



ISSN 2951-0619(Print), 2951-3952(Online) • <https://doi.org/10.22691/kacs290201> • Vol.29, No.2,2023, pp.105-125

Original Article

NOT A MUSEUM, BUT A COMMUNITY OF RELATIONSHIPS: A CANADIAN ECOMUSEUM CASE STUDY

Christopher Gunter^a

^a Assistant Professor, Élisabeth-Bruyère School of Social Innovation, Saint-Paul University, Canada,
cjgunter@ustpaul.ca

ABSTRACT

Inspired by Indigenous notions of relationality, accountability and holism, this paper examines an ecomuseum case study, l'Écomusée du patrimoine funéraire et commémoratif, to better understand its activist community forming claims. In particular, this paper seeks to describe and analyze how this ecomuseums' relationships with the environment and community take form (i.e., projects, practices, objects, values, etc.), and discuss what this model of museum implies for its community, and as a possible model for other organizations to adopt. Implications regarding its holistic structure, values, and mission, and aims for public participation will be juxtaposed with the classic iteration of public museums. Although previous studies have studied aspects of ecomuseums regarding their history, their connection to policy change, this article's aim is to examine and compare this ecomuseum, with emphasis on the intimate relationship and communal claims regarding how it views, builds, organizes and understands its relationships with its public and larger ecosystem.

Keywords: Canadian heritage, ecomuseums, public museums, cultural community

1. INTRODUCTION

The classical image of museums has always been controversial. From the very first ICOM established definition in 1946, the notion of a ‘museum’ was built on the idea of a physical building that contains “all collections open to the public, of artistic, technical, scientific, historical or archaeological material, including zoos and botanical gardens, but excluding libraries, except in so far as they maintain permanent exhibition rooms” (ICOM, 1946-2007). Beyond the limitation of requiring a physical location under recognized thematic labels, later iterations further limited the scope of museums through prescriptive aims such as preservation, conservation, and exhibition. Not only did this fail to include a plethora of intangible artifacts; but it led to the exclusion of similar less-resourced cultural institutions often representing minority communities, neighbourhood interpretation and cultural centres, and special interest collections. Worse still, these changing museum definitions seemingly promoted one style of traditional museum structure: hierarchical, object-oriented, elite-supported, and with the aim to ‘educate’ and ‘civilize’ the public. In short, the museum was perceived as a structured institution that was not bound by its public, environmental, or overarching communal relationships.

While the last few decades led to shifts in reconciling these contentions, new challenges plagued the heritage of traditional museum practices. For example, it was recently revealed that prestigious museums, like the over 200-year British Museum, have lost, misplaced, or had artifacts stolen. For the British Museum, some 2,000 artifacts were stolen over a period including items such as gold, precious stones, and even pieces that date as far back as 15th century BC (McLaughlin, 2023). Although some of these pieces have since been recovered (Wingatem, 2023), ethical questions concerning provenance and acquisition of artifacts emerged with calls from other countries to return and repatriate items and collections that were essentially looted by the colonial British Empire (Sommerlad, 2023).

Of course, Canada is not immune to museum controversy. As a member of the commonwealth, Canada has greatly benefited from the British Empire’s colonization and appropriation of Indigenous lands. Several pilfered Indigenous items, such as the Blackfoot (*Siksikaitstapi*) people’s cloths, headdress, and ceremonial staff (Plain Eagle, 2023), remained on display in Canadian public institutions. In fact, the Canadian Museums Association reported that 6.7 million Indigenous objects and human remains continue to be held in Canadian institutions (Liu, 2022). With more attempts to slowly return indigenous artifacts (Bernstien, 2021), there are increased calls for all western museums to return and repatriate items (Moran, 2021), assuming they were not lost (The Canadian Press, 2023). The implications of these practices lead us to question the museum’s archaic detached and asymmetric relationship with the public, its authenticity in institutional practices on how it manages, interprets, and presents cultural communities, and its overall ability to be a cultural ward for Canadian heritage. Two questions emerge: is the idea of the public museum too

tarnished by its object-focused colonial legacy to still be of service to the Canadian society, its environment and its people, or are there institutional alternatives?

In Canada, a different model, called ecomuseum (*écomusée*), that was inspired by French and English museological developments circulated to North America the 1980s and took root in several places. One such place is the city of Montréal in the French-speaking province of Québec. Formed in 1991 by several Montréal citizens and activists concerned about funerary heritage, l'Écomusée de l'Au-Delà (now known as l'Écomusée du patrimoine funéraire et commémoratif [ÉPFC]) drew on an alternative model of museums that is paired with social objective and a drive to authentically connect with its surrounding ecosystem (its people, its environment, and its heritage). ÉPFC presents several organizational elements that are distinctive from public museums. For instance, ÉPFC presents place and relationship-bounded mission that claims to “promote the involvement”, “work with”, “mobilize”, and “unite” its various funerary and commemorative communities (ÉPFC, 2022). These declarations seemingly imply an active commitment to its public and environment, which reflects holistic approach to its relationships along with a local sense of ‘place’ that extends beyond the physical. If these claims are true, they represent a remarkably different model than public museums whose hierarchy and established managerial roles dictate institutional goals, values, practices, and project outcomes. Furthermore, it can be argued that these characteristics could illustrate more than just an alternative museological approach; but, a new form of community. While these claims and implications seem innovative, it’s less clear on how it works, and whether this shared sense of place leads to collaboration and an authentic sense of community.

