MUSEUMS IN THE ‘AGE OF PARTICIPATION’

Re-imagining the museum experience
HOW DID WE GET HERE?
The Evolutionary Museum

• Scientific mindset replaced superstition.
• Museum cataloguing sequenced the evolution of the earth and humankind.
• Museum collections key to rise of the great disciplines – art history, archaeology, geology, palaeontology, etc
• Audience – scholars, students, enthusiasts
Expansion to general public

• Collections as cultural memory stores for humankind and our world.
• Engagement with collections makes sense of the world and our place in it.
V&A created as a museum for ordinary people

- The ‘South Kensington system’ as a model for public education:

“I go every Saturday night to see the handicraftsman, the woodcutter, the glass blower and the worker in metals”

Oscar Wilde
Universal Survey Museum: History of Art by period and/or school

Birmingham Art Gallery 2015
Learning at a glance:
The ‘Three Ages’: Stone, Bronze, Iron

Christian Jurgensen Thomsen, Denmark 1816

An objective, systematic representation of the world as knowable by Western audiences.
Elitism - the ‘official past’

Museum role to support social order – meant promoted establishment view of the world.

“museums inhibited the capacity of visitors to imagine alternative social orders – past or future.”

Wallace, M. 1996: 24

Nelson’s uniform: great men, great events
The National Trust equivalent was the great man and the house he built.
The lives of working people represented by folk life
SOCIETAL CHANGE RISKS LOSS OF CORE AUDIENCES
Societal change c1950 – c1990s

• Growth of professional society (became 70+% of museum audience):
  • Education, Affluence, Leisure Time
  • Democratisation of travel
  • Spread of television and internet

• Changing nature of work:
  • Rise in professional jobs: public sector, finance, services
  • Rise of immigration linked to staff shortages
  • LATER- rapid decline manual labour: de-industrialisation, export of jobs, globalisation
Perfect storm post 1990s speeds change

- Globalisation;
- Generational shift;
- Impact of new media/technology;
- Demographic change;
- Economic crisis – austerity, cuts, market forces.
# Generational shift

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silent Generation: born 1927 - 45</th>
<th>Shaped by depression and war</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baby Boomers</strong>: born 1946 - 64</td>
<td>Shaped by social upheavals of 1960s</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Witnessed impact of mass media</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lived through economic boom</td>
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<td><strong>Dominated society for 40 years</strong></td>
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<th>Generation X: born 1965 - 78</th>
<th>Smaller numbers</th>
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<td>Rise dual income families</td>
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<td>Family splits</td>
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<td>Higher debt burdens</td>
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<td>Expansion women in higher education</td>
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<td><strong>Now have power</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>Generation Y: born c1979 – mid 90s (‘Millennials’)</th>
<th>Having children later</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increasingly diverse</td>
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<td>Filter the world through new media</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Already outnumber Boomers in workforce.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>Generation Z : post mid 90s</th>
<th>“Digital natives”</th>
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Impact of societal change on the professional audience

• Growing affluence;

• Highly informed, well-educated, media-savvy, socially and culturally diverse, individualistic and extensively travelled;

• Increasingly demanding expectations of quality, choice and variety;

• Expectations of a personalised experience and lifestyle being matched;

• More choice in how to spend leisure time & money
The rise of new technology

• 1990s The Information Age
  - Web 1.0
  - Globalisation of supply chains
  - 2004 Web 2.0
  - Rise of ‘Participatory Culture’

• 2000s The Age of Participation
  - ‘New Power’
  - 2007 Smartphone
  - Rise of Social Media
The ‘Age of Participation’: attitudinal and behavioural revolution for all

… with the explosion of technologies that allow people to connect, communicate globally, and customize their experiences to their own preferences and needs, public expectations of participation have taken root in every fertile inch of our human culture.

McLean (u/d: 1)

… participation has become a key feature of … our lives… content we shape and produce ourselves by sharing, liking, tweeting,instagramming and blogging, preferably as and when it happens since instant status updates are the ultimate proof of participation.

