

**Ecomuseums and Nouvelle Muséologie.** For some decades now, museums have been undergoing a major transformation, designed largely to strengthen the link between institution and community and place a greater interpretative emphasis on the social aspects of culture. This phenomenon is closely bound up with ecomuseums, which, more than all others, have attempted to interpret the innovative concepts of the Nouvelle Muséologie.

Whereas it was relatively easy to define the traditional museum on the basis of the nature of its exhibits, an institution inspired by the principles of Rivière and de Varine probably requires more elastic categories, different, in part, from the ones we were previously accustomed to.

In view of these transformations, the present terminological uncertainty is anything but paradoxical. In the move from a museum of objects to a museum of ideas, it is harder to establish rigorous definitions. Furthermore, the relative diffusion of the ideas of the Nouvelle Muséologie only makes the situation more muddled, since many of the characteristics believed to be peculiar to ecomuseums, such as in situ interpretation or the involvement of the local community, may actually be typical of and effectively implemented by many of the innovative museums that belong to traditional theme typologies.

#### **A definition of the ecomuseum**

The ecomuseum has always been hard to describe. One of the most effective definitions remains that originally put forward de Varine based on the differences between traditional museums and ecomuseums.

MUSEUM	ECOMUSEUM
Collection	heritage
Building	place
Audience	population

Boylan (Boylan, 1992) instead has proposed a simple checklist to show the differences between eco-, environment-oriented and outward-looking and, finally, traditional museums.

CRITERIA	MUSEUM	ECOMUSEUM
Reference scope	building	place
Focus of interpretation	collection	heritage in a holistic sense
Organisational priorities	disciplinary	interdisciplinary
Benchmark audience	visitors	community
Political control	museum and its bodies	community and its bodies

For each criterion Boylan assigns a mark of 1 a 5 according to proximity to the characteristics of the second column and considers an institution an ecomuseum only if its total marks exceed 20.

Davis (P. Davis, 1999) proposes the use of five criteria:

- Area extending beyond the confines of the museum
- Fragmented site and in situ interpretation
- Cooperation and partnership as opposed to ownership of exhibits
- Involvement of the local community and inhabitants in the museum's activity
- Holistic- and interdisciplinary-type interpretation

Other institutions exist which are concerned with the environment without being ecomuseums proper. Jorgensen (A. Jorgensen, personal comment) states five conditions which differentiate the ecomuseum from open-air museums, local history museums and heritage centres.

- Existence of a documentation centre
- Plurality of visit centres with exhibition
- Existence of workshop for the active participation of visitors