

THE EVOLUTION OF MUSEUM CULTURE IN BOTSWANA TOWARDS MULTI-LAYERED ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION

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Abstract

The role of museums in Botswana has evolved from collecting ethnographic objects and exhibition development to architectural heritage conservation. This paper explores the evolution of museum development through case studies of the National Museum in Gaborone and a regional museum, the Phuthadikobo Museum in Mochudi. The study examines exhibition practices in these museums by discussing the limitations of traditional methods of exhibition and arguing in favour of a multi-layered exhibition method. Both the National Museum and Phuthadikobo Museum have now transformed into cultural institutions which now undertake architectural heritage conservation projects. These projects include the National Museum project which recreates three huts representative of the vernacular architecture of different tribes which we argue is a heritage-making project. The Phuthadikobo Museum proposes for an open-air museum that conserves the existing buildings in situ and addresses the intersection of heritage conservation, a sense of history, intangible heritage, and lived traditions. Situated within the debates on museum development and heritage conservation, the paper considers how museum development in Botswana could address the challenges of museum exhibitions and the questions on heritage authenticity.

Keywords: architectural conservation, authenticity, multi-layered exhibition, intangible heritage

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Introduction

Throughout history, museums have played a key role in education, the construction of national identity, and the promotion of tourism and travel. Tony Bennett (2004) has traced the origins of early museums to European museums established by wealthy members of society. These museums were driven by the antiquarian spirit of collecting objects deemed of treasure and importance (Bennett, 2004; Walsh, 1992). During this period, private country homes were transformed into storehouses of objects and collections of cultural artefacts reflective of their owner's status and wealth. These houses were opened to the visiting public and travellers as private museums. Public museums gained currency in Europe after World War II and their role was mainly educational (Eyo, 1994). Exhibition practices of these early public museums were also driven by elitist antiquarian interests (Eyo, 1994; Myles, 1976). Bennett (2004) further notes that 19th century the classification and traditional exhibition of materials in Europe were also influenced by the popularity enjoyed by the developments in "new museums of natural history, ethnology and geology" (Bennett, 2004, p. 2). The exhibition of artefacts in these museums was organised according to thematic areas developed by these disciplined mainly glass-cased. Similar museums were established throughout colonial Africa, with exception of Botswana, reflecting this traditional method of exhibition. The strongest criticism of these museums is that they do not reflect the cultures and aspirations of the local people they sought to represent (Arinze, 1998; Eyo, 1994; MacKenzie, 1994; Mazel & Ritchie, 1994). This is because, in African countries, the issues of heritage and culture are closely related (Arinze, 1998) and some of the displayed artefacts are part of the material culture used in traditional and cultural rituals (Setlhabi, 2014). Therefore their display should find ways to re-contextualise these objects within their cultural and social contexts. The question is whether current museum exhibitions can continue to follow this approach.

This paper explores two issues related to the evolution of museums. One is exhibition design development and the other is architectural heritage conservation approaches. We situate our discussion of museum development and curatorial practices in Botswana within the immediate post-independence period which focused on the preservation of objects of antiquity and the narration of a singular history of Botswana. Drawing on the recent studies on museums, we follow the suggestion that museums are products of their broader socio-cultural contexts. Such studies have been conducted by scholars from different conceptual approaches (see for example Byrne, et al., 2011; Lien & Nielssen, 2019; Mao & Fu, 2021). A compilation of museum studies by Byrne et al. (2011) examined the process of how museums were developed, from building collections and artefact interpretation to exhibition development. However, these studies tended to limit their discussions to the process of museum development only and not sufficiently considered the contemporary relevance of this exhibition. From an exhibition design perspective, we aim

to extend these discussions by arguing in support of a multi-layered exhibition approach that seeks to contextualise and diversify exhibition strategies. This includes a consideration of the historical context in which museum exhibitions in Botswana museums were produced, as well as how the future exhibition design may start to consider developing multiple narratives of histories and employ different displays such as artefacts, historic photographs, and illustrations.

