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Comparative analysis between two Ecuadorian museums.

The National Museum of Ecuador (MUNA)

The Salango Archaeological Museum

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1. Museums as Public Historic Sites

Museums were conceived as spaces to educate and entertain the public, and they are generally recognised as the link between people and the past.¹ Visitors are able to experience this journey through historical artefacts with a profound scientific value for humankind. Museum development has been closely linked to social and political changes and the selection of historical items, including their presentation and interpretation, has influenced the creation of narratives linked to concepts like national identity and collective memories. In this context, curators' work has often been divided between the representation of the public and political agendas. That said, I will introduce a brief context of Ecuador's museum situation.

a. Background on Ecuador's museum sector

In Ecuador the Law of Culture² states that museums are “institutions at the service of the citizenry, open to the public”. There are 175 museums located in 23 provinces.³ 17 of them are administrated by the Ministry of Culture and Heritage and constitute the National Museum Network.⁴ Mercedes Cárdenas from the Ministry of Culture confirmed through email that the government is currently updating the Ecuadorian Register of Museums 2020. This structure is formed by four “nuclear museums” and 13 “headquarters museums”, in which the “nuclear” ones have their own artefacts and assist the “headquarters”, which have a small infrastructure. These museums are located in 11 cities of the country and together they hold more than 700,000 cultural assets. MUNA is

¹ Faye Sayer, *Public History: A Practical Guide*, (Great Britain: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015) p. 19-20

² Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, (National Assembly of Ecuador), *Ley Orgánica de Cultura*, (*Law of Culture*), Resolution 913, (2016). Document provided by Ministry of Culture and Heritage.

³ Ministerio de Cultura y Patrimonio, *Directorio Red Ecuatoriana de Museos*, (*Directory Ecuadorian Museums Network*), 2018. Document provided by Ministry of Culture and Heritage.

⁴ “Panorama de los Museos: Ecuador”, (Panorama of Museums: Ecuador), Ibermuseos, accessed September 4, 2020, <http://www.ibermuseos.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/estudio-de-publicos-muna-2020-compressed.pdf>

a “nuclear” museum in this network whereas Salango Archaeological Museum is an independent community museum outside of this network.

Jorge Albuja, Ecuadorian cultural manager, ethnographer and award winning history teacher, gave me his views on the wider museum situation in Ecuador during several calls and text messages. I will translate and paraphrase his contribution below as I think it serves as a good introduction, from someone with direct experience working as an independent consultant with Ecuadorian museums.

In his words, “the issue of critical museology” in a country like Ecuador, that does not have museum culture and whose history responds to a perhaps very traditional chronology, “has made people [Ecuadorians] unable to decode, they cannot interpret, but everything is based in memorization and dates, and on very specific events. That is, there is no analysis of the social historical context in formal education in general”.

Albuja goes on to say that the training in museums in Ecuador is “extremely scarce”, for example, he mentions that the Equinoctial Technological University (UTE) closed the career in Restoration and Museology two years ago, and it was the only university in the country that offered this course. “The museum is connected with archaeology, with anthropology, but specific training in museums [in Ecuador] is limited. In Quito and Cuenca there is Cultural Management, there are no Heritage careers, and it is difficult. The museum sector is quite lacking in training at the national level”.

MUNA has professionals in various fields. Albuja mentions that the director Gabriela Mena for example, is an expert in educational mediation, and cultural mediation. “In other regions [the expertise] is very poor. Of the little that there is, usually these groups that are formed, after some time must close due to the lack of demand”. Effectively, it is very difficult for these professionals to work outside of the state funded museums in Ecuador.

1. Introduction

This is a multi-part assessment, a comparative analysis between two Ecuadorian museums: The National Museum of Ecuador (MUNA) and the Salango Archaeological Museum, in order to understand how they each work with the public and what recommendations can be made. I will explain in the next few pages when these Ecuadorian museums started, who works for them and who they work for, considering their vision and values, among other core aspects.

a. Selection of museums

The National Museum of Ecuador and The Salango Archaeological Museum are both considered unique organisations within the educational and cultural environment of Ecuador. Both started as private initiatives and over time the concepts and administrative models have evolved significantly. In a country where a museum career is relatively recent compared to neighbouring Latin American countries Peru and Colombia, the cultural heritage and management policies have been redefined in recent years. It is interesting to analyse the proposal of both museums, one managed directly by the Ministry of Culture and Heritage of the Ecuadorian government, and the other following a model of collaboration between academics in further education institutions and the community.

The objective of this study is to understand how museums work in Ecuador, the context, their evolution, their understanding of identity and heritage in the Ecuadorian reality, and how successfully or otherwise these concepts are transmitted to both citizens and tourists.

b. Research aims & key questions

The primary research aims are to expose the work of both museums, analyse their strengths, and identify the areas that require greater attention and exchange valuable information, not only for the benefit of both organisations, but also for the Ecuadorian cultural community. Among the main features and issues in the two museums that will be analysed in this work are:

- Are the museums coherent with their stated values? Are the values clearly represented in their exhibitions or other output?
- What are the methods of dealing with particular national issues such as Spanish post-colonialism, the representation of minority peoples and the portrayal of gender issues?
- Do the employees and outside collaborators of each museum receive training? What is their background and levels of expertise?
- Have they demonstrated community engagement, including effective use of social media?
- What are the future plans and which areas do the museums recognise can be improved?

These topics will serve as a basis to help us to have a clearer understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the two museums, although they are not intended to be exhaustive.

c. Use of methods and sources

Due to the distance and current pandemic situation it was not possible to visit the sites in person, however I was able to use my background as an Ecuadorian journalist and local knowledge to interview and discuss with relevant personnel remotely. Additional research sources used were journal articles, books, electronic books, conference papers, newspaper and magazine articles, company documents, social media, visitor reviews and official web pages. The representatives of both museums were initially contacted through email, and for the interviews with the members of the Salango museum, video calls and voice calls through WhatsApp application. Communication was maintained with MUNA exclusively through email because the bureaucracy of the Ecuadorian government requires multiple personnel to sign off on these communications.

Representatives from National Museum of Ecuador (MUNA):

- Gabriela Mena, Director of the National Museum of Ecuador.
- Luisa Ambrosi, Member of the museum's Educational Team.

Ambrosi answered all questions via email after consulting with colleagues.

Representatives from Salango Archaeological Museum:

- Valentina Martínez, Director of Salango Cultural and Archaeological Project.
- Yolaida Muñoz, Administrator of the Salango Museum and president of the Salango commune.
- Luz Baque, team supporter at Salango Museum.

- Cirilo Macías, president of “Pueblo Manta”, a group that includes the communities of Agua Blanca, El Pital, Las Tunas and Salango, who are considered descendants of the Manteño pre-Columbian civilization. (800-1532 CE.)⁵

Martínez, Muñoz, Baque and Macías were consulted via WhatsApp calls.

In addition to the representatives of each museum, professionals with experience in heritage conservation and work within museums in Ecuador generally, were also consulted for this project. They provided some useful background information.

- Mercedes Cárdenas Rodríguez, Public Politic Director of the Ministry of Culture.
- Consuelo Zambrano Núñez, Public Politic Member of Subsecretariat of Social Memory, who provided documents for this consultancy.
- Jorge Albuja, Cultural Manager and History teacher.

Cárdenas and Zambrano were consulted via email, while Tuárez and Albuja were consulted via WhatsApp calls.

⁵ Macarena Hernández-Ramírez y Esteban Ruíz-Ballesteros, “Etnogénesis como práctica. Arqueología y Turismo en el Pueblo Manta (Ecuador). [Ethnogenesis as a practice. Archaeology and Tourism in Manta People (Ecuador)], *AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana* 6, No. 2 (2011): 159-192, <https://doi.org/10.11156/30>

2. The National Museum of Ecuador (MUNA)

a. Context

The National Museum of Ecuador (MUNA) is located in the centre of the capital city of Ecuador, Quito. In accordance with a recent official report, Ecuador has 175 museums and MUNA is responsible for guiding the public policy of all these Ecuadorian museums, as established by Ecuadorian cultural law.⁶ MUNA was founded in 1969 by Banco Central del Ecuador (Ecuador Central Bank) under the name of “Museo Guillermo Pérez Chiriboga”. After two decades on the original site, in 1992 the facilities were moved to the building of the House of Ecuadorian Culture and renamed the National Museum of the Central Bank of Ecuador. In October 2010 this institution handed over the administration of the museum to the Ministry of Culture and Heritage and with it, eighteen museums, seven libraries and a photographic archive, among other assets located in Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca. In 2015 MUNA closed for 3 years after hosting *Habitat III*, a United Nations conference on housing and sustainable urban development.⁷ During this period of closure, 31 months in total, a decision was made to pivot and modernise the museum’s entire concept. The patrimonial assets were preserved in the archives of the national collection, a specialised space to house them.