Jalving, 2017: 8
Smartphone + Social media = the new normal

- MOBILE, DIGITAL & PERSONAL the defining qualities.
- WITNESS – RECORD – SHARE the norm.
- Involves core audiences as well as millennials and Generation Z.
Result – changing attitudes, behaviour and expectations

People are thinking about the experience of culture differently than in the past, placing value on a more immersive and interactive experience than is possible through mere observation…

Result – intense pressure for change on all our cultural institutions

We are witnessing a complete renovation of our cultural infrastructure. Those ‘bricks and mortar’ culture houses, citadels of experience, towers of inspiration, that for so long have stood steadfast as symbols of cultural continuity and comfort, while the streets around them have whizzed and clattered to multiple disruptive transformations, are being turned inside out... this wholesale renovation is born out of an urgent requirement to change or die, and it is just beginning.

Fleming, 2009: 1
Museums are ill-prepared to serve these PROFOUNDLY different behaviours

Audiences that … look, think, behave, and process information differently.

[We must] be willing to make bold changes... to meet future visitor needs.

OP&A (2007: 15)
Museum lack of skills, money, flexibility

• ...audiences expect artistic creators and distributors to be technologically literate, responsive to their personal interests, and constantly generating fresh content.

• a formidable challenge for most non-profit arts organizations, which are neither organizationally nor financially structured to allow for rapid innovation or hypersensitivity to consumer expectations.

AEA Consulting 2006: 9
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AEA Consulting 2006: 9
Change or Die!

• Change is essential. Without it museums will die.
• But, can museums reach out successfully to both core audiences and new users?
• What roles can museums successfully play in the 21st century?
MEETING THE DEMANDS OF THE PROFESSIONAL AUDIENCE
Building relationship with audiences

It requires a major change in mind-set for the museum:

• responding to lifestyle expectations;
• engaging with users as active participants and contributors;
• appreciating the expertise and experience users bring;
• developing new approaches to support more active user involvement.
Recognition that museum experience holistic
Museum lifestyle response – a global quality leisure experience.

Ancillary spaces and activities essential in larger museums:

• Quality restaurant and shop;
• Theatre with lectures, film, & live performance;
• Blockbuster exhibitions;
• Evening openings and activities; and
• External plaza.

Pompidou Centre (1977) leads the way
Still developing: Lifestyle programming for millennials

• Lates events a feature of UK museums since 2001 – and can now be found all over the developed world.

• Estimated 8000 UK events per year, with the audience younger than the daytime adults.
Service matters most

Encouraging more visitors to cultural and heritage attractions

- A warm and friendly welcome
- Places nearby to eat, drink & relax
- Transportation/attraction bundles
- British food & drink
- Attraction/activity bundles
- Guided tours in own language
- Behind the scenes/after hours tours
- Audio guide in own language
- Interaction for adults or children
- History brought to life

Percentage who said ‘Appealing’

Museum content response - re-think the display offer

Museums still see learning as main reason for visit.

In practice the main motivation is for a quality social outing.

Meanwhile, museum focus on learning leads to didactic displays.
Visitor still too often seen as passive:

Didactic approach sees visitors as empty vessels waiting passively to have their brains filled with the information we impart and in the order that we impart it.
Result – permanent static displays akin to 3D lectures

Image of museums as didactic, passive, and never-changing.
Re-thinking museum experience as based on social interaction

• Downplay outcomes

• Plan for PROCESS
  • Museums and galleries as social spaces: relax, chat, interact, explore, participate, contribute, collaborate.
  • Explore the exhibition and experience new things as you go along.
  • Experience, share and interact together.
  • Families – ‘forage, broadcast, comment’.
Design for people as well as for exhibits

• Warm and welcoming
• Orientation – physical & conceptual
• Atmospherics – colour, lighting, sound, smell
• Shared viewing of exhibits
• Regularly changed trails/activity packs
• Pacing
• Reflection zones
• ‘Pathways’ or ‘entry points’
• Seating
Develop exhibits that social groups can take part in together

Participatory exhibits are driven by the users and so are about the **process** of learning. They:

- seek to stimulate social interaction amongst visitors;
- are driven by the direction that the user or group want(s) to go in;
- can work on different levels; and
- are **open-ended**: the end-point is frequently outside the museum’s direct control.

