



**MUSEUMS**

**SOCIAL**

**LEARNING**

**SPACES**

**AND**

**KNOWLEDGE**

**PRODUCING**

**PROCESSES**

**SOCIAL LEARNING SPACES AND  
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IF MUSEUM IS THE ANSWER  
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WHEN AUDIENCES TEACH – OR THE REDEFINITION OF  
THE INSTITUTION  
NIELS RIGHOLT



# **MUSEUMS** **SOCIAL** **LEARNING** **SPACES** **AND** **KNOWLEDGE** **PRODUCING** **PROCESSES**

**IDA BRÆNDHOLT LUNDGAARD  
& JACOB THOREK JENSEN**

  
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# PREFACE



# PREFACE

Museums as social learning spaces for knowledge producing processes – why and what does it mean?

The Danish Agency for Culture focuses on creating the framework conditions for museums to continue to take on new roles in society. Roles that build on learning potentials, where the museums constitute open social learning spaces for knowledge producing processes.

Museums are democratic educational institutions that contribute to culture being an active resource in society. This implies that museums as social learning spaces for knowledge producing processes can create social change and sustainable growth.

The museums' role in society is changing. In the same way as all other parts of society are constantly changing. We now expect the museums to rethink their exhibition practice, that they are present on other and new platforms, that they continually develop their professional work, and, not least, that as modern knowledge institutions, they ensure access to current knowledge.

Museums are therefore also social spaces with innovative ideas about where and how knowledge production takes place, and how different views of knowledge create possibilities for creativity. This means that museums as institutions are in a constant process of transformations.

The museums build on value-based management, taking their starting point in intercultural learning and development of citizenship, which includes user involvement, multivocality and critical reflection. Co-creation and learning partnerships contribute to the development of complex, interdisciplinary and inclusive processes – in relation to the museum's organisation as well as its relations to society and to the individual citizen.

Culture is about what it means to be human. Culture is therefore a bare necessity and a prerequisite for the continued development of society. And here, museums have a significant part to play.

## **OLE WINTHER**

Head of Division, Museums  
Danish Agency for Culture

**SOCIAL  
LEARNING  
SPACES  
AND  
KNOWLEDGE  
PRODUCING  
PROCESSES**





# LEARNING MUSEUMS AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

**IDA BRÆNDHOLT LUNDGAARD** holds a Master's degree in art history and Nordic literature and language from the University of Copenhagen. She is Senior Advisor for museums at the Danish Agency for Culture, where she is project managing the Educational Plan for Danish Museums. Before that, she worked as Head of Education at Louisiana – Museum of Modern Art. She lectures at the University of Copenhagen and Aarhus University as well as internationally and has an extensive publication list.

She has specialised in developing the educational role of museums in society, intercultural learning, and culture and education policy. Her work is focused on cultural democracy and on securing active citizenship by promoting participatory practices, multivocality and critical reflection.



## LEARNING MUSEUMS AND ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

How can museums, as democratic educational institutions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century's knowledge society, create constructive contributions for social and cultural development? This is a question and a challenge that museums across the world are facing. ICOM's Triennial General Conference in Rio de Janeiro, 2013, was held under the title of 'Museums (memory + creativity) = social change'. An example to be followed, which addresses the issue of cultural and social change, is the Museum of Liverpool. This museum has just been awarded the Council of Europe Museum Prize 2013 on the following basis:

"The Museum of Liverpool provides an exemplary recognition of human rights in museum practice. The interaction with local community is excellent, with museum activities involving children, young people, families and the elderly. It promotes mutual respect between ethnically and socially diverse parts of society, addresses human rights through contemporary debates and dialogue and maintains an open and inclusive policy aimed at bridging cultures in every aspect of its work."<sup>1</sup>

The Museum of Liverpool is a city museum that reflects the challenges caused by modern-day urbanisation processes. Urbanisation and the technological development are expected to continue to affect citizens' behavioural patterns. Complexity is a contemporary condition of life, and the significance is the speed at which changes take place. These are conditions that have an impact on whom we consider friends and strangers, and on how local communities constitutes and evolves.

City spaces challenge traditional ways of living through social staging that expands the frameworks of social networks. Travel, re-localisation, work forms, new partners, communication and media platforms are prerequisites for how people settle into new forms of self-organisation and thereby continue free-choice learning in a lifelong perspective.

The education concept is undergoing change and has been given new content. It is about obtaining tools for navigating in a complex society and a globalised world. Today, education includes not only cultural awareness, but also competences such as social intelligence, media knowledge and the ability to communicate. Education is the prerequisite to be able to handle the challenges we face as individuals and as a society.

Here, the museum's spatial and material ways of staging movement patterns and actions are crucial to the role they can play in contemporary society. The museums' socio-material practice relates to experience, time and space as well as physicality. The interplay between the tangible and

the intangible establishes the framework for new learning spaces. Movement, diversity and presence create an understanding of how knowledge is developed within the material cultural field.

### **NEW VIEW OF KNOWLEDGE**

Museums manage tangible and intangible heritage in the framework of art, cultural and natural history. Both in Denmark and internationally, museums and educational institutions focus on knowledge sharing and knowledge production in relevant and qualified settings. This is a development that is caused by an ongoing paradigm shift in terms of access to, dealings with and definitions of what we perceive as knowledge in a socially and globally complex society.

This discussion includes a rethink of where and how knowledge production takes place and of the quality and relevance of knowledge. Italian philosopher Umberto Eco, for instance, has introduced a distinction between organic and academic intellectuals, which reflects the need for a new complex view of knowledge that also includes non-academic knowledge, and which is often anchored locally.

The on going process necessitates a rethink of the museum institution and its role in contemporary society. It is a development from a unanimous, authoritarian transmission of knowledge to the development of a multifaceted reflection space where knowledge is up for negotiation and new experience and knowledge may emerge. The museums' role is no longer to present truths, but to present various options in a qualified manner, bringing knowledge into place and thus sharing their authority with others. The museums are in the middle of a transformation process in relation to their knowledge management.

It implies that museums rethink themselves as learning organisations that bring knowledge into play and contribute to facilitating knowledge exchange, thus constituting knowledge centres and learning environments that can form the framework for free-choice learning in a lifelong perspective. The museums' management of knowledge about art, cultural and natural history is a joint project between museums and citizens – between museums and the surrounding society.

The museums' new role demands new professional competences and new research into the knowledge production that takes place and could take place at the museums. This means that the museums' self-perception, as it is expressed in the organisation and its staff, is challenged. It is necessary to develop new professional methods and new content in learning partnerships with diverse citizen groups and different institutions in society.

## **NEW PROFESSIONAL DEMANDS AND STANDARDS**

The state owned and state approved museums in Denmark have an obligation to comply with the Danish Museum Act, which has five pillars: collection, registration, preservation, research and education. The Danish Museum Act is influenced by ICOM's museum definition:

“A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.”<sup>2</sup>

The new demands on and expectations to the museums mean that the professional standards for research and education are in focus with a view to ensuring that the museums' research-based knowledge becomes an active resource by means of professional pedagogical and didactic competences.

Didactics describe, understand and relate critically to current and future educational problems and challenges. Didactic competences are a prerequisite for the museums' professional and sustainable development. The development of museum didactics in partnerships between museums and educational institutions therefore provides opportunities for rethinking and developing the museums' learning potentials. In other words, museum didactics are key to the development of museums as democratic educational institutions that contribute to cohesion and citizenship.

## **ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP**

The development of society depends on the diversity of the population composition. Museums therefore need to make sure there is a representative section of the population in their user groups and staff composition in order to reflect and react to societal developments.

The User Survey 2012 (read more about the User Survey in the following chapter)<sup>3</sup> is a strategic tool for changing social inequalities among museum users and for promoting development of cultural democracy. The User Survey forms the basis for the development of new methods and practice forms that build on organisation development, new curatorial practices and a rethink of the museums' physical settings and digital presence. In other words: a tool for strategic management with a user perspective.

Museums that work strategically to include citizens with different social and cultural backgrounds create a foundation for competent and relevant contributions to a sustainable development of society. Learning partnerships between museums and other public and private institutions are a key method for developing museums' relevance in society. Social and

cultural diversity has become a basic condition that requires the development of an intercultural museum practice.

German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858-1918) reflected on the potentials in intercultural communication and described the challenges in his article, '*Der Fremde*' (The Stranger) as early as a hundred years ago.<sup>4</sup> Simmel defined the stranger as the person who arrives today and stays tomorrow and who has not been there from the beginning. This implies another interpersonal relation for the stranger between proximity and distance. A relation that is characterised by the fact that the stranger is physically close, but socially distant. An individual may be part of a system in a spatial sense, but not be included in a social sense. It is due to this position that a stranger in the system can add new value to it.

Georg Simmel's schematic sociological deliberations describe the mechanisms that learning partnerships are based on. With the museums' architecture, art, culture and nature as knowledge resources, museums can create spaces for people to find meaning and direction. This means creating settings for encounters that are based on a profusion of knowledge and experience and on being developed and formed in interplay with others.

### **SOCIAL LEARNING SPACES**

The User Survey 2012 documents the complex and equivocal factors that create relevant museum visits. It is quite essential in this connection that the act of using museums is a social event, and that the atmosphere – as a setting for differentiated learning opportunities – plays a decisive role in citizens' use of museums. We have therefore chosen to focus on the museum as a social learning space for knowledge producing processes.

The atmosphere is crucial to learning and education. The concept of atmosphere can open up to an understanding of what takes place between users and the museum. Museum use is conditioned by the relation between people and the physical settings. This means that what happens between people and works/objects/specimens in exhibitions serves as indicators of how museums' physical settings always influence users' states of mind; in other words motivation and learning behaviour.

Settings for social learning spaces must therefore give consideration to both individual and collective experience and knowledge. The scientific theoretical starting point for the atmosphere concept is phenomenological. That is, the physical, sensory experience that is not necessarily tangible and verbal. French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, among others, has described how the body and the senses are the starting point for the encounter with a space / an exhibition.<sup>5</sup> These are also questions



that another French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) examined closely in his book *'La poétique de l'espace'* (The Poetics of Space) from 1958.<sup>6</sup>

### THE SPIRIT OF THE PLACE

The User Survey 2012 documents that it is relevant to work with a didactic design where the atmosphere contributes to the development of potentials for social learning spaces and knowledge producing processes. But – what is the character of such spaces? This is not a new question in relation to cultural institutions. In relation to this question it might be relevant to investigate the spirit of the place.

ICOM's Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of the Place (2008) embodies this heritage approach. The declaration focuses on maintenance of integrity of the cultural biography of the place.<sup>7</sup> The term spirit of place replaces the term sense of place to underline the living social and spiritual nature of places.

The spirit of the place is an ancient concept, which the founder of Louisiana – Museum of Modern Art, Knud W. Jensen, was preoccupied with and sought to realise in a contemporary idiom with inspiration from the Alhambra palace in Andalucía and the Acropolis in Athens. He phrased the spirit of the place in this way:

“One might ask what generally determines genius loci (the spirit of the place). A piece of art, the architecture or a landscape will not create it on its own. Only when a unity emerges, when art, building and landscape unite and thus intensify the experience do we get this almost indefinable sensation that – here is something special.”<sup>8</sup>

Louisiana is located by the Sound, north of Copenhagen. The Museum opened in 1958 in a large classicist villa, which until then had been hidden away in a tangled, overgrown garden. From the time of the first extensions in 1958, interaction with the surroundings and respect for nature has been an important concept. Today, Louisiana is a functionalistic museum influenced by the Scandinavian building tradition, characterised by its horizontal building parts in tiles, wood and glass, and by its whitewashed brick walls. The different extensions are placed in a merging sequence that alternately opens and closes. There is a change in height, angle of light, acoustics and atmosphere creating a constant variety of experience while one moves through the exhibition spaces and the museum park.

Often called 'the hidden museum', Louisiana was in part constructed on top of old naval installations. The view of the Sound and the close proximity to the water are essential elements of the museum and emphasise the interplay between art, architecture and landscape. In natural keeping with

Louisiana's architectural philosophy, artists who work with site-specific concepts have left their mark on Louisiana's collection. The museum possesses a number of works that were either created for the place or bought for a specific placing.

The architecture constitutes a labyrinth-like structure, which makes a circular swerve. Human scale spaces aim at establishing a democratic architecture. A circular swerve like a big nest for the collection and temporary exhibitions of modern and contemporary international art, architecture and design. The complex and integrated approach constitutes the memory of the place. It is about signification.

### **A SAFE PLACE FOR UNSAFE IDEAS**

Why is Louisiana one of Denmark's most popular museums, both with foreigners and as a place that local citizens visit again and again? Maybe because it realises the American museum director and museologist Steven E. Weil's vision for museums: "Museums must be safe places for unsafe ideas".

How can a museum be a safe place for unsafe ideas? Maybe the architecture can embed and address basic needs for human beings. In 'The Poetics of Space', Bachelard describes how experiences of space shape thoughts, memory and dreams. His chapter on nests includes the following passage:

"According to Michelet, a bird is a worker without tools. It has "neither the hand of the squirrel, nor the teeth of the beaver". "In reality," he writes, "a bird's tool is its own body, that is, its breast, with which it presses and tightens its materials until they have become absolutely pliant, well-blended and adapted to the general plan." And Michelet suggests a house built by and for the body, taking form from the inside, like a shell, in an intimacy that works physically. The form of the nest is commanded by the inside. "On the inside," he continues, "the instrument that prescribes the circular form for the nest is nothing else but the body of the bird. It is by constantly turning round and round and pressing back the wall on every side that it succeeds in forming a circle."<sup>9</sup>

The quotation illustrates how body and materiality can recall memory and ideas. The circular nest is a primitive shape that bears resemblance to animals' lairs. The circular form has a universal reference to the sun and symbolises the circle of life. The circle makes a space. It is a sacred symbol that creates an experience of man's sense of unity with nature. The nest is a natural dwelling place. To a bird, the nest is a life-giving home protecting young birds. It is a shelter, refuge and a place of hiding. It is a safe, pleasant place to be in, a place of peace and rest. The nest is a

site-specific materialisation of the concept of home and the concept of coming home, just like the bird returns to the nest. The nest is a place in memory and in the dream of returning, which makes what is distant and remote exist in the present. The nest reaches further than the material conditions from which it springs.

### **A DESIRE FOR PRESENCE**

In his work 'Production of Presence – What Meaning Cannot Convey', Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht introduces the concept of Presence in a spatial context as that which is around us, within our reach and tangible to our bodies. The tangibility that comes from the materials' statements causes it to be in constant motion.<sup>10</sup> Due to the possibilities that technology offers in the form of knowledge sharing, communication and visual information, Gumbrecht sees a need to focus on the properties that materialities contain:

"Western culture can be described as a process of progressive abandonment and forgetting of presence, some of the 'special effects' produced today by the most advanced communication technologies may turn out to be instrumental in reawakening a desire for presence."<sup>11</sup>

This need for presence is exemplified, in the documentary about the Serbian performance artist Marina Abramovic: 'The Artist is Present', who uses her body as a tool to push her own and the audience's boundaries, risking her life in the process. The film shows her preparations for a performance at a retrospective exhibition of her work at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. Marina Abramovic's challenges and studies of the museum's physical settings in interaction with the users, indicate other spatial potentials in the museum institution.

Marina Abramovic is now building an institute, a high temple, for long duration work in Hudson, NY.. The idea of the institute derives from her work experience at MoMA. The purpose of the institute is to disseminate her ideas about art and culture. She describes it as a cultural spa. "It is really about immaterial work, collaboration between art, science, spirituality and technology. She resembles the institute to the idea of Bauhaus – different minds from different fields come together to create some kind of new reality." It is about changing the consciousness of human beings on this planet, she explains. Artists are in her opinion servants of society. Users of the institute will be issued with lap codes and ushered from room to room undergoing three hours mind-body cleansing exercises before they can experience the institute performance spaces, lecture halls, art works, café and library.<sup>12</sup>

## THE HUMAN CONDITION

The performance concept has its roots in dramaturgy. Performativity theorist Richard Schechner expands his understanding of the performative to the sociological and culture-anthropological field, thus making it an overall designation for the entire humanist subject area that describes ‘the Human Condition’.<sup>13</sup>

There seems to be a need for primary spaces that remind us of what it means to see, to listen, to move and to find our being in a world full of colours, sounds, shapes, currents and smells. Italian artist Alfio Bonanno who works with ArtNature creates works with respect for nature and the materials he uses. This means that the materials keep their own identity while obtaining a new meaning in his work. His aesthetic fascination with nature’s design includes an interdisciplinary approach that embraces botanical, geological, zoological and meteorological phenomena. He creates shape around himself establishing interaction. His work embraces a universal rhythm in growth and in the pulse of life, which emerges as boundless metamorphosis.

Spaces for authentic human experiences and the relationship between the individual and the surrounding world are essential. It is a matter of actual time, real materials and real action. We propose statements of human reality – essence of experience. Through dialogue with the surroundings, we can emphasise the values that determine human wellbeing, our behaviour patterns, our ideas and sensory possibilities. To constitute an environment with symbols and memories that creates identity and change through an embodiment of mental staging and life practice. It is in our bodies that we are present in the world. In our bodies we are in contact with objects and with life, and it is as bodies that we speak, perceive and mould our consciousness, our soul.

With this present publication, we focus on, among other things, how spatial structures are of importance to experience-based learning. This is an interdisciplinary approach that embraces socialisation theory, psychology, network theory and material culture studies with the intention of identifying aesthetic learning processes and experience-based learning as these take place in time and space. In order to establish a framework around social learning spaces for knowledge producing processes, it is necessary to have flexible and dynamic platforms for practice that challenge the institutional framework where the self-organising consists in something performative.

## Endnotes

- 1 Council of Europe Museum Prize 2013.
- 2 ICOM Statutes, 21<sup>st</sup> General Conference, 2007, Vienna, Austria.
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- 6 Bachelard, Gaston: *The Poetics of Space*, translated by Maria Jolas, 1964, Massachusetts, Beacon Press.
- 7 ICOM: Québec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place, 2008, Québec, Canada.
- 8 Jensen, Knud, W.: *Stedets ånd* (Spirit of the Place), 1994, Copenhagen, Gyldendal.
- 9 Bachelard, 1964, p 100.
- 10 Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich: *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*, 2004, Stanford University Press, p 17.
- 11 Gumbrecht, 2004, p XV.
- 12 International New York Times, Culture, Tuesday October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013.
- 13 Schechner, Richard: *Performance studies: An introduction*, 2002, London, New York, Routledge.





# SOCIAL LEARNING SPACES & KNOWLEDGE PRODUCING PROCESSES

Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue

Motivation and Learning Styles

Social Learning Spaces

Social Inclusion and Interdisciplinarity





## READING GUIDE

The User Survey 2012 is the foundation for the present publication, which is based on an international seminar held in May 2013 at ARKEN – Museum of Modern Art, Denmark. The participants were 230 museum directors, curators, educators and communication professionals, university lecturers and students. The participants' interdisciplinary and cross-institutional competences constitute an important sounding board for the present publication, which in itself is documentation for the museum as a social learning space for knowledge producing processes.

The publication is divided into five thematic sections that aim to shed light on the overall issue. Each theme includes an international expert's scholarly reflections and a Danish museum director's proposals for strategic management with a user perspective. In order to promote participation, a variety of views and critical reflection, two interaction agents facilitated the seminar. They give their reflections in the fifth section of this publication.

The introduction under the heading *Social Learning Spaces and Knowledge Producing Processes* explains why we have chosen to focus at the museums in this light based on the results of the User Survey 2012.

This is followed by the chapter *Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*. Here, Thomas Block Ravn, Director of *Den Gamle By* (The Old Town) in Aarhus, in his article *A Museum for the Fool and the Professor*, shares his thoughts about strategic management with a user perspective. His works span from collaboration with psychologists and elderly care about the development of programmes for people with dementia, to a project with a homeless citizen living in The Old Town. Then follows the article *Benchmarking diversity in Museums* by Amareswar Galla, Director of the International Institute of the Inclusive Museum, India/Denmark. His article is based on ICOM's Diversity Charter, and he uses global cases to demonstrate how indicators can be used in relation to strategic management and sustainable development of museums for social and cultural change.

The next sections appear under the heading *Motivation and Learning Styles*. Christian Gether, Director of ARKEN – Museum of Modern Art, opens with his reflections in the article *The Art Museum – still an institution in transition*. The article focuses on the art museum as a changing institution and a relational art concept. He writes, among other things, about Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson's installation 'The Smoke Tunnel' at the museum. Then follows the article *Understanding Museums Visitors' Motivation and Learning* by John Falk, Professor at Oregon State University, USA. Falk's article is about his global research into people's motivational and learning styles at museums and science centres, which was part of the basis for the User Survey's question frame and results.

In the third section, *Social Inclusion and Interdisciplinarity*, Jacob Christian Salvig, Director of Naturama, describes in the article *Modern Natural History*, how he works with his young and successful institution in relation to strategic management with a user perspective. It is a combination of nature and drama that forms the basis for the museum's development of scenography and stand-up techniques for storytelling as well as learning partnerships with educational institutions from primary schools to universities. In continuation of this follows the article *Open Doors – Open Minds* by Martha Fleming, Curator, Researcher and Artist, Canada/UK. Taking her starting point in the science museum, she addresses and demonstrates how interdisciplinarity and inclusion form the basis for new complex and challenging ways of working in relation to collections and curatorial practice across the museum categories.

The publication's fourth section has been given the headline *Museums as Social Learning Spaces*. Jette Sandahl, Director of the Museum of Copenhagen, presents in the article *Waiting for the Public to Change?*, her strategic practice in relation to management with a user perspective. She writes, among other things, about the museum's exhibition practice. One case study is an exhibition about Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard and how the museum in collaboration with citizens reflects on his concepts of love while at the same time collecting objects for the museum. With a sharp, critical view of the museum's user surveys, Jette Sandahl questions whether it is reasonable to talk about a successful culture policy in relation to creating equal access to culture for all. Lynn Dierking, Professor at Oregon State University, USA, then presents in the article *Museums as Social Learning Spaces* her research-based studies in relation to the development of museums as social learning spaces. Lynn Dierking's research includes, lifelong learning, intergenerational learning, young people's learning behaviour, and a gender research perspective. Along with John Falk's research, her research has formed the basis for the User Survey's question frame and results in relation to users' identity related motivational and learning behaviour forms.

The publication's final section has the title *Cultural Democracy*. Here, the interaction agents are given the word, thus ensuring a multifaceted and critical reflection on the museum as a social learning space for knowledge producing processes. In his article *If Museum is the Answer*, Søren Friis Møller, PhD, Dept. of Management, Politics and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, identifies a relation between the aesthetic field with its origin in the Age of Enlightenment and a cultural policy that pays homage to a top-down perspective of art and culture. His theoretical starting point is French philosopher Michel Foucault. Søren Friis Møller's point is that in spite of the arm's-length principle, we still do not have the right framework in Denmark for the development of a horizontal practice that creates cul-

tural democracy. This is followed by an article by Niels Righolt, Director of the Danish Center for Arts & Interculture, entitled *When Audiences Teach – or the Redefinition of the Institution*. He writes about user engagement as a key driver for knowledge producing processes, institutional change and the cultural institutions as learning spaces and frameworks for social interaction.

### **THANK YOU**

The Danish Agency for Culture wishes to thank all contributors to this publication, including the authors, the participants at the seminar at ARKEN, and the museum staff who contribute on a daily basis to the work of conducting the User Survey and thus create the basis for collaboration about the development of our museums and other cultural institutions.







# IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF MUSEUMS IN SOCIETY

**JACOB THOREK JENSEN** holds a Master's degree in history and has specialised within the fields of cultural heritage and museology. His thesis focuses on the public opinion of the foundation of the public museums in Denmark around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as part of a democratic turn and the development of the nation state.

He is working at the Danish Agency for Culture. In addition to this, he has worked at the Workers' Museum in Copenhagen, the Danish Museum of Science and Technology and the National History Museum at Frederiksborg Castle.





## IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF MUSEUMS IN SOCIETY

Since 2009, Danish museums have participated in the User Survey, which is conducted at all state owned and state approved museums. In 2012, the User Survey included 8 state owned and 100 state approved museums covering 188 exhibition places.<sup>1</sup> Each year, some 50,000 users complete a questionnaire in connection with their museum visit. The User Survey thus gives cohesive and systematic insight into who the museums' users are. The results provide museums, society and citizens with knowledge about how users assess the museums.

### THE EDUCATIONAL PLAN

The User Survey is a part of the Educational Plan, which was launched in 2006.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the Plan is to develop the museums' educational role in society and create equal access to culture for all citizens. The idea is to focus on competence development of the museums' staff and identify new professional competences as well as new ways of sharing knowledge and collaborating within the organisation. The idea is also that museums are to create new framework conditions for the development and communication of knowledge that is relevant and at the same time reflects challenges and current issues.

The Educational Plan includes seven action areas:

- Development of the educational role of museums
- Research into education
- Training and competence development
- International experience exchange
- Museums and education
- User surveys
- Experience exchange and knowledge sharing

The action areas are implemented by means of five pools, from which the museums can apply for funding of development projects that are carried out in learning partnerships with other museums or other private or public institutions. This bottom up approach has now resulted in 400 projects being funded since 2007 within the framework of the Educational Plan. In addition to this, a number of national surveys have been conducted, including the User Survey. The Educational Plan is flexible, as experience and knowledge from development projects and surveys are continually adopted and converted into practice, requirements and criteria. This has

meant that the focus has shifted from funding products to funding processes.

The User Survey is a tool that contributes to collaboration between citizens, museums and the Danish Agency for Culture on assuming shared responsibility for the development of professional and relevant cultural institutions in Denmark. The User Survey provides the museums with a tool for working strategically with their areas of responsibility and research, exhibitions, activities and events in collaboration with their users. The results can be used to establish new measures and to recruit user groups who are underrepresented at the museums.

The User Survey is a unique tool for qualifying practice and promoting inter-museum collaboration. This is due to the fact that all museums participate in the same survey and therefore have comparable data. In other words, the common User Survey is an instrument that gives a professional lift to an entire sector. The User Survey helps create consensus about terminology related to museum users, which is a prerequisite for the professional development of the area. Denmark is the first country in the world where all state owned and state approved museums collaborate about a common user survey that gives everybody access to each others' results.<sup>3</sup>

The question frame for the User Survey has been developed in close collaboration between representatives from museums, universities, the Association of Danish Museums and the Danish Agency for Culture. The Danish Agency for Culture funds the User Survey via the Educational Plan. TNS Gallup has developed the User Survey design and serves as operator in relation to the survey. The results of the User Survey are published in the form of a national report, which presents the combined results for all museums. In addition to this, each individual institution receives a report for each participating branch every six months. Furthermore, all of the museums have access to the data via an online database, where they can benchmark their results with the results from other museums.

The User Survey has been carried out during its first project period from 2009 to 2011, after which the results and questions have been evaluated. The current project period runs from 2012 to 2014 and has a new question frame, which focuses on the users' motivation and learning behaviour based on the research of John Falk and Lynn Dierking.<sup>4</sup> The number of participating institutions in 2013 has been increased by 40, including art galleries, university museums, world heritage sites and a number of non-state approved museums and exhibition places.

Further to the quantitative User Survey, the Educational Plan has a pool that supports qualitative user surveys at the museums, where the survey

design is based on the quantitative results of the common User Survey. Examples worth mentioning include the National Gallery of Denmark, which in 2012 completed a user survey about museums in non-users' everyday lives, and the Trapholt museum, which in 2011 investigated how museums can help retain young people in the educational system.

### **TRENDS FROM 2009 TO 2011**

This section sums up some of the main results from the User Survey's first project period from 2009 to 2011. The Survey's results are divided into two main groups: users who live in Denmark and users who live in other countries. In 2011, 24% of the users lived in other countries.<sup>5</sup> Here attention is given at users who live in Denmark.

During the period, the share of women and men, respectively, at the museums has been stable, with women making up 60% of the total number of users over the three years. Women are particularly overrepresented at the art museums, while men are least underrepresented at the natural history museums.

The age distribution of users has not changed notably. Users in the age group 14-29 are the most underrepresented group. They make up about 13% of the total number of users, while in the Danish population as a whole, they make up 23%. Users in the age group 65+ are overrepresented with a share of 26%, whereas they only make up 21% of the Danish population in general.<sup>6</sup>

The distribution of users' educational background has been stable. The share of users who have a primary or secondary school background is 17%, while this group makes up 42% of the entire Danish population. Users with a long higher education make up 27% of the museums' users. They make this group the most overrepresented at the museums, as the group only makes up 6% of the Danish population in general. The most underrepresented group is the users who have a vocational education. They make up 15% of the museums' users, while in the Danish society as a whole, they make up 33%.<sup>7</sup> Museum visits are social events, as only 7% of the total number of users visit the museums on their own.

The above results show a general image of the users of Denmark's museums. However, there are great variations in the users' assessments of the three museum categories: art museums, cultural history museums and natural history museums.

The art museums make up 21% of the participating exhibition places in the User Survey, but they have 44% of the total number of users at Danish museums. 66% of the users of the art museums are more than 50 years old. 75% of the users have a short, medium-length or long higher education.

These educational groups only make up 25% of the total Danish population. 50% of the users come to see a particular special exhibition. Only 31% of the users are first-time users. Users give the atmosphere at the museum the highest rating among the museum's core services, while the possibility of participating actively is given the lowest rating.

The cultural history museums make up 75% of the participating exhibition places, but they only have 53% of the total number of users. 46% of the users are less than 50 years old. 21% of the users of cultural history museums have a lower or upper secondary education, making this the largest proportion of users with this background across the three museum categories. This educational group makes up 42% of the total Danish population. 74% come to see the museum. 45% of the users are first-time users. Users give the atmosphere at the museum the highest rating among the museum's core services, while the possibility of participating actively is given the lowest rating.

The natural history museums make up 4% of the participating exhibition places in the User Survey. Correspondingly, they have 4% of the total number of users at Danish museums. 59% of the users are less than 50 years old. 32% of the natural history museums' users have a lower or upper secondary education or a vocational education. These groups make up 75% of the total Danish population. 84% come to see the museum. 49% of the users are first-time users. Users give the possibility of learning something new the highest rating among the museum's core services, while the possibility of participating actively is given the lowest rating.<sup>8</sup>

### **NON-USERS, WEB USERS AND MUSEUMS' LEARNING POTENTIALS**

Based on the results of the User Survey, the Danish Agency for Culture has had a user survey made about young users and non-users.<sup>9</sup> The results show that young non-users often do not visit museums because they feel that the museums are not relevant or of any interest to them. Often, their last museum visit will have been a visit in connection with their education or job. These visits have sparked prejudices against museums, which stop non-users from visiting their local museums. By contrast, young non-users are happy to visit museums outside their local area – most often in other countries.

The survey shows that museums face great challenges in relation to changing young non-users' prejudices against museums. They view museums as places that store objects, e.g. from the Middle Ages, which are of no relevance to their lives. They do not consider museums to be places with space for reflection, or places where you can participate actively in something relevant.

Young users are controlled by their interests when they visit museums, and they seek out places where these interests can be stimulated. The museums' content is decisive for the young people's use of museums. The Danish Agency for Culture made a publication entitled *Young Users in Museums* with good practice from Danish museums and recommendations on how to include young people.<sup>10</sup> Young people have as well been prioritised among funded projects.

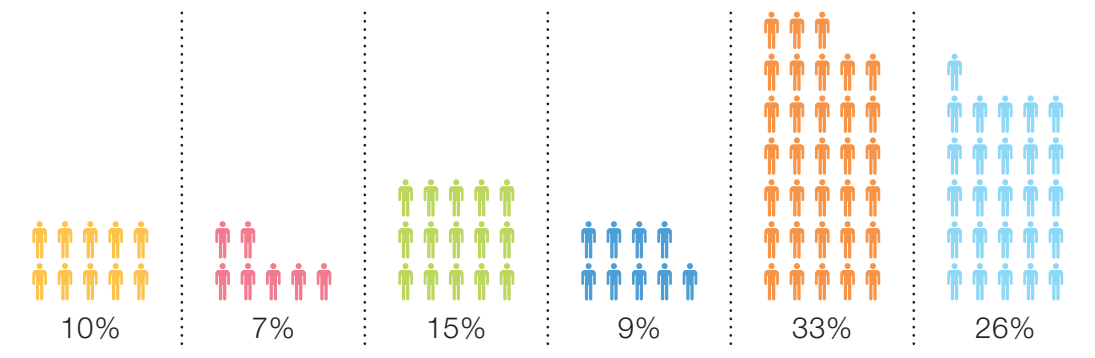
In 2010, the Danish Agency for Culture had a web user survey made, which looked at citizens' use of the museums' digital offers and presence.<sup>11</sup> The survey indicates that it is exclusively the citizens who use the physical museums who also use the museums' digital offers. The results have given rise to the Danish Agency for Culture's recommendation that the museums handle their physical and digital presence at the same professional level.

In 2007, the Danish Agency for Culture mapped the museums' educational activities aimed at primary and secondary schools in order to find out how the museums understand and practice formal educational activities and identify the challenges that the museums face in relation to professional handling of their learning potentials.<sup>12</sup>

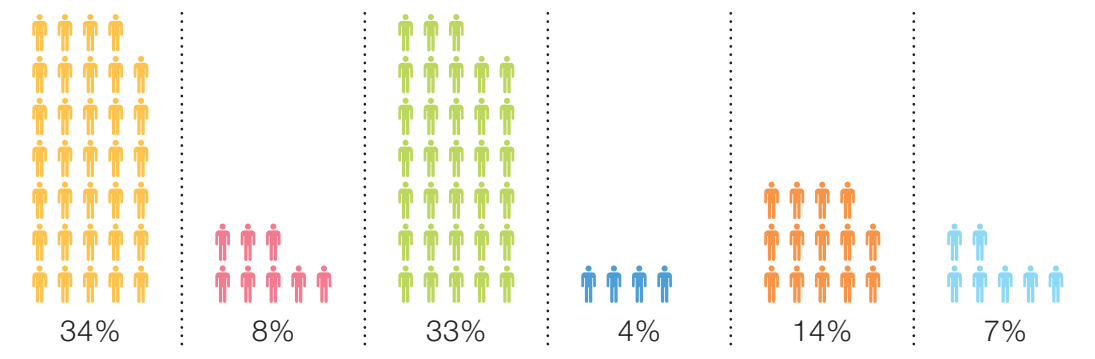
# USERS WHO LIVE IN DENMARK, DISTRIBUTED ACROSS EDUCATIONAL LEVELS (2012)

LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION    UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION    VOCATIONAL EDUCATION    SHORT HIGHER EDUCATION    MEDIUM-LENGTH HIGHER EDUCATION    LONG HIGHER EDUCATION

## USERS WHO LIVE IN DENMARK



## DANISH POPULATION



## ART



## CULTURAL HISTORY



## NATURAL HISTORY





## THE USERS' ASSESSMENT OF THE OVERALL EXPERIENCE AND THE INDIVIDUAL PARTS OF THE EXPERIENCE



**FACTORS THAT ARE IMPORTANT  
TO THE USERS' OVERALL ASSESSMENT  
OF THE EXPERIENCE**

**1  
EXHIBITION**

- Exhibitions
- Atmosphere
- Learning options
- Exhibition subjects
- Exhibition design

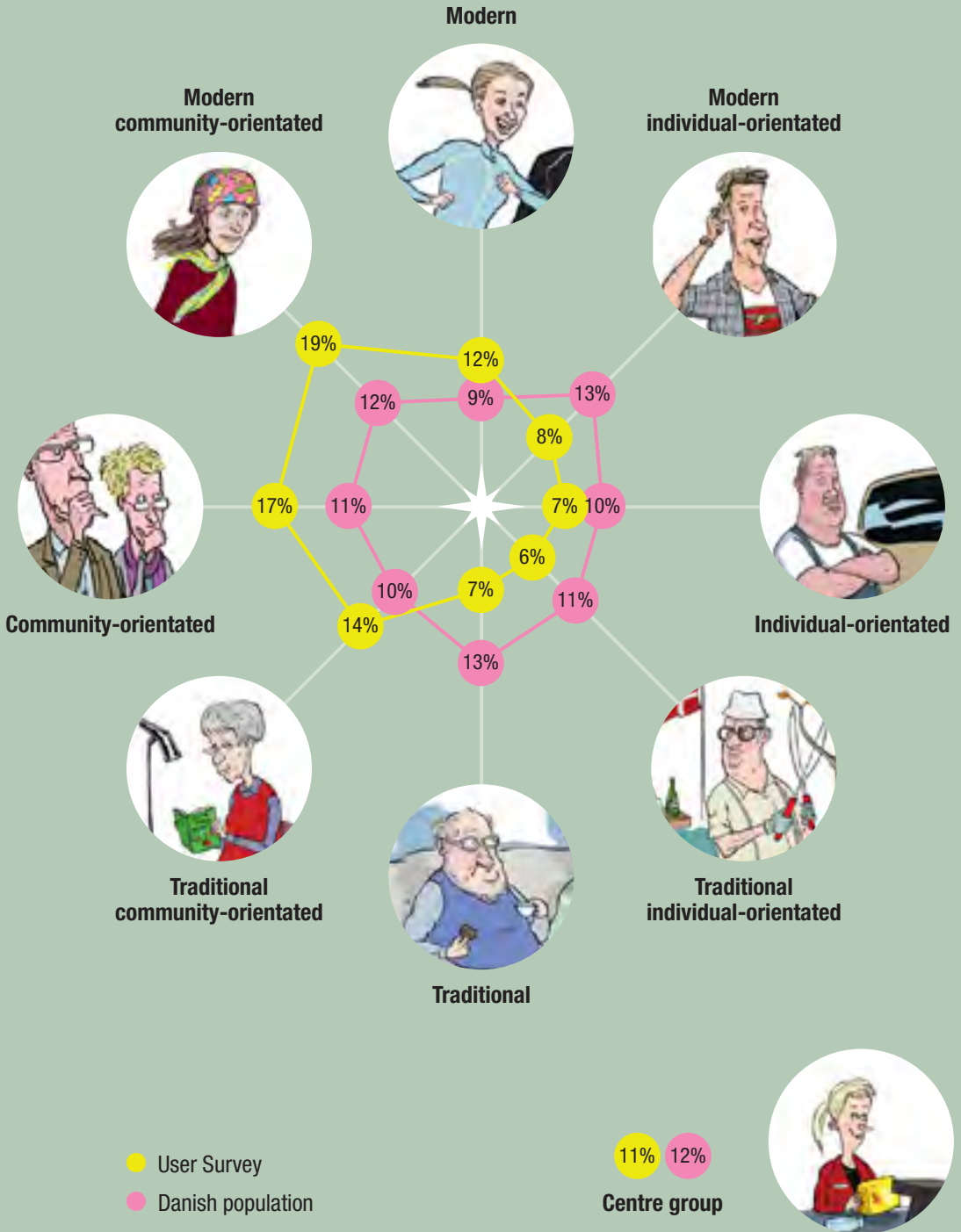
**2  
ACTIVITY AND  
REFLECTION**

- Suitability for children
- Possibility of participating actively
- Events
- Space for reflection and contemplation
- Variation in dissemination and knowledge

**3  
SERVICE**

- Service and assistance
- Information at ticket sales

**THE DISTRIBUTION OF USERS ACROSS COMPASS SEGMENTS COMPARED WITH THE DANISH POPULATION**





### **FOCUS ON MOTIVATION AND LEARNING BEHAVIOUR**

In 2012, the User Survey was developed further following an evaluation of the previous three years' results. These showed a need for more knowledge about the users' motivation and learning behaviour in connection with museum visits.

John Falk and Lynn Dierking's studies and research show that the motivation for a museum visit is decisive for the users' actual activity at the museum and for what they gain from a visit. This means that motivation determines the users' learning behaviour and user identity. Their research became the basis for the new design of the User Survey.

The User Survey 2012 works with six different motivation and learning behaviours, which are presented on the following pages.

### ***Explorer***

Explorers usually visit out of a general interest for that which can be found at the cultural institution. They are driven by curiosity and would like to be informed about everything. Explorers are interested in learning and seek new knowledge.



The explorer is attracted by new exhibitions, primarily because this appeals to their desire to expand their horizon while at the same time they enjoy immersing themselves in details.

**“I am curious and interested. I am here today to gain new knowledge and inspiration.”**

### ***Facilitator***

Facilitators are motivated by a social learning process. They visit the exhibition place to create a good experience for others. The motivation of the facilitator is to stage a social event that works. The facilitator is not personally interested in seeking knowledge.



**“I am here to give those I am with a good experience. The most important thing is that the people I am with find it interesting to be here.”**

### ***Experience seeker***

Experience seekers are motivated by the idea of being in a culturally important place. They seek highlights and must-sees, e.g. blockbuster exhibitions.



Experience seekers are motivated by fulfilling others' expectations of what is important to experience. They aim for individual and popular objects, buildings or environments.

**“I am here to experience and concentrate on what is most eye-catching. I do not have to see everything to get to know the place.”**

### ***Professional/hobbyist***

Professional/hobbyist visits the institution with a specific target in mind and is orientated towards seeking professional insight. They relate critically and reflectively to everything in the exhibition.



They often come alone and most often visit the exhibition place when there are not a lot of other users present.

**“I am here because I have a specific professional interest. I am taking a critical look at the exhibition and the professionalism of the presentation.”**

### ***Recharger***

Rechargers would like to use the institution to recharge their batteries and they experience the institution as an oasis away from everyday life. Rechargers do not like places with a lot of people and do not want to be disturbed. They seek aesthetic experiences, beautiful views and architecture that facilitate peace and contemplation. The rechargers use the institution for mental relaxation and inspiration.



**“I am here to recharge my batteries and to find peace and time for contemplation. I am seeking aesthetic experiences in the exhibits, architecture and surroundings of this exhibition venue.”**

### ***Tag-along***

Tag-alongs visit cultural institutions because others have brought them along. They are not particularly interested in the exhibitions' content or the institution.

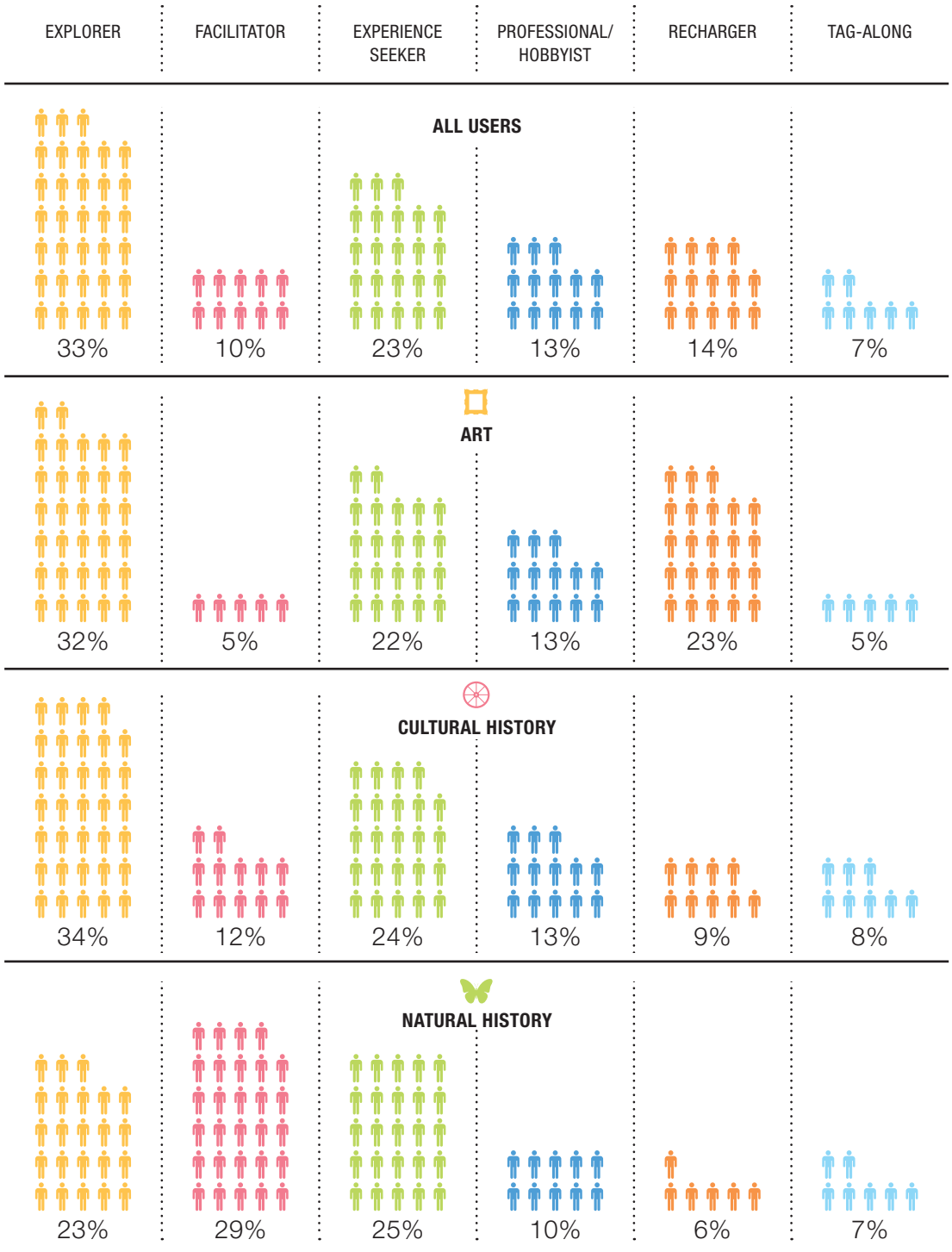


This group has been added to the Danish version of motivation groups, and it stands out notably from John Falk's other five motivation and learning behaviours.

**“I am here because I am accompanying others.”**



# MOTIVATION SEGMENTS, DISTRIBUTED ACROSS THE THREE MUSEUM CATEGORIES (2012)



## KEY RESULTS FROM 2012

The User Survey's combined results for 2012 show that most often users reply that they are motivated to visit the museum because they are interested and curious and therefore characterise themselves as being *explorers*. This group make up 33% of museum users. The smallest number of users characterise themselves as *tag-alongs*, i.e. 7%. The User Survey shows that the users' motivation and learning behaviour varies greatly dependent on which type of museum they visit.

With just 5%, the art museums have a small share of users who characterise themselves as *facilitators*. By contrast, the art museums have a very large share of users who characterise themselves as *rechargers*, i.e. 23%.

The cultural history museums do not stand out significantly in relation to the overall results. 34% of their users characterise themselves as being *explorers*. 8% of the cultural history museums' users characterise themselves as *tag-alongs*, the highest proportion for this group.

The situation at the natural history museums is completely different to what is seen at the art museums. The natural history museums have a very high proportion of users who characterise themselves as *facilitators*, i.e. 29%, whereas they have a very low proportion of users who characterise themselves as *rechargers*, i.e. 6%.<sup>13</sup>

The overall results of users' motivation and learning behaviour show that the users' age has a great impact on their user profile. 33% of the users in the age group 14-29 characterise themselves as *tag-alongs*. By contrast, 63% of the users who characterise themselves as *rechargers* are more than 50 years old.

The users' educational background also has a significant impact on their motivation and learning behaviour. 22% of the *explorers* are users with a primary and lower secondary school education. Users with a long higher education are dominant among those who characterise themselves as *rechargers*.

The users' motivation and learning behaviour influences their assessment of the overall museum experience. It comes as no surprise that users who characterise themselves as *tag-alongs* give the museums the lowest rating and that users who characterise themselves as *rechargers* overall give the museums the highest rating. Both users who characterise themselves as *explorers* and those who consider themselves to be *professionals/hobbyists* also give the museums a relatively high rating.

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# DIVERSITY AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOG





# A MUSEUM FOR THE FOOL AND THE PROFESSOR

**THOMAS BLOCH RAVN**, Museum Director of Den Gamle By (The Old Town – National Open-Air Museum of Urban History and Culture) since 1996. He holds an MA in Danish Local and Cultural History. From 2001, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Danish Center for Urban History, and President of the Association of European Open Air Museums 2007-11. As Museum Director, he has focused on managing and developing the museum to be in dialogue with the present society. He participates in public debates about museology and museums' relevance for the community.

In recent years, Den Gamle By has had a significant growth in initiatives such as rebuilding the Mintmaster's Mansion from 17<sup>th</sup> century Copenhagen, a Shopping Street from 1927 and a Town District depicting from 1974 plus new buildings for the Danish Poster Museum and The Gallery of Decorative Art, both of which are museums integrated into Den Gamle By.

ou



## A MUSEUM FOR THE FOOL AND THE PROFESSOR

*Den Gamle By* (The Old Town) is an open-air museum dedicated to urban culture. It encompasses several museums at the same site at the heart of Aarhus: a toy museum, a poster museum and a gallery of decorative arts with exhibitions of silverware, Delftware and clocks and watches. However, basically, *Den Gamle By* is the national open-air museum of Danish urban culture with the characteristic open-air interplay between exteriors, interiors and living history.<sup>1</sup> In 2012, the museum had 386,000 visitors. The entrance fee during the peak season is DKK 135, which makes the museum the most expensive Danish museum to visit.

*Den Gamle By* was founded in 1914 as a popular, visitor-orientated museum in opposition to the scientific, inward-looking National Museum in Copenhagen. The Director of the National Museum at the time, Sophus Müller, was extremely aggressive towards open-air museums and supported local museum people who proposed that the renaissance timber of *Den Gamle By*'s first house should be chopped up and sold as firewood. What it boiled down to was basically a conflict about totalities versus objects, people versus scientists and storytelling versus research.

The identity of the museum is to think differently, to do things our own way, and from time to time be in opposition to conventional wisdom. A well-known Danish patron of the arts once said that the museum is for both the fool and the professor.

We try to target a variety of users by means of a variety of measures – in other words, we play different tunes in the same symphony. We are a museum that is about people, for people and with people.

### A VARIED USER PROFILE

A recent user survey of *Den Gamle By* documents that users generally mirror the Danish population. The survey shows a balanced visitor profile, which includes the segments defined as individual-orientated, modern individual-orientated and traditional, which are usually characterised as non-museum users according to the user survey.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the museum is the most expensive Danish museum clearly does not restrict the broad reach of the museum.

Museums are about preservation and research, but what matters in the end is the output for the users. How do we draw attention? How do we inspire fascination? How do we trigger imagination? How do we touch hearts?<sup>3</sup>

In tune with the museum's DNA, our mission statement is to bring history to people! Our practice is based on research, but we do not want the museum to appear academic. It is the museum's ambition to reach out to as many people as possible – even to people who never use museums and to people who consider museums to be elitist and boring.

In order to implement the mission we have identified three action points:

1. To update relevant storytelling.
2. To develop our brand.
3. To intensify user surveys and user studies.

In updating the storytelling and relevance, we have focused on five areas: living history, events, temporary exhibitions, modern history and outreach to a variety of target groups.

In 2001, we introduced living history to make space for people and dialogue at the museum. This was not a popular decision among museum professionals. Some classified this move as a Disneyfication of the museum.

Apart from this move, we introduced events with a view to developing additional seasons. For instance, the museum started opening during the Christmas season, and over the years, this has turned into a peak season with around 30% of the annual users visiting the museum during a six-week period.

The museum has increased its focus on temporary exhibitions based on the museum's own collections, ranging from party dresses to tobacco objects and photography of rock musicians and youth culture.

### **RETHINKING THE MUSEUM**

In 2002, we decided to rethink the museum by adding a new town district that would depict the year 1974. We translocated houses from towns and cities all over Denmark to illustrate a mini Denmark from the post-war boom period to the beginning of the oil crisis.

We have already made a radio/TV shop, a needlework shop and several shop facades. In the summer of 2013, we opened a huge block with a tearoom, a bakery, a supermarket and a gynaecologist's practice. The block also contains a shared flat for young people, a flat for an unmarried teacher and a flat for a traditional family.

In the coming years, we plan to open a jazz pub, a kindergarten, a second-hand shop with pornographic magazines, a plumber's workshop and a room for scouts. The houses will also contain flats for a single woman and her son, a retired couple from the working class, a hippie, a blind man and a one-bedroom apartment housing six young workers from Turkey.<sup>4</sup>

The initiatives mentioned above are in tune with the basic ideas of open-air museums. The early open-air museums were both radical and highly relevant institutions. They were radical because they focused on the daily lives of ordinary people, and they were relevant because their storytelling targeted ordinary people.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, we have developed programmes for marginalised groups, who are typically non-users of museums – from mentally disabled young people to elderly people suffering from dementia.

In the flat from the 1950s, people suffering from dementia are treated as guests who visit the housewife. The sounds, the smells – even the toilet paper – are from the period. It corresponds to a specific time and experience in the users' life when they were young, recently married and had their first child. In this context, they re-experience a highlight in their lives. The setting opens their minds and enables social interaction. This contributes to social value and well-being.<sup>6</sup>

The project is carried out in partnerships with the healthcare sector. Research conducted by psychologists from Aarhus University confirms the value of the project for the participants.

Recently we brought the 'home' of a homeless person into the museum. The homeless man's name is Ulrik, and he was very active in the process of having his 'home' exhibited in a backyard at the museum. He lived there for some months sharing his story and earning his living by selling a magazine about homeless people. In collaboration with Ulrik, the museum documented his life and way of living. In this project, the museum explored new ways of learning about contemporary history.<sup>7</sup>

### **MUSEUMS FOR SOMEBODY**

These projects give the museum public attention and visibility, and they start discussions about the role of museums in society. Can projects like the ones mentioned above be carried out by other public institutions? Do museums have a social responsibility? Stephen E. Weil's famous dictum from 1999 about the changing role of the museum has often been quoted: "From being about something to being for somebody".<sup>8</sup>

These initiatives have widened general knowledge about the museum and changed and strengthened our brand. Based on a qualitative analysis of the museum's brand, we are focused on changing our identity and brand with an emphasis on the museums within the museum and especially with projects reflecting contemporary history.

We acknowledge that it is important to be in tune with reality and to intensify our PR and marketing based on user surveys in order to change and strengthen our brand.

The founding director of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, George F. MacDonald, once pointed out that: “The theme park is setting the tune to which we will all ultimately have to dance... But as museums we can use their techniques and outclass them with a value-orientated content they cannot match”.<sup>9</sup>

MacDonald has studied attractions, museums and parks made by the Disney Corporation. I believe we can learn about service, visitor handling, PR, marketing and user studies – and how to improve storytelling in order to attract diverse user groups. Museums are and must be museums and museums must stick with their mission. However, if we have the courage, we can learn a lot from theme parks and commercial attractions – and beat them with their own means.



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## Credits

- p. 53 The shared flat for young people in 1974, Den Gamle By.
- p. 54 The shopping street 1974, Den Gamle By. Photo: Thorsten Overgaard.
- p. 56 The homeless man, exhibited in Den Gamle By 2012.
- p. 58 From the gynaecologist's practice 1974, Den Gamle By.
- p. 60 Den Gamle By's flat for people suffering from dementia. Photo: Thorsten Overgaard.









DISTILLERIE

FOTO







Susi

Arla  
Sodmilk  
100% Vollmilch  
Laktosearm  
1,5% Fett

Wulffmorgensbrot  
mit Butter  
100% Weizenmehl  
100g













**JENS AAGE**  
*Plader*  
**RADIO TIRNSVH PLADER**  
12 AAGE  
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# BENCHMARKING DIVERSITY IN MUSEUMS

**DR. AMARESWAR GALLA** is a champion of cultural democracy, UN Millennium Development Goals and safeguarding of heritage. He is an alumnus of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and Professor of World Heritage and Sustainable Development, Split University. He is the founding Executive Director of the International Institute for the Inclusive Museum, Denmark & India.

Prof. Galla's publication record focusing on inclusion and active citizenship ranges from *World Heritage: Benefits Beyond Borders*, 2012; to *Heritage Curricula and Cultural Diversity*, 1993. He was Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* and current founding Editor of the *International Journal on the Inclusive Museum*. He was Professor of Museum Studies, University of Queensland, Brisbane and Professor & Director of Sustainable Heritage Development Programs, Australian National University, Canberra. During 1994-99, he was the International Technical Adviser for the transformation of Arts Councils, National Museums and the National Parks Board (now SAN Parks) in post-apartheid South Africa. He worked on the implementation of Museums and Cultural Diversity Promotion at the National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, the Netherlands.

His work, listed as best practice in the 2009 World Culture Report by UNESCO, includes the establishment of World Heritage Areas as culture in poverty alleviation projects – Ha Long Bay and Hoi An, Vietnam and Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, India. He has been honoured internationally on several occasions including Outstanding Conservationist of the Year Award, Vietnamese government (2002), and the European Best in Heritage Award (2008). ICOM Australia conferred on him the 2012 Individual achievement award of excellence for his extensive and on-going commitment to museums, sustainable development and poverty alleviation through culture.





## BENCHMARKING DIVERSITY IN MUSEUMS

Denmark is listed as the happiest country in the world. The simple question that the Danes in the street ask is why they should change when life is good. Perhaps the world is changing around them. There is also the next generation with different expectations. It could also be that to be insular in a rapidly changing world that inevitably exposes one, perhaps even makes one vulnerable, to the accelerated pace of all forms of globalisation. Transformations are manifestations of the dynamism of a society where cultural democracy is valued. So, what is the position of museums in this context?

Denmark is gradually emerging as a culturally and linguistically diverse country. The ambition of the civil society appears to be appreciative of the diversity of cultural expressions, across time and space – both diachronic and synchronic – and for this new social value to inform empowerment and development of the Danish society into the future. Denmark is one of the richest countries in the world with an enviable GDP, even among the OECD countries. It has an admirable social net to ensure the maximum possible benefits for its citizens. However, cultural policies are yet to be developed at the national and local levels that inform growth and development, positioning culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development along with social, economic and environmental.<sup>1</sup> So, what do museums as social learning spaces mean?

Are exhibitions based on the current state of collections and curatorship adequate to inform the practice of cultural democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The Learning Day on Active Citizenship I facilitated on 31 October 2012 at Arken, with 32 museum employees from middle management – educators, curators, conservators and public programmers – underlined the state of the national profile, which is a disconnect between ‘collections and communities’. There was further concern that there was no balance of gender at the decision-making levels in Danish cultural institutions. This came as a surprise given the gender compliance requirements next door in Sweden and Finland. The buy-in was also mentioned as lacking from directors, governance mechanisms and administrators for genuine inclusion and cultural diversity planning in the democratic transformations of cultural institutions.

### **INCLUSION – A TOTAL MUSEUM DISCOURSE**

Inclusion has become the *mantra* in Denmark and Europe, calling for a conceptual or contextual understanding. The fact that there is an aspiration and near consensus for change was evident from the 247 museum



employees and researchers that gathered at the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Inclusive Museum at the National Gallery of Denmark.<sup>2</sup> The theme was Museums and Active Citizenship. Papers and books are undergoing peer review from the gathering, in which nearly half of the delegates came from Denmark and the rest came from 47 other countries. Informed by the above mentioned Learning Day at Arken, three museum day practice seminars and workshops were scheduled as part of the Inclusive Museum Conference.

The first activity focused on urbanism. It is frequently mentioned by the UN Habitat and various planning agencies that nearly 200,000 people are moving into an urban landscape every day across the world and that in Northern Europe, Oslo has become the fastest growing city. Copenhagen is facing rapid demographic changes as well. The Museum of Copenhagen and its dynamic staff facilitated thematic engagement on: Urban Archaeology as a Site for Active Citizenship, Participatory Contemporary Collecting, the exhibition Becoming a Copenhagener and The WALL – co-creating common cityscape themes.

Place Making – Parkmuseerne (the Park Museums) was the second workshop activity. The Park Museums comprise six museums and three parks, all joined up to form a vast recreational district at the heart of Copenhagen. Here, you are promised the best experiences that art and nature have to offer. Experiential choices can be found both indoors and outdoors. The Park Museum district is easy to access, and everything can be reached on foot. Discussion drew on comparative museum districts such as the Smithsonian Mall in Washington DC, Museum Park in Pretoria and Reconciliation Place in Canberra.

The third activity focused on how cultural institutions address the practice of gender mainstreaming. The question as to how the gender dimension is defined and negotiated in a range of cultural institutions was vigorously debated. KVINFO, the International Institute for the Inclusive Museum and the Danish Institute for Human Rights convened this one-day seminar in order to scope, assess and understand the extent to which cultural institutions are addressing gender mainstreaming and perhaps even come up with a set of strategic directions.

It is significant that all three seminar/workshops were co-facilitated by the directors of major Danish cultural institutions working together with the international leadership of eminent museum directors. It emerged that appropriate and inclusive leadership is critical for Denmark beyond managerialism. There is a demand for policy-driven and arm's length development of museums. Moreover, on first diagnosis, it appears that the deficit model of 'multiculturalism' that plagues the international museum sector is beginning to infect the Danish cultural scene. The tyranny of the discourse of binary oppositions, especially us, museums, and them, communities/

citizens, is dominant. The affirmative approaches to planning based on participatory cultural mapping for making museums and galleries relevant to contemporary Denmark are yet to be developed. But these require mainstream capacity building and transformative professional development programming that is sorely lacking.

### **CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

The Danish situation is symptomatic of Europe. Crisis as a Challenge has become the hackneyed theme of conferences in the past two years. But most of the focus has been on reactions to financial pressures and cut-backs. The threat of closure of the Tropen Museum in Amsterdam has come as a shock to the global museum community. Amalgamation of smaller museum collections under the umbrella of larger ones and the de-contextualisation from the knowledge-producing contexts has become a threat to both the cultural diversity and the sense of place and identity of rural populations. This is within a policy vacuum and in the face of rapid and rabid globalisation in all its dimensions, economic, social, cultural and digital.

In the past year, both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister David Cameron made sweeping statements that state-sponsored multiculturalism is not working and that integration is the way forward. This is nothing new in pandering to populism. Neither leader was informed that there is a difference between immigration and settlement services and multiculturalism as a public policy in culturally and linguistically diverse societies. Those of us at the forefront of public policy debates have consistently cautioned against assimilation policies that are in contradiction to the EU commitment to cultural diversity and human rights. What we have always advocated is integration based on sound governance principles of equity and access. So integration it is and “not more of the same” or a cultural reproduction by the establishment.

If museums are to become civic spaces then they must address the hegemonic discourse of assimilation that is rampant and sketch pathways for integration through inclusion based on mutual respect. Ethno-specific exhibitions and immigration stories are a dime a dozen in Europe. As important as they are to raise awareness about European cultural diversity, there is a need for transcending essentialism of the ‘other’ in exhibition discourse and rethinking collections and their multidimensionality in meaning, historical contexts and multiple interpretations. For example, someone like me cannot be reduced to simply an essential identity of ‘Indian’, whatever that might be for 1.3 billion people. This can be a challenging task within the predominantly monolingual and monocultural population of Denmark. To hide behind the size of a small country in Europe can be at best escapism from the realities of the nascent diversity of the country.

I am many peoples. From a minority community from Andhra Pradesh in South India where I completed schooling in three Indian languages. Educated at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, globally renowned for its leadership in postcolonial studies in humanities and social sciences. I worked as a museum and heritage professional in Australia for a decade in the immediate years after the official scrapping of the White Australia policy; five years in the transformation of post-apartheid cultural and environmental institutions under the first President of the free and democratic South Africa; several years in Vietnam and the Netherlands; and now in Denmark as a recent migrant. Indeed, I wear my loin cloth underneath the three-piece suit and a cravat or tie. How does one capture the contemporary culture and image of populations that are increasingly forming the profile of Denmark? How do museums rethink their historical collections and engage with the contemporary cultural diversity of their stakeholder populations?

In Europe, the assassination of Theo van Gogh in November 2004 was a turning point for museums. It happened in the vicinity of the Tropen Museum in Amsterdam where I had just facilitated a research action workshop focusing on Museums and Cultural Diversity for 18 doctoral candidates from 10 countries. I was a visitor at the National Museum of Ethnology on cultural diversity programming. In the immediate aftermath of the extreme reactions in the Netherlands following the murder, the Dutch Museum Association organised at the Tropen Museum a conference or jamboree if you will, entitled *Dancing with Diversity*. It was well attended by museum and cultural professionals as well as artists from the Netherlands and other concerned European countries, especially Germany and Norway. Baroness Lola Young from the UK and I were invited to give plenary addresses to the gathering. However, we were presented after the Dutch national profile of museums and multicultural work. Through this entrée, the binary of Dutch and foreigners was repeated as the main categorisation, even if some of the foreigners were descendants of Swahili-speaking slaves from the lucrative historical trade. It was the result of this impasse in Dutch museological discourse that prompted us to develop the Inclusive Museum Knowledge Community with the first meeting held in Leiden in 2008 with the support of ICOM.

It was a similar impasse in Denmark – at the crossroads dealing with the establishment discourse of assimilation and attempts to understand integration and inclusion of all peoples of Denmark including the rural migrants into urban centres – that provided the fertile ground for the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Inclusive Museum. The Director General of the Danish Agency for Culture, Anne Mette Rahbæk, made her commitment to the promotion of inclusion clear in her opening speech. The host, Director at the National Gallery of Denmark, Karsten Orht, along with other directors of national and local museums chimed in with their affirmation. The impact of the outcomes from the culturally and linguistically diverse

participation in the Copenhagen Inclusive Museum Conference was so seminal and relevant that it captured the attention of the global museum community. Resolution 4 of the 28<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the International Council of Museums was unanimously adopted at the Triennial General Conference in Rio de Janeiro on 17 August: *Assess the extent to which ICOM programmes and activities are in accordance with the 2010 ICOM Cultural Diversity Charter and implement a gender mainstreaming policy as an integral part of ICOM's strategic directions.*

In detail, Resolution. No. 4 read as follows:

**Museums, Gender Mainstreaming and Inclusion: Benchmarking against the ICOM Cultural Diversity Charter, Shanghai 2010**

*Noting that:*

- *ICOM adopted the ICOM Cultural Diversity Charter during the 25<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in Shanghai, in November 2010*
- *ICOM also adopted during the 25th General Assembly ongoing support to the Inclusive Museum Knowledge Community*
- *The International Symposium on Inclusion and Gender Mainstreaming in Copenhagen as part of the Inclusive Museum Knowledge Community conference in April 2013 (Co-chaired by the President of ICOM, Hans-Martin Hinz) expressed strong concern about the inadequate engagement with gender and women's issues in museums*
- *Gender mainstreaming and other cultural borders of diversity such as race, ethnicity, class, faith, age, physical ability, economic status, regionalism and sexual orientation are important for the development of the principle of inclusiveness in museums.*
- *ICOM must continue to expand and become inclusive of the members and their communities and countries across the world, in its goal to become a globally representative INGO (Internal Non-Government Organisation).*

*It is resolved by the 28<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of ICOM meeting on 17 August 2013 in Rio de Janeiro that the newly elected President and the Executive Council:*

- *Develop a systematic approach to assessing the extent to which its programs and activities including various Committee deliberations address cultural and linguistic diversity benchmarked against the ICOM Cultural Diversity Charter and as part of this agenda;*
- *Develop a Gender Mainstreaming policy and actively ensure its implementation as an integral part of ICOM's strategic directions.*

*In addressing Gender Mainstreaming:*

- *We recommend that museums analyze the narratives being told from a gender perspective.*
- *In order to have a gender policy, we recommend museums to work with audience, staff and programs from a gender perspective and at the same time with the embodiment of ideas.*
- *We recommend museums to use the analysis of inter-sectionality (race, ethnicity, gender, class, faith, sexual orientation and so on) to realize the ideas of inclusiveness in Museums.*

### **NEED FOR CULTURAL POLICIES IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT**

Museums do not exist in isolation. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, museums with diminishing resources and an alienated youth that are the next generation of tax payers and political decision-makers for the cultural sector, it has become imperative for systematic and relevant cultural policies to inform the museum domain. The Netherlands was one of the first countries to adopt a comprehensive national cultural policy. The latest being Australia, which has unfortunately opted for a minimalist approach without even the recognition of its intangible heritage. While there are several national and local cultural policies, few have addressed the location of culture in sustainable development. This is despite the call for such cultural understanding by the UN World Commission for Culture and Development in 1995.

*“Development divorced from its human or cultural context is growth without a soul. Economic development in its full flowering is part of a people’s culture... Unlike the physical environment, where we dare not improve on the best that nature provides, culture is the fountain of our progress and creativity.”<sup>3</sup>*

The World Culture Forum in Bali, November this year, calls for fostering a Holistic Human Development Ethic where culture is located in all its manifestations and its localised diversity as an integral part of sustainable development.<sup>4</sup> As Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, puts it: “Global economic growth per capita has combined with a world population [passing 7 billion last year] to put unprecedented stress on fragile ecosystems. We recognize that we cannot continue to burn and consume our way to prosperity. Yet we have not embraced the obvious solution – the only possible solution, now as it was twenty years ago: sustainable development.”<sup>5</sup>

The Director General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, said “Heritage stands at the crossroads of climate change, social transformations and processes of reconciliation between peoples. Heritage carries high stakes – for the

identity and belonging of peoples, for the sustainable economic and social development of communities.”<sup>6</sup> She argued that “heritage does not represent luxury; it is a capital investment in the future. It is the sound foundation without which nothing lasting can be built. Disregarding heritage, severing our roots, will inevitably clip our wings.” She has consistently advocated a paradigm shift to further sustainable development, “a new approach to research that is interdisciplinary, solutions oriented and policy relevant, with a stronger social science component.”<sup>7</sup>

One way of addressing this challenge is to redefine what we mean by human development. In this regard, there is widespread agreement with Helen Clark, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, that “progress needs to be defined and measured in a way which accounts for the broader picture of human development and its context,” which would emphasize “equity, dignity, happiness, sustainability”.<sup>8</sup>

In its report *Resilient People, Resilient Planet*,<sup>9</sup> the UN Secretary General’s High-Level Global Sustainability Panel concluded that “the international community should measure development beyond GDP and develop a new sustainable development index or set of indicators”. These views are also reflected in the OECD’s Better Life Initiative<sup>10</sup> and the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission<sup>11</sup> and numerous other similar initiatives, which call for a broad range of social indicators to complement GDP figures.

Recently, these efforts have resulted in two landmark resolutions adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, N. 65/166 and N. 66/208, which emphasise the crucial importance of culture as “an essential component of human development, a source of identity, innovation and creativity for the individual and the community”.<sup>12</sup>

Rio+20 in June 2012 reiterated this concept by recognising that “all cultures and civilizations can contribute to sustainable development” (Section 41 of the outcome document, *The Future We Want*)<sup>13</sup> and that “many people, especially the poor, depend directly on ecosystems for their livelihoods, their economic, social and physical well-being, and their cultural heritage” (Section 30). The Rio Conference also stressed the “intrinsic value of biological diversity, as well as its ecological, genetic, social, economic, scientific, educational, cultural, recreational and aesthetic values” (Section 197).

In 2015, the international community will review the progress made in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (adopted in 2000), and define a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will set priorities for the post-2015 Development Agenda. In this context, it is crucial to ensure that the conservation and wise use of heritage, both



natural and cultural, is taken into account and fully integrated into future sustainable development policies and programmes with consolidated sets of experience and evidence-based arguments.

Most activities associated with the stewardship of cultural and natural heritage developed over centuries if not millennia of slow adaptation, do indeed have a much lower impact on the environment compared with other sectors while generating sustainable local employment opportunities, including the fostering of creative industries based on local arts, crafts and other products.

Finally museums are essential to human spiritual well-being for its powerful symbolic and aesthetic dimensions. Conservation of the diversity of cultural and natural heritage, fair access to it and the equitable sharing of the benefits deriving from its use, enhance the feeling of place and belonging, mutual respect for others and a sense of purpose and ability to provide for succeeding generations, which contribute to the social cohesion of the community as well as to individual and collective freedom of choice and action. Another recurring point is the value and role of responsible tourism in the conservation and promotion of museums.

In the above context, the World Culture Forum in November 2013 is the first in a series of planned international forums to be convened in Bali in order to discuss vital global issues for culture in development. These are significant to countries from every region of the world that seek to preserve their local culture and values while at the same time maximising on the benefits of globalisation – whether educational, economic, cultural or social. The aim is that the World Cultural Forum will become part of the annual global agenda shaping issues in cultural development in a similar way to that in which Davos in Switzerland has evolved to impact on global economic policy, and Rio de Janeiro meetings provide leadership on world environmental issues.

At this historical juncture, Indonesians promote the importance of examining the strategic role of culture in strengthening relationships among countries. They also seek to formulate policies that allow national and local cultures to contribute to national development and world civilization in an age of unprecedented globalisation. This ambition resonates with the strategic goals for internationalisation and cultural exchanges of the Danish Agency for Culture.

## MUSEUMS AS CIVIC SPACES

It is often emphasised that museums must aspire to become civic spaces for intercultural, intergenerational and interfaith dialogue. Denmark has launched significant projects such as the User Survey to create the context for the relevance of museums and to promote active civic engagement. The ambitious goal of promoting citizenship in museums anticipates processes of inclusion through:

- Active participation and engagement at the local and global levels in all aspects of museum business.
- Synergies in collaboration, collective action and strategic and relevant partnerships between all stakeholders, be they institutional or community agencies.
- Spaces for mediation enabling 'reflective, revealing and confronting' intercultural dialogue, promoting mutual respect and reconciliation of differences, especially between museums and youth.
- Convergence of all forms of communications and interactivity to maximise on knowledge generation and affordable accessibility.

For any museum or heritage site or landscape that is embedded with the legacies of conservative museological discourse, transformative planning and learning requires unmasking in order to understand the layers of significance of the collections or heritage resource and the multiple voices, both silent and active, that inform the meanings that we wish to communicate.

The performance piece on the next page is from the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore during the ASEMUS<sup>14</sup> meeting entitled Museum Hopping: The Asia Europe Market Place for Sharing Cultural Heritage, March 2004. On the right hand side is Dr Brian Durrans, then Senior Curator in anthropology at the British Museum who was responsible for Indian collections. Next to him is his display, a mask which gazes back at the visitors challenging them to consider whether they can only see the tangible mask but that they do not understand the people, communities and spaces behind the mask. The mask tells us more about the curator and collector than it creates an understanding of the multiple meanings and context of the source community. The message that is relevant to museums in my newly adopted country is that the scoping relevance and promoting active citizenship are about getting behind the mask.

Most establishment cultural institutions tend to brush off any discourse of inclusion and transformation by stating that they are already engaged and have been working with stakeholders and source communities since their inception. In order to deal with such resistance, museum funders have used a range of approaches including partnership-driven grants



and throwing open challenges in generating resources. These are often grounded in appropriate policy frameworks. In the past, for example, *Turning the Page* in the mediations between Museums and First Nations in Canada, and *Excellence and Equity* in the USA. However, the complexity of 21<sup>st</sup> century population mix and hybridity calls for integrated local area planning and innovative approaches to promote integration that is not assimilationist.

There is no one-size-fits-all model or one correct way of doing things. There are several excellent examples in the world. Several of these have had a multiplier effect in the way museums have customised good practices. For example, the *Peopling of London* project from the Museum of London in 1992-93 has had a lasting impact on the museum world. It inspired exhibitions such as *Rotterdamers* at the World Museum in Rotterdam, *Canberrans* at the Canberra Museum and Gallery in Canberra, and *Becoming a Copenhagener* at the Museum of Copenhagen. The *Peopling of London* was based on the principle that everybody came to London from some 28,000 years ago and onwards, and the project finishes with the then latest migrants from Hong Kong. The project is based

on the principle of mapping the layers of significance of populations, histories and objects. It was developed in partnership with the schools and residents in the stakeholder hinterland of the museum.<sup>15</sup>

Projects inspired by the *Peopling of London* project have resulted in contextual museums that bring together the tangible and the intangible, the movable and the immovable, and natural and cultural heritage resources. On opposite page is a summary diagram that promotes a holistic and inclusive museum development that provides a service for all.<sup>16</sup>

This model calls for, as far as possible, evidence-based benefits to multiple publics, diverse audiences and stakeholders through integrated cooperation and coordination mechanisms and more participatory governance structures for culture. It also requires a deeper statistical understanding of the importance of the cultural sector to sustainable development and far greater awareness-raising strategies about the cultural dimension of development.

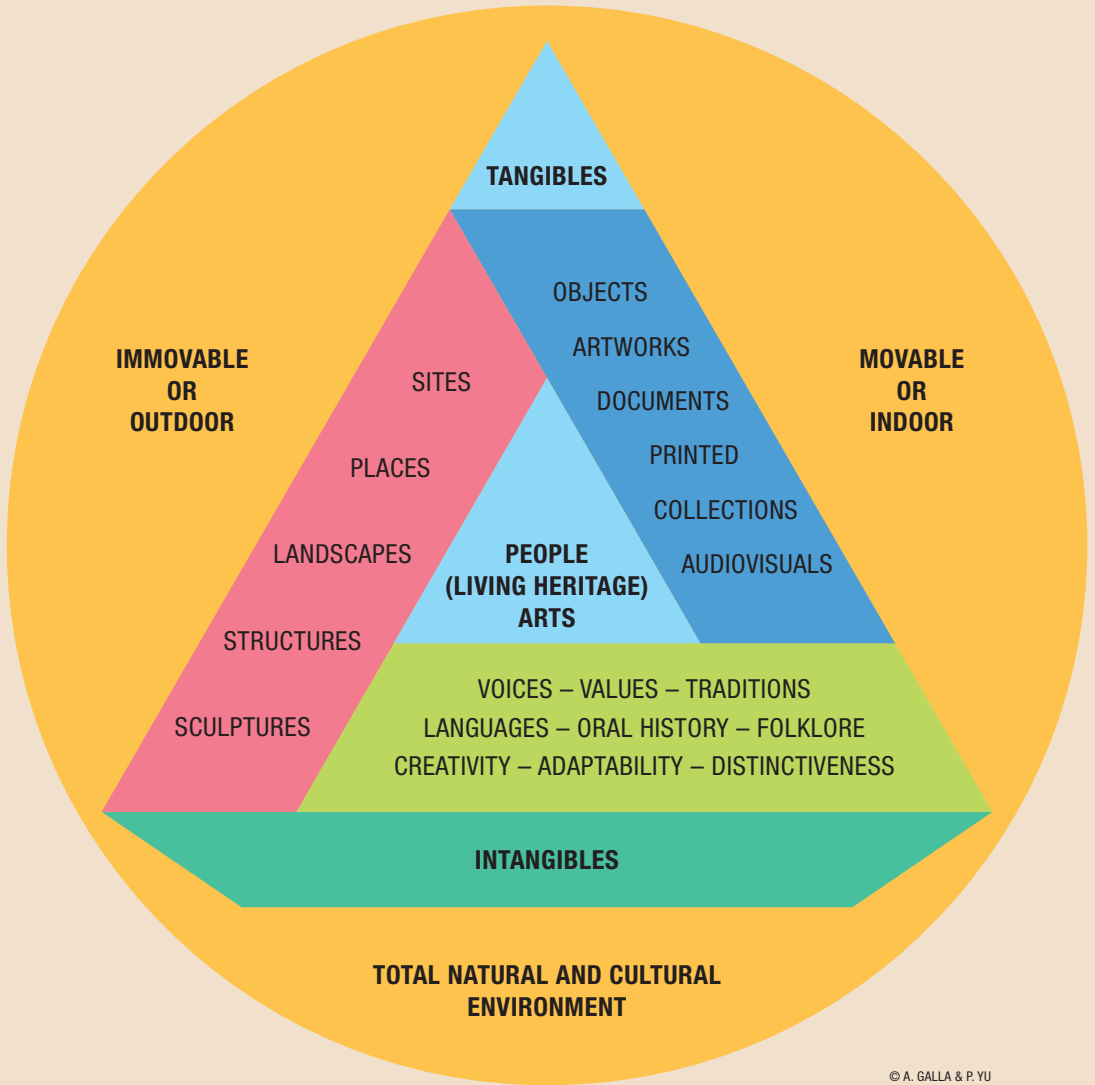
### **BENCHMARKING TRANSFORMATIONS IN MUSEUMS**

In times of change and increasing demands for accountability and relevance, we need cultural indicators or principles to benchmark our performance. ICOM, has developed since its Quebec General Conference in 1992 and adopted its Cultural Diversity Policy in Melbourne in 1998. In 2005, a new initiative started with the establishment of the ICOM Cross Cultural Task Force. It was mandated to build on the previous work of ICOM “in order to continue to examine and report on the ways that museums throughout the world are addressing the wide range of issues with cross cultural dimensions; develop inclusive approaches and guidelines concerning the way that museums should endeavour to deal with cultural diversity in general and indigenous and multicultural issues in particular; and advocate and make appropriate recommendations concerning the ways that cross cultural perspectives should be enhanced in the work of ICOM and its committees.”

In 2010, the Task Force completed its work with the adoption of two resolutions at the ICOM General Conference in Shanghai. One focused on supporting the Inclusive Museum Knowledge Community. The second adopted the ICOM Cultural Diversity Charter. The Charter provides a set of principles that could assist in the benchmarking of the transformations of museums in Denmark and other countries in their aspiration to become relevant and inclusive.

**A HOLISTIC PARADIGM**

**INTEGRATION OF ELEMENTS IN POST COLONIAL MUSEUM PRACTICE  
– CRITICAL FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP**



Below, I have provided a brief summary of the Charter principles:

#### PREAMBLE

As an integral part of the outcomes of the activities of 2010 — *The International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures*, *The International Year of Biodiversity*, and *The International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding*; and in response to the ICOM Cross Cultural Task Force recommendation for a set of guiding principles that are consistent with the 1998 Cultural Diversity Policy Framework of ICOM, and in continuing to address the wide range of issues with cross cultural dimensions through intercultural and intergenerational dialogue, and in developing inclusive approaches and guidelines as to how museums should endeavour to deal with cultural diversity and biodiversity, the 25<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the International Council of Museums meeting on 12 November 2010 in Shanghai adopted the following set of principles as the ICOM Cultural Diversity Charter:

1. **DIVERSITY:** To recognise and affirm all forms of cultural diversity and biological diversity at local, regional and international levels, and to reflect this diversity in all policies and programmes of museums across the world.
2. **PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY:** To promote enabling and empowering frameworks for active inputs from all stakeholders, community groups, cultural institutions and official agencies through appropriate processes of consultation, negotiation and participation, ensuring the ownership of the processes as the defining element.
3. **COOPERATION & COORDINATION:** To cooperate and coordinate in sharing projects and enhancing professional exchanges so as to maximise resources and expertise at regional and global levels.
4. **PEACE & COMMUNITY BUILDING:** To promote the sense of place and identity of diverse peoples through appreciating their multiple inheritances – natural and cultural, tangible and intangible, movable and immovable – and fostering a shared vision inspired by the spirit of reconciliation through intercultural and intergenerational dialogue.
5. **INNOVATION & INSPIRATION:** To foster creativity and to develop challenging approaches to stimulate inclusive heritage consciousness in culturally and linguistically diverse museum contexts.



6. **CAPACITY BUILDING:** To make directed and sustained endeavours to increase the operational capacity of museums to respond with vigour and insight to transformation and change in culturally and linguistically diverse societies.
7. **PRODUCTIVE DIVERSITY:** To maximise approaches that will encourage the diversification of resources to address and reconcile the competing demands of cultural diversity and biodiversity with economic imperatives.
8. **STANDARD SETTING:** To discuss and debate various UN and UNESCO international heritage law instruments, both soft law recommendations, charters and declarations and hard law conventions and treaties, providing strategic professional leadership, especially with reference to the cultural suite of international legal instruments.
9. **SUSTAINABILITY & CLIMATE CHANGE:** To locate culture as the fourth pillar along with economic, social and environmental sustainability and to address the cultural and creative dimensions of climate change.
10. **DIGITAL DOMAIN:** To understand the differences between digitisation, digital access and digital heritage, to support digital access in all activities, and to recognise that digital access is not a substitute for return, restitution and repatriation.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The new century began 13 years ago with several challenges. First of all, we spent the night of 31<sup>st</sup> December 1999 wondering whether all our digital mechanisms would collapse, so much so that several predictions were made about nuclear holocausts and the end of the world. Well, it did not happen. Then on 11 September 2001, the geopolitical formation of the world with the USA at the centre was shattered and new forms of global instability emerged. War and terrorism took on a new dimension. There is also a greater awareness of the lack of tolerance and cross-cultural understanding.

Concern increased about culture in all its forms and the value of preserving diversity and the tangible and intangible manifestations of humans and their environment. It was in this state of insecurity in the post-September 11 environment that the whole world adopted, on 2 November 2011, The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of UNESCO. Since then counter terrorism strategies even recognised museums and started funding exhibitions and projects to promote cross-cultural understanding.

After decades of deliberations, the UN General assembly finally adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in September 2007. Both of the declarations place emphasis on dialogue among communities and across communities, among nations and across nations, and across cultural systems. ICOM's Strategic Plan has been drafted in such a way that an inclusive museum could aspire to become a vehicle for such communication at the local and supra-local levels.

Cultural diversity has several borders that museums need to take into consideration in the complexity of projects. These include race, ethnicity, class, gender, faith, age, economic status, regionalism, sexual orientation and so on. These are cross-cutting themes. Perspectives on the environment are also diverse as are local knowledge systems. Most pre-colonial knowledge systems do not have the binary opposition of nature and culture as perceived in the Judaeo-Christian world view. Yet it has become the norm since colonial times. Indigenous peoples in particular point to the non-duality of nature-culture in their world views.

I started the paper with a reference to the happiest people on earth. Quality of Life indicators: The six basic categories of the Qualities of Life (QOL): *local economy, natural environment, personal goals and aspirations, fairness & equity, basic needs and social inclusion*, tend on the whole to be measured by primarily economic indicators such as relative income and percentage of income spent. Whilst this is useful for identifying the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', many of the 'intangible' cultural values that contribute to a society's cohesion and people's sense of well-being cannot be measured by the mere flows of capital.

Benchmarking is often misunderstood as pandering to bureaucracy. It can be a tool to locate culture in QOLs. It is indeed for 'Listening, Learning and Leading'. The greatest impediments in Europe that are focused on integration and inclusion are select hearing, silences and embedded racism derived from colonial signatures in the knowledge systems of the establishment.

Benchmarking for corporate cultural transformation requires actions that are strategic and not confused with the operational. Most projects that address diversity tend to be caught up at the operational level without institutional transformation. Even the inspirational and innovative *Mining the Museum* project did not lead to lasting changes in the conservative and Caucasian centred host in Baltimore.

Based on my first-hand experience in dealing with the transformation of museums that aspire to become democratic and inclusive, I found the following steps useful. These could be used along with the above principles in the ICOM Cultural Diversity Charter.

- Identify any key structural and functional characteristics that have contributed to your institution's excellent reputation.
- Describe your governance structure, roles and responsibilities. What are the reporting lines into the governance body? How do you separate governance and operations roles?
- Describe your mission-direct philosophy and the major functions in terms of their scope, scale, staffing, spans/layers, budgets, areas of achievement, recruitment and talent development.
- Describe your mission support philosophy and strategies, e.g., in-house/outsourced, shared or department-specific, scope, scale, budgets.
- Describe your funding and revenue generation strategy.
- How does your institution relate to other cultural institutions within the country?
- What do you see as areas for particular attention, and that could have structural and/or functional impacts, because of their growing importance or increasing risks?
- What significant organisational change initiatives are you planning or executing?
- Share any lessons learnt / pitfalls in your institution's evolution that we should avoid.

I would like to finish the paper with a quotation from Nobel Laureate, the late Chinua Achebe.<sup>17</sup>

*"Coming Out of the Skin:*

...the only place where culture is static, and exists independently of people, is the museum... even there it is doubtful whether culture really exists. To my mind it is already dead. Of course a good curator can display the artefacts so skillfully that an impression of completeness or even of life can be given, but it is no more than the complete skin which a snake has discarded before going its way."

## Endnotes

- 1 Denmark is hosting the Eleventh International Conference on Environmental, Cultural, Economic, and Social Sustainability: <http://onsustainability.com/2015-conference>
- 2 <http://onmuseums.com/conference-archives/2013-conference>
- 3 Our Creative Diversity: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001055/105586e.pdf>
- 4 <http://inclusivemuseum.org/world-culture-forum-bali/>
- 5 The Future We Want, *International Herald Tribune*, 24 May 2012.
- 6 Opening address to the General Assembly of the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, 7 November 2011.
- 7 Address to *Preparing the way to sustainable development after Rio+20: Forum on Science Technology and Innovation for Sustainable Development*, 27 June 2012.
- 8 High-level forum at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, *Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 20 June 2012*.
- 9 <http://www.un.org/gsp/report/>
- 10 <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/>
- 11 Commission on the Measurement of Economic performance and Social Progress: <http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/en/index.htm>
- 12 <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N10/522/50/PDF/N1052250.pdf?OpenElement>
- 13 <http://www.uncsd2012.org/thefuturewewant.html>
- 14 <http://asemus.museum/>
- 15 Merriman, N and R.Visram, 'The world in a City', *The Peopling of London* by Nick Merriman, UK, Museum of London, 1993, pp 3-27.
- 16 Galla, A. (1993). *Heritage Curricula and Cultural Diversity*, Office of Prime Minister & Cabinet, Australian Government Publishing, 1993. Reproduced and updated in Galla, A. 'The First Voice in Heritage Conservation', *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, Vol. 3, 2008. <http://pacificasiaobservatory.inclusivemuseum.org/files/2011/10/AmeswarGalla.pdf>
- 17 Lindfors, B., I. Munro, R. Priebe, and R. Sander (1997) 'Interview with Chinua Achebe, 1969', in B. Lindfors (ed.), *Conversations with Chinua Achebe*, Oxford, Miss., University of Mississippi Press.

## Credits

- p. 71 Prof. Kenji Yoshida, Research Center for Cultural Resources, National Museum of Ethnology, Japan.
- p. 73 Ameswar Galla / P. Yu, 'The First Voice in Heritage Conservation', *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, Vol. 3, 2008.





















# MOTIVATION AND LEARNING STYLES





# THE ART MUSEUM – STILL AN INSTITUTION IN TRANSITION

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Christian Gether is former Director of the Danish Contemporary Art Foundation and Vestsjælland Museum of Art, Sorø, as well as Appraiser at Bruun Rasmussen Auctioneers of Fine Art. He is currently a member of the board of Henie Onstad Art Centre, Oslo, and a member of the council of Wonderful Copenhagen. Christian Gether has authored the book *The Sculptor Kai Nielsen, 1882-1924* and published an extensive amount of articles on art.



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## THE ART MUSEUM – STILL AN INSTITUTION IN TRANSITION

Contemporary art may take forms and expressions that may seem hard to decode at first glance. According to the French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, as human beings we are entangled in the world, both mentally and physically.<sup>1</sup> We are in the world and the world is in us. The bodily understanding of the world is just as important as the intellectual.

In this context, Olafur Eliasson's work 'Your blind passenger', a tunnel of smoke, is an interesting experience. The work is a 90-metre tunnel filled with variously coloured smoke that you can walk through. The concept is to encourage users to enter the artwork and experience it with their bodies.

When users have been asked about their experience, the answer has often been: "I don't know, but it was an amazing experience." In other words, while the bodily experience is impossible to express verbally, it is without a doubt a great experience for the senses.

The 'smoke tunnel' does not work unless it is used by somebody. The same could be said about the art museum of today. The art museum establishes a connection between work and user by incorporating the user's own life experience.

### THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The area in which ARKEN is located was planned and developed in the 1960s as part of an urban plan for the suburbs south of Copenhagen and in relation to the development of the modern welfare state. People from the working class areas of Copenhagen were relocated in Ishøj.

As part of the development of the local area, politicians from the local municipality and the State decided to establish an art museum. The museum, ARKEN, was inaugurated in 1996.

The museum is based in a community with inhabitants from all over the world. In our local municipality, more than 100 different languages are spoken.<sup>2</sup>

The architecture is an important part of the museum experience. The architect of the deconstructivist building is Søren Robert Lund (1962). The aim of the architecture is to challenge the user's senses. The challenging architecture plays a part in the users' overall museum experience.

A visit to the museum should be an aesthetic, intellectual and emotional challenge based on insight, contemplation and quality.

The museum has between 100,000 and 200,000 users per year. Our user survey documents that 95 percent visit the museum because of the temporary exhibitions.<sup>3</sup>

### **THE EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF THE MUSEUM**

The museum has a strategic focus on developing the educational role of the museum. In doing so, the user survey is an important tool. The museum continually facilitates workshops and focus groups in order to interpret the results and improve our strategies.

Based on analyses of the local community, we have developed our strategy for user participation. The museum combines broadly appealing exhibitions with narrow exhibitions in order to establish a social learning space.

In terms of developing the educational role of the museum, the museum focuses on the following areas: formal educational programmes, from preschool level to art academy and design school level, outreach programmes and informal education.

In facilitating relevant art experiences, the museum wants to stimulate intellectual as well as intuitive abilities for developing visual and cultural understanding and critical and analytical competences.

The museum establishes learning partnerships with primary and secondary schools to ensure that the museum is a relevant and continuing supplement to general education.

‘Kick-start’ is an example of a programme for 5 to 12 year-old students. The programme also engages with parents and families inviting them to participate in informal educational activities at the museum. This is a way to include local families who are not familiar with the museum. ‘ARKEN over the bridge’ is another example of an outreach strategy in terms of engaging with the young people from the local community.

### **MUSEUMS FOR SOMEBODY**

The walls of the modern art museum were whitewashed as in a protestant chapel. The modernist art object was exhibited as if it were sacred. The museum took on an identity reflecting the modernist view of the artist as avant-garde. The art museum was thought to exist by its own right.

The American artist Dan Graham once stated: “All artists are alike. They dream of doing something that’s more social, more collaborative and more real than art.” Extending this approach, the museum developed a participatory strategy that widely involves the users.

The vision of ARKEN is: “A visit to ARKEN shall add a new perspective to the visitor’s life so that the individual gets wiser about him- or herself and



thus about life as such". In other words, the role of museums in society today is to empower people to take part in a globalised world.

Strategic management and user perspective are the basis for museum management in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 1995, I wrote a book for the Danish Ministry of Culture entitled *The ART Museum, an institution in transition*,<sup>4</sup> focusing on changing the 20<sup>th</sup> century concept of art museums from institutions being about something to institutions being for somebody. In doing so, the art museum must constantly rethink itself.

We call the art museum of tomorrow the participatory museum because we are convinced the museum exists for the citizens. In making the museum relevant, we have to facilitate exchanges of experiences, new ways of developing educational programmes and communication strategies, thereby strengthening the value of the museum's role in society.

## Endnotes

- 1 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice: *Signes*, Paris, 1960, and Merleau-Ponty, Maurice: *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris, 1945.
- 2 For more information about the municipality: <http://www.ishoj.dk/>
- 3 *ARKEN user survey*, 2012.
- 4 Gether, Christian: *Kunstmuseet – en institution i forandring*, Kulturministeriet, 1995.

## Credits

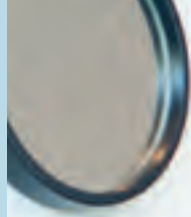
- p. 96 ARKEN. India: Art Now.
- p. 102 The Phoenix is closer than it appears, 2010. Installation view inside.  
Photo © Studio Thilo Frank.

































# UNDERSTANDING MUSEUM VISITORS' MOTIVATIONS AND LEARNING

**DR. JOHN H. FALK**, Sea Grant Professor of Free-Choice Learning at Oregon State University and Director, OSU Center for Research on Lifelong STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics) Learning, is known internationally for his expertise on free-choice learning; the learning that occurs in settings like museums and parks and on the Internet.

John H. Falk has authored over one hundred scholarly articles and chapters in the areas of learning, biology and education as well as more than a dozen books, and he has helped create several nationally important out-of-school educational curricula. Some notable recent books include: *The Museum Experience Revisited* (2012, with Lynn Dierking); *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* (2009); *Free-Choice Learning and the Environment* (2009, with Joe Heimlich and Susan Foutz); *In Principle, In Practice: Museums as learning institutions* (2007, with Lynn Dierking and Susan Foutz); *Thriving in the Knowledge Age: New business models for museums and other cultural institutions* (2006, with Beverly Sheppard), and *Lessons without Limit: How free-choice learning is transforming education* (2002, with Lynn Dierking).

Before joining the faculty at Oregon State University, he founded and directed the Institute for Learning Innovation where for 20 years he oversaw more than 200 consulting projects across a wide range of free-choice learning institutions. He also worked as an early child science educator at the University of Maryland and spent 14 years at the Smithsonian Institution where he held a number of senior positions including Director, Smithsonian Office of Educational Research. In 2006, Falk was recognised by the American Association of Museums as one of the 100 most influential museum professionals of the past 100 years. In 2010, he was further recognised by the American Association of Museum's Education Committee with its highest award, the John Cotton Dana Award for Leadership.





## MUSEUM VISITORS' MOTIVATIONS AND LEARNING

I remember best [what] I did with my kid. It was an interactive computer program to add sound to a moving film to show how sound added to our senses of fear or anxiety. We watched a short, hum-drum film about 1 minute long and then edited it to add sound effects like creaking doors, a loud bang, or the screech of a tire. Then we watched the movie again and saw how it suddenly became very scary. ... Later at home we talked about this again as we were watching a TV show; [my son] was wondering what parts of the show they had added in [during post-production].

**Long-term recollection of a visitor to the California Science Center, USA**

What do people remember from their museum visits? And more importantly, what factors seemed to most contribute to visitors forming these long-term memories? To answer this question, my graduate student Katie Gillespie and I qualitatively analysed the museum recollection transcripts of 22 museum visitors.<sup>1</sup> Each of these individuals had visited an interactive science centre roughly six months previously. The 22 conversational telephone interviews were transcribed and coded in order to understand what visitors remembered about their visit, and to identify the factors that may have shaped these memories. Memories fell into 10 categories:

1. Exhibits
2. Social
3. Personal
4. Setting information
5. Previous visits
6. Feelings/emotions
7. Temporal agendas
8. Interactive nature of the experience
9. Interview participation
10. Visiting the gift shop/café



Visitors' responses varied from naming or listing to deep reflection. The partial transcript at the beginning of this article, related to us by an approximately 40-year-old man who had visited the science centre with his 10-year-old son, typifies the kinds of recollections we heard. Our analysis revealed that four factors seemed to influence the memories of all 22 of these visitors:

- Things that supported their entering needs and interests.
- Things that were novel.
- Things that had high emotional content for the individual.
- Things that were supported by later experiences.

Although what someone remembers from a museum visit is not exactly the same as what someone learns, the two are clearly related. We can think of memories as the visible part of the iceberg that is learning. Thus understanding what someone remembers from their visit turns out to be critical to understanding the entire museum visitor experience. So, how can we use these insights to better understand something about the museum experience itself? Not surprisingly, there is a causal link between what someone actually experiences while at the museum and what they remember. So memories help us understand how visitors utilise museums. Perhaps more surprising, though, is the discovery I made roughly a decade ago that there is also a causal link between visitor memories and the reasons someone has for visiting the museum in the first place.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the issues of why people visit, what they do when they visit the museum, and what they learn/remember from their visit are not in fact three separate questions, but intimately inter-related versions of the same question. To say this reality has not always been appreciated is an understatement.

### **HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO INVESTIGATING THE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE**

For more than a generation, researchers have worked at describing and understanding the museum visitor experience better. I would assert that the validity and reliability of much of this earlier research, including much of my own research, must be questioned. Research has been done on who visits museums and to a degree why. Research has been done on what visitors do in the museum. Research has been done on what visitors learn from the museum. However, only rarely has research been done in ways that allow understanding of the whole visitor and the whole visit experience – research on individuals whose life-course intersects with the museum experience prior to as well as after the visit. The reductionist ways in which museum visitors have typically been studied, beginning with a focus on 'who' visits the museum, have long prevented us from truly understanding the museum visitor experience.

For example, over the past several decades, thousands of visitor studies have been conducted in order to better understand who is visiting the museum; in fact this kind of research is overwhelming the most common type of visitor research conducted in museums. Although only a tiny fraction of these studies have been published, virtually every museum, from the tiniest historic house museum and volunteer-run natural area to the largest art, natural history, zoo, aquarium and science centre, has variously counted and in some measure, attempted to describe who their visitors are. Overwhelmingly, these many efforts to describe museum audiences have utilised traditional demographic categories like age, education, gender and national origin/ethnicity; qualities of individuals that do not vary from day to day – a white Danish male is always a white Danish male. Museums have also used other tangible categories such as visit frequency – frequent, infrequent, non-visitor, etc. – and social arrangement – family, adult, school group, etc. More recently, museums have also begun to classify museum audiences using sophisticated psychographic tools such as the Gallup Kompas social psychological, two-dimensional values-oriented segmentation system; e.g., as used in recent Danish User Surveys.<sup>3</sup>

As a consequence of these many years of research, we have discovered that worldwide, museum visitors are disproportionately more affluent and well-educated than the general public.<sup>4</sup> In most Western countries, museum visitors are also much more likely to be drawn from the majority population, which in most cases are white individuals of European extraction; Danish museum-going populations are a prime example of this generalisation. As the recent Danish national *User Survey 2012* has shown, the typical Danish museum user is female, Danish, late middle aged, well-educated, and using the Gallup Kompas framework, disproportionately from the 'Modern/Community-Orientated' segment.<sup>5</sup> This is what we know; or at least think we know. Arguably, this long-standing way of thinking about who does and does not visit museums may actually obscure rather than enlighten our understanding of museum visits.

Although almost every museum has at one time or another attempted to count and sort their visitors based upon demographic categories, I would assert that these categorisations yield a false sense of explanation. We think we know our visitors, but I would argue that we do not. As summarised above, we think we 'know' that museum visitors are better educated, older, from the local country, more urban-modern, wealthier and more female than the public as a whole, but what does this actually mean? Although these statistics are on average true, museum visitors are not averages, they are individuals. Knowing that someone is better educated, older, from Denmark, more urban-modern, wealthier and more female than the public as a whole provides insufficient information to predict

whether or not they will visit a museum or what they will do in the museum and remember from the experience. Equally, knowing that someone is less educated, younger, not from Denmark, more rural-traditional, poorer and more male than the visiting public as a whole provides insufficient information to predict that they will not visit a museum or that their visitor experience will be significantly different from other visitors. In fact, the major conclusion I have reached after studying thousands of visitors over more than three decades is that museum-going is far too complex to be understood merely on the basis of easily measured, concrete demographic or psychographic variables or for that matter tangible qualities like the 'type of museum' (e.g. art, cultural history, natural history etc.) or 'exhibition style' (e.g. hands-on, didactic, interactive etc.). *The fact is that the museum visitor experience is not readily captured with tangible, immutable categories. The museum visitor experience is much too ephemeral and dynamic; it is a uniquely constructed relationship that occurs each time a person visits a museum. And the same person can visit the same museum on two different days and be an entirely DIFFERENT visitor.*

### **TOWARDS A NEW MODEL OF THE MUSEUM VISITOR EXPERIENCE**

The museum visitor experience cannot be adequately described by understanding the content of museums, the design of exhibitions, by defining visitors as a function of their demographics and psychographics or even by understanding visit frequency or the social arrangements in which people enter the museum. To get a more complete answer to the questions of why people do or do not visit museums, what they do there, and what learning/meaning they derive from the experience, turns out to require a deeper, more synthetic explanation. So despite the considerable time and effort that museum investigators have devoted to framing the museum visitor experience using these common lenses, the results have been depressingly limited. Arguably, these perspectives have yielded only the most rudimentary descriptive understanding and none comes close to providing a truly predictive model of the museum visitor experience.

Over the past decade, I have begun to develop what I think is a more robust way to describe and understand the museum visitors' experience. Undergirding this new approach have been a series of in-depth interviews, now numbering in the hundreds, in which my colleagues and I have talked to individuals about their museum experiences weeks, months and years after their museum visits (an excerpt from one of these interviews leads off this article). Time and time again, what leaps out in these interviews is how deeply personal museum visits are, and how deeply tied to each individual's sense of identity. Also striking is how consistently an individual's post-visit narrative relates to their entering narrative. In other words, what typically sticks in a person's mind as important about their

visit usually directly relates to the reasons that person stated they went to the museum in the first place; and often they use similar language to describe both pre- and post-visit memories. The ways in which individuals talk about why they went to the museum as well as the ways they talk about what they remember from their experience invariably seem to have a lot to do with what they were seeking to personally accomplish through their visit. Visitors talk about how their personal goals for the visit relate to who they thought they were or wanted to be, and they talk about how the museum itself supported these personal goals and needs. The insights gained from these interviews led me to totally reconceptualise the museum visitor experience; led me to appreciate that building and supporting personal identity was the primary driving motivation behind virtually all museum visits.

### VISITOR MOTIVATION AND IDENTITY

Considerable time and effort has been invested in understanding the motivations of museum visitors. A variety of investigators have sought to describe why people visit museums, resulting in a range of descriptive categorisations.<sup>6</sup> More recently, investigators have begun to document the connections between visitors' entering motivations and their exiting meaning making. This is not surprising if, as postulated by Doering and Pekarik, visitors are likely to enter a museum with an *entry narrative* and these entry narratives are likely to be self-reinforcing, directing learning, behaviour and perceptions of satisfaction.<sup>7</sup> My interviews support this view as well. Interestingly though, I detected a strong pattern in these entry narratives. At some level, each of the hundreds of visitor entering narratives I heard was unique, but stepping back a little, it was possible to see an overall pattern in these narratives. The entry narratives appeared to converge upon a relatively small subset of categories that could best be understood by thinking of them as describing an individual's motivations for visiting the museum. These motivational categories, in turn, could best be understood as designed to satisfy one or more personal identity-related needs.

For more than 100 years, the constructs of self and identity have been used by a wide range of social science investigators from a variety of disciplines. Despite the wide-spread use of identity as a concept, there is no single agreed-upon definition of self or identity, though there are a number of useful reviews of these various perspectives.<sup>8</sup> Highlighting the complexities of the topic, Bruner and Kalmar state, "Self is both outer and inner, public and private, innate and acquired, the product of evolution and the offspring of culturally shaped narrative."<sup>9</sup> It has been characterised as the product of endless dialogue and comparison with 'others' – both living and non-living.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps most pointedly, Simon states that:

“even if identity turns out to be an ‘analytical fiction’, it will prove to be a highly useful analytical fiction in the search for a better understanding of human experiences and behaviours. If used as a shorthand expression or placeholder for social psychological processes revolving around self-definition or self-interpretation, including the variable but systematic instantiations thereof, the notion of identity will serve the function of a powerful conceptual tool.”<sup>11</sup>

It is just such a conceptual tool that I was seeking as I tried to better understand the nature of the museum experience.

As outlined in my 2009 book *Identity and Museum Visitor Experience*, the model of identity that I have adopted has antecedents in the work of a number of other investigators. I subscribe to the view that identity is the confluence of internal and external social forces – cultural and individual agencies. That identity is always influenced, to a greater or lesser extent, by innate and learned perceptions about the physical environment. And that the creation of self is a never-ending process, with no clear temporal boundaries. From this perspective, identity emerges as malleable, continually constructed, and as a quality that is always situated in the realities of the physical and sociocultural world – both the immediate social and physical world an individual may be immersed in and the broader social and physical world of an individual’s past (and future) family, culture, and personal history. A key understanding of identity is that each of us has not a single identity but rather maintains numerous identities, which are expressed collectively or individually at different times, depending upon need and circumstance. Each of us possesses and acts upon a set of enduring and deep identities – what I call big ‘I’ identities. Examples of ‘I’ identities might be one’s sense of gender, nationality, political views or religion; these are identities we carry with us throughout our lives, and though they unquestionably evolve, they remain fairly constant across our lives (e.g. most of us do not change our sense of gender or nationality, though our sense of what that gender or nationality means does evolve). These are the types of identity that have been most frequently studied by social scientists and most frequently spring to mind when we think of identity. However, I would argue that much of our lives is spent enacting a series of other, more situated identities that represent responses to the needs and realities of the specific moment and circumstances – what I call little ‘i’ identities. Examples of ‘i’ identities might be the ‘good niece/nephew’ identity we enact when we remember to send a birthday card to our aunt who lives in a different city or the ‘host/hostess’ identity we enact when someone visits our house for the first time. If we were about to get the Nobel prize and someone was interviewing us, these kinds of ‘i’ identities would not be likely to top our list of characteristics that we would offer as descriptors of ‘who we are’; but undeniably these types of identities



play a critical role in defining who we are and how we behave much of the time. It was my observation that for most people, most of the time, going to a museum tended to elicit predominantly 'i' identities. In other words, people went to museums in order to facilitate identity-related needs such as a desire to be a supportive parent or spouse, to indulge one's sense of curiosity or the feeling that it would be good to get away from the rat race for a little while. Nationality, religion, gender or political affiliation did not seem to be the primary motivations behind most people's visits to art museums, children's museums, zoos or science centres.

Following particularly on the work of Simon, I hypothesised that as active meaning seekers, most museum visitors engaged in a degree of self-reflection and self-interpretation about their visit experience – in other words, they were dialogic with the museum serving as a context for that dialogism. According to Simon, “through self-interpretation, people achieve an understanding of themselves or, in other words, an identity, which in turn influences their subsequent perception and behaviour.”<sup>12</sup> In Simon's model, self-interpretation involves a varying number of 'self-aspects' – a cognitive category or concept that serves to process and organise information and knowledge about one's self. According to Simon, self-aspects can refer to:

“generalised psychological characteristics or traits (e.g. introverted), physical features (e.g. red hair), roles (e.g. father), abilities (e.g. bilingual), tastes (e.g. preference for French red wines), attitudes (e.g. against the death penalty), behaviour (e.g. I work a lot), and explicit group or category membership (e.g. member of the Communist party).”<sup>13</sup>

In other words, within a specific situation, individuals make sense of their actions and roles by ascribing identity-related qualities or descriptions to them. A variety of other investigators have reinforced this model; they found that individuals do indeed construct identity-relevant situational prototypes that serve as a working model for the person, telling him or her what to expect and how to behave in situations of a particular type. I believed that this was also quite likely what visitors to museums were doing.

People who visit museums typically possess a working model of what going to a museum entails; they also have a sense of what benefits will accrue to them by visiting. Thus, I reasoned, visitors would ascribe a series of self-aspects to their museum experiences framed around what they perceived that those museum experiences would afford them. Visitors' self-aspects would therefore be congruent with both their understanding of what the museum had to offer and their own perceived identity-related roles and needs. As described by Erikson, individuals have no choice but to form their identities using as a framework “the existing range of alternatives for identity formation”.<sup>14</sup> I hypothesised, and my colleagues and I

have now found evidence supporting the proposition, that visitors utilise their pre-visit self-aspects both prospectively to justify why they should visit the museum and then again retrospectively in order to make sense of how their visit was worthwhile.

For example, many art museum visitors describe themselves as curious people, generally interested in art. They see art museums as great places for exercising that curiosity and interest. When one particular individual was asked about art museums, she responded, "Art museums are great places to visit because they put together exhibitions designed to cultivate people's interests and understandings of art". When asked why she was visiting the art museum today, she answered, "I came to see what's new here. I haven't been in a while and I was hoping to see some really new and interesting art." Several months later when I re-contacted this person, she reflected back on her visit and said, "I had a superb time at the art museum, I just wandered around and saw all of the fabulous art; there were some really striking works. I even discovered a few works that I had never seen or known anything about before. That was really wonderful."

The visitors' understanding of their museum visitor experience is invariably self-referential and provides coherence and meaning to the experience. Visitors tend to see their in-museum behaviour and post-visit outcomes as consistent with personality traits, attitudes, and/or group affiliations such as the person above who saw the museums as a mechanism for reinforcing her view of herself as a curious person. Other visitors use the museum to satisfy personally relevant roles and values such as being a good parent or an intrepid cultural tourist. Despite the commonalities in these self-aspects across groups of visitors, individual visitors experience these self-aspects as expressions of their own unique personal identity and history. However, how you see yourself as a museum visitor depends to a large degree upon how you conceptualise the museum. In other words, if you view yourself as a good father and believe that museums are the kind of places to where good fathers bring their children, then you might actively seek out such a place in order to 'enact' such an identity. Or, if you think of yourself as the kind of curious person who goes out of your way to discover unusual and interesting facts about the human condition, both in the present and in the past, then you might actively seek out a history museum during your leisure time. I believe that this is what a large percentage of visitors to museums actually do, not just with regards to parenting and curiosity, but as a means for enacting a wide range of identity-related meanings.

As museums have become increasingly popular leisure venues, more and more people have developed working models of what museums are like and how and why they would use them – in other words, what the museum experience affords. These museum 'affordances' are then matched

up with the public's identity-related needs and desires. Together, these create a very strong, positive, dialogic feedback loop. The loop begins with the public seeking leisure experiences that meet specific identity-related needs, such as personal fulfilment, parenting, or novelty seeking. As museums are generally perceived as places capable of meeting some – though not all – identity-related needs, the public prospectively justifies reasons for making a museum visit. Over time, visitors reflect upon their museum visit and determine whether the experience was a good way to fulfil their needs, and, if it was, they tell others about the visit, which helps to feed a social understanding that this and other museums like it are good for that purpose. As a consequence, these past visitors and others like them are much more likely to seek out this or another museum in the future should they possess a similar identity-related need.

Over the course of numerous studies, in a variety of museum settings, evidence is beginning to mount supporting the existence of these identity-related feedback loops. The ways in which individuals described their museum experiences appear to reflect visitors' situation-specific, identity-related self-aspects. Although, in theory, museum visitors could possess an infinite number of identity-related 'self-aspects', this does not appear to be the case. Both the reasons people give for visiting museums and their post-visit descriptions of the experience have tended to cluster around just a few basic categories, which in turn appear to reflect how the public perceives what a museum visit affords. Based upon these findings, I proposed clustering all the various motivations visitors ascribe to visiting museums into just five distinct, identity-related categories.<sup>15</sup> Descriptions of the five categories and some typical quotes from visitors follow on the next page.

**EXPLORERS:** Visitors who are curiosity-driven with a generic interest in the content of the museum. They expect to find something that will grab their attention and fuel their learning.

**“I remember thinking I wanted to learn my science basics again, like biology and that stuff. ... I thought [before coming], You’re not going to pick up everything, you know, but you are going to learn some things.”**

.....

**FACILITATORS:** Visitors who are socially motivated. Their visit is focused on primarily enabling the experience and learning of others in their accompanying social group.

**“[I came] to give [my] kids a chance to see what early life was like ... it’s a good way to spend time with the family in a non-commercial way. They always learn so much.”**

.....

**PROFESSIONAL/HOBBYISTS:** Visitors who feel a close tie between the museum content and their professional or hobbyist passions. Their visits are typically motivated by a desire to satisfy a specific content-related objective.

**“I’m starting to put together a saltwater reef tank, so I have a lot of interest in marine life. I’m hoping to pick up some ideas [here at the aquarium].”**

.....

**EXPERIENCE SEEKERS:** Visitors who are motivated to visit because they perceive the museum as an important destination. Their satisfaction primarily derives from the mere fact of having ‘been there and done that’.

**“We were visiting from out-of-town, looking for something fun to do that wouldn’t take all day. This seemed like a good idea; after all, we’re in Los Angeles and someone told us this place just opened up and it’s really neat.”**

.....

**RECHARGERS:** Visitors who are primarily seeking to have a contemplative, spiritual and/or restorative experience. They see the museum as a refuge from the work-a-day world or as a confirmation of their religious beliefs.

**“I like art museums. They are so very quiet and relaxing, so different than the noise and clutter of the rest of the city.”**

As predicted, and evidenced in these and many other quotes I could have selected, museum visitors use museums to satisfy identity-related needs – occasionally deeply held identities, such as the person who sees himself as first and foremost an ‘art person’, but more commonly important but more ephemeral identities, such as the person looking for an appropriate, for them, way to spend an afternoon in a city they are visiting. Perhaps most important, though, is that my research has produced strong evidence that categorising visitors as a function of their perceived identity-related visit motivations can be used as a conceptual tool for capturing important insights into how visitors make sense of their museum experience – both prior to arriving, during the experience and over time as they reflect back upon the visit. In the most detailed study to date, the majority of visitors could not only be categorised as falling into one of these five categories, but individuals within a category also behaved and learned in ways that were different from individuals in other categories.<sup>16</sup> Specifically, individuals in some of the categories showed significant changes in their understanding and affect, while individuals in other categories did not; for some categories of visitor, the museum experience was quite successful, while for others it was only marginally so. Thus, unlike traditional segmentation strategies based upon fixed demographic or psychographic categories like age, nationality, gender, or social class, separating visitors according to their entering identity-related motivations resulted in descriptive data predictive of visitors’ museum experience. Also unlike fixed demographic or psychographic categories, these categories are not permanent qualities of the individual. An individual can be motivated to go to a museum today because they want to facilitate their children’s learning experience and go to the same or a different museum tomorrow because it resonates with their own personal interests and curiosities. Because of the differing identity-related needs, the nature and quality of that single individual’s museum experience will be quite different on those two days.

In summing up, it is important to emphasise, though, that what we are measuring with this model are not visitors’ identities, but the ways identity-related needs influence why people visit museums. These identity-related needs are made *visible* through visitors’ descriptions of their museum visit motivations/expectations. Finally, these visitors’ motivations/expectations do not just emerge out of thin air, nor are they some kind of constructed psychographic framework. Rather, these five identity-related reasons for visiting museums are a direct reflection of how the public currently perceives the attributes and affordances of museums; in other words, what the public perceives are the *right* reasons for visiting museums.



### WHY IS KNOWING VISITORS' IDENTITY-RELATED MOTIVATIONS IMPORTANT?

So let us return to where we began this paper, by looking at what determines what a visitor remembers/learns. As summarised at the beginning of the paper, four factors seem to be critical to influencing what people remember about their museum visit:

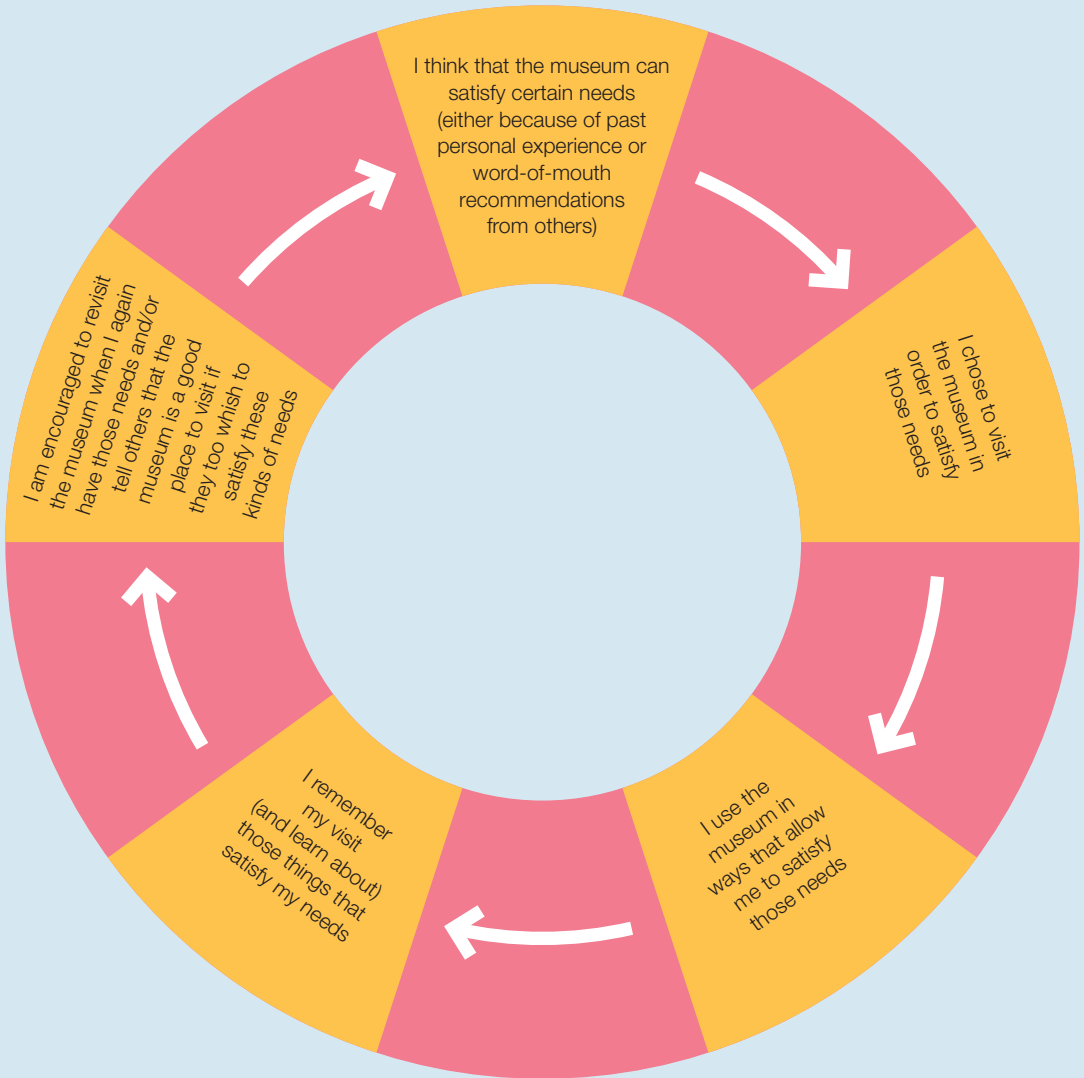
- Things that supported their entering needs and interests.
- Things that were novel.
- Things that had high emotional content for the individual.
- Things that were supported by later experiences.

Not all four of these factors are related to visitors' entering identity-related motivations, but two of the four are! We can see this illustrated in the short visit recollection transcript that leads off this paper. Although not included in the transcript, but as part of the interview process, we asked each visitor to tell us more about the reasons they visited the science centre on the day in question. The particular visitor featured in our transcript quickly volunteered that his son had been the reason for his visit; he thought his son would find the science centre interesting and educational. In other words, this visitor was a Facilitator. We can see in his transcript how this man's entering visit motivation shaped his memories – his most salient long-term memory was an exhibit that his son found particularly compelling. It does not take a huge leap of faith to see how this particular exhibit experience actualised this father's identity-related visit goal – it was at this particular exhibit that our interviewed father was able to help facilitate an engaging and rewarding experience for his son. This direct relationship between a visitor's entering identity-related motivations, in-museum experiences and subsequent memories emerged time after time in these interviews. As suggested earlier, visitor identity-related motivations form a key part of a typical museum experience cycle, which can be summarised as follows on the next page.

Although visitors can and do respond to new and novel experiences, they primarily attend to those things that help them accomplish their original visit goals. For example, the Explorer finding something new and/or novel to experience, the Recharger finding that bit of peace and/or transcendence they are looking for or the Experience Seeker seeing the things that make this area or collection special. When this happens, then the experience is not only satisfying but memorable.

Research in psychology has consistently demonstrated an association between memory and emotion.<sup>17</sup> Emotionally arousing events are likely strongly remembered because of the increased activation of the brain's limbic system, which has been correlated with enhanced explicit memory for both pleasant and unpleasant events.<sup>18</sup> Recent research by Falk and Gillespie<sup>19</sup> and Staus<sup>20</sup> has confirmed the important role of emotion in museum memories and learning. But what is the connection between

## MUSEUM EXPERIENCE CYCLE



emotion and identity-related motivations? As outlined elsewhere, the events most likely to have emotional salience for visitors are those that satisfy their needs and interests; in other words, their entering identity-related motivations.<sup>21</sup> Such appears to be the case illustrated in our sample transcript. Although the exhibit described by our father on making a film 'scary' was probably, in and of itself, not the most 'exciting' exhibit at the museum, and thus emotion-laden, the fact that it emerged as the exhibit that enabled him, on this day, to successfully enact his identity-related goal of engaging his son in an educational experience, made it an emotionally exciting experience for him as a Facilitating father. Thus if I am visiting as a Facilitator in order to ensure that my son or daughter has a great museum experience, seeing my son or daughter enjoying him-/herself will light up my limbic system. The same holds true for visitors with other identity-related visit motivations. For example, if I am a true connoisseur/lover of a particular artist and the local art museum has a special, one-of-a-kind exhibition on this artist, visiting the museum in order to see these rare paintings – i.e. visiting as a Professional/Hobbyist – is likely to be very emotional for me; and highly memorable.<sup>22</sup> In short, the connection between emotion and identity-related motivation, though not explicit, is likely implicit in many, if not most museum visits.

Of course, how visitors experience the museum, and thus what they learn, is influenced by a wide range of factors, not just their entering identity-related motivations.<sup>23</sup> Among the important influences are the visitors' entering prior knowledge and experience and their social group. Also important, of course, are their experiences inside the museum such as the exhibitions and programmes they engage with. Finally, as indicated above, post-visit reinforcing experiences such as conversations, news articles or programmes on television also play an important role in remembering and learning. However, without question, visitors' entering motivations appear to have a particularly strong and important influence on both in-museum experiences and learning.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

I believe these findings have important implications for practice. Not only is research from an ever-growing number of studies revealing that the majority of visitors to most types of museums arrive with one of five general motivations for visiting,<sup>24</sup> it appears that these identity-related motivations directly relate to key outcomes in the museum setting, such as how visitors behave and interact with the setting and importantly, how they make meaning of the experience once they leave. In other words, being able to segment visitors in this way gives museum practitioners key insights into the needs and interests of their visitors. This is very different from the one-size-fits-all perspective that has historically dominated our interac-

tions with museum visitors. For example, my research has revealed that Explorers are focused on what they see and find interesting, and they act out this me-centred agenda regardless of whether they are part of a social group, like a family with children, or not. Facilitators are focused on what their significant others see and find interesting, and they act out this agenda by, for example, allowing their significant others to direct the visit and worrying primarily about whether the other person is seeing what they find interesting rather than focusing on their own interests. Experience Seekers are prone to reflect upon the gestalt of the day, particularly how enjoyable the visit is. Professional/Hobbyists tend to enter with very specific, content-orientated interests and use the museum as a vehicle for facilitating those interests (e.g., information that will support their own personal collection or taking photographs). Finally, Rechargers, like Experience Seekers, are more focused on the gestalt of the day. But unlike Experience Seekers, Rechargers are not so much interested in having fun as they are interested in having a peaceful or inspiring experience. By focusing on these needs/interests, museum professionals could begin to customise and personalise the visitor's experience and satisfy more people more of the time.

Another important conclusion from this line of research has been that the 'one size fits all' experiences provided for visitors by most museums (e.g. exhibits, programmes, tours) do not work equally well for all visitors all the time. The content may be just right for some, and totally miss the mark for others. By learning more about the specific needs of each visitor, at least categorically, it should become possible to better serve the needs of more visitors more of the time. It also should be possible to begin to create more satisfied visitors. The closer the relationship between a visitor's perception of his/her actual museum experience and his/her perceived identity-related needs, the more likely that visitor will perceive that their visit was good and the more likely they will be to return to the museum again and encourage others to do so as well.

For example in Denmark, Explorers are a common group of museum users across all types of institutions.<sup>25</sup> Explorers are individuals with a natural affinity for the subject matter but generally, they are not experts. These visitors enjoy wandering around the museum and 'bumping' into new (for them) objects and exhibits. Provide an Explorer with the opportunity for a unique museum experience and you will fulfil his/her need to feel special and encourage him/her to come back for more. Professional/Hobbyists, on the other hand, tend to be quite knowledgeable and expect the museum to resolve questions others cannot answer. Not surprisingly, these are the people who will sign up for special lectures or courses but will eschew the general tour. Figure out how to reach them – perhaps by advertising in hobby magazines or on hobby/professional websites – and get information about upcoming learning opportunities into their hands. And perhaps

most importantly, recognise these individuals when they come into your institution; these people want to be acknowledged as possessing expertise and passion and do not want to be treated as just another one of the 'great unwashed'. Experience Seekers want to have a good time but they also want to see the best of what the museum has to offer. Given the high proportion of foreign tourists visiting Danish museums,<sup>26</sup> going out of the way to ensure that these visitors can see the things they feel they have come to see, and are acknowledged as having different needs than local visitors, is likely to be rewarded by great word-of-mouth back home; which in turn will result in more foreign tourists visiting in the future.

Many museums are working hard to attract more family groups to their institutions; and these types of visitors are already attracted to natural history museums.<sup>27</sup> Many of the adults in such groups are likely to be Facilitators (though not all!), primarily visiting in order to be good parents. Under these circumstances, it would make great sense to acknowledge and reinforce that motivation. Whether directly or indirectly, 'telling' these visitors that bringing their children to the museum that day was a wonderful thing to do will make them feel successful and inspire them to return again.

Finally, Rechargers appear particularly drawn to Danish art museums.<sup>28</sup> Working to understand these users' particular needs and interests could be as simple as helping them know where to find the least crowded, most peaceful places in the museum. Or if yours is a particularly crowded institution, you could invite Rechargers to visit at those times when they could find the rejuvenation they seek.

In short, I believe that customising museum offerings to suit the distinct needs of individuals possessing different identity-related needs will not only better satisfy regular visitors' needs but also provide a vehicle for enticing occasional visitors to come more frequently. I also believe that this approach opens the door to new and creative ways to attract audiences who do not visit museums at all. This is because these five basic categories of identity-related needs are not unique to museum-goers. What separates those who go to museums from those who do not is not whether they possess one of these basic categories of need but rather whether they perceive museums as places that satisfy those needs. In other words, if we could figure out how to help more people see museums as places that fulfil their needs – and then deliver on this promise – more people would visit.

In conclusion, a large number of visitors arrive at museums with preconceived expectations. They use the museum to satisfy those expectations and then remember the visit as an experience that did just that – satisfied a specific expectation. Therefore, being able to ascribe one of these five identity-related motivations, or some other group of identity-related motivations, to a visitor provides some measure of predictability about



what that visitor's experiences will be like. Each visitor's experience is of course unique, as is each museum. Both are likely to be framed within the socially/culturally defined boundaries of how that specific museum visit affords things like exploration, facilitation, experience seeking, professional and hobby support, and leisure-time rejuvenation. Other types of experiences no doubt could and do occur in museums, but it appears that most visitors seek out and enact these alternative needs relatively infrequently. Ultimately though, these specific categories are not important – all such categories are fluid and likely to vary as a function of institution, place and situation. The key idea embedded in this model of identity-related motivations is that it is really important to deeply understand *why* individuals choose to visit *your* museum.

The lens of identity-related museum motivations provides a unique window through which we can understand how best to accommodate museum visitor needs; it allows us to better understand the nature of the museum experience and potentially improve it. Initial evidence suggests that applications of this model can enable museums to dramatically enhance the experiences of their current museum users, improve the likelihood that occasional museum users will become regular users, and provide new and improved ways to attract groups of individuals who historically have not thought of museums as places that meet their needs.<sup>29</sup> My hope is that this model will provide a usable and practical tool that enables museum professionals to design ever more attractive, satisfying and memorable experiences for visitors.

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## Credits

p. 120 John Falk. Museum Experience Cycle.



















# **SOCIAL INCLUSION AND INTER- DISCIPLINARITY**



# MODERN NATURAL HISTORY

**JACOB CHRISTIAN SALVIG**, Head of Naturama and Fjord&Bælt, has more than 20 years of experience in developing exhibitions as well as museums and museum concepts. He is a qualified wildlife biologist and has worked for many years as such within different research projects. Jacob Salvig has thus gained a thorough experience in research, field research, nature management and nature rehabilitation.

With his passion for nature and his skills as a wildlife biologist, Jacob Salvig took over the management of the former Svendborg Zoological Museum, and by innovative thinking and with his talent for business development, Jacob Salvig completely redeveloped the museum, and his new concept modernised the way of running a natural history museum. Jacob Salvig is a member of several boards, groups and committees, most of them related to the management and strategic development of museums and tourist attractions.



rs are very  
Naturama  
r in the center!

## MODERN NATURAL HISTORY

Nowadays, the public want ‘all-inclusive experiences’ – it is all about architectural expression, modern technology and new ways of communication, professionalism and authenticity as well as how the museum interacts with the surrounding society. These are the demands of today’s citizens who are willing to travel across the world to satisfy their cultural needs.

A modern museum must focus on innovative user concepts and strategies. Developing inclusive user strategies is fundamental in order to increase the number of diverse users.

Naturama is the continuation of Svendborg Zoological Museum, which was founded in 1935. The present museum was inaugurated in 2005 and has been growing ever since. The museum changed its name to Naturama, a play on the words nature and drama. The museum’s progress is connected to an educational strategy, including a wide range of interactive exhibitions, and a communication strategy.

Naturama’s collection contains more than 35,000 objects including many unique species from the past that no longer exist. Combined with collections from other Danish natural history museums, the museum’s collections form part of the national collections and thus the national heritage.

The museum does not conduct scientific research, but the collections are accessible to external scientists and others. The collections form part of the museum’s educational strategy.

The permanent exhibitions in the museum focus on wildlife from Northern Europe. The museum is divided into three levels: a water level, a land level and a sky level. The water level contains the largest collection of whales in Denmark. Each level is closely interconnected. The land level focuses on large woodland mammals, while the air level houses the rich variety of European birds.

The overall aim is to give the museum’s visitors an overwhelming impression of the beauty of nature – and a better understanding of the world that the animals inhabit.

‘*Isen brænder*’ (Burning ice), ‘*Rovdyr*’ (Predators), ‘*Karen Blixens Afrika*’ (Karen Blixen’s Africa) and ‘*Ranger*’ are examples of special exhibitions presented at Naturama.



### **AN EDUCATIONAL STRATEGY**

The museum has developed an educational strategy aimed at encouraging learning and interest in natural science. Naturama's educational approach is to work with the narratives from theatre and movie based on multi-media and sensory experiences. The museum dramatises history in educational shows by using music and sounds, wide-screen movies, light effects, objects and presentations, stand-up communicators and acting.

Today, users participate in the storytelling, and modern technology sets the stage for a collective knowledge producing process. Using play, hands-on activities and interaction, the goal for the future natural history museum is to encourage user curiosity and critical reflection as well as to help sharpen people's senses.

Naturama offers educational shows for small and large groups – from groups of 20 to hundreds of people at a time. The educational shows turn the exhibition area into a social learning space where the users find themselves in the middle of the experience.

### **FORMAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES IN PARTNERSHIPS**

The museum is constantly developing educational programmes through learning partnerships with educational institutions.

In partnership with local schools, the museum has developed educational programmes involving more than 400 students. Research has shown that the dramatised educational approach of the museum has increased knowledge about and interest in natural history among young people. Students participating in the programmes have been more likely to choose science subjects at upper secondary schools and to pursue a higher education in the natural science fields as a result of the input from the museum.

Based on the positive learning experience from the educational programmes in partnership with lower secondary schools (12-15-year olds), the museum has now established partnerships with upper secondary schools (15-18-year olds).

Currently, the museum is working with long-term partnerships with educational institutions across the country, which includes the museum's participation in activities outside the museum.

## STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

Strategic leadership is about partnerships and branding. The museum considers itself a cultural institution in rapid development and a cultural engine in the development of local society. The aim is to evolve into a significant national scientific knowledge centre. In this process, the museum has merged with a research and experience centre, *Fjord&Bælt*, and has established a partnership with the Faculty of Science at the University of Southern Denmark.

*Fjord&Bælt* is a knowledge centre about Danish marine life, where research is carried out on living animals such as porpoises and seals. The centre is one of the very few places in the world where toothed whales are trained to form part of scientific research. Through daily presentations and information about the animals, visitors can watch the animals in the pools and also from an underwater tunnel, which provides visitors with a unique opportunity to watch the animals at close range.

## SOCIAL INCLUSION

Over a number of years, natural history museums have branded themselves as institutions for children. This is also the case with Naturama. Schools, families and grandparents are the primary users of the museum.

The museum's challenge is to attract specific marginalised groups such as young people in the age group 15-30. According to research conducted in Denmark, this group finds museums irrelevant, and a major reason for them not to visit museums is that they have had bad experiences when participating in educational programmes at museums with their schools.<sup>1</sup>

The museum is trying to address the needs and interests of young people through a range of events and other activities based on participation and inclusion.

In order to attract citizens in the age group 40+, the museum has entered into another successful partnership with the Karen Blixen Museum, which focuses on the famous Danish author's life and literature.<sup>2</sup> The two museums have developed a joint exhibition about Blixen's experiences with the wildlife of Africa and her writing.

It is our ambition to develop the two institutions, Naturama and *Fjord&Bælt*, into a museum based on research into and knowledge about natural science and thereby make a difference in society regarding an educational understanding and knowledge about nature and sustainability in a life-long learning perspective for a great variety of citizens.



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## Credits

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Skeleton of a  
*Fregata*  
*(Fregata aedon)*  
Natural History Museum, London





Skull of  
**Fiskehejre**  
Lunde 1983

# OPEN MINDS OPEN DOORS

**DR. MARTHA FLEMING** is an artist, researcher and curator. Martha Fleming has worked with London's Science Museum and Natural History Museum, as well as at the Royal Society, the UK's science academy. At Copenhagen's Medical Museion, she was Creative Director of the 2010 Dibner Award winning exhibition *Split + Splice: Fragments from the Age of Biomedicine*. From 2009 to 2011, she was part of a team developing a Centre for Arts and Humanities Research at the Natural History Museum in London and Kingston University's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and she is currently working with the British Museum as a consultant developing a large-scale project about the Enlightenment collections of Sir Hans Sloane. She has held research fellowships at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin, the Institute of Astronomy, Cambridge, and the Materials Library, University College London. She has also co-created, with Lyne Lapointe, large-scale site-specific collaborative exhibitions as an artist in Montreal, New York, London, Madrid and Sao Paulo.





## OPEN MINDS – OPEN DOORS

Generosity cannot be legislated; it is a quality, and it requires a culture. My premise is that a culture of interdisciplinary thought and practice in museums engenders a commensurate widening of the relevance of activities and a consequent broadening of the welcome that a museum can offer to its many possible users.

Quite simply, the more interesting the thinking is, the more interested the people get.

And people, all kinds of people, are ‘all kinds of interesting’. Individuals have astonishingly varied interests and identifications, often apparently conflicting, but always important to them and constitutive of subjectivities as complex and as intricate as can be imagined.

Museum professionals themselves as well as the public who participate in museum activities find that large portions of their subjectivities are cordoned off from their experience of the museum itself – including the experiences that they have of each other.

How can we begin to embrace again, in the museum, a fuller range of thoughts and feelings? What better place to experiment than in this space, which is both public and intimate, which is shared and yet in which each experience is unique?

We can begin by exploring, as museum professionals, the aspects of ourselves that we feel we must set aside each day when we step through the museum doors. Looking at what we ourselves leave behind, we might begin to imagine why others do not feel welcome. We might begin to imagine what sort of ‘shape’ the museum might have if it were to accommodate these other segmented parts of self. What kind of practice would we then have? And what could we do with the collections and the resources in our care? Who else would then begin to take an interest, start to engage, and ultimately collaborate with us?

### **AN INTERDISCIPLINARY INCLUSIVE APPROACH**

Before we can expect to collaborate more fully with museum users, we could look at the ways in which we ourselves work together as museum professionals. Museums already effect many different kinds of collaborative projects – exhibitions, educational programmes, outreach projects, websites, collection interpretation resources, tours, and more. The processes and methods by which these projects are produced could happily become more interdisciplinary and more inclusive even within the structure of museum management.

If museum projects were identified, conceptualised and formulated based on the wide-ranging interests and under-explored subjectivities of museum workers, they would certainly be much more varied. If they were effected using the skills, disciplines and methods that individual practitioners were personally wanting to contribute to these projects, they would doubtless also be more exciting. As museum professionals, let's ask of ourselves the kinds of existential and social questions that we are asking of the users of museums; we will need to dig deep and change in order to answer them. What skills can you share in order to explore something entirely new? The answers will be the fundamental scaffolding for interdisciplinary collaboration, producing new knowledge, and forging entirely new methods. These processes also forge new understandings between people, and that opening is where we need to begin if we are to become truly inclusive.

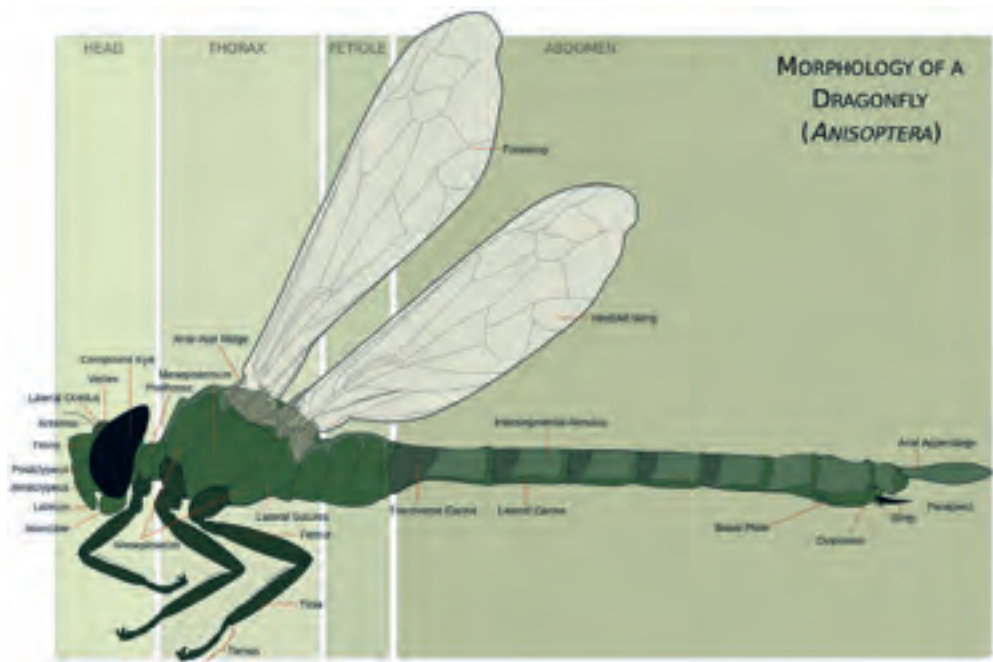
In the interests of forging new understanding between people, I will begin by explaining in broad-brush terms the practices of a natural history museum, and then identify what I mean by interdisciplinarity, and inclusion – and in particular how difficult it is to foster either interdisciplinarity or inclusion using statistical information alone. Following that, I will give three short examples of how interdisciplinarity could be conjoined directly with inclusion in the context of Naturama specifically.<sup>1</sup>

Collections and the practices that construct and interpret them are very different from one kind of museum to the next. A museum of the history of science is not the same thing as a museum whose collections are amassed and used in science practice. Though Naturama is better known as a visitor attraction, its origins are in science practice, in biology: we cannot think clearly about it until we address that history – and that future.

### **NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS**

Few people know about the scientific uses of natural history collections or the underlying reasons for the long-term collection of such vast quantities of organic material, or for the ways in which the collections are structured. A natural history museum may look like a building, but it is in fact an instrument, a scientific instrument, an instrument for the practice of taxonomy. The science of taxonomy is the discovery, identification, naming and describing of different species of plants, animals, minerals and geological formations. Taxonomy functions in tandem with the science of systematics, the study of the biological relations *between* species in the natural world.

For much of its long history, from the early modern period until the advent of molecular and genetic biotechnologies in the 1970s, taxonomy and



systematics were focused on the close visual observation of the natural world, differentiating between species through careful morphological examination.

In order to effect an accurate morphological differentiation that is useful to species identification, large numbers of variations of specimens are collected. The following example of the snowy owl gives an indication of the scale of the project. The snowy owl is a circumpolar species, and the distribution of the bird spreads from Russia to Nunavut in Canada and much of the north of Scandinavia and the Arctic. A curator of ornithology would want examples of the bird from a range across this worldwide distribution, in order to have a sense of natural variations in plumage and appearance occurring across the globe.

From each locality, one would want examples of adults, juveniles and chicks. One would want males and females of each age. Of every species, one would also want enough examples to be able to prepare at least three different kinds of specimens for study. Skins, with the feathers, preserved without the bones or internal organs. Bones, for osteological analysis. And then the entire bird preserved in spirit, for tissue analysis. And eggs, of course. And nests.

So, take five different locations across the world distribution, two sexes, three ages, three types of preparation and preservation, and eggs and nests, and *you have close to 100 specimens for one species alone*, representing a range of morphological variation across the single species. And to give a sense of scale, there are currently about 1.75 million species identified to date on earth.







Maintaining order at that kind of scale is a demanding process. For the curator of natural history, the care of the collections extends to maintaining the absolutely critical location of each specimen in relation to other specimens within an intellectual/conceptual structure of speciation. That conceptual structure has, of necessity, a direct physical correlative in a spatial disposition in the museum itself.

Each carefully localised specimen in each drawer, in each cabinet, in each department on each floor of the building is treated as if it were a precise location on a branch on the so-called tree of life. The building itself is in effect constructed, used and understood as a three-dimensional diagram of life on earth, made up of the matter of life itself. Thus, a natural history museum is itself a vast instrument for the practice of taxonomy.

For at least 150 years, both the collections management and the collections display of natural history collections had the same intent: to show the morphological differences between species in clear, demarcated, taxonomic arrangements, and to train the observant eye to identify these species, as well as new ones. This meant that what was on display out in the visitor end of the museum was much like what was behind the scenes in storage – ordered, seried ranks of species. Taxidermy was king because it was the art of rebuilding the exact shape – the morphology – of the animal, using its dead and treated skin.

### NEW PRACTICES

In the last few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the discovery of DNA in 1953, all that started to change. With advances in biotechnology in the 1970s, particularly in genetic analysis and the invention of the PCR machine, an increasing number of zoologists began to use *genetic information* to identify more clearly the differences between species that could not exclusively be understood at the macro scale of morphology.

By the 1990s, there was a kind of millennium fever that swept through biological sciences, and evangelists in the natural history fields began to lobby for the abandonment of the use of morphology as a tool in speciation altogether. They argued that if molecular analysis was the best way to ascertain and identify species, and DNA was impossible to obtain from taxidermied specimens that had been heavily treated with toxic chemicals in order to fix skin, feathers, fur and more, then why bother to keep the space-hungry collections of taxidermied animals that were the familiar taxonomic stock in trade of most older natural history collections?<sup>2</sup> Indeed, why bother even to keep the curators who cared for these collections and whose deep knowledge of morphological characteristics, visible to the eye and measurable with micrometers, was no longer really needed?



This deep rift in the practice of biology has been a complex and decades-long debate in zoology and botany in particular. But it is the zoological collections that have been most at risk, because they take up so much space, and indeed large numbers of zoological collections have become ‘orphaned collections’ – collections with no curator who understands them, and with little assumed scientific value. In the 1980s and 90s, many such collections were literally thrown away into the garbage all over the world.

### VALUING COLLECTIONS AND CURATORS

Fortunately, this was not the case in Svendborg. I would like to say that the Naturama project has probably actually saved the taxidermic collection of the Svendborg Zoological Museum, a collection that could easily have been lost and destroyed in the 1980s and 90s.

If this collection has been saved, for whom has it been saved, and how is meaning made from it? How does this meaning relate to the museum’s users, and how do they bring meaning to the museum?

This link between museum, meaning, and individuals is at the heart of what I would like to address. The subject of my presentation is *Interdisciplinarity and Inclusion*, and the relationship between the two is something that I have been thinking about and working inside for many years in different ways.

What do I mean when I say ‘Inclusion’ and what do I mean when I say ‘Interdisciplinarity’?

## INTERDISCIPLINARITY

Interdisciplinarity is a tricky word. Many disciplines have their interdisciplinarity – it is the hallmark of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the promise of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It may be one of the few intellectual drives that spans both modernity and post-modernity.

Artists' crossover experiments with film and video in the 1970s and 1980s are the foundation stone of media art, bringing self-reflexivity to everything from cinema to advertising to the Internet.

Biology and physics gave birth to biophysics, and now we have X-ray crystallography and protein structure prediction.

In the humanities, philology, linguistics and literature have together given us semiotics.

In each case, groundbreaking new methodologies emerged from adjacent fields too long kept apart. But what of the ultimate leap to be made in the methodological triangulation that could span straight across the division walls between arts, science and humanities?

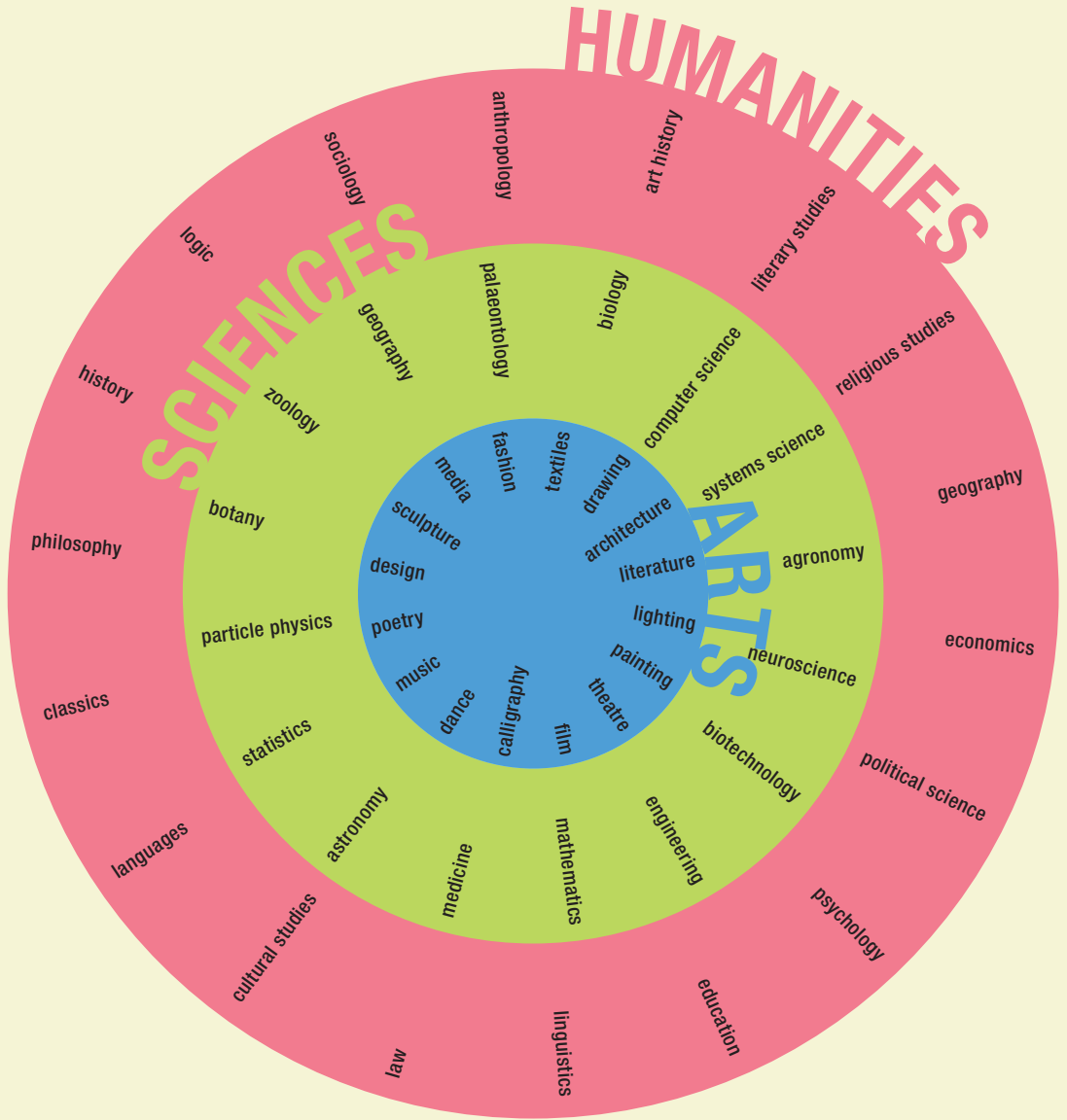
Investigation, intervention, inquiry, analysis, critique, visualisation, modelling. All these processes are present in scientific methodology, in the discipline of art, design and aesthetics, and in the methods of history and of philosophy. Following along these rich seams of practice, we can align the best of humankind's three great traditions of *making, doing and thinking*.

Current interdisciplinary practices and projects are showing us how to recognise in the overlaps a range of ideas, issues and realities we have not even been able to acknowledge before. Some of these are so urgent – such as tackling climate change – that interdisciplinary practice has come to be seen as a frontline activity in problem-solving. The development of interdisciplinary methodologies to approach today's problems is in fact crucial to survival: environmental, intellectual, spiritual and cultural.

Of course, bringing these disciplines together is not as easy as it seems. Each has different languages, methods, workflows, economic models, funding bases, ethics and outcomes. To achieve the knowledge transfer required, these groups would need an ideal platform in which to work, and a lot of support.

In Denmark – where thankfully, innovative thinking is still considered to be normal, pragmatic and part of being responsible with knowledge – The Danish Business Research Academy and the Danish Forum for Business Education published *Thinking Across Disciplines: Interdisciplinarity in Research and Education* (2008). The document advocates greater investment in interdisciplinary education and research in universities – including the Design School and the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts.<sup>3</sup>

**INTERDISCIPLINARY POTENTIAL OF INTERACTIONS BETWEEN  
ARTS, SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES**



In the United States, The National Academy of Sciences published *Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research* (2005), a manual concerning the development and resourcing of interdisciplinary practice – but it was limited to the sciences, and did not encompass (as the Danish research report did) the humanities and the arts.<sup>4</sup> In 2010, Julie Thompson Klein's roadmap to university futures, entitled *Creating Interdisciplinary Campus Cultures*, did include the humanities, but not practices such as fine arts, architecture, design, creative writing, filmmaking and so on.

Klein does note, however, that museology and museum studies are inherently interdisciplinary in their practice, and here is where we start to get somewhere. Somewhere 'inclusive.' She is pointing away from universities and their departmental fiefdoms, and towards another, more flexible form of infrastructure – *that of the museum*.<sup>5</sup>

### **INTELLECTUALLY, SOCIALLY AND CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE**

It is possible that the museum is the only platform in which full interdisciplinarity can take place – interdisciplinarity that spans the humanities, the sciences *and* the creative arts; exploratory interdisciplinarity in the public sphere. Museums can, and do, involve a wide range of methodologies in their work. They are already *methodologically* inclusive, and have the capacity to be more so.

I am proposing here that *interdisciplinarity is inherently inclusive*, inclusive of different approaches to knowledge, to meaning-making, to solutions. And it is not just intellectually inclusive, but also socially and culturally inclusive, because *methodologies are practised by people*. By individual people, with different personal drives and subjectivities, with varying experience and cultural origins, from different countries and life histories and occupations and political convictions. The kind of people who visit museums.

### **USER SURVEYS AND SEGMENTATION**

That long list is beginning to sound very much like a population study... the kind of population study that is effected through a national census perhaps, or even through a survey. In fact, the divisive segmentation that occurs in the kinds of statistical classifications of people effected through surveys is unfortunately very similar to the kind of segmentation of methodologies that occurs in the divisions between the disciplines that we have just been discussing. We really must ask what use these segmenting divisions are, what kinds of knowledge they produce about users, and ultimately, what sorts of relationships they trap us into.

The Gallup Kompas of Danish society is produced by a private marketing company and used as a kind of benchmark against which the *User*



*Survey 2012* results are checked.<sup>6</sup> The idea is that each museum can measure the interest that each of these market segments expresses in their institution. And of course the Gallup Kompas groups truly are *market* segments. Unlike John Falk's spectrum of learning styles, the underlying data which create this Gallup Kompas segmentation are generated directly in relation to patterns of consumer activities. I will express here a deep personal doubt about whether this kind of market segmentation is in any way useful as a benchmark for museums to use when thinking about the essential leadership role they can play in the visionary co-creation of a society that is expansive, inclusive and just.

Market segments represent only one way of 'grouping' people, and groups are ultimately made up of individual people. The kind of people who visit museums. Individual people who have unique skills and disciplines and interests and methodologies. People who experience both their subjectivity and their interdisciplinarity every day, whether they would use those words or not.

### **A NEED FOR QUALITATIVE USER STUDIES**

What if the *User Survey 2012* started to ask users (and, indeed, non-users) what their skills and interests are? What if you discovered that a user of Naturama had a range of language skills, was trained as a nurse and loves music? In what ways could this be both harnessed and set free in relation to the shared national resource of Naturama's amazing collections?

Here we are asking not just what people might want to see at Naturama, but also what they might want to *contribute* to its programme, to its thinking.<sup>7</sup> It is only in understanding what individual people do and what their passions and interests are that you will get them to come to museums and work together – and work together with museums. This granularity of detail, this specificity of identity, will require that we ask different kinds of questions – not only of users, but also of museums.

### **NATURAMA**

Let's get back to Naturama, to Jacob Salvig and his colleagues who saved the Svendborg Zoological Museum from being lost. What did they do with the collections? For those who have never been there, it is worth giving a sense of what kind of place Naturama is today.

The main display concept is to divide the taxidermied collections between those which live in water, those which live on land, and those which live in the air. There are therefore three levels to the architecture of the new building. Entering on the ground floor, it is mainly land animals. Going downstairs, the marine world is encountered. At the top of the building,



we find the birds. This arrangement is much like a walk-in diorama, and it has echoes of its origins in earlier forms of display of taxidermied animals in constructed habitats. And it also means that users are invited to touch some of the specimens, to pat them as if they were alive, and even more so than if they were alive, because many of the creatures represented are of course wild and not domesticated animals.

There is an extensive one-to-one learning engagement, which is complemented by a computer database of information for digitally native children. There is a lightshow and soundscapes that contribute to the diorama, and people have a sense that they are inside a landscape.

But what is this landscape? Some of the stilled creatures have no flesh or skin; others have fur but no bones. They do not move, but there is something incredibly moving about them, about their suspended animation. Whatever else these encounters at Naturama might be, they are also fundamentally existential. This is not just because the exhibits are lifelike, but because they retain and embody the after-effects of life.

In his 2003 article entitled 'Präparate – 'Bilder' ihrer selbst. Eine bildtheoretische Glosse', the historian of the life sciences Professor Hans-Joerg Rheinberger outlines the huge amount of work that is done to create, with scientific specimens, images of themselves.<sup>8</sup> He covers this approach





in relation to different forms of scientific instrumentation, such as microscopes, but taxidermy is certainly among the most significant of these instances where ‘the thing comes to represent itself’: It is both real fur and bones and an elaborate cultural and technical construction at one and the same time. Both nature and culture, and something unique in between.

It is perhaps one of the great successes of Naturama that it is possible to imagine its taxidermy collections being used in different ways than the way in which they are currently arranged. Naturama is open enough to culture to entertain a much larger number of questions than the original scientific questions that inspired the creation of the collection some 75 years ago. What if an exhibition at Naturama could explore the existential part of its own user experience? Who would you work with and what kind of interdisciplinarity would you need?

### EXPLORING THE EXISTENTIAL PART OF USER EXPERIENCE

You might need a group of academic researchers working in animal studies, which is a burgeoning field of cultural studies. Researchers such as Donna Haraway, author of *When Species Meet* (2007) and *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (1989).<sup>9</sup> Researchers such as Steve Baker, who published *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation* (2001) and *The Postmodern Animal*



(2000). You might set up a research group to explore what it means to prepare and display specimens, such as *Cultures of Preservation* and *Activating Stilled Lives*, which recently took place at the History of Art Department of University College London.<sup>10</sup>

You might need to work with artists who have collected materials that other natural history museums have thrown away. Artists whose work is exploring the existential aspects of these cultural productions, such as Angela Singer and Karen Knorr.<sup>11</sup> And you might want to work with people who have been studying the very subject of the relationship between existential experience and taxidermy, such as Rachel Poliquin with her book *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing* (2012).<sup>12</sup>

### **ANIMALS AS OBJECTS AND SIGNS**

Exemplary interdisciplinary work on these subjects is being affected in Nordic countries and cultures. At the University of Uppsala, there is a department of animal studies researchers, as one could expect from a town steeped in Linnaeus.<sup>13</sup>

In Oslo, a research project in the university's Faculty of Humanities entitled 'Animals as Objects and Animals as Signs' culminated with an exhibition co-curated with artists.<sup>14</sup> Those artists were participants in the project, and they are the collaborative team Mark Wilson and Bryndis Snæbjörnsdóttir.

One of their most successful works involved an incredibly meticulous five-year research project to locate and identify the origins of all mounted taxidermy specimens of the polar bear in the United Kingdom. Bringing all the bears together at Spike Island Gallery in Bristol was a way of exploring the deep strangeness of both taxidermy and trophy culture, and also of giving back some semblance of community, of inclusion, to the remains of the dead bears. It is both like Naturama in appearance and completely different in effect.

There was much more to this project, which is reflected in the publication *Nanoq: Flat Out and Bluesome* (2006).<sup>15</sup> Each bear, once located, was photographed in its current position – a kind of post-mortem portrait. The provenance of each of the bears was carefully researched following a range of sources, returning the dignity of specificity to each specimen, and turning a post-mortem portrait into a portrait of a cultural practice with a deep history.

This project has interdisciplinarity at the level of the individual artist's skills and interests, and a high level of collaboration with a range of museums and collections. It is a project where the subjectivity of the co-creators and the subjectivity of the audience members are both explored, and the notion of animal subjectivity is addressed.







### ANIMAL HOMOSEXUALITY AND NATURAL DIVERSITY

For a second example, let's leave arts and humanities and take the science road, going in an alternative interdisciplinary direction, towards the inclusion of another kind of subjectivity.

In 1999, a book entitled *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* appeared.<sup>16</sup> The author, Bruce Bagemihl, had spent many years drawing together existent research by qualified zoologists concerning aspects of the sexual lives and behaviour of animals that were not uniquely procreative, that did not produce offspring. Much of this non-reproductive sexuality is what would be considered homosexual, transgendered, or homosocial in humans, and some of it also involves the sharing of childcare between same-sex pairs of animals.

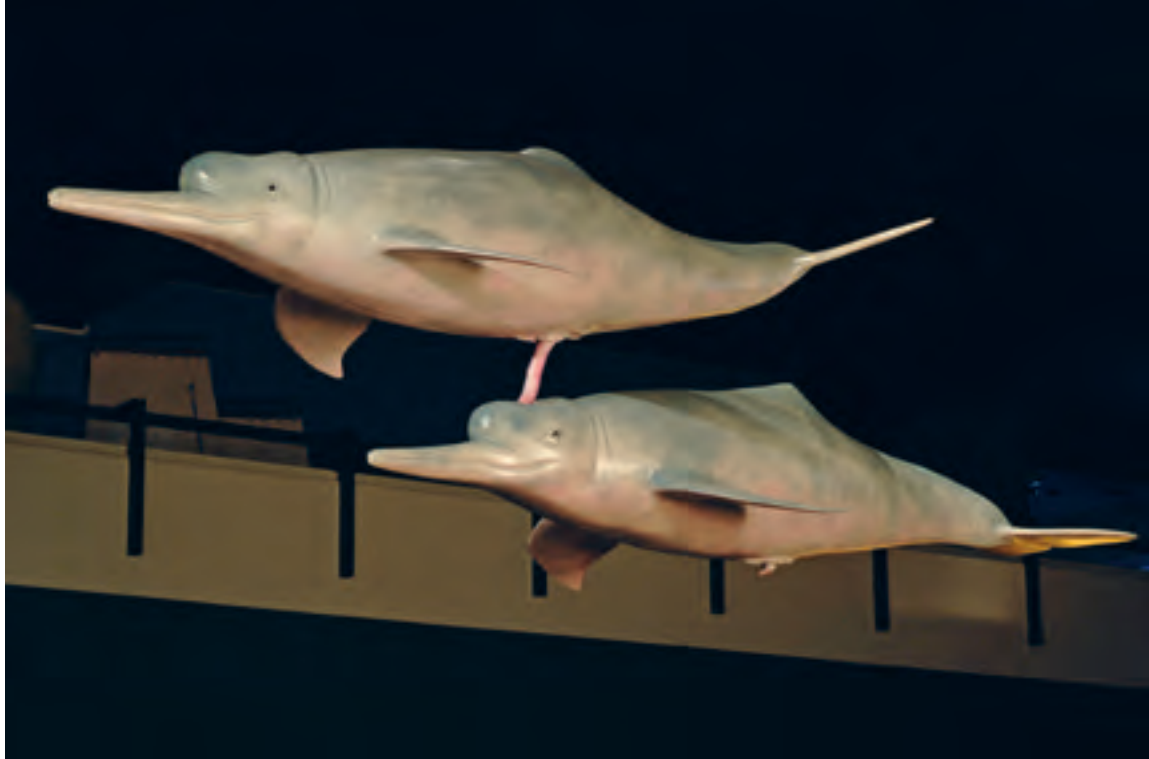
The book, still highly contested, sent shock waves through several very different communities. For zoology, it meant that it was possible that there is much more to the question of Darwinian natural selection than we think. Perhaps evolution has more realities to consider in its theory than has been understood to date. For the religious right-wing, of all denominations, it was a blow to the canonical notion that human homosexuality is not 'natural'. For gay men, lesbians and all kinds of transgendered people, it was a revelation that was deeply moving. In general, the troubled normative social construction of animal sexuality versus human sexuality was suddenly eclipsed by the reality of a shared interspecies subjective experience.

It took some years, and a Nordic culture, to turn this complex nexus of interdisciplinary research and social paradigm shift into an exhibition. The exhibition in question was originally entitled *Against Nature?* (with a question mark), and was organised by the Natural History Museum of the University of Oslo, with funds from the Norwegian Authority for Archives, Museums and Libraries. It opened in 2006.

It travelled to Bergen and Trondheim in Norway, as well as further afield, to Maastricht and other locations. By the time it reached Stockholm, where it ended its tour, it had lost its question mark, and was simply called *Rainbow Animals*.

It did not come to Denmark.

I do not know if it was offered to a natural history museum in Denmark, and if it was turned down as a travelling exhibition, and what the reasons might have been for this. But I do know that it is an amazing way of making socially and culturally relevant these kinds of taxidermied collections, which we know to be marginalised and threatened: in making an exhibition to empower and embrace a group of museum users who may themselves feel marginalised and threatened.



But it is not only the specimen collections that are marginalised and threatened in natural history. It is also the information that is held about these specimens, which is in many cases not making it across the digital divide and into the future of big data – and here is my third and final example of interdisciplinarity fostering inclusion.

### **ENGAGING COLLECTIONS**

In natural history museums, huge amounts of data are collected and managed alongside the collections. Curators manage the link to the specimen itself of all the information that already accompanies the collected specimen when it arrives at the museum, all that can be known through scientific analysis, and all that can be further garnered in the wider world about the specimen.

With this information, it is possible to keep track of population numbers, biodiversity issues, environmental conditions and more. This kind of precious information exists in every natural history museum in the world, including the Svendborg Zoological Museum, and it is usually held on paper cards and in book-bound catalogues. But it is very difficult to get this kind of written information into actual computer databases where it can be usefully analysed and compared with the kinds of large numerical databases that molecular biology is producing.

What if the people who visit Naturama were also transcribing into a database the typed and handwritten catalogues of the 75-year-old Svendborg Zoological Museum? This third way to be both interdisciplinary and inclusive is to engage with digital platforms in ways that are meaningful collaborations between scientists, humanities computing professionals, and both museum users and non-users.

Galaxy Zoo, an online data analysis project in astrophysics, was a pioneer in crowdsourcing, and it is now a huge forum for participation in the research process of both the sciences and the humanities. Recently, its parent website, Zooniverse, set up a trial project called Notes from Nature with the express intention of engaging citizen scientists and natural history fans in the process of unlocking all this important data.

“Museum records contain historical biodiversity data. Scientists and researchers can use the data to conduct new research and make better conservation decisions.”<sup>17</sup>

Well, that is one level of engagement with the material – help scientists to access the information. But there could be other levels of engagement. At Naturama, there is already a digitisation project underway and a database of animal information available onsite – how could this database use crowdsourcing to go deeper into the museum, and deeper into the visitor experience as well?

There are so many interesting ways that online, and onsite, can be linked up. Could Naturama involve not just its visiting community, but also communities much further afield, in transcribing its catalogues through crowdsourcing? And what could that new community do with the data themselves once it has been transcribed? What kind of data-driven project could they design themselves? How could such a group of people – young and old, trained and amateur, artist and scientist, gay and straight, local and foreign users and non-users – how could this group of people contribute to the work of the museum, to the work of zoologists and environmentalists, and indeed to their own sense of well-being, through such a project of their own design? Not something that a curator might propose, not something that is ‘only’ science or ‘just’ culture. Something new, something that belongs to its creators.

### **KNOWLEDGE CREATION IS COLLABORATIVE**

The underlying question here is one relating to the definition of research in a museum context: who gets to do research in and with the collections, how is knowledge produced with them, and how integral is dissemination of that knowledge to its production? How is the authority of varying bodies of knowledge shared and built upon? Many people, from Greenland to



New Zealand, will have contributed specimens to Svendborg. If Naturama reaches out to embrace them, it could become the most significant international ambassador in Denmark, and produce a richly textured collection with unrivalled data and supporters.

Above all, it is important to have an overarching sense of *why* you want to have more kinds of people visiting and learning and teaching in your museums. Surely Denmark wants not just more people coming and learning in its museums, but more people actually collaborating together there to improve society and increase wellbeing. Learning is about knowledge, knowledge creation is collaborative, and interdisciplinary approaches are essential to 21<sup>st</sup> century problem-solving – for this we need everyone, not just the few. Open doors – open minds.



## Endnotes

- 1 For information about Naturama, see Jacob Salvig's article in this publication, or go to <http://www.naturama.dk/>.
- 2 The fact that it is now possible in many instances to extract DNA molecules from the keratin of the hair follicles of even the most chemically treated of taxidermied mammal specimens is a good reminder to science that it is always worth holding on to things until long after any scientific revolution.
- 3 *Thinking Across Disciplines: Interdisciplinarity in Research and Education*. DEA, FBE (2008): [www.fuhu.dk/filer/FBE/Publikationer/thinking\\_across.pdf](http://www.fuhu.dk/filer/FBE/Publikationer/thinking_across.pdf). Last Accessed 25 August 2013.
- 4 *Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research*. Washington, The National Academies Press, 2005.
- 5 Klein, Julie Thompson: *Creating Interdisciplinary Campus Cultures: A Model for Strength and Sustainability*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010 (p 49). Thompson Klein is referring to the American Government 'Classification of Instruction Programs' (Edition 1990), which lists under 'Program Area 30) Multi/Disciplinary Studies' a range of subject fields including Museology. "30.1401: *Museology/Museum Studies* – An instructional program that describes the attitudes, knowledge, and skills required to develop, prepare, organize, administer, conserve, store and retrieve artifacts, exhibits and entire collections in museums and galleries, and that prepares individuals to assume curatorial, technical and managerial positions in museums. Includes instruction in institutional management, acquisition, exhibit design, observation, packing techniques and public relations." <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/cip2000/ciplist90.asp?CIP2=30>. Last accessed 24 August 2013.
- 6 See the compass in chapter 2.
- 7 Inclusive audience contributions to museums have come to be understood as 'co-creation.' This approach has been discussed extensively in the past few years as an emerging museum practice, particularly in relation to the notion of the 'Participatory Museum'. However, not all of the Participatory Museum techniques are useful for all museums, and not all of the precepts are transferable from one culture (American) to another (Danish).
- 8 Rheinberger, Hans-Jörg: 'Präparate - ,Bilder' ihrer selbst. Eine bildtheoretische Glosse', in: Horst Bredekamp und Gabriele Werner (eds.), *Oberflächen der Theorie* (Bildwelten des Wissens. Kunsthistorisches Jahrbuch für Bildkritik). Berlin: Akademie-Verlag (2003).
- 9 Haraway, Donna J.: *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (2007), and *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. London: Routledge (1989).
- 10 The Culture of Preservation: [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/art-history/events/culture\\_of\\_preservation](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/art-history/events/culture_of_preservation). Activating Stilled Lives: [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/art-history/events/culture\\_of\\_preservation/activating-stilled-lives](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/art-history/events/culture_of_preservation/activating-stilled-lives). Both last accessed 24 August 2013.
- 11 Angela Singer: <http://www.angelasinger.com>. Karen Knorr: <http://www.karenknorr.com/>. Both last accessed 24 August 2013.
- 12 Poliquin, Rachel: *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press (2012).
- 13 HumAnimal Group, Centre for Gender Research, University of Uppsala: <http://www.gender.uu.se/Research/animal/?languageld=1>. Last accessed 24 August 2013.

- 14 'Animals as Objects and Animals as Signs' was a three-year research project based at the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages from 2010 to 2012: <http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/projects/animals/index.html>. The exhibition by Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson, entitled *Animal Matters*, took place in 2012: <http://www.uio.no/english/research/interfaculty-research-areas/kultrans/news/events/seminars/2012/animal-matters.html>. Both last accessed 24 August 2013.
- 15 Snæbjörnsdóttir & Wilson, *Nanoq: Flat Out and Bluesome*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006.
- 16 Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity*. London: Profile Books, 1999.
- 17 Notes From Nature is a 'citizen science' crowdsourcing website aiming to engage the public in the activity of transcribing handwritten catalogues of natural history specimen collections: <http://www.notesfromnature.org/>. Last accessed 25 August 2013.

## Credits

- p. 152 Morphology of a dragonfly. wikipedia.org
- p. 153 Taxonomic arrangements in the storage facility of the Department of Birds, National Museum of Natural History. Chip Clark © Smithsonian Institution.
- p. 155 DNA Barcodes for two species of butterfly and two species of owl. Smithsonian Institution.
- p. 157 Interdisciplinary potential of interactions between arts, sciences and humanities. Martha Fleming.
- p. 160 Naturama.
- p. 161 Naturama.
- p. 162 Hedgerow, 2010. Angela Singer. Recycled vintage taxidermy fox and mixed media. © www.angelasinger.com
- p. 163 Snæbjörnsdóttir/Wilson (2008) nanoq: flat out and bluesome, Spike Island, Bristol.
- p. 167 Specimens of male dolphins mounted for display in *Against Nature?* at the Natural History Museum of the University of Oslo (2006). Per E. Aas, Natural History Museum, University of Oslo, Norway.

# MUSEUMS AS SOCIAL LEARNING SPACES





# WAITING FOR THE PUBLIC TO CHANGE?

**JETTE SANDAHL** is Director of the Museum of Copenhagen, Denmark. She came to the cultural sector after a decade of university studies, teaching and research in psychology. Spanning her academic work and her museum career is a commitment to individual and community empowerment, and to creating public institutions as platforms for democratic dialogue and as agents for social change.

Jette Sandahl was a founding Director for the pioneering new Museum of World Cultures in Sweden, which opened in 2005, and a founding member and Director of the Women's Museum of Denmark. She has served as Director of Exhibitions and Public Programmes for the National Museum of Denmark and, most recently, as Director of Experience at the Te Papa Tongarewa National Museum of New Zealand. She trained for museum leadership at the J. P. Getty Museum Management Institute.

Jette Sandahl has been a part of the difficult transition in museums as they struggle to reinterpret and transcend their traditional colonial or nationalistic world views, and she has been active in shifting basic paradigms as cultural institutions adjust to the new obligations of complex, culturally diverse societies, and reach for methods that allow and facilitate self-representation, cultural participation and cultural democracy. Publications include: Living Entities, in *The Native Universe and Museums in the 21st Century: The Significance of the National Museum of the American Indian*, USA, 2005; The Included Other – the Oxymoron of Contemporary Ethnographic Museums?, in *Journal of Anthropology and Culture*, Russia, 2007 (in Russian and in English); Ein fortwährender Prozess der Aussöhnung, in *Humboldt Forum Berlin. Das Project*, Berlin, 2009 (in German and in English); Disagreement Makes Us Strong?, in *Curator. The Museum Journal*, 55:4, 2012.

looking for and  
responsive to exhibitions  
less pleased in general  
younger than average  
local  
quicker to get out of there  
even higher education  
frequent museum users  
patterns condensed in  
foreign visitors.



## WAITING FOR THE PUBLIC TO CHANGE?

Artist Fred Wilson once stated that for more than a century, museums have waited for the public to change to fit the museum better, but that it may now be time for museums to change to be more in tune with the public. User surveys have been one way for museums – or for some museums – to find new knowledge and new methods that can support such a turnaround in perspective at and for museums.

As publicly funded institutions, museums – or most museums – attempt to direct their resources towards what is perceived as the needs of the public and of society as such. But how projective are these interpretations of the needs of the people and the needs of society? How projective from what museum professionals, management and governing bodies like and want and need themselves? From what the profession thinks people want and need and like? Or ought to need and want and like?

User surveys are a way of ensuring that the voices and needs of the outside world are heard at the museum. They are a tool for making the blind spots of the personal and professional perception and practices inside the institution visible, and for making the profession reflect on and confront the things that we tend to take for granted.

The user surveys at Danish museums measure the overall degree of satisfaction with the sector as a whole and with each museum and its public activities at a particular moment in time. They offer little knowledge about why people choose to visit or not visit museums, and they do not really explain the different levels of visits at different museums, or the different qualities perceived by audiences at each museum.

At best, the surveys provide museums with tools to gauge the patterns of visits and the composition of their users, and to trace over time whether these compositions remain the same or can be changed by means of conscious strategies and changed practices at the museums.

### FREE CHOICE OR ACTIVE EXCLUSION?

A number of trends in these patterns and compositions emerge from the user survey. From the point of view of social justice, and from the point of view of national cultural policies that for half a century have been committed to equal access to culture for everyone, a continuously alarming pattern is that museums massively favour people with a higher education. 26% of museum visits by people who live in Denmark are made by people

with the highest education who make up only 7% of the population. 59% of visits to museums are made by people in the two highest educational brackets who compose only 21% of the population. Only 15% of museum visits are made by people with vocational training who make up 33% of the population, and only 17% of the visits are made by the 42% who have the lowest levels of education. Among visitors who do not live in Denmark, these patterns seem even more pronounced.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, in the public debate, less attention is given to these differences than to e.g. the differences in gender composition of museum audiences.

If there were no pattern as to who non-users of museums are, non-visits to museums could be viewed as just a personal choice like many others – like wearing red or liking oatmeal – but the educational pattern is so clear, so dominant that it seems to transcend the level of individual preferences. The educational differences in user patterns seem so systematic and so persistent over time, that it is hard not to interpret them as an active act of exclusion – on the part of the museum – of a large segment of the population, as an act of exclusion at the core of museum practices.

#### **LACK OF INTEREST OR LACK OF RELEVANT OFFERS?**

The survey reports that only four% of the non-users of museums state that what the museums offer is directed towards other kinds of people than themselves. Half of the non-users say that they are not interested in the museums and their exhibitions.<sup>2</sup> This non-interest can, of course, be seen simply as a ‘neutral’ statement of personal preference. From another critical perspective, one might regret that non-users seem to have internalised non-use as a lack of interest on their own part, not as a lack of relevant or interesting offers on the part of the museums. In the current Danish context, non-users seem to voice no criticism or disappointed expectations in their – lack of – relationship to museums. Would it be possible in the national surveys to pose questions that explore the potentially critical position of non-users vis-à-vis museums, and create a platform from which non-users could explore the possibility that museums should come up with something that might interest them, since they are actually, as tax payers, paying for the show?

The educational pattern of exclusion from museums is, of course, consistent with the way in which knowledge, previous background knowledge, learning and learning styles are seen as the central parameter of motivation and satisfaction in the survey. What other factors or parameters of meaning, of feeling at home and feeling at ease, of identification and dis-identification, are missed by the survey as core dimensions in the gap between museums as cultural institutions and our non-users?

In *Staying Away: Why People Choose Not to Visit Museums*,<sup>3</sup> Marilyn Hood has made the fundamental point that non-use of museums is an active choice, anchored in the specific relationship between the museum form on the one hand and the values, interests and needs of the individual on the other.

So, a discussion should be about not just who, but also what the user surveys do not address and include.

From the point of view of a museum which, as the Museum of Copenhagen, is underutilised relative to its physical capacity, and seriously underutilised relative to the population living within a travelling radius of e.g. one hour, the people who choose to stay away from the museum are at least as interesting as the people who choose to visit.

### **WAY TOO FEW AND WAY TOO SIMILAR**

Looking at the visitor figures for the Museum of Copenhagen in the user surveys, a very simple conclusion about the visitors stands out immediately – there are way too few of them, and at the same time there are way too many of the same kind.<sup>4</sup>

Within this general pattern, a number of other trends are discernible:<sup>5</sup>

- Users are looking for and are responsive to museum programming, and follow the ebb and flow of special exhibitions and events in terms of numbers as well as in terms of general satisfaction and scoring on the individual dimensions. This is encouraging. It actually matters what the museum does.
- Users at the Museum of Copenhagen are less pleased or satisfied than users at museums in general.
- Users also tend to stay there for a shorter period of time than the overall average for museums. One would hope that this has to do with the small scale of the public areas of the place.
- Users are younger than average for museums – a pattern which the museum has worked hard to achieve.
- Users are very local, more local than average for museums – which is not how it ought to be, given that the Museum of Copenhagen is the museum for the national capital, and as such should be able to address a nationwide audience in meaningful ways.
- There is a high proportion of first-time users, which reflects the increase in numbers.



- The proportion of the higher educated is even higher than the average among museum users – which is not at all what the museum has intended or is committed to.
- The proportion of frequent museum users is also very high – not what the museum was aiming for either.
- The same patterns are even more pronounced among the foreign users – who are also even more critical of the museum.
- A higher than average proportion of users visited the museum with children – despite the fact that the museum is given a low score in terms of suitability for children. Is this a carry-over effect from the child-orientated exhibition of the previous year?<sup>6</sup>

### **RELATIVE SUCCESSES AND ABSOLUTE SHORTCOMINGS?**

Over the years 2008 to 2012, the Museum of Copenhagen had an increase in users from 32,000 to 56,000 in the museum building – a really significant and positive increase in terms of percentage, while still a very low number of visits in absolute terms. To these figures should be added, of course, the wonderful more than 1.3 million people who have used the digital interactive Copenhagen Museum WALL.

A number of different strategies have contributed to this increase in the use of the museum:

- There has been a focused channelling of resources into the exhibition and outreach areas.
- Galleries have been transformed from static, permanent, chronological displays to series of thematic, temporary exhibitions, which change according to a rolling schedule.
- Historic subjects are interwoven with or anchored, in different ways, in different contemporary issues of importance in the city of Copenhagen and for its residents, such as migration, sustainability, or, as is the case right now, love.
- Differentiated form and design languages are used to showcase different thematic content and to address different target groups.
- The museum is taking to the street in many different shapes and forms, and meeting people where they live and work and walk about.
- Outreach projects that employ local residents are carried out in specific neighbourhoods, which have traditionally been underprioritised in terms of culture.

### **A GAP OF UNFULFILLED NEEDS AND UNFULFILLED EXPECTATIONS**

However, while these strategies have obviously had a positive impact, and have translated into higher user numbers at the museum, the gap of unfulfilled needs – and possibly also unfulfilled expectations – between the museum and its potential users is still so profound that a continuous process of self-evaluation, self-reflection and self-criticism is necessary within all areas of the museum's activities. From research to collecting to documentation and exhibitions and public programmes, the museum needs to continuously explore its irrelevance in people's lives – or examine the barriers it may be creating or maintaining between itself and its constituents.

### **A CONTINUOUS PROCESS OF (SELF)ASSESSMENT**

The Museum of Copenhagen is not a collection of rare objects, treasures or masterpieces that live by and through their immanent aesthetic value. The collections of this museum live and find their value and meaning primarily through their embedded narratives, the stories they – and the museum – can tell.

As many other city museums, the Museum of Copenhagen has tended to focus on the public sphere of the city, on the bourgeois founding fathers, on trade and industry and public governance. Huge voids in the collection mark where the everyday life of the residents of the city should be. Private life, personal life, women's and children's lives have largely been absent.

As the museum becomes increasingly aware of these voids and silent areas, it becomes equally clear that objects from everyday life as Copenhageners live it now are not just there for the picking. An active contemporary collecting process is not a simple process of identifying and subsequently acquiring desired objects. It is a slow, long-term and complex process of relationship-building, and building of trust with our communities.

*Becoming a Copenhagen* has been a successful research and exhibition theme for the Museum of Copenhagen, which has positioned the museum on a current social and political arena. Internally, this project has highlighted the potential new knowledge gained through a re-interpretation of existing collections. New collecting, however, has been sparse and less than the museum had hoped for. The museum does not – or does not yet – have the credentials or reputation as an institution people could entrust with their personal, precious, sometimes painful objects of migration and transition.

Participatory working methods are a key strategy for community building. Outreach projects in specific neighbourhoods have created documentation and exhibitions at the museum or in the neighbourhood itself. Formal archaeological excavations have been supplemented with a community dig, and with frequent pop-up talks at the sites. The current archaeologi-

cal exhibition, *The Past beneath our Feet*, is quite exemplary in its consistent use of multiple voices and in bringing together traditional museum expertise with other voices of expertise around each object in the exhibition.

However, is this principle and its lovely execution drowned out or negated by the dominant concern with protecting the objects from light? And by an exhibition budget that has demanded a full re-use of existing cases and floor plans? Does the uniformity of the exhibition design entail that the spatial and kinetic experience negates or contradicts the plurality of voices of the texts? Are there ways in which the museum – unwittingly – in practice undercuts and defeats its own best intentions?

Aided by different kinds of empirical user research, the museum attempts to become more precise in the choice of media for a given theme and a given target audience.

Is, for instance, the current *One, two, three o'clock rock* and 1950s theme proving to be nostalgia that, as an exhibition, attracts mainly the older generations, while for younger users, it appeals mainly through its active events, such as dance contests? Likewise, the people who participate enthusiastically in the museum's 'pram-walks' in the city do not necessarily want to visit the museum and its exhibitions. And even the most avid contributors of images and dialogue for the Copenhagen Museum digital interactive WALL may not want to go to the physical museum. Should the museum do more to bring them to the physical museum building? And would the museum be interesting and convincing, or disappointing and boring to them, if they were indeed to come?

The most recent experiment at the Museum of Copenhagen is taking the participatory working methods to one of the most traditional collections, a group of personal objects left by philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. On the one hand, the continued relevance of the philosophical concepts is examined 200 years later, and on the other, it is explored how a traditional museum collection can be re-vitalised by bringing it into play in a current context. Within the framework of *Søren Kierkegaard. Objects of Love, Works of Love*, contemporary objects of friendship, parenthood, of falling in love, of broken relationships, love of self and of the other are collected. A new digital handheld registration system has been developed, which involves donors of objects behind the scenes of the museum, and enables them to actually carry out the registration and documentation process themselves. The exhibition thus continues to grow after opening, and will – hopefully – by and by begin to spill over the edges of the minimalist design, and reflect the complexities and messiness of love in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, even if this new collecting method turns out to work as an enabling and empowering strategy for donors of objects and for the users who

participate with comments, this project as a whole is unlikely to reduce the problematic educational bias in the composition of the museum's users.

The next theme for research and exhibition will be less cerebrally defined. In 2014, when Copenhagen will be Green Capital of Europe, the Museum of Copenhagen will focus on urban nature and urban gardening, as both an indoors exhibition and a real garden development, working with the most sensory and tangible of visual languages, and working with artists, gardeners, children and young people with special needs.

The museum thus adjusts and readjusts continuously in its planning and programming in order to create a programme that is rich, diverse and balanced over time, and which can become a platform for dialogue with diverse communities.

### **USE VALUE AND VISIONS OF ALTERNATIVE MUSEUM FORMS**

So, the relative successes of the Museum of Copenhagen have, in some ways, underscored the absolute underutilisation of a city museum supposed to serve a conurbation of more than one and a half million people. For most Copenhageners and other Danes, the museum is irrelevant to their lives. What would the museum be or be like if it were to a much larger extent to be formed by the needs of the surrounding world? Can the museum find ways to address real needs in society and thereby enrich its communities and increase its utility value?

Carol Scott has pointed out that studies of the societal value of museums often appear when the societal economy is under pressure, and that museums in this situation often resort to a quite defensive instrumentalisation of the utility value, in terms of e.g. increased tourism and increased economic turnover.<sup>7</sup> In the Danish context, use value is often defined or instrumentalised in the more tangible and physical areas of museum activities, for instance in archaeology or in the areas of planning and protection of the built cultural environment.

Carol Scott has also attempted to develop concepts and typologies for the more intangible experiential qualities of the museum, tied to the objects and works of art as historic evidence, or to the aesthetic presentation, spanning values from the historic, the social, the symbolic and the spiritual.

However, the experiential, aesthetic or emotional qualities and value of museums are complex and hard to define, document or advocate – as is the interplay between these more intangible values and a contribution to the general quality of life and social interaction among people and between communities.

The Museum of Copenhagen is running a series of open-ended round-table dialogues with diverse groups of people. A conversational thread in one of these seemed to indicate that the need for research, in the form of e.g. archaeological excavations, and the need to store the finds and other objects for further research, was fully recognised. However, the usefulness or value of what the profession would consider the protagonist – the museum as such, a defined building where objects are made accessible by being brought into a knowledge-based interpretative and aesthetic context with each other, and into an educational exchange with the public – seemed a vague and blurred concept of little power.

Some new museums, as for instance the Museum of World Cultures in Gothenburg, succeed in creating a museum institution that is unlike any existing and show how a museum can connect to needs that people are hardly aware of having. Visitor numbers at museums like Kelvingrove in Glasgow or the Museum of Liverpool testify to a broad societal engagement that finds its platform of expression in the museum.

For the Museum of Copenhagen, there is a need for further qualitative research into what is really on the minds of Copenhageners in their everyday lives. Where are Copenhageners concerned with and open towards the global world? How is identity tied in with the past and the history of the city? Are urban identities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century much more grounded in the choices of the present and our strategies for the future? What are the expectations to the museum as both expert institution and platform for the voices of the citizens? How important is continuous change and renewal at the museum? How far can the museum integrate across sector boundaries and still retain its identity as a museum? Or is that no longer important?

The museum is asking for input to what a museum for the future of Copenhagen might be, or could be, using user surveys and dialogue with the public as a springboard or catalyst to the visions of alternative museum forms, which short-circuit the distance and separation, the alienation and the estrangement between people's needs and the museum as an institution.



## Endnotes

- 1 Jensen, Thorek Jacob & Lundgaard, Ida Brændholt: *User Survey 2012*, Danish Agency for Culture, 2013, pp 17-22.
- 2 Lundgaard, Ida Brændholt & Moos, Thyge: *Unges museumsbrug – en målgruppeundersøgelse af museernes unge brugere og ikke-brugere* (Young people's use of museums – a target group survey of the museums' young users and non-users), The Danish Agency for Culture, 2012.
- 3 Hood, Marilyn: 'Staying away: why people choose not to visit museums', *Museum News*, April 1983. Conclusions similar to Marilyn Hood's could be drawn from focus group work carried out at the National Museum of Denmark in the late 1990s. Non-users did not conform to the stereotype of passive non-consumers of culture in general. Their idea of having a good time or of actively participating in the creation of culture or a specific event, however, did not correspond to the opportunities provided by the museum. Jf. Jette Sandahl, 'Mere lys over land' (More light across the country), in *Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark*, 1997.
- 4 The interpretations of the patterns of visits at the Museum of Copenhagen are based on data from 2011.
- 5 – To the extent that one can really have confidence in the validity of the data in general, when, for instance, the non-existing cafe at the Museum of Copenhagen gets a rather good score?
- 6 Based on data from the national user survey 2011 for the Museum of Copenhagen.
- 7 Scott, Carol: in the presentations *Advocating the Value of Museums*, Vienna 2007, <http://www.intercom.museum/documents/CarolScott.pdf> or *Audiences, Value and the Future of Museums*, [http://www.icmmonline.org/pages/icmm\\_2009%20-%20keynote%20Carol%20Scott.pdf](http://www.icmmonline.org/pages/icmm_2009%20-%20keynote%20Carol%20Scott.pdf), or the most recent publication, *Museums and Public Value*, May 2013.

## Credits

- p. 186 Museum of Copenhagen. One, two, three o'clock rock.
- p. 187 Museum of Copenhagen. The Past beneath our Feet.  
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- p. 194 Museum of Copenhagen. Copenhagen Museum digital interactive WALL.  
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- p. 196 Museum of Copenhagen. Becoming a Copenhagener.
- p. 197 Museum of Copenhagen. Becoming a Copenhagener.  
Photo by Anne Mette Kruse.

Before I die I want to

A Big Backslip

Before I die I want to

How to  
clay

Before I die I want to

Before I die I want to

MEET REVZ

Before I die I want to

Before I die I want to

Kiss Lindall  
write a book - a good one

Before I die I want to

JAHAD

Before I die I want to

Kil jø gøve so  
ud i verden:  
fuck Danni

Before I die I want to

(be black)

Before I die I want to

Love + FINISH MY PH

Before I die I want to

See my dream's  
Fuck JUSTIN Bieber

Before I die I want to

svømme med kvalder  
Pee standing up

Before I die I want to

slå MØRDERN I HAVE NO  
MARTYR ANNAIE (fra pa

Before I die I want to

finish my e  
with my face

Before I die I want to

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Before I die I want to

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Before I die I want to

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Before I die I want to

Take



SCHÖP  
DIN MOR  
TO MEET ID

I LOVE

DIFERENCE  
Vasemin  
ID Hay

Hay





































# MUSEUMS AS SOCIAL LEARNING SPACES

**Dr. Lynn D. Dierking**, Sea Grant Professor of Free-Choice Learning, College of Science, and Associate Dean for Research, College of Education, Oregon State University. Lynn Dierking is internationally recognised for her research in lifelong learning, particularly free-choice, out-of-school time learning, focusing on youth and families historically under-represented in STEM; Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics.

Lynn Dierking recently completed a retrospective study of the long-term impact of gender-focused free-choice learning programmes on young women's lives 5-25+ years after the experience. *Cascading influences: Long-term impacts of informal STEM programs for girls*, describing findings of the study, was published in 2013. Lynn's other research projects include: a four-year longitudinal study, *SYNERGIES: Understanding and Connecting STEM Learning in the Community*, tracking the STEM learning trajectories of 10-year-olds, in school and outside school, in a diverse neighbourhood of Portland, a Denver Museum of Nature & Science study to improve scientific literacy among urban middle school youth and the *Hispanic Pathways to Family Science Literacy and Green Jobs (Hispanic Pathways)* project, offering free-choice science education experiences to Hispanic youth, many who are currently 'at risk' of dropping out of high school, joining gangs, and/or are already incarcerated in the juvenile justice system. Lynn has published extensively and serves on the Editorial Boards for *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, *Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship* and *Afterschool Matters*. In 2006 she was recognised by the American Association of Museums (AAM) as one of the 100 most influential museum professionals of the past 100 years, and in 2010, she received the AAM Education Committee's highest award, the John Cotton Dana Award for Leadership, recognising her work to promote the educational responsibility and capacity of museums.





Lynn D. Dierking  
Professor in Free-Choice Learning  
Oregon State University  
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## MUSEUMS AS SOCIAL LEARNING SPACES

So long as a dedication to public service is its driving force, a museum can be a good one in an almost infinite number of ways... In everything museums do, they must remember the cornerstone on which the whole enterprise rests: to make a positive difference in the quality of people's lives. Museums that do that, matter – they matter a great deal.<sup>1</sup>

**Stephen E. Weil, 2002**

The discourse of my article is threefold:

1. To describe the socio-cultural context of museums (and learning!), using the data from the survey to support these ideas.
2. To advocate for museums as social learning spaces well suited to interaction and meaning-making among visiting groups and facilitation by other visitors and staff.
3. To argue that museums consider themselves well-positioned to support *social* outcomes by being of value at the level of the individual, group, community and society.

I focus on the socio-cultural dimensions of the museum experience as a lens in which to understand who visits museums and why, and importantly, who does not visit and why. The socio-cultural context of museums arrives with the visitor and is embodied within the institution itself. Although research demonstrates that visitors use museums to meet personal needs,<sup>2</sup> these needs vary greatly, as does a person's knowledge of how and why a museum could meet those needs. Beyond an individual's personal needs, there are also the collective needs of communities and societies, for instance, to preserve heritage or educate one's citizenry within a democratic, civil society. These collective needs also shape personal and societal perspectives on the roles and affordances of museums. Two questions arise for me:

1. How can museums support the socio-cultural resources, identities and motivations that groups bring to the experience?
2. Can museums learn to be of value to individuals, groups and society

by framing their activities within the fabric of people's lives, needs and community?

By acknowledging themselves as *social learning* spaces, museums may better be able to be of value.

### **MUSEUMS AS SOCIETAL INSTITUTIONS**

Examining the cultural dimensions of the museum experience, particularly why some people use museums as rich community resources for personal learning and others do not, is a complex and challenging topic, full of nuance and subtlety, a topic that can evoke strong emotions. As a result, it is inherently difficult to discuss, particularly in a brief article. However, the place of museums within societies is too important a topic not to raise and discuss, particularly in rapidly changing times. However, appreciate that I will only be scratching the surface of a complex and layered issue.

