Museums in cultural hubs: the future of tradition

By Gail Lord - President, Lord Cultural Resources - September 4, 2019
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Islands are by their nature places of apartness and through human intervention become hubs of creativity. An Island hub is suspended between two possibilities - gateway and defense.

For two centuries Dejima was both a gateway between Japan and the world and defensive strategy against the cultural influences that trade would bring to Japan.

In our own time, the dying post-industrial Island Naoshima has been transformed to a lively place of cultural exchange, youth engagement and art tourism.

Despite their radically different origins, both Islands experienced decline, tragedy and rebirth. In their rebirth as 21st century hubs, they invite us to be connected and creative and to see ourselves and the world with fresh eyes. And these are the themes I will explore in my presentation on how museums function as hubs and in hubs.

Museums of past centuries functioned more like Islands than like hubs:

• They stood alone and isolated in their independent worlds of discipline-based collecting.

• Indeed, the origin of many of our museums was in the hard power of colonial conquest.
OUR URBANIZING WORLD

More and more of the world’s population lives in cities. Just 10 years ago, for the first time in human history, half the world’s population lived in cities. This is all the more remarkable since the first cities were only developed 10,000 years ago. We could well ask ourselves whether we have actually evolved sufficiently to adapt to urban life in such a short time. After all urban life requires diverse people to live and work in very close quarters.

Cities generate 80% of global GDP. Technology and the knowledge economy (which includes financial and legal services, education, research, design, health care, communications, consultancy and culture) have liberated these “creative” industries from the need to co-locate with natural resources so cities are taking off. However urbanization is uneven and this is especially evident in the contrast between the Global South and East and the Global North and West. In Japan, for example, 78 per cent of the population lives in cities; but in Great Britain, 90 per cent live in cities.

There is a strong correlation between economic output per person and urbanization - urban dwellers are more productive. Singapore occupies the top tier of both urbanization and output per capita - according to Richard Florida it ranks as the fourth most advanced global city in the world, behind only New York, London and Tokyo (all located on Islands to pick up on that theme). Asian cities like Jakarta...
Since many museums were founded before the current urban real estate boom, they need to be thinking about how best to monetize their land value at a time when government support is declining.

Museum districts are very convenient for tourists because they share transportation infrastructure, can influence and benefit from city policies (exercising their soft power) and are co-marketed. Because each museum has a different history in the city, they are not likely to share resources.

So the question before us is what is the most impactful way for us to be organized - as Islands? In Districts? In Clusters? In Hubs?

DISTRICTS

Museum districts happen in cities. Where museums are located or even co-located depends on the history of urban growth and planning in a given city and ideas about the value and uses of museums as they evolved from the colonial and industrial periods of the last 300 years and most importantly today on real estate values.

Urbanization is a growing force, and since most of the world’s 50,000 to 80,000 museums are located in cities, we want to consider how museums contribute to economic development and quality of life in cities. But, given the importance of museums for education, economic development, identity creation and preservation I do not want to ignore the countryside which may account for 80 % of the population in the Global South. I’d like to take a quick poll - How many of you work in museums in the Global North and West? How Many in the Global South and East? How many work in museums in urban areas? How many in the countryside?

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CLUSTERS

Clusters are more intentional. You find them in cities, in suburbs and in small towns and rural areas as well. The seed may have started with an historic building, archeological site or a museum. Then a cultural centre was added or a library was located here. The cluster is more intentional and often or ideally results in sharing resources - of people, research materials, artifacts and libraries, auditoriums and audiences. This is especially important in small communities and rural areas where the population density is low, finances are limited and needs are great - especially for learning spaces, access to technology and gathering places. Clusters are ideal for creating what I call “cultural commons” or “creative commons” in my soft power book-places where people of different ages, backgrounds and interests can intersect and even collaborate thereby creating social capital. Is there an economist in the house who can prove an inverse relationship between real estate capital and social capital. I wonder.

and Ho Chi Min City have much higher economic output per person than their countries (which have only about 35% of the population living in Urban areas). But interestingly each of these Asian cities have total economic output just slightly less than a former industrial powerhouse like Turin.

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THE HUB

Now the moment you have been waiting for - the Hub

This is a relatively new idea which has characteristics of clusters - especially intentionality and sharing resources. For me the great power of the hub is its consciousness - So the hub can be more diverse than the cluster - it might include not just cultural institutions and organizations but also corporations, hospitals and housing. This diversity is made to make sense because - while each organization has its own mission and mandate - there is a unifying theme - a meta narrative which guides how they work together to create new knowledge.