Next, we explore the approaches to museum displays and how museums have transformed to engage with issues of heritage conservation. Phuthadikobo Museum and the National Museum embarked on heritage projects, inspired by the popularity of cultural villages in southern Africa during the early 1990s aimed at the representation of cultural and national identity (Ndlovu, 2018), the presentation of local traditions (Zeppel, 2002) and the conservation of cultural heritage (Moswete et al, 2015). The National Museum heritage project has discussed an example of an attempt to create a replica of vernacular architecture of different ethnic groups built out of context, without the involvement of the ethnic communities' architecture it seeks to represent. The ongoing project in Mochudi through the Phuthadikobo Museum is located within the area designated as a historic centre for revitalisation and preservation (Council, 2008, p. 74). The project is an example of the community's attempt to conserve architectural heritage in situ which engages with issues of maintaining a sense of continuity with the past by preserving architectural relics, history, and lived traditions. When viewed through the lens of architectural heritage conservation, these projects raise questions on the interpretation of heritage, whose heritage is being conserved and the role of intangible heritage in architectural conservation. This paper contributes to how the ideas of authenticity and heritage have been addressed in the emerging architectural conservation practices and the subject of museum development in Botswana, however, remains underexplored.

Museum exhibition development and the calls for multi-layered exhibition strategies

The first museums in Botswana were established in tribal villages in the early 1970s (Nteta, 1973). These museums, which are often referred to as regional or rural museums, were and still are community-based and curated out of the interest of presenting local histories and cultures through selected cultural artefacts. The National Museum was built in the capital city, Gaborone, in 1967 and is modelled on traditional European museum practices. Meanwhile, the Phuthadikobo museum in Mochudi Village was established in 1976 as a community-curated museum and managed by the Bakgatla Community Trust.

As previously highlighted, early public museums in the western world had a direct influence on museum development and exhibitions throughout Africa. These museums' exhibitions followed a traditional method of display commonly termed the 'cabinets of curiosities'. Glass-cased exhibition practice came

under criticism for various reasons. Scholars have argued that most of the artefacts displayed in western museums were uprooted from their local contexts (Abungu, 2005). Colonial museums were also criticised for prioritising the interests of the coloniser by presenting local histories in ways that were alien to the local population (Arinze, 1998; Fogelman, 2008; Machiridza & Thondhlana, 2022). This practice has been pointed out to persist in the post-colonial period of museum development (Arinze, 1998; Eyo, 1994; Mazel & Ritchie, 1994). Glass-cased traditional exhibits have been criticised for creating a barrier between the objects and the visitors. Furthermore, the continued development of the exhibition narrative largely based on the past only has been criticised by scholars like Kevin Walsh (1992) for creating a distance between the past and the present. He argues that our "preoccupation with modernity" has resulted in ideas of progress being viewed in a linear fashion and in museum representations this approach is visible in the "static displays" (p. 13). Examples of such linear displays of modernity are evident in colonial museums where artefacts displayed are usually related to past histories of the indigenous populations' precolonial cultures. In these displays, very little or no information is provided about the artefacts themselves and there are no attempts to re-contextualise these such as their cultural or social contexts.

Recent studies have begun to explore how museum exhibition design can begin to address different layers of telling narratives, visitor interests, and unpacking layers of objects' meanings. One strand of these studies focuses on the need to re-contextualise displayed objects within their social, cultural, and political contexts. A study by Ruohan Mao and Yi Fu (2021) explored a strategy of re-contextualisation of museum objects using a framework that entails categorising exhibits into macro and micro contexts. In macro contexts, objects are presented within the general theme introducing visitors to the overarching topic. Meanwhile, micro context or sub-themes are used to provide a further interpretive framework of the same topic by exploring other connected themes such as social, cultural, and scientific contexts (Mao & Fu, 2021). The value of this method of exhibition design is the use of a multi-layered where a single theme is presented in multiple ways and allows multiple interpretations by the visiting public.

Another important analytical method sharing the same approach as the contextual approach considers the museum's complex network of agencies (Byrne, et al., 2011). In this context, museums are analysed as part of the social networks, which include professionals, stakeholders, and researchers. A contextual analytic approach emphasises the need to explore other hidden layers that form part of museum exhibitions, including the historical and socio-cultural contexts, in which exhibition designs are produced during the colonial or post-colonial period. It is however important to note that other methods which allow further interpretation of artefacts during exhibition design may be considered, due to poor cataloguing of

collections. Such methods may include the values of the objects, how they were produced, their meanings, and who produced them. Thus, we situate our discussion within the studies which consider museum exhibition design as a multi-layered process. The process includes the context in which exhibition designs were produced as well as the practical side where artefacts could be further interpreted, allowing the presentation of histories or narratives in a multi-layered approach.

Although the subject of museum exhibition has been extensively explored, these studies have illustrated the value of exploring case study—specific museum practices. The practices are studied to fill in the paucity of research on how this critic may inform the future transformation of these museums (Fogelman, 2008). Given this context, this paper does not address the debates on exhibition practices in detail, but it explores museum exhibition practices in Botswana, their influence, and how these may inform future museum development in the country. In Botswana, museum research and development has continued at a slow pace as compared to other sub-Saharan countries. This slow development has led scholars like Setlhabi (2016) to argue in favour of establishing more specialised museums to present different aspects of Botswana's history and memory. This calls for new museum typologies, highlighting the need to develop a critical understanding of museum culture and development.

From exhibition to architectural heritage conservation

The museums in Botswana fall under the government Department of Museum and Monuments and play a critical role in the interpretation of heritage and architectural heritage conservation. For example, most museums in Botswana reuse existing listed buildings or are built on sites of historic and heritage interest. These include the Supa Ngwao Museum in Francistown, housed in a listed heritage building, and the ongoing Ntsweng Museum in Molepolole which is located on a listed heritage site of historical and cultural. The challenge of conservation for the museum has been the need to explore appropriate architectural conservation practices. Literature suggests that the approaches to architectural heritage conservation are multiple and times contested (Gao & Jones, 2021; Ito, 2003). These include the debates on whether a total reconstruction of heritage buildings is ethically acceptable, as most of the building fabric is significantly changed and thus impacting its heritage authenticity.

The majority of these debates in southern Africa also stem from the emerging cultural recreations commonly known as cultural villages or eco-museums. Similar examples of conserving buildings as life-size exhibits have been built in other parts of the world under different museum typologies, such as folk villages in Europe. The earliest example of this type is the Skansken built in 1819 (Ndlovu, 2018; Young, 2006). In Australia, museum villages became popular from the 1960s to the 1970s and these entailed the recreation of replicas of the old building using construction techniques developed from the interpretation of

available archaeological evidence (Young, 2006). The majority of new cultural villages built in southern Africa are driven by commercial and tourism interests. These cultural villages are purposely built as tourist cultural attractions often presented and packaged as replicas of vernacular architecture complete with the simulacrum of traditional practices and cultures (van Veuren, 2003). Furthermore, the cultural villages have been examined through the lenses of tourist experiences (Marschall, 2003; Mokoena, 2020), the representation of culture and the construction of identities (Ndlovu, 2018), and the debates on authenticity (Boonzaaier & Wels, 2017). This is because the definition of heritage itself has been extended over the years, from tangible to intangible, as a sociocultural process (Smith, 2006), and as a selective process in which we use the past in the present (Ashworth, 2011; Graham, 2002; Lowenthal, 1998). As a result of this expanding nature of heritage, there is a growing concern to address how the notion of authenticity is considered in architectural heritage conservation. In communities where architectural heritage is not monumental, a growing number of studies have argued that we need to extend the notion of authenticity beyond the tangible heritage and consider intangible heritage (Ahmad, 2006; Ito, 2003). In this context, it is important that architectural heritage conservation projects are conducted to ensure best practice that integrates the safeguarding of local construction skills.

Study methods

The research is based on some of the fieldwork completed during a PhD study in 2014, 2015, and 2016. In 2020, further fieldwork was carried out in the National Museum, particularly in their in-house public library. The fieldwork entailed a tour of the Phuthadikobo Museum and the Mochudi *kgotla* conservation area. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with the Bakgatla community who were volunteers at the Phuthadikobo museum. The interviews focused on the interpretation of heritage, heritage values, and significance, the appropriation of the buildings, and the meanings the community attaches to these. During the site visit, we had an opportunity to tour the sites and guided those who provided interpretation of some of the artefacts, and heritage values, and these were documented through observation.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with heritage managers, architects, historians, curators, and museum directors who were previously involved in the re-imagining of the Phuthadikobo and Botswana National Museum. Interviews with professionals explored how heritage is interpreted and reimagined. Interviews with community members in Mochudi focused on heritage interpretation, meaning, values and significance. In addition, documentary research was used to contextualise how exhibition development and the conservation of heritage are framed. The documentary research in Mochudi included old photographs and sketches produced by anthropologist Isaac Schapera's accounts and archives.

The documents provided the only architectural documentary record of how the Mochudi *kgotla* area and conservation space have evolved and been built over time. Architectural drawings, design statements, and reports produced by professionals, who were involved in the conservation of heritage in Mochudi, elucidate how heritage conservation was framed. Meanwhile, the academic papers published by Botswana Notes and records in the 1960s to the late 1990s provided different accounts of the establishment of both museums.

Exploring the National Museum and Phuthadikobo Museum: Histories of national origins and traditional rituals exhibition

Unlike most former colonial countries, there was no museum in Botswana built by the British colonial government. According to Doreen Nteta (1973), the interest to establish the first museum in Botswana was expressed by Chief Bathoen II in 1938 in Kanye—it was named Kgosi Bathoen II Museum. Since then, similar regional museums were opened in Maun, Mochudi, and Francistown. The aim of museum development at the time was to "provide on the one hand a picture window of Botswana through the ages and, on the other hand, a centre for the encouragement of future research and the encouragement of future research and the integration of its results" (Nteta, 1973, p. 216). The National Museum was mainly for educational purposes (Grant, 2006) and most importantly to build collections (MacKenzie, 1994). Its development was closely related to the early European museum's interests in antiquity and natural history, histories associated with the origins of indigenous cultures, and prehistoric sites around the world (Gaugue, 2001).

The National Museum is located within the capital core, the oldest part of the city, opposite the City Hall. Currently, the museum is undergoing a process of renovation and new exhibition development. The original building is modest, organised around a central courtyard with several exhibition rooms opening into the cloister. The Octagonal Gallery used to host annual art competitions and cultural shows. A double-storey building with offices and a library forms part of this composition on the northern side of the site (Figure 1). Curation and exhibition in the museum have always been the responsibility of government staff members at the Department of National Museum and Monuments. The exhibition was loosely divided into four broad themes: indigenous landscapes, local wildlife, collections of ethnographic objects, and colonial encounters.¹ The displays were not necessarily strictly structured, but moved through the rooms' permanent displays with recreations of the lifestyles of indigenous communities, which was one of the central themes. One display shows a scene of one of the indigenous communities, the Basarwa, in a homestead (Figure 2). The setting for this homestead was a Basarwa vernacular hut with a forecourt used for cooking and other home social

¹ These themes are our categorisations having visited the museum throughout the years and during the study.

activities. The man who makes fire is surrounded by objects that were typically used in homes, such as pestles and mortar to grind grains, forming part of the setting. Another person who seemed to be a member of the same family becomes part of the display and appears as if they had just arrived home from a hunting trip. Both hunting and rearing of livestock were captured in the scene for a tribal community which was largely nomadic hunters and gatherers.



Figure 1. The condition of the National Museum before renovation in 2017 (Photograph by Katlego Mwale)

A focus on the general history of Botswana continues with an exhibition of historic photographs and maps on colonialism. The display includes a painting portraying European and indigenous people in one place, perhaps to highlight colonial encounters through trade and the arrival of missionaries. The contrast between the two cultures is further reinforced by the juxtaposition of traditional and modern wares (Figure 3). Modern artefacts include bottles and guns, while traditional artefacts include animal skins and iron clamps. Recreations on the indigenous landscapes and wildlife scenes also take the centre stage for permanent displays (Figure 4). Set against the painted backgrounds of the savannah grassland and wetlands, stuffed animals, such as lions, antelopes, and warthogs, formed the display.

These representations in the exhibition could be read in two ways. One is that it sought to reflect on Botswana's rich landscape such as the importance of the Okavango Delta's biodiversity, which we infer from the painting given the minimal text presented. The other is that it reflected the interest of the curators at the time in wildlife and tourism and the developments in archaeology and ethnology studies. Robert MacKenzie (1994) highlights this strong interest in indigenous cultures and wildlife. He situates the development of the museum within the transition from colonialism to independence where the focus on cultural policy and research focused on the protection of antiquities associated with the Basarwa, natural history, and archaeology. During this period, the intellectual agenda was mainly driven by the local indigenous elite and government officials, including former colonial government workers. The collections were mainly "historical and cultural items relating to southern Africa" (MacKenzie, 1994, p. 207).

Here, history was presented in a singular narrative whether the Basarwa, who is considered the first inhabitants of Botswana, form the original storey or colonial encounters and formed part of the development storey. Since independence, Botswana has pursued a one-national identity cultural policy. According to the historian Neil Parsons (Parsons, 2006), the idea of writing a single history in Botswana gained currency from the 1960s and late 1970s and is viewed as a way of developing an antithesis of pre-colonial histories and representations recorded by European anthropologists who focused on the individual identities of the different tribal groupings. This perspective has manifested in the museum exhibition, despite that Botswana is made up of different tribal communities. As one of the former National Museum curators, Doreen Nteta (1973), notes, "the museum exhibition was developed to present ... Botswana with its changing landscape and its people as they develop from the earliest hunter-gatherer through today into the future" (p. 216). It is quite clear that the exhibition emphasises Botswana as a hegemonic nation with a singular origins narrative and does not present other histories. Furthermore, research in the museum focused on natural history, archaeology, and ethnology.

More importantly, Mackenzie (1994) questioned whether the National Museum would still be relevant to the local citizens. The simple answer is no and this could be attributed to the failure of the exhibition strategy to diversify narratives on histories that the public may not necessarily identify with. The majority of public criticism of the National Museum notes the 'outdated' mode of display. Such displays lack in creating interest in artefacts on display and have been described by some visitors as old fashioned and static. The displays remained austere with very limited interpretive frameworks. They are kept unchanged since their inception despite several developments in the museum industry that explore different object displays, such as the use of digital exhibitions, other interpretive aids such as audio and videos, and different thematic arrangements.



Figure 2. Part of the permanent display that shows a family of the Basarwa family set against painted landscapes (nomadic hunters and gathers) (Photograph by Sun Reporter, 2018)



Figure 3. Exhibition part employs a painting of Europeans and locals combined with modern and traditional artefacts (Photograph by Sun Reporter, 2018)



Figure 4. Permanent exhibition part that displays wild animals in a permanent with a painting of a wetland landscape (Photograph by Sun Reporter, 2018)

On the other hand, the Phuthadikobo Museum is locally curated, borne out of the activism of the Bakgatla tribal community working with a local historian Sandy Grant to preserve their cultural heritage (Grant, 2006). The museum is accommodated in the building previously built by the Bakgatla as their national school in 1921. The building is currently listed as a national monument, indicated by the archival evidence suggesting that the building was conceived and built as an architectural monument by the community.² It is located on top of Phuthadikobo Hill in the centre of the village and is visible from the village below. The museum comprises the *kgotla*—a traditional royal place and the majority of heritage buildings. This area is currently designated as a conservation area. Its architectural significance is described in its official designation

² A description of the process of building the Bakgatla National School is described by Amos Pilane (1973) in a paper titled, 'Notes on Early Educational Efforts among the Bakgatla', Botswana Notes and Records, Vol. 5, pp. 120–123.

as an excellent example of local interpretation of colonial Cape Dutch architecture (Figure 5). Architecturally, the building has retained its H-shaped plan with a series of rooms on either side of the plan and a central room used for events and meetings. The forecourt defines the entrance and is articulated by a veranda commonly found in this style of architecture. The most striking feature of this building is the red-painted high-pitched gabled-end roof which stands as a contrast to the whitewashed wall. The Phuthadikobo Museum is funded by private donors and periodically by the government of Botswana through the Kgatleng District Council. According to Grant (1994), the museum was established during a period when community-based museums in Southern Africa had not yet existed.



Figure 5. The Phuthadikobo Museum in 2017 (Photograph by Katlego Mwale)

In this museum, most of the exhibition is based on donated private collections, including cultural artefacts associated with rituals, photographs, and private letters. The main purpose of this museum is both educational and cultural custodianship. The exhibition practices in the Phuthadikobo Museum are loosely arranged based on a combination of traditional Eurocentric systems of classification and local curation, resulting in an eclectic display reflective of both professional and locally inspired ideas on representation. The exhibition themes are developed based on the contexts of historic photographs, personal letters, and ethnographic and cultural artefacts.

The displayed historic photographs document the traditions and lifestyle of the Bakgatla tribal community by anthropologist Isaac Schapera during the colonial period. Schapera's photographs are displayed in their original form and there is no curatorial effort to enlarge them. The photos can be categorised into architecture, everyday life, and traditional ceremonies. Architectural photos depict vernacular architectural huts in homesteads separated by low walls while some of the public buildings, such as churches, follow a locally adapted Cape Dutch colonial architecture.

One of the displays focuses on the rainmaking ritual as labelled (Figure 6). There is very little information or illustration showing the connection between the photographs and the ethnographic objects. For example, one cabinet is dedicated to rain-making rituals with photographs on display, but the artefacts that were used for these rituals are in a separate cabinet. The challenge to design a comprehensive exhibition strategy is captured by the former Phuthadikobo museum director, Sandy Grant, who in 1978 wrote to Isaac Schapera that:

After a great deal of trouble, I now have a proper display cabinet for the rain-making pots (those of both Lentswe I and Isang) and have written to Speed in London asking him to confirm with me the terms on which he deposited the one pot with the National Museum. (Grant, 2015, p. 117)

Indeed, the majority of the artefacts' interpretation in the museum was based on the research conducted by Isaac Schapera and historian Sandy Grant. The extract of letters between the two professionals that were published in a local journal, the Botswana Notes and Records, suggest that the communication sought to establish the interpretation and use of some of the artefacts, such as the drums used in traditional initiation ceremonies and historic photos and sketches done by Schapera. A combination of both accounts by Schapera and artefacts as an exhibition strategy could have been explored fully to construct a multi-layered narrative on rituals such as rain-making. Rain-making is a ritual in which the community used to worship their ancestors as part of requesting better rains before the ploughing season. The strategy narrates processes involved in the ritual itself and its contemporary hybrid interpretation as a result of Christian influences. The practice as with many traditional rituals was banned by the Christian missionaries in all tribal communities in Botswana, as Schapera (Schapera & Comaroff, 2007) notes during one of these studies within the Bakgatla:

The Bakgatla among whom I am working have been affected to a very considerable degree by European influences... What impressed me the most is the fact that although the old tribal ancestor worship has been well-nigh completely replaced by Christianity, magic still flourishes very strongly, even church members of the high-standing resort to the magician at the beginning of the agricultural season, when they are building new houses, when they are in need of rain and so on. (p. 24)

The ritual continues today in very limited ways and is now part of the lived memories of the community. It is, however, clear that within the period where cultural artefacts associated with traditions were seen as backward and inappropriate, the exhibition of these objects during the immediate post-independence age was in ways restrained by these beliefs. It is not easy to understand the process of rainmaking ritual from the exhibition.

More importantly, both the National Museum and Phuthadikobo Museum are currently being redeveloped. Given the availability of artefacts in both cases, we suggest

that museum exhibition design could explore a multi-layered strategy which uses both objects and photographs to present themes from different perspectives. This exhibition design strategy would ensure that these museums are not stuck in their past. The National Museum exhibition and research have continued to focus on pre-colonial histories with greater emphasis on the singular history of the nation and the national identity of Botswana. We argued elsewhere concerning Benedict Anderson's theory (1991) on the nation as an imagined community, that, in Botswana, "a common identity was imagined as something that could be drawn from the distant past, when the nation of Botswana was seemingly homogenous" (Mwale, 2017, p. 141). In the context of this exhibition, the imagined nation were initially hunters and gatherers. As a result of European colonial encounters through trading and Christian missionaries, the local began to adopt a modern lifestyle as shown in the paintings. This persistence in precolonial histories is also a part driven by the current governance structures of the National Museum, which are formulated along the old departmental divisions of natural history, archaeology, and ethnology.

Rain-making ritual pots displayed separately

Rain-making ritual pictures



Figure 6. The exhibition inside the Phuthadikobo Museum shows the use of historic photographs and cultural artefacts in ways that do not show connections between the displays (Photograph by Katlego Mwale)

Architectural heritage conservation or heritage making

Apart from exhibition development, the role of the National Museum expanded in the subsequent years to play a central role in the custodianship of heritage, culture, and monuments. As part of this new role, in 1994, the National Museum built an open-air museum as a life-size exhibition of traditional huts in the courtyard. The composition of this open-air museum is meant to be a depiction of a typical traditional village layout. It includes two re-created traditional huts as a representation of the vernacular architecture of selected cultural groups in Botswana. A *kgotla* open space completes this layout. One of the huts is a replica, representative of the Bakgatla vernacular architecture, and the other hut is a representation of the Bambhukushu vernacular architecture. Bambhukushu hut is built out of reeds and has a thatched roof. The Bakgatla hut is built out of mud bricks with traditional decorations known as

lekgapho. The huts are thatched and have a forecourt articulated by low walls also decorated with traditional *lekgapho* (Figure 7). This project was promoted for educational purposes and it was published in 1995 a handbook titled *Visit the Traditional House at the National Museum*. According to the publication, the aim of the open-air museum vernacular exhibition is twofold, firstly it is considered heritage conservation—safeguarding the vernacular architectural skills of these communities at risk of disappearing. The importance of conserving traditional building skills is further highlighted in the publication (Baeletsi et al., 2005):

The traditional house at the Museum is an example showing traditional building skills which are still alive in Botswana, mainly in rural areas. Traditional building skills are deeply rooted in the social and cultural character of every nation. (p. 2)

In this context the huts are treated as a physical documentation of vernacular architectural skills and could be studied by future generations as a way of learning "about Botswana's culture, history and traditions and society as a whole" (Baeletsi et al., 2005, p. 2). Secondly, it is an architectural depiction of a typical traditional Tswana settlement based on social and cultural values. The need to conserve traditional construction skills and to present the traditional architectural layout of a village was considered as conservation.



