

LEARNING FROM LISTENING TO A CITIZEN BOARD

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Abstract

Listening is a skill that goes beyond hearing another person's words. It is an attentive communication process that deeply acknowledges individual backgrounds in making sense of the world. In this paper, we propose a listening approach to museums in their conception as social spaces in the service of society. Departing from the museum's historic to contemporary concerns for citizen participation, we detail our work with a citizen board in the 'Right to the Museum?' project within a comparative study of five Viennese museums. Engaging in intense dialogue through accompanied museum visits and post- surveys, we present our learnings regarding citizens' situated interpretation strategies in permanent exhibitions and potential discrepancies between museum missions on paper and perceptions on-site. Based on the responses by the citizen board to museum and exhibition scripts, we also reflect on how such a listening approach can be used to pluralise perspectives on cultural heritage and its societal value.

Keywords: museum missions, exhibition scripts, citizen board, listening, identity politics.

If museums are considered public and to be used by diverse audiences, the question is how they can better understand citizens' viewpoints and cater to their needs. Framing museums as social spaces, or as in this issue as 'spaces of rootedness and responsibility', we propose to apply a listening approach. Listening is a skill that goes beyond simply hearing another person's words. Far more, it is about actively seeking to understand their meaning and the person behind them in an attentive communication process. The paper builds on our work with the citizen board in the 'Right to the Museum?' project that investigated changes in museums' concepts of the public and current public perceptions of museums in a comparative study of five Viennese museums (Reitstätter and Galter, 2023). Ranked by the year of their founding, these were the MAK – Museum of Applied Arts (*1863), the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna (*1891), the Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art (*1895), the Belvedere (*1903), and the House of Austrian

History (*2017). On the one hand, we engaged in archival research analysing institutional self-descriptions from historical founding statutes to current mission statements. On the other hand, we investigated the perception of these museum concepts and responses to exhibition scripts from a citizens' point of view in intensive field research.

To explain our listening approach and share our learnings, the paper first theoretically contextualises the concern for citizen participation regarding the institution's public purpose, audience communication models, and the concept of the listening museum with examples of citizen boards. In the second step, we present the methodology of our project 'Right to the Museum?' detailing how we invited for participation, composed the citizen board, conducted the accompanied museum visits with the subsequent survey and vignette interviews, and worked on our data analysis. In the third step, we outline our findings on situated interpretation strategies (within power and identity mechanisms) and the relation between museum missions and perceptions (analysing critical discrepancies). In conclusion, we discuss how citizens' responses to exhibition scripts and museum missions can be used for a diversified addressee policy and the pluralisation of perspectives on cultural heritage and its societal value.

Concerns for Citizen Participation

Within the many calls for democratisation and diversity in museum history, this literature review exemplifies the concerns for citizen participation by deciphering discrepancies between the museum as a public institution and inherent exclusion mechanisms, by showing shifts in museum communication models and audience conceptions, and by conceptualising the listening museum and giving examples of citizen boards.

The words museum and public seem to be related in a logical and long-lasting way. However, museum history shows how a citizens' 'Right to the Museum' inherent in the museum as a public institution shifted its semantic status from opening the formerly aristocratic collections to a broader public to dealing with contemporary identity politics today. As Jennifer Barrett (2012) outlines, the word public is often used loosely while missing a critical reflection on its etymology and political meaning within museum history from the founding of the modern museum to new practices of community engagement today. Applying Habermas' theory of the public sphere, Barrett stresses the need to align museums with civil society positioning museums as public spaces where public discourse takes place. In our research on museum self-descriptions from the first statutes to the most recent mission statements among five Viennese museums, we also found shifts in the public understanding of the museum with quite remarkable differences regarding museum types and individual museum histories. While for instance, the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna was opened to the public to bear witness to the wealth of the Habsburg

collections and enable scientific studies (and still very much stresses its splendour and academic rigour today), the MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, was founded without considerable collections but the aim to elevate the taste through the education of a wider audience within a new consumer culture (and a continuous focus on design education intermingled with societal concerns today) (Reitstätter et al., 2025).