The notion of a societal view of the institution museum is not a new idea. People grow and develop within a cultural milieu that influences their language, customs, values and thought processes. Historically museums were 'created' to preserve things deemed by some members of society as valuable and important, worthy of keeping and caring for. From early on in their history, museums also have played learning and educational functions; societies deemed the contents of museums worth knowing and learning about. Depending upon the time and circumstances, people (at least some people) have been invited to take advantage of opportunities to experience the unique objects, specimens and ideas preserved in museums. What has only been explored more recently, though, is the appreciation that since people visiting are from varied cultures and backgrounds, the museum as institution is experienced differently, and perhaps even more importantly, *perceived* differently by people, too.

These varied public perceptions of museums interact and influence the personal and collective needs of visitors, shaping their expectations of whether these institutions are for them and have offerings they value. For those who do visit, these perceptions influence their satisfaction with the experience. Cultural differences among visitors are further complicated by the fact that the museum itself is a socio-cultural entity, created by people with their own cultural values and biases. The experiences visitors have in a museum can be consistent with the value and belief systems of the museum's creators, or be at odds with the institution. How 'museums as societal institutions' dimension shape, interact and are affected by personal and collective needs is key to understanding why only some people use museums. These perceptions matter as museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century attempt to reach out and be relevant to larger numbers of people across the economic and cultural spectrum; it is critically important to honestly

acknowledge museums as societal institutions that perhaps only meet the needs of some.

It is also important to understand the social nature of museums. Extensive research provides empirical evidence that most visitors to most museums visit with others. In the U.S., UK and Australia, about 60-70% of visitors are families.<sup>3</sup> Another 25-35% of visitors are school groups or adult tour groups; only 5% or less of the visiting public comes alone. The *User Survey 2012* shows similar trends in Denmark; only 7% of visitors in the national survey visited alone and 46% arrived in groups of 3-6,<sup>4</sup> although at the Museum of Copenhagen, 63% were in groups.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, the number of groups of 3-6 has risen but the proportion of larger groups has fallen.<sup>6</sup>

Because most people visit museums as part of social groups, studies show that a large part of people's attention during visits is devoted to the people with whom they are visiting.<sup>7</sup> Data on what visitors recall from museum experiences many years later consistently indicate that the social aspects of a visit are rarely, if ever, forgotten and, sometimes, are primarily what a visitor does recollect.<sup>8</sup>

Most of the research on the social context of museums has focused on families; however, this is changing.<sup>9</sup> For instance, long under-valued and under-studied, children visiting as part of organised school groups arrive at museum settings with social agendas that can powerfully influence their museum experience.<sup>10</sup> And as observed by Lois Silverman, adult groups also bring their own social agendas.<sup>11</sup> Staff and volunteers who work with groups are a part of the social context as well, as are other museum visitors with whom a group might interact.<sup>12</sup> There is even widespread anecdotal evidence to suggest that some visitors go to museums specifically to meet others,<sup>13</sup> and it is not unusual for museums to offer programmes for singles and young adults; some even host science or history pub nights. Finally, an increasingly important way that museums are attempting to be more interactive and engaging, as well as to reach out to groups who have not traditionally visited the museum, is through programming, particularly efforts focused on families and youth. Museums are also working to support the learning of home-educating families, many of whom use museums regularly and are eager to have more personalised and in-depth experiences.<sup>14</sup> It is also significant that the majority of visitors to the Danish museums in the survey had heard about the museum through their social networks of family, friends or acquaintances.

### **SOCIO-CULTURAL NATURE OF LEARNING**

Whatever the group, what is important is that the museum experience is, in great part, shaped by the socio-cultural context, both the perceptions of museums as institutions brought to the visit, and the actual on

the ground, in-museum interactions groups have during the visit or programme. These socio-cultural dimensions are not independent; they shape and are shaped by each other and play a role in shaping the museum experience, be it in an exhibition or through a programme.

In fact, a uniquely rich aspect of museums is their ability, if designed well and in partnership with their audiences, to tap into the very nature of learning, since socio-cultural factors are key to the learning process. Research shows that learning involves others; we construct meaning by interacting and sharing within these rich socio-cultural / physical contexts.<sup>15</sup> We learn through group interaction, conversations, gestures, emotions, and watching one other. In fact, if we specifically focus on families, they are the very first learning group a person belongs to; a group considered so essential that anthropologists, sociologists and social psychologists refer to the family as an educational institution, without the bricks and mortar.

Our brains are wired to learn through stories and narrative.<sup>16</sup> Intergenerational, school and all-adult groups learn by talking, watching and interacting; even when alone, a visitor is interacting with those who created the experience.<sup>17</sup> At the most basic level, learning is identity-building.<sup>18</sup> Visiting groups use museums to shape and reinforce their individual/collective identity. Our activities should be about them and their needs, rather than the needs of the institution.

We are so wired to learn socio-culturally that I believe museums should be positioning themselves in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as social learning spaces. Groups bring many assets to their visits: shared background, history and knowledge; for the most part they understand how others in the group learn, their interests, strengths and weaknesses. Most are choosing to be there because they find places like museums interesting and enjoyable. They are settings in which to converse, collaborate and construct their *own* experience using the objects and activities the institution offers. Visitors make meaning together, ideally in enjoyable and fun ways, what my colleague, Marilyn Solvay coined, “laughing and learning”.

### **A RESEARCH-BASED APPROACH TO INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING**

So how can embracing the socio-cultural nature of museums and learning at the level of visitor interactions help one respond to the question raised earlier: Are museums doing everything they can do, even with their current visitors, to support the socio-cultural resources, identities and motivations that groups bring to the experience? A recent Oregon State University (OSU) research study conducted by Scott Pattison at Oregon Museum of Science & Industry (OMSI) would suggest perhaps not.<sup>19</sup>

In this study, Pattison investigated *unstructured* interactions between staff and family visitors to OMSI, the many unscripted conversations and



interactions that occur regularly between staff and visitors, which likely represent the most common type of staff-mediated experience in museums. His early review of the literature showed a dearth of research on this topic, with only two notable exceptions: a mixed-method study of zoo educators<sup>20</sup> and a qualitative study of living history museum interpreters.<sup>21</sup> Findings from both of these studies indicated that the ways in which staff facilitation interacts with the socio-cultural context of family learning is important to understanding the nature and outcomes of these interactions.

This study was framed within everyday social interaction and sociolinguistics literature. Such research has rarely been applied to the study of behaviour and learning in free-choice settings but offers insights into the rules and patterns that govern everyday interactions and likely shape unstructured staff-visitor interactions.<sup>22</sup> Findings highlight the importance of opening sequences such as greeting, the negotiation of roles and relationships, and nonverbal communication.<sup>23</sup>

Pattison inductively coded and analysed 63 videotapes of unstructured staff-family interactions in two lab spaces at OMSI. The analysis highlighted the importance of role negotiation between staff and adult family members, particularly during the initiation of interactions, the balancing of staff and visitor facilitation, and the introduction of new learning goals by staff members. Aligned with prior research on family learning in museums, adult family members played a critical role in shaping the nature of the interactions and determining the level of involvement and the success of staff members. Four themes emerged from the qualitative analysis:

1. Staff-visitor interactions in these settings are complex social encounters, defined by ongoing role negotiation.
2. The opening greeting and role negotiation strongly influenced the nature of the interaction.
3. Adult visitors played a critical role during interactions with staff.
4. The physical context of the interaction affords and constrains the negotiation of roles between staff and visitors.

Study findings highlighted unstructured staff-family interactions as challenging contexts for front-line museum educators, with adults in families playing a strong role even in the presence of museum educators. Adults used a variety of strategies to maintain and support their role as learning facilitators for their families; in most cases, it was clear that there were tensions between staff and adult perceptions of who was 'in charge' and what the focus of the experience was to be. Very few staff members even introduced themselves and they seemed to have an implicit idea that their job was to teach science to the family, often directing their attention to children in the family and not respecting that in many cases facilitation was already underway, either directed by adults in the family or in a few cases by children.

The findings reinforce much of what we know from studies of family learning in museums more generally. Prior research indicates that adult visitors come to museums with identities, motivations, and goals of their own, including for many a desire to facilitate learning for other family members,<sup>24</sup> which shape the nature and outcomes of their visits. However, in a very concrete way, this study demonstrates that even though the field knows this, its efforts to facilitate family learning for the most part are still focused on the museum meeting its agenda, in this case to teach science, rather than respecting and supporting the agenda of the family itself, which was sometimes aligned with the museum's but sometimes was focused on other equally appropriate outcomes: encouraging creativity, exploring together or discovering something new. The science centre in this case was missing the opportunity to support and build upon the socio-cultural resources, identities and motivations that families were bringing to the experience

Fortunately, Pattison is a Research & Evaluation Strategist on the OMSI staff, and so in partnership with museum educators, he has shared his findings and they have begun implementing facilitation strategies that recognise and support the unique role that adults play in family learning at OMSI. In particular, they are focusing on approaches that leverage the deep understanding parents and caregivers often have of their children's knowledge, interests and prior learning experiences, as well as adult family members' natural inclination to facilitate successful learning experiences for their families. They are also encouraging designers, exhibit developers, and front-line educators to work together to create learning environments that take into account the role of educational staff as they attempt to support family learning in respectful ways that leverage the ongoing interactions of families, appreciating in many cases that the design of the physical context may be just as critical to supporting successful staff-family interactions as the strategies used by front-line educators.

### **AN APPROACH TO THE DANISH CONTEXT**

I believe that a similar approach could be used to tackle a problem presented in the *User Survey 2012*. A major finding in the study is that youths & young adults (14-29) are significantly underrepresented in relationship to the rest of the sample of users and they are dissatisfied with school visits. Interestingly to me also were the three lowest scores in core services:

1. A lack of variety in museums' learning opportunities (7.6).
2. Decreased suitability for children (7.5).
3. Little possibility for active participation (6.7).<sup>25</sup>

I wondered if these low 'experience' scores could be contributing to less use by youths and young adults, as well as their dissatisfaction with school excursions.

I should acknowledge that this is not a Danish concern only. Although children consider museums interesting places to visit in order to see and learn about ‘cool’ things, in the U.S., the UK and Australia, children consistently say they prefer to visit with family rather than school.<sup>26</sup> In these studies, children indicated that they often prefer to visit museums with their families because they get to look at more things of interest to them personally; they get to ‘do’ things, and can talk to their families about what they are doing and seeing.<sup>27</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that as a result, research indicates that visiting museums as a child with one’s family correlates more highly with adult use of museums than visiting with a school group.<sup>28</sup> Research also demonstrates that children want purpose, choice and ownership in their visit and opportunities to be actively engaged.<sup>29</sup>

My major recommendation for improving interaction with schools would be to better tap into the socio-cultural needs of the children and youths themselves. Perhaps one could rely less on school administrators and teachers to design school visits. Talk to users directly; 14-18-year-olds could be great advisors. Also taking the literature into account, try to design experiences with real purpose by creating meaningful before, during and after visit experiences so that the museum visit is needed and valued by the students because it serves a purposeful function, just not a day away from school. Some museums in the U.S. are requiring a commitment from teachers that the museum visit will be used in meaningful ways; strategies include letting children design their visits, offering lengthier, deeper experiences and multiple visits.

### THE SOCIAL VALUE OF MUSEUMS

The second question I raised revolves around whether museums can learn to be of value to individuals, groups and society by framing their activities within the fabric of people’s lives, needs and community. The discussion of public value is in the air among museums and other cultural institutions as they strive to achieve strategic impact *for and with* their *communities*, rather than merely operational impact *for themselves*. At the most basic level, it is about ensuring that their work is fully and meaningfully connected to the fabric and true needs of the communities in which they reside and the audiences they serve.

It is important to recognise that public value is not a new concept for museums. Public museums in the U.S. in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century were founded with missions of supporting public good. John Cotton Dana, a progressive educator and museum director who founded the Newark Museum in 1909 as a resource for the working people of Newark, believed to his core that museums should be *useful* to their communities or not exist.<sup>30</sup> More recently, the U.S. Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) annually makes awards for museum excellence utilising

as a principal criterion, a ‘commitment to public service through exemplary and innovative programs and community partnerships’.

On the surface, approaches to accomplishing public good may seem to be only nuanced and subtle differences from what museums have always done, but like Pattison’s family learning research, the results are actually quite different and profound. Taking a community-centred approach focuses an institution on achieving strategic impact *for the community*, rather than operational impact *for the institution* itself. This distinction is important because unfortunately even with the best of intentions, starting from the perspective of the institution can result in activities that an institution *thinks* the community needs (or portions of the community at least), often leading to the conclusion that what the community needs most is a healthy and vital museum! This is a circular and self-serving argument. A healthy, vital museum is a means toward accomplishing public good, rather than the end goal itself.

The elephant in the room, of course, whether the field is willing to admit it or not, is that many museums are not as relevant to their communities as the professionals who work within them care to think. However, not to paint too bleak a picture, the truth is that many museums are grappling with how to be more intentional in terms of planning for, initiating and documenting public value, value defined by the community and its needs, rather than from the perspective of the institution. Strategic efforts that start from a community perspective reframe and use ‘why’ and ‘to what end’ language in describing the activities being undertaken by the museum. The major question that an institution needs to answer when planning strategically for public value from a community-centred perspective is: ‘How will my community be different in positive and recognised ways because the museum exists and undertook this effort?’ Sub-questions that can help one reframe and strengthen activities through this lens of community impact include:

- Who is/are the primary audience(s)? Why have you selected them?
- What specific needs or wants of the *audience* are being met?  
How do you know?
- Have the ‘right’ people been involved in planning *from the outset*?
- How will the audience benefit from the planned activities?  
How will you know?
- How will the *community as a whole* benefit from the activities?  
How will you know?

To successfully achieve public value requires a long-term commitment to continually engage and listen to the community, but the pay-offs for the museum, and most importantly, for the community, can be huge and highly gratifying. For instance, in an effort to reach the ‘less usual’ suspects, museums increasingly are investing in the creation and imple-

mentation of intensive programmes for families, children and youths, particularly focused on under-resourced communities including urban and rural areas. One effort, New York Hall of Science's Science Career Ladder programme in Queens, was established in 1986 and continues to be a place for diverse youths in the community. Research on the short-term impacts of this particular programme demonstrates that youths' interest and attitudes toward science improved, they developed communication, career preparation and other life skills, their self-confidence was strengthened and many learned science as well. For some youths, the programme has been transformative.<sup>31</sup> In another set of studies, which systematically investigated intensive youth programmes, outcomes were analysed within a larger socio-cultural and developmental context, demonstrating that these programmes also influenced family dynamics, giving young adults the opportunity to explore new roles, perspectives and identities within the family, as well as learn new things about family members. There was evidence that interests that young adults developed within the programme were carried over into the family context, resulting in shared family interests. Programmes also influenced young adults' contributions and connections to the larger community, fostering a tolerance of other people and cultures, and cultivating a sense of civic responsibility.<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly, research also shows that even though many of these programmes, even family ones, primarily focused on the children in the group, they positively influenced adults in the families individually, as well as the family as a whole. For example, summative evaluation studies of family programmes indicate that, in some cases, these programmes have enriched family relationships to some degree, changing not just what adults and children did together at the museum, but also how they interacted and communicated at other times, providing valuable opportunities for children and adults to engage in positive learning experiences together, something not offered in other parts of their lives. These programmes also often helped adults understand the importance of supporting their children's learning and boosted their confidence, as well as provided tools for them to be successful at this task.<sup>33</sup> The major innovation of such programming has been to involve participants in the activities of the museum in meaningful and productive ways, with an approach that is not merely exhibition-focused.

### **ADDRESSING GENDER ISSUES**

Findings from a retrospective research study I recently completed with Dale McCreedy at the Franklin Institute Science Museum, demonstrate that these impacts can be long-lasting as well.<sup>34</sup> Starting in the 1980s in the U.S., funders including the National Science Foundation (NSF) began supporting informal science education programmes for girls, many



of them occurring in museums. Evaluation work had shown that well-designed and implemented programmes offer rich and engaging experiences that often inspire girls and women in science in the short term. However, we wondered about their long-term impacts.

With funding from the NSF, we were able to pursue this line of inquiry. Our goal was to investigate whether girls-only, informal science experiences had potential long-term influences on young women's lives, both in terms of science and more generally. We wanted to explore a broad variety of impacts; not only the important yet fairly typical science education and career outcomes, but also changes in girls' interest, engagement, and participation in science-related leisure pursuits, hobbies, and ways of thinking about what science is and who does it. We wanted to consider how, and to what degree, young women's participation in informal science communities influenced their self-identity, including science, gender, cultural identity, and their ultimate relationship to sustained interest, engagement and participation with science.

This was not an experimental or quasi-experimental study. Appropriate to the participation and engagement goals of many informal STEM programmes for girls, we used a socio-cultural lens to frame the study and approached most of our data collection from a qualitative perspective. Since this was a retrospective study to explore *possible* long-term impacts (5-20+ years) of informal STEM experiences for girls, this was a study of girls who were most likely to have been influenced. We felt that it was a place to begin since we know so little about long-term impact. Research participants (174 young women) were recruited from six successful girls-only programmes whose focus was to engage girls, particularly girls from traditionally under-served communities, in free-choice/informal science education practices.

We conducted three investigations:

1. Personal Meaning Mapping (PMM) / in-depth interviews with a subset of young women.
2. A web-based questionnaire developed using the data from the PMM study.
3. Group conversations and the development of stories about girls' informal STEM programme experiences and their perceived impacts.<sup>35</sup>

We analysed the questionnaire data; three clusters of outcomes emerged:

1. Participants formed long-lasting memories of their experiences in the programmes.
2. Programme experiences influenced women's attitudes toward and understanding of science, shaping future education, careers, leisure pursuits, and ways of thinking about what science is and who does it.

3. Participation in these programmes helped to shape women's personal identities and their life trajectories.

First, these programmes were highly memorable, and memories of these experiences were critical resources in these girls' stories about their lives. Findings confirmed that these experiences were not only salient but, in some cases, powerful, as evidenced by the detail, diversity and emotional quality of the memories and stories women shared (memories were equally detailed and salient whether the young woman had participated 5 years or 20 years before). Young women recalled engaging in hands-on activities, trips, outdoor experiences, and specific skills and practices such as learning to be a facilitator at a museum. Young women also had strong, positive memories of the community of people with whom they interacted (mentors, programme leaders and peers); many girls were advised, mentored and supported long after they participated, particularly important to the young women who pursued science careers.

Years after the women could look back and say definitively that these experiences made significant contributions to their lives, both in the area of science and beyond. For some, science experiences were important to career choice. They discussed how participation had increased their understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of science. For others, the programme helped to build a sense of competence and a desire to teach or lead. Programme participation also supported participants' interest in science and their appreciation for the diversity of disciplines and practices embodied within it. Many discovered that science was interesting enough to merit continued focus through reading, television or hobbies.

In addition to these outcomes, women perceived that participation positively influenced their personal identity and agency, social capital, networks and skills, and commitment to civic engagement. Some women also felt that the programme had contributed to an increased sense of agency – including increased self-confidence, self-esteem and aspirations. Women also discussed changes in their identity – changes in trajectory, interests, sense of self – both in science and more general. There were also outcomes such as increased awareness, recognition and pride around gender and race-ethnicity-specific issues: “I received support and motivation, which I did not receive from others. The programme gives young girls an opportunity to participate in activities schools do not offer. It helps girls set aside any stereotypes set for women in the field of science and engineering.” Noteworthy, these programme effects – both science impacts and more general impacts – were particularly significant and impactful for girls living in urban areas when compared to those in suburban areas (unfortunately the sample size for rural girls was too small for statistical comparisons).

Recognising the complexity of documenting learning, particularly long-term learning, it is important to remember that the focus of this study was to determine how participation in these programmes *contributed* to women's long-term understanding of science, and most importantly to their relationship to and with science, so it is critical to reinforce that these programmes alone were not the reason for these impacts; participation in them *contributed* to these impacts. There was rich evidence that young women's experiences in these programmes were not isolated, but connected to their activities at school, home and in other free-choice learning settings and programmes.

### **SHIFTING NEEDS AND VALUES OF THE PUBLIC**

These research findings demonstrate the role that museums can play in supporting lifelong learning and public good, resulting in powerful, lasting effects. It also points to opportunities for partnerships that connect experiences across youths' lives. Continuity was very important so helping youths (or the audiences you are working with) to see your programme as one step in their learning trajectory is important. Although there is no doubt that the six programmes from which young women were drawn for this study were successful, they are not unlike other programmes offered by museums and community-based organisations elsewhere in the world. And although this study focused on young women, I am certain that similar outcomes would result for young men or co-educational programmes. At the core of this example is the ability of the museum to understand the shifting needs and values of the public they hope to serve. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, museums no longer have the 'luxury' of dictating top down what the public should receive; no longer can the museum expect that one approach, one label, one type of experience will satisfy all.

Successful museums in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be those who figure out how to develop long-lasting, meaningful relationships with their public; that means thinking of those they serve as assemblages of individuals and not as some undefined, mass 'public'. The successful museum will be an institution designed to provide a specific public with something of worth that they desire. A number of museums would argue that they exist to serve their community, that they are there to support civic engagement and to build social capital, but how many museums have made the effort to actually go into the communities they serve, or would like to serve, and ask them directly what it is that *they* really need, and then deliver on *that* need? This approach is starkly different from strategies used in the past, when priorities were set on the inside by a small group of individuals who felt they knew what the public needed; without the benefit, of course, of ever actually communicating with the people they claimed to be serving.

Arguably, the museum community's strongest public role in this new age is the recognition that, despite the wide variety of museums, all are *essentially* institutions of public education – particularly if we take a broad, 21<sup>st</sup> century view of learning and what it means to be a public education institution. People who come to museums do so, to a greater or lesser extent and often subconsciously, to engage in meaning-making, the fundamental core of learning and being human – to wonder, consider, question and/or to discover something about themselves, their companions and their place in the cosmos. Collectively, museums have an unfathomable number of resources – points of connection of unlimited possibility. Individually, they are found in all kinds of communities, proudly embraced as community assets.

Does this mean that museums should never try to expand visitors' horizons and challenge their thinking? The answer is obviously no. Museums will continue to be mission-driven with goals of their own. The museum agenda is no more, and no less important than a visitor's agenda; for true value to be achieved, both agendas need to be satisfied, and ideally, if possible, connected like a bridge. Museums invest a huge amount of their resources getting one side of the bridge 'right' – the objects, the scholarship around those objects, the design of the exhibitions and programmes, the skilled staff to interpret these ideas. However, most museums invest relatively little time and resources understanding the other side – the needs, interests, priorities, expectations and capabilities of the visitors and potential visitors who make up their public.

Perhaps the key to maximising the impact of an institution lies with finding that 'tipping point' which intellectually nudges individuals to actively engage with important topics, ideas and behaviours that are just beyond their current awareness. The nudge cannot be too small nor can it be too hard; and just to make matters more challenging, it is not going to be the same for every visitor. However, as the findings from the retrospective study demonstrate, these 'nudges', if created within an environment that feels safe and culturally relevant, and, if possible, includes knowledgeable and supportive guides, can result in major impacts. One of the most common outcomes the women in this study reported were changes in awareness – about science of course, but also about one another, themselves, the adults in their lives and the role of museums and other free-choice learning environments.

How to find this tipping point, the personalised 'nudge', that will make a difference in the lives of individuals in our communities? To accomplish this, we need to work more diligently at two levels. First, we must reshape institutional goals to make them more compatible with what we currently know about visitors' experiences in our institutions. Think of the work at OMSI where they are acknowledging and respecting both the strengths

and weaknesses of their museum as a learning institution and trying to make changes that respect and honour the resources families bring to their institution. It means taking seriously the importance of the identity-related needs and expectations that visitors arrive with; all of which involve learning at some level, but many of which sublimate learning to more social, emotional or aesthetic considerations.

In summary, I am arguing for a radical shift from traditional museum practice. This approach challenges the notion of the museum as authority and the visitor as learner and suggests a process through which the strengths of both are the basis for co-learning and the development of new knowledge and understanding – knowledge producing processes. The museum becomes a learning resource for all, including the staff working there, and takes on new meaning through this dynamic use. Whether the goal is fostering more frequent visits or building community, the world outside the museum's walls is experiencing dramatic change. The societal institution of museums needs to join in or I believe sadly be left behind. There is a fleeting opportunity for museums to embrace not just new ways of thinking about who they are – both internally and externally – but a new vision of how to engage and interact with their communities.



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# CULTURAL DEMOCRACY



# IF MUSEUM IS THE ANSWER

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Søren is currently engaged in teaching and developing courses and programmes in the field of Arts Management and Cultural Entrepreneurship. He is particularly interested in processes aimed at changing and reinventing cultural institutions and policies in order to bring about cultural democracy.



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## IF MUSEUM IS THE ANSWER

If museum is the answer, what might then the question be to which this answer would appear as sensible, interesting and engaging?

My claim is that while we cling to museum as the answer, we seem to have avoided the important discussion of what question the answer we already have in place might be the adequate response to. Thus, quite specifically, I do not aim to suggest that museums be abandoned. On the contrary, museums are, as I will argue, fundamental in the organising of societies, historical, present and future ones, and my discussion aims to be a contribution to the continued existence of museums.

We have forgotten what question our museum efforts are aimed at being the obvious answer to; there is a risk that the constant reiteration of the answer will look more and more like a Duracell rabbit. Do museums work through eternity? Yet, while eternity may have appeared as a relatively stable given at the birth of museums, thanks to God, the Church, the rich and the mighty, the question of eternity, or even the near future, is a much more debated question in our times.

My invitation is to rethink what the question should be in order to make sure that the museum is still an appropriate, interesting and relevant answer.

### CULTURE AND ITS LOGICS

Culture, as Ray has pointed out, is a system of mechanisms organising the relationship between the individual and the collective.<sup>1</sup> Among such mechanisms, we find the church, the law, the school, the tradition, the language and the customs. We also find art, knowledge, museums, theatres, music, literature and poetry. These mechanisms serve to organise how we as individuals relate to one another and to the communities of which we are a part. They function in strict and rigid ways organising the relationship between the individual and the collective in preset, predictable and rather stable ways. Examples of such mechanisms are criminal law, religions and customs. It appears that we prioritise stability, predictability and a low pace of change.

Change, uncertainty and experiment in these areas are evils, and we welcome regularity and the well-known: In Denmark, we dance around the Christmas tree, criminals are brought to justice, and marriage is for man and wife as prescribed in the holy Bible, and not for people who love each other.

Art, knowledge and taste are examples of organising the relationship between the individual and the collective in more loose ways. In these areas, diversity, instability, unpredictability and a high pace of change is accepted; art quickly becomes so last season, new knowledge is the steroid of our time, and having a particular taste is just such poor taste, as eclecticism *is* the taste of postmodernism.

### THE PROPERTIES OF THE MECHANISMS

The mechanisms of art, knowledge and taste hold four properties: Firstly, they have the ability to morph over time, and secondly, they are susceptible to influence from the collective to the individuals and from the individuals to the collective. Thirdly, they tend to institutionalise in ways that appear impressive and over time come to be taken for granted. And fourthly, once institutionalised, the mechanisms may even materialise in a concrete physical sense, appearing as glorious churches, austere courtrooms, impressive palaces, overwhelming monuments, awesome universities... and museums.

Museums are still a remarkable case, as they endeavour to organise perhaps the three most important domains of human life: our nature, our past and our imagination, each of which has been vested with a museum category of its own. In each of these vast domains, museums have been active and influential mechanisms in terms of organising the relationship between the individual and the collective.

At natural history museums, one would first gape at the divine creation in all its peculiarities, yet later attention would be directed at how the new divinity, the white European male, has succeeded in subduing all other species regardless of continent, colour or size. Be it flora or fauna, all would be there organised according to the white man's will and his intellectual and physical superiority.

In cultural history museums, one would gaze at a past organised first as providentially ordained, yet later as *the* past organised in accordance with the winner's tale, which by the way also happened to belong to the white European male. As Tony Bennett has pointed out, the past in this sense, is "*publically demarcated and represented*" as precisely the past, yet organised from the point of view of the present, from which it is paradoxically being separated as 'history'.<sup>2</sup>

In art museums, we may contemplate eight hundred years of organising the individuals' relations to the collective in terms of imagination, first as a formal representation of a divine episteme.<sup>3</sup> Later, as a normative representation of wealth and power, and since the Age of the Enlightenment, as

a glorification of the emancipative and creative powers of the white European male. Creative expressions by those not qualifying for this axiomatic standard would be exhibited in so-called ethnographic collections.<sup>4</sup>

### THE FIRST PROPERTY: MORPHING

Michel Foucault has pointed out that one is most likely wrong to think of mechanisms in linear ways.<sup>5</sup> What appears to us as self-evident and beyond any questioning, may well have come into being in the most haphazard ways: There are no such constants,<sup>6</sup> only discontinuities, no essence except one “*that was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms*”.<sup>7</sup> This means that the trajectory museums have followed from royal treasuries and follies, over personal *Wunderkammern* and teleological affirmations of the national states and national subjects to unquestionable human rights and obligations in democratic societies, is by no means a linear one. It is only our “*faith in metaphysics*”<sup>8</sup> that allows us to believe that these disparate and discontinuous events may be organised along one long string of time stretching from the beginning of time to its very end with our present as only a tiny knot linking them together. This thinking allows us a position as humble servants of history, and our role in tying the knot between history and eternity is merely one of paying our respect to the orderly course of time.

The genealogist, as Foucault would argue, is by no means convinced of this passive role in organising the transition between the past and the future. We have an active role, but also an interest in believing that our role is passive, as this works remarkably well as a stalking horse, arguing that museums are merely the result of history, not the producers of the present.

However, museums are nothing but producers of the present, precisely because they are an effective mechanism. Therefore, museums must be encouraged to realise that they are not the result of history standing before eternity. Museums are to stay in the imagery, soiled in oil, busy producing present reality. This entails an obligation to consider what present reality museums want to engage in producing. It also entails the ability of mechanisms to morph. Collecting objects, specimens and art, recording them, conserving them, researching them and displaying them does not mean the same thing over time.

Museums have been busy claiming that they only ‘apply the mechanism’, thus discharging themselves from their role in morphing. When asked ‘*Is it the role of the Tate specifically, and the national collections broadly, to reflect or to establish taste?*’, the director of Tate, Nicholas Serota, replied: “I think that the collections, if they are doing their job, will establish taste. There are plenty of examples going back to the nineteenth century

that demonstrate how the National Gallery established taste, particularly in terms of collecting early quattrocento painting. You could say that the same is true of Tate at certain moments, for example when it collected minimal art in the 1970s.”<sup>9</sup>

Serota's precautionous confession is exactly what I am getting at: Museums cannot seriously claim that they do not produce history, art and nature. Museums must assume the responsibility through their collections, records, preservation, research, display and communication of whatever narrative they construct, and not consciously or unconsciously try to hide behind an unchangeable mechanism.

### **THE SECOND PROPERTY: DOUBLE-BOUND INFLUENCING**

The second property about mechanisms is their ability to be susceptible to influence. The collective may influence the mechanism in order to change the way it organises the relationship between the individuals and the collective. In a similar way, the individuals may influence the mechanism in order to change the relationship between the collective and the individuals. This double-bound process of influencing the mechanism may appear in a number of different formats. Education is an example of the collective influencing the mechanism in a systematic way. In some mechanisms, the double-bound influencing occurs unexpectedly, perhaps unwillingly. In other cases, the process of double-bound influencing is organised in predictable and transparent ways. We may not like the schoolteacher, but we have a number of ways in which we can influence teaching. We may not agree with current politics, but we have ways of influencing politicians.

Museums rarely witness storming crowds of angry people tearing down their collections, nor do museum directors and curators come up for elections at certain intervals. These positions seem to be hermetically closed to the public, on whose nature, past and imagination the same positions will have a final say. These circuits are made up of people with so-called professional knowledge, i.e. formal education in a museum-relevant field.<sup>10</sup> There are legitimate arguments for devising the mechanism in this particular way: professional knowledge opposed to layman's knowledge, and competences opposed to amateurism etc.

