



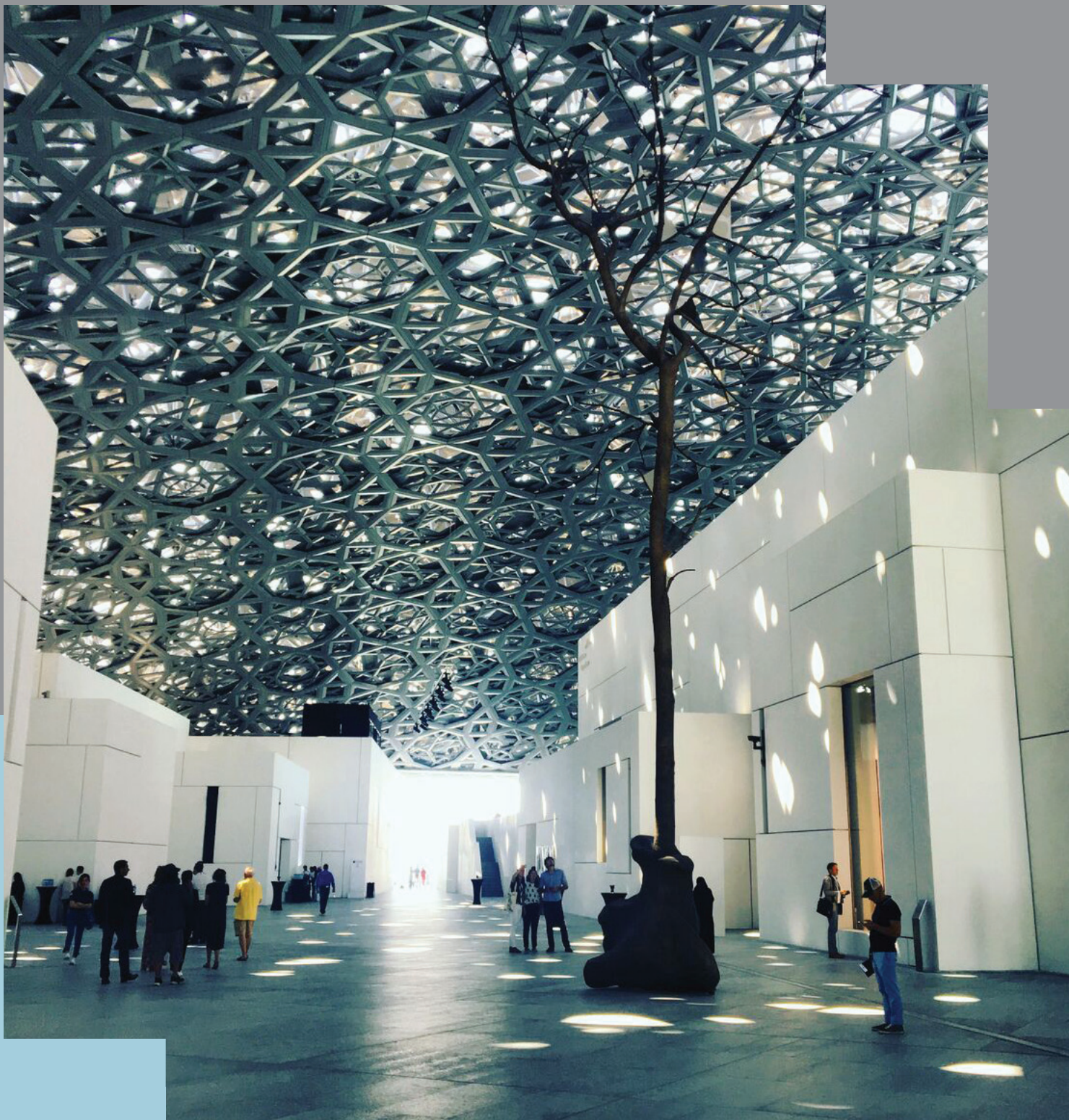
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# Museological Review: Museums of the Future

A Peer-Reviewed Journal Edited by the Students of  
the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester



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Cover image: The Louvre Abu Dhabi Museum of Art, Atelier Jean Nouvel, 2017. Photo © Sophie Kazan

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## Contents

<b>Note from the Editors .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The Editors' Interview .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Sophie Kazan, Gina Wouters, Jimmy Fok Yeung	
<b>Museums of the Future: Embracing digital strategies, technology and accessibility.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Mark D. Osterman	
<b>The sonic threshold of the Museum of the Future.....</b>	<b>18</b>
Giacomo Pompanin, Stefania Zardini Lacedelli	
<b>#DayofFacts, Museums, and Socially Purposeful Practice: The Future of Museological Public Service .....</b>	<b>19</b>
Miranda L. Chavis	
<b>The Platform-Museum: conceptual revolutions and practical implications .....</b>	<b>30</b>
Stefania Zardini Lacedelli	
<b>Ongoing Cultural Phenomenon as Future Museum Objects .....</b>	<b>43</b>
Sumi Kim	
<b>When matter becomes a monster:Examining Anthropocenic Objects in Museums.....</b>	<b>44</b>
Bergsveinn Þórsson	
<b>Future museums as educational labs: lessons learned from MoMA's Young People's Gallery (1937-1957).....</b>	<b>54</b>
Sara Torres Vega	
<b>How can museums work with hospitals? .....</b>	<b>63</b>
Nuala Morse, Carolyn Bloor	
<b>Museums and Innovations .....</b>	<b>68</b>
Zoi Tsiviltidou	

## Note from the Editors

Welcome to Issue 22 of *Museological Review*. This year's issue takes as its theme the concept of Museums of the Future. It seeks to explore future museum practice, museum ontologies and museum experiences in the light of innovations at a technological, curatorial, educational and communicational level, while analysing the implications that the latter have for the conceptualisation of the museum of the future in a global context and its social sustainability and impact.

Our front cover image, captured by our editor **Sophie Kazan**, is an interior shot of the Louvre Abu Dhabi Art Museum, designed by the Ateliers Jean Nouvel. The Louvre Abu Dhabi welcomed its first visitors in November 2017.

Following the trail blazed by previous editions, this issue utilizes a wide range of platforms including academic articles, visual submissions, a book review and a Q&A. However, considering that this year's issue discusses innovation, it was deemed appropriate to come up with our innovation as well. Hence, this year's issue introduces a new item: Interview responses with museum professionals from around the world being put together in a single interview format that could be read as a global conversation. **Gina Wouters, Sophie Kazan** and **Jimmy Fok Yeung**, members of the editorial team, conducted interviews with museum professionals, participating in some kind of innovation (mostly museum making projects). The responses of these professionals, who have diverse museum experiences from institutions around the world, underscored both the diversity and the similarities of global museum practice and its implications for the future museum.

The edition then features two works that contribute to a discussion of the impact of innovative technologies on the museum experience. **Mark Osterman's** paper explores how the applications of innovative interactive technology could enhance future museum experience and enable future museums to serve their mission for accessibility and inclusivity. **Giacomo Pompanin's** and **Stefania Zardini Lacedelli's** visual submission explores a multimedia radioguide which encourages users to envision a virtual museum.

The discussion then shifts to discuss the post-digital and communicational concept of platform in relation to the future museum practice. **Miranda Chavis** examines the future of museological public service in relation to the use of progressive communication platforms. **Stefania Zardini Lacedelli's** submission explores a new platform model for museums, examining the evolution of the museum in an intangible entity.

Seeking to envision innovation in the curatorial practice, the issue includes two submissions who examine curatable museum objects of the future museums. **Sumi Kim's** visual submission comments on the influence of Korean Wave in the curatorial practices of The National -but simultaneously global- Museum of Korean Contemporary History. **Bergsveinn Þórsson's** paper discusses the addition of two anthropocenic objects, plastiglomerate and fatberg, in the future museum collections.

An academic article by **Sara Torres**, bridges the past with the future by analysing museums as labs with reference to MOMA's educational history. And as innovation can emerge through a thorough analysis of lessons learned at the past, a Q&A by **Carolyn Bloore** and **Nuala Morse**, draws on a past V&A Museum of Childhood Hospital Schools programme, to envision how future museums could be involved in untypical partnerships to fulfil their social role.

Finally, the edition features a book review by **Zoi Tsilvitidou**. Tsilvitidou reviews Antos, Fromm, and Golding's *Museum Innovations*, focusing at the (re)interpretation of the terms 'museum' and 'ethnography' in the context of a more participatory and socially-driven practice.

**Katerina Vlachaki (Editor-in-chief), Amornchat Sermcheep, Jimmy Fok Yeung, Gina Wouters and Sophie Kazan**

## The Editors' Interview

**Sophie Kazan, Gina Wouters, Jimmy Fok Yeung**

*To celebrate this achievement and inspired by the 2018 Review's theme of Museums of the Future, the Editorial team have reached out to museum professionals directly in a new item, The Editor's Interview. Following on from the theme of embracing digital strategies, technology and accessibility, members of the editorial team have interviewed museum professionals with distinctly different museum experiences from around the world, bringing their responses together in a single interview format that we hope will read like a global conversation and show not only global diversities but also world-wide similarities.*

Note: The museum professionals were interviewed individually (apart from Valerie Hillings and Maisa Al Qassimi). Their responses are not featured in a consistent sequence for the sake of flow.

### **The museum professionals:**

**Eve Tam, Chief curator of Hong Kong Museum of Art,**

**Valerie Hillings, Associate Director of Curatorial Affairs, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation Abu Dhabi Project**

**Maisa Al Qassimi, Programmes Manager, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi.**

**Elizabeth Merritt, Strategic Foresight and Founding Director, Center for the Future of Museums, Arlington, VA, United States of America.**

## As an introduction/background, please could you let us know what museum innovation that you are taking part in?

**Valerie Hillings / Maisa Al Qassimi** - We are fortunate to be a part of building a new institution from the ground up, allowing us to participate in the rethinking of art history. Guggenheim Abu Dhabi will be located in the United Arab Emirates, a historical and contemporary gateway that brings together people and cultures from all over the world.

Finding and celebrating points of interconnection in contemporary art will enable us to explore histories and ideas from around the globe and commonalities among cultures. The Guggenheim Abu Dhabi collection includes numerous works by artists that examine the expressive potential of calligraphy. Some artists focus on given letters, for instance Parviz Tanavoli's *Big Heech* (1973); others evoke its methods while employing distinctive techniques such as Gu Wenda's use of human hair in *United Nations–Silk Road* (2000). Various artists explore the meditative potential of writing in their art as for example Shirazeh Houshiary's painting *Luminous Darkness* (1998), and still others evoke the human figure as in Rachid Koraïchi's installation *Le Chemin des Roses* (Path of Roses) (1995–2005).

**Eve Tam** - The Hong Kong Museum of Art is undergoing a major renovation project, which has begun in 2015. The museum was established in 1962 and moved to its current purpose-built premise at the side of the Victoria Harbour in 1991. We closed the museum in 2015 to launch the renovation project and it will be opened in around mid-2019. The main purpose of the project is to increase the visual transparency of the museum building and the interaction with the public through the renovated design. Four entrances, including barrier free access, will be provided after the renovation which will allow the public to enter the museum from different directions around the building. This will further enhance the accessibility of the museum and its interaction with the audience by constructing a friendlier environment.

**Elizabeth Merritt** - When the Alliance launched the Center for the Future of Museums (CFM) in 2008, one of our goals was to encourage museum practitioners to exercise their creativity and support risk-taking and innovation. In his book *Diffusion of Innovation*, Everett Rogers observed that only 2.5% of any given set of organizations are actually innovators, and we've found this holds true for the museum sector as well. Rather than trying to push more museums into that small cadre of innovators, we've focused our efforts on increasing the speed at which useful innovations diffuse into the rest of the field. Rogers postulated that four main elements influence the spread of a new idea: the innovation itself, communication channels, time, and a social system. Through CFM, the Alliance identifies potentially useful innovations from any sector and uses our communications channels (e.g., our blogs, conference, magazine, social media) to explore how these innovations can help museum

practice. To Rogers' point about social systems, one of the most important things we do is to encourage museums to be more open to experimentation, rough prototyping and failure in the process of finding new ways to succeed.

## How would you position your museum/ institution in the future, how do you think about the future of museum sector? What is your vision on it?

**Elizabeth Merritt** – The Alliance's vision for the future is “a world informed and enriched by thriving museums.” CFM's role is helping the field imagine the many plausible ways the future may unfold and create strategies that will enable them to thrive in whatever future comes to pass. For much of the last century, museums as a whole could depend on a significant chunk of their funding coming from local, state, and federal government sources. But government income of all sorts has been declining over the past forty years—a trend that accelerated during the financial crisis of 2008. Now we see an increasing number of states and municipalities asking non-profits, including museums, to pay into the system, charging fees known as Payments in Lieu of Taxes. Some research suggests that the next generation of donors will favour giving to social service non-profits in preference to cultural organizations, and when they do give to museums they will want to see credible evidence of the impact they've achieved through their support. In a future shaped by these trends, I hope we see museums developing new mission-related income streams, and getting better at documenting how they make people's lives happier, healthier, and more fulfilling. That may mean that more museums shape themselves around the needs of their communities, with fewer focusing on an idealized image of what a museum looks like, or how it behaves. The Alliance has been paying a lot of attention to the future of P-12 education, and we hope that in the coming century museums play a more integrated, and integral, role in the next educational era. We can see bits of that future today—museums that operate schools, schools that model themselves on museums, teachers that use their community's museums as their extended classroom. So here is one inspiring vision: in the future, a quarter of children in the US “go to school in a museum” in some way, shape, or form.

**Valerie Hillings / Maisa Al Qassimi** - Guggenheim Abu Dhabi will celebrate developments in contemporary art. Art is a barometer of our time that also offers a glimpse of the future. The museum will be a dynamic platform that will continuously evolve, with its local and regional communities, tourists, and online audiences. In this sense, it will always be open to innovation, from its modes of display to its programmatic models, etc. Last year, as part of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi collection exhibition *The Creative Act: Performance, Process, Presence*, we organized a dynamic program with the artist Susan Hefuna, Abu Dhabi Crossroads, which was comprised of a short art historical lecture and conversation with the artist followed by a performance by members of New York University Abu Dhabi's student-run Attitude Dance Society, which was choreographed in collaboration with the artist and presented in the galleries where her work was on view. Related workshops offered after the performance, were inspired by Hefuna's work and that of other collection artists featured in the exhibition. Such hybrid programs appeal to diverse audiences, evidenced by the 500 people we welcomed that evening.

**Eve Tam** - The role of a museum professional is no longer to simply impart knowledge to the public about objects on display as part of a museum's educational mission. Both now and in the future, we serve as conveners and facilitators who can create encounters and experiences that encourage visitors to see the world from multiple perspectives and engage in conversations about art and society.

## How do you understand international co-operations between museums across the world? How can we overcome the challenges that we may face in terms of international collaboration?

**Elizabeth Merritt** - The common trait that I see shared by futures-facing museums across the globe is a willingness to identify the one most important thing they want to achieve in the world, and to let everything else they do change, if needed, to support that goal. Museums that are anchored to the past tend to want to control all the variables: where they are located, what they collect, how they design exhibits, who they partner with, where they get their money. Organizations can't constrain all those variables, be sustainable AND maximize their impact all at the same time. The mission of Project Row Houses in Houston, Tex., is to “empower people and enrich communities through engagement, art, & direct action.” So yes, PRH has art exhibits and artists residencies, and it also provides housing for young mothers, a business incubator for local startups, partners to create affordable housing, hosts community markets, and provides tutoring for neighborhood students. Rather than running a traditional capital campaign to increase the size of their building, the Children's Museum of

Richmond (Virginia) creates satellite sites in multiple neighborhoods the better to reach children who can benefit from their services. This is one reason I believe that as museums evolve into the 21st century, our field will become even more diverse in form, function, governance, and practice than we are now. We may well see a rise in mission-oriented for-profit museums that base their sustainable business models on earned income and impact investments. We may see more museums that are entirely virtual, but also more museums that are low tech, mobile, and distributed. As a result, my vision for our field is that when we approach the turn of the next century, museums will be regarded as vital public resources that deserve significant public and private support.

**Eve Tam** – The numbers of museums rapidly increased in the last two decades worldwide, especially in the Asia-Pacific region such as mainland China. Many of them are so-called mega cultural infrastructure projects as establishing new and modern museums and galleries has certainly become a way to rebrand the notion of cities and symbolizing the cities' modern achievements. Moreover, as travelling is now being increasingly common, it is convenient for people to travel around and engage with different museums and galleries. Audiences are able to compare and comment museums across different museums and galleries, which the competitions between museums is no longer only local, but also in a global level. It raised an important issue for the museums, which is how to make the museum be unique and special with a clear positioning. I suggest that we should not only focus on how many new museums or new exhibition spaces we have, but also concern about how we can use existing local museum's space, collection and resource to produce high quality museum exhibition and education programmes.

**Valerie Hillings / Maisa Al Qassimi** - Museums share their collections through loans of artworks and their ideas through exhibitions—both those that travel from one museum to another and those that are co-organised—as well as conferences/symposia, and publications. Thanks to the ease of technology and communication today, there are many ways to share information and develop common projects, so international collaborations don't have to unfold in a single place or time. New cultural centers continue to emerge and become potential partners for dynamic, transnational exchanges.

## How is your work involved in embracing digital strategies?

**Elizabeth Merritt** - Sometimes museums are distracted by emerging technologies, before it is clear what they are actually good for. The role of any technology in the museum, from a pencil to the latest Virtual Reality rig, is to help visitors engage with the museum in a way that is effective, compelling, and satisfying. I like to point out that anything that any digital experience has an analogue equivalent. For example, I'm fascinated by the potential for museums to use artificial intelligence to create 'chatbots' of historical figures—primed by published writings, archives, and oral histories—that could engage with visitors inside the museum, and reach outside the museum to put history in the hands anyone who owns a smart phone. On the other hand, The Brooklyn Museum already chats with visitors via their award-winning Ask app—but the museum's chatter is created by a team of art historians working behind the scenes, rather than by AI. However, digital technologies do give museums the power to increase the scope and scale of their work. It's increasingly common for the audience accessing a museum's digital resources to be one or two orders of magnitude bigger than the audience actually walking through the door. And by sharing digital resources, museums can invite the public to access, make, remake, and manipulate content in a way that is difficult or impossible when working only with physical collections.

**Valerie Hillings / Maisa Al Qassimi** - Digital platforms, including those yet to be launched, connect the museum and its content with new audiences and in new ways—for example, with younger audiences and those who might not be able to physically visit the museum. Through our experience organising two exhibitions of works from the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi collection, and particularly our presentation of Yayoi Kusama's installation *Infinity Mirrored Room—Filled with the Brilliance of Life* (2011), we recognized that younger generations are enthusiastic about engaging with art and culture through digital platforms and social media. So we see these as critical tools for building and sustaining the museum's audience.

**Eve Tam** – In this highly globalized contemporary world, we sometimes just get lost in the wave of globalization and over-emphasize the so-called 'global' elements of the museum and neglect the balance between the 'local' and the 'globe'. What we shall avoid is establishing a homogenic understanding and ideology on museum exhibitions and interpretation of museum collections. Hong Kong is a global city featuring its international outlook and it is becoming more important for us to locate our unique local art and cultural elements differentiate us from our counterparts such as Tokyo and London and maintain the long-term sustainability of local cultural sector. What I want to urge here is a concept of "lo-bal-isation" which means that we should start from the local and then extend our local elements to a global perspective instead of just 'adding' local features on top of a homogenised 'global' standard. I think it is very crucial for the preservation and sustainability of the

uniqueness local people and its culture. We should make effort to cultivate the uniqueness of each unique land and enrich the globe with real locality.

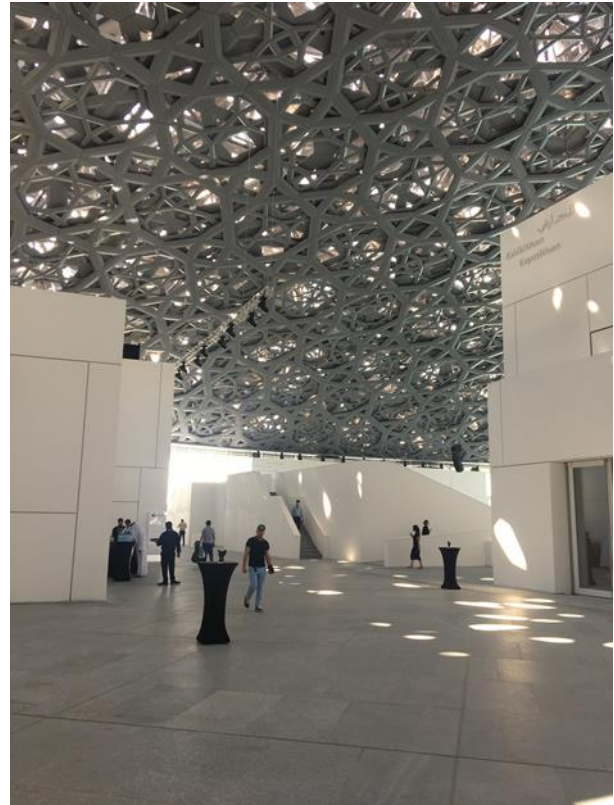


Image 1 and 2: Louvre Abu Dhabi, Images courtesy Sophie Kazan

## How would you comment on the notion of making museums be more accessible and inclusive in the future?

**Elizabeth Merritt** - It is essential that museums serve a more diverse audience in the future. As a sector, we appeal primarily to a narrow, and shrinking, segment of the population. That is both unsustainable and unsatisfactory. Doing a better job of attracting a more diverse audience starts with recruiting a staff that is more diverse by a number of measures: race and culture, socioeconomic status, life experience, outlook, and more. That kind of inclusive recruitment and hiring is going to require a profound culture shift on the part of museums. Right now eighty percent of the graduates from US museum studies programs are white, eighty percent are female, and their ranks are slanted towards people who are able to assume the economic burden of an advanced degree. Rather than a museum studies degree as a screening qualification, museums need to be much more creative and open-minded in filling positions. They should actively court people who may never have considered a museum career, and use unbiased methods of assessing applicants' ability to do the job, rather than relying on traditional resumes.

As to whether any one museum can be inclusive for all—I think there is always room for specialized or niche museums that may appeal to a narrow audience, but I will always challenge such a museum to test its assumptions about whom that audience may be. Is it inevitable that a museum about fly-fishing will appeal only to fly fishers, or can it tap into a larger interest in nature and conservation? I would flip your question and ask whether it is possible to make a museum that does not, a priori, exclude any audiences. I think the answer to that question is “yes.”

**Eve Tam** - I suggest that Hong Kong itself is a dynamic and historical process and the making of Hong Kong is always a mixture of different cultures, both Chinese and non-Chinese cultures. We have to understand that we should recognize the strong cultural and historical connections with Chinese culture, for example, three quarters of our museum's collection are related to Chinese art while the remaining are chiefly contemporary art collection of Hong Kong, the problem is how we make use it as our advantage to establish a Hong Kong perspective on various cultures and arts. We position ourselves in Hong Kong but it does not mean that we only concern about our locality, we explore and appreciate cultures through our lens and it also further augment the context of our local culture.