Yet inherent exclusion mechanisms also need to be considered because even if the opening of museums in the course of the Enlightenment granted citizens a fundamental right to visit the formerly aristocratic collections, their opening should not be equated with democratisation (Krasny, 2016; McClellan, 2003). In particular, the prerequisite of visual literacy within the requirement of 'civic seeing' systematically excluded audiences from different ages, genders, races, and classes (Bennett, 2007), or at least museums functioned as 'spaces of controlled behaviour [...] who would eject those who behaved in an unruly fashion.' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, p.14) Today, the still very bourgeois museum audience and the small group of only up to 15% of active cultural users (Eurostat, 2015) show the discrepancies between museum concepts targeting a broad segment of society and the limited use of museums by a few. In a recent survey of Austrian citizens, it was again proven that cultural capital is inherited pointing towards the continuous higher cultural participation of people with a higher social income and formal education. Factors for shrinking cultural participation in specific cultural sectors – as among museums where attendance (of at least once a year) dropped from 54% to 45% from 2007 to 2022 – were found in the ageing society and demographic change, the wish for socially framed cultural events (while missing companions to attend) and the risk of poverty in the current challenging economic circumstances (Schönherr and Glaser, 2023, pp.98–105).

Efforts to work against structural exclusion mechanisms have cumulated in the participatory turn at the end of the 20th century with the outcome that museum practice has been giving more emphasis on visitor-centred practices such as exhibiting and educating, community engagement, or social care (Black, 2018; Morse, 2021; Museological Review, 2022; Sandell, 2003). In questioning the sole authority of the museum where the institution speaks and the others listen, we can see a conceptual shift in audience communication from a linear transmission model to a dialogic cultural model (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). In the transmission model, the museum communicates its wisdom and knowledge (according to the internal logic of the subject matter) to the visitors (envisioned as the general public) without considering their expertise and without knowing about their experiences due to missing research. This one-way or top-down communication model is also mirrored in what Zahava Doering (1999, p.3) coined the baby bird model of communication 'which regards the visitor as a relatively undeveloped appetite needing [the museum's] wise and learned feeding.' The cultural model, in

contrast, shifts from the mediation of content to visitors' active processes of meaning-making and the museum's task of facilitating access and participation in line with a constructivist learning approach.

In line with this general shift in audience communication and based on the behaviour, incorporation/resistance, and spectacle/performance paradigms from Abercrombie and Longhurst's audience characterisation, Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert (2010) captures museums and their visitors in a three-fold way: In the behaviour paradigm, the museum is seen as a mass communicator in a one-way communication process transferring a preferred message while the audience is seen as a mass public that receives this message and reacts to it directly. In the incorporation/resistance model, the museum represents the dominant cultural order transmitting skilfully coded messages while the audience is only capable of decoding these if they have the 'cultural capital' to do so. The new spectacle/ performance model shifts the museum concept further to an open work only completed by the visitor based on their personal experiences and sense of identity. While this last paradigm enables us to see visitors as skilful and active meaning makers, Stylianou- Lambert underlines the need to question these assumptions, taking into account institutional power mechanisms, empirical evidence on audience activities and the museum's responsibility in the construction of cultural narratives to not fall into the trap of romanticising this active model of museum audiences.

