

EXPERIMENTAL MODELLING OF MUSEUM EDUCATION IN A CONTEXT OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

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Introduction

Since 1981, we have done research on museum education at the *Département des sciences de l'éducation* at the *Université du Québec à Montréal*, within the framework of the *Groupe de recherche sur l'éducation et les musées* (GREM). Over the years, we have developed and authenticated pedagogical models designed specifically for museum education (Allard, Larouche, Meunier and Thibodeau, 1998; Boucher and Allard 1998; Allard, Boucher and Forest, 1994; Allard, Larouche, Lefevre, Meunier and Vadeboncoeur, 1995-1996). Without attempting to summarize our work, it will serve as a source of inspiration throughout this exposé that deals with modelling in a context of cultural diversity. We will illustrate our exposé by partially presenting models designed for the planning and evaluation of educational programs implemented in national historic sites in Canada.

Recently, we developed and authenticated an all-encompassing model of museum education (Allard and Boucher, 1998) based on the following postulate: *museum education fundamentally has a museological dimension, an educational field dimension and a social dimension.* (Figure 1). The museological dimension clearly refers to the museum, to the museum as experienced by the visitor and to interactions between the latter and the works and objects exhibited. The educational field dimension refers to the discipline that the museum espouses by choosing to present objects of an artistic, historic, scientific or other nature. The social dimension corresponds to the specific characteristics and demands of the visitor's social group. These three dimensions are linked together in shared zones and exclusive zones. For example, a learning objective targeted in a museum educational program could be pursued in a school curriculum and be of a museological nature. Similarly, a learning objective could be exclusively of a museological nature.

