

The Establishment and Economic Significance of Addis Ababa Museum, 2005 to 2015, Ethiopia

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Abstract: This paper attempts to show the establishment and economic significance of Addis Ababa Museum. Both primary and secondary sources are used to produce this article. The primary sources include archives, minutes, photographs and oral information. The researcher collected many archival sources from different offices and individual persons. The researcher used purposeful sampling method to select informants, who have good knowledge about the issue under discussion. He met 9 employees of Addis Ababa Museum from whom he obtained crucial information. Equally important, he used some secondary sources such as books, brochures and articles. Each data was checked and counter-checked for its reliability and authenticity. The findings of this paper are discussed qualitatively and quantitatively using tables and bar graphs. It underpins the types of cultural and historical heritages available in the museum. The findings of this paper also evinces the current practices and some challenges of Addis Ababa Museum. It reveals the number of Ethiopian and foreign visitors who visited the museum between 2005 and 2015. This paper also reveals amount of money generated from visitors of both nationalities during the time specified above. It is stated that the museum is an important heritage that requires due attention of every concerned body so that it can be further developed and attracted many visitors from whom the country can generate good revenue. By now, the museum is not earning the expected amount of revenue.

Keywords: Ras Biru, Museum, visitors, Revenue, challenges

1. Introduction

Different sources defined museum in various ways. The following definition is the most commonly accepted among different scholars. Museum is a non-profit generating permanent institution uses to preserve heritages, which be useful for research, education and enjoyment. It is open to public (Merkeb Mekuria, 2007:17; Crystal L.B. Willie, 2003:3; Janet Marstine, 2006:1; National Heritage Board, 2010:23). Museums construct a view through displaying and interpreting objects, paintings, photographs, models and texts (Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, 2007:1). Museums “can arouse curiosity or inspire new ideas” (Ibid, 2007:4).

According to Grincheva, museums are powerful forces that shape and define collective values and social perceptions in national contexts (Natalia Grincheva, 2013:40). Visitors to museums are no longer satisfied simply gazing at worthy displays of exhibits in glass cases. Rather, they expect to be actively involved with the exhibits, to learn informally and to be entertained simultaneously (Tim Caulton, 1998:1; Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, 2007:1).

As far as the historical genesis of the word museum is concerned, several authors agree that it was a product of the classical period. According to Geoffrey Lewis, the word museum has classical origins (Geoffrey Lewis, 8). This is shared by Merkeb Mekuria who discusses that the word museum, first used in English in the 17th century, derives from the Greek *mouseion*, meaning “seat of the Muses.” Mouseions were temples or sacred places, which later became repositories for the gifts and offerings of devotees (Merkeb Mekuria, 2007:18).

The change and continuity between the middle age and renaissance is clearly noted in Merkeb’s thesis. According to him, in the Middle Ages, “cathedrals, churches, and monasteries became repositories for religious relics, jewels,

precious metals, rare manuscripts, and fabrics” (Ibid, 2007:19). Museum was being used in Europe in the 17th Century to describe collections of curiosities (Geoffrey Lewis, 8). The 18th Century saw the beginnings of the public museum in Europe and, at the close of the century, the establishment of the first museums in the “New World”. The new “public” museums, however, were generally inaccessible to all but the aristocracy (Merkeb Mekuria, 2007:20).

Geoffrey Lewis claims that the use of the word museum during the 19th and most of the 20th Centuries denoted a building housing cultural material to which the public had access (Geoffrey Lewis, 8). Merkeb has similar idea. According to him, the concept of the public museum began to flourish in the 19th Century. During the last half of the 20th Century, museums throughout the world grew tremendously in number and in diversity (Merkeb Mekuria, 2007:28). He further reveals that, at the beginning of the 21st Century, museums throughout the world enjoy unquestioned popularity and public respect. Millions of people visited museums each year to see, enjoy, participate in, and learn from their collections, exhibitions, and programs (Ibid). It is stated that tourism was introduced in to majority of African states during the colonization period. However, the case in Ethiopia is exceptional. Unlike to other African countries, Ethiopia was not colonized by European forces and the establishment of museum in the country is not a product of colonization. It has many museums among which Addis Ababa Museum, which is the major concern of this paper, is good case in point (Ibid, 2007:22-28).

2. The Opening of Addis Ababa Museum

A house was designed in the 1880s by *Haji Kawas* for *Ras Birru Weldemicael*, the alleged son of Emperor Menilik II. The site was originally intended as munitions’ store, but the Emperor decided instead to give it to *Ras Birru* on the

latter's marriage to HE *Woizero* Amakelech Ali. The house was surrounded by fertile tract of land which was adjacent to the Emperor. The house continued in use as a residence until 1935 when it was captured by the Italians for use as a clinic. After the country was liberated from the Italian occupation in 1941, the house became a private residence shared by *Woizero* Fikirete Birru and *Woizero* Zenebework Birru following the death of *Ras* Birru. In the late 1960s, it was rented out as a school before being used as a factory for manufacture of woven sweaters. Its next change was in to a building for local administration. Before becoming Addis Ababa Museum, its final metamorphosis was into the Maru Dembya Hotel [Minutes of the museum; Informants: Eshetu Taye, Abebaw Abera, Derese Eshetu, Dereje Seyum, Amdemariam Mamo, Meseret G/Mesekel, Sisanesh Abate, Wubit Zewde, Girma Lema; personal observation; Brochure of the museum].

3. Parts of Addis Ababa Museum

The Addis Ababa Museum is one of the several museums in Ethiopia. It is located in the Meskel Square, near to the Ethiopian Workers Association Building. It was founded in 1986, when Addis Ababa was celebrating its 100 years anniversary. It has six major sections or halls naming Finfine Hall, Developmental Hall, Alferd Ilg Hall, Adwa Hall, Handicraft Hall and Future Vision Hall [*Ibid.*]. These halls have their own basic and very interesting collections showing the socio-economic, political and cultural history of past Ethiopia. Each hall is briefly discussed below as follows.

Finfine is the first hall having many photographs and other collections showing the socio-economic, political, cultural and other aspects of Addis Ababa City. Majority of the photographs clearly show the formative period of the city. There is also Emperor Menilik's crown cloth displayed in the hall [Informants: Eshetu Taye, Abebaw Abera, Derese Eshetu, Dereje Seyum, Amdemariam Mamo, Meseret G/Mesekel, Sisanesh Abate, Wubit Zewde, Girma Lema]. Development Hall is the second hall from the entrance gate. Similar to the first hall, it has many expressive photographs revealing the past history of Addis Ababa in particular and Ethiopia in general. A considerable number of historical clothes are available in the hall. For instance, some mayors' clothes and Colonel Atinafu Abate's, Ethiopian military officer and a leading member of the Derg, military uniform is present in this hall. Equally important, the first telephones introduced to Ethiopia during the reign of Emperor Menilik II are put in this hall. A written material posted below the telephones reveal that the "old-aged telephones need 30 minutes to get connected and transfer message to someone waiting to receive the message". The introduction of the first car, called *Cidili*, in 1908, and the first train, called *Awraris*, in 1917, are clearly presented in this hall [Minutes of the museum].

Alferd Ilg Hall is the third hall in the museum. There are many historical, cultural and political heritages present in Alferd Ilg hall. The eucalyptus coverage of Entoto and its environs, celebration of Ethiopian Epiphany in the 20th Century, Holhol Railway Bridge, the first train which arrived at Dire Dawa after 14 hours travel from Djibouti to

Ethiopia in December 1902, Tiya Steal, 15 cannons brought by Ilg and Chefneux in 1890 in request of Emperor Menilik and the settlement pattern of Addis Ababa during its foundation are presented in this hall in the form of photographs. Not only the above mentioned but also other very interesting photographs and their brief explanations are found in the hall [*Ibid.*].