**Valerie Hillings / Maisa Al Qassimi** - In covering the world through its collection, Guggenheim Abu Dhabi will offer people from different places and backgrounds the opportunity not only to connect with what is familiar to them but also gain an appreciation for commonalities with and differences from other cultures. Part of this process involves inviting colleagues from around the world to contribute to the museum's research, and in years to come to its programming and publications. Since 2011, we have been inviting scholars and curators from around the world to discuss and advise on the strategy for the collection. Just last month, we held a seminar with six specialists focused on South and Southeast Asia. This has helped us to build a vision that reflects multiple perspectives and voices, and it has allowed us to develop an international network of colleagues who can participate in the life of the future museum for years to come.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thank you very much for speaking to us, Eve Tam, Valerie Hillings, Maisa Al Qassimi and Elizabeth Merritt .

# Museums of the Future: Embracing digital strategies, technology and accessibility

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## Abstract

Technology is innovating and expanding at an exponential rate. This continuous explosion of innovation has many implications for museums. New technologies have the potential to improve interpretation, increase access to resources and support accessibility, integration and equality. As part of the effort to participate and inform the museum field of the ways some organizations develop digital strategies and integrate accessible technology into their collections and programmatic interpretation, this paper provides a rationale for developing a digital strategy with an accessibility component, offers a brief survey of some of the latest accessibility technologies used by museums, gives an overview of Vizcaya Museum and Gardens' development and implementation of its Virtual Access Tour and lastly, offers recommendations for how museums can embrace strategies and technologies that will have an impact on the future of accessibility and visitor experience in the museum context.

**Keywords:** technology, accessibility, access, museum, digital strategy

## Introduction

Technology is innovating and expanding at an exponential rate. This continuous explosion of innovation has many implications for museums. In particular new technologies have the potential to improve interpretation, increase access to resources and support inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility. At the same time Museums can use technology to meet visitor expectations of highly individualized experiences with seamless technology-based interactions (Devine 2015). While some museums have made great advances using technology for such purposes many organizations are just beginning their digital journey, experimenting with how best to achieve digital literacy and integrate digital technologies into existing organizational structures (Armstrong, Dessaint, Von Heyman & Nash, 2016). Other museums are beginning to expand their uses of technology to allow people with disabilities to experience museums in deep and meaningful ways (Nolan, 2016). As museums adopt new technologies staff need to be strategic, deliberate and aware of trends and strategies that exist and can inform and guide their work. The Center for the Future of Museums (CFM) — a project of the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) has been producing the Trends Watch report since 2012. The report typically identifies six trends that will shape the ways institutions do business, engage viewers, handle their collections, and renovate their buildings. Technology is a recurring trend in these reports spanning mobile and pop-up experiences in 2012, 3D printing in 2013, big data in 2014, wearable technology in 2015, virtual reality and augmented reality in 2016 and artificial intelligence in 2017. Another recurring trend in these reports is accessibility as seen in creative aging in 2013, multisensory experiences in 2014, slow culture in 2015 and the spectrum of ability in 2017.

Thinking deeply about these trends and as part of an effort to participate and inform the museum field of the ways some organizations develop digital strategies and integrate accessible technology into their collections and programmatic interpretation, this paper provides a rationale for developing a digital strategy with an accessibility component, offers a brief survey of some of the latest accessibility technologies used by museums, gives an overview of Vizcaya Museum and Gardens' development and implementation of its Virtual Access Tour and lastly, offers recommendations for how museums can embrace strategies and technologies that will have an impact on the future of accessibility and visitor experience.

## Rationale for Developing a Digital Strategy with an Accessibility Component

At Vizcaya Museum and Gardens a key question that arose as the institution reflected about digital strategy was whether a digital strategy should be a separate strategic document or whether it was more

effective to embed digital strategy across our existing strategic and interpretive plans. To make a determination the museum looked to the field and current research. One common thread identified was that a digital strategy document can often be a helpful tool for museums to raise awareness amongst staff of what digital approaches might contribute to the advancement of a museum's work (Stein, 2017). Others in the museum field have stated that approaches to digital interpretation and the need for a digital strategy that is separate or integrated was very dependent on the particular institution's maturity in thinking about strategy and uses of technology (Stein, 2017). For example, organizations with little experience in digital technologies might benefit from a separate digital strategy that both illustrates and advocates for how those efforts might best move the institution forward. Coerver, 2017 at SFMOMA does not think a museum's digital strategy is or should be distinct from an analog or a human-to-human strategy but rather should be fully integrated into the museum's practice and viewed as an extension of a visitor's natural experience. According to Derby Museums (2013) a digital strategy should act as a catalyst for change, not in the form of a document but as a vision, a framework, a way of working and specifically through delivery of projects on time and to budget. Other approaches include the development of digital strategies in the short term to build capacity towards having a long-term ambition of holistic digital approach to overall strategic planning. Good examples of this two-stage approach include John Stack's (2013) Tate Digital Strategy 2013–15: Digital as a Dimension of Everything and Rippleffect's (2013) Derby Museums Digital Engagement Strategy. In both cases, the digital strategy is a separate document, but one that is linked to the overall strategic documents and focus of each museum.

At Vizcaya, digital strategy development was originally placed within the Learning Division with cross departmental collaboration through institutional taskforces that included the Interpretive Planning Task Force (IPTF) and a subcommittee that focused on technology. The IPTF was comprised of staff from Marketing, Learning, Advancement, Horticulture and Collections and curatorial Affairs. This structure helped to decentralize digital efforts and integrate them better throughout museum divisions. The subcommittee advised the museum about the opportunities and challenges posed by rapidly evolving media and technology fields. To help with the realization of this work a digital consultant was taken on to collaborate directly with staff members. The focus of the consultant's work was to lead the development and implementation of an institutional digital strategy, ensuring a holistic plan across all museum divisions and digital initiatives. In addition to working with a consultant Vizcaya convened a group of technology innovators and experts, community leaders and museum staff to explore, discuss and recommend the best role technology can play in advancing Vizcaya and South Florida as an international cultural heritage destination and innovation hub. This group became an advisory committee to the museum and now meets on a bi-monthly basis to discuss technology initiatives.

As Vizcaya is not a mature institution in terms of its use and integration of digital technologies it was decided that the institution needed to develop a discreet digital strategy that was currently separate from other strategic or interpretive plans. It was determined that such a document could serve to do the following:

- \* Help evolve the museum's digital ecosystem to a connected network of platforms, frameworks and tools to create dynamic, high-impact digital experiences for all our visitors both online and onsite.
- \* Build staff knowledge and awareness of the potential digital technologies.
- \* Help set clear goals, strategies and guidelines for how digital technology should be considered.
- \* Act as an advocacy tool to build staff awareness about accessibility and the role digital technology can play in enhancing access.
- \* Avoid diluting digital strategies within other larger strategic documents that staff are not engaged in.

To further strengthen the digital strategies impact on staff and its integration into our practice we also developed an aspirational vision statement: Vizcaya uses technology to enhance, leverage and embed technology into the museum's infrastructure, learning strategies and marketing initiatives to engage the public in meaningful cultural experiences, and to transform the way visitors experience the museum onsite and online. This statement tries to underpin the holistic approach of technology across all aspects of museum practice. In addition, we developed the following digital goals:

- \* Vizcaya sparks dialog with audiences by emphasizing interpretation by people, for people.
- \* Vizcaya digitally documents, preserves and promotes its institutional legacy.
- \* Vizcaya's content is universally accessible.
- \* Vizcaya fosters partnerships for digital development and learning.
- \* Vizcaya identifies, measures and inspires passion in its audiences.
- \* Vizcaya produces media-rich interpretive content that's timely, interactive and multi-purpose.

One of the key priorities listed above is making Vizcaya's content universally accessible. It is Vizcaya's desire to increase accessibility through technology at the museum. Vizcaya wants to enable visitors to achieve their full

potential by improving access to resources and supporting integration and equality using digital technology. Vizcaya is a National Historic Landmark that strives to meet accessibility laws and internal goals, but is also greatly challenged with accessibility for its diverse visitors. The Museum is not a purpose-built space and providing access in ways that preserve the character of the historic institution requires creativity and collaboration among staff. We hope to use our constraints as an impetus for innovation and for these reasons promote developing a digital strategy with an explicit interpretive accessibility component.

To ensure that accessibility is embedded into our practice we have developed the following accessibility principals to support integration of accessibility best practices within our digital strategies.

\* Accessibility is an institution-wide responsibility that requires commitment and involvement from leadership across the enterprise.

\* Technology access for individuals with disabilities must provide comparable functionality and should be delivered in as seamless a manner as possible.

\* The implementation of universal design principles should be incorporated into all interpretive efforts.

Digital strategies and accessibility have not yet been fully embedded into budgets, workflow and general practice across Vizcaya. The development of these strategic documents will be used as advocacy tools towards these goals and help lead the organization in a direction that is representative of the future of museum practice. A future that has the potential to enhance visitor experience by improving access to resources and supporting integration and equality through digital technology.

## Accessibility in Museums

According to the American Alliance of Museums, a museum should not only strive to be inclusive by complying with accessibility laws and offering opportunities for diverse participation, but should also demonstrate a commitment to providing the public with both physical and intellectual access (AAM 2016). Vizcaya is a 43-acre estate that was built in 1916. It is comprised of a main house, where most of its museum collections are featured, as well as a formal garden and a variety of outbuildings. Historic places such as this pose barriers to adaptive reuse projects and current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations. Like most historic structures, Vizcaya was not originally designed to accommodate people with disabilities. However, persons with disabilities should be able to experience the museum and gardens in the same manner as other users whenever possible.

Substantial regulations are in place in the U.S. that mandate physical accessibility of public spaces. The ADA of 1990 makes clear the responsibilities of museums to visitors with a broad range of disabilities and upon a spectrum of each disability. The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public including museums. In 2010, the New Americans with Disability Act standards were adopted by the Department of Justice, replacing the original ADA standards. The revised standards continue to help create buildings and facilities that are accessible to more than 56 million Americans with disabilities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

About 56.7 million people, 19 percent of the US population had a reported disability in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Of the 69.6 million families in the U.S., 20.3 million families have at least one member with a disability and about half of all families have loved ones or close friends with disabilities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Between 2006 and 2016 in the U.S., the age 50+ population will have grown by 22 million with 1 in 4 people over age 50 and 1 in 2 people over age 65 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2000). As Baby Boomers age, the probability of developing a disability or chronic illness increases. In 2015, the baby boomer generation commanded 60% of the net U.S. wealth and 40% of its spending (VSAFL and U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This constituency makes up a large proportion of the museum going population. Museum staff must be conscious of the needs of visitors as we think about accessibility and realize that access issues affect a large rather than small part of the population, especially those attending museums.

To be vigilant, museums must view disabilities upon a spectrum that can be both visible and hidden and range from subtle to severe. Disabilities include physical, sensory (vision, hearing, touch, smell), developmental, cognitive, and psychological. Viewing disabilities upon a spectrum refers to the range of ability under which people function. For example, a person who is legally blind can see at 20 feet what a person with vision can see at 200 feet. This does not mean that individual has total blindness. People with vision loss will range from those who are completely blind to those who can't adjust quickly to changes in lighting conditions. We should never presume that someone doesn't have a disability just because it is not readily apparent.

Museums have been steadily incorporating accommodations and programs that ensure access and inclusion for all visitors and participants (Bienvenu, 2015). In 2011, The Smithsonian took a leadership role in not only ensuring accessibility in its own programs and exhibits but, by guiding the museum field through its publications and resources, including the Smithsonian's Guide to Accessible Exhibit Design. Within, guidelines are offered for audiovisuals and interactives providing recommendations on control and operation, heights and locations, glare and reflection, and basic user interface characteristics for interactive elements such as touchscreens.

Additionally, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) maintains a page of web resources related to accessibility in museums and libraries to assist those organizations in embracing easily accessible physical and virtual spaces, and interactive innovative digital technologies. IMLS supports these projects through grants and awards as well.

## Accessibility Technologies in Museums

Some examples of technologies that are improving inclusion and accessibility in museums include: The Beam, a telepresence robot that allows users to take one-on-one guided tours through a museum without ever being physically in the space; the interactive Augsburg Display Cabinet at the Getty Museum for homebound and deaf museumgoers; The Vlog (virtual blogs) Project at the Whitney Museum that caters to the deaf community; Assisted Listening Devices (ADLs), devices that amplify the volume of a desired sound without increasing the background noise; and the Louvre's Nintendo 3DS offering, which includes in-depth audio guides as well as location mapping services; a useful feature for visually-impaired visitors. For those with visual impairments, many museums are incorporating tactile exhibits and interactives as well as updated audio guides and apps. Museums are also experimenting with beacon technology, which connect to a mobile device app to improve accessibility for people with visual impairments guiding blind visitors through a space.

Other technologies such as 3D documentation through photogrammetry and laser scanning is allowing for accurate scans and 3D print-outs of objects that museumgoers can touch and handle (Nolan 2016). In order for 3D printing to allow greater accessibility to European museums, the Ambavis project was launched with the support of the European Union. For this project 3D printers recreate "touch copies" for the visually impaired, so that they can explore the exhibits in a tactile manner. Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom are some of the countries in which this initiative is being implemented. In 2015, the Museo del Prado in Madrid launched the exhibition "Hoy toca el Prado", in collaboration with the AXA Foundation and ONCE. The exhibit created 3D prints of works of different genres that could be touched by people with visual disabilities. The exhibition also featured texts in Braille, audio guides and opaque cardboard glasses.

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights acknowledges the fundamental importance of the principle of Universal Design in its building and its exhibitions, web presence, and programs. The museum's accessible mobile app includes an audio guide with text-based transcripts and descriptive audio will soon be incorporated for all visual elements. Sign language for visitors who are Deaf or hard of hearing, the app can be viewed in ASL or LSQ and includes additional sign-language content for several exhibits. A "Near Me" mode connects devices through low-frequency iBeacons to over 120 Universal Access Points (UAPs) located throughout the Museum. Designed to assist visitors who are blind or have low vision, this function can be used by all visitors to create an experience focused on key exhibit highlights. The museum also offers an accessible interactive map of the Museum's public spaces to help visitors find their way. The map can tell visitors where you are, show floorplans, or guide visitors to destinations with text-based directions.

The Andy Warhol Museum has a fully redesigned website and the installation of tactile art reproductions in its galleries with a focus on accessibility. Through these projects as well as the Out Loud inclusive audio guide, the museum is leading the way in its field by combining technology and enhanced museum experiences to overcome barriers for people with disabilities.

The Warhol also worked with Prime Access Consulting, Inc., led by Sina Bahram, president, to make the site accessible to users with a wide range of abilities and preferences. The website achieves WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) 2.0 AA compliance and improves the web experience for visitors across a spectrum of abilities, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing; interact with the site via only keyboard or mouse due to limited mobility/motor control; people who are blind or have low vision and use a screen reader or employ zoom tools to enlarge the page; and users with cognitive disabilities.

The Museum of Modern Art offers a variety of accessibility technologies. MoMA Audio: Visual Descriptions is an audio program for blind and partially sighted visitors that provides detailed descriptions of key works from

the Museum's collection. In addition, all MoMA theaters, lobby desks, ticketing desks, audio guide desks, and one of the classrooms are equipped with induction loops that transmit directly to hearing aids with T-Coils.

The Guggenheim app covers special exhibitions, selections from the permanent collection, and the architecture of the building. The app includes verbal descriptions of select collection artworks and exhibitions for visitors who are blind or have low vision. The Guggenheim's admissions desk, membership desk, and store are equipped with T-coil compatible induction loops. The museum's app devices are also T-coil compatible and include transcripts of all tour stops. In addition, the free Guggenheim app includes video guides of the Thannhauser Collection in American Sign Language (ASL) with open captions for visitors who are deaf or hearing impaired.

The Museum of Fine Arts Boston (MFA) has Assistive Listening Devices (ALD) for gallery tours and talks. For visitors with hearing aids with a T-coil switch, there are induction loops at all entrances, the box office, and the information desk. The MFA is also committed to facilitating the accessibility and usability of its website, <http://www.mfa.org/>, for all people with disabilities. The MFA will be implementing over time the relevant portions of the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 Level AA as its web accessibility standard, which will also bring the MFA into conformance with the Section 5-8 Web Accessibility Standards developed by the United States Access Board.

The Museum of Science, Boston, is noted for its work in developing accessible touchscreen interactives. For example, its Provocative Questions exhibition incorporated an extensive program of testing that included visitors with and without disabilities. Staff discovered that they anticipated the users' needs regarding physical layout, but they needed to clarify on-screen instructions and display sensitivity (O'Hara, 2015).

The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago offers EnChroma color blindness-correcting glasses for individual visits and tours. When possible the museum provides audio description for performances and activities in their theater. In addition to on-site offerings, the museum provides descriptions of artworks on their website in both short and long description formats through an initiative to describe images called the Coyote Project. With the redesign of their website, the museum has committed to adhering to ADA standards for web accessibility.

What the author has provided is a small sampling of the museum field's attempts at accessibility through technology. Many museums included SFMOMA are doing meaningful and innovative work in this area that should be looked at. The author has not included the vast efforts by museums outside of the specific realm of digital technology to make their institutions more accessible to a wide variety of visitors. With the continued integration of accessible digital technology into museum exhibits, programs and general interpretation new challenges and solutions continue to arise. It is the author's hope that digital technology will continue to allow for greater inclusion and accessible design through multi-media approaches that are highly adaptive to context and content.

## Vizcaya's Virtual Access Tour

The primary objective for Vizcaya's Virtual Access Tour (VAT) was to replace a narrated video of the main house's second floor decorated rooms with a broader platform of enhanced accessibility and an active free-choice learning experience. Vizcaya's second floor is primarily only accessible by a two-story main staircase and sections of the gardens are difficult to access with even minor mobility impairments. VAT achieves accessibility and inclusion for diverse audiences through universal design and allows virtual access to the second floor and non-accessible areas of the gardens. ADA compliance for this project was paramount and represented a combination of proper kiosk design, appropriate installation and site preparation, and accommodating software application development.

Vizcaya's work on the VAT was highlighted by a social justice model to accessibility, universal design and free-choice learning. The social justice model considers inclusion from the standpoint that everyone belongs and that all people have a range of abilities and disabilities that need to be catered to (Loewen & Pollard, 2010). Universal design considers all audiences and levels of ability, rather than single populations that are targeted at the expense of others. Universal design is a concept originated by Ron Mace, the founder of the Center for Universal Design in North Carolina. Mace was an architect with a disability (Mace, 1988). Free-choice learning theory promotes personalization of experience so that users may navigate in a way that is appropriate for their interest and cognitive and developmental level. Falk (2005) defines free-choice learning environments, such as museums, aquariums, zoos, nature centers, and national parks, as places where individuals have significant choice and control over their learning. Free-choice learning is also defined by the National Research Council

(2009) as “Learner motivated, guided by learner interests, voluntary, personal, ongoing, contextually relevant, collaborative, nonlinear, and open-ended” (p. 11).

As Vizcaya explored design considerations for the VAT staff utilized a comprehensive study of issues and potential solutions related to kiosk accessibility prepared by Fain (2009). This study guided Vizcaya’s design. Areas of focus when designing the VAT included:

1. Height of interactive elements. Working closely with the software designer all interactive elements were placed at the bottom of the touch screen to meet ADA requires of 15 inches and 48 inches from the ground.
2. Use high contrast colors for text. ADA has multiple recommendations for various elements to ensure color contrast. It suggests either light on dark, or dark on light elements. Recommendation is to keep contrast level of 70 percent between the background and foreground text for all interface elements in our user interfaces. The kiosk was placed in a room with consistent lighting to ensure the screen appearance remains the same throughout the day.
3. Size of text and interface elements. ADA requires the use of large text (3/16 inches). Vizcaya ensured that text was sufficient in size with adequate spacing between each element. Icons were designed as large as possible, given the space available. All buttons were designed large and spaced far enough apart to minimize the possibility of accidental activation of adjacent buttons.
4. LCD viewing angle: Vizcaya ensured that the viewing angle of the kiosk display accommodates both standing and seated users.
5. Limit physical barriers. Vizcaya provided a minimum clear floor space of 60" in diameter in front of the device (ADA recommended) so the kiosk can easily be accessed by someone using wheelchair and to accommodate both forward approach and a circular or T-shaped turning space for leaving the kiosk.

The widespread use of touchscreens is problematic for those with impaired vision. With some exceptions, notably ATMs, touchscreens typically do not cater to the needs of the vision impaired, thus limiting the ability to access and take advantage of such devices and creates unequal or restricted access to information. With this in mind future design considerations for a next generation VAT should include: visitor controlled contrast adjustment for the display, alternate display mode with larger fonts and high contrast options along with large widely spaced controls and alternatives to the visual display such as descriptive auditory experience to facilitate interaction by users with low vision. Currently, Vizcaya does offer an audio tour that can be used by all visitors to learn about the museum, though the audio tour does not incorporate audio description.

## Next steps

Vizcaya Museum and Gardens is in the planning phase of evaluating the VAT with regard to both physical and intellectual accessibility. Items to be assessed include (a) physical accessibility of the display; (b) intellectual accessibility of the content (e.g. quality and length of text, understanding of messages); (c) interface design (e. g. how easy is it to navigate the tour). Vizcaya will also collect basic demographic information. The museum’s approach to assessment will be both quantitative through survey delivery and qualitative through staff observation of visitor use and informal oral discussions with visitors. Vizcaya hopes to use the findings to augment, refine and if necessary change the VAT to better accommodate our visitors. The lessons learned from the VAT project will inform Vizcaya’s strategic approach to interactive delivery throughout the museum.

Moving forward Vizcaya must begin to fully understand the solutions and considerations required for a range of disabled visitors and how to accommodate them, engage with the disabilities community to understand solutions that could be integrated to cater for those with disabilities and enable an accessible environment based on globally approved standards and improvements to the infrastructure, systems and technologies. In addition, we must adopt Universal Design to increase accessibility and inclusion for diverse audiences, create visitor-centered and developmentally appropriate experiences, capture visitor data to further improve and enhance the visitor experience and embrace unique and accessible visitor wayfinding experiences.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

In the future, museums will continue to be shaped by a wide variety of trends and drivers. Programs such as the New Museum’s NEW INC which was founded in 2014 and is the first museum-led cultural incubator dedicated to supporting innovation, collaboration, and entrepreneurship across art, design, and technology are inspiring. Each year the program selects an interdisciplinary community of one hundred members who are investigating new ideas and developing sustainable practices for the field. Such programs are examples of a future where technology truly enhances visitor experience and increases accessibility. These programs also allow

us to dream about how the latest technologies can be innovatively applied; such as a day when visitors are provided with entry wristbands that use GPS, radio-frequency identification (RFID), text-to-speech, and Tag technology to facilitate wayfinding or museums begin to use facial recognition technology to provide content tailored to individual visitors' needs and use real-time translation and visual description services or even the use of touch, gesture, and optical tracking technologies to enable visitors to experience museums in whatever way is most natural and accessible for them.

