the telephone system. And this is not bad. Instead, the possibility of speaking to the world and knowing it only favors the individual. The risk, however, lies in the possibility that this individual does not recognize his or her culture – way of living, language, daily life, customs etc. - as important. In other words, the person does not know how rich and important cultural diversity is, comparing their cultural expression to that of other peoples.

In these times of globalization, our role as professionals of an institution that deals with cultural heritage increases greatly: our responsibility to our Brazilian audience is doubled in the sense of developing a critical spirit and recognition of the "others" in their differences and affinities, as well as our responsibility to the worldwide electronic community, in order to value and make our cultures respected in their diversity and heterogeneity. The second responsibility will not be accomplished effectively if we have not fulfilled the first.
II - The Museum and Socio-cultural Inclusion

There are many Brazilians who have never stepped into a museum, either because they have not had the opportunity to do so or because they do not feel entitled to do so.

We are sure that many people who are not within the line of extreme poverty do not feel included in our cultural institutions. As an example, I can cite a fact that occurred at the Museum of the First Reign in 1988, on the occasion of the opening of an exhibition on Mangueira Samba School, in the Memory Room of São Cristóvão. Nininha, a lady from the samba school, awaiting the inauguration of the exhibition in the entrance hall of the museum, commented that it was very beautiful; I asked her if she had ever been to the museum and, in response to the negative answer, I asked a colleague to show her around. Upon returning from the visit, Nininha asked me if the Mangueira people who were to visit the Mangueira exhibition could also see the rest of the Museum.

I believe that the situation described above clearly denotes the ideological significant that the museum represents for certain social classes: a place for some, for the "cults." Visiting the exhibition on Mangueira, even being inside a museum, would not be a problem, because after all the Samba School is part of their daily life, but visiting the rest of the museum, would that be permitted? Nininha, from the Samba School, knew that the Mangueira staff could go to see the exhibition about Mangueira in that room (feeling of belonging), but was not sure if the rest of the museum could be visited by the staff of the Samba School.

With respect to communities living in situations of vulnerability or social exclusion, museums usually disregard these groups as potential visitors. On the part of the groups, they are generally unaware of the museum and do not perceive it as a place of their interest, since they do not feel represented by it, as the museum is the space of the others, of the cultural elites. And, on top of it all, they do not realize what the museum can add to their daily lives, which are marked by various urgencies.

Thus, I start from reflections and actions developed in the field of museum education since 1979, thinking about the social responsibility of the Museum, whatever its typology. I start reflections as a classroom teacher and then as a museum educator. Reflections brought by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire.

The main objective has always been to enable the formation of critical, conscious citizens capable of interfering in their reality and in the realities that surround them in an active way, providing a better quality of life, building ethical values, more active social and political participation, being able to exercise their rights and duties and perceive
themselves to be producers and heirs of cultures produced not only by the community to which they belong, but also by other peoples and nations.

It is necessary to point out that the educational role of the museum, whatever its size, location or typology, is not only important, but also holds a broad social responsibility, since we must recognize that the museum in Brazil is a cultural organization located in a contradictory and socially unequal structure. And it is the Education Sector of a museum that bridges the gap between the institution and the public.

Believing that museums are above all educational institutions and that what makes them public institutions for the preservation of culture is their educational work, we conceive the educational action in the museum as fundamental. This assumption is about understanding that, by accepting that the museum is by its very nature, educational, there are moral, social and political commitments to be reflected upon and fulfilled. Thus, we must take our view of the role of education in society, what kind of education we value and what purpose it should have.

III - Some examples of Educational Actions aimed at Socio-Cultural Inclusion

When we reflect on museums, communities and social organizations, we can think of two movements: the movement to bring communities and social organizations to the museum and the movement to support them in preserving their memories.

In the first movement, we must assume that the museum is surrounded by several communities, from its closest neighborhood to the most distant ones. Even in the nearest neighborhood, there are several communities to be sought out by the museum and with them, develop activities that encourage them to make use of it. Communities which, as already registered, are often excluded socially and culturally from society and do not feel allowed to visit museums.