The result from the work of those months was a new museum discourse built around four concepts: gender and interculturality,⁸ memory and heritage, participation and

⁶ Ibermuseos, “MUNA: Estudio Cualitativo de Públicos”, (MUNA: Qualitative Study of Audiences), 2020, <http://www.iber museos.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/estudio-de-publicos-muna-2020-compressed.pdf>

⁷ Gabriel Flores, “Lenín Moreno reabrió oficialmente el Museo Nacional del Ecuador” (Lenín Moreno officially reopened The National Museum of Ecuador), *El Comercio*, August 5, 2020, <https://www.elcomercio.com/tendencias/leninmoreno-museo-casadelacultura-museonacional.html>

⁸ Interculturality means exchange between equals. According to Cambridge Dictionary the concept means “relating to or involving more than one culture”.

democracy, and the production of knowledge. MUNA was reopened to the public on May 18, 2018, and approximately nine thousand people visited the museum during its first days of operation.⁹ The museum is defined as a Decentralized Operating Entity (DOE) with administrative and financial autonomy,¹⁰ and leads the National Museum System, made up of 16 repositories nationwide. The museum is free to enter and normally opens from Tuesdays to Sundays, from 09h00 to 17h00. At the time of writing, MUNA is beginning to reopen (physically) after the Coronavirus pandemic. During the Covid-19 restrictions in Ecuador, the museum organised virtual tours through video conferencing service Zoom, which was generally free with pre-registration required. Some events asked for small donations.

Visitor Numbers

In 2018, the first year of reopening, the number of visitors was recorded at 83,997. In 2019 MUNA showed a modest increase to 97,550. According to museum records from July 2019,¹¹ adults over 25 years of age visit this space of social memory the most (68.41%), followed by young people (16.19%), children (12.14%), and the elderly (3.27%). Regarding the origin, 83 of every 100 visitors are Ecuadorians, the majority from the local province of Pichincha (60.5%). Foreign visitors, who represent 17 percent of visits, come mostly from the US, France, the UK and Venezuela. In 2020, as the coronavirus pandemic drastically changed the routine of cultural centres and museums

⁹ Ministerio de Cultura y Patrimonio, “Aproximadamente 9.000 personas visitaron el Museo Nacional en sus primeros días”, (Approximately 9,000 people visited the National Museum at its reopening), accessed May 29, 2018. <https://www.culturaypatrimonio.gob.ec/mas-de-9000-personas-visitaron-el-museo-nacional-en-sus-primeros-dias/>

¹⁰ “Museo Nacional se reabrirá luego de dos años y medio”, (National Museum will reopen after two and a half years), *El Telégrafo*, May 18, 2018, <http://tinyurl.com/ybtl4ptc>

¹¹ “En 14 meses, más de 142 mil visitantes registra el MUNA”, (MUNA records more than 142 thousand visitors in 14 months), MUNA, accessed September 21, 2020. <https://muna.culturaypatrimonio.gob.ec/index.php/noticias/133-inti-raymi-8>

around the world, MUNA was forced to remain physically closed to the public. Due to this situation, the organisation enabled virtual visits via its website, and from March to July of this year the platform registered a total of 22,053 users.

Funding and number of employees

The museum receives state funding and has a total of 31 employees, the full list is available in MUNA's website.¹² In an updated report from August 2020,¹³ MUNA details that their annual budget corresponded to \$1,500,764.62 (approx. £1,160,000). According to the members of the museum, the team is in constant training and they have access to different workshops because of institutional agreements. The Ministry of Culture also organises training, not only for MUNA's personnel but also for other cultural institutions. The museum did not provide more detailed information on the type of training that its workers undertook. However, it is possible to find some information on their Facebook page. One of the courses, for example, was focused on universal accessibility.¹⁴ The director of MUNA, Gabriela Mena, interviewed for this project, is a conservator and cultural manager with 15 years of experience.

b. Mission and values

As their mission, the National Museum of Ecuador defines itself as part of a global process of transformation of general paradigms on which the institution and the museum's discourse will function. Since they reopened, the new proposal is based on an alternative

¹² MUNA, *Transparencia*, August 2020, <https://muna.culturaypatrimonio.gob.ec/index.php/transparencia>

¹³ MUNA, *Presupuesto de la institución*, (*Institution's Budget report*), Section g, 2020.
<https://muna.culturaypatrimonio.gob.ec/index.php/transparencia>

¹⁴ MUNA Ecuador, "Capacitación", Facebook, December 3, 2020,
<https://www.facebook.com/2102158066731651/posts/2249839131963543/>

model that reviews traditional ideas of heritage, memory, education and communication. In an email exchange, Luisa Ambrosi from the Ministry of Culture explains that the old model “strengthened colonial and elitist values, keeping the institution isolated and on the fringes of contemporary cultural, social and political debates”. MUNA emphasises that they are an institution that “recognises the multiplicity of identities of Ecuadorian society and its permanent transformation”. The museum seeks to establish itself as an open space for participation, dialogue, confrontation and representation in the public sphere. To achieve these visions, MUNA has established a new relationship with the public and wants to ensure in its messaging that this new bond goes beyond specialised audiences.

Talking about these topics to a community like the Ecuadorian people, which is highly diverse,¹⁵ and trying to give space to all those voices seems to be a very ambitious challenge for MUNA, but it is perhaps a natural path for the institution to create a relationship with the people and ensure continuing relevance. The museum records¹⁶ that 60% of visitors in 2019 were from the Pichincha province around Quito, but as a national museum they have to balance their location with the reality that there are entire ethnic groups from other provinces of the country that are unlikely to physically visit, due to the

¹⁵ Michael Handelsman, *Culture and Customs of Ecuador*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), Introduction. Ecuador has a diverse population made up of Blacks (known as Afro-Ecuadorians, their ancestors were brought as slaves by the Spanish), Indigenous groups estimated at around 15 distinct peoples, Mestizos (of mixed Native and white European blood, mainly the legacy of Spanish colonialism) and other groups with origins in Asia, Europe and Middle East. The lack of understanding of ethnic and racial conflicts is a regular issue in Ecuador. Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians both contend that they have been excluded by Mestizos from important political and social processes. The 2010 census reveals that Ecuadorians mostly self-identified as Mestizos (71.9%). Afro-Ecuadorians (7.20%), Indigenous (7.1%), Montuvios (rural people from Ecuadorian coast) (7%), Whites (6.10%) and Others (0.3%) make up the remainder.

¹⁶ “En 14 meses, más de 142 mil visitantes registra el MUNA”, (MUNA records more than 142 thousand visitors in 14 months), MUNA, accessed September 21, 2020.
<https://muna.culturaypatrimonio.gob.ec/index.php/noticias/133-inti-raymi-8>

geographic distance.¹⁷ The MUNA is aware of this need, as is illustrated in a report from 2018,¹⁸ which highlighted the importance of having vulnerable groups involved in future projects.

American Archaeologist Betty Meggers, who worked in Ecuador in the 1950s and 60s,¹⁹ supported the idea that the museum should be adapted to the needs of the country. She thought that well-conceived museums could become the pivots of cultural action, both for research and for dissemination. For her, it is vital that museums are integrated with the local community from the beginning and mentioned Agua Blanca, Real Alto and Salango communities as examples of this in Ecuador. These reflections highlighted the importance of the museum as place where people can feel represented and not as a simple appendix of the cultural task or worse still as a “white elephant”, or structure without a purpose.

MUNA is not only recording Ecuadorian cultural history but also creating a narrative for future generations, narrative that might establish the ‘credentials’ of a nation.²⁰ This idea is shared by Diane Losche, who explains that museums “are often born with the nation state, and, so the story goes, reflects aspects of that state”.²¹ This is of course true in all

¹⁷ It is worth noting that ethnic groups are highly localised around the country and journey times considerable, making it less probable that someone from Galapagos Islands or deep Amazon for example, will be a visitor of MUNA.

¹⁸ Ibermuseos, “MUNA: Estudio Cualitativo de Públicos”, (MUNA: Qualitative Study of Audiences), 2020, <http://www.iber museos.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/estudio-de-publicos-muna-2020-compressed.pdf>

¹⁹ Betty Meggers, *Personalidades y Dilemas en la Arqueología Ecuatoriana. (Personalities and Dilemmas in Ecuadorian Archaeology)*. (Quito: Ediciones ABYA – YALA, 1996), 103-104

²⁰ Mark Donnelly and Claire Norton, *Doing History*, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), p. 121.

