

CRITICAL ZONE: What's a Museum For?

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That we have a large network of museums in Cuba, which comprises all municipalities of the country, is truly a privilege, which we don't always take full advantage of.

When I was a child, as a primary school student, once a week we visited the Municipal Museum, not only to appreciate the collections, which we already knew by heart, but to become interested in various topics of local history.

It wasn't a sporadic activity. It was weekly scheduled. And it was fulfilled.

Some museums in the country still keep this link with schools; but others seem to sleep the heavy sleep of apathy and disinterest.

And we are not talking precisely about national museums, which in one way or another are guaranteed a permanent flow of public, which regularly develop clubs, gatherings, talks, presentations, scientific conferences ... We are talking about local museums, those located in small towns.

Of course, the collections there are usually smaller, which doesn't mean that they are less interesting. But truth be told the inhabitants of those places are likely to already have more than points of view.

Now, a museum is, it should be, much more than a display case with objects. It has to be a cultural center of reference for the community.

To a large extent, it depends on cultural authorities in each municipality that the museum has a stable and attractive program, which even transcends the four walls of the premises and spreads into the neighborhoods and work centers.

There are potentialities in all places. And there's an audience. And if it doesn't exist, it can be built.

On top of all that, museums have a perfectly defined responsibility: to investigate, study, promote the history of the localities. And that's a practically inexhaustible field.

The greater history, that of the nation, is nourished by these short stories. In fact, it's impossible to understand the logic of many great events without looking for the roots in the history of the communities.

It's a large field of study. And that's another task for municipal museums. The work of cultural extension is essential, because museums cannot be closed in themselves. It's not enough to wipe the dust from time to time: a few schemes need to be renewed and rethought.

Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff