

Socializing Art Museums

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SOCIALIZING ART MUSEUMS

Rethinking the Publics' Experience

DE GRUYTER

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ALEJANDRA ALONSO TAK AND ÁNGEL PAZOS-LÓPEZ

TO OPEN UP ART MUSEUMS TO A MORE SOCIAL APPROACH

An Introduction

The concept of art museums and galleries, as we understand it nowadays, is between two and three centuries old. Art institutions have been major witnesses of History and have adapted to political, economic and social changes. Having as fundamental missions to preserve, do research on and share their collections, they have remained places for the encounter between art and people. More recently, as we will see in the following chapters, museums have participated in the forging of contemporary society after the two World Wars. They engaged with values such as nationalism, which later on were abandoned for a more globalized inclusive vision. Today, a more social model is being requested by museums' visitors. Museums professionals -curators, educators, as well as security or services staff- are raising awareness on the diversity of audiences' profiles and are actively contributing to the opening of the museum to a more social approach. How are museums' professionals doing this? Have we achieved to understand universal accessibility? What will come next? Should we redefine the museum's mission? What do audiences want? To answer these and many other questions, this monography introduces five lines of inquiry to define the role of museums as vehicles of social change, agents in the educational process and even as technological innovation platforms applied to museography and communication. A corpus of original studies reflects about the increasingly active role of art museums amid the rise of social, educational, inclusive and innovative consciousness and action in cultural institutions. Hence, beginning with the museum(s)-public(s) binomial, several new forward-looking actions are presented, identifying the museum as one of the tools of the cultural sector that contributes to socio-economic stability and the development of universal accessibility.

A greater understanding of the public, both as receivers and creators of knowledge, in addition to their needs as individuals and members of a community, falls in with the global social evolution of these first decades of the 21st Century.

Therefore, *Socializing Art Museums* is meant to be a relevant and academic tool that offers different studies from a multidisciplinary perspective, looking to divulge some of the international initiatives and solutions sought in recent years. It attempts to offer a plurality of views to map the missions that the 21st century museum must assume. Hence, both renowned and emerging researchers and professionals of Museums and Arts, ranging from art historians, educators and exhibition curators to technologists, museum conservators, architects and psychologists, offer a cross-sectional analysis with theoretical proposals that will be developed through practical case studies.

This multidisciplinary work allows us to achieve a global vision on certain museological trends that are being developed in different countries and cultures sharing the common goal of making art more accessible to people via increasingly flexible and inclusive museums. This stance has aimed for a balance between theory and practice to facilitate understanding to all national and international museum professionals, as well as researchers in the field of Art History and Arts Management.

It is clearly unachievable to encompass all innovations that are taking place nowadays; therefore, these lines of inquiry must be completed with many other examples about the connection between art institutions and their social environment.

A five-parts structure is presented. In each part, chapters develop issues related to the abovementioned contemporary challenges faced by museology and museography.

The first section, "Museums and Audiences in the 21st Century", addresses the frame-question of this monography: what is the museums' role nowadays? Several chapters analyse the social shift of their mission and how museums are putting audiences in the core of their reflections, both in terms of museology and museography. Studies on audiences and museums, so necessary in these days, offer a reflection on the relationship and the link that is established between visitors and the activities organised by the institution. Therefore, the success of museums' cultural policies lies in the better understanding of its publics, allowing them to anticipate and adapt some measures and adopt some new ones, attempting to integrate audiences' needs and interests. Nevertheless, they are the genuine protagonist of the museological reality

One of the main pillars of today's new museology is its educational and universal access mission. Our second section, "Education Strategies in Museums", aims at questioning the social approach of pedagogy in museums, in addition to reflecting on the viability of this cohesive role attributed to the museum, as an element of society.

Thirdly, in "Museums as Forums for Citizenship", it is tackled the question on how the museum can act as a foundation for critical thinking, taking advantage of museums' reach across their communities. The origin of museum activism and examples of good practices in museums that show a social commitment and a consciousness shift are analysed. As a result, museums are revealed to be potential catalysts for social change through the reflection triggered by the exhibition of objects that are rich in symbolism. The ensemble of works suggests a revision of the shift in the mission of the museum, going beyond its educational role to embark on a socially engaged philosophy. How did museums engage with its societal context in the past? What are the causes that require museums' engagement today?

A very specific engagement is universal accessibility, with a particular focus on audiences with cognitive or physical diversity. The section "Accessibility in Museums" presents several actions seeking inclusion and accessibility, in the broader sense of both concepts. Art becomes a tool to encourage participation and integration of individuals within the community and the museum becomes a therapeutic tool and space for the diversity of audiences. It also becomes a platform that recognizes the rights of groups that wish to augment the echoes of their voices through culture and heritage.

"Rethinking Spaces in Museums" is the section that closes our monography, offering a deep reflection on how spaces influence and have great impact on visitors' museum experience. The

evolution and development of some of the unique exhibitional objects that have been present in the museum since its genesis is explored, covering their practical use and experimenting with all of the sensorial potential the museum can offer to its visitors. From the architecture to the showcase, what innovations can improve the perception and rapport between the public and the artwork?

As mentioned before, the monograph is composed of individual studies which offer a specific insight on the social role of museums.

In the first chapter, *Museums in a Globalized World*, Hans-Martin Hinz, former president of the ICOM, gives an overview on the history of museums' engagement with society and their essential role as agents in processes of reconciliation, illustrating it with examples from Japan or New Zealand. Also, he analyses the theoretical frame on which museums have based their actions. By the end of the 20th century, museums lived under the sign of the "Second Modernity" or "Reflexive Modernization". Main characteristics were increasing individualization, receding significance of the nation-state and globalization. However, cyclic as History is, some scholars are seeing features of a "regressive modernity" that may lead to a renationalization. What is the role of museums in this succession of changes?

In order to answer this question, museums need to know the people they serve. Who are its audiences and what do they demand and expect from them. In addition, in times of austerity, efficiency is particularly sought and undoubtedly needful. Audiences studies become an essential tool to get to understand from multiple perspectives the museum visitor. These studies are being carried out in different fields, such as health, sustainable development, sociology, etc. as they are proving the positive impact of peoples' participation in cultural activities. *Best Practices in Visitors Studies*, by the Coordinator of the LPPM (Laboratorio Permanente de Público de Museos), Eloísa Pérez Santos, gives us an approach on how evaluation is being implemented in Spanish museums, encouraged by international organisms.

In connection to this issue, in the following chapter *Transformations in Museums from the Audience's Perception*, Iñigo Ayala, Macarena Cuenca-Amigo and Jaime Cuenca, from University of Deusto, analyses what is the visitors' perspective on the changes museums are both facing and implementing. Has the elitist perception that Bordieu attributed to museums changed? Does the frequency of visit affect the public's vision or experience in the museum? He gives us a very interesting insight on what people think a museum is for: leisure, a place where to participate within the community or, simply, a waste of time.

Undoubtedly, technology has changed the way in which we all interact with the museum. Álvaro Notario Sánchez, researcher at the University of Castilla-La Mancha, explains in his chapter *From the Public Museum to the Virtual Museum* how no so long ago, the appearance of the internet was seen as a threat to cultural institutions. However, websites, images databases, social media, etc. are nowadays seen as basic tools of communication for them. These digital tools make the museum accessible from anywhere in the world, any day, anytime, regardless physical barriers. The original fear of the "virtual museum" being in competition with the "social museum" has been mitigated -hopefully eradicated- thanks to the use museums professionals have made of the former. The "virtual museum" is an excellent exchange database where museums can complete their informative and educative mission, and a place where the public can participate and interact via the social media through the activities available online.

The chapter *Seducing Audiences* closes this section. In it, Luis Walias Rivera, professor-tutor at UNED Cantabria, brings us the case of the Centro Botín in Santander, which has precisely developed a very strong strategy on visitors' studies and using digital tools in order to attire the public. The information collected by these tools allowed the institution to accurately target potential audiences and foster their loyalty by tailoring the way to address to them. Is this marketing strategy an alternative to museums management? Can Mediterranean idiosyncrasy successfully implement Anglo-Saxon models?

As seen before, the second section addresses education and pedagogy. Alice Semedo, assistant professor at the University of Porto, offers us in *Border Pedagogy and Empowerment Education in Museums* a fantastic reflection on the challenges of education praxis in museums. The educator represents the museum's ethics and deontology. Contemporary pedagogy stands for a horizontal transmission of knowledge in which the educator must build a speech taking into account visitors' backgrounds, experiences and profile. In order to explain this, Alice Semedo introduces the concept of "metacognition": thinking about owns and others thinking. The complexity of this praxis lays on the numerous elements that must be integrated in the discourse from both the museum and the visitor: values, beliefs, political stands, engagements, etc.

