Museological Review, 11: 2004

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ISSN 1354-5825

Museological Review, Issue 11. 2004

Department of Museum Studies

MUSEOLOGICAL REVIEW

A Journal edited by Students of the Department of Museum Studies

Issue 11
2004

University of Leicester
GRADUATE STUDIES

MUSEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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Department of Museum Studies

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Editors:
Yupin Chung
Tzon-wei Huang

University *of*
Leicester

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Design and layout: Jim Roberts,
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Editorial

Welcome to the eleventh issue of the Museological Review, a journal edited by Ph.D. students at the Department of Museum Studies, which provides a platform for current museological research.

This edition covers a wide range of aspects of the research - very much as a coming together of disciplines, an intellectual space for experimentation. It begins with an article by **Konstantinos Arvanitis** in which “Museums and the Everyday: Making Meaning of an Ancient Monument in Greece” is examined. **Anders Høg Hansen** discusses the concepts of Communities of Practice (CoP) from Lave and Wenger, and field and capital from Bourdieu and Broady, as possible illuminating tools for exploring forms of learning and power in co-operative processes in museums. **Ruth Rentschler** examines the literature on governance and postulates a four-by-two theory of non-profit museum governance. **Evert Schoorl** reviews an exhibition “The American Effect” and discovers art and economy in the Whitney Museum of American Art. **Barbara J. Soren, Bonnie Callen, Anne Chafe, Laurence Grant and Tom Reitz** present a project which establishes common practices for audience-based performance measures in the museum field and demonstrates how museums can work together to develop and market meaningful programmes across Southern Ontario, Canada. Finally, **Dimitra Zapri** looks at existing studies on early childhood in museums, and suggests a research focus on the way young children perceive the museum setting.

We would like to remind all our readers that we welcome contributions. These may be articles, exhibition reviews, or book reviews. Please make sure that you follow the guidelines set out in the Notes for Contributors.

We hope you enjoy this latest issue.

Yupin Chung and Tzonwei Huang [editors]

Notes for Contributors

Aims

- To enable museum studies students and other interested parties to share and exchange museum information and knowledge.
- To provide an international medium for museums students and ex-students from around the world to keep in touch with a relevant centre of research.
- To bring to the attention of the practising and academic museum world, innovations and new thinking on museums and related matters.

Objectives

- To provide a platform in the form of a journal to be published per annum, for museums students, staff and others to present papers, reviews, opinions and news of a relevant nature from around the world.
- To widen up the constituency of the readership beyond the normal museological boundaries (e.g. to teachers, historians, artists, sociologists, environmentalists and others) in order to emphasise the importance of museums to society as a whole.
- To promote and advertise the research of contributors to as wide a public as possible via the journal and other means as the committee may from time to time decide.

Submission of manuscripts

The Editors welcome submissions of original material (articles, exhibition or book reviews etc.) being within the aims of the *Museological Review*. Articles can be of any length up to 5,000 words. Each contributor will receive one copy of the issue, but not a fee.

Four copies of the typescript will be required; three copies to the Editors and a copy for you to keep for your own reference. Make sure that all copies carry late additions or corrections. ***It will not be possible for us to undertake or arrange for independent proof reading and the obligation for thorough checking is the responsibility of the authors' not the Editors.***

Contributions should be set as follows:

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Do not use footnotes.

All foreign language extracts must be also translated in English.

Style

- Sub-headings are welcome, although 'Introduction' should be avoided where this is obvious. They should be in bold and aligned to the left.
- Words ending in -ise or -ize: -ise is used.
- Numbers: up to and including twenty in words, over twenty in figures, except that figures should not begin in a sentence.
- Measurements are given in metric (SI) units, though Imperial units may be quoted in addition.
- Place names should be up-to-date, and in the Anglicised form (Moscow not Moskva).
- Italics should be used a) for foreign words not yet Anglicised, including Latin; b) for titles of books, ships, pictures etc.; c) very sparingly, for emphasis

- Quotations should be set in single quotation marks '...', using double quotation marks "..." for quotes within a quote. Quotations of more than two lines of typescript should be set on a new line and indented.

- Abbreviations should always be explained on first usage, unless in common international use. Full points should not be used between letters in an abbreviation: e.g. USA not U.S.A.

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- First person tense should be avoided.

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Museums and the Everyday: Making Meaning of an Ancient Monument in Greece

Konstantinos Arvanitis

Introduction. The 'post-museum': the museum as process and experience

In the last decades museums have experienced a broad and in-depth negotiation of their role. Their definition has been broadened to include botanical gardens, zoos, aquaria, planetaria, historical houses and archaeological sites (Ambrose and Crispin 1994:16). Their focus, also, has shifted from the objects to the visitors. Museums, indeed, have started to accept that knowledge is multivocal and that people's voices have a role to play in the objects' interpretation and presentation. Consequently, it is not surprising to see publications that, even from their titles, question old or current perceptions of museums and suggest new ways of thinking about them: Stephen Weil's, *Rethinking the Museum and Other Mediations* (1990) and *A Cabinet of Curiosities. Inquiries into Museums and their Prospects* (1995), Paul Martin's *Collecting and Everyday Self. The Reinvention of Museums* (1999), Hilde Hein's *The Museum in Transition. A Philosophical Perspective* (2000), Julian's Spalding *The Poetic Museum* (2002), Andrea Witcomb's, *Re-Imagining the Museum. Beyond the Mausoleum* (2003) and the latest *Manifesto for Museums* (2004) signed by prominent members of the UK's museum world, are only some of the most cited publications.

In this context, Hooper-Greenhill in her last book *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000) argues that we move away from the modernist museum of the 19th century that was imagined mainly as a building and transmitted authoritative factual information through mainly the means of exhibition. Instead, we experience the emerging of a new museum model, the *post-museum*. According to Hooper-Greenhill, the post-museum is a site of mutuality, where knowledge is constructed, rather than transmitted, through the account of multiple subjectivities and identities. In the post-museum the curator's voice is one voice among many others that are incorporated to create a constructive polyphony of views, experiences and values (ibid: x, 140, 144, 152). Apart from the tangible heritage, the post-museum is also interested in the intangible heritage and tries to involve the emotions and the imaginations of visitors (ibid: 142, 152). In the post-museum, the exhibition is only one form of museum communication, which is enriched with other communication means to suit objects' interpretations and visitors' needs. (ibid: 152). Hooper-Greenhill ends by suggesting that 'the museum in the future may be imagined as a process or an experience. It is however, not limited to its own walls, but moves a set of process into the spaces, the concerns and the ambitions of communities' (ibid: 152).

This last notion of the museum as process and experience that leaves the museum walls to enter the spaces of the public is the focus of this paper. It is a view that has its roots in Cameron's dichotomy of the museum as temple

and forum (Cameron, 1971). This movement of the museum content from inside to outside has been, also, discussed long ago by Andre Malraux in his *Museum Without Walls* (Malraux, 1967) and Walter Benjamin, in his 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction' (Benjamin, 1973), whose thoughts have dominated contemporary discussions of the museum without walls. Following Malraux's and Benjamin's thinking, the museum can be described as an artificial extension or different presence of the physical museum enabled by the use of various methods and technologies to repeat the museum outside its walls; what is at large understood today as 'virtual museum'. It is nowadays practiced with the diffusion of museum knowledge or objects through outreach activities, outdoor exhibitions, catalogues, postcards, replicas of objects and museum websites.

However, this paper does not aim to see the post-museum of process and experience as just another interpretation of Cameron's, Malraux's and Benjamin's views of the museum. In does not consider the post-museum as an alternative presence of the museum content in non-museum spaces, or the construction of museum-like experiences through museum-named applications, such as museum websites, online databases of museum objects, museum catalogues, or museum replicas. In other words, this paper does not intend to interpret the post-museum in 'virtual terms', but in 'physical'. It suggests that physical museum objects exist outside the museum walls as well. Focusing on an ancient monument standing on a street of Thessaloniki (Greece), the paper will argue that museum objects can be considered not only objects collected and displayed in museums, but also objects with similar museum qualities that exist in the everyday life, such as ancient monuments. The paper will go on discussing the impact that everyday life has on monuments, the way that meaning-making occurs regarding them and the consequent implications they have for defining the post-museum.

The arch as a museum object

According to the Greek legislation, all ancient material culture is part of the national cultural heritage. In Greece, the state has the constitutional right of property on all ancient material culture (Act 3028, 2002:3005). It is only the state that decides which ancient objects are to be safeguarded and preserved and which to be disposed of (Act 3028, 2002:3006). The criteria of preservation are mainly the mobility and the archaeological, cultural, local or national significance of the ancient material culture. Usually only the moveable material culture[1] is removed from the place it is found and placed in museum stores or displays. The immovable one, like buildings or remains of buildings are either preserved *in situ*, or disposed of. As a result, in Greek cities, a large number of such monuments stand nowadays on streets and squares or lie in buildings' basements. In exceptional circumstances related to conservation issues, immovable material culture may be transferred in museum stores.[2]

In Greece, both the moveable and the immoveable ancient objects are considered as *ancient monuments*, because they are material traces of past cultures. However, in daily practice, ancient monuments or just monuments

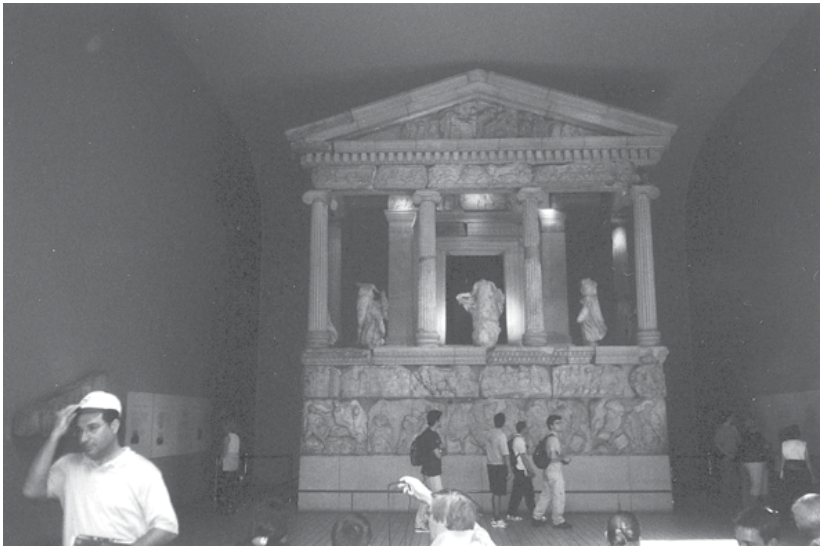
are called mostly the immovable parts of the ancient material culture[3] (Moutsopoulos, 1988: 25). This is because they provide a more direct reference to the ancient past, by standing where they were built. In this way their monumental or memorial function is emphasized more than in other ancient objects.

Although ancient monuments do not end up in museums, they are not very different from museum objects. In fact, they can be regarded as museum objects outside museums, because they have similar qualities to the objects found inside museums: ancient monuments are preserved, safeguarded and considered part of the Greek cultural heritage. They, also, belong to a material culture – the archaeological material culture – whose natural environment nowadays tends to be the museum. And, they create a particular museum setting where they stand, being permanently on display.

To discuss this relation of monuments with museum objects, two ancient structures will be used. In picture 1 an ancient temple is presented, the so-called Nereid Monument (390-380 BC), removed from its original place in Minor Asia, and currently housed in the room 17 of the British museum. Picture 2 shows the remains of a triumphal arch of the Roman times, built by the emperor Galerius (ca 304 AC). The arch is still standing in the place it was originally built, which is now part of the city centre of Thessaloniki in Greece.

Both monuments are 'archaeological', that is, they are part of a material culture with specific chronological and cultural connotations. They were both made in Greco-Roman times. The function of both of them is not anymore the one they were made for: The Nereid monument is not anymore a functional temple and the arch is not used anymore for triumphal processions. They are both preserved by the countries they hold them and they are both appreciated as parts of cultural heritage and art. But, the temple is in a museum, while the arch is not. Accordingly, the temple is, also, a museum object, while the arch is not, or is it?

The arch seems to share many common characteristics with museum objects: The arch has experienced a ten-year cleaning and conservation by the conservators of the city's Archaeological Ephorate.[4] It is surrounded by a fence that prevents people from coming in direct contact with it. Nearby there is also a sign (see picture 3) naming the arch as an ancient monument and giving more information about it. The arch has been studied and published by a Professor of Classical Antiquities (Stefanidou-Tiveriou, 1995). The arch, or better, archaeological information about the arch, has been part of museum displays in the local archaeological museum.[5] It has also been included in a catalogue that is sold in the museum shop. The arch is a popular tourist attraction in the city; tourists visit the arch and they take a closer look and photographs. It seems, then, that these museum-like features of the arch create a particular museum setting around it.



Picture 1: Nereid Monument, British Museum

Picture 2: Arch of Galerius, Thessaloniki, Greece

Picture 3: Information panel next to the Galerius arch

Furthermore, we could say that the arch and every ancient monument is by definition also a museum object. Not because it creates a potential museum setting, or because it shares similar characteristics or treatment with museum objects, but because it belongs to a material culture (the archaeological material culture), which is usually found inside museums. Hilde Hein argues that 'most objects found in museums were never intended to be kept there' (Hein, 2000:4). The museum removes objects from their original environment in the everyday life to place them inside its physical and conceptual walls. It appropriates the objects it holds transforming them into museum objects. This is what has been called 'the museum effect', (Alpers, 1991:26) or 'museumification' (Duclos, 1994:7) or 'musealisation' (Sola, 1995), that is, the impact that the museum has on the objects it collects; it turns them into museum objects and gives them an 'aura' (Benjamin, 1973) that distinguishes them from the mundane objects of the everyday life.

However, in the case of archaeological material culture, its natural environment today tends to be the museum. Ancient objects are already removed from their original environment, that is the antiquity, long before they are placed in museums. They have, also, come to have an inherent cultural value, the value of belonging to an ancient culture and art. As a result, they are always alienated from any contemporary surroundings, spatially, functionally and conceptually: An ancient object, when excavated or found, is not just a

cup, a temple or an arch, but also and primarily an ancient object. As such, it does not belong to the everyday, but the museum, which is the place created to house ancient objects. Consequently, in this case, the 'museum effect' turns not only the ancient objects into museum objects, but also the museum as the natural home for these objects.

Even if some of these objects are not kept inside museums, as the arch, they carry this 'museum nature', which is attributed to them by the plethora of their counterparts in museums. Museums by museologising the ancient objects inside their walls, they have projected this 'museum effect' to the ancient objects that 'escape' the institutionalisation. They have created a museum culture that is not confined by the museum boundaries, but expands to characterise similar objects outside museums. As Sharon MacDonald points out, 'there is also a revitalization of the idea of the museum, a diffusion of the museum beyond its walls, a 'museumification' of ever more aspects of culture, and a claiming of the museum by ever more sectors of society' (Sharon Macdonald, 1996: 2).

So, is the arch a museum object or not? Do we actually need a building around it in order to call it a museum object, while it carries so many qualities of museum objects? It is collectible as the temple in the British Museum is, it is preserved as the temple is, it gets visitors as the temple gets, and most importantly, at least in principle, it could be found inside museums, like the Nereid monument is. A museum object is not only an object collected, stored and displayed inside museums; it is not only the context and the physical place that defines museum objects. It is also the inherent qualities that some objects have come to have and the conceptual place where society puts it, which nowadays is the museum. As Moore puts it, all historic material culture, from the smallest object to the largest building, are part of the same process and the same purpose (Moore, 1997:136). Equally, Sola argues that the division between movable and immovable heritage (which usually distinguishes museum objects from monuments) is nonsense (Sola, 1992:399), because all archaeological material culture is by definition removed from its original context. It is more useful to define heritage in terms of its role in understanding our world, rather than mobility.

For these reasons this arch and all other ancient monuments that exist outside museums could be considered as 'museum objects' outside museums. Stephen Weil argues that museums are places, in which people might encounter rare objects not generally a part of their everyday lives (Weil, 1990:52). However, it seems that in the case of ancient monuments standing on city streets, like the arch, museums objects are also part of people's everyday d life.

The arch as an everyday object

The arch is an ancient monument, which according to the above, stands for a museum object outside museum walls. The arch shares similar qualities with ancient objects inside museums, but for practical, scientific and perhaps

Picture 4: Group of tourists visiting the Galerius arch

political reasons, remains where it stands and not in a museum. Its archaeological nature, preservation and visitation creates also a particular museum setting, which could be compared to other museums settings, such as historic buildings, archaeological sites and open-air museums.

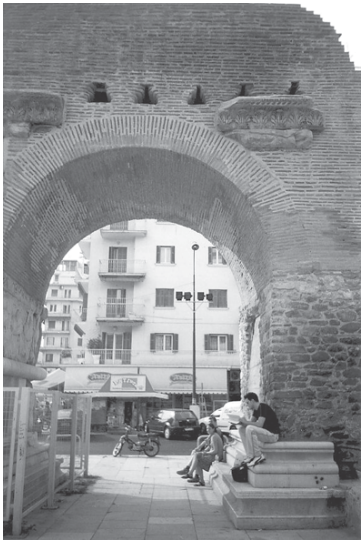
However, the arch belongs, also, to the setting of Thessaloniki's everyday life. Consequently, the arch is open daily to interpretations, meanings and uses that are conditioned by the everyday life and may alter from the official discourse of ancient material culture. The official discourse is expressed through legislation that defines the arch as ancient monument, part of the national heritage and orders its protection and preservation (Act 3028, 2002).