Adwa Hall is another hall located next to Alferd Ilg Hall. Many displays in this hall are related to the battle of Adwa of 1896 when Emperor Menilik II scored colorful victory over the Italians at the Adwa. Different types of military weapons that were used during the battle of Adwa are present in this hall. Handicraft Hall is another very interesting section of Addis Ababa Museum where several collections representing Ethiopian nations and nationalities are available. Cultural clothes and household tools of different ethnic groups of the country are found in this hall. Besides, the hall housed many cultural jewelries, artifacts, sculptures and paintings. It is part of Addis Ababa Museum where several gifts contributed by foreign and regional governments during the centennial anniversary of Addis Ababa city in 1986, are displayed [*Ibid.*]. Future Vision Hall housed paintings prepared by artists Afewerq Tekle. There are also additional materials stored in this hall. Unlike to the above mentioned halls, this hall is, however, currently not accessible to visitors. It is already closed. Due to this reason, many heritages stored in this hall remained out of reach of visitors [Minutes of the museum; Informants: Eshetu Taye, Abebaw Abera, Derese Eshetu, Dereje Seyum, Amdemariam Mamo, Meseret G/Mesekel, Sisanesh Abate, Wubit Zewde, Girma Lema; personal observation; Brochure of the museum].

4. The Museum between 2005 and 2015

Addis Ababa Museum is very interesting museum that can help visitors to enjoy and learn a lot. Having seven staffs, the museum has working hours between Monday and Friday from 8:30 to 12:30 o'clock in the morning and from 1:30 to 5:30 o'clock in the afternoon. It is also open to visitors in the weekend from 8:00 to 12:30 o'clock. It is visited both by Ethiopian and foreign visitors. The entrance fee varied according to the nationality and status of visitors. Due to the absence of data, it is hardly possible to know the revenue the museum generated from visitors between 1986 and 2004. Besides, there is similar problem for the period between January 2008 and March 2009 [*Ibid.*].

During September and October 2005, each foreign, Ethiopian student and Ethiopian adolescences paid 2, 1 and 0.5 Eth \$ respectively. Since November 2005, each foreign, Ethiopian student and Ethiopian adolescences is made to pay 10, 2 and 0.5 Eth \$ respectively. Between 2005 and early 2015, 8566 foreign tourists visited the museum and 84,156 Eth \$ was collected. It was also visited by 18,205 and 26,132 Ethiopian adolescences and students respectively. The museum generated Eth \$ 32,633 and 13,182.5 respectively. Totally, 54,407 visitors visited the museum during the time specified above and Eth \$ 129,971.5 was collected. The museum rarely gave service for free. For instance, on Feb 2006, visitors were allowed to visit the museum without paying entrance fee for eleven days. Sixty (60) visitors from

Youth and Sport Club of Addis Ababa were also permitted to visit the museum on 18 March 2010 free of fee [*Ibid.*].

Table 1: No of Ethiopian Visitors and Revenue Generated (2005-2015)

No	Year	Ethiopian Visitors						Total No of visitors	Total money paid (Eth \$)
		Adults			Students				
		No of visitors	Payment per head (Eth \$)	Money paid (Eth \$)	No of visitors	Payment per head (Eth \$)	Money paid (Eth \$)		
1	2005	3482	1	3482	3340	0.5	1669.5	6822	5151.5
2	2006	2099	2	4198	2638	0.5	1319	4737	5517
3	2007	1937	2	3879	2357	0.5	1179	4294	5058
4	2008	329	2	658	452	0.5	226	781	884
5	2009	660	2	1320	1719	0.5	859.5	2379	2179.5
6	2010	2020	2	4040	3900	0.5	1950	5920	5990
7	2011	1739	2	3278	2226	0.5	1195	3965	4473
8	2012	1905	2	3710	4220	0.5	2144.5	6125	5854.5
9	2013	2042	2	4084	3693	0.5	1846.5	5735	5930.5
10	2014	1533	2	3066	1334	0.5	667	2867	3733
11	2015	459	2	918	253	0.5	126.5	712	1044.5
Total		18,205		32,633	26,132		13,182.5	44,337	45,815.5

Source: (Source: Minutes of Addis Ababa Museum, 2015)

Equally important, one hundred twenty five (125) students were allowed to visit the museum without any charge on 9 May 2010. These scholarships are very important methods of promotion that could encourage people to develop pleasant attitude towards the museum. Currently, the museum is closed for reconstruction purpose using a fund of

Eth \$ 13,000,000 granted by the World Bank. Thus, there will no service until the reconstruction process is finished [*Ibid.*]. The number of Ethiopian and foreign visitors and amount of revenue generated from them between 2005 and early 2015 are presented in the following tables.