Figure 7. A re-created vernacular architecture hut in the National Museum with traditional *lekgapho* decorations (Photograph by Katlego Mwale)

Despite the intention of the open-air museum as architectural heritage conservation, our research revealed that the construction process of these huts does not follow any heritage conservation practices. This perspective emerged during the interview with one of the museum representatives, who referred to the recreations as architectural heritage. However, the representative highlighted the construction process that did not attempt to follow any 'authentic heritage' conservation approaches (interview with an anonymous museum representative, 2017). Both, the Bakgatla and Bambhukushu cultural community members, were not involved in the interpretation of their traditional building skills, which

contradicts the aim of the project. The traditional construction skills, which could be considered intangible heritage, are still in existence within these communities and practically transmitted through generations. In this case, there is a need to reconsider how communities could be involved in the interpretation of how local traditional skills and the building of traditional huts. Furthermore, the social organisation of the traditional layout has not been explored because some of the spaces that are fundamental in a traditional spatial layout are missing, such as the chief's house, the *kraal*, and granary storage. The exhibition is silent on the social organisation of traditional layout where several compounds based on family relations were organised around a circular open space. The open space in the middle is the *kgotla* and was used for meetings, rituals, and cultural events. The *kgotla* is still culturally significant and currently used for political and cultural meetings. As a result, these re-creations are "selective representations devoid of context and meaning" (Mwale, 2017, p. 188) and represent an unsuccessful heritage-making project rather than an architectural conservation project.

By the early 1990s, the role of the Phuthadikobo Museum also expanded to the conservation of architectural heritage, the interpretation of heritage, culture, and lived traditions. Since then, the museum has undertaken two major projects—one being the continuous restoration of the Phuthadikobo museum over the years and a proposal to turn the area around the museum into an in-situ open-air living museum aimed at maintaining a sense of history and a continuity with the past. This area is the oldest part of the village built in 1870 by the Bakgatla tribal community and was designated as a historic area in 2008 for conservation purposes. It is located on the foothill of Phuthadikobo Hill. According to Kgatleng Development Plan, conservation of this area would "address the issues of preservation, infill, restoration, adaptive reuse and tourist development" (Council, 2008, p. 12). Research suggests that the original 1870s layout was built based on socio-cultural traditions such as polygamy. The chief's compound and his wives' compounds were built around the central space, locally known as the *kgotla*. The historic area is the best-preserved example of vernacular architecture and layout of the Bakgatla tribal community. It is also characterised by local interpretation of Cape Dutch colonial architecture defined by white-washed walls, and deep verandas topped with contrasting red painted hipped roofs. The area currently comprises two preserved original traditional huts and a tribal police administrative building. They are listed as architectural heritage buildings which include a Dutch reformed church building that follows Cape Dutch colonial architecture located towards the entrance of the site. Other heritage-listed structures include a cattle *kraal* used for rituals, a dilapidated chief's compound, consisting of a dilapidated vernacular architecture hut and main house characterised by Cape Dutch colonial architecture, and two-grain silos.

Unlike the open-air museum in the National Museum, the ongoing project in Mochudi preserves the existing layout in-situ as an open-air living museum. The term 'living museum' is used in this context because the *kgotla* is still used as a setting for the representation of Bakgatla culture, traditions, and intangible heritage (Mwale, 2017). The activities include the coronation of the chief, cultural events, and political meetings. The project began in 1998 with the preservation of the two vernacular architecture huts by Phuthadikobo Museum. These huts are part of the original 1870s layout with walls built out of mud bricks decorated with *lekgapho* and thatched. Although these huts are not necessarily in use, they are part of the original 1870s layout. According to the former Phuthadikobo museum director, Sandy Grant, the preservation of the huts was important to retain the authentic vernacular architecture in situ (interview with Sandy Grant, 2017). As part of the ongoing project, the proposal seeks to conserve and reuse the existing structures for different uses which would accommodate the visiting public. The tribal administrative office and chief's house would be used for temporary exhibitions and events. The *kgotla* will continue to be used for everyday life activities such as cultural and political events and meetings. This approach of balancing living heritage with architectural heritage conservation was expressed by the members of the project team and it was informed by mapping the material heritage and living heritage.