This paper identified two issues that are critical to gaining strength from the shifts caused by the disruption of digital technologies. First, is for institutions to choose whether to embrace digital strategy as a component of larger institutional strategy or as a discreet document based on technological maturity. When institutions are more digitally literate across the entire organization, they are able to make integration happen, but prior to this maturity it is recommended that organizations focus on broadening and deepening the visitor experience as well increasing accessibility by building institutional awareness through the creation of discreet digital strategies that outline clear goals, objectives and guidelines. Second, when designing technology interfaces, museums should incorporate the goal of inclusion and accessibility into projects. Following through on this basic principle can help keep inclusion and accessibility at the forefront of project design. Through a universal design approach museums can avoid targeting specific populations at the exclusion of others. Many accessibility features can be useful to a wider group than just the visitors with disabilities who inspired them. For example, Vizcaya's VAT is used by many visitors regardless of disability satisfying different interpretive needs of visitors. For example, the VAT permits visitors to be virtually inside a decorated room rather than restricted by a room barrier. In addition, the VAT enables visitors to zoom in on objects that are far away and allow detailed inspection of such objects that is not possible to do physically. Lastly, the VAT was photographed with lighting that is brighter than exists in decorated spaces on a daily basis due to conservation considerations allowing for visitors to better see details and colors of decorated spaces. With this in mind the VAT can serve as a corollary for any visitor who wants to have deeper exploration of a decorated room that may be limited by the physical experience.

For the twenty-first century museum the urgency to effectively leverage technology for contemporary audiences has never been more palpable (Embuscado, 2017). The development of a digital strategy is a complex process requiring deep thought and staff resources that may be currently beyond the capacity of many institutions. With that said, the process of creating a digital strategy whether discreet or embedded is of great import for a museum to remain relevant and part of the future of the field. Visitors have an expectation for technological integration into their experiences wherever they go. To not meet these expectations puts the field in jeopardy of losing visitors and relevancy to a very fickle public. The development of a digital strategy can serve as an advocacy tool to bring about awareness of technology and use it to leverage or enhance other priorities such as accessibility at the museum. In the broadest sense a digital strategy should be thought of as something that can increase accessibility for dynamic and interactive learning, help us better understand our audience and their needs and allow us to invest in digital production and dissemination infrastructure.

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## Visual submission: The sonic threshold of the Museum of the Future

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A voice into my headphones starts speaking: «Close your eyes. You are about to enter into a virtual museum. A museum without walls, composed entirely by dematerialized entities. You have no physical points of reference, you cannot walk through a real entrance, you cannot touch any material object. You only have your ears, and your imagination». This experience has been launched in Belluno (Italy) during the presentation of a multimedia radioguide proposed by the theatrical company 'La Piccionaia'. Using a whisper radio system and their sonic imagination, the public tried to imagine the imaginary doors of DOLOM.IT, the virtual museum of the Dolomites landscape ([www.museodolom.it](http://www.museodolom.it)). «Now, you should start to perceive in your mind the shape of this museum. Each of you will visualize unique and personalized doors. Are you ready to open your eyes again and to immerse yourselves in the museum of the future?»

*This photo was digitally edited with the aim of highlighting its symbolic meaning: in a virtual museum, sonic imagination expands physical boundaries and fosters a unique personal experience.*

# #DayofFacts, Museums, and Socially Purposeful Practice: The Future of Museological Public Service

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## Abstract

This paper examines contemporary trends in scholarship and public policy to conceptualise the future of museological public service. The research notes the capacity of museums to leverage institutional talents and assets to explore contemporary social themes and contribute to community well-being. The work evaluates the case study of the social media campaign, #DayofFacts, a collaborative effort between museums, libraries, cultural organisations, and scientific institutions born in response to American social trends of fake news by promoting the importance of facts and truth. Moreover, the demonstrated success of the case study highlights the use of progressive communication platforms in terms of message delivery and socially relevant content. Based upon the case study, public policy trends, and scholarship, the author theorises that increasing focus placed upon socially purposeful practice, which promotes societal development and community well-being, will become a central conceptual framework for future public service within the museum sector.

**Keywords:** public service, socially purposeful, #DayofFacts, social media

On February 17th, 2017, The Field Museum, located in Chicago, Illinois, launched a video across several social media platforms. The video opens with a museum staff member, smiling and holding up a handmade poster that reads, 'At the Field Museum, FACTS matter' (Field Museum, 2017C). During the video's one minute and fourteen second length, eight scientists scattered throughout the museum's Evolving Planet exhibition hold up similar signs that communicate scientific facts, such as the age of the earth (4.5 billion years), dinosaurs' closest living relative (birds), the evolution and subsequent immigration of homo sapiens (Africa is the Motherland of us all), and climate change (which contributes to plant and animal extinctions) (Field Museum, 2017C). The video closes in front of The Field Museum's famous Tyrannosaurus Rex fossil, Sue, where over 100 staff members hold up more signs of facts. As the picture fades out, words appear: 'Facts are always welcome here. And so are you. The Field Museum. #DayofFacts' (Field Museum, 2017C).

On Twitter, The Field Museum's video has received approximately 82,900 views, 2,500 retweets, and 4,200 likes (Field Museum, 2017B). On YouTube, the video has been viewed 7,797 times, with 154 thumbs up and one thumbs down (Field Museum, 2017D). On Facebook, the video has been seen 1,139,705 times, shared 18,253 times, and liked 7,585 times (Field Museum, 2017A). The Field Museum's social media posts on February 17th, 2017 were similarly executed by over 350 additional cultural organisations and numerous individuals from 40 American states and 16 countries, all participants in the collaborative, social media campaign #DayofFacts (Kurlandsky, 2017A).

'On this day, museums, libraries, archives, cultural institutions, science centers and other trusted public sources of knowledge...share mission-related content using the hashtag #DayofFacts...By not taking an overt political stand but simply sharing mission-related, objective, and relevant facts, we...show the world that our institutions are still trusted sources of truth and knowledge' (Day of Facts, 2017B).

Initiated in response to contemporary society, hosted on social media platforms, and featured scholastically founded and mission-oriented content to contextualise ongoing social issues and themes, #DayofFacts serves as a powerful case study of evolving concepts of museological public service. This paper first examines the evolving nature of museological contribution to contemporary society and how it manifests, in terms of institutional public service, based upon museological scholarship and public policy trends, as indicative of evolving public expectations of the museum sector. Next, this paper inspects the social media campaign, #DayofFacts, as a case study of evolving museological public service. Finally, the paper unpacks the implications of future museological public service based upon scholarship and through the lens of the #DayofFacts case study.

## Socially Purposeful Public Service: A Museological and Public Policy Perspective

As public service organisations, museums provide a service to the public. Within the Conner Prairie Museum's blog article addressing its #DayofFacts participation, this Indiana museum's president and CEO, Norman Burns, eloquently describes the diverse impact of museums upon communities through public service. Museums are:

“significant economic engines, stewards and trustees of important collections, community connectors and education providers...[museums] reach underserved populations in meaningful ways. Museums help create vital communities in which to live and work. They spur travel and tourism that feed the economy” (Burns as cited in Brodt, 2017).

Undoubtedly, stewardship of humanity's material and cultural heritage features as a profoundly important responsibility of the sector's service (Cuno, 2004; Genoways, 2006). Collections material, scholarship, exhibition, and interpretation offer compelling insight into the human experience (Dudley, 2010). Within this paper, socially purposeful practice is characterised by the promotion of societal development and facilitation of community well-being through these traditional sector services (International Council of Museums, 2007). This socially purposeful concept of museological public service demonstrates an incredible, diverse capacity to meaningfully contribute to contemporary society (Weil, 2002). The research of Richard Sandell (2011; 2012; 2017) notes that museums can bridge societal isolation and foster understanding of marginalised populations. Simon (2014) demonstrates that museums successfully explore and contextualise sensitive contemporary issues. Meanwhile, the research of Carol Scott (2013) and Lord and Blankenberg (2015) describes museological capacity to create social value through the branding of communities, education, economic development, tourism, and beyond to include the promotion of civic ideals, citizenship, and community cohesion. In essence, scholarship affirms museological power to promote ideals of social justice and human rights, explore contemporary societal themes, and support community well-being, all as manifestations of socially purposeful public service (Eichstedt, 2006; Gershevitch, 2014; Gurian, 2007; Janes, 2009; Janes, 2011; Marstine, 2011; Nightingale et al., 2012; Sandell, 2011; Sandell, 2012; Sandell, 2017; Weil, 2002). Such practice can manifest in a myriad of ways, but ultimately connects traditional sector talents - of scholarship, interpretation, and exhibition - and assets - of collection material - to contemporary society based upon current themes and issues relevant to the unique population served by each individual museum.

Moreover, public policy indicates a strong desire to foster the contextualisation of contemporary social issues and community well-being through the museum sector's assets – collection material – and talents – scholarship, interpretation, and exhibition (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2000; Department for Media, Culture and Sport, 2016; European Commission, 2017; Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2014). Funding trends support and facilitate museums and programming towards such ends. For instance, the United Kingdom's Department of Culture, Media and Sport Culture White Paper outlines fiscal and collaborative support in ‘the role that culture has in building stronger and healthier communities and boosting economic growth,’ including dedicated financial opportunities such as the Discover England grants and Creative Local Growth funds (2016: 32). In the United States, 68% of funding issued by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) in 2014 supported 1) public-centred learning experiences ‘to prepare people to be full participants in their local communities and our global society’ and 2) ‘strong community anchors that enhance civic engagement, cultural opportunities, and economic vitality’ (2014: 4-6). The remaining 32% of grants funded cultural stewardship and accessibility, with priority given to technology (IMLS, 2014). Public policy research reveals a willingness to invest in organisations and institutions seeking to support societal development and promote community well-being through socially purposeful practice (Besel et al., 2011; Bryan et al., 2012; Llop et al., 2011; Manetti et al., 2014; Scott, 2013; Weil, 2002; Witmer et al., 2016). Because of public interest in organisations that develop, promote, and sustain social value, financial resources place primacy upon such organisations and activities. When reviewing governmental funding policies and opportunities from the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union, a large swath of cultural financing is contingent upon the creation of social value and civic impact (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2000; 2016; European Commission, 2017; IMLS, 2014).

However, government policy and funding, including for museum related programming and agencies, are typically reviewed and allotted each year. As governing bodies frequently reassess spending priorities, funding for cultural institutions, whether prioritizing socially purposeful public service or not, remains at risk. Upon reflection of #DayofFacts, Mara Kurlandsky stated “that museums and other cultural organisations should assume the extreme funding cuts would come, and to prepare in advance” (2017B). On one hand, Kurlandsky's

assessment was accurate. In May 2017, President Trump released his proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2018 (National Council of Nonprofits, 2017). President Trump's Fiscal Year 2018 proposed budget included an \$84 million increase in Smithsonian Institution funds (AAM, 2018B). Despite the increased fiscal support of the Smithsonian Institution, the President's budget proposal revealed a significant decrease in agencies and programs related to the museum sector (AAM, 2018B). The President's budget proposal included museum related agency and program eliminations of: the IMLS Office of Museum Services, NASA Office of Education, Civil Rights Movement Sites, Save America's Treasures, among others (AAM, 2018B). Furthermore, the budget proposal also featured a reduction to the budget of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) by \$107.5 million, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) by \$120.9 million, and the National Park Service Operations (NPS) by \$200 million (AAM, 2018B). The President's proposed FY2018 budget indicates a reduction in fiscal priority for museum associated programs and agencies and underscores the annual nature and ever-increasing precariousness of public policy and funding for museums.

Nevertheless, recent research from the American Alliance of Museums reveals that the overwhelming majority of American constituents (96%) want to "maintain or increase" federal funding for museums, due to the perception of educational value and positive economic impact of upon communities served (AAM, 2018A: 4). When the Federal budget for 2018 was signed into law in March 2018, the funding reflected this support, despite President Trump's initial reductions to financing of museum associated programming and agencies. The NEH and NEA received an increase of \$3 million, while the IMLS gained \$9 million increase over the previous year's budgets (AAM, 2018B; NEA, 2018; NEH, 2018; IMLS, 2018). The Smithsonian Institution, likewise, benefited from an \$180 million increase, and the NPS gained \$53 million over last year's budget (AAM, 2018B). The 2018 funding, allotted by Congress and ultimately signed into law by President Trump, broadly maintains or increases federal funding in support of museum agencies and programs. While the federal funding and indicative American public policy for museums demonstrates backing, the fiscal support is only for 2018, and it does not guarantee funds or the continuation of public policy trends for 2019 and beyond.

## #DayofFacts: A Case Study

'Cultural organizations, especially non-profits dependent on public donations, typically avoid politics and partisan messaging. But what happens when the very notion of "facts" becomes politicized' (Kurlandsky, 2017B)?

Throughout the conclusion of the 2016 United States Presidential Election Campaign and during the First 100 Days of President Donald Trump, the concepts of "fake news" and "alternative facts" were introduced into mainstream society, undermining central museological tenants of facts and truth based upon scholarship (Kaplan, 2017; Kurlandsky et al., 2017A; Steinberg, 2017). One cultural institution's tweet would inspire a social media campaign in demonstration of museums as 'trusted sources for truth and knowledge' (Day of Facts, 2017B). On January 25th, 2017, @DeathValleyNPS (Death Valley National Park) tweeted "During WWII Death Valley hosted 65 endangered internees after the #Manzanar Riot. #JapaneseAmericanInternment" (Death Valley National Park as cited in Kurlandsky et al., 2017A). This tweet, in the middle of attempts to curtail social media activities by the new Administration and immediately following Trump's first travel and refugee ban by Presidential Order, inspired the social media campaign #DayofFacts. For #DayofFacts co-founder, Alli Hartley, this tweet resonated with ongoing social issues by exploring missionary content.

'By presenting factual information that connected to the present political moment (but without explicitly mentioning the moment) the park was making a powerful and pertinent statement about the current moment' (Hartley, 2017).

More importantly, the content was factual, missionary, institutionally 'appropriate,' contextualised 'the current political moment,' and 'resonated with the public' (Kurlandsky et al., 2017A). As a result, Alli Hartley, in partnership with Mara Kurlandsky, founded and facilitated #DayofFacts. This social media campaign, on February 17th, 2017, sought to replicate the power of the @DeathValleyNPS tweet on January 25th on a large, collaborative scale. By having over 350 museums, libraries, cultural institutions, science centres, and even individuals collaborate and share 'mission-related, objective, and relevant facts,' the #DayofFacts social media campaign sought to affirm the sector's dedication to truth, scholarship, and communities 'without exception' (Hartley, 2017; Kurlandsky, 2017A; Kurlandsky, 2017B; Day of Facts, 2017B).

For participating museums, #DayofFacts became a platform to communicate with community members, collaborate with other cultural organisations, and promote scholarship by sharing missionary facts through social media. DePaul Library, for instance, participated in #DayofFacts to promote museums, libraries, archives, and other cultural institutions as 'recognized sources of verifiable facts' and encourage scholastic inquiry in the

pursuit of information (Walter, 2017). The National Aquarium, on the other hand, celebrated #DayofFacts as an opportunity to 'open dialogues with our community around climate change and the simple actions we can all take to make a difference' (National Aquarium, 2017). Conner Prairie Museum participated in #DayofFacts 'to foster advocacy for cultural institutions' (Brodt, 2017). The Field Museum, whose #DayofFacts video went viral, underscored that both facts and everyone are welcome at its institution (Field Museum, 2017C).

For co-founder Alli Hartley (2017), the goals of #DayofFacts aligns with the above institutional examples. First, the actions of the campaign sought to 'reassure the public that museums will stay true to their missions' by sharing scholastic, factual information (Hartley, 2017). Next, #DayofFacts hoped to 'encourage dialogue with the public...about issues that specifically affect them,' thereby demonstrating that museums do not exist in a vacuum and can meaningfully connect organisations and visitors through the exploration of current events (Hartley, 2017). Mara Kurlandsky's written reflections further substantiate Hartley's perspective.

'Ultimately, #DayofFacts exceeded our hopes and expectations for the organizations involved...#DayofFacts united hundreds of organizations and for many, renewed their commitment to core values' (Kurlandsky, 2017B).

These core museum values – facts and scholarship, 'inclusion and empathy,' public engagement – were energised by the contextual connection to current events and resonated with both the participating museums and the public served (Kurlandsky et al., 2017A; Kurlandsky et al., 2017B).

Moreover, the #DayofFacts social media campaign demonstrated incredible success in terms of outreach and message delivery. 'Based on the fact that campaign went viral, and from specific feedback from participants about their positive and meaningful experiences, we judge the campaign to be successful' (Hartley, 2017). With a website, a twitter handle, a dedicated hashtag, and over 3,000 twitter followers, Hartley and Kurlandsky secured broad institutional buy in, organised, implemented, and demonstrated that cultural organisations can connect traditional talents and assets to a "present moment" of contemporary society in a missionary manner (Day of Facts, 2017C; Hartley, 2017; Hartley as cited in Kaplan, 2017). Social media provided a uniquely suitable outlet for the campaign's goal realisations explored above. Social media provided a virtual space for dialogue with community members (Hartley, 2017; Kurlandsky, 2017A). By midmorning of February 17th, 2017, #DayofFacts 'was trending in the United States' (Kaplan, 2017). Based upon evaluation data published on #DayofFacts, approximately 70% of participant institutions reported more than typical engagement of #DayofFacts posts (Kurlandsky, 2017A).

'#DayofFacts was deeply meaningful for many of its participants, who said they received positive feedback from their audiences and felt a sense of empowerment about being able to respond to current events in a mission-appropriate and constructive way' (Kurlandsky, 2017A).

As the above quote demonstrates, the reported social media engagement between participating museums and their audiences were largely positive, affirming each institution's ability to explore contemporary social issues in a missionary and productive manner. Moreover, evaluation data also notes institutional collaboration through 'a sense of solidarity' and feelings of encouragement by witnessing 'what their colleagues were sharing' (Kurlandsky, 2017A).

With #DayofFacts, social media demonstrates that institutions and individuals can virtually engage with one another to impressive results, placing traditional talents and assets in a digital medium, amplifying communication, and doing so with a socially purposeful focus. This case study displays the ability to connect over 350 institutions worldwide, generate 'at least 50,000 tweets,' trend on twitter, and go viral across multiple platforms (Hartley, 2017; Kurlandsky, 2017A). #DayofFacts further illustrates outreach beyond social media through extensive media coverage by American news agencies, including The Washington Post, The Chicago Sun-Times, Mashable, Huffington Post, and Hyperallergic (Day of Facts, 2017A).

Regardless, the use of social media for the #DayofFacts campaign also reveals challenges. Prior to February 17th, 2017, the organizers of #DayofFacts encouraged participating museums to reflect upon their organizations' "mission, funding, board composition, and governance structure" (DayofFacts, 2017B). After all, "we cannot promise that every participating institution will be free from any backlash," especially those who benefit from federal funds or government support (DayofFacts, 2017B). The warning, although stark, underscores the museum sector's fear of potentially alienating or losing funding sources through programming and public service initiatives beyond the traditional scope. Evaluation data following #DayofFacts does not indicate, one way or another, whether participating museums suffered from the alluded to "backlash" as a result of the social media campaign (DayofFacts, 2017B). Instead, institutions, like the Chicago Academy of Sciences, reported "positive responses to our involvement" (as cited in Kurlandsky, 2017B). Nonetheless, this does not show, one way or

another, that museums did not experience negative comments or potentially suffered from loss of funding due to #DayofFacts participation.

Kurlandsky and Hartley likewise note that the digital distribution medium experienced trolling (Hartley, 2017; Kurlandsky, 2017B). The designated hashtag was appropriated during the event to “share the exact kind of unverified facts we were aiming to fight” (Kurlandsky, 2017B). Hartley (2017) also describes the potential mission creep of social media campaigns once viral.

‘Technology gave us a chance to reach millions of individuals...and because we used a hashtag that was inclusive of all institutions (libraries rather than just museums) as the hashtag picked up throughout the day and other institutions began joining, it became less museum-centric and people may not have even realized museums were involved’ (Hartley, 2017).

Even as the digital medium offered a responsive, collaborative platform, when #DayofFacts went viral, the original purpose faced challenges. Internet trolling attempted to dilute the campaign’s goals through off-topic posts and message redirection, and mission creep redirected awareness from museums and affirmation of the sector driven nature of the campaign’s goals.

## Conclusion

According to David Fleming, museums “are held in high regard by the public—not just as places where the past can be viewed, but where ideas can be explored. These ideas are often of direct relevance to today’s public (2012: 252). When museums connect their public service, their institutional talents and assets to contemporary social issues, they directly contribute to social development and community well-being. #DayofFacts represents one case study of socially purposeful public service that offers compelling insight into such museological practice. This work’s initial literature review of scholarship demonstrates the impact and diverse capacity of socially purposeful public service. Likewise, public policy trends of the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the United States show support, even if only on a year to year basis. As seen with #DayofFacts, the public service has “relevance” as it contextualises, explores, and examines contemporary society (Fleming, 2012: 252). However, there exists another side to this coin. Such public service carries the “risk of offending” (Fleming, 2012: 253).

When museums connect their public service, their institutional talents and assets to contemporary social issues, museums run the risk of challenging existing funders and visitors. Did #DayofFacts cause participating museums to lose funders? Does socially purposeful public service adversely impact the finances of practicing museums? Potentially yes, but the answer remains unknown. Regardless, exploring contemporary issues can and does create challenges. Museum scholarship notes that some audience members may react negatively, creating what Sandell refers to as “oppositional voices” (2017: 104-105). This vocal dissent from the museum’s audience can adversely impact the staff, the institution’s reputation, and result in a resistance to public service beyond the status quo (Sandell, 2017; Watson, 2015). Even as #DayofFacts museums report broadly positive responses to their participation, this does not translate as universal positive responses from the institutions’ audiences. For instance, look at The Field Museum’s #DayofFacts social media posts. Even with approximately 8,000 views on YouTube, The Field Museum’s #DayofFacts video has one thumbs down and received some negative commentary on its parallel Facebook post (Field Museum, 2017A; 2017D). Moreover, as #DayofFacts underscores, the institutional message can be lost, misdirected, or trolled. Museological scholarship also highlights the potential development of “counter narratives” that undermine the original aim of the programming (Smith, 2010: 194).

