

# MUSEUMS, CITIZENS AND URBAN SUSTAINABILITY

## ICOM GENERAL CONFERENCE 2022, PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

# BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

**CONFERENCE ORGANISERS:**

**M CAMOC** ICOM  
international committee  
for the collections and activities  
of museums of cities

**M CIMUSET** ICOM  
international committee  
for museums and collection  
of science and technology

**WORKLAB**

**ICOM GENERAL  
CONFERENCE**

**SESSIONS OF CAMOC,  
CIMUSET AND WORKLAB**

**BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS  
PRAGUE 2022**

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# Museums, citizens and urban sustainability

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CTĚNICE CASTLE IN VINOŘ, PRAGUE. PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

## From the Three Chairs

Triennial ICOM conferences offer many opportunities to meet and learn from colleagues outside our own areas of museum specialisation and expertise. Joint sessions among International Committees and other partners also provide a chance to find common areas of interest and practice. The ICOM 2022 General Conference brought together the international committees CAMOC (Collections and Activities of Museums of Cities) and CIMUSET (Museums and Collections of Science and Industry) along with WORKLAB, the International Association of Labour Museums.

We decided to take things one step farther this time, however, and to jointly publish a book of proceedings that brings together an assortment of presentations from both our joint session and individual meetings in the city. We do this in the hope that readers will share the sense of connection among the diverse presenters who came together in Prague Congress Hall.

CIMUSET – the ICOM International Committee for Museums of Science and Technology – was founded in 1946 and reorganised in 1972. It brings together experts, museum workers and other enthusiasts for science and technology from all around the world. One of the goals of its work is to provide space for cooperation, communication, and exchange of information on the protection of this kind of cultural heritage. In line with ICOM's strategic plan and key documents, goals and activities, the committee works with issues its members bring in, and supports open discussion, inclusion and diversity.

Since organising as an international committee in 2005, CAMOC has focused on cities and their people—their history, their present and their future. The committee is a forum for those who work in museums about cities, but also for anyone involved and interested in urban life: historians, urban planners, architects, citizens, all of whom can exchange knowledge and ideas across national frontiers. Recent projects and conferences have looked at global migration and cities, democracy and citizenship, and where city museums are all around the world.

Set up in 1997, WORKLAB brings together more than 40 labour history museums from across the world. The association aims to promote the collection, conservation and interpretation of working class culture, work processes, and the labour movement. Member museums address this purpose as industrial history museums, museums focused on a single production facility or company, or museums concerned primarily with the organisational and ideological aspects of the labour movement. WORKLAB has on several occasions cooperated on EU-funded research and dissemination projects, for example on migrant labour or on the sound of labour heritage. WORKLAB and CIMUSET collaborated at a previous ICOM General Conference in Milan 2016.

The theme of the joint session was “Sustainable Citizens and Smart Museums.” Presentations in the form of 15 minute talks and 5 minute Ignite presentations explored how museums and citizens can together build a more sustainable society. What kind of activist and democracy building practices can museums adopt to promote social sustainability? What is the role of technology in creating sustainable cities of the future?

The international committees also took advantage of the rich assortment of museums in Prague and to hold meetings with our own members. The one-day, annual meeting of CIMUSET was held

on Thursday the 25<sup>th</sup> in the National Technical Museum in Prague - symbolically 50 years since the reorganisation of the committee, which took place at the same place in 1972. After an initial welcome by the director general of the museum, Mr. Karel Ksandr, we listened to the introductory lectures regarding the anniversary of CIMUSET - by the now former chairs Ech Cherki Dahmali and Bernard Blache. This was followed by a number of interesting presentations by museum professionals from both the National Technical Museum and the Technical Museum in Brno, for example about the collections protection and the history of technical museology in the Czech Republic. The next part of the meeting was the General Assembly, during which the election of the new board of the committee took place.

CAMOC's single-day meeting took place Friday the 26<sup>th</sup> at the Prague City Museum's lovely, pastoral Ctěnice Chateau Complex. Following a welcome from Zuzana Strnadová, Director General of the Prague City Museum, there were ten presentations exploring the role of city museums as local sustainable citizenship hubs. These built on a research thread initiated in 2021 at the ICOM and CAMOC webinar, Museums, Sustainable Cities and Communities and at CAMOC's Barcelona 2021 Annual Conference. Presenters shared experiences of programs and activities that fostered citizen engagement, prosperity and well-being, but were also rooted in place and based on a sense of place.

So what commonalities did we find across our broad organisational interests? A focus on people and engagement was one shared interest: ways that citizen curators or citizen scientists can play more meaningful roles in both museums and communities. Sustainability was another common concern, exploring how museums can help contribute to climate solutions and understanding of the global crisis. Also, the idea of the museum as laboratory, places where people can come together to experiment with concepts, to deepen their knowledge, and to strengthen their capacities for inquiry. Readers may identify more connections among the two dozen selections from the presentations here. We hope that this publication will inspire other partnerships between museums focusing on cities, science, and labour.

### ***Acknowledgments***

This publication would not have been possible without the dedicated work of our volume co-editors, Riina Linna and Johanna Vähäpesola. Other members of the editorial committee offered critical support along the way: Andréa Delaplace, Jacob Thoren Jensen, and Elena Perez Rubiales. Thank you as well to Bingul Gundas for the design and layout. We also want to acknowledge the Prague conference organisers. For CAMOC: Joana Sousa Monteiro, Jelena Savic, Catherine C. Cole, and Sarah Henry. For CIMUSET: Ech Cherki Dahmali, Marie Gilbertova, and Johanna Vähäpesola. And for WORKLAB, Søren Bak-Jensen, Kalle Kallio, and Irena Marušič. Our off-site hosts, Prague City Museum (Zuzana Strnadová, Director General, and Olga Samalova, Head of Presentation Department) and National Technical Museum (Karel Ksandr, Director), provided splendid facilities for our presentations and discussions. Finally, thanks to all of the contributors to this volume and to the participants in and attendees at the conference sessions.

*Søren Bak-Jensen (WORKLAB), Marie Gilbertova (CIMUSET), and Glenn Perkins (CAMOC)*





SØREN BAK-JENSEN

*The Workers Museum,  
Copenhagen, Denmark*

## THE MUSEUM AS A DEMOCRATIC FITNESS CENTER. REPOSITIONING THE WORKERS MUSEUM IN COPENHAGEN

### ABSTRACT

The Workers Museum in Copenhagen has embarked on a new path to position a commitment to democratic dialogue centrally in the visitor experience and public value of the museum. Key to the process is a strengthening of the connection between the subject area and the material and immaterial heritage of the museum's building. The museum is housed in the former Workers' Assembly Building, set up in 1879 as a meeting place for members of the working class. Through a major renovation project, a large part of the building including the main meeting hall has been included as a part of the museum experience. Critically, the renovation has brought forward the history and identity of the building as a training ground for democratic participation for the working class. The article presents the background and elements of the new direction taken by The Workers Museum to revive the function of the museum as a place of democratic empowerment. At the same time, the article points to challenges that have emerged in the effort to combine a traditional museum experience with an identity as a versatile and socially engaged meeting place and the responses that The Workers Museum have found to these.

**Key words:** Democracy, labour movement, activism, immaterial heritage, audience development

On a Saturday in March 2022, a group of young people walked into The Workers Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark, carrying more luggage than museum visitors normally do. Coming from different parts of the country, only a few in the group knew each other already. But one thing they all had in common was that they had signed up for a two-day “Activist Camp” led by museum educators and curators along with activists involved in raising awareness about climate issues, gender rights, and social justice. While other museum visitors filled the galleries, the group used part of the museum to conduct workshops, share experiences and listen to talks, all focused on how to make your voice heard and participate in democratic dialogue, even if you were not yet eligible to vote. When the museum closed, the group continued their work and had food brought up from the museum restaurant. And when it became time for bed, they rolled out their sleeping bags in one of the public spaces of the museum and got a good night’s rest before they continued their discussions the next day.

This Activist Camp was an early example of how The Workers Museum is repositioning itself in these years and developing the role we play as a museum. While maintaining and caring deeply about a more traditional museum experience which is important to most visitors and which draws on the rich collections of the institution, the museum is also developing its identity as a gathering place for groups and individuals who draw inspiration and perspective from the museum setting in their effort to make an impact in public debate today and raise awareness about current issues. In that way, The Workers Museum is trying to raise its profile as a place for empowerment and for building democratic self-confidence. And a central approach to this transformation is to establish a much clearer connection between the strategy and development of the museum and the history and values of the physical building it is located in. The aim could be summarized as trying to turn the museum into a democratic fitness center. A place to build strength and self-confidence in democratic participation today while drawing on the stories and heritage of the past.



Participants in the Activist Camp at The Workers Museum.  
© The Workers Museum

### **An Activist Museum in a Building of Engagement**

Stories of claiming a space in public life is at the center of what The Workers Museum is about. The museum was set up in 1982 in collaboration between grassroots organizations and the Danish labour movement and draws on collections that were begun as early as 1909 in an effort by trade unions to document their own stories. The museum has a national responsibility for collecting and disseminating the development of living conditions of working-class people since the 1870s and the history of the Danish labour movement. The collections form links between the details and individual stories of everyday life in industrial society with larger reflections about the development of mass-democracy and welfare states and include highly varied material regarding the political parties of the left, trade unions, cooperative businesses, grassroots organizations, and cultural associations. The museum works from a mission statement “to strengthen the will to an equal and just society through engaging encounters with history” and is committed to playing a part in present-day dialogue and reflection about social issues. Exhibitions about slavery, political activism, migrant workers, political art, and other subjects form the basis of this. At the same time, the museum places great emphasis on appealing to a broad audience, especially to people who are not frequent museum visitors.

*Members of The Industrial Woodworkers' Union attending a meeting in the Workers' Assembly Hall in 1915.*  
© The Workers Museum



The museum is located in the former Workers' Assembly Hall in central Copenhagen. Built in 1879 as the first building erected by the Danish labour movement and established through crowd funding among workers, it is a building that has direct relation to the subject matter of the museum. When the Danish labour movement was set up in the 1870s, opposition from authorities made it difficult for the workers to find places where they could hold meetings uninterrupted. Also, in the effort to gather as many people around the labour movement and enable the mass-organization that many workers saw as the only way to find the strength to demand better working and living conditions, the labour movement needed a place where a sense of belonging and community of the working class could be developed and maintained. For these reasons, the idea to construct the workers' own building emerged, with craftsmen and factory workers being asked to donate part of their salary to the buying of land and building process. Constructed as a multi-functional building with large and small meeting rooms, offices, and apartments along with a large kitchen and restaurant, the building was a venue for political, educational, cultural, and social activities. Most of the people attending these meetings in the first decades would not have enjoyed formal democratic rights. But by attending meetings, making agendas, listening to arguments, taking minutes, speaking in public, setting up associations, standing for office, and casting their vote, they became accustomed to how to participate in formal democratic processes and making their voices heard. In short, it became a democratic training ground for workers and a preparation for when they too would be able to take part in elections and put themselves forward as candidates. Not through the well-meaning efforts of paternalist associations, but through their own efforts.

This process of self-organized inclusion into public life and democracy is at the very heart of the story that The Workers Museum wishes to tell. But it is by no means a story that is unique to the building in Copenhagen. It was the first of more than fifty buildings set up with the same purpose in Denmark, and it is the oldest of the thousands of workers' assembly halls established in Europe in the decades around 1900. The vast majority of these have now disappeared, and on a global scale it is only the Victoria Trades Hall in Melbourne, Australia, which is older. But a few well-preserved buildings remain, and The Workers Museum along with partners from six countries is currently in the process of developing a transnational serial nomination of workers' assembly halls for the UNESCO World Heritage list (Brøndgaard 2023).

## Reviving a Heritage of Democratic Participation

The building functioned as an assembly hall for more than 100 years before being turned into a museum in 1982. By then, many of its original characteristics were in a poor state of conservation and difficult to appreciate due to disrepair and later modifications, and renovations of parts of the building have taken place ever since then. In 2021, a major restoration of the central part of the building, the main meeting hall, staircase, and adjacent meeting rooms was completed, uncovering for the first time in decades many of the original decorations and details of the rooms.

Preserving the physical heritage of the building was central to the project, as was an effort to upgrade technical installations and reduce energy consumption. But equally important was the ambition to revive the immaterial heritage of the building and make its history and original purpose part of the experience for visitors. Indeed, the restoration project was conducted under the heading that the main meeting hall “should not be turned into a museum”, meaning that it should be a place that was open to as many different activities as possible and where the museum was to be open to all kinds of cooperations that could bring life and activity with it. This meant developing a soundscape and new lighting that would bring meetings, speeches, and singing alive to the visitors, thereby giving an impression of what the atmosphere might have been like in the hall in the past. But chiefly, it meant reorienting the museum towards being prepared to seize more opportunities for cooperation and activities than previously. And this turned out to be a process that involved challenges that were only partly anticipated at the outset.

## Combining Institutional Identities

The strategy to revive the identity of the workers’ assembly building as a versatile meeting place enjoys strong organizational support at The Workers Museum. But it also demands new skills and competences. Being open to rapidly enter into partnerships around public events, reading circles, and debates on short notice required the allocation and hiring of staff that had the ongoing dialogue and planning with collaborators as their primary task. Many potential partnership organizations expected the museum to be able to move more quickly than we had previously done in terms of planning of events.

Also, there was a question about how to maintain economic sustainability in the role of the museum as a versatile meeting place. Many potential collaborators were attracted by the prospect of holding events in the unique physical environment of the assembly building but were perhaps not expecting to pay market-based rent for the venue. At a less intense level of external partnerships around events, it was less problematic for the museum to reduce prices. But with the ambition to conduct many more events in partnerships, clear guidelines for economic cooperation with partners had to be developed to ensure that activities would not exhaust the financial basis of the museum but rather be a positive contribution to it.

Yet most importantly, there is the challenge of safeguarding a good experience for all visitors regardless of whether they are using the museum for a traditional experience of exhibitions or for an event, a community meeting, or a study group. And again, the particular qualities of the workers’ assembly building are at the heart of the challenge. After the renovation of the main meeting hall, this

*The main assembly hall is the heart of the Workers' Assembly building from 1879 and is now completely renovated..*

© Søren Hytting / The Workers Museum



room is part of the museum experience and is marketed as a central attraction in visiting The Workers Museum. At the same time, the meeting hall is the most attractive location to hold large meetings and events, also for external partners. Consequently, visitors may go to the museum with the intention of experiencing the meeting hall, only to find that it is closed for a special event. Finding ways to manage expectations and combining different uses of the building will be crucial to making sure that every visitor has an enjoyable experience.

In the end, these challenges are worth taking on because they are necessary obstacles to overcome on the way to creating a unique museum experience, where histories of democratic engagement and activism are not only displayed, but also continued. Drawing on the qualities of the workers' assembly building, The Workers Museum aims to create a place of empowerment and community with a strong sense of authenticity. Regardless of the specific nature of their visit, every visitor should leave the museum feeling stronger and more self-confident in taking part in democratic dialogue.

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## BIOGRAPHY

**Søren Bak-Jensen** is the director of the Workers Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark. At this and other museums, he has headed a number of collecting and dissemination projects focusing on community involvement. He holds a Ph.D. degree in history from the University of Copenhagen. Since 2021, he serves as president of WORKLAB – The International Association of Labour Museums. Afghanistan in 1975. Orloff has been a member of CAMOC since 2006.

## CIMUSET 50 YEARS...AND MORE

**BERNARD BLACHE**

*Parcours des Sciences, Association  
for scientific walks in Paris,  
France*

### ABSTRACT

This presentation recounts the beginnings of the CIMUSET Committee of ICOM in 1972, thanks to the directors of two scientific and technical museums : Josef KUBA for the Narodni Technicke Muzeum in Prague and Jean Rose for the Palais de la découverte in Paris.

I then briefly discuss who the successors of these creators are, what their actions were over the next 50 years and for what purposes.

**Key words:** Cimuset, history, creation, goals, ICOM

## Reminder

The CIMUSET (acronym for Committee of Science and Technology Museums) is one of the 32 international committees of ICOM, it was created in 1946 and for 26 years has chained works and meetings, its second birth dates from 1972, it marks the start of a more regular operation at the origin of many collaborations.



50 years of Cimuset booklets.  
© Bernard Blache

## The beginning

In 1972, (I had been present at the Palais de la découverte for a year and a half) I had the opportunity to take part in a preparatory meeting for the reorganization of the CIMUSET committee (then called committee n°1 - it was the first committee of ICOM International -), reorganization which was the subject of a meeting in Prague from October 2 to 8, 1972. The two instigators of this work of restarting were Dr Josef KUBA, director of the Narodni Technicke Museum in Prague and Jean ROSE, director of the Palais de la découverte. The meeting took place in Prague at the Narodni Technicke Museum with 21 participants from Prague, Brno, Paris, Moscow, Stockholm, London and Washington. Attended this meeting Hugues de Varine-Bohan, then president of ICOM international. The subjects that were discussed during this meeting : the mode of operation and the statutes of this «committee n°1», a project to assist in the design of an exhibition in India, the ISMEL project, the attempt to create a directory of science and technology museums based on the sending out of a questionnaire, projects for duplicating exhibitions to provide new museums with limited means, the search for new original methods to present the science and technology. A number of communications were delivered: by Mr. BERKA from Brno, Mr. MAKKINK from Delft, Mr. ROSE from Paris and Mr. RASL from Prague. The session ended with a visit to the SKODA factory in PILSEN.



Refoundation of CIMUSET - Prague 1972.  
© Bernard Blache

An illustration is presented : the account book of «Committee No. 1» kept - by hand - by Charles Penel for many years. It should be noted that the first operation was a grant from ICOM in May 1972.

## 2d meeting

The second meeting took place in France, in Brittany at Trélévern, the region of origin of Jean ROSE from October 1 to 6, 1973 , it was attended by 23 participants (transported by the daily flight of the CNET) and gave rise to 8 communications. What were the subjects discussed during this meeting, which also gave rise to numerous visits, both tourist and industrial. Initial work was done on CIMUSET's operating rules, office, decisions, operations, then an update on the directory: the survey collected 46 responses out of 150 questionnaires sent. Then a report on two projects that could not be followed up due to lack of funding (one in Bangalore, the other in Egypt); more promising an innovative project began to take shape, the 3M project (Modern Model Museum) resulting from reflections on a new museology. Finally, the reflection focused on a selection of experiences that could be presented to the general assembly of ICOM in 1974 in Copenhagen.

