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# COSMOPOLITANISM, EDUCATIONAL, AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURES

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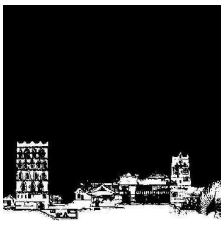

**TRADITIONAL DWELLINGS AND SETTLEMENTS WORKING PAPER SERIES**

Volume 348
Contents

# COSMOPOLITANISM, EDUCATIONAL, AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURES

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**Traditional Dwellings and Settlements**

Working Paper Series

# FOLK MUSEUM: THE HERITAGIZATION OF TRADITIONAL DWELLINGS IN HONG KONG, 1976-1997

*Yin-Tong Chen, Chang-Xue Shu*

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*The folk museum in Hong Kong—as both concept and practice—is part of a colonial effort at defining and packaging Chinese past. Following the establishment of Antiquities and Monuments Office in 1976, folk museum constitutes an institutional path to the heritagization of Chinese past, where the local traditional dwellings participated in framing the declaration of monuments towards the end of the colonial era in 1997. In the name of preserving objects of historical interests, there has been a spirit of pragmaticism throughout such processes under examination. Efforts were made to keep the evidence of Chinese architectural, agricultural and industrial traditions* in situ. *Surprisingly, the growing stress on integrity of different aspects of a heritage site was a result of the collaboration of stakeholders of increasing social complexity.*

*This paper demonstrates the multi-layered process of turning traditional dwellings into folk museums through a broader picture of global-local circumstances. According to our examination of the traditional dwellings in Hong Kong's heritage lists, such cases as Sheung Yiu Folk Museum and Sam Tung Uk Museum — discussed below as exemplars — were then carefully chosen in order to move the local heritage agenda. We illustrate the roles of varied stakeholders in the stretched interplay between preservation and urbanization, city fabric and rural lands, and colonialism and cosmopolitanism.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Analyzing Hong Kong (HK)'s heritage lists issued between 1976 and 1997, 19 items of vernacular architecture were declared as monuments, 6 of which were traditional dwellings for ordinary Chinese. Among the earliest types listed, these traditional homes were transformed into folk museums and given a preservation priority that was only second to the archaeological sites listed at the same time. This indicates that an official process of acknowledging HK's past of Chinese culture had started in the 1970s at the latest, the late colonial period of HK. Folk museum — a new form of cultural practice in HK — participated in this process at a time when folk museum was not a mainstream subject in mainland China. Why did the conservation efforts in HK begin with traditional Chinese dwellings, and how were these dwellings converted into folk museums? Are they a result of transplanting European ideas of folk museums after WWII? We will examine Hong Kong's heritagization process to answer these uncharted questions.

The term "folk museum" originated in 19th century Europe, with its theoretical foundations rooted in folklife research and regional ethnology[1]. This concept was influenced by the Victorian-era British museum model and aimed to showcase the customs, beliefs, and cultural lives of ordinary people, reflecting anthropological characteristics[2]. In 1872, Artur Hazelius established the first ethnographic museum in Sweden. He later founded the open-air Skansen Museum (1891), which recreated authentic life scenes with the aim of preserving folk culture, including but not limited to traditional buildings and handicrafts. This marks the initial materialization of the folk museum. In Western academia, folk museums are widely recognized as spaces for exhibiting aspects of folk lives but also institutions that recreate traditional cultures and lifestyles, often under the context of modern industrialization. They serve purposes of education, providing a vital platform for preservation and display of folk cultures[3].

In some Asian countries with colonial pasts, such as India and Indonesia, the "Cultural Village Museums" in Indonesia and the "Folk and Tribal Museums" in India have been well recorded. Scholars have often related such Asian folk museums to the European prototype of open-air museum (or outdoor museum), showing that the European ideas of folk museum have influenced the way Asian people appreciated their own pasts. Similar to their European counterparts, such Asian museums also incorporate ethnographic research narratives, showcasing different lifestyles, belief systems, and social structures of local communities through architecture, artistic performances, and the display of handicrafts.[4] While exhibiting cultural diversity, these Asian folk museums also fulfill the political functions of reducing ethnic tensions and promoting national identity in the climate of decolonization. Comparably, HK's folk museums in question served the initiative of curating the Chinese past as a political discourse of the colonial government in an era of rising postcolonialism.

In republican China (1912-1949), forerunners of folk studies were three academic associations established in Peking University in the 1920s, respectively the associations on Folklore (歌謠研究會), Folk Culture (風俗調查會) and Vernacular Language (方言調查會), along with the Association of Archaeology (考古學會).[5] They each had exhibition rooms of the material culture without the name of folk museum. From the late 1970s onwards, discussions about folk museum arose significantly, following the state's Reform and

Opening-Up policy. In 1980, Mu Xuan — a self-taught folklorist during the Mao era — proposed to build a folk museum dedicated to the folk studies. The republican-era ideas of using folk museums as institutions for collecting, studying, and showcasing the Chinese folk cultures of specific regions continued in the 1980s.[6] It is still unknown whether or not there was intellectual exchange on the theme of folk museum between HK and mainland China.

## 2. RECONSIDERING FOLK MUSEUM AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF HERITAGIZATION

Despite the widespread establishment of folk museums in both government and community settings, the fields of heritage conservation and museology has largely overlooked the roles played by folk museum in colonial HK. Existing studies have mostly focused on the development of historic building conservation in HK, examining aspects such as policies and institutional frameworks.[7] These studies often emphasize the tensions and reconciliations between different demands from the society and heritage conservation.[8] In contrast, research on traditional dwellings has primarily addressed their challenges and the balance between conservation and development, without thoroughly investigating into the sources and mechanisms of the colonial government. the benefits of converting heritage buildings into museums have also been discussed in terms of adaptive reuse and urban sustainability.[9] These studies typically regard museumization as a crucial approach to heritage conservation[10], suggesting that museums can aid in sustainable urban development. However, previous authors often overlook the fundamental motivations and consequences of transforming traditional Chinese dwellings into folk museums. Specifically, the roles of various stakeholders in this process, along with their interrelationships, remain underexplored. Consequently, the role of folk museums in HK's heritagization process has yet to be fully examined.

In a bigger picture, Western academia has concentrated on the study of folk museums since the mid-20th century, initially focusing on innovations in museum definitions and exhibition methods[11]. Recently, the emphasis has shifted toward digital technology and public engagement[12]. Chinese scholars of folk museum studies, on the other hand, have been discussing the construction, design, and cultural continuity since the 1980s.[13] They mainly addresses the emergence, development, and internal spatial design of folklore

museums, as well as the identity construction they facilitate[14]. These corpuses of work are also disconnected to the process of transforming objects, places and practices into cultural heritage (resources) in HK.

We thus consider the issue of folk museum not only an approach of preserving certain elements of the past and constructing local identity, but also an integral part of the heritagization process in HK in the period of 1976-1997. We have examined original files from governmental archives, including policy papers, meeting minutes, departmental correspondence, and memos. This examination reveals decision-making discussions, interdepartmental collaboration networks, and the evolution of policy revisions. These archives not only reflect the colonial government's policy priorities but also offer valuable insights into the motivations and ways of working in creating folk museums in HK.

## 3. THE INTELLECTUAL LANDSCAPE IN FAVOR OF CONSERVATION

Our study shows that the resurgence of local culture in HK and the establishment of heritage conservation are closely related. Preservation is a result from a growing awareness of Chinese culture from both Chinese and foreigner communities. The 1955 archaeological discovery of the Eastern Han tomb at Lee Cheng Uk marks a milestone of cultural event in post-war HK. This ignited broader academic interest in researching HK's past, leading to the proposal of the Antiquities and Monuments Bill in 1957. The bill, however, was shelved due to the political climate at the time.[15]

Meanwhile, the wars and political turmoil in the first half of the 20th century drove many intellectuals migrating to HK, bringing a wealth of scholarly resources. The founding of the Chinese University of HK in 1963 exemplifies this phenomenon. On the other hand, the 1967 leftist anti-colonial riots in HK triggered the trajectory of cultural conservation. In response to the political-social unrest, the colonial government, then under the impact of the Labour Party in London, had to take a new, societal-based strategy to stabilize the Chinese society. Constructing local welfare was part of the agenda. These included building a collective identity for "Hong Kong people" through narratives fostering a sense and

consciousness of local belonging and local culture unique to HK.[16] Once the unrest subsided, the government promoted local culture resources and historical education[17], which led to the initiative of drafting an ordinance for "the preservation of objects of historical, archaeological and palaeontological interest".[18]

In Europe and North America, there was a surge in studying vernacular architecture from the late 1960s to the 1980s. Structures of vernacular architecture began to be viewed as "living heritage" and were often converted into museums. This architectural trend, combined with the influence of socialist movements in Britain during that time, reached HK. The appointment of Governor Murray MacLehose in 1971 marked a crucial turning point in HK's cultural policies. Inspired by the British Labour Party's social welfare and cultural development, MacLehose's administration aimed to enhance governance by promoting local culture.

From the late 1960s, a group of British elites began to investigate into local indigenous customs in HK. The Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch (RASHK) and its associated activities played a significant role in rediscovering local histories and promoting cultural awareness in HK. The society was originally founded in 1847 by colonial officials and foreign scholars who were dedicated to researching local history. Although it was dissolved in 1859 due to a lack of resources, it was re-established in 1959 with a focus on cultural and historical studies of China and Asia, particularly emphasizing the past of HK.[19] Although the society does not directly participate in government decision-making, many of its members engaged with the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB, 1977), the consulting body for heritage, and Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO, 1976), the executive body of conservation.[20]

In 1961, the society began publishing the "Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch," which has become an essential platform for research on HK's history and contemporary Chinese history. The journal addresses various facets of Chinese culture, including traditional theater, festive customs, Chinese calendar, and religious beliefs, along with socio-economic themes such as HK's local history, agricultural history, and housing development. The journal also published extensive studies on the history of the New

Territories, clan relationships, and Hakka culture, providing a base for the later preservation of Hakka villages.[21] Authors, both foreigners and Chinese included, also examined the diversity of traditional Chinese architecture, historical structures like the walled villages of the New Territories and ancestral halls, and the origins, ownership, and social functions of temple architecture.[22] Furthermore, the journal published evolution of historical sites in detail, including our case Sam Tung Uk.[23] The intellectual sphere of and around RASHK has formed a foundation stone of the official declaration of monuments and sites in HK. Vernacular architecture in particular became a valuable reference in the discussions among Westerners in HK.

## 4. THE ADMINISTRATIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

The aforesaid activities influenced the government's decisions in the matters of preservation. HK's administrative structure developed to provide essential institutional support for that. Between 1976 and 1997, the HK government underwent a series of adjustments and reforms. The *Macpherson Report* prompted changes within the administrative framework, enhancing the role of the Government Secretariat in policy formulation and resource allocation.[24] The introduction of the District Advisory System and the establishment of the District Board in 1982 created important platforms for resident participation in cultural heritage conservation.[25] Additionally, the Urban Council, established in 1936, and the Regional Council, established in 1986, clarified management responsibilities for cultural and recreational affairs in HK Island and Kowloon. These councils became key administrators of such institutions as the folk museums in New Territories.[26]

The Government Secretariat was reorganized to support the establishment of the Regional Council, leading to the creation of a new position: Municipal Services Branch. This role was tasked with overseeing matters related to antiques and heritage sites. Additionally, the Urban Services Department was renamed the Urban Services Authority. In 1989, the government established the Culture and Recreation Branch to enhance communication between the British government and the two municipal councils. This department also developed policies for cultural and recreational activities. After the handover of HK in 1997, the

Home Affairs Department and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department took over the decision-making and implementation roles for heritage, thereby streamlining the management process.

The aforementioned AMO had a primary duty of implementing the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance. This covered daily protection of monuments and sites, assessing their conditions, as well as conducting emergency excavations at archaeological sites at risk.[27] The AMO operates under the guidance of the aforesaid AAB; the latter should offer advice to government agencies in the formal declaration process for statutory monuments. Together, the AAB, AMO, and the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance have been the three pillars in the heritagization process in the 1980s and 1990s, still forming the conservation framework today.

The intellectual, political-social, and administrative environments facilitated the declaration of traditional dwellings as statutory heritage. In the process of transforming the Chinese homes into folk museums, the colonial administrative bodies acted as key stakeholders and played a crucial role in policy making, coordination of institutions and resources, and the overall strategy of preservation.

## 5. TRADITIONAL DWELLINGS: THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The establishment of the AAB and AMO in 1976 should be considered as a response to the pressing need in a context of increasingly rapid urbanization. In the 1960s, urban development of HK already resulted in the demolition of numerous historic buildings, raising widespread concern among various social sectors. In response, the colonial government passed the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance in 1971. Unfortunately, without a dedicated implementation body, the ordinance was unable to achieve its intended impact. It was only with the establishment of the AAB and AMO in 1976 that a necessary institutional framework and organizational support for heritage conservation were finally created.