For traditional museums, a connection with the community does not really fit in the organizational mission. For public museums, the curatorial aim to recreate and present a ‘objective’ heritage clean of any normativity by sharing narratives in tandem with acquired fragments of place for context, and to exhibit them together. Ultimately, this is done to best recreate their vision of place. However, the complexity of “place” draws into question the ability of curators and the authenticity of public museums and their ability to capture these elusive qualities, label them, store them, and ultimately recreate them without the help of the public who experienced and lived these narratives.

Inspired by Indigenous notions of relationality and holism, this paper examines the case of ÉPFC to better understand its activist community forming claims. In particular, this paper seeks to describe and analyze how ÉPFC’s relationships and community take form (i.e., projects, practices, objects, values, etc.), and discuss what this model of museum implies for its community, and as a possible model for other organizations to adopt. Implications regarding its holistic structure, and public participation will be juxtaposed with the classic iteration of public museums. Although previous studies have studied aspects of ecomuseums regarding their history (Davis, 2011), their connection to policy change (Gunter, 2017), this article’s aim is to examine and compare ÉPFC the intimate relationship and communal claims regarding how it views, builds, organizes and understands its relationships with its public and

larger ecosystem. To do this, we will review the literature on museums and the public. Next, we will describe our methodology followed by a history and analysis of ÉPFC. Finally, we will discuss the implications of the case study and how it's model might help public museums, and broader cultural communities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on museums and its relationship with its public can be divided into two discourses: 1) museums for the public, and 2) museums by communities. Each discourse emphasizes a unique view of the public and alternative approach on how to instrumentalize the museum (democratization, decentralization vs participation) and transform their relationship with society (cultural management vs local empowerment), all of which are largely motivated by the political environment.

The first discourse is a reaction against previously established cultural hierarchies and elitist approaches in the face of privately held cultural collections. Museum management is largely seen as a process to exhibit, conserve, preserve, and educate the public. In this sense, museums viewed their collections and institution as ways to 'educate' their public; thus, curators needed to find ways to make their cultural narratives more accessible to reach more audiences. Furthermore, neoliberal reforms in the 1980s led to increased new business-friendly norms that fomented managerial efficiency and financial accountability mechanisms with the aim of sustainability as the main measure of success for museums. Eschewing intrinsic notions like "art for art's sake", this museum management discourse saw museums playing a role in helping governments fulfill their economic and social missions.

On the other hand, the second discourse reflected a reaction against this managerial approach. Since the previous discourse saw public museums as a one-dimension tool used to influence people on behalf of government policies and objectives, other cultural activists began to seek out alternative approaches. These different approaches illustrated a disdain for the traditional elitist museums and more modern government authority. Instead, this new approach sought to reclaim local control of the cultural narrative. Emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, this discourse interprets museums as communities and believes in holistic approaches that are anchored in its people and community. The goal of these new grassroots institutions was to build its local public socially and economically, together.

2.1 Museums for the public: civilizing the public

While the seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries of museums largely took the form of private structures, temples, curiosity collections, etc. that served to demonstrate family power, prestige, and royalty (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Bennett, 1995; Bennett, 2004), this

presentation of bourgeois status functioned as an instrument of domination that cemented the asymmetric relationship of authority between the public (the dominated) and the ruling cultural elite (the museums and its owners). Reforms reacting to this antagonistic relationship led to heritage works being circulated and reconstituted in the hands of public museums with a new drive: make these works more accessible for visitors and communities to enjoy.

The classical era of museums, arguably, began in 1946 when ICOM cemented a definition of museums. While the definition presented focused on what a museum should be, it was not till 1951 before a prescriptive element emerged. According to 1951 article II, the museum is an institution whose purpose is “preserving, studying, enhancing by various means and, in particular, of exhibiting to the public for its delectation and instruction groups of objects and specimens of cultural value” (ICOM, 1946-2007). This prescriptive goal of conservation, preserving and exhibition was reflected again in the 1961 definition, which declares museums as an institution that “conserves and displays” for “education and entertainment” (ICOM, 1946-2007). Even with these changes, the distance between the public and museum owners and managers did not change. One thing that did change, however, was how museums positioned themselves as having a public service role to educate and entertain the public.

While the idea of entertainment is ubiquitous in the arts and culture sector, the implications of a public education objective was less clear. Although the educational component appeared in the 1961 definition for ICOM, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had previously discussed this element. Instead of address education as a practice to inform, share wisdom, and guide, the meetings at UNESCO discussed how museums have sought to ‘civilise’ the public (UNESCO 1948.R3) and develop their artistic taste (UNESCO 1948.R6) without consultation or clear objectives. This approach enforces a patriarchy relationship with the public whereby the museum authority and curator singularly choose what is to be ‘taught’ and reinforced. In this view, the public (particularly the working class) is an uninformed and empty vessel needing the cultural and artistic guiding providing by the heritage authority of the museum.

