

The Value of Collaboration and Sustainable Development Goals on the Issue of Native Artifacts in European Museums

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ABSTRACT

American Native communities are stepping away from the silence and showing their right to their cultural heritage, which can be found in museums because of colonization. Museums are trying to shift from a colonial attitude to decolonization in their exhibitions. Yet, the process is ongoing, European museums are still lagging behind American ones. Therefore, European museums have to learn from Native communities, although being geographically far away. By using a comparative approach

with a qualitative strategy, this study shows the difference between European and American museums, and the struggles they are facing to integrate Native communities in the creation of exhibitions. This research advocates for a comprehensive methodology using the Sustainable Development Goals to co-create value and to integrate common international groundwork for the improvement of the collaboration between Natives and museums.

INTRODUCTION

“Together, Joe Biden and I, are committed to writing a new history together, upholding our treaty responsibilities, and making meaningful investments in Native American communities” (Harris, 2020). Kamala Harris wrote this tweet for the Native American Heritage Day last November, all Native Americans¹ and non-Natives are using this day to raise the voice of those discriminated communities, they capitalize on this day thanks to social media such as Tik-tok, Twitter, Instagram or Facebook. Native users of these platforms, such as Shinanova, Autumn Peltier or Isabelle Chapedeau, are trying to educate people on what it means to be Native, that it is not just history, people are still living by ancient rituals and practices. They are taking ownership of their

¹ American Indian or Alaska Native: “A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment” (United-States Census Bureau). In this study the focus will be on Natives from North America and the terms Natives and Indigenous will be used interchangeably.

identity by using the internet and other media.

They are sharing the identity crises Natives are facing, as Hilary Weaver (2016: 63) demonstrates: not recognizing a culture, an *identity* is a type of oppression, because *“identity is a combination of self-identification and the perception of others”*. European colonizers changed the Natives’ identity by appointing to them other names, labelling all of the communities by the generic term “Indians”, but it is taking away the diversity of cultures of Native people (Sleeper-Smith, 2009). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that Natives are changing the narratives on their history, their identity and the representations that non-Natives people made for centuries (Weaver, 2016). This is why this study will not be on cultural appropriation or on the definition of Native identity; as a non-Native, my role is to find solutions to fight the oppression Native

communities faced, and are still facing, in the shape of *neo-colonialism*. Museums were based on the “*colonialist ideology*”: nowadays museums are still misrepresenting Natives by showing a distorted vision of the reality (Harrison, 1997).

Hence, there is a lack of knowledge and misconceptions on Native cultures due to biased Western representations. Furthermore, it shows that we do not understand the complexity of Native cultures, even when we have a lot of their artworks in Europe displayed in museums. Sometimes, the exhibitions are created through the prism of *white construction* (Lobo, Talbot and Morris, 2016) on how Native Americans were living and practicing their beliefs. Moreover, European museums are distant from the Native communities who could help to create meaningful exhibitions. Thus, the exhibitions are not made to understand the cultures of Native Americans but the point of view of

non-Natives, which is connected to the concept of *exoticism*: collecting foreign artifacts and bringing them back to Europe with an erroneous interpretation, leading to the creation of stories and reproduction of false representations of Natives (Mancall and Bleichmar, 2011). Indeed, Native artifacts exposed in European museums were collected by colonizers, not always with the consent of Natives, and were ending in what was called “*cabinet of curiosities*” which led to museums as we know them today (Mancall and Bleichmar 2011). It is not to be forgotten that most of the artifacts are attached to strong beliefs. Therefore, it is important to work, in the light of the Sustainable Goal n°4 “Quality Education”, to “*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*” (United Nations, 2015:14), by establishing a non-biased representation of Native cultures in museums. Notwithstanding the theft of

Native Art by Europeans and the lack of knowledge surrounding the Native artworks, which are increasing the sensitivity of Natives asking for their right to repatriation (Nafziger & Nicgorski, 2009).

The repatriation desire started days beyond recall, but progress has been made only some decades ago, thanks to different movements by archaeologists and Natives (Nafziger et al., 2009), with the UNESCO Convention of 1970 against illicit trafficking, and then with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 in the United States of America (USA), stating that institutions receiving federal funding need to repatriate cultural items to Native communities (Thom, Myers & Klugman, 1993). This Act helped meditations to start in the USA, but not in Europe. Even though the United Nations Declaration on the Right of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) (2008) states clearly in article 11, point 2

([APPENDIX A](#)), that if the theft of Indigenous Art happened, it is considered against international laws. This is in relation with the 16th Sustainable Development Goal “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions” which “*Promote[s] peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*” (United Nations, 2015: 14): by improving the relations between Natives and museums, it allows to respect the Indigenous rights. Europe is still far from mediation practices to be universal: the subject is discussed with French President, Mr. Macron, who is willing to start the repatriation of African artifacts (Macron, 2017), as well as an advisory committee who is putting pressure on the Dutch government to repatriate stolen artifacts (Advisory Committee on the National Policy Framework for Colonial Collections, 2020). This repatriation

movement is coping with Goal 16 but also with Goal 10 “Reduced Inequalities”, because it will allow Natives to have better access to their cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, museums need to start the mediation process, as the Dutch National Museum of World Cultures in Leiden², which is one of the first museums to create guidelines for repatriation (Hickley, 2020). Indeed, Art can be displayed in Europe but that has to be done by collaborating with the right persons, the long silenced voices of Natives, which can help to exhibit the artifacts from the past and present in more sensitive ways because “*extensive community involvement and collaboration help reproduce tribal values within the museum setting*” (Sleeper-Smith, 2009: 252). It is an issue of creating sustainable relations between communities and improving the view and the practices Europeans have for Native Art and traditions. This is associated with Goal 11

“Sustainable Cities and Communities”, willing to make the world more inclusive and to protect cultural heritage.

The question raised by these issues is: *How can European museums, in the context of SDGs, intensify their collaboration with American Native communities on the issue of Indigenous artifacts to allow for collective knowledge and understanding?*

The aim of this study is to gather the issues of foreign Native artifacts and museums’ responsibility towards Native communities in a call for consultation and dialogue. These issues are controversial, but European museums need to tackle them by understanding the underlying misconceptions and colonial standards attached to current Native artifacts exhibitions in Western countries. With the help of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, namely “Quality Education”, “Reduced Inequalities”,

² Volkenkunde Museum

“Sustainable Cities and Communities” and “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions”, this research is willing to demonstrate the duty of non-Natives to start a process of dialogue with Natives communities to end neocolonialism in museums.

