

The Liquid Museum: A Museological Paradigm

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the concept of a "liquid museum," a museological paradigm that aims to complement Bauman's "liquid modernity," which acquires operational space when backed by a public administration founded on decentralized, autonomous governance, and which aims to adjust through a relational process to the community in which it is inserted.

Keywords: Museum, Liquid, Governance, Community.

Introduction

The accelerated social transformations were engines for the changes in the theoretical-methodological field of museology. Thus, in the context of the second half of the twentieth century, the museum became a center for expressing the social dynamics of groups that worked from memory and references from the past to build of their identity. The definition of ICOM / UNESCO is the reference and basis of the plurality of approaches to the museum sector. It is a definition that has evolved since 1946, in the need for greater precision and comprehensiveness. According to the 2007 version (21st General Assembly in Vienna), the museum can be understood as a «non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment». This definition seems to emerge as a direct reflection of the many objections that have been developing in museums since the beginning of the 1970s, influenced by the ideas and requirements of the intellectuals of the generation of 60 who called these spaces as evident bourgeois institutions.

As such, at a time when questions were intensifying about its capacity to make itself understood – questioning its social purpose and public projection, its internal functioning and its historical legitimacy, its authenticity and even the necessity of its own existence – in order to legitimize and validate its relevance, the museum started a continuous questioning about its addressee, using practices that aimed to open the institution to the outside, attract the public, seek its complicity and articulate with it a space of shared participation and protagonism. Thus, if museums have been for decades

regarded as symbols of modernity, progress and Western civilizational ideals, now they seem to be profoundly changing in the context of postmodern societies, currently occupying an ambivalent and contradictory position to questions such as power and knowledge, authorship and cultural authority, identity and difference.

Bauman (2007) tells us that this postmodern period is characterized by the fragmentation and hybridism of traditional, modern, and postmodern worlds, by the coexistence of continuities and discontinuities between the present social condition and previous formations, by the generalization of concepts such as emergence, creation, reinvention, participation, contestation, negotiation and transformation, as well as by the articulation of homogenization tendencies and global processes with heterogeneities and local particularisms. It is in this context that the sociologist advanced with the definition of a “liquid modernity”, or postmodernity and later postmodern knowledge. Based on this reality, we can contextualize the changes that occurred in cultural and social institutions, specifically in museums, within the scope of the transition from a modern reality to a postmodern one. If by analogy we see that in the “solid modernity” the traditional museum manifested itself as a hermetic, fixed and stable element, that is, as a holder of a knowledge which corresponded wholly to the structure of its collection, in “liquid modernity” due to instability, uncertainty, acceptance of the ephemeral, discontinuous and chaotic, museums must assert themselves as spaces of active and direct participation, seeking to establish a commitment and an active and fluid relationship with their community.

From this perspective, we observe the existence of a “solid modernity” that combines a so-called traditional museum and, in another dimension, a ‘liquid modernity’ that justifies the existence of a liquid museum (Figure 1).

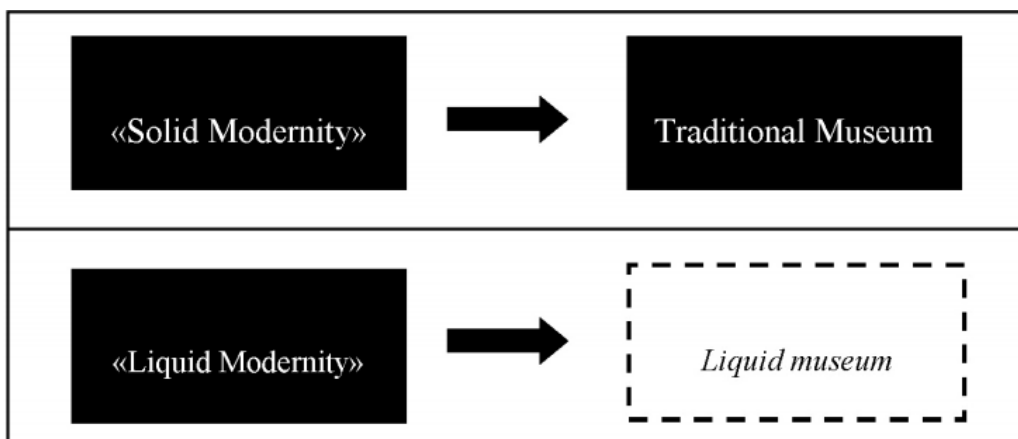


Figure 1. Correlation between types of modernity and museological typologies

Therefore, in adopting Bauman’s theory and adapting and positioning museological institutions in this conceptual redefinition, we observe that if in a “solid modernity” the museum seems to be a traditional institution, by contrast, it becomes possible to interpret the postmodern museum as a liquid element from the moment it

departs from its traditional format – that is, a categorically solid and static format—and assumes itself as an open element that seeks to follow its community, negotiating a permanent process of fluidity. In this way, we seem to observe that the liquid museum appears as a theological project of postmodernity, which aims to keep up with the pace of the accelerated changes of society, trying to integrate them in its museological exercise. In other words, if society is seen as a “liquid” product that is not formalized and rapidly transformed, the museum will also have to lose its solid structure in order to adapt their social reality.