Of course, these asymmetric views and policies diffused to Canada, who is a member of both UNESCO and ICOM. In Canada, organized museum networks began as an attempt to differentiate its national image from the US through its British heritage and culture. The 1949-1951 Massey Commission that was formed by many high art and performing art patrons, was asked to “examine certain national institutions and functions and to make recommendations regarding their organization and the policies which should govern them” (Massey Commission, 1951, p. 3). The Commission was an attempt to appraise Canada’s physical resources, with particular focus on the less tangible ‘human assets’ (Massey Commission, 1951, p. 4) that may inspire devotion or prompt a nation's action. Largely focused on its British imperial heritage, most recommendations would fail to garner any support till 1967 when the then-Secretary of State, Judy LaMarsh, introduced a bill (National Museums Act) to reorganize national museums. This bill restructured all crown-owned cultural institutions

into one corporation that included the National Gallery and the other three National Museums, which would mark the beginning of a new vision for museums that would be firmly established in the 1970s by the cultural vision of a new Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, and his Secretary of State, Gérard Pelletier.

In 1972, Pelletier gave a speech about his vision for Canadian museums, which concluded with one hope: “I venture to hope that my appeals in favour of democratization and decentralization will have been to some degree instrumental in bringing about change” (Pelletier, 1972, p. 222). In sum, Pelletier succinctly presented the national cultural vision for Canada: decentral (widespread public involvement), and democratized (reducing barriers for increased access). While this might seem to imply a more progressive stance regarding the federal government’s handling of culture and its relationship with its public, there was no real standardized practice or vision to authentically include the public. In short, these reforms restructured the museum environment around an instrumentalized direction for Canadian museums focused on supporting a new national culture and heritage with the guise of creating a more accessible and widespread homogenized authorized Canadian culture and identity. Once again, the public are manipulated and used Canadian culture in ways that influenced Canadians to achieve political and economic aims.

In sum, the inception of museums was largely motivated by the instrumental desires of their ownership. Whether it was to display royal power, construct cultural narratives through exhibits and collected objects to purposefully ‘civilize’ its public, or achieve public policy goals, the relationship between the public and museums have remained one-dimensional. In this sense, museums are owned and operated by a select few with no real mandate to authentically consult, co-produce, etc. with its public, whose sole role is to visit, pay patronage and be ‘educated’ through a democratized global-tourism experience.

2.2 Museums by communities: empowering the public

The 1971 ICOM general assembly in France, entitled *The Museum in the Service of Man*, marked a self-reflective turning point for museums. The meeting discussions highlight an urgent plea with all museums to “undertake a continuous and complete reassessment of the needs of the public which they serve” (1971.R1a). This first resolution further acknowledges the changing nature of society, questions the primary objective of collecting artifacts, and charges museums with a broader societal duty to evolve and find ways to better service the specific social environment in which it operates (1971.R1). By attempting to ground museums’ purpose to the changing nature of their respective environments, we begin to see the dynamic between the museum and the public change from a top-down asymmetric relationship to a duty to be more accountable to its larger community beyond the “museum-visiting public” (1971.R1s4).

Inspired by the 1971 general assembly, two French cultural activists investigated the social relationship between the public and museums, and the implications of what a closer

connection might bring. In his seminal article, Georges Henri Rivière (1973) examines the role of several types of museums and suggests ways in which they could integrate human and social science approaches. Regional and local museums have already played an important role in the service of community development, providing them with tools, training, and education for skill development, and creating space for community events, heritage celebrations, and the debate of social issues. Similarly, Hugues de Varine-Bohan (1973), presents the case of a unique ‘fragmented’ museum called The Museum of Man and Industry. The actual museum constitutes the entire community, making it a living museum that develops projects and promotes initiatives for the benefit of its inhabitants, who are also its visitors and takes part in the decision-making and implementation of museum work. This unique position and formation allowed the museum to develop its community using its own heritage and resources.

The term “ecomuseum” was coined by Hugues de Varine-Bohan in 1971 (Isar, 1985, pp. 184, f.n.2) and developed with the help of Georges Henri Rivière to encapsulate the idea of museums created by local heritage and driven by local communities for community development. Unlike the public museum, the ecomuseum is defined as a tool and instrument to be shared and used jointly with the local community in a range of ways for a variety of reasons (Rivière, 1973). This model and cultural approach is inherently bottom-up. Not only is co-creation of the cultural narrative expected, the local public are the cultural authorities and experts with the knowledge and lived experience to share. This collective view of the ecomuseum positions its relationships as invaluable compared to the arms-length model of the public museum.