²¹ Jennifer Barret, *Museums and the Public Sphere*, (Chichester: Wiley-Backwell, 2011), ch. 3 ‘The Museum as a Public Space.

museums but is particularly crucial in a country with a relatively limited and recent academic study. As Faye Sayer indicates, historians and their work are not only affected by government policy, especially in the public sphere like in MUNA's case, but also their work with government organisations influences history's representation in the public domain.²² The historians are continually working with and within government organisations and agencies to change policy and influence politics and historical representation. MUNA has a responsibility to the people and that implies being critical with ways to interpret the culture and making all parties included in this discussion.

c. Exhibitions

The exhibitions that take place in MUNA are related to the historical processes of Ecuador, and also to art history, described as “witness of the events” in our email exchange. As described by Ambrosi, the museum has an archive, music library, and reserves of pre-Columbian art, colonial, modern and contemporary, that feed the temporary exhibitions. In total, the Ecuadorian National Collection has close to six hundred and fifty thousand cultural and patrimonial assets, without considering the thousands of documents in the historical archive, library and audio-visual collection, which are guarded by the Ministry of Culture and Heritage.²³ Ambrosi explains that they are constantly inviting MUNA's audiences to reflect on the concept of nationality, and question official accounts of Ecuadorian history.

MUNA has a permanent exhibition that covers five main themes.

²² Sayer, *Public History: A Practical Guide*, p. 274-275.

²³ MUNA, *Guion Academico 2018, [Academic Script 2018]*, (Quito: Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2018), accessed August 6, 2020, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1am9gNCKyMpzh31R7JpA9I0FB6j7h50cl/view>

Historical Nuclei, which addresses the creation of the national collection in Ecuador.

Inter-disciplinary concepts: the museum in its rooms works with four concepts: Gender and Interculturality²⁴, Memory and Heritage, Production of Knowledge, Participation and Citizenship.

Political Power and Social Organisation: aboriginal societies, colony and republic.

Territory, Economy and Work: aboriginal societies, colony and republic.

Pre-Columbian Metallurgy

At the time of writing, the museum exhibits two temporary exhibitions:

“MUNA exposes MUNA”

“Volumes of the Nation”

The former is a dynamic exhibition shown in a “chronological walk” that creates a space for reflection, and it is made up of cultural assets and patrimonial documentaries belonging to the reserves and the repositories of the National Historical Archive. Meanwhile, “Volumes of the Nation” is an exhibition made up of nine works selected from the National Reserve of the Ministry of Culture and Heritage, by nine contemporary Ecuadorian authors.

²⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, *Diversity of Cultural Expressions*. Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/interculturality> (Accessed: 3 September 2020).

Other temporary exhibitions that the museum has held include “Soundscapes”, “Ecuadorian Amazon”, “Rhythm and Colour in homage to Araceli Gilbert”, “Diverse, and facets of gender in pre-Hispanic Ecuador” and “Germania Paz y Miño” (an Ecuadorian artist). Perhaps the most striking of these exhibitions is the one that addresses the facets of gender and transgender in pre-Hispanic Ecuador, this being a country where 80.4% of the population is conservative Catholic.²⁵ Identifying as homosexual was considered a crime until November 25, 1997, with custodial sentences ranging from four to eight years,²⁶ and LGBTQ+ people have suffered violent prejudiced murders.²⁷ This exhibition, produced by the Ecuadorian archaeologist María Fernanda Ugalde, invites audiences to question the ways of observing archaeological assets. A written guide²⁸ explains that this exhibition, which analysed interpretations of sexuality and gender in Pre-Columbian figurines by past historians, tells us much about changing understanding of public history. In a presentation,²⁹ Ugalde explained how some pieces from Tolita culture were challenging to “pigeonhole” between male and female genders, and emphasised that this idea was intended to invite visitors to have a discussion about these objects with a contemporary context.

²⁵ The first survey of religion in Ecuador carried out in 2012 showed that 91.95% of Ecuadorians had a religious belief, 7.94% were atheists and 0.11% were agnostic. Of the 91.95% of believers, 80.40% were Catholic Christians, 11.30% were Evangelical Christians; 1.29%, Jehovah's Witness; 0.37%, Mormon; and 0.29% Buddhist.

²⁶ The Constitutional Court of Ecuador recognised the marriage between two people of the same sex on June 12, 2019.

²⁷ “¿Quién era Javier Viteri, el joven apuñalado 89 veces en Arenillas?”, (Who was Javier Viteri, the young man stabbed 89 times in Arenillas?), *Vistazo Magazine*, June 6, 2020, <https://www.vistazo.com/seccion/pais/actualidad-nacional/quien-era-javier-viteri-el-joven-apunalado-89-veces-en-arenillas>

²⁸ “DIVERS[JS]: facetas del género en el Ecuador prehispánico”, (“Diverse, and facets of gender in pre-Hispanic Ecuador”, MUNA, accessed September 15, 2020, <https://muna.culturaypatrimonio.gob.ec/index.php/exposiciones/exposiciones-temporales/divers-s-facetes-del-genero-en-el-ecuador-prehispanico>

²⁹ MUNA Ecuador, “DIVERS[JS]: facetas del género en el Ecuador prehispánico”, Facebook, September 15, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=843140799375694>

This exhibition of 150 pieces was launched in June 2019, was free to visit and remains available online. Although the samples' presentation can be watched on Facebook,³⁰ comments from MUNA's users are disabled, consequently it is not possible to know the visitors' opinion on social media about this particular display. This was due to the difficulty of moderating such a politically contentious topic. On the other hand, a 2020 report³¹ collects the opinions of interviewees and asks whether they identified with this output. Some of them replied that the display was a "very interesting genre perspective", while others identified more personally.

d. Outreach and Community Engagement

Regarding social media, Ambrosi states that the museum manages to reach a very wide range of ages. Three social networks are handled at the moment: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Facebook being the most far-reaching with a peak of 460 visitors per day. A greater influx of visitors is reflected on the dates in which virtual tours are offered. Twitter registers greater interaction when there is work on an inauguration and there is a presence of other media, that is, when the museum generates "mainstream" news. On Instagram the statistics indicate that the users who follow the account are mostly from Quito and are between 25 and 34 years old, and a slight majority are women. Although the museum does not mention it, it also manages an account on Soundcloud³² and on this website it

³⁰ MUNA Ecuador, "DIVERS[JS]: facetas del género en el Ecuador prehispánico", Facebook, September 15, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2343031415818219>

³¹ MUNA, "MUNA: Estudio Cualitativo de Públicos", (MUNA: Qualitative Study of Audiences), 2020, <http://www.bermuseos.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/estudio-de-publicos-muna-2020-compressed.pdf>

³² Grupo de Música y Danza de la Comunidad Educativa Tránsito Amaguaña, "KARAS KARAS KURIKINKI". 2008. Soundcloud. <https://soundcloud.com/user-270963628/karas-karas-kurikinki-sanjuan-tradicional>

has 49 tracks with songs and rhythms from the different oral tradition of Ecuador's ethnicities, including Montuvios, Kichwas, Afro-Ecuadorians, among others.

Ambrosi also mentions other available resources: the website muna.culturaypatrimonio.gob.ec, the app that contains the audio guide and the link to the virtual visit that can be done through prior registration with MUNA or at the ARTex site.³³ People can also use the MUNA 2020 Virtual Tour as another online resource where they can be accompanied by a moderator, who encourages a participatory dialogue between the audiences, this activity is carried out on the Zoom platform and also requires registration.

From MUNA's work published on its social networks, it can be seen that museum guides have conducted discussions with online visitors about the impact of Spanish colonisation on pre-Hispanic cultures³⁴, indigenous representations in Ecuadorian art,³⁵ and the role of the woman in the history of republican Ecuador.³⁶ The latter addressed the idea that the Ecuadorian State saw women as a "pillar of the home", and how these roles of the 19th century had their impact on Mestiza, Afro-Ecuadorian and Indigenous women in the following years. Virtual discussions have also been held on cultures native to Ecuador

³³ https://artex.ec/exposiciones/muna_museo_nacional_del_ecuador

³⁴ MUNA Ecuador, "Territorio, economía y trabajo. Sociedades Originarias", Facebook, August 27, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=312353976772752>

³⁵ MUNA Ecuador, "Escuela de Bellas Artes", Facebook, September 10, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=669101590402552>

³⁶ MUNA Ecuador, "Mujeres en la República", Facebook, August 6, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1671405909684510>

with academic groups from other countries,³⁷ such as one shared with students and professionals from the University of Trujillo in Peru.

e. Reputation and Profile

In websites that rank tourist and cultural places, users say that MUNA is “very informative” and contains ancient artefacts, historical timelines, exhibitions of gold relics and masks. Visitors highlight that items are grouped by themes such as workforce, women, economy and religion, and discuss their effects on current Ecuadorian society.³⁸ Some are surprised to find that items are not arranged chronologically. In an article published on the Ministry of Culture and Heritage’s website, a visitor wrote that his visit to MUNA was “incredible, extremely educational and enriching” for his family.³⁹ Some Ecuadorian media personalities, like Ecuadorian journalist, Andrés Carrión, said that the museum was “an option to recognise ourselves, to understand each other and achieve national pride”,⁴⁰ while the Ecuadorian writer Jorge Dávila Vázquez recommends that all Ecuadorians experience the cultural offerings of the National Museum.