## Places of meetings

This map shows the towns where a CIMUSET meeting took place (since its origin in 1946). 72 places are thus checked off. These meetings have taken place within



65 CIMUSET meetings - 76 towns. © Bernard Blache

the framework of ICOM's triennial assemblies, between these assemblies, or even informally (such as a meeting three years ago in Barcelona).

### Who ?

This leads us to examine who are the members of CIMUSET : they are approximately 400 (which places the committee in the middle range of international committees), they show interest in its activities without necessarily engaging in them regularly. What institutions are they from? They are most often technical museums rather than science museums and rather medium-sized museums, very large establishments are poorly represented. Finally, this map shows that the meetings took place mainly in Europe, a little in Asia or in America, only once in Australia or Africa.

### Objectives

The objectives of CIMUSET In summary: To carry a program of activities, to provide a forum for communication, cooperation and the exchange of information, to support the objectives and programs of ICOM

### Presidents

Who were the presidents of CIMUSET? The first André Léveill , painter, was also director of the Palais de la d couverte (in 1946). Out of 15 in total, there were only one woman (two now with our last president Marie Gilbertova).

### BIOGRAPHY

**Bernard Blache** was the former president of CIMUSET from 2004 to 2010, former board member of ICOM France. After training as an engineer, he worked in a Parisian science museum, the Palais de la d couverte, for 38 years as head of temporary and traveling exhibitions, then director of communication. Actually working in an association organizing scientific "promenades" : "Parcours des sciences".

## A COMMUNITY-CENTRIC MODEL FOR CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY: A MODEL IN PRACTICE, WITH A CASE STUDY FROM MAE CHAEM, CHIANG MAI, THAILAND

### ABSTRACT

The remote community of Mae Chaem, Chiang Mai, Thailand, became the first case study to utilize The Community-Centric Model for Cultural Sustainability to conceptualize and design a pilot project to serve a community. Centered around building Mae Chaem's future generations, the project asked the questions: How do we engage and equip youth to explore, think, act, and thrive in a changing world; impress them with a sense of commitment to and ownership of their community; and motivate them to take action to invest in their shared future? How can museums, as civic and gathering space, and museum education practices and tools help to unlock cultural assets, and contribute to the whole child development approach? The project brought together community partners – from local, national, and international levels and from various sectors – to help the youth and their community build a process to determine their own path forward. The project also enabled connections between urban and rural communities and demonstrated how a city museum might serve as a change agent in rural communities. Based on this case study, this article provides an update on the Model with key success factors for adopting and implementing the Model and new learning and discoveries.

**Key words:** Well-being, sustainability, identity, belonging, resilience

From ICOM Kyoto 2019 to ICOM Prague 2022, the question of the relevance and the contribution of museums in a changing world has become increasingly important. ICOM Prague 2022 challenged us to imagine and inquire into topics such as museums as agents of social change (Purpose) or as active participants in the creation of sustainable models for contemporary societies (Sustainability), and the need to find new solutions to unprecedented issues (Vision) or to meet the different needs (Delivery) (The Organizing Committee Bureau, ICOM Prague 2022, 2022). These questions underscore that, in addition to asking what they traditionally do (collecting, conservation, communication, research, exhibition), museums need to elevate two additional important dimensions of their roles: *for whom* museums serve (audience), and *to what end* museums are accountable for delivering (outcomes and impacts). These additional dimensions not only broaden the scope of museum primary missions but also require museums to be more inclusive, more thoughtful, more specific, and more intentional about their activities than ever before. In this broadened scope is a specific idea that museums are service organizations to serve their communities towards specific end goals. What might a museum as a service organization look like?

The Community-Centric Model for Cultural Sustainability (“the Model”) aims to answer that question by providing an organizing framework to help communities and their partners, including museums, sustain or improve community well-being, and thereby deepening a sense of identity, belonging and community commitment. A project team worked with Mae Chaem, a remote community in Northern Thailand, to utilize the Model as a framework for leveraging the community’s cultural assets as a seed for growth, sustainability, and resilience amidst changes at the national and global levels. Based on this case study, this article provides an update on the Model from its launch at ICOM Kyoto 2019, with key success factors for adopting and implementing the Model and with new learning and discoveries.

### The Community-Centric Model for Cultural Sustainability: A Summary and an Update

From the initial, detailed version (*Figure 1*), the Model has been simplified to the 6 Ps of Community-Centric Model for Cultural Sustainability (*Figure 2*) where: *People and Place* (respectively, community members and their context) form the center and the basis of the community; in response to external shock or change,

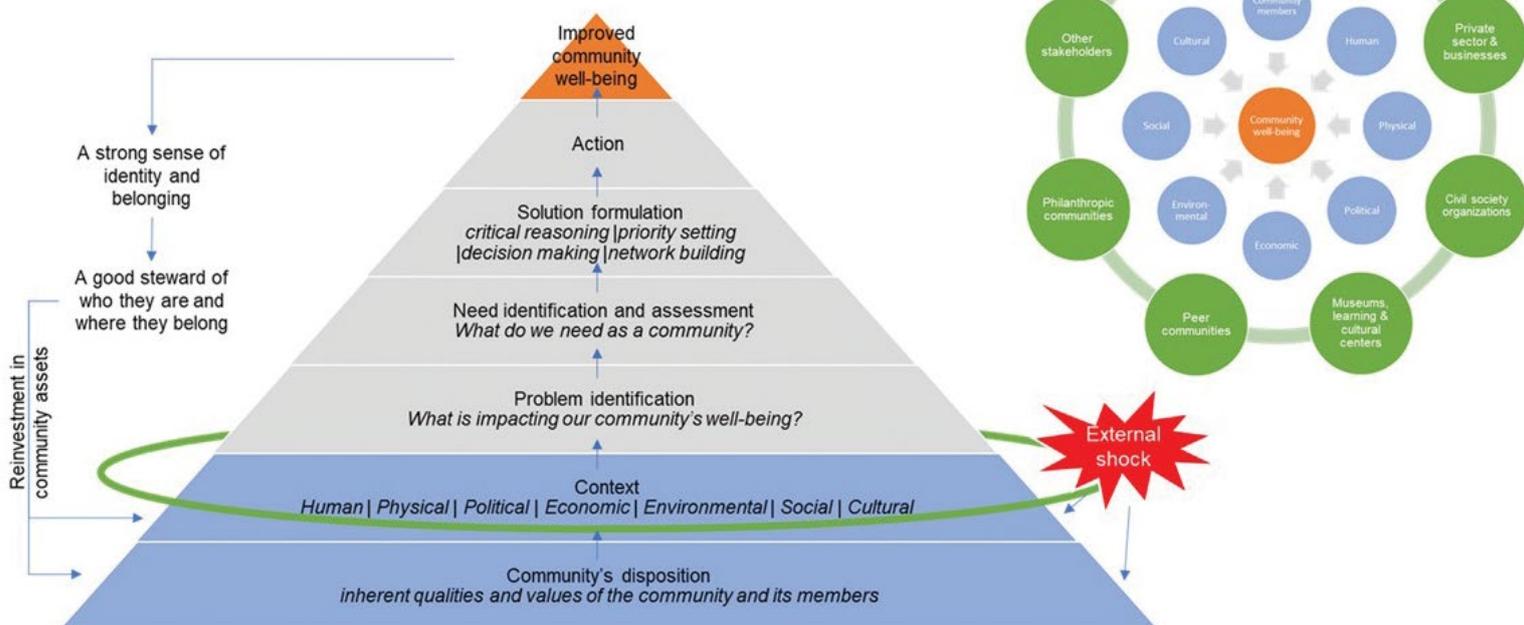
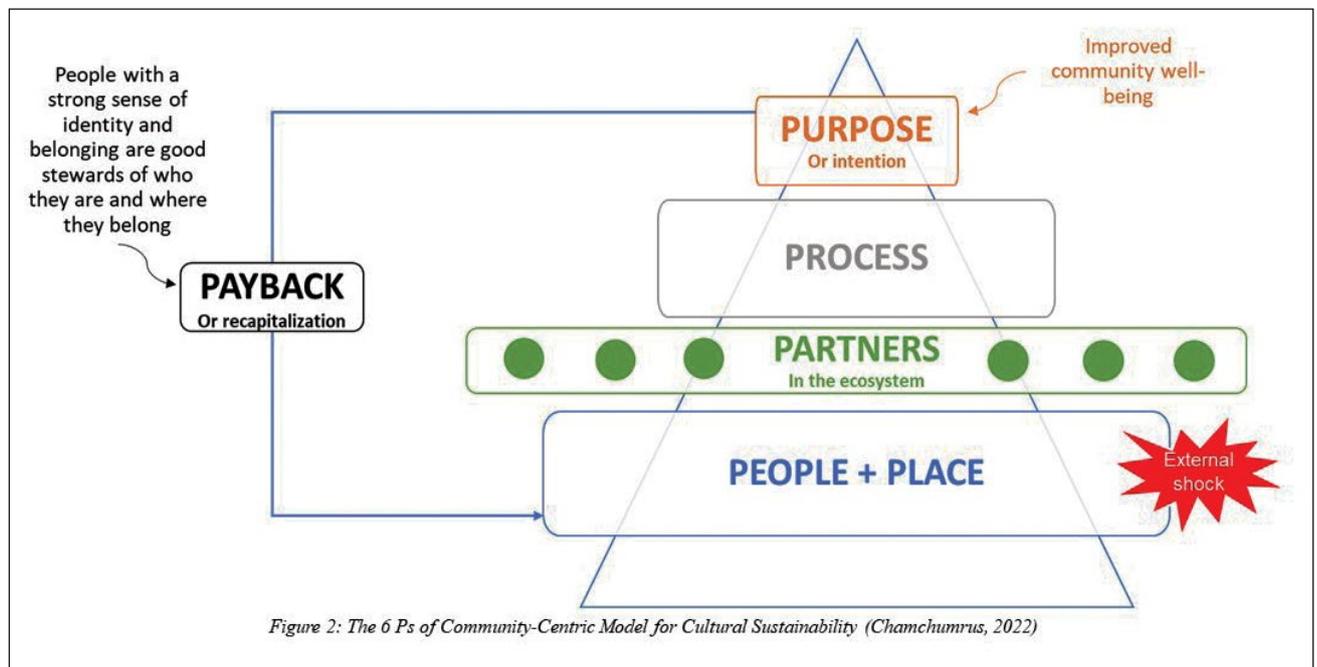


Figure 1: A detailed version of the Community-Centric Model for Cultural Sustainability (Chanlumrus, 2020)



*Process* represents the mechanisms through which the community works, with support from *Partners* including museums, to regain or improve its well-being, or *Purpose*; with a higher level of well-being and a deeper sense of identity, belonging and commitment, community members *Payback* by being a good steward to the community by reinvesting in it.

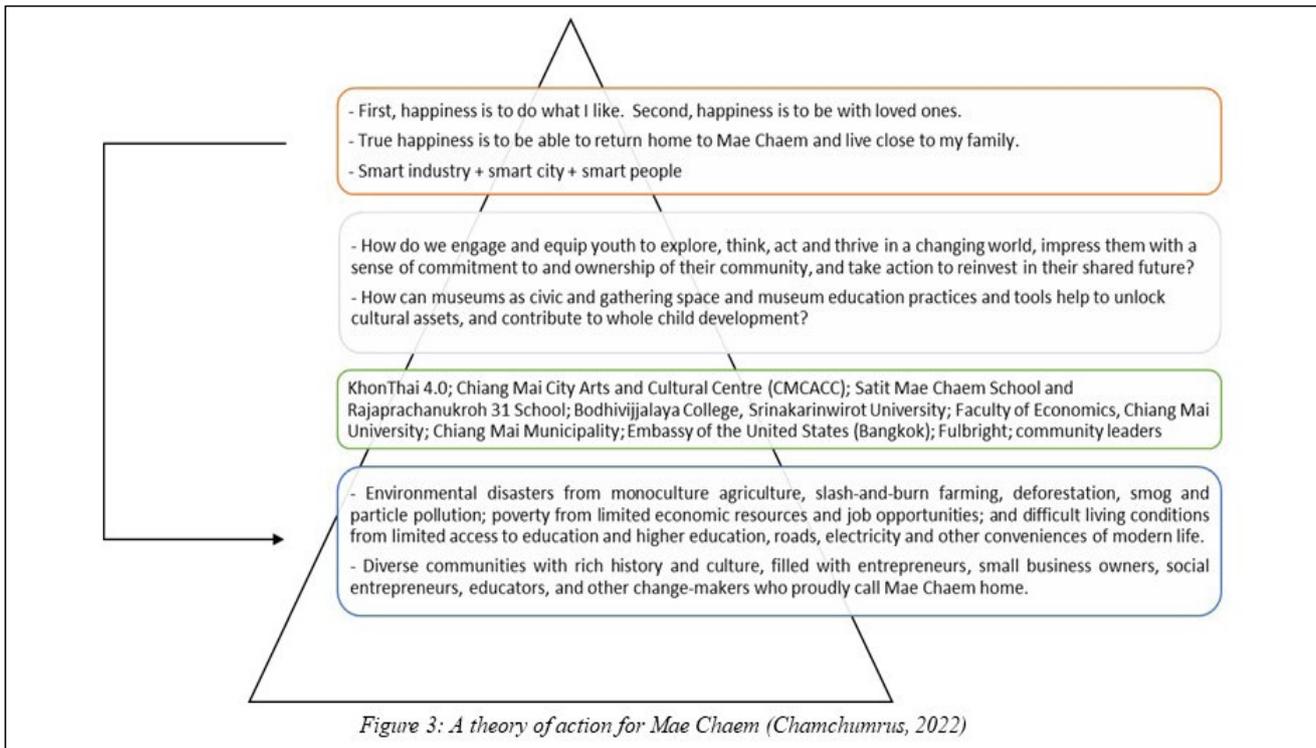
#### A Case Study from Mae Chaem, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Mae Chaem is a remote community in Northern Thailand. In 2018, it was caught between its own challenges at the local level, ranging from socioeconomic to environmental to access to education, and the national aspiration of Thailand 4.0 with a vision of “Smart Industry, Smart City, Smart People” by 2032 (The Royal Thai Embassy, Washington, DC, USA, n.d.; The Royal Thai Embassy, Washington, DC, USA, 2018). How could Mae Chaem as a community thrive as Thailand and the world continue to change?

To answer that question, two organizations came together: The Chiang Mai City Arts & Cultural Center (CMCACC) and Khonthai 4.0, a national research program focusing on the critical question of how to invest in Thai people today to create future generations who will thrive in Thailand as envisioned in Thailand 4.0. They worked with the Mae Chaem community to understand *People* and *Place* and quickly identified that the community’s cultural assets were an untapped resource for growth, sustainability, and resilience. They asked community members who had chosen to stay or return to invest in their community, “What is success and happiness to you?” and gained insight into what defined well-being, or *Purpose*, of the community and how to foster the sense of identity and belonging among younger generations to encourage *Payback* in the future. They pulled in other *Partners* – two schools for programmatic support; universities for technical assistance and support in information dissemination and networking; the municipal government for political support; and the US Embassy for international perspectives and funding. The project team and the community decided to focus on the future generations of Mae Chaem – 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders – and used two questions to guide the design and implementation of a *Process* towards solutions in a pilot project:

- How do we engage and equip youth to explore, think, act, and thrive in a changing world, impress them with a sense of commitment to and ownership of their community, and take action to reinvest in their shared future?
- How can museums as civic and gathering space and museum education practices and tools help to unlock cultural assets, and contribute to whole child development?

The pilot can be summarized and mapped into the Model as illustrated in *Figure 3*.



With clarity, specificity and intentionality in the planning, the pilot became a straightforward youth development project using existing tools and practices in museum education such as the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. With support from the museum staff from the CMCACC and from their teachers, students went through a semester of oral history exercises with the community and experiential learning using museum resources. They created an exhibition about themselves, their community, their hopes and dreams, and their commitments to their community, that was shown and celebrated in Mae Chaem before traveling to the CMCACC in the city of Chiang Mai and to the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre, an international gallery in the capital city of Bangkok (KhonThai 4.0, 2022; Phatthanaphraiwan et al., 2022).

### Learnings and discoveries

The pilot integrates concepts and practices from international development, community development, museums and culture, and education to serve a community with specific needs and to help the community create a process to find its own solutions for its own growth, sustainability, and resilience. With the Model as an organizing framework, the pilot's initial success and early findings not only demonstrates the Model's validity and potential but also highlights areas of focus for further investigation both in research and in practice.

#### 1. Key success factors for implementing the Model

The pilot confirms the utmost importance of community leadership and ownership. The project persisted despite the disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic because the community insisted that the project continue. The community leadership was also supported by the right partners and project champions, who understood and committed to a long-term vision and who helped navigate challenges and change management, and by the museum leadership who followed community needs and participated as part of the network.

The pilot also highlights the importance of network thinking. In this case, the project was able to interrelate Mae Chaem's needs and priorities to Thailand's national policy priorities and the US Embassy's global priorities on Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion,

thereby connecting systems and creating interactions across different levels: local, regional, national, and global. Such connections and interactions led to shared goals, relevancy and urgency at all levels and contributed to the success and sustainability of the project.

II. **The power of motivation and validation**

It may take years to observe the action and contribution of the participating youth to see and understand the full impact of the pilot. However, motivation and validation have come up as two leading indicators of community resilience. The pilot used culture as a tool to help youth explore their place identity and belonging and be aware of their community assets. The awareness, reinforced by the validation from the community, gave them the motivation to deepen their learning journey and the agency to turn knowledge into action. For example, through the oral history process, the youth learned that their community was known for textiles, so for the exhibition, instead of drawing a community map, they chose to learn how to sew and embroider a map to tell their community stories using a community skill. In this process, they not only learned how to make traditional patterns, but they also began to innovate new patterns, to teach their parents how to sew, and to design contemporary clothes using traditional materials and skills. As a result, the textile tradition lives on in the hearts and hands of the people who have pride and skills to keep it alive.

III. **A need for new ways for impact evaluation**

Given the transdisciplinary approach to the pilot, new ways of impact evaluation are needed. What indicators do we need to convince all stakeholders to make an investment today for the payback today, tomorrow, and over the lifetime? For whom do we measure – funders, partners, museums, policymakers, or the community itself? How do we prioritize and align those measurements? What do we measure and how? What timeframe do we measure – short term, long time, or lifetime?