In Canada, the influence of these critiques and ideas emerged during the 1st International – Ecomuseums/New Museology Workshop in Québec in 1984, where 15 countries adopted la Déclaration de Québec. Canadian community museologist Pierre Mayrand (1985) describes the declaration as a protest against old museological practices motivated by other heritage professionals desiring more inclusiveness of neighbourhood museums and popular culture. Unlike the objective of object conservation, the declaration expresses a desire to reinforce heritage and community by “bringing people together to learn about themselves and each other” (Mayrand, 1985, p. 201). In the same vein, Canadian cultural museologist and experienced consultant René Rivard (1984) presented an interim report drawing on the responses of 75 different people, 92 visits to 51 museums and ecomuseums, and information from attending 366 meetings. Rivard’s work reveals how the ecomuseum movement was rooted from the early development of interpretation centres in Québec and neighbourhood museums. More interestingly, the survey work reveals some potential categorical types of ecomuseums with different focuses: the discovery ecomuseum (seeking new forms of environment-based teaching), the development ecomuseum (community development motivated), the specialist ecomuseum (socioeconomic activity and regional-focused), the ‘combat’ ecomuseum (social struggles and defence).

In sum, the ecomuseum model inherently rejects the traditional aims of public museums that seek ‘masterpieces’ or goals that focus more preservation, conservation and the building

of scientific compendiums rather than cultural context and authenticity. Furthermore, for ecomuseums, curators are no longer the sole manager of all museum activities. Citizens share in the decision-making and implementation processes of the museum with the innate goal of promoting and developing the community in service of the public. One notable initiative that illustrates this is the museum's establishment of a scientific research centre that explores industrial development in order to deal with problems of adaptation of traditional industries due to their gradual decline.

3. METHODOLOGY

Given ÉPFC's activist community forming claims, this case study on the ÉPFC and its public is rooted in the holistic notion of relationality. Drawing on the work of Opaskwayak Cree researcher Shawn Wilson, the concept of relationality refers to "relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality" (Wilson, 2008, p. 7). Building on this, Wilson also emphasizes relational accountability, which can take form in shared practices of research decisions, data collection, form of analysis, presentation, etc. In short, a relational style is understanding how ideas develop through the formation of relationships (*i.e.*, its relational context). Together, the focus on relationships and relationship accountability sheds light on special and temporal context in countless forms. The first is the reciprocal relationship between people.

For instance, for ÉPFC this means exploring the fundamental beliefs, values, norms, and goals shared by the members and public. In examining these values and norms, we can further understand their pre-existing relationships, and how their projects are co-created. Even if projects are different, ÉPFC members and their public should still share the same underlying beliefs guiding their different work. By working closely, learning, and forming relationships with participants, and the public, people inform and change each others' views in this process. Even the use of intermediaries shifts our perception and is often essential when expanding and forging new relationships between these different projects for in-depth guidance and context-specific expertise. Through the process of creating and forming new bonds, reciprocating expectations (an accountability) towards each other's interests, needs, goals, and communities are respected. Thus, for researchers engaging with others, we must look to see how created projects fulfill obligations, support participant responsibilities, equally shares knowledge, and creates growth for all involved. In sum, a relationality approach is grounded in an authentic acknowledgement of each others role and how their beliefs, values, views are inherent in all aspects of their projects.

Equally as important is a relationship with the environment and land. Wilson (2008) highlights that the sense of place contains three important ideas: 1) the land as embedded knowledge and heritage about the space, 2) the environment as a catalyst for linking people together and linking people with the environment, and 3) the relationship between people or made with the environment are equally valued (Wilson, 2008). In short, by understanding the

relationship with the environment, more light is shed on the context. For ÉPFC, a relationality approach builds from a social constructivist view and explores the institutional identity as a form of interlocking relationships that seamlessly blends with its public and beyond. More than this, as an alternative model for museums that makes claims regarding its holistic relationship with place and the environment, it's pivotal to understand how 'place' figures into its practices, projects, and overall identity. It's clear that the environment and linked heritage plays a large role in how ÉPFC works; however, more light needs to be shed on how equitable and represented this relationship is reflected in the ecomuseum's practices.

As a non-profit charity status (under the name la Fédération Écomusée de l'Au-Delà), the ecomuseum was initially founded in 1991 as an instrument to circulate former president and founder Alain Tremblay's passion and concerns related to death, funeral rituals, representations of the afterlife and the environment (ÉPFC, 2023). Primarily an influence in the province of Québec, the ecomuseum was an institution without a physical building. The austerity measures it, along with many other cultural institutions, faced made it nearly impossible to develop, promote, or protect the funerary industry in different regions all over Québec. With a regional focus in mind, the ecomuseum began to sprawl in various community areas where it created sectional associations of people (region-specific cultural projects) with the same goals as the museum, itself, but that were targeted to specific Québec regions: Québec et Chaudière-Appalaches (founded in 2008), Patrimoine funéraire Montréal (founded in 2012), and Patrimoine funéraire Estrie-Montérégie (founded in 2014). With a strong institutional foundation established, these sectional associations represented an opportunistic use of community building, which even led to the evolution and separation of the first section, Québec et Chaudière-Appalaches, as an autonomous non-profit organisation called Pierres mémorables.