The study is structured as follows, in the first section the existing literature on neocolonialism in museums will be discussed; to continue with the new representations of Natives and Native artifacts; to finish with the need to cope with the idea of sustainable communities. A second section presents the methodology used for the study. This leads to a third section introducing the empirical findings. Finally, the findings are discussed and conclusions and implications are drawn.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Problems of museums

Museums were built as storytellers, taking collections from private owners and cabinets of curiosities. They were a sign of authority and power over the Natives (Mancall &

Bleichmar, 2011). They are the accumulation of objects, taken away during colonization or bought from oppressed populations which had no choice but to sell their cultural heritage to survive. As the story of the White Mountain Apache from Arizona, which Hoerig (2011) presents in his anthropology-based research for more collaboration in museums. This Native community suffered oppressions during the 19th and 20th century by the destruction of their economy in order to alienate the population. They had only their agriculture to survive, and had to sell objects to sustain. That is how this community lost all their sacred belongings to the hands of Charles Owen who was working for a museum. It was a “*mental pain*” to sell these objects because they are the legacy of their ancestors. Many of the objects ended in the Field Museum of Chicago and displayed without the expert eye and knowledge of Natives. Museums were, and some still are,

telling the stories of white people, spreading stereotypes about Natives because of the objects collected and how they were presented to visitors in museums (Sleeper-Smith, 2009). Thus, it created an *interpretative context* which is not showing the reality of Native cultures. Museums, when displaying Art from former colonies, are, therefore, one of the hands of colonialism, through the insidious use of stereotypes and misconception to disseminate false and hurtful information on Natives.

Museums, in their will to change to a more collaborative form, fell into a neocolonial process, by still being the center of the authority. They are still collecting, exhibiting and educating, which is leading to the standardization of knowledge (Archambault, 2011; Boast, 2011; Harrison, 1997). Notwithstanding the efforts of curators since the 1970s in the USA, to integrate Natives in the process of

exhibition: for example, the National Museum of the American Indian in New-York implemented a Collecting Policy to respect the Natives' choices for their artifacts (Boast, 2011).

However, museums still face the risk of being *disconnected* from the source communities, meaning that Native people do not and/or cannot share the knowledge about the object displayed in the museum, and new generations do not have the knowledge anymore as artifacts were taken away (Chavez Lamar, 2019). American museums can have a stronger link with the Natives community thanks to the physical proximity, but it is still not enough because of this disconnection. Yet, for museums in Europe this risk is higher due to the geographical distance. Natives are still pressuring museums and governments to ensure an access for new generations to their cultural heritage (Van Broekhoven, Buijs & Hoven, 2011). European museums have to find new

ways of creating co-narratives between curators and Natives, because objects have a role to teach too, and new generations must have access to them. Van Broekhoven and colleagues thought about visual and virtual repatriation to have a connection with the communities. It is linked to the fact that museums are neoliberal, because some are open access, and the Internet is an easy and fast way to connect people to their heritage (Boast, 2011). In a time of global pandemic and lockdown, these entryways to museums are increasingly used to have access to knowledge from home.

Museums still face a lot of challenges, as remainders of colonialism, they “*remind us that colonized landscapes were once the homelands of these oppressed peoples*” (Sleeper-Smith, 2009: 4). Thus, museums have to recognize other centers of knowledge, for example tribal museums which are a growing force in the USA (Boast, 2011).

New representations

The *representation*, meaning “*the way that something or someone is shown or described*”³, changes due to subjectivity: a bowl will not be presented the same depending on the information you have about it and the relation you have to it. Natives have a different relation to objects than Western people: objects are animated, therefore the representation that a Native and a Western person will have on them will totally differ (Van Broekhoven et al., 2011). It needs to be understood that a realignment of knowledge is necessary for museums to be able to engage in educational practices. Furthermore, knowledge is subjective as it depends on the perspective of the teacher: the whole process to acquire knowledge is social, so dependent on the context and environment which can change (Boast, 2011). Thus, museums, at the same time the teacher and the environment, are responsible

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<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/representation>

for providing valid and shared knowledge to visitors.

Unfortunately, Natives are suffering from misrepresentations of their culture and their traditions. They were represented as *the other* in Europe, even more because it is a population from far away, from the New World, therefore romanticized (Harrison, 1997; Mancall & Bleichmar, 2011). Nonetheless, nowadays, museums are trying to include Native communities in their effort to change the representation of Natives, from Indian to Natives/Indigenous communities with diverse and rich cultures (Harrison, 1997). Indeed, Native communities are taking the problem in their own hands by creating *tribal museums*, using their own narrative. They are keen to become new centers of Native knowledge for younger generations. Museums cannot have a totalizing vision, History is not just a Western point of view. A new representation of Native culture is only possible if

museums are ready to experience a shift in their practices, as Van Broekhoven and colleagues proposed (2011: 13). They also explained that museums should be seen as “*resources for living cultures*”, and give a foreground role to Native communities. And finally museums should seek partnerships. This shift will allow curators to be “*sensitive*” and “*informed*” (Archambault, 2011: 20), and therefore to favor more collaboration with Natives. Indeed, if a person feels heard and understood thanks to interest in his/her culture, the dialogue will be easier.