On the other hand, it is possible to consider that, as a rule, the format of a museum is decided by the governing bodies of each territory. As such, considering that many museological units are progressive and increasingly protected by the organs of power, the attitude and the exercise of these organs exerts a direct influence in the museological practices. In this dynamic, González points out the existence of 2 types of governmental actions that can be adopted by the organs of power: a traditional public administration that focuses on unilateral action, in which government and society interact separately, and a public administration based on governance that resorts to action centered on the interaction between government and individuals. Thus, in making a correspondence between the modes of administration and the museum typologies, it is possible to observe that, if, on the one hand, the practices of traditional public administration present as a corollary a so-called traditional museology, and, in the other hand, governance practices seem to outline the development of a liquid museum (Figure 2).

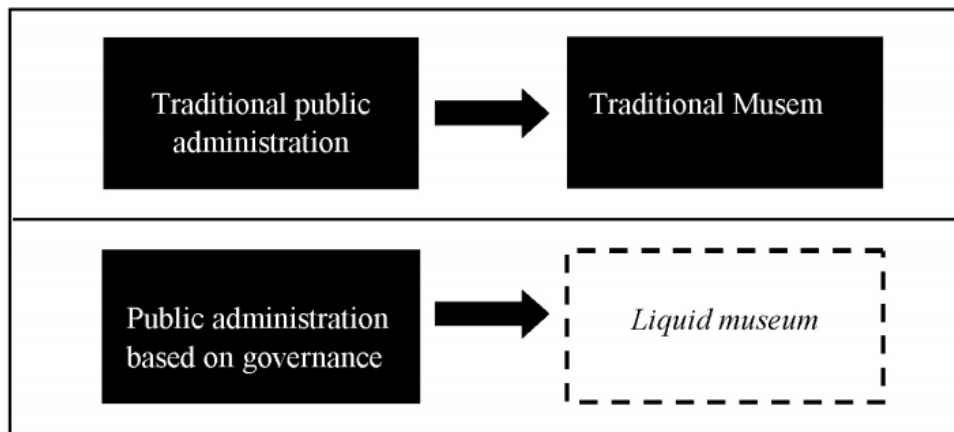


Figure 2. Correlation between types of administration and museological typologies

In this way, when a traditional public administration is practiced a traditional museum is cultivated and factors such as the hegemony of scrupulous fulfillment of institutional procedures are manifested in this relation; the total and hermetic dependence on the political decisions of the guardianship without consideration for contributions coming from outside the organization; a concern to ensure mere existence as opposed to achieving goals; the distance from citizenship that is seen as passive; and the hierarchy as opposed to the structural horizontality of the institution and the rigid and inflexible

organization. On the other hand, in a public administration based on governance, a liquid museum can emerge, stimulating, in this association, factors such as the perception of social change and the need to adapt institutions to the contemporary conditions; the reconceptualization of the institutional social function; the process of institutional democratization; an approach to people and institutional openness to the environment and to society; the emphasis on participation and involvement of the individual; the enhancement of the institution as an instrument for the creation of personal and critical consciences; the emphasis on service delivery; social co-responsibility; the use of new information and communication technologies to the individual; and the institutional contribution to community development.

Therefore, if the liquid hypothesis advocated here approach the fluidity of the frontiers of the museological institution and the extension of its performance and social position, governance presupposes, in the scenario of permeability of the borders between society, state and economy, the adoption of a new philosophy of political action centered on the principle of horizontal and solidarity relations between rulers and groups of individuals promoting, as a last resort, the capacity for sustained territorial development. Following this approach, we can highlight 2 significant aspects that come directly from the principle of governance and which are indispensable for the exercise of an institution that wants to be liquid: decentralization and autonomy. Decentralization seems to be as a democratic requirement of contemporaneity, and this can be affirmed at the center of public administration action. It will be through a decentralization of decision-making that the distance between power and the individual is reduced, stimulating the proximity between them and the effectiveness of services in the pursuit of the interests of individuals while encouraging their participation.

In terms of autonomy, and following decentralization, we can see that from the implementation of a growing autonomy, reinforced the idea that administration is not an end per se, but rather a means to achieve the democratic objectives of a development. Autonomy may, in turn, lead to the promotion of the emancipation of the community and individuals in their human development process centered around the question of identity. The museological action of this liquid museum should reflect the work and effort of the members of the community, making sure that their involvement allows them to provide the means of recognizing themselves. In this model of museum, the entire institution team plays a major role as actors of territorial development, being militants of a community action that recognizes that in the perspective of the integral development of the population, the first obligation of the museum and its professionals is to detect the and respond to them in a correct and effective way.

In this perspective, distancing itself in broad steps from the action promoted by the traditional model, the museological action promoted by the liquid museum seeks to reveal other concerns that incite the participation and involvement of the whole community, serving as an intervention tool capable of mobilizing wills and efforts for resolution of common problems within the community in which they are located.

Although in this proposal of a liquid model spaces and collections do not necessarily fall into the secondary plane, the individual and / or collective person assumes the primary role in the museological process. Being anchored in the context of “liquid modernity” and in the context of a public administration based on governance, which relay in aspects such as decentralization and autonomy, the liquid museum competes for the image of a disconnected space in any form or rigid structure, a naked space that becomes changeable and constantly adaptable. Hence the importance of a current reflection on the image that the museum tries to formulate of itself, but also an observation on the image that the museum tries to produce in its community and the relations that tries to establish with them.

It is for this reason that to feel properly represented and provisioned, the liquid museum will have to correspond in a logical follow-up to the expectations of the community where it belongs. Essentially, we consider that the museum should open itself to the environment that surrounds it, leaving its own walls and searching the surrounding community, allowing it to participate democratically in the cultural (material and intangible) heritage that belongs to it: a museum that does not live in parallel with the community, but rather seeks to submerge in the daily life of the community.

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