During the 1970s and 1980s, urbanization speeded up in HK, with population growth and economic development leading to the saturation of urban areas in Kowloon and HK Island. In response, the colonial government implemented the New Towns Development Program, expanding into the New Territories by

developing areas such as Tsuen Wan, Tuen Mun, and Sha Tin into industrial hubs[28]. However, this rapid development accelerated the disappearance of traditional settlements and led to the demolition or transformation of numerous historical buildings during redevelopment. As a result, heritage conservation became a growing public concern.[29]

Prior to 1980, AMO primarily focused on archaeological sites and movable artifacts. This is a result of the complex tensions between private property rights and opposition from certain government departments and real estate developers, who contended that conservation efforts would impede urban development.[30] A turning point occurred in 1980 when the government, drawing on British experience, introduced a grading system for monuments.[31] Although this grading system lacked statutory authority and functioned merely as a set of guidelines,[32] it established an essential foundation for later initiatives. Between 1987 and 1992, under the active promotion of then-Governor David Wilson, heritage conservation in HK gained substantial momentum, resulting in notable advancements in the preservation of traditional dwellings.

It suffices to say that HK's heritage conservation is distinctly a crisis-driven approach. This has become even more evident since the 1980s, when the speeded urbanization highlighted the tension between urbanized and rural areas. Large-scale projects, such as subways and highways, progressed, causing frequent conflicts over land acquisition. These conflicts inadvertently led to significant conservation of some traditional dwellings, such as Sam Tung Uk in Tsuen Wan and Law Uk in Chai Wan. In this context, government agencies emerged as key stakeholders, taking a leading role in the conservation process and developing standardized operational procedures. This involved initiating formal assessments, implementing emergency protections to ensure the preservation of historical buildings, and ultimately transforming these structures into folk museums by adaptive reuse.

A milestone was the establishment of the Ethnography Gallery at the HK Museum of History in 1975, which represented an initial response to European ethnographic methodologies. This gallery focused on collecting and documenting folk songs, festivals, clan rituals, and the daily lives of such local minorities as Tanka people.[33] However, this early practice presented a fragmented view of local culture.

A further, significant change occurred with the opening of the Sheung Yiu Folk Museum in 1984. This museum utilized an entire Hakka village as its medium, creating an "authentic environment" by restoring traditional homes, farming tools, and furniture. Its goal was to simulate the "vanished rural life".[34] This approach closely resembled the European concept of folk museums, primarily featuring agricultural tools and household items that reflected the everyday lives of ordinary people. The museum architecture per se served as "built evidence" of the material culture of Chinese agricultural civilization. Unlike the previous model exemplified by the Museum of History, Sheung Yiu Folk Museum moved towards a more holistic approach by preserving the whole working and living conditions of that Hakka village. This approach not only focused on conserving the physical structures but also emphasized their integration into recreated living environments, embodying the concept of integrity in heritage conservation. This transformation highlighted the government's gradual shift from merely protecting individual artifacts to embracing the comprehensive preservation of heritage. It demonstrated a growing awareness of presenting heritage within its broader social, historical, and environmental context, presaging the later development of intangible heritage. Above all, despite the updates of heritage policies, it deserves to note that important urban development plans were never impeded by concerns over so-called "less-significant" heritage sites.[35]

## 6. FOLK MUSEUM AS A WAY OF PRESERVATION?

The *fait accompli* of transforming urban development crises into opportunities of adaptive reuse of monuments is a result of the interplay of economic forces, administrative efforts, and intellectual conditions in HK. It highlights a strategy of pragmaticism in balancing preservation and development, given limited land resources. This approach has led to the standardization of protection, enabling various historical buildings to be systematically listed as monuments. As a result, HK has developed a distinctive mode that is development-oriented preservation, or a preservation-in-development mode. Still today, despite the establishment of a heritage conservation system, there is no single agency fully responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of monuments. Instead, the required cooperation of conservation are divided among multiple government departments and agencies.

Below we use Sam Tung Uk Museum and Sheung Yiu Folk Museum to elaborate the problems. Sam Tung Uk Museum is a typical model for preserving rural heritage amidst the development of new towns in HK. It exhibits a significant "crisis-driven" context. Its protection was prompted by land acquisition conflicts during the construction of the Tsuen Wan new town in the 1980s, ultimately resulting in a successful transformation into a folk museum through government-led preservation and adaptive reuse. This case, moreover, highlights the role of government agencies in standardizing the processes of heritage conservation. In contrast, the Sheung Yiu Folk Museum, due to its remote location and long-term vacancy, has been able to evade the impacts of urban development, thereby preserving a more pristine environmental character. Even today, it remains situated within the boundaries of a country park. This case stands in stark contrast to others, such as Sam Tung Uk Village, Law Uk, the Old House in Wong Uk Village, and the Old House in Hoi Pa Village, which were all challenged by urbanization. Together, they underscore the diverse strategies employed in HK.


Fig. 1 The mentioned traditional dwellings turned into folk museums (Source map: HK Historic Maps, 1987)

**Case 1: Sam Tung Uk 三棟屋 Museum**

Sam Tung Uk is HK's first traditional dwelling listed as monument. Its preservation illustrates the common characteristics of heritage conservation that often arise from land acquisition conflicts during urban development. This case showcases many features typically seen in similar situations. The process not only highlights the balance and compromises between urban development and heritage preservation but also reflects the government's evolving philosophy on heritage conservation and the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders.

Fig. 2 Sam Tung Uk Museum (Source: Antiquities and Monuments Office, n.d.-b)

Sam Tung Uk Village, situated on higher ground along Castle Peak Road in Tsuen Wan, is a small walled village that dates back to the 18th century. It has been historically inhabited by the Chan family for generations. The village features three rows of approximately 30 residential units and a central ancestral hall. Despite undergoing significant changes over time, it has largely retained its original layout, making it a quintessential example of traditional rural settlements in HK. The preservation of Sam Tung Uk Village began in the 1970s due to the threat of demolition from new town developments and MTR construction

projects. In 1973, the Land Development Policy Committee first proposed its conservation. Then, in 1977, the AAB capitalized on the village's vacancy to advocate for its designation as a declared monument[36]. Although there was some debate over the potential conversion of the village into a museum, the government ultimately decided to preserve it, emphasizing its strategic location and the cultural needs of the region. In 1981, the government acquired the site and initiated restoration work following the completion of the MTR project. By 1987, Sam Tung Uk Village was officially transformed into a folk museum.

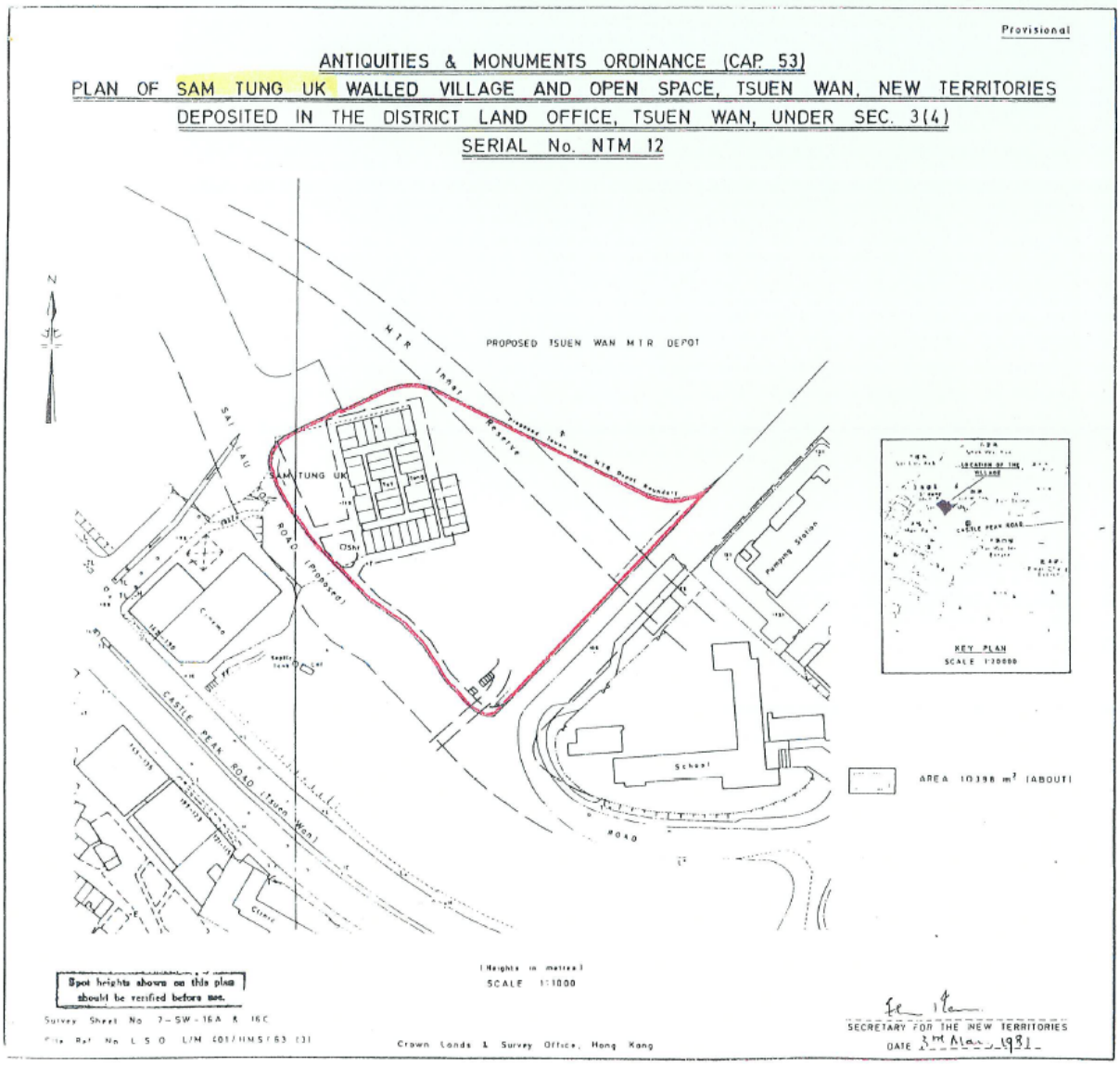


Fig. 3 Site plan in AMO Document in 1981 (Source: Antiquities and Monuments Office, 1981b)

The heritagization process of Sam Tung Uk illustrates the balance and compromises between the needs for development and the preservation of heritage. In 1979, during the construction of the MTR, some buildings were demolished. Although the villagers proposed retaining the internal alleyways to maintain the village's original character, the government chose reconstruction as an alternative. This decision reflects the government's pragmatic approach to heritage preservation at that time, prioritizing urban development while attempting to retain the core values of historic structures where possible[37]. The scope of preservation also sparked debate. Initially, the plan was to conserve only the original three rows of buildings dating back to 1786. However, the Tsuen Wan District Office strongly advocated for the inclusion of the rear row, open spaces, and the ancestral hall, arguing that these elements were crucial to the village's integrity and would enhance the functionality of the future museum[38]. This proposal ultimately garnered the support of the Urban Services Department, resulting in one of the few examples of holistic preservation in HK's early heritage conservation efforts[39].

The collaboration among various stakeholders gradually developed throughout this process. Key decision-making was primarily conducted by the New Territories Administration and the Tsuen Wan District Office. The New Territories Administration issued land-use permits to prevent demolition, while the Tsuen Wan District Office coordinated negotiations with villagers regarding their relocation. They also worked with the Urban Services Department on the monument application, provided the AAB with structural assessments, financial evaluations, and development proposals, and finalized the adaptive reuse plan[40] [41] [42]. Additionally, the District Council and its predecessor, the Tsuen Wan District Advisory Board, played a significant role in the preservation efforts. They provided financial support and gathered public opinions on the potential future use of the building. The Urban Services Department acted as a central coordinator, collaborating closely with the Tsuen Wan District Office to implement the preservation plan. This included defining the boundaries of protection and granting the AMO the authority to oversee management. Following the establishment of the Regional Council in 1985, management of the Sam Tung Uk Museum was transferred to this council. Its Museum Selection Committee was responsible for exhibition planning and artifact collection, ensuring the long-term operation and preservation of the site.

Sam Tung Uk has been successfully repurposed as a folk museum, preserving its historical significance while introducing new social functions. The museum highlights the village's history and restoration process through photographs, texts, and artifacts, providing insight into traditional Hakka lifestyles. The Heng Hau Exhibition Hall previously hosted exhibitions focused on local folk festivals, while the rear exhibition hall, in collaboration with the Urban Council, showcased the "Qing Dynasty Family Life" exhibition. This exhibit featured export paintings, ceramics, textiles, clothing, and crafts that illustrated domestic life during the Qing Dynasty[43]. Since 2016, the Sam Tung Uk Museum has been redefined as a venue for exhibiting and educating the public about HK's intangible cultural heritage (ICH). This aims to enhance public awareness and understanding of ICH. This transformation reflects the government's recognition of the link between the term "folk" and intangible cultural heritage. The museum's reconfiguration represents a continuation and evolution of the original "folk museum" concept.