With #DayofFacts, no specific guidance was given prior to February 17th, 2017 to address trolling or oppositional voices, leaving each participating institution to handle these matters as outlined by individually established organizational policy and practice (Day of Facts, 2017). Instead, #DayofFacts encouraged participating institutions to share and cite “factual, timely, and relevant information,” featuring the dedicated hashtag for cohesive message delivery (Day of Facts, 2017). Content guidelines, including links and suggestions for best social media practices, also facilitated individual institutional, and ultimately collaborative, success of the campaign in spite of trolling, oppositional voices, and counter narratives (Day of Facts, 2017). One simple comment from the #DayofFacts Content Guidelines, “please feel free to promote your participation in advance of campaign day,” encouraged individual institutions to contextualise #DayofFacts participation, thereby fostering deeper audience engagement with the campaign, the contemporary issues that inspired it, and individual organizational goals. For instance, prior to #DayofFacts, The Field Museum posted a blog, titled “What Do We Mean When We Talk About Facts in Science?,” that defined scientific fact, hypothesis, and theory to clarify the concept for its audience (Angielczyk, 2017). DePaul University Library, on the other hand, posted a

blog a week prior to #DayofFacts reinforcing: the importance of facts; the role of museums and libraries as repositories of primary source materials and scholarship; its institutional commitment and instruction “in how to locate, evaluate, and employ facts in your own pursuit of information;” resources to spot fake news; and information about #DayofFacts (Walter, 2017). By communicating prior to the social media campaign, individual institutions encouraged their audiences to understand the motivations behind both #DayofFacts and their participation, thereby deepening the conversation around the campaign, its goals, as well as the contemporary events that inspired it.

Regardless of the challenges faced by #DayofFacts, this case study, demonstrably socially purposeful in practice, positively leverages institutional talents and assets to address and explore contemporary issues for societal development and community-wellbeing. Much like the inspirational @DeathValleyNPS tweet on January 25th, the #DayofFacts social media posts were ‘brilliant, poignant, honest, relevant, and demonstrative of the important role our institutions can play’ (Kurlandsky et al., 2017A). The #DayofFacts social media campaign serves to illustrate the importance of facts in the face of untruthful, inaccurate information perpetuated through society’s trending “fake news” and “alternative facts” and museums’ role to perpetuate fact and scholarship in the face of fallacy (Day of Facts, 2017A; Day of Facts, 2017B; Kaplan, 2017; Steinberg, 2017). Moreover, the #DayofFacts campaign sought to promote and further social inclusion through institutional inclusive policy and practice.

‘This campaign was also an opportunity to reaffirm our institutions as welcoming places for everyone. Many of our constituents and visitors are part of groups that are feeling more marginalized than ever. Museums and cultural organizations are uniquely situated to serve as safe and welcoming places (physical or virtual) committed to their communities without exception’ (Day of Facts, 2017A).

#DayofFacts illustrates that community responsiveness and inclusive practice are not mutually exclusive from collection material, curated research, and facts. By actively communicating facts based upon sound research, museums are uniquely positioned to promote social development and well-being. Inclusive practice presents diverse cultural and historical experiences, offering marginalised communities a voice and creating an opportunity for mainstream communities to understand divergent perspectives (Eichstedt, 2006; Gershevitich, 2014; Hartley, 2017; Janes, 2009; Nightingale et al., 2012; Sandell, 2012; Sandell, 2017). Sandell (2012; 2017) describes community responsiveness through inclusion as a unique institutional platform to address issues of social justice and human rights. Consequently, sound, research-based knowledge communicates and deconstructs stereotypes, misconceptions, and fallacy to break down barriers that promote prejudice through emotionalised ignorance.

As a case study, #DayofFacts demonstrates a capacity for such museological practice.

‘From the success of the campaign and the way that social justice seems to resonate with visitors, it is clear that this is something if museums want to remain connected with visitors that we need to be doing’ (Hartley, 2017).

Scholars, such as Janes (2009), Janes and Conaty (2006), Ocello (2011), and Weil (2002), affirm the importance of socially purposeful public service for the future of the museum sector. In his article, “From Being about Something to Being for Somebody,” Weil traces the increasing focus upon such public service as ‘museums can play a powerful role in bringing about social change’ (Weil, 2002: 34). Janes (2009), on the other hand, considers socially purposeful practice as a central element of future museological relevance.

For Mara Kurlandsky, co-founder of #DayofFacts, “What right would we [museums] have to ask the public for [financial] help later if we were silent about the ways the administration’s policies were hurting our visitors” (2017B)? This is affirmed by Janes (2009) and Ocello (2011), who theoretically connect contemporary, relevant service to public support. As an emerging museum professional, Hartley’s definition of museological public service also evokes the increasing importance of socially connected practice:

‘I would define museological public service as our sector’s commitment to being in touch with issues that may be affecting our visitors (such as social, racial and economic realities) and being willing to take a stand to protect communities that have been marginalized to make them feel welcome in our institutions. I see public service is how we as institutions relate to the most vulnerable of our visitors, and how we react in a timely manner to issues and conversations that affect our visitors’ (Hartley, 2017).

The union of traditional museum talents and assets to the present moment for societal development and community well-being defines the future of museological public service as socially purposeful in nature. However, a central characteristic of the #DayofFacts case study potentially illustrates the disconnect between



broad sector application of such practice at present. Ultimately, #DayofFacts founders and organisers, Alli Hartley and Mara Kurlandsky completed all work associated with the social media campaign as individuals during their spare time (Hartley, 2017; Kurlandsky, 2017A; Kurlandsky, 2017B).

'In my writing and speaking reflecting on the campaign, I try to reinforce over and over again that if this is a future that the museum field wants to be going towards (and based on the reception to the campaign, it appears it very much is) then we have to place a lot more value on the activists who are leading this field...but institutions need to step their game up. Institutions speak with how they spend their money and allot resources, and unless institutions invest deeply into social justice, this work is not going to happen or be a real priority' (Hartley, 2017).

As Hartley passionately notes, the future of socially purposeful public service will require broad institutional investment of time and resources from the museum field. Given that museological scholarship demonstrates institutional capacity to address social themes and facilitate community-wellbeing, public policy trends reveal a willingness to support such practice, and the #DayofFacts case study illustrates an instance of successful application, the data indicates that the future of museum public service should increasingly manifest as socially purposeful practice. But, will it?

Regardless, #DayofFacts offers practical lessons for museums seeking to broaden their public service ethos to include socially purposeful practice, especially online. As a social media campaign, #DayofFacts occurred in a digital medium that fosters easy, connective communication with audience members and collaborating institutions through dedicated hashtags and phrases. Content guidelines encouraged participating organisations to share images and links with social media posts on #DayofFacts, linking traditional museum talents and assets to contemporary issues, while simultaneously exhibiting them in a digital medium (Day of Facts, 2017). Hartley and Kurlandsky also leveraged free internet offerings, such as wordpress for a website and twitter for a handle, to outline the #DayofFacts' mission and goals, content guidelines, best practices with links to examples, and campaign contact information (Day of Facts, 2017; 2017A; 2017B; 2017C). By sharing the #DayofFacts information completely online, Hartley and Kurlandsky fostered a cohesive social media campaign and message across approximately 350 participating organizations (Day of Facts, 2017; 2017A; 2017B; 2017C). However, #DayofFacts also proved adaptable to individual institutional mission and capacity within the outlined framework. Even as #DayofFacts sought to promote scholarship and facts, each organization communicated missionary content unique to their scholarship and through the social media platform(s) favored by the institution (Day of Facts, 2017). Likewise, some individual institutions optimised communication occurring around current social issues, by exploring #DayofFacts and their participation prior to February 17th, 2017 through press releases, news articles, or blogs.

In conclusion, #DayofFacts offers insight into socially purposeful public service. Even as challenges arise with vocal dissent, potential backlash from supporters and funders, and loss of message through trolling and counter narratives, the responsive connection between traditional service and social issues creates an opportunity for museums to foster societal development and community well-being. With #DayofFacts, the founders and collaborating institutions promoted facts rather than "fake news" and "alternative facts," fostered inclusion, and encouraged organizational participation with current issues. From the case study, further review highlights the use of social media to exhibit scholarship and collection material as a means of contextualising contemporary society and fostering deep, reflective conversations around social issues. Ultimately, #DayofFacts demonstrates one example of socially purposeful public service, founded and organised by two museum professionals. For the future of museological public service to broadly promote social development and well-being, institutions can leverage the lessons of #DayofFacts, but first must demonstrate commitment and a willingness to do so.

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# The Platform-Museum: conceptual revolutions and practical implications

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## Abstract

The article will investigate the emergence of a new platform model and its implications on the evolution of the museum of the future. Acting as a post-digital concept, the transformative power of platforms will be analysed from two different perspectives: (1) the ontological implications of the platform metaphor on the museum conceptualisation, how it influences the perception of museum shape, its physical boundaries, the institutional role and the meaning of heritage itself; (2) the practical implications of the use of platforms in a museum context, both existing and created by museums themselves; how they reconfigure spaces, practices, relationships with public and processes of cultural production. Ultimately, the article will propose – through the analysis of a case study – the new theoretical concept of the Platform-Museum: a metaphor, an organisational structure and a business model to become a platform for culture.

**Keywords:** platform-museum, museum platform, post-digital, co-production, participatory culture

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Museums in a platform world

Museums are in the midst of a paradigm shift. The so-called ‘digital revolution’ has drastically modified the ways people consume and interact with culture, introducing new pervasive practices that museums cannot ignore. The impact of the ‘participatory turn’ to the museum sector has been widely analysed and different terms have been introduced to describe the museological consequences of this evolution: *post-museum* (Hooper Greenhill, 2000), *participatory museum* (Simon, 2010) and *post-digital museum* (Parry, 2013: 24–39).

The introduction of the term ‘post-digital’ (Parry, 2013) marked a moment when digital technology has become normative and assimilated at all levels of the organisational structure, strategies and workflows; it is a moment in which ‘digital thinking’ has become part of how the museum conceives its role, mission and future development. Following the post-digital approach, ‘platform’ emerges as the main model around which not only the Web is organised, but also organisations are developed and sociality functions. The wide range of digital platforms evolved since 2000s not only channelled most of everyday activities, but also introduced new cultural practices and social norms that enhanced and engineered human relationships (Van Dijck, 2013: 9-14). More than a technology, the platform is recognised as a ‘transformative concept that is radically changing business, economy and society at large’ (Parker et al. 2016: 3). Platforms have patronised new roles for the ‘consumer’ as a distributor, creator, co-developer, curator and author of content. They have also led to the democratisation of practices once devoted only to highly specialised institutions and the emergence of co-production and collaborative approaches in cultural production (Tamma and Artico, 2015).

The aim of this article is to use a platform as a post-digital concept to understand the socioeconomic structures and business models, as well as the entire array of cultural forms and social practices that pervade the overlapping of online and offline life of museums. The article will highlight how the ecosystem of platforms is influencing the museum at both ontological – introducing new interpretations of museum and heritage – and practical levels – introducing new strategies, practices and processes of cultural production. In doing so, the article will contribute to outline a platform model for museums and cultural institutions that heralds a new theoretical concept: the ‘Platform-Museum’.

### 1.2. Background Platform Theory

Before analysing how a platform can be a post-digital model for museums and cultural institutions, we need to understand the meaning of the term ‘platform’. What does ‘being a platform’ mean in a post-digital context? What are the main components of a platform system?

‘Platform’, similar to other structural metaphors like ‘network’, ‘broadcast’ and ‘channel’, is a versatile term that carries multiple meanings. Gillespie (2010: 349–352) highlighted four different semantic connotations: *computational* – an infrastructure that support the design of different applications – *architectural* – a raised surface on which people or things can stand – *figurative* – the ground foundation of an action – *political* – a place from which to speak and to be heard. At a conceptual level, a platform is an open, neutral, egalitarian facilitator for activity – a different role from the one of traditional broadcasters and publishers – but at the same time it offers ‘patronage’ for user expression, since every platform controls some of the conditions under which content is produced (1). According to Van Dijck, this relational connotation is in line with the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) developed by Bruno Latour, Michael Callon and John Law. In this view, platforms would be considered a set of relations rather than artifacts, a mediator that shapes the performance of social acts (Van Dijck, 2013: 26).

There is another field where the concept of ‘platform’ arose. In political economy and business studies, the platform has been used to discuss new participatory perspectives in value creation in society (Negoro and Ajiro, 2013; Kim, 2016; Parker et al., 2016; Moazed, 2016). In this context, ‘platform’ is both a new organisational strategy and a holistic business model that creates value by facilitating exchanges between two or more player groups (e.g. consumers and producers). Instead of creating value through the creation and sale of good and services – traditional linear business models – a platform allow users to create value ‘in a variety of ways and places, all made possible by the connections that the platform facilitates’ (Parker et al., 2016: 6). The best example is the Web or any enterprise that wants to exploit it can flourish only using a platform business model. Depending on the value being exchanged and the actors attracted, several types of platforms have been developed in the market. Alex Moazed (2016: 118–119) proposes a distinction between *exchange platforms* that enable users to optimize connections (e.g. social networking platforms such as Facebook) and *maker platforms* that generate value by enabling users to create and share content (e.g. content platforms such as YouTube). In this sector, we can include all the cultural platforms that have been developed to extend the access to and interaction with the so-called ‘digital heritage’ (e.g. Europeana and Google Arts & Culture).

The sociotechnical and the economic approach are both necessary to understand the ecosystem of platforms that characterises our society(2). For the perspective of this article, I will adopt the terminology proposed by Van Dijck in order to distinguish between a ‘platform microsystem’ – when we look at individual platforms – and an ‘ecosystem of connective media’ when we look at the larger context of interconnected platforms and the culture in which they evolved (Van Dijck, 2013: 21). The two fundamental questions for analysing the influence of the platform model on the heritage sector are: (1) how can the museum interact with the ecosystem of interconnected platforms that pervade our society?; (2) can the museum develop its own platform model, by conceiving itself as a cultural platform microsystem?

To answer these questions, I will propose a ‘Museum Platform Model’ that can be adopted by heritage institutions in order to guide the reconfiguration of the museum spaces, activities, production processes, strategies and business model within the platform world.

## 2. The Museum Platform Model

The Museum Platform Model acts at two main different levels, as shown in the figure 1 below. The first level is ontological. The platform here acts as a metaphor of the museum conceptualisation. With the entrance in the Information age and the dematerialisation of many of our tangible possessions (Belk, 2013: 478–479), the museum changed its shape. While the eighteenth-century museum was a physical institution devoted to the collection and display of material objects, the 21st-century museum is a dynamic platform for the access, sharing and co-production of heritage in a growing range of ways – often digital-based. Section (2.1) will be dedicated to analysing this museological paradigm shift and what it means for a museum to be a platform for culture.

The second level is practical. The platform here is a tool used by museums for different purposes. In order to adapt to the functioning of digital platforms, museums are gradually reconfiguring spaces, cultural practices and products; assigning new roles and new actions to the public; adopting new processes of value creation. Section (2.2) will focus on the practical implications for the museums, following two different lines of actions: the use of existing platforms and the creation of new ‘museum platforms’.

By combining the ontological level with the practical, the model leads to the emergence of an entirely new museum that I define as ‘Platform-Museum’. The platform here is both the techno-cultural construct that mediates the relationship between the museum, users and content, and the socioeconomic structure that conveys new business models. Section (3) is dedicated to the analysis of this new museum, through the analysis

of a case study.

## THE MUSEUM PLATFORM MODEL

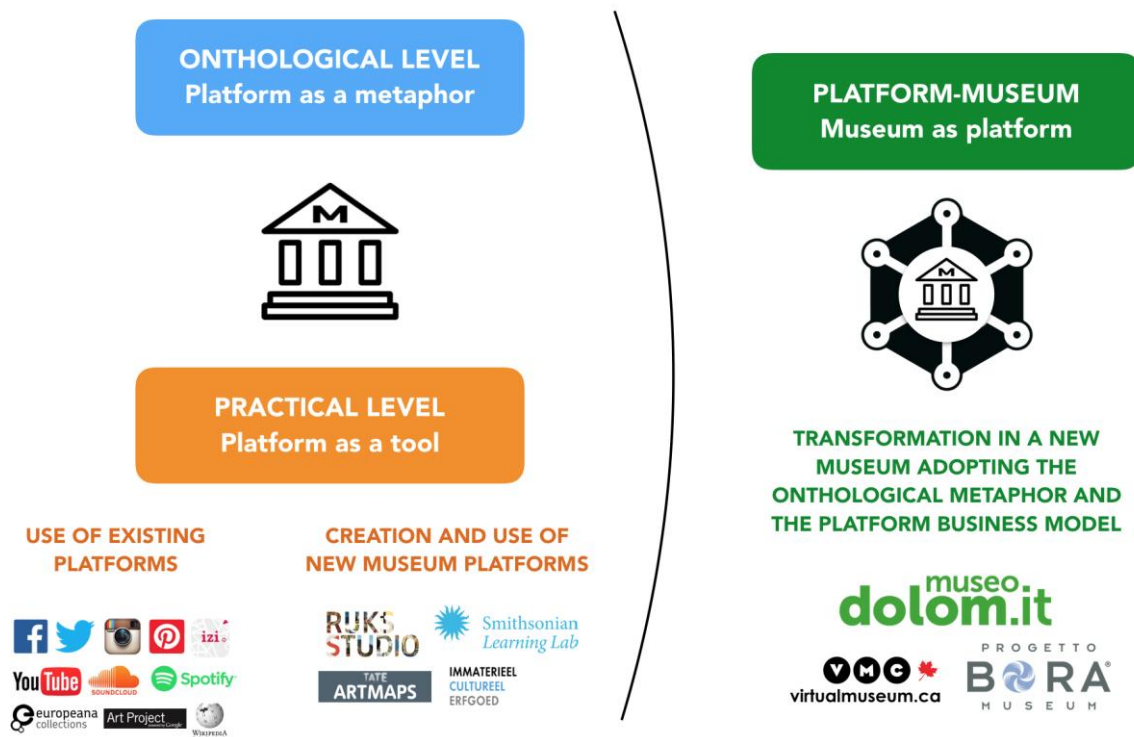


Figure 1: The Museum Platform Model

### 2.1. The museum conceptual revolution: the museum as a platform

The museum has – as we can document – its pre-forms and this is not a single given form, but it will continue changing and in the future it will have eventually completely new forms.

– Zbyněk Zbyslav Stránský (1981)

The first applicative level of the platform model is ontological. This is a deep level since it involves the museum 'being', the system of beliefs and interpretations that constitute its institutional meaning. A change in the museum ontology implies a change in behaviours and mindsets that have served museums since their origin (Falk and Sheppard, 2006: 22–25). It is a new way of thinking about what museums are, why they exist, how they behave, how they conceive their roles and functions.

As Stránský had predicted in 1981, the form that museums have assumed throughout the centuries is historically determined and it continues changing depending on the society in which the museum lives. Since the contemporary world is totally different from the world in which most museums forged themselves as institutions, [SM1] 'museums need to fundamentally rethink for whom they exist and how they exist in order to build new business models appropriate to this new age in which we now live' (Falk and Sheppard, 2006: 14). The authors connect the museum conceptual revolution with a shift in business models, a comprehensive term that includes objectives of the institution, vision and strategies, assets and value proposition (the range of products and services offered). Abandoning the 18th century ontology – and abandoning many of the attributes that have been associated to museums – is the prerequisite for changes at practical levels.

To explain and guide this conceptual revolution, the 'platform' metaphor acts on different layers of interpretation of what a museum is.

First of all, it affects **the perception of the museum shape**. With the advent of the Web, physical spaces and physical collections became just one of the manifestations of the museum presence, which has been extended to the virtual dimension. The platform is the latest stage of an evolution that transformed museums from physical institutions devoted to the acquisition, collection and display of tangible objects, to intangible entities with multiple access points. There are many implications of this ontological shift: the museum is perceived as a



changing environment with multiple locations rather than a single static place; processes and experiences gained primacy over objects; the museum entrance is not defined by a physical act anymore, but by experiential and relational thresholds (Parry, Moseley and Kristiansen, 2014).

Consequently, the platform metaphor influences **the perception of the museum boundaries**, i.e. the relationship between the interior and the exterior. For a long time, the museum conceived itself as an isolated entity, a centralised institution that attracts visitors thanks to its top-down linear model of cultural production – from the ‘head’ of the organisation to an indistinctive public. In the interconnected ecosystem of platforms, ‘no longer can museums operate as they exist in isolation’ and they ‘need to invest in relationships’ (Falk and Sheppard, 2006: 14). The idea of an institutional ‘autonomous self’ needs to be substituted with the interpretation of the ‘aggregated self’ proper to the digital era(3) (Belk, 2013: 477–478). Borrowing Van Dijck (2013: 21)’s terminology, the museum can be conceived as a microsystem of relationships that interact with other microsystems at both local – the territorial network of stakeholders – and global level – the online ecosystem.

Thirdly, the platform metaphor changes the interpretation of the museum role and authority. Being an authoritarian temple of knowledge no longer meets the expectations of people, who are active agents rather than passive recipients of information. In a world where people want to ‘create, remix, and interpret content messages on their own, museums can assume a new role of authority as “platforms” for those creations and recombinations’ (Simon, 2008: Museum 2.0 Blog). This implies juxtaposing the traditional role of content provider with a new role: being the facilitator of the production of new cultural content. It is a reconceptualisation of the museum authority that Phillips (2013) calls ‘Open Authority’: ‘the coming together of museum authority with the principles of the open Web, a mixing of institutional expertise with the discussion, experiences, and insights of broad audiences’ (222). This authority is based on platform control instead of content control. In renouncing to control the content – and the overall cultural experience – museums are not abandoning their expertise, but they are employing it to rally, manage and curate a plurality of voices on the subject they choose, following the interaction rules they set. In this way, they continually improve the content, opening up to the opportunity of connecting with the ‘expert web’ (Proctor, 2010: 40–41) (4).

Ultimately, the platform metaphor also affects the understanding and meaning of heritage: the very core of museums. The participatory culture and spreadable practices (Jenkins, Ford and Green, 2006), by making social media a place for cultural production, highlight that heritage values and meanings are constantly co-created, rather than attached to artifacts and places. This leads to the recognition of heritage as a socially constructed process rather than an object that can be preserved, collected and communicated (Byrne, 2008). This paradigm shift has been internationally recognised by the Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for the Society (2005), which, for the first time, places people – and their ‘constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions’ (Art. 2) – at the centre of the definition of heritage. The Convention states that heritage is about individuals, communities and the value that they give to places, objects and cultural practices, thus setting no limits to what heritage can be.

In the end, the museum as a platform reveals itself as a new museological dimension: a dynamic intangible entity with multiple access points; a microsystem of relationships inserted in an ecosystem of connected platforms; a facilitator for participatory cultural production and a catalyst for the new socially constructed conception of heritage.

## 2.2 How the museum shapes platforms and how platforms shape the museum

Building platforms is not the same as building programs. It flexes new muscles, requires different skill sets. But to me, the benefit is clear. In a platform model, our community takes us further than we could ever go on our own.

