

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINING OF MUSEUM DOCUMENTATION PROFESSIONALS IN ZAMBIA

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INTRODUCTION

Documentation is a phenomenon that has occupied an important place in museum discourse. This is because of the important role that documentation plays in the overall management of museum collections. This paper seeks to discuss the challenges and opportunities that are faced by museums in Zambia in relation to implementation of a successful documentation system that meets information needs of both researchers and visitors. The paper will highlight internal and external factors that contribute to lack of implementation of documentation in museums in Zambia. The paper will propose how museums can adopt Library and Information graduates to manage their documentation system.

IMPORTANCE OF DOCUMENTATION

National Museum Board (2002) defines documentation as all the recorded information a museum holds about the items in its care. Museum documentation is concerned with the improvement and use of information regarding objects in a museum collection. The information is either recorded in written or digital format in a museum documentation system and should be accessible to staff, researchers and the public (CIDOC, 2014).

CIDOC (1995) outlines the following as objectives of served by museum documentation;

- **Ensure accountability for objects:** Documentation can be used to define the objects that are owned by a museum, identify the objects, and record their location.
- **Aid the security of objects:** Documentation can be used to maintain information about the status of objects and provide descriptions and evidence of ownership in the event of theft.
- **Provide an historic archive about objects:** Documentation can be used to maintain information about the production, collection, ownership, and use of objects and as a means of protecting the long term value of data.

- **Support physical and intellectual access to objects:** they can be used to support access to objects themselves and information about the objects.

DEVELOPMENT OF DOCUMENTATION STANDARDS IN ZAMBIA

The process of developing a homogeneous documentation system in Zambia was a process that began in 1996. In 1998 an appraisal was conducted to assess the state of museum documentation in all museums in Zambia. A report entitled “The Assessment of Development Needs and museum conditions in the National Museums of Zambia” was produced after the survey and some of the pertinent findings included;

- Museums in Zambia had different documentations
- Different documentation system within a museum
- Other museums did not have any kind of systematic documentation system at all

In 2002, a handbook for museum documentation system in Zambia was published. The handbook provides a standardized language for documentation of museum collection in Zambia. Despite all these measures put in place to improve documentation, museums are still having difficulties in implementing successful documentation of collections.

CHALLENGES OF MUSEUM DOCUMENTATION

Internal Factors

Documentation requires financial resources for it to be implemented successfully. However, museums in Zambia have been receiving reduced funding from government. This has made it difficult for museums to carry out their core functions including documentation.

In addition, in Zambia the only museum that has employed a Registrar of Collection in charge of museum documentation is the Livingstone Museum. The rest of the museums have not employed any one to be in charge of documentation. The responsibility of documentation is left to the curators. This has proved to be a challenge in implementing documentation system since curators also have other demanding responsibility.

External Factor

The lack of tailor made training of museum documentation professional in higher learning of institutions such as university and colleges is an external factor that has negatively affected the capacity of museums to hire trained professionals in museum documentation. Since museum documentation needs specialized training, the lack of such training in Zambia to meet the documentation needs of museums has had adverse effect on the ability of museums to document their collection.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITY FOR MUSEUM DOCUMENTATION PROFESSIONAL

The activities surrounding documentation gives hope to museum as they can be able to tap into human resource of trained information specialist (Library and information Studies graduates) from the University of Zambia, Evelyn Hone College of Applied Arts and Commerce and Zambia information Communication Technology College in order to enhance documentation in museums. The paper will however focus much on training of information specialist being provided by the University of Zambia.

University of Zambia-Library and Information Studies

The training of library and information personnel in Zambia goes back to 1966 (chifwepa, 1999). The department of Library and Information Studies under the school of education began offering undergraduate training in 1967. The degree programme has undergone extensive revision in 1996 and 2008 following needs assessment conducted by the department of Library and Information studies (Mtanga et al, 2013). Chifwepa (1994) observes that in order for training of library and information studies to meet the changing information needs of organizations, new courses like information technology have been included as part of the degree programme. In a bid to produce productive information professions, the department of Library and Information Studies offers the following mandatory courses;

- Foundation of Library and Information Science
- Foundation of Knowledge Management
- Introduction to information and communication technologies
- Organization of information resources
- Collection development
- Information sources and services

- Application of ICTs in information Management
- Management of Information Systems
- Indexing and abstracting
- Library Practicum
- Research in Development Information Systems and Services

Elective courses include

- Records Management and Archives Administration
- Business Information
- Documentation
- Marketing Information Services
- Information literacy
- Organization Knowledge retention
- Information Management in organization
- School libraries and Information Centers

From the list of course that have been outlined, the paper will focus on organization of information resources, application of ICTs in Information Management, Records Management and Archives Administration. The paper will discuss the importance of these courses in relation to museum documentation

Organization of Information Resource

This course covers cataloguing and classification of information resources in a library for easy retrieval of information resources by patrons. This involves assigning of class mark and subject headings to information resources. Assigning of class mark just like assigning accession number is important because both class mark and accession number can be used to locate and retrieve a book or artifact from a museum collection. So the knowledge gained from such training in Library and Information Studies can be tailor made by the museum to meet their documentation needs. It easy for information specialist trained in cataloguing and classification to be able to learn and apply such principles in documentation of museum collections.

Application of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Information Management

In order for institutions to be competitive and be able to meet needs of their clients, organizations have embraced the use of ICTs. Many organization now have online databases where all there information is stored and made available to employees or users on request. Many organizations have websites that provide information. ICTs have been defined by different people and organization differently. However, Kundishora (2014) defines Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) as a general term referring to technologies that are used for collecting, storing, editing and passing on information in various forms.

Application of ICTs in information management is a course that introduces students to application of Information Communication Technologies in the management of information not just in libraries but to any government or private organization. It provides hands on experience on creation of website using web programming language such as XHTML (Extensible Hypertext Markup Language) and web based database creation using MySQL. The course provides hands on training on web designing using Joomla which is a content management system. In addition students undergo training in setting up and customizing server based Integrated Library Management Information systems such as Open Biblio and Koha mostly used in libraries.

Museums can use staff trained in Library and Information Studies to develop websites and web based databases. This will ensure that information in the database can be accessed from any part of the world provide one had the privileges (access password) to the database and access to internet. Application of ICTs can greatly enhance museum documentation.

Records Management and archives Administration

Records management is an important aspect of information in every organization and it is important for organizations manage it as a strategic resource. Records are important in the running of any organization and hence the need to systematically manage these records through a systematic records management programme. In order for such documents to be easily accessed they need to be adequately documented by a well trained specialist. Students undergoing training in Library and Information studies can be valuable to institutions like museums as they have the necessary training to manage both museums records and archival collections.

CONCLUSION

A good documentation system is an important component in management of museum collection. Museums have huge amount of information on collections that needs to be properly documented. However, museums face the challenge of lack of trained staff to manage the documentation system. The paper will conclude by encouraging museums in Zambia to utilize graduates in library and information studies to take care of their documentation needs.

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