

Chapter 14

Participatory Architecture: Web 2.0 Education in the Uganda National Museum

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Web 2.0 is currently pressing how museums represent themselves and educate their patrons. Major Western national museums increasingly desire such engagements, merging the digital with the educational and promising unprecedented outreach and scope. In the Global South, however, Information Communications Technology (ICT) challenges abound, including a lack of sustainable contemporary technology and the needed expertise to employ it, but Web 2.0 offers much for the educational possibilities of Global South museums, particularly with respect to oral traditions and cultures. This case study presents both the possibilities and problematics of conceptualizing a Museum Web 2.0 site for the Uganda National Museum (UNM) in Kampala.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-1930-2.ch014

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Web 2.0 technologies increasingly bleed into surprising arteries of culture, and national museums are no exception: Web 2.0 offers a particularly attractive architecture of participation for institutions that wish to develop their reach, audience, and preservation efforts. Technologies like Facebook, Flickr photo sharing, iTunes, Open Cobalt, Twitter, and YouTube allow museums to interact, share, and discuss their artifacts and exhibitions with audiences around the world. More and more, Web 2.0 also grants museums an avenue for unique educational e(electronic)-, m(mobile)-, and social media learning offerings, but as the Global North (developed countries) advances rapidly in Web 2.0 development, collaborative opportunities must be made available to museums in the Global South (developing countries). Enter our project: Web 2.0 and the Uganda National Museum, on which this case study will focus.

Founded in 1908, the Uganda National Museum was first located at Fort Lugard in Old Kampala until 1942, when it was transferred to Makerere University until 1954. The current UNM, autonomous from a Makerere University connection, is now in Kitante on Kira Road, Kampala. The museum was established to conserve, promote, and interpret Uganda's cultural and natural heritage as well as act as a centre for education and research.

The Uganda National Museum is the oldest museum in East Africa, with a core collection of over 1 million ethnographic artifacts, fossils, and signifiers of Ugandan oral heritage. Sections of the core collection include exhibits on the Stone Age and the evolution of tools. The Museum's section on the Iron Age depicts traditional kingdoms, tribes, and communities of Uganda through the display of traditional clothing, transportation, fishing, war, agriculture, religion, and recreation. The Museum also features a section on natural resources as well as on paleontology: environmental and climactic changes, archeological excavations, paintings of early settlements, and traditional architecture. The collection additionally includes fossils and objects of Ugandan science and technology, landscape, animals, and traditional music.

Our Museum 2.0 project is currently in its planning and early development stages. The overarching goal is to visually and interactively represent a selection of the UNM holdings online: art objects, textiles, and musical instruments and concerts, both traditional and contemporary. In addition, the Museum 2.0 will feature a particular section devoted to education about historical violence in Northern Uganda: working towards representations of orally transmitted culture. Our team is currently planning how best these four sections may be displayed and learned from. Current approaches include e- and m-learning—that is, electronic and mobile learning. These approaches, as we currently conceive of them, will use social media. Uganda has an existing mobile health network, which our project hopes to parallel.

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