Yet, it is not only the gentle will of museums that changed the representation of Natives, but also their fight for rights and the translation of these in national and international laws. It started in the USA with the Antiquities Act in 1906: the President can declare a monument, a land to be protected by law. Then the Roerich Pact in 1935 was made to protect culture over

military necessities in America. In the 1960s archaeologists and Natives became more resolute in the fight for repatriation and protection of their cultural heritage (Nafziger et al., 2009). In the USA, it led to the NAGPRA⁴ in 1990, which obligates federal institutions and federal funded organizations to repatriate any item which has a spiritual and/or cultural importance for Native communities. On an international scale, it started mainly with The Hague Convention⁵ in 1954, which protects any cultural heritage during a conflict. Then, the creation of UNESCO, in 1945 was also an important step for the protection of cultural heritage. By implementing these national and international laws, they were fighting against colonization and the doctrine of Discovery, which is a religious act of possession introduced by Columbus in the 15th century. However, this doctrine is still

⁴ Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

⁵ The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflicts

used today to withhold the rights of Natives. This is why the UNDRIP of 2008 is important. For our study, articles 8 and 11 ([APPENDIX A](#)) are crucial as they emphasize the rights of Indigenous people to protect their cultural heritage (UN, 2008). These two articles are protecting the cultural heritage and identity of Indigenous people, but it needs to be remembered that Australia, Canada, New-Zealand and the USA who once voted against the Declaration, now support it. It shows that the rights of Natives can be in danger, that they need to be strengthened by the soft power of culture. Museums have a role to play in the respect and protection of Natives' rights.

Sustainable communities

Sustainable communities, Goal 11 of the SDGs, are one of the most important challenges of the past decades and the ones to come: it aims to *“renew and plan cities and other human settlements in a way that offers opportunities for all, with access to basic services, energy, housing,*

transportation and green public spaces, while reducing resource use and environmental impact” (Eurostat, 2020). To be a sustainable community, you need to cope with the definition of Sustainable Development proposed by the Brundtland report in 1987, “*a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”. In the context of Native cultural heritage and museums, the sensitive and collaborative shift of museums can help to achieve this goal.

Hence, the collaboration on exhibition will not only have an impact on museums and stakeholders but also on the whole community (Hoerig, 2010). In regards to sustainability and the role of museums towards the whole community, museums need to take their role of care-takers, and bring inside these institutions Natives’ perspectives, which will add to the common

knowledge and to the legitimacy of the museum (Chavez Lamar, 2019). Museums need to let go of their authority on knowledge: it is what Hoerig (2010: 70) calls *realignment of authority* or Clifford (1997: 210) with *sharing of authority* or Lonetree (2012) with *decolonizing museums*. It will allow the deconstruction of the neo-colonial museums and help the creation of shared places for education with non-biased knowledge. It is already happening in some museums. Nevertheless, colonial representations remain as the *reciprocity* between communities and museums is not strong enough (Hoerig, 2010). Although museums are hiring Native consultants, there is still little going back to the community, and the final choice is still in the hands of the museum. To be sustainable, the situation needs to be win/win, the museum needs to think like firms and create shared value (Porter & Kramer, 2011), meaning that the value is not

only created for the firm but also for the society. Nevertheless, not to open a profit-driven expertise, museums can go further by entering in a process of value co-creation (Upward & Jones, 2016), meaning that they need Native communities to create this value. This attempt can be seen with tribal museums which care about the needs of their community, thus they have more chances of creating value. It is therefore important to create *community-collaborative exhibitions* which will connect the objects to its history and to the community where it is coming from (Lonetree, 2012).

There are many ways to integrate Native communities in the process of creating an exhibition, and therefore generating outcomes for the whole community. Hence, the change in practices can have impacts which help to cope with some of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN) (2015).

Museums have a social role, as emphasized by UNESCO (2015: 5): they are a “*support*”, a “*vital public space*”, thus they have a role to play for the SDGs. By ensuring a non-biased education to Natives and non-Natives through exhibitions of Native artifacts, the Goal 4 “Quality Education” is targeted. Furthermore, helping Native communities to have access to their heritage through loans and/or “*virtual repatriation*” (Van Broekhoven et al., 2011), supports Goal 10 “Reduced Inequalities”: students in Native communities are suffering from lower quality of education and more discrimination than non-Natives in the USA, particularly because they do not have access to the same resources (Gentry & Fugate, 2012). Thus, the recognition of their knowledge by museums and the possibility for the new generation to have access to it, is a way to reduce the systematic inequalities they suffer from. Finally, the recognition of Native knowledge in museums and their

impact as stakeholders will allow museums to be more legitimate, and will help the dialogue between Natives and non-Natives on repatriation, as per Goal 16 “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions”. Museums can, therefore, have a positive impact on various SDGs, and help create sustainable communities, Goal 11.

METHODS

To answer the question raised by this study, I used a qualitative strategy and comparative design by cross-cultural approach by interviewing three European curators and three American curators. The approach is meant to compare the management of museums in different cultural contexts, the North American and European ones. As the study is willing to emerge with a comprehensive process of collaboration in the context of SDGs, qualitative research by induction is the best research strategy (Bell, Bryman & Harley., 2019).

Data collection

To start the data collection, I used the purposive sampling method, I chose the participants based on my research question (Bell et al., 2019). Three curators in European museums were interviewed as well as three curators, including two Native curators, in North American museums. The three European Museums were the Volkenkunde Museum (VM) in Leiden, The Netherlands, which is already collaborating with Natives from Greenland to build their exhibition. The Nouveau Monde Museum (NMM) in La Rochelle, France, is interesting not only because of the will of the French President to repatriate some artifacts in former colonies but also because the museum displays only artifacts from America to illustrate colonization. Furthermore, the Weltkulturen Museum (WM) in Frankfurt, Germany, with a particular exhibition “Posted! Reflections of Native North America” in 2019 where they only used the voices of Natives to explain

their story. It is important to keep in mind that the three cases are in Europe, located in former colonial States, the Netherlands, France and Germany. They all engaged in new practices to change from colonial museums to museums. Therefore, I conducted three semi-structured interviews to acquire primary data ([APPENDIX B](#)) with the curators to understand the functioning of the museums: more precisely, how they are building and formalizing exhibitions. The focus then shifted to their collections of Native artifacts and how they are displaying it, to finally introduce the topic of collaboration regarding Native artifacts.

Nevertheless, to conduct rigorous and cross-cultural research, the point of view of Natives has to be understood, particularly that of Native curators in North American museums. This methodology helped to contrast and compare the efforts done by European museums and the

practices implemented in American museums. Three museums from the USA were discussed. First, the National Museum of American Indian (NMAI) in Washington DC, the most known museum on Native Art and culture, created in 2004. Secondly, the Field Museum (FM) in Chicago, which is integrating collaboration in their exhibition process and practices. Finally, the Mille Lacs Indian Museum (MLIM), an “hybrid tribal museum” created by the close collaboration of curators and the Native community. I conducted semi-structured interviews ([APPENDIX B](#)) with the curators to understand the organization of the museums, the place of the Native community in the museum and how they are collaborating.