Originally, founding focused on protecting several of the main features of cemetery gardens including the funerary monuments and plants from the natural environment. Thus, an early set of objectives declared that the ecomuseum would: 1) preserve and promote the landscape, cultural and historical heritage of Montreal's cemeteries, particularly those on Mount Royal, 2) encourage the exploration of all facets of the themes of death and the afterlife (L'Écomusée de l'Au-Delà, 1997, p. 123). Together, these objectives illustrate the ecomuseum's sense of place through its empathy and concern of its green spaces in its ecosystem, where an increasing number of monuments (at the time there were over 100,000 on the mountain) were being built without concern for their sustainability and the health of the environment. The construction of mausoleums was first proposed as an idea to preserve thousands of bodies that the cemetery would otherwise not be able to hold, while saving space and providing the necessary income to maintain the cemetery; however, community members and the ecomuseum argued that mausoleums did not meet the criteria of sustainable development and were incompatible with the concept of the cemetery garden. In fact, it was citizens' opposition to increased construction of mausoleums in the Notre-Dame-des-Neiges cemetery that shaped and formalized the institutional creation of the ecomuseum.

In 2022, the ecomuseum underwent transformations. Tremblay broadened the original 1991 mission with multiple new facets of commemoration and changed the name to l'Écomusée du patrimoine funéraire et commémoratif (ÉPFC, 2023). This change emerged with thematic model (Appendix A) that developed and clarified ÉPFC's goals and relationship commitments. For instance, the mission's first goal is -geopolitical relationships are made clear to highlight distinct spaces of heritage and culture it intends to support, represent, and preserve that includes all cultural communities from their territory: France, First Nations, and rest of the 'American' French, which covers the rest of Canada and the US. In addition, the mission also claims direct commitment in co-creation with its publics:

The Écomusée also promotes the engagement of these communities in the promotion of funerary and commemorative heritage, both tangible and intangible. It develops its contents and develops them with them through activities based on the fundamental principles of inclusiveness, discovery, research, promotion, preservation, rectification and advancement towards the future. (Tremblay, 2022)

Together, these claims equate a clear and decisive mandate for representation and inclusive participation of vulnerable French minority publics in projects with a promise towards some temporal 'advancement' for their respective communities through these activities. While these claims are in line with Wilson's approach regarding relationship forming, it is less clear how their projects implemented these missions and if the completed project fulfilled its aims.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

How has ÉPFC developed in time to fulfill these relational and inclusive mandates on behalf of its vulnerable French communities? From a relationality view, the ecomuseum achieves its mandates in three ways. First, by practicing inclusivity in its activities, ÉPFC exhibits a firm and personal relationship between its members, participants, and communities. Rather than one-directionally exploiting its participants and publics for knowledge, the ecomuseum demonstrates a trust and collaborative nature through their collective work and autonomous of projects, which often showcase the involvement of others within the ecosystem. Second, ÉPFC's relational accountability takes form through collaborative social development goals. Again, instead of internally focused goals on self-development, projects are motivated by, or embed, social development goals for its publics. Finally, ÉPFC's relationship with the environment appears in the ecomuseums efforts that aim to mobilize towards a sustainable future environment and community.

4.1 Relationships as an inclusive process

The ecomuseum prioritizes their relationships in three ways. First, their restructuring and institutional identity as embodied in their thematic model (Appendix A). Breaking down the thematic pillars, the ecomuseum transparently displays its different pillars that include aspects, practices, objects, places, rituals, beliefs, sciences, and symbols, each supported by a plethora of broad and inclusive subthemes (ÉPFC, 2021). In his thirty-year retrospective, Tremblay (2022) outlines the milestones of the ecomuseum from the founding, notable symposiums, communal projects, memorandums presented to the city, publications and studies, and major activities. In each case, these milestones evidenced many participatory engagements: collaborative publications (journals, self-published), weekly activities and community visits, the creation of new committees, conferences, and studies (even one on citizen vigilance for the city of Montreal), policy briefs submitted to the public consultation office, collaboration agreements among many groups (businesses, universities, cemeteries), and co-produced exhibitions. Following these decades, it is understandable how a new model to highlight these different and expansive achievements was necessary to adapt to its larger networked ecosystem and showcase their services to the public. Many of these activities engaged with authors, local business collaborators, university and non-profit volunteers, and benefactors.

Secondly, relationship maintenance and growth are constantly seen as a priority for the ecomuseum. This is done in two ways. First, through regular bulletin updates via email, ÉPFC can create a digital networked environment with a distinctly grounded feel that showcases many voices from the community to the board. In fact, their bulletin known as *La veille* (French for ‘the day before’) often includes substantial news, articles, testimonials, summaries from meetings or conferences, updates on board members, etc. For instance, at an impressive 41 pages, Winter 2018’s volume 6 issue 1 edition includes seven different contributor pieces ranging from the director, volunteers, and even a doctoral student. Beyond the standard items (e.g., updates on all member activities, announcements for new and deceased members and for events), this issue evokes several points of dialogue from Arguably, the media monitor section showcases the ecomuseum’s serious attention to community activities with provocative narratives inviting the dialogue for the public to engage and be further informed. For instance, this issue considers the implications of the graveyards dedicated to spacecrafts and how the public should react regarding lost shuttles and their impact on the environment. Similarly, stories about items that were stolen and returned showcase an empathetic side, while articles like ‘what to do with our dead?’ questions the future of funerary ceremonies through the promotion of a documentary about its art and its heritage, along with the implications of cremation and its impact on the funerary industry and its artisans.