IV. **Contributions to the museum definition discussion**

Instead of defining what a museum is, the pilot demonstrates what a museum can do as a service organization for a community and how to do it. Through the lens of the four pillars of ICOM Prague 2022, it shows us what a museum looks like as an agent to social change (Purpose), what it can do when actively participating in the creation of sustainable models for contemporary societies (Sustainability), its relevance when working as part of a network to find new solutions to unprecedented issues (Vision), and how it can meet the different needs of the audience it serves and engages (Delivery), with or without technologies.

## CONCLUSION

The case study shows us that museums can stay relevant and contribute to contemporary societies by acting as service organizations. While additional work still needs to be done in research and in practice, the Model can be a practical, helpful organizing framework to help museums be inclusive, thoughtful, specific, and intentional about their activities, audiences and intended outcomes and impacts as they expand their scope of primary missions.

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Teng is interested in museums' roles in serving communities and the intersection of economic development, cultural sustainability, and sustainable communities. Teng is committed to bring his professional expertise and experience to help keep communities vibrant and diverse for generations to come.

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## **WHAT NARRATIVES, WHAT OBJECTS, WHAT SPACES? PRESENTING MIGRATORY GROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN CITY MUSEUMS**

### **ABSTRACT**

What narratives, what objects, what spaces? Presenting migratory growth, housing and urban development in city museums is essential as these are central questions in the transformations of any city. The population movements and fluxes are essential to understand the deep changes and urban evolution in any city's history. In this article we are looking at how three Parisian museums are talking about migratory growth and sustainable urban development in city museums.

**Key words:** City museums, sustainability, migratory growth, social housing

What kind of inclusive practices can museums adopt to promote social sustainability in a crisis scenario where climate change, forced migrations and health crises (like the recent pandemic) are shaping our realities. Citizen engagement based on a local level is becoming more and more important to face these critical issues and city museums can become hubs where the local gets connected to the global. Museum initiatives on a local level can open the discussions on a global level where a network of actions towards a more just and sustainable society can be envisaged.

We will focus on the only case study of the city of Paris and three museums that focus on the thematics mentioned above: the *Musée Carnavalet*, the *Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration* and an associative initiative to create a popular housing museum in Aubervilliers (Paris suburb).

The main objective is to analyse these study cases to highlight the museological dynamics and principles related to the work of local memory and local identity (that of a particular neighbourhood, for example) and how they are trying to engage the different communities in Paris (a global capital) and its *banlieue* (La Métropole du Grand Paris) to engage and actively participate in creating solutions for an increasing social disparity in France (and the world).

### 1 - The Musée Carnavalet : collecting the city and its histories

In the heart of the Marais district, the Musée Carnavalet presents a collection with more than 625 000 objects including paintings, sculptures, furniture, decorative woodwork and *objets d'art*, shop signs, photographs, drawings, prints, posters, medals, coins, historical objects, archaeological collections and more, presented in an outstanding historical setting. Visitors travel through Paris from prehistoric times to the present day as they pass along the different levels of the museum.

The museum reopens in May 2021 after four and a half years of work with a new exhibition that highlights its rich collection on Parisian history from the Roman period to today. According to the director of the museum, Valérie Guillaume (2021): “The specificity of Carnavalet is the diversity and complexity of its collections. It is an interdisciplinary museum. As we have more space, we were able to create boxes around themes or spaces - the Ile de la Cité, certain districts, Parisian cemeteries, Haussmann breakthroughs, suburbs, etc. - or personalities, Proust in particular. Finally, we managed to create a continuous chronological thread: missing periods: the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, as well as the 19th and 20th centuries. We have adapted the visit to all audiences, people with disabilities, children (10% of the works are presented at children's eye level). About fifty women and men - historians, architects, directors, artists - now comment on an object or an aspect of the collection on terminals, for example André Guyuax, specialist in literature from Paris, who intervenes on the cane of Baudelaire. The wide variety of proposals that I had noted in Tokyo (at the Edo museum) or in the United States (in city museums), I wanted to find it in the new Carnavalet.

We are also fortunate to be part of a network of institutions whose collections complement each other: City Hall Library, Historical Library of the City of Paris, Paris Archives, Department of Architectural History and Archeology of the City of Paris, History Committee. This will make it easier for us to organise temporary exhibitions or put these collections on a virtual network. We have yet to get most of our funds back. Finally, we are working to set up a resource centre to make the collections even more accessible to all audiences.” (1)

The work done over the past four years is impressive: all the exhibition spaces have been renewed and the new long-term exhibition is more thorough and complete than its predecessor. The overall impression of visiting the museum after its renovation is that the museum has deepened the scope of its chronological timeline but kept the most important aspects of the old exhibition.

The visitor can still admire the beautiful period rooms and the famous galleries of shop signs that were among the favourites of the old exhibition. The renovated rooms offer a brighter and cleaner display of artworks and historical objects. The new display cases and museography (room dispositions) offer the possibility to create a dialogue between the different objects and artworks on view. The supplemental material is also very abundant and completes the museography: videos with testimonies from specialists, digital archives that can be consulted on the spot, etc.



Fig. 1. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.  
© François Grunberg, 2021

The Musée Carnavalet remains an important museum in the Parisian cultural landscape. Research on oral history and focusing on important contemporary issues such as climate change, sustainability, gender equality, social justice and inclusiveness continue to widen perspectives at this well-established museum.

## 2-The Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration : a new permanent exhibition opened in 2023

An architectural masterpiece in the Art Deco style, the Palais de la Porte Dorée was erected for the colonial exhibition of 1931. It now houses the National Museum of the History of Immigration, since October 2007. (2) This scientific and didactic museum explains the main stages of immigration to France, thus approaching the history of the country in a chronological timeline from the Ancien Regime to 2015. Colonialism and slavery, wars, reconstruction policies, economic and social conflicts, crises, struggles for rights or solidarity, meeting of cultures (fig. 1).

Closed for more than a year due to works, the galleries of the permanent collections of the Museum of the History of Immigration reopened to the public on June 17, 2023. Or more precisely, it is the permanent collection of the museum - located in the Palais de la Porte Dorée. The museum undertook three years' work in order to review the scenography of these galleries, and to install a better air renewal system.

Previously, the collections were presented in the form of thematic chapters. Now the focus is to highlight eleven major dates in the history of migration, from 1685 to the present day. The museum is also being modernised with new digital tools. To enhance this new route, works by contemporary artists are installed in the museum's collections. Photographs, installations, paintings, sculptures, testimonials, personal objects, videos from migrants testimonies, these are all part of the museum's collections that aims to tell the many stories of migration to France.

Through nearly 600 works, documents, art or historical objects, video or sound clips, the Musée national de l'histoire de l'Immigration questions the reasons and consequences of these population movements - chosen or not. Several portraits are also highlighted in the course, recalling that behind the figures, hide people, struggles, hopes, personal stories. Even though this museum is not a city museum, it is located in a historical building that is deeply connected to the city's history and French national history. Plus it is one of the only museums that speaks about migration history in France.

## 3-The AMULOP association and the project for a popular housing museum Exhibition "The life of HLM"

A project in Aubervilliers, a popular and "difficult" neighbourhood in the north-east of the parisian region, is dedicated to social housing and the different communities (most of them from a migrant background that live there). The project is totally created as an associative initiative led by AMuLoP (3) and has a first temporary exhibition (fig. 2) running from October 2021 to June 2022 called "La vie HLM-Histoires d'habitant-e-s de logements populaires. Aubervilliers, 1950-2000".(4)



Fig. 2. "The life of HLM"  
Exhibition dossier

The famous HLM (*habitation à loyer modéré* or low-rent housing in English) is a type of housing built with the help of the State and which is subject to precise rules of construction, management and attributions. Rents are also regulated and access to housing is subject to a limitation of maximum resources. It's an exhibition dedicated to these buildings and communities that are often connected to stereotypes such as social exclusion, poverty and criminality. The idea is to show the real lives of its inhabitants and social interactions that build the “*vie de quartier*” (community life). This exhibition is a project to foreshadow the popular housing museum. (5)

The exhibition retraces the daily life and the journeys of several families who lived in the building housing the exhibition between the 1950s and 2000s, based on a historical survey in the archives and interviews with the inhabitants, carried out by researchers and scholars.

Starting from the history of these families, the aim is to show the changes experienced by Aubervilliers over the last decades, and more broadly the working-class suburbs in the second half of the 20th century, under the effects of major economic and industrial changes. Some of the thematic that are addressed in this temporary exhibition range from housing and working conditions to social and political movements. Also regional, provincial, colonial and international migrations is an important theme that is at the centre of this exhibition as many of the inhabitants of the building where the exhibition is presented come from a migrant background (fig. 3).

Other important points and themes that are being treated by the research developed by the association are access to social rights, leisure and consumption, mobility, transformation of the territory and, finally, population health, gender, class and race relations. By bringing into light many different aspects related to social housing and urban transformations, this important project aims to demystify stereotypes around popular housing in the *banlieue parisienne*. (6)

The social history of working class living conditions is very important to understand not only the deep transformations of city living and urban environment but also for understanding how the gentrification process is modifying the urban cityscape of many cities around the globe. Old working class neighbourhoods are becoming more and more hype pushing the populations once living there to even further away urban spaces and neighbourhoods in the city (and outside city limits).

#### 4 - The hidden potential of city museums and local community projects

The new Musée Carnvalet doesn't really go deep in the discussion of urbanistic transformations over the years and the dynamics between the banlieue and the city intra-muros. The very last room of the permanent exhibition does present briefly the contemporary challenges that the city of Paris have been facing but it doesn't go deep in the discussions or analysis. Climate change and social tensions (regarding thematic as migration, social exclusion and fracture between the *banlieue* and the ville *intra muros*, gentrification, etc.) are briefly mentioned but not deeply developed. We understand that the Musée Carnvalet has a very rich collection and does have a very long timeline (from Prehistoric times to the present) but it is a pity that a city museum dedicated to Paris (a global international capital) doesn't present real discussions and reflections on its contemporary challenges.

The *Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration* has a very “inconstant story” and we had the impression that the museum was always trying to justify itself in front of critics and even the public. (7) But it has the merit to bring the history of migration into the museum landscape in France and it did present a permanent exhibition called *Repères* (from 2007 to 2020) that presented social housing as



Fig. 3. Climbing Down by artist Barthélémy Togo, The Musée national de l'histoire de l'Immigration, Paris. © Andréa Delaplace, 2020.

being deeply connected with the lives of most migrants that moved to France (specially in the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's). Through artworks of contemporary artists and archival documents and objects, the section of the exhibition called *Ici, là-bas* (8) put into perspective the importance of the *grands ensembles* in creating a better environment for everyone involved.

*Les grands ensembles* (9) is also the title of a work by Mathieu Pernot presented as part of the former permanent exhibition of the *Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration* - MNHI. Thus highlighting the importance of these spaces when creating a discourse on immigration in France. Many humanist photographers were also interested in the documentation of these spaces in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Marc Riboud and Robert Doisneau. This leaves a lot of documentation on the buildings and it is an important visual support that helps in the "representations" of the HLM inhabitants and the social life in these spaces over time.

The AMuLoP's project is innovative as it actually brings a more realistic approach than the *Musée Carnavalet* or even the MNHI. This associative initiative is doing a real multivocal exhibition and working in partnership with the local community. The project of a permanent museum dedicated to social housing in Aubervilliers is very promising in bringing a fresher, polyphonic and participative approach to the creation of an exhibition that talks not only of the urban transformations of Aubervilliers but of migration and the social history of labour. It also brings to the table a decentralisation of the perspective by telling the story of social housing in a working class peripheric area outside of the Paris *intra-muros*.

Initiatives like this are showing the potential of a collaborative work in between inhabitants of social housing, researchers (and university) and museums professionals in creating an exhibition that not only tells the stories of families that lived in the same building in different periods over time but also brings to life the reality of a huge multicultural community that lives in the peripheral areas of Paris.

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- (3) For more information on the Association pour un Musée du Logement Populaire: <https://www.amulop.org>
- (4) For more information on the development of this exhibition and project read this article: <https://hal.science/hal-03915520/document>
- (5) The exhibition will take place in an HLM a few steps from a future Grand Paris Express station, in an area that will be profoundly transformed by the construction of 1,800 housing units. In this context, putting the history of the neighbourhood and the daily life of its inhabitants into perspective is a crucial issue.
- (6) Especially in the midst of the presidential elections in France, when more than ever talking about difficult neighbourhoods and migration is a sensitive subject.
- (7) I did treated more in depth the creation of this museums and its several transformations over time in my PhD thesis but also in the following article: <https://journals.openedition.org/cel/296>
- (8) For more information on the exhibition *Repères*, please check the MNHI's website: <https://www.palais-portedoree.fr/en/the-permanent-exhibition-reperes>
- (9) For more information on this artwork please check the MNHI's website: <https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/collections/le-grand-ensemble-de-mathieu-pernot>

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## THE ROLE OF CITY MUSEUMS AS LOCAL CITIZENSHIP HUBS A COMPETENCE BASED APPROACH

### ABSTRACT

Taking an active stance towards the enhancement of our local urban societies has become a vision for many city museums. This could be achieved by acting as a local citizenship hub: a place where the role of the citizens is discussed, civic engagement is fostered, where diverse people and ideas meet to overcome the societal divide, where social cohesion is fostered and visions for the future are elaborated. However, this new role for museums as an integral part of society requires a clear strategy, an adequate organizational set-up as well as committed and competent staff. In order to learn more about the competences needed, I suggest taking a transdisciplinary approach and looking at methods from the field of education, since museums are places of non-formal and informal education. More specifically, two reference frameworks for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills on a global scale, i.e. the OECD Learning Compass 2030 as well as the Council of Europe Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, serve as a starting point. This leads to the question, which of these competences do we already have in our museums' organizations? Which are missing? Moreover, how can these competences help to develop social innovation practices?

In addition to a theoretic approach, I will illustrate which competences are needed in a collaborative process towards an inclusive cultural network within the city of Graz. The Graz Museum leads the process as part of its social innovation practises. In "Culture inclusive", members of cultural organizations of different size and sections are collaborating with social welfare institutions, artists and with handicapped people in a democratic working process with equal rights to participate and shape the results. An open and lively process with distributed agency, which is bringing together a diverse group with different needs but common goals: to make cultural institutions more accessible and a place where everybody feels welcome, heard and empowered. A place where people get insight and knowledge along their specific needs, get the chance to meet others, actively foster social cohesion and exchange ideas to overcome the societal divide. The results of the evaluation of the ongoing process will be shown and will serve as the base for rolling out the process to a wider audience. Furthermore, key learnings on the competences needed and on how sustainable social practices can be achieved in order to foster the museum as a local citizenship hub will be highlighted.

**Key words:** Social innovation, local citizenship hub, inclusive society, democratic competence, participation, inclusion

## Introduction

Living in times of multiple crises, civic society is more than ever challenged to take an active stance in contributing to transformational processes towards a good future for all. City museums can play a major role in a diversified, network and knowledge society with a potential to be stakeholders in societal transformation processes. Ideally, a city museum taking on the role of a citizenship hub would be a public place, where the role of citizens is discussed, civic engagement is fostered, where diverse people meet and debate conflicting ideas, where a common understanding to overcome social divide is sought and thus social cohesion is fostered.

For the realisation of this vision, we must understand the complex processes involving numerous actors such as individual citizens, civil society, the city administration and the city government. In order to become a local citizenship hub and shape the processes, (city) museums need to develop new and specific methodologies. Museum staff has to be qualified to develop these methodologies, to mediate conflicts and facilitate new ideas. I am therefore interested to find out how this will change the job profiles of museum professionals entrusted with these tasks.

In the following, I will firstly look at relevant theoretical frameworks describing competences needed for transformative and democratic processes. Secondly, I will give the example of a process of social innovation lead by the Graz Museum and illustrate the lessons learned and the competences acquired in it.

## OECD Learning Compass 2030 and Council of Europe Competences for Democratic Culture

As a theoretical basis for an empirical examination of the required competences, I have taken a transdisciplinary approach and looked at methods from the field of education, since museums are places of non-formal and informal education. I analysed two reference frameworks for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills on a global scale, i.e. the

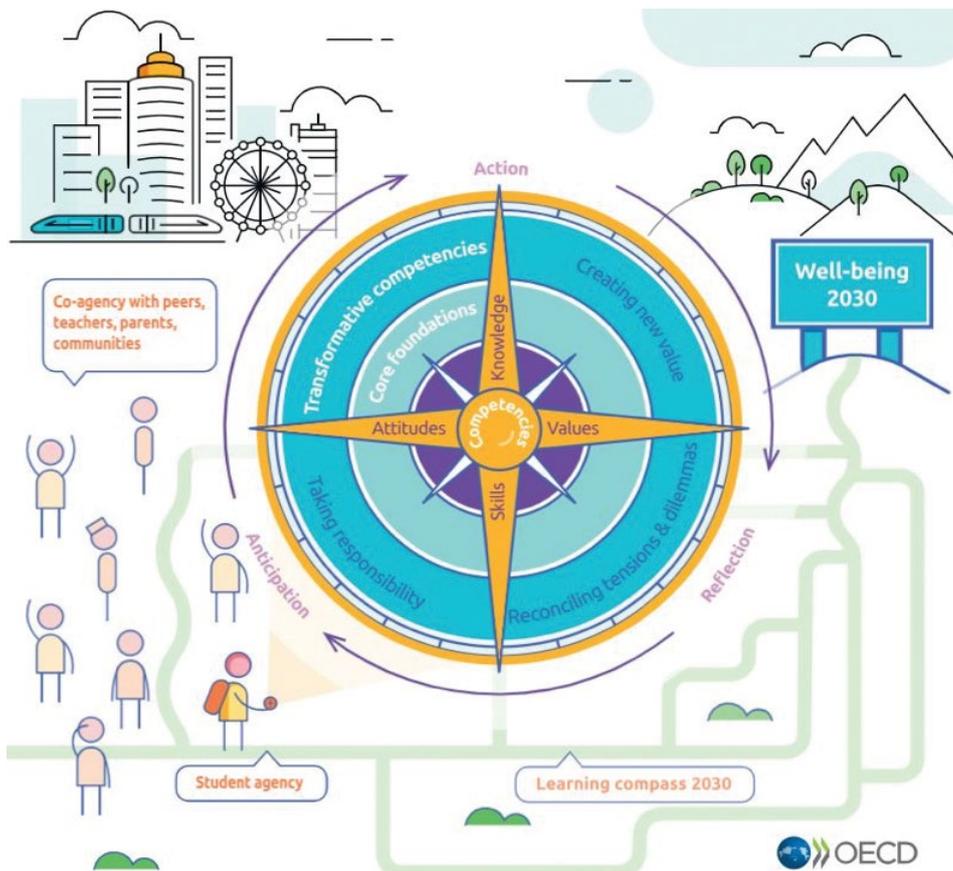


Fig. 1. OECD Learning Compass 2030 (OECD p.6)

OECD Learning Compass 2030 as well as the Council of Europe Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.