As an example of this first movement, we can cite some experiments already carried out:

1) The Vacation Workshop of the Museum of the First Reign

In 1984, the Educational Service of the Museum of the First Reign decided that its Vacation Workshop, aimed at children from 7 to 12 years old, would have as its theme a samba school, an important cultural manifestation in Rio that originated in the black culture.
Neighboring the Museum, there are two samba schools, one of them being the famous Mangueira.

Thus, in January, for three weeks, the children learned about the origin of samba schools, how they worked, received people who belonged to them (composers, dancers, etc.), visited the places where they prepare for the parade during carnival, where they build costumes and floats. At the same time, the children prepared their own "samba school", which presented each year a theme based on the collection, decorative aspects or historical period of the museum. They made their costumes, built their floats (on supermarket shopping carts), danced, composed and sang the samba with which they would parade on the last day of the workshop, on the street where the Museum is located. For this parade, we had the support of children from Mangueira Samba School, who played percussion instruments.

In 1987, we decided to invite 12 children from Mangueira Samba School to participate in the Vacation Workshop. They accepted the invitation promptly and loved to participate. However, the following year they gave us a lesson: they said they wanted to continue participating, but they wanted to be monitors. They wanted to teach the other children of the Vacation Workshop how to dance, how to do the samba, how to write samba, how to play. Of course we readily accepted it and learned the lesson. Those children from Mangueira Samba School had their own special knowledge.

The other examples that I bring to you have happened more recently in the Museum of the Republic, which I run, but also where I work as an educator.

The Museum of the Republic is defined as a space of citizenship and its mission is to preserve, investigate and communicate the testimonies linked to the history of the Brazilian Republic.

By defining itself as a space for citizenship, the Museum of the Republic invests, through educational projects and cultural actions, in the democratization of access to the collections it preserves, starting with the palace itself, its historic garden, and its surroundings, places of permanent dialogue with the cultural manifestations of the city, state, and country.

2) The All Together Project: for autonomy and citizenship in the Republic space

In 2008, Brazil celebrated the 20 years of the Brazilian Constitution known as The Citizen Constitution, promulgated in the period of redemocratization of the country, after the
Military Dictatorship period. The Museum of the Republic opened, on November 15, the exhibition "**Constitution of 1988: the voice and the letter of the citizen**". The exhibition, composed of four modules, explained and narrated the process of the Constituent Assembly of 1988, valuing ideals such as citizenship, autonomy, equality and popular participation.

The "**All Together** educational project for autonomy and citizenship in the Republic space" was developed from March to October 2009, with the exhibition as a guiding thread, with the aim of putting forward an educational proposal capable of promoting integration between the Museum of the Republic and its community, privileging a school next to the museum, CIEP Tancredo Neves, seeking to awaken the look at the current reality and instigate the critical awareness of the user.

The project was developed with all CIEP students.

According to data provided by the Direction of the School, in December 2008, the school had 798 students, contemplating Elementary and Secondary Education. Of this universe, 356 students were from the Youth and Adult Education Program (PEJA), attending night shift classes. This group corresponded to 44.6% of the total of CIEP students, i.e. practically almost half of the students of the School.

PEJA students are employed by small businesses, working as janitors, maids, taxi drivers, doormen, and in informal occupations, such as the large number of street vendors.

They are residents of the district of Catete, where the museum is located, and in the neighborhood. The majority lives in slums.

The project was also based on data from the public research conducted in February 2009 with the students of the Youth and Adult Education Program (PEJA) and found that 90% of these students did not know the Museum of the Republic. The majority of the respondents justified with lack of time, since 87% of this universe worked full time, but also because they thought it was not quite the right place to go.

Also participating in the project were students of the NGO **Ser Cidadão**, focused on the education of young people in situations of social vulnerability, aged between 16 and 19 years, with a diversified educational level.

The Museum of the Republic was open at night to welcome the students, making sure they entered through the front door of the museum.