Similarly, conferences and symposiums are also ways that have consistently build the networks in the ecomuseum. As highlighted in the same bulletin issue, ÉPFC has been arduously researching, consulting, and lobbying with the Muslim Burial association of Quebec through Rachid Baïou to create multi-faith cemeteries and how to participate in the construction of an inclusive ‘us’ in Quebec. Not only did the conference highlight several public voices with suggestions, experiences, and concerns, all guided with board members,

Baïou's work in particular highlighted several dimensions of potential inclusive participatory methods and best practices to move forward together, should municipal politicians accepted to be involved (L'Initiative - Journal économique, sociale & culturel, 2017).

Finally, ÉPFC jointly creates projects emerging from community concerns. For instance, the ecomuseum is well known for its work with cemeteries, including Notre-Dame-des-Neiges; Shaerith Israel; Shaar Hashomayim; and, Mont-Royal. These cultural projects are community-enshrined monuments that include many aesthetic pieces and represent the ecomuseum's most tangible and intangible collections. Many of the monuments in these environments belonged to families whose responsibility it was to ensure their renewal. Because of this, the maintenance and renewal of monuments became uncertain as it meant that later generations, to whom the financial burden fell, were not always able or willing to renew these pieces, notwithstanding the artistic or heritage value of the work. Outside of private commemoration, public monuments erected by communities also share the same problem; both are generally left without a benefactor to properly maintain them (L'Écomusée de l'Au-Delà, 2005B). In an effort to unearth their historical and cultural significance, and restore and reframe them in the light of local cultural, the ecomuseum has also put together profiles of these historical cemeteries (Radio Canada International, 2012). For instance, the Baie-du-Febvre cemetery mausoleum—otherwise known as Bellemare-Paradis-Jutras—was a featured project and exhibit that represented a firm community stance for the ecomuseum. Supported by communities wanting to learn more and preserve these areas, this project brought together local people and challenged government practices for the enhancement of the community.

In fact, project Bellemare-Paradis-Jutras represented a disturbing trend of monuments that needed to be saved. To prevent more damage, Tremblay garnered the support of several leading community figures—city councillor Lina Beaudoin, retired priest Gilbert Lemire, Mayor Claude Lefebvre, and the MNA Nicolet-Bécancour Donald Martel (L'Écomusée de l'Au-Delà, 2014A)—as well as the support of the Municipality and parish of Baie-du-Febvre (L'Écomusée de l'Au-Delà, 2014B; Lacroix, 2014). Together, this group, in collaboration with funerary and heritage experts, were able to finance and compile an evaluation report for the formulation of a restoration quote supported by several community and cultural justifications (L'Écomusée de l'Au-Delà, 2014D). The report compiles information on the architectural and cultural heritage value of the mausoleum and the ecomuseum's financial inability to restore and maintain the funeral chapel, with the restoration quote serving as a precautionary measure to maintain and improve the quality of the architectural landscape of the cemetery. For its part, the ecomuseum conducted a campaign of recognition to familiarize the public with Joseph-Elzéar Bellemare, a historical figure and one of the greatest historians of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Nicolet, who published several parish monographs that have since become reference books and cultural insights for the period before 1910 (L'Écomusée de l'Au-Delà, 2014E). The report highlights how this restoration helped define the local identity and strengthen the community's sense of belonging.

4.2 Relational accountability through social development goals

In general, ecomuseums have a wide range of interpretations that range from a simple model (Rivard, 1984; Mayrand & Mairesse, 2000) to a more complicated set of indicators (Boylan, 1992; Hamrin & Hulander, 1995; Davis, 2011). With its thematic pillars, ÉPFC is no different. Following these models, two trends emerge in ÉPFC. First, ÉPFC claims a desire and commitment to public equality/equity and fair treatment. For this case, this ethos takes form in how ÉPFC recognizes the value and expertise of their different publics, groups, and peoples. Together, this relationship and commitment seems to demonstrate a natural accountable extension to inclusion and public participation, which, in turn, leads to different projects. Second, ÉPFC, like other ecomuseum modes, showcase community solidarity and a militant desire to be engaged (take part, contribute, and support) in public affairs.