In the next chapter, *Accessible Museums: Vision or Reality?*, Nicole Gesché-Koning, Honorary Professor at the Royal Art Academy Brussels, dares to question us all if universal accessibility is reachable. As she exposes, this is not a new issue, as many pioneering experiences had been carried out in Belgium, rediscovering us the figure of 16th century museologist Samuel Quiccheberg. This tradition has led to very interesting actions in many Belgian museums, which have had remarkable results in terms of connecting museums with their communities, both local and international. A particular example mentioned in this chapter is developed in the following one: *Museum at Home*, by Stéphanie Masuy, Head of Education at the Musée d'Ixelles. It shows us how a museum can take advantage of a close-for-renovation period. A time that we could associate with less activity for pedagogic actions can be an opportunity to engage differently with the local community. They have succeeded to create a strong bond with the museum's neighbours by giving them the opportunity to engage personally with the artworks. They become ambassadors of the museum's collection by hosting an artwork in their own homes, allowing them to live an exceptional artistic experience.

The section "Museums as Forums for Citizenship" begins with the chapter *New York City's Art Museum and Activism*, by Martina Majewska (DESA Unicum Warsaw). In it, she scrutinizes how activism has interacted with museums and vice versa: the recognition of activism by the museum, the "artistifaction" of these movements, the image of the museum as personification of the state, the involvement of the citizenship in issues as *dirty money*... This all embodies the idea of the museum as a forum and no longer a temple.

In this line, *The museum as a Potential Space*, by Marián López Fernández Cao, researcher at the Art education and Art Therapy Department of the Complutense University of Madrid, continues with a critic on how museums become spaces where audiences can read and experience further than the traditional art history description of the objects. The role of the museum as vehicle of a given discourse is precisely essential in this sense: they become providers of experiences and, as she says quoting Montpetit: products are tangible, services intangible and experiences, memorable.

Also highlighting the relevance of the museum discourse on its collection, Carolina Peral (Complutense University of Madrid) shares her research on the different approaches driven by History of Art on art representing women and art made by women through the centuries. In *Museums and Violence Against Women*, she brings up some examples of uncomplete or unfair discourses on a selection of artworks.

The last chapter, *The Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups in University Museums*, illustrates an evaluation on the accessibility of vulnerable groups (people with physical or mental handicaps, migrants, etc.). Tamara Bueno, Irene González and Rosaura Navajas, also from Complutense University of Madrid, tell us about the importance of having governmental laws and policies to guide and ensure universal accessibility. Also, the success when applying the RRI (Responsible Research and Innovation) model that proposes to plan accessibility with all stakeholders.

This last idea articulates next section, in which several examples of inclusive activities are brought up. The first chapter, *Research Strategies in Inclusive Museology with the Museo del Prado Collections*, by Ángel Pázos-López (Complutense University of Madrid) and Alejandra Alonso Tak (Ministry of Culture of France-Department of Public Policies), sums up the actions led by Consortium MUSACCES in terms of universal accessibility, not only in museums but also in the academic world. They have contributed to raising awareness and erasing barriers on accessibility studies in Art History Departments.

Secondly, *Close Your Eyes and Open Your Mind* insists on the importance of integrating concerned agents in accessible activities through a very interesting experience in the Vincenzo Vela Museum (Switzerland). In it, Marta Pucciarelli, Luca Morici and Jean-Pierre Candeloro (University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland) explains us how visually impaired people worked along with undergraduate students to make “visible” some artworks through the technique of narrative writing.

This section is closed by another extraordinary experience led by the Venancio Blanco Foundation (Spain): *The Museum as a Space for Individual and Collective Expression*, by María Victoria Martín Cilleros and Miguel Elías Sánchez Sánchez, professors at the University of Salamanca. This activity achieved that a group of people with Asperger syndrome and communication difficulties created a language through art, being able to express themselves and interact with other participants and visitors.

As mentioned before, last section reflects on the museum space. Alexandra Irimia (PhD student at the University of Western Ontario) introduces us to the concept, uses and versatility of the void in art in her chapter *Museums of the Void*. The experience of the visitor is determined by the void he or she inhabits in the exhibition and the interaction with it.

Interaction is also an essential element in the research carried out by David Gallardo López, Silbia Idoate and Patricia Navarro Cantón (LIME-Laboratory for Museographical Research and Experimentation Museums): *The 3.0 Showcase*. In times of austerity, their research seeks for a sustainable multi-task showcase that would enhance the artwork, allow an easier, immediate and broader access to information about it and become an interface for the visitor to where he or she would be able express about his/her experience in real time through the social media.

Last chapter of both this section and the monograph describes the research project LIME, in which his head of project, Juan Carlos Rico, gives us some *Final Reflections Laboratory for*

Museographical Research and Experimentation. He very honestly describes the difficulties in museology and museography research nowadays and encourages every museum professional to dare to go further and to be fearless about changes, evolution and mistakes.

We totally adhere to this way of thinking and working. Museums are run by and for people. Diversity is a richness on both sides of the board and even more when both sides meet. There is still much research to do and many lessons to be learnt. We hope this book inspires the people to approach museums as open, democratic and accessible spaces where they feel represented, safe and excited. The beauty of heritage resides in the eternal message it passes. Thousands of stories are woven among paintings, sculptures, books, architecture and many other objects. It is our task, as museums professionals, to listen to all the stories encapsulated in them and be capable of transmitting them to the largest audiences possible. It is our task, as museums professionals, to build new discourses with visitors and continue the ongoing mission of heritage. It is our task, as human beings, to understand that heritage belongs to us all, so we all should be able to enjoy it, participate of it and contribute to this endless storytelling for future generations. Socializing art museums is simply the logical evolution for these institutions created to serve humankind.

We did not want to end this chapter without dedicating a few lines to all those who have contributed to this project: professor in History of Art, José María Salvador González, Chair of the MUSACCES Consortium. He entrusted us the task of achieving the publication of this book. We thank him for his generosity and engagement, especially with young researchers, without which this book would not have been possible. We owe very much to Full Professor in Modern History at the Complutense University of Madrid, Teresa Nava Rodríguez, whose vision and trust has encouraged us all along the way. A very special mention to the restless work of Ana María Cuesta Sánchez, Director of Cabinet of the Academic Project Manager of MUSACCES Consortium. Her dedication, efficient management, support and diligence have helped us meet the quality and financial requirements for the accomplishment of this book. To Víctor Rabasco and Tomás Ibáñez, ex-researchers of our Consortium who worked as Codirector and Secretary of the International Conference "The limits of art in the Museum", which inspired us to edit this monography.

We also want to dedicate a few words to the institutions that welcomed our work: members of the MUSACCES Management Committee, who understood the importance of universal accessibility in museums and the social role of cultural institutions. This monography has been partly defrayed thanks to the aids programme in Humanities and Social Sciences S2015/HUM-3494 of the Autonomous Community of Madrid, co-funded by the European Social Fund.

To the Faculty of Geography and History of the Complutense University of Madrid, which hosted some of the activities that also contributed to the creation of this book. Without this open and democratic space for dialogue and reflection, this work would not have been possible. Our gratitude goes as well to the Publics Policies Department of the Ministry of Culture of France, who generously offered its expertise in audiences diversification in museums.

A very special thanks to all the authors: Iñigo Ayala Aizpuru, Tamara Bueno Doral, Jean-Pierre Candeloro, Jaime Cuenca, Macarena Cuenca-Amigo, Marián López Fernández Cao, David Galardo López, Nicole Gesché-Koning, Irene González Hernando, Silbia Idoate Pérez, Alexandra Irimia, Martyna Majewska, María Victoria Martín Cillerros, Hans-Martin Hinz, Stéphanie Masuy, Luca

Morici, Rosaura Navajas Seco, Patricia Navarro Cantón, Álvaro Notario Sánchez, Carolina Peral Jiménez, Eloísa Pérez Santos, Marta Pucciarelli, Juan Carlos Rico Nieto, Miguel Elías Sánchez Sánchez, Alice Semedo and Luis Walias Rivera. They all have shown endless patient with the editorial process, peer reviews and multiple corrections, but most importantly, they gave us their trust when invited to participate to this project. It is because of this silent labour that we also wanted to do some justice by expressing our gratitude to all peer reviewers. With their ideas and evaluation, they have contributed to substantially improve this work. May our gratitude also go to María Cattarini, María Teresa Roca de Togores and Silvia Santillán, for their generous and valuable help when translating and proofreading texts.