The six interviews were added to secondary data, by documentation research on the museums and their internal processes.

Data analysis

Six interviews were conducted between April and May 2021, through video calls

lasting between 40 minutes and 1 hour 15 minutes. The interviews have been transcribed with the help of a software, otter⁶ and checked again manually. Thanks to a thematic analysis, the interviews were coded into themes and sub-themes to be analyzed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As Ryan and Bernard (2003) prescribed, I searched for repetition, cultural expression, metaphors and analogies, shifts in the discourse, theoretical concepts, language connectors, missing data and differences and similarities. These interviews offered deeper insights into the difficulties faced by European museums in their search for more collaboration; they were also a way to compare different approaches to collaboration from the USA.

Ethics

To improve the reliability and validity of the study, a consent form ([APPENDIX C](#)) was presented to the participant, via email, and it had to be sent back signed by the researchers

and the participants ([APPENDIX D](#)). Nevertheless, the consent to participate in the study was asked again at the beginning of the interview. It helped to ensure the rigor and strength (Bell et al., 2019) of the research as well as the understanding of both parties. My role as a researcher was to stay unbiased and to avoid any unthoughtful mistakes.

FINDINGS

The participants are working professionals in museums, therefore they have an inside view of how museums and exhibition processes are happening. Their contexts are different because of their geographical position. Thus, these differences will be important to contrast the findings, and understand how museums can work differently and similarly. Thanks to the answers of the participants ([APPENDIX D](#)), the study demonstrates that museums and their members are enhancing an important dialogue toward more inclusive, respectful and sustainable practices.

⁶ <https://get.otter.ai/interview-transcription/>

Museums are educational institutions

The participants could all agree on the role of museums in society, as an educational role. Indeed, to the question “*For you, what is the role of museums?*”, they answered “*to educate people*” (Zimmerman, MLIM), “*continue to be education*” (Wali, FM), “*to create awareness*” (Woerlee, VM), “*it’s education and it’s sharing*” (Lindner, WM), “*there is a transmission role*” (Moreau, MNM). Museums have a role towards society; some participants were also adding the notion of responsibility to their definition, they need to help people to “*wonder*” (Moreau, MNM), to share knowledge. The term “knowledge” was also questioned by one of the participants, because knowledge must not be taken away from a group of people, here the Natives, and given away; it is about understanding the differences of cultures and embracing them.

The will to know more about other cultures and to be educated about different

subjects is one of the reasons people go to museums, as Alaka Wali from the Field museum in Chicago is pinpointing: “*museums to educate people is an alternative to the academic in education, because it is multidimensional*”, to help people learn what they did not learn. Some of the respondents, from the USA and Europe are showing that the misconceptions about Native Americans are legion: “*There is a lot of ignorance*” (Wali, FM), “*school groups, they’re still wearing feathers*” (Woerlee, VM) showing that there is still “*a long way to go*” (Woerlee, VM). Nonetheless, they are not seeing this lack of knowledge as an end. They are showing practices and techniques that they are implementing to help visitors understand the complexity of Native cultures. They are starting dialogues with the visitors, at the NMAI for instance, to guide their understanding of the history of the Native people; they are programming interactive

activities to show that the Native cultures are still alive, that they evolved. Furthermore, there is an important challenge for museums to show that Native cultures are living cultures, the MLIM in Minnesota is organizing many workshops and is working with Native contemporary artists to show the visitors that Native cultures are living and thriving. It seems that museums are using the help of Native artists to highlight the dynamism of Native cultures. The last exhibition at the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden named “First Americans: Honoring Indigenous Resilience and Creativity” called artists to emphasize the contemporary work of Native people.

The participants also accentuated the importance of showing the diversity of Native American cultures. Mandy Van Heuvelen (NMAI) indicated that one of her challenges is being in front of the diversity of cultures and not being able to know everything, as well as Markus Lindner, guest

curator in the Weltkulturen Museum, as you cannot get in touch with everybody. Nevertheless, they are *compelling* visitors to try and understand those cultures, thanks to the “*layers of information, and people can access what they want to access*” (Lindner, WM). Museums need to “*compel [the visitors] to change their perspective about culture*”, as Alaka Wali (FM) mentioned. The visitors do not have the same knowledge, thus curators and managers of museums need to find how to make an exhibition the clearest and most enjoyable possible. They need to tickle visitors’ curiosity. Curators, managers and cultural interpreters are trying to create a more lively and attractive experience for the visitors.

Museums are institutions that have a role to play in society, they educate visitors on various topics: for Native American cultures, they are showing the diversity, the heritage, the difficulties, the colonization, and the adaptation of the cultures.

Nevertheless, museums are facing many challenges on which they still have to work on.

Museums are changing institutions

The participants agreed on the fact that museums are looking forward to implementing more practices toward respectful exhibitions when working with Native artifacts. As Markus Lindner explained, the dialogue for the recognition of the museum's colonial heritage started in the 1970s, they have come a long way to understand that the institution is linked to colonialism which needs to be told. Museums are telling the stories of colonization, but nowadays Native people do not want that. They want museums to talk about their cultures. Travis Zimmerman (MLIM) is not seeing colonization as a part of the identity of Native people: *“that’s not what American Indians are all about”*. In the museum, with the help of the Advisory Committee composed of members of the Ojibwe community, he is trying to tell the

story of the people, of the language, of the celebrations, of their life. It does not mean that colonization is not part of the story but *“[they] are not defined by the tragedy”* (Zimmerman, MLIM). Museums, by listening to Native people, are helping them tell their story. The word “story” appeared many times in the different interviews: giving a voice to Natives is a goal of the museums.

