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*Proceedings of the ICOMON meetings held in: Stavanger, Norway, 1995, Vienna, Austria, 1996 / Memoria de las reuniones de ICOMON celebradas en: Stavanger, Noruega, 1995, Viena, Austria, 1996*

[Madrid] : Museo Casa de la Moneda, [1997]  
269 p. – ISBN 84-88298-03-X., pp. 77-79

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## WHAT IS THE USE OF A NUMISMATIC MUSEUM IN MEXICO?

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In Mexico, as well as in other countries in Latin America, every 6 years, when a president is elected, he has to design a Development Plan that proposes the general strategies and priorities (including culture) for the development of the country during his regime.

Last month, the President of Mexico announced the National Development Plan for the period 1995-2000. It establishes, among other things, the objectives that the country's culture policy pursues. Within this aim the program of museums must be in agreement, as one of its fundamental instruments.

It was decided to "Promote appreciation for our history, our culture, the customs, values and principles that give us our identity". It was also pointed out how important it was to realize "A permanent crusade for education, supported by a national alliance in which every government order and social group converge their efforts and initiatives".

The outlined cultural policy is situated in the frame of the country's global project of modernization, rising from national and international environments, which have undergone transformation in the last decades of this century.

The modernization of Mexico was proposed as a way to face the grave challenge of its fast-growing population demanding food, urban services, housing, education, and security.

Of the concepts expressed, the most outstanding are:

1. To reaffirm the fundamental values that identify us as Mexicans.
2. To establish a commitment with every government, private institution and social group to support this mission in order to make the knowledge and appreciation of our history and cultural patrimony available to the public.

In the frame of the multiple identities that characterize Mexicans, education and culture will be the main point of reference.

In this country of almost 2 million square km., with a population of more than 81 million, with 14 million living in conditions of extreme poverty, with 49.5% between the ages of 0 and 19, with only primary school as the level of education; a country where the population is divided into a large number of socio-economic groups with different ethnic backgrounds, where there still exist 6 million natives in 56 ethnic groups, the goal of national unity and development can be reached only through a change in the basic concepts of education (XI General census of the population and housing 1990).

As Ivan Illitch the renowned Latin-American sociologist affirms, "Historically, faith in education grew in the shadow of alchemy. Education is today the contemporary version of the philosopher's stone, just to touch it refines the basic elements of the world" (Ivan Illitch, *En Latinoamérica para qué sirve la educación*).

We are used to thinking about education as an exclusive product of schools, and we are inclined to presume that the educational system that worked in the 19th and 20th centuries will surely give us the same results in the 21st century.

In Latin America, the delusion persists that schools will produce an ample middle-class, in spite of dubious education, who parallel their counterparts in the highly industrialized societies. Today, it is evident that the school alone cannot reach this goal. It is a commitment of many other institutions in promoting and supporting education.

The museums are one of the most important of these. Mexico has about 50 large museums as well as several hundred smaller installations, 67 archaeological sites open to the public and innumerable historic buildings.

In this cultural universe there is only one unsuccessful, tiny numismatic museum with grave deficiencies that exhibits pieces which try to show the history of coinage in Mexico.

Aware of the importance that a museum of this sort has in the national plan of culture, the Bank of Mexico, owner of an important coin collection, has decided to open a museum in Mexico City to display its collections.

How should this museum fulfil its function in the reality of strong socio-economic and educational contrasts, as pointed out at the beginning of this paper?

How could the history of the country be understood through its contents?

How to teach such a diverse and generally under-educated local public the historic significance that the New Spain (now Mexico) had, that made it the site where the first mint of the American Continent was established?

How to make them feel the transcendence of our country as a bridge between the East and West through the commerce of the galleon that brought and took our monetary circulation and trade from Catay to Acapulco, which was then in turn shipped out from Veracruz, in the Gulf of Mexico, towards Europe?

In short, what sense would there be in having a museum of numismatics in a developing country like Mexico? It would only make sense as long as it educates, it is aesthetically pleasing, but mainly, it helps one understand history and serves as a medium for national unity.

Concerning the topics mentioned above, its implementation should consider:

- I. A clear definition of its reason for being and its objectives within the reality of the country and the National Plan of Development.
- II. Clear knowledge of the majority of the public, not the specialists, since the museum, in a wide sense, is a supplier of services to the community.
- III. Formulation of a logistical museum study in which what we want to say is defined.
- IV. Use of a clear, well-planned museography to give support to communication with the public.

On this matter, the following elements have to be taken into account:

1. Inclusion of other works of art and historical pieces.
2. Inclusion of museographical objects as well as graphics such as maps, diagrams, historical charts, etc.
3. Use of special museographical implements to support the correct observation of the pieces.
4. Adoption of quality not quantity in the selection of numismatic pieces.
5. Inclusion of very concise labels which take into account the limited knowledge of the visitors.
6. Placing of coins and banknotes in their historic context, to give them a justification within an historic frame.
7. Explanation of the reasons for the changes in design and the use of coins and bank notes.
8. Installation of a cabinet reserved for specialists.
9. A guarantee that the visit will be enjoyable through the use of good lighting and correctly designed furnishings which permit the appreciation of the details of the pieces comfortably.
10. Use of interactive installations and multi-media displays.

To conclude, I think that all the facts above mentioned will help to make a Numismatic Museum like ours an instrument for the National Plan of Development. Above all it should become an institution according with today's Mexican society comprising groups of great contrasts.