Museum workers in our passion to preserve often forget that one of our key outputs is “the creation of new knowledge”. It could be new knowledge about the environment, about learning, about history or well-being. The powerful impact of an interdisciplinary hub to create new knowledge cannot be under-estimated. I would argue that is essential for economic and human progress in the knowledge-based economies of the 21st century.

Naoshima Art Island: most beautiful hub (1988)

Slide 1: When Japanese philanthropist Soichiro Fukutake decided to create this art hub in the Inland Sea, his intent was to revive Naoshima with the help of nature and culture. The 20 year process is described by architect Tadao Ando as “a process of place-making through continuous dialogues that has transformed a small Island with a population of 3,000 into a destination for pilgrims from all over the world seeking art”. The elements of the hub include

- Benesse House Museum and Hotel 1988-92
- Benesse House Oval 1993-95
- Chichu Art Museum 2000-2004
- Art House Projects 1998-2002
- Benesse House Park and Beach 2004-2006

Slide 2: The Benesse House Museum is likely the first combined hotel and art museum. Opened to the public by day, guests can wander freely in their pyjamas by night. Of this experience the founder says, “I wanted visitors to experience the art work and the environment with their whole bodies and minds”.

The collection is superb and the works are sited in many cases so you have a vision of nature framing them. I have emphasized the point that a hub has a meta narrative that unifies the work of each institution and museum. Mr Fukutake has provided the following a spiritual backbone for the 21st Century

Mr Fukutake modestly refers to himself as the ‘producer’ of the project.

DISTRICT TO CLUSTER

Once a challenged neighborhood, today, it is an 87-acre urban redevelopment project, recognized as one of the top 30 urban parks in the U.S. attracting about 4.5 million people a year. It includes housing, open space, cultural facilities, children’s facilities, a convention center, 6 museums and an art centre. The museums are diverse and innovative

- SF MOMA
- Museum of the African Diaspora
- Children’s Creativity Museum
- Contemporary Jewish Museum
- Mexican Museum
- California Historical Society

Slide 3: The Chichu art museum (Chichu means below ground) contains art by three artists who are master of light - James Turrell, Walter de Maria and Monet’s Water Lilly Pond (1915-26).

The impacts are profound. Economic revival, returning confidence to the community, stimulating creativity, bringing art and nature together - sheer beauty.
There is also a somber memorial aspect to the Gardens which includes memorials to two assassinated political leaders: The Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial waterfall and the Mayor George Moscone convention centre who was assassinated along with Gay rights activist Harvey Milk in 1978.

In social terms: key developments include an improved commitment to low - and moderate - income housing in the downtown area, increased cooperation within the city’s arts community, and the enlivening of the downtown financial area.

- Each entity has its own executive director. Prior to the development of the YBG Conservancy (below), inter-organizational collaboration was hugely challenging, as there were no incentives for collaboration and many perceived disincentives.
- City of San Francisco is the owner but each entity operates independently and has its own governance and own director and staff.
- In June this year (2019), an agreement between the City of San Francisco and Yerba Buena Gardens Conservancy was signed a master lease agreement between the City and County of San Francisco, as landlord, and the Yerba Buena Gardens Conservancy, a California nonprofit public benefit corporation, as tenant through September 1, 2061.
  The Conservancy oversees the management, operation, and programming of the Gardens, and all leases there is the aspiration that this cluster may well become a hub that capitalizes on the synergy of its diverse museums and audiences.

**Museum Quartier, Vienna - a Museum and Innovation Hub (1990)**

1 One of the ten largest cultural complexes in the world created in the heart of Vienna - **The Museums Quartier Wien (MQ)**. At a single location it offers a cultural experience of 90,000 square meters in the former Imperial riding stables, historically important buildings which have been repurposed to include.

   1 Leopold Museum
   2 Museum of Modern Art (MUMOK)
   3 Kunsthalle Wien
   4 ZOOM Children’s Museum
   5 Tanzquartier
   6 Architekturzentrum Wien
   7 Q21
   8 Monochrom
   9 Modepalast

2 The “big idea of this federal government project that was planned from the 1980s was to transform the image of Vienna from being a city of waltzes for old people to being a youthful destination and a centre of creativity. So while each institution is separately governed there is an overall management that facilitates creative events like:

   • the film festival
   • the ImpPulsTanz Vienna International Dance Festival,
   • Coded Cultures,
   • Techno Sensual,
   • quartier21, which features around 60 alternative art groups
   • an artist-in-residence programme brought over 735 artists to MuseumsQuartier, who have been working and living in the studio spaces.