What is then the role that the arch plays in its everyday existence? Is it a monument that creates an appreciated museum setting, or is it another element of the everyday life's jigsaw? The following photographs of the arch, taken during the author's fieldwork from November 2003 to March 2004 will help us to answer this question.

The photographs capture moments of everyday interactions of people with the arch. It should be pointed out that the photographs show common, repetitive and daily actions that can be observed around the arch. There is nothing extraordinary about these actions or behaviours and this has been also confirmed by people that encounter the arch daily.[6] In picture 4, a group of tourists are standing in front of the arch listening to a guide. In picture 5, people standing under and near the arch looking in different directions. Picture 6 shows a young man sitting on the arch's pillar and reading a book. In

picture 7 we can see a woman on the left looking at the arch's sculptures. What, then, do all these daily actions and behaviours say about the way people perceive and interact with the arch?

Picture 5: People standing under and near the Galerius arch



Picture 6: Young man sitting on the base of the Galerius arch

According to Barker and Wright, (quoted in Falk and Dierking, 2000:55) settings dictate behaviour: 'when a person enters a behaviour setting – a school, museum, hospital, or library – everything in that environment encourages him or her to maintain the status quo'. In a sense, the person is no longer an idiosyncratic individual but a teacher or student, museum professional or visitor, doctor or patient, librarian or book borrower. This can explain the behaviour of tourists that visit the arch (picture 4). They recognise the museum status of the arch and behave, as visitors in museums usually do: they listen to the guide, consult their own guidebooks, walk around the arch, look at its sculptures, and take photographs of the arch.

But what about all the other people that seem to stand indifferent around the arch

Picture 7: The arch of Galerius

(picture 5), or that person that sits on the base of the arch and reads his book (picture 6)? Don't they enter as well that same setting that leads the tourists to behave in a more 'appropriate' way towards the arch? Presumably they do, as picture 7 suggests, where one of the same people standing and waiting beneath the arch for her appointment to arrive, takes the chance to see (or perhaps see again) the sculptures on the arch's pillar. However, in this case, the arch belongs also to another setting, that of the everyday life. The arch is, indeed, recognised as an ancient monument by visitors, tourists and residents of Thessaloniki. But this setting is highly appropriated by the context it exists, which is that of the everyday life. The arch creates a museum setting that is more or less active depending on how much it is clearly defined and the extend it overlaps with people's everyday lives.

The arch in Thessaloniki is not clearly defined as a museum setting. Although it has physical (a fence) and conceptual (regarded as monument) walls that mark it and removes it from the everydayness of its surrounding space, yet it exists in a not explicitly museum environment, that of the everyday life. Therefore, the arch may not be regarded by people primarily as a museum setting. As Falk and Dierking again explain, 'humans expect the world to be a particular way because of the preliminary mental representations they form and their memories of similar environments or events…We guide our behavior by these expectations and keep checking their accuracy' (Falk and Dierking, 2000:116). The people in pictures 5, 6, and 7 would not identify the space primarily as a museum space, and the object as a museum object because the whole setting does not directly remind them of a museum space.

Furthermore, this weak museum setting of the arch is easily overruled by the everydayness of daily life. The arch, by existing in the setting of the everyday life it bears also its consequences. It becomes part of the everyday. Accordingly, it is not unique and particular, but common and familiar, part of the repetitive structure of the everyday life (Lefebvre, 1987:11) The arch is 'what we never see for a first time, but only see again, having always already seen it by an illusion that is, as it happens, constitutive of the everyday' (Blanchot and Hanson, 1987:14). In other words, it is taken for granted and because of that it is difficult to notice and even more difficult to be valued as something out of the ordinary (Highmore, 2002:8; Attfield, 2000:50). In the same way, the arch in the everyday has nothing extraordinary about it (Attfield, 2000:173). It occurs, what Falk and Dierking describe for the people that work in museums: 'for people who work at the museum every day, there will appear to be less to be curious about; the environment is no longer novel, and much is already known' (Falk and Dierking, 2000:115). It is not a coincidence that the author's research shows that the sign (see picture 3) that stands next to the arch is rarely seen by passers-by, far more read. It occurs then what often is pointed out in everyday life literature, that is, 'the everyday is invisible, but ever present' (Miller, McHool, 1998:9). Both the arch and the sign, by existing in the everyday life and not in a museum become invisible. The arch in the everyday life of Thessaloniki's residents is primarily an object of the everyday, continuing its sociocultural history as all non-museum objects do (Appadurai, 1996) and secondarily a monument to be gazed.

So, the arch is in this inbetween status, being in concept a museum object and in practice an everyday object. Gurian suggests that (quoted in Silverman, 1995: 169), 'more and more boundaries must be blurred, rendering fuzzy the distictions between museums and other institutions, such as temple, church, school, hospital, and playground, as well as the distinctions between "visitors" and "curators"' in order museums to meet a variety of human needs. It seems that this blurring of boundaries has been happening around the arch all along.

Making meaning of the arch

According to the above thinking, the arch can be both part of a museum setting and an everyday setting. But, then what kind of meaning-making occurs regarding the arch? Is it a meaning-making of a museum object or a meaning-making of an everyday, non-museum object? Presumably one could argue that both are equally valid. As far as this paper is concerned, the meanings that the arch is given as an everyday object enriches the way we understand it as a museum object.

Museums, in their endeavour to learn about the objects they safeguard, they often go to the original place of the objects to find more or, consult people that happen to hold information about the objects. Regarding the arch as a museum object, this would be any information of archaeological character, since the arch is appreciated as an ancient monument. But, this is only one face of the coin. Apart from an ancient monument, the arch is also an ancient

monument in the social space of the city. The arch continues its existence, and it acquires constantly and daily meanings and interpretations in relation to its everyday setting. Therefore, in order to understand the arch, both as an ancient monument and as an ancient monument in the everyday, we need to extent the range of information we collect about the arch. We need to see the way the everyday produces knowledge and understandings of the monument.

As Tony Hiss writes in his book *The Experience of Place*, (Falk and Dierking, 2000: 60),

> 'we all react, consciously and unconsciously, to the places we live and work, in ways we scarcely notice or that are only now becoming known to us […] our ordinary surroundings, built and natural alike, have an immediate and a continuing effect on the way we feel and act, and on our health and intelligence […] In short, the places where we spend our time affect the people we are and can become'.

It is not only the archaeological discourse that gives meaning to the arch. The moment the arch stops being only an ancient monument and becomes also a meeting place for young people, a playground or a garbage dumb, that moment it may not be the archaeological or museum character that stimulates these reactions, but the encounter of these objects as everyday objects. Then, it is important to take into account this particular meaning-making if we need to understand these objects.

In addition, Silverman, (Silverman, 1995: 166) points out that 'the meanings of objects in contexts other than museums contribute greatly to meanings constructed by visitors in museums. The joy of seeing a chair like one you

Picture 8: Archaeological remains in Halkidiki, Greece

grew up with' - or it could be added the joy of seeing an ancient monument similar to one you have in your backyard [see picture 8] – 'is a natural response that takes place often in museums'. Visitors have developed such responses and transferred them from their experiences with objects in everyday life to their encounters with museum objects.

As archaeologist Fotiadis writes in relation to the validity of the way locals interpret archaeological material: (Nixon, 2001: 91)

> 'local people are not only crucial for survey work, they are also "beings who can *signify*" and are "able to engage in representation just as much as we, 'archaeologists' and 'scientists' are". Local people are not only agricultural producers, but also "producers of meaning"'.

Falk and Dierking when speaking about meaning-making in museums, they argue that museums have to understand how visitors make meaning, what they are likely to bring in museums. This understanding then should be incorporated in the exhibits, programs, and museum methods if we expect to engage visitors in a meaningful experience, educational or other (Silverman, 1995:165). Regarding the arch, the role of this meaning-making is moreover, to inform the knowledge about arch. Unlike in museums where people's meaning-making is the outcome and even the goal and in a way also the end of the museum process, in the semi-museum and everyday space of the arch, this meaning-making of the arch is part of the object's life history.

Then, if we would like to stretch this thinking, we could arrive at some interesting questions. If museum objects can exist also outside museums, then what is a museum? And even more importantly, what is not a museum? If the non-museologised space of the everyday life potentially accommodates museum objects, if in this space people can found themselves in front of museum objects, how can we distinct between museums and everything else? And what is the role of the museum as we know it today? If a museum is an institution that takes objects from their natural contexts and puts them in a different context, what happens to that museum when similar objects with similar qualities can also be found outside it? And what happens to the museum experience that museums argue that offer to people? Can such experience be found only inside museums or also outside them? In the case of our arch, it seems that the museum experience is a construction of an artificial relationship between people and objects. And the prototype of this relationship exists already in the daily life, when for example we encounter museum objects that happen to exist outside museums. As Lois H. Silverman puts it, 'many of visitors' meaning-making strategies are actually behaviours basic to most humans; integral parts of daily life for museum personnel, visitors, and nonvisitors alike' (Silverman, 1995:161).

Conclusion

Museums are usually highly static and occasional, determined by the specific space and time of the museum visit. However, in the case of ancient monuments like the arch, the museum becomes an everyday, flexible,

dynamic, familiar and ephemeral experience appropriated and conditioned by the rules of the everyday that makes it going unnoticed. As Hegel would put it, 'the familiar is not necessarily the known' (Gardiner, 2000:1).

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill argues that 'the museum in the future may be imagined as a process or an experience' (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000:152). In the case of ancient monuments in Greece, the post-museum of process and experience is not an artificial existence of the museum content outside the museum walls. On the opposite, it exists already outside the traditional museum walls, in the daily interaction of people with ancient monuments. The monuments by being museum objects in everyday settings stimulate meanings, understandings and experiences that are always under negotiation. It is a negotiation between the museum nature of the monuments, the weak museum setting they create, the dominating everyday environment and the constantly shifting position of people towards all these. The experience of the monuments becomes, then, indeed a process, a process of making meanings of them in the everyday, and, also, a process of accessing this meaning-making, what Spalding calls 'the documentation in vivid ways of the formative events in our own times' (Spalding, 2002:9).

Notes

1. According to Greek legislation (Act 3028, 2002:3003), the moveable ancient material culture consists of objects, items or artefacts that were not attached to the ground, or they are not part of any ancient constructions (buildings, houses, etc).

2. Author's interview with Dimitrios Grammenos, Director of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Greece, January 2004.

3. According to the Greek legislation, ancient monuments are the material culture that is dated from prehistoric times until 1830 (date of establishment of the Greek State). The material culture dated after 1830 is considered as modern monuments and their legislation differs from the ancient monuments.

4. Archaeological Ephorates are the local departments of Antiquities of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture.

5. Author's interview with Dimitrios Grammenos, Director of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Greece, January 2004.

6. Four focus groups with university students of Thessaloniki have been contacted. The arch, by being close to the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki is largely part of the students' everyday life.

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Communities, Capital, Co-operation Learning and Power in Exhibition Development Processes

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Introduction: *Mirror* and concepts

This article discusses the concepts of *Communities of Practice (CoP)* from Lave and Wenger

(1991, 1998, and 2002) and *field* and *capital* from Bourdieu (1990a + b, 1992, and Broady 1991) as possible illuminating tools for exploring forms of learning and power in co-operative processes in museums.

I have primarily used material from field research on exhibition development in European natural history museums. The research was part of the *Mirror* project (a 2 year EC Framework 5 Information System Technology research project) aiming to investigate learning interactions[1] in exhibition work and develop a prototype software (components described in endnotes)[2] 'mirroring' and supporting museum employees work around collaborative exhibitions. I was a research associate in the Department of Museum Studies working for the *Mirror* project in co-operation with a range of partners around Europe[3].

The concept of *CoP* seemed useful as a way of understanding informal group exchange and nourishing of identity among peers, but maybe more importantly it was a workable conceptual platform upon which to develop pragmatic, co-operative tools (see, for example, Moussouri, 2003). However, by bringing in the concepts of *field* and *capital* I see in future studies the possibility for a critical analysis of specific forms of values and power at stake in group-learning processes[4] - as well as useful conceptual vehicles helping to locate paths of knowledge production expected, or inherited and pursued in negotiation. A central aspect of the conception of *field* is the struggles between disciplinary positions conditioning co-operation and competition.

Section 1: General pondering on *Community* and *Communities of practice*

This article is a pit stop where I assess Wenger's *Communities of Practice*, a theory on informal group bonding and knowledge exchange. This will be done in the light of a broader discussion on communities, capital and fields. But why all the fuzz about *communities* anyway? Rising insecurities of our own social standings and belonging, without doubt make up part of the impetus to make *gemeinschaft*, identity and community the talk of the town. We are caught in a dilemma, seeking a freedom which, however, compromises on security and safety. *Community* is here seen as warm and cosy, a paradise lost, as Zygmunt Bauman notices (2001). In Wenger's vocabulary community not only provides safety and belonging, it is also fruitful in terms of learning and development. The related terms of society, company

or *gesellschaft* do not have the same warm feel, but the cold structural order of a 'society' or a 'company' contains soulful caves of communal warmth, apparently - and the great thing about *CoPs* are that they are able to produce profits too if the plant is watered the right way. This potential might explain the human resource- and business-studies interest in *CoPs* (See, for example, Lesser and Storck, 2001).

The fact that *CoP* is a new, sexy component in the armoury of potential management tools should nevertheless not frighten researchers coming from other disciplines or approaches. These forms of community (*CoPs*) have been seen in any setting, company or institution where knowledge or common practice is exchanged and developed, long before Wenger's concept appeared. In the case of *Mirror*, the concept of *CoP* seemed useful at a time where museums increasingly launch temporary and collaborative exhibitions (see Retout & Paleco, 2004 and Knell, Moussouri & Høg Hansen, 2002). Funding is more likely to be available from collaborative projects, it is more cost-effective in terms of more organisations sharing costs, and the change of exhibitions and events stimulates more visitors to come back to museums. In addition, more museums adopt a team approach to the development of exhibitions, and draw upon resources from different collections, as well as a mixture of, and collaboration around, designed environments. Designed environments and the digital age, among other changes, may even alter the very notion of 'collection' and exhibition work? We may see a strong reason for museums to establish cross-organisational practices of exhibition development? A rising potential for educational enhancement in terms of the interplay between digital design, copies and originals/original objects, may also encourage a stronger emphasis on co-operation and education (Walsh, 1991, Fopp, 1997, Knell, 2003)? Let me assume that digital possibilities enable us to support, and play with, particular aspects of an object's several life histories (Appadurai, 1986). The present era, replacing the curator- and collection-based museum in the colonial era (Hooper-Greenhill, 2001), suggests potential, to be explored with caution, in the use of new technologies as well as new co-operative forms around the technologies.

Importantly, a *CoP* is an informal grouping - which may cross physical or departmental boundaries - where people with similar interests, values and disciplinary orientations share practices, language and a tacit knowledge and enhance their sense of identity and belonging in that very process (Wenger, 1998). One thing we quickly learned after doing research for *Mirror* was that *CoP* enables us to distinguish between two forms of groupings. Firstly, the efforts of institutional teams (task groups), like groups that produce a part of an exhibition or all of it. This grouping is goal-focused, working towards a specific output or target. We named this one *vertical* exchanges. This form is distinguished from less formalised exchanges that take place between peers, often distributed across departments or amongst a number of institutions. This form is closer to a *CoP*. We named this *horizontal* exchanges. This can be exchange (can be virtual, through email, or by seeing each other in the kitchen, at conferences, in the pub etc.) between curators doing research in a specific subject area, academics immersed in different

forms of youth research, yet not on the same project, or a group of PhD students sharing a house or attending the same seminar series. These horizontal *CoPs* can be a resource of fruitful development and learning, intellectually and personally, as well as a source of conflict, which again is a part of the learning process.

In natural history museums natural scientists mix with designers, museum educators and others to develop exhibitions as a team and a task, but natural scientists also share a craft and a repertoire with colleagues in other institutions. Through processes of co-operation and co-participation a museum's natural scientist is a part of various communities of practice centred on curatorial practices and specialist knowledges and, as well, *CoPs* that reflect the social politics of the museum. A point I will return to is the minimal emphasis and exploration of *power* and *politics* in Wenger's writings on *CoP*.

Each *CoP* relies upon a domain, a shared orientation and identity which are built up through particular experiences, though not necessarily through any formalisation of the group.[5] Wenger and his co-workers (2002) stress that a community of practice is not a task group - what we named *vertical* exchanges in a 'team', as mentioned. In contrast to the clear goal orientation of the task group, a community of practice is sustained from within and bound together via interests.

Our research revealed, maybe not surprisingly, that there are fuzzy boundaries between teams/tasks groups and *CoPs* in real life interaction in museums. Teams working in museums will over time develop some common tacit knowledge[6] - and in some respects become a *CoP*. This became apparent in Århus natural history museum in Denmark, a case I will return to.