Nowadays museums are trying to collaborate more when it comes to Native artifacts, they understand that they are not experts anymore. Anne-Marie Woerlee, from the Volkenkunde Museum in Leiden explained it: *“I’m an experienced exhibition maker; [...]. But, you really have to listen [to the communities the artifacts are coming from]”*. Mélanie Moreau (NMM, La Rochelle) explained that for an exhibition on Inuit people from what is now Canada, she did not have enough knowledge and that humility is key. She is also emphasizing the

fact that, in Europe, there is the risk of facing eurocentrism when creating and visiting exhibitions. Therefore, it is important not to “*pretend to be a specialist*” (Moreau, NMM). Moreover, having this humility concerning Native collections is helping to build trust relationships which are needed for collaborating. Markus Lindner particularly covered the trust issues that Native people can suffer from; museums need to start a dialogue and build the relationships by showing their good faith and their progressive practices. It seems that museums managed to create these relations by giving a voice to Native people. Indeed all the museums interviewed realized one or more exhibitions in collaboration with Native people and not only non-Native specialists. However, asking for help to design exhibitions is not only important for the relevance of the stories but also for the creation of a “*safe space*” (Anne-Marie Woerlee, VM) for Native people. The word

is used by some of the interviewees to describe a place where Native people feel comfortable to go to, where they feel like they are legitimate and where their voices are heard. The NMAI was created for Native people and it is important for them to feel welcomed. To illustrate this focus, Mandy Van Heuvelen explained an event where the security of the museum did not allow Native people to enter because they thought they were protestors. It was a problem for the museum and its image, she showed that it is not what should have happened. It is vital to maintain the trust relationship with Native communities to allow museums to educate.

Museums are also using artifacts exchanges as a tool of collaboration: the loans that museums are giving or are being given are long term, from 5 to 100 years. They are collaborating, in the USA, with cultural centers in the reservations; the NMAI is granting many loans because the majority of the Native people are situated in

the West part of the USA and the NMAI is on the East coast. Therefore it is difficult for Native communities to see the artifacts. They are implementing not only loans, exchanges of exhibitions but also online meetings: as the webinar “Youth in Action” for young Native activists to share their experiences and thoughts. The COVID pandemic forced museums to look for virtual solutions: online tours were implemented, when their teams and budget allowed them to. Nevertheless, digitalization is a way for Indigenous to have access to their heritage when it is not in their communities and they do not have the opportunity to travel. Museums are shifting toward practices which enhance their relations with Native communities, and curators and managers are ready to implement more of them.

Museums are still struggling institutions

Museums are changing and are tackling multiple challenges with what they know best: sharing, caring and educating.

Nevertheless, the participants showed obstacles that museums are still struggling with. The most recurring problem is probably financial: museums do not always have the sufficient resources for loans, because of insurance and logistic costs. It was the main obstacle for Mélanie Moreau (NMM), who explained that she is more than willing to collaborate and to exchange exhibitions but it is too expensive for this small scale museum. This barrier was also added to the time pressure to create exhibitions. Firstly, when an exhibition is decided by the museums and its managers, the conception needs to be pretty fast to offer visitors a nice experience. Therefore it is putting pressure on the curators to find contacts and artifacts. Secondly, the time pressure is also coming directly from the visitors and the society, as Mandy Van Heuvelen (NMAI) highlighted, after a protest for the Dakota Pipeline, an important Native community gathered in Washington

DC and all over the USA to protest. They wanted the museum to help them in the protest. Unfortunately, making an exhibition takes time: *“a lot of people don't understand the amount of time it takes to [...] change an exhibition or something like that”* (Van Heuvelen, NMAI). Curators and managers are enthusiastic about the integration of even more collaboration, which can entail repatriation. The interrogated museums are seeing repatriation as normal, as something that should be done with the help of a dialogue with Native communities. Without this dialogue there can be problems, as Markus Lindner (WM) explained about the NAGPRA, *“even Repatriation Act doesn't work for a lot of Native communities because they don't want to have the bones back.”*, for various reasons. Nevertheless, it is important to have a conversation as sometimes human remains, to be repatriated under the NAGRA to their origin community, cannot be identified, and Mandy

Van Heuvelen and her colleagues had a dialogue with a Cherokee community to take the remains and proceed to a burial ceremony. Native communities can be very different, you cannot expect the same from different communities as they do not have the same culture. Museums are still involved in important internal and external discussions to learn how to be the most respectful with the collections they have. This attitude is seen among all interviewees who were happy with how far they have come, notwithstanding that they still have a long way to go. Discussions are also happening with national governments, in the USA the decisions of repatriation were taken in 1990 and before, in Europe laws are coming bit by bit, as Anne-Marie Woerlee is emphasizing. The collections of the Volkenkunde museum are national, therefore the government needs to give its permission. She ended up raising the issue of ownership, to whom artifacts legally belong? The

interviewees were sometimes reminded that governments and laws are slower than the changes they would like to pursue.

Nevertheless, curators and managers are showing the visitors a progressivist view of the collection, with a particular focus on the context of each artifact, linking it to a community and showing that these communities are not relics of the past but living and thriving. They are trying to start a dialogue with the visitors, but as already mentioned, curators need “*to pick [the visitors] up somehow, somewhere...*” (Lindner, WM), they do not have the same knowledge on Native American, so the curators must find a method to open constructive dialogues. Mandy Van Heuvelen (NMAI) is showing that asking random questions to visitors about how they would experience what Native Americans are experiencing was proven to be useful for visitors to be more understanding of the cultures. Furthermore, curators are also

planning festivals: as at the MLIM and at the NMAI, or activities with Natives explaining their culture. However, it is more difficult for European museums to organize events with Natives because of the costs and the distance. Markus Lindner (WM) and Mélanie Moreau (NMM) are stressing this point when talking about collaboration: the best chance they have is inviting Native people to come to Europe, which is not an easy solution. The context matters when trying to justify museums, because as the interviewees showed, museums in the USA are not under the same legislation. Furthermore they were not founded at the same time, as with European museums.

Nonetheless, they do not have written rules for the exhibition process, to ensure respectful treatment of artifacts. The NMAI and the MLIM still have some documents: the NMAI was created by the National Museum of the American Indian Act⁷ and by “*policies [...] and protocols*”

⁷ November 28, 1989, Public Law 101-185

that the museum follows, as well as public programs to start discussions with Native communities. Travis Zimmerman (MLIM) explained that the Advisory Council aided the exhibition, by ensuring that the exhibitions are respectful and accurate. Moreover, the museum is working on an institutional acknowledgment about the relationships between the Minnesota Historical Society, which is the operator of the sites of Minnesota, and the Native tribes in Minnesota. Mr. Zimmerman stressed that the Institution has a colonial past which is sometimes “*omitted*”, that is why it is really important for the museum to ensure that the Institution above them is in line with their values. Older museums are following more tacit rules and their knowledge acquired through collaboration, to ensure that exhibitions are respectful and relevant. The question was still asked about the SDGs, to know if it is a framework they follow. The interviewees did not know about it, and just

by the name they tried to explain the environmental practices of the museum, as energy efficient buildings for example. Nevertheless, after explaining briefly the point of these SDGs, they acknowledged that they were following them without knowing.