We must not forget those who have recently integrated our team: Sofía Gómez Robisco, who has efficiently led the Publishing and Communication Department in MUSACCES consortium; and Elvira Rodríguez Martín, who has helped us since the very first moment she joined us, few weeks ago. Together they accomplished the last proofreading of the manuscript, among other missions. Also, we want to thank the help offered by our team of assistants, grantees and interns, for being so understanding when time was scarce and the tasks, numerous. We want as well to express our affection to those who have been next to us. Without their support this book would not have been possible: Aarón, Ángeles, Buky, Claude, Eduardo, Florencia, Ignacio, José Manuel, Magdalena, Manuel, María, and Nicolás. They know very well how demanding the coordination of a book is. Finally, we must thank Anja Weisenseel and Arielle Thürmel, editorial staff at De Gruyter, who accompanied us through the editorial process. Without her patience, engagement and diligence this project would not have been successfully achieved.

To open up museums to a more social approach is not an easy task, as this ambitious book wants to show. We believe that main actors in this turn are museums professionals. They are the ones who work to achieve visitors' successful experiences and to place them in the core of museums' reflections. This work is addressed to them. Small museums, as much as large ones, have to innovate and take advantage of their specificities to be able to build a true experience for their public. Being away from the focus of the media, small museums count on their staff's professionalism and creativity. We hope some of the examples shown in this book will inspire them, offering new perspectives on what to do -and what not- in order to face the challenges that the 21st century is bringing. We wanted to share this book with them, alongside with professors, researchers and students who may find *Socializing art museums* of their interest. With this monography, we did not aim at bringing up universal solutions to the challenges abovementioned. On the contrary, we hope many questions will rise after reading it. It is in theirs and our hands to build the answers with the audiences.

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MUSEUMS AND AUDIENCES
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

MUSEUMS IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

Still in the Service of Society?

Introduction

In the past, cultural politics and museum development have been a tandem in the service of society¹. The support of cultural politics for museum-development followed the demand of being pro-active or reacting to social needs in times of uncertainties, rapid changes in everyday life and political crises in order to help stabilizing identities among the population.

From this point of view, museums can be seen as tools for realizing these overall political aims. However, museums understand themselves as institutions independently based on ethical values and academic freedom. From their point of view, they are in the position of helping the public to understand the past and the present through their exhibitions and educational programs.²

If we want to understand the current relation of politics and museum-development in our times of changes and crises, it makes sense to review earlier periods of social changes and see how good or bad the tandem worked out. A good example for this is the development of national museums.

The First Wave of National Museums

Be proud of belonging to your nation! This was the core educational incentive of cultural politics, supported by groups of citizens for the newly established national museums in modern countries in the second half of the 19th and of the early 20th century. Offering history and culture as a *golden age* in a time of massive industrialization and rapid social changes were meant, most of

1 The current ICOM museum definition of 2007 points out the Service for Society and its development as a core task of museum work: "A museum is a non-profit making permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, the tangible and intangible evidence of people and their environment," in: ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, <https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf> (accessed on October 20, 2019).

The ICOM-museum definition is part of the global ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, which is compulsory not only for individual and institutional ICOM members, but has become part of state museum laws. In countries without museum-laws due to the respective constitutional situation, the ICOM Code in many cases has become an official document of parliaments and/or governments.

2 ICOM Code of Ethics, current version 2004, principles, in: <https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf> (accessed on October 20, 2019); Geoffrey Lewis, The ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, Background and Objectives, in: Bernice Murphy, *Museums, Ethics and Cultural Heritage*, London: Routledge, 2016.

all, to stabilize identities among people and to give them a support in times of migration from the countryside to the urban centers and in times of nation building. If we look at the exhibitions of these early national museums, history was mostly conceptualised and presented as a positive one-dimensional narrative. The exhibitions did not offer clear different versions or various perspectives on history and almost nothing was told about conflicting historical situations. History and culture were positively expressed through art.

At that time, this kind of exhibition-conception and style of presentation made sense since the aim was to offer a solid footing through historical, cultural and educational policy. The same applies to the buildings for the early national museums. They are rich in architecture, often located in the prestige centres of the capitals, and they were erected in order to evoke the same effect: be proud of your country.

Anyway, cultural policy and national museums co-operated productively a century ago, even though the museum ethics of the time and the political ideology was definitely not comparable with the set of ethics which binds the museums today.

The Second Wave of National Museums

One hundred years later, in the 1970 s and 1980 s, cultural policy, first in the so-called post-industrial societies, reacted again to new transformation processes in order to meet the latest social challenges. At that time, several changes and crises led to a loss of confidence in democratic structures. Among them were the internationalisation of everyday life, migration because of economic and other reasons, massive and widespread political conflicts, including the Cold War and the nuclear weapons race, apartheid as well as military conflicts in many parts of the world.

As one reaction to this, the 1980's saw a boom, a wave of new national museum foundations.³ Some of them had already had an individual past, i.e. in terms of collections or as already existing museums. Others started as completely new institutions. Several of them did not use the term "national" in their names any longer, they were called history museum or civilization museum.

During the process of conceptualization, most of these museums were not aware of each other, but had a lot in common. What was the new museum strategy in the 1980's, and how should these new museums become frontrunners for stabilizing identities under the then current circumstances? Unlike exhibitions of the 19th century museums, these new museums present multi-perspective views of culture and history, often accompanied by international comparisons and an increased focus on political history, while in most cases still using the means most common to museums: original historical artefacts.

However, the presentations do not follow traditional criteria for collections; rather, objects are juxtaposed in such a way as to make historical connections and situations visible for the visitor. People were put into the position to make up their own minds, because they learnt that history was always the sum of perspectives. Therefore, different views and opinions were presented, so that visitors were able to understand the past better than before, a precondition for

3 Hans-Martin Hinz, National History Museums – Places of the Memory of Nations? An Approach, in: Hans-Martin Hinz and Rosmarie Beier-de-Haan (eds.), *National Museums, The Memory of Nations*, Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museums, 2007, p. 16.

an understanding of the present. To strengthen the visitors' reflection on the presentations was and is of utmost importance of this kind of museums.

Here are a few examples of the then newly established houses: in 1981, the National Museum of Japanese History was founded as an inter-university research institute and opened its doors in 1987 on the site of a castle in Sakura, a suburb of Tokyo. The aim of the museum as a national institution (semi-privatization in 2004) is to present Japanese history based on university research programs.⁴ The academic freedom of universities allowed especially this new national museum to include also the dark period of Japanese colonialism and imperialism of the 20th century into its program. In spite of this and compared to European exhibitions on the subject, the Japanese presentation touches these themes in a very sensitive way. Nevertheless, the exhibitions have led to intensive public discussions and criticism in Japan. However, for the first time a Japanese museum was accepted as frontrunner dealing with historical taboos in Japan.

In 1982, the Canadian Government announced its intention of constructing the Canadian Museum of Civilization – later renamed as Museum of Canadian History – in the capital, Ottawa, and inaugurated an impressive building in 1989.⁵ The museum presents the culture and history of the First Nations and the history of the English and French population equally, a completely new conception. It presents the past in a way that all Canadian visitors were able to understand themselves as equal members of the nation and as members of an international community.

In the 1980s also New Zealand intensively discussed the establishment of a new national museum which, for the first time, was to present the country's history on the one hand, from a Maori point of view, and on the other hand, from a white society's perspective. In the capital, Wellington, the new bi-cultural Te Papa Tongarewa National Museum of New Zealand (Place of the treasures of the country) got a modern building based on collections of the old National Museum and the National Art Gallery. A mixed staff of Maori and white New Zealanders realized the then new conception.⁶ The Maori collections are under complete control of the Maori community, what is of great importance for the exhibition-conceptions, as well as on the perspectives of the narratives, and the style of presentation. The museum works intensively together with local groups, but on the other hand, presents as well New Zealand's role in the world. It finally opened in 1998 and played an important role in the country's reconciliation process of the time.

Already in 1980, the Australian Parliament established the National Museum of Australia in Canberra, which did in the first two decades mostly travelling exhibitions.⁷ From the very begin-

4 Rekihaku, *The Future of History*, National Museum of Japanese History, Sakura City, Chiba Prefecture, 2007; Tsuneo Yasuda, *Japan Faces its Past. National History in the Museum*, in: Hans-Martin Hinz and Rosmarie Beier-de-Haan (eds.), *National Museums, The Memory of Nations*, Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museums, 2007, p. 68.