This task- and CoP-group complexity of social interaction is apparent in museum exhibition development activities. When an exhibition is finished and open, its interconnected, ordered series of displays, objects, and texts presents an image which belies complex and chaotic production. An exhibition is an order of things. However, in reality text has been written over and over again and often several specialists and communicators have been struggling with a series of different versions and views about how to tell stories and deliver information. Designers turn ideas into spatial arrangements often battling with conceptual and aesthetic desires of other members of the team. The success may depend on the social working of teams and the resources they can create or call upon, such as *CoPs*, or the *CoP* spirit within the team!

CoP has a high resonance in profit based business settings as a way of theorising and showing the potential of collaborative human resources in a decade where 'knowledge sharing' has become a catch phrase. It has, however, also had impact upon educational debates, at least in Denmark, throughout the 1990s, particularly as a spin-off to Lave and Wenger's book *Situated Learning* (1991), where the concept of *CoP* was conceived. In addition to the focus on group learning, a new catch phrase has emerged: 'responsibility for your own learning', a problematic ethos I would say, which

nevertheless as well contributes to group learning debates. The theory of *situated learning*, which grew into theories on *CoP,* aimed to theorise apprentice learning, as well as the informal bonds that stimulates continuous learning – in particular in workspaces and school settings where project/ group based learning modes were prominent. The dynamics of collective learning, where apprentices and experts are caught in a ping-pong, goes all the way back to Vygotsky (e.g. *Zone of Proximate Development*, 1978) and theories about how a learner leaps from what he/she can do to a higher state of knowing, via facilitation or guidance from a more experienced person. These theories, from Vygotsky to Wenger, emphasise learning more widely than just being individual cognitive processes. It is about social processes and experiences that also produce identity.

In particular in the 1990s, one was able to reflect back on particular innovative forms of collective work in academic circles, which I argue is affiliated with the idea of a communities of practice: for example Roskilde University in Denmark, and the Contemporary Centre for Cultural Studies in Birmingham, UK. In Roskilde, the individual essay was only very rarely practised and instead people were enquired to work in semester long group projects grounded in empirical or laboratorial investigations in social and natural science, for example. As in a *CoP*, the groups functioned as conglomerates of fairly common interests, yet expert- and apprentice-roles were also seen. Since there were no fees in Denmark, some groups would not bother too much about handing in time, and they would go on arguing and writing for ever. The goal became second and the process became the most important thing, as in a *CoP*! As a former student of that university, I wrote my first essay since further education when I took an MA in England!

In the latter case of cultural studies in Birmingham, people from English and literary criticism and sociology, as for example Richard Hoggart and later Stuart Hall, developed and adapted tools for analysing power, class and culture based on a collective co-operative structure, where postgraduates sat in when ideas were shaped and the curriculum was developed and decided. Later on the group broke down into subgroups, because people could not agree - for example some women affiliated with the centre noticed that gender had not been theorised in the male researchers immersion in working class culture, race, youth, hippies, bikers and literature (Willis, 2001).[7]

Section 2: Examples from field research in Scandinavia and Cardiff[8]

Several of the museums researched for the *Mirror* project rely heavily on local audiences and are therefore depending on the museum's ability to persuade audiences to return, and since most people do not want to come back to view the same old permanent exhibits, there is an increasing emphasis on fresh material and new themes in temporary exhibitions. Teams are set up to produce shorter thematic exhibitions in a hurry. In smaller museums like Århus, the same team works continuously on the yearly temporary exhibitions

and events. They develop what was called a family spirit, in their own words. We found a similar tendency in the small Goulandris museum in Greece. In Århus a core team is headed by an informal 'ideas engine', as they called it, which is a subject mater specialist/scientist. He is working with two designers, a conservator and an educator. They meet on a weekly basis whether an exhibition is being prepared or not. This consolidates the team spirit and ensures that team practices are always in place, ready to function effectively in more stressful periods before an opening.

It was clear to us that this heterogeneous team was able to develop CoP-like features over time, where some members sat in as learners in some phases, and were more central in other phases. Somehow the different disciplinary skills became moulded well together over time, or knowledge were 'leaking' to use a formulation from Wenger (1998). However, the individual members were by no means meant to become *one* in a disciplinary sense. For example the designer usually 'tested' texts with a difficult biology or natural science content. If he was able to digest and understand easily, the audience would too. The team had over several exhibitions developed some coming values and tacit ideas about what they wanted.

In Copenhagen University's Geological museum, the 'cathedral of collection'-style and the curator's role as 'absolute monarch' over a 'kingdom' of objects was a common practice until not long ago. In talks with the staff members we realise that a transition process towards more team based exhibition production, more temporary exhibitions and more emphasis on education is under way, but it is a slow process[9]. The Geological museum in Copenhagen realise they need to co-operate more with other museums and bring different *CoPs* in touch with each other, as well as to base work on sharing and continuous co-operation, rather than individual research and curatorship. As one scientist continuously stresses: they need educators and communicators to be involved in the process of exhibition development and not just brought in towards the end to shine up things with events and so forth.

Several employees in these museums were particularly happy about the general idea and aim of *Mirror* as a way of formalising and managing work with exhibitions, and they were keen to be future test users using a *Mirror* prototype on their own projects.

In Cardiff and Stockholm, both larger museums, the processes of creating temporary exhibitions are more formalised and established. Both museums have set up exhibition departments, and in Stockholm for example, several teams work at the same time. Here we saw a competitive field of exhibition teams working in parallel, competing for funding. Each team tend to form its own temporary closely knit collaborative environment, developing *CoP* features.

Staff in Århus and Stockholm express some dissatisfaction with parts of their old exhibitions. In Århus they took a radical step and created a completely open exhibition without any display cases. The exhibition furthermore to a strong extent combined cultural and natural history with literary storytelling

and fairytale. In Stockholm, staff stressed the importance of connecting collections with *folkverksamhet*, a Swedish term meaning activities for, and interaction with, the people[10]. It is a key word expressing how museums aim not just to record a past, but to play a role in contemporary society, continuously offering new exhibitions and activities for old and new segments of its audiences.

Particularly in Cardiff and Stockholm, some contradictory domains or paradigms seemed to be struggling. In both cases they expressed a desire to blend the value of collection research with educational efforts. Stockholm had a decreasing amount of objects exhibited, and had developed a discovery and science centre approach to attract more youth. The youth now have less objects to look at, but plenty of buttons to push! At the same time the new director had called for a reemphasis on the classical exhibition ideal, according to a staff member. Maybe she feels the pressure from the Swedish state who told the museum to 'document all species' in their work?

This is just a list of some of the conflicts noticed. Looking back on our work and reports, I think we had some problems theorising this in a systematic sense using the *CoP* concept. The concept did other things for us.

We learned that we had to create a software accommodating for horizontal knowledge exchange among academic peers as well as creating something that could integrate the different aspects of exhibition development, planning, writing, design, content- and knowledge storage and retrieval, communication across organisational boundaries and so forth (Høg Hansen, Knell and Moussouri [not yet published], and Knell, Moussouri & Høg Hansen, 2002). It had to mirror the communication patterns of *CoPs*; be immediate, intuitive, adaptive and easy to use - just as *CoP* communication happens – or at least in Wenger's vision of a constructive and pragmatic formation for learning and more or less voluntary interactions. Wenger's cunning terms for informal groupings were, to some extent, a good enough platform for *Mirror* to build a co-operative software from.

In the *Mirror* project we have also worked with a range of alternative concepts to supplement the research as well as the continuous analysis of what we were doing. I now aim to take this process further and introduce the concept of *field* as a critical review of what is going on with *CoP* and team work in educational arenas.

Section 3: *Field* and *capital*

A *field* opposed to a more clear-cut *game* with more strict rules (Broady, 1991, Bourdieu, 1990a + b, 1992 and 1993) has got regularities and a range of unwritten rules. The participants are equipped with values and knowledge, or *capital*, which, if they bring it into the *field* and into communication with participants at a right time, strengthens and develops the particular community. A *field* contains different specialists within an umbrella-area, so to speak, like for example the literary field with its novelists, poets, critics, publishers, academics and so forth. They obtain different positions, and are

eager to find out what other people in the field say or do, and they are all more or less concerned with the same thing – literature! This is similar to the case of a museum where staff are involved in exhibitions: designers, curators in different subject areas, fabricators and so forth. You can say that they all bring different *investments* into the same *field*. Fierce arguments over books and genres are everyday practice (continuing with the literary field as example), and so are battles around who sits in which committee to allow, with authority, that a writer is given a grant or that one can call himself a writer and so forth. It is nevertheless a game around the same stake, as noted before.

A *field* is something one finds himself caught in, in a relational struggle, rather than a nice and voluntary, informal progressive practice. *Fields* can be understood as having institutionalised and formalised structures which informs participants actions, although without falling into a deterministic stance (Broady, 1991). A *field* emerges when human beings struggle over symbolic or material conditions which they have a common interest in, for example natural history or literature. The concept can explain how we adjust to forms of *symbolic violence* or hegemony without physical violence (Broady, 1991). To invest in the *field* is to believe in the value of the game's stakes (Bourdieu, 1992).

The concept operates thereby with a larger frame than *CoP* where we can more easily go down to 3 to 5, or 10, people and call it a *CoP*. Particular dispositions are unfolded and acted out in relatively autonomous *fields*, where particular forms of *capital* have value and are subject of the struggle. Positions in the *field* are defined in relation to other people's positions. The concept explains hegemony or forms of consent, as well as resistance in the form of a sudden recognition of alternative forms of *capital* in subcultures for examples. The convincing aspect of *field* theory is, I argue, is that it makes it possible to analyse actions in groups and social contexts as dynamic and most often hierarchical or competitive fields of resources or capacities. Resources are, on the one hand, incorporated over time, layered and ready to act accordingly - as a fitting *habitus*. These capacities, styles and practices are nevertheless also used in situated contexts, where participants possess certain capital forms or are pressing for new possessions and changes (see introduction to three forms below). The participants are adapted and flexible, and able to gain or change shape in specific contexts, where particular spontaneous or practical logics are acted out. It is thereby not a mechanistic or rule-based form of action. It is based on something already learned, and - importantly - in the process of being learned (understood in terms of a time-bound *modus operandi*, not a finished *opus operatum*, Bourdieu, 1991). The participants are guided and stimulated, as well as limited, by earlier learnings, and habitus is never fully formed.

The concept of *capital* can be divided into many sub forms. Let me briefly introduce three forms: Firstly *embodied capital*, which is naturalised and incorporated; secondly *objectified capital* in the form of books, pictures, objects, instruments, skills etc, and thirdly *institutional capital*. The institutional capital can be a particular position recognised, a degree, like a PhD, for

example (Bourdieu, 1997: 42). Institutional capital may help in some cases, but not necessarily always.

In several of the museums researched, many staff search for ways to make new forms of capital to become prominent in the field and thereby in the domain. Exhibition teams attempt to level out many form of capital stakes – *embodied capital*, in terms of old-fashioned curatorship style, struggle with new forms of *objectified capital* in terms of more thematic and temporary exhibitions and team approaches. In this process the team negotiates internally the emphasis on management and budget, funding, biology, communication, fabrication, design and layout, and the preservation of objects from the different key roles point of view in the team and in the museum. By letting the team labour together for a long time, they might overcome some of the problems and reach consensus and mutual direction.

Field theory can be understood by adding another key word *strategies* - also used by Bourdieu and his interpreters (Beasley-Murray, 2004). *Strategies* pay attention to manoeuvres and flexibility within the unwritten rules and frames of acceptable behaviour. *Strategies* describe the time and space, that means a particular interval of time in a context, which participants have and use in situated actions. *Strategies* refers importantly to timing. Exhibition development can be viewed as a series of actions happening to the sound of a ticking clock ending with a bell: the opening of the exhibition.

Section 4: Conclusion

Wenger teaches us about how a framework of *CoP* may offer good conditions for learning and interaction, and in his newer work (2002) Wenger and his co-workers provide examples primarily from the commercial sector. Not much research (if any) has applied these concepts to museum work. With the *Mirror* software we have tried to create something that could enhance existing practices in the museum sector. It becomes more difficult to say something more qualified about how learning and interactions actually come about, and which learnings and practices are adopted by which people during a particular process. Furthermore, we do not really know how conflicts are dealt with in *CoP*- and team-like groups. A future task could be to do more ethnographic work and research around the particular forms of learning, the different stages and strategies or timely and untimely actions of team labour and team formations and changes. This could be done, for example, by following users in a test project where a *Mirror* prototype (or a similar form of community-enhancing software) is used.

For observing actual group interaction processes or keeping account of a particular process, I suggest to keep the *CoP* framework in mind, but to adopt some new conceptual pillars to structure such an investigation. Conceptual tools like *capital* and *field* may help us diagnose how skills and positions and investments are used and altered with and without the supporting tool.

What kind of material is stored and retrieved and altered in the library? Who is most active in their use of the prototype and in what way? At what times and

stages - and for what reasons - do the software or particular technologies succeed or fail as *CoP* enhancing tools? One way forward to investigate these questions, is to pay attention to the particular forms of authority and recognised capital, already working within a field as a naturalised knowledge. Let us, just as examples, pick some phrases from the museum world: 'learning through objects', 'interactives as enhancers of educational potential', 'educational school material assisting the exhibition', 'curator responsible for scientific content', 'educator involved at stage x' and so forth. Each museum has a range of these 'taken for granted' ideas about exhibitions or an *accumulated labour incorporated*, to use some of Bourdieu's words (Bourdieu, 1997: 46). Some of the ideas above may be conflictual, some are hot (and some are not). Further on, one can say - as mentioned earlier - that the digital age challenges or renews some foundational ideas about collection and the original versus the copy (see for example Knell, 2003 and Baudrillard, 2000).

An ethnographic investigation of co-operative learning processes must analyse, and make explicit, the *capital* inherited, as well as the *capital* brought in to the process as forms up for negotiation and development in these processes.[11] Future research on learning communities could benefit from qualifying what kind of learnings and *capital* are at stake, which again depends on the particular situation/exhibition and the format of the team and their partners.

Bogenrieder and Nooteboom (2004) state that the management literature on communities of practice and related concepts tend to focus on knowledge sharing and less on knowledge production. In the first form individuals learn from each other, and in the second form people develop new knowledge jointly. I find the distinction problematic. Reality is full of overlaps and isn't there always a degree of knowledge production in sharing? What *CoP* theory fails to capture is the messy or fuzzy picture of learnings from other *CoPs* affecting a particular context, as well as missing out on the power relations and politics of human co-operation in organisations, as several reviewers also have noted (see for example Warring, 1999, Buch 1999 and 2002). The concept of *capital* may help us to order and categorise values and knowledges brought into a struggle.

The concept of *field* emphasises that the shared capital is continuously debated, and some capital forms are included and some are excluded. This adds dynamism to the related concept of *domain* in Wenger. *Social capital* (which may fall under embodied or objectified capital) also works to maintain consensus and sustain intimacy. Social resources include common identity, familiarity, trust, and a degree of shared language and context among individuals. Together, these resources manifest themselves in a variety of ways, as for example reducing the time it takes to locate an expert within an organisation; to convince him/her about an idea and reducing the time and effort associated with developing and monitoring an agreement between individuals in an organisation. All of these activities are at stake, as negotiation of knowledge resources as capital. As financial capital, *social capital* can be

fostered or accumulated, and thereby also suddenly lost. It is these alterations, negotiations, and wins and losses, the concepts of *field* and *capital* may add to the discussion of *communities of practice*.

Notes

[1] The Department of Museum Studies developed a methodology for studying learning and co-operation among natural scientists and exhibition developers. The concept of *CoP* was used to structure the investigation – using semi-structured interviews with a handful of staff involved in exhibition development processes in each museum, visits to offices, laboratories, exhibitions, and gathering of materials and written information from a larger body of natural history museums all over Europe. See also Knell, Moussouri and Høg Hansen, 2002.

[2] The *Mirror* prototype software has four main components (to be further developed and used in conjunction with existing software). A *project management functionality* helping managers and members in working teams to organise every aspect of the team-work. A *sketch board/design studio environment* for draft designing, communication and visualisation of exhibition scenes. A *library for collecting and sharing digital content*. A start up content database in the areas of exhibition development theory, a case study (The Fatal Attraction temporary exhibition), ICT, collection management and access, learning and educational projects was established with input from RBINS (Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Science), subcontractors and the Department of Museum Studies (University of Leicester). Finally, the software has *communication facilities*; *a* chat forum and a conference facility for simultaneous collaboration around visualisation and annotation (or text) in the design studio. The prototype might in the future be tested on a real, small-scale collaborative temporary exhibition before being launched on the market. See www.mirror-project.net for details.

[3] In many ways the project organisation in a *Mirror consortium* - involving software developers, pedagogue- and museum-specialists and museum staff - mirrored the complications of the research and the development of a *Mirror* prototype software. The co-operation among differences, in terms of approach to technology, to research and evaluation, for example, was continuously negotiated in our cross-organisational communication through emails and occasional meetings. It took a high morale and patience to keep up the good spirits. Co-operation usually does.

[4] I have found it useful to apply the concept to other informal educational settings, apart from museums, as, for example, a sports club outside Copenhagen where I was active in the youth department as coach for a number of years. See www.hexis.dk / 2004b.

[5] A *CoP* does not necessarily have a name, or at least not an official name, like a department or a specific task group set down to solve a problem. However, informal names may be self-chosen or attached to the grouping.

