19th Workshop APDR

**Resilient territories: Innovation and creativity for new modes of regional development**

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# ON THE TRAIL OF SOCIAL MUSEOLOGY: INCLUSION & DIVERSITY IN THE MUSEUM OF SÃO BRÁS

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## ON THE TRAIL OF SOCIAL MUSEOLOGY: CHALLENGING SUTAINABILITY AT MUSEUM OF SÃO BRÁS

**ABSTRACT:** The words Museology and Museum may exhibit different textures, tones and meanings, according to the principles and criteria with which they are brought to life in each location. We frequently find them associated with initiatives whose operating principles focus on exhibitions, objects and collections, thus prioritizing an approach of low-volume participation, at once fearful of the modern and of the social. As such, numbers (such as budgets, statistics, etc.) become the principal indicator of the quality of the projects. However, when they are applied respecting the principles of Museology committed to local development, and recognizing the particular diversity of each community, a "Museology of an inclusive texture", or Social Museology, transpires. Consequently, a museum emerges where local people define the meanings, textures and tones, a museum capable of legitimizing other forms of knowledge and presences than the curatorial. This is the case of the *Costume Museum of São Brás de Alportel* (MuT), a small museum located in inland Algarve, in southern Portugal, which is developing a management model characterized by a drive for sustainability (social, cultural, economic and environmental), freedom of action and by the sharing of knowledge, meanings and local experiences. Despite its weaknesses and contradictions, the polyphonic character of this experiment produces a set of participative practices that, beyond being a central part in constructing its sustainable character, make the Museum a true platform for connecting, recognition, and empowerment[19] of the local population, in a place for building **a** utopia.

**Keywords:** empowerment, recognition, Social Museology, transformation, utopia.

## NA SENDA DA MUSEOLOGIA SOCIAL: DESAFIANDO A SUSTENTABILIDADE NO MUSEU DE SÃO BRAS

**RESUMO:** As palavras Museologia e Museu podem apresentar diferentes texturas, matizes e sentidos, segundo os princípios e critérios com que ganham vida em cada lugar. Com frequência encontramo-las associadas a iniciativas cujas lógicas de atuação focam a sua atenção nas exposições, nos objetos e nas coleções, priorizando um conceito de participação de baixa densidade, com abordagens receosas da contemporaneidade e do social. Neste conceito, os números (orçamentos, estatísticas, etc…) são por vezes o principal indicador de qualidade do projeto. No entanto, quando aplicados sob a ótica de uma Museologia comprometida com o desenvolvimento local e com o reconhecimento da diversidade própria de cada território, estes mesmos termos dão lugar a uma "Museologia de textura inclusiva", ou Museologia Social. Transparece assim um Museu onde as pessoas do lugar definem os sentidos, as texturas e os matizes do processo museológico, um Museu capaz de legitimar outras formas de conhecimento e outras presenças. Este é o caso do *Museu do Trajo of São Brás de Alportel* (MuT), um pequeno museu localizado no interior do Algarve, que desenvolve um modelo de gestão caracterizado pela procura da sustentabilidade (económica, social, cultural e ambiental), pela liberdade de ação e pela partilha de saberes, sentidos e experiências locais. Apesar das suas fragilidades e contradições, o caráter polifónico desta experiência desemboca num conjunto de práticas participativas que, além de constituir uma peça chave na construção da sua dimensão sustentável, tornam o Museu numa plataforma de encontro, reconhecimento e empoderamento da população local, num recanto aberto à construção da utopia.

**Palavras-chave:** empoderamento, Museologia Social, reconhecimento, transformação, utopia.

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[19] Empowerment: Obtainment, increasing or the strengthening of power. Ex.: «Economic development presupposes an empowerment of the least favored layers», in Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa Comtemporânea (2001). Lisboa: Academia das Ciências/Verbo, pp.1379.

## 1. Introduction

For some time now we have been playing with the idea of constructing a text on the management model that is being developed at the *Costume Museum of São Brás de Alportel* (MuT). Through dialogue and shared experiences, as daily paths towards the construction of a Museology, and other ways to "ser-en-plural" (Delgado, 2009) with the museum, the desire to write emerged.

Aided by the resource of words and its scientific partners – research and thought – our objective was to systematize the type of Social Museology that has been taking form in recent years at MuT. Our inner desire was to communicate to other people, museum and worlds, to turn their attention towards our work and in this way to grow in the echoes which consequently emerge. Our target: a museological project that privileges empowerment and working through networks, along the lines of an inter-relational Museology. In short, a museum that provides the perfect excuse to debate new forms of museological participation, its causes and effects, within a broader consistent process and socially balanced development, where culture constitutes an important factor of social and economic equilibrium and the museum plays a central role in the access to knowledge.