The significance of this case lies in its exemplary nature as HK's first heritage conservation project involving a traditional residential dwelling. The Sam Tung Uk Museum shares notable similarities with other conservation efforts. Throughout the preservation process, the emphasis was placed on its "age value," and the collaborative model between the government, as the key stakeholder, and various departments was effectively demonstrated. The preservation pathway of "rescue–restoration–museumization" established a standardized process that serves as a critical reference point for subsequent projects, including the establishment of the Law Uk Folk Museum and other conservation initiatives, such as the Old House in Wong Uk Village and the Old House in Hoi Pa Village.

**Case 2: Sheung Yiu 上窰 Folk Museum**

Unlike Sam Tung Uk Village, which was preserved due to the pressures of urban development, the conservation of Sheung Yiu Village is largely the result of "passive preservation," owing to its remote location. Established over 200 years ago by the Hakka Wong family on the eastern shore of the Shing Mun River estuary within Sai Kung Country Park, the village initially thrived through brick and lime production using kilns. However, with the advent of cement and rising competition from other industries, kiln production gradually declined, leading to nearly 20 years of abandonment and severe deterioration of the

village's buildings. Despite the extensive damage caused by this prolonged vacancy, Sheung Yiu Village embodies typical features of traditional Chinese rural dwellings. It offers valuable insights into village life, family structures, and the Feng Shui-inspired layout of rural settlements[44].

Fig. 4 Sheung Yiu Folk Museum (Source: Information Services Department, 1989)

The preservation efforts for Sheung Yiu Village began in 1978 when the government commissioned the University of HK to conduct a survey study of rural Chinese architecture in New Territories. This study provided support for the Antiquities and Monuments Section within the Urban Services Department[45]. In the same year, the AAB recommended that the village be designated as a declared monument. However, due to delays related to land classification, it was not officially declared as a monument until November 1981. The declaration of the housing complex rested on all the evidence of the ceramics industry run by the owner of this dwelling complex, including the production of local bricks, tiles, and lime. In 1984, the village was converted into a museum showcasing Chinese rural life, becoming the first museum of its kind in HK.

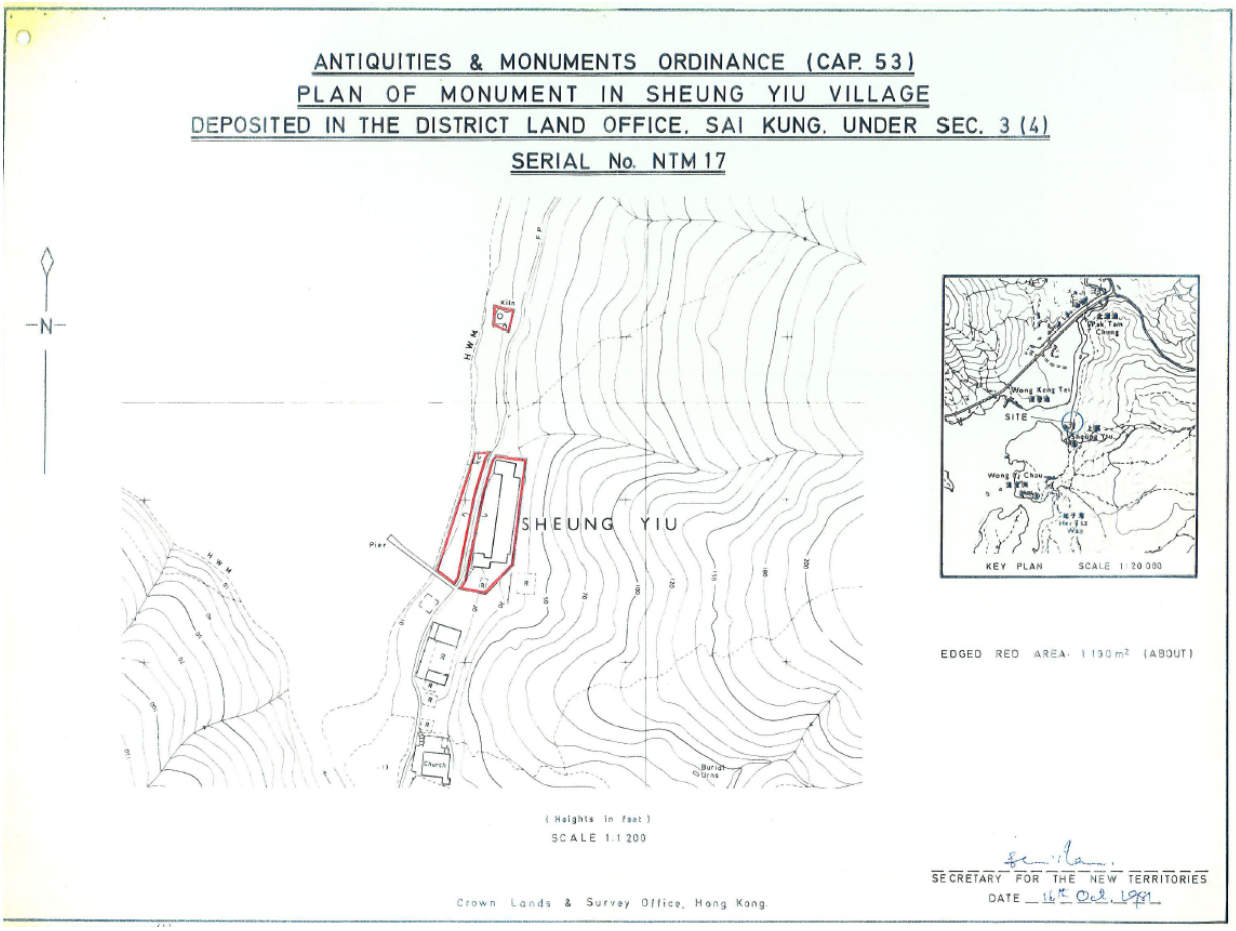


Fig. 5 Site plan in AMO Document (Source: Antiquities and Monuments Office, 1981a)

The government's initial motivation was to establish the village as a small folk museum. Additionally, the nearby Po Leung Kuk Youth Hostel could provide educational opportunities for young people. During the preservation process, the New Territories Administration took the lead in creating the legal framework and implementing conservation efforts. The Sai Kung District Office served as the primary executing unit, facilitating the village's designation as a statutory monument. They conducted surveys, monitored building conditions, and managed land acquisition, funding, and progress reports[46]. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, along with the Country Parks Authority, was also involved. The former was responsible for funding decisions and assessing restoration and maintenance costs, and it collaborated with the AMO on the village's restoration, the construction of the folk museum, the protection of historical and cultural buildings, and the provision of educational and recreational services[47]. The Country Parks

Authority focused on restoration, maintenance, and daily operations while working to promote the village and attract more visitors[48]. Notably, Sheung Yiu Village is unique among the three cases because it involved a charitable organization: the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals. Their donations not only supported conservation and museum construction but also helped establish the Pak Tam Chung Nature Education Trail, reflecting an early integration of heritage preservation and public health initiatives.

The exhibits at the Sheung Yiu Folk Museum primarily come from donations made by local villagers, which include agricultural tools, furniture, and crockery. Among these items, the most valuable is a traditional Hakka wedding cage. The museum vividly recreates the everyday life of a 19th-century Hakka rural community, featuring facilities such as a kitchen stove and livestock pens, all reconstructed using traditional methods and old blue bricks. This strong connection with the community has established the Sheung Yiu Folk Museum as not only a site for preserving cultural heritage but also as a bridge between the past and the present.

Although the preservation efforts for Sheung Yiu Village did not face the same pressures as Sam Tung Uk Village, its remote geographical location and prolonged vacancy created favorable conditions for maintaining its traditional village layout. Additionally, its relatively straightforward property ownership structure allowed the government to acquire the land more quickly than at Sam Tung Uk, facilitating its transformation into a folk museum ahead of the others. This case not only stands as one of the earliest successful examples in HK of converting traditional dwellings into folk museums but also serves as an important reference for establishing the subsequent two folk museums.

The folk museum serves as an institutional framework for cultural preservation and exhibits, reconstructing historical scenes through the methods of static preservation and adaptive reuse. This model, currently the leading approach to safeguarding vernacular architecture, is based on the practices of the open-air museum movement that emerged in Europe during the 1950s. However, contemporary preservation methods in HK are often criticized as a form of "freezing," where adaptive reuse is utilized to maintain past cultural settings. This raises an important question: Is the folk museum model, as the dominant method for

protecting vernacular architecture today, truly the only effective way to safeguard these cultural assets? While open-air folk museums were widely established in Europe during the 1950s, are there alternative strategies available today that could also effectively protect vernacular architecture?

## 7. CONCLUSION

From the early 1950s to the 1980s, the official attention in declaring monuments has gradually shifted from archaeological discoveries to historical buildings of the Chinese past. This movement should not be considered as a result of changing ideas or ideology in the heritagization under examination. Rather, it resulted from the strategic role AMO skillfully played in the tensions between the demand for urbanization, property rights, and intellectual interests of the HK citizens. Most historical buildings were privately owned, and owners often opposed to having them listed as monuments. Therefore, AMO prioritized natural and archaeological sites in the early stage of declaration of monuments. After consulting with the relevant property rights holders for several years, the ownership of these lands was eventually transferred back to the government. Thanks to this progress, AMO was able to add three traditional Chinese dwellings into the protection registry. Compared to the more ideologically driven approaches in France and mainland China, HK's heritage conservation practice has, in essence, been shaped by the local emphasis on economic development and profitability. This pragmatic approach has — if not prioritized — placed emphasis on the needs of economic and industrial development, striking a balance between economy and the intended construction of local, cultural identity. The local popularization of the Western ideas of "monument" and "folk museum", in fact, represents a colonial struggle and strategy of re-discovering and re-defining the Chinese past. It is also a process of reusing historical assets and cultural resources in HK. This realistic and pragmatic attitude towards heritage has characterized the conservation practices of HK even down to the present day.

In the examined period of 1976-1997, little had been discussed regarding international theories of conservation of immovable heritage, nor the methodology; this is also the situation today. The material culture exhibited in the folk museums, though connected to the colonial initiative of better governing and

the aim of constructing a local identity, in effect failed in illustrating distinctive features of the localness of HK. The reductionist and pragmatists manner of mobilizing traditional dwellings as material resources for promoting the contemporary agendum, either politically or socially, has yet to be changed into a more scientific and holistic manner of appreciating the material evidence of all sorts of layers of the past, prior to any aggressive intervention, restoration or reuse.

The official heritage conservation system, which essentially consists of the Ordinance, the ABC and AMO, is a result of reacting to different political-social dynamics; they still serve the administrative infrastructure of cultural heritage in HK today. Besides these three pillars, the Urban Council and Regional Council also played a crucial role in advocating local interests. From 1973 to 1981, Arnaldo de Oliveira Sales (1920-2020), then the first unofficial chairman of the Urban Council, devoted himself to promoting HK's culture and directed the council's cultural development. Under his leadership, the Urban Council prioritized enriching citizens' cultural lives, establishing institutions such as the HK Museum of History and the HK Heritage Museum to showcase and promote HK's unique cultural features[49]. The Urban Council actively supported establishing and growing folk museums.

In 2008, the government introduced the "Revitalizing Historic Buildings Through Partnership Scheme", emphasizing adaptive reuse with the new establishment of the Commissioner for Heritage's Office (CHO) besides AMO. This aims to resolve the tensions between the government and society arising from the demands of economic governance. The scheme encourages "NPOs" (non-governmental and non-profit organizations) to operate historical buildings in the form of social enterprises, adopting new modes of conservation and utilization[50]. We consider this recent administrative action a continuous step of the said pragmatist approach in HK in terms of cultural conservation. In HK, Meanwhile, traditional dwellings are continuously in degradation especially in countryside areas of HK in the heritagization processes.