[6] Even the most heterogeneous team has the potential of moulding together, over time, a common ground also reflected in Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990: 52-66) - an embodied history and a naturalisation of experience and methods. The *habitus* (similar to Wenger's *domain*) generates incorporated practices and routines. Practices, in general, take place with the armoury of forms of *capital*, and are structured and fought out within particular *fields*.

[7] Similarly early pioneering groupings in museums mirrored *CoP* processes - as for example the Geological Curators group which were instrumental in professionalizing the UK sector. Another clear manifestation of *CoPs* in the museum sector may be the Biology Curators Group in the 1970s (Simon Knell in Høg Hansen, Knell & Moussouri, 2004, not yet published).

[8] This section is reflecting upon field research material reported in Knell, Moussouri and Høg Hansen, 2002. Theano Moussouri did the field research at Cardiff and Anders Høg Hansen did the work at Stockholm, Copenhagen and Århus. Exchange with staff member continued during usability evaluation of the software during its development. As with the research, usability evaluation was also lead by Department of Museum Studies (see, for example, Moussouri, 2003).

[9] From visits and talks at Manchester Museum, I realised that a similar process is under way there, where they have entered what a staff member called the 'post-Apartheid era'.

[10] Århus natural history museum's recent outreach projects and field laboratory activities, involving audiences as co-participants in processes of collection as a way of connecting communities and creating 'writerly texts' (opposed to passive 'readerly texts') is discussed in Høg Hansen, 2004.

[11] My PhD is investigating teenage participants and adult facilitators narratives and conceptions of themes such as *conflict, space, identity* and *dialogue* in alternative educational projects in Israel, and analysing the pedagogic means and structural conditions of power underpinning the particular projects (Høg Hansen, 2003). Despite multiple and competing agendas within these alternative educational sites, the facilitators (Jewish and Palestinian) aim to establish a shared political and democratic culture or domain for conflict expression and negotiation.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for inspiration from several sources and people at the Department of Museum Studies in the course of the work on the Mirror project. In particular, I would like to thank Theano Moussouri and Simon Knell. Their input has been highly valuable, although they might not share all the views presented in this article. Also thanks to our partner-organisations in the Mirror consortium: Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Science, Syntax Information Technology Inc, uma Information Technology AG, University of Manchester and University of Athens. Finally a big thank you to staff in the museums participating in

research and evaluation: the natural history museums of Århus, Copenhagen (Geological museum), Stockholm, Cardiff, Leicester, Paris, Brussels, Athens, Lesvos and Verona.

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In addition: quotes from informants have been summarised in the article (museum staff at Copenhagen University Geological Museum Århus Natural

History Museum, The State Museum of Natural History in Stockholm, and Manchester Museum in the UK).

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Four by Two Theory of Non-profit Museum Governance

Ruth Rentschler

Abstract

As plainly illustrated by the collapse of Enron in the US and HIH in Australia, the world of organisational governance is complicated. In response to ongoing trustee tensions, legislative reforms have been adapted to encourage organisational performance. However, limited theoretical foundation exists regarding how trustee dynamics are forced to adjust within non-profit museums. The trustee's world requires insights from different mindsets to be synthesised into a whole.

The purpose of this article is to examine the research conducted on governance and apply it to the non-profit museum. The article contends that most research on governance has been conducted in the for-profit arena, with little robust empirical research having been conducted on non-profit governance. It identifies concerns with the thrust of articles published as they restrict new theory development. The article provides a four by two theory of non-profit museum governance, that is characterised by close interaction with the research published and application to the non-profit museum. It concludes by demonstrating the increased performance opportunity of a model to the non-profit museum seeking to be accountable in an increasingly complex and demanding environment.

The souring relationship between the director and the trustees at the prestigious Australian Museum in Sydney was the cover story on the Four Corners television program on 29 September 2003 (see also Sexton 2003). Other events have made governance a leading issue for non-profit museums. From the early 1990s until the end of the decade, the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory faced 'major challenges' at board level, requiring new trustees and new managerial leadership and organisational structure, made urgent by a series of reports from the 1980s onwards, by government and museum peers. Annual reports are dominated by discussions of irregularities in organisational and financial matters (Annual Report 1990-1991). New trustees and a new chairman were appointed. The trustees were provided with a 'focus for change' including establishing due process in accounting and accountability; organisational restructuring; new and orderly procedures; a more significant place in the community; and cultural change. As the then director stated in 1997: 'museums have gone beyond the powerful aesthetic of an individual to drive them towards a personal vision'. (Rentschler 1999). Similarly, in the 1990s, the Auditor-General indicts the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery trustees for not implementing policies on security, storage, management and revenue initiatives. Again, changes in leadership, strategy and structure occurred to rectify these matters (Annual Report 1990-1991; 1994-1995; 1996-1997).

In 2002, an article in *Museums Journal* cited the shortage of good trustees in museums as a 'situation that was only likely to get worse', with 'very little literature

on best practice governance' in the museum sector (Pybus 2002: 30). In an increasingly complex regulatory environment, where accountability is demanded, governance needs to be carefully considered. However, the fact that it is rarely considered in the museums' literature is perhaps not so surprising, given that only 5.7 percent of articles in significant museums journals cover 'administration' issues, with governance not identified separately as a topic of interest. Of the 39 titles most cited in these museums publications as 'influential works', not one of them is on governance (Rounds 2001).

Each of these reports brings into question museum governance, museum performance and accountability. Yet little research into non-profit boards has been undertaken, and even less into non-profit museum boards. Hence, the importance of this article is underscored: it reviews the literature and develops a theoretical, integrative model to guide research. Behind these issues lies an important question: What does it mean to think like a trustee? Researching this question helps to establish theories and to develop understanding of which board attributes and roles assist in effective museum performance. This is the four by two theory of non-profit museum governance.

Governance Defined

So what is non-profit governance? How can it be reviewed empirically? What are the implications of non-profit governance on museum performance? The problem, of course, is that governance is complicated. Trustees are volunteers in museums. They are at once asked to be strategic and in smaller museums hands-on. Further, museums

are professional bureaucracies, whose staff is dependent on peer review for justification of quality performance rather than dependent on the organisational hierarchy for it. These roles and attributes establish the bounds of governance: everything that the trustee does is sandwiched between the action on the ground and the helicopter view necessary from above in order to reflect and scan the environment. Therefore non-profit museum governance is seen as an umbrella term which includes two board roles of performance and conformance, and four board attributes of mission, strategy, board-executive performance and community relations (discussed below). Previous reviews of the literature (Cochran & Wartick 1988; Johnson & Daily 1996; Zahra & Pierce 1989) have all focused on corporate governance, which as the name suggests does not include the non-profit literature. In corporate governance, and including such diverse disciplines as management, law, economics, finance and sociology, the literature is predominantly quantitative or conceptual, with few depth studies having paid attention to non-profit and specifically museum boards. Some of the few exceptions to this gap is work by Bieber (2003), Radbourne (1993; 2003a and b), Rentschler (1999), Wood

and Rentschler (2002 and 2003) and Griffin and Abraham (2000). These studies used mixed methodologies, including reflection, case studies, surveys and interviews. Some studied boards as part of a larger study on museum leadership or the museum as organisation; others studied performing arts governance.

Why study museum governance?

Why study non-profit museum governance? There are three reasons. First, governance on non-profit boards can differ markedly from the governance of businesses (McFarlan 1999). Current models of governance focus on profit sector appropriateness, with little attention given to which models (if any) are suited to the complex, government-funded non-profit museum. This has some salience, but has led to a new focus on culture as industry, and not on the appropriate role and responsibility of board members, their accountability, organisational performance and how to resolve pressures for both audience diversity and audience enrichment, which are often conflicting objectives. Industry development is thus hampered by the lack of a suitable model of measurement of effectiveness of non-profit museum governance, disallowing industry development around fundamental issues for the elite arts.

Second, the economic and social contracts under which museums operate have been transformed in the last twenty five years due to discontinuous change in museum funding, organisation and delivery (Rentschler 2002). These systemic changes have added weight to the complex issues that boards face, including responding to competitive pressures, maintaining the delicate balance between meeting creative and organisation needs, increased scrutiny from stakeholders, and ensuring accountability to the community they serve. Globalisation poses specific challenges for museum governance in the face of dwindling surpluses and edgy stakeholders. Governance is in the spotlight after spectacular collapses, questionable ethical decisions and dubious practices on the world stage. Scepticism as to board competence makes it the 'hot' topic in business today. But what of the museum? Researching the exact nature of museum governance confuses many when the bottom line is not the only yard stick.

Third, governance is often associated with federal and state policy documents, legislation and regulation. Yet responsibility for interpreting policy is often left to governing boards of individual museums. The fiduciary role of governing boards assigns them direct responsibility for the complex and often conflicting demands of stakeholders in government, market forces, community, audience, sponsors and the organisation itself. It is the complex combination of action, reflection and collaboration which is paramount in this environment, emphasised by the umbrella term for governance identified in this article.

Museum governance then and now

Governance is a major social and economic policy issue. The last two decades have seen considerable debate and significant change in museums,

with vast changes in political, economic, social and cultural environments worldwide. The ascendance of the information superhighway and the communications revolution are among the changes that have given rise to the phenomenon of the 'creative industries'. 'Creative workers' within the labour force occupy an increasingly important role as providers of innovative ideas, new products and new processes (Throsby and Hollister 2003). These changes—forming part of the broader phenomenon of globalisation—pose specific challenges for museum governance in the face of dwindling surpluses, edgy stakeholders and a more capricious funding environment (Rentschler 2002). For example, even museum definitions have changed to focus more on people rather than on the object (see Table 1).

Functional	museums acquire, conserve, communicate, and exhibit art for study and education	object-based
Purposive	museums are for people to enjoy and to learn from collections which are held in trust for society	people-based

Table 1: Shift in museum definitions

Table 1 illustrates that museums have traditionally been defined by function rather than by purpose (Weil 1990). Functional definitions relate to activities performed in the museum and are object-based: to collect, preserve and display objects. More recently, there has been a shift in definitions. Purposive definitions now relate to the intent, vision or mission of the museum where the focus is on leadership and visitor services: to serve society and its development by means of study, education and enjoyment (Besterman 1998). As museums themselves are changing to meet the needs of a changing world, so too important concepts change. Change has led to an increased interest in museum governance and to a reappraisal of museum purpose, evident in the changing definition of the word 'museum'. Museums need to rely more heavily on the complexities of governance in this climate.

Focus of the Literature

Exploring governance has been studied in the non-profit sector (Golensky 1993; Harris 1989; Heimovics and Herman 1990) and in the museum and arts management field in Australia, New Zealand and Britain (Bieber 2003; Creative New Zealand 2003; Griffin and Abraham 2000; Radbourne 1993; 2003a and b; Rentschler 1999). Research publications have focused on the key work of the executive officer, board member performance, recruitment and training, reputation, decision-making and power. The few empirical studies on museums are a combination of survey, interview and case study methods (Bieber 2003; Griffin and Abraham 2000; Rentschler 1999).

Author/Year	Dimensions	Analytical Approach	Major findings
Ames 1985	Museum Trustees	Conceptual	The effect of composition, operation and values of trustees on museum performance; the difficulty of finding appropriate trustees
Bieber 2003	Museum Board - executive officer relationships, roles and power	Case studies and survey	There is tension between board members and decision making
Dickenson 1991	Museum Boards and Management	Conceptual	Conflict between trustees and director is of critical concern
Griffin 1987	Museum governance	Conceptual	Summary of different views about the establishment of organisational structure and practices within museums
Griffin 1991	Museum governance	Conceptual	The roles and relationships of and between governments, trustees and managers in the management of museums
Griffin 2002	Museum governance	Case studies and survey	Museum trustee-government tensions
Griffin & Abraham 1999	Museum governance	Case studies and survey	Successful organisational reform and issues pertaining to government-driven reform in museums
Griffin & Abraham 2000	Museum governance	Conceptual	Boards and Leadership in museums
Lindsay 1965	Director's perception of museum governance	Conceptual	Autobiographical account of time as director of National Gallery of Victoria
Missingham 1973	Director's perception of museum governance	Conceptual	Autobiographical account of time as director of Art Gallery of New South Wales
Malaro 1994	Museum governance	Conceptual	Legal and ethical charters for museum sustainability
Pybus 2002	Museum governance	Conceptual	The difficulty of finding appropriate trustees
Rentschler 2002	Museum governance	Survey of museum directors in Australia and New Zealand	Director perception of trustees (among other indicators)
Ullberg 1984	Museum boards	Conceptual	Restructuring museum boards to make them work better
Wood & Rentschler 2003	Museum governance	Survey	Need to broaden concept of governance to include ethics
	Arts governance	Conceptual	Need for trustees to fulfil mission, make decisions, lead and liaise with community

Table 2 Non-profit Museum Governance Literature

Table 2 lists key studies identified on museum boards16 in allidentifying their dimensions, analytical approach and major findings. As is clear from the table, eleven studies are conceptual rather than empirical. Conceptual studies which have developed the debate include those by Ames and Griffin from almost twenty years ago, and Dickenson from around ten years ago. Autobiographies of museum directors sourced include the biting missive by Missingham and the definitive account by Lindsay. No doubt there are other autobiographical accounts by directors which discuss relations with trustees. Those that are empirical include studies by the author, Griffin and Abraham, and Bieber. Each of these articles makes reference to the complexities of governance, underlining the importance of this matter in research and practice.

Governance Theories

The non-profit arena has paid little attention to governance theory, and the museum sector even less. Based on prior research, work to date in the area of governance theory shows that stakeholder theory is more relevant to non-profit arts boards than the other major theories (Radbourne 2003b). *Stakeholder theory* is based on the premise that boards are constituted to recognise the various stakeholders the organisation represents. This means that the organisation is able to respond to broader social interests rather than the interests of one group. This theory appears to be strongly applicable in subsidised arts organisations where board composition is often representative of all stakeholder groups, eg. government, business, museums, and special interests, such as regions, Indigenous and youth. However stakeholders have different interests and can find it difficult to develop common goals and policies for the organisation (Cornforth 2003; Radbourne 2003b). Further, there is some evidence within *Stewardship theory* and *Resource dependency theory* of its relevant to museums. *Stewardship theory* sees the director acting as a faithful steward of the organisation's shareholders (or in the case of non-profits, stakeholders). *Resource dependency theory*, grounded in sociology and organisational theory, argues that directors are able to extract resources for successful organisational operations. This has particular resonance for museums. While empirical evidence in support of the theory is limited, practice shows that resources are vital to museum sustainability. For example, Dr Gerard Vaughan, director of the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia, has raised $40 million for the art museum redevelopment, citing the necessity to reconnect with the community in order to ensure he can achieve his vision: 'It's the collections that count. That's what we're here for', says Vaughan. Critical to obtaining commitment from donors and the local community has been a hectic schedule of speeches, cocktail parties and tours up to five nights a week. (Strickland 2003: R8-9). The complexities of roles and attributes of trustees and their relationship to the director are essential to fundraising success.

Four by Two: Board Attributes and Roles

It follows from the discussion above that board attributes and roles are essential to effective museum governance. Everyone knows a museum board that has focused on one at the expense of the other, expert at abstract strategy but sloppy at focused attention to board-executive officer relations, for example. Zahra and Pearce (1989) found that attributes determine a board's undertaking of its roles. There are four board attributes identifiable from non-profit theory that have been linked to meet the needs of the non-profit museum. Hoye and Cuskelly (2003) identify the attributes of non-profit sports organisation boards as determining the mission; initiating strategy; board-executive officer relationships; and community relations. These attributes are also identified separately in the museums literature. *Developing and maintaining the mission* includes ensuring the museum is mission-guided,

in an increasingly complex, pressured environment (Ames 1985; Griffin 1991). *Initiating strategy* relates to envisioning the future commensurate with its responsibility, authority and accountability and to meet objectives (Griffin 1991; Ullberg 1984). Second, it relates to monitoring outputs, including those related to board structure, composition and process, and how individual board member characteristics influence board dynamics. *Board-executive officer relations* entails influencing interactions and performance of board and executive officer seeking to exercise power and those who are subject to it (Griffin 1991). *Community relations* includes achieving balance between the needs of the board, the museum, government stakeholders and the community (Hoye and Cuskelly 2003).

Numerous studies have linked the importance of attributes to role functioning. There are two roles relevant to the non-profit organisation, developed from the literature (Bosch 1995; Garrett 1996; Hilmer 1993). These roles are: performance and conformance. *Performance* covers the strategic contribution of the board to performance, as well as stakeholder liaison and analysis of the external environment to determine its influence on organisational success. *Conformance* covers accountability, executive officer supervision, legal, monitoring and access to resources issues. Grounded in sociology and organisational theory, this role is important as a boundary-spanner that makes timely information available to executives, monitors executive money management and extracts resources from the community, government and sponsors. These activities enhance the organisation's legitimacy and help it achieve goals and improve performance. Hence, the interrelationship between the two roles is integral to museum performance. Taken together, attributes and roles are the four by two theory non-profit museum governance.