## 2. Social museology and the local cause as museum semantics

In this part of the world, an old and changing Europe, we have witnessed in recent decades a seemingly orchestrated symphony of shifting economic and social ideologies.

Taking the thematic stage as a point of departure for this paper we have tried to develop our discussion (which will, nonetheless result in some inevitable non-intentional exclusion). Considering this objective, and taking into account that the kind of Museology practiced at MuT tends to be a reply to the profound exchange of paradigm that has been taking place in the fields of social science in the recent decades (Fraser, 2000; Bourdieu, 2001; Santos, 2009), it seems interesting to take a step back into the 1970s and to situate our study in the evolution and the crossing of three key concepts for museums in the 21st Century: Heritage, Museology and Development.

In effect, two UNESCO documents from the last century place emphasis on ideological and conceptual thought concerning the compromises associated with these concepts. The first formed the backbone of a huge convention on cultural heritage and privileged what we now consider a monumental and elitist notion of heritage, belonging to a hegemonic Europe (UNESCO, 1972). The second, created by the museological section of this very entity, reflects the spirit of new social causes that play a central role on both sides of the Atlantic, pushing forth the debate begun with the *UNESCO Regional Seminar on the Role of Education in Museums* (ICOM, 1958) and recognizing its social function as based on the concept of the "integral museum" (ICOM, 1972). In this last document, better known as the *Santiago Declaration*, ICOM lays its premises on a participatory Museology, capable of recognizing the museum as a dynamic instrument of social change, based on interdisciplinary work and the recognition of the museologist as a socio-political being (Cândido, 2003).

Following on from this, we can then state that the 70s witnessed the birth of sociocultural practice as playing a fundamental role in the museological process, a means to integral development. Within this framework we are able to identify new ideologies based on a participative democracy which was gaining visibility and the recognition of social capital as an axis of cohesion and development.

With the dawning of a new decade, the current debate and the natural evolution of those trends, delineated at Santiago, would result in the emergence of a new museological tendency which under the title of New Museology (*Quebec Declaration*, 1984), would propose a renewal of principles and methodologies in this field of social science (Lorente, 2012; Sancho Querol, 2013). New forms of Museology (ecomuseums, school museums, community based, neighbourhood, urban…) had begun to spread throughout Europe and the Americas. Strengthened by the creation of an *International Movement for a New Museology,* in 1985 (http://www.minom-icom.net/about-us 19.08.2013), this

current of thought structured its theoretical stance on a conceptual triad where Community, Territory and Heritage formed the anatomy of a Social Museology (Fernández, 2003; Bruno, 2010).

During that same period, the third of our concepts would finally come into being. Within a context drawn out from a still shy and early form of globalization, closely related to a growing environmental conscience, the report from the *United Nations Worldwide Commission for the Environment and Development*, "Our Common Future*"* which is best known as the "Brundtland Report" (UN, 1987) appears. Providing us with a critical vision of the development model which had been adopted up till then by developed and developing nations, Brundtland defined the concept of Sustainable Growth, highlighting the risk of excessive use of natural resources without considering the capacity and support of ecosystems in the present, and consequently unsustainability for future generations.

Following this initial alert, and as a result of the first *United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development* (UN, 1992), the *Rio 92 Declaration* and, above all, the *Agenda 21,* were crucial documents in pushing forth a reformulation of the development models which had been in use until then. In these documents, a strong relation between global environmental protection, its economic branching and social development could be detected.

In this sense and as a result of this ongoing international debate and of the work of activists such as John Elkington, in the 90s we witnessed the rise of the "Model of Sustainability of Three Pillars" or "*Triple bottom line*" (Elkington, 1998) to answer those challenges posed by organisations such as the United Nations.

Structured according to three key dimensions: Social (justice), Economic (prosperity) and Environmental (quality) (http://www.sustainability.com/history, 12.09.2013), this concept of sustainability revealed interesting similarities with another which had been previously established in Santiago do Chile. One word marked the difference and raised the level of compromise to the field we now occupy: the word Museum.

Despite developing from different contexts, and keeping in mind that New Museology emerged as associated to socio-cultural development, the concepts were moving closer together in rationale making it possible to establish an interesting parallel between them. In effect due to its nature and commitments, the Social Dimension of the concept of Sustainability could be equaled to the concept of Community in New Museology and the Environmental Dimension to Territory. Nonetheless, in comparing the third dimension of Sustainability (the Economic) with the third working axis of New Museology (Heritage) the process seemed to lose its natural linearity.

