

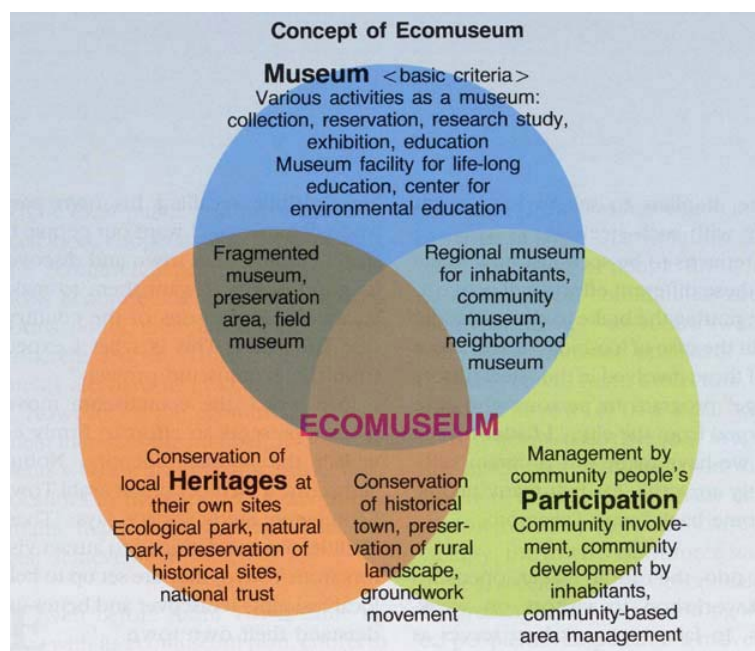
The ecomuseum definition in the contemporary museology

Contemporary museums are more and more museum of ideas rather than museums of objects. In this move, 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.

By the beginnings, one of the most effective definition compares an ecomuseum with a classic museum: essentially a cultural process, identified with a community (population), on a territory, using the common heritage as a resource for development, as opposed to the more classical museum, an institution characterized by a collection, in a building, for a public of visitors (H. de Varine, 1996).

MUSEUM	ECOMUSEUM
OBJECTS	HERITAGE
BUILDING	PLACE
VISITORS	COMMUNITY

Peter Davis (P. Davis, 1999, *Ecomuseums: a sense of place*, Newcastle, Newcastle Univ. Press) states that the degree to which a museum demonstrates true ecomuseum characteristics might be gauged by the amount of overlap in a three circles model (community, museum and social, cultural, natural environment) and in its ability to capture a sense of place. Kazuoichi Hoara gives an effective description of the contents of the circles (K. Hoara, 1998, *The image of Ecomuseum in Japan*, Pacific Friends 25/12).



Maurizio Maggi defines an ecomuseums as a very special kind of museum based on an agreement by which a local community takes care of a place (M.Maggi, 2002, *Ecomusei. Guida europea*, Torino-Londra-Venezia, Umberto Allemandi & C.).

Where:

- **agreement** means a long term commitment, not necessarily an obligation by the law
- **local community** means a local authority and a local population jointly
- **take care** means that some ethic commitment and a vision for a future local development are needed
- **place** means not just a surface but complex layers of cultural, social, environmental values which define a unique local heritage

The first three issues are part of the so called local network while the forth is quite close to the idea of milieu. These two elements play a central role in Ires present studies on the so called Place based Local System.

Also the Chinese school contribution must be mentioned. Su Donghai (Su Donghai, 2006, *Communication and Exploration*, SCM-IRES-PAT, Trento-Beijing) summarized the intense work developed by the Chinese and Norwegian museologists (among them, the lamented John Aage Gjestrum) in the last decade of the 20th century in the Liuzhi Principles.

1. The people of the villages are the true owners of their culture. They have the right to interpret and validate it themselves.
2. The meaning of culture and its values can be defined only by human perception and interpretation based on knowledge. Cultural competence must be enhanced.
3. Public participation is essential to the eco-museums. Culture is a common and democratic asset, and must be democratically managed .
4. When there is a conflict between tourism and preservation of culture the latter must be given priority. The genuine heritage should not be sold out, but production of quality souvenirs based on traditional crafts should be encouraged.
5. Long term and holistic planning is of utmost importance. Short time economic profits that destroy culture in the long term must be avoided.
6. Cultural heritage protection must be integrated in a total environmental approach. Traditional techniques and materials are essential in this respect.
7. Visitors have a moral obligation to behave respectfully. They must be given a code of conduct .
8. There is no bible for eco-museums. They will all be different according to the specific culture and situation of the society they present.
9. Social development is a prerequisite for establishing eco-museums in living societies. The well being of the inhabitants must be enhanced in a way that does not compromise the traditional values.