³⁷ MUNA Ecuador, “Ciclo de Conferencias Arqueológicas”, Facebook, September 26, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/102422874877943/videos/vb.102422874877943/332442521404408/?type=2&theater>

³⁸ Tripadvisor, “Museo Nacional del Ecuador”, accessed August 7, 2020, https://www.tripadvisor.es/ShowUserReviews-g294308-d314218-r638600805-National_Museum_of_Ecuador-Quito_Pichincha_Province.html

³⁹ Ministerio de Cultura y Patrimonio, “El Museo Nacional cumple nueve meses de reapertura”, (The National Museum celebrates nine months of reopening), accessed August 7, 2020, <https://www.culturaypatrimonio.gob.ec/el-museo-nacional-cumple-nueve-meses-de-reapertura-y-suma-cerca-de-100-mil-visitas/>

⁴⁰ Ministerio de Cultura y Patrimonio, “Aproximadamente 9.000 personas visitaron el Museo Nacional en sus primeros días”, (Approximately 9,000 people visited the National Museum at its reopening), accessed August 7, 2020, <https://www.culturaypatrimonio.gob.ec/mas-de-9000-personas-visitaron-el-museo-nacional-en-sus-primeros-dias/>

Nevertheless, MUNA's official fan page on Facebook⁴¹ has mixed opinions. While some of the visitors post pictures of themselves next to paintings or sculptures and congratulated the museum, others express that the experience through the place could be quite confusing. Similar criticisms could be found in sites like Tripadvisor, considered the most influential online travel research company in the world.⁴² A MUNA visitor from the Netherlands expressed on this site⁴³ his view that people can "jump from one period into another" without realising it. "Intertwining the history of the museum with that of the nation often left me puzzled. It is probably related to another issue: the use of very complicated language". Wordings like 'independence processes' and 'transition of social and management systems' demonstrate the "gap between the exhibition organizers and the people", mentioned the visitor, who also noted that general texts are in English, Kichwa and Spanish, but that detailed item information is only written in Spanish.

f. Future Plans

The museum's representative, Ambrosi, explained via email that the organisation is planning to create many more projects in the future with the participation of artists, writers, performing artists, contemporary musicians and other cultural agents. However, the museum could not yet provide details about these projects.

⁴¹ MUNA Ecuador, "Reviews", Facebook, accessed August 7, 2020.

https://www.facebook.com/pg/MuseoNacionalEcuador/reviews/?ref=page_internal

⁴² Linda Kinstler, "How Tripadvisor changed travel", *The Guardian*, August 17, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/17/how-tripadvisor-changed-travel>

⁴³ Tripadvisor. "Museo Nacional del Ecuador", accessed September 20, 2020. https://www.tripadvisor.es/Attraction_Review-g294308-d314218-Reviews-or5-National_Museum_of_Ecuador-Quito_Pichincha_Province.html#REVIEWS

Shortly before completing this research, a TV report suggested⁴⁴ that the building where MUNA is located has serious structural issues. The probability of collapse is believed to be higher than 90%, according to a study made by the National Polytechnic School (Escuela Politécnica Nacional) conducted in 2017. This clearly raises doubts about the future of MUNA at this site. They are now in the process of moving the assets.

⁴⁴ Visión 360, “*Patrimonio en Riesgo*”, (*Heritage at Risk*), October 4, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbQmTlzGPmg>

3. Salango Archaeological Museum

a. Context

The Salango Archaeological Museum is located in the centre of Salango, a town in the south of Manabí province, on the northern coast of Ecuador. The museum was created between the years 1978-1979 by Ecuadorian Presley Norton, a researcher and business person without a formal background in archaeology, but with considerable practical experience⁴⁵ and connections. Norton established a research project in Salango which ran for about ten years. The Salango Archaeological Museum and its attached Research Centre were born from the work done by the Anthropology Program for Ecuador (PAE in its acronym in Spanish).⁴⁶ This was an unprecedented project in the country, led by Norton, which carried out archaeological excavations in this area of Manabí province. There are many archaeological sites of interest on this Pacific coast, and several museums, but few of them as developed as at Salango.

The management of the Salango Museum project is now a partnership between the Salango community and Florida Atlantic University. Currently there is an inter-institutional agreement between the Ministry of Culture and Heritage through the Ecuadorian Institute of Cultural Heritage, the ancestral Community of Salango and the Florida Atlantic University (FAU), which has a field school on location.⁴⁷ This partnership exists to promote and develop research, management and dissemination of

⁴⁵ “Diccionario Biográfico Ecuador, (Ecuador Biographical dictionary) ”, Rodolfo Pérez Pimentel, accessed September 6, 2020, <http://www.diccionariobiograficoecuador.com/tomos/tomo8/n2.htm>

⁴⁶ Yann Gabrer, “Between sea and land: dual development of the pre-Hispanic populations of southern Manabí, Ecuador”, *Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Études Andines* 39, no. 3 (2010): 603-621, <https://doi.org/10.4000/bifea.1786> PAE worked in Salango until 1989. In 1993 it became the Presley Norton Foundation.

⁴⁷ “Ecuador Field School”, Florida Atlantic University, accessed September 8, 2020, <http://www.fau.edu/artsandletters/anthro/archfield/>

cultural heritage of the archaeological site at Salango. The archaeological field program run by FAU is now in its ninth year of operation in Ecuador. “Pueblo Manta”, the organisation representing the descendants from Manteño culture, also acts in an advisory role for the museum and consider themselves pioneers within Ecuador for the conservation of their own ancestral heritage. The organisation was formed in 2005 to resolve conflicts over land and private tourism development.⁴⁸ Referencing Sayer, Salango Archaeological Museum fits the definition of a grass-roots historical project,⁴⁹ where work is initiated by the community and facilitated by professionals. This type of project enables the communities to set agendas and develop methodologies, which tend to be more flexible than a top-down approach.

Valentina Martínez, professor at Florida Atlantic University and Field School Director at Salango, highlights in an interview for this consultancy that one positive aspect of Norton’s administration was that Salango Archaeological Museum became, at the time, the only site in Ecuador that had on exhibition pieces from systematic excavations. “At the time the Salango museum emerged it was something innovative: a small museum within a community”, highlights Martínez, who argues that most Ecuadorian museums, for instance the National Museum of Ecuador (MUNA), have archaeological pieces that come from the purchase and sale of artefacts.

The museum was administrated by Norton and other foreign archaeologists until 1993, when Norton died. From that moment, the “Pro Pueblo” foundation, associated with the

⁴⁸ Macarena Hernández-Ramírez y Esteban Ruíz-Ballesteros, “Etnogénesis como práctica. Arqueología y Turismo en el Pueblo Manta (Ecuador). [Ethnogenesis as a practice. Archaeology and Tourism in Manta People (Ecuador)], AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana 6, No. 2 (2011): 159-192, <https://doi.org/10.11156/30>

⁴⁹ Sayer, *Public History: A Practical Guide*, p. 144.

Ecuadorian Cemento Nacional (National Cement) Company, began to manage the museum, and four years later the FAU started its research in Salango and its surroundings. As explained by Martínez, the foundation and the foreign archaeologists associated with the centre were not well integrated with the local community. This changed in 2005, when the Salango community began to administrate the museum and the research centre. “It was the first time in the coastal region of Ecuador that a village took over the administration of a cultural institution”, says Martínez, who compares Salango’s case to other site museums,⁵⁰ such as the Pumapungo museum in Cuenca, which in contrast is administrated by the Ecuadorian Institute of National Heritage (INPC).⁵¹ Professor Martínez claims that the university’s and her role as an Ecuadorian researcher were to support the community “in their desire to protect their heritage and direct their own future”.