In this paper, we will try to see which communication models are empirically on stage working with the theoretical model of a museum script that encourages visitors to make use and sense of the given material setting but also limits them by proposing certain ways of doing and thinking. Within this double artefact-human relationship, the act of use, in consequence, neither means free interpretation nor is the act of conditioning to be equalled with fixed determination (Reitstätter, 2015, p.122). Far more, this model takes into account both the possible parallel existence of the three general communication models presented above as well as the potential agency of visitors in appropriating the museum space without neglecting inherent power mechanisms and the dominance of certain narratives. In this sense, we see museums and their exhibitions as spaces of meaning-making where 'the "social work" happens when museums, objects and people come together.' (Morse, 2021, p.11) As Alice Procter furthermore points out detailing her dialogic approach in guided tours that address the colonial nature of museum collections: 'We can use these spaces to encourage people, firstly, to develop critical thinking skills and critical engagement with history, but also to teach that you can hold multiple truths at once; that you have to hold that complexity and make space for nuance, uncertainty, and contradiction.' (Ferraro, 2022, p.71)

In a similarly oriented belief that museums acting as ‘centres for learning, cultural rights and cultural democracy’ make the strongest contribution to society, David Anderson (2009) argues for the concept of a ‘listening museum.’ While he bases his analysis on the epistemic injustice of the cultural institutions and the disadvantaged group of children, we can follow his general conclusion that museums have to develop their empathic skills by actively seeking to provide opportunities for participation and by learning to listen to a variety of visitors to adequately fulfil their public educational role. In museum and visitor studies, listening has also been implemented as an approach by audio recording visitors’ conversations. An early case of such research, departing from the premise that ‘[s]urprisingly little is known about the processes by which museum objects come to hold meaning for visitors,’ is the PhD thesis by Lois Helayne Silverman (1990, p.vi) that marked individual and relational identities of visitor pairs in the shared process of meaning-making with the museum acting as a locus for negotiating cultural meaning. Gaea Leinhardt and Karen Knutson (2004) succeeded by closely examining museum conversations as socio-cultural ways of learning in museums as well as other researchers who analysed visitors’ conduct and talk in multimodal detail (e.g., Christidou, 2018; vom Lehn, 2013). Alongside taking visitors’ social interactions as serious material to study the museum as a social space, establishing a citizen board might be another valuable way to invite others to speak out and develop listening skills on behalf of the institution.

An early reference for citizen boards was the case of the Denver Art Museum (2001) which used visitor panels to improve their interpretative materials in the process of the rearrangement of their collections. The documenta 12 advisory board, in contrast, was set up in Kassel two years before the opening of the grand international exhibition to serve as a link between the local population and the contemporary art scene by imparting local knowledge to the documenta team, discussing the exhibition themes in the city’s society and strengthening local initiatives (Wieczorek et al., 2012). Also especially addressing the city’s inhabitants, the Museum Ostwall in Dortmund recently established its citizen board ‘MO_Beirat’ to engage in their participatory exhibition and collection work including acquisition decisions.ⁱ

Due to more diversity-sensitive museum work, a lot of examples of citizen boards can be found in the US, with for instance the C3 (Creative Community Committee) that acted as an intercultural leadership network at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History from 2012–2019 and has now evolved into several community groups.ⁱⁱ At the same time, especially children and teenagers (with the need to include young perspectives not present in the adult staff) are addressed in citizen boards to develop exhibitions and adapt special programmes (Zentrum für kulturelle Teilhabe Baden-Württemberg, 2023) as in the case of



Fig.1: Communication campaign 'Would you like to go to the museum with me?,' photos: Department of Art History, University of Vienna, Karl Pani.

Tate Collective Producers Teamiii or Junges Schloss Landesmuseum Baden Württembergiv.

In general, our enquiry showed that citizen boards in museums still rather tend to be the exception than the rule (in comparison to advisory boards with renowned experts), being rarely communicated prominently on museum websites or reflected in academic publications. Regarding their functions, our short overview of examples of citizen boards demonstrates that various forms of participation – from sharing opinions and feedback in the forum function of the museum to co-developing programs and activities to participating in the governance of the museum (although to a much lesser account) – can be embedded in museum's citizen boards, despite Bandelli and Konijin (2015) assigning public boards to the highest form of participation. Their survey research into public participation in science museums found that visitors' interest in the forum function depended on the museum's capability to enable citizenship while the interest in the engagement in the form of co-development or even policy-making was much more dependent on their previous engagement with science and frequent museum visits. In addition, their survey revealed that visitors positively view the establishment of a public board but are reluctant to support the idea that its advice should have a binding status for museums. However, visitors from countries with a more fragile infrastructure for formal public participation were more positive about this binding status, possibly explained by the hope for museums to be platforms for full participation.