Board Attributes	**Board Roles**	
	Performance	Conformance
Mission	Ames 1985; Creative New Zealand 2003; Radbourne 1993 Urice 1990; Weil 1995;	Arts Law Centre of Australia 1990; Creative New Zealand 2003; Wry 1990
Strategy	Radbourne 2003a; Radbourne 2003b; Wood & Rentschler 2003; Ostrower 2002; Drucker 1973; Bradshaw, et al 1992;	Lindsay 1965; Malaro 1994; Missingham 1973; Ostrower 2002; Pybus 2002
Board-executive officer liaison	Dickenson 1991; Griffin 1987, 1991, 1999; 2002 Griffin and Abraham 2000;	Ullberg 1984
Community relations	Middleton 1987; Bieber 2003	Griffin 2002; Wry 1990

Table 3: Four by Two Theory of Non-profit Museum Governance

Table 3 summarises the four by two theory of non-profit museum governance: four attributes and two roles, citing relevant museum and arts organisation literature that discusses each aspect. While some judgement was exercised

in locating research into each segment, and indeed some studies fall into more than one segment, the resultant table gives the reader an indication of the scope and focus of previous work in the field. The table identifies the focus of previous research and, more importantly, the agenda for future research. These studies show that board attributes and board roles have dominated the literature, and have been studied using different theoretical and methodological perspectives. However, museum governance studies so far have not linked these perspectives to create a synthesis of the literature and approaches.

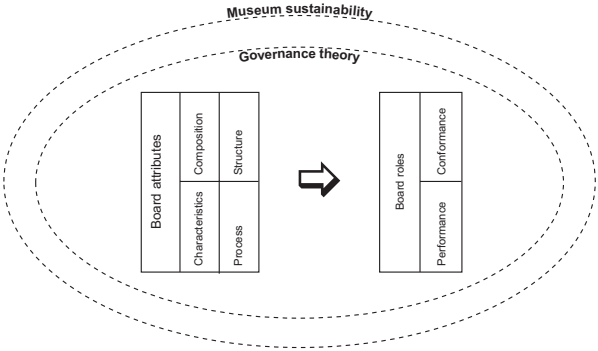

Figure 1: Four by Two Model of Museum Governance

Towards an Integrative Model of Non-profit Museum Governance

In combination, governance theory, board attributes and board roles identify an important focus of study in a complicated but disparate field. This literature review shows a gap between the literature on governance theory, museum trustee attributes and roles, and empirical documentation of the extent to which each is performed in reality. For example, while the literature shows that conformance is recognised in the normative literature, research has shown that it may not be monitored effectively or only in a perfunctory manner. Research on the performance role is strong (Radbourne 1993; Griffin and Abraham 2000), but whether trustees have reflected changes in societal values in shaping museum identity is questionable (Griffin and Abraham 2000). Similarly, research in the strategic performance arena is recognised, but empirical evidence is limited. Certainly, museum boards have not been shown to be strategic in all cases, putting the sustainability of their organisations at risk.

The challenges faced by museum leaders suggest that a dynamic model may enhance understanding. The model achieves interaction with the literature in a number of ways. The proposed model consists of four by two

major parts: four trustee attributes; two trustee roles. Figure 1 shows the influence of governance theory and organisational sustainability on the four by two model of museum governance. There is little in the museums literature which links governance theory to board attributes and roles and the resultant conformance and performance leading to sustainability.

Conclusions

This article examined the literature on governance and applied it to the non-profit museum. It identified the complex nature of museum governance, its emergence in the museum literature and the need to focus attention on the development of a comprehensive approach to museum governance in order to meet the needs of a complicated, changing world. The article contends that most research on governance has been conducted in the for-profit arena, with little robust empirical research having been conducted on non-profit museum governance. It identifies concerns with the thrust of articles published as they restrict new theory development. The article postulates a four by two theory of non-profit museum governance, characterised by close interaction with the research published and application to the non-profit museum. The article concludes by demonstrating the increased sustainability opportunity of a model of non-profit museum governance, seeking to be accountable in an increasingly complex and demanding environment. It argues that there is a need to focus more on a holistic approach to governance in a complex, changing context and that this focus will better ensure museum sustainability than a narrow focus on one attribute, role or governance theory alone.

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The American Effect: Rudy Giuliani in Shit Art and Economy in the Whitney Museum

Evert Schoorl

Perhaps I should start by explaining my position: I am not one of those who think that good intentions will necessarily produce good art. But even for me there are exceptions to this rule-of-thumb. Last Summer's exhibition in New York's Whitney Museum of American Art was one of those. Reflections by non-Americans upon North-American culture were the project's subject. The exhibition showed sculptures, paintings, photos, videos and a number of short movies. Even outside the exhibit's context many of these were simply beautiful, others humoristic, and some hilarious. The entire project was matched by a documentary research initiative called

Distributive Justice, organised by a group with a postal address in Croatia (and a website: www.distributive-justice.com) which asked the visitors to complete a query about his or her socio-economic status, and ideas about a just income distribution.

At least since Warhol we know that American icons can become art by simply framing them – or is it the other way around and have Warhol's frames become icons? Anyway, today a little more effort is necessary before icons become art. This effort has been put into a number of sculptures by Ousmane Sow (Dakar 1935) of the Cowboys-and-Indians stereotype: larger-than-life images of The Death of General Custer and The Battle of Little Big Horn. A modern counterpart, reminding us by the way that Karl May was a German, was provided by the photos of Andrea Robbins en Max Becher: beautiful portraits of German members of Indians clubs showing palefaces fully dressed-up in beads and feathers.

Generally we do not linger about the age of movie and comics heroes. They are ageless, or at any rate they don't grow older in their images and in our minds. But they did in the Duane Hanson-like sculptures of American Heroes. Emerging from the time machine of Gilles Barbier (Vanuatu 1965) they had become a wrinkled and shrunken Superman or Captain America in the home for the elderly.

Besides these characters a number of real-world heroes were depicted: Rudy Giuliani's image was hanging larger-than-life on a wall, painted in a kind of improved social-realistic way by Zhou Tiehai (Shanghai 1966), as a capitalist Great Leader.

For years we have been familiar with movie heroes being used as publicity and marketing busters, in Europe as well as in the U.S. But in 1980 this was not yet so common, when Chrysler advertised in *National Geographic* magazine for its new top model, the Imperial. The advertisement was a pages-long dialogue between Frank Sinatra and Chrysler's President Lee Iacocca. In 1998 Gerard Byrne (Dublin 1969) has made a video of this dialogue with two actors playing Sinatra and Iacocca. Another time machine, and a very special one! Immediately after putting on a headphone I almost fell off my

chair rolling with laughter, while many younger people kept watching silently and seriously.

> **Sinatra:** - *Is this stuff all standard equipment?*
>
> **Iacocca:** - *Frank, the only option on the Imperial is a power sliding roof. Every luxury is standard.*

In 2003 we know better: the consumer wants to be with it, but even more to distinguish himself. So anyone can e-mail his or her vital statistics to Levi's with an individual order for so many side and back pockets with or without zippers, and he/she will be sent a customized pair of 501 jeans. But the hot air salesman have survived. Back in my hotel room I watched Iacocca's nephew, the CEO of a telecom firm, explaining on a local channel how his company would grow at least 20 percent annually, at the expense of its competitiors, thanks to a new product. But it remained totally obscure what this new product really was: hardware, software, services? The interviewer did not press the question so I am still ignorant.

Consumer society and the experience economy were illustrated in an even more contemporary way by the video of Mark Lewis (Canada 1957) in which porn starlets were walking through a tropical garden. Every time they appeared you could just catch a glimpse of them. No bench was provided in this room of the exhibition, so I sat down on the floor. Sitting was allowed by the custodian, but leaning against the wall was not. Speaking of humour in art!

One week later I read the news about a new attraction: paintball-shooting at naked girls in the desert. Shame! On the next day the denial followed: the news was fake, its reality was an art project. Life imitates art imitates life!

Another close link between art and economy was apparent in the photo series called disCONNEXION by Danwen Xing (China 1967). It depicted in an Arte Povera-like way a number of heaped-up dissembled electronic devices, worn-out in the U.S and exported to be recycled in Asia. Documentary information and good art at the same time.

A video by Young Hae-Chang Heavy Industries (the name of a Korean-European partnership which had a presentation in 2002 in the Amsterdam Mediamatic gallery), was a textual images bombardment supported by an Art Blakey drums solo. For me this meant another recollection of the nightly jazz concerts in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw around 1960. Just the evening before I had heard heard the trombone player Slide Hampton perform in the Blue Note jazz club with a group starring Bob Brookmeyer. In the interval I approached this old valve veteran:

> - Mister Brookmeyer, more than forty years ago I first heard you play in Amsterdam.

He did not hesitate one moment to answer:

> - That was with Mulligan!

A Picture of an Air Raid on New York City, by the Japanese painter Makoto Aida (1965), depicted a kind of kamikaze attack on Manhattan. It had not been

painted after Nine-Eleven, but already in 1996. Another comment on American imperialism was given in the images of the Colombian Miguel Angel Rojas (Bogotà 1946). With dots stamped from dollar bills he had pictured galoping cowboys as well as classical-Southamerican textile designs. This produced very strong images. Both strong and estranging were the photos by Yongsuk Kang (S-Korea 1958) of the South Korean island Nong where American atomic test explosions had been held in the fifties.

There were many, many more non-American representations of American images which are consciously or unconsciously present in our minds. Take for example the desert cactuses in Arno Coenens computer-animated video The Last Road Trip. Or the fire-spitting spaceman appearing in the series of Legendary Warriors painted in a classical-Japanese way. As a Dutchman I was keen to note not only Coenen's contribution, but also the piece written by Dutch-born Ian Buruma in the excellent catalogue to which eleven prominent authors had contributed - Tariq Ali, Nawal El Saadawi, Edward Said and Pramoedya Ananta Toer among them.

I happened to visit the exhibition on its opening day. When I left, a local TV channel team asked me a few questions. What did I think of mayor Giuliani's picture in which elephant dung had been used? To be frank, I had not noticed this detail at all. But first the academic teacher in me was tickled:

- I am Dutch, and could I please first note that this is an excellent exhibition. As to your question, in my opinion any material can be used to produce beautiful art. Not the medium but the result is the yard-stick of Real Art.

As I had walked away twenty steps, the one-liner which should have been my answer came to my mind:

- Isn't that what art is about: turning shit into gold?

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Audience-Based Program Evaluation & Performance Measures

Barbara J. Soren, Bonnie Callen, Anne Chafe, Laurence Grant and Tom Reitz

Abstract

During 2002-2003 a partnership of museums in Southern Ontario (Wellington County Museum & Archives, Doon Heritage Crossroads, Guelph Museums, and Heritage Collection - City of Waterloo) embarked on a project to establish common practices for performance measures in the museum field. The project was financed by the Museums Assistance Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage and municipal employers. Our major goal was to implement a system of performance measures. The partnership represents a diversity of museum types: archives, history museum, a city collection, historic site, and living history site. Key components of the project were to be collaboration, learning from one another, and professional training. Important outcomes were: improved tracking of statistical information and reporting; the development of descriptive templates for exhibitions and special events; more skill at using performance measures in our daily work lives and planning cycles; and de-mystifying and de-stigmatizing 'performance measures.'

Performance Measures for Museums and Other Cultural Organizations

A 2-day Symposium, which was intended to initiate awareness of the importance of performance measures to cultural organisations was hosted by the Management Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) at the Art Gallery of Ontario in January 1998. At Great Performances: Performance Measures for Canadian Museums and Other Cultural Organizations, sessions provided an opportunity to learn more about the potential use of performance measures across museums and performing arts organizations in Canada. A range of speakers from the public, private, and not-for profit sectors discussed the strengths and limitations of performance measures. For instance, Greg Baeker (1998) highlighted how performance measures can provide cultural organizations with valuable and practical tools for managing change in a radically changing environment. Evaluator Arnold Love (1998) stressed that performance measurement, in practice, is a process that contributes to continuous improvement and increased accountability by being linked into the planning and management cycle. Love argued that performance measures for the cultural sector must be based on the sector's fundamental values.

A group of participants who attended this Symposium expressed disappointment that there were no sessions related to how to measure success for audiences and visitors, the publics who attend performances and visit museums. Barbara Soren, an audience researcher, was invited to

organize a session for a follow-up Symposium entitled Criteria for Excellence in November 1998. Performance Measures and Audience Response was a two-part session to consider 'public interest' and performance measures for cultural organizations, which included a panel discussion and small group roundtables to discuss an action plan for developing audience-based performance measures.

Laurence Grant, Director of Guelph Museums, had also been to the CMA Symposium sessions. He had found that the use of performance measures seemed, in his museum experience, to be stuck at the discussion level rather than involving implementation practice. He had been part of a municipal project initiated by the City of Guelph Finance Department, but the discussion was mostly about benchmarking things that were easily measurable, and did not relate to harder to evaluate exhibition and special event performance. Grant thought it would be useful to follow through on a reflection and implementation process with like-minded museums and guided by a consultant knowledgeable in the field. He invited Barbara Soren to work as a trainer and advisor on this innovative collaboration because he believed she had pioneered unique investigative techniques to better understand experiences of audiences in museums and the performing arts. One of the areas of expertise she had been evolving was audience-based program evaluation for measuring the success of museums' exhibits and programs, both on-site and online (e.g., see Soren, 1999-2001). Grant also invited four area museums, three of whom were interested in being involved (i.e., Wellington County Museum & Archives, Doon Heritage Crossroads, and Heritage Collection - City of Waterloo). Managers of these museums had varying degrees of experience and training in the domain of performance measures, from none to participation in a municipal project. Grant also spoke with the Department of Canadian Heritage about Museum Assistance program support, which the group applied for and received.

Guelph Museums & Partners Performance Measures Project

The Guelph Museums and partners' group proposed working out a common set of tools that would help to improve the museums in this project, as well as the broader community of museums in Canada. Collectively, the group planned to establish a process for audience-based program evaluation and performance measures and to implement the process at each museum site.

Outcomes of this project would be that partners would have a better understanding of how to improve their exhibitions, special events, and programs, as well as build audience and greater self-reliance. Learning in a meeting/workshop environment, the partnership would develop an ease with performance measures vocabulary and evolve a useful set of performance measures techniques for application in their respective museums. Once such practices were established, a set of benchmarks could be formulated. Each museum in the partnership would be able to make audience-based evaluation comparisons from year to year, and the partners could also

compare visitor attendance and response to programs and activities across their institutions. Because the museums represent diverse institutions yet are within a geographic proximity, the project seemed feasible.

The following were objectives, anticipated outcomes, and activities for the audience-based program evaluation and performance measures project.

Project Objectives:

- To review methodologies for performance measures including a case study of Guelph Museums and the project of the City of Guelph undertaken in 1998.
- To establish a set of common tools (effectiveness measures) for evaluating and determining success indicators for exhibitions, education programs, special events, and general visitation that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time bound.

Project Benefits/Outcomes:

- *Possession of the capability to report on the value of museum services to the public, government bodies, and other funders through demonstrable economic performance indicators and impacts.*
- *A broadened and more secure funding base with an improved means of communication, improved effectiveness of programs, improved revenue generation, and greater accountability and relevance.*
- *Broadened awareness of outcomes-based evaluation through communication of the experience to the broader museum community*.
- Audience-based program evaluation templates for measuring the success of exhibitions and programs at each museum with regular and systematic review of objectives, outcomes, evaluation strategies, and success indicators.
- Improved exhibitions, programs and visitor experiences through improved effectiveness, efficiency, service delivery, and ability for innovation.

Project Activities:

- The development of a common understanding of performance measures vocabulary and methodologies.
- Use of methodologies to measure performance in a number of selected areas, such as: the tabulation of attendance in common categories; tabulation of revenues; measurement of research requests; and artifact donations.
- Use of project and exhibition briefs as a means for measuring the success of exhibits/exhibitions, education programs (including education kits), and special events (such briefs would include the

delineation of outcomes and performance indicators, and other evaluation tools).

Audience-Based Program Evaluation & Performance Measures

During 2002-2003, the group met seven times, alternating meeting locations so that staff at each museum could be involved in the project. The following describes the process the group worked through.

Related Resource Material

The starting point for the Performance Measures project was to review relevant literature. The most compelling material that partners continued to return to throughout the project was a report by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (ILMS) in 2001, *Perspectives on Outcome-Based Evaluation for Libraries and Museums*.[1] In this publication, Beverly Sheppard, Acting Director, Institute of Museum and Library Services introduces the fundamental importance of understanding how to evaluate museum exhibitions and programs based on the outcomes of the experiences of the audiences who attend them. She argues that funders of museums and their programs frequently call upon museum managers to tell their stories and to share the impact of their work as community leaders, educational resources, and guardians of our cultural heritage.

In the same publication, Stephen Weil, Emeritus Senior Scholar for the Center of Education and Museum Studies, Smithsonian Institution, describes 'two distinct revolutions' in the [North] American museum. The first revolution during the past 50 years has been a shift in focus from being inwardly oriented (i.e., on growth, care, study, and display of its collection) to outwardly focused with a range of educational and other services to its visitors and its communities. The second revolution is related to public expectations that a museum experience 'will demonstrably enhance the quality of individual lives and/or the well-being of some particular community' (Weil, 2001: 6). Weil confirms that 'Managing for results' and measuring 'outcomes' (i.e., benefits or changes for individuals or populations during or after participating in program activities) have become important terms to understand in the present day climate.[2]

How to Develop Audience-Based Program Evaluation & Performance Measures

Soren then introduced the group to the Audience-based Program Evaluation model she had been evolving and the group considered the effectiveness of a Program Evaluation Form Guelph Museums staff were using.