Within this framework of thought and reflection, we now realize the discrepancies between the Economic Dimension and Heritage in fact revealed two great absences, which would only appear in the 21st Century. The New Museology Heritage did in fact bring the challenges related with that which is today the fourth pillar of sustainable development: Culture (Hawkes, 2001; UN, 2012). Along another line, the Economic Dimension of Development introduced the challenges related with the financial sustainability to the new concept of the museum, and of Museology. The present state of affairs, where Culture would come to be recognized as an important factor in social and economic development was then launched into the future.

Henceforth, the steps taken would be marked by the progressive awareness of these absences. Heritage Studies welcomed the humanization of heritage, expressed through the broadening of the concept to include popular culture (UNESCO, 1989) still in the 80s, but also through valuing our most precious legacy, cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2001) and by recognizing the intangible dimension of our cultures (UNESCO, 2003) at the turn of the century. These were traces of a new discourse surrounding a regenerating concept of heritage (Gonçalves, 2007).

As a result of the maturing of the New Museology movement during the 90s, but also due to the characteristics and needs of contemporary societies, Museology and Sociology came into closer contact in the form of Social Museology or Sociomuseology. Heir to New Museology, this field used the museum to achieve sustainable development through the participation of communities in the

definition, management and socialization of cultural and natural artifacts, focusing its practice on the concept of the museum as a collective project of sociological nature. It is because of this objective that its practice has been structured till this day, from a yet broader and more profound concept of participation (Moutinho, 2010) which we find in MuT an interesting example, as we will see in the next few pages.

Well into the second decade of the 21st century, and facing such great changes as those we are now crossing, the need and pertinence to reposition museums and Museology at the heart of our society becomes evident. With this in mind, and conscious of the role that the museum holds in the process of development where culture rests as one of the main axes of practice, ICOM reminds us of how "there is no sustainable growth without cultural development" (ICOM, 2013a) recognizing the potential of the museum and of heritage as "positive engines of development rather than sources of expenditure" (ICOM, 2013b). Heritage, Museology and Development are now one of the keys to a sustainable society.

It is in this context that Sociomuseology has at hand the challenge to incorporate the four axes that form the integral structure of development. The museum as a microcosm and a local lab for a society in evolution is located at the heart of the system, with the role of valuing and re-using the natural (Territory – Environmental Dimension) and the cultural (Heritage – Cultural Dimension) resources, the construction of social justice (Community – Social Dimension) and an integrated development (Museum Sustainability – Economic Dimension).

Serving as social radar of our times, citizen's platform and forum for the construction of a present and future, in the eyes of Sociomuseology it is the role of the museum to emphasize that its greatest heritage are the people (Chagas, 2013) who will contribute towards the building of an alternative globalization.

## 3. At a village in the Algarve interior

The *Costume Museum of São Brás de Alportel* was born in 1983 when its founder, Father José da Cunha Duarte, decided to organize an exhibition of ethnographic objects in the Fire Department of São Brás de Alportel.

With the help of the local Parish Social and Cultural Centre, a more thorough process of ethnographic collecting is started from which, in due time the idea of constructing a museum with this thematic focus is born. The objective was to pursue research and to provide information on local artifacts.

It was in 1987 that it took form, motivated both by the interest shown for local assets, but also for its mission of social support and local development, the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia de São Brás de Alportel*[20] (SCM), decided to get involved in the project, by request of Father José, accepting to look after the existing collection.

The SCM, embarked on this mission with the local ethnography in mind, and while benefiting from the donation of a 19th Century property, located in the village centre, created a new place of interest, focused on matters that the priest had brought to the attention of the village: the *António Bentes Cultural Centre*[21]. The name refers to the husband and executor of the will of the benefactor and owner of the property, Lucília Dias Sancho, now deceased.

In the hands of the Misericórdia this house would become the *Etnographic Museum of Algarve Costume* and fully operational around 1990. The idea was to have its own building with one

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[20] The *Santa Casa da Misericórdia de São Bras de Alportel*, is the local branch of a nationwide organization of the same name, which focuses on social and charitable work of different types.

[21] See "Protocol signed between the Santa Casa da Misericórdia de São Brás de Alportel and the Parish Social and Cultural Centre of São Brás de Alportel" (1987) in: www.museu-sbras.com/docs-protocolo1987.pdf and the updated document in 1992 at: www.museu-sbras.com/docs-protocolo1992.pdf

employee, a small group of volunteer collaborators and a corpus of intentions that previewed the existence of revenues and the freedom to produce its own cultural agenda.[22]

On the subject, it is worth mentioning that, if on the one hand, the centennial principles of the SCM were based on the social needs as priorities in its field of action, and placed cultural heritage on a secondary level, on the other hand, its solidity provided a stable environment which favored the implementation of long term projects, based on the practice of concepts such as "cause, social conscience and citizenship" today also applied to ecology, the preservation of cultural heritage or integrated development (Sancho, 2006).