In response to the use of art and culture in the totalitarian regimes of the 1930s and 40s culminating in World War II, the United Kingdom introduced the arm's length principle to ensure the independence of arts and culture from political influence.<sup>11</sup> This principle of supporting arts and culture became a model for governmental engagement. This principle, which functions as a kind of constitutional principle in arts and cultural policies, aims at freeing professional knowledge from political influence. Today, the arm's length principle is being used as a shield by artists or cultural profes-

sionals when politicians have the audacity to attempt to influence what is being supported and what is not.<sup>12</sup>

The purpose of this article is not to question the arm's length principle. The purpose is to point to the fact that however good and effective it may be in terms of protecting arts and culture from politicians, it leaves the public with only one way of influencing how their nature, past and imagination are being dealt with in museums: 'stay away'. The Danish Agency for Culture's annual User Survey is interesting because it thoroughly documents over time how widespread the 'stay away' mentality is practised by museums in opposition to citizens' wishes to participate.<sup>13</sup> In plain terms, it basically spells out that the way in which nature, the past and our imagination are put on display in museums is considered irrelevant, or outright offensive to large groups of the public – in particular those groups who have not acquired the same kinds of professional knowledge or share the same ethnic, religious or other codes as those working in the museums. Surely, tremendous efforts have been made, especially since the 1990s, to disseminate the museum experience to new users and to develop new user groups. However, these efforts aim at embracing more people from diverse backgrounds, but they do not challenge the fundamental assumption underlying the arm's length principle and its protection of professional knowledge. Governments, especially in the UK, but also in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and other countries, have gone very far in terms of putting restrictions on how professional knowledge is being exercised by adding demographic criteria such as gender, race, religion, sexual orientation etc. to other professional criteria. This has not resulted in unreserved enthusiasm as the McMaster Report *Supporting the Excellence in the Arts – From Measurement to Judgment* suggests.<sup>14</sup> The overwhelmingly impressive field of informants whom McMaster has asked how excellence can best be ensured through public support to the arts and culture all more or less unanimously state their own professional judgment as the best path ahead.

From this perspective, museums are devised as mechanisms organising the relationship between the individual and the collective in such a manner that the only way individuals can influence the collective is by voting with their feet – going or staying away. This particular way of organising the relationship is done with reference to events at different times and under different circumstances, and yet, no morphing seems to have occurred in this regard. The question is of course why museums do not seem to be willing to engage in more dialogue-based ways of organising their work, and why they do not want to engage in more procedural ways of establishing knowledge about nature, culture and imagination. The answers are most likely manifold, but in the following I will point to their institutionalisation as a main feature.



### THE THIRD PROPERTY: INSTITUTIONALISATION

Knowledge, as Foucault has pointed out, “*is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting*”.<sup>15</sup> What Foucault alludes to is two things: implicitly, the etymological root of science, which via transformations relates to the Latin verb *scindere*, meaning to cut and to divide, and explicitly, the discursive function of knowledge, i.e. its ability to create domains of truth in opposition to the surrounding domains of non-truth. These domains of truth legitimise themselves as scientific knowledge by what Lyotard terms the meta-narrative of the Enlightenment, i.e. the knowability of knowledge, which in plain terms means that knowledge can be true regardless of time, place and context.<sup>16</sup> This self-referential and self-perpetuating mechanism has its advantages in terms of organising the relationship between individuals and the collective. Education relies heavily on this mechanism, in the absence of which exams would have little meaning. Exams have little if any meaning all the same, as learning and not education should be the focus of our efforts and attention.<sup>17</sup> Yet, for our purpose, the example is illustrative as it relates how so-called professional knowledge is produced by a self-referential and self-perpetuating mechanism, the purpose of which is predominantly to “*legitimate the rules of its own game*”.<sup>18</sup> A prominent art museum director recently said in public: “*We want to give people access to the best art available.*” The enunciation consciously or unconsciously describes how professional knowledge implicitly legitimises itself in a robust circuit allowing those who are part of it to put their professional knowledge to use without having to legitimise it in any other ways than what is established by the professional knowledge itself. It also allows those in possession of such professional knowledge to implicitly discredit all other knowledge as non-true, whereby the self-perpetuating purpose of the mechanism is satisfied. With a robust circuit assuring the production and legitimisation of professional knowledge, we can go on by inquiring how such knowledge is best governed and controlled.

DiMaggio has pointed out that the forging of an institutionalised system is what allowed the elite of Boston of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to isolate high culture and to differentiate it from popular culture.<sup>19</sup> DiMaggio’s business is to show how an aesthetic ideology, a derivative of the good taste of the Old World, became instrumental in establishing, positioning and maintaining the privileges of the local elite. His argument is that they needed to accomplish three different interlinked tasks. The first task is entrepreneurship, in the sense of creating an organisational format, which they can govern and control. Secondly, classification is needed, which means a robust system that clearly defines boundaries between what is considered high art, and what is mere entertainment. The classification must be acknowledged by other classes and the state to ensure its legitimacy and also to allow it to be a privileged position that can be sanctioned e.g. through lack of sup-

port and recognition for other forms of culture. The third task is framing, i.e. a “*new etiquette of appropriation*”,<sup>20</sup> which regulates the relationship between audiences and the works of art.

At the museum, these three tasks materialised in what was to become a highly effective mechanism aimed at organising the relationship between individuals and the collective, not only in Boston, but also in the American society at large. The museum in itself provides an organisational format that can be governed in terms of what is put on display, but also how it is put on display, by whom and how the building, the arts and artefacts, the audiences, the circulation of information etc. can be controlled. The museum provides a clear demarcation between what is considered compatible with the aesthetic ideology of the elite and what is not. Entering the museum means facing high art and culture, whereas staying outside means ignorance about these. Finally, allowing visitors to admire the high art and culture of the elite, having duly paid their entrance fees, in itself became an etiquette of appropriation, as paying to be able to admire the taste of the elite had an educational effect on the lower classes in two ways: They would acknowledge the taste of the elite and its position as superior to their own, and at the same time, they would acknowledge the superior position of their own taste as unworthy of being put on display in a museum.

This institutionalisation of allegedly professional museum knowledge establishes an efficient mechanism, which in its own self-perpetuation can maintain its dominant position as a protagonist of the aesthetic ideology of the elite. The *User Survey 2012* shows a pattern in the use and non-use of museums that corresponds to the institutionalised mechanism described by DiMaggio, although more than a century has passed since the occurrence of the events he describes.<sup>21</sup> Museums are largely the prerogatives of the financial and intellectual elite, and in spite of tremendous efforts since the 1960s to broaden their popular appeal, they show little, if any, sign of broadening their demographic mandate. This situation is maintained, not as an outspoken political ambition, on the contrary, massive political efforts have been made all over Europe and in the US to break, or at least to modify the self-perpetuating institutionalisation of professional museum knowledge by adding democratic and demographic criteria in exchange for public support. Little has happened for the simple yet complex reason that professional museum knowledge is effectively protected from democratic influence through the arm’s length principle. Thanks to DiMaggio, we now understand that this is key to maintaining and defending museums as strongholds of elitist taste and desires.

### THE FOURTH PROPERTY: MATERIALISATION

Danish history from 1660 to the present is exhibited in 'Stories of Denmark' at the National Museum. More than 5,000 objects are on display in 37 rooms. The museum describes the principles behind the exhibition as follows: "The period from the introduction of the absolute monarchy up until today's welfare state has been characterised by continuity, but also by change. The story is not just one long account of progression – hence the title of the exhibition: Stories of Denmark. There is not just one story of Denmark, but many."<sup>22</sup> Polyphony is the ordering principle in addition to the 'long account of progression'. Progression, however wrapped up in more or less half-hearted polyphony, still seems to thoroughly inform the exhibition. Gay culture has been granted a voice in the choir of Danes, albeit not as a colourful, yet rather fundamental rejection of dominant family patterns in Denmark, but precisely through the artefact that marked the point when gay culture finally obtained the much desired emblem of the dominant family pattern with the legal marriage in 1989. Finally, this "deviant" culture was normalised as much as possible according to the norms of ordinary society, with the remarkable exception of the right to adopt children and hereby the possibility of disseminating the "deviant" culture to coming generations.

This striking example opens the fourth and final property of the mechanisms: their ability to materialise. Bennett points out that museums are about the reordering of things.<sup>23</sup> Reordering nature, history and our imagination in accordance with the current view on these, yet claiming scientific taxonomies to be the underlying principles. This leads to the conclusion that female artists throughout Western history are significantly worse or less imaginative than their male colleagues, as they account for only 10 – 20% of museums' collections.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, European citizens with ethnic backgrounds that differ from the dominant one in the country in which they live tend to never be absent from media coverage; paradoxically, the same citizens and their respective ethnicity seem to be completely absent from museum collections, organised as they are in order to exclude contributions from beyond the dominant culture.

Museums of natural history are organised as a reorganisation of nature in accordance with taxonomies such as the Linnaeusian, to show how man finally managed to bring order to nature's messiness. The devastating mess that the same mankind brought to nature, which is now threatening to extinguish mankind, on the other hand, is surprisingly absent from museum collections. Thus, the history of nature is organised in such a way that the true sovereign of nature, mankind, appears as marching through nature both as its superior but paradoxically also as its saviour, only in a denaturalised form.

Museums and their architectural appearances are themselves materialisations of a reordering of nature, past and imagination. The National Gallery of Denmark is raised five metres above the ground to give visitors the impression that they are entering the Parnassus of high spirits. Climbing the majestic stairs of the *Alte Pinakothek* in Munich gives an experience of how Art with a capital A is used to impose its tremendous powers upon the visitors' shoulders. Bennett refers to 19<sup>th</sup> century museum architecture: "*the individual must be allowed to contemplate the work displayed in order to be receptive to its beauty and uplifting influence*".<sup>25</sup> When materialising the museum as a mechanism organised through a mere ordering of space and objects, the relationship between individuals and the collective serves to lift spirits, not in any direction, but in the preferred direction of the community.

### LOOKING BACK – AND AHEAD

Looking at museums as a mechanism that organises the relationship between individuals and the collective, and highlighting four distinct, inter-related properties of these mechanisms has served the purpose of reconsidering what question 'museums' might be a relevant answer to. Museum as an answer has primarily been a response to the question of how to pacify, control, subdue, obliterate, discourage etc. the world views, imagination and self-understanding of the less fortunate, and simultaneously to erect a plinth of victory for the taste, ideologies and wishes of the financial and intellectual elite.

As the aesthetic ideologies of the financial and intellectual elite seem to be withering, along with a number of other ideologies and assumptions about the ordering of the world, it is not much to ask of museums that they reconsider their positions as handmaidens and lackeys of the elite. With democratisation processes evolving all over the world, enabled and powered by social media and new technologies, culture has become, as argued by Held and Moore, the lens through which we can understand the world.<sup>26</sup> Understanding this world from a sole elitist perspective seems unlikely to have much going for it as a continued strategic basis. On the contrary, such un-reflected, un-nuanced views are likely to end up in the global kitchen midden. On the other hand, taking on their responsibility as social engines, as active producers of the present, museums can again become focal points of knowledge production. Such focal points of knowledge production cannot make any claims to universality. But they can, by constantly reconsidering and renegotiating their position, become transit halls through which we as humans must pass. Not to feel superior, nor to feel humble, but to find a moment to consider what we might become, not at the expense of nature and our fellow man, but rather in dialogue with him. Thus, museums might become a relevant place to look for answers to the questions arising out of our discussion of what we might become – together.

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CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

IF MUSEUM IS THE ANSWER

















# WHEN AUDIENCES TEACH – OR THE REDEFINITION OF THE INSTITUTION

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## WHEN AUDIENCES TEACH – OR THE REDEFINITION OF THE INSTITUTION

Almost no matter who you ask in Danish cultural life these years, there seems to be a massive interest in the question of how to effectively address more citizens and reach the groups who do not use the institutions and other publicly funded cultural initiatives today, and at the same time increase the rate of return visits by the already established group of users.

Across the country, there have been a multitude of different audience initiatives under way in recent years and we are now reaching a level where the experience overall forms a sort of ‘backdrop’ for a more nuanced and immersed perspective on the relationships between the potential audience and the producing and controlling level in the cultural sector.

There is hardly any doubt that the institutional interest is sincere. The vast majority of decision makers in culture have long understood that an extension of the audience circuit also implies a possible expansion of revenue and, not least, a greater legitimacy for policy makers. This has led to a number of studies – conducted more or less professionally – and a subsequent steady stream of reports.

### REFLECTING TRANSFORMATION

User and audience surveys are being conducted frequently in relation to individual institutions and cultural activities within municipalities and regions, and as a kind of general sector initiatives under the auspices of the funding agencies and official bodies. The large annual User Survey on Museums in Denmark from the Danish Agency for Culture is an example of the latter. The in many ways exemplary and comprehensive study and examination of the users of our museums reflects the need to take the process one step further in order to get an even more timely and qualified image of the institutional challenges that museums face in relation to developing a relationship with the surrounding society to ensure that they are perceived as relevant and important to the community at large.

The user survey’s realisation of the museum branch being in the middle of a transformation process in relation to its dissemination of knowledge, where the research-based knowledge and learning potentials have become more of a joint project between the institutions and the citizens in the surrounding society, reflects, in many ways, the societal changes and the increased democratic expectations that those who are paying for the ‘party’ also have the right to be invited to take part in it. The cultural institutions are under increasing pressure to turn to those parts of the population whom they have no real experience in reaching out to. The

traditional and often normative publicly funded cultural offers in Denmark, which have long been synonymous with the culture-bearing national identity, now suddenly have to act far more pluralistically and experimentally in a development of multi-voice reflection spaces where narratives as well as knowledge are up for negotiation. The vast majority of the institutions lack experience, tools, inspiration and partners that would enable them to meet these challenges.

### **CHALLENGE OF REPRESENTATION**

From a political point of view, the demands for a democratisation of the cultural sector are increasing in terms of a more inclusive practice that may increase both audience volumes and the composition of the audience. If the political ambition is to create better conditions for all citizens' opportunities to take part in cultural life, thus creating space for a meeting and an interaction between different cultural traditions and the citizens' different experiences, knowledge and perspectives, then the institutional challenge is perhaps best described as a matter of artistic, performative and social representation in terms of repertoire, recruitment practice, audience and dissemination work, organisation etc. without lowering the requirements for quality and timeliness.

We are in a time of change, with all that this entails. Artists' way of producing, the channels used, the media, new patterns in audience consumption, institutions' and arts' democratic role and opportunities and responsibilities are constantly changing. From live digital displays of operas at the local cinema, subtitled performances at theatres and three-dimensional museum displays to interactive and partially user-led cultural projects online and in public spaces. Some of the main changes in the way we organise ourselves are supported by the professional, semi-professional and entertainment-based global social media and networking sites such as LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, the long-term political and democratic implications of which we have only seen the beginning.

### **HANGING ON TO DEVELOPMENT**

It is a great challenge for most cultural institutions simply to hang on to the development. The changes in society and participation are so extensive and rapid that dialogue with the new possibilities becomes a pure survival strategy for cultural institutions in the form we know them today. Especially for the small and medium-size institutions, finding a lasting way to deal with societal changes through a real transformation of their practice costs many resources, which they do not feel that they have. The ability to act interactively and openly in relation to the new reality is a prerequisite

for the development of both the institution and its employees, and it is worrying that a great number of institutions cannot see how they are supposed to be able to change their modus operandi.

According to the Danish Museum Act, the national and government-approved museums are under obligation to comply with five pillars: collection, registration, preservation, research and education. In many ways, these are logical areas, which naturally must be taken into account in any professional museum's operational practice. However, the very same pillars are perhaps a part of the problem in reaching out to a wider audience or to new audiences. The Museum Act does not clearly describe the importance of dissemination of the museums' knowledge to a non-professional group of receivers, whether these are citizens or other societal bodies. The museum as a communication platform – or if you like, as the scene of specific narratives or even storytelling for a potentially large public audience – is not sufficiently articulated, something which could be perceived as a reason for the somewhat outdated hierarchical structure in the relationship between the museum and the surrounding community. The lack of focus on dissemination issues also indicates why quite often there seems to be an absence of dialogue between the institution and the community it serves.

### **COMPLEX DEMANDS**

Especially in the major cities, cultural institutions' ability to reflect and incorporate the demographic and social complexity plays a significant role in relation to how they are experienced by the surrounding community. Demographic composition – not least the presence of a rapidly growing critical and well-educated mass of citizens with different cultural references and the digitisation of society, infrastructural changes and new media opportunities – places new demands on the institutions. The museums in e.g. Copenhagen will have to be able to meet, reflect and interact with the ongoing changes and urban development in order to be able to set an institutional cultural agenda in the future. Institutions that are perceived as outdated and old-fashioned find it harder and harder to recruit new employees, find other financial sources, create new partnerships etc. The judgement from society is as it is with competition: it is hard.

Reports from Denmark as well as from abroad show that institutions that are not able to change their reproductive patterns – in terms of content, research and education and perhaps especially in relation to the composition of their workforce and their selection of external partners – are less motivated to seek the necessary changes in their mindset and attitude in relation to reaching out to a wider audience.

## DEVELOPING INSTITUTIONS

In many of the case studies carried out by the Danish Centre for Arts & Interculture, we have seen a close correlation between how institutions perform and how they manage the transition between more traditional models of organisation skills, professional roles, attitudes, developmental perspectives and a new way of interacting with their surroundings, influencing all parts of the institution. Dialogue, renewal and openness are often highlighted as the key concepts for the development of institutions when adapting to the new reality. An increasing flow of knowledge and the development of skills among individuals and institutions and among employees with different perspectives and experiences seem to be necessary in order to exploit the new opportunities and at the same time provide the basis for new knowledge and stimulate further enhanced creativity within the institution itself.

When investigating some of the more progressive initiatives within the culture scene, we found indications that genuine and sincere audience engagement rather than a mere focus on the relationship between programme and repertoire, PR and audience, reaches far deeper into the organisation. It turns out that a promising audience engagement process is also about the recruitment of new employees and new skills, budgetary changes of priority, the establishment of new partnerships, new funding sources, new production methods, new communication strategies, new goals and perhaps even new assignments and new public agreements.

These indicators have already reached the political level leading to the formulation of new contracts and new demands on the institutions. The Royal Danish Theatre in Copenhagen – by far the largest cultural recipient of state funds in Denmark – has, as the Chairman of the Board phrased it, received an agreement with emphasis on audience, audience, audience and audience! In practice, this challenges all aspects of the theatre's way of working. The Royal Danish Theatre is now working on a strategy where the theatre's self-understanding and artistic responsibilities in a complex interaction and cooperation with its audiences, artists, and other institutions and organisations work together in shaping the institution's new identity.

## SENSORY CONCEPT AS A FRAMEWORK OF UNDERSTANDING

It is on this background that initiatives such as the national user survey on museums should be seen. The survey for 2012 focused on how the physical environment affects people's well-being and behaviour at the museum based on the thesis that the *atmosphere* is essential to the learning and education process of which the visitors are a part. Referring to the French

phenomenologist Merleau Ponty, the study sympathetically introduces the soft sensory concept of the *atmosphere* as a parameter to get a better understanding of what is going on in the meeting between the users and the museum, where the senses are recognised as the starting point for any meeting with an exhibition. The aim of the study is to develop new methods and tools for experience, development and learning that take both individual and collective experiences and knowledge into account. The results document, in a way, the complex and ambiguous factors that reflect the individual's visit to the museum.

The introduction of soft parameters and a greater focus on the experience help focus on one element of the professional museum practice that does not quite have the same status as research: the show, the exhibition, as an advanced space for dissemination, a narrative structure, a stage for stories and interaction, where the audience shapes the experience to a greater extent than in many other contexts, tapping into one of the largest development potentials for the museums.

It is quite an obvious idea, in a way, to add another dimension to the interpretation of visitor behaviour by addressing a non-verbal and non-specific element, which so clearly is part of the museum experience. But by doing that, you also raise awareness about a certain tension that has not yet been properly addressed: What does it mean if *atmosphere* plays a major role for the visitors in terms of changing the position of the otherwise very exact and verbal research tradition within museums? Does it only change the forms of sharing knowledge or will it also influence what museums put on show and how they do it?

### **AUDIENCE DEFINES RELEVANCE**

With the Chilean scientist Humberto Maturana's<sup>1</sup> words, "causality is in the minds of the observer" – or expressed less academically: The consistency (meaning) is in the minds of the audience. It is each single user of the institutions who defines the relevance of their visit. So the challenge is how to ensure that the museums of tomorrow will have a sufficient and fruitful dialogue with their users, ensuring that they are perceived as relevant and important? I agree that the new requirements and expectations of the museums indicate the need for a 'lovingly critical' look at the professional standards of research and training, developing museums' knowledge into an even more active social resource. The question is, though, from which position this happens and whether it is enough.

There is little doubt that the results from studies of this kind help to emphasise the importance of working with a deliberate educational design in the development of museums as a social learning space for knowledge-



producing processes and meetings. And it is encouraging that one of the objectives of the study is to create a tool that can help develop museums to become inclusive institutions that can support the development of cultural democracy. It is a strength in the design of the user survey that it is so clearly linked to the establishment of cross-sectoral learning partnerships between institutions and groups of citizens with different social and cultural backgrounds as a prerequisite for museums to live up to their democratic responsibilities as learning environments and knowledge institutions in society.

### **SEGMENTATION MODELS AS OPERATIONAL TOOLS**

With the study in hand, you are provided with a very detailed picture of the users, and both the Gallup Kompas' nine segments that have been applied and John Falk's six-segment segmentation model make good sense in terms of getting an operational picture of the visitors and as a meaningful way to concentrate the collected data. Similarly, the Dutch Uitburo collected segment data in a number of cities for years using an eight-segment model, and the largest state-funded performing arts institutions in Oslo are currently working with another segmentation model in a performer project in collaboration with one of the UK's largest players in the field. Segmentation as a working model reflects an international movement towards getting a functional grasp of the challenge of how to understand the audience – or at least the audience that the institutions already have.

This brings us back to the question of what museums and cultural institutions put on show. It is fine, of course, that museums start reflecting on how they communicate and disseminate research-based knowledge in relation to a sensory framework and the audience's experience from visiting the museums. However, this is not necessarily enough in order to be perceived as relevant to the general public, at least not if you ask those who do not make use of the cultural offers.

A comprehensive report about Danish cultural habits and leisure activities,<sup>2</sup> which was published in the autumn of 2012, showed that although cultural participation is increasing (now 64% of the population), a good third of the population does still not make any use of publicly funded cultural activities. And although the report immediately got an enthusiastic reception by the then Minister for Culture and by the Danish public at large, a scrutiny of the figures showed that there is still a long way to go when one in every three Danes declines the invitation to participate in the publicly funded cultural offers with the argument that they do not experience the activities to be relevant to them.

### **IT IS NOT RELEVANT!**

The report presents quite a lot of interesting new material, and the analyses of the survey got the Minister for Culture to highlight the Danish practice of performance contracts as a way to ensure that the institutions receiving public funds are constantly aware of the audience perspective and the need to work hard to make sure that as many people as possible will experience them as a genuine offer. For the first time ever, the report mapped new citizens' cultural habits. They are clearly left behind when it comes to use of traditionally 'highbrow' art and culture such as theatre, museums and concerts. Every one in three has never been to a museum, one in five has never been to a theatre and one in ten has never visited a concert hall. Several interviewees expressed that they do not feel invited to participate, they do not experience the cultural offers as relevant to them, and they expressed that a lack of time, a lack of interest and a fairly high price image also play a role in their rejection of the offers. But their main reason was aimed at content. The 'stories' told are not perceived as relevant, or the institutions simply fail to explain why their offers might be relevant to the groups often described as non-users.

The new Danes' 'lack of interest' emphasises that cultural institutions still have a long way to go in terms of establishing long-term and sustainable relations with the new Danes. There is a profound need for a nuanced picture of who the new Danes are, in the same way that one has to build up a picture of who the other segments of the population who reject the publicly funded cultural experiences are. It is not at all a homogeneous group, but rather a heterogeneous mass that reflects the diverse reality in which we all live. And new investigations of the cultural behaviour of citizens with non-western backgrounds in greater Copenhagen show that they definitely make use of cultural offers in a parallel structure outside the normative mainstream.

### **INVESTIGATING EXPERIENCES**

A few years ago, the Danish Centre for Arts & Interculture performed a study, on behalf of the Danish Centre for Culture and Experience Economy, of the reflections made by 40 major Danish cultural institutions in relation to their audience.<sup>3</sup> The institutions were asked to participate in a varied experience exchange about methods, perspectives and opportunities for audience development: What are the consequences and outcomes for the cultural institution when a deliberate strategy is implemented about the work of establishing new audience relationships and extended audiences? They were also asked to answer questions about rethinking the task, methods, the role of the institution and their possible partners. The idea was that the perspectives and issues that they would raise might be

relevant for all players on the Danish culture scene – regardless of size, governance and commissioning.

The study showed that most of the institutions appear to be searching for the same ‘key’ that would unlock the transformation from perceiving the audience as ‘customers’ to seeing them as ‘co-perceivers’ and perhaps even as ‘co-creators’. There was broad agreement amongst the experienced institutions that audience development is not about developing audiences, but rather about the development of the organisation that seeks to renew its audience. That any outreach initiative requires an in-reach ditto – a critical look at the organisation itself.

Efforts to renew the audience are closely linked to all other parts of cultural institutions or cultural project conditions. Each cultural institution has its own special and very different policies and framework, and the work with audience engagement is basically something that must start from within the organisation.

### **COMING CLOSER TO WHAT IS NEEDED**

The Danish Agency for Culture’s national user survey, the large report about Danish cultural habits, and our own studies of the experience of varied audience work all suggest that we are continually getting closer to a clarification of what appears to be needed for cultural institutions and projects to come into contact with and attract a larger proportion of the population to a higher extent than is currently the case.

It is about thinking across existing boundaries and structural limitations and creating some incentives to develop and use modern communication methods, using innovation and inclusive methods that can contribute to increased diversity in the cultural offers, and thus create greater resonance with the potential audience and ultimately contribute to a better use of the growth potential in the cultural sector as such.

And it is about delegation of power, or rather delegation of influence on what is to be shown – in order to create space for new stories, new perspectives and new skills. It is about increasingly creating the framework for the stories told together with the users. It is about seeking renewal through new partnerships, new competencies, not least through the support of networks responsible for the exchange of knowledge and dissemination in the field.

Obviously, the institutions have a responsibility to boost development, but there is an even greater need for some overarching political incentives or requirements about greater diversification and broader goals in terms of users if the institutions are to be able to meet the demands. Cultural de-

mocracy is only possible if the institutions are part of a real dialogue with the users who do not see the institutions as relevant. That is maybe one of the important lessons about engaging with the audience. The audience will both be part of an educational and social practice and regarded as an equal part in the process.

### **A HETEROGENEOUS LANDSCAPE**

At the same time, the surveys and studies provide us with a picture of a Danish cultural landscape in at least three stages. The cultural infrastructure in the country is simply very different on the eastern and western sides of the Great Belt, respectively. There are large regional differences in how people experience artistic events, cultural institutions and products, and their role and assumed responsibility in society. It is striking to see the extent to which local and regional cultural priorities – or the lack thereof – have led to a cultural landscape in Denmark with very different approaches to the role that arts and culture play in society as a whole and in the local community in particular.

Not least when it comes to initiatives or projects closely related to the audiences' perspectives, local expectations and the need to renew repertoires or programmes, is there a need for further development of overall nationwide action initiatives and incentives.

### **PARTICIPATION AS SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT**


The importance of being able to embrace and promote increased user participation and cultural diversity in modern society is multifaceted, especially when put into a global perspective. It affects not only the arts and culture sector locally, but also the concept of culture as such and the community at large. It is about identities, production environments, innovative growth layers, creative and highly skilled culture workers, business start-ups, investments, self-perception etc. In order to meet this challenge politically, audience engagement and cultural diversity should be thought of as a focal point for new approaches, new investments and new projects, free from the more traditional cultural distribution practice, which relates to the individual disciplines in a sector-divided competence and organisational structure.

However, it is crucial that quality, innovation and renewal underlie the priorities in the institutions, and that a reflective practice is established that can incorporate both the users' different perspectives and the institutional need for research and dialogue.

## *Endnotes*

- 1 Humberto Maturana (born September 14, 1928, in Santiago, Chile) is a Chilean biologist and particularly known for creating the term autopoiesis about the nature of reflexive feedback mechanisms in living systems. His work has been influential in many fields mostly with the biology of cognition.
- 2 Bak, Lene (ed.) and Anne Sophie Madsen, Bettina Henrichsen and Søren Trolborg: "Danskernes Kulturvaner 2012", Kulturministeriet, Udarbejdet af: Epinion A/S og Pluss Leadership A/S, Copenhagen, November 2012 (ISBN 978-87-7960-140-6).
- 3 Aidt, Mik (Ed.) and Sofie Henningsen, Niels Righolt: "Fra Guder til Tjenere", Center for Kunst & Interkultur, Copenhagen, Februar 2012 (ISBN 978-87-993435-3-9).





**MUSEUMS – Social Learning Spaces  
and Knowledge Producing Processes**

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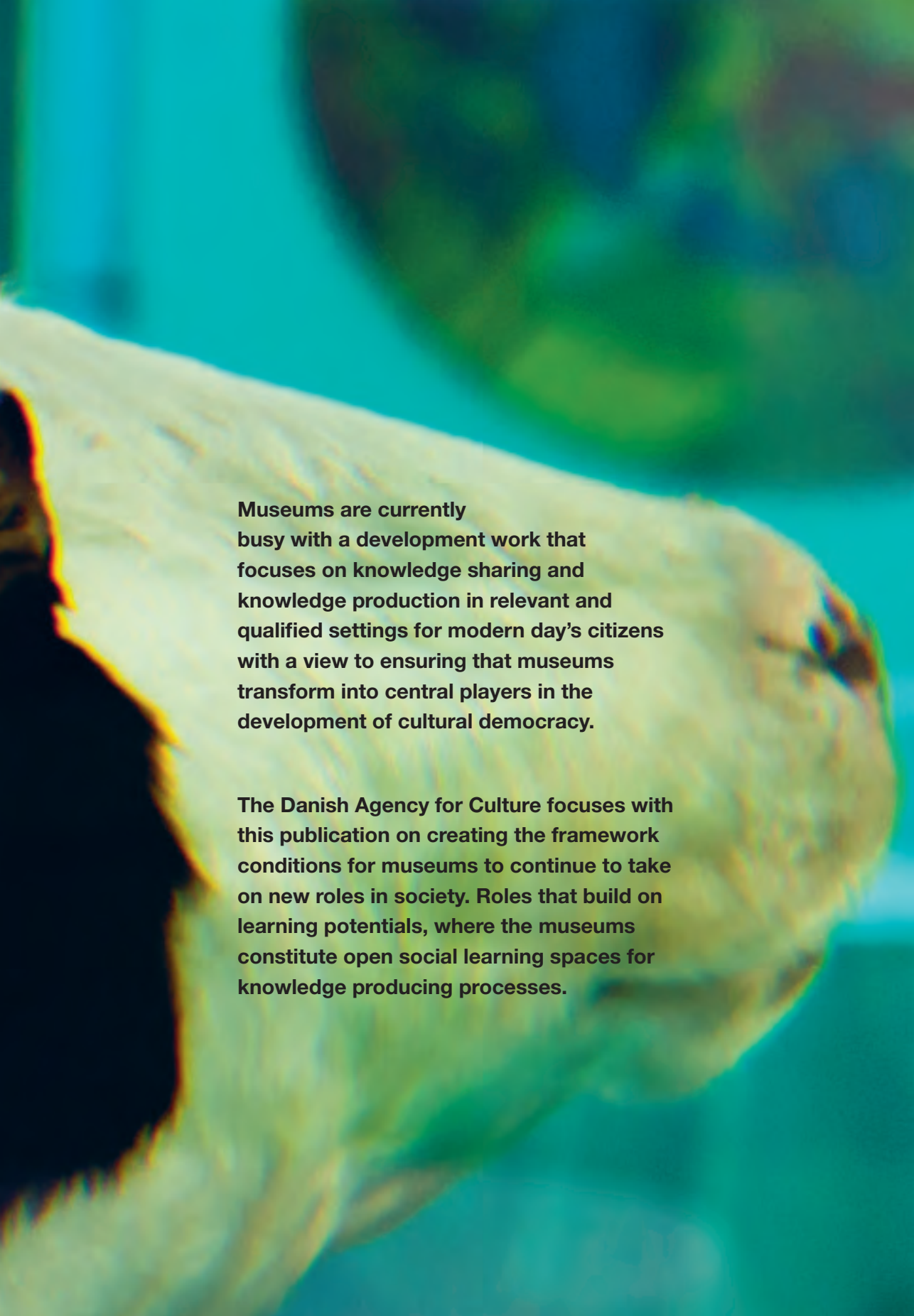


# **MUSEUMS** **SOCIAL** **LEARNING** **SPACES** **AND** **KNOWLEDGE** **PRODUCING** **PROCESSES**

**The act of using museums is a social event, and the atmosphere – as a setting for differentiated learning opportunities – plays a decisive role in citizens’ use of museums. The atmosphere contributes to the development of potentials for social learning spaces and knowledge producing processes. But – what is the character of such spaces?**

**The User Survey is a strategic tool for changing social inequalities and for promoting cultural democracy. It forms the basis for the development of new methods and practice forms that build on organisation development, new curatorial practices and a rethink of the museums’ physical settings and digital presence.**





**Museums are currently busy with a development work that focuses on knowledge sharing and knowledge production in relevant and qualified settings for modern day's citizens with a view to ensuring that museums transform into central players in the development of cultural democracy.**

**The Danish Agency for Culture focuses with this publication on creating the framework conditions for museums to continue to take on new roles in society. Roles that build on learning potentials, where the museums constitute open social learning spaces for knowledge producing processes.**