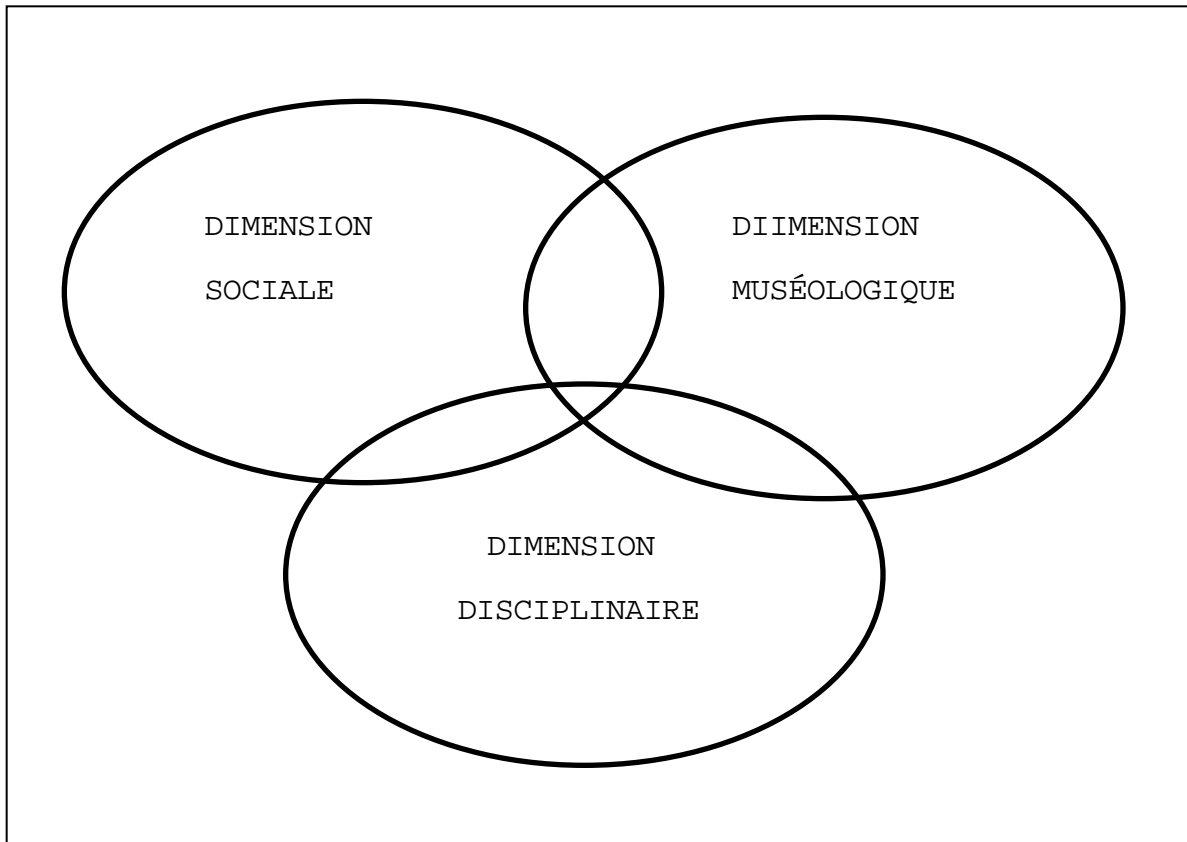


Figure 1

The Dimensions of Museum Education

Each of these three dimensions of museum education can be illustrated through the example of the national historic sites conserved and restored for the purposes of heritage presentation in Canada.

The educational field dimension: a glance at Canadian history

When the first Europeans arrived in America in the 16th and 17th centuries, the presentday territory of Canada had already been peopled by Aboriginal peoples migrating from Asia for millennia. Grouped into tribes, they spread all over the continent. The French were the first to colonize the country that then became known as New France. In the mid-18th century, New France was conquered by Great Britain with the help of its colonies in North America. A few British subjects, primarily

merchants, settled in the St. Lawrence Valley. The royal authorities tried in vain to assimilate some 60 000 inhabitants of French language and culture called Canadians who had not returned to their mother country, France. Following the American Revolution (1783), several thousand colonists, called Loyalists, who had migrated north to Canada, remained loyal to Britain. They established several mutually independent colonies: Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick on the Atlantic Coast; Upper Canada to the north of the Great Lakes; and Vancouver on the shores of the Pacific. In the second half of the 19th century, the British colonies were grouped together by the British Parliament to form a new country. Today, Canada occupies a huge territory stretching from east to west, from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans; from north to south, from the North Pole to the United States. Canada is comprised of ten provinces and two territories united in a federation. The Francophones are concentrated in the province of Quebec and the Anglophones are in the majority throughout the rest of the country. Since the end of the 19th century, thousands of immigrants of various languages and cultures have settled in Canada. As for the Aboriginal peoples, they are spread throughout the entire territory.

Canada as we know it today is the product of the cohabitation of citizens descending from two main cultures occupying a territory already tributary to Aboriginal cultures and to which thousands of immigrants from different cultures and languages have come. In this context, the question, if not of national identity, at least of a certain degree of coherence has come to the fore (Allard et al. 1980; Allard et als. 1995).

The museological dimension; the concept of a historic site

Since the early 20th century, the Canadian government has designated sites of national historic interest with the increasingly clear purpose of commemorating Canadian historical facts. In addition, the expression "historic site", which

originally evoked a physical space having cultural and symbolic meaning, took on a legal definition. From this perspective, a national historic site designates "any place declared to be of national historic interest by the Minister responsible for Parks Canada." (Parks Canada, 1994: 121).

It may comprise:

"Surface and sub-surface remains, individual buildings or complexes of buildings and other works, artifacts, natural features and combination thereof" (Parks Canada, 1994: 69).

Today, federal government records include nearly 800 designations of national historic interest with regards to sites (HSMB, 1996).

More than a hundred of these historic sites have been preserved and enhanced for the purpose of commemorating a theme representing Canadian history, and are managed by Parks Canada. They refer to a variety of diversified themes. For example, the province of Quebec has twenty-one national historic sites that can be grouped into the following themes (Lacelle, 1995); the theme receiving the widest treatment is that of the **military**, mainly approached from the perspective of buildings (e.g.: the national historic sites of Fort Chambly and the Fortifications of Québec); and battles (e.g.: the Battle of the Châteauguay National Historic Site). This is followed by the theme of **industry and trade** evoked by the fur trade (such as the Forges du Saint-Maurice Historic Site) or by the fishing industry; the **theme of political life** commemorating the life and work of politicians (e.g.: the homes of Sir George-Étienne Cartier and Wilfrid Laurier, turned into historic sites); that of **transport** associated with communication routes (e.g.: the Côteau-du-Lac or Lachine historic canals); lastly, the theme of **social organization** present in sites dealing with the exploration and occupation of the territory (e.g.: the Cartier-Brébeuf Historic Site). In conclusion, the

historic sites deal with several aspects of life shared by Canadians.

However, an important question remains unanswered: Is a historic site a museum?

According to the definition by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), a historic site is not, strictly speaking, a museum. However, it can be assimilated into the category of a museum according to an addendum to the latter definition:

b) In addition to institutions designated as "museums", the following qualify as museums for the purposes of this definition:

(i) natural, archaeological and ethnographic monuments and sites, and historic monuments and sites of a museum nature that acquire, conserve and communicate material evidence of people and their environment (ICOM, Statutes of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) as adopted by the 16th General Assembly of ICOM. (The Hague, The Netherlands, September 5, 1989) and amended by the 18th General Assembly of ICOM (Stravanger, Norway, July 7, 1995), Article 2).

Despite this addition, it is important to note that a historic site does not always fulfil all of the functions of a museum. In fact, although a historic site conserves, exposes and communicates *in situ* material witnesses of man and his environment, strictly speaking, it does not always have a collection. Notwithstanding this remark, national historic sites can be considered as museum institutions.

The social dimension: the educational function of a historic site

Once historic sites became the responsibility of the federal government in 1919, historic sites were devoted more or less openly to educational purposes. In addition to attracting visitors and stimulating research, they had to favour a better understanding of the country and create a spirit of national pride (HSMB, 1919: 7-8). By giving children the opportunity of acquiring historical knowledge, they would contribute, according to James Bernard Harkin (1875-1955), the first Parks Canada commissioner, to making better Canadians (Harkin, 1914; quoted by Taylor, 1986; 67). In short, in the 1920-1960 period, historic sites were considered to be sources of education and "patriotic" inspiration (Lacelle, 1995:5) based on knowledge of the past.

In 1967, at the time of the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of Confederation, the role of historic sites in increasing public knowledge of the country's history was recognized, especially since many of the immigrants who had settled in Canada in huge numbers since the beginning of the century were not cognizant of national history (HMBS, Minutes from the meeting held May 27-30, 1958: 4). The minutes state that the commemoration of historical themes must contribute to the celebration of Canadian identity, particularly by reinforcing the symbolic legitimacy of the Canadian Confederation. A few successive policy statements (1968, 1980, 1994) would define the objectives to be fulfilled by historic site conservation and heritage presentation. In particular, historic sites should "promote a better knowledge of the past" (Parks Canada, 1980: 28). Finally, they would be envisaged as "symbolizing its national identity and human environmental heritage" (Parks Canada, 1994: 71). Consequently, they must, according to the policy statement presently in effect, "[...] play a significant role in the education of all Canadians" (Parks Canada, 1994:71).

However, at the same time, around the end of the 1960s, there was a major change in the preferred educational approach. Knowledge of history should not be restricted to the transmission of knowledge linked to events that took place on the location of a historic site. Drawing inspiration from the work of the American historian, Tilden (1957), it was proposed that the large amount of information available should be used to effectively interpret heritage (MAINC, 1972: 7-8). But what is meant by interpretation? According to Tilden, interpretation is essentially an educational activity intended to uncover the significance of things and their interrelationships by using authentic objects, personal experience and examples rather than simply by the communication of factual information (Tilden, 1992: 248-249). Interpretation is therefore:

"An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information."

Historic sites, therefore, adopted a holistic approach that seeks to immerse the visitor in a planned heritage setting, resolutely devoted to the promotion of Canadian identity. To illustrate our comments, we will present several of our studies. Particular emphasis will be placed on the case of the Sir George-Étienne Cartier Historic Site commonly known as "Cartier House", located in Old Montréal.

The case of Cartier House

In 1994, the *Groupe de recherche sur l'éducation* was mandated to define the theoretical basis and develop a specific methodology for evaluating and, ultimately, for planning educational programs implemented at Canadian historic sites. Within the framework of this research project, we have particularly studied an educational program entitled *Le Voyage autour du monde de M. Cartier*, implemented at Cartier House (Larouche and Allard, 1996). Located in Montréal's oldest neighbourhood, Cartier House actually combines two adjoining Victorian-style houses dating from the 19th century. One of the buildings was the home of Sir George-Étienne Cartier, a politician who was one of the main initiators in the joining of the British colonies of North America with the Canadian Confederation. At Cartier House, two main types of exhibition are preferred: didactic exhibitions and period reconstructions. The first exhibition type, which we will call didactic, deals with "Cartier's career and work" and evokes "the ideological and socioeconomic context of his time" (Management Plan, 1985: 30). Elsewhere, reconstructions "intended to provide a better understanding of Cartier as a man" (Management Plan, 1985:30) evoke the layout of several rooms in his house.

The evaluation was done using the preliminary version of a program planning and evaluation model for historic sites and other museum institutions developed and validated by GREM (Allard, Larouche, Meunier and Thibodeau, 1998). The preliminary version is represented in the following manner:

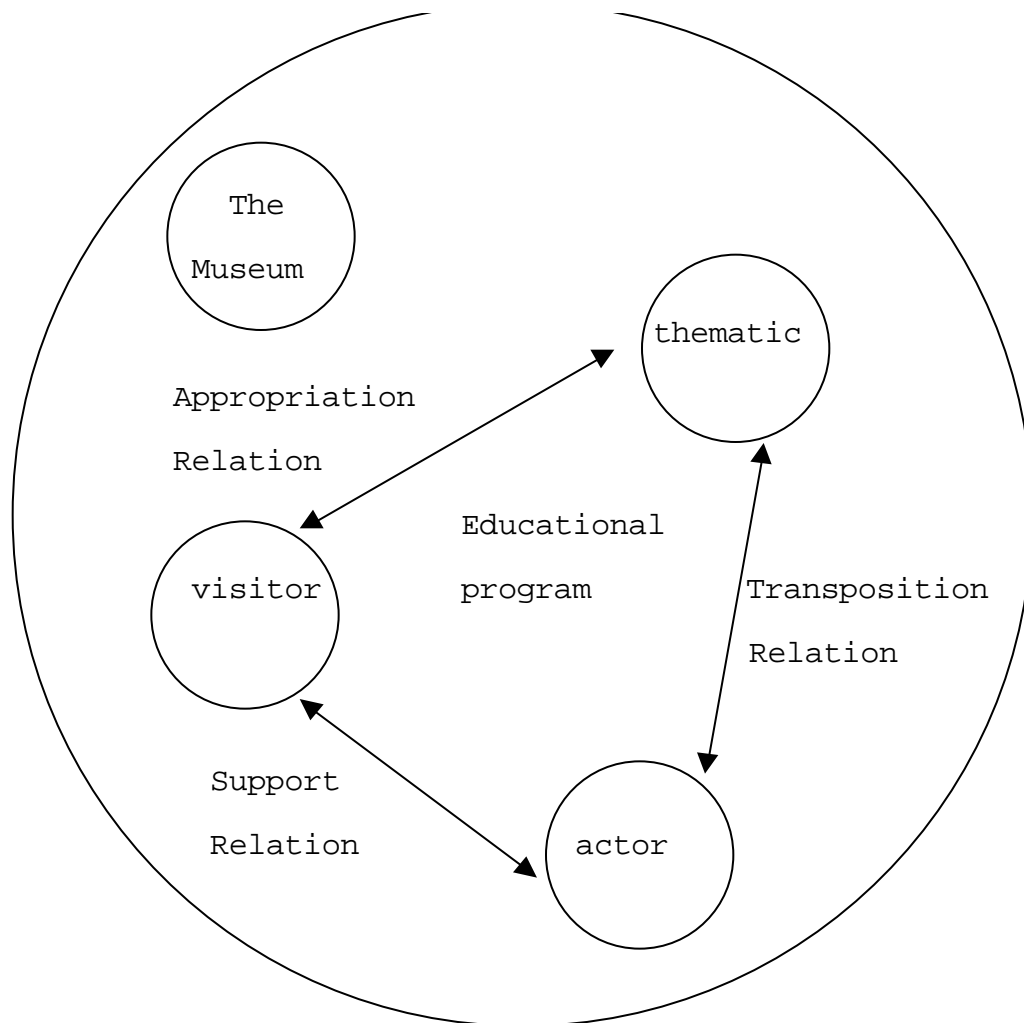


Figure 2

The Theoretical Model for Using Museums for Educational Purposes

(Allard, Larouche, Lefebvre, Meunier and Vadeboncoeur, 1995-1996: 19)

The program we studied entitled, *Le voyage autour du monde de M.Cartier*, "[...] is normally intended for a clientele participating in French, English or literacy programs, particularly groups of students from the *Centres de formation des immigrants* (COFI). It is based on the visit of all of the exhibition rooms at Cartier House, following the viewing of a slide show" (Larouche and Allard, 1996).

The sample retained for the study was made up of ninety-two (92) immigrant students, known as interns, attending ten (10) classes at COFI, where they received instruction on the fundamentals of French and were initiated into Québec society. It is not surprising that the participating classes' teachers wished, as one put it: "to give practise in speaking French; provide cultural and historical knowledge" (Appendix 11, in Larouche and Allard, 1996).

The objectives of the *Voyage autour du monde de M. Cartier* program as determined by the management of the historic site differ somewhat from those pursued by the COFIs. They are:

- provide information on Cartier's life and work,
- make visitors familiar with the history of the country;
- move visitors by the exotic character of the 19th century;
- and, in a more general way, stimulate curiosity about history (Larouche and Allard, 1996:21).

These objectives comply in a general way if not specifically, as was presented earlier, with those shared by all of the serviced national historic sites in Canada.

However, the *Voyage autour du monde de M. Cartier* educational program has a purpose which is not explicitly mentioned in the documentation, which stems from the objective: "move visitors by the exotic character of the 19th century". According to information gathered from staff members, the purpose is to make visitors understand the cultural diversity of Canada. To this end, the staff of the historic site has developed an interpretation concept said to be of cultural cohabitation. Throughout the activity, they attempt to make visitors aware that all objects, or eventually any custom that appears strange or foreign to them, is not so unless they imagine it to be. In this respect, it is important to establish links between an object or custom they know and an object foreign to them. According to one staff member: "[...] the idea is to show that what is foreign is actually familiar". For example, the guides emphasize the origin and usefulness of foreign objects such as a Russian samovar, or customs of foreign origin, such as ways

of setting the table (Addendum to the minutes of the meeting held August 30, 1995, in Larouche and Allard, 1996). Clearly this objective is entirely suited to interns from the COFIs, to the extent that they may eventually recognize the influence of nations they know.

In addition, the interpreters frequently present sketches, giving the visit a theatrical character, reinforced by circulating through the scenographed site. They encourage visitors to actively participate in the visit and make them play the roles of figures (anonymous) who could have frequented Cartier House or Cartier himself (a friend, a household servant, eventually a politician), forced to follow the etiquette of the period (such as the way of dressing, standing, moving, talking, etc.). On the whole, the staff of Cartier House considers this to be an emotive approach, because it consists, as much if not more, in moving the visitor than in passing on a certain amount of knowledge.