They can vary from simple additions to deep visitor engagement.
A typology of participatory exhibits

- **Taking part**: focus on minor approaches that can help transform permanent displays.

- **Responding creatively**: directly from engagement with collections.

- **Contributing**: reflecting and responding/adding to content.

- **Belonging**: engage audiences as equal partners on a learning journey with the museum.

- **Empowering**: seek to empower people & communities to become actively engaged in wider society and so enhance their own lives.

- **Taking action**: actively influencing behaviour.

- **Smart participation**: involving new technology.
Take part: Trails and carry-round packs give families a sense of purpose + TAKE-AWAY
Creative: maker station - MOSI
Contributing:
Importance of user contributions

• Converts the contributor into an active participant.

• Diversifies content and range of voices heard in the museum.

• Reveals museum as an “…open place, one that encourages participation and is willing to engage with a variety of opinion and ideas…” (Durbin u/d)

• Decreases power of museum as a gatekeeper.

• Opportunities to contribute shows the museum values its users.

• But the museum must want to listen.
Smart: building on the selfie
submit photographs: It’s time we MET
Smart: taking images in response to works -- Oh Snap! Carnegie Museum of Art

• The museum selected and exhibited 13 new works of photography – each chosen for its potential to inspire creative responses.
• It then invited people to submit their own photographic responses via the web.
• Each day the museum prints out new submissions and hangs them beside their inspirations, and lets each participant know by email.
• 21Feb – 13March 2013, 685 submissions.

Museum 2.0, 13 March 2013
Smart: Rijksstudio online: ‘set the collection free’

Free online access to hundreds of thousands of high resolution images from the museum collections
People will do it for themselves - Ugly Renaissance Babies

This app encourages people to contribute examples.

https://uglyrenaissancebabies.tumblr.com
THE SOCIAL ROLE OF MUSEUMS
The Social Imperative

The goals of inclusiveness, accessibility and use by a broad range of people as a primary duty of museums.
What are museums for today?

- Representative of the nation/region/city
- A cultural treasure house
- A leisure and tourism attraction
- A source of local pride
- A resource for informal and structured learning
- An income generator
- An agent for physical, economic, cultural and social regeneration.
- A memory store for all in the local community, relevant to and representative of the whole of society
- Accessible to all - intellectually, physically, socially, culturally, economically.
- A celebrant of cultural diversity and promoter of social inclusion, with a core purpose of improving people’s lives
- A place of dialogue and toleration, and a community meeting place, committed to promoting civil engagement and community empowerment
- Proactive in developing, working with and managing pan-agency projects.
- An exemplar of quality service provision and value for money.

Black, 2012: 5
Manual workers left behind by globalisation

• More than half the world’s population now middle class.
• Less than 10% world population now in extreme poverty.
• Falling global inequality, rising domestic inequality – job exports.
• The ‘left behind’ manipulated by populists.
Impact of demographic change

• By 2030 c30% population retired.

• By 2050 c24% of English population ethnic minority.

• Lots migrants from Eastern Europe.

• 216,000 net from outside EU in 2018.
Museums peripheral to most people’s lives

UK:  c30% do not visit at all
     c70% attend at least once every 3 years
     17% attend 3-4 times a year
     3-4% attend monthly  Taking Part Longitudinal Study

Australia:  5% visit art galleries monthly
           3% visit museums monthly

EU:  c37% visit museums at least once a year
     c6-7% visit over 5 times per year
Not interested is the main reason for not going to museums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Germany 40%</th>
<th>35.5</th>
<th>Germany 32%</th>
<th>29.2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not really interested</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to find time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Germany 32%</td>
<td>29.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can’t easily get to it</td>
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<tr>
<td>Never occurred to me</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health not good enough</td>
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<tr>
<td>No need to go</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wouldn’t enjoy it</td>
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<tr>
<td>Costs too much</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not enough information on what available</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have been in past – no need to go again</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not child-friendly</td>
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<tr>
<td>No one to go with</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
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<td>5.0</td>
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Nothing new about reaching out

- V&A created as a museum for the masses 1850s

- John Cotton Dana: Librarian and Director Newark (New Jersey) Museum 1909 (when he founded it) – death 1929

- Theodore Low (1942) *The Museum as a Social Instrument*

- Anacostia Museum (1967)

- *Round Table on the Development and the Role of Museums in the Contemporary World* held in Chile in 1972.
Participation and the Social Museum

- 1960s emergence of ‘participation’ in the UK as a founding principle of modern democracy – empowering people through inclusion in the political decision-making process.

