

*Implementing best practices in museum
documentation: the case of Haiti*

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Documentation: Past, Present,
Future**

Overview

- **1. Presentation of two case studies:**

(part of an ongoing research project: assessment of Haitian museums; these are preliminary findings)

MOF: Musée Ogier-Fombrun

Ogier-Fombrun Museum

PHCS: Parc Historique de la Canne à Sucre

Sugar Cane Historic Park

- **2. Lessons learnt**

Implementing best practices: a transformative project

- **Purpose of my presentation:**
- **I will use the 2 case studies to demonstrate how museum documentation is at the core of a deep transformation currently undergoing in some museums in Haiti.**
- **Context : 2 moments: the situation prior to 2010 and the situation after 2010**

MOF (exterior)



MOF (interior)



MOF



MOF

- **A renovated Sugar Cane Plantation (18th century)**
- **Collection: from diverse periods of Haitian history:**
 - **pre-Columbian period,**
 - **Spanish colonization,**
 - **French colonization, slavery, plantation economy**
 - **slave revolts, wars of Independence**
 - **Post 1804 (independent Haiti)**
- ***Focus:* the plantation slavery system**



Moulin Hydraulique



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PHCS

- **Renovated Sugar Cane Plantation (18th century)**
- **Collection: diverse periods of Haitian history:**
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 - **French colonization, slavery, plantation system,**
 - **slave revolts, wars of Independence**
 - **Post 1804 (Independent Haiti)**
- ***Focus: the evolving technology to produce sugar (18th-20th centuries)***

Assessment of documentation situation prior to 2010

- Primary inventory registers exist (manual; no data base)
- No accessioning system
- No acquisition policy
- Many flaws in terms of documenting the provenance of the objects
- No adequate cataloguing
- No systematic marking of the objects ...

The 2 museums were run by *amateurs*, unaware of ICOM and CIDOC standards, of museology principles

Time for change: implementing best practices

- The earthquake was the occasion to rejuvenate and modernize Haitian museums cultural Institutions
- ICOM-HAITI: takes a new start since 2010
- The common goals pursued by both museums: to *rise up* to the *international standards of ICOM*, while taking into account the limitations of the socio-cultural and economic context of Haiti.
- The revision of the *documentation systems* was the trigger that led to a *profound evaluation* of the *overall practices of the museum*, from acquisition procedures to display/interpretation.

Lessons learnt (1)

Implementing best practices in museum *Issue of digitization*

- *One must always implement best practices taking into account the overall context (no one size fits all)*
- *To implement a good documentation system does not mean necessarily to acquire (sometimes expensive) softwares for digitization*
- *A local solution, culturally fit, and low-cost, is often a better solution*

Lessons learnt (2)

Implementing best practices in museum *Codification (inventory)*

- *The first quality of a system of codification is that it is useful and usable*
- *It should fit to the situation and be clearly spelled out*
- *There is no point using a foreign system of codification which does not meet the particular needs of a small Haitian museum*

Lessons learnt (3)

- ***Object description: immaterial aspects***

while documenting an object, efforts must be made to include :

Not only information on the socio-historical context

But all the immaterial cultural aspects very alive in the collective imagination (ethno-history, myths, legends, religious-cult practices)

Lessons learnt (4): values

- *Documentation is not just about technicalities, it is also about values*
- *Documenting and valorizing a collection (through a documentation system) is most and foremost about social and ethical values*
- *Ex. from 2 museums (MOF and PHCS): issue of fakes*
- *processes of documenting the provenance of the objects, or the interpretation of the objects,*
- *raise issues of intellectual honesty,*
- *raise issues of respect and service to the public*

Lesson learnt (5)

- *The process of re-organization the documentation system of a museum can lead to a profound personal transformation. (for both MOF and PHCS)*
- *New vision of 2 museums as an educational space to foster a sense of belonging to a community (be it national, regional or simply human)*
- *New mission the Directors of the 2 museums embrace personally as active citizens,*
- *The process is so rewarding that it is worth all the sacrifices past, present, and to come.*

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And thank you all for your attention!