For the purposes of our study, we have used the following data collection instruments:

- a cognitive test administered to every subject one week before and after the visit. It includes nineteen (19) items divided into three sections, the period, the man and his work, and the society;
- an interview guide administered in a semi-directed manner to thirty (30) participants chosen randomly. It includes eleven open-ended questions;
- a grid for observing the intellectual skills implemented during the visit, administered to all groups;
- an interview guide with open-ended questions, administered in a directed manner to the interpreters after each visit;
- a questionnaire evaluating the satisfaction level of about ten participating teachers, a few days after the visit;

Results

The matching of the data gathered after the administration of different measuring instruments enables the detection of certain trends and the making of a few recommendations.

The overall analysis of the results in terms of cognitive retention reveals that the various participants made significant progress.

The analysis of each question indicates that the participants made progress in terms of specific knowledge, for example, of the territory (provinces of Canada); of technology (invention of the train, of photographic devices, of the velocipede); of the immigrants' countries of origin; or about Cartier himself and his house. Specific knowledge was acquired. One might, therefore, suggest that the visit enables participants to become familiar with the history of Canada, as a teacher of one of the participating classes pointed out:

"The site makes history come alive, whereas in class, history is an abstract notion. The visit focuses on a historical period. It is not passive; it is an incursion into time. The idea of role enactment succeeds at every level. A great formula..." (Appendix 11, *in* Larouche and Allard, 1996, Free translation).

A more refined analysis of the participants' understanding, using results obtained from interviews with the interns, shows that, whereas nearly two-thirds know that the historic site commemorates events which occurred in the 19th century, several are unable to identify the exact century in which George-Étienne-Cartier lived. Confusion with regards to the perception of Cartier's identity was also noted.

In addition, the data concerning observed intellectual skills show that although observation, locating and anticipation skills are the most often implemented, describing, making relationships, justifying, comparing, making decisions, classifying and synthesizing skills are very rarely used by the participants.

Apparently, the anecdotal details attracted the participants' attention rather than the overall message.

Finally, although the educators' evaluation of the activity is favourable, nevertheless they recommend that the acquisition of historic knowledge and of the understanding of the theme be improved.

In short, rather mixed results were obtained regarding the reaching of the objectives concerning Cartier's life and increasing visitors' familiarity with national history.

A few hypotheses may be advanced to explain these results. Firstly, the interpretative approach advocated in this site, in which one attempts to move visitors by means of theatrical scenes linked to the Victorian way of life, is quite likely part of the explanation. One could also suggest that there is a gap between the commemorative mandate, limited to the life and work of Cartier, and the thematic interpretation of the historic site - the main themes broached in the exhibitions - based mainly on bourgeois life in Montréal in Victorian times. One thing is perfectly clear - the visitor circuit through the various reconstructed interiors and the evocation of the manners of the time strike the imagination and seem to hold visitors' interest more than the didactic visit of the exhibition in which Cartier's various achievements are broached.

These findings lead us to formulate a theoretical observation. In a historic site, the setting and the theme of an educational program appear to be interrelated. In fact:

the historic site consists as it were in a museological version of historic commemoration, in which "in situ" heritage constitutes the backdrop for illustrating a theme about the country's history. Attracting attention, it acts as a media in the same way as an exhibition, on the simultaneous presence of the visitor and of the object of commemoration, made perceptible by conservation and heritage presentation (Larouche, 1998, Free translation).

From this perspective, once the historic site has been the subject of heritage presentation, it cannot claim to be authentic; it is a means (an accessory) for achieving a purpose, namely commemoration. The object of commemoration should be authentic. In addition, the heritage presentation and

objects of commemoration approaches are merged in this question (Larouche and Allard, 1996). One can then understand the confusion that may reign among visitors and that the explicit objectives assigned to the *Voyage autour du monde de M. Cartier* program are not fully reached.

