

## **SOCIAL INCLUSION: ROLE OF MUSEUMS IN PRESENT PERSPECTIVE**

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### **Introduction**

Social interaction is the fundamental nexus of any relationship, small groups, formal organizations as well as communities. Some disturbing trends in our society hinder or even eliminate this civic building agent, resulting social atrophy; a growing isolation as individuals become increasingly separated from our neighbours, our co-workers and even our family members. If we ignore it now, then entire humanity will be compromised and our quality of life will be diminished. Museums are rare social organizations which engage with social issues viewing their role and purpose in a way which is fundamentally different from the majority of cultural organizations. For such organizations, culture, arts or heritage is not intrinsically valuable but rather its value ascertains in relation to people - individuals, communities and society. Museums are more than auxiliaries to teaching and offer 'open-ended' informal learning situations which can provide a range of meaningful experiences for public which in turn bring about positive social change in the society. Museums are places of excitement and enjoyment which through their environment can

inspire interest and creativity in children and young people of our society, the most vulnerable group to social atrophy, and thereby create awareness concerning social bonding; in ways which neither parents nor teachers can provide and that might otherwise remain untapped. Therefore, there is a growing need for museums and alike social organization to remain relevant and be responsive to this thought-provoking social issue.

### **Museum strategies in social inclusion**

With the passage of time museums have ultimately been transformed into a public institution, a significant component in defining socio-cultural identity, nationally and internationally. In the definition for "Museum" proposed by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the Communication appears as one of the potent tool of museum management characterizing the cultural and social mission of museums. At present times, the museums are no longer just treasure house, but they are considered as mixed metaphorical experiences, through which society symbolizes its relationship with its own history and that of other cultures.

Museum environment explores what we actually see, touch, and experience when looking at art. Typically, art history is an enterprise of recovery--of searching out the provenance, the original intentions, the physical setting, and historical conditions behind a work

of art. By collecting and interpreting objects through exhibitions museums provide knowledge about social history and cultures and thus educate our society in an informal way. The main goals of museum communication in this context are:

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- Providing societal information
  - Increasing awareness about the cultural identity and socio-cultural history among people
  - Inviting social conscience related to social atrophy
  - Promoting visitors' involvement for better museum experience

Fig: Objectives of Museum Communication in social context

Social inclusion work in museums has been most often associated with the work of outreach, access or education departments. Learning through objects is different to the more text-based and often passive learning in classrooms. Feeling or looking at artefacts, imagining their story, reconciling the object with its accompanying text is a way of learning unique to museums which promote an effective approach to learning, encouraging children to find a niche area of the subject and present it to others. The content of museum education is built to nurture a sense of community, shared history and cultural value. Museums engage children in complex and sensitive issues and provide a secure forum for communication. Beside programmes

for school children, museums offer different types of education and learning opportunities for visitors irrespective of age such as gallery talks, lectures, guided tours and publications for distribution etc. Other initiatives try to take the museum out into the community which aims to make museums more accessible to various parts of the population, and more responsive to the social issues as well as visitors' needs and interests.

Museums besides their tangible collections (artefacts or specimens) can effectively use knowledge, beliefs, assumptions, codes and practices associated with the various communities of the society not only for better interpretation of museum



displays but also for better engagement of the public with the museum activities. In this context, it would be worth mentioning that in response to the UNESCO convention for the preservation of the immaterial cultural heritage, museums all over the World have started to focus on the documentation and preservation of the Intangible Cultural Heritage through its effective dissemination. Museums should arrange more and more live programmes including intangible and tangible heritage of the various communities of society. Such live programmes may include demonstration of various kind of art and craft work by artists and craft persons, traditional song and dance performances, drama and enactment of positive ritualistic customs, traditional living and practices of communities and so on. Such activities invite interactive talk among the participants ranging from layman to experts and practitioners. As museums are open to all irrespective of age, sex, caste, economic status and social position, a unique but rare kind of social engagement may form on these interactive socio-cultural activities.

#### **A Model of social inclusion in Museums**

Based on above discussions a model of social inclusion in museum is prepared below. The socio-cultural network is formed in museums by three primary aspects- Museum Collection, Museum Programmes and Museum Environment. Museum collection includes tangible and intangible heritage of society. Museum Programmes includes communication through exhibits, Personal/ Face to Face interaction through inhouse as well as outreach programmes. Community development Programmes widen access and scope of museum, create a suitable platform to consult and enter into a dialogue with the community. Museum Environment consists of display, spatial arrangement and facilities. In other hand the experience that a person gained during his/her visit in the museum can be categorized as edutainment (Education plus Entertainment), social impact, reciprocity (Individual, community, and society).