- Hi-jacked by developers and Planners.

- Revitalised in the 1990s by New Labour under the Social Inclusion banner.

- Substantial impact on UK museums – which were given a role in combating exclusion. This continues today – and same role reflected across western museums.
Move away from elitism

Two major shifts:

1. The ‘New Social History’: the life experiences and contributions of everyone matters, not just the elite.

2. Importance of oral histories.
Social exclusion

Introduced into the political agenda in UK with New Labour 1997:

- The key risk factors include: low income; family conflict; being in care; school problems; being an ex-prisoner; being from an ethnic minority; living in a deprived neighbourhood…; mental health problems, age and disability.

Cabinet Office (2001: 11)
Museum response to social exclusion

... museums can contribute towards social inclusion at *individual, community and societal* levels...

*individual*... enhanced self-esteem, confidence and creativity;

*community*... catalyst for social regeneration...;

*[societal]*... representation of inclusive communities... promote tolerance, inter-community respect and to challenge stereotypes.

Sandell (2003: 45)
Huge increase in schools usage
Active involvement for children
Expanded focus on learning and programming – impact of education officers

Visitor as active participants in own learning
Building relationships with communities
Community sourcing: Revisiting collections
LGBT representation

- In 2017 the National Trust held a national celebration of the 50th anniversary of the legalisation of homosexuality in the UK.
- There was an outcry in the right wing press, esp. the Daily Mail.
- But the Trust’s own surveys showed 72% approval.
Disability access and representation

E.g. Organisational preparation:

- Ensure your organisation is disability aware.
- Ensure buildings and events accessible – same route for all.
- Ensure personnel trained in disability issues.
- Seek disability representation amongst staff and volunteers.
- Develop networks and partnerships with disability groups.
- Respect choice and control.
- Respect product of people with disabilities.
- Monitor development and share experience.
- Profile successes.
Tackling Dementia

Working with Age Concern, Northampton Museum is one of many that has taken collections out from the museum to work with older audiences.

Leicestershire Museums train the care workers to run sessions.
Tackling difficult issues
‘Art road to Peace’, Tel Aviv Museum
Deepen understanding of the complex Dana Centre, Science Museum, London
Who controls the projects

• Power normally remains with the museum.

• Without power – the participation process becomes empty and ineffective (Arnstein, 1969).
The beginnings of collaboration

1. ICOM *Migration Cities* initiative.
2. Nina Simon’s *Of/By/For All* project.
Potential to address wider Social Challenges (NESTA 2018)

1. Health and Care: ageing society, social care, disability, etc.

2. Skills & Learning: reduce inequality of access/outcomes, democratisation of creativity, etc.

3. Food, environment & climate change: sustainability, raising public awareness, etc.

4. Migration & integration: long-term integration challenges, inc. education, training, community engagement, etc.

5. Digital democracy: growing mistrust in democratic institutions, rise populism, emergence misinformation, etc.

6. Cities and urban development: social & demographic change, cohesion, loneliness, etc.
Conclusion

• Public museums are under immense pressure.
• All must become more entrepreneurial, to develop new income streams as budgets are slashed.
• All must re-think their core visitor experience to attract new generations of core audiences.
• Yet they are also expected to re-position themselves at the heart of their communities.
• How can all this be achieved?
David Fleming: Managing and sustaining change

• A new vision to provide clarity of purpose
• A new senior management to provide leadership
• Embedded planning at all levels
• A new staff structure
• Involvement of staff in decision-making
• Greater political and media awareness
• Staff training and development
• ‘Change agents’ as missionaries
• Raised ambitions
• Encouraged risk-taking and innovation
• Careful financial management.
Museums can change lives

“If you hang out with astronauts, you end up sitting on the moon.”

Young person in poetry workshop, Lambeth Libraries
Thank you

graham.black@ntu.ac.uk