Returning to the mission and thematic pillars, ÉPFC, to reiterate, claims to subscribe to “fundamental principles of inclusiveness, discovery, research, promotion, preservation, rectification and advancement towards the future.” (ÉPFC, 2022), with the strategic objective of “bringing together professionals, amateurs and organizations...” (ÉPFC, 2022). Together, these claims manifest in the ecomuseum’s drive to support the funerary industry. Structurally, ÉPFC has open elected positions in tandem with staff that run the day-to-day operations. There are annual conferences where the executive board (a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and several administrators) are elected. Again, the ecomuseum is a non-profit organization founded to preserve and promote the funeral heritage in Québec and is connected with three corporations: Patrimoine funéraire Estrie-Montérégie, Pierres mémorables - Québec et Chaudière-Appalaches, Patrimoine funéraire Montréal. The latter corporation was founded in 2012 with the objective of carrying out dissemination activities that emerge from the museum’s conferences and symposia, such as le colloque *The future of Quebec cemeteries*. For ÉPFC, public participation and community involvement are at the heart of its decisions, information and opinion acquisition, and public actions. In this case, the narrative of funerary heritage is inclusive and being told by many individuals and organisations – not simply told by one, detached museum professional. Local involvement, including industry actors and institutions, occurs through various assemblies, which further develop local objectives through associated plans for action or mobilisation. For example, due to the different connections among various people and groups, ÉPFC have been fortunate enough to form diverse conferences to illustrate various interests and public plans of action, including: the examination of death and how to preserve its diverse manifestations (La mort... Parlons-en, un colloque qui renaît); new approaches and recent successes in the dissemination, restoration, protection and reuse of religious heritage in Québec (Conservation et innovation); the future of funerary traditions and the cemetery (L’avenir des cimetières du Québec); and different perspectives on the temporality of the practices of dying, death and mourning (La mort en son temps).

Secondly, these various conferences highlight many of the current and prevailing issues that public members share in the ecomuseum. For example, one of the most lingering problems is the growing popularity of mausoleums as a corporate alternative and replacement to traditional burials. To support the ignored funerary industry, ÉPFC has taken to challenging the growing popularity of mausoleums. Seen as a corporate alternative and replacement to traditional burials, this concern over the increasing presence of Montréal mausoleums was an early motivated in the birth of ÉPFC (L'Écomusée de l'Au-Delà, 2005A). Mausoleums, large collective spaces for multiple dead bodies to be kept for upwards of 99 years, threaten the livelihood of community burial grounds and, ultimately, the future of cemeteries. For instance, in Montréal, by replacing these communal spaces with more space-efficient mausoleums, corporate funerary organizations can more lucratively use the Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery's diminishing space. Unsurprisingly, it only seemed logical for Notre-Dame-des-Neiges to follow the many other cemeteries in Québec that have already opted to build mausoleums of their own as a cost-effective approach to burials. Moreover, this new trend represented a very standardized elite approach to cemeteries that was once appreciated as quite personal, cultural, and representative of a unique heritage and identity. Mausoleums represent a sterilization of the artisanship, craftsmanship, and cultural sense of place that occur in cemeteries. Simply put, this private alternative was seen as a divide between the natural sense of place and the public, favouring a more commodified funerary process.

4.3 Fighting for community and 'place'

The notion of 'place' for ÉPFC is best illustrated in their relationship between the funerary industry's natural environment (preserved green spaces, community cemeteries, local heritage sites, etc.) and its public. Inherently, the thematic pillars ÉPFC showcases the importance of heritage protection and cultural recognition. Regarding protection, ÉPFC is vigilantly involved in fighting for maintenance of several heritage spaces. Similarly, it becomes necessary for the public and government to first recognize the importance and value of many cultural artifacts and spaces before they proceed to legislate protections. Thus, both practices are equally intertwined with the ecomuseum's broad missions.

First, heritage protection is a common concern for all cultural institutions and generally refers to preventing further destruction or deterioration to something or someplace falling under the heritage label. On the other hand, this can also mean promoting the enhancement and development of heritage objects and sites. For example, ÉPFC has several ongoing protection and development projects such as: the development of le Repos Saint-François d'Assise, the future and protection of Mount Royal, the development of le cimetière Notre-Dame-des-Neiges, and the heritage regulation of le square Dorchester. Similarly, cultural recognition has been a major concern due to the lack of inclusion or celebration, and little to no financial support (and inclusion) funerary and commemoration heritage has in Canadian cultural policy. Therefore, ÉPFC has been quite active in formal memorandum and public

consultations for the protection and development of funerary properties and for policies concerning the recognition of funerary heritage. In addition, the ecomuseum has also been involved in the development of several policies and laws (e.g., Law n° 82 - Cultural Heritage Act, Law n° 66 - Funeral Activities Act, Quebec's religious heritage, the City of Montréal's heritage policy, etc.). Ultimately, these actions and practices reflect a dedicated ethos to the protection and recognition of the funerary industry's sense of place and the relationship it has with its community, the space and people who use it.

Although space limitations prevent this paper from going too in depth with any of these activities, one thing is clear: as an ecomuseum case study, ÉPFC showcases a strong ethos that is grounded in a local sense of place. It is this ethos that has guided its practices towards activities that maintain and strengthen its grassroots relationships between the French funerary public and its environment. The clearest embodiment of this ethos is in the ecomuseum's self-description and institutional missions, values, and norms. Overall, this holistic approach creates open guidelines for community inclusion and solidarity for all funerary industry public (from working artisans and funeral directors to mourners and priests and ceremony personnel). Temporally speaking, ÉPFC's identity is a symbolic negotiation of public experiences between the community founders who established the museum, and the connections (new and old) that evolved along with their shared sense of place (also growing with each new member and partnered group). While the original aim of the ecomuseum was to question the future of Québec's cemeteries and conservation issues of monuments, it has grown with the aim of opening up spaces for diverse rituals related to death and the preservation of Québécois heritage (Viger, 2015).