These were the first years of existence of the Cultural Centre and of its Museum from 1987 onwards. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the poor state the building was in would lead to continual thorough renovation works between 1993 and 2003. Meanwhile, the existing collection was beginning to gain visibility for its ethnographic and heritage value. In this highly demanding field of textile heritage, the lack of organization and of inventory, as well as the deficient conditions of preservation in which most of the assets were found required the training of a small team. This formation relied on the specialized support of the *National Costume Museum*.

In fact, the bases on which this project rested – lack of properly trained staff, the nature of its ownership, the self-management model, low budget and the "collective essence" of the museum origins and collection – did not allow for analogies with more conventional models. Due to the intrinsic characteristics of the territory, the bond with the locals became indispensable, for reasons of mutual recognition, to further enrich the museological assets, while also to expand the technical team based on the diversity of knowledge and local experiences, and the self-sustainability of the project.

So slowly but surely, throughout the years and following the natural evolution of these processes the *Ethnographic Museum of Algarve Costume* developed its own dynamics based on two central profoundly intertwined pillars: the collective construction of processes related to the life of the Museum (in tone with life besides its own), and the definition of a central theme of study which allowed for the proximity of historical, geographical, social and cultural contexts of the region: the field of fashion and costume heritage (Sancho, 2006).

Simultaneously, and in recognition of the work in progress on the part of its ownership, from 1994 onwards the museum would employ a second worker.

In the same way, and according to the politics of value for difference and diversity (Abreu, forthcoming) that had started to gain strength in the beginning of the century, but also in tone with the principles and methods of Social Museology, from 2006 onwards the Museum's new name, *Costume Museum of São Brás de Alportel*, would come to reflect its local commitment.

Recognized as the guardian of a collective past and present memory and as the generator of plural dialogues committed to the safeguarding of diversity, MuT constructs itself as a Museum which is useful to the people, both in their daily lives as in its relation with the local environment. In this process, and along with the ideological values which can be found at the basis of its creation and evolution (social solidarity and Social Museology), the key to its development seems to rest in the museological and cultural autonomy it succeeded in gaining.

On this basis, and under the patronage of the Misericórdia, MuT currently relies on a staff of three (1 director and two employees) who guarantee museological management, its daily opening to the public and the maintenance of its spaces. Educational services, inventory and management of technical reservations are in the hands of volunteers with experience, knowledge and possibilities of cooperating with the "Visible Museum" (see Figure 1, pp. 12).

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[22] See "Rules and guidelines" at: www.museu-sbras.com/docs-regulamento-ccab1987.pdf

In this context, the museological management is of the sole responsibility of the Museum director who organizes medium and long term initiatives, exhibitions and projects with the help of a group of collaborators of different ranking and of varied fields of specialization.

The planning and putting together of new exhibitions, having the contents well defined and the selection and collection of objects based on collective work processes, falls within the scope of responsibility of the local enterprise *Museu à Medida.* Something similar is occurring in the area of Design and Communication, whose economic viability depends on the services provided to MuT and mostly to the outside market. The *Cantinho do Museu*, the small Museum bar, functions through the collaborative concession to young entrepreneurs with interest in giving life to this part of the garden (see "Integrating Museum", Figure 1).

On the other hand, along with the exhibition and research project program (see "Long term Museum", Figure 1) MuT relies on a cultural and recreational agenda which is the responsibility of the *Friends of the Museum* who, as a result of their efforts and the value of their interaction with the institution, occupy a place of great visibility within the general structure. The Friends are a multilicultural association of about 800 members who are responsible for a vast sociocultural program, for the functioning of various autonomous groups in the fields of theatre, music, photography, fitness, history and handicraft in addition to a multilingual library (see "Day to day Museum", Figure 1), and also for its voluntary initiatives which are fundamental to the proper functioning of the inventory and heritage educational services.

Within this kind of structure, the many organizations which share museological spaces benefit from an autonomy based on individual responsibility, assuming the management, the mediation and the building of a working network.

The team, its collaborators, volunteers, collectives, organizations and users see MuT as a space for sharing, based on the development of sociocultural creativity and on the valuing of new uses of natural and cultural diversity characteristic of the region. The Museum sees itself as an experimental field of an alternative model of management which may represent a contribution to the social function of the museums within the community.

Looking into the past, we now realize how the origins of MuT shaped its present form and content. But much more so than its natural framing, its initial bond with the locals would come to be a continual essential factor in its evolution, allowing for the achievement of a sociocultural level of maturity as we will be discussing next.