– Nina Simon (2017)

The most visible manifestation of what has been called the ‘platform revolution’ is represented by a few giant worldwide platforms. Each one dominates a particular niche of the marketplace: Google for browsing, YouTube for video-sharing, Facebook for social networking, Instagram for photo-sharing, Spotify for music-sharing, Twitter for microblogging, Amazon for e-commerce, Wikipedia for open knowledge. Each platform is born to be ‘used’, and the use of these ‘giants’ has permeated every aspect of everyday life, including museum experiences. Even if a museum does not embrace one of these platforms, its visitors probably do, i.e. by sharing photos, videos and information of the museum on their personal accounts. As a result, the museum presence is distributed in a variety of different platforms, sometimes under the museum control – i.e. platforms used by

museums – sometime not – i.e. platforms used by individuals. But the platform revolution has also led to the foundation of an endless number of smaller platforms that serve different purposes in different sectors. In this growing ecosystem, the museum interacts with platforms in different ways. First of all, the museum can use spaces, channels, tools, networks of existing platforms to extend its presence, share its cultural heritage, create new cultural products and engage audiences in new ways (see Section 2.2.1). Secondly, the museum can create its own cultural platforms and heritage communities around them (see Section 2.2.2).

### 2.2.1 The use of existing platforms

The use of existing platforms is anything but neutral for the museum. The intrinsic mechanism of each microsystem – including specific rules of behaviour, social practices and modes of interaction – shapes the way in which museums make content accessible and build relationships around it. In order to fully leverage the potential of this medium, museums need to develop a post-digital approach, going beyond the digital nature of the instrument and recognising its social role and cultural implications. The complexity of each platform needs to be analysed in detail, but I identify three basic principles that museums should follow.

The first is that museums need to consider platforms as places for cultural production. The most evident example is when a platform enables the museum to be the content provider, by participating in the creation of digital heritage archives – e.g. Europeana – or multimedia tours on storytelling application – e.g. izi.TRAVEL(5). But the museum is not the only content provider. Also non heritage-based platforms – such as social networks – can be spaces for cultural production if the museum accepts the multiple roles of the user that can act simultaneously as a consumer, distributor, curator and creator of content. Different roles correspond to different levels of interaction, strictly dependent on the modes of engagement that the platform enables and the museum designs (Simon, 2010). In the first interaction level, people ‘consume’ content in the traditional ‘broadcasting mode’. But in a platform system there is always a further level: anyone can comment and share what has been published. Therefore the museum content, after being selected, presented and delivered by curators, can be re-presented and re-contextualised in a variety of new ways determined by users. The non-linear business model of the platform allows forms of spontaneous digital curation and the production of new interpretations. The potential of this role has been fully understood by the Italian initiative Digital Invasions, which considers the ‘public’ the first and most important cultural promoter, and social media the channels through which heritage can spread in highly personalised ways. A deeper level of contribution to cultural production is crowdsourcing, where people are asked to tag the museum digital content for research purposes (Ridge, 2013). But social media platforms can also foster the creation of bottom-up cultural production forms not intentionally designed by the museum, such as the ‘art memes’: visual, often ironic interpretations of works of art created and shared by people on social media.

The second principle is that **museums can use platforms as potential archives of Big Data**. The shift from connectedness – the ability of social platforms to enhance human relationships – to connectivity – the opportunity to exploit behavioural and profiling data generated within the platform system – is intrinsic to the development of the platform ecosystem (Van Dijck, 2013: 14–18). Behavioral and profiling data – a by-product that users do not intentionally deliver – are turned into a primary and precious resource to respond to users’ needs, predict social trends, develop recommendation systems, adapt and co-develop platforms in collaboration with users. Thanks to the openness of the Application Program Interface(6), researchers can collect and extract very large data from social platforms in order to analyse the circulation and consumption of digital content. The potential of this rich tapestry of data for the heritage sector is yet to be fully explored: heritage researchers are starting to address these enormous web archives to understand audiences, analyse the public perception of heritage, and study new spontaneous forms of cultural engagement emerged in these social spaces. Recent research has demonstrated how Facebook can be a potential ethnographic archive for testing the public perception of the past (Bonacchi et al., 2018); how Twitter can function as a precious textual dataset to evaluate the quality of cultural participation in social media campaigns (Zuanni, 2017: 119–133); how Instagram or Flickr can enable a deep analysis of the visual imagery of the heritage experience (Budge, 2017: 67–85). To leverage the potential of these ‘big web archives’, museums need to adopt – and adapt – research methodologies(7), while remaining aware of their limits: (1) the entire dataset is not always accessible; (2) data are often decontextualized; and (3) there could be ethical implications in using personal data (Bonacchi, 2017: 71–72).

The third principle is that **museums can have an active role in platform development**. Microsystems are not finished products but ‘dynamic objects that are tweaked in response to their users’ needs and their owners’ objectives’ (Van Dijck, 2013: 7). In an ongoing changing ecosystem, the API’s system is the mechanism that each platform adopts to leverage external contribution for the development of new applications and the extension of

functionalities. Many platforms – such as Spotify – have also designed specific spaces where users can submit ideas or proposals for the platform improvement. In order to ‘use’ and not ‘to be used’ by the platform, museums are called to participate in this ongoing development. If they do not participate, the platforms that dominate our sociality would probably develop in a way that will not suit their cultural mission(8). In the past museums have contributed to shape cultural spaces and cultural forms in the physical world. They are now called to be creative in shaping the new ‘hybrid spaces’ of our platform world. Thanks to the increased creativity generated by online platforms(9), a museum can imagine new cultural forms that originate from its uniqueness, by combining different tools available on different microsystems. An interesting experiment, proposed by the author in 2015, originated from the museological use of a spreadable practice: the sharing of YouTube musical links on Facebook. Four different museums in the Dolomites area(10) shared on their Facebook pages a single image from their collection, inviting users to post their personal musical associations through a YouTube link. The format overcame its digital boundaries by transferring offline through the sharing of the users’ playlist on the local radio.



Figure 2: One of the ‘musical paintings’ post. February 2016, MUSEION Facebook Page

## 2.2.2 The creation of museum platforms

More or less consciously, museums are embracing the platform transformation. The more they exploit different platform tools for cultural purposes, the more they shape themselves as platforms for culture. But there is a highest level of control, when the museum creates and uses its own cultural platforms. I define these example ‘museum platforms’ (not to be confused with the ‘Platform-Museum’), since they are an extension of the physical museum. Nina Simon (2008) highlights four different forms of power in platform management: (1) the power to set the rules of behavior; (2) the power to preserve and exploit user-generated content; (3) the power to promote and feature preferred content; and (4) the power to define the types of interaction available to users.

A museum platform can serve different purposes. One of the most common is to personalise the online experience of the museum website, by giving people the opportunity to create individual accounts and curate personal collections. These kinds of platform are able ‘to harness, prioritize, and present the diversity of voices around a given object, exhibit, or idea’ (Simon, 2008: Museum 2.0 Blog). An example is Rijkstudio, a platform developed by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. The introductory byline ‘Discover the possibilities of the masterpieces’ reveals how the collection is interpreted as a resource for public creativity. This is directly linked with the evolution of the concept of ‘collection’ in the post-digital age. In a world where access rather than ownership defines the relationship with objects, the practice of accumulating ‘own objects’ is substituted by the practice of collecting ‘links to digital objects’ as a mean of personal expression (Belk, 2013: 491). To further develop this potential, in 2015 Rijksmuseum conceived Rijkstudio Award, an international design competition that invites members of the public to download images from Rijkstudio and create their own artwork, with no

limit to the imagination: ‘Anyone can take part and all art forms and interpretations are allowed, from design, decorative arts and applied arts to fashion design, photography and video’ (Rijksmuseum, 2017 International Rijkstudio Award).

Museums have developed other kinds of platforms to facilitate the creation of value around their resources: educational platforms, interactive learning environment where educators can create and share learning resources (Milligan and Wadman, 2015); crowdsourcing platforms, where people are engaged in research projects or specific museum tasks to generate new meanings and interpretations to collections (Ridge, 2013: 437–438; Stack, 2013); heritage platforms, living dynamic archives devoted to the collection and co-creation of intangible and audiovisual heritage (Janssens et al., 2013); crowdfunding platforms, powerful tools to attract new donors and enhance the museum financial sustainability (Riley-Huff et al, 2016: 67–85). And many others are yet to come, depending on the museum scope and specific goals.

### 3. A new paradigm: the Platform-Museum

The museum of the future is not just a place where objects related to cultural heritage are cared for and displayed. It is not just a place where the stories of these objects and their significance is presented. It is a place where visitors (real and virtual) can interact with those objects and those stories, with the museum’s staff, and with each other. Through these activities, the museum of the future is a platform where new ideas and meanings are generated, exchanged and preserved.

– John Stack (2013)

By combining the ontological with practical level of the platform model, museums can transform themselves into an entirely new museological being that I define as ‘Platform-Museum’. The platform, here, goes beyond the creation of a digital space: it determines the way in which the museum is conceived, heritage is created, museum activities are designed, and people are involved. Among cultural companies that place culture at the core of the production practices and business model (Artico and Tamma, 2017: 12), the ‘Platform-Museum’ adopts ‘platform’ as its own business and founding model. The main traits of a ‘Platform-Museum’ will be derived by analysing a particular case study.

#### 3.1 The case study: Museo Dolom.it

Museo Dolom.it, of which the author is co-founder, could be considered a digital-born ‘Platform-Museum’. This is a virtual museum composed entirely by digital cultural content co-created by students, museums and communities of the Dolomites area(11). Originating from an educational project aimed to engage young audiences in the reinterpretation of their heritage landscape, Museo Dolom.it evolved into a real museum that exists only in its online form, without a physical counterpart. This digital native museum overturns the top-down process of cultural production, in favour of a bottom-up approach on collaborative creation (Szabo, Zardini Lacedelli and Pompanin, 2017: 119–122), proper for the platform business model.

The first section, dedicated to the theme of ‘water’, was created in 2016 by 10 classes from high schools in the Belluno Province: using a Content Management System developed by the Italian Centre Institute for the Union Catalogue of Libraries, each class developed its digital interpretation of ‘water’ that can be accessed on the platform. In 2017 and 2018, other sections have been added, thanks to the involvement of other classes and different stakeholders that joined the participatory process. From there originated multimedia tours of the Belluno Province on the izi.TRAVEL platform, a collaborative archive of Dolomites soundscapes on SoundCloud, videoperformances and anthropological interviews on the YouTube channel. The museum has also promoted the Digital Invasions format in the Dolomites, coordinating thirty participatory events during the fifth and sixth edition of the initiative (21 April – 7 May 2017 and 20 April – 6 May 2018) with the hashtag #invasoridolomiti (#dolomitesinvaders).

Rather than an institution, then, Dolom.it is a dynamic process continuously fostered by its running organisation, a local-based cultural enterprise named ISOIPSE. Thanks to different funding sources, the association involves schools, museums, archives and other cultural institutions in the creation of new content, building new relationships through this participatory process. Notwithstanding its first stage of development, Museo Dolom.it can be considered as a prototype of a ‘Platform-Museum’: a museum where people are no longer visitors or users, but ‘actors’, at various levels, of the heritage process. They are the ‘authors’ of the museum itself.

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**museo.dolom.it**

## #ACQUE

Il museo virtuale del paesaggio dolomitico

**L'ESSENZIALE E INVISIBILE AGLI OCCHI**

Nonostante l'acqua sia un elemento essenziale per la vita sulla terra, non è sempre immediatamente percepibile. Come accade nell'arte, l'assenza di un soggetto ne fa spesso percepire maggiormente la sua "presenza". Tra le opere del museo Civico e quelle del Museo Rimoldi, ne abbiamo scovato alcune dove l'acqua si nasconde ai nostri occhi, ma non alla nostra percezione...Curiosi?

DI GOCCIA IN GOCCIA  
AIVA, IEGA, AGA  
THE LORDS OF PIAVE  
LA VIA DELL'ENERGIA  
OCCHIO ALL'ACQUA  
INFINITE SFUMATURE D'ACQUA  
FORTE COME L'ACQUA  
EMOZIONI CHE SCORRONO  
**L'ACQUA NASCOSTA**  
ALLA RICERCA DELL'ACQUA  
L'ESSENZIALE È INVISIBILE AGLI OCCHI  
ACQUA INQUINATA NELL'OTTOCENTO?  
VITA ATTORNO A UNA FONTANA  
ECHI DI LAGOLE  
STORIE CHE SCORRONO  
NE È PASSATA DI ACQUA SOTTO I PONTI  
LE NOSTRE APP

ACQUA INQUINATA NELL'OTTOCENTO

Tra i quadri del Museo Civico di Belluno, uno in particolare ha attirato la nostra attenzione per la particolare colorazione con cui l'artista ha rappresentato l'acqua. Agli occhi di un contemporaneo, il Piave potrebbe risultare particolarmente inquinato. Ma quali potrebbero essere le cause di questo colore?

VITA ATTORNO A UNA FONTANA

Figure 3 The first section of the Dolom.it museum, available at [www.museodolom.it](http://www.museodolom.it)

Home | Libreria | Cerca | Passa a Pro | Carica

**Museo Dolom.it**

Museo Dolom.it  
DOLOMIXER - A soundscape composition by Lucio Santin  
7 mesi  
#Soundscape compos...

0:14 11:28

Scrivi un commento

5 Ripubblica Condividi Altro 134

Museo Dolom.it  
Sonic Mesolithic - Mesolitico sonoro  
8 mesi  
#Soundscape

0:57

2 Ripubblica Condividi Altro 73

Museo Dolom.it  
Water  
8 mesi  
#Soundscape

2:02

1 Ripubblica Condividi Altro 31

Figure 4 The collaborative archive of Dolomites soundscapes on the Museo Dolom.it profile on SoundCloud, available at <https://soundcloud.com/user-225842254>



Figure 5: The closing ceremony in the Dolomites of the fifth edition of 'Digital Invasions'. Full program available at [www.invasionidigitali.it](http://www.invasionidigitali.it).

### 3.2 What defines a 'Platform-Museum'

Based on this case study, the ideal type of a 'Platform-Museum' presents the following traits: (1) it adopts a platform business model; (2) the community development is one of its core goals; (3) it involves a diffused area and different locations, without necessarily having a physical centre; (4) heritage is co-created with community members, and it does not necessarily originate by a pre-existent collection; (5) its development is defined by the growing network of actors that involve in the co-production, rather than the number of 'visitors' that attract. The 'community-driven', bottom-up approach and its diffused nature bring the 'Platform-Museum' closer to the 'ecomuseum', a new paradigm emerged in 1970s. Ecomuseums place community participation at the core of their mission, therefore fostering the creation of 'heritage community' as intended by the Faro Convention: a community in which each member 'could be moving from the role of consumer to that of actor, and even author of the museum' (Rivière, 1989: 164–165).

While 'ideal type' presents simultaneously all of these traits – as in the Museo Dolom.it case study – the 'Platform-Museum' is not a strict categorisation, but an evolving process. In the evolution toward the model, a 'Platform-Museum' can include several of, but not necessarily all, the aforementioned traits. Furthermore, the evolution into a 'Platform-Museum' does not automatically imply the existence of a museum institution or the involvement of an entire single museum. A 'Platform-Museum' can originate also from a single museum department or a research project – such as the Museu de la Paraula, a platform of the Valencian Museum of Ethnography; from a network of museums and cultural institutions – such as The Virtual Museum of Canada (VMC) –; from a community-based archive – such as The Bora Museum in Trieste. These are preliminary examples of an evolving concept that can envision the museum of the future. Any cultural institution can shape this model on its specific mission, dimension, context, by developing its own way of being a platform for culture.

### Conclusion

'Platform' is a strong concept for museums. It holds a transformative power, capable of harnessing all the revolutionary practices that society has assimilated during the digital revolution. The skills, mindsets, literacy and abilities of people are different. The cultural, social and technological expectations are different. And they will continue to change. Museums cannot anticipate future revolutions but they can design themselves in order to be ready for them. The only way of doing so is to shape themselves as dynamic systems in connection and adaptation with society, becoming platforms for culture.

The platform model does not substitute previous meanings of the museum. It adds a further one. Alongside the museum as a cultural institution and as a production structure, a new behaviour surfaces: the museum as a platform. A 'Platform-Museum' is a way of being, of creating value with people, of producing new heritage with communities, of participating in the development of the society. This is the main contribution the platform model can make to museums. Not simply in a technical sense, as a new set of tools that museum can adopt, but as a metaphor, an organisational structure and a business model. The platform model contains the ontological and methodological principles that can launch the museum into the future.

## Notes

(1) Burgess and Green (2008) describe the role of 'patronage' of the YouTube platform: 'YouTube Inc can be seen as the "patron" of collective creativity, inviting the participation of a very wide range of content creators, and in so doing controlling at least some of the conditions under which creative content is produced' (60).

(2) The analytic framework developed by José Van Dijck in her book *The Culture of Connectivity* (2003) combines the two different layers of interpretation:

1 Platform as technocultural construct, i.e. the provider of software, sometimes hardware and services that code social activities into a computational architecture: the focus is on the co-evolution of people – users – technologies and content.

2 Platform as socio-economic structure, i.e. a system of production whose constitutive elements are ownership status, governance and business models: with its ownership status, a platform can be owned by non-profit or for-profit organisations. Governance allows each platform to set the rules for content management system and the norms for privacy, property and proper behaviour through the Terms of Service. Finally, each platform has explored different business models, from the subscription fee to the freemium model to the monetisation of data and metadata that allow the development of personalized and targeted advertising.

(3) According to Belk (2013), a new sense of extended self has emerged in digital age: 'The aggregate self can no longer be conceived from only a personal perspective and is not only jointly constructed but shared, that is, a joint possession with others' (490)

(4) The expertise is enhanced, as Proctor states: 'In the new cultural economy, the curator's expertise will be judged not just by the depth of his or her subject- knowledge, but also by the extent, diversity, and richness of the network that is engaged in active conversation with the curator, thereby ensuring the ongoing quality, relevance, and future of the discourse' (Proctor, 2010: 41)

(5) In this case, the museum need to deal with copyright issues on digital content made accessible - usually managed by each platform through the terms of service – in the same way a single person does with personal content.

(6) The Application Program Interface (API) is a set of codes that specifies protocolised relations between data, software and hardware.

(7) Big Data analysis includes, among others, text mining, topic modelling, sentiment analysis and visual content analysis.

(8) In his article 'Is Spotify good for classical music' (2014), Burton-Hill reports the declaration of Jonathan Gruber, the managing director of the leading classical music consultancy Ulysses Art: 'It's not a question of having a choice, of either embracing this or letting it go past: if we don't embrace it, it will develop in a way that we're not happy with. And classical music will run the risk of becoming less relevant if it doesn't engage with the way the rest of the world is moving.' (BBC Culture Website, 2014).

(9) According to Van Dijck (2013), online platforms 'have indisputably given rise to a number of new (and arguably liberating) cultural forms: the tweets, the video snippet, the blog entry, the webisode, and the mash-up, to name just a few. Online platforms spawned a lot of creativity, allowing users to invent new forms that suited their expressive and communicative needs' (161).

(10) The format was experimented in 2015 by the Mario Rimoldi Modern Art Museum in Cortina and, in 2016, by the contemporary art museum MUSEION in Bozen, the science museum MUSE in Trento and the Mondeval Museum in Selva di Cadore, in collaboration with Radio Cortina.

(11) The museum can be accessed at [www.museodolom.it](http://www.museodolom.it).

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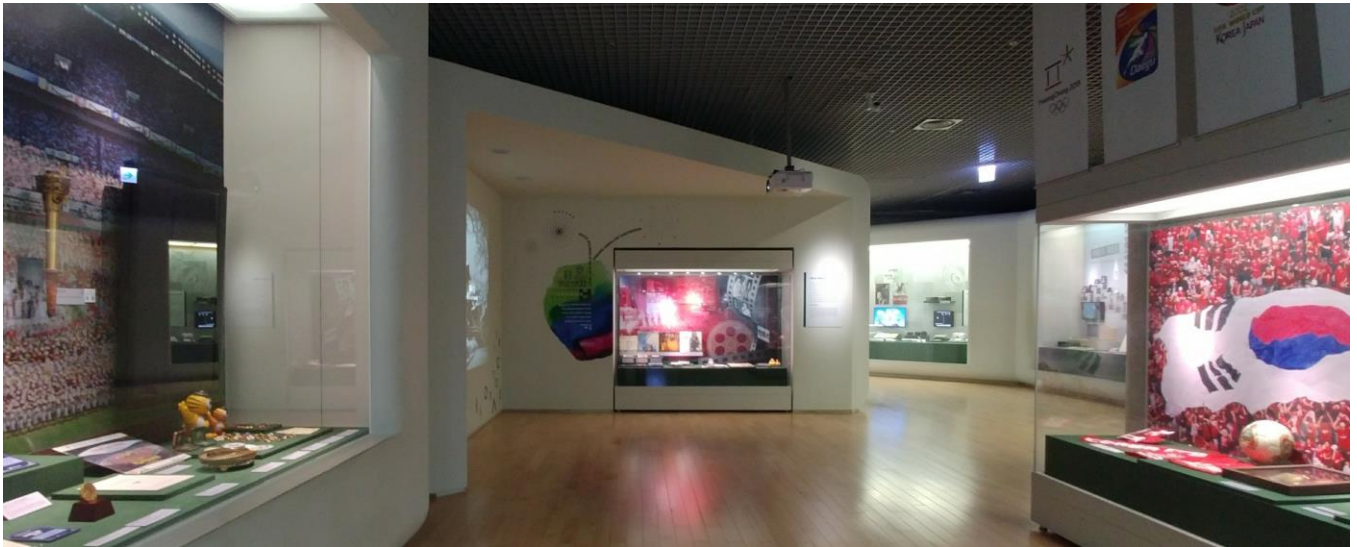
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## Visual submission: Ongoing Cultural Phenomenon as Future Museum Objects

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Globalisation implies continuous contact between national and international cultures. The development of South Korea's cultural industry reflects the national 'specificity' of cultural policy which is unfolded in the international context. Divergent discourses of the Korean Wave(1) produced complementary effects that are both explicit (economic profit) and implicit (cultural relationships particularly via social networking services). K-pop and K-drama relevant objects (centre of photo) are placed in the final stage of the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History along with the international engagement – digitally curated UNESCO World Heritage Sites (left of centre), the 1988 Seoul Olympics (left), the 2002 World Cup (right), and international summits. The contents of this wide-angle image would be considered as sustainably curatable objects for future museums: a nationally originated cultural phenomenon connectable with international stories, ongoing cultural contents interactive with contemporary audiences, and cross-historical time and sites reachable through digital curating.

(1) One part of the contemporary cultural phenomenon of South Korea, which involves the distribution of Korean popular cultural products and the following influences of cultural trends such as the promotion of the diverse aspects of Korean culture and tourism. This phenomenon started from the 1990s with the export of K-drama and K-pop and resulted in its fever starting from the Asian region and gradually spreading out across other nations over a few decades. This could be interpreted as a sort of 'unique' but 'glocal' cultural characteristic of South Korea.