However, the implicit objective of this program, designed to increase understanding of cultural diversity by making associations between the objects exhibited and elements known to participants, appears to be more fully reached than the others. Many personal accounts refer to this aspect. Several participants admitted having experienced real culture shock when visiting Cartier House. For example, a participant of Romanian origin found the residence rather modest for a Canadian dignitary compared to the grandiose palaces belonging to her country's leaders. A young Lebanese engineer remarked that everything designated as old in Canada would not be considered as such in his country where vestiges may date back several thousand years (Larouche and Allard, 1996). In short, the comparison between what the participants see and their previous experiences enables the detection of both differences and similarities. This, in our opinion, is the first step in recognizing cultural diversity. The next step consists in understanding and explaining, before finally accepting it.

Conclusion

In a country like Canada, built on varied and diversified cultures, historic sites may serve as a means of bringing people closer together. However, a fine line exists between the commemoration of historical facts and propaganda. It is important not to hide reality under the pretence of virtue. History is not only comprised of a set of good actions. An idealization of the past runs the risk of deceiving one's audience. In addition, each event has several possible interpretations which may vary from one historian to the next and, ultimately, from one person to another. One cannot claim that every single visitor at a national historic site in which the thematic development and the setting are merged, can appreciate and interpret it in the same manner.

Bibliography

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Notes

1. A place finds expression in the natural and cultural order by means of the collective creation and the history of which it forms the subject (Dupront, 1990:58). Alphonse Dupront, in his article entitled "Au commencement, un mot lieu", published in an issue of *Autrement* magazine, *Hauts lieux, une quête de racines, de sacré, de symboles* (1990), proposes a "semantic study of the destiny" of the concept of place: "The twofold character of simplicity and distinction which is the virtue of place evidently stems from less obvious, but otherwise revealing qualities at the level of discourse: a twofold secret of the place considered in itself, one part from the natural order and the other from a collective creation and from a story" (Dupront, 1990:58-59, Free translation).
2. It follows that the term "national historic site" applies to the entire range of places recognized by the Canadian government as of interest. These places cover the spectrum from "the gravesites of the Fathers of Confederation to extensive cultural landscapes in urban, rural and wilderness settings [...] Where individual national historic sites do not constitute national historic landscapes in their own right, they form part of a larger cultural landscape. Recognition of this enhances our appreciation of the value of these historic places and their associated environments". (Parks Canada, 1994:71).

3. "Historic sites that still retain evidence of their former importance are assets of extreme value not only because they attract the attention of visitors and strangers, but because they stimulate historic studies amongst our own people and tend to excite a just appreciation of our country and its history and create a national pride and spirit" (HSMB, 1919; quoted by Lacelle, 1995:2).
4. Parks Canada, a federal government organization, was originally called the Dominion Parks Branch.
5. "It would be doubly beneficial if these historic spots were not only properly restored and marked but they should be used as places of resort by Canadian children who, while gaining the benefit of outdoor recreation, would at the same time have opportunities of absorbing historical knowledge under conditions that could not fail to make them better Canadians" (Harkin, 1914; quoted by Taylor, 1986: 67).
6. Lacelle (1995) deduces a philosophy implicit in the conservation activities undertaken in similar sites, such as at the Lennox and Chambly forts.
7. This represents a political strategy that organizes the conservation of the sites designated as being of national historic interest into a symbolic purpose linked to Canadian identity. It is not our intention to discuss this topic in our thesis. However, see the analysis suggested by Groulx (1989), identifying two opposing strategies for interpreting history in a museum setting: that of the government of Québec, attempting, for example, to make Place-Royale in Quebec into a site testifying only to the New France period, whereas in the 1970s the federal government tried to increase its visibility on Québec soil by proposing an interpretation of history which also takes the British period into account, at a time when the independence movement was in full swing in Quebec. See Groulx, Patrice, 1989 "Une mémoire momifiée? Problèmes et perspectives de l'interprétation de l'histoire dans les centres

d'interprétation". Masters thesis in History, Montréal, Université du Québec à Montréal.

8. Interpretation was defined by Tilden in 1957, in his work entitled *Interpreting Our Heritage*, which would be published a third time in 1977: "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information" (Tilden, 1977:8).