**4. MuT: a day to day museum, from collective strength to shared knowledge**

The encounter of a number of improbable conditions at MuT caused a peculiar development in the management model. Motivated by the freedom of action, by financial autonomy as a means to the sustainability of the Museum and an example for the area where it is located, this museum today relies on high indicator levels of participation and involvement of the population.

For the reasons above, it has become an interesting case study from both the point of view of new practices related to Social Museology, as from the point of view of new models of social and cultural development structured from the base to the top.

In effect, MuT functions as a platform for the encounter and recognition of knowledge and experience of life which nurture the concept of sociocultural diversity in the Algarve interior.

In this sense, the management assumes postures and practices which aim at the development of a truly transversal model, based on the contemporary concept of the network, involving the intense exercise of the construction of the Museum as a space for the empowerment of local populations.

Keeping all these aspects in mind and within a perspective which conforms to the experimental character of this process, it is now time to ask: but what is in fact, characteristic of the *Museum of*

*São Brás*? What gives it its hybrid structure, somewhat like a cultural centre in permanent relation with local associations? How does it, following a cooperative model, and attempting to refuse hierarchies, still call itself Museum?

MuT satisfies most of the requirements which allow us to classify it as a Museum, both from the point of view of the parameters stipulated by the *Portuguese Museum Network*, as in the definitions and international norms defined by ICOM. However, we are not dealing with a Museum as those that we visit in big cities, dependent on historical conditions that further separate them from local community involvement. We are faced with a type of museum which is profoundly inspired on the principles and practices of Social Museology: the result of an apparently spontaneous generation and of the adaptation to the environment, or rather, a variety resulting from an evolutionary process molded by natural and human geographies of the region, and with the aim of aiding local development.

### 4.1. Systemizing the experience

So as to better understand the functioning of MuT, and above all the sociomuseological character of the project, we have decided to create a table which allows us to approach each of the layers that presently bring to life the Museum as it is today (Figure 1). Within it we have defined four levels of practice according to the type of social, cultural and territorial outreach, but also that of the objectives, of the agents and of the public that use it, so as to better explain the management model of our main character.
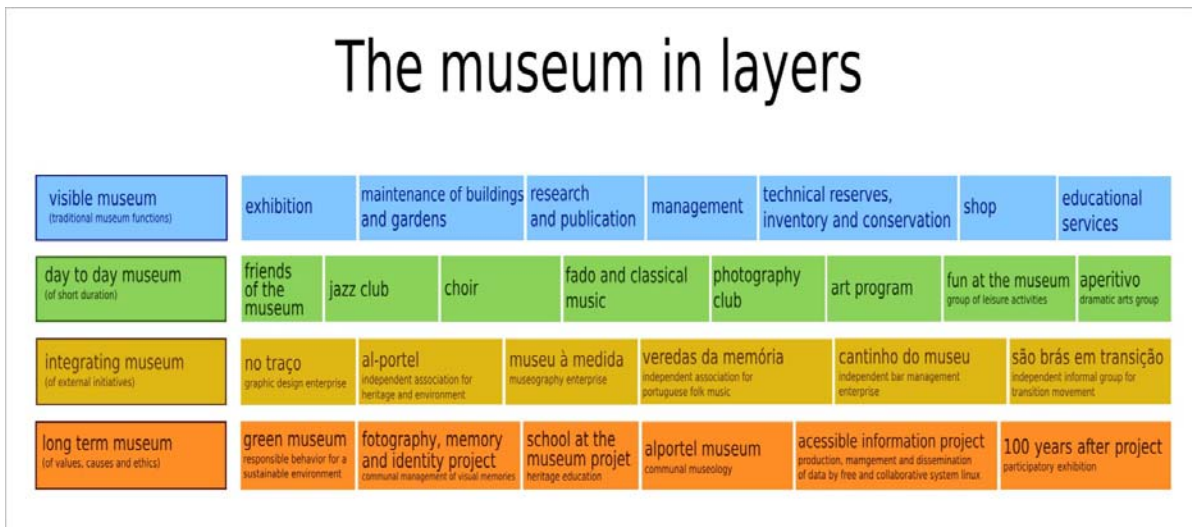


**Figure 1:** The cultural ecosystem of MuT seen through the layers of museological fields of action.

So, in the shadow of the **Visible Museum**, and within a structure which takes as its starting point the museological practices which are today globally recognized as part of the Museum, we find the dynamics related to exhibitions and catalogues, research and publication, the collections and the activities of heritage education. This Museum is especially directed at the visiting public, who are looking for more information on local culture and realities.

Yet at MuT we witness the co-existence of new skills and volunteer work, environmental and artistic projects, diverse forms of utopia, colors and intensities and also the commitment of providing a new sustainable management of the resources related with the Museum and the territory in tone with a broader and inclusive concept of culture.