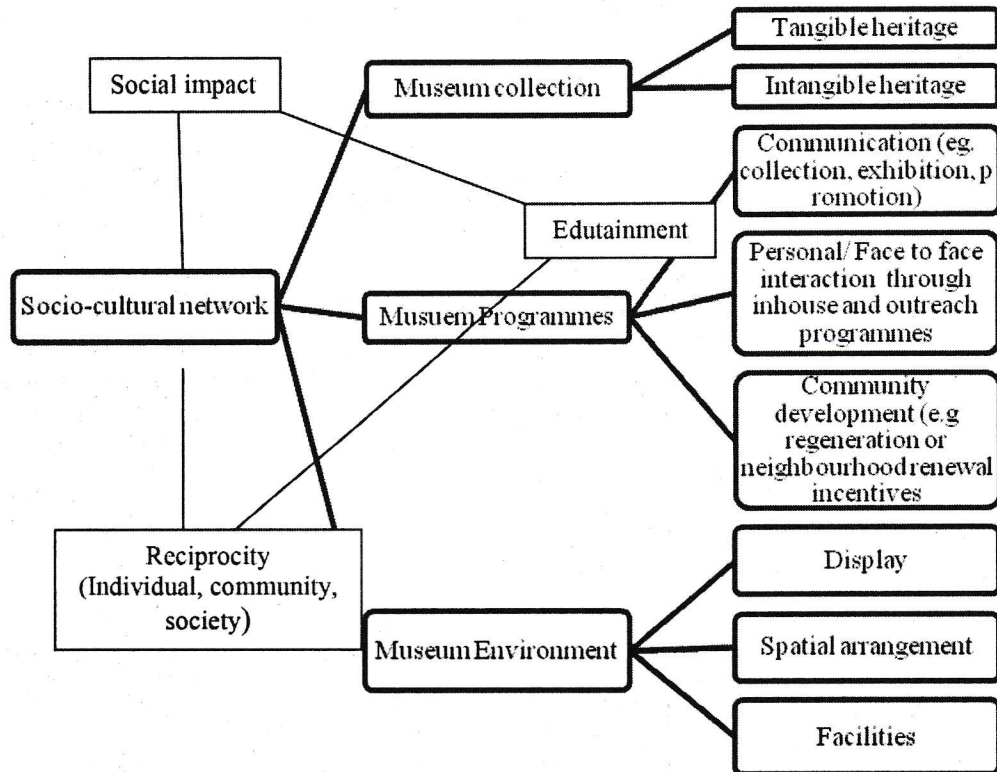


Fig: Model of social inclusion in Museums

**Conclusion**

Museums have not just a role, but a special role to play in society related to the growing isolation in the society. Their collections, tangible heritage and intangible heritage irrespective of local, national and international levels and the scholarship and expertise surrounding those collections, offer an invaluable, original and thrilling resource for individuals, community as well as society. In addition, museums

offer a hugely valuable 'third' space between school or workplace and home, in which it is safe intellectually and physically for visitors to communicate, where different relationships are forged between generations; children and adults – whether parents, grandparents, teachers, or museum educators – and between children themselves or adult themselves. It is difficult to categorize and simplify the many ways in which

museums might contribute towards inclusion but the model above attempted to conceptualize both the social impact of the museum and the process by which this might be achieved. The model suggests that museums can deliver outcomes in relation to social inclusion at three main levels; individual, community and society.

Social life has changed dramatically throughout the world in the past few decades in the face of the accelerated pace of cultural, economic and technological globalization as various social trends isolate us more and more from each other. The challenge of addressing social atrophy in museums lies in reinterpreting existing collections and cultures in ways that are sensitive and relevant to recent social perspectives. Museums, of course cannot claim to single-handedly reduce such social ailment, however a growing body of research is commenced concerning this issue in museum world. Museum administrators now acknowledge that museums and programmes need to demonstrate impact and value within their local communities in order to identify the specific areas that need to bridge up using requisite collections and arranging suitable programmes.

Positive impacts have been developed throughout the world, and a number of benefits are claimed for participation in museum programmes and museum visitation. Finally, museums have opportunities to influence, challenge and sometimes change how visitors think; inspiring them to take action on big issues and be more social citizens in an increasingly globalised world.

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