3 The controversial transformation from City of Waltz to City of Innovation - **That’s the meta narrative** - has taken 40 years and is still evolving. These days Vienna appears in the top 10 innovation cities world-wide.

**Constitution Hill, Johannesburg: A Hub (2004)**

Historic Site, a mixed-use development.

This Museum Hub in the heart of Johannesburg has a clear meta narrative - ‘The Journey to Democracy’.

1 The site is a former prison and military fort now home to the country’s Constitutional Court, which protects the rights of all citizens.
2 There is perhaps no other site of incarceration in South Africa that imprisoned the sheer number of world-renowned men and women as those held within the walls of the Old Fort, the Women’s Jail and Number Four. Nelson Mandela. Mahatma Gandhi. Joe Slovo. Albertina Sisulu. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. Fatima Meer.
DISTRICT TO HUB

London’s Knowledge Quarter

Slide 1: Between 1987 and 2006, the UK saw knowledge-based exports jump from GBP 13 billion to GBP 90 billion - largely in urban areas. Led by the British Library in 2014, a consortium of 30 knowledge based organized that are located within a one-mile radius of St Pancras International and Euston rail stations formed the ‘knowledge Quarter. Today, it has doubled to 60 partners including museums (the British Museum), educational institutions research institutes like the Crick Institute and the Welcome Trust and its museums, design schools, housing and parks as well as an art centre and the headquarters of the Guardian media group. 30,000 people are employed in the KQ, it attracts 4 million visitors and by 2020, it is planned that 50,000 people will be studying, working and living here.

Slide 2: From district to Hub. Led by a 9 person Board representing the main sectors in the quarter, interdisciplinary research projects are initiated and encouraged. The goal is to create new knowledge - something that occurs when people of different perspectives collaborate.

Slide 3: If it is a hub, it has a meta narrative. ‘The area around King’s Cross, St Pancras and Euston Stations is a gateway to the most valuable commodity of the 21st-Century-knowledge. Just as the great Victorian Railway engineers built a revolutionary transport hub for people and goods in this part of London, so the knowledge quarter will establish an interchange for creative ideas, research and innovation: a center for the knowledge economy in the 21st Century.’ (Roly Keating, Chief Executive of the British Library and Chair of the Knowledge Quarter)

They all served time here. But the precinct also confined tens of thousands of ordinary people during its 100-year history: men and women of all races, creeds, ages and political agendas; the indigenous and the immigrant; the everyman and the elite. In this way, the history of every South African lives here.

This is a place of contrasts: of injustice and justice, of oppression and liberation. The precinct is testament to the importance of preserving sites of atrocity for posterity, and also to recreating them so that they can serve the purposes of the present and serve to mould the future.

- Old Fort, the Women’s Jail, Number Four, Awaiting Trial Block.
- Art Gallery, Atrium, Constitution Court.
- Exhibitions spaces are available for hire on a weekly basis and include the Old Fort atrium, the Women’s Jail atrium, the boiler room and the rampart rooms.
- Annual Human Rights Festival.
- The Peoples Park festival and eventing space currently under construction in front of the court.

In 2018, the Site was declared as a National Heritage Site:

- The Old Fort, Section 4 and 5 and the Women’s Prison and the Constitutional Court are now part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site serial nomination for a South Africa Liberation Heritage Route. The dossier has been presented to UNESCO for World Heritage listing.
- have made significant progress on the completion of the Human Rights Precinct which will see the Office of the Chief Justice as well as many of our Chapter Nine Institutions moving onto the precinct.
- begin construction of the new Interpretative Centre in the next few weeks (August 2019). This space will include the Museum and Archive of the Constitution (MARCH) - Lonnie G. Bunch III has been instrumental in assisting the design team to conceptualise the space, a 1000 seat conference centre; co working spaces; museum shop and roof top restaurant and eventing space.
- The Peoples Park is an 15,000 capacity festival and eventing space currently under construction in front of the court
- host the AFROPUNK African Edition of this international festival on this site over New Year.
- provide studio spaces for creative start-ups on site.
- One of the heritage buildings, the Nurses Home, is being refurbished as a social justice hub through a substantial grant from a local private foundation.
- Constitution Hill is a State-owned Company of province of Gauteng. The shareholders are the Gauteng Province (87%) and the City of Johannesburg (13%). Constitution Hill is governed by a board of directors. There is also a Constitution Hill Trust that support the development and programmes of ConHill. The Chief Executive Officer is Dawn Robertson. The site achieved its millionth visitor last year.