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# TOWARDS SOCIAL COSMOPOLITANISM: WAYFINDING IN AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM IN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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# TOWARDS SOCIAL COSMOPOLITANISM: WAYFINDING IN AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM IN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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*Submission 66 of the Select Committee on Autism by the Australian Parliament emphasizes the importance of creating inclusive public services for individuals on the autism spectrum. This initiative aims to provide environments where people with autism can safely and effectively contribute their unique skills and talents, enhancing the cosmopolitan nature of Australia's diverse society. By integrating children with autism into mainstream learning environments, we build on the tradition of inclusivity and acceptance, promising a more socially cosmopolitan society for the future. However, the complex architecture of school buildings—comprising many halls, classrooms, cafeterias, and various amenities—can be overwhelming for children with autism. Without proper navigational design, schools can be confusing and disorienting for these children. This study examines how wayfinding systems in South Australian primary schools can be improved to help children with autism navigate their learning environments better. Wayfinding involves the design elements that guide people through physical spaces. This study focuses on identifying and analyzing specific wayfinding features in school architecture, an area that has not been extensively studied. The research explores how familiar and unfamiliar environments impact the wayfinding abilities of children with autism. The goal is to develop a set of wayfinding principles to create more inclusive school environments.*

*This study employs a direct intervention method to assess wayfinding performance among children with autism from two specialized schools in South Australia. Navigation abilities were evaluated in both familiar and unfamiliar settings, incorporating subjective impressions and teacher's assessments of key wayfinding parameters. The analysis explores relationships between wayfinding performance, user's experience, environmental familiarity, and spatial conditions. The findings inform design recommendations for architects and designers to enhance wayfinding systems in educational environments, improving navigation for children with autism while fostering inclusive and supportive school spaces. This research contributes to the broader goal of creating accessible and universally accommodating learning environments.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Australian Government's commitment to fostering an inclusive and socially cohesive multicultural society, as outlined in the *Multicultural Framework Review* (2022), highlights the nation's dedication to ensuring an inclusive and cohesive society equitable for all individuals, regardless of cultural and linguistic backgrounds [1]. However, while these initiatives address social and economic inclusion for marginalized communities, they lack clear directives on integrating individuals with cognitive and developmental disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), into the broader societal framework. This gap in policy and practice presents a critical challenge in achieving the broader goal of a truly inclusive society that accommodates diverse needs beyond cultural and linguistic dimensions.

Within the educational landscape, the *Disability Discrimination Amendment Act* (2005) and the *Disability Standards for Education* (2005) mandate that all schools provide students with disabilities, including ASD, with equal access to educational opportunities "on the same basis" as their neurotypical peers [2]. Despite these legal provisions, research indicates a persistent lack of comprehensive strategies in mainstream schools to

effectively support students on the autism spectrum [3]. Given that wayfinding plays a crucial role in students' ability to navigate and engage with their learning environments, ensuring that educational spaces are designed with the cognitive and sensory needs of children with autism in mind is imperative.

This study addresses this critical gap by examining the wayfinding experiences of children with autism in educational settings and developing design recommendations to improve their navigational experiences. By utilizing a direct intervention method with students from specialized schools in South Australia, this research explores how environmental familiarity, spatial design, and cognitive factors influence wayfinding performance and overall experience. The findings aim to provide architects and design professionals with pragmatic guidelines for implementing effective wayfinding systems in mainstream schools.

In doing so, this study aligns with Australia's broader commitment to inclusivity, advancing the discourse on disability rights within the framework of the nation's core values. The Australian Value Statement emphasizes respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, equality of opportunity for all, and a 'fair go' that upholds mutual respect, tolerance, and compassion for those in need [4]. By ensuring that children with autism can navigate and participate in school environments with greater ease, this research contributes to the realization of an educational system that genuinely upholds these principles. Furthermore, it reinforces the commitment to the rule of law, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of disability, have equitable access to education in accordance with national policies. The development of evidence-based design interventions serves as a foundational step towards achieving a society that values and accommodates neurodiversity, reinforcing Australia's vision of an inclusive, accessible, and supportive educational landscape for all students.

## 2. WAYFINDING AND ASD IN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Research on individuals on the autism spectrum within the field of architecture remains relatively limited, with existing studies on school design for autism offering only a partial understanding of the spatial needs of autistic students [5],[6],[7],[8]. The available literature can be broadly categorized into two groups. One set of studies has focused on specific architectural elements within specialized educational environments designed exclusively for children with autism[9],[10] . These works provide detailed recommendations for classroom design but do not incorporate universal design principles or address the challenges of inclusive educational settings. The second category of research explores inclusive school design and proposes design parameters intended to benefit all students, including those on the autism spectrum [11]. While both research streams contribute valuable insights into learning environments, they predominantly focus on classroom spaces and overlook the crucial role of wayfinding in school design.

Wayfinding design is essential in creating inclusive school environments, as it ensures that all students can independently access the facilities and services available to them. This is particularly important for children with autism, who often struggle with spatial navigation and are at risk of becoming disoriented in complex environments. Mostafa highlights that children with autism frequently experience sensory distractions that can impede their ability to navigate spaces, with even minor environmental details capturing their attention in ways that neurotypical individuals might overlook[12]. Due to sensory processing differences, autistic individuals often engage with their surroundings through an atypical combination of visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory perceptions, making intuitive navigation particularly challenging [13],[14]. Consequently, the lack of tailored wayfinding strategies can lead to increased anxiety and difficulty in accessing educational spaces.

Despite the significance of wayfinding for autistic individuals, research in this area remains sparse. A notable study by Williams examined the impact of basic wayfinding cues—such as color-coded doors, floor markings, and signage—on the navigation behaviors of children with autism in a school environment[15]. While the study found that both the control and treatment groups were able to navigate their surroundings, one participant in the treatment group, who had access to enhanced wayfinding cues, demonstrated an improved ability to locate their destination directly. However, the study was exploratory, with a small sample size of only nine participants, and did not provide comprehensive design guidelines for wayfinding in schools catering to autistic students. Instead, it documented methodological insights and challenges associated with conducting research with children with autism, offering a foundation for future studies.

Further research in this field includes a study conducted in Malaysia by Rahaman, Rahim, and Abdullah (2017), in which the authors identified 20 wayfinding design parameters (WDPs) and five wayfinding design aspects (WDAs) through teacher interviews and questionnaire surveys[16]. While this research provided valuable theoretical insights, it did not include on-site testing or direct evaluation of these special children's wayfinding experiences. Consequently, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these identified parameters translate into practical, real-world applications for school environments. Table 1 below presents the WDPs and their corresponding WDAs based on the previous work of Rahaman et al. forming the basis for further exploration in this study[17].

| Wayfinding Design | | Wayfinding Design Parameters (WDPs) | Wayfinding Design Aspects(WDAs) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 1. Legibility of Space | 2. Legibility of Route | 3. Choice of Space | 4. Sensory Considerations | 5. Safety and Security |
| Architectural Wayfinding Design | Layout | 1. Layout with identifiable zone | X | | | | |
| | | 2. Use of Physical and visual cues to identify space | X | X | | | |
| | | 3. Clear indication of beginning and end of space | X | X | | | |
| | | 4. Minimum detailing | X | | | X | |
| | | 5. Uncluttered circulation space | | X | | | |
| | | 6. No long narrow corridor | | X | | | X |
| | | 7. Less sensory distraction along the circulation space | | | | X | |
| | | 8. Option for vertical circulation visible from decision making point | | X | | | |
| | | 9. Space for group interaction along the circulation area | | | X | | |
| | | 10. Space for personal time along the circulation area | | | X | | |
| | | 11. Space to prepare for transition along the circulation area | | | X | | |
| | | 12. Generous space standard | | X | | X | |
| | Landmark | 13. Provision of recognizable landmark | X | X | | | |
| | | 14. Availability of reference point for circulation | | X | | | |
| Informational Wayfinding Design | Orientation | 15. Provision of observation near circulation path and public space | | | | | X |
| | | 16. Use of simple maps with minimum text | X | X | | | |
| | Signage | 17. Use of pictogram, typography and colour as signage (visual cue) | X | X | | | |
| | | 18. Appropriate signage at decision making point | | X | | | X |
| | | 19. Clear identity sign of entry and exit | | | | | X |
| | | 20. Visual information prior to any change | X | | | | |

Table 1: Wayfinding Design Parameters (WDPs) and Wayfinding Design Aspects (WDAs)

The current research is considered a continuation and progression of this earlier work. Initially, the 20 WDPs were evaluated through an online survey, in which autism experts in South Australia rated their relevance for children with autism. However, to obtain evidence-based results, an observation study was designed. This study involved children with autism participating in a wayfinding task, a memory task at each site, and a post-observation interview to assess their overall wayfinding experiences. Table 1 below presents the WDPs and their corresponding WDAs based on the previous work of Rahaman et al. (2017), forming the basis for further exploration in this study.

## 3. METHOD

This research was conducted in South Australia to examine the environmental needs of children with autism in wayfinding. The study followed a five-phase methodology, as outlined in Figure 1. Each phase played a crucial role in validating and expanding on previous research findings through a combination of expert evaluations, observational studies, and direct engagement with children with autism in school settings.

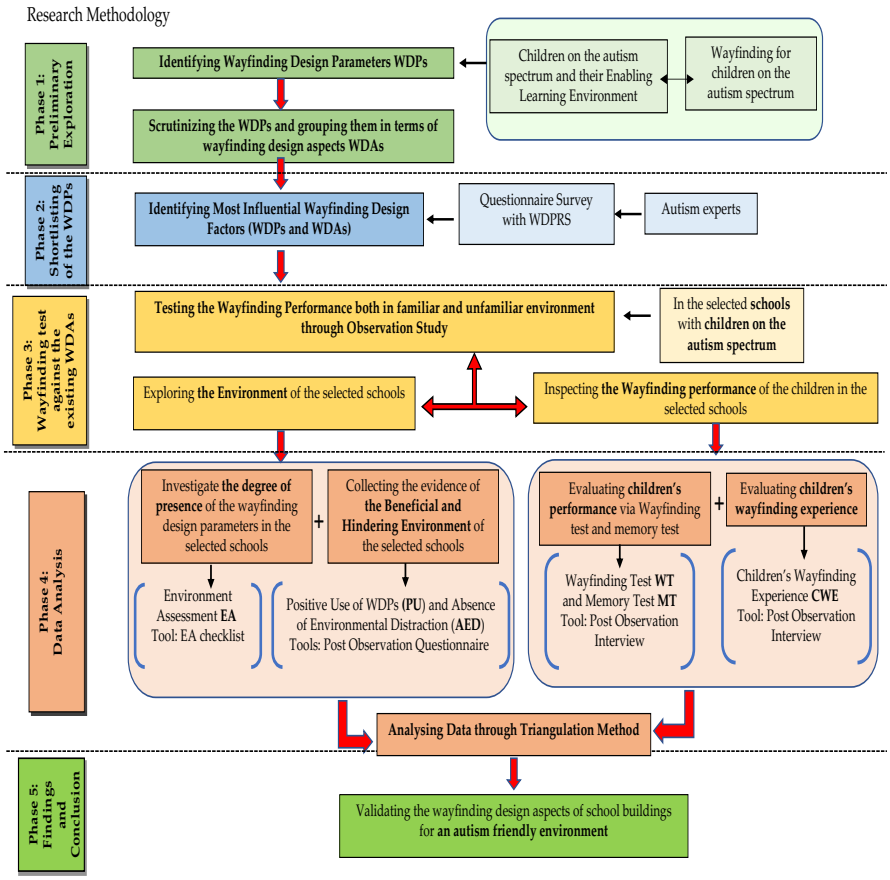


Fig. 1: Research Methodology

Phase One: The first phase reviews existing literature on autism, architecture, and wayfinding, focusing on the environmental needs of children with autism. The researcher's previous work identified 20 Wayfinding Design Principles (WDPs) beneficial for these children, based on teachers' evaluations in Malaysia. However, it lacked real-life observations of children and was qualitative. This research builds on that work by validating the WDPs and Wayfinding Design Attributes (WDAs) in real school settings. The methodology combines approaches from Khare[18] and Williams[19] .

Phase Two: The second phase involves an online questionnaire survey with 71 autism experts—caregivers, teachers, and therapists—who rated the 20 WDPs for validity on a five-point scale. Their recommendations were based on idealistic environments, necessitating further validation of the WDPs and WDAs in real educational settings to assess their impact on children's performance.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Sample size:** | **71** |
| **Participant group:** | Autism Experts (including parents, firsthand caregivers, teachers, therapist) |
| **Data collection method:** | Online Questionnaire Survey with wayfinding design parameter rating scale WDPRS using Autism SA website. |

Table 2: The questionnaire survey

Phase Three: In the third phase, the identified wayfinding design parameters (WDPs) were tested against the wayfinding performance of children with autism in real educational settings through observational study. The performance of 32 children was tested in both familiar (special schools) and unfamiliar (mainstream schools) environments in South Australia. Children with moderate autism, capable of following simple instructions, were selected, and their teachers acted as observers. Eight teachers from each special school participated. The schools were evaluated based on the presence of WDPs using an environmental assessment (EA) sheet. Participants completed a wayfinding task (WT), with performance metrics such as reminders needed, hesitation, wrong turns, success, and assistance recorded. A memory task (MT) was also conducted, where participants identified objects from the route during a post-observation interview (POI). Additionally, a post-observation questionnaire (POQ) recorded the positive use of WDPs (PUW) and environmental distractions (ED) hindering wayfinding. Finally, participants were interviewed to share their wayfinding experiences (CWE).

| | |
|---|---|
| **Sample size:** | **Teacher - 8** |
| | Children with autism - 32 |
| | School site – 4 (2 familiar site +2 unfamiliar site) |
| **Total number of observations:** | 128 |
| **Data collection method:** | Environment Assessment EA Checklist |
| | Observation checklist (to record WT) |
| | Post observation interview POI (to record MT and CWE) |
| | Post observation questionnaire POQ (to record PUW and AED) |

Table 3: The observation study

Multiple data collection methods were employed to enhance validity and cross-check findings. Data were gathered through an online questionnaire, cognitive profile checklist, observation, picture interview, photographs, and audio/video recordings.