# When matter becomes a monster: Examining Anthropocenic Objects in Museums

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## Abstract

Human activity will have a long lasting effect on the planet. To the point it has been suggested that the earth has entered a new geological epoch: the Anthropocene. It highlights the entanglements of natural and human forces. It is a new phase in human history where slow-motion earthly processes are being connected to the passing moments of everyday life. It is becoming clear that humans are participating in a shared, vital materiality and there is a need to attend to nonliving vitality. This article will examine two museum objects: plastiglomerate from the Museon in The Hague and fatberg at the Museum of London. They will be considered as anthropocenic objects materialising the Anthropocene. They consist of disposable goods, human waste, organic and inorganic material. They are unintended consequences of consumer culture, forming outside human control and revealing entangled histories of multiple materials. Examining them as anthropocenic objects highlights the shared vitality of matter, living and nonliving. Adopting a sensory attentiveness to vital materiality is an important future task for museums to contribute to a deeper understanding of human and environmental entanglements in the Anthropocene.

**Keywords:** Anthropocene, Anthropocenic objects, plastiglomerate, fatberg, museum materialities

Living in the Anthropocene, it is not possible to assume that the ground beneath us or the atmosphere around us is a stable backdrop for human societies. Humanity has shaped biological and geological histories, and the concept of the Anthropocene highlights the entanglements of natural and human forces, where the fate of one determines the fate of the other (Zalasiewicz et al., 2010). It is meant to emphasise the effects of human activity which are collectively altering the planet to the point that the traces will be a permanent part of earth's geological record (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000). It is a 'unique phase of human history', according to Dipesh Chakrabarty (2018: 6), in which the slow-motion processes of Earth's systems and the fleeting moments of everyday life are understood as interconnected.

This new phase of human history is a complex phase of entangled histories that has surfaced on the horizon of museums. The Deutsches Museum, a museum of science and technology in Munich, Germany, opened the temporary exhibition *Welcome to the Anthropocene: The earth in our hands* in 2014. Technological inventions are put into an environmental perspective featuring the unintended consequences of past progress and possible future solutions (Möllers, Schwägerl & Trischler, 2015). Across the Atlantic, in Pittsburgh, USA, the Carnegie Museum of Natural History opened the exhibition *We Are Nature: Living in the Anthropocene* in 2017, focusing on stories of humans' impact on the planet. Furthermore, the museum intends to embrace the concept in multidisciplinary research and visitor engagement through exhibitions and programming (Carnegie Museum of Natural History, 2017). Museums are moving towards a deeper understanding of complex environmental issues such as climate change and future ecological uncertainties. They have the capability to mobilise their collections and to shape practices to act as catalysts of change in the future (Cameron & Neilson, 2015; Newell, Robin & Wehner, 2017).

This article will explore the transformative possibilities of the Anthropocene by examining two museum objects: plastiglomerate from the Museon in The Hague and fatberg at the Museum of London. They will be considered as anthropocenic objects materialising the Anthropocene as assemblages of waste and organic and inorganic material: plastic waste, marine debris, sand and basaltic lava fragments in the case of plastiglomerate. Fatberg, on the other hand, is made up of congealed fat, oil and grease entangled with discarded wet wipes, used diapers and human excrement. They evoke unease and concerns about the disposal and accumulation of waste, but spark curiosity at the same time. When they are placed in museums together with other established treasures of culture and/or nature, this raises questions about their status as museum objects. Escaping easy

categorisation, they are not purely cultural artefacts or natural specimens, but a bit of both or even something else. What is their significance, and why should they be collected, preserved and/or displayed in a museum setting? Examining them as anthropocenic emphasises noticing them and adopts an open-ended observation of the vitality of matter, which is an important task for museums engaging with the uncertain future of the ecological crisis.

## Vitality of matter

The Anthropocene was originally thought of as a concept in earth and climate sciences when it was first coined in the early 2000s. Since then, it has moved with remarkable ease to other fields, receiving critical examination (Lewis & Maslin, 2015). It has been pointed out that the planetary scale is diminishing socio-environmental struggles, past or present, flattening out the immense complexities of human activity into a simple species of acts (Bonneuil, 2015). Its human exceptionalist connotations have also been criticised, where Anthropos is challenging geological forces during a time when the divisions between human individuals and the environment are increasingly being challenged (Bennett, 2010; Haraway, 2016).

It is becoming clearer that humans are, in fact, participating in a 'shared, vital materiality', and the ethical task at hand is to 'cultivate the ability to discern nonhuman vitality' (Bennett, 2010: 14). We are of the earth and not separate from it. The act of revealing the capacity of humanity as a species to enact deep time motion also introduces the act of giving agency to inert earthly matter in historical times. The environment is not simply a silent and passive backdrop to cultural or social histories. The timelessness of nature is being challenged by complex issues such as human-induced climate change (Chakrabarty, 2009). The Anthropocene raises questions about the relations between the social and the geologic. Giving geology a body and agency as the 'substratum to life and its conditions of survival' provides the opportunity to look at humans not only as being shaped by social configurations, but also by inhuman forces (Yusoff, 2016: 7).

Defining a geological time unit depends on locating a global stratigraphic signature, a golden spike in earth's geological record that is distinct from the epoch preceding it, e.g. the Holocene (Waters et. al, 2016). There is a material side to the matter, i.e. a search for traces. Without geological objects, there is no geological time scale (Chakrabarty, 2018). The persistence of matter is a vital component in the discussions on the Anthropocene. The accumulating byproducts of human activity are not inert, whether they are plastic waste, disposable consumer goods, carbon dioxide emissions from burning coal or even the radioactive traces of atomic bomb testing. Human waste is becoming an object of geology, and it is an object that plays a key part in discerning a distinct signature in sediments, which is required for the official recognition of the Anthropocene as part of the Geological Time Scale (Waters et. al, 2016)

The official recognition of the geological epoch is still under review, but as Rob Nixon (2018: 6) rightfully points out, the slow assessment of earth scientists has been taken over by high-speed deliberations in areas outside their jurisdiction. This rapid transformation is moving beyond golden spikes to determine what 'comprises and confines (if anything) the matter of the Anthropocene' (Pétursdóttir, 2017: 185). It is moving from a planetary scale to a minute one by noticing the entangled traces of seemingly trivial material to 'rediscover the vitality of mundane objects' (Nixon, 2018: 16) such as waste that is carelessly disposed of. Plastic bottles and wet wipes, marketed as disposable, end up in landfills. There, 'different waste forms are merging in complex and unpredictable ways' (Hird, 2017: 202). Waste also ends up in oceans, washes ashore on beaches or accumulates in other places. The magnitude of waste possibly makes it the most 'enduring trace of the human' as suggested by Hird (2017: 188), who described it as a 'major human-instantiated planetary de- and re-stratification'. Fatberg and plastiglomerate are examples of beach and sewer assemblages that are a mix of waste, organic matter, rocks and minerals, merging in tangled and undetermined ways. How does this make them a good case for examination as anthropocenic objects?

## Anthropocenic objects

A 'Wall of anthropocenic objects' was presented at the temporary exhibition on the Anthropocene at the Deutsches Museum. It included eighteen objects from the museum's vast collection that attempted to construct the history of the Anthropocene from the start of the industrial age (Möllers et al., 2015). The anthropocenic objects highlighted ecological concerns that are related to a number of technological inventions since the industrial age. They were seen as connected to nature because they relied on natural resources as well as altered nature (Trischler, 2015).

Connecting technological objects to nature is a step towards crossing the boundaries, but such objects do not present the messy, complex and entangled sense of the Anthropocene. They are simply too pure, already streamlined as masterpieces of technology, materialising human ingenuity. Well-preserved and aesthetically pleasing, there is a sense of distance from the messy entanglements and uncertain state of the Anthropocene. Without dispelling them as a proper representation of the Anthropocene, the intention here is to expand on the notion and to look at more disturbing, filthy and uncanny assemblages of matter that materialise the complex relationship between human activity and the environment.

This also opens up the multiplicity of ways to become a museum object. Making the case for the multiple identities of objects, Nicholas Thomas (2016) argued for the need to overcome the misleading 'naturalisms' of heritage, collections and the artefact. This naturalisation is based on the assumption that 'physical identities' and 'forms of belonging' are fixed (17). Thomas claims that material artefacts usually have 'oblique and incidental relationships' with events and a development that is emphasised in the historical circumstances presented in museums (122). In a similar way, Sandra Dudley (2010: 5) turns the attention to the materiality of museum objects, the physical properties and the enactment of the object, constituting the moment the material thing is 'perceived and sensorially experienced'.

This underlines the agency of the object in the sense that it produces effects and embodies intentionalities. Acknowledging the agency of objects has led to experiments with biographical writing, placing objects in a historical context and linking them with written sources and documentation pertaining to their lives in museums (Hoskins, 2006). Studies on object biographies acknowledge the agency of objects. They do so with a main emphasis on their relational connection to people, practices and institutions (Alberti, 2005).

Object biographies have so far ignored the vitality of matter and assemblages exceeding human relations (Pétursdóttir, 2017). Taking the Anthropocene into account requires a step towards seeing objects more like nature-culture hybrids, which belong to complex systems 'involving the actions and agencies of many human, non-human, technological actors and earthly processes' (Cameron, 2017: 30). There is a need for a stronger 'sensory attentiveness' to inert forces, in the way that Jane Bennett (2010) explains how to explore vital materialism:

The capacity to detect the presence of impersonal affect requires that one is caught up in it. One needs, at least for a while, to suspend suspicion and adopt a more open-ended comportment. If we think we already know what is out there, we will almost surely miss much of it (Bennett, 2010: xv).

Examining objects as anthropocenic means exploring them as assemblages of multiple materialities. It requires detecting the objects' agency and the presence of impersonal affect, the vitality of matter. What follows is an account of two objects, exploring entangled histories in order to write complex biographies that involve proven and speculative traces that may possibly exceed human relations. It remembers that objects 'are mostly mute about their journeys, though most of them have traveled much farther than any of us' (Robertson, 2016: 7).

## Plastiglomerate: In the tight grip of plastics

Among the interactive displays and numerous museum objects, a specific kind of stone is presented in the exhibition *One planet* at the Museon, a museum of science and culture in The Hague, Netherlands. It is not an official rock type that is present in lists of rocks and minerals. This stone is called plastiglomerate and was collected by the museum during the preparation stage of the exhibition. The museum staff learned about this recently discovered stone and acted swiftly in order to obtain one. It originates from Kamilo Beach in Hawaii and was collected for the museum by the Hawaii Wildlife Fund during one of its beach clean ups with school children (van Oord, 2018). Plastiglomerate is a recent type of rock that is formed through the intermingling of melted plastic, beach sediment, basaltic lava fragments and organic debris.

*One planet* is a permanent exhibition that opened in 2016, which is dedicated to the seventeen Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDG) put forth by the United Nations. SDG is 'a set of goals to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all as part of a new sustainable development agenda' which the United Nations aims to achieve by 2030 (United Nations, 2018). The exhibition is divided into different sections, with each section focusing on a specific goal. It is a family-oriented, educational exhibition combining interactivity and objects from the museum's collection 'offering visitors an entertaining way to find out how we can work

together to ensure a healthy and sustainable future for the planet' (Museon, 2018).



Image 1: Plastiglomerate. Copyright: Museon

The plastiglomerate is not actually tied to any of the specific goals, but is presented in a glass case alongside other rocks and minerals, under the headline 'Building blocks of the earth'. With only four rocks, the history of the earth is traced, starting with the oldest sedimentary rock on earth, 3.7 billion years old, from Greenland. Then, through three long jumps to the near-present, the plastiglomerate stands for the huge impact human activity has had on the planet in an incredibly short time within a deep time context (van Oord, 2018). It is an important connection to a much longer span, compared to the seemingly present-oriented timeframe of the SDGs.

Plastiglomerate is a stark reminder of the presence of plastic waste in the environment and how synthetic polymer is accumulating and tightening its grip on earthly material because of careless disposal by humans. Plastic waste is having a huge negative effect on the environment on a global scale. Although it was once seen as a promise to free humanity from the constraints of natural materials, plastics have turned out to be a resource-depleting and ecologically devastating problem (Davis, 2015). Plastic garbage is not only a human issue, it affects non-humans as well, entering the digestive systems of animals that mistake it for a source of food (Robertson, 2016).

The plastiglomerate collected by the museum is of considerable size, 108 cm long and 51 cm wide, weighing in at about 24 kilogrammes. In the display, the side that is facing up has a sandy surface covered with ropes, fishing nets and plastic pieces protruding here and there. According to Aaike van Oord, the programme manager in Geology at the museum, the object is actually displayed upside down, and the burnt darker side (which is not visible in the display) was facing up when it was found. It was the surface of a camp fire made earlier at the beach, melting the plastic lightly buried on the beach (van Oord, 2018). When it is melted, other material, organic or inert, sticks to the plastic when it solidifies. Marine debris, organic material, beach sand and basaltic lava fragments are in the tight grip of the plastics in perpetuity. Unveiling another rather chilling side of the conglomerate, this plastic footprint will possibly outlive humans.

Plastics have been described as the living dead among us, material derived from fossilised organic matter formed over millions of years. When it is discarded, it slowly roams around the planet, inattentive to its surroundings. The synthetic polymers do not interact with other 'carbon-dependent life forms', but keep their molecules intact, refusing to go away or biodegrade (Davis, 2015: 352). Where does it go? The plastic accumulates in places like Kamilo Beach, Hawaii. The beach's location on the southeastern tip of the island makes it a sink for floating plastic garbage and marine debris pushed around by the North Pacific subtropical gyre, which eventually washes ashore on the beach. The remoteness of the beach helps with the constant

accumulation of debris, while visitors tend to camp there and make fires for cooking and warmth (Corcoran, Moore & Jazvac, 2014).

The name *plastiglomerate* originates from research done by Patricia Corcoran, a geologist, and sculptor Kelly Jazvac, who travelled to Kamilo Beach in order to investigate this new material after a tip from oceanographer Charles Moore. The three of them published a scientific article proposing this new stone as a potential global marker horizon in the Anthropocene. It describes 'an indurated multi-composite material made hard by agglutination of rock and molten plastic' (Corcoran, Moore & Jazvac, 2014: 5). After analysing the samples collected from the beach, Kelly Jazvac displayed the *plastiglomerate* as sculptural ready-mades alongside other plastic-based artworks she created (Jazvac, 2013; Robertson, 2016). In an interview, Jazvac described her art practices as considering the permanence of the disposable (Valentine, 2015).

Does viewing the object as an artwork, rather than as a scientific specimen or a geological marker for the Anthropocene, make a difference? Kirsten Robertson (2016) tackles that question in her writing about Jazvac's sculptural ready-mades. She argues that the object 'demonstrates an already existent artistic relationship between human and planetary action that can't really be improved by rendering that relationship as solely human' (Robertson, 2016: 12). Hence, it is about more than pollution. The sculptural ready-made also speaks to 'geology, the deep time of Earth, colonization, human-animal knowledges, currents of water, and the endless unfolding and collapse of life on Earth' (Robertson, 2016: 12).

Viewing *plastiglomerate* as an artwork in one way allows for the same sensory attentiveness that Bennett calls for when examining vibrant matter. Is it possible to look for the same when confronted with a *plastiglomerate*, which is not an artwork, but a museum object of culture and science?

The *plastiglomerate* presented as part of *One planet* in the Museon speaks to some of the SDG's key points in the exhibition, such as 'responsible consumption and production' or 'life below water' and 'life on land'. But its materiality still has the potential to speak to more than the effects of pollution. It is an agentic assemblage, an 'interactive interference of many bodies and forces' (Bennett, 2010: 21). Each matter of the assemblage has vitality, with power unequally distributed across its surface; it is an 'open-ended collective' which has 'a distinctive history of formation' and 'a finite life span' (Bennett, 2010: 24).

Many different materials, temporalities, and journeys are joined together in the *plastiglomerate*. It is an anthropogenic object of entangled histories. Consisting mostly of ropes and fishing nets, the beach sand and basaltic lava fragments are also entangled in the grip of the deformed living dead plastic waste. So, the formation of *plastiglomerate* can be traced back to humans, from the fisherman cutting off tangled nets, a container ship losing some of its cargo en route, a woman throwing away her lighter, to a group of people camping at Kamilo Beach and making a bonfire. The formation of *plastiglomerate* is also enacted by inhuman forces: ocean currents, waves, beaches and the erosion of stone into sand.

At the Museon, the *plastiglomerate* is a part of the geological time scale, materialising the most recent although very sudden presence of human agency from the deep time perspective. The object is also connected to the present problem of plastic pollution, a matter of sustainability. It is unstable in that it might continue to melt and mutate, become larger, or break down into microplastic and wash away. It is a seemingly slow process, but the collection of the object seems to interrupt the process even further. It is perceived to be stable, slowly but surely becoming a part of the future rock record.

## Fateberg: The whitechapel monster

For a much shorter time span, a six-month period, the Museum of London plans to display the Whitechapel monster. It is presented in two sealed-off glass cases in a dimly lit space. The entrance is guarded by a mannequin dressed up in protective gear. Next to it is a glass case of 'micro tools', a small pick axe, a spade and a shovel, used to battle the monster. On the walls are texts describing the smell and size of the beast, along with tales of the nine-week battle in which the 'evil, gut-wrenching, rancid blob' was hosed away and chiseled down into pieces. Finally, it was removed and parts of it transformed into biodiesel (Thames Water, 2017b).

The monster had made headlines a few months earlier when the news broke that it had been discovered by Thames Water (the UK's largest water and wastewater services provider) hiding in London's sewage system. There, it had been growing, unnoticed, becoming the largest of its kind, a monstrous fatberg (Taylor, 2017). Out of the 130 tonnes, the museum only has about 5-6 kilogrammes, the only remaining sample of the Whitechapel fatberg. The extraction process of the fatberg substantially limited the shape and size of the samples acquired by the museum (Sparkes & Holbrook, 2018).

Fatberg is a rock-like lump of congealed cooking fat, oil and grease which expands its mass with wet wipes, nappies and other kinds of compacted waste, growing in sewers and possibly leading to flooding or pollution. It



is a cesspool of bacteria, an ideal home for flies feeding off the rotting material. The monster has been reported to feed off of food outlets that pour oil and grease down the drain. The domestic homes also share the responsibility with the other perpetrators, feeding 'flushable' wet wipes and other sanitary items through the toilet to the rancid blob (Thames Water, 2017a). The issue of fat, oil and grease (FOG) clogging drains and sewers is not a recent thing, although the term fatberg dates back to 2008. This kind of problem has been considered an issue in sewage maintenance for decades (Wallace et al., 2017).



Image 2: Fatberg. Copyright: Anna Sigridur Halldorsdottir

It is a real monster. With rubbish of all kinds thrown away in toilets and sinks, the fatberg is a nasty assemblage, a patchwork of matter forming on the margin of human society. The monsters are 'disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration' (Cohen, 1996: 6). Its body is both corporeal and incorporeal, as 'its threat is its propensity to shift' (Cohen, 1996: 5). The fatberg forces itself up to the surface from the underground, clogging sewage systems, threatening to return everything people have flushed away.

Fatberg not only poses a threat to ways of living, it also upsets ways of thinking. Offsetting easy categorisation, the problems of collecting and preserving a nature-culture hybrid like this become apparent. The preserved remains of the monster have been air-dried, resulting in it shrinking and releasing some gases, enabling its preservation. 'The fatberg that our visitors see will be more like the hard, dried mass which sticks to the sewer walls and blocks pipes, rather than the floating mass of excrement and oil' (Robinson-Calver, 2017). Efforts to slow the changes have been made, but it is still transforming. In fact, the museum keeps an open diary on its website in order to document the transformation of the air-dried lump. Shortly after the opening, flies emerged from the body of the fatberg, and new white mold spots were discovered. It started to sweat, forming condensation on the inside of the sealed-off case (Museum of London, 2018).

Sharon Robinson-Calver (2017), the head of Conservation and Collection care, explains the conservation process as a difficult challenge. This is mainly because it is not just a question of stabilising the object itself and thus protecting it, but also a matter of protecting the museum's staff and visitors. 'The fatberg in its current state is an extremely hazardous material, teeming with bacteria and releasing small amounts of toxic gases' (Robinson-Calver, 2017). What really lurks within the dried-up fatberg is not known. The main ingredients are usually fat, oil and grease (Wallace et al., 2017), and it tends to cling to sanitary waste, such as the infamous flushable wet wipes (Thames Water, 2018). Further, nasty surprises could also be hidden within the solid mass, such as needles, condoms or other disease-ridden matter (Robinson-Calver, 2017).

Feeding off anything, there is a sense of danger even in examining its material combination. When matter becomes a monster in this way, it spells fear and disgust. Bradley L Garrett (2016: 1948) points out that despite the horror, the putrid spawn of the sewer is 'strangely alluring' and sparks curiosity. Designed to keep human waste out of sight and out of mind, the underground infrastructure is integral to urban growth. The construction of the sewage system of London in the Victorian age was 'an immensely visible project', a modernising feat ushering in the new age (Garrett, 2016: 1952). Today, a functioning infrastructure such as the sewage system should be a silently running system. It merely surfaces in connection with disruption, increased costs or repairs. In this case, the ever-growing metropolis is putting serious pressure on London's historical infrastructure, with its increased population and changing habits of waste disposal: The fatberg is proof of this.

Making the fatberg public was meant to raise awareness, which is one of the most common methods to battle the possibly disastrous effects of FOG waste (Wallace et al., 2017). In the aftermath of the Whitechapel monster's discovery, workers from Thames Water visited restaurants in the vicinity, providing information on oil and grease traps. They also have a running campaign targeting households: Bin it - don't block it (Thames Water, 2018). Measures such as this have proven to be successful to the point of reducing incidences of fatberg forming in cities (Wallace et al., 2017).

The extended life of the fatberg within the walls of the museum could also mean that it will continue to raise awareness of the issue, displayed as 'a stark reminder of what we waste' or 'a visceral reminder of the pressures modern society places on London's historical infrastructures' (Museum of London, 2017b). In interviews with the media, the director of the museum, Sharon Ament, said that it was important to display 'genuine curiosities from past and present London' (Greenfield, 2017). Further, Alex Werner, a curator at the museum, looked to the future and predicted that perhaps in half a century, the fatberg would be considered a historical artefact, a problem of the past which was solved by progressive waste management (Greenfield, 2017).

The exhibition does not provide a historical perspective focusing on the infrastructure of the Victorian age. It also avoids becoming a campaign for the proper disposal of waste. The exhibition is sponsored by Thames Water, and perhaps the mere presence of the air-dried remains of the giant monster is enough to encourage visitors to at least consider their own wasting habits. The exhibition instead focuses on the acquisition, the extraction process, and explaining why it is shaped the way it is and how to preserve it. There are key questions addressed on the labels in the exhibition, i.e. what fatberg is and why it should be collected. For the museum, it is important to collect things that reflect the highs and lows of living in a city, and there is much to be learned from studying the waste of society.