Methodology of the 'Right to Museum?' Project

The citizen board in the 'Right to the Museum?' project was composed of 20 members representing the Viennese population and not the classic museum public. Therefore, the invitation 'Would you like to go to the museum with me?'^v – shared via press, social media and in public urban spaces (see Fig.1) – did not only ask citizens to contribute to the project. It was also an activist claim to make use of one's own 'Right to the Museum.' While the visitor panel was framed as an open group of 200 people per museum who received free admission for feedback during one specific week in each museum, the citizen board was compiled according to the six diversity criteria of gender, age, educational level, migration background, disabilities, and museum affinity, being representative of the city of Vienna. Yet the 233 applications for the 20-member citizen board already showed the homogeneity of the interested group of people most of whom held a university degree (69.1%) and frequently visited museums (66.8%).

To counteract this tendency, the citizen board members were chosen from the responses to our call as well as through active search. A complex aspect was that we had to select fitting board members not just according to one but all six diversity criteria leading to a Sudoku-like challenge. Figure 2 shows the statistically ideal composition of the citizen board with 20 members as well as the final composition with 21 persons since a couple with disabilities shared a seat to facilitate participation. As the overview shows, we could fulfil most of the diversity criteria.

Gender	Age	Highest completed level of education	Museum affinity
Female: 10 9	18–29 years: 4 3	Compulsory school / Apprenticeship / Intermediate vocational school: 11 8	3 2 frequent visitors
Male: 10 10	30–44 years: 6 6	Secondary academic school / Higher vocational school: 4 6	9 9 occasional visitors
Diverse: X ⁽¹⁾ 2	45–59 years: 5 5	University / University of applied science: 5 7	8 10 non-visitors
	60–74 years: 3 5		
	75+ years: 2 2		
Migration background	Disability / disabilities		
9 9 people with migration background	4 4 people with a disability / disabilities		

Fig.2: Statistically ideal (left) and final composition of the citizen board (right) in the 'Right to the Museum?' project^{vi}

We engaged with the citizen board in intense field research via accompanied museum visits and two post-visit surveys, namely a museum diary, and a vignette interview. The 100 museum visits (all 20 members visited each of the five museums) took place from the 19th of May to the 5th of September 2021 and were conducted by the two authors as field researchers. In every visit, one field researcher and one board member (1+1) visited representative areas of the permanent exhibition to give an insight into the museum's collection as well as enable a manageable exhibition visit. Starting the accompanied

museum visits at the entrance of the museum and ending in a seating area for the survey parts, the museum visits were structured both by the museum and exhibition script as well as the needs and specifics of the respective board members. Methodologically, the accompanied museum visits (see Fig.3) combine participant observation with Thinking Aloud and Object Elicitation in a walking conversation (Burns et al., 2020; Reitstätter and Fineder, 2021; Zahner, 2021). While the citizen board member was asked to share their museum experience via thinking aloud, the field researcher took part in listening, only inquiring about certain statements in a conversational manner.

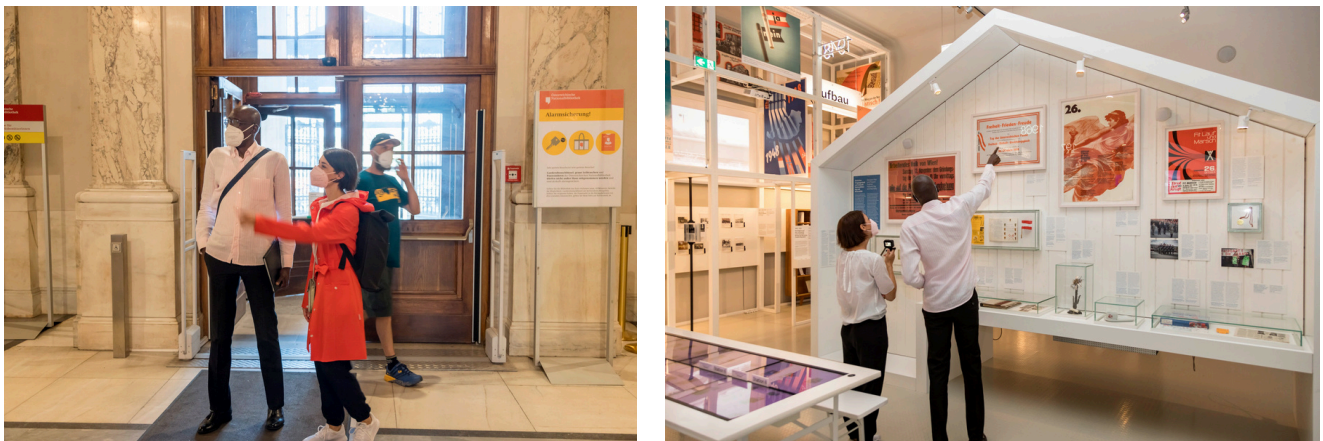


Fig.3: Accompanied museum visit, House of Austrian History, photos: Department of Art History, University of Vienna, Karl Pani.

The museum diary represents a survey based on forms of self-documentation (Alaszewski 2006) that we used to invite board members to systematically reflect upon their visit immediately after the experience. The museum diary was presented on a tablet and filled out by the board members on their own answering open and closed questions. Information was collected on the perception of visitor rights (such as feeling comfortable, welcome, or being offered an easy orientation), (un)appealing objects, the description of the visited museum with three characteristic adjectives, earlier visits to the specific museum and the wish to return to the museum or recommend it to others, the perception of the regular entrance fee as well as general appraisal and critique. Following the museum diary, a vignette interview took place (see Fig.4). A vignette is usually a story about a specific person, situation, or structure that serves as a conversation stimulus to collect people's opinions via a very concrete form of questioning (Hughes and Huby, 2004). In this project, three excerpts from historical to present-day museum missions collected in the archival research were contrasted with the visiting experience of the board member. In addition to the verbal elaboration, we also invited

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Fig.4: Museum diary and vignette interview, House of Austrian History, photos: Department of Art History, University of Vienna, Karl Pani.

On average, the joint visit through the selected parts of the permanent exhibition lasted 01:21 hours. In total, we spent around two hours with each board member at the museum, from the meetup to the exhibition visit to the museum diary, vignette interview and informal post-visit-talk. The accompanied museum visits were documented using an audio recorder and a small camera (GoPro). In addition to the audio (talk) and video (shared visual field), the collection of contextual biographical information and atmospheric impressions of the visit were documented in a protocol. The museum diary, executed in Qualtrics, was saved as an Excel file containing all answers per museum and as a single PDF of each board member's visit. The vignette interviews were documented as screen recordings and as screenshots to capture the annotation of each vignette. In the process of data preparations, the accompanied museum visits and vignette interviews were

transcribed or summarized. Data analysis was undertaken by deductive and inductive coding in Atlas.ti as well as in interpretative group analysis sessions in the process of data exploration.

Learnings from listening

In this section, we present our learnings from listening to the citizen board members accompanying their museum visits and exchanging a posteriori. More specifically, we focus, on the one hand, on situated interpretation strategies in the permanent exhibitions within power and identity mechanisms and, on the other hand, on the relations between museum missions on paper and exhibition experiences on-site deciphering potential discrepancies.