The data were measured in terms of:

**Wayfinding Task (WT) Performance**

- Number of reminders to stay on task
- Number of hesitation or confusion moments
- Number of wrong turns
- Success in identifying the destination
- Level of assistance required

**Memory Task (MT) Performance**

- Number of pictures identified from a given set

**Children's Wayfinding Experience (CWE)**

- Perception of the wayfinding experience
- Perception of difficulty or anxiety
- Willingness to engage in the same experience in the future

**Environment Assessment (EA)**

- Degree of presence of the 20 wayfinding design parameters

**Teachers' Observation on Wayfinding Cue Use**

- Positive Use of Wayfinding Design Parameters (PUW)

- Absence of Environmental Distractions (AED) hindering wayfinding

Phase Four: In the fourth phase, collected data were analyzed and triangulated to compare the site environments and the children's performance, validating the WDPs and WDAs as detailed in Chapter Six. The four selected sites were ranked and scored based on Environment Assessment (EA), Positive Use of WDPs (PUW), and Absence of Environmental Distractions (AED). These sites were also ranked and scored according to the children's performance in Wayfinding Performance (WP) (WT+MT) and Children's Wayfinding Experiences (CWE). The scores were then compared to determine whether environmental factors aligned with performance outcomes.

$$\frac{\text{Quality of wayfinding design}}{(EA+PUW+AED)} \quad \text{Vs} \quad \frac{\text{Quality of wayfinding performance}}{(WT+MT+CWE)}$$

The results indicated that children with autism performed better in wayfinding when the environment incorporated effective WDPs and WDAs. Familiarity with the site positively influenced their memory, but successful wayfinding was more strongly linked to the absence of environmental distractions than to site familiarity. These findings validate the WDPs and WDAs as beneficial for children with autism. The study highlighted the significant role of the environment in the children's performance, emphasizing the importance of considering sensory needs when designing spaces. Statistical analysis confirmed that even high-rated designs could be undermined by overlooked factors, negatively affecting performance.

Phase Five: In the final phase, the research findings were presented in a visually engaging booklet, intended to serve as a reference for architects and designers when creating spaces for children with autism.

## 4. RESULTS

The results showed that children with autism performed better in wayfinding in environments with effective WDPs and WDAs. Familiarity with the site positively impacted memory, but successful wayfinding was more closely linked to the absence of environmental distractions than site familiarity. Traditionally, wayfinding has been viewed as an issue in unfamiliar environments. However, this research raises the question of how even familiar settings can impact autonomy for individuals with autism, as these children can still struggle with wayfinding in familiar spaces due to distractions. The study also found that memory task performance did not always correlate with wayfinding performance, but it was directly influenced by the presence of WDAs.

Positive WDAs contributed to reducing anxiety, helping children navigate new environments more successfully.

This research highlights the value of user experience for individuals on the autism spectrum in understanding how environmental design influences wayfinding, aiding architects in creating autism-friendly spaces. Ultimately, the study validated the 20 WDPs and 5 WDAs as essential for efficient wayfinding in educational spaces for children with autism, with evidence-based results. It reinforced the crucial role of the environment in children's performance and emphasized the need for architects and designers to consider sensory needs when designing such spaces. Statistical analysis revealed that even high-rated designs can be undermined by overlooked design factors, negatively affecting children's performance. This study confirmed the significance of the 20 WDPs and 5 WDAs as key aspects for designing spaces for children with autism and recommended their use as a framework for architects and designers.

## 5. WAYFINDING DESIGN ASPECTS

Designing spaces for children with autism requires a thoughtful approach that considers their sensory needs, cognitive patterns, and emotional responses. Creating environments that support their wayfinding, promote independence, and enhance their overall experience is crucial for fostering a sense of security and autonomy. This intervention experiment explores various design principles that contribute to building spaces that meet these needs as described below.

### 5.1. Legibility of Route

Circulation spaces should serve multiple purposes, allowing for group interaction and independent activity, rather than just facilitating movement. Long, narrow corridors should be avoided as they can feel congested and instill fear. Instead, breaks in the traditional corridor design provide reference points for circulation. The circulation system should clearly display all possible routes and include visual, tactile, and auditory cues, such as clearly marked paths, visible edges, and easily accessible lifts and stairs near entrances. For children with autism, visual cues like signage and landmarks enhance the legibility of circulation spaces.

### 5.2. Legibility of Space

Large, open spaces can be disorienting, so zoning and labelling areas help children understand the space's purpose. Consistent visual cues, such as color coding, and design uniformity (e.g., doorknob height, light switch placement) improve legibility for children with autism. While visually structured environments are beneficial, excessive visual information can reduce predictability and make space harder to navigate.

### 5.3. Choice of Space

Designing small group activity areas helps children overcome social challenges by encouraging interaction. Private spaces, such as one-on-one workstations, are essential for personal sessions like counselling. Transitional spaces are crucial for children with autism, as they help prepare for changes between environments, such as transitioning from quiet classrooms to noisy cafeterias. Architects should design spaces that balance autonomy and social integration to maintain inclusion within the school environment.

### 5.4. Sensory Considerations

Spaces should minimize visual distractions, as children with autism can become fixated on excessive details. Auditory needs must also be considered, with acoustic design addressing loud noises and creating quieter areas for concentration. Unpleasant odors should be removed, and areas like kitchens should be well-ventilated. Environmental factors like temperature and tactile stimuli also need attention. Providing adequate personal space for children is essential, as they require more distance to feel secure. Architects should account for these sensory needs when designing spaces.

### 5.5. Safety and Security

Observation areas should enable discreet monitoring of children to avoid feelings of being watched, while allowing freedom of movement within secure boundaries. Controlled entry and exit points are necessary, as children with autism may try to escape uncomfortable situations. Limiting the number of entry and exit points helps manage security, while clearly defined boundaries assist children in understanding space limits and behaving appropriately.

Controlling entry and exit points is essential, as children with autism often attempt to 'escape' unpleasant situations. Limiting the number of entry and exit points can reduce this risk, while clear observation systems enhance security. In larger spaces, multiple entry and exit points can help prevent congestion. Additionally, children with autism, who rely on visual cues and prefer clear rules, benefit from clearly defined boundaries that indicate the limits of a space, aiding in appropriate behavior.

The study highlights the importance of incorporating 20 wayfinding design principles (WDPs) and 5 wayfinding design attributes (WDAs) to improve wayfinding and overall experience for children with autism in educational settings. Key findings emphasize the need for clear, legible routes, structured spaces, and sensory considerations to reduce anxiety and enhance independence. Additionally, the graphical illustration of the WDPs and WDAs plays a crucial role in helping architects visualize and effectively implement these design principles. By understanding these factors and using clear visual tools, architects and designers can

create spaces that are both functional and supportive for children with autism, ensuring they can navigate and engage with their environments more confidently.

## 6. GRAPHICAL ILLUSTRATION of WDPs and WDAs

Initially, simple graphical illustrations were created to highlight the major Do's and Don'ts for each Wayfinding Design Parameter (WDP). These illustrations were then grouped according to the five Wayfinding Design Aspects (WDA). Figure 2 presents the initial clustering of WDPs around WDAs and illustrates their potential manifestation in a real-life 3-dimensional space. This 3D spatial arrangement is not a definitive design solution but rather a suggestion, demonstrating the non-hierarchical pattern of WDPs and how all relevant parameters can contribute to a possible spatial layout.

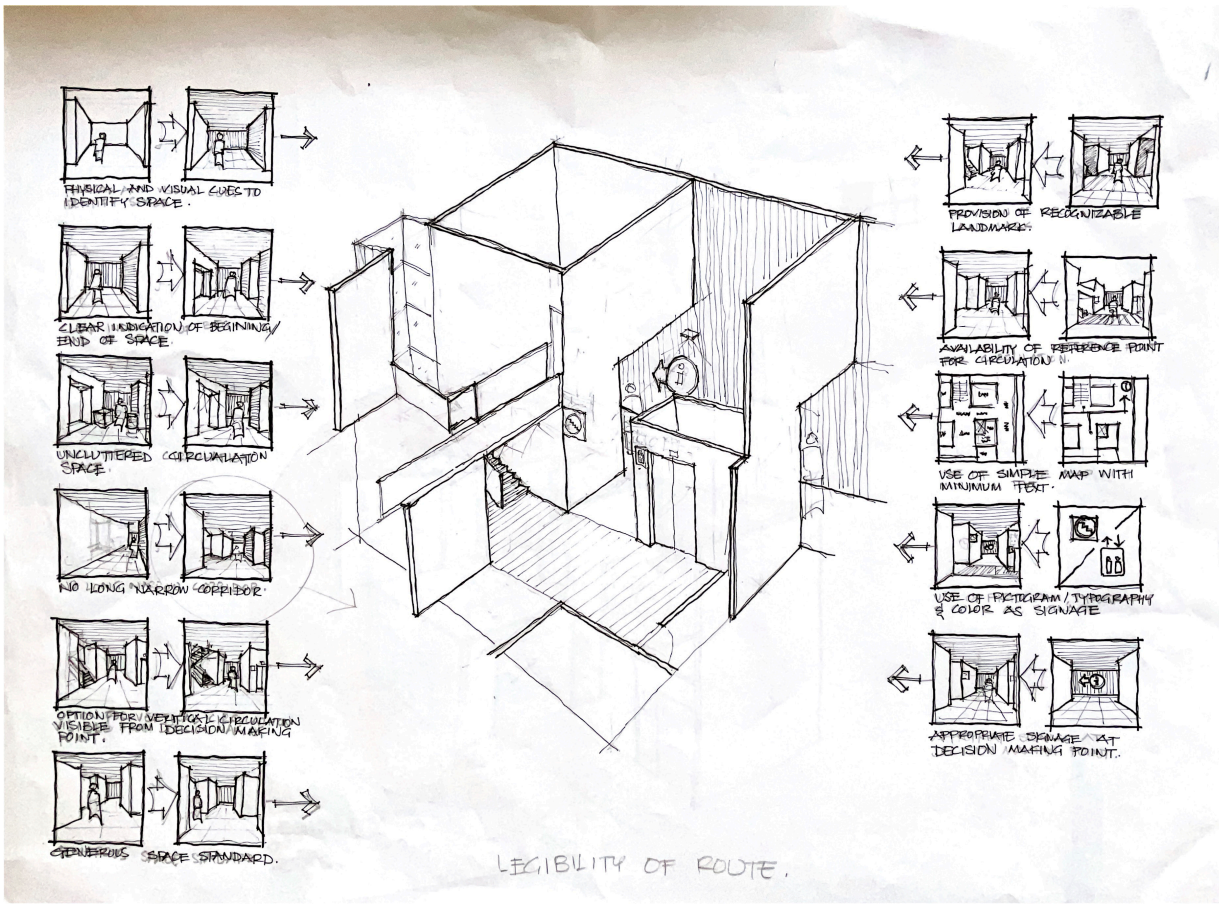


Figure 2: Sketch demonstrating the Initial Clustering of the WDP's around WDA. (Source: Sketch analysis by the Author).

The pictorial representation of the five clusters simplified the complex interrelationship between WDPs and WDAs. A comparison of these clusters reveals further overlap of WDPs across different WDAs. For instance, the WDP "Clearly Visible Vertical Circulation" overlaps with the WDPs "Legibility of Route" and "Safety & Security," while also having a minor impact on "Choice of Space." To illustrate this overlapping, a color coding system has been employed, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. Each color represents a different WDA, and the color code in the corner of each detailed image indicates the potential overlap of WDPs with multiple WDAs, as well as the level of impact.

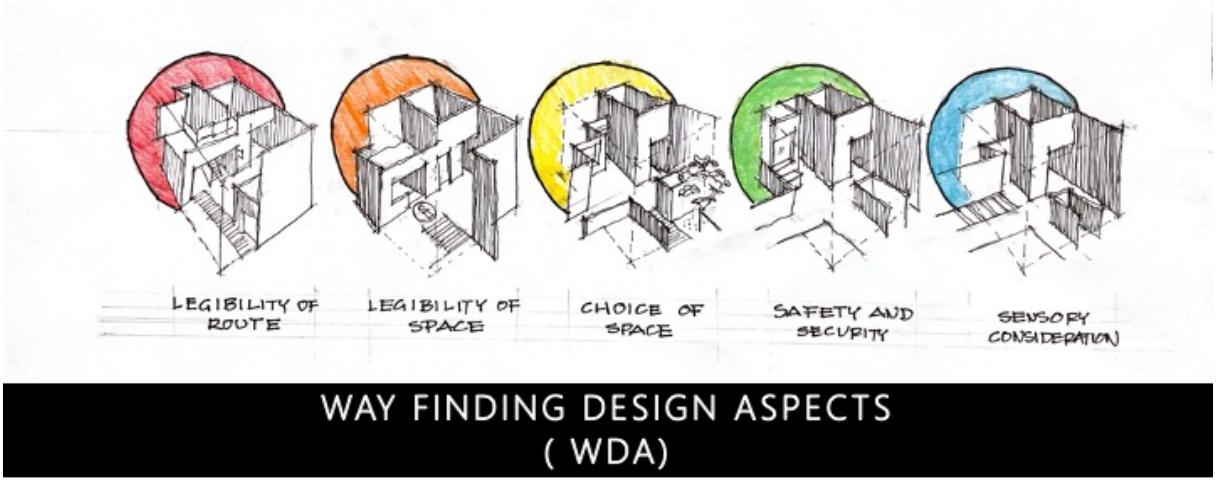


Figure 3: Cover page of the booklet showing the color coded WDA's. (Source: Sketch analysis by the Author).