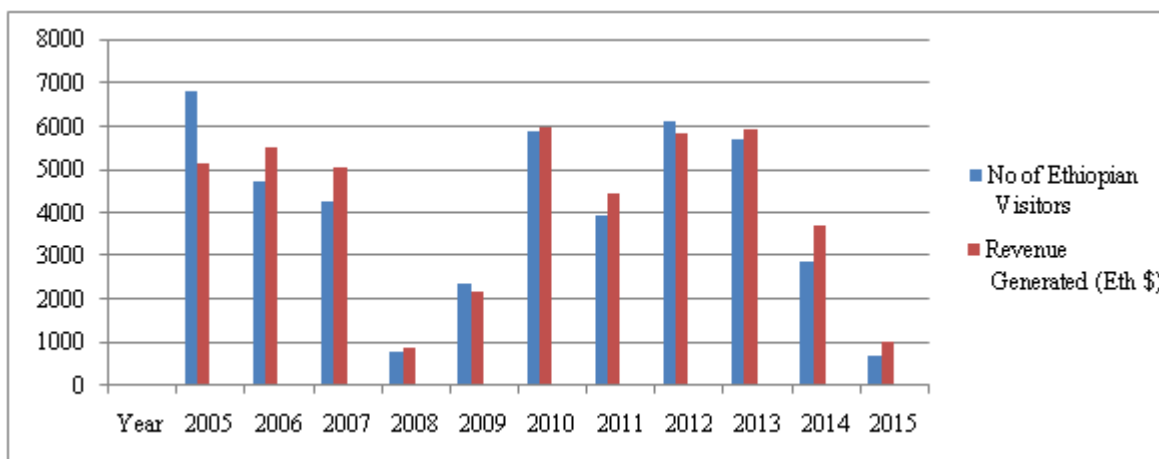


Figure 1: No of Ethiopian Visitors and Revenue Generated (2005- 2015)

As can be seen from the above figure, the number of Ethiopian visitors varied from time to time and so do the revenue. Even though the museum is resourceful, very minimal revenue is being collected from Ethiopian visitors. This adversely affects the development of tourism in Ethiopia.

Table 2: No of Foreign Visitors and Revenue Generated (2005-2015)

No	Year	Number of foreign visitors	Money paid per head (Eth \$)	Total money paid (Eth \$)
1	2005	1662	2	15116
2	2006	1328	10	13280
3	2007	1071	10	10710
4	2008	153	10	1530
5	2009	330	10	3300
6	2010	875	10	8750
7	2011	904	10	9040
8	2012	874	10	8740
9	2013	565	10	5650
10	2014	613	10	6130
11	2015	191	10	1910
Total		8,566		84,156

(Source: Minutes of Addis Ababa Museum, 2015)