The **OECD** launched the **Learning Compass 2030** project in 2015 in order to proactively deal with the “global trends like digitalisation, climate change, and advances in artificial intelligence” which “pose fundamental challenges to both the goals and the methods of education”(OECD, p.4). Thus, the Learning Compass is an aspirational vision for the future of education. It is supposed to provide students with orientation and competences that would guide them to a future of individual and collective well-being.

As Figure 1 shows, it is a complex model: at the center there are competences such as skills, knowledge, values and attitudes – the so called core foundations. These are the basis for developing transformative competences. The Anticipation-Action-Reflection cycle is a means for applying the competencies.

In the OECD Learning Compass 2030 concept note on Transformative Competencies for 2030 (OECD TC, p. 2), they are described as follows:

- “**Creating new value** means innovating to shape better lives, (...) developing new knowledge, insights, ideas, techniques, strategies and solutions”. Questioning the status quo, thinking-out of the box, collaboration are essential parts of it.
- “**Reconciling tensions and dilemmas** means taking into account the many interconnections and inter-relations between seemingly contradictory or incompatible ideas, logics and positions, and considering the results of actions from both short- and long-term perspectives.”
- “**Taking responsibility** is connected to the ability to reflect upon and evaluate one’s own actions in light of one’s experience and education, and by considering personal, ethical and societal goals.”

These short definitions already show where institutions and their staff need to develop competences in order to be able to contribute to social transformation.

The OECD framework offers a comprehensive vision of the competences for student agency, with a clear focus on education. It is, however, of limited use as a policy framework for museums, apart from the transformational competences. It can therefore be helpful for cultural institutions to look into another reference framework, namely the **Competences for Democratic Culture by the Council of Europe**.

This framework “offers a comprehensive model of the competences that individuals require in order to function as democratically and interculturally competent citizens” (CoE Model, p.1). It defines democratic competence as “the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities” in democratic situations (CoE Concepts, p.3).

Consequently, the framework presupposes that democratic and intercultural competences are necessary for participation in democratic processes and intercultural dialogue, but are not sufficient to ensure participation. Appropriate institutions – these could be museums among others – are needed that make opportunities for active engagement available to citizens. If these are available and promoted, citizens are more likely to engage. Institutions and citizens’ competences and actions are interdependent (cf. CoE Context).

The model consists of four categories – these are values, attitudes, skills as well as knowledge and critical understanding – and comprising 20 competences, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Already at the first glance, one can see how complex the prerequisites for participation in democratic processes are. Not all 20 competences are necessary at

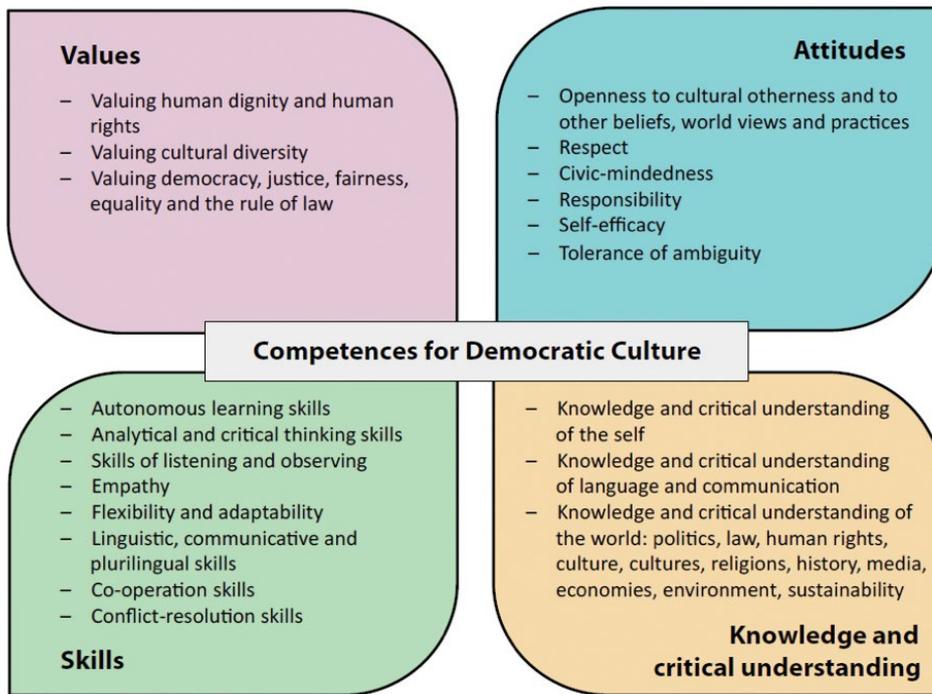


Fig. 2. The 20 competences included in the Competences for Democratic Culture (CoE Model, p.1)

*Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*

the same time; it depends on the specific situation, which competences are needed and to what extent.

The framework itself is so comprehensive that with minor changes it can easily be adapted for the methodologies of all kind of projects and processes related to active participation in the citizenship hub. It cannot only be used for staff development, but can also be adapted and used in non-formal and informal educational programmes for all age groups.

### **Culture inclusive – a collaborative process**

In the second part, I would like to present a collaborative process designed by the Graz Museum and evaluate it using the theoretical considerations from the before mentioned frameworks.

Like all other museums, the Graz Museum offers different formats where citizens can get involved at different levels of participation, mostly limited to one-off gatherings. However, it is not the single action but the continuous work that makes the museum a local citizenship hub. At the Graz Museum, we wanted to find out what it means to go into a longer collaborative process with a specific group of people. Therefore, we decided to take up a project that we had already been involved in as a project partner and turn it into a process that we hosted at the Graz Museum in 2022.

The process is called “Kultur inklusiv” – Culture inclusive. It aims to give people with disabilities a voice in the development of cultural programmes and activities in Graz, to make the work of disabled artists visible, and to enable cultural participation for people with disabilities. In the process, we respond to specific requirements of the group so that they can participate in cultural programmes. However, it is important for me to emphasize that we must ensure that these programmes are designed in such a way that they also benefit other visitors. Inclusive measures for one group must not lead to the exclusion of other cultural participants.

In order to achieve these goals, members of cultural organizations of different size and sections are collaborating with social assistance institutions, artists and disabled individuals and representatives from the people first movement in a democratic working process with equal rights to participate and shape the results.

A lively process that is bringing together a diverse set of people with different needs but with the common goals mentioned before. Leading and developing a methodology of the collaborative work of the group in a results-oriented way requires a lot of time and resources. At the same time, it is an exceptional learning experience.



Fig. 3: Lively exchange on the main square of Graz.  
© Sebastian Reiser

As central activity, we agreed to celebrate inclusion on the main square of Graz, in front of the town hall. The participating cultural institutions presented their inclusive activities. A programme was offered where artists with disabilities were given a stage, and there was an area where lively exchange with people coming by was enabled. In addition, as of July 2022, every second week at least one participating institution has special inclusive offers, which we communicate on the City of Graz website. For the Austrian Museum Night in October 2022, in Graz there was a regional focus on inclusion. In parallel, we are developing a communication platform for inclusive cultural activities and programmes.

In cooperation with a social assistance institution, the Graz Museum offers trainings where people with intellectual disabilities learn what a museum is, how it works and how they can visit it well.

Furthermore, an inclusive, multi-sensory exhibition on the subject of posters from 1920 to 1955 has been shown, which was developed in cooperation with people with disabilities, especially blind and visually impaired people. Again, with the aspiration to develop an exhibition that offers increased accessibility and benefit for all.

At this time, the first learnings are:

- A better understanding of the dynamics and complexities of a collaborative social innovation process in a changing and growing network of actors
- A better understanding of the requirements for collaboration in terms of working environments, methodology, communication
- A better understanding of what makes cultural programmes relevant to people with disabilities

Moreover, just to mention a few competences needed in the process:

- Openness, empathy, respect, conflict resolution skills
- The whole set of cooperation skills, such as creating a common vision and common goals
- Valuing diversity in the group and learning from other people's diverse perspectives

As part of the process methodology, we continuously evaluate the activities to gain evidence for the further development of the process. In parallel, the Graz Museum team plans to use the framework and lessons learned from the process to reflect on how to use this knowledge to design future democratic processes and programmes for other groups and communities.

### Summary

The process has been a very empowering experience for everybody involved. I think the attitude towards the inclusion of people with disabilities has now become an integral part of our work and no longer depends on the commitment of individual team members only. Our connection with people with disabilities and social assistance institutions has been strengthened. Institutions that are working

with and servicing people with disabilities value our inclusive competence and actively look for our programmes.

Concluding, I would like to remind ourselves that we live in a knowledge society which, combined with individualisation and increasingly shaped by the effects of an attention economy, has specific demands on our competences if we want to actively engage in social discourse. Above all, we need the competence to formulate contradictions, to endure conflicts and ambivalences; as individuals and as institutions, we can contribute to the above-mentioned challenges. This is in my opinion a fundamental prerequisite for city museums to become a hub for active citizenship. All of this is work in progress and needs further discussion, evaluation and continuous development.

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**Sibylle Dienesch** was appointed director of the Stadtmuseum Graz GmbH – comprising the city museums and municipal archives of Graz – in January 2023. She has been part of the management of Stadtmuseum Graz GmbH since 2006 and vice-director as of 2014. She was responsible for all operational and financial matters of the Graz Museum. As part of her responsibility for the strategic development, she initiated and steered the continuous change processes towards an inclusive and intercultural institution. The work on a digital strategy and its implementation is also one of her core tasks. Contentwise her focus is on socio-cultural developments in the city of Graz. She was the co-curator of exhibitions and co-editor of publications dealing with public space and with the life of people with intellectual disability. Upon her appointment as director in 2023, she started a transformation process of the Graz Museum and associated city archive, which envisions a democratic institution.

## OUT OF THE MUSEUM BOUNDARIES: INSIGHTS FROM AN ITALIAN CASE-STUDY FOR A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO URBAN CONTEXT AND COMMUNITIES

### ABSTRACT

A fundamental change, which has rapidly accelerated in the last twenty years, has been the re-orientation of the museums from content to audience, from inside to outside, from collection to public space, from museum to museum district: the museum no longer remains withdrawn, both in a conceptual and physical sense. Within this framework, the MANN – Museo Nazionale Archeologico di Napoli – museum, is exemplary for a creative methodology, which aims to build an organic relationship with the city of Naples, stepping out of the “conventional” roles and boundaries of the museum. In this perspective, a different way of conceiving the museum space is proposed, creating a museum connected with the neighbourhood as a whole and strengthening the link with the urban - and therefore social - space in which the museum is located. Therefore, solutions have been studied to involve the open spaces close to the museum, and actions capable to create a new network with the institutes nearby the museum. The case study becomes a pretext to show how museums today can be the new “agorai” (squares) of dialogue, shifting from museography to the relationship of the museum with the city and its citizens, and becoming an active subject in the city transformation processes.

**Key words:** Local community, social inclusion, urban sustainability, urban regeneration, museum spaces



*The entrance of MANN museum: a place of social interaction (2021, Photo by the author).*

## Introduction

A study of the contemporary museum in the European city shows how the last twenty years have witnessed a fundamental change: a reorientation of the museum from the content to the public, from the collection to the public space, shifting its gaze towards the museum's relationship with the city and its citizens. The museum no longer remains 'closed in on itself', both in a conceptual and physical sense, and becomes an active subject in the city transformation processes, measuring itself with the complexity of the urban space. The museum internalises the functions, spaces and logics of the urban context and with them the complexity and dynamics of the city. Based on these considerations, this contribution proposes a reflection from a PhD research project in Architectural and Landscape heritage at Politecnico di Torino that investigates the new spaces of the urban museum and how the museum can reveal itself as a dynamic agent in the city's transformation processes through the study of exemplary European cases. The final objective is the proposal of a qualitative-quantitative model to evaluate the complexity of the impacts that the museum with its new role can generate and guidelines to be potentially applied within similar processes. The result is not intended to be presented as unique and exhaustive, but rather as a possible scenario open to multiple approaches. The article presents part of the research thesis, briefly describing its methodologies and delving into one case study in particular as a pretext for investigating in a broader sense the ways in which museums today can become the new "agora" of dialogue, between spaces and between people. Because of their ability to build new relationships with the context - from the museum to the city and viceversa - independently of their exhibition function, they reveal themselves to be active components of a broader process of urban regeneration and activation of material and immaterial relationships.

## A new interpretation of the museum: the MANN new strategic plan

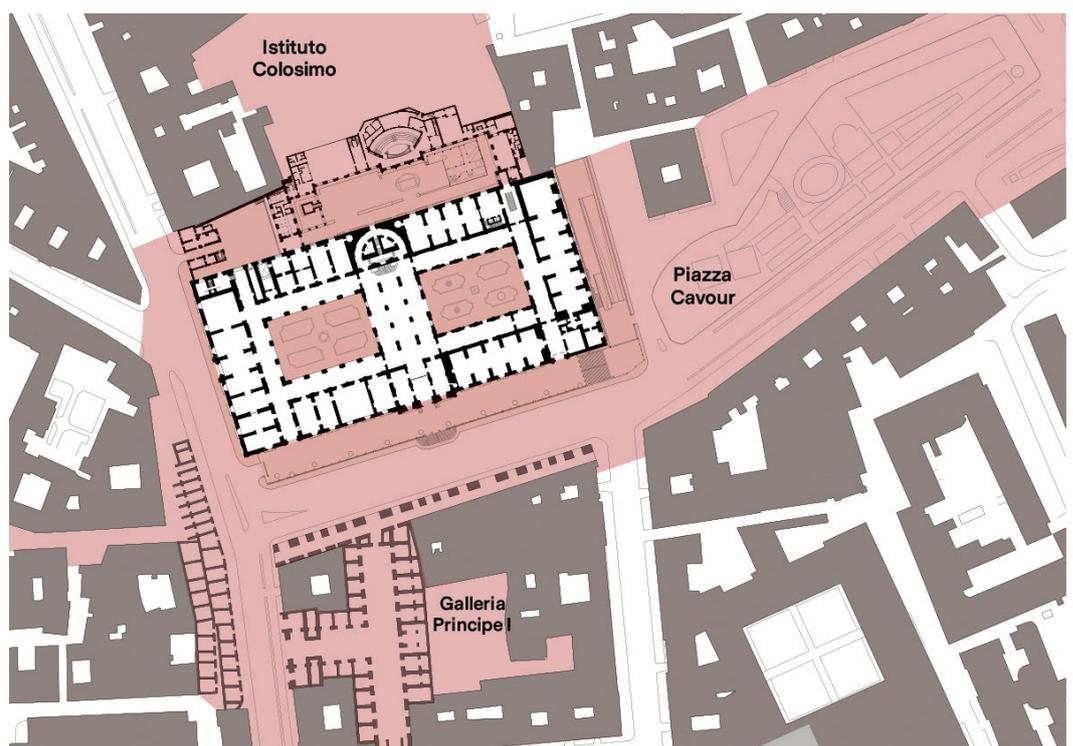
In this context, turning our gaze to the specificity of the Italian context, we can observe some emblematic cases in which the museum institution has

contributed to the redevelopment of urban space, rethinking the relationship between the museum and its surroundings. The MANN -Museo Archeologico di Napoli - through its most recent Strategic Plan, is implementing a policy of intervention aimed at building an organic relationship with the city. Underlying the strategic vision is the concept of a museum's role not limited to the valorisation and conservation of its collections, but also concerns an ethical and political commitment to the community. The aim of the new strategic plan is to establish a museum entirely connected with the neighbourhood, strengthening the relationship with the urban - and, consequently, social - space where the museum is located, through solutions designed to involve neighbourhood open spaces and to build a network with local cultural institutions. According to this perspective, a new concept of the museum space is proposed, permeable to urban public spaces and perceived by the local community as a common place at their disposal (fig.1). The interview with director Giulierini outlines how the strategy is based on the preliminary construction of relationships on a local and territorial scale, such as, for example, the development of the network of the *Negozi Amici of the MANN*, with which a programme of activities aimed at strengthening the artisanal identity of the area has been defined, and the *extraMANN* network, to foster knowledge and awareness of the museum on the part of the community. This was achieved starting from the intentions of accessibility and connection of the first Strategic Plan 2016-2019. The 2020-24 Strategic Plan, on the other hand, specifies how the next phase - still in progress - is aimed, once the immaterial interconnections have been created, at structuring in a physical form the social meeting places for the neighbourhood (fig.2).

This choice wants to strengthen direct and indirect economy in the neighbourhood, starting from urban regeneration. In order to fully understand the masterplan proposal, it is essential to know the place where the museum is located. In fact, the project responds to the specificity of the place, its identity and the set of architectural and socio-cultural characteristics.

The museum is located in a barycentric position within the urban fabric, at the crossroads of the city's development axes - via Toledo, via Foria, and the northward link with Capodimonte - and in the heart of Naples' ancient city centre, «a mixture

*The new strategic plan of MANN to improve the relationship with the neighbourhood community (2021, El. by the author)*



of ages and epochs, social strata and cultures, and at the same time of order and disorder, urban quality and profound decay, a complex whole in which the past city is not erased, but is incorporated into the present city. Its vitality and authenticity over time are derived precisely from its ability to renew its belonging to places and to continue its culture». Streets, squares and open spaces in the historic centre of Naples, besides being elements of connection and permeability, historically constitute the meeting place of the inhabitants, the lived part of the city.

The new masterplan starts from a reading of the existing and the potential in the contact points between the interior and exterior of the museum. The network it constructs is oriented not only to the building and its connection to individual institutions, but also to the spaces between buildings, the permeable fabric of the city, the life in and between buildings, the lived space of everyday life.