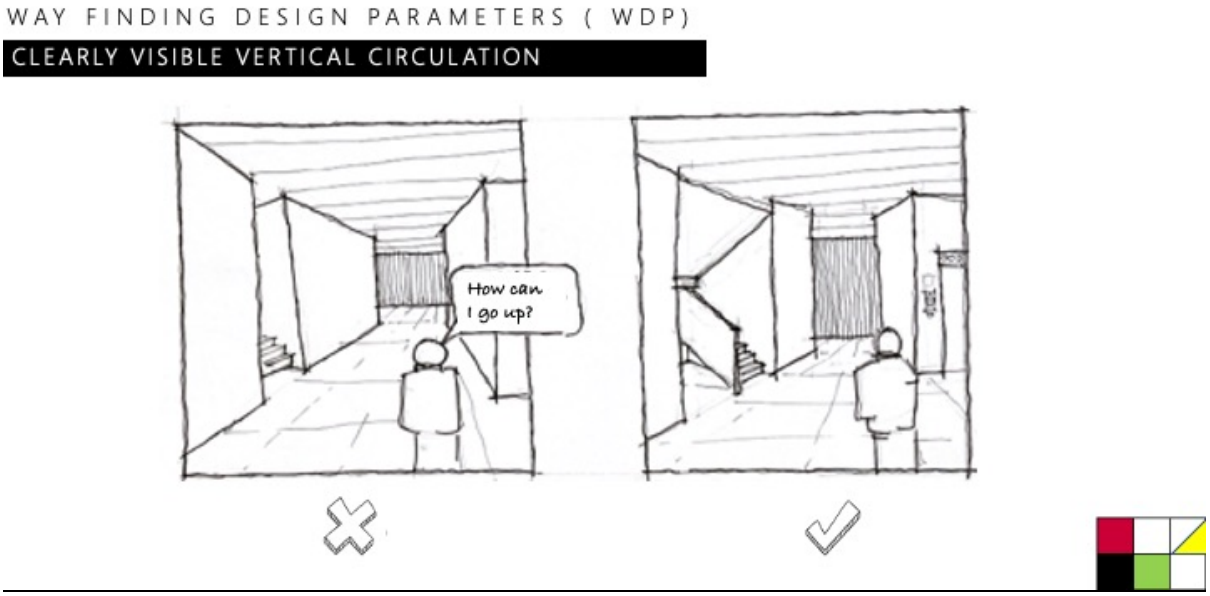


Figure 4: Sketch of a sample page demonstrating the overlapping of the WDA's by colour code at the corner. (Source: Sketch analysis by the Author).

The analysis and comparison of these five clusters informed the design of the visual booklet. As mentioned, this booklet is intended for design professionals—whether or not they are familiar with children with autism—to provide a clear understanding of the key considerations for wayfinding design in inclusive learning environments. The booklet begins with a brief overview of wayfinding and its relevance to children with autism.

It is then divided into five subsections, each corresponding to a Wayfinding Design Aspect (WDA). Each subsection begins with a concise definition of the relevant WDA, followed by individual pages dedicated to the do's and don'ts for each Wayfinding Design Parameter (WDP) within that WDA. These pages are designed for easy comprehension, with an emphasis on real-world application. To enhance understanding, a character has been created to visually represent the impact of each WDP. The character's emotional expression in different environments is highlighted in a callout bubble, enabling the designer (user of the booklet) to grasp the emotional stress each WDP may impose on children with autism. Additionally, a small color-coding chart in the corner of each page helps underscore the importance of each WDP, showing how it can affect multiple WDAs.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This research makes a pivotal contribution to the understanding of how wayfinding design in educational settings can be optimized for children with autism. Addressing a critical gap in existing literature, this study introduces a comprehensive, evidence-based evaluation of wayfinding design parameters (WDPs) and wayfinding design aspects (WDAs) within real-world school environments. Previous research has largely focused on specialized or idealized educational settings for children with autism (Henry, 2011; Khare, 2010), but this study bridges the divide between theoretical design principles and their practical application by observing children with autism directly in both familiar and unfamiliar school environments.

What sets this research apart is its innovative approach of validating WDPs and WDAs in actual educational settings, with real participants—32 children with autism across four school sites. This empirical study offers a deeper understanding of how environmental factors impact wayfinding performance, revealing that success in navigation is not solely determined by environmental familiarity, but by the presence of appropriate wayfinding cues and the absence of environmental distractions. These findings stress the importance of sensory-sensitive, inclusive school designs that cater to the unique cognitive and sensory needs of children with autism.

Moreover, this research aligns with Australia's broader vision of achieving social cosmopolitanism, which calls for a society that embraces diversity, inclusivity, and mutual respect for all individuals. This vision, as

outlined in the *Multicultural Framework Review* (2022) and reflected in the Australian Value Statement, prioritizes the dignity and freedom of individuals, regardless of background or ability. By ensuring that children with autism can navigate educational spaces more easily, this study contributes directly to the movement toward a socially cosmopolitan society—one where all individuals, regardless of their neurodivergence, have the opportunity to fully engage in and contribute to their communities.

The findings of this research provide architects and educational designers with the necessary evidence and guidelines to implement effective, inclusive wayfinding systems in mainstream schools. In doing so, it sets the stage for a more socially cosmopolitan educational system, where children with autism can navigate their learning environments independently and with confidence. Through these contributions, this study not only advances academic discourse but also catalyzes a shift toward an educational landscape that genuinely values neurodiversity, contributing to the realization of an inclusive, equitable, and accessible society for all students. Thus, this research is an essential step toward achieving social cosmopolitanism, ensuring that education systems are designed to meet the diverse needs of every student and promoting a truly inclusive future.

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**Traditional Dwellings and Settlements**
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# REIMAGINING MUSEUMS: DECOLONIAL PRAXIS IN THE CASA GRANDE DEL PUMAREJO IN SPAIN

*Caroline Ramos dos Santos*

# REIMAGINING MUSEUMS: DECOLONIAL PRAXIS IN THE CASA GRANDE DEL PUMAREJO IN SPAIN

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*This paper examines the possibility of reimagining a museum by approaching decolonial, urban and museological studies within Casa Grande Del Pumarejo, an 18th-century palace in Seville occupied by activists in 2000 to prevent its conversion into a hotel. Following its occupation, the building gained municipal ownership and cultural heritage status; however, the movement did not secure its permanence in the house, with its work and social resistance completely separated from the maintenance and existence of the space. Research conducted between 2021 and 2023 studied the practices of the association and its 20 member groups, exploring Pumarejo's potential as a museum space by analyzing the house's daily activities and their impact on the process of urban space construction.*

*Caroline Ramos is a researcher and activist with a master's degree in human Rights, Interculturality and Development and a Law degree. With a decade of research experience and extensive international training in Spain, Germany and Cairo, her work focuses on the intersections between human rights, social justice and sustainable development. She is the author of several publications on decoloniality, climate change and intersectionality, including "We Still Have a Chance" (2023) and "Memories of the Body and its isms" (2023). This research is part of a doctoral study in Human Rights at the University of Coimbra, funded by Portugal's Science and Technology Foundation, supervised by Portuguese architectural historian Tiago Castela and by the Spanish anthropologist of Equatorian origin Ivonne Herrera Pineda.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Museums have historically functioned as repositories of cultural heritage and symbols of national identity, yet they often perpetuate colonial narratives and power structures. The modern museum, rooted in the Enlightenment, emerged as a space where objects were collected, classified, and displayed to construct a narrative of progress and civilization[1]. According to Vergès[2], the Louvre's history as a museum exemplifies the complex relationship between cultural institutions and power. The author details how the museum (one of the oldest to follow the colonial pattern), initially established in 1793 as a revolutionary act to return art to the French people, evolved through various stages of acquisition and transformation. During the Napoleonic era, the museum expanded dramatically through systematic plundering of artworks from conquered territories across Europe and beyond, including Belgium, Holland, Prussia, Austria, Germany, Italy, Egypt, and Spain. Even after Napoleon's defeat, the Louvre managed to retain much of its collection by arguing for its "universal value" and citing practical concerns about restitution costs. This helped establish the concept of the "universal museum," which became a model for other European nations. The Louvre's transformation under Napoleon's reign, particularly through the direction of Vivant Denon, created what Vergès describes as a mythical episode in European museum history, setting a precedent for how cultural institutions could serve as symbols of national power and "enlightened governance."

However, over time, this narrative often excluded or marginalized the voices of colonized peoples, reinforcing hierarchies of knowledge and power. The museum's role as a space of power is deeply embedded in its etymology, deriving from the Greek *mouseion*, a place where the muses—goddesses of art and knowledge—resided, the muses were born from the union of Zeus (representing power and will) and Mnemosyne (representing memory)[3]. This connection to divine inspiration underscores the museum's dual nature as both a repository of memory and an instrument of power[4]. The colonial legacy of museums is evident in their structural elements: location, space, society, and collection[5] . As location, nowadays, museums are often situated in urban centers or tourist hubs, reinforcing their role as symbols of cultural authority. As space, their Greek-architecture, frequently grandiose and imposing, further emphasizes their power. As society, there is several layers: the first is economic - the vast majority of museums do not have free admission; the second is social - a specific code of conduct, dress, and behavior is required, even if unconsciously; third, we have a mixture of layers socioeconomically - there is a focus on foreigners, as those who come from outside are the target audience of the traditional museum, and even among foreigners, there is a dominant class that frequents these spaces. While their collections, often acquired directly or indirectly through colonial exploitation, perpetuate narratives of dominance and control, with a special blur to how the specific piece arrived there. Despite efforts to democratize museums through social museology and participatory practices, the colonial underpinnings of these institutions remain largely unchallenged[6]. However, despite the critiques from social museology, the changes presented are merely in the direction of democratizing museum spaces rather than a decolonization process, that is, a process of disarticulating museum from the legacy and space of colonial rationality, despite the colonial role of museums being widely recognized in the literature. According to Vérges, museums have faced contestation for decades, with various groups demanding reparations and restitution. The researcher reiterates that recently, in 2022, a series of environmental protests in Western museums drew global attention. Activists from different groups, such as Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil, carried out interventions on famous works, from Picasso's Massacre in Korea to Van Gogh's Sunflowers, questioning the priority given to art at the expense of environmental and social issues. In response, representatives of major Western museums defended these institutions as essential spaces for dialogue and cultural exchange, reaffirming their importance in research, conservation, and mediation. However, no museum addressed the criticisms that the movements made. Considering the lack of action from the groups that defend democratization as decolonization, Vergès argues that the decolonization of Western museums demands more than just exhibiting "decolonial" works or diversifying the pieces on display. The author contends that it is necessary to rethink the very concept of museums, considering issues such as working conditions, internal spatial and human hierarchies, and crucially, funding. Inspired by Fanon, she acknowledges the challenges posed by authoritarian racial capitalism and current counter-revolutions but

values the initiatives of museums from the Global South and the peripheries of the North as sources of important questioning for this process.

Despite there being a need, the possible decolonization of the museum exists only in theoretical terms. There is a gap in the literature where even authors who are more radical about museum transformation show a lack of imaginative possibilities. In this sense, Vergès argues that the question of slavery and colonization should not be *musefied*, as this would neutralize its revolutionary power. The author reports that in 2011, during an international colloquium, Achille Mbembé argued that the enslaved should remain as a symbol of resistance and struggle for freedom, rather than being transformed into an object of exhibition. Initially skeptical, Vergès came to agree with this view, recognizing that museological institutionalization could domesticate the political force of this history. She observes that, although there are museums and memorials about slavery in various cities around the world, a true exposition of the origins of capital and whiteness would reveal the involvement of institutions still prestigious today, such as banks and insurance companies, thus challenging the official historical narrative. Despite the need, there is an intrinsic difficulty in understanding that a decolonial or counter-colonial museum does not necessarily need to be about a specific historical moment, with central figures or heroes specially when is possible to recognize that the colonial is it specially in its form, space and logic.