Before the pandemic in 2020, the museum normally served the public from 09:00, Monday to Sunday, and has 245 pieces declared in its cultural heritage collection. These date back 4,500 years and come from the Valdivia, Machalilla, Chorrera, Bahía, Guangala and Manteña cultures, which were all discovered in this area.⁵² Close to the museum there are 11 community cabins offering lodging services which can accommodate up to 45 tourists, who can also access other tourist services offered by the community such as whale watching, sale of handicrafts, hiking and snorkelling. The museum is also

⁵⁰ Hermanus Johannes Moolman, “Site museums: Their origins, definition and categorisation”, *Museum, Management and Curatorship* 15, no. 4 (1996): 387-400, DOI: [10.1080/09647779609515499](https://doi.org/10.1080/09647779609515499)

⁵¹ “Pumapungo requires an urgent promotion”, *El Mercurio*, February 20, 2020, <https://www.elmercurio.com.ec/2020/02/20/pumapungo-requiere-de-una-promocion-urgente/> The director of Pumapungo Museum explained that the museum it is a decentralised operating entity of the Ministry of Culture, this means that it has some autonomy to make decisions on administrative and financial matters. Pumapungo is considered a tangible testimony of the Cañari-Inca culture in Ecuador.

⁵² Ronald Ladines, “Salango, destino turístico que matiza la historia y el mar”, (Salango, a tourist destination that nuances history and the sea), *El Comercio*, July 13, 2019, <https://www.elcomercio.com/tendencias/salango-destino-turistico-historia-mar.html>

promoted as a tourist attraction on the Salango community's Facebook page. At the time of writing the museum is closed to the public due to the pandemic.

Number of visitors

In 2019, from January to December the museum received in the region of 1,590 visitors, according to the register kept by Luz Baque, volunteer at Salango Archaeological Museum.⁵³ She expressed that the tourists and also the FAU students are a “very fundamental part of the museum” and she hopes to recover in 2021 the visits that during this year were reduced because of Covid-19. “Every year FAU students come to do their archaeological studies and that is the greater part of the income we have. [The situation] has changed, few tourists come now, the situation worsened with this pandemic, [there is] less income. The students used to come from June to August, and this year they did not come because of the pandemic. You have to imagine how we are in the centre, it is a very difficult situation”.

During 2017 and 2018, after the 2016 earthquake in Ecuador, they did not have a large influx of visitors, as recounted by Yolaida Muñoz, who is president of the Salango commune, administrator of the museum and also supervises the inventory and registry of curatorship.⁵⁴ The situation only changed in 2019 and Muñoz explains that the museum experienced a year of recovery in visits. With the 2020 pandemic, the museum had to

⁵³ There was some confusion over the totals because the museum uses a paper based register. There was doubt between the Salango museum's manager and one volunteer over inclusion of December's figure.

⁵⁴ “Four years after the earthquake of Pedernales: a testimony about the seismic danger in Ecuador”, Instituto Geofísico del Ecuador, accessed September 15, 2020, <https://www.igepn.edu.ec/interactuamos-con-usted/1810-cuatro-anos-despues-del-terremoto-de-pedernales-un-testimonio-sobre-el-peligro-sismico-en-el-ecuador> The 2016 earthquake had a magnitude of 7.8 and caused extensive destruction especially on the north and central coast of Ecuador. According to official data, 700 people died and economic losses reached close to 3 billion dollars.

close to the public and as of late September they were still waiting for visitor numbers to return.

Funding and number of employees

Salango museum does not receive government funding and is managed independently to obtain financial resources. Muñoz mentioned, for example, that entrance fees are charged to visitors to help maintain the museum. These costs are split into two categories: Adults, who pay \$2.50 (£1.90). Concessions, including children, elderly, and disabled are charged \$1.50 (£1.20) per visit.

A second way to generate income for the museum is the lodging (accommodation) service which the community manages. Muñoz explains that groups of companies or students visiting the museum can stay in these cabins and there is a charge of \$15 (£12 approximately) per person per night, although discounts are made for large groups. If the groups are interested in holding conferences, they can do so in a room that is set up for that purpose within the Research Centre. Muñoz explains that most of the people who stay with them prefer the weekend, but occasionally this routine changes when students visit the museum. For instance, in January students from the Central University (Quito) were guests, a group of 60 people in total.

With the exception of this year, where again the pandemic disrupted plans, their usual guests were students from the FAU (Florida) and Central Washington University⁵⁵

⁵⁵ “Bioarchaeology Field School”, Central Washington University, accessed September 29, 2020, <https://www.cwu.edu/international-programs/bioarchaeology-field-school-0>

institutions with which the Salango Museum and its Research Centre has a cooperation agreement. FAU students used to stay from late June to August, and during those months the community did not offer their lodging services to tourists. Central Washington University held their first experience in Salango in 2019.

Between 6 and 12 people, composed mostly of women, work in the museum on a part-time basis, as part of the two year conservation agreement with the FAU. The museum staff includes an administrator, an assistant, the guards and the museum guides, the latter of which are scheduled only on the days booked for guided tours, a scheme that is maintained due to the limited budget. Usually, three staff run the museum in the morning and the other three in the afternoon. After three months they are replaced by a new team from the local community. Among the tasks that are distributed between the museum's collaborators are: patrolling the site, cleaning of the facilities, running the kitchen and lodging. Muñoz explained that the crew of six were reduced to four due to the pandemic, but she hopes that they can bring people back with the new opening measures after the quarantine period in Ecuador.

Regarding the training of the Salango team, Muñoz explains that the community leaders also manage agreements with Ecuadorian universities and with different ministries of the country, such as the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Culture and Heritage, in order that the volunteers can participate in workshops. The most recent training at the time of writing is taking place in October 2020, under the guidance of students from the State University of the South of Manabí. This was focused on the development of a digital platform to convert the record system, which is currently manual, onto an online system.

From Martínez's point of view this mechanism, which includes the inhabitants of Salango, allows the museum to execute a dynamic in which it can reach more people in the community and teach them about heritage and conservation. Martínez claims that the members of the project are interested in the team growing and being made up of new generations, in knowing their heritage, the dynamics of the centre and continuing with the processing of archaeological material. As the museum is managed by local people, the communal work carried out there is voluntary and must be sustainable on a low budget. For Martinez this is the major difference between the dynamics of a state-run museum and one that is managed independently.

b. Mission and values

According to information found on the museum's previous website,⁵⁶ the museum's mission is focused on "recovering, rescuing and strengthening the cultural life of people in the community through actions aimed at preserving the cultural heritage, worldview, folklore and ecology". The site explained that Salango's Archaeological museum has the vision to be a space dedicated to the ancestral identity of the Salango commune, a permanent and non-profit institution at the service of the community and its development, an organisation that acquires, conserves, investigates, communicates and exhibits Salango's community heritage.

Since the community took over the administration of the Salango Research Centre in 2005, the work carried out by the community was not free of criticism from national and

⁵⁶ "Museo Salango. Misión-Visión", (Salango Museum. Mission and Vision), Centro Turístico Comunitario Salango, accessed August 10, 2020, <http://www.salango.ec/museo-arqueologico-salango-mision-vision.php>

foreign archaeologists. According to Martinez, these experts were reluctant to accept the Salango commune assuming control of their heritage, because they considered that the community members did not have the necessary knowledge to manage the project. Martinez believes that this non-inclusive and sometimes even prejudiced line of thought was born in colonial times and perpetuated even after Ecuador became an independent republic in the mid nineteenth century.

In the words of Muñoz, the museum is extremely important for the community because it is a reflection of their ancestry and it also gives them representation. “Our mission as leaders of this community is to not fail this project and to highlight the struggle to maintain the centre”. This opinion is shared by the representative of the Manta People, Cirilo Macías, who underlines their link with Manteña pre-Columbian culture and advocates the inclusion of the people with scientific divulgation. “Other universities could join with other communities and apply this model, so that this type of research is not only the field of archaeologists or scientists, but also includes the community”.

Today, Martinez considers that it is “the elites” who control culture, material objects and museums. For this reason, the existence of the Salango Research Centre stands out, as a proposal born under private administration, which over time returned to the hands of the people. On the Ecuadorian coast, Salango may be the only community where the process has yielded positive results. For example, the town of Valdivia, which is located a few kilometres from Salango, has a museum that is quite neglected. Others, like the Agua Blanca Museum located north of Salango, took a more commercial path.