Program Evaluation based on the results or outcomes of audiences' experiences is one way to develop indicators that demonstrate the success

of exhibitions and programs. Adapted from Arnold Love's approach, the major benefits of developing outcomes evaluation templates related to museum practice are that they:

- Help link exhibition program design with outcomes evaluation.
- Provide a succinct description of exhibition-related activities, which can be linked to program standards, benchmarks, and 'best practices.'
- Document the actual exhibition program delivery.
- Assist in the evaluation of both processes and outcomes.

The categories the Guelph Museums and partners worked with in developing templates for evaluating outcomes and success indicators related to their exhibitions and programs included:

1. Name of Museum
2. Date of Template Completion
3. Person Completing Template and Contact information
4. Mission/Mandate/Aims/Goals
5. Description of Exhibition Program
6. Target Group(s)
7. Objectives for the Visitor Experience
8. Outcomes after a Visitor Experience
9. Activities for achieving Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes
10. Leadership (overall responsibility and staffing – full-time, part-time, volunteer)
11. Funding and Resources
12. Facilities for Exhibitions and Programs
13. Community Linkages (with other museums, community organizations, or programs)
14. Exhibition Program Evaluation (for continuous improvement)
15. Exhibition Program Success Indicators (directly linked to achieving outcomes).

The following are descriptions and examples for the more challenging categories.

Mission/Mandate/Aims/Goals

What are the museum's mission, mandate, aims, or goals for individuals visiting exhibitions or participating in programs?

Mission and/or Mandate

The most general statements about the exhibition and public programs. For example:

- The type of objects exhibited, interpreted, and documented.
- The subject matter focus.
- Primary activities.

Aims and/or Goals

Statements of intent, midway in generality between mission/mandate and objectives that describe the purposes for the exhibition or public program. For example:

- Target audiences for whom the museum's programming is of special interest.
- Educational expectations.
- Outreach through the museum's Web site.

Description of Exhibition or Program

A 'rich' description of the exhibition or public program as if the museum is promoting to potential funders as sponsors, encouraging people who have not yet visited to attend, or orienting new board members, staff, volunteers, or student interns. This is the beginning of creating a brand identity with target audiences related to the museum's offerings and visitor benefits.

Objectives and Outcomes for Visitor Experiences

Objectives focus on opportunities that will be provided for the visitor experiencing an exhibition or program, or intentions of museum staff designing an exhibit or program. If objectives are clearly articulated in exhibition and program planning (e.g., as behavioural, affective, physical, spiritual objectives), they should provide a basis for assessing the extent to which an exhibition or program is effective, and ways to improve.

- versus -

Outcomes focus on what a visitor who interacts with objects in an exhibition or participates in a program will know, do or value as a result of that experience, or the result of the visitor's experience at the museum. If outcomes are clearly articulated in exhibition and program planning they should provide indicators for measuring the success of the museum's exhibition program

for visitors.

Objectives for the Visitor Experience

Specific statements of what individuals will be able to do during their experience in an exhibition or program (e.g., behaviours, performance, problems to solve, emotions, hands-on activities, and/or interactions with live interpretation).

Outcomes after a Visit Experience

What one ends up with, intended or not, after an exhibition visit or program, such as:

- A new appreciation, sensitivity, understanding.
- A strong feeling.
- Wanting to do something/find out more.
- Valuing an idea, topic, person, and object.

Exhibition Program Evaluation

How can museum staff evaluate if they are achieving the objectives they have articulated for the exhibition or public program to ensure continuous improvement? For example:

- Verbal feedback and written comments in the comment book on the success of the exhibition or program.
- A questionnaire to determine:
  - where audiences are coming from
  - individuals' interests, expectations, and previous exposure to subject matter
  - how they heard about your museum/exhibition
  - how many times they have visited
  - what their experience was of the exhibition or program
  - what their needs are in the museum
  - what other services/interpretive aids they would like or would use in conjunction with the exhibitions to enrich their viewing experience
  - what they might do as a result of their experience.
- Staff and volunteer observations of visitor response to exhibitions and programs.
- An annual meeting with local teachers, educators, and related instructors who have experienced the exhibition/program about outcomes of the educational program, and ways to continue to improve these services.

- Meetings with other community group leaders/instructors to develop ways to identify and reach new audiences, and to strive to develop appropriate interpretive activities to meet their needs.

Exhibition Program Success Indicators

What are signs or evidence indicating to museum staff that visitors have experienced what was expected during their experience in an exhibition or participation in a program? What indications are there that individuals may use or apply knowledge gained, do something to learn more, or value their experience after they leave the museum? Generally, these indicators can serve as benchmarks to compare the success of your museum's exhibition program from year to year. They can help staff working across departments collaborate on how the museum can better reach visitors and program participants.

The following are some **quantitative indicators** that can measure success (numbers tend to be the only way people think success can be measured):

- The number of:
  - Invitation/hand-outs printed and distributed for each exhibition (mailed; distributed to schools; on hand at the gallery; archival)
  - Visitors attending openings
  - People attending related talks
  - Visitors attending exhibitions and projects
  - Advanced group bookings for gallery tours annually
  - Hands-on workshops annually for school groups in conjunction with tours
  - Requests to circulate exhibitions originated by the museum.
- The extent and quality of the media coverage of museum programming, and the audiences reached through these media.
- The level of support the museum receives and from whom acknowledging the merit and value of the museum's activities (e.g., demonstrated by both increases in annual activity grants and comments from peer assessment juries).

However, to effectively evaluate exhibitions and programs and determine how successful they are, qualitative measures are equally as important as quantitative measures (e.g., Soren, 2001b).

Some of the **qualitative indicators** of success (typically not considered valid, credible, and reliable as a way of measuring success) can include:

- What individuals look at and how they interact with exhibit components.
- The extent to which a visitor's experience is meaningful.
- What people learn about the objects the museum displays, the creators

or owners of the objects, and different interpretations of the objects.

- What people learn about themselves and/or others during their visit.
- What individuals decide to do as a result of their museum experience (e.g., buy a related book or object in the museum's gift store, share their experience with friends and family, return to the museum, visit the museum's Web site, donate an object to the museum, visit a related museum).

Most often a combination of qualitative and quantitative strategies provides multiple perspectives and the most in-depth understanding of the visitor experience. Both strategies are needed to evaluate the effectiveness of exhibitions and programs, and are useful for finding indicators of success for visitor experiences.

Collaborative Activities

The partners developed a master template that blended the above audience-based program evaluation and performance measures categories and the Program Evaluation Form that staff at Guelph Museums were using. Each museum then selected a special event, exhibition, and/or program and staff at the museum evolved a template specific to that activity.

The group also looked at each museum's visitor statistics, visitor surveys, and surveys specific to exhibitions and programs. They discussed how many templates to create based on time and resources. The partners decided which questions were most important to ask and provided the most meaningful information on program evaluation forms (e.g., school, holiday, and summer programs). Then they compared attendance forms and daily, weekly, monthly, and annual reports. They also thought about what common demographics could be collected across museums, which partners could examine periodically. Excel training during February 2003 helped staff at each museum to model the high quality reports being produced at Guelph Museums. All the project partners wanted to learn how to use Excel, a standard software at all of the sites, to track attendance in many categories, and to show these statistics in a clearer, more understandable format. This was achieved through a series of workshops.

Finally, staff from each museum shared their experiences with the use of the Audience-Based Program Evaluation and Performance Measures template that they evolved. And the group considered how each partner museum could use their audience-based performance measures work as a benchmark, comparing visitor response and behaviours during 2002-2003 with 2003-2004.

The following highlights the nature of activities at each of the partner museums and demonstrates the value of the audience-based performance measures project across the four municipal and community museums.

The Wellington County Museum and Archives

The Wellington County Museum and Archives wanted to implement a system of performance measures at their sites using standard templates that could be altered to fit their individual site-specific program and statistical needs. For Bonnie Callen, Director, the project was two pronged. Museum staff wanted to: develop templates to help program and exhibition staff better plan and evaluate what the museum offers their visiting public; create a more accurate and versatile data base system for the statistical tracking of visitor attendance. Basically, they wanted to 'wow' their board, public, and themselves with pie charts and graphs instead of the old-fashioned single column listing month-by-month totals. They knew intuitively that to measure their performance in delivering quality programs and services, they had to learn how to track and identify the makeup of the museum's clientele.

The curatorial staff from the museum's four sites was invited to contribute to the development of the audience-based program evaluation template to make it applicable to exhibition planning and evaluation. The Wellington County Museum and Archives curator started by using it in the early stages of a new permanent exhibition, *First Story: The Neutrals of Wellington County*, which opened in June 2003. The curator was more than willing to utilize the form because it allowed her the opportunity to re-confirm on paper the overall aims and goals of this exhibition, rationalizing why the theme was chosen, describing in detail her vision of the finished product, and identifying target groups and media opportunities. The form was helpful to all the curatorial design team working on this gallery, as well as the museum activities programmer who needed to know what was being planned so she could begin her curriculum based programming. Since the opening, staff has been tracking the exhibition's success by examining improvement in the various success indicators projected on the template in the early stage of exhibition development.

Callen feels that exhibition and program templates have proven to be useful to her staff, improving the quality of what the museum offers their publics. Curatorial and program staff recognized from the outset the value of the performance measures project and by making a conscientious effort to keep them informed and consulting them along the way, their support was easy to garner and maintain. The key to implementing an effective performance measures system at a museum site is to respect the input of staff because it is based on their knowledge and experience. If all the staff is not committed, consistency in planning and evaluating and tracking will be difficult to attain.

Another vital part of measuring performance in a museum setting is developing a consistent database system for the tracking and reporting of attendance. Offsite Excel training was an excellent way for the staff to focus on the program, ask questions relevant to their own sites, and feel confident in adopting the new templates for tracking attendance. The training sessions in Excel brought about a whole new confidence and enthusiasm for the performance measures project.

City of Waterloo's Heritage Collection

As a 'team' of one, the Curator of the **City of Waterloo's Heritage Collection**, Anne Chafe relies on contract staff and volunteers to assist with the development of exhibitions and programs that are offered in various City-owned facilities such as the Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery.

A Business Measurement Project for the City of Waterloo was precipitated by the Province's introduction of the use of performance measures for municipal services in March 2001. Those measures were designed to enhance accountability to the local taxpayer and to act as service improvement tools. Throughout this City project, Chafe found it difficult to apply the measurements for the programs offered by her colleagues to those developed by the City's heritage resources unit. The audience-based performance measures project provided the focus she was looking for to assist her in measuring the success of the City's heritage programs and exhibitions.

Chafe was particularly interested in learning how performance measurement could assist her in maximizing limited financial and staff resources in order to provide quality programs. Working in a municipal climate of accountability, she was also looking for a way to expand the view within her organization of the value of the City's heritage programs other than by attendance numbers and budget figures, and to communicate the impact of their programs in a meaningful way.

Chafe discovered that embarking on performance measurement requires an extensive commitment of time to complete the exercise. She recognized that she could not possibly measure every program, so she decided for this project to concentrate on the 1,000 square foot exhibition, *Charlie Voelker: Architectural Designer, Alderman and Visionary*. Based on the success of this performance measures activity, she plans on continuing to develop performance measures for their annual exhibitions and to initiate its use for new programs. She also better understands that doing this requires a commitment for action and improvement and a willingness to learn from past experiences.

While the commitment of time was extensive, the benefits of conducting performance measurement for this exhibition were many, particularly given that there is only one person ultimately responsible for the development, installation, and promotion of an exhibition project. Benefits included, for instance:

- Articulating the aims, objectives and outcomes of the exhibition, which provided focus for the project and clarity of communication and thinking.
- Providing direction for determining the exhibition's content by identifying specific outcomes for the exhibition, and the relationship between the desired outcomes and the visitor experiences needed to lead to these outcomes.
- Creating a succinct description of the exhibition up front, which was a time saver in the end as the information was easily transferable for use in media, promotional, and sponsorship material.

- Identifying target groups, which assisted in the effective distribution of promotional material. It also directed the development of the media release content. For example, because Chafe had identified families with children as a target group, she made sure that the media release highlighted the activities available for this audience.
- Sharing the completed form with contract staff so that they also had a clear vision of what the exhibition was attempting to achieve.

For Chafe, the most beneficial part of the process was the articulation of activities and evaluation tools for achieving goals, objectives and outcomes. However, it also proved to be the most challenging for Chafe to follow through on, due primarily to time constraints. The planned publication and one of the two workshops could not be completed in time for the exhibition. She was also overly ambitious with the identification of her evaluation tools. The outcomes she had identified required a variety of evaluation methods. Inspired by the impressive Excel charts prepared by Guelph Museums, she had hoped to develop an exit questionnaire and similarly chart the results. As the opening date for the exhibition drew near, this kept getting pushed to the bottom of the 'to do' list and never got done leaving a hole in the evaluation process.

However, it was rewarding to see during the review and the critical assessment portion of process that most of the objectives for the exhibitions had been met. Documenting these successes in this format has proven to be a valuable tool. Chafe has been able to justify to her manager, who does not have a background in museum work, the resources (both staff and financial) needed for annual exhibitions. Working in an ever-increasing competitive environment for public funds to provide municipal services, the performance measurement system has assisted her in securing additional contract staffing resources for exhibition activity.

Doon Heritage Crossroads

Doon Heritage Crossroads, a living history museum in Kitchener, Ontario, recreating a rural village and two farms to the year 1914, is located on sixty acres of environmentally sensitive forest, marsh and farmland. The museum also serves as the collecting and preservation facility for a regional history collection and is owned and operated by the Regional Municipality of Waterloo.

Tom Reitz, Manager/Curator of Doon Heritage Crossroads**,** found that the *Evaluating and Achieving through Performance Measures* project helped museum staff discover that they have many more quantitative measures than their annual attendance figures, and they do have some existing qualitative measures. Doon Heritage Crossroads was initially daunted by the language of the world of evaluation and museum staff had no formal training or experience in evaluation.

At Doon, staff chose their *Country Christmas* event for consideration as part of the audience-based program evaluation project for several reasons. First

and foremost it was opportune, as the event was one of the last of the museum's eight-month season schedule and it fit with the evaluation project time-line. More importantly, however, *Country Christmas* was a repeat event, which in December of 2002 was about to take on a potentially new focus with a change in audience demographics.

Country Christmas is one of several seasonal events that the living history museum presents in the month of December. The living history village buildings are decorated for the Christmas season and special highlights for these event afternoons include horse-drawn wagon rides, carol singing in the village's church and a visit by Father Christmas. Previous year's attendance at the event varied, but based solely on previous years, the museum anticipated that approximately 250 to 300 people would visit the museum each Sunday.

In the fall of 2002, well in advance of the start of seasonal Christmas programming, the museum was approached by the Region of Waterloo's Home Child Care Division, which provides a flexible type of licensed care and is especially suited to families who work shifts or have irregular hours of employment. The group requested complimentary passes to the museum for their clients.

Also in 2002, Doon Heritage Crossroads was writing new mission and vision statements for the museum (to be presented to Regional Council in fall of 2003 or winter 2004). Museum mission statements have traditionally focussed on the five pillars of museum functions: to collect, educate, interpret, preserve, and research. Doon Heritage Crossroads' new mission and vision suggest a 'higher' mission for the museum. The proposed vision reads:

> *Doon Heritage Crossroads enriches the quality of life in the Region of Waterloo. Doon Heritage Crossroads makes better Canadian citizens by increasing knowledge of what Canada is, has been and will be.*

The proposed mission also includes a number of guiding principles. One of these principles relates to the concept of 'community:'

> *Doon Heritage Crossroads has a unique opportunity to enrich the quality of life in our own community and lives of individuals in the many communities Doon Heritage Crossroads serves. Doon Heritage Crossroads does this by: being inclusive in our programs and activities, reaching out to the community with our services and programs, serving as a center for community gatherings, and serving as a bridge between different communities and cultural groups.*

The inclusion of statements in the proposed mission regarding the museum's role in the community is reflective of an emerging trend in museums to not just reflect the community in their exhibits and programs, but also to ensure that the museum is an active, participatory institution in the life of a community. The emphasis on community is also reflected in changes to the Community Museum Standards, reintroduced by the Ontario Ministry of Culture in 2000.

It was clear that honouring the request for complimentary admission passes from the Region of Waterloo's Home Child Care program was in concert with the museum's new mission and more specifically, celebrates and affirms the museum's role in the community. Doon Heritage Crossroads saw this performance measures project as an excellent opportunity to test the new effectiveness of the proposed vision and mission, to evaluate the impact if any of honouring the request by Home Child Care, and to get a head-start on implementing the Community Standard required in 2005.

The Audience-Based Program Evaluation form for *Country Christmas* pointed out the success of the event and the impact of the distribution of the complimentary admission passes. Museum staff distributed 1,300 complimentary passes, and 378 admission passes were redeemed (29% of the coupons available). Although Doon Heritage Crossroads did not complete a survey of visitors attending *Country Christmas*, Reitz felt it was fair to assume that most if not all of the 378 individuals who entered the museum using a complimentary admission pass would not have visited otherwise. On each of the two Sundays for which passes were distributed, the total visitation was approximately doubled by complimentary pass holders.