The project emphasises the relationship with the city's main directions of development and, in particular, the axial North-South direction that acts as the barycentre of the museum's planimetric scheme and follows the course of the ancient orthogonal Hippodamean layout still clearly legible in the urban fabric around the MANN. This direction is taken up by strengthening the connection to the south with Galleria Principe I - which, in turn, connects with two other institutions that are part of the project, the Academy of Fine Arts and the San Pietro a Majella Music Conservatory - while to the North with the Colosimo Institute. In fact, the new project will connect the museum building with the Institute's open space throughout a system of spaces and ramps.

The first phase of the project, which has already been completed, coincides with the reopening of the historic gardens and the enhancement of the enclosed green spaces of the Vannella garden in connection with the re-functionalisation of the so-called Braccio Nuovo that overlooks it. In July 2019, the new museum's cafeteria was inaugurated, which contributed to the improvement of the overall level of enjoyment of the visiting experience. The open space also interfaces positively with the activities of the auditorium and workshops within the New Wing.

The next planned phase will see the museum's entrance hall and two internal courtyards opened to the public, making them fully accessible public spaces with functional independence from the museum collection.

Finally, the project also will change the relationship between the museum's eastern front and Piazza Cavour. The interface point between the two is the Cavaiole garden, visible in many historical views as a public square, which currently has a closing gate that physically limits the direct building-open space relationship of the municipal gardens of Piazza Cavour. The entire recovery of Piazza Cavour and its closure to traffic, the possibility of a side entrance to the museum through the recovered municipal gardens, are all objectives aimed at favouring pedestrian enjoyment and the construction of a new network of public spaces.

### **Conclusion and open scenarios**

The case study can offer an interesting overview with respect to contemporary museum scenarios.

Starting from the comparison with the other case studies considered in the thesis, the intervention stands out for its willingness to build a common design of transformation intervention in a shared manner with municipalities, administrations and institutions, such as the University. This was done in particular from a partnership with the Campania Region and the Municipality of Naples, maintained during all the phases of the process.

Furthermore, it can be a virtuous example to have considered architectural aspects from the very beginning, in close relation to socio-economic issues. The design concept was based on the awareness of the urban regeneration potential inherent in the redesign of urban public space starting with the role of the museum. In the other case studies examined, on the other hand, this interaction between strategic mission and architectural intentions was difficult to achieve.

Starting from the reading and valorisation of the latent potential in the existing urban fabric and in the relationship between full and empty spaces, the link with the urban - and therefore social - space in which the museum is embedded has taken place. It is therefore clear how the methodological aspects on the one hand, and the process on the other, can open up interesting scenarios in museum design proposals that favour the recognition of their value and maintain high urban quality. The intentions are in line with contemporary European trends in the redevelopment of urban areas based on culture - MuselInsel in Berlin, the MuseumsQuartier in Vienna, Frankfurt's MuseumsQuartier, to name but a few - in which public spaces acquire a fundamental role, and confirm the orientation also in Italy towards the definition of museum poles that are increasingly integrated in the historic centre and that enhance urban space, representing a museum «that resonates and radiates in the community that surrounds it» (Guerzoni, 2014, p.21). Museum can promote urban sustainability from their ability to stimulate and build new relationships with the context - from the museum towards the city - independently from their main display function, and to be active components of a wider process of urban regeneration and activation of material and immaterial relationships.

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## BIOGRAPHY

**Caterina Di Felice:** architect, she obtained her PhD in Architectural and Landscape Heritage at Polytechnic University Turin, Department of Architecture and Design, with a thesis, titled as *The new urban museum spaces: the museum as a dynamic agent in city transformation processes*. She completed her doctoral research under the supervision of Prof.ssa Silvia Gron and Prof.ssa Cristina Coscia with a multi- disciplinary perspective on heritage studies. Her field of interests focus on the field of cultural heritage, with a look towards the renewed role of the contemporary museum, its ability to engage dynamic processes of social, urban and territorial transformation. She is currently a teaching assistant in Architectural Composition on the Master's and Bachelor degree courses at Politecnico di Torino. Previously she gained experience at the Musei Reali di Torino as an architect/exhibit designer and she was involved in different scale projects on enhancing cultural heritage.

## CITY MUSEUMS AS URBAN HUBS FOR CIVIC RESILIENCE

### ABSTRACT

In recent years, we have witnessed an expanding phenomenon in which city museums transform from functioning as institutions dedicated to representing and presenting the city's history to serving as dynamic urban centres that address contemporary issues. As such, they operate as platforms for civil discourse and citizens' active engagement.

This process is, to a large extent, influenced by the new opportunities enabled by big data and smart city technologies, in parallel with the digitalization processes museums have been going through in the last decades. The ability to extract knowledge from vast databases and integrate information from different ontological fields becomes a significant engine in these new urban institutions.

This paper presents a new emerging model for a city museum which functions as a platform for civic engagements on urban issues. It contextualizes the city's heritage and facilitates critical literacy towards its history and its present and future perspectives. It utilizes big data, smart city, and digital twin technologies to enhance communal resilience.

While contemporary city museums using these technologies mainly focus on real-time-based data and simulations, this paper suggests incorporating historical heritage data to provide a comprehensive understanding of urban processes, needs and values that may be relevant for the future.

**Key words:** Urban museums, resilience, Smart City, Digital Twin, Past-Present-Future

## Museums' Transformation and Resilience

From the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we witnessed an increasing number of urban museums transformed from merely showcasing the city's history to becoming vibrant hubs that tackle contemporary issues, including those with significant political and social implications.<sup>1</sup> As such, they operate as a new kind of public space where visitors can become active participants in co-defining the city's past, present, and future. To achieve these goals, some urban museums operating today expand their activities beyond the conventional roles of the museum and function as cultural centers, communal agoras or urban laboratories. This approach is based on the recognition that museums should remain relevant in their communities and actively contribute to enhancing sustainability and communal resilience. (Gerchow, 2017)

The term resilience refers to the ability of a system to overcome trauma and adjust to new situations without collapsing.<sup>2</sup> Achieving resilience requires a multi-temporal approach: It aims at anticipating and preventing a traumatic event before it occurs, coping with it at the time of happening, and recovering from its harmful consequences through an adaptation and learning process. This paper presents a new emerging model for a city museum which functions as a platform for civic engagements on urban issues. It contextualizes the city's heritage and facilitates critical literacy towards its history, present and future perspectives. It utilizes big data, smart city and digital twin technologies to enhance communal resilience. While contemporary city museums using these technologies mainly focus on real-time-based data and simulations, this paper suggests incorporating historical heritage data to provide a comprehensive understanding of urban processes, needs and values that can be relevant for the future.

### Data-Based Museums and Contextualization.

Traditional museums are products of material culture. As data becomes a major cultural transformative factor, and database becomes a new paradigmatic form of our time (Manovich, 1999), museums have shifted their focus from collecting objects to generating narratives and experiences. In addition, they develop new modes of data organization and archiving, which become part of their museal strategy. The curatorial and museal models this paper addresses are based on contemporary approaches to archives that enable museums to function in new ways and develop new forms of interaction with their visitors.

The ability to store vast amounts of data, process it and make it accessible in real-time has turned contemporary archives into dynamic systems based on "live connections." (Mackenzie, 1997, p. 66) These systems do not necessarily rely on past patterns but rather realize a cultural state of contemporary relevance. Their value is not embedded in the content stored or the logic of its insertion but rather in how this content can be retrieved, contextualized and connected to other sources. This way, knowledge becomes transferable, comprehensive, and cross-referential. The change is substantial because it eliminates prior references to knowledge within closed systems and allows open and context-dependent systems to exist. The ability to access information through the Internet and the option of using open-source collaborative tools, which the public can use, adds a significant dimension to archives and their functionality.

<sup>1</sup> This approach to museums is also taking place in other kinds of museums, but not to the extent as is happening in city museums. A thorough exploration of this phenomenon is available in Eylat Van Essen's book, 'Rethinking the Museum,' published in 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The term resilience has gained a vast number of definitions in various disciplines. The definition presented here is referring to a systemic approach to resilience. For a broad overview of different definitions, see, for example, Southwick, S.M. et al. 2014.

The idea that there is no delay between memory and present time within digital archives is expressed by Wolfgang Ernst in his book *Digital Memory and the Archive* (2013). He claims that “there is, in principle, no more delay between memory and the present but rather the technical option of immediate feedback, turning all present data into archival entries and vice versa” (p. 98). With this conceptual transformation, archives are no longer perceived as a repository space for static data. Therefore, he claims: “With the supremacy of selection over storage, addressability over sorting, there is no memory in the emphatic sense anymore; archival terminology—or rather the archive itself—becomes literally metaphorical, a function of transfer processes” (p. 97). Ernst proposes to refer to the archive in terms of “vector dynamism” which is replacing the static notion of the traditional archival classification system. Borrowed from analytical mathematics, he addresses this term of “vector fields” as representing the cross-referencing of the two ontologies of matter and energy. In its new digital media-based environment, the archival field is mastered by cybernetic logic resulting in electronics. As archives are transformed to be cybernetic systems, repositories turn into “frequently access sites.” In this context, he claims that “[t]he aesthetics of fixed order is being replaced by permanent reconfigurability. Digital economy nowadays operates with terms such as reframe or re-load” (p. 99). Therefore, in the framework of new technologies, the distinction between media transmission and storage becomes obsolete (p.100).

As cities undergo intense datafication processes, they utilize advanced big data technologies as central operational practices. The use of these technologies not only enables one to comprehend the complexity of the city but can also facilitate structured contextualization of data.<sup>3</sup> The ability to extract knowledge from large databases and integrate information from different ontological fields and periods, characterizing current big data systems, can become a powerful engine for restructuring city museums. In this way, past events can be contextualized in relation to the present situation, the present should withdraw understanding from past occurrences, and future planning can gain substantial benefits from the knowledge that can be extracted from the past and from data accumulated in real-time.

### **City Museum, Smart Cities and Digital Twins**

A city museum based on these principles was planned for the City of Tel Aviv for its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It presented a model for an urban museum that aimed to serve as a hub for diverse interactions concerning the city’s past, present and future. The museum was intended to function as a dynamic platform for negotiating urban, cultural, social, and political issues that would reflect in real-time the changing focal points in urban transformations and the changes in visitors’ interests and concerns.<sup>4</sup>

To conduct such a challenge, a considerable effort was invested in building a historical database for the city that would be continuously updated. The museum’s central space was planned to include two main elements in which this database would have played a significant role: the first was a complex technological infrastructure designed as a digital envelope for the space, presenting the

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<sup>3</sup> The decision to make extensive use of technology, in this context, does not stem from the desire to make the museum more attractive and updated. This choice is intended, first and foremost, to refer to the conceptual transformations that result from the new technologies, with respect to the way we shape memory, share a common heritage, communicate with each other, create narratives, refer to the concept of truth and generate trust.

<sup>4</sup> This plan offered a relatively progressive approach to city museums at the time of its planning. It was eventually not realized for different reasons, although it has undergone a very detailed planning process and technological specification. More detailed information about this project can be found at: Y. Eylat Van Essen, Institutional Critique and the City Museum of Tel Aviv, Institution as medium, <https://on-curating.org/issue-13-reader/institutional-critique-and-the-city-museum-of-tel-aviv.html>

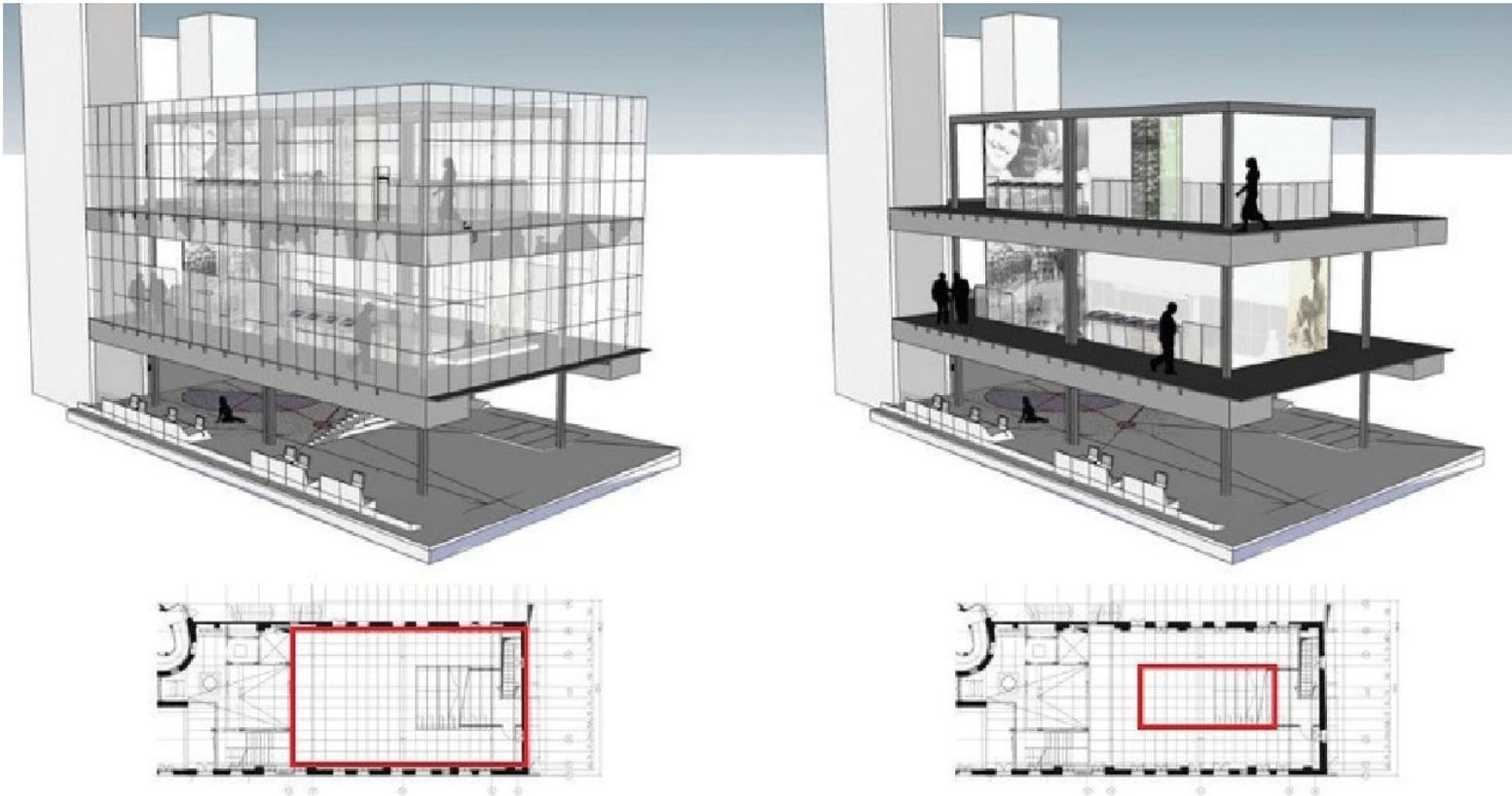


Image 1. The virtual database is spread out physically upon the surface of the inner walls of the gallery and functions as a kind of hidden archive that reveals itself in relation to the visitor's location. © Minz+Melamed Architects

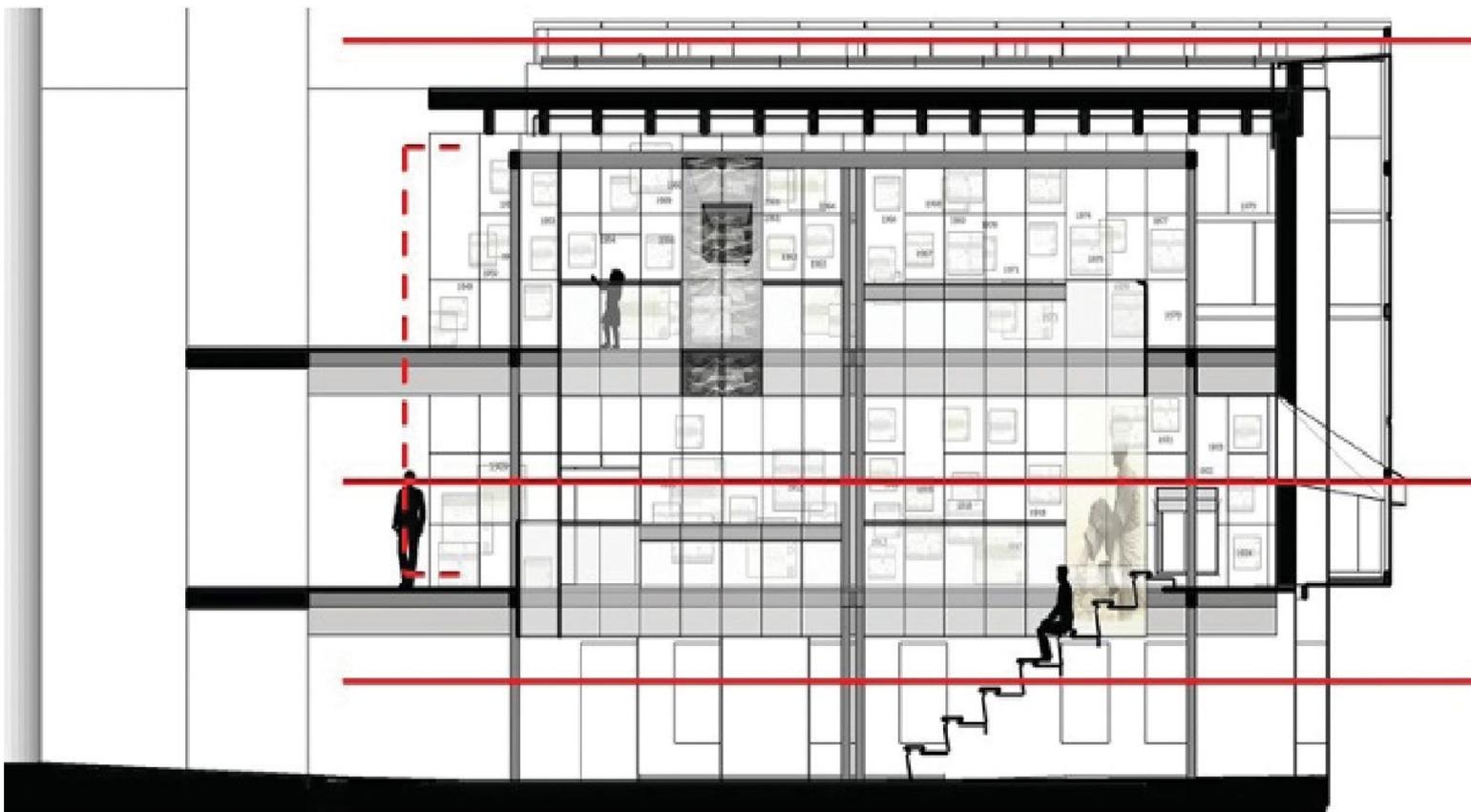


Image 2. The museum is designed and laid out as a dynamic and changing system/machine, both in relation to the visitor's presence, as well as in relation to its ability to update itself in real-time and to present the changing reality. © Minz+Melamed Architects

constantly expanding database. This display was intended to create the visual and conceptual effect of a **breathing archive** responding to present occurrences through constant contextualization of historical narratives. The second element was a display of a virtual 3D model of the city, designed to be projected at the bottom of this space. This model was planned to connect the historical database with online urban systems. Therefore it was expected to provide the city's inhabitants with a more substantial understanding regarding their debates on future urban development.