5 George MacDonald and Stephen Alford, *The Canadian Museum of Civilization*, Quebec, 1990.

6 Seddon Bennington, *Double Gaze. New Zealand's Bi-Cultural View on History*, in: Hans-Martin Hinz and Rosmarie Beier-de-Haan (eds.), *National Museums, The Memory of Nations*, Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museums, 2007, p. 103.

7 Dawn Casey, *The national Museum of Australia: Exploring the past, illuminating the present and imagining the future*, in: Darryl McIntyre and Kirstin Wehner (eds.), *National Museums, Negotiating Histories*, Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2001, p. 3.

ning, the museum accompanied the process of reconciliation between Australia's white society and the Aboriginals. It is a focal point of public and political discussions about the way to deal with the country's diverse history and Australia's role in the world and what national identity means to Australians today.⁸ In 2001, for the 100th anniversary of Australia's independence from Britain, a permanent exhibition was launched in a brand new museum building in the heart of the capital Canberra.

For Berlin's 750th anniversary in 1987, the German government decided to establish a German Historical Museum in Berlin. The museum planning was intensively discussed in the West-German public, among political parties and in the media.⁹ A brand new conception included the museums' task to present German history foremost in its international context and from a multi-perspective point of view. This approach was the reason for the success of the new institution, especially after German re-unification (1990).¹⁰

All these then new museums were and are very much accepted by visitors and no one was surprised about the huge success of these institutions. What is behind the success?

Sociologists and museological researchers alike have been analyzing this wave of new museum foundations of the 1980 s, classifying them since the mid-1990 s under the theory of the *Second Modernity* or *Reflexive Modernization*.¹¹ According to this theory, the ongoing transformation of societies in the 1970 s and 1980 s represented a break with the structures and values that had shaped the modernity of the industrial societies of the 19th century, the first modernity, when many of the early national museums were established.

In contrast to the modernity of the early industrialization, the search for sustainable strategies for the development of society a century later is determined by growth limits and ecological problems on a global scale, the receding significance of the nation-state, the dissolution of traditional bonds such as marriage or household, and the loss of tradition. This is accompanied by greater individualization in terms of lifestyle, economic independence and consumer power.

The new national, historical, civilization and ethnological museums of the 1980's, met on the one hand, met the greater demand of a better-educated and more inclusive audience by fostering mutual international understanding. On the other hand, these museums were called driving forces when it came to new and equal societal dialogues in the respective country. For example, the new and fair communication with aboriginal populations, like in Australia, New Zealand and

8 Mathew Trinca, The National Museum of Australia, Representing a Culturally Diverse Nation in the 21st Century, in: Hans-Martin Hinz and Rosmarie Beier-de-Haan (eds.), *National Museums, The Memory of Nations*, Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museums, 2007, p. 98.

9 Christoph Stölzl, *Deutsches Historisches Museum, Ideen-Kontroversen-Perspektiven*, Frankfurt: Propyläen, 1988, pp. 17; Hans Ottomeyer, German History in its International Context, in: Hans-Martin Hinz and Rosmarie Beier-de-Haan (eds.), *National Museums, The Memory of Nations*, Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museums, 2007, p. 39.

10 Hans-Jörg Czech, Two Thousand Years of German History: A Walk through the Permanent Exhibition of the German Historical Museum, in: Hans-Martin Hinz and Rosmarie Beier-de-Haan (eds.), *National Museums, The Memory of Nations*, Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museums, 2007, p. 51.

11 Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

Canada. In the case of Germany the newly introduced multi-perspective exhibitions did a lot for the mutual understanding of life in the former East and the former West and, besides the political reunification, paved the way for a social unification in 1990 and after.

What is important to know is that the new museums of the 1980's in their international, multi-perspective work were, by far, not at all anti-national, but international, post-colonial and multicultural National museums.¹²

Parallel to the renewing process of national museums, ethnological museums underwent substantial changes as well when they gave up their European-centered view of the world. Some of them changed their names into, for example, Five-Continents-Museum, World-Cultures-Museum, or just World Museum in order to demonstrate the new conceptual way of thinking that that cultures all over the world are equal and should be presented as equal.

Furthermore, these 1980's conceptions, which are still valid and were, in the meantime, adopted by many more already existing and newly founded museums, have put museums in the position of being places of reconciliation in a broader sense. Reconciliation with the past in general, among parties of civil conflicts or former enemies of wars, victims and perpetrators of dictatorships, or underrepresented groups of society.

These museums help to successfully overcome societal taboos, and at the same time, to avoid harmonizing the past. Modern memorial museums and Human Rights museums are the best examples for the latest museum-development. It is important to mention that the newly conceptualized museums of the 1980's did not replace traditional national museums, mostly art museums. Not at all. It is the opposite: several types of national museums have their place in society. To foster reconciliation through new museum activities is a very important museum service for society. And it is not only an internal issue of a country, but has international challenges as well, especially after wars. There is a good and successful example from the Balkans, realized after the Yugoslavian Wars of the early 1990's. The aim was to heal wounds of the yearlong conflict on the Balkans.

After the break-down of Yugoslavia, museums of the region were not only focused to re-write their conceptions concerning the new political situation of the respective new country, but they wanted to act internationally in order to foster a better understanding of former war enemies. Therefore and as a result of an international museum conference in Belgrade in 2008, ICOM and UNESCO brought museums of former Yugoslavia around a table in order to develop a joint travelling exhibition for the region.¹³ *Imagining the Balkans* was the title of the exhibit which toured around all the new states and beyond for more than two years. To offer new views on a culturally rich region, which has much in common, but which was still in crisis, was exactly the right tool to foster mutual understanding.¹⁴ Before visitors from the different areas of the Balkans

12 Rosmarie Beier-de-Haan, *Erinnerte Geschichte- Inszenierte Geschichte: Ausstellungen und Museen in der Zweiten Moderne*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 2005, p. 71.

13 Sladjana Bojkovic and Ana Stolic (eds.), *Museums as places of Reconciliation, Proceedings of the 8th Colloquium of the International Association of Museums of History*, Belgrade: Historical Museum of Serbia, 2010.

14 Philippos Mazarakis-Ainian and Ana Stolić (coords. and ed.), *Imagining the Balkans: Identities and memory in the long 19th century- travelling exhibition*, Ljubljana: National Museum of Slovenia, 2013.

could learn more about their new own state and the common ground of the region in terms of culture and history, museum professionals themselves had to overcome the silence, a process, in the end full of success.

If we evaluate the museum boom of the 1980's and the development afterwards, we can state that new institutions as well as cultural politics have reacted positively to the then current social needs. The new international and multi-perspective approaches of exhibition-conceptions were successful since the aim was again, like 100 years before, to offer a solid footing through historical, cultural and educational policy, but with a completely different educational approach. In many cases, museums and cultural policy worked together productively as a successful tandem.

Museums Today – Are They in the Position to Meet the Current Demands?

We currently live again in a time of dramatic worldwide changes and we need to ask: do cultural politics and museum-professionals properly reflect the present challenges again and are they in the position to meet the demands by new initiatives and conceptions?

Sociologists speak about the *Regressive Modernity*, which has followed the booming post-war *Second Modernity* and mirrors current social problems.¹⁵ There are rapid social changes in current societies because of the massive impact of globalization on one's everyday life, the introduction of new technologies and their deep impact on the labor market, the fear of climate change, poverty and military conflicts in many parts of the world, including the highest number of migration ever.

There are at least two social groups in western societies who are highly affected by the changes and fears: firstly, middle class people feel that education, good skills and motivation are no longer the reasons and sources for fair chances on the labor market. Secondly, the so-called *Behinders*, people living in the forgotten countryside and old industrial areas, do not feel connected with the mainstream society. Especially these groups look for alternatives. As a result, there is a growing populist movement in many parts of the world, a trend towards an expected splendid isolation, including a new nationalism and a denial of the importance of international political and economic structures.

What does all this mean for museums and cultural politics? What are the consequences?

Should museums follow the re-nationalization trend and give up the international approach of their work of which they were so proud of in the last decades. Should they return to the 19th century educational policy of "be proud of your country"? Have they lost the contact to this growing demand and are not aware that sociologists argued already 20 years ago that re-nationalization would follow globalization?¹⁶

15 Oliver Nachtwey, *Die Abstiegs-gesellschaft. Über das Aufbegehren in der regressiven Moderne*, Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016, pp.71.