The fatberg is presented as remains of human activity, with the obvious value of reminding the visitor about unsustainable ways of living. The instability of the object and its ongoing transformation, despite the efforts made by the museum to stabilise it, add an interesting perspective reflecting on the value within a specific lifetime (Sparkes & Holbrook, 2018). Unlike the plastiglomerate in the Museon, the fatberg is not presented as an object of the Anthropocene. The short lifespan of the fatberg and the high-speed temporalities involving the media attention, and the acquisition and creation of the exhibition contrast with the slowness and perceived stability inherent in the plastiglomerate.

Everything points to the fact that the fatberg will not live a long life in the museum's collection. The short lifespan does not make it an unsuitable object of the Anthropocene. The accumulation of matter and entangled agencies of living and nonliving materialities are important factors. There is human agency in the emergence of fatberg, and this is perhaps the strongest force able to prevent the underground accumulation of matter before it starts. Even if people in urban areas decide to 'bin it', the material still does not go away. Instead, it might start another journey towards a different kind of merging in landfills, a heterogeneous mix of unknown things that will emerge, grow and gather mass in the periphery of people's consumerist culture. The notion of the Anthropocene reveals the potential to see the entanglements of slow and rapid processes. Left alone, it is not difficult to imagine that a fatberg might eventually turn into a stratigraphic signature of the geological epoch.

## Infesting the Institution

In engaging the entangled histories in the Anthropocene, it is important to see that matter is mutable rather than essential. Adopting a sensory attentiveness to the vitality of matter means that museums see objects not as fixed, but as lively assemblages with a wide variety of relations and rich histories. It is a matter of suspending suspicion and adopting more open-ended observations. In this case, the plastiglomerate and the fatberg seem to have little in common at first. One is an object of the Geological Time Scale, inserting human activity into the long temporality of earthly processes. The other is a rapid transformation of human remains

that resist a long lifespan of stability, but still accumulate and threaten to become big enough to transgress infrastructural boundaries. The process of accumulation is similar in both instances, although the objects belong to different temporalities: the drifting plastics in ocean currents and the drifting waste in man-made sewage systems. They both speak to the problems of human waste disposal and the accumulation of trash everywhere, from densely populated areas to remote ones.

Matter persists, and it continues to move and shift; even if it is disposed of, it can re-emerge in a different form or as part of a new assemblage. The two objects discussed in this article represent a revenge of matter, a sudden realisation of vivid material assemblages, re-emerging in different ways in different places. These unclean, filthy monsters are infecting the institutions. Their impreciseness, mutability and transgression challenge the traditional museum management of objects and their categorisations, collections and displays.

In both cases, the significance of collecting the objects and displaying them is made explicitly clear. Although they are hybrids, they are connected to important environmental concerns. It has been argued to be an important future task for museums to challenge the dominant presupposition of a human-centred position, as well as the simple categories of a given nature and constructed culture, in order to tackle the complexities of climate change and ecological uncertainties (Cameron, 2017). Examining objects as anthropocenic reflects that argument. It means attending to a material vitality that exceeds human relations. The ecological uncertainty, the entangled enactments of human agency and living and nonliving entities and earthly processes make it more important to tread the challenging paths of living in the Anthropocene.

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## Future museums as educational labs: lessons learned from MoMA's Young People's Gallery (1937-1957)

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### Abstract

A lab is a space for ideas to be tested, challenged or co-created. The lab as a concept can offer the future museum a framework for being experimental, research-based and committed to questioning itself. Powered by honest curiosity, it promotes an ideal frame for education. In 1939 Alfred H. Barr, the first director of The Museum of Modern Art, defined the museum as a 'laboratory'. In 1937 Victor D'Amico had been appointed Director of the Educational Project to fulfill MoMA's educational mission which included the opening of the Young People's Gallery. The Young People's Gallery served as a safe, participative space for pushing the limits of the idea of the museum as a laboratory. This article is an exploration of the concept of museums as labs through MoMA's educational past, in search for socially relevant practices to inspire the museum of the future.

**Keywords:** education, museum, lab, archive, high-school

When thinking of a 'Lab', the most common image that comes to mind is that of a special facility that contains beakers, burners and other tools and instruments necessary to complete experiments. In museums, the idea of the laboratory has been related to working models of machines, devices for hands-on activities and invitations for people to help in gathering specimens for collections (Wittlin, 1949, p.155). Through popular culture we connect the idea of a laboratory to scientific experiments.

However, many institutions not connected to the sciences are inquiring about how the museum of the future should be while embracing similar dynamics to the ones that take place in labs. Many museums no longer want to exhibit incontestable truths but want to provide an environment for ideas to be tested, challenged and co-created.

Defining the Lab as a protocol in museums means having an experimental and research-based approach. Departing from this definition, this research follows an inductive method so as to outline a series of specific conceptual categories that are relevant for understanding the idea of Museums as Laboratories. A qualitative and quantitative front-end analysis from different museums working with the idea of the lab shows that two concepts are key: experimentation and participation. These two terms have become commonplace in contemporary positions concerning the so-called educational turn (Allen, 2011). The educational turn in the context of art exhibitions theorizes how curators implement educational strategies as part of their museum work. This involves a departure from material orientations to artworks, instead focusing on the process, as well as on the use of discursive, pedagogical methods and situations in and outside of the exhibition. In practice, participation and experimentation are key to achieve a heightened awareness of diverse audiences and publics that allows for the educational turn to come into effect.

While the educational turn was prevalent in contemporary art since the second half of the 1990s, in the case of art museums, looking at particular histories we might consider exchanging the concept of the educational turn for the term educational return. In searching for the roots of the presence of experimentation and participation in museums we found a paradigmatic case in the definition that Alfred H. Barr, first director of Museum of Modern Art, gave in 1939: 'The Museum of Modern Art is a laboratory: in its experiments the public is invited to participate' (p.15). Participation, experimentation and the idea of the lab was being applied at the time almost exclusively to museums connected to science labs. Early examples are the Museo Kircheriano (Rome, Italy) or The Ashmolean Museum (Oxford, England). Research museums and Science museums like The Museum of Science in Munich (Germany) were in many cases planned in such a manner as to serve as Everyman's Laboratory (Wittlin, 1949, p.144) by handling exhibits and testing mechanical processes.

Regarding children's education, Wittlin (1949) saw museums as laboratories for testing new approaches to the teaching of children and a medium of considerable capacity for furthering progressive education as it afforded opportunities for experiments without prematurely upsetting the existing curriculum (p.212). The Brooklyn Children's Museum pioneered this idea with Anna Billings Gallup as its driving force since 1903

("History - Brooklyn Children's Museum", 2018). The influence of the Laboratory School of the University of Chicago founded by John Dewey permeated the field of museums too.

In contrast, in the context in which Barr defined MoMA as a laboratory, art museums' offerings were more related with contemplation and less with participation and experimentation. Barr's definition was unique in the sense that the subject of experimentation was Modern art and in the way the public was invited to participate through a pedagogy that emerged from art itself.

This article outlines how the Museum of Modern Art carried out experiments in exhibiting and collecting, while involving the public in the process. It is thanks to the time elapsed between the creation of this definition and the present that we have the chance to look at its application and long-term impact on the museum and its visitors. Understanding the long-term impact of museums enables a better understanding of how to serve and enrich communities, of which museums are part (Anderson, Storksdieck & Spock, 2006, p.197). Few studies have investigated long-term impact arising from experience in museum and museum-like settings and most consider the longitudinal impact over relatively short time frames – weeks and months after the visitor experience (see Adelman, Falk & James, 2000; Anderson, 1999; Anderson, Lucas, Ginns, & Dierking, 2000; Falk & Storksdieck, 2005; Storksdieck, Ellenbogen & Heimlich, 2005). In the case of MoMA, studying the long-term impact with a time frame of decades enables the museum to select what elements of past programs are relevant in the biography of the visitor.

It is through this historic research that we realize that the invitation to participate in Barr's concept was ensured through the newly founded Educational Project. In it, all kinds of people had the chance to participate actively in the museum's life.

Of the many educational experiments that were carried out during this time at MoMA we have chosen one example that embodies Barr's definition: the Young People's Gallery (1937-1957). So as to understand why the Young People's Gallery was the incarnation of Barr's definition, we will explain its purposes and outcomes in detail.

The Young People's Gallery serves as a case study to help understand the elements at play when a museum wants to function as a laboratory, and when the museum's users have the chance to select what stories the museum tells. We use this historic case to collect archival data and review it in search of repeated ideas and concepts. These concepts are what we present as the Lab Protocol.

While believing that true innovation will only come from the deep understanding of the past, we speculate whether the Lab Protocol as extracted from the documentation related to the Young People's Gallery is suitable for what museums might face in the future.

## The Museum of Modern Art as a Lab

In the catalogue of the exhibition *Art in Our Time*, The Museum of Modern Art's first director Alfred H. Barr wrote: The Museum of Modern Art is a laboratory: in its experiments the public is invited to participate. (Barr, 1939, p.15)

MoMA under Alfred H. Barr was a laboratory for experimentation not only in the objects on view, which included painting, sculpture, American Popular Art, photography, film and paintings by children, but also in the way they were displayed. Modern and Contemporary creative processes involved a sense of experimentation, and MoMA was a risk-taker in hosting examples of modernism to a Manhattan audience that was relatively new to it.

Barr's view of participation envisaged a future MoMA being shaped by the public's response to the *Art in Our Time* exhibition (1939, p.15). This wish for participation had been reinforced when in 1937 Victor D'Amico was hired to direct the Educational Project at The Museum of Modern Art.

Victor D'Amico was a pioneer of art education who championed ideas of art as experience, learning by doing and teaching as a modern art practice. His experience included a national survey for the Rockefeller Foundation titled 'Art in American Schools' that he had elaborated during the years 1934 and 1935 while travelling to different schools in the United States. In it, he analysed the ways in which art education was being taught in different institutions which gave him pivotal data to create his own teaching method. This research took place parallel to his position as the Head of the Art Department at the Fieldston School. His deep knowledge of art education made him the ideal candidate for 'building up satisfactory relations with the schools and colleges and for providing popular instruction' (Packard, 1936, p. 19) at the Museum.

The Educational project was to establish connections between high-schools of New York City and the Museum of Modern Art. The Educational Project was the first step towards the foundation of what would later become MoMA's Education Department.

The Educational Project had two main aims: first, to study the nature of art appreciation among adolescents; and second, to seek and prepare better methods and materials for teaching visual arts in general education (D'Amico, 1939, p.1).

The object of studying the nature of adolescents was to find out about the aesthetic and creative character of the adolescent, in the belief that such knowledge would help the teacher in promoting the student's creative growth. For D'Amico, promoting the creative growth of the individual was the way to succeed in the development of the student's complete personality. According to D'Amico, 'creative character should involve, in the broader sense, all the sensibilities of the individual, and should provide key to individuality' (D'Amico, 1939, p.2).

The Educational project was conceived as a research project. The procedure for acquiring evidence that gave answers to the previously mentioned research aims was conducted along several lines. It included the analysis of 'reactions to pictures and art objects through oral and written responses, group discussions, and exercises in graphic and plastic media' (D'Amico, 1939, p. 3). Evidence was obtained through verbal and visual expressions. The results were recorded and interpreted by Victor D'Amico himself. Early in the project, the results showed that more and more responsibility was demanded by the students in the content selection. The Educational Project underwent changes so that the students were progressively given more decision making power and exhibitions were re-organized in response to the "profitable criticism by teachers and students" (D'Amico, 1938, p.9).

Experiments were conducted both at the schools cooperating in the project and at the museum. At the school, a museum representative would visit equipped with the necessary visual materials and would present a series of exercises. This service was necessary for those schools whose curricula or location prevented them from going to the museum. There were also rotating exhibitions to be hung at the destination schools, demonstrations of artistic techniques, lectures to teachers, art courses and circulating exhibitions.

At the Museum, a specific room was to be built:

A laboratory or studio will be established at the Museum for conducting experiments. It will be planned expressly for conducting experiments in appreciation and creative work. Such a room has been designed by the Director to serve the function of both studio and gallery. It is therefore a convertible studio-gallery (D'Amico, 1939, p. 3). This laboratory was called the Young People's Gallery and is the focus of the following section.

## Young People's Gallery (1937-1949)

The Young People's Gallery was an 'educational experiment' with the intent of 'making the Museum's collection more accessible to New York schools' (D'Amico, 1940, p. 2). The Young People's Gallery's central activity was the exhibition of works selected and hung by high school student juries from material assembled from the permanent collection of the Museum and loan exhibitions from private collections and art galleries. The exhibitions were visited by students individually and in classes and were discussed with teachers and D'Amico.' (D'Amico, 1940, p. 2) The project sought to give students a hands-on experience curating and producing art exhibitions.

The Young People's Gallery was a lab in two different ways. On one hand, the high school students were encouraged to experiment with different ways of presenting original works of art in a truly hands-on experience while curating exhibitions at the gallery. On the other, the aesthetic decisions the students made helped the museum to study the nature of appreciation and creative character of the adolescents.

For both research threads to be successful, the design of the spaces was of great importance so that the data extracted was relevant. Victor D'Amico designed special equipment in the Young People's Gallery so that it served both as gallery and art studio. This included community easels, a continuous chain of desks folded flat against two of the walls and a large screen which covered an entire wall of the gallery and could be opened to form narrow drop shelves. On these shelves paintings could be placed and easily removed to make way for more paintings during demonstrations and lectures.

The Young People's Gallery opened in 1937 in the temporary headquarters of the Museum of Modern Art in 14 West 49 Street. After the Museum of Modern Art re-opened in 11 W. 53 Street in New York, it was located on the third floor of the museum building. It was located in a visible place at the museum and the experiments were widely publicized, as were the research conclusions (The Museum of Modern Art, 1938).

The sample schools that took part in the experiment included 'pupils from varied nationalities and racial backgrounds of a large metropolitan city'. The selected schools were both public and private and were defined as: a fair representation of the wide variety of differences among our pupils, namely racial, national and religious



differences, low and high mentality, gifted and average art ability, verbal and manual individuals, students trained and untrained in the arts (D'Amico, 1939, p.1).

The immediate goal of this study was to help to develop a creative city individual and the findings of the project were meant to throw light upon the nature of adolescence in all situations and localities (D'Amico, 1939, p.1). The number of schools was decided so that the data would be manageable, but large enough so that the results were relevant. In the first year 'twelve schools were invited, two finding it impossible to continue throughout the year due to lack of facilities' (D'Amico, 1940, p. 2.). The second year 16 schools took part in the experiment. The number of schools kept growing throughout the years.

The study was carried out for the first three-year period of the Educational Project, involving various stages and approaches. According to the research plan, the first stage was to find out the adolescent's preference to subject matter in pictures. Several sets of pictures covering subject matter from portrait to still-life were prepared and tried out on students from twelve to eighteen years of age. Later stages of the study involved the adolescent's reactions to dramatic and aesthetic quality in pictures, to styles and technique, to size and mounting of pictures, to period and modern pictures as well as to the various schools within the modern period. The Final period of the study was to test various techniques and methods of teaching the arts both as to their appropriateness and effectiveness in developing the adolescents. 'These methods involved the verbal, visual and activity approach.' (D'Amico, 1940, p. 2.).

In the first year, the exhibitions organized by the student juries included Transitions and Contrasts in Painting and Sculpture, Contemporary Drawings, American Folk Art, Machine Art and Young People's Exhibition. During the first year 'more than one thousand pupils between the ages of eleven and seventeen' visited the Young People's Gallery (The Museum of Modern Art, 1938). Each of these visitors registered on a questionnaire provided by the Museum comments and criticism on the painting, sculpture, drawings and other original works of art in the exhibitions. In those comments the presence of criticism, irk, enjoyment and self-awareness are part of the analysis. A student from Erasmus Hall High School wrote:

I realize now how important individual expression, originality and the spirit of exploration are; as a result I am better fitted to judge, criticize and appreciate the products of the modern trend in art. For example, some things which I had once thought senseless, grotesque and crazy seem to have become quite the opposite types. (D'Amico, 1938, p.2)

The understanding of the importance of 'the spirit of exploration' that this student refers to was to be accomplished through the dual nature of the gallery-studio at the Young People's Gallery. The goal was for Modern art to be understood through the experience of creative process as well as the analysis of the outcome. The proposal of a gallery that includes both elements constitute a ground-breaking understanding of the gallery as a place of learning by doing. If museums are places for learning and 'doing' and process is inherent to Modern art, the Young People's Gallery was pioneering in embodying both principles. For Victor D'Amico, only through taking part in the processes of modern art creation would a person be able to appreciate and respect other people's experiments (Maeda & Iwasaki, 1995, p.30).

In following years the Young People's Gallery included exhibitions like Creative Growth, Childhood to Maturity in 1939/40 which featured Dahlov Ipcar's work from age three to 21. It intended to illustrate that 'with proper stimulation and encouragement,' (The Museum of Modern Art, 1939) anyone could be creative. The Dahlov Ipcar exhibition was a milestone in the general history at MoMA as it was the first time for a woman to have a solo exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art (she was also the youngest person).

Other exhibitions were focused on high-school students' taste (like Twelve Favorites: Paintings Selected by Students from the Museum Collection in 1940 or We Like Modern Art 1941), art techniques (like How to Make a photogram 1942), art education (like the Preliminary course of the Bauhaus in 1941, New teaching Techniques: Basic Design and Foundation Courses in 1947, Art Education in War Time in 1943), international children's painting (Soviet's Children art in 1944 or Paintings by French Children, 1948) or education for parents (like Understanding your Child Through Art: A Course for Parents in 1949).

In these exhibitions, Education was exhibited at MoMA with the same level of importance as any other exhibition. The belief behind this attitude was that the Modern artists' most important mission was to remind people of their own creative self. Teaching was considered by D'Amico (1970) as the ultimate art form, and as such had to be displayed.

The results of the research that the Young People's Gallery produced translated into approximately sixty schools being supplied with more than 100 visual aids, including exhibitions, slide talks, teaching models, teaching portfolios and films, which were seen by more than 350,000 school children each year. Exhibits; lending libraries of color reproductions and museum books which students could borrow and take home; teaching

portfolios designed for classroom use on such subjects as modern sculpture and texture and pattern; slide talks; and art films were among the materials that the experiment's results helped to create.

'The record of this program,' Victor D'Amico said, 'and the exhibitions are a tribute to the Board of Education teachers whose interest sustained the program and whose cooperation with the Museum over the years has been an adventure.' Olive Reilly, Director of Art of the Board of Education, called the program 'an outstanding example of the fine contribution that a museum, through its educational department, can make to public school education.' (D'Amico, 1960, p.46)

One student summarized his personal experience as follows:

The Young People's Gallery has taught me things I will always remember. It not only has helped me with my work here at Erasmus (Hall High School), but it has also given me a fine understanding of the arts...

The trips, demonstrations and exhibits sent to schools are really fine and of great interest to us all. Being able to work with you, and being able to belong to the Gallery is an experience that I shall never forget. (D'Amico, 1938, p.3)

The Young People's Gallery evolved over the years and the laboratory concept expanded to other projects of the Education Department at the Museum of Modern Art. The impact of the Young People's Gallery was foreseen by Victor D'Amico after the first year of the project:

One word may be said with respect to the future of the Project. I am even more enthusiastic about its possibilities now than I was at the outset and I believe that it will become one of the most important of the Museum's functions. If our facilities permitted it, we could even now expand the work to include many more schools. In time we should be able to work with most schools within and about the city. The influence of the rotating exhibitions is unlimited. I feel that the major objective of the project should be to help bring about desirable changes in art and general education and I believe that the Museum of Modern Art is in a strategic position to accomplish this end. The realization of such a plan would require a much larger enterprise that we can at present visualize, but I do not think that such realization is impossible or remote. It is toward this larger end that I am working and I believe our present program is a step in that direction. ('Report on the Educational Project of The Museum of Modern Art 1937-38', 1938, p.10)

MoMA, founded with an educational charter, was in a strategic position to accomplish changes in art education because the museum collection was in many cases a response to the inadequacy of traditional and academic art education in reflecting modern times. Traditional art education failed to help Modern artists find their own way in making sense of the world around them. Indeed, so as to find their own expression most artists displayed at the museum rejected what they had been taught in their formal training at one time or the other in their lives. Many artists had to find their own self-teaching strategies and MoMA embraced those processes considering self-taught and educated artists as equally essential to 20th-century modernism.

Both educators and students at MoMA's Young People's Gallery were presented with the challenge of crafting a new art education that would fuel their personal journey towards discovering their own creative selves. Indeed, the Young People's Gallery was a first step in this direction. The Educational project expanded into a Department and education became one of the Museum's most important functions. Many experiments have followed the Young People's Gallery and the plan of bringing about change in art and general education that D'Amico envisioned is far from over. The Learning Lab protocol is a proposal for taking the next steps.

## The Learning Lab Protocol for Museums

Although the Young People's Gallery was a singular case designed for a specific audience and based on theories that have been reviewed multiple times, it provides a practical case study from which to extract the elements of the Learning Lab Protocol in a museum. The elements of the Lab Protocol in Museums according to the case study of MoMA's Young People's Gallery are:

Experimentation. There is a single great idea behind the Lab Protocol which is the experimental angle. This viewpoint says that ideas must be tested in practice (Tanner, 2017). The idea of a museum devoted entirely to testing educational theory has never taken hold. One of the greatest paradoxes in museums is that while being educational institutions, they hardly ever (although there are important exceptions) produce educational theory. The Young People's Gallery and the Educational project departed from the desire to know about the adolescent's nature of art appreciation. That desire produced data that established the basis for preparing better methods and materials for teaching at the museum. Although the results achieved at the Young People's Gallery are not relevant for use today as adolescents interact in completely different ways with visual arts, the attitude of research and experimentation on the part of the institution is nonetheless necessary for the future

museum. Educational activities need to be engineered by the need to know more about audiences so as to provide a better experience in the museum. The recognition of the museum educator as a researcher is key towards a more reflective practice, and the museum should provide for learning by creating opportunities that lead the visitor in a journey of self-discovery.

**Community.** Dewey wrote in 'Ethical Principles Underlying Education' (1903) that the School must be 'an embryonic yet typical community life' (p.14). This affirmation could also be applied to museums as educational institutions. There has to be a motivation and a desire to discover in administration, selection of subject matter, methods of learning, teaching, and discipline, for making a learning environment such as a museum 'a cooperative community while developing in individuals their own capacities and satisfying their own needs.' (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p.xvi). At the Young People's Gallery there was a strong sense of being part of a learning community in which all members were fulfilling a role. Being able to belong to the Gallery was an unforgettable experience to many (D'Amico, 1938, p.3). Part of the Learning Lab Protocol is the realization that the users are in fact part of the institution. The museum users may develop an awareness that they and their experimentation changes and improves the institution. The sense of ownership and belonging that the museum users may develop as a result of the Lab Protocol is the first step towards making a socially relevant institution.