Situated interpretation strategies and identity politics

Already in its conception, our study aimed at examining museum perceptions by the population living in Vienna. The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting absence of international audiences intensified this approach, as did the media debate about the insufficient addressing of the local audience and the neglect of museums' own collections in their exhibition work. Beyond polemical statements, it was our concern to provide empirical insights into this debate while discovering relevant issues for relationship- building with local visitors departing from the permanent exhibitions. In this sense, our study generally revealed high satisfaction with the museums and a revived interest in the cultural heritage of one's city. At the same time, local citizens remarked upon better visiting conditions due to absent international visitors, being able to claim space for themselves in the museum and become more aware of their right to exist in these spaces – recognising, one might say, their own 'Right to the Museum.' Also, when asked half a year later what they had taken away from the five accompanied museum visits, the answer of the citizen board was unanimous towards the appreciation of the museums' value, or as one member resumed, 'What great museums there are in our city.'

In these later reflections of the citizen board, it was also noticeable that the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna scored particularly well. For example, one board member recalled: 'During the visit, a splendour is developed that the average citizen does not experience in this way; the museum is extraordinary for the museum visitor.' The Austrian Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art, which other board members described as 'a bit outdated,' 'poor,' or 'not memorable in a striking way,' scored far lower in terms of retrospect impressiveness. From this importance of outstanding buildings, we conclude that visitors need extraordinary spaces for extraordinary museum experiences. But even if splendour can trigger this shift of attention towards the aesthetic museum experience, the

responses from the board members regarding their accompanied museum visits demonstrated that splendour is not enough on its own. We especially encountered critique on a missing common thread, the lack of contextualisation of certain objects as well as expectations regarding a more differentiated display of, e.g., artworks of famous Austrian artists or the inclusion of feminist perspectives. Pointing towards the obsolescence of the purely aesthetic exhibition, board members also wished for more varied presentations, or emphasised it as extremely positive when their needs for versatile medial address and emotional touch were met.

During the accompanied museum visits, we also noticed that the board members often saw themselves addressed as learners in line with the aforementioned baby bird model of communication. Many objects that required specific cultural-historical knowledge were classified as 'silent objects' in the museum diary after the visit, as was the case with Rubens' paintings at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna where the exhibit labels presupposed certain Christian knowledge and art historical expertise resulting in a board member's telling summary: 'Sacred art, not enough prior knowledge.' In presentations that encouraged contemporary readings and individual connections in contrast, the board members often discovered 'talking objects.' These objects facilitated relations to matters such as family histories, interior design preferences or gender equality. For instance, one board member recounted the very personal experience of fleeing from the Bosnian War and her struggles to fit into Austrian society, acknowledging the exhibition's power to stimulate self-reflection based on other migration biographies presented at the House of Austrian History. Another member who grew up speaking Austrian Sign Language and had first-hand experience of the non-recognition of this language at school was satisfied to see that the same museum featured the successful fight for sign language as a human right. In the course of the five visits, it also became apparent that the members of the citizen board varied greatly in their interest focus showing individual preferences for specific object categories such as portrait paintings or subject matters such as travelling. At the same time, we generally observed changes from the first to the fifth accompanied museum visit, characterised by the increasing acquaintance with each other in this 1:1 situation while 'growing' into the role of a citizen board member whose perspective was put at the forefront in this listening process. From the third visit onwards, we noticed an increasing understanding and appropriation of the exhibition scripts, especially if members of the citizen board were not habitual museum visitors before. The more pronounced showcasing of individual visiting strategies included for example, more deliberately deciding not to look at certain objects, the focused use of exhibition texts to establish a first orientation, not seeing the need to know everything about the topics presented or the objects exposed, or making connections between different museum collections. Thus, the

board members were not trying to make their visit right anymore but to make the visit theirs, adapting it to their personal needs and individual interests.