The second layer of visibility, not of lesser importance, brings to life the **Day to Day Museum**. It is in this layer that the *Friends of the Museum,* thanks to the autonomy which they are given by the management and in a meaningful relation with the locals, provide training, information and

socialization through the previously referred initiatives. The construction of this Day to Day Museum demands presence, attention and permanent listening to the needs and aspirations of those who co-habit the land with the Museum. It demands "living with" the people, meaning, identifying synergies capable of accompanying rhythms, making the most of knowledge, time and spaces, making the Museum of use to everyday life. This process has been translating itself into a growing affluence of public and users[23], through a diversified, daily use of spaces and, consequently, through the increasing revenue that result in a stable functioning of this organization, allowing for the creation of a new position: Administrator of the Friends.

At a deeper level, which combines decreased outside visibility with a growing level of local utility, another museum emerges, one which integrates within its spaces long term projects, services, new businesses, ideas, dreams and local associations, taking on the role of an **Integrating Museum**.

Within this framework, MuT performs yet another social function: that of supporting people and organizations in the realization of its individual and collective objectives, constructing through proximity and complicity a collaborative community of individual interests, which complement each other and intersect on a daily basis. This play of interaction simultaneously allows for the consolidation of a sociocultural facet of a museological project through new collaboration, diversity of experiences, cultures and skills, the creation of innovative competences, in short, the social renovation with basis on the axis of local cultural development.

At last, we find the layer of the "substratum", that is, the not so visible but still the most structuring in the construction of a long term sociomuseological equilibrium, whether for its ethical implications - in its economic, ecological, social and heritage perspectives – as for its capacity to make the museological project sustainable, contributing to the recognition of the role of the Museum within the scope of local development. What we are referring to, is the **Long term Museum**, a layer of MuT where we find the initiatives and projects which, in the long term, are giving way to other things:

- To broaden the DNA heritage in the Algarve interior (Varine, 2012) with the participation of different local collectives, whose experiences and knowledge allow us to identify other forms of heritage community capital;

- To contribute to the recognition of social experience and local culture, and from here to the construction of a local shared and inclusive knowledge (Santos, 2009), capable of responding to the challenges of contemporary societies;

- To transmit, through heritage education, the active and structured safeguarding mechanisms taking from processes of action-research that privilege alterity, intergenerational and multicultural dialogue, starting from the school-museum axis.

- To establish principles and good practices of sustainable Museology from environmental and economic, social and cultural heritage perspectives, allowing for the best use of natural resources and the re-use of different capitals coproduced with the Museum.

Subjacent to this structure we find the foundations of the edifice that is, the result of a constant effort in creation and stability in the long term, in view of achieving the recognition as a space for auto-determination and freedom, but also sustainability in its most diverse forms.

**4.2. On the construction of economic sustainability**

In this sense, and taking a different look at these layers of action, we have proposed to analyze the current experiences according to economic maturity in order to understand how sustainable Museology is being constructed. Four main points may be outlined:

23. Within the scope of this management model, and according to the nature and intensity of the participation, MuT distinguishes between the visitors, those who use the museum in a more detached and occasional form, and those who regularly visit and with whom an interaction is developed on a social and cultural level which is lasting and rich for both parties (Victor, 2005).

- in a first group we identify the components that reveal an intentional commercial objective and that, besides allowing for the creation of new work posts born out of cultural dynamics, constitute regular sources of income at MuT: we are talking about the Shop and the Bar (more information at: www.museu-sbras.com/bar.html*)*

- in the second group we find the initiatives that have achieved full economic sustainability, that is, that generate funds equivalent to the spending for adequate functioning. These are, the Day to Day Museum through entrance fees and other sources of income which fund the exhibitions, museography, research and publishing. Also the *Friends of the Museum* (http://www.amigos-museu-sbras.org/), which earned its majority in 2007, when it balanced out its revenues and expenses (including the previously referred work post);

- the third group includes part-time job projects that comply to a plan of economic viability at medium term, which are in the meantime funded through other projects which have already achieved economic stability. Some examples are the initiatives of the *Museu à Medida,* (http://museuamedida.yolasite.com/) and *NoTraço, Graphic Design enterprise* (http://museusbras.wix.com/design);

- the fourth group includes museum departments which on their own do not generate enough revenue to be self sustainable. It is necessary that the Museum itself produce additional funds to support their existence. Some examples are the *Documentation Centre* (Library management and archives) and the *Maintenance Service.*


## 5. Redifining concepts, practices and meanings in the museum

Conscious of the importance in the construction of a Museology capable of associating the social to the sustainable, at MuT we have considered a question that seems vital to us: how to materialize, in practice, the crossing of the four pillars of sustainable development and the three axes of practice that brought Social Museology to life, in order to define new logic and modes of action for the local museum.