16 Ulrich Beck, *Was ist Globalisierung?*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998, p.16.

We often speak about museums as frontrunners of social change, as being inclusive and working for lifelong learning and sustainable development. We think about virtual museums in order to reach the digital natives. This was and is true. It reflects the current self-understanding of museums. However, do museums reach those, who are losing trust in internationalism and democratic structures? Are museums not inclusive enough or are they this time already out of the game?

In addition, what about cultural politics as the traditional supporter of museums in times of rapid changes? Is politics still a convincing tandem-partner for museums? Unfortunately, in several countries we have to recognize a political role back concerning academic freedom in cultural activities. Countries, once liberal in politics, are now under populists' control. There, museums, theatres and other cultural institutions are forced to change their open, liberal program-work and to perform more conservative – patriotic programs, returning to one-sided views on culture and history. Museum directors get under pressure and some of them are replaced. Does re-nationalization automatically mean that academic freedom is not at the top of priorities any longer?

However, even in still liberal countries museum colleagues are often disappointed by cultural policy for being too passive in its intellectual input of protecting academic freedom and the independence of museums. The museums are afraid to become overpowered by those who give simple answers to complicated issues. Intellectual resistance against this is missing, but necessary, if museums want to be accepted by the public as places of free information, good education and true reconciliation.

However, how shall we overcome? It is no surprise that a third wave of new types of museum-foundations is not around, which could give us hope like decades ago. Nevertheless, what we currently see as positive signals is a twofold development: on the one hand, there is a re-consideration in the museum-community of what museums should be in the 21st century, and on the other hand, there are international political activities in order to support museums on a global scale.

In order to reflect what museums of the 21st century should be like, the International Council of Museums, ICOM, stimulated a worldwide discussion about a new museum-definition, beginning in 2015. Already 40 workshops in 40 cities on all continents with more than 1000 professional participants have taken place until 2019. A new wording of the museum-definition is not of priority now, it is the content and the self-understanding of the museum community about what a museum is in current society, their missions and expectations. Everyone can take part in the discussion; ICOM has an online-platform which invites everyone who is interested to join and to give a personal view of the museum of the future.

In September 2019, when the museum world meets at the ICOM General Conference in Kyoto, the discussions will continue on a broader scale and probably a new definition will be approved.¹⁷ The current political pressure on museums in several countries is one dangerous issue, and colleagues there need solidarity of all liberal thinking people. However, a more general problem museums are facing in many parts of the world is the still missing appropriate support by the owners of the museums. There are multiple reasons for that. The continual weak financial

17 After the Kyoto Conference an agreement on the new museum definition was not reached. Thus, the discussion is still open.

situation in many countries for already a decade is the most important one. Therefore, museums suffer from extreme budget cuts, which fundamentally limit their engagement for the service of society in rapidly changing situations. Counter-cycle expenses would be the right answer to that, but since public expenses for culture are not compulsory in many countries in opposition to state expenses for the social sector, there is little hope for the better.

On the other hand, concerning international cultural policy, there is at least a glimpse of hope. The community of States, organized under the roof of UNESCO, have worked out new strategies for a better protection and support of museums. In 2015, the General Conference of UNESCO approved an important international tool, the *Recommendation on the Protection and Promotion of Museums, their Diversity and their Role in Society*.¹⁸ Member-States are encouraged to take actions for a better development of museums in their respective countries. UNESCO published an interim report already in 2019, which allows everyone to evaluate the success of this new UNESCO policy for museums.

The 2015 document is the first museum-related one in almost 60 years.

Conclusion

If we look back into the past, we can say that the relationship between museums and cultural politics, especially in times of rapid social changes and upcoming problematic situations concerning identities were productive and successful as long as the academic freedom for museums was guaranteed. Museums were in the position to follow their core intention: helping the society by launching convincing museum-strategies.

However, the current situation is not as easy and clear as it was in the past. What we see in many countries is a decreasing support for museums, financially and ideologically, but fortunately, there are international initiatives for the better, too, like the UNESCO policy. What we see as well is that museums, even under worse and critical circumstances do a lot to maintain ethical responsibility in order to meet the social challenges of society and to promote a better understanding of an interconnected human history and the heritage of humankind in a globalized world.

Very recently, there is indeed a new tandem-like activity between cultural policy and museums. The current global north-south decolonization dialogue at a political and museum-community level about a new reconciliation policy concerning the colonial times and the ownership of museums-collections from the colonial past in northern museums. It can be definitely seen as a good example for an important joint initiative. Both, cultural policy and museums started working closely together in order to find good solutions for a worldwide shared heritage, ethical behavior, repatriation and museums-related co-operation on a global scale.

18 UNESCO, Recommendation concerning the protection and promotion of museums and collections, their diversity and their role in society, http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49357&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html (accessed October 19, 2019).

ICOM has recently initiated a series of workshops in former colonial regions in order to bring museums from the global north and south directly together. To listen to each other seems to be the best pre-condition for finding good solutions following the ethical values we all share.

The current challenges differ from the ones in the past, but, museums, in their great majority still do their best and many of them, fortunately, do a very valuable work in the service of society!

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BEST PRACTICES IN VISITORS STUDIES

The Permanent Laboratory of Museum Audiences

Introduction

Visitor Studies in museums is a discipline with a history of almost a century. Therefore, it has demonstrated its ability to provide valid results for cultural institutions. Unfortunately, museums have been reluctant to launch research on their visitors as well as to apply the knowledge derived from them. This chapter reviews the causes of this type of attitudes and describes a successful experience: the Permanent Laboratory of Museum Audiences,¹ which works to propose solutions to these problems and has led to a major change in the way of understanding audiences in Spanish museums.

Problems of Implementing Visitors Studies

For almost a century, visitor studies have been configured as a discipline applied to a specific field, with very specific characteristics. The museum has developed its own methodology, based on psycho-social research, in order to withdraw the knowledge on everything related to the processes and variables involved in museums visit. The field is currently multidisciplinary, taking into account the variety of methods, the diversification of the theoretical sources and the wide spectrum of variables studied.²

Research conducted in museums around the world has succeeded to define, quite accurately, the basic profiles of museum visitors. We can get information on their sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, educational level, previous visits, company during the visit, etc.) and psychological ones (motivation, attitudes, lifestyles, preferences, etc.). This allows us to have a good knowledge of the museum audience.

Visitors Studies in museums are considered today a very important pillar to support management decisions. However, the practical application of research results and even evaluation as an integral part of the exhibition design is still a utopia in many museums, particularly in art museums. This has been pointed out by many researchers of this field in recent years.³

1 Laboratorio Permanente de Públicos de Museos (LPPM).

2 Eloísa Pérez Santos, *Estudios de visitantes en museos: metodología y aplicaciones*, Madrid: Trea, 2000.

3 Visitor Studies Association, *Evaluator Competencies for Professional Development*, Informal Science Education Program of the National Science Foundation, 2008, <https://www.visitorstudies.org/evaluator-competencies> (accessed June 25, 2019); Gloria Romanello, Públicos culturales: una aproximación sociológica a partir de la perspectiva de la Visitor Research, en: *IX Congreso Español de Sociología "Crisis y cambios, propuestas desde la*

The possible causes of this disaffection should be sought on different places. On the one hand, although the practice of evaluation of public services is increasingly entrenched, the evaluation of culture is particularly complex and heterogeneous. This is partly because of the difficulty on defining and selecting relevant indicators that respond to real needs. On the other hand, even if there is a good will among professionals who work in museums towards audience research, sometimes, them themselves do not know the most elementary technical aspects. This leads to maintaining erroneous ideas and prejudices about them. Some other professionals are simply sceptical and ignore the benefits of using them.⁴

Opposite to this, it is also easy to find museums and institutions that conceive visitor studies as an end itself. They understand it as a good way of acting, using the research carried out more as an argument to justify actions or decisions already taken than as a point of departure towards the development of audiences or the implementation of services.⁵

However, an evaluation (like any audience research in museums) should not be considered the final stage of an intervention, but should be part of the process itself, becoming the central axis that directs the tasks to be performed in each of the phases.⁶ Evaluation turns out to be more useful the more it is overlapped throughout every phase in a project.

Generally, any evaluation activity must meet a series of requirements so that it can be considered a best practice:⁷

- It must be applied in all phases of the intervention cycle, as it seeks an integral understanding of it (results, impact, processes, etc.).
- Must follow a scientific methodology.
- Must include judgments and recommendations.
- It should serve to improve and design future actions.
- It must be democratic and participatory, because its ultimate goal is to serve society.