Relations between museum missions and citizens' perceptions

As described above, we not only accompanied the members of the citizen board during their museum visits but also asked for their responses on the permanent exhibitions and museum missions. In line with today's more participatory museum conceptions, the contemporary mission statements of our five museums showcase a stressed focus on service, dialogue, and socio-political issues, aiming to 'think the museum [...] from a visitor's point of view,' to be a 'place of information, of exchange at eye level,' to 'provide space for social interaction and discursive exchange,' and to open 'new perspectives and spaces of action' by thematising 'our future by confronting socio-politically relevant issues with perspectives and approaches from contemporary art, applied art, design and architecture.' When asked to characterise the museum they had just visited, the members of the citizen board, however, most frequently used the words 'interesting,' 'beautiful,' 'fascinating,' and 'informative' across all five museums,^{vii} painting a rather conventional and not very agile cross-sectional picture of the museums. The far lower frequency of adjectives such as 'inviting,' 'engaging,' or 'courageous' thus also runs contrary to current mission statements, which accentuate inclusion, proximity to life, or desire for change in their public purpose.

More concretely, we found that phrases from mission statements specifically addressing these values were the ones that were often questioned or contrasted with the museum experiences. While especially the phrase 'art is for all' invited board members to reflect on economic and knowledge-based exclusion mechanisms, the phrase 'as many guests as possible,' for instance, triggered one board member to doubt the imperative of continuous expansion of visitor numbers. In line with the complaint on missing contextualization, several members questioned the museum's way of communicating in a 'credible, understandable and dialogue-oriented' manner or also commented on the good intention but maybe not sufficiently traceable 'driving force for positive change' throughout the whole exhibition programme. Occasionally, feelings of exclusion were also triggered when for instance an earlier mission statement from the Belvedere (2015/16) declared its mission as 'to explore the great [works] of Austrian artists and to honour them accordingly,' pointing towards the outdatedness of uncritical art historical tributes and national narratives in a post-migrant society.

At the same time, we could observe that some earlier missions still seemed to be valid or worth rediscovering for the citizen board members. The MAK's statement 'The objects on display in the museum [...] are to be made as accessible as possible for viewing, use and

study' from the founding statutes (1871) proved to be in line with the citizen's board's interest in multi-sensory engagement with the exhibits, despite the following disclaimer 'insofar as this is compatible with their safety and preservation.' The Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna's declaration (1989) to be 'a grandiose monument to Western culture that is almost impossible to exhaust' seemed almost impossible to resist in line with the aforementioned appreciation of splendour. But also, the factual description of the House of Austrian History's mission 'to convey the contemporary history of Austria from the second half of the 19th century [...] to the present day in its European and international context' from a legal mandate (2016) was highly confirmed within the citizen board's educational desire. Interestingly, however, it was one specific sentence from the current mission statement of the Belvedere that triggered the most responses: 'They [the visitors] leave the museum richer than when they entered,' could convince the board members in so far as it opened a space for individual and identity-related museum engagement and the transformative potential that lies within.

Conclusion

Theoretically, we can conclude that we conceptualised the 'Right to the Museum?' project pointing towards the fundamental public character of the modern museum while questioning the institution's relation to the public based on changing museum conceptions and contemporary citizens' perceptions. By inviting Viennese citizens to make use of their museums and share their feedback after visiting, we aimed to let those people speak who museums are meant for in a sense of social responsibility. By establishing a citizen board representative of the city of Vienna concerning the six diversity criteria of gender, age, educational level, migration background, disabilities, and museum affinity, we especially targeted representation and identity issues working against the homogeneous and habitual group of museum audiences and existing exclusion mechanisms. Our methodology of the accompanied museum visits and the subsequent survey formats marks our listening approach by ascribing the expert status to the participating board members. Regarding existing museum communication models, we view the board members as active meaning makers while not neglecting power mechanisms at stake following the model of museum and exhibition scripts. Here, agency is both given to institutional narratives as well as visitors' meaning-making based on prior knowledge, interests, and expectations.