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the ÉPFC case study, this research explored how the ecomuseum model used by this case illustrated two unique organizational elements. First, temporally speaking, public museums are focused on dealing with the present due to their loaded colonial heritages, controversial acquired and exhibited collections, and ongoing struggles on how to repatriate items. On the other hand, ÉPFC acknowledges the importance of fluidity in its temporal mission, which is coupled with its ethical aspiration to serve the public of “the past, present and future” (ÉPFC, 2022) through its narratives, inclusion practices, and overall collections. Unlike the classic public museum model that orients its structure around a dichotomous internal-external view of its public, ÉPFC showcased a flatter ecosystem relationship-bound orientation that included its public along with all surrounding elements and intangibles. Because of its positionality (an institution focused on funerary and commemorative heritage) and grassroots, relationship-focused ecomuseum model, there is a natural extension and locally developed expertise to include intangible aspects like spiritual beliefs and practices, myths and symbols, and environmental links. Secondly, spatially, the same systemic approach holistically views its geospatial identity as a relationship between people and its “territory, places and locations” (ÉPFC, 2022) in Québec and French North America. This place-inclusive relationship and design stands in opposition to the public museum’s structured and exclusive view of space where it is often limited to its physical building, often with global aims to further its tourism outreach. Together, the temporal and spatial emphasis implies a holistic view of its community. In other words, ÉPFC saw their structured institution less as a museum; rather, as an active constantly moving community and think-tank based on an ethos of forming more relationships, create and inform its members, and socially represent its public. Although we cannot say whether all ecomuseums are equally as successful with their relationships, ÉPFC’s use of the ecomuseum model does showcase its relational potential with communities.

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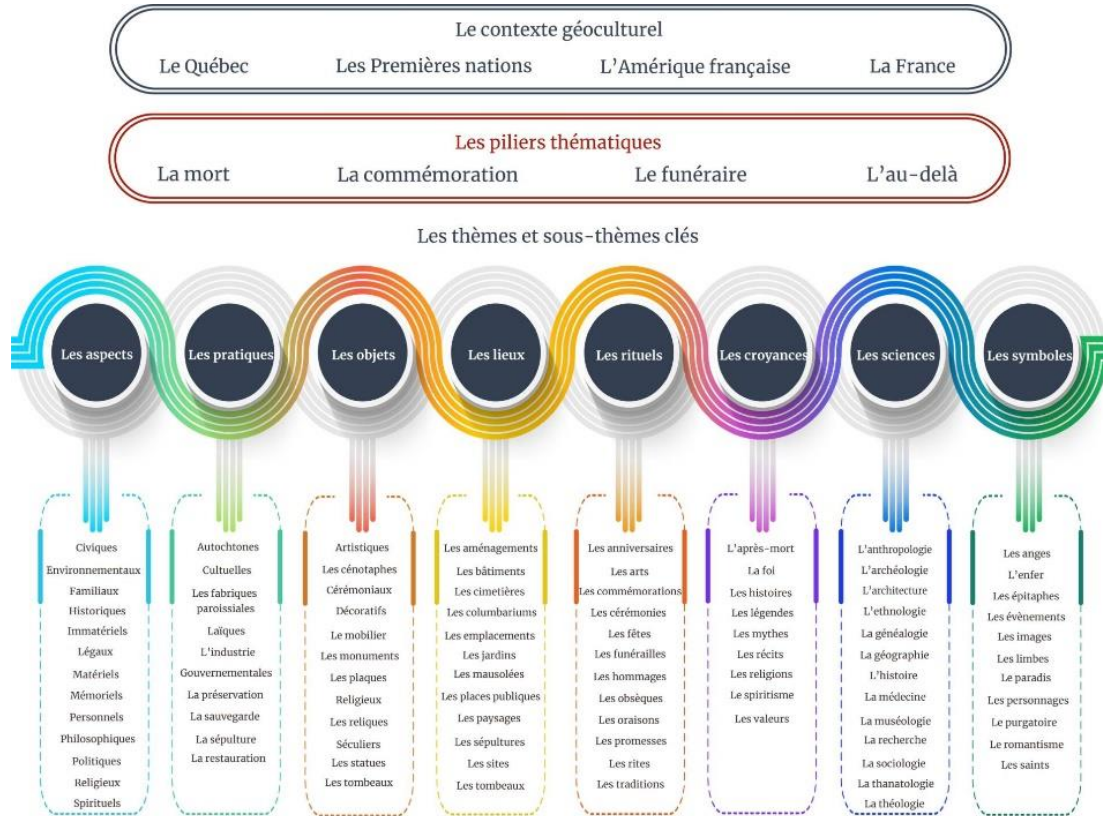
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APPENDIX A: THEMATIC MODEL



Received 10 Sept, 2023; Reviewed 10 Nov, 2023; Accepted 08 Dec, 2023