With this in mind we have been working on the construction of an ideogram, included below in its initial phase, which besides giving a voice to these worlds, allows us to structure the challenges according to the referred compromises.

Just as has been happening with other projects at MuT, this process of reflexivity presents us with a markedly collective character that takes as its starting point the experiences of this and other local museums, as well as of multiple perspectives originally from different fields of knowledge that convene in Social Museology. All have provided observations, criticism, success and failure. Gradually we are able to see the emergence of a concept of a museum which results in the intersection of four museological dimensions that have in view environmental, cultural, social and economic sustainability (Figure 2).
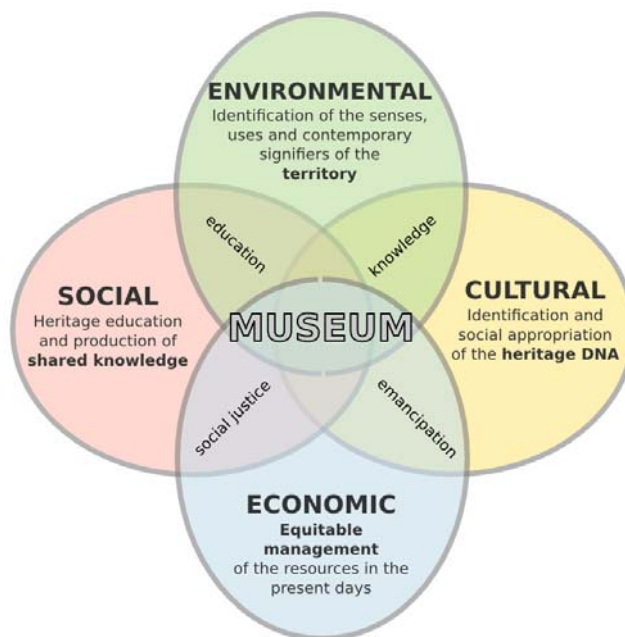
**Figure 2:** Ideogram showing the dimensions of the Sustainable Museum.

**5.1. About the ongoing experiences**

From this perspective and in order to gain a deeper understanding of some of the work at MuT, we have identified four experiences that seemingly respond to the challenge of constructing this sustainability, and that we will be displaying next:

**Project *Photography, Memory and Identity* (FMId).**

The FMId project was born in 2009 and established itself as an exercise in archeological memory in the municipality of São Brás, representing the interrelation between the social and cultural dimensions of development. In this sense, the Museum assumes the role of a mediator for the process with the local population, its main driving force.

Objective: To work on visual memory in the territory, from photographical archives of local families, with the aim of constructing a huge album of the community capable of decoding cultural, social and urban cartographies which have long been forgotten but are fundamental for the understanding/construction of a present looking out into the future.

Methodology: organizing weekly meetings of a small group of local citizens with the right profile and interest in this process, to work on the decoding of submerged memories through family images, dating back to various periods and social segments of the region.

Results and products: along the chosen course and while giving voice to the working group, the Museum has gradually been assuming a discreet posture, that of the facilitator and supplier of memories that are awakened through work. This project uses new information technology support platforms to facilitate the sharing of memories located within and outside the Museum, contributing to the constant enlargement of the project on different scales.

Simultaneously, a data base was created containing today around 30.000 images representing 400 local families. For this reason, Museum and community share the idea that together they have managed to create a "current account of memory" for each of the local families (more information at: www.museu-sbras.com/grupo-fotos.html).

***Museum School* Project (EMus).**

The EMUS project was born in 2008 and aims to contribute to closer ties between Education and Culture on a glocal scale. The project connects the environmental, social and cultural dimension of sustainability. Within this context, it aims to develop complementary relations that exist between formal and non-formal education, bringing the School and Museum into closer contact in view of the creation of an educational heritage project aimed at the Portuguese primary school levels (6-10 years of age).

Considering as its priority the formation of new generations and the demystification of the elitist image that children and families have of museums, this project places MuT at the service of the school, facilitating the proceedings by eliminating barriers and bureaucracies, and allowing the teaching staff **(...)** freedom of action.

Objective: To develop close relations and tighter cooperation between School and Museum, stimulating work through diversity of aspects and themes related with the territory and local cultures. The construction of an affective and lasting relationship between the Museum, the children and their families, has the aim of:

1. Valuing the natural and cultural diversity of the region, country and planet;

2. Transmitting the values of citizenship and critical thought;

3. Developing new habits and cultural needs among families;

4. Inserting the Museum into the circle of spaces and common livelihoods of local families;

5. Redefining its areas of heritage and traditional education with the aim of creating new fields of study;

6. Creating a Youth Group of *Friends of the Museum*.

Methodology: By directing local schools located close to MuT, EMUS has in view the creation of an annual agenda of activities constructed between the professor and the Museum, based on the recognized needs of school programs and on the characteristics of each class.   In this way, for the duration of four academic years which represent the cycle, monthly activities on local heritage will take place.