The Program Evaluation form indicated what the museum staff believed was a successful 'win-win' endeavour. The *Country Christmas* event would have occurred regardless of the distribution of complimentary admission passes. By offering these passes, the museum was able to meet its newly written mission statement's guiding principles to be inclusive in their programs and reach out to the community with their services and programs.

The museum is not able to quantify beyond attendance figures the potential qualitative impact these complimentary admission passes may have in the future on the lives of those who used them. Reitz believes, however, that opportunities such as these do demonstrate how Doon Heritage Crossroads enriches the quality of life in the Region of Waterloo.

Guelph Museums

Since a system of performance measures was already in place at Guelph Museums and was being used for special event planning, exhibitions and attendance tracking, Laurence Grant, Director, and his staff were versed in both the terminology and practices. Staff made some adjustments to education program evaluation forms and attendance tracking as a result of this project, but Grant mostly focused on using the Audience-Based Program Evaluation template on an exhibition called *The Neighbourhood Store*.

Although it is not part of his usual job to do exhibitions, he had come up with the idea and proposed it to curatorial staff. They decided to go ahead with it, in part because they had a gap in the exhibition schedule, and in part because Grant saw the opportunity for a community-based exhibition. This exhibition was about the history of neighbourhood or corner stores from the mid 19th century up to the present day and includes a section of photographs by a contemporary Guelph photographer. The exhibition spoke to the changing

ethno-cultural ownership of neighbourhood stores and the struggle with the big chains in maintaining a viable share of the market. There was a 'hands-on' play store for children within the exhibition.

Grant found the template very useful in thinking through the process of preparing for the exhibition. Discussions with museum staff and project partners helped him come up with ideas that really improved the final exhibition product. The form was ultimately a very good communications tool and a time saver. It was crucial for communications with curatorial and education staff. One thought and planned first and then 'did.' It helped Grant ensure, for example, that education staff was involved in the development of an education use of the exhibition from the beginning and not just at the end, as is too frequently the case.

The audience-based program evaluation form for the exhibition was in constant evolution and changed considerably during the exhibition development process and even after the exhibition had opened. The 'Description' and 'Research Materials' sections really helped define the focus of the exhibition and sources of materials. In his experience with Guelph Museums' staff, Grant found that people have the most trouble with differentiating 'Objectives' and 'Outcomes.' The 'Leadership and Staffing' section was very important for everyone to understand their roles in this team-based project. Staff return to the 'Evaluation Tools' section following the close of the exhibition. This section of the template underlines that the form has a life far beyond its initial composition. Guelph Museums also added an 'Impacts' section, which is very important for follow-up.

Guelph Museums staff uses this form for all exhibitions, special events, and fundraising projects. It enables them to improve events and exhibitions through using the 'Impacts' section. For example, prior to a repeat event, they always get out last year's form and look at staff comments. A summary of such comments is placed on the preparation form for this year's event. Similarly, for board fundraising projects, it is very important to have down in words what the goals of the project are and how staff will know if it has been successful.

In summary …

It is probably fair to assume that most museums, large and small, know that evaluation is a good thing; but not only will it be an endeavour with which most museum staff have little experience, it will be one more task to find time for among cataloguing projects, event planning and writing media releases. If they have not been involved in anything more than counting bodies through the turnstiles, contemplating formal evaluation of exhibits, events and/or general operation can be very intimidating.

However, at the end of this project each museum partner articulated the following important learnings from the audience-based program evaluation:

- Early 'buy in' from core museum staff is essential to institute performance measures at a museum site. Once staff 'buy in' and

audience-based performance measures templates are in place, measuring performance should be easy.

- While the time commitment required for this performance measurement system can present challenges for smaller museum operations, the effort is well worth it. With limited resources, it is important when embarking on this exercise to identify what is important to measure, attempting to measure 'key things, not all things,' and asking two things: 'What would museum staff like to improve?' and 'How do we measure up?'
- To reap benefits from the performance measures system, it is crucial to be prepared to report and share the results in a consistent format (as the Guelph Museums and partners have developed in their Audience-based Program Evaluation template) with stakeholders, such as board, staff, members, volunteers, and funders.
- In adopting this system, museum staff must be prepared to take action towards improvement and to plan for future measurement activities in order for performance measurement to be a worthwhile investment of scarce resources and time.
- This is not only an effecting planning tool, it is also a crucial communication tool so that the entire team knows what is going on in other people's heads as museum staff prepare for events.

The museum professionals in this partnership have worked together for years, and highly respect and value one another. They have made very important contributions to their local and regional communities, as well as provincial and national museum associations. Meeting/workshops helped the group better understand the important contributions that community museums make to their local neighbourhoods. The project also demonstrated how museums can work together to develop and market meaningful programs across a region. Each museum now has a better sense of how important audience-based performance measures can be for evaluating visitor response to exhibitions, special events, and programs and staff have tools for reporting these responses to stakeholders and funding agencies statistically and anecdotally. The audience-based performance measures templates and impressive statistical reports that staff has learned how to produce are testimonials to the commitment each partner museum has made and will continue to make to this performance measures process.

Notes

[1] There were also materials from a pre-conference workshop Soren attended at the American Association of Museums 2002 Conference in Dallas, TX, that Karen Motylewski from ILMS facilitated on *Measuring Outcomes: Showing the Difference You Make*. Materials included a Logic Model for Outcome-Based Evaluation for ILMS Grant Projects and important resources.

[2] Weil (2003) further elaborated on Outcome-Based Evaluation in *Museum News*. He argues for the importance of evaluating a museum's worthiness by examining 'the positive and intended differences that it makes in the lives of the individuals and communities that constitute its target audience.' For Weil, the critical issue is how such differences can 'become and remain an institution's central focus' (p. 42).

Acknowledgements

This audience-based program evaluation project was made possible through the generous support of the Museums Assistance Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage and the respective municipal employers of Wellington County Museum & Archives, Doon Heritage Crossroads, Guelph Museums, and Heritage Collection - City of Waterloo. During 2003-2004, the group presented at the Ontario Museum Association Conference in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, October 2003, and the Canadian Museums Conference in Quebec City, May 2004. The partners have also produced a CD that can be purchased form Laurence Grant at Guelph Museums for the modest charge of $5.00 (CAD). The CD contains the Audience-Based Program Evaluation template, examples of completed exhibition and special events forms, and some of the graphs, photographs and education program evaluation forms produced.

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Changing Perceptions of Early Childhood Museum Research

Dimitra Zapri

The discourse on the way children grow and learn in the western world is a relatively recent issue[1], which originates in the writings of 18th and 19th century thinkers such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, John Locke and Friedrich Froebel, and later in the sociological and psychological research of 20th century thinkers such as Jean Piaget, John Skinner and Lev Vygotsky. All these studies have emphasised more or less explicitly the complex nature of children's development and the significance of the early years in the human development process.

In the museum context, the significance of early childhood has also started to be recognised, although with some delay, since it is not until the 1990s that positive visiting experiences in the early years become more openly connected with sustained museum visitation in the future. Of course, the actual discourse and research on the relation between children and museums dates back to the late nineteenth century with the foundation of the first children's museums in the United States. It has since become more persistent roughly in the last thirty years, as a result of increasing reconsideration of the role of the museum as a learning setting for all, in the context of museum visitor studies and political claims for social inclusion and broadened accessibility of the learning resources. Nevertheless, this discourse, which aimed mainly at improving the quality provision in 'general public' museums[2] according to visitors' needs, has been referring to childhood in more generic terms, and the attempt to study more particularly young children in museums seems to be an increasing trend only in the last decade[3].

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how existing studies on early childhood in museums have led to suggest a research focus on the way young children perceive the museum setting. To address this purpose, we must first discuss the way existing studies regard the nature of early childhood and early visiting experiences, and the approaches to research these studies have adopted to explore young children as museum visitors. The issues that emerge from this discussion are the foundations for challenging the notion of 'museum learning' as a research focus, and for developing a new research question on young children's museum perceptions. This question has formed the basis of a doctoral research project in Greece, according to Urie Bronfenbrenner's *Ecology of Human Development* (1979).

1. Background studies in early childhood museum experiences

Reviewed studies on early childhood in 'general public' museums show that young children started to be regarded as a separate stage in childhood roughly in the 1990s, mainly in terms of exploring the agendas of family audiences in museums (Leichter *et al.,* 1989; Wood, 1990; Brûlé-Currie, 1991; Moussouri, 1997), while in the late 1990s and 2000s we find evidence

of a more specific interest in the way young children perceive and experience museums (Harris Qualitative, 1997; Moss, 1999; Piscitelli and Anderson, 2000; Graham, 2002). These studies have been carried out by researchers and museum professionals mainly based in Canada, Australia and Great Britain, deriving from art and education backgrounds and largely representing the work of education and curriculum studies departments or of specific museums.

Although the contribution of these studies is highly recognised, their actual range indicates that early childhood museum experiences are not only a recent issue in museum research, but that they are also geographically and culturally specific, while underrepresenting – quite unexpectedly – the views of early childhood and museum studies specialists. These limitations would possibly put into question the extent to which the nature and approach of these studies are pertinent to the characteristics of early childhood. Hence, it is important to examine the images that existing studies hold about young children and the nature of their museum experiences, and the approaches they adopt in order to research these experiences.

1.a. Perceptions of early childhood in museum research

The impression that is gained from background studies is that the image of young children in the museum context is closely related to the perceived role of the museum. It seems that the more the museum's mission is linked to knowledge transmission and formal schooling, the more children are thought of in a student capacity (e.g. Melton, 1936; Dansereau-Dorais, 1991). Likewise, the more the museums' role is linked to leisure experience and to social aims such as social/cultural inclusion and accessibility imperatives, the more young children are seen in their own right and in connection with other settings as part of their life experience (e.g. Moss, 1999; Anderson and Piscitelli, 2002).

The latter more comprehensive image is a significant achievement in museum research, since it seems to recognise the complexity of the nature of early childhood and the subsequent diversity of early visiting experiences. Opportunities and constraints in early museum experiences have been attributed both to developmental characteristics, such as the kinaesthetic and cooperative way of learning (Winstanley, 1967; Piscitelli, 2002; Graham, 2002), and to socio-cultural parameters, such as the impact of the family background on children's personality (Leichter *et al.,* 1989; Harris Qualitative, 1997; Moussouri, 1997). Ethical considerations are also taken into account, connecting early childhood, for example, to Children's Right Convention, especially to the articles 29-31 on children's right to education, play, recreation and enculturation (Piscitelli, 2002). This complex image of early childhood, which is also in line with current trends in early childhood educational research (Anning and Edwards, 1999; Aubrey *et al.,* 2000), clearly dispels other single-sided images of children regarding them, for example, as a homogeneous group sharing the same baggage in terms of school visits (Dansereau-Dorais, 1991).

It seems, however, that images of childhood in the museum context are open to assumptions of the kind that young children are happy and enthusiastic museum visitors (Spencer, 1974; Piscitelli and Anderson, 2000), perhaps in an attempt to restore the special grace of early childhood. As such views are not supported by evidence from rigorous research they tend to generalise an image to any type of museum and any type of child background, disregarding the element of diversity, sometimes to the limit of 'ethnocentrism'[4]. Besides, even when views on the nature of early childhood are based on some evidence, they still run the risk of being reduced to assumptions, especially if the supporting evidence has been challenged by later findings. For example, Piscitelli and Anderson (2000) argued that young children have a limited ability to communicate and understand, based on Jean Piaget's theory and on earlier museum research findings, despite the fact that Piaget's views have already been challenged and reviewed in the light of developmental psychology findings in the 1970s and 1980s (Bower, 1977; Donaldson, 1978; Cox, 1986)[5].

1.b. Perceptions of early childhood museum experiences in research

The aforementioned variety in scope that is identified in the constructed images of early childhood is also evident in the research focus of existing studies in early childhood museum experiences. The focus of reviewed resources ranges from assessing the adequacy of museum provision for young children (Heywood, 1970; Moss, 1999); to studying the effectiveness of educational programmes (Brûlé-Currie, 1991; Filiatrault, 1991) and the learning impact of the museum setting and its exhibits (Piscitelli, 2002; Anderson *et al.,* 2002); or to exploring the influence of young children's background and of the visit context on the quality of the museum experience (Moussouri, 1997; Harris Qualitative, 1997; Anderson *et al.,* 2000; 2001). The first three examples refer to the outcomes of the museum visit and are typical of exhibit evaluation projects, whereas the latter refers to the processes entailed in the museum visit itself and is typical of in-depth audience research.

The functional distinction between outcome-focused and process-focused studies might be less clear-cut than it seems, since both types can be used as complementary and ultimately serve as evaluation tools for existing museum practice. The starting point of the studies, however, indicates different ways in perceiving the nature of the visiting experience and the role of young children in this. Thus, when outcome-focused studies set out to assess whether intended messages are successfully communicated, or what young children have learnt from their museum visit, there seems to underlie a four-fold assumption: that museums are fields where messages are immediately transmitted; that young children's experience**s** consists in immediately receiving these messages on a 'hit-or-miss' path (Hedge, 1995); that young children can demonstrate what they learned, immediately after their visit; and that these immediate accounts from young children demonstrate, in turn, the quality of the visiting experience. On the other hand, a process-focused study, setting out to explore the impact of young children's background and of the visit context on the quality of the visiting experience, seems to be underpinned

by a different rationale: that young children have their own 'baggage' of socio-cultural experiences and personal abilities and interests; that young children's museum visits always occur in a certain social context, like family or school; that this 'baggage' and context influence the way young children understand the museum experience; and that the visiting experience acquires a personal significance according to young children's understanding. While the former set of assumptions shows a linear visiting experience leading to a measurable result, the latter describes a constructive visiting process, where meanings are negotiated between the visitor and the museum, and messages are interpreted accordingly (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; 1999; Hein, 1995; 1998; Falk and Dierking, 2000).

Although both approaches can reflect a different side of the coin, it is the constructivist and contextual approach that led to an array of significant realisations about early childhood museum experiences. First, young children's museum experiences are multigenerational, involving interactions with other people, like teachers, parents and siblings, where decisions about the pace and the content of the visit, and, consequently, the degree of leadership[6], depend on the nature of relationship between these people (Leichter *et al.,* 1989; Moussouri, 1997; Harris Qualitative, 1997; Moss, 1999; Piscitelli, 2002)[7]. Second, the quality of young children's visiting experiences is not essentially connected with certain types of exhibits, like hands-on exhibits (Moussouri 1997)[8], but it rather depends on how closely the museum experience links to young children's developmental potential and life experience (Harris Qualitative, 1997; Graham, 2002; Anderson and Piscitelli, 2002; Anderson *et al.,* 2002). Third, the nature of children's museum experiences might not just be, after all, an educational experience different from adults' experiences (Melton *et al.,* 1936; Dansereau-Dorais, 1991), since the way children contextualise their museum experience, that is, the way they understand it according to their ability and life context, seems to be very similar **to** adults' contextualisation processes (Winstanley, 1967; Pittman-Gelles, 1981; Anderson and Piscitelli, 2002). Finally, young children's museum experiences are linked with the development of life-long museum interest, and they are regarded as a significant element that influences the nature and frequency of future visitation (Heywood, 1970; Piscitelli, 2000).

However, although existing research seems to recognise the complexity of young children's museum experience, it cannot resist the simplistic assumptions that museums are unique learning settings and that museum visits are happy experiences (Spencer, 1974). Such assumptions might promote the value of museums in a competitive leisure industry, but they can hardly be founded solely on some presumed innate happiness in early childhood (Spencer, 1974; Piscitelli and Anderson, 2000); on children's responses to specially designed educational projects (Spencer, 1974; Filiatrault, 1991; Piscitelli, 2002), on some 'magic transformation' occurring through children's contact with exhibits (Pittman-Gelles, 1981: 3); or on the museum experiences of middle-class children (Piscitelli, 2001). Questions on what makes museum visits a unique leisure experience, who finds this experience unique and under what circumstances, still remain to be explored.

1.c. Research approaches to early childhood museum experiences

The element of complexity in the current perceptions of early childhood and early childhood museum experiences reveals a post-modern view on human nature and behaviour, according to which the idea of absolute truth cedes to the existence of multiple subjective perspectives. This view is clearly reflected in the research approaches of the majority of the reviewed studies, such as case studies and qualitative, naturalistic and collaborative research (e.g. Moussouri, 1997; Moss, 1999; Piscitelli, 2002; Anderson *et al.,* 2002), which are more introspective and serve to examine observed facts in more depth[9]. Based on theoretical frameworks, like phenomenology and social constructivism, which recognise the influence of individual and social factors on the development of meaning, these research approaches underpin the combination of research methods, that allows researchers to study a situation from multiple perspectives (e.g. Moussouri, 1997; Piscitelli and Anderson, 2000; 2001; Anderson *et al*., 2001; 2002).

This post-modern research approach to studying early childhood museum experiences consists a considerable attempt to control any shortcomings inherent to individual research methods, which may adversely influence the quality and depth of collected data – especially when additional developmental constraints in early childhood are into effect, like limited repertoire of means of self-expression, short attention span and concrete thinking. Instances of such method-related pitfalls, which are also stressed in other early childhood-related areas, like developmental and educational research, might be the bias of pre-established hypotheses in experimental research (Bower, 1977; Donaldson, 1978; Cox, 1986)[10]; the adult interviewer's authority and the abstract properties of verbal communication in interviews (Donaldson, 1978; Cox, 1986; Fairchild, 1991; Hooper-Greenhill and Moussouri, 2001); dubious interpretations and inadequate sensorimotor skills on the part of young children in the case of drawing (Cox, 1986); and the difficulty to grasp the underlying 'hidden' context of young children's actions in field observations (Friedman, 1979; Aubrey *et al.,* 2000). Ultimately, post-modern research approaches in their ideal form might be the key to address the issue of uncertainty[11] and the claim for objectivity[12] that prevail in socio-cultural research.

