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Vera Maria Sperandio Rangel

# Genetics Museum' strength and challenge



Fig. 1

In the year of 2009, the coordination and the professors of the Graduate Program in Genetics and Molecular Biology (PPGBM) thought of beginning a memory's preservation project of this pioneer Program that initiated in 1954.<sup>1</sup> The PPGBM developed itself at the same time of the Genetics science's construction at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), state of Rio Grande do Sul and Brazil reflecting, for sure, in the international scientific environment. The technique used by the historian to approach the PPGBM/UFRGS's trajectory was the oral history. The professors that participated in the foundation donated their testimonies with which an information guide was created. With the rich material collected and other documents, including machines used in the earlier times, the museum's organizers thought of how to show this history in order to share the information with the community. The museum's creation has imposed itself. Therefore, the great objective of the first exposition "Genetics at UFRGS, Brazil and the World", that presents the museum, is to inform the scientific and universitarian

community that the museum is, from now on, a tool to access the historical collection.

The former professors agreed to arrange photographs, microscopes and machines. The pieces represent symbolically the trajectory crossed since the first class. With the reuse given to the elements on the historical exposition, we have the material patrimony side by side with texts, the immaterial patrimony. According to the diagnosis patterns to strategic planning, this is the museum's strength indicator. At the exhibition room that everyone calls museum is presented an interpretation of PPGBM's trajectory. It's a mistake to think that the museum is only its exposition or its physical installations. The Genetics Museum is much more than that. It carries the "Foundation Effect"<sup>2</sup> that mixes the patrimonies with the constructed history developed today, given continued existence to the founders. One of the museum's objectives is to make the current and future students aware of what history they make part of. For this reason, the exposition's simplicity – composed by furniture from the University Patrimony Department, a place that houses substituted furnitures as school desks, tables and desks – is a proof that the success formula is not in a sophisticated museograph's project. We can have creative solutions with little resources. The relevance is in the history that we have to tell. The project's grace is in the immaterial patrimony. The selection of some pieces composed the museography. An old desk painted in white color and placed in front of a photograph's collection makes

<sup>2</sup> „[...] they are not many people, genetically talking, that present intrinsically the Foundation Effect. These are those things from people who founded, who created this group, their manners, their ways that show up. The Foundation Effect should exist in Porto Alegre, for example, or New York, whatever. So it really has effect in small populations. It worths for anything and so to the Genetics' Department, that is small. I can't create a Foundation Effect at the University but as a general policy. Inside the Genetics Department it is stronger: it is about to adore the research putting it in first place, to respect the others, but mainly respect the research, the Science generally. This strong interest by research and the chase for a serious and honest result... In this case Genetics' Department is strong.” (Rocha, Fernando José da. Memories – Graduate Program in Genetics and Molecular Biology – PPGBM. Testimony given in the interviewee's residence to the historian Naida Menezes. Porto Alegre, November 14th, 2009. Free translation by the author).

<sup>1</sup> About our Program. *PPGBM: Graduate Program in Genetics and Molecular Biology* [online]. [cit. 2014-02-08]. <http://www.ufrgs.br/ppgbm/en/historico>.



Fig. 2

a laboratory's ambience (Fig. 1). Some pieces show up as the photograph amplifier (used in association with old microscopes' models) and the electrophoresis technique. At the rear of the room there's a shelf with several niches that bring references to every PPGBM's department or laboratory (Fig 2). The technical reserve has been placed in the room nearby to allocate the scientific reviews' collection and other pieces and materials, taking place an ambience for their preparation for eventual expositions or to preventive conservation treatment.

The contemporary sociomuseology's pattern proposes a museum as a tool to the communitarian development from an institutional basis but at the same time constructing new forms of relations: learning, entertainment, communication, leisure and many others that result from the interaction with the society's interests and this way educating.<sup>3</sup> This amount of possibilities, starting in the exposition room, can be spread outside the university, what I call the museum's challenge. The communication between the Genetics Museum and the society goes beyond the university's walls. It contributes to the integrations between several publics through the technology's insertion, with mixed languages between tradition, innovation, dialogues, articulations and connections, always starting by the material and immaterial patrimonies. The Internet site in development course will provide a wide access to several documents and – why not? – a virtual tour. The objective is to put together past and present and make possible to show a little of what we do here to faraway places. With this media we make easier the cultural and scientific exchange even if it's only a first approach. In other way, to create interest in the new students and other people who passes in the campus and renew every semester

<sup>3</sup> RANGEL, Vera Maria Sperandio. *Os Museus de Calçada do Centro Histórico de Porto Alegre na Atualidade*. Tesede Doutorado – Museologia. Lisboa, Portugal: Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias. Faculdade de Ciências Sociais. Educação e Administração, 2013. Orientador: Prof. Doutor Mario Caneva Moutinho.



Fig. 3

begin: a graffiti, almost a mural, announces the museum (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). It calls people come to know it, even if they are from other areas. Most of them become curious. The colorful panel changed the landscape. The stairs next to the panel, before uninteresting and boring, became informative, welcoming and



Fig. 4

fun. It's a message with artistic language that comes directly to young people, the so-called "Y generation". By the way, the predominant population on the campus. The accessibility question, nowadays an important subject in general urban equipments, is far from the ideal considering this museum. To qualify this museum, the access that today is only possible by stairs can be changed in the future transferring the museum to the ground floor.

I believe that the museum's DNA has much emphasis in history than in expensive resources from the Ephemeral Architecture, that sometimes is shine but not fundamental. In the case of the Genetics Museum its gens and genetics are fundamental.

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