At the end of the project, an exhibition was set up. Each action of the project was contemplated with a room. The museography of the exhibition was the responsibility of the
museology sector of the Museum of the Republic, following the guidelines of the script that was elaborated by the educators in the project.

3) The Education and Work Project: A Citizenship Action

On November 15, 2013, the Museum of the Republic opened the exhibition "Work, Fight, and Citizenship: 70 Years of the CLT", celebrating the 70th anniversary of the creation of this important legal document for the country. The Consolidation of Labor Laws, or CLT, as it is best known, was the compilation and consolidation in a single legal document of the various laws on labor already in existence. The CLT was enacted in 1943.

The exhibition dealt with the question of work from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day.

And in view of the specificities of the subject, we considered it more appropriate to treat it with working students. Again we went to CIEP Tancredo Neves, proposing to develop the educational project Education and Work: A Citizenship Action with the students of the night shift, of the Program of Education of Youths and Adults (PEJA). The Project was carried out from February to May 2014, with about 240 students.

Subjects were chosen to be worked on that were displayed at the exhibition, such as

● Child Labor;
● Female Work;
● Informal work;
● Professions and Technologies;
● Rural work;
● Workers’ Health;
● CLT: positive and negative aspects;

Again the Museum of the Republic was open at night to welcome the students, making sure they entered through the front door of the museum.

The students were, again, the same kind of employees as before and they lived exactly as the others.
Among the activities carried out, it is worth mentioning one that was proposed by the students themselves: the Wheel of Conversation, in which they brought to discussion their problems of work, of life, etc.

A film was requested by the students to be shown: Lula, the son of Brazil. After all, Lula, a worker, had been the president of Brazil.

A Legal Service was also set up, in which an educator from the museum trained in Law assisted the students to clarify doubts about labor laws and provide consultations on the follow-up of labor lawsuits to the students once a week at night.

Also at the end of the project there was an exhibition with the work done by the students.

The project Education and Work: A Citizenship Action received two awards: the first place in the V Ibero-American Award for Education and Museums, awarded by the Ibermuseus Program; and selected among the top five (no order of placement) in the Best Award Practice, awarded by the International Committee for Education and Cultural Action (ECSC) of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). Regarding this award, the project was published and presented at the ICOM Annual Conference in Washington/USA in September/2015. In relation to the Ibero-American prize, US$ 10,000.00 (ten thousand dollars) were granted to the project.

Since at the end of the project there was a determination to work more directly and permanently with PEJA students, with the receipt of the prize and the financial resources from it, a new project was developed in 2015 with other PEJA students from other schools, with the aim of sensitizing PEJA teachers and museum educators in general to work in favor of the socio-cultural inclusion of these students on a regular basis, and seeking to sensibilize authorities to support the opening of museums at night.

4) The Peja Project: A Gap in the Museum

The project was developed with CIEP Gregório Bezerra, located in Penha neighborhood, north of the city of Rio de Janeiro, and with the Municipal Reference Center for Youth and Adult Education (CREJA), located in the City Center of Rio de Janeiro.

The reason for the selection of CIEP Gregório Bezerra was the fact that the Museum of the Republic was contacted by a teacher of the PEJA of this CIEP, who had learned about the work of the Museum of the Republic with CIEP Tancredo Neves, to propose a project in which a group of PEJA students could be prepared to act as mediators of the cultures exhibited in the spaces of the museums, building knowledge and experiences with their
fellow visitors in a shared way. The teacher is also a museologist, thus her view on the importance of the PEJA students' relationship with the museum.

Therefore, the Project "**PEJA: A gap in the Museum**" comprised the preparation of the mediator students for two months, once a week, for 4 hours each day; the reception in the schools of a motivating exhibition in the form of banners; students’ visits to the Museum of the Republic mediated by the mediator students.

Coincidentally, when the students visited the Museum, the temporary exhibition was about photos of the English Photographer Anthony Leeds, about the slums in the 1950's, named “The Rio one wanted to deny”.