DISCUSSION

This study adds to the knowledge on museums and their way of handling Native artifacts. The participants all cared for the respectful display of Native artifacts, and were in the process of improving their practices. They acknowledged that even if a lot was done for collaborating in museums, there is still a long way to go to ensure that the work of the museum is “*relevant*” (Moreau, NMM) and shares all “*sides of the story*” (Zimmerman, MLIM). Nevertheless, European museums want to intensify their collaboration with Native communities to lead to collective knowledge; curators and managers are willing, but some barriers are hindering difficulties to the process.

As all the participants described, museums are spaces of education: alternative to school, and according to the current definition of the International Council of Museums (2007): “*A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.*”. Therefore they have a responsibility toward the civil society, they “*serve a public benefit*” (Yerkovitch, 2016: 242). This responsibility enhances the importance of collaboration practices in museums, the stories need to be told by all parties as well as a dialogue about the stewardship of the collections (De Jong & Grit, 2015). Non-Native curators can bring their expertise on how to build exhibitions, but Natives will bring the meaning behind the artifacts: they will help

to make them more alive, because Native artifacts are seen as alive and the cultures need to be understood as alive as well (Van Broekhoven, 2011). Yet, even with collaboration, some barriers are still very much present for curators. Education is the main purpose of museums, but it can be difficult to reach all visitors. The participants were showing that visitors can be ignorant and sometimes clueless, thus their attitudes can be hurtful for Native communities and it will not help a common understanding of Native communities. Therefore, curators and managers imagined various methods to include the visitors and to help share information. It can be through asking thoughtful questions, which guide the visitor to connect his/her own life to the Native cultures and history. Some museums have important programs for children, and are hoping, as Mélanie Moreau (NMM), for the children to share with their parents. Another way is to include activities

animated by Native people as it is done in most of the museums. This last possibility is more difficult for European Museums to implement, due to the costs involved and the physical distance between Europe and Native communities. By starting collaboration and trying to educate the public, museums are helping to reach Goal 4 of the SDGs “Quality Education”.

Curators and museum specialists had to understand as well that they are not the only ones with knowledge, the power needs to be more balanced, and museums have to “*break down existing social power relations*” (Quinn, 2017: 23). As Mélanie Moreau (NMM) explained: “*we are not pretending to know as much as Native people. There is some kind of humility to have*”, and Lonetree (2012) emphasizes the importance of humility when meeting with the Native Advisory Council of the MLIM. It is important for museums to realize that they are not the authority anymore, even if

they have the last word on the exhibitions, there is a shared authority to implement (Yerkovitch, 2016). Yet, they also need to understand their colonial past. It seems that all the participants understood the colonial meaning behind museums, and they want to move forward by keeping this fact in mind. Museums are “*constructed to tell stories about Western, rather than Indigenous, society*” (Sleeper-Smith, 2009: 1), by sharing the authority on the exhibition processes, museums can build a new relation with Native communities. The participants highlighted the importance of building a trust relationship and being flexible on the processes (Yerkovitch, 2016), thus telling stories including Native voices. Museums have to legitimize “*marginal voices*” (Turunen, 2020: 1024). They need to integrate them in the museums’ network. They are the knowledge, but it cannot be taken away, otherwise we risk falling into colonialism again (Van Broekhoven, 2011).

There needs to be reciprocity (Hoerig, 2010), which can be done by accepting for some artifacts to return to the community for important events or for extensive loans, as the NMAI is doing. The solution will be found by creating an active collaboration with Native people, to understand their needs and their desires. These barriers are known and cared for by museums, this is an ongoing process which is starting to be well understood. They are becoming stronger institutions, more transparent and participatory, starting to achieve Goal 16 “Peace, Justice and Strong Institution”, as well as Goal 10 “Reduced Inequalities”.

Hence, museums need to advocate for online participation: the global COVID pandemic rushed the museums’ intention with online events. Some museums implemented numerous events during the pandemic, but it seems that only the biggest museums could do it. Indeed, setting up online events takes time and resources. Yet,

it allows Native communities to participate more in the creation of exhibition and knowledge, even if they are far away, a change that Mandy Van Heuvelen (NMAI) saw during this period. She contacted young Native activists and more were able to participate due to the easy access. Fischer, Lundin and Linberg (2020) are advocating for the need to use technology to access opportunities for learning; they also emphasize the fact that humans need to participate in this learning tool. Participation is the biggest issue that museums are facing, and it is a barrier for more collaboration. They need to fully integrate the communities, Native and non-Native, in the process of creation; non-Native people need to learn why Native cultures are so different and diverse, this will help museums to be more than a contact zone (Clifford, 1997) but cross-cultural zones (Hogsden & Poulter, 2012). Museums are educating but are also trying to include everyone, going

toward, particularly, Goal 10 “Reduced Inequalities”.

Although museums are struggling, they are trying to build “Sustainable Cities and Communities”, Goal 11, because they are caretakers, they are protecting the cultural heritage for the next generations (Nafziger, 2009). To achieve this goal they need to integrate the public, as Mélanie Moreau emphasized: thanks to participatory exhibitions, the visitors understood better the value of cultural heritage and the work that is done by museums. Thus, visitors are becoming caretakers as well. Nevertheless, to be sustainable, museums need to exchange knowledge with their network and Natives, otherwise they will not be a community. Hogsden and Poulter (2012) are presenting the digital contact network, which can be a way to have more exchanges between cultures and to allow polyvocality, meaning that each center of the network can be represented equally.