The intersection of museums, urban development, and social movements reveals a power dynamic that shapes cultural memory, urban landscapes, and resistance strategies. As cities undergo rapid transformations driven by processes of gentrification and touristification, traditional cultural institutions like museums find themselves at the center of debates about preservation, commodification, and social justice. In this context, the rise of cultural tourism has significantly impacted urban landscapes, particularly in European cities like Seville. Cultural tourism, which accounts for 39% of international tourism arrivals in Europe and 60% in Spain (Richards, 2018), has driven the commodification of urban spaces, transforming neighborhoods into tourist attractions.

This process, often accompanied by gentrification, can displace residents and erodes community ties. As neighborhoods are "regenerated" to cater to tourists, the original inhabitants are often pushed to the margins, leading to a loss of social and cultural diversity[7]. Gentrification, a key strategy in contemporary capitalism's restructuring, involves the reinvestment of capital into urban areas, resulting in the displacement of lower-income residents and the influx of wealthier populations[8]. This process is not merely economic but also cultural, as the new inhabitants bring with them different aesthetics, values, and practices that often clash with those of the original community. The result is a homogenization of urban spaces, where local cultures are replaced by marketable, tourist-friendly narratives[9].

Therefore, the study uses the Centro Social Okupado Autogestionado (CSOA) movements, such as Casa del Pumarejo, which surfaced in the early 2000s against the background of privatization of urban space and commodification of cultural experiences, as a point of reference. The activists (and many residents who had lived there for more than 30 years) occupied a colonial-style mansion that has served various purposes throughout its history, including as a prison, hospital, and school. Despite its historical significance, the space is often misconstrued as a museum by tourists, creating a paradoxical relationship between its anti-touristic objectives and its role in the city's tourism route.

In response to these urban transformations, social movements have emerged as critical actors in the fight against displacement and cultural erasure. The CSOA movement, represents a radical reimagining of urban space. By occupying abandoned buildings or buildings that are at risk of being sold due to predatory tourism, and transforming them into self-managed social centers, these movements challenge traditional notions of property and urban development. According to the literature, the occupation of abandoned buildings emerged in Europe during the 1950s but became more prevalent in the 1980s due to economic instability and housing market speculation[10]. While initially driven by housing needs, the movement evolved to encompass youth cultures, particularly punk communities, and artistic expression. The organizational structure developed from family-based units to neighborhood collectives, eventually incorporating diverse groups united by shared interests outside institutional frameworks, such as housing rights advocacy, cultural spaces creation, feminist initiatives, and anarchist ideologies. The movement reached its peak in Spain, England, and Italy, where anarchist and punk groups[11], primarily targeted abandoned residential buildings and factories[12]. The CSOA movement, with its emphasis on horizontal democracy and community participation, offers an alternative model of cultural preservation that resists the commodification of urban spaces.

In this context, it becomes important to differentiate "okupas" from other models of squatting, especially considering that the history of squatting is historical and occurs in various places around the world. However, the okupa movement is clearly distinct, having a pattern: they are political and cultural occupations, representing not just the need for housing, but an explicit discourse on the right to the city and community, and perhaps most importantly: it is common for many of their supporters and occupants to have a home, meaning that the act of occupying does not necessarily stem from an individual need, but from a recognition that it is a collective necessity[13]. The CSOA movement's use of the letter "K" in "okupación" (occupation) is symbolic of its counter-cultural ethos. By occupying these spaces, the CSOA movement seeks to increase the visibility of these groups and their concerns, challenging dominant narratives about urban development and social inclusion[14].

Following the review of literature and its gaps, a critical question arises: could this movement, which originally came from the advocacy of housing rights and opposed urban touristification, be conceived as an alternative to the colonial museum? If yes, aligns with the framework that the movement itself has been seeking to legitimize its presence in the house in a stable form. The intersection between grassroots activism and museological practices offers a stimulating case study for interrogating the prospects for decolonial approaches in community-led cultural spaces.

Considering this research context, the research employs a critical ethnographic approach[15], including participant observation to explore the dynamics of Casa del Pumarejo. This methodology allows for a nuanced understanding of the power structures and social inequalities[16] inherent in the movement, while also enabling the researcher to actively engage with the community. The study is divided into three main objectives: 1) Analyze the historical contextualization and current situation; 2) Explores how Casa del Pumarejo reappropriates urban space through democratic participation and collective memory; and 3) Investigates the potential for Casa del Pumarejo to serve as an example of decolonial museum.

## 2. THE MOVEMENT & PRACTICES

The Palace of Pumarejo, an architectural and historical landmark in the Spanish city of Seville, has been a witness to the gradual social and political history of the city. Built in the 18th century as a colonial mansion, the grand structure has changed its identity from a seat of wealth and power to a self-worked center of social activity. It serves to showcase all-around transformations in societies and their fighting spirit against gentrification in cities. Constructed by Count Pedro Pumarejo, a wealthy merchant with ties to Latin America, the palace was originally styled with Moroccan architectural style. Its construction in 1775 involved the demolition of 70 surrounding houses to enhance its visibility and accessibility, a move that underscores the power dynamics of colonial urban planning[17].

Later, it served various functions as needs: prison, hospital, and even a school. The most critical transformation occurred in the late 20th century, transforming into an okupa (squatter's social center) in the view of resisting aggressive urban development. Currently, the palace's walls are adorned with posters, photographs, and artifacts that document the city's history of activism, creating a tangible link between past and present. These visual narratives serve as a form of "collective social memory," where the history of social movements is preserved and celebrated[18]. It was under battles fought between community activists and the palace for recognition as a cultural heritage site in 2003. This victory was not just a legal triumph but a reaffirmation of the community's right to the city[19][20]. The building faces structural problems and a litany of bureaucratic hurdles, along with ongoing debates about renovation and future use.


Photo 1: The first photo was taken in the interior courtyard of the house during an event, where two urban master plan logos can be seen in the background. The second photo shows the explanation of the master plan written "Living Heritage". The third photo is from inside the house showing the structural problems. Personal photos.

The declaration of the palace as a monument, however, is preserved not only in the physical structure but also in what and how the people used it historically. In this way, it allowed the community to stay (until 2026) within its multifaceted role to continue operating cultural events, workshops, and social programs, however, without the guarantee that the movement can stay in the house. Within the palace, twelve collectives function, including the following: Bibliopuma, a self-managed library with 5,000 books. The women survivors, a feminist collective for survivors of gender violence that serves free meals weekly and the association of Domestic Workers, working with advocacy of rights of migrant Domestic Workers.

As such, these are coming to be those spaces in the palace where memory and activism in the community are made alive. According to the fieldwork was possible to categorize three distinct forms of remembering the palace are retained as such: Museal Memory with timelines, posters documenting the history; Collective Social Memory with protest posters from the past 26 years, and community archives; and Affective Material Memory, personal objects left by residents, like the plaque from writer José Saramago.

The palace's identity then consists of the stories surrounding its existence and the presence of the remaining structure itself. The anniversary for the independent newspaper El Topo showcases its role as a voice for the

marginalized. For one of the members, a long-time volunteer, "The palace is not just a monument; it is a testimony to collective struggle and resilience."

Unlike most museums, in this palace and movement, one participates, and people walk in and interact with them by storytelling and activity as the boundary between the observer and contributor is dissolved. This sort of phenomenon thrives in challenging colonial museum parameters, wherein horizontality and ownership by the community are prioritized. The palace's identity is shaped by both its physical presence and the stories of those who inhabit it. Events like the anniversary of the independent newspaper El Topo highlight its role as a platform for marginalized voices. One of the members, a longtime volunteer, notes, the palace is more than a monument—it is a testament to collective struggle and resilience.

A casual observer might pick up on the building's history, spatial arrangement, and symbolic meaning, whereas most members would consider the house/movement contribution to the shaping of experiences and perceptions of those interacting within the framework to be the most important. The space acts as a "laboratory" for social-political experimentation in which new forms of democratic participation are tested and nurtured. In a manner, this metaphor captures the exploratory nature of activities therein, together with the systematic emergence of new social organizations. Through the use of Casa Pumarejo, collectives such as ODS (Observatorio de Desigualdad de Andalucía) and PAH (Platform for People Affected by Mortgages) work toward a communal sense of belonging and identity in developing alternatives to social organization and political activism.

PAH (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca - Platform for People Affected by Mortgages) is a Spanish social movement and grassroots organization that works to defend the right to housing and fights against unfair evictions. The organization was founded in 2009 in Barcelona in response to the Spanish housing crisis and has since spread across Spain. Inside of Pumarejo they have their Seville branch. Some of their many actions are: 1) Direct support to affected families: They provide legal advice, emotional support, and practical assistance to people facing eviction or struggling with mortgage payments; 2) Collective action: They organize protests, negotiate with banks, and prevent evictions through peaceful resistance and community mobilization; 3) Legal advocacy: They work to change housing laws and fight against abusive mortgage clauses in courts and 3) Community building: They create support networks among affected people, organizing meetings where people can share experiences and find collective solutions.

PAH brings people together to assemblies where they can ask for help, share information, and organize actions. It works in a horizontal, non-partisan way, which means decisions are made collectively, and they do not affiliate with or back any political party. Their model is a blend of practical support and political activism but has always focused on people keeping their rights to housing. Big achievements have been accomplished

by this organization stopping thousands of evictions, negotiating the cancellation of debts by banks, and successfully pushing for changes in housing legislation across several parts of Spain. During times when there was a big economic downturn in the country, it was most needed as it helped so many families out of losing their sole shelter due to non-repayment of mortgages or rent.

Within PAH Pumarejo there is no specific profile of members, there are people of different religions, ages, and nationalities. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in immigrants and refugees becoming directly involved with the group, because in addition to all the bureaucracy already faced, there are several other problems that arise in the search for housing: racism, Islamophobia, language difficulties and documentary bureaucracies and some of the many problems faced by immigrants.

In this sense, PAH's work ends up aligning itself, albeit informally, with ODS, where practically all their clients are refugees or immigrants, predominantly from African countries. The Observatory of Inequality in Andalusia (ODS) is a grassroots organization that combines social and legal intervention to defend the rights of vulnerable populations. Founded over two decades ago, ODS operates through a unique model that integrates political advocacy, trade union self-organization, and free advisory services. The organization works with various marginalized groups including home workers, undocumented immigrants, hostel workers, and field laborers, providing them with essential information about their rights and offering legal support through a combination of voluntary work and professional legal assistance.

The operational model of ODS relies on principles of self-determination and self-organization. It is an important factor in the Casa Pumarejo, where is always present at the assembly that takes place monthly, and it makes possible to have spaces where various collectives can collaborate to decide how to proceed. Such actions have brought awards such as the 2011 Human Rights Award from Seville; different academic research has regarded their work as important for the social transformations used to advocate for social rights and organize communities. The organization's approach creates what they term a "political rhizome" that extends throughout the community, generating transformative social relationships with humanization attached and enabling the possibilities for direct democracy.

These engagements that happen between volunteers, participants, members, clients and visitors creates an important impact that is important to highlight. One of the aspects mentioned by many members is the “transformation of identity” once they spend a long time in the movement. The transformation of identity within Casa Pumarejo occurs through multiple dimensions: physical, social, and political. As individuals engage with the space and each other, they develop new understandings of their roles in society and their potential to effect change. The movement itself was constantly mentioned as something that contributes to shaping the experiences and perspectives of its inhabitants, making it an active participant in the formation of

new social and political identities. The democratic practices that emerge within this space are not merely theoretical constructs but lived experiences that shape both individual identities and collective actions. This process is evident in the way participants describe their engagement with the space as a form of personal and collective empowerment. This participatory approach aligns with the concept of "full democratic participation" proposed by Pateman[21], which emphasizes the importance of equal power in decision-making processes. In the case of Pumarejo, the community's involvement in the preservation and management of the space ensures that its history is not just remembered but actively reimagined.

The democratic practices within Casa Pumarejo are characterized by a horizontal, assembly-like structure where decision-making power is distributed among members. This approach embodies the principles of participatory democracy, where every member has an equal say in the decisions that impact the collective. The organization's commitment to autonomy, self-organization, and inclusivity also offers a unique perspective on societal structures and politics, making it a model for those seeking alternatives to traditional systems. As political practice between the movement and the community, the house hosts a range of courses and workshops that provide knowledge and information not typically available in conventional educational institutions or political parties. The internal division is made between the collectives mentioned before and the movement itself (formally association Casa del Pumarejo). The collectives have their own way of functioning and contributes with 20 euros monthly. The movement itself organize the finances and have the general assembly in the first week of every month. In this assembly all questions and problems are debated. All collective participants are considered members of the movement, but not all members movement belongs to one of the collectives.

The concept of participatory democracy is central to understanding the dynamics within Casa Pumarejo. Pateman (2012) argues that while deliberation is a necessary element of any democratic system, it is not sufficient on its own. True participatory democracy requires active citizen involvement in decision-making processes, which is evident in the way Casa Pumarejo operates. The organization's emphasis on horizontal structures and collective decision-making reflects a commitment to democratic principles that go beyond surface-level engagement. This approach is particularly significant in the context of Spain, where citizen participation has often been limited to consultative roles rather than active involvement in decision-making processes.