It was decided that the motivational exhibition to be taken to the schools should also include, besides the museum, the theme of work and CLT.

Five students participated as mediators, one of which, during the development of the project, got a job and had to abandon it. The students served were in the number of 135.

After all the activities, it was proposed the organization of a Seminar in the Museum of the Republic, directed at PEJA Teachers and Museum Educators to present the project developed and promote an approximation among these professionals. The seminar was attended by 142 professionals, including PEJA teachers and museum educators.

As of 2016, the Museum of the Republic has been open every Tuesday of the month at night, so it can receive students from PEJA, from the simple visit mediated by the museum's educators to the formulation of special projects and the loan of the itinerant exhibition.

In the **second movement**, that of supporting communities and social organizations in the preservation of their memories, it is necessary to bear in mind Brazilian anthropologist Eunice Ribeiro Durham’s observation:

"**Popular memory, as it depends on people, 'is a short memory,' without the resources to attain the historical depth gained by the heritage gathered by intellectuals at the university."** (Durham, 1984, in Canclini, 1994, p.98)

It is, therefore, a question of having a pedagogical proposal in accordance with the objective of working with the social memory of the communities and structured social organizations, whose objectives are interventions in the local reality in which they live, with projects related to education and culture.
The Museum of the Republic has supported several social organizations to create their museums or to set up exhibitions that speak of their communities, their problems, etc. Here are the exhibitions at the Museum of the Republic developed with other Museums:

A) THE MARÉ MUSEUM
In 2009, the Museum of the Republic gave support to the setup of an exhibition similar to the one held at the Museum of the Republic on the Brazilian Constitution, with funding from the Ford Foundation. The Maré Museum had total freedom to discuss the theme.

In 2016, the photos of the exhibition about the War of Canudos (1893-1897), when the word "favela" appeared in the language, were lent to the Maré Museum. That exhibition had been previously held at the Museum of the Republic, in celebration to the title awarded by UNESCO in 2009 to such photos - Memory of the World. The Maré Museum had total freedom to set up the exhibition and decided to call it "Memory of the Favela". In 2017, when 120 years of War are completed, the Maré Museum, together with the Museum of the Republic, will hold a Round Table on the theme.

B) FAVELA MUSEUM (MUF)
In 2012, MUF set up a banners exhibition entitled "Warrior Women " in the Garden of the Museum of the Republic, about women of their community Pavão - Pavãozinho, located in the southern area of the city.

C) NEGA VILMA ECOMUSEUM
In 2013/2014, Nega Vilma Ecomuseum, located in Morro Santa Marta, south of the city, set up the exhibition "Memories of the Hill", with photos and pictures of artists from the community of the hill, in the Garden Bandstand of the Museum of the Republic. They also held for two days the 1st Seminar of the Ecomuseum - 125 years of memory, in the auditorium of the Museum of the Republic, with an opening performance by a musical group formed by artists from the community.

D) FRIENDS OF THE RIVER JOANA ECOMUSEUM
In 2015, the Museum of the Republic provided technical support to the itinerant exhibition "When Grandma walked in Andaraí," organized by Friends of the River Joana Ecomuseum, opened on December 5, 2015, in the court of Flor da Mina Samba School, in Andaraí, a neighborhood in the northern part of the city, where the Ecomuseum is located.
IV- Final Considerations

Finally, I bring a reflection from my technical advisor to the Museum of the Republic, Mario Chagas, currently President of the Movement for a New Museology (MINOM) and one of the Coordinators of the Network of Social Museology in Brazil:

"As a discursive field the museum is produced like a text by specific narrators who give it different historical-social meanings. This narrative text presupposes interpretative contents and it is in this sense that the museum is also a center that produces meanings on themes of global, national, regional or local scope. But the elaboration of this text is not peaceful, it involves disputes, fights, which explains its character of a political arena. The museum institutions, of course, have life given to them by those who live from and in it. It is therefore interesting to know by whom, why and for whom their narrative texts are constructed; who, how, why and what is interpreted; who participates and what is at stake in the museums” (2013, page 67)

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