Although the residents of Salango actively support the museum's activities, Muñoz thinks that more work should be done in the area of tourism promotion to obtain recognition inside and outside the country, and therefore, increase the number of visitors, both for the museum, and for the community. In Muñoz's opinion, Salango was a beach town little-known among tourists, and in recent years she has witnessed the accommodation, restaurants and other services grow in the town. For the community leader, this change is positive, and should be used to position Salango as an important tourist and cultural destination on the Ecuadorian coast.

c. Exhibitions

Administrator Muñoz explains that the Salango Archaeological Museum has two sections: the first one is the Archaeological Museum, which exhibits 245 pieces from the six different cultures (Valdivia, Machalilla, Chorrera, Bahia, Guangala and Manteña) that have been found in Salango. The Historical Museum alongside is a house which was formerly a country estate which was rebuilt and is now part of the community's heritage. This house was the workplace where the professor Michael Harris from Florida Atlantic University and his students conducted the ethnography of the population. The Research Centre has a collection of bones from more than 1,500 fish, 140 mammals and 35 reptiles. 5% of the collection are excavated bones and the remaining 95% correspond to modern animal bones, which allows, through the comparative method, to establish differences and similarities with bones from excavations in the region.⁵⁷ Muñoz emphasised that in the Historical Museum people can see the economic activities to which the community

⁵⁷ Alexander García, "Salango, sitio de del estudio del pasado prehispánico", (Salango, site of the study of the pre-Hispanic past), *El Comercio*, February 1, 2017, <https://www.elcomercio.com/tendencias/salango-manabi-arqueologia-restos-intercultural.html>

has dedicated itself, from its origins, and more importantly its struggles for the territory, including the recovery of the space that today the museum and the research centre occupy.

The exhibition is organised around three main thematic axes: by chiefdom, by archaeological site and by chronological and cultural period, with a particular emphasis on the main resources of the area and its ecological diversity. Each of these axes are developed through the exhibition of pieces, photographs, maps, reconstructions, as well as explanatory panels.

d. Outreach and Community Engagement

Since 2005 the museum has participated in a series of arrangements with local and international institutions, in order to allow the Salango community to achieve its purpose of protecting their heritage. The first major project for the museum took place in 2009 when the institution won the Ambassador's Fund for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, a program led by the American Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, which supports projects to preserve a wide range of cultural heritage in developing countries, including archaeological sites. These resources were used for the restoration of the hacienda (country house) "La Tropical", a building inside the research centre. The house was restored to its 1940's appearance and a new social function assigned to it. From being a repository of archaeological materials, it became a museum with a permanent exhibition that tells the history of its people and their struggle for land, a change made at the express wish of the Salango inhabitants.

The second project was executed in conjunction with the community in 2018 when they again won the Ambassador's Fund. This time the money was invested in the conservation of the archaeological materials of the Salango commune. As Professor Martínez explains, the Salango Research Centre has been used as a base for archaeological operations by several researchers from the United States and England, among others. After excavating the site, the materials used by these experts were kept in a depository, without technical care or duly accounted for. In view of this, a proposal was made for turning this storeroom into a true warehouse of material where these tools are inventoried, protected, preserved and registered. This project is directed by Martínez and managed by Salango collaborators, such as Yolaida Muñoz, who is president of the Salango commune and administrator of the museum, and also supervises the inventory and registry of curatorship.

The museum has carried out research on the objects that have been recovered archaeologically by the Salango Research Centre. For instance, one piece explained how the Manabi Oven was used, a tool that has endured over time. For that project women from the community were interviewed, who reported that their grandmothers made these ovens from scratch. During this survey, traditional recipes prepared in these ovens were also collected.

Field School

Archaeologist Martínez also coordinates another long-term project with her husband, who is an anthropologist. There is a field school in archaeology and anthropology in Salango, a program started in 1997. This plan, which is another joint effort with the Florida Atlantic

University, the Salango commune and the Salango Research Centre, has allowed them annually to bring students from the USA and Europe to do their internships at the centre. They have also created the conditions for local archaeology students to join the program. In order to carry out these activities, an agreement was created with the community which allocates part of the budget given to this Field School for the use of the museum's resources. This money is invested in the maintenance of the research centre and the expert emphasises that this is the first archaeological group in Ecuador to make this payment. According to Martínez these payments, which have been in place for more than 20 years, are fair because as archaeologists they take so much from a community when they come to study it; doing excavations in community land and asking for valuable information, that is not only used to reproduce the past, but also for professional development.

This collaboration with the FAU has allowed the Salango community to have a budget to stay afloat. The museum is not associated with local government bodies, such as the Ministry of Culture, which brings together a network of 16 free museums located in 11 cities in Ecuador (institutions that receive a budget from the Ecuadorian state). As it is not a state museum, the Salango Research Centre works independently to obtain resources. Martínez usually travels to Ecuador and stays on campus from May to August. This year she could not do so due to the pandemic but remains in remote communication with the local team.

Social Media

The museum has a website and a Facebook page⁵⁸ which has 811 followers. The page began in 2018 and is occasionally managed by members of the museum, such as guides. The social media was previously handled by one person, however they have stopped posting and sharing content regularly because of the pandemic. On the profile, people can see pictures and videos about the visitors, the museum's facilities and the work being done there. Services of a tourist nature are also occasionally promoted, which are part of the activities undertaken by the community to sustain the museum financially.

Salango museum's content and news can also be found on the website and the Instagram account of the community, with 269 followers and which also began in 2018. With the exception of Facebook, the aim of the Salango community is to include all the information related to the museum in their digital platforms, to fulfil its intention to show the links between the community and museum, and to emphasise that this place is administrated by the leaders of the commune. They plan to gradually incorporate more social media to reach more people through these platforms. Muñoz acknowledges that the museum's website is not properly managed, but if resources are obtained, part of that fund will be used to maintain the website, and she hopes that it will be better managed by one dedicated person.

⁵⁸ Museo Salango, "Salango Hermoso Paraíso Natural", (Salango, a Natural Paradise), Facebook, February 26, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/Museo-Salango-896914647099602/>

e. Reputation and Profile

The museum has been highlighted by the press as a place that fights for the conservation of its heritage.⁵⁹ Other digital spaces, such as online bloggers of Ecuadorian history,⁶⁰ emphasise that the museum, beyond preserving archaeological pieces, actively promotes archaeological research in its geographical area. They add that the museum offers a complete overview of the archaeology of this region in Ecuador.

f. Future Plans

According to Martínez, 2020 has been a difficult year for the museum due to the Coronavirus pandemic. However the FAU keeps its support for the community, while those who lead the project seek new ways to remain solvent. One of these alternatives that have been studied by Martínez and the rest of the team is the Ibermuseos Program fund, an advocate organisation for cooperation and integration of Ibero-American countries for the promotion and articulation of public policies in the area of museums and museology. This organisation held a contest in which they invited professionals from the region to think about new ways of working during the pandemic.⁶¹ The Salango Research Museum applied to this contest and at the time of writing this report, their project was selected among the 20 best of 210 projects presented.

⁵⁹ “Salango lucha por su conservación”, (Salango fights for its preservation), *El Telégrafo*, July 24, 2019, <http://tinyurl.com/y4x9ttzw>

⁶⁰ Catherine Lara, “El Museo Arqueológico Salango y su Centro de Investigación”, (The Archaeological Salango Museum and its Investigation Centre), *Arqueología Ecuatoriana*, July 24, 2007, <https://museos.arqueo-ecuatoriala.ec/es/presentaciones-de-museos/4-generalidades/10-el-museo-arqueologico-desalangoy-su-centro-de-investigacion>

⁶¹ Ibermuseos, “11º Premio Ibermuseos de Educación. Proyectos Premiados”. Press release, September 17, 2020, <http://www.ibermuseos.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/ibermuseos-ata-resultado-pie-2020-final.pdf>

The museum participated with two ideas: the creation of a 3D video game and a 3D virtual tour of specific museum objects. The first idea proposes to develop the Minecraft-style video game with the aim that the player rebuild with blocks the houses and neighbourhoods of the pre-Hispanic period of the Manteños, the aboriginal community that inhabited those territories, with the help of information collected by the centre. The game aims to educate the youngest about this tribe. The second idea is a 3D guided tour of specific objects found in the museum's depository, telling for each object what it represents, who used it, what for, and how it is used today. If this is completed, it is intended that the history of each object be narrated by the members of the community, and not an expert voice, to establish a closer relationship between the exhibition and the audience.

4. Comparative analysis

a. MUNA

Strengths and Distinctiveness

Expertise: The team that leads MUNA has recognised expertise and formal qualifications. This is an advantage for MUNA because their team understands the theory and dynamics of a contemporary museum and they are able to understand the audience and improve the visitor experience. Ecuador is a country where usually the cultural sector lacks professionals with enough experience to manage a cultural centre. The leaders of most institutions in Ecuador are themselves elderly and in many cases bring traditional concepts of chronological history teaching to their work, with little opportunity for audience participation or discussion. In contrast, with MUNA we can see the inclusion of the revised value statement in their output. This is an example of the role that historians should have, according to the author Edward Linenthal,⁶² creating spaces where people can engage with interpretations of the past.