Finally, museums are following without knowing the SDGs, as can be seen in the conceptual model ([APPENDIX E](#)), they are advocating for better education, for less inequalities, for strong museums, transparent and respectful and for sustainable communities, for the protection of the artifacts. McGhie (2019) highlighted that the recommendations of UNESCO and ICOM are linked to the SDGs, and that museums should follow them for global understanding with different sectors as well. Nevertheless, most of the museums, the eldest, do not have written rules concerning the processes to follow with Native artifacts. In the USA, they have legislation and for the newest museums, the NMAI and the MLIM, they have internal rules. As the conceptual model is outlining, Museums with a common international basis, as SDGs approved by 193 countries, could implement more comprehensive practices toward Native people, for collaboration between

countries. The international basis, provided by the SDGs, is important for museums to exchange and Native people to feel welcome everywhere, thus easing the collaboration.

Implications

This study holds important practical implications for the future of museums. The barriers for European museums to intensify their collaboration with Native communities are numerous. Nevertheless the SDGs can be a solution to face those challenges. The SDGs, voted during the Paris Agreement in 2015, need to be achieved by the countries that approved them. These countries need to implement policies to reach them. Museums need to urge for higher financial resources to reach these goals, showing that museums are fulfilling minimum 4 Goals: 4, 10, 11 and 16. SDGs should be implemented by museums to put pressure on governments to help them comply with these goals. This study offers a different perspective on the issue of Native artifacts in European museums: it is linking the SDGs, that are not

only about the environment, museums and the will to collaborate more with Natives, thus adding to the work of McGhie (2019). The SDGs can help to include Natives into the international museums' network by showing that their participation is critical for the sake of a sustainable future.

Limitations

It needs not to be forgotten that qualitative research is facing limitations, mainly because of the difficulties to generalize the findings and the subjectivity of both the participants and the interviewees (Bell et al., 2019). Thus, the interviews were written with an important care put on objectivity. Furthermore, the possibility to compare and contrast by interviewing curators in different contexts, thanks to cross-cultural research, helped to improve generalizability.

Furthermore, the fact that the interviewees chosen were museum employees can hint toward a biased view due to their will to protect the institution for

which one works for. Notwithstanding the importance of context in this study, the topic can be sensitive due to one's history with colonization.

Further studies

Nonetheless, further research should focus on interviewing Native communities outside of museums, to understand what they are looking for in museums and if the SDGs could fit their claims. Furthermore, politicians and policymakers have to be

integrated in the study as they are the ones controlling the ownership of the artifacts, the possibility of repatriation and the budget allocated to culture. Therefore, it is important to understand their position on the topic. This study is leading to the repatriation issue, which is taken more seriously than before in Europe: the repatriation of Native artifacts is part of their right stipulated in the UNDRIP (2008).

APPENDIX A

Article 8 and 11 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, United-Nations, 2008

“Article 8

1. Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.
2. States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for:
 - (a) Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities;
 - (b) Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources;
 - (c) Any form of forced population transfer which has the aim or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights;
 - (d) Any form of forced assimilation or integration;
 - (e) Any form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them.”

“Article 11

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain,

protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.

2. States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs.”

APPENDIX B

Interview guide - European Museums

Introduction

- Summary of my ongoing work
- Consent form
- + I am a student, I am a learner, I will be glad if you could give me the information to write a thesis that will make sense.

I- Personal Questions

- Can you introduce yourself ? (education, background ...)
- Why did you start working in a museum ?
- What is your role inside the museum ? (if not answered before)
- General question : in a sentence, to you, what is the role of museums ?
- (Do you have a particular appeal for Native Art ?)

II- Organization of the museum (internal + external (if exchanges))

- What is a normal day in the museum ?
- How long does it take to build an exhibition ? (Storytelling, logistics ...)
- What are the rules, do you have a certain code of conduct ? (rephrase)
- Do you build the exhibitions only with your own collections ? (ask to elaborate)
- How does the process of exchange of artifacts work ?
- Does it happen often ? (ask if mainly in Europe and also with international museums)
- How many different collections is the museum taking care of ?

III- Native Collections

- Is it difficult to work with foreign artifacts ?
- As a curator, how do you manage to give a sense to the collection you present ? (can be seen as past objects, difficult to read ...)
- I saw the “...” exhibition, how did you create it ? (number of ppl, process, storytelling)
- You have a beautiful Native Art collection, where is it coming from (different tribes ?), how do you take care of it ?
- Do you have other projects concerning Native collections ?

IV- SDGs (depending on how the interview is going otherwise go to V)

Museums were often seen as biased, due to their history, nevertheless it is changing, your museum is an example.

- How do you think museums could improve their objectivity ? (even if talking about Art which is subjective)
- Which practices are you implementing to get rid of the old image of museums ?
- What would be the museum of the future, link to the 2030 Agenda ?
- Many organizations are implementing some SDGs, is it something possible for the museum ?

V- Ending questions

- What is the “biggest flex” of museums (or the museum you are working for) ?/ What is the role of museums nowadays ? (linked to the question in I-, to see if there is a difference)
- Is there something you would like to share before ending the interview ? About the functioning of the museums, the Native collections ... ?
- Could you advise some documentation about your museum ?

Thank you for your time !

Interview guide - American Museums

Introduction

- Summary of my ongoing work
- Consent form
- + I am a student, I am a learner, I will be glad if you could give me the information to write a thesis that will make sense.

I- Personal Questions

- Can you introduce yourself ? (education, background ...)
- Why did you start working in a museum ?
- What is your role inside the museum ? (if not answered before)
- General question : in a sentence, to you, what is the role of museums ?
- (Do you have a particular appeal for Native Art ?)

II- Organization of the museum (internal + external (if exchanges))

- What is a normal day in the museum ?
- How long does it take to build an exhibition ? (Storytelling, logistics ...)
- What are the rules, do you have a certain code of conduct ? (rephrase)
- Do you build the exhibitions only with your own collections ? (ask to elaborate)
- How does the process of exchange of artifacts work ?
- Does it happen often ? (ask if mainly in Europe and also with international museums)
- How many different collections is the museum taking care of ?

III- Native Collections

- As a curator, how do you manage to give a sense to the collection you present ? (can be seen as past objects, difficult to read ...)
- I saw the “...” exhibition, how did you create it ? (number of ppl, process, storytelling)
- How do you integrate Natives in the creation of exhibitions ?
- You have a beautiful Native Art collection, where is it coming from (different tribes ?), how do you take care of it ?
- Do you have other projects concerning Native collections ?