Although this model was developed for the city of Tel Aviv, its conceptual guidelines can be implemented and adjusted to other urban museums, considering each city's unique characteristics. It is based on creating a comprehensive infrastructure at all levels of museum representation, physical and virtual, that would enable it to be constantly updated, reflecting the city's transformation and its ongoing occurrences.<sup>5</sup>

The potential for using data as a substantial "raw material" for city museums is becoming even more relevant due to the vast technological advances in the last couple of years with the emerging uses of artificial intelligence, 5G and digital simulations. Moreover, the massive implementation of smart technologies in cities has proven to be a valuable asset for operational infrastructure and urban planning. City museums have also started incorporating such systems into their exhibits, providing an interactive platform for visitors. By using technologies like smart city and digital twins, city museums can strengthen their role as community-oriented institutions and contribute to introducing the citizens to the intricacy of the urban space. Nevertheless, they provide them with better tools to understand the city's miscellaneous layers and offer engagement and civic participation opportunities.

Integrating historical heritage data within smart city systems has been used so far mainly for managing and improving tourist experiences (Borda & Bowen, 2017). Yet, this integration is also related to "...making cultural data freely available (open), and consequently increasing the opportunities for interpretation, digital curation, and innovation" (p. 10). Including a historical lens into the smart city discourse can enhance "urban intelligence" by contextualizing urban activities. However, as smart city systems' operational logic is based on statistical models, it reflects an utterly a-historical sense which does not refer to issues of causality. As such, it does not leave space for political or value-based discourse (Chandler, 2015). Since history is a valuable source for a more comprehensive understanding of different phenomena, integrating historical aspects should be utilized to apprehend urban processes and assist in identifying historical and urban patterns. The desire to understand why things happen, which characterizes a critical approach that contemporary museums should foster, enables the creation of a civil discourse that takes responsibility towards the current and future realities. In addition, the accessibility to online mapping and simulating different scenarios on digital twin systems can provide citizens with better tools to generate narratives for possible futures. Therefore, connecting smart systems with museum practices that present historical and value-based layers can open such systems to new modes of operation and to new kinds of civic engagement.

Furthermore, museums can benefit from integrating smart city and digital twin platforms as they provide opportunities for critical examination of their impact. Therefore, concerns such as data-driven biases and algorithmic control must be addressed in this context. Additionally, as the Smart City paradigm conveys a promise of optimization and automatization of urban processes

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<sup>5</sup> Although I have focused on the display of digital data in the museum space, this concept of the museum, does not exclude the display of physical objects.

reflecting neoliberal ideologies and “globalist and entrepreneurship-like agendas” (Golubchikov, 2010) , their consequences should be analyzed, and alternative concepts could be explored. (Estrada-Grajales et al 2015).

Based on a critical understanding of the properties of smart city systems, they can offer new tools for new civic engagement for exploring the relationship between the citizens and the city. Therefore, from the perspective of civic quality, the potential role of the city museum can be to navigate between the logic behind the smart city and the smart citizen-led visions of the city that the museum should promote.

Adopting the new possibilities opened to city museums to utilize smart city technologies enables city museums to function as sites for “data practice” (Bates, 2017; Grincheva, 2022) where citizens can explore the intricacies of data-based systems. Such sites should be dedicated spaces within a smart city ecosystem, where different actors can engage in various forms of data curation, circulation and analysis. Integrating smart cities into museums can serve as more than just a problem-solving platform but function as a conceptual laboratory for creating meaning in the urban environment (ibid). Incorporating heritage data into these systems holds substantial potential value while offering a dimension often underappreciated in contemporary urban museums that leverage advanced smart technologies.

## CONCLUDING WORDS

Urban museums are ideal sites for information-driven displays capable of generating new perspectives on the relationship between the past and the present and providing tools for generating potential scenarios for possible futures. This is due to two main factors: the intensive digitization processes of museums, and the urban datafication process, which became a preliminary condition for the operation of smart city and digital twin platforms. Based on these parallel processes, museums can function as sites where the two information systems of the museum and the city can collide. Integrating these systems can foster a better understanding of urban processes and enhance civic engagement in urban issues. In addition, smart city platforms generate novel forms of data cognition based on new forms of sensing that incorporate human and non-human, thereby paving the way for the emergence of renewed perspectives and insights (Cameron, 2021, p. 214). Based on access to new knowledge resources, these platforms can provide new ways of absorbing the city, and therefore present new spatial logic. They can also raise awareness to emerging concerns and develop new community practices originating in museums, that can contribute to urban communal and environmental resilience.

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## BIOGRAPHY

*Dr Yael Eylat Van Essen* is a researcher and curator specialising in the interface between art, design, science, and technology, as well as in museology. She received her PhD from Tel-Aviv University, followed by a post-doc at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Her last book *Rethinking the Museum*, which explores the impact of digital technologies on the concept of the museum, was published in 2016. She has curated many exhibitions in Israel and abroad, among them for the Israeli Pavilion at the Venice Biennale for Architecture. Her research interests include digital heritage and museology, digital culture theory, new-media art, post-photography, resilience studies and speculative design. Currently, she is a senior lecturer at the Design Faculty at HIT (Holon Institute of Technology), and she also teaches in the interdisciplinary master's program at the art faculty at Tel-Aviv University. In 2023 she was on a research residency at MUSEum+ in the Czech Republic.

**MARKITA FRANULIC**

*Museum Director, Technical Museum  
Nikola Tesla (TMNT), Zagreb, Croatia*

## **SUSTAINABILITY AS SOCIAL ACTIVISM – EXAMPLES FROM THE TECHNICAL MUSEUM NIKOLA TESLA (TMNT) IN ZAGREB, CROATIA**

### **ABSTRACT**

The approach to the topic of Sustainable Citizens and Smart Museums in the paper departs from the position of social sustainability i.e. museum engagement in terms of researching, problematizing and presenting topics that observe technology in the context of social change and its consequences for people. This primarily refers to the projects of the Technical Museum Nikola Tesla related to three main topics: industrial heritage in Croatia, which was influenced by the process of transition from socialism to capitalism in the early 1990s and the interrelationship of changing social circumstances to industry and vice versa; gender equality program and a program relating to immigrants. The paper presents projects realized in the period 2018 – 2022.

The presentation is aiming to present how a museum of science and technology faces challenges of how to be a heritage and knowledge-based institution, contributing at the same time to the reflection and education about a more sustainable and just society.

**Key words:** Museum program, industrial heritage of socialism, migrants, gender equality, the Other

## Introduction

The paper is aiming to present how a museum of science and technology faces challenges of how to be a heritage and knowledge-based institution targeting some of the contemporary problems through social memory. It presents three topics / projects of the TMNT in the period 2018 – 2022:

- 1) Re-evaluation and preservation of the industrial heritage of socialism in Croatia,
- 2) Programs relating to migrants,
- 3) Gender equality programs.

Through the project activities, collecting and presenting material and immaterial traces and personal narratives of the “Other”, as well as including them in participatory programs, Museum tends to make the public aware of them and at the same time to (re)integrate them into culture and society.

## Museums are not neutral

In the following theoretical concepts presented in the preface of the book *Museum Activism*<sup>1</sup>, we find common points with our projects:

“...museums are not, and never have been, neutral” and there’s a shift “in the way we think about the role and responsibility of museums (...) A growing body of research is revealing the powerful part museums playing engaging visitors in dialogue surrounding contemporary social issues, and in shaping the way we see, think about and act towards others and the world around us”.

“... in order to best address sustainability challenges, they must be continually evaluated and refined with an eye toward the well-being of all people in the system.”

“*Museum Activism* elucidates the largely untapped potential for museums as key intellectual and civic resources to address inequalities, injustice and environmental challenges...”

“The mindful museum (Janes 2010) cannot help but be activist, and the activist museum is grounded in mindfulness...”

It is incumbent upon all museums to help envision and create this new narrative in partnership with their communities, and then deliver this story using their unique skills and perspectives”.

“There are also occasions, though, where taking a stand requires museums to not only create spaces for dialogue but to actively participate, presenting and defending their own views and principles.”

## Projects

### 1) Recognition, valorization and preservation of the “forgotten” industrial heritage of socialism in Croatia

During the transition from socialism to capitalism and privatization processes in the 1990s, many successful factories in Croatia were closed, workers lost their jobs and their social status has changed. New, private owners, by purchasing a factory, became owners of the inventory and factory archives, that were sold out or thrown away, and most buildings were demolished and replaced by residential and business complexes.

Over time, not only physical traces but also the social memory of once important industry vanishes or factory ruins stand as ghosts of the past. The Museum programs in this chapter were launched with the intention not only to awake awareness of the need to preserve the material remains of the industrial heritage

<sup>1</sup> Sandell, R., Janes R. R. (2019). *Museum Activism*, Routledge, (Preface)

of socialism, but also to point out its complex intangible cultural legacy, which is often overlooked, and (when possible) to include its bearers in the process - to give voice to the workers.

Besides enriching the Museum's collections with new objects and documentation, they emphasize the importance of interpreting them in a broader social and cultural context.

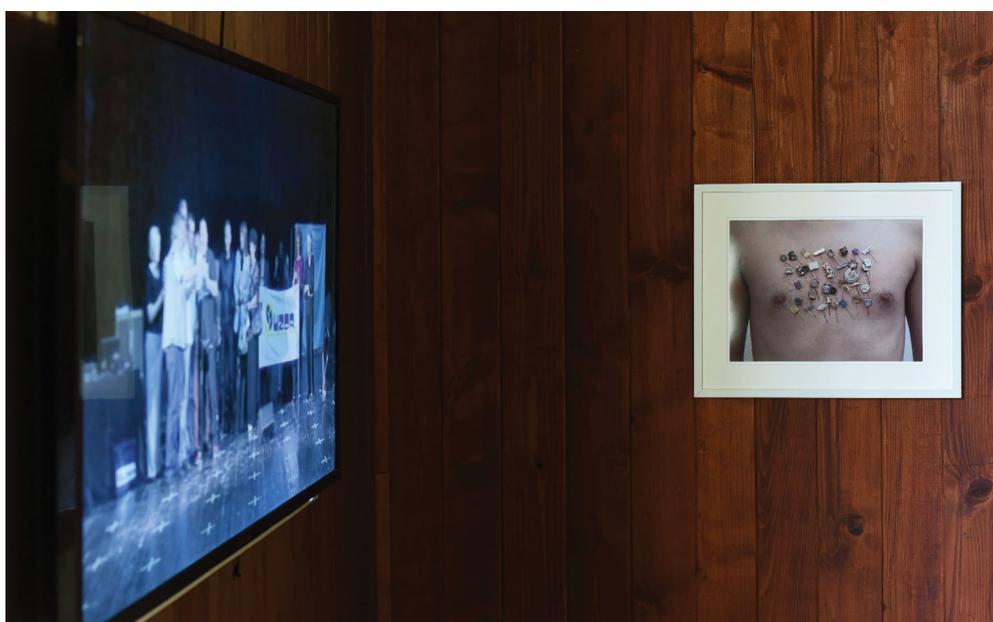
### **1.1. *Tailored Futures?* – exhibition and participatory program (ESF, 2018-2019)**

(Authors: Julija Gracin, Kosjenka Laszlo Klemar)

<https://skrojene-buducnosti.eu/>

Project focused on textile industry (which once employed more than 100.000 workers) and on the consequences of privatization processes. Textile factories were mapped, their condition was recorded, clothing produced in leading textile

*Tailored futures? exhibition and participatory program.*



factories was collected, and workers' stories about production processes, working conditions and strikes were recorded, including workers' personal experiences of the factory privatization and the closure process.

It is important to say that the factories took care of education and participation in cultural activities of the workers. That's why the participatory program of the project was designed with the aim of "restoring" the broken connection between art/culture and workers, mostly women as the majority of the workforce in the textile industry. Numerous workshops with former textile workers were held in 7 towns with 257 users. The focus was on the exchange of knowledge between participants (mostly women 54+) and artists, whereby forgotten knowledge about work processes in former factories was revalued and, along with memories of working conditions and workers' everyday life, became artistic content.

These memories are a key starting point not only for research into the history of the textile industry in Croatia, but also for various other social studies, especially those focused on gender, work, processes and consequences of deindustrialization.

As part of the project, an exhibition was realized, presenting works of art that thematize the textile industry of socialist Croatia.

Also, an audio archive was created, which, along with collected items and photo documentation became part of the TMNT holdings.

## 1.2. Action marking locations of destroyed factories in Tresnjevka district (2020)

(Authors: Kosjenka Laszlo Klemar, Markita Franulic)

Part of the project *Tresnjevka Neighborhood Museum - construction from below* (ESF, 2018-2020, lead partner: BLOK)

<https://www.muzejsusjedstvatresnjevka.org/program/akcija-obiljezavanja-propalih-tresnjevackih-tvornica>

The action was realized in the form of mapping and marking locations of destroyed factories in the Tresnjevka district (where also TMNT is located) as a dedication to the industrial heritage of the district, which experienced intense gentrification in recent decades and lost its original character of industrial and working-class neighbourhood. Referencing the socialist history of the factories, locations were marked with red flags bearing the name of the factory, year of its formation and its closure, and basic information about its production.

The aim was to make citizens aware of the districts' workers' / industrial past and to preserve social memory of factories that had significant influence on urbanization of this Zagreb district and social status of its residents.

## 1.3. Film program and discussions dedicated to female factory workers (2021)

(Authors: Kosjenka Laszlo Klemar, Tea Kantoci)

The film program aims to critically engage with industrial past and post-industrial present, and their social consequences. The first cycle in 2021 was focused on films showing the employment of women in industry after 1947, their working conditions, and industry-related social services.

In addition to screenings, talks and discussions were held on following topics: *Work conditions and protection of workers - then and today*, *Second shift - double workload*, and *Automation of work and its labor relations*.

## 1.4. Factories and letters – reading on the subject of labor, industry and neighborhood (2021)

(Authors: Ana Kutlesa (BLOK), for TMNT: Kosjenka Laszlo Klemar, Anica Tomić)

Program aimed at recalling (and pointing out) the complexity of the socialist industry cultural legacy. For 20 days the permanent exhibition of the TMNT became a space for reading.<sup>2</sup>

At five points a variety of literature was available, from museum publications, through factory publications, factory monographs, texts about industrial heritage to theoretical and literary works related to technical heritage, industry, work and labor as well as deindustrialization.

Sound recordings in the form of radio drama, based on the amateur literary work of factory workers were produced for the project and available for listening.

## 2) Projects dedicated to problem of migrations and integration through culture

Considering the specific question of migrants and refugees, museums can create spaces with the possibility of meeting “the Other” seeing beyond labels and stereotypes. These encounters with real people can open up dialogue, tolerance and respect; they can create possibilities for realizing that there are things that unite us as well as differences between us.

### 2.1. Nikola Tesla – Migrant. (2018)

(Authors: Kosjenka Laszlo Klemar (TMNT), Lea Horvat (Center for Peace Studies), Petra Matic (activist/intercultural mediator)

<sup>2</sup> In occasion of the Year of Reading proclaimed by the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia in 2021

In occasion of the International Museum Day we launched the project dedicated to the problem of migrations. The project included a public forum on technology and migration, an educative workshop for asylum-seeking children, and free entrance to the museum for refugees and asylum seekers.

We connected the project to the personality of Nikola Tesla – migrant himself throughout his whole life, who gave great contribution to the countries where he migrated and to the whole world. Tesla was deeply convinced that the development of science/technology could contribute to “more direct contact and better understanding between individuals and societies throughout the world” (Nikola Tesla, *My Inventions*).

The aim of the project was to position the TMNT as a place of intercultural dialogue and to gather physical and public figures (engineers, programmers, designers, activists, non-governmental organizations...) who discussed how to contribute to the development and distribution of technological innovations that seek to alleviate the refugee and humanitarian crisis.

## 2.2. Museum - a place of intercultural dialogue and meeting (2019)

(Authors: Kosjenka Laszlo Klemar, Zeljka Susic, Zeljka Jelavic)

Collaboration: Technical Museum Nikola Tesla, Ethnographic Museum, Typhological Museum, Zagreb and NGO *Are you Syrious*.

The aim of the project was to achieve mutual understanding and cultural integration.

The program included inclusive museum workshops with joint participation of Zagreb high school students and young people from Pakistan and Bangladesh between the ages of 14 and 18 who have been granted asylum or subsidiary protection in Croatia.

The focus of the workshops were museum objects as stimulators of the exchange of knowledge and experiences and objects of emotional connection.

## 3) Gender equality programs

Rethinking museums and museum exhibition practices from a gender perspective and introducing content that contributes to gender inclusion is of particular importance for science and technology museums, given that these areas are still predominantly male (which is the case of the TMNT).