Unfortunately, even when all of the explanations above are performed, it is unlikely that the results obtained through visitor studies are implemented. If the research does not respond to the

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4 Eloísa Pérez Santos, Buenas prácticas en la investigación del público en museos, in: Leticia Pérez Castellanos (coord.), *Estudios sobre públicos y museos. Volumen III: Apuntes para pasar de la teoría a la práctica*, México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2019 [2017], pp. 26–56.

5 Romanello 2013 (as fn. 3).

6 Laboratorio Permanente de Público de Museos, *Proyectos educativos y culturales en museos: Guía básica de planificación*. Madrid: Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deportes, 2015.

7 AEVAL (Agencia Estatal de Evaluación de las Políticas Públicas y la Calidad de los Servicios), *Fundamentos de evaluación de políticas públicas*, Madrid: Ministerio de Política Territorial y Administración Pública, 2010.

interests and objectives of the institution, in spite of the personal interest of the researchers themselves or other specific people, they are destined to be forgotten once they have been carried out, which makes the investment useless. Therefore, the use of visitor studies results depends, to a large extent, on the involvement of all museum departments in their planning, execution and application. In this sense, the more informed and involved in the evaluation processes all the professionals and workers of the museums are, the more they participate in planning and implementing them. Also, a greater and true commitment to the application of the results will be generated.⁸ As Reussner says,⁹ "it is important to make audience research an integral part of the organization's operations and culture."

Factors to the Effectiveness of the Museums' Audience-research Activities¹⁰

- Research quality: the level of scientific rigour and soundness of the study, the level of qualification and experience of the researcher.
- Acceptance and support of audience research throughout the whole institution as a legitimate and valuable contribution to museum work.
- Resources available for audience research in terms of money and staff (time).
- Integration: the degree to which audience research is integrated into processes such as exhibition development and other projects.
- Communication and dissemination of audience-research findings.
- Responsibility: the formal responsibility for audience research within the organization.
- Involvement of staff during the development and conduct of audience studies.
- Visitor orientation centeredness.
- Present throughout the institution.
- Research utility: the degree to which the research is targeted and the findings are useful, actionable and easily available.
- Leadership of senior management: the degree to which audience research is supported and driven by influential individuals in the institution.
- Understanding of the role and methods of audience research among staff.
- Awareness of audience research, in general, and the studies specifically conducted for the institution.
- Readiness to learn from and apply audience research results.

Audience research and evaluation are closely linked. In many occasions the research carried out in museums involves evaluation activities, which can respond to very general motivations such as supporting decision making, guiding planning, improving management, increasing transparency in public management or legitimizing an intervention. Although these motivations are legitimate, they are not explicit enough to launch a research that should seek solutions to specific problems.

8 Pérez Santos 2019 (as fn. 4).

9 Eva M. Reussner, *Best Practices in Audience Research an Evaluation: Case Studies of Australian and New Zealand Museums*, in: *Visitor Studies Today* 7 (2) (2004), pp.15–25.

10 Ibid.

But, what can a study or evaluation provide? Is it worth the effort? Are there enough resources to do it? What should be evaluated? These are some questions that it would be convenient to always ask ourselves before addressing any audience investigation.

Advantages of Carrying out Research and Evaluations in the Museums

- Improve performance.
- Reorient the meaning and application of a project to achieve the desired objectives.
- Generate new proposals for new projects.
- Innovate and not always follow the same schemas.
- Compare different interventions.
- Be able to demonstrate successes achieved.
- Show a planning and evaluation method to the staff.
- Appreciate and value, within the team, the work and the results obtained.
- Generate an internal debate.
- Show the public the interest in the results ... and be able to transmit it to them.
- Offer an image of engagement and professionalism.
- Consult the project and its memory in the future, identifying the causes of successes and failures.

Visitors Studies should only be carried out if it is clearly stated why it is needed to be done, what do we want to achieve with it, what are the procedures to follow, whom it is directed to, where it will be done, when it will be done, who will carry it out and which will be the available resources be. Evaluation must be inserted in a broad action research project, extended in time. This is an essential condition which allows us to provide solutions to the specific problems of management within a strategic planning. Evaluation should be designed as well to provide evidence-based knowledge that will lead to accurate judgments regarding an intervention design, implementation or impact. But the history of public research and evaluation applied to cultural activities shows that this has rarely been the case.

Visitor Studies in Spain

Visitor Studies in Spain were born much later than in its surrounding countries. Some Spanish museums (such as the Prado Museum in Madrid or the Picasso Museum in Barcelona) were part of the famous research that Bordieu and Darbel conducted in several European museums in 1969. But it will not be until the eighties of the past century that first works on museum visitors appeared, in response to the spontaneous concerns of museum professionals. They wanted to get to know the visitor of "their museum", despite the difficulties in their professional environment and lack of methodological training.¹¹

11 Ángela García Blanco, El museo como centro de investigación del público, in: *Política científica* 34 (1992), pp.27–32.

In the late 1980's and early 1990's, first scientific research projects carried out by some museums began, in collaboration with universities. Consequently, a series of publications on the results of these projects appeared.¹² And, some studies on specific museums visitors and concrete exhibitions were published.¹³

At institutional level, the most complete work on the characteristics of museum visitors, in terms of the sample size and variables studied, was the one carried out in 1997 by the Ministry of Education and Culture on the audiences of four public museums: National Archaeological Museum, National Museum of Decorative Arts, Cerralbo Museum and National Museum of Anthropology. This study collected data on the main characteristics, visiting habits, motivation, expectations, accessibility, behaviours, visit difficulties, satisfaction, preferences and opinions of 2326 people who visited these museums in a year.¹⁴

However, in the early 2000's, visitor studies in Spain showed three basic problems: First of all, the little field-work carried out: only seven of the seventeen state museums had carried out a profile study of the visitors. Secondly, some of these studies had been carried out with a little rigorous or simply unknown methodology. Finally, most of them were forgotten in a drawer. This means they did not have a direct impact on the museums they had been implemented in, either on the general management¹⁵ decisions.

Permanent Laboratory of Museum Audiences (LPPM)

A laboratory is a place of experimentation and study, where hypotheses are formulated and tested. This definition of the concept of laboratory served as the basis for creating the Permanent Laboratory of Museum Audiences (LPPM). It is a space for museum visitors studies but also for experimentation and innovation on research methodologies and audience development strategies.

In 2007, the project began to take shape under the technical coordination of the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Spain. It supervises the framework of the investigations carried out and their practical application. Also, it has the technical, budgetary and administrative control in the execution of the projects. In addition to this, it included a scientific coordination that has been developed to date by two specialists in Museology and Visitors Studies¹⁶ who design the basic structure of the operations. Their essential characteristics can be found in a

12 Pérez Santos 2000 (as fn. 2).

13 Mikel Asensio, *Estudios de público en España*, Seminario Internacional: Museum Visitor Studies, Mérida, 1996; Reinaldo Alarcón, Sociología y estudios de público en los museos españoles, in: *Museum* 12 (2008), pp.233–237; Eloísa Pérez Santos, El estado de la cuestión de los estudios de público en España, in: *Revista Mus-A* 10 (2009), pp.20–30.

14 Ángela García Blanco, Eloísa Pérez Santos and María de la O. Andonegui, *Los visitantes de museos: Un estudio de público en cuatro museos*, Madrid: Ministerio de Educación y Cultura, 1999.

15 Pérez Santos 2000 (as fn. 2).

16 Ángela García Blanco (Curator and Museologist) and Eloísa Pérez Santos (professor at Complutense University of Madrid).

work by García Blanco,¹⁷ under an agreement in collaboration with Complutense University of Madrid for the establishment of a joint work program. This coordination has been completed throughout these years with a permanent commission and specific working groups, in addition to an administrative coordination carried out by technicians from the General Management of State Museums.¹⁸

The basic structure of LPPM was inspired by other observatories of museum audiences and visitor studies organizations around the world, known until that date. Thus, different operating models were taken into account:

- The English model involved an internal approach to systematic visitor evaluation. Different museums in Britain had conducted visitor studies since 1972 as part of a process for designing and assembling exhibitions. This model has crystallized, years later, in the inclusion of networks of visitors observatories in major museum associations, such as *British Museums Association* or in specific audience development programs within the Arts Council.¹⁹
- The French model and the *Observatoire Permanent des Publics (OPP)*²⁰ created in 1990 and funded by the Ministry of Culture (Direction de Musées de France), systematically maintained a survey in more than 100 museums throughout the country. Researches were carried out continuously, in such a way that it reflected the changes and evolutions that affected both the museum and the visitors who frequented it.
- The American model launched by *American Alliance of Museums* in 2002 through the *Museum Evaluation Program (MAP)* by which all American museums were urged to make a systematic evaluation, offering economic and technical assistance to carry out such work. This program offers five assessments types: Community & Audience Engagement Assessment, Education & Interpretation Assessment, Organizational Assessment, Collections Stewardship Assessment and Board Leadership Assessment.
- The Canadian model and the *Observatoire des Musées de la Société des Musées Québécois*:²¹ it is a visitor studies service aimed to provide with a strategic management system, including a training plan and dissemination of research results, to its members (more than 300 institutions in the Quebec region).