Strength of discourse: MUNA is now highly capable in regards to discussing issues, including gender roles of Ecuadorian women in history, LGBTQ+ issues in pre-Hispanic Ecuador, and issues with colonialism, none of which are commonly discussed within Ecuador, so this is a very significant achievement. They are trying to confront difficult contemporary socio-political issues and having to deal with some negative reactions, and overall MUNA shows commitment to maintaining these discussions.

Good use of Technology: MUNA has organically managed the social media and other digital tools to make it through the pandemic. In my view this is possibly its most

⁶² Thomas Cauvin, *Public History. A Textbook of Practice*, (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 220.

important strength. Content is available on several social networks and also they have used video calls to keep their public engaged with all the museum activities. Other museums in Ecuador are notably behind MUNA in this respect, and broadband in Ecuador in general is behind many developed countries.⁶³ In this context, MUNA is on the forefront of providing cultural content, and faces particular challenges which hopefully will lessen as the country develops.

Community engagement: After a challenging period in the last decade, including closure for three years, MUNA is developing stronger community links and offering its audience the opportunity to learn about and discuss under-represented issues in the country, such as the facets of gender in pre-Hispanic Ecuador, a subject of one of its temporary exhibitions at the time of writing. As a national museum, MUNA perhaps cannot be expected to maintain the same level of local engagement as a site-based museum such as Salango, but they do make exhibitions to connect to particular groups around Ecuador, for example the Kichwa community, which is spread around the country.

Funding: Government funding allows MUNA to employ experienced professionals and full-time social media staff, and the museum has been given some independence to construct the narratives as they see fit. This is clearly an advantage in comparison with some other cultural organisations which must self-fund through ticket sales or rely on external expertise, such as Salango. Their funding model arguably allows MUNA more freedom to diversify its content without commercial constraints.

⁶³ A 2019 survey show that 45.5 % of Ecuadorian homes are connected to broadband, in rural areas this dropped to 21.6%. Approximately 46% of people have smartphones, also as of 2019. The Ecuadorian government has said it is working to increase coverage of mobile broadband, although this has been delayed numerous times by economic problems. You can see the complete survey here.
https://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/documentos/web-inec/Estadisticas_Sociales/TIC/2019/201912_Principales_resultados_Multiproposito_TIC.pdf

Areas for improvement

Profile: MUNA is relatively unknown outside Ecuador compared with national museums of other countries, including in neighbouring capitals such as the Museo del Oro (Museum of Gold) in Bogota, Colombia. There is potential to promote MUNA as a greater cultural destination outside of Ecuador. Ecuadorian tourism has focused mainly on the environment (“Amazon, Andes, Galapagos”), and less on the cultural aspects which MUNA exhibits.

Politics: The disabling of comments on some of the exhibition posts on social media, for example on the temporary exhibition “Diversity, and facets of gender in pre-Hispanic Ecuador”, whilst not necessarily a criticism, shows that they need to continue to resist certain pressures from critical voices in these topics if they wish to continue to advance these discussions, despite the attacks on minority groups such LGBTQ+.

Language: MUNA says that its mission is focused on reviewing the traditional Ecuadorian ideas of heritage and memory, recognising the multiplicity of identities and establishing a space for participation and confrontation. To some extent the museum tries to approach these ideals with forums, debates and events open to professionals in the field, to encourage the cultural industry and online conversations which have increased dramatically with the pandemic. MUNA has used social media as its key tool to publicise all these mentioned events, and Facebook has been its preferred medium. Notwithstanding these efforts, there is a specific difficulty with the presentation: the language. Beginning with the concepts the museum shows in its exhibitions, many of the terms used are familiar to students and professionals with academic backgrounds, but not to the general public.

Las demandas de la sociedad global, la influencia de nuevas tecnologías de comunicación e información, los conceptos contemporáneos de memoria social y patrimonio cultural amplían el ejercicio de los derechos culturales y la crítica de la identidad homogénea construida desde la exclusión. Además, exigen a los espacios culturales replantear sus discursos para integrar diversas ópticas y crear nuevas relaciones con la ciudadanía.⁶⁴

For example, in the previous paragraph, the museum is explaining its core concept, which translates approximately to “the demands of global society, the influence of new communication and information technologies, contemporary concepts of social memory and cultural heritage expand the exercise of cultural rights, and the criticism of the homogeneous identity built from exclusion”.

In its effort to escape the linear narrative of the old museums, arguably the museum now leaves some visitors bemused. MUNA’s description of “Transversal Concepts”, “Segregation” and “Homogeneous identity” deserve a prior introduction for the public. Some writers have expressed that “language is the last and arguably the most fundamental potential barrier to being able to understand and articulate an assessment of significance”,⁶⁵ especially if the museum wants to establish a discussion space in which everyone feels included.

⁶⁴ “Conceptos Transversales”, MUNA, accessed September 17, 2020, <https://muna.culturaypatrimonio.gob.ec/index.php/exposiciones/exposiciones-permanentes/conceptos-transversales>

⁶⁵ James Arthur and Robert Phillips, *Issues in history teaching* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 47

This understanding also needs to be shared in the museum's social platforms. Although it is true that MUNA's online talks are aimed at groups with different ages and expertise, it would be worth starting to use less technical language to share the museum's content and fulfil its mission and values.⁶⁶ There are examples that manage to combine their aims with a more accessible language, such as a 14 minute animation posted March 2020 on their Facebook page, which teaches about a festival of the moon cycle in indigenous folklore.⁶⁷

This animation is presented in Kichwa language (sometimes written as Quichua, the latter spelling since 2004 is no longer favoured politically, it is itself a remnant of Spanish colonialism), one of the significant ancestral languages in Ecuador today.⁶⁸ It is noteworthy that the Facebook post itself does not clearly introduce their own content. Perhaps this is due to a guideline or style that the museum follows, as although the content itself is given Spanish subtitles, it still requires the user to have previous Kichwa cultural knowledge or to use external sources to understand the context of the animation. It may be recommended to introduce the content in both Spanish and Kichwa and particularly to explain the context for monolingual Spanish users. To provide more participatory experiences, MUNA needs to better understand their audiences.⁶⁹ This is a small example of a more general communication problem: the museum, although making a good effort

⁶⁶ It is notable that in comparison with other national museums, e.g. the British Museum, MUNA has a more ambiguous value statement on its website.

⁶⁷ MUNA Museo, "Los Instrumentos del Calendario Luni - Solar en la Mitad del Mundo", Facebook, September 22, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/MuseoNacionalEcuador/videos/790118171825031/>

⁶⁸ María del Pilar Cobo, "Entendamos el kichwa", (Let's understand kichwa), *El Telégrafo*, March 16, 2015, <https://www.eltelegrafo.com.ec/noticias/carton-piedra/1/entendamos-el-kichwa> Kichwa is one of the 14 ancestral languages spoken in Ecuador, and it is recognized in the Ecuadorian Constitution, along with Spanish and Shuar, as the official language of intercultural relationships. The last census of the country in 2010 revealed that around 591.448 people speak kichwa language.

⁶⁹ Cauvin, *Public History: A Textbook of Practice*, p. 142

to appeal to different demographics, is perhaps not doing quite enough to connect the different audiences within Ecuador.

b. Salango

Strengths and Distinctiveness

Engaging with the community: Salango museum has integrated the community well to actively participate in the museum's work. It is encouraging to see the passion that people from Salango have for portrayals of their own culture. However people did show some resistance to outside scientific oversight. (I will talk more about this issue in the section below, "Areas for Improvement".) Albuja considers that "there has been some fabulous community training, especially of women now specializing in bone grading".

Partnership with scientists and academia: The partnership with the FAU has been running successfully for almost 10 years and has been of noticeable benefit to both sides. On the one hand the university has been able to run its Archaeological Field Program in Salango, an area rich in archaeology, where FAU students gain "hands-on experience in excavation, survey, data recording, laboratory procedures, and report writing".⁷⁰ The management have created an environment where students can live and study. On the other hand, you can see the Salango inhabitants taking into their own hands their heritage and raising awareness about the importance of keeping their ancestry alive and available to future generations. This link between FAU and the Salango community has provided the museum with the resources to help with both general maintenance of the site and with the conservation of archaeological materials. Salango demonstrates a model that could be

⁷⁰ "Ecuadorian Field School", Florida Atlantic University, accessed September 30, 2020, <http://www.fau.edu/artsandletters/anthro/archfield/>

considered for adoption by some other currently undeveloped sites in Ecuador and elsewhere.

