Participatory approaches dealing with local heritage. The case of the 'Val de Bièvre' ecomuseum (France)

Daniel Urrutiaquer
Université Lumière Lyon 2, France

The logical framework of action and justification for the 'cultural democracy' is relying on the mega-objective of co-building projects. The artists are called to share their competences with inhabitants' abilities in participatory processes. The eco-museums are referring mainly to this framework as their objective is to enlarge the perimeter of local heritage. The local population cultural diversity is a subject of museum's interest. Some typical usual objects and individual or collective stories are collected as materials for specific exhibitions. Heritage value is therefore given to local cultural practices. This process is consistent with the objectives of the Agenda 21 for culture.

The 'Val de Bièvre' eco-museum is based in Fresnes, which is 17 km far from Paris. It is a scarce case of non-rural eco-museum in France. Opposite to the Town Policy, the museum is not focusing on poor or working classes and has a willingness to stay in touch with all social groups. As for many local museums, the budget is low and the financial viability is depending on benevolent involvement and partnerships with local non-profit cultural or social organisations.

The case has been observed in a grant-aided research programme on the diversification of the museum offer by performing arts in the metropolises of Paris and Marseille. The value framework of this eco-museum will be questioned in regards with the systemic obstacles for a 'fair' cooperation. The State and the local authorities are more paying attention to the attendance and the economical impact of their cultural expenses. Thus, quantitative objectives are tracking the staff from their qualitative missions. The partnerships with local relay can be frictional when amateurs are more searching an artistic recognition than participation. The low budget for cultural action is also a constraint for the quality of exhibitions or story tellers' performances.

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