17 Ángela García Blanco, Conociendo a los visitantes. El Laboratorio permanente de Públicos de Museos, un Proyecto integral, in: Leticia Pérez Castellanos (coord.), *Estudios sobre públicos y museos. Volúmen II: Apuntes para pasar de la teoría a la práctica*, México: Publicaciones Digitales encrym-inah, 2017, pp.51–72.

18 Héctor del Barrio, Virginia Garde and Teresa Morillo, El Laboratorio permanente de Público de Museos, in: Macarena Cuenca and Jaime Cuenca, *El Desarrollo de Audiencias en España: reflexiones desde la teoría y la práctica*, Bilbao: Deusto Digital, 2019, pp. 101–119.

19 Arts Council of England, <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/> (accessed September 10, 2019).

20 Observatoire Permanent des Publics, <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/Thematiques/Connaissance-des-patrimoines/Departement-de-la-politique-des-publics> (accessed September 10, 2019).

21 Société des Musées Québécois, <https://www.musees.qc.ca/fr/professionnel/> (accessed June 12, 2019).

The initial objective of the LPPM was specified in the following fundamental points:²²

- Make evaluation a common work tool.
- Have scientific advice to guarantee the rigour of the results.
- Evaluate according to the possibilities of each museum.
- Optimize the work done by crossing the data of the different museums.
- Define the orientation and application of the studies by the museum itself.
- Involve all departments of museums.
- Organize training courses according to needs.
- Promote the interconnection between departments and people.

Permanent Laboratory of Museum Audiences is conceived as an instrument for the improvement of management, allowing museum professionals and state managers to have significant data on visitors. Its purpose is to provide data, tools and knowledge to guide all the actions in museums which have as their ultimate target the public. It is through the relationship public-museum that the fulfilment of its social function is optimized. To carry out this work, the LPPM is articulated around three strategic lines:

- a) *Research*: This includes planning of research, designing measurement tools and supervision and direction of investigations. Our target is to have data which results allow us to test hypotheses and reach conclusions on the behaviour of audiences. This is then used to plan and design lines of action. Therefore, visitors research serves to develop a management strategy based on a thorough knowledge of the needs of the public in what encompasses their relationship with these institutions.
- b) *Training*: it aims to provide museum staff with the preparation needed to undertake tasks related to visitors studies. The LPPM designs, directs, elaborates materials and organizes seminars and training courses in visitors research for state museum technicians responsible of public departments, as well as for others professionals interested in visitors studies.
- c) *Communication and dissemination*: This implies a communication system among museums, encouraging teamwork. It also allows the participatory design of the research to be carried out, as well as the joint application of results. The LPPM is also committed to the dissemination of these results for a better knowledge of museum visitors. This is achieved by participating in forums, events, congresses, scientific meetings, etc. Sixteen national state museums integrated the LPPM at the beginning. Currently, six more museums have joined them, signing collaboration agreements. The LPPM coordinates all the agents involved (museums, technicians and collaborating companies) and edits the results and reports.

22 Margarita de los Ángeles, Mara Canela, Ángela García Blanco and María Ángeles Polo, Los estudios de público, un instrumento de trabajo. La gestión de un Proyecto, in: *MUS-A, Revista de los Museos de Andalucía* 10 (2008), pp.31–35.

Research in Permanent Laboratory of Museum Audiences (LPPM)

The analysis of visitors' main characteristics is the most basic study that can be carried out in a museum. It is particularly useful to do it from the beginning and with a certain periodicity as these types of studies provide indispensable information for the development of literature focused on specific subgroups or variables of museum visitors. Following these premises, the Laboratory carried out the first phase of the research called "Knowing our visitors" between March 2008 and April 2009.²³ The objective was to unveil the main sociodemographic characteristics, visiting habits, expectations, motivations, needs, use and evaluation of services of public museums' visitors, as well as their previous knowledge on these institutions. Results were presented in a general report and individualised ones on each museum have been published gradually.

Since 2010, visitors' characteristics, visiting habits, motivations and satisfaction have been studied in the 18 state museums, both in large museums such as the Reina Sofia National Museum of Art, the National Archaeological Museum, the National Museum of Roman Art or the Museum of America (among others), to smaller but no less emblematic museums, such as the National Museum of Decorative Arts, the National Museum of Anthropology or the Sorolla Museum. All these studies have been published and the list appears in the bibliographical references of this chapter. The full text can be found on the LPPM website.²⁴ At present, additional data is being collected in some museums, such as the National Archaeological Museum or the National Sculpture Museum, in order to perform a long-term analysis. It will allow us to see the evolution of the publics' characteristics in these museums over the past 10 years.

The initial investigations bases of the LPPM were to get an extensive sample of visitors of public museums, collected with a rigorous control. It showed that the composition of visitors in terms of socio-demographic profile (gender, age, level of studies, occupation, and residence-nationality) did not correspond to what one would expect, according to the distribution that these variables have within the national population. This difference was manifested in age and gender groups and, above all, in the educational level. Visitors with higher level of education were highly overrepresented in museums, compared to their percentage within the population. Whilst, visitors over 12 years old with primary education were under-represented. Perhaps, one of the most interesting conclusions of the study was confirming the existence of potential audiences currently excluded in museums. Among them: young people, whose demographic decline and their lack of connection is striking in museums; visitors over 65 and retired, who are usually thought to have plenty of time for this type of activities and whose absence in museums can be related to the educational deficiencies of previous generations, as well as to the fatigue and movement difficulties derived from their age; those seeking employment; foreigners resident in the country emigrating from socio-economic struggling countries and citizens with low educational level; foreign tourists with language difficulties; people with disabilities and specific needs

23 Laboratorio Permanente de Público de Museos, *Conociendo a nuestros visitantes: Estudio de público en museos del Ministerio de Cultura*, Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, 2011.

24 Los informes del laboratorio, <http://www.culturaydeporte.gob.es/cultura/areas/museos/mc/laboratorio-museos/publicaciones/informes.html> (accessed May 28, 2019).

for social integration or even, in many of the museums analysed, children under 12 years of age in a family visit.

The reasons why these groups do not frequently visit the museums can be very varied, the LPPM has already detected some of them: difficulties of the visit related to the low educational level, the lack of attractive activities for these sectors of the population (adolescents, elderly people), the scarce presence of facilities for people with disabilities or with mobility problems, the lack of information in other languages or the low tourism promotion of museums in the appropriate media.

The results obtained of visitors' characteristics in Spanish museums in this first analysis were the departing point to initiate other qualitative-focused lines of research on potential museums visitors and their perception of the institution. On this line, a study was carried out, following a methodology focused on targeted groups. This allowed us to compare and contrast the image that current, potential and non-visitors have of museums and the processes involved in the decision to make a visit.²⁵ In 2017, a study was carried out on the specific characteristics of families as a potential segment in museums.²⁶ It produced important results on the motivations, expectations and agendas that families have when visiting a museum.

LPPM also carried out evaluations focused on exhibitions and others museums activities. The evaluation of the exhibition *Fascinated by the East* (National Museum of Decorative Arts, December 2009–October 2010) was the first example of a complete evaluation programme within an exhibition carried out in Spain. The exhibition evaluation model stated three consecutive evaluation stages (front-end, formative and summative), integrated from the early stages of the exhibition development. Subsequently, the exhibition design and production team obtained significant data about interests, naive notions and communication effectiveness of the exhibits.²⁷

Accessibility related studies have also been carried out on wayfinding and use of hand maps. This helped to redesign such orientation tools and test its effectiveness. These researches resulted in a series of recommendations for the design of hand plans cognitively accessible to all types of visitors in museums.²⁸

In the last decade, research in non-formal education contexts has highlighted the importance of considering the experience resulting from the interaction as the main result of the exhibits effectiveness and not the consequences thereof. These researches indicate that, in museums, learning must be based on experience as opposed to what happens in other educa-

25 Laboratorio Permanente de Público de Museos, *Conociendo a todos los públicos. ¿Qué imágenes se asocian a los museos?*, Madrid: Secretaría General Técnica Subdirección General de Documentación y Publicaciones, 2012.