Despite this research rationale that seems sophisticated and promising, there is, however, one paradox: assumptions about the nature of early childhood museum experiences still exist. The generalisations about young children's images and the nature of their museum experiences, which were pinpointed in the previous sections, were founded on biased sampling of participants or of museums, and on preconceptions about young children's developmental characteristics. The findings of surveys on visitor agendas (e.g. Harris Qualitative, 1997), which are based on the views of distinct social groups with different level of familiarisation with the museum setting and about different types of museums, do not seem to be critically integrated in more recent process-focused studies on young children's museum experiences. Likewise, the assertion that museum visits are unique learning experiences still persists, without a rigorous definition of learning that could

support the interpretation of young children's museum experiences, and despite serious suggestions that the question should not be whether museum visits lead to attitudinal changes or learning, but whether they help maximise young children's developmental potential[13].

Apparently, there is a discrepancy between the research rationale and the actual research process in studying early childhood museum experiences. The claim for in-depth research risks to be reduced to a mission that begins and ends in revisiting museum provision in order to enhance the visiting experience – the value of the museum itself in the broader sociocultural context is taken for granted; participants' responses are scarcely challenged; and the relevance of museums to children's lives is rarely, if ever, questioned. Hence, the post-modern notions of relativity and complexity seem to dissolve in favour of a pre-established consensus (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999) and presumed uniformity, while researcher's reflexivity[14] tends to be covered by an array of self-fulfilling prophecies. Whether this tendency is a sign of 'egocentrism' (in the Piagetian sense)[15], 'ethnocentrism' or globalisation is premature to say, but it certainly raises the question of researcher's responsibility.

2. Research focus: from 'museum learning' to 'museum perceptions'

The first part of this paper attempted to critically review the kinds of perceptions existing studies hold about the nature of early childhood and of early childhood experiences in museums. This review has demonstrated, on the one hand, that studies tend to adopt gradually more post-modern perceptions, which embrace the complexity of human nature and experience. This tendency is in line with other early childhood-related areas, like developmental psychology and educational research, and with current theoretical trends in museum studies, like constructivism and contextualism. On the other hand, this post-modern trend does not seem to be fully employed and developed in the actual research practice and analysis, since studies communicate more or less explicitly certain assumptions and generalisations that conflict their epistemological rationale and they are not essentially supported by their findings.

An intriguing issue that emerges from the research approaches of the aforementioned studies refers to what will be regarded here as 'the museum learning assumption'. The learning assumption is frequently encountered, as shown above, in the form of a claim for researching museum learning or for viewing the museum as a unique and positive learning experience. Apart from the question of uniqueness, which has already been presented in the first part, this claim raises at least a couple more questions related to research practice: the pertinence of researching learning in the museum, and the definition of a positive museum experience.

That learning is an on-going, multi-faceted and experience-based process involving the dynamic interaction of personal, environmental and political

factors, has already been acknowledged in museum studies, not only in those focused on early childhood museum experiences, as shown above, but also –and more significantly– in an array of conceptual works, like those of George Hein, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, John Falk and Lynn Dierking. The problem really begins with the appearance of such labels as 'museum learning', even more so when these labels are used as a museum research basis.

In order to discuss the museum learning assumption, let us first refer to the notion of learning in educational and psychological research. When researchers and practitioners in education and psychology, like Maria Montessori, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky and John Skinner, started during the first half of the twentieth century to explore learning processes in the developing person, they had set out from quite different epistemological credos, but they had similar concerns: to demystify how children learn and to adapt their learning theories to formal education, so that children develop a set of transferable skills for the future. They had also realised that formal education, that gradually became more generalised around the world, was a considerable part of children's daily routine for a significant length of time. School years, as a compulsory and systematic experience along with other socio-cultural and personal factors, would inevitably leave their traces on the quality and way of one's learning. This practically meant that researching an on-going phenomenon, such as learning, would be pertinent to formal education institutions, that provide a continuous learning experience covering the most critical years in a person's development.

But is researching learning as pertinent to museums as it is to schools? The answer to this question would be positive, if museum experience was as generalised and systematic in children's daily routine as schools are, but the current world reality and museum studies with non-visitors, such as the Harris Qualitative survey (1997), clearly show that this is not the case. The fact that the museum culture may be expanded in the United States, Canada and Great Britain, for example, does not mean that this is so for other socio-political and cultural contexts in the rest of the world, or that museums are even relevant to all the people living within these areas. In any case, museums are culturally specific leisure settings, where attendance – if at all possible – is optional and occasional, thus making it difficult to assess in the long-term any significant changes[16] in the dynamic, complex and continuous process of learning.

This difficulty becomes even greater when researching childhood, a critical period of exploration, rapid changes and subtle brain connections, where in lack of systematic experiences??, it is hard to decide on the learning significance and persistence of changes occurring in a leisure setting. Hence, in order to study learning events occurring in a museum in terms of young children's visits, it is essential to undertake longitudinal and anthropological research, taking into account the particular contexts where both children and museums develop. For children live and grow in their own socio-cultural environment – including basically their family, school, and friends – and

museums are part of a political ideology, that is symbolically integrated in the act of collecting and displaying (Hodge and D'Souza, 1979; Duncan, 1991). This need for longitudinal and contextual research might sound as common sense for the post-modern spirit of the 21st century, but in research practice some confusion still exists, as it is clearly illustrated in the longitudinal comprehensive research agenda of Piscitelli and Anderson launched in 2000. Their agenda, which is apparently the most early-childhood-focused museum work so far, endorses the social-constructivist paradigm, but surprisingly the components of learning it sets out to examine (that is, the child, the museum, exhibitor's and curator's intentions, and the programme of the museum) are totally museum-based – children's broader social environment is absent as a learning factor.

As long as museums are culturally and geographically specific leisure options, researching learning in its broad sense, as presented above, seems to be an over-ambitious and far-reaching project. Hence, the term 'museum learning' sounds as a contradiction *per se*. A research alternative to the museum learning assumption, however, may exist in certain views that derive from texts focusing on the issue of museum provision for families and children. Carefully avoiding any generalised use of the term 'learning', these views choose to link the museum with personal agendas and 'cultural itineraries' (Moussouri, 1997); with developing positive images about the museum (Moss 1999); with the sense of ownership (Graham, 2002; Anderson *et al.,* 2001); and with opportunities to maximise a child's developmental potential (Breuse, 1991; Graham, 2002)[17]. Indicating a people-centred approach, all these features imply that museum attendance (if possible), as well as the kind and quality of the museum experience, depend on visitors' needs, abilities and socio-cultural background. This idea is fully supported by Chamberland (1991: 72), who suggests that exploring personal meanings says more about the nature of the museum experience than museum-centred approaches and school-learning findings could say. It follows then that museum learning is neither an essential part of visitors' – or non-visitors' – agenda, nor an essential question in museum research. Instead, the research focus could now shift to the way visitors – or non-visitors' – perceive the museum setting and the nature of the museum experience.

The issue of museum perceptions[18] in early childhood museum experiences has already appeared as 'museum perspectives' in Barbara Piscitelli and David Anderson's article 'Young Children's Perspectives of Museum Settings and Experiences' (2001). The article approaches young children's museum perspectives rather descriptively, referring to memories, impressions and connections with children's life-context. However, in the *Perceptual World of the Child* (1977) Tom Bower provides a more psychological explanation of perceptions, which is necessary, if perceptions are to form a basis for research practice. More specifically, Bower (1977: 7) defines perception 'as any process by which we gain immediate awareness of what is happening outside ourselves'. As children grow, their perceptual abilities become more concrete and 'perceptions become more meaningful through memory and knowledge' (Bower 1977: 25). Bower (1977: 84) also states that in the course of time

Perception becomes less and less important […]. The information provided by our senses stays relatively constant throughout development. The way we interpret it changes.

In other words, as knowledge increases, so does the ability to manipulate the meaning of any perceived information. In early childhood, however, where knowledge is still at lower levels, perception is the most significant way for young children to explore and understand the world, and the perceived information – or perceptions – are almost free of bias. Given this dimension of perceptions, it would be interesting for museum researchers to explore children's perceptions in juxtaposition with their parents' respective perceptions. The results would probably be quite revealing about family interactions.

Let us emphasise, at this point, that any positive museum perceptions should not essentially be interpreted as positive learning experiences. According to John Dewey (1963), positive learning experiences have to fulfil certain criteria. Briefly, a positive learning experience is produced by an interaction between a person and their environment, and also produces some change to the environment; it is conducive to continuing growth and to the development of habits, attitudes and self-control in decision-making and problem-solving; and it consists the moving force for further positive experiences. Dewey's perception of positive experiences resembles Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's notion of 'flow experience' (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson, 1995), but where Csikszentmihalyi stresses an 'immediate aspect of agreeableness' (in Dewey's terms), Dewey stresses the element of continuity of experience in a person's life context and its influence upon later experiences. Therefore, there is a great distance between perceptions and learning.

Nevertheless, a focus on perceptions may be more pertinent to researching early childhood in museums than a focus on learning. As it was shown above, a claim to research 'museum learning' might be problematic and over-ambitious, since the scope of learning is too wide for a setting, which, in most cases, is still a leisure setting of occasional attendance. Besides, a 'museum learning' focus risks to lead to museum-centred approaches, which would be culturally inappropriate, since museum is not a generalised cultural phenomenon or learning option around the world. We read in Piscitelli (2002): 'start your learning mission with the young and grow with them' – but will the young be able and willing to equally grow with museums? On the other hand, researching museum perceptions not only seem to be a research focus that is more suitable for young children's needs and abilities, but is also, by definition, a people-centred issue, that is free of any preconceptions about the value of museums as learning or leisure settings.

This innovative research focus is currently employed in terms of a doctoral study on the development of museum perceptions in early childhood. The study aims to explore how young children perceive the notion of museum through a series of different types of visits to different types of museums. This study and the respective field research that is currently conducted in

Thessaloniki, Greece, are based on Urie Bronfenbrenner's *Ecology of Human Development* (1979). The Ecology of Human Development is a theoretical and research framework, which has often been cited in educational research (Anning and Edwards, 1999; Aubrey *et al.,* 2000; Lewis and Lindsay, 2000), but is innovative in museum research (for, in Dewey's terms again, a new order of conceptions should also lead to new modes of practice). This framework offers a systemic and systematic approach of human development in relation to the settings where this development occurs, and it practically means that the study should take into account, as far as possible, every setting and person that are involved in the child's experience (in this case, the museum and its staff, the family and the school). This is definitely a challenging task, both for the researcher and the participants, but it will hopefully contribute to examining the relation between museums and societies in its true dimensions.

Notes

[1] According to Aubrey (Aubrey *et al*., 2000: 21), child psychology as a separate discipline was founded just a century ago.

[2] The term *'general public' museum* is used arbitrarily here to denote an institution (potentially) open to various types of audience and distinct from children's museums, which are by definition positively biased towards childhood and child-centred in their mission and rationale. There is also a broader debate on whether children's museums are eligible to be called 'museums' or not, given that they are not based on collections. This debate is beyond the scope of the paper, but for practical reasons, the museum definition that we adopt here sees collections as a basic feature of the museum institution and is believed to cover the majority of museums beyond the States.

[3] This realisation is clearly reflected in a bibliographic review on museum learning by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill and Theano Moussouri, who state that young children have been underrepresented in museum research (Hooper-Greenhill and Moussouri, 2001: 28)

[4] According to Aubrey (2000: 27-8) ethnocentrism is to 'take for granted the dominant model or theory of childhood and childrearing in any one culture as a measure against which to judge others'. The issue of 'ethnocentrism' is particularly relevant to museum audience research, which studies people from diverse backgrounds in a setting that is a western-culture product.

[5] According to Donaldson (1978), 'young children might not understand a word but can *understand situations*', as long as these are contextualised in a meaningful way, which reveals some human intention or feeling (p.24) and entails concrete reference points (e.g. in physical space). The opposite type of thinking is 'disembedded thinking', which 'does move beyond the boundaries [of human sense], so that it no longer operates within the supportive context of meaningful events' (Donaldson, 1978: 76). An example of this notion derives from the criticism on Piaget's experiment on young children's points of view using a model of three mountains, which the child

would be asked to see from different angles: 'The mountains task is abstract in a psychologically very important sense: in the sense that it is abstracted form all basic human purposes and feelings and endeavours. It is totally cold-blooded. In the veins of three-year-olds, the blood still runs warm' (Donaldson, 1978: 24). Cox (1986: 37-42) has also regarded Piaget's experiments on perspective as inappropriate for young children, because they are based on the use of a difficult vocabulary and they do not distinguish between *what* young children see and *how* they see it. Cox holds that *what* questions are more relevant to younger children than the *how* questions, whereas Piaget overemphasised the latter in his research questions addressed to young children.

[6] Research evidence shows that children often lead the adults to objects, exhibits and experiences that seem unusual to the adult (Piscitelli 2002). Also Cox (1986: 7), exploring parent-baby communication, states that this issue of leadership depends on the parent's flexibility and willingness to give initiative to the child.

[7] This realisation puts into question the assertion that museum experience is self-directed and visitors can follow their own pace, which has been stated, for example, in Winstanley (1967), Pittman-Gelles (1981) and Falk and Dierking (2000).

[8] Moussouri in her research focuses on hands-on exhibits as being designed for the purpose of responding to the needs of the families. However, recent research findings show that children seem to remember large-scale and non-interactive exhibits (e.g. transport and animals), thus challenging the impact of hands-on/ multisensory exhibits on forming positive visiting experiences (Piscitelli and Anderson, 2001; Anderson *et al.,* 2000). Besides, in a comparison between hands-on exhibits and play, Graham (2002: 44) regards hands-on as more closed-ended, providing 'a fact to learn and a principle to discover', while being based on abstract scientific phenomena. Instead, Graham considers play as more open-ended and relevant to past experiences and existing interests and fantasies of young children.

[9] This should not lead to the conclusion that quantitative approaches should be rejected. We read in Aubrey (2000: 34) that ' to reject totally the quantitative perspective is to lose all right to claim factuality for one's results; to reject totally the qualitative may lose one the right to claim meaning'.

[10] According to Lefebvre (1991: 124), the risk of a visit primarily driven by pre-existing interests, preconceptions and assumptions is to limit the scope of knowledge. Likewise, the same risk exists when museum research is driven by hypotheses and predetermined patterns, which may affect the degree of children's understanding of experimental conditions and the degree of objectivity in analysing children's responses (Cox 1986: 12). This issue goes back to the 1970s, when the validity of tests employed to measure children's educational performance was questioned. Aubrey (2000: 33) writes that 'the way children interpret test questions could differ from those intended by the researcher, resulting in test items failing to measure what they were designed to do'.

[11] Emphasising the principle of uncertainty, Barret (1991: 130) accepts that the most certain thing is the fact that the observer transforms the object of their observation.

[12] This claim refers to selecting a research approach according to a rigorous evidence-based practice (Aubrey *et al.,* 2000) and not just because it is felt that it will be good for children (Platten, 1976).

[13] Moss (1999, 60) states that, since for many children it will be their first visit to a museum, they often have few 'preconceived ideas', so it is not about changing their attitudes, but creating a positive image of a place, where they have been thought about and would like to return. Moreover, Graham (2002, 47) holds that 'museums should not be asking whether young children are learning or playing, since children learn something through everything they do, but whether the activities they are designing are rich enough learning opportunities to maximise the child's potential'. This view is also in line with Breuse's claim (1991: 92) for providing more opportunities for better visiting experiences that can enrich the process of individual development.

[14] Aubrey (2000: 5) defines 'reflexivity' as the awareness 'of one's own potential influence on the research process, as a result of one's standpoint and assumptions'. Likewise, Fairchild (1991: 145) also refers to the need of distinguishing between things occurring spontaneously and experimentally.

[15] Egocentrism is to take our personal point of view (both literally and metaphorically) for granted (Donaldson, 1978)

[16] In psychology, learning refers to any changes in personality (emotional, physical, intellectual etc.) that persist in time, and are manifested through a set of behaviours, which are retrievable in problem-solving and decision-making. Behaviours may be modified through maturation and experience, but these modifications are only valid when they are functional and systematic. For museum research this practically means that learning cannot just be assessed through memories and impressions during or after a museum visit, as it has happened in the vast majority of museum learning research (see Hooper-Greenhill and Moussouri, 2001, for an effective overview of museum learning research). Situated changes that are specific to a moment and place could obviously evolve into functional learning and persistent attitudes, but the experience of hundred years of psychological research shows that learning generalisations could only be attempted through a continuous assessment of responses to repeated stimuli over a long period of time.

[17] See note 13 for details

[18] The term 'perception' here is used here as the ability to see, hear and understand, while the same term in plural is used to denote the actual way of seeing and understanding, or the point of view. In the latter sense, 'perceptions' are similar to 'perspectives'.

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