Results and products: Identifying the proximity, constancy and assiduity as key factors in the process, EMUS has allowed, among other results, the spreading/visibility of educational activities with the community and the Museum visitors, the raising of the quality of some school activities due to the technical intervention of the Museum, a greater involvement of families with events and in educational processes, free access to teachers, students and families to various MuT initiatives, and the use of some resources and museological assets in educational activities (more information at: http://www.museu-sbras.com/escolamuseu.html).

**Participative Exhibition "A hundred years later" (CADe).**

Crossing the economic, social and cultural dimensions of sustainability, CADe will be the next exhibition to be held at MuT, and will be inaugurated on the 16th May 2014.

Its provisional title being ***A hundred years later***, this exhibition is a museological initiative to celebrate the centenary of the municipality of São Brás de Alportel (1914-2014). It is the second edition of a museographical experience which resulted in the current exhibition open to the public at MuT[24]. The new exhibition will rely on the same methodology as before but taking what has been learnt from the previous exhibition take a step further.

Objective: to promote the participation of everyone who because of their relation with the territory, its history and culture, accept the challenge and the museological right to cooperate in the design,

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24. Algarve 19, was a museological(graphical) shared experience organized in 2010 which led to the exhibition Shadows of Light – Algarve in the 19th Century. The webpage that served as a platform for its developments is still available at: www.algarve19.yolasite.com

management and materialization of exhibitions at MuT, encouraging group work and defining new courses of action that lead to a participatory Museology.

Methodology: this type of participative exhibition takes as a starting point the opening of an internet page where a museological initiative is found, yet to be created and from which the whole process of conception and participative assembling of the exhibition is organized. Within this virtual space all the details of the process, planning, layout of the spaces, itineraries, selection of the artifacts, research, work memo and agenda will be made available. Participation is made possible through the various forums which are available on the page.

Results and products: These experiences stimulate the cooperation between a great diversity of people among which we find collectors, technicians or merely interested participants from all over the world. The previous experience revealed an important participation of immigrant groups who had left the region and settled around the world. In the same sense, it is worthy to note the transparency of the procedures regarding the organization of the exhibition, the profound level of sharing that defines the process and the incentive towards the collaborative model, as strong points of this experience (webpage of the current proceedings: www.museu-sbras.com/100anos.html).

***Green Museum* project (MuVe).**

Of the four projects here referred, MuVe could be considered that which best manages to simultaneously join the four dimension**s** of sustainability. In this experience we are able to verify the adoption of a set of good environmental practices that reveal relevant economic impacts to the management at MuT, and that raises awareness in the Museum and its community of the great environmental issues that currently affect our planet.

This project has totally altered the position of the Museum, namely in what concerns the separation of residues, the use of low energy consumption equipment, production of compost, the watering systems with on-treated waters, the use of bicycles for short distance travel or the use of solar and wind powered energy. Besides that, the construction of a 10Kw photovoltaic station is now complete and awaiting licensing, guaranteeing the Museum energy self-sufficiency (more information at: http://www.museu-sbras.com/museuverde.html).

**5.2. Cross glances**

In this play of relations and commitments between the four dimensions of museological sustainability, the present working ideogram allows us to preview an initial set of four zones of intersection, which may come to reproduce themselves in new directions, and that reflects other commitments capable of further consolidating this concept of museum.

The possibility of other forms of intersection is left open, as well as the possibility of other challenges and other answers which may contribute to the maturing of this concept.

**6. Final thoughts**

Our aim was to demonstrate the challenges of a Museum in construction. We achieved this by associating to the notion of Museum the idea of process, and to the notion of construction the challenges that are common to other architectures, other heritage, and other causes that deserve our attention today, because they lay the foundations of present changes.

Working from within this encounter of senses and values, absences and presences, times and forms, with a small team and low budget, which is mostly the result of the initiatives and the creative use of local diversity, is to MuT a daily exercise that responds to the challenges of a Sustainable Museology.

Social creativity, cultural sensibility and museological flexibility appear to be the keys to the process where, along with realized experiences, we also find initiatives that were unable to meet their objective because of a structure lacking minimal stability. We also learn to build the museum from these experiences.

Step by step we walk along the paths of a **M**useology that **U**nites and acts with **S**ocial conscience and **E**mpowers worlds and local voices to give sense to the word **U**topia in a country that finds in its diversity – cultural and natural – its greatest treasure.

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