Arocena Museum: Inclusive Museum

Introduction

Torreón, México is located in the southwest corner of one of the five states bordering the United States. Coahuila is the third largest state in Mexico.

It is a city of the twentieth century as it was founded in 1907. At the beginning of the century many foreigners began arriving in Torreon, attracted by “white gold”: cotton. Torreon, then grew from being merely a train station to a big city, center of the most important cotton growing area of Mexico.

One of the entrepreneurs who arrived in Torreon was Rafael Arocena, a Basque from Bilbao, who developed thousands of acres for cotton. At the same time, his only daughter was collecting European and Mexican colonial art. Eventually the collection grew and the two daughters became important collectors. Ten years ago, part of the collection of the great-grandson of Rafael Arocena was donated to the E. Arocena Foundation in order to create the Arocena Museum in Torreon.

The Museum opened its doors in August 2006 with a permanent collection of European Art, Colonial Art of Mexico, plus an exhibit on the History of Mexico and a chronicle of La Laguna Region. The museum now includes four areas dedicated to temporary exhibits and a Historic House.
The Museum Educational Program

An inclusive Museum as a community committed to learning is one of the Museum's principles. To achieve this, the Museum must find ways to establish meaningful relationships of trust and commitment with the various educational agents: parents, teachers, authorities and the community in general.

A museum can, and should be, an inclusive space where students visit and gather to learn together, regardless of their personal, social or cultural background. To enter a museum there must not be any discriminatory mechanisms, separation or selection of its visitors or its staff.

Although children come from schools where these elements of inclusion may not exist, the museum intends to insure that the time spent within its doors will serve as an environment where all feel included and welcome. They must all have the same opportunity to access the knowledge that the museum offers through its shows and collections.
Since the quality of the education of children and the young generations is one of the major problems in Mexico, the Arocena Museum is committed, since its opening, to have the mission and vocation to help advance their education. The Museum offers an ambitious educational program that is inclusive and provides equal opportunities through school visits for all students in the region. The educational program includes free transportation to all the children in the school system, for both public and private schools, from kindergarten to ninth grade, which we call basic education.
The city of Torreon has a student population of 120,000 (one hundred and twenty thousand) children from basic school. Of this total, not all can afford the cost of transportation to visit the museum. As the museum is centered in being an inclusive institution, it solved how to transport 100% of the students at least once a year. Thus, the educational program with the cooperation of local businesses was established proving their interest in the education of the local students.

Private companies dedicated to transportation and dairy were invited to join the Museum in this collaborative strategy to facilitate buses and drivers to
work with the logistics of the program. Also, authorities of the Ministry of Education added their support in order to approach the parents.

To this date, the Museum has achieved a 75% success.

The four partners in the program are: the state educational authorities, a Transportation enterprise, a dairy company and the museum.

The Museum design the weekly schedule and programs in coordination with the schools, one week in advance so teachers may be able to prepare the visit and train teachers who are scheduled to go to the museum by participating in a session on how to make this visit more productive and meaningful, volunteer guides who lead the visits, according to the age of each group and the workshop activity regarding the topics discussed during the tour, plus a complementary talk on nutrition, water care and sustainability among others themes and the bus drivers on the responsibility of tending to children and to assess the risks involved when picking up the children in their schools some of which can be located in violent neighborhoods.

The students spend two hours in the museum:

1. Transportation school-museum.
2. Meet, greet and welcome at the museum square.
3. One hour tour or rally in the scheduled art room; may be one of the permanent or temporary exhibitions.
4. Thirty minutes complementary art workshop.
5. Twenty minutes complementary talk, for instance on nutrition. And

6. Back to their schools.

The visit is not only important in content, but also equally important is the way in which mediators and guides connect with the group and with each of the students. The experience is an opportunity to create a bond with the self of each child, to motivate them and awaken their interest in what they will see, on how to use all their senses and to experience an integrative visit.
The visit takes place in an atmosphere of freedom and respect. Children leave the museum differently from how they entered. If we think that some of the children may lack running water in their homes, looking at objects of art illuminates their eyes and the experience feeds their spirit.

It is important to explain the current social context.

The city of Torreon has been experiencing a crisis of insecurity that strikes directly to families. It is increasingly common that schools cancel field trips for theirs students to museums, parks, or other places, in order to avoid any risk.

Nevertheless, the number of schoolchildren who visit the museum each semester has been satisfactory. These students have the opportunity to leave aside the reality of their city and learn about art and culture.

During their visit to the museum, the youngest obtain constructive experiences, of both educational and a positive social impact nature. The invitation to schools in dangerous neighborhoods is relevant, because the simple fact of entering these neighborhoods on buses to pick up students involves a risk, so it is perceived as a great success for the museum to do so with zero negative incidents.

Due to distance, social or economic circumstances, the students are not used to this type of cultural or educational activities, so the social impact and
the changes in the attitudes and interest shown by these students has been very positive.

After two years of this educational program the museum has received a total of **almost 140,000 students** (one hundred and forty thousand students) and **16,990 teachers**, (sixteen thousand and nine hundred and ninety teachers, almost seventeen thousand) adding more every day.