IV- SDGs (depending on how the interview is going otherwise go to V)

Museums were often seen as biased, due to their history, nevertheless it is changing, your museum is an example.

- How did [your museums] improve its objectivity ? (even if talking about Art which is subjective)
- Which practices are you implementing to get rid of the old image of museums ?
- What would be the museum of the future, link to the 2030 Agenda ?
- Many organizations are implementing some SDGs, is it something possible for the museum ?

V- Ending questions

- What is the “biggest flex” of museums (or the museum you are working for) ?/ What is the role of museums nowadays ? (linked to the question in I-, to see if there is a difference)
- Is there something you would like to share before ending the interview ? About the functioning of the museums, the Native collections ... ?
- Could you advise some documentation about your museum ?

Thank you for your time !

APPENDIX C

Research Informed Consent

TITLE OF STUDY

The Value of Collaboration and Sustainable Development Goals on the Issue of Native Artifacts in European Museums

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Why am I being asked to review this form?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This form is provided so that you may read and understand the reasons why you might or might not want to participate in the research. Your participation is voluntary.

What is the purpose of the study ?

The purpose of this study is to see how European museums could improve concerning the representation of Natives. The collaboration goal is linked to the SDGs, namely “Quality Education”, “Reduced Inequalities”, “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions” and “Sustainable Cities and Communities”. Museums are an important part of the fight for sustainability as presented by the United Nations.

What is the goal of this interview ?

The goal of this interview is mainly to have your point of view on the practices of the museums you are working for and the efforts made to cope with the SDGs.

What will happen before the interview ?

- You are allowed to withdraw from the study without justification and without negative consequences until the ;
- We will review this form before the beginning of the interview ;
- You can contact us and our supervisors if you have any additional questions (cf. Contact Information).

What will happen during the interview ?

- You will be ask multiple questions ;
- The interview will be recorded ;
- You have the right to decline answering particular questions.

What will happen after the interview ?

- The recordings of the interview will be transcribed and analysed by the researchers ;
- We will send you the transcription, which is allowing you to correct, review and approve it ;
- This reviewed transcription will be integrated to the final report ;
- Quotes from the transcription will be used as verbatim in the report ;
- You will have access to this final report and the transcription ;
- For confidentiality purposes, you have the right to ask to be anonymized.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Researcher directly (cf. Contact).

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____
Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

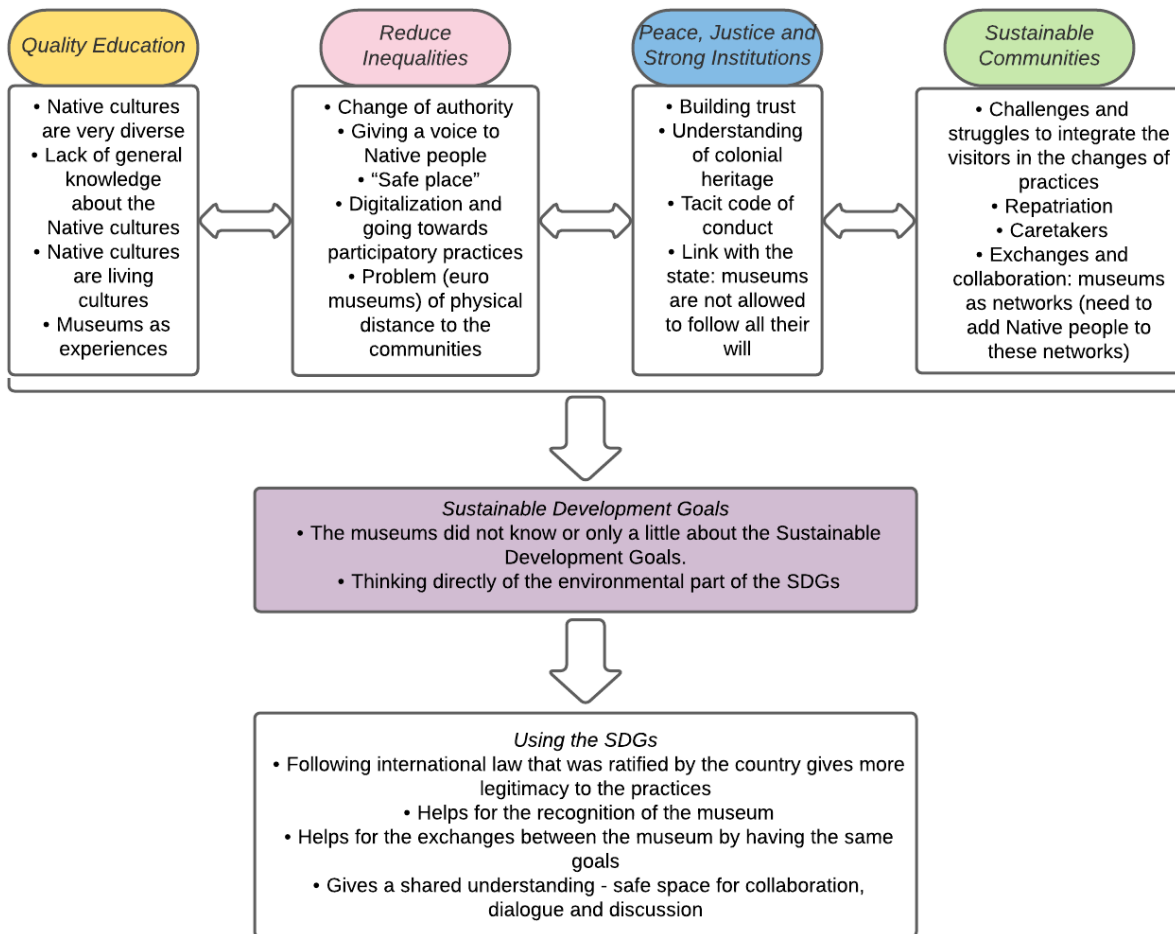
APPENDIX D

In google doc :

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1F-s-SoB_uiJlwecdlM2Gg7ZBCCkRBzPR/view?usp=sharing

APPENDIX E

Conceptual Model - The future of museums: implementing the SDGs



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