Engaging with tourism: Salango allows tourists to witness an active archaeological site and stay in their accommodation on site. The museum has secondary benefits to the local economy: it is seen as an important tourist attraction, creating extra jobs (restaurants, crafts, excursions and so on) and bringing money into a relatively poor area, in comparison with the big Ecuadorian cities, such as Quito.

Areas for improvement

Balance: Salango needs to promote itself as a tourist destination, but they have to balance and handle this sensitively with the possible impacts of increased tourism on an active archaeological site, considering the accommodation is very close to the archaeological remains. As David Herbert emphasizes,⁷¹ sometimes people recognise the potential for the economic development of heritages sites and are sometimes times prepared to ignore the precepts of preservation.

Exhibitions: Salango has a significant physical collection, rich in terms of archaeology. In the words of Albuja, “this museum has very valuable pieces, there is a wonderful collection of bones, a very interesting palaeontology collection”. However, in undertaking this consultancy remotely I found the information available on the website is limited. The content seems more aimed at general tourists and not at people with an interest in archaeology or anthropology. The pictures posted on Salango’s social media let visitors have only a glimpse of what can be found there. Perhaps an informative

⁷¹ David Herbert, “Heritage Places: Leisure and Tourism”, in his *Heritage, Tourism and Society*, London, Mansell Publishing, 1995, 1-21. (Module Reader).

physical guide would be useful to provide more information to tourists, or an online version that could be accessed on visitors' own devices to reduce printing costs. It is important to remember that many tourists are interested in archaeological sites but most have minimal specialised knowledge about the past.⁷²

Social Media: Salango has potential for improvement to their social media and website. There is very little information about their exhibitions, but due to budget constraints, perhaps in the partnerships with universities, some of the website and the social media work could be offloaded. There is currently only a brief introduction to each of the cultures found on the site. The museum has a section within the Salango community's website and Instagram account, and its own dedicated account on Facebook with little activity on the timeline. The administrator of the museum is aware of this and recognises that they could not afford to employ a full time community manager to maintain the website and the museum's social media. However, it is possible to find mechanisms to improve the presentation of the Salango museum to the public. For example, an object catalogue could increase academic interest in the site, and the students who do their archaeological work in Salango could help produce this.

Research feedback: There is now a significant body of academic research based on Salango which is not available either to the local community or to the general public via the website. This seems a wasted opportunity. Essentially, there appears to be a lack of feedback from the research partners, to the museum generally. The president of Pueblo Manta expressed frustration at this lack of follow up communication from research partners, although he specifically excludes FAU from this criticism. From the interview with Macias, he considers that public institutions, NGOs and universities do not find it

⁷² Bob McKercher and Hilary du Cros, *Cultural Tourism*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 40

convenient that the Salango community's work is more visible, or more community led. He thinks this community leadership reduces the political power of these external institutions. This is his personal opinion.

The scenic location on the Ecuadorian coast is clearly a big draw for tourism in Salango, the region and the museum, but there is a need to provide visitors with more engaging exhibition content.

5. Recommendations for MUNA

- Continue producing and promoting the regional content, making sure to introduce this content on social media in both Spanish and the local language, for example Kichwa. It is neither practical nor advisable to attempt to provide separate language social media feeds, instead I would suggest placing both languages consecutively within the relevant content description, for example on Facebook. Everything currently is posted in Spanish only, even where the content itself, e.g. a video clip, may be in a different language with Spanish subtitles.
- Consider providing the main website in English, both for tourism and academic purposes. This would work better with a shorter URL, for example both muna.com.ec and www.muna-ecuador.com are available at time of writing. Improved SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) also will help visitors to find MUNA on the internet (Unfortunately "MUNA" is a commonly used museum acronym in the Spanish speaking world). Also it would be helpful to have the context, mission, values and an annual report from MUNA available on its website.

- The item details currently in the physical galleries are also only in Spanish and providing translations in English would assist many foreign visitors. This was an issue specifically mentioned by user reviews.
- The museum is well placed now to begin to raise its profile internationally, this could be done through collaboration between ministries of Culture and Tourism. Refer to the promotion of better known sites in capitals Lima, Peru and Bogota, Colombia (el Museo del Oro/Museum of Gold is relatively famous for example), consider also approaching them for cross-promotion marketing opportunities.
- Social media is a useful way to include people from other provinces but also it might be helpful to work in partnership with regional museums and to include representatives from ethnic groups to further achieve their mission as an inclusive national institution.
- Continue driving the use of technologies in exhibitions (multimedia content). This is ground breaking work for Ecuador and is particularly helpful to attract younger audiences and citizens who might not normally visit a traditional museum. There are many methods that could be adapted from institutions in e.g. the US and UK where they have decades of experience in digital exhibition delivery.

6. Recommendations for Salango

- There is a significant opportunity here to collate the research made on the site, which currently exists scattered around academic papers, and make more of it available at the site, which could also then drive more tourism and further research. Students from the different universities that collaborate with Salango perhaps could give, as part of the agreement, some time to write summaries or

portfolios of their research to be added to the museum exhibition, or to help produce an object catalogue, in return for the use of the site.

- Salango could ensure balance between tourism and conservation of the archaeological site by consulting with a person with relevant experience. This professional should be able to produce policy for the museum, to avoid possible problems related to the accommodation sited very close to the archaeological remains.
- Produce a printed informative guide for Salango Museum for tourists which includes a brief overview of the site, including the background of the pre-Columbian pieces, and charge visitors for this booklet. Alternatively, or in addition, this guide could have a free online version that could be accessed on visitors' own devices. This eliminates printing costs and makes updates easier.
- Ask for social media guidance and support in this area from the members of the FAU, as their closest partners. It may be, that new groups that will return to Salango in the coming years might include someone whose task is to support the social media activity of the site, and train volunteers at Salango to manage the website and the social networks themselves. The museum can also ask for this training from the government institutions, such as the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Society or the Ministry of Tourism, which have been developing workshops⁷³ to help the tourist sector to learn about social media as a marketing strategy. Once they have improved this, it would be helpful to have the context, mission, values and an annual report from Salango available on its website.

⁷³ The Ministry of Tourism conducts the National Tourism training Program with the purpose of training tourist actors in hospitality, food safety, tourist transport, business management, tourism marketing strategies, and social media management. You can have more information in the official website: <https://servicios.turismo.gob.ec/portfolio/capacitacion-turistica>

- Organising workshops and meetings more often between the researchers from FAU and the members of Salango community, so both parties can have a more steadfast and constant feedback about the work that is being done in Salango museum and the Research Centre. The communications amongst the academic team and the community need to be more fluid in order to achieve further improvements for the project and to make community members unfamiliar with the project feel included. This suggestion applies also for other universities that work with Salango museum.

7. Conclusion

Both the museums studied have been quite successful in their primary aims. This is a credit to the dedication of their staff, both current and previous, paid and unpaid. Both the locations face significant challenges, not all of which are predictable. For example, the effects of the pandemic on visitor numbers in 2020 (particularly difficult for Salango, which remained closed for much of this year), or the future political direction of the country (the latter especially in the case of MUNA, which currently enjoys a good degree of political and creative independence). Each museum has strengths that might benefit the other; Salango demonstrates particularly effective community engagement, whilst MUNA shows a very progressive approach to both technology and public discussion in its work, which is especially noteworthy in a largely conservative society.

MUNA clearly has the stronger financial position because of their government funding, this allows them have a greater number of employees, to keep the collections they have in good condition and to be able to plan further ahead with new projects. The Salango museum necessarily follows a different path, where money is a recurrent concern and they are under pressure to sell tickets and carry out all tasks on a minimal budget. With a large proportion of volunteers, Salango has to ensure staff are rewarded and kept interested in other ways, and that visitors and students are seen to “give back” to the site, whether that’s in financial or other terms, particularly with the students as discussed above.

Both Salango and MUNA have some issues around language and communication of their exhibitions. MUNA suffer somewhat from overly academic “jargon” whereas Salango

could benefit from being more detailed, perhaps both could benefit by bringing on board people with writing or marketing experience. Both museums have potential to improve accessibility to their audiences, domestic and international. MUNA in particular might be able to form partnerships with foreign museums to cross-promote exhibitions or share materials or exchange staff, as they are somewhat lacking in experience in their new “modern incarnation”. Salango meanwhile stands to benefit more from technological and financial assistance, and some solutions for this were discussed above.

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