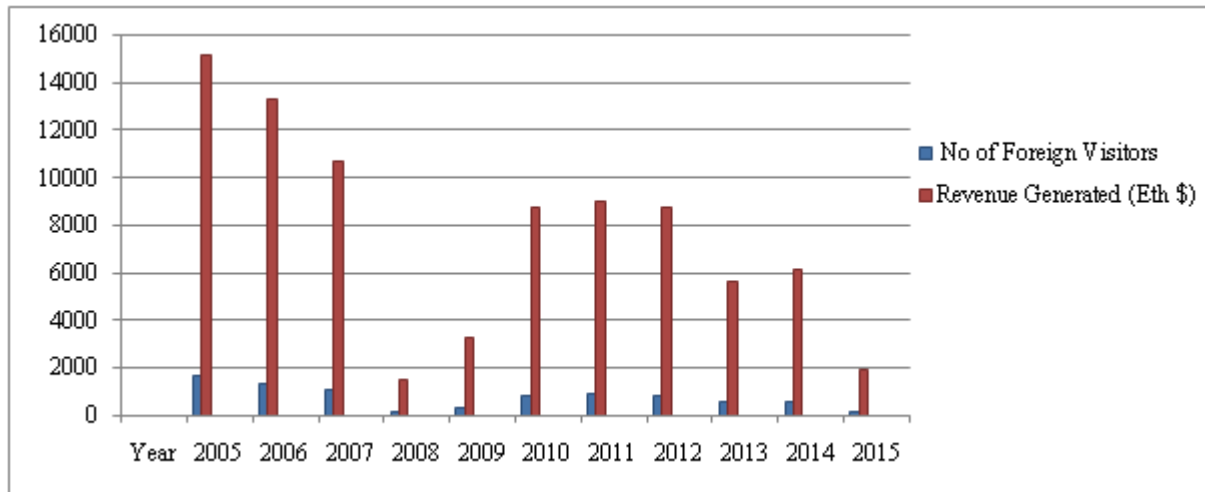


Figure 2: No of Foreign Visitors and Revenue Generated (2005-2015)

Figure 2 shows similar situation to figure 1. The number of visitors and revenue generated from decreased from time to time. This is very terrible situation denying the country to generate adequate revenue from the museum. The frequent closure of the museum, its unpleasant environment and absence of adequate promotion might be among the major factors affecting the development of the respective museum.

5. Major Challenges of the Museum

As discussed before, the museum is frequently visited by many Ethiopian and expatriate visitors from whom good revenue is generated. However, there are several major challenges that affect the development of the museum. Future Vision Hall, one of the six (6) halls of the museum, is closed since longer time. Due to this reason, the collections put in this hall are kept out of reach. Many heritages are stored in a closed house in the museum and they are not displayed for visitors. The absence of well organized data showing the number of visitors and amount of revenue collected from the revenue since its establishment did not allow researchers, policy makers and other concerned bodies to know more about the museum. Closure of the museum for several times as long as months and several weeks limited the museums opportunity to generate better revenue [*Ibid.*].

The absence of adequate light source in most of the halls influenced visitors looking at the heritages urged them to use battery and mobile flash to capture photos. This has its own negative impact on the current practices of the museum. These are not the only challenges that the museum is facing. Some visitors, mainly students, touch heritages displaced in the halls with their hands. In addition to this, the compound of the museum, which is covered by improperly handled grasses and other plants, is not clean and neat. No regularly prepared brochures are available to promote the museum. Equally important, the location of the museum is not suitable for people with physical disabilities. Especially, the entrance to the museum and the upstairs halls of the museum are out of the reach of disabled individuals. All these and other challenges have pervasive influence in the development of the museum. Such challenges are quite enough to reduce the amount of revenue, which is expected to be earned from visitors, by far at large rate [*Ibid.*]. Therefore, stakeholders

should work hard to address these problems and ensure better development of the museum.

6. Conclusion

Ethiopia has many cultural and historical heritages among which museums are worth mentioning. There are several regional and national museums in the country. Most of them have numerous collections such as artifacts, photographs, cultural goods and clothes, traditional weapons, charts and maps that attract many visitors or tourists. Many museums are used as a means of generating good revenue while some are not used well for the same purpose. It may be difficult to generalize about the situation of museums in having conducted a case study on Addis Ababa Museum.

However, our country's tourism policy still needs some sort of special attention. Particularly, as far as Addis Ababa Museum is concerned, though many Ethiopian and foreign visitors visited the museum at different historical times and it managed to generate 132,783.5 Eth \$ between 2005 and early 2015, it has many challenges. Future Vision Hall's closure, absence of well developed profile, its inappropriateness to people's with disabilities, lack of good promotion strategy and absence of light source to some sections of the museum are some problems which are looking for urgent response unless the country will not able to generate good revenue from it. A further research on this area should be carry out in a way that it can help tourism experts, employees of the museum and other concerned bodies to develop good strategies to improve the present practices and to mitigate the existing challenges. This, in return, will help the country to generate revenue from the sector.

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