## 3. RE-THINKING THE MUSEUM AND PRE-FIGURATIVE POLITICS

This political decision-making process promotes daily practical actions that are directly connected to the members' vision for their community's future. Pre-figurative politics is a vast departure from the ways in

which traditional political engagement can happen. Rather than waiting for the changes in the larger system to take place, it is all about creating alternative social structures and relationships here-and-now. This approach is applied as museology, directly challenges the radical assumptions on what museums are, who they serve, and how they operate. It raises critical questions about power, representation[22], and the role of cultural institutions in social transformation[23]. (Boggs, 2020; Breines, 1980).

The concept of pre-figurative politics in museum spaces emerges at a crucial moment in museological history. As cultural institutions worldwide grapple with calls for decolonization, democratization, and social justice, the traditional museum model faces unprecedented scrutiny. This intersection of pre-figurative politics and museology[24] offers new possibilities for reimagining cultural spaces as sites of active resistance, community engagement, and social transformation[25]. The possibility of Casa Pumarejo to be a museum-like space is not without challenges. One of the primary challenges is the need for local and international recognition to secure the space's protection and official museum status. This requires balancing the preservation of the house's cultural and historical value with the need to meet institutional standards for museum designation. Another significant challenge is the binary perspective on property ownership, which views property as either public or private. Casa Pumarejo's community advocates for a new form of property ownership—community-based urban property—that transcends this binary and ensures the space remains accessible to the community while resisting commodification and gentrification[26]. Both are beyond the scope of this research, with the first being a process that involves international and national bodies for effective recognition and the second being an internal legislative process. Therefore, what matters here is to observe, analyze and identify how the movement decolonizes or counter-colonizes museum spaces and logics.

In this sense, unlike traditional museums, which often serve as static repositories of cultural artifacts, Casa Pumarejo operates as a living, dynamic space where history is continuously recreated and reinterpreted by its inhabitants. The community's engagement with the space reflects a process of humanization, where abstract concepts such as power, memory, and urban space are reimagined through collective action and daily practices. Two key processes related to museum decolonization can be distinguished: first, the process of humanization, and second, the transformation of space.

The counter-colonial process that happens at Casa Pumarejo occurs through three interconnected dimensions: museological humanization, power humanization, and urban humanization. It is important to emphasize that any decolonization process must be based on an epistemology of human recognition in an equitable manner. The first colonial debate (Valladolid Debate) was precisely about whether bodies from the global south were human or not. In this sense, these processes transform traditionally abstract or institutional notions into more accessible, human-centered frameworks. For example, the community's slogan, "We create

space and time, we update our past," encapsulates the idea that the collective is responsible for self-management and the active creation of history, rather than passively accepting it[27].

Humanization, in its general sense, refers to the recognition of human nature. It tells us that while individuals and groups are conditioned by systems, they also have an agency of their own. Again, thinking about "we create space and time" as an entrance to the house. Neither time nor space are processes people would have power of creating, no one create time or space; they are just there, and everyone is part of it. To humanize anything-whether that be a space or a process-is to reverse this general logic. "I create space and create time" meaning that as a collective, there is a responsibility to self-manage themselves; this responsibility bears with it enormous power to take decisions regarding the space and make it into whatever the collective wants it to be; and the same goes for the concept of time. Many collectives were forgotten throughout the history of Seville and Spain; it is for the collective to create this history in an active voice, to make noise and, when needed, to keep alive the other stories-whether they be of other collectives or simply of citizens with community participation.

Regarding the transformation of space there is four vital counterpoints: location, space, society, and collection. Location plays a crucial role in traditional museums, which are typically situated in prestigious, central urban areas with limited residential presence. The Casa Pumarejo presents an interesting case study of shifting geographical dynamics. While it existed outside the city's tourist zones in 2019-2021, urban development has since incorporated it into the central tourist district. This transformation raises important questions about spatial politics and accessibility. The building's integration into the tourist circuit mirrors the very colonial museum patterns it initially sought to challenge. Its central location, while ensuring easy access for tourists, has coincided with broader gentrification processes.

Space emerges as one of the most critical dimensions in museum studies, extending beyond mere physical structures to embody deeply symbolic meanings. Traditional museums typically occupy imposing, meticulously maintained buildings that historically served as centers of authority. Their architectural grandeur, characterized by expansive halls, ornate aesthetics, and carefully curated accessibility, fundamentally shapes public perception and engagement. The Casa Pumarejo presents an intriguing spatial paradox. While its impressive statistics - an 8-million-euro valuation and 2,339.34 square meters spanning multiple levels - mirror conventional museum spaces, its essence derives from a two-decade-long grassroots preservation effort. The community's sustained commitment to maintaining and restoring the building represents a fundamental departure from institutional preservation models. This living museum concept challenges traditional museological paradigms that often require spaces to be emptied of life to preserve history. The building's presence radiates a unique form of authority - not through architectural dominance alone, but through the

vibrant intersection of its physical structure and the dynamic human activities within. The true power of Casa Pumarejo emerges from this synthesis of space and community, where internal vitality transcends external grandeur.

Society, in the museum context, relates to the museum visitor experience as central to understanding and assessing the socio-cultural impact of museums. Traditional museums tend to use these interactions to cement nationalistic thoughts and cultural hierarchies. These traditional patterns: thus reinforce the exclusionary nature of museums, where the thresholds of access are determined by socio-economic status and bureaucratic borders. The Pumarejo House offers an alternative model that presents an alternative to this paradigm. Long hours and open access prioritize community engagement over tourist consumption. Rather than a passive engagement, the Pumarejo House welcomes active participation. Community members often go from being visitors to volunteers, establishing real connections with both the space and its collective history.

Collections in traditional museums serve as repositories for gathering, preserving, and displaying artifacts, primarily operating under a paradigm of accumulation to demonstrate institutional prestige. This approach typically prioritizes international visitors over local communities, reinforcing a hierarchical museum model. In contrast, Casa Pumarejo challenges these established norms, particularly regarding property accumulation and real estate commodification. The Casa Pumarejo represents a significant departure from colonial museum narratives that often frame history through binary "victor-vanquished" relationships. Instead, it embodies what scholars recognize as alternative heritage, manifesting in two distinct but interconnected dimensions: the tangible aspect, represented by the physical structure itself, and the intangible cultural heritage, encompassing the ongoing daily practices and community engagement that breathe life and meaning into the space.

This analysis (considering the physical form of colonial power and deconstructing) examines the Pumarejo space through the lens of counter-colonial rather than decolonial practices. While the space actively resists colonial dynamics, it does not explicitly engage with decolonial theoretical frameworks. Instead, it organically develops alternative approaches to space, memory, and power relations. The counter-colonial nature of Pumarejo manifests through several key characteristics that work together to create its unique identity. The space embraces diversity by rejecting homogenization in favor of a heterogeneous community identity that transcends traditional national boundaries. Through its collaborative approach, the collective seeks equitable partnerships and systemic change rather than taking an adversarial stance. The organization maintains a non-hierarchical structure where power is distributed through collective decision-making, directly challenging traditional institutional structures. Additionally, members cultivate a strong sense of community pride and belonging while maintaining an inclusive atmosphere that welcomes others. This pride in collective identity

distinguishes itself from nationalist sentiment through its inclusive nature. The community's motto "Here we are and from here we won't leave" reflects not territorial defensiveness, but rather a commitment to maintaining an open, transformative space. Despite external pressures from local authorities and businesses, the collective maintains its integrity through shared values and practices.

The strength of Pumarejo's approach lies in its synthesis of spatial awareness and collective purpose. Their practices demonstrate how communities can achieve meaningful transformation while working within existing frameworks. Rather than pursuing complete institutional rejection, they engage in conscious reappropriation of space through community-centered practices, these practices, which are constantly based on popular power and memory, are counter-colonial museum practices that can serve as an example or at least show an alternative path to the traditional-colonial museum structure.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The academic literature on colonial and counter-colonial movements has traditionally focused on specific geographical regions, particularly Africa, Asia, and the Americas. However, when examining colonial perspectives and epistemology within institutional spaces rather than territories, such as museums, new challenges and considerations emerge. Museums, as repositories of cultural heritage and knowledge production, often embody colonial power structures that may not be immediately apparent. The process of decolonizing museums requires careful consideration and precise terminology. It is crucial to approach the concept of decolonization with academic rigor, avoiding casual or imprecise usage that might diminish its significance. The fundamental challenge lies in recognizing that coloniality extends beyond territorial occupation to encompass systems of thought and institutional practices.

This understanding allows us to recognize that colonial structures can persist even in regions that were historically colonizing powers, rather than colonies. Indeed, these spaces may be among the most critical sites for decolonial work, particularly given the Global South's ongoing economic, social, and legal dependencies on European powers. Therefore, it becomes essential to examine decolonial practices in contexts and institutions that, while never directly colonized, have nevertheless perpetuated colonial modes of thinking and organization.

In this case, Casa Grande del Pumarejo, as grassroots initiative in an urban space that is under dispute is the focus around which this study interrogates the intersection of decoloniality, museum practice, and community resistance. It shows that transformation of traditional-colonial museum models, in line with community-centered practices that dispute institutional power and assert rights of attachment, could be carried out. Considering the place attachment theories in the Pumarejo struggle is possible to argue that emotional ties,

daily practices, and collective memory render spaces into places by resisting cultural commodification and erasure. Therefore, this process, in an unconscious way, counters the structural and material parts in the colonial museum as location, space, society, and collection.

Superficially, applying decolonial epistemologies may create some frictions around these circumstances in Europe. Therefore, it is fundamental to recognize that museums are a specific example where all different decolonial schools still fail to intersectionalize. It is not possible to apply only African, Asian, or American decolonial thinking within the museum institution, as it is everywhere performing its coloniality in the same way. A museum in Cairo or in Brazil is still colonial, exercising power and control in its location, in its space and internal divisions, in the society that frequents it, and in the collection that is exhibited. Museum coloniality should be viewed as an epistemological coloniality; once deepened and recognized, the apparent frictions disappear.

True coloniality is not in the space itself, but in the subjects who inhabit it - freeing oneself from the colonizer at a territorial and economic level is hardly effective if the way of thinking, among the colonized, remains colonial. This same logic applies to Pumarejo, located in Southern Spain, a region historically disputed between Spaniards and Moors. As explored previously, race is the root of colonial thinking, and within Pumarejo we see, in practical terms, real anti-racist and social inclusion practices. Focusing on counter-colonial and decolonial practices is what truly characterizes the movement as decolonial, regardless of where it is located, and the same applies to museums. In this sense, it is important to emphasize that is possible to conclude the movement as decolonial, its actions, modus operandi, are counter-colonial.

In this sense, this situates the social movement as an active agent constructing alternatives to the traditional museum logic in its opposition to colonial structures, rather than just responding to or modifying them. Counter-colonization emphasizes the intent of these movements to instill new cultural representations, knowledge-making, and community engagement. Inside the movement, this primary convergence between the museum and decoloniality goes beyond practical memory initiatives to emphasize the very crucial notion that daily human rights work becomes a fundamental tenet within an anti-racist framework. The movement, through its internal collectives, is at the forefront of racial debates among other things, where issues of race are not metaphorized merely but rather engaged and acted upon concretely as everyday issues.

This study contributes with three essential contributions to the field: The first proves to be empirical evidence on how community-led initiatives preserve and activate cultural heritage outside of traditional institutional frameworks; second, because on one hand, the emotional attachment to and spatial attachment of heritage assist its preservation, which includes not merely its physical maintenance but also the social relationships with the heritage and the collective memory; and third, because on the application of decolonial theory in the

context of Europe, with strong arguments urging for more nuanced frameworks where colonial legacies and local specificities are considered.

The Pumarejo collective's standards of democratic participation, living heritage, and emotional attachment uphold a different mode of conceptualizing museums and challenge traditional museum paradigms toward spaces of resistance, community empowerment, and living heritage. This model reframes museums as active sites of history-writing and reinterpretation by the community, rather than as passive institutions centered on colonial narratives.

In summary, the case of Pumarejo, which may not straightforwardly belong to a decolonial framework considering its European territory, demonstrates counter-colonization and provides a valuable model for how different kinds of activity can help to reconceive museums as sites of inclusion and community-building. After proper analysis, this research suggests that places like Pumarejo promote ways to make museums suitable for activities that transcend their colonial heritage, emphasizing emotional and social attachments within communities rather than merely focusing on heritage preservation. This subverts traditional museological practices and opens new doors for future research into a new concept for museological studies, expanding its definitions and recognizing other kinds of museums that prioritize living heritage and community engagement.

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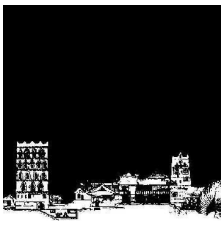

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# COSMOPOLITANISM, EDUCATIONAL, AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURES

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