Our findings on situated interpretation strategies show that active meaning-making especially took place when board members did not feel inferior due to a lack of specialized knowledge (as in the transmission model) but when they were given space to relate their biographies to museum objects and histories (as in the dialogic cultural model). At the same time, we observed more opportunities for meaning-making when board members applied and developed their individual visiting strategies in the course of repeated visits,

appropriating the museum space and locating themselves in the exhibition scripts. Another benefit of working with a citizen board was the possibility of paying attention to those people who are often not taken into account in museum and exhibition studies: The so-called non-visitors, who rarely or never go to the museum but represent the majority of citizens. Listening to a diverse group of citizens thus helps to understand 'forms of difference (rather than an undifferentiated "public").' (Barrett, 2012, p.4) Findings on the relation between historic to contemporary museum missions and citizens' perceptions can furthermore show how much or how little these missions align with museum experiences on-site. Interestingly, the focus on service, dialogue, and socio-political concerns of current mission statements was often put in doubt due to feelings of exclusion, lack of contextualisation or missing contemporary relevance while earlier museum missions were partly better aligned due to their educational or multi-sensory appeal.

Limitations of our study are methodologically rooted in the fact that although we video- and audio-recorded the accompanied museum visits to assign conversations to certain museum areas and objects, we did not apply a multi-modal analysis which would have given us insight into multi-sensory responses to museum scripts and exhibition displays. We opted for this solution primarily to avoid pressure for the board members to perform in front of the camera but also due to the high amount of accompanied museum visits which already were a challenge to analyse by simply focusing on verbal expressions. Based on the composition and activities of the citizen board of the 'Right to the Museum?' project, we can conclude on a structural basis that while the board was established as a representative sample of the Viennese population responding to their museums, their activities remained in the forum function of citizenship giving feedback and advice (Bandelli and Konijn, 2015). To further move from the feedback function to co-developing programmes or even participating in the governance of the museum, it also became clear that a citizen board needs to be established by the museum itself and incorporated into the internal programme and management policies so that citizens' contributions can have a direct impact on the museum's mission and exhibition practice.

Regarding the implications on museum practice in the 'Right to the Museum?' project, we acted as mediators between the feedback from the citizen board and the five partnering museums selecting specific viewpoints and narratives from certain board members that proved to be adequate for visualising museum and exhibition perception patterns and points of critique. We presented and discussed our findings with each partner museum in internal presentations. At the same time, we shared the procedures and learnings from working with a citizen board at museum conferences, in our open-access report (Reitstätter and Galter, 2023) as well as in individual presentations to team members of other museums, including the consultancy of two museums that were in the process of

establishing a citizen board. However, the presentation and discussion of results also revealed that the awareness of necessary change does not necessarily lead to change. Practical difficulties in applying results from the work with a citizen board to museum practice are to be found in selective scepticism towards participatory work, insufficient resources, rigid structures, or also inexperience with the application of results to operating procedures (Reitstätter, 2022). More generally, we conclude that it is important to invite critique but not easy to listen to feedback and find ways of implementation while we believe that it is worth investing in this attentive mindset and mood for action.

Indeed, a citizen board, if implemented directly in a participatory museum's strategy, can have plenty of possible applications and implications. One application is the inclusion of the citizen board in summative evaluations of current programmes while aiming to discover general perceptions, strengths and weaknesses, or open questions that can help to refine or renew the museum's offers. Potentially, this can also lead to the co- development of museum programmes, such as exhibitions, workshops, guided tours, social events or digital communication activities together with internal team members. Involving a citizen board in these processes can be used to deepen the museum workers' empathy and understanding of different visitors' requirements and in turn allows them to (co-)develop appropriate programmes for the museums' different stakeholders. In other words: While making citizens' voices heard in this participatory work will contribute towards the museum's ability to listen to its audiences and better respond to their various needs, their contribution can also strengthen communities' attachments to the museum itself. In consequence, such a listening approach consciously applied in museums can pluralise perspectives on cultural heritage and foster its societal value.

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