**Participation.** Nina Simon defines 'a participatory cultural institution as a place where visitors can create, share, and connect with each other around content' (2010). All of the categories of participation that the Public Participation in Scientific Research report (2009) defines were present in the Young People's Gallery: contribution, collaboration and co-creation. It was thanks to the contributions of more than one thousand pupils who visited the Young People's Gallery (The Museum of Modern Art, 1938) during the first year that the education team was able to design better resources in the following years. They registered their comments and criticism on the painting, sculpture, drawings and other original works of art in the exhibitions in a questionnaire provided by the Museum. From that data and the close collaboration with the schools the Young People's Gallery could host more meaningful experiences. The exhibitions displayed at the Young People's Gallery were a co-creation between the museum staff and the student juries.

**Trust.** No museum user will experiment freely at a museum if there is no sense of trust in the institution. The museum user that engages in the Lab Protocol will potentially create or connect concepts that are expected to be valued and integrated in the museum discourse. Trust is sometimes the consequence of good communication and generous participation on the part of the museum and its users but incorporates an emotional level. Establishing a level of trust is basic for honest experimentation to happen and make the most of the fact that museums are safe places of unsafe ideas (Pelletier, 2016). Not only museum users need to trust the institution, but the museum itself also needs to trust its users. There are few cases in which an institution has trusted its users to the extent of giving them space and agency to select and hung original work of the collection. The Young People's Gallery based its functioning in the trust the museum put in the adolescents who selected and hung the exhibitions. There is an understandable fear in relying on museum users for important decisions at the museum. This fear is in many cases fed by not knowing who the museum users are. To fight that fear communication is crucial.

**Communication.** None of the above is possible without fluid communication between the museum and its constituencies. The museum users' presence at the museum is priceless not only for their own learning but the learning of the institution. The presence of a user at the museum has the potential to challenge and improve the institution. Active listening on the part of the museum as well encouragement for taking part in whatever is happening are decisive. According to Victor D'Amico one of the most important aspects of The Young People's Gallery was that 'the informality of the Museum's galleries was liked by both students and teachers.' (D'Amico, 1939.p.3). Big institutions are oftentimes seen as faceless bureaucratic structures, but in the end institutions are still made up of people. Stressing the human side of institutions and facilitating one-to-one conversations is necessary to establish personal relationships between the museum and its users.

These five concepts were key in the execution of Young People's Gallery. Even if the project started more than 80 years ago, looking at the data it is difficult not to wonder whether these concepts might also be useful in leading present or even future initiatives in museums. The question of whether the Lab Protocol is a suitable model for the future museum will remain inevitably unanswered but in the following section we allow ourselves some speculation.

## Conclusions: Future Museums as learning labs?

The only thing that we know for sure about the future is that it is unknown. Preparing for an unknown future when budgets and structures are prepared for a very demanding present time is a challenging task for a

museum. However, if we were to make a safe bet on what the future holds, it would be that in a changing society, museums will have to change to remain socially relevant (Janes, 2009, p.24). The direction, influences and nature of that change is the key to museums' survival.

The Lab Protocol offers an open-ended frame for action that departs from the recognition that the most important existing tool for understanding a changing world is research. Furthermore, through experimentation museums need to cultivate a self-awareness of their own nature and what they can offer to a changing world. Preconceived notions of what's worth exhibiting, criticism, private demands or audience reactions have no place in a Museum that works as a Lab. The Museum as a Lab opens up to audience participation to experiment and take ownership of what happens inside the institution. The Museum as a Lab doesn't exhibit incontestable truths but hosts the co-creation of stories.

Many may argue that what the Future Museum needs is innovation. True innovation, however, can only come from the deep understanding of the past. Understanding the Young People's Gallery and extracting the defining elements that turned the Museum of Modern Art into a lab is an opportunity to speculate whether the Lab Protocol could be of use in the future museum. The features of the Lab Protocol (experimentation, community, participation, trust and communication) can offer the future museum a framework for being experimental, research-based and committed to questioning itself. Powered by honest curiosity, it promotes an ideal frame for education.

The Young People's Gallery was the same as that which we speculate the future museum will be: a laboratory whose growth will depend on the understanding of its successes and failures, experiments that (we hope) will pave the way towards a socially relevant museum.

## Coda

The Museum of Modern Art is constantly questioning its past in education so as to innovate in present and future practices. Current practices that resonate with the Young People's Gallery are the Art Labs and the Studios.

The Art Labs are interactive spaces where families and other museum visitors can discover different ways of making art and engage in their own creative process. An important element of the Art Labs is the presence of educators who help visitors maximize their time in the lab and in the museum. In order to facilitate more meaningful experiences, they try to find connections between their personal interests and an area of our collection or a specific artwork. Educators often make connections between the activities visitors explore in the lab and what they have already seen or may see in the galleries. Educators also offer various ideas for how to continue visitor's exploration of an artist, or ways to build upon their experiences after their visit to MoMA.

Studios are free, interactive spaces offering drop-in programs and artist- and educator-led workshops to visitors of all ages, in conjunction with an exhibition or a topic related to modern and contemporary art. These experiences complement looking and talking about works of art in the galleries, allowing for engagement with art in participatory, creative ways. Visitors can experiment, learn, play, and create as they make connections between their lives, their own creativity, and the processes and materials of modern and contemporary art.

While celebrating the 80th Anniversary of the Educational Project that included the Young People's Gallery, the Education department is raising awareness of its own past so as to explore its educational and social role in the future.

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## Question and Answer: How can museums work with hospitals?

### A brief history of the V&A Museum of Childhood Hospital Schools programme and some future thoughts on the role of the museum sector.

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**Nuala Morse:** In recent years, UK museums and galleries of all sizes, capacities and collections have looked to ways in which they can support and enhance the health and well-being of their local communities. UK-based<sup>1</sup> and international<sup>2</sup> examples showcase a rapidly growing area of museum practice including programmes with health and social care partners and in hospitals (Lackoi et al., 2016). These examples collectively present a new direction for museums and outline other museum futures where the power of objects is harnessed in the support of the care of people and cultural practice is reoriented towards public health.

The V&A Museum of Childhood has a long-standing partnership with hospitals in the Greater London Area. In this Q&A, we look back on the development of this programme and consider its future possibilities.

**Carolyn Bloore:** There are approximately thirty hospital schools in the Greater London area providing education for children in schoolrooms or on the wards. Some children are in hospital only for a day or two. Others with chronic conditions may be there for weeks at a time, waiting for transplants, undergoing chemotherapy or making regular visits for dialysis or for treatment for lifelong conditions. All young patients, despite the best efforts of the staff, are likely to experience a mixture of boredom, fear, anxiety and pain during their time in hospital. What could the museum do to help?

### Taking collections into hospitals: The V&A programme.

The V&A Museum of Childhood is part of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the world's leading museum of art and design and contains the nation's finest childhood collections.

The Hospital Schools programme at the V&A Museum of Childhood began almost by accident. An unexpected request to the Learning Programme from a hospital school drew attention to this potential audience and in 2007 independent funding was sought to develop a programme. This need was recognised by other museums and the National Portrait Gallery produced a toolkit for working with hospital schools.<sup>3</sup> In 2010, three years of funding facilitated the appointment a dedicated Hospital School Officer (HSO). This enabled greater consultation with teachers-in-charge and doubled the number of visits that the museum could make. Nowadays, the Museum delivers sessions during term time to thirty different hospital schools or child and adolescent mental health units across Greater London and reaches about twenty young patients each week. During the last decade approximately 5,000 young patients have accessed and experienced a wealth of museum objects.

### How does it work?

All sessions take their starting point from the Museum's collections. Links are made to the National Curriculum and to current projects within the hospital schools and units. This always involves consultation with teachers-in-charge: requests can be as diverse as heroes and superheroes (using the collection of plastic toy figures) and Chinese New Year (referencing models of late 18th century rock gardens and metal toys dating from the last years of Mao) to well-recognised schools topics. The Museum is fortunate in having a large Learning Collection, which can be taken on outreach visits, and replica objects which promote handling. Whenever possible, a creative making activity is incorporated into the session. A selection of moving toys and optical toys, with which the HSO can readily respond to all ages of young patients from 5 to 16 years, is always available. The youngest children enjoy watching toys such as Jumping Jacks (pull a string) and tumbling clowns (gravity). Young people are challenged to think about forces and mechanics (torsion, gravity, friction, momentum, cams, gears and cogs), to discuss the history of the toys, and how they differ from toys today.



Image 1: Chinese Figures from the V&A Museum of Childhood Learning Collections. Image courtesy Carolyn Bloore

### Working in hospitals: what have we learned?

Touch is a powerful sensation and combined with the physical appearance of an object can enable a museum session to be immediately engaging. It is this material engagement which is key; touching and feeling objects from the past. Though the lifetime of the programme, much has been learnt about how to deliver museum activities in a hospital context, which can help shape future programmes.

Initially, most sick children do not want to listen or be talked at, but they are drawn to objects: especially those that can move and sometimes by those that also make a sound. Objects can even attract reluctant attendees to join a session. They must be adaptable for a wide age range and have cross gender appeal.

Multiple objects can engage the whole group and include visiting siblings and parents during 1:1 bedside visits. When families are dealing with a sick child, particularly one with a chronic or life-limiting condition, parents spend a huge amount of time in the hospital and often so do the siblings. Anything that distracts from the normal routine is welcomed, and Museum visits give families something else to talk about and interact around. Small colour-coded washable bags can create an element of surprise – what will be brought out next? The bags are invaluable for 1:1 bedside visits since taking a case round wards is not practical. Infection control is also major issue and objects must be made from materials that can be disinfected, cleaned with mediwipes between patients and even disposed of should that become necessary.

Depending on treatment, young patients may come and go at various points during any session, they may be attached to drips or other medical equipment, they may be in wheelchairs or even wheeled in on beds. To accommodate this and dealing with children's low mood or anxiety, the HSO needs to be a skilled and experienced educator. Effective forward planning by the HSO is essential to fit in with the days and times that work best for each hospital, for example, requests a particular morning when the hospital runs a very busy blood transfusion clinic and objects provide a welcome distraction to bored or anxious children.





Image 2: Making Chinese gardens on the blood transfusion ward. Image courtesy Carolyn Bloore

### Benefits for children in hospitals:

Since 2008, feedback from young patients has been consistently positive.

These are recent responses, March 2018, from two different hospitals session which indicate their enjoyment of objects 'I really liked the session. I learned a lot about toys and their mechanism, it was most enlightening to discover how children used to entertain themselves.' (girl 16). Even the most reluctant can become engaged, 'I didn't want to do anything today, but I'm glad I did because it was fun.' (boy 10)

Parents are appreciative too, 'B and I wanted to say a massive thank you. We very much enjoyed looking at the artefacts, touching and listening to all the amazing facts. Long may you continue to do what you are doing.

'Hospital school staff at Great Ormond Street commented: 'We've had the opportunity to work with the V&A Museum of Childhood for many years. It has given so many of our pupils and their families such an enjoyable, inspiring and enriching experience at a time in their lives which can be very challenging.'

Teachers-in-charge recognise the sessions as a valuable educational tool, as well as having a positive impact on hospitalised children and young people.

Museum visits can also support staff, who often work with young people with challenging behaviour: 'It is a chance for our staff to enjoy and observe the pupils' interactions more objectively and it enriches the curriculum. It also helps us to think about teaching style and what works for the young people.'

Object handling is recognised as a way of encouraging shared activity and socialisation evidenced by outpatients at UCLH, 'Our young patients can often experience a high level of anxiety and stress whilst waiting to see a doctor. You are very good at bringing the children together in shared activities, which helps them to socialise and feel less isolated with a chronic condition'

Clinical staff too recognise positive applications of working with objects. At the Royal National Orthopaedic, a staff nurse was able to complete two sections of a neurovascular observation chart by watching a young girl with bandaged hands manipulating objects. She commented, 'If I had gone up to her and asked her to move her fingers before you had been working with her, I doubt she would have done it.'

These different benefits all highlight the important work that museum can do using their collection in healthcare contexts.

### Some brief thoughts on the future of museums in health.

**Nuala Morse:** We can draw parallels between the V&A programme and the longer-established movement of arts in health and arts in hospital, both commissions and artists residencies (Fancourt, 2017). A significant difference however is the power of museum objects and their role in healthcare spaces. The work of the V&A Museum of Childhood offers opportunities for children and young people to escape through play and imagination, which can draw their attention away from feelings of anxiety or fear or boredom. There is a sense in which engaging with objects can focus body, mind and soul in ways that might support a holistic approach to healing and wellbeing, in particularly difficult circumstances.

There is now a growing body of evidence about how museums and galleries engagement can provide health and well-being benefits (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2017). Cross-disciplinary academic studies have described how museum engagement (museum visits and object handling sessions) can lead to increases in psychological wellbeing and positive emotions including self-esteem, optimism and hope (Chatterjee and Noble, 2013; Dodd and Jones, 2014). In a hospital context, museum activities have been found to lead to a positive distraction from clinical environments and increased communication between patients and care providers. The work of the V&A Museum of Childhood showcases this potential where distraction can be far more significant than the term first implies. A recent study of one-to-one object handling sessions with female patients on an oncology ward found that objects enabled patients to explore issues of loss, fear, ill-health and death, while at the same time finding support and comfort through these object interactions and in the objects themselves (Lanceley et al., 2012). Understanding these connections for children beyond playful distraction and in terms of finding comfort in things is a significant question for future research.

The V&A sessions also clearly support families, which is key to children's recovery. Additionally, museum objects are taking on a potential role as ancillary objects in care enabling rehabilitation and other clinical and diagnostics work. The V&A Museum of Childhood case study highlights a range of benefits derived by patients, families and professionals within the Hospital School programme, and there is much further research to be carried out to gain further understanding of the role of museum objects in care settings. While 'museums in health' is a growing area of practice, these kinds of programme are far from the norm and their reliance on project-funding means that they are often short term.

### How might we imagine the future of this work of the museum?

First, we might consider this work conceptually as extending the 'social work' of museums called for by scholars such as Elaine Heumann Gurian and Lois Silverman. This locates the community work of museums outside of the museum spaces and further into community spaces such as care homes, community centres and hospitals. The future of social work of the museum within relations of care will require new models of funding (see Camic and Chatterjee, 2013) and new alliances of care across the cultural and health sector (Morse and Munro, 2015).

Second, it will require the reassessment of a range of different relational skills to those technical skills currently valued in professional museum work and the emergence of new roles, such as the Hospital School Officer described above. Finally, it will require new ways of thinking about the power of collections and the value of culture, for instance, extending museums' engagement with identity work to explore issues of well-ness and ill-health as part of the human experience, as well as recognising lifelong learning opportunities in non-formal spaces. The work of the V&A Hospital Schools programme opens up a number of museological lines of enquiry for understanding the power of object in relations of care along with an important reminder of the possibilities for learning beyond the formal classroom.

### Notes

(1) <http://museumsandwellbeing.org/>

(2) <https://museumsandwellbeingalliance.wordpress.com/international-examples/>

(3) <https://www.npg.org.uk/assets/media/Projects/hospital-schools/npghospitalstoolkit.pdf>

(4) 'Arguably, touch could be considered as the ultimate sense which allows up to build a complete representation of the world.' Christos Gianchritis, 'The Use of Haptic Interfaces in Haptics Research', Ed. Helen J Chatterjee, *Touch in Museums. Policy and Practice in Object Handling*, 2008, p.75.

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## Book review: Museums and Innovations

**Antos, Z., Fromm, A., and Golding, V. (eds.), 2017. *Museums and Innovations*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. ISBN: 1-4438-1268-4, hardback, 241pp.**

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The book under review informs about innovative approaches to the presentation of cultural heritage in ethnographic and social history museums. *Museums and Innovations* is an edited compilation comprising an introduction and sixteen chapters written by authors representing various disciplinary contexts and geographic locations (including Germany, Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom, Malta, Serbia, Croatia, Italy, Spain, Poland, Finland, Estonia, the Netherlands, Russia, the Republic of Moldova, and Belgium). The essays evolved from discussions at the 2014 Annual Conference of the International Committee for Museums of Ethnography, an International Committee of the International Council of Museums. The book is a timely publication because it re-approaches ethnography in museums aimed at an international audience and reflecting a convergence of developments in the field at large that taken together contribute to an awareness of the museum's role to act as agent of change. A central argument is to prompt debate about the museum's impact on heritage presentation and interpretation.

The first part 'Exploring identity and community' presents four case studies, which touch upon issues of interdisciplinary research in exhibition design, multiculturalism discourse in the inclusive museum, re-shaping community identity through engagement in museum practice, and artistic interventions to re-approach history and heritage. Edenheiser favours the 'historicisation' of ethnographic objects in colonial contexts and the 'anthropologising' of art to diversify exhibition design and enrich the museum narrative with a multitude of stories. Quinn puts an emphasis on the museum's role to foster intercultural dialogue framing social inclusion through an equal integration of communities into museum practice. As Quinn puts it, 'accepted notions of why the museum exists and what and who it represents are now being renegotiated' (2017: 18) and the ways museums address cultural diversity seem to adjust to a cross-cultural understanding. Vella and Cutajar argue that a small museum can set the ground for re-shaping the identity of a local community through personalised engagement in museum programming and a learning provision based on shared histories and visitors' involvement in heritage re-appropriation. Peric showcases the ways artistic interventions could fuse heritage with personal stories and memories to 'transpose the objects into dialectical constructs of historicity and fiction within an artistic context' (2017: 47) blurring the boundaries between ethnography and art.

'Communicating heritage and intangibility' comes next with three case studies, which discuss issues of intangible heritage preservation and promotion, innovative practices in museum education, and new approaches to exhibition design using advanced digital technologies for emotive storylines. Krstovic claims that '[m]useums must provoke people's memories' (2017: 62) but at the same time 'must be universal' (2017: 74); to do so museums should reach out to local communities encouraging a contribution to knowledge exchange as well as a shared responsibility for heritage preservation and promotion. Buletic presents innovative ways to extend the museum's learning provision by inviting young audiences in research-based workshops about the museum praxis; as well as by engaging adults in heritage conservation and presentation through community-driven events. As Buletic puts it, safeguarding intangible heritage involves 'the stimulation of awareness and the engagement of community members in everyday social life practices' (2017: 92) by creating opportunities for participation and partnerships. Giostrella and Tranfaglia argue that heritage communication is enlivened by emotive storylines using advanced digital technologies in exhibition design structured around memory-activation and multisensory experiences; accessible to all and aiming to engage visitors in the preservation and protection of cultural heritage as they 'take away the emotional experience and retell the significance of the stories heard while at the museum' (2017: 108).

The third part 'Transformations' presents two cases studies, which put forward new ways of thinking about mounting exhibitions with regard to relevance, accessibility and social impact. Segui and Tamarit explain the efforts and challenges faced in transforming permanent exhibitions in an attempt to diversify the offer and

ensure sustainability. Oleszkiewicz comments on reviving exhibitions integrating sense-stimulation and placing an emphasis on the objects themselves. This approach involved blurring the lines between the past and the present leaving negotiated meanings aside and 'deciding on a new way to select the museum stories on display and seek fresh forms of communication' (2017: 123); in order to enrich the museum narrative with the versatile polyphony of voices heard in and about the museum constituting ethnographic objects meaningful prompts for interaction and reflection. As Oleszkiewicz puts it, such an approach is 'not composed as a story but rather as a meeting or as a conversation' (2017: 129).

The volume reads on to 'Participation and social justice' with three case studies about issues of policy-making, studying visitor motivations to reinforce participation, and assumptions about visitors. Harju presents the efforts in compiling a customer-based exhibitions policy and comments on the peculiarities of trying to respond to the needs to diverse audiences taking into consideration feedback about strengths and weaknesses, clarifying objectives, and monitoring progress regularly. Aljas provides a brief overview of museum participation in terms of visitor motivations -personal and social-, and attempts to extend the 'access-interaction-participation' model to include viewpoints relevant to the community at large and not only to the individual. Masson discusses the ways heritage presentation is mediated by advanced digital technologies to project a coherent narrative about the identity of space and at the same time leaving room for alternative narratives to emerge. The discussion problematises the museum's role in framing interpretation efforts and the visitors' assumed role in re-shaping identity.

In the part, 'Developing new practices' the reader is presented with two cases studies about the museum preferences of migrants' children and issues of mobility in exhibitions that serve as platforms for interaction. Grinko and Shevtsova argue that museums should build more partnerships with schools to respond to the needs of children in minority communities more effectively increasing cultural access and fostering participation. Wild and Haack present cases of mobile exhibitions aimed at non-visitors and designed to travel and prompt dialogue about identity, migration and society at large. As Wild and Haack put it, 'the mobile exhibition can re-configure the public space, and even re-politicise the public space' (2017: 193) by bridging the gap between visitors and non-visitors, and encouraging interaction outside the museum.

'New voices and (re)interpretation' comes as the final part of the volume with the intent to discuss issues of re-defining the role of the ethnographic museum and developing practices and new ways of thinking about the presentation of heritage. Van Der Zee suggests museums 'cut across cultural relativism and once again focus on the many aspects which cultures share' (2017: 204) in an attempt to re-affirm the value of ethnography in cross-cultural understanding. To do so, it is recommended to contextualise ethnographic objects drawing on history and anthropology, and treat them as agents of meaning-making beyond time and aesthetics. Icke-Schwalbe addresses the question of whether the name of the International Committee for Museums of Ethnography should change and provides a historical overview of ethnography juxtaposed to ethnology with the intent to remind us that debates and critical discussions remain paramount to furthering knowledge.

The chapters are diverse but the thread that unites them is the questions raised about the (re) interpretation of the terms 'museum' and 'ethnography' in the context of social inclusion and identity as well as participation in the heritage presentation and interpretation discourse. The discussions aim to re-define these terms and extend the museum's role to contribute to social change. The volume neither reads like an answer to these questions nor lingers in the theory guiding the work; but rather it exposes the practicalities and limitations of the case studies placing the emphasis on the outcomes. The reviewer found much of the work in this volume to echo a recent commentary by Thomas (2016) about the reviving interest in the value of ethnographic museums. In Thomas's commentary, the reviewer found similar suggestions to move the discussion about the role of ethnographic museums beyond colonial exploitation and re-approach them as spaces of encounter and dialogue representative of cultural diversity; spaces where visitors are encouraged 'to ask their own questions, about the making of the museum's collections' (2016: 34).

The overall sense of continuity is somewhat disrupted by the change of focus and tone -at times highly conversational- between chapters, but what is lost in terms of flow is gained at the level of the book's contribution to scholarship. The volume 'serves to encourage more critical and creative praxis from international museum professionals and concerned members of the academy' (2017: 8). Therefore, even though the case studies are described less systematically than expected in terms of analysis and the evaluation of outcomes -as the authors limit themselves to descriptive rather than reflective language-, they constitute notable additions to the field. It is indeed difficult to do justice to the multitude of aspects that the book explores as a resource of great interest to museum professionals and researchers alike. The volume concludes with an impressive bibliography list, the contributors' biographical notes and an index.

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