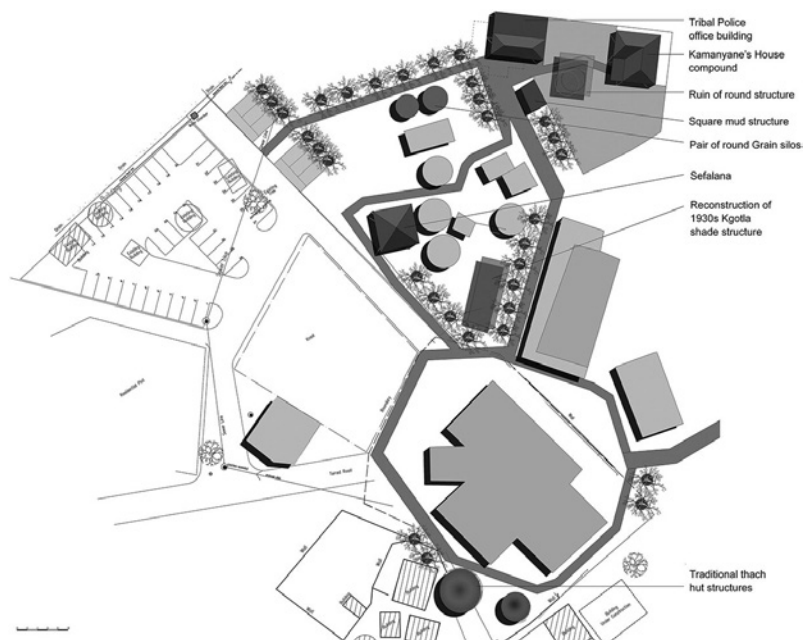


Figure 8. The layout of Mochudi kgotla shows the location of different heritage buildings and it is currently designated as a historic core (Drawing by Nabeel Essa)

The need to balance material heritage with living heritage was emphasised by the community members, who were interviewed, noting that a *kgotla* is a place for the chief who is viewed as a custodian of their cultural customs. In this case, the *kgotla* and activities which occur in space represent a sense of continuity with the past as well as architectural heritage conservation of the existing structure.

Concluding remarks: Towards an evolved exhibition and architectural heritage conservation

As previously highlighted, both the National Museum and the Phuthadikobo Museum draw their exhibition influences from the traditional Eurocentric approaches. This study has illustrated that the major concern in the National Museum is the lack of transformation of exhibitions as previously emphasised. The failure of the National Museum exhibition to overreliance on Eurocentric approaches where artistic values take priority over cultural values, leading to object misinterpretation (Setlhabi, 2012). To this, we have observed that the immediate post-independence cultural policy focused on the need to present a singular identity and history of the origins of Botswana. Furthermore, the current artefact display reflects the biases of disciplines of natural history, ethnology, and geology, which influenced classifications in early public museums. During our research, we have noted that the traditional museum classification system is often rigid and does not allow for a multi-layered curatorial strategy in which the narratives around artefacts are told in texts, pictures, and videos. This is because, when a museum exhibition is viewed through the lenses of traditional exhibition practices, it is then constrained by the primary role of building collections, overlooking the important role of exhibition development. The National Museum is currently undergoing a major renovation and exhibition redevelopment.

Recent museum studies have pointed out the need to adopt multiple exhibition strategies as a way of building multiple interpretive frameworks (Bann, 2003; Macdonald, 2021; Mao & Fu, 2021). MacDonald (2021) argues, in support of exploring different exhibition methodologies in museums, that "the museum has never been pure and singular, but has always contained multiple possibilities within it" (p. 185). Similarly, a study of museums in the Netherlands by Mao & Fu (2021) explores the use of multiple exhibition strategies in museums, in which the narrative is constructed from various exhibition strategies using broader thematic categories which are then broken down into sub-themes. The study illustrates how different objects, texts, and artefacts can be exhibited to allow for multiple interpretations from different perspectives, such as historical, socio-cultural, or even political.

The two projects illustrate contrasting ideas on architectural heritage conservation. In the National Museum, the project entailed heritage-making and somewhat resembles a stage set or themed park. Recreating vernacular huts of the Bakgatla and Bambhukushu without any attempt to contextualise these within the cultures involved in their production represents a failed architectural heritage conservation approach. Traditional craftsmanship, which includes traditional construction techniques, is one of the important aspects of intangible heritage in urgent need of preservation. However, a need to guard against recreation can be interpreted as architectural heritage conservation without heritage value or meaning. As Smith (2006) has pointed out heritage is not only about material

things, but a process of how these are created and meanings placed on them. Its conservation should therefore consider all the above as the case in Mochudi takes into consideration the existing architectural heritage, its meaning, and significance.

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