26 Laboratorio Permanente de Público de Museos, *Conociendo a todos los públicos. Un análisis de la visita al museo en familia*, Madrid: Ministerio de Educación, Cultura, y Deporte, 2017.

27 Subdirección General de Promoción de las Bellas Artes, *Programa de evaluación de exposiciones: Evaluación de la exposición "Fascinados por Oriente"*, Madrid, 2010; Arantxa Chamorro, Fascinador por Oriente: coordinación técnica de una exposición comunicativa y su proceso de evaluación, in: *Museos.es* 7 (8) (2012), pp. 394–407.

28 Laboratorio permanente de Público de Museos, *Una evaluación sobre planos de mano en museos*, Madrid: Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2013.

tional contexts, where information-based learning prevails. Therefore, the main objective of the exhibition design must be to provide adequate experiences to promote learning. Absorbing, significant and memorable exhibitions are attractive to the visitor. They make the visit satisfactory and valuable, thus creating the conditions for other more complex processes such as learning.

LPPP began a line of research to learn how the visitor values his or her experience in the museum in both cognitive and emotional terms, analysing variables related to comfort during the visit, learning, relaxation, fascination, fun and involvement or happiness, among others. The objective of this type of study was to know the influence that certain sensations have on the level of general satisfaction of the visitor and on the overall experience obtained during the visit (up to thirteen variables have been measured using a scale created for the study: the Scale of the Positive Museum Experience). This line of research has already resulted in some publications²⁹ and is currently in the data analysis phase.

Recently, the Laboratory has expanded its studies to science museums, such as the National Museum of Science and Technology, whose report of results will be published shortly; and the National Museum of Natural History that will begin soon an ambitious research on its audience. This type of centres has meant a rethinking of the instruments that must be adapted to the special characteristics of these museums. In them, activities, active participation, workshops and demonstrations are important aspects for the evaluation that must be integrated together with more traditional audience studies.

Training and Knowledge Disclosure in Permanent Laboratory of Museum Audiences (LPPM)

One of the initial objectives of LPPM was to implement actions to break down the attitudinal barriers that currently impede the acceptance of visitor studies, among all professionals and at all levels of cultural institutions.

The introduction of visitor studies in museums offers the opportunity to change and modernize old organizational structures incompatible with new forms of social participation.³⁰

As Romanello points out,³¹ the inclusion of visitor research in museums has a double level of influence: on the one hand, a first impact directly involves visitors and their experiences within the museum (pl. 1). But, on the other hand, a second impact is the transference of results to internal management and the production of significant information for policy makers. In this case, visitor research is the practical consequence of a greater orientation towards the public by managers. This directly influences the consideration of visitors' point of view when launching policies and strategies.

However, social research, in general, and visitor studies, in particular, is not simple or easily understood tasks. Also, we admit that professionals working in a museum do not have to be experts in this type of research either. But it is necessary that, at least, the staff in audience's ser-

29 Laboratorio Permanente de Público de Museos, *La experiencia de la visita al museo*, Madrid: Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deportes, 2013.

30 Pérez Santos 2019 (as fn. 4).

31 Romanello 2013 (as fn. 3).

vices departments (communication, education or customer service departments, for instance) have a specific minimum training on the subject.³²

Giving to museums' staff the necessary preparation to undertake tasks related to visitor studies and audience research, through different training activities, was considered another strategic line of LPPM. In order to do so, parallel to the research, different training sessions have been scheduled, aimed for both museums professionals and other professionals interested in public studies.

Since 2008, training courses and workshops have been held on different contents: methodology for data interpretation, research design to know audience profiles, social network evaluation indicators in museums, quality assessment and best practices applied to activities evaluation, as well as the design of indicators for management evaluation. The last courses have been directed towards the social value of museums, focusing on universal cognitive accessibility as a commitment of museums. They engage themselves to adapt the texts to the method of easy reading.

As in 2015 monographic training sessions were dedicated to different groups that are underrepresented in museum visitors, such as families with children, teens, young people or people over 65, in collaboration with the *Museums Social Plan*.³³ Our objective is that museums develop specific programs for these groups, evaluate them over time and thus verify the effectiveness of the actions and recommendations of the LPPM.

The Laboratory is also a communication network that lets participants connect with each other, promoting teamwork. Its research design and instruments used are thus, the result of a participatory process. Taking a step further, the LPPM has developed a methodology for planning strategies and programs that emerge directly from the results of research. Objectives are designed depending on the results obtained and each of these objectives involves the implementation of specific programs. These programs should be assessed in terms of the proposed objectives in the future. This is how the research-training-action circle closes. Each of the stages described includes a specific training according to the research objectives. Also, the "work in teams" methodology allows the Laboratory to include the opinions of museums in order to reach consensus (pl. 2).

In this way, research is gradually serving to train museum staff. They learn all together how to increasingly apply the findings to museums' needs. It is obvious that this process is continuous, as one research study leads and inspires a new one.

The Laboratory is in contact with professional and university fellows in order to expand learning opportunities as well as the extension of public-centred management models and practices.

Therefore, agreements of collaboration with universities have been signed. Collaborations range from curricular practices to the development of degree and master's projects. This training provides basic research strategies to students interested in visitor studies or audience development in museums.

32 Pérez Castellanos 2017 (as fn. 4); Pérez Santos 2019 (as fn. 4).

33 Ministerio de Cultura de España, Museos + Sociales, <http://www.culturaydeporte.gob.es/museosmasociales/presentacion.htm> (accessed April 30, 2019).

At the same time, LPPM promotes the dissemination of the results of the research carried out, both in national and international professional forums, in order to contribute to a better knowledge of museum visitors (pl. 3).

LPPM is a reference for visitor studies in museums in Spain. Its results have been made available to society as an exercise of transparency and constant dissemination. This can be particularly seen on its website, where all publications are in open access.³⁴ It has 25,000 visits per year on average and a percentage of 56.5 % new visits in the last year.

Permanent Laboratory of Museum Audiences as an Instrument for Museum Management

Visitor Studies in museums are not useful if the knowledge gained is not applied to the benefit or improvement of communication between cultural institutions and visitors. Research is an essential tool for museum management as it facilitates general policies decisions, based on an objective analysis of reality: analysis of current and potential audiences and the evaluation of exhibitions, general services and visitor care provide extremely important information on the current functioning of the museum and on the issues to be addressed.

Visitor Studies can therefore be considered an instrument of general museum policy management and a decision-making tool in the elaboration and design of exhibitions, as well as a framework for carrying out experimental studies on the processes involved in the interaction between the visitor and the museum context.

The LPPM was created as an applied research project, with a firm vocation to make practical use of the results obtained and to modify specific aspects of museum management. The LPPM research has therefore had consequences of different magnitudes. It has also diversified its shape and application, according to the needs and actions carried out. Fundamentally, these actions have been directed towards the development of under-represented audiences in museums, the increase of public knowledge about museums and the improvement of the quality of the visit (eventually generating a greater customer loyalty).³⁵

LPPM is also a provider of data oriented to museum management.³⁶ Since 2012, after the results generated, the LPPM has become a project of the *Strategic Plan of Spanish Secretary of State for Culture 2012–2015*.³⁷ It seeks to develop collaborative information and knowledge tools. In addition, LPPM has been integrated into the audience development planning, included in Culture 2020 plan.³⁸

34 Laboratorio de museos, <http://www.culturaydeporte.gob.es/cultura/areas/museos/mc/laboratorio-museos/publicaciones/informes.html> (accessed April 30, 2019).

35 Del Barrio, Garde and Morillo 2019 (as fn. 17).

36 Virginia Garde, El Laboratorio Permanente de Público de Museos: un Proyecto de Investigación, una Herramienta de Gestión, in: *Actas del I Seminario de Investigación en Museología de los Países de Habla Portuguesa y Española*, Oporto, October 12–14 2009, Oporto: University of Oporto, 2010.

37 Secretaría de Estado de Cultura, Plan Estratégico General, <https://www.audiovisual451.com/wp-content/uploads/PlanEstrategicoGeneral2012-2015.pdf> (accessed May 10, 2019)

38 Plan General de Cultura 2020, <http://www.meecd.gob.es/dms/meecd/transparencia/sec/plan-cultura-2020.pdf> (accessed April 10, 2019).