This is also the case which “examine how encounters and engagements with ‘Otherness’ in the museum can promote affinity, feelings of being-at-home, optimistically pointing to the real democracy ‘yet-to-come.’ (ref. Derrida)

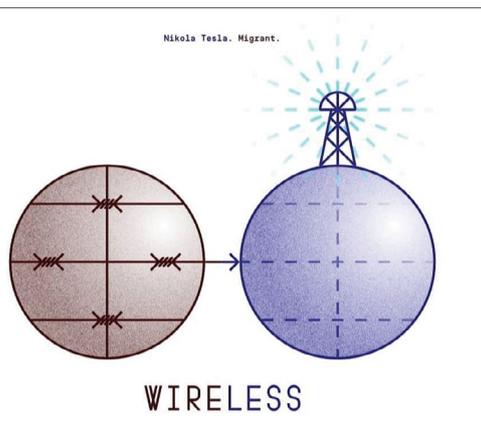
### 3.1. Women and technology – a gender-inclusive exhibition (2021 – 2022)

(Authors: Kosjenka Laszlo Klemar (TMNT), Barbara Blasin (independent researcher, designer)

The aim was to overcome the lack of female presence and contribution to the history of technology, as presented in the TMNT permanent exhibition. It was focused on the affirmation of women who contributed to the development of science and technology in the world and in Croatia (but very often unknown), as well as on questioning the impact of the development of science and technology (scientific discoveries and technical inventions) on the life and social status of women, with an emphasis on the work sphere.

Conceptually, the exhibition relies on the thematic departments of the permanent exhibition of the Museum. It consists of 15 exhibition units (Introduction, Firefighting, Industry, Aviation, Transport, Mining, Astronomy, Textile technology, Household technology, Education for science and technology...) interpolated into the Museum’s permanent exhibition

Visually the position of women is metaphorically illustrated “in the closet”.



Nikola Tesla Migrantproject.



Women and technology - a gender inclusive exhibition.

### 3.2. Project Women and technology - towards a gender-inclusive museum (2021)

(UP.02.1.1.14.0057, ESF)

Partnership with the Center for Women's Studies; the associated partner was Prosvjeta - Cultural Society of the Serbian Ethnic minority in Croatia.

<http://www.zeneitehnika.com/en/about-the-project/>

Through project-based online workshops and webinars led by experts in the field of art and culture, young people virtually intervened in the museum's permanent exhibition, changing the dominant exhibition narrative (object based into person based).

Some of the webinars and workshops were: *Role and position of women - society, science, technology*; *TMNT - permanent exhibition and possibilities of (re) interpretation*; *Women and industrial work*; *Workers, body and time*; *Women and society from an artistic perspective*.

Also 3 artworks on the topic were created. One of them "Astroscientists – women who know the stars", an interactive web application by the artist Kata Mijatović is available on

[https://www.zeneitehnika.com/zvjezdoznalice/?fbclid=IwAR2LrUQ\\_RK3zuihm3DOMLLyKUIW3a8J4EsdgVJSSjb0VJJ9qQzItifU2LpU](https://www.zeneitehnika.com/zvjezdoznalice/?fbclid=IwAR2LrUQ_RK3zuihm3DOMLLyKUIW3a8J4EsdgVJSSjb0VJJ9qQzItifU2LpU).

### 3.3. Exhibition Behind the firewall – women in firefighting (2022)

(Authors: Kosjenka Laszlo Klemar (TMNT), Vedran Runjic (Croatian Museum of Firefighting))

The exhibition provides an overview of history, status and role of women in firefighting in the area of Croatia. "Firewall" denotes a structure delimiting the area of fire expansion; in the context of the exhibition, "firewall" symbolically represents hardly permeable structures that prevented or hindered women from entering the world of firefighting.

Our plan is to continue to research and present other specific fields of work (mining, transport...) and the history of female presence in these fields.

#### BIOGRAPHY

**Markita Franulic**, M.A. in Art History and Italian Language and Literature. Professional title of museum advisor. From 2012 to the present, director of the Technical Museum Nikola Tesla. In addition to the director's work, I am also involved in professional work: documentary work, organization and coordination of exhibitions, organization of educational programs (especially those belonging to innovative educational practices) and editing museum publications. I led the EU project for the renovation of part of the Museum and the introduction of new content, facilities and services. I am particularly involved in organization of science / technology and art integration programs in the context of the museum of science and technology. In recent years, I have been working on the development of the concept of a "slow" museum and the concept of "degrowth" applied to the museum context.

**BETH HAWKINS AND  
KAREN DAVIES**

*Science Museum, London; The  
Science Museum Group, United  
Kingdom*

## **DESIGNING AND DELIVERING INCLUSIVE EXPERIENCES USING A SCIENCE CAPITAL APPROACH**

### **ABSTRACT**

The Science Museum Group is the UK's national museum of science and industry, with a mission to inspire futures. As a public institution, it aims to provide inspiring and memorable experiences that are accessible and inclusive to everyone. However, it recognised that many of the approaches that are used in the cultural and informal science learning sector can favour those who are already engaged with science and with museums, and often exclude people who face inequalities in wider society.

To address this, the Science Museum Group have adopted a science capital informed approach to apply more equitable practices to its work so that a broader range of people can engage with, and participate in, science and feel more welcome in the museum.

The focus of change has been to not give audiences the things that we think they need; it is to recognise and value the things that they bring to us. Applying a science capital approach shapes and informs every level of our organization which means reflecting on your practice and changing the environments that we invite audiences into, so that everyone can make meaningful connections with the science that shapes their lives.

**Key words:** Science capital, equity, inclusion, science museums, open for all

## Introduction

Scientific discoveries and new inventions influence our lives every day. Despite this, a lot of people feel alienated from science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). Figures in the UK show that although many people like and enjoy science at school, relatively few aspire to continue with science-related study or careers or feel comfortable in places where science is presented or discussed.

The Science Museum Group, the UK national museum of science and industry, is committed to being more inclusive and enabling more people to engage with and participate in science. It is exploring and applying ways of growing science capital in individuals and society – to help bring greater diversity to the type of people who participate in, benefit from, and contribute to science and innovation. This will not only bring a broader range of perspectives and solutions to world challenges, but also help to build a fairer and more inclusive society.

## Taking a Science Capital Approach at the Science Museum Group

Science capital gives us research-based insights into what shapes people's attitudes, engagement and relationship with STEM.

It recognises the significance of what you know about STEM, how you think about it, what you do and who you know in shaping your identity and relationship with science and maths.

Equity, inclusion and social justice are integral to the concept of science capital, enabling and empowering everyone to access the opportunities and wonders of STEM.

Each of us has a different amount of science capital; it is not fixed and can change across a lifetime. Every experience that you have can influence your relationship with STEM both positively and negatively. Recent figures in the UK show that among 11–15 year olds, five per cent have high science capital, meaning they are actively engaged in STEM; 68 per cent have medium science capital, meaning that they are interested but not engaged; while 27 per cent have low science capital and feel science is not for them<sup>1</sup> which in turn influences the choices they make throughout life.

We know that the more science capital you have, the more likely you are to feel that STEM is useful and important in your life, something you have a stake in, and which is 'for you'. By taking a science capital approach we can better understand and challenge inequalities and reach out and connect with new and infrequent visitors as well as nurturing our exiting audiences.

## The Benefits

People experience and learn about STEM in many different places – at school, at home and in their everyday life. Informal learning experiences play a key part in the STEM learning ecosystem by supporting and encouraging audiences to extend their learning within and beyond our spaces. They are a trusted source of information, and they help to broaden people's perceptions of science and have the potential to inspire people of all ages and backgrounds with the opportunities and wonders of STEM, and introduce them to the joy of discovery,

Equity and inclusion are frequently referred to by policymakers, strategic leaders and funders. As such taking a science capital approach provides a strong common language for our sector to use to communicate the role and value of informal learning experiences in society.

## What We Need To Do

Our work is driven by the commitment that nobody should feel unwelcome at our museums and sites and nobody should feel excluded from science.



Image 1. Science capital is like a bag that collects and carries all the STEM-related experiences you have had throughout your life.  
© The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum

Putting science capital research into practice is about focusing on the environment we invite and welcome our audiences into<sup>2</sup>. Every aspect of a visit, whether it is the welcome people get, the signage and images they see, the staff they meet, or the STEM content they encounter is an opportunity to shape someone's feelings about and relationship with STEM.

Everyone who works across the organisation has an opportunity in the work that they do to make a difference, and this really does mean everyone – from trustees, directors and leadership teams to front of house and maintenance teams.

We all need to continually reflect on what we do every day through the eyes of our audiences, by asking questions such as:

- Are we doing all we can to make everyone feel welcome and confident?
- Have we assessed whether exhibits, programmes, websites, marketing, communications and our staff recruitment are inclusive?
- How can the communication methods and language we use help everyone to feel that they are part of science?
- How do the experiences we offer connect and relate to our audiences' rich and diverse interests, experiences and everyday lives?
- How do we value and build on the STEM knowledge and experiences that visitors bring with them?

This diagram represents an organisational model for delivering engaging, inspiring and memorable experiences which are inclusive. Every level needs to be addressed if we are to grow science capital in individuals and society – and help more people to feel at home in museums and STEM settings.



*Image 2. Organisational model for delivery of memorable and inspiring experiences.*  
© The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum

It is only when all these needs are met that our audiences will have a memorable and inspiring experience which will help to grow their science capital.

The Science Museum Group have developed a toolkit of resources and training courses to empower and support all staff across the entire organisation to apply an inclusive and equitable approach to their work.

### Reflecting on Our Everyday Practice

Reflective practice puts audiences at the heart of our work. It enables us to take a critical audience centred view of our work and to continually learn from and adapt what we do to improve our practice in order make our museums more inclusive.

The most central and useful tool that the Science Museum Group developed is a set of reflection points<sup>3,5</sup>. These are action-focused considerations which bring together good practice around STEM and cultural engagement. They are used by all staff to reflect on their everyday interactions and when designing and delivering any experience including exhibitions, shows, resources and workshops.

## ENGAGEMENT REFLECTION POINTS



Image 3. A science capital approach includes reflecting on you experiences through the eyes of your audiences considering these reflection points.  
© The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum

Our experience has been that the best way to start embedding a science capital approach is to adopt an experimental attitude and to take your time. This is a new way of thinking, and there is no magic formula – see what works in your setting and with your audiences. Consider<sup>4</sup>:

- Supporting all staff to feel comfortable with your ambitions and address any misconceptions or concerns.
- Piloting activities first, don't be afraid to experiment and then scale up to bigger projects.
- Small and meaningful tweaks can have a big impact.

### Measuring Success

Success can come in a variety of forms and on a number of scales – from working in new ways to recruiting and growing fresh talent in your organisation, to forming fruitful partnerships with an entire new audience community.

We can't really tell how a single visit or experience has increased someone's science capital as this will come from a combination of factors over time, but we can observe and measure people's engagement with STEM, which will help to grow their science capital.

Engagement can be measured and observed through seeing whether they:

- Have a meaningful connection with our experiences and content.
- Make links with what they know and experience in their everyday life.
- Feel a sense of belonging and ownership.
- Persevere, complete activities, and spend longer in our spaces.
- Have positive emotions towards an experience.
- Have purposeful involvement in, and contribute to, experiences and programmes.

The Science Museum Group's monthly visitor exit survey includes a set of science engagement measures informed by the science capital research which is used to track outcomes across the whole museum experience. Other indicators of engagement such as representation in visitor profile and audience research are also used.

## CONCLUSION

Museums and science centres need to be accessible and inclusive and foster diversity and sustainability. Whilst not everyone needs to study science, take part in science related activities or visit museums, everyone should feel able to do so. Through taking a science capital approach we know that we can become more relevant to a wider range of people.

All museums and science centre's aim to grow their audiences and reach and inspire more visitors. We all have different opportunities in the work that we do, and if we all work and through collaboration across our sector, across the world, we can maximise the impact of our STEM experiences for the widest possible audiences.

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## **MUSEUMS, CROSS-SECTORAL PARTNERSHIPS AND REGIONAL REVITALIZATION: A PERSPECTIVE FROM “PIKAKASAWAN PROJECT” (TAITUNG COUNTY, TAIWAN)**

### **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose of Paper:** This paper examines the relationship between museums and their core values in society, focusing on cultural creativity's development in Taiwan. Using the "Taitung Changbin Township Vanilla Field Project in 2021" as a case study, we analyze the National Museum of History's role (NMH) in promoting sustainable development. Museums as public organizations preserve cultural collections and knowledge, also serving as multi-participative platforms. Their core content goes beyond collections, acting as the foundation for cultural creativity in Taiwan.

**Principal Results:** In Taiwan, museums mainly demonstrate cultural creativity through licensing and developing derivative products from digital image collections. To enhance their impact, museums should emphasize art and cultural elements' promotion. By connecting unique collections and derived image resources to urban culture, museums play a pivotal role beyond their walls. They initiate cross-sectoral partnerships, leading with common values and public interests, and contribute to regional revitalization.

**Major Conclusions:** Museums' cultural creativity intertwines with their social value, contributing to sustainable development. Through cultural creativity, museums can connect with urban culture, lead cross-sectoral collaborations, and promote common values, fostering a more sustainable society. The "Taitung Changbin Township Vanilla Field Project in 2021" showcases how museums can embrace sustainable practices while serving as pioneers for future transformations.

**Key words:** National Museum of History, licensing

## 1. Introduction

As the beneficiary of "public sources", museums must face the relationship between their core values and contemporary society and transform from their role as "carers" to institutions that provide social care to those in need (Kreps, 2003). From the perspective of public needs, as mentioned by Sacco (2016). The wave of global closures caused by the sharp decline in public spending on arts and culture during the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted "surviving" museums to face the possibility of normalization of severe financial aspects in the post-pandemic era, and they must explore how to achieve a sustainable financial structure without compromising their mission and non-profit values model (Szántó, 2021).

The development of cultural and creative industries by museums contributes to the realization of their own cultural, economic, and social values, and has become the niche of the business model of museum development, and major museums around the world have reinterpreted the uniqueness of museum collections through cultural creativity, and empirically the development of cultural creativity has also changed the way society contacts museums (Falk & Sheppard, 2006).

The National Museum of History (NMH) located at the center of Taipei City in Taiwan and opened to the public in 1955, was one of the first public museums in Taiwan after WWII. The NMH has a sixty-thousand-piece collection, including ancient bronze, tri-color pottery, and modern Taiwanese artworks. Now it has closed for renovations and will reopen in 2024 (Huang, 2020). The NMH collaborates with the social enterprise "Blueseeds" through image licensing to jointly promote a medium and long-term experimental project: "Pikakasawan Project". The project is mainly to provide image licensing from the NMH. Blueseeds invests funds and equipment to set up a farm to restore vanilla fields in Changbin Township, Taitung in Taiwan, and uses the raw materials of the farm to produce co-branding essential oil products to drive regional revitalization. (National Museum of History [NMH], 2022)



Figure1. NMH opened to the public in 1955, and it is closed now for renovations, and will reopen in 2024. © Huang Ying-Che

We adopt the IMRAD format theory, the two research objectives that this study intends to achieve: (1) Analyzing the main discussion of the museum's operation mode of practicing the concept of the cross-sectoral partnerships, summarizing the current situation of the museum's development of a cultural and creative business model with social value. (2) Taking the "Pikakasawan Project" of the NMH as an embedded case study to explore the actual implementation structure and empirical analysis of its operation.

## **2. Research Methods and Theoretical Approaches**

This research adopts qualitative research methods. In this study, the literature analysis method Documentation and the secondary data method Secondary Qualitative Study were used to collect data, which are described as follows:

(1) Literature analysis method: This article plans to collect relevant Chinese and English periodicals, publications. As a museum practitioner, the author can also use Participant Observation to conduct systematic data collection on research phenomena and actions, carefully analyze and interpret the collected data, and cross-reference to confirm the correctness and feasibility of the literature data based on other data.

(2) Secondary Qualitative Study: The collection of literature in this article is scheduled to start with "museum", "museum cultural and creative development, and "social enterprise model". Since the research topic of this project involves domestic and foreign museums and social enterprise institutions, it is still necessary to use secondary data analysis to test the hypothesized data and to compare and analyze the potential deviations or sources of problems with internal or external validity, such as national Differences between the concept of foreign social enterprise and Taiwan.

## **3. CASE STUDY: "Pikakasawan Project" of the National Museum of History**

### **(1) Analysis of Social and Cultural Environment**

After the COVID-19 epidemic, the financial structure of most museums is in crisis, and various innovative projects, such as the "Pikakasawan project", can be one of the ways to increase revenue. We believe museums are generally highly trusted by society. We should make good use of this advantage, actively become a multi-participative platform for integrating social resources and promote the value of museums through closer cooperation. The NMH transforms the "Motif" of its collection into a continuous image of graphic design - "Pattern Image", and licensing. In the international licensing market, the subject of such licensing is also called "stamp" licensing (NMH, 2022). For example, the Victoria and Albert Museum has a series of well-known stamp licensing images.

The NMH currently works with 50 companies and brands, producing about 1,000 items. All of NMH's products are produced through authorization, and in addition to no investment, royalties are also charged. Some of these royalties are paid to the government and some are reserved for museums. With the previous cases as the basis, the museum goes further and wants to replicate more successful cases. Museums are storytellers, and we want to make those stories meaningful.

### **(2) Case Study of NMH**

The NMH cooperated with "Blueseeds" to develop essential oils made with natural farming methods from the pattern image "Flowers Blooming Seasons", combining "cultural creativity" with the concept of "Regional Revitalization" to give full play to the social value and positive influence of the museum. The goal is to incorporate museum-grade classic works of art into everyday life and create economic benefits. The pattern image "Blossoming Four Seasons" was transformed from the "Vertical Flower and Butterfly Embroidered Piece" in the late Qing Dynasty. The original work was taken from the original work and redesigned to make the composition full of vitality. It also has auspicious meanings such as longevity and happiness (NMH, 2022). Let's take a look at another protagonist of this case: Changbin Township, the NMH and his co-branding partners are both in Taipei City, the northern part

of Taiwan. Why did you choose Changbin Township in the eastern part of Taiwan as a partner? The name of the project, pikakasawan, is derived from the ancient name of Changbin Township, Taitung County, and is the name of the local aborigines: the Amis. Changbin Township is located in the eastern part of Taiwan and is dominated by the Amis aborigines of Taiwan. The loss of the agricultural population has seriously affected local development. Through the information of the local government and enterprises, we found that there are good conditions and potential for planting herbs here. That is why the NMH chose this place.

The NMH cooperates with the brand of social enterprise "Blueseeds" to set up farmland to grow high economic value vanilla as raw materials for products. This project goal will produce special essential oil products to attract the farmers' return to the community and guide farmers in using natural farming methods that are less harmful to the land, regenerate the land, and establish a cycle. The farmland is cultivated using natural farming methods without the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers and is cultivated on a contractual basis with Aboriginal tribal farmers. Starting from a small scale and locally, it will promote the development of local contract farming employment, land restoration, vanilla fields, profit sharing (5% of income), and small farmer economy, and gradually achieve the expected goal of community creation (NMH, 2022).

With the natural farming method, the NMH and their co-brand partners insist on using no herbicides, no pesticides, and no chemical fertilizers. Natural farming is a process that eliminates all chemical substances, such as pesticides or herbicides or fertilizer, and instead, the NMH and their partners learn how to let nature take control (NMH, 2022).

The project makes this work under a contract farming model, in which they partner with local farmers with access to long-term followed land and guarantees these farmers a payment in exchange for the farmers' cooperation in following the NMH's guidelines, allowing the NMH to expand their reach and create more opportunities for local citizens. As such, not only are they able to make use of vacant land, but by providing financial security and by eliminating exposure to harmful chemicals, it raises the living standards of our farmers and their families as well.

In this case, the museum's image licensing is the key element. First, cross-sectoral partnerships between museums and businesses are established through image licensing from museums. Then, a co-brand partnership was developed according to the project of cooperation between the two parties (this case is a cultural and creative product). Some are even transforming themselves into laboratories, reflecting on modern society. Collaborations with corporations are key drivers in the process of a museum's transformation into a more audience-centric organization, which aims to educate, bring the community together, and create new experiences. The key partnership benefits for brands and museums, and these go beyond just marketing for the first and securing financial support for the latter. For brands, museum partnerships provide an opportunity to take advantage of the image transfer effect, and to engage their employees, clients, and government stakeholders better.

#### 4. Discussion

This study argues that The NMH and its co-branding partner "Blueseeds" promote a more creative lifestyle and regional revitalization by connecting museums, consumers, producers, and nature in a sustainable, mutually beneficial cycle and mindset, constructing cross-sectoral partnerships.

In this study, the business model advocated is an "altruistic" and "value-oriented" business model with the concept of social enterprise, which emphasizes how to



Figure 2. NMH collaborates with Blueseeds through image licensing to jointly promote Pikakasawan Project to produce co-branding essential oil products.  
© Huang Ying-Che



Figure 3. Making strong connections between museums and urban sustainable development.  
© Huang Ying-Che

meet the needs of disadvantaged markets through social innovation activities, and even further create new social value, has two important characteristics. On one hand, "not aiming at maximizing profit", solving social problems by commercial means. The profit is the goal but also a means. For-profit is a way to maintain organizational operations and improve financial autonomy. On the other hand, for "public welfare social purpose", museums have digital assets in the collection, so that cultural creativity can not only involve the interests of making cultural and creative products or licensing Orientation can also be socialized, transforming the organization from the inside to enhance the willingness and ability to practice social values. Three features are as follows:

First, museums can use unique collections and derived image resources, which have cultural richness and knowledge content, and can serve as the basis for museums to connect with cities.

Second, museums have a sense of authority and trust, and their influence can go beyond the museum to provide a common framework, language, and goals for stakeholders in different sectors of the city, establish cross-disciplinary partnerships and play leadership roles, and practice common values and publicity.

Third, museums can use the rich collection of image resources and art majors, combined with the funds and resources of social industries, to help create employment opportunities related to the local living environment, and promote regional revitalization.

In sum, the development of museums contributes to the vitality and sustainable development of cities. The cultural and creative development of the Taiwan Museum is mainly based on the authorization and development of derivatives from the collection of digital images. In addition to helping the museum maintain its operations with profit, it also pays more attention to the promotion and application of art and culture. On this basis, the sustainable development of the museum in the city is more Conditions that establish a close relationship.

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## ADDRESSING 'THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM': DOCUMENTING CONTEMPORARY WORKING-CLASS EXPERIENCES AT THE LONDON MUSEUM

### ABSTRACT

This paper addresses a critical issue in contemporary museum theory and practice: museums' elusive relationship with social inequalities and class differences in the contemporary. We argue that 'class' has remained the 'elephant in the room' particularly in the UK, a country where the class system continues to be deeply entrenched, despite recent debates and professional practice around diversity, inclusion, and equality. A considerable disregard for class differences marked the feverish *rapid response collecting* programmes carried out by museums in the UK and elsewhere during the COVID-19 pandemic, although this health crisis was displaying a distinct class bias. This led us to initiate *Inequalities, Class and the Pandemic* (2021-22), a research and collecting project examining the impact that the virus was having on the most socio-economically disadvantaged members of British society. With this project we sought to document, critically examine and preserve for posterity the lived experiences of low-paid Londoners in 'essential' jobs such as supermarket cashiers, cleaners and food delivery riders. Building on our findings, this paper sketches out a picture of contemporary working-class lives in urban environments and argues for city museums' key role in addressing contemporary socio-economic inequalities through their collecting, programming and research practices.

**Key words:** Working class, museums, pandemic, lived experience, contemporary collecting

Museums across the world have had an elusive relationship with class differences (Chynoweth 2022), including in a country such as the UK where class divisions remain very powerful (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor 2020). Although, since the 1970s, many museums have strived to collect, display and interpret the 'everyday' and tell the (hi)stories of all members of British society (Black 2011), critics argue that British museums have displayed only limited interest in working-class communities and their histories (e.g., Fleming 2022). In museum theory, class differences have been largely overlooked, even within the burgeoning literature developed in recent decades addressing issues of diversity, inclusion, social justice and activism (e.g., Sandell and Nightingale 2012). This neglect is not accidental and requires critical reflection, particularly at a time of severe economic downturn and high inflation (United Nations 2023), which disproportionately affect the most economically vulnerable groups.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted the world economy and torn apart our social fabric, was the impetus for *'Inequality, Class and the Pandemic'* (hereafter ICP) (2021-2022). With this seed research and collecting project co-funded by the London Museum and King's College London, we aimed to research, document and collect the lived experiences of working-class Londoners during the pandemic. The research was developed within the framework of 'Curating London', a London Museum's contemporary collecting programme focusing on Londoners' lived experience.<sup>1</sup> As a city museum striving to tell the story of London from pre-Roman times to the present days, the London Museum offered a productive platform to examine issues of class and social inequalities in contemporary urban settings.

In the following sections, after elaborating on the problematic relationship between museums and class, we build on our research findings to argue for city museums' key role in addressing contemporary socio-economic inequalities through their collecting, programming and research practices.

### **'The elephant in the room'**

If, in recent decades, politicians and critics have urged British museums to include and better serve traditionally marginalised audiences, attention has by and large focused on the 'protected characteristics' of the UK 2010 Equality Act such as ethnicity, race, disability, gender or sexuality, disregarding socioeconomic differences (Iervolino and Sergi 2022; 2023). Museums in the UK have tended to support a liberal agenda that foregrounded 'identity politics' over economic disadvantage, arguably turning 'class' into 'the elephant in the room' in contemporary debates and professional practices around diversity, inclusion, and inequality.

The limited academic publications addressing class differences have often focused on the representation of working-class and labour histories in British museums (e.g., Hill 2005; Carnegie 2006; Smith, Shackel and Campell 2011). This scholarly interest responded to civic museums' efforts to document the demise of Britain's industrial heritage and culture brought about by Margaret Thatcher's economic policies. From the 1970s, the growing interest in preserving working-class histories gave impetus to the creation of many social, local and industrial history museums and heritage sites (Black 2011), whose legacy is echoed today in institutions such as the People's History Museum and the Working Class Movement Library (based in the two post-industrial cities of Manchester and Salford, respectively). With the emphasis on labour history and adoption of historical approaches to class analysis, however, social, local and industrial history museums have largely focused on the past, neglecting to pay attention to class differences in the *contemporary*.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/collections/about-our-collections/enhancing-our-collections/curating-london>

An explanation is that British museums and their, largely middle-class, professionals might have bought into the growing popularisation within media and policy discourses of the notion that class divisions no longer define British society – a phenomenon mapped by journalist Owen Jones (2020). McGrath and Taylor (2022: 417) have noted how this bias was also reenacted by museum professionals during sectorial events striving to emphasize the marginalization of working-class audiences and staff.

Contrary to this misconception, our empirical research shows that class is not only ‘alive and well’, but also that working-class people in Britain do not reflect the simplistic, demonising and devaluing portrayals that have increasingly populated and media and policy discourses (Jones 2020; Savage 2015).

### **The empirical research**

We developed our collaborative research and collecting project *Inequality, Class and the Pandemic* (ICP) within the institutional framework of the London Museum’s *rapid response* ‘Collecting COVID-19’ programme initiated in April 2020. With ICP, we aimed to counter the class-blind approach of other COVID-related collecting projects by focusing on the experiences of Londoners in low-paid, working-class ‘essential’ or ‘frontline’ occupations such as supermarket cashiers, food delivery drivers, cleaners, social care workers, bartenders, and teaching assistants. We conducted oral history interviews with 15 Londoners who were diverse in terms of age, nationality and ethnicity, 9 of which are now part of the London Museum’s permanent collection.

If one’s class is also shaped by social and cultural factors, intersecting with variables such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity (Brook, O’Brien and Taylor 2020), with our focus on labour we privileged the economic dimensions of class. This seemed pressing as the, usually disposable, working-class labourers whose experiences we wished to document, were being asked to shoulder high level of health risks for negligible earnings, thus exposing the ‘profound class dimensions’ of the crisis (Jones 2020: xix).

The project methodology and our interviewees’ experiences are fully addressed in the project’s report *Museums, Class and the Pandemic* (Iervolino and Sergi 2022). Here, we sketch out a picture of contemporary working-class lives in Britain as it emerged through the oral history interviews.

### **Contemporary Working-Class Lives**

If economic precarity surfaces as key to the experiences of working-class Londoners in low-paid employment we interviewed, their testimonies point to the significant role played by systemic factors, rather than individual responsibilities, in their individual experiences of economic struggle, which were only heightened by the pandemic.

Particularly interviewees on zero-hour contracts or working in the gig economy discussed the insecurity and precarity felt when being made redundant or losing regular work, and finding themselves ineligible for government financial support such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (otherwise known as ‘furlough’). Many spoke about having to resort to hard-won savings, if any, borrowing money, attempting to apply for Job Seeker’s Allowance, often unsuccessfully, or having to secure work in the few job markets that thrived during the pandemic. Rather than passively waiting for state support as working-class people are often misrepresented (Savage et al. 2015), our interviewees strived to take control over their lives by taking up precarious work in businesses such as the booming food delivery industry, which inevitably exposed them to higher health risks.

Thus, alongside structural factors, a looming feeling of vulnerability emerged as shaping the experiences of our interviewees. Those in customer-facing service roles such as food delivery riders discussed the risks of contracting COVID, and the discomfort linked to customers' distrust. Significantly, however, the pandemic only exacerbated pre-existing risks (related to health and otherwise) faced by food delivery couriers as part of their work, including the lack of employers' insurance. Other interviewees discussed the impact on their mental and physical health of COVID-related changes to their roles: for instance, pub staff talked about the stress associated to the feeling of operating as 'state agents' for having to enforce government rules on social distancing or mask wearing when lockdown measures were partially lifted.

Alongside experiences of precarity and vulnerability, the agency and resourcefulness of our interviewees were palpable, moving beyond the reductive topoi of struggles and deprivation associated with working-class lives. Several interviewees discussed their decision to move to a different sector or a career which would provide a more stable income, thus putting forward an image of working-class people that does not tally with their predominant portrayals as passive or 'work-shy' (Savage et al. 2015).

Contemporary working-class lives are also shaped by experiences of solidarity, mutual support and community, primarily felt with fellow colleagues, whether supermarket workers, pub staff or food delivery couriers. For example, food delivery riders discussed at length how the pandemic fostered a sense of solidarity among riders, strengthening pre-existing support networks and communities of care. Like the other workers we spoke to, food delivery riders appeared to tie their own identities primarily to their specific job, rather than to their working-class status. As we discuss elsewhere (Iervolino and Sergi 2023), the absence of an *overt* working-class identification and a collective class identity amongst our research participants, even when they clearly belonged to an urban working-class, point to a growing 'dis-identification' from class as a desirable identity marker.

### **Conclusions: Embracing complexity**

Our research shows that contemporary working-class lives are marked by experiences of economic struggles, vulnerability and precarity, but these are a product of structural inequalities and of labour markets' dynamics. These structural factors require recognition by city and social history museums particularly, alongside stories of resilience, agency and inventiveness, and of mutual solidarity and community support and care. At present, this complexity is not reflected in British museums and their stubborn focus on past working-class lives, which disengages from contemporary realities and politics – a tendency that is arguably detectable in other parts of the world.

As our small project demonstrates, museums scholars and practitioners have a role to play, working in partnership, to refute the myth of a 'classless Britain', and to offer a more sophisticated portrayal of contemporary working-class lives. Research and collecting projects focused on autobiographical testimonies can enable museums to develop richer understandings of contemporary working-class lives, laying the foundation for participatory curatorial practices with working-class communities to re-interpret their identities and heritage. Collections-focused and curatorial initiatives should be accompanied by interventions across several museum functions including engagement work, public programming, marketing and governance, and targeted workforce initiatives to attract and retain working-class professionals.

Whilst critical, individual museums' programmes are insufficient alone to address what is in fact a sectorial problem; such can be only tackled with concerted efforts

of several actors in the museum ecosystem, including universities, museum bodies such as museums associations and ICOM committees, and policymakers, to address the role that privilege plays in keeping working-class people and their experiences outside the sector. We urgently need close collaborations amongst professionals, scholars and policymakers, if class is to gain the centrality it deserves in contemporary museum theory and practice.

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**Domenico Sergi** is Senior Research Lead at the London Museum where he is responsible for the development of a new Research Centre. He was previously Senior Curator for the museum's contemporary collecting programme called *Curating London* (2018-2022). Before joining the London Museum, Domenico worked as a Curator (Anthropology) and CE Coordinator at the Horniman Museum and Gardens, and was a Lecturer at Department of Art, Design and Museology, University College London. Domenico holds a PhD in museum studies from the University of East Anglia. His principal research interests lie in contemporary material culture, with a particular focus on participatory approaches to curatorial practice. Domenico also has extensive experience in working with diaspora groups, and refugees in particular, in a museum context. He recently published the monograph *Museums, Refugees and Communities* (Routledge, 2021).

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## **EVERYONE'S SCIENCE MUSEUM OF TOMORROW: HOW CAN WE CONFRONT AND ERADICATE OUR EXCLUSIVE PRACTICE?**

### **ABSTRACT**

This article explores the need for science museums to change in order to engage more diverse audiences. It focuses on the transformation of the Danish Museum of Science and Technology as a case study. The text emphasizes the increasing number of crises in the world, such as climate change, pandemics, and technological advancements, which necessitate science museums to address these issues and involve diverse perspectives in finding sustainable solutions. The Danish Museum of Science and Technology adopts an experimental approach to reimagine its formats, work processes, and organizational mindset. By conducting smaller experiments, they test new ideas and collect data to develop new knowledge and insights for further progress. The text also highlights specific experiments conducted by the museum, including a date activity for adults, a pop-up museum at the Copenhagen Airport, and an educational program for vocational school students. Furthermore, the museum aims to explore the role of artificial intelligence and its impact on society, aiming to engage visitors in collective investigation and knowledge production. Addressing the unequal representation of different demographics in museums, the article calls for change in museum practices to promote inclusivity and social justice.

**Key words:** #inclusion #socialjustice #sustainability #newformats

In my article I would like to address the question, is there a need for us to change at all to become relevant for more diverse audiences? I will reflect on the question by sharing experiences with the transformation of the Danish Museum of Science and Technology, where I work as a curator.

### About the museum

The Danish Museum of Science and Technology is the national museum of science and technology in Denmark. The collection consists of about 30,000 objects with one of the highlights being the oldest car in Denmark from 1888 – which can still drive making it the world's oldest functioning car.

### Is there a need for change?

The museum used to be a rather traditional science museum with exhibitions reflecting a conventional way of organizing technologies including communication, transportation, engines, inventions, etc., and a focus on how technologies function rather than how they affected society and people's lives.

The museum did not attract large numbers of visitors but had a core group of visitors, who loved the museum and would come back regularly. This meant that there were a lot of people who would never even consider visiting the museum as they didn't see the museum as something for them. We clearly needed to change this. And it's a transformation, where we can say that we are close to the end of the beginning, but there's still much to do. It takes time to create new connections with citizens who haven't visited us before, and it takes time to transform the organizational mindset.

The work is part of a bigger transformation of the museum, which also involves relocating the museum from its current location in Elsinore north of Copenhagen into an old power plant in Copenhagen. But why do we need to change? And how can we make this change happen?



Figure 1. The Danish Museum of Science and Technology at its current location in Elsinore, Denmark. © Kim Matthai Leland.

## The long line of crises

It seems today that the number of crises is ever-increasing. Climate change is the most severe one, but there are many others, which also need our attention, such as world pandemics, international terrorism, fake news, armed conflicts, famine, loss of biodiversity, and so on.

Maybe a crisis of the future will have roots in digital technologies and technological innovations such as super artificial intelligence and biotechnology. As science and technology museums, we need to address and show how these technologies are something we should care about and shift our focus from a matter of fact to a matter of concern in our practice. And we need more different kinds of people to participate in the development of new sustainable ideas.

Before the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the former UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, said; “More of the same will not do”. We need to completely rethink our way of living and what we do to create a more sustainable future. As science museums, we have a unique opportunity to become spaces for critical thinking, to show science in the making, and to collectively develop ideas for how to create a better future.

## Science – right where you are

The museum where I work is inspired by and works with science capital as part of transforming the institution. Science capital is the framework for our thinking about the development of new practice, but it's also with the acknowledgement that the UK and Danish societies are very different, and we need to translate the science capital thinking and practice into a Danish context. However, the overall conclusions, ambitions, and thinking are in tune with our approach and practice.<sup>1</sup>

We have chosen a path of experimental practice, where we are rethinking our formats, work processes and organizational mindset. This is to make the museum relevant for citizens, who may think that science or a science museum is not for them – even though science and technology are relevant for everyone. We are carrying out smaller experiments in our exhibitions, and public and educational programs.

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<sup>1</sup> See: Archer, L., Dawson, E., et al. (2015). “Science Capital”: A Conceptual, Methodological, and Empirical Argument for Extending Bourdieusian Notions of Capital Beyond the Arts. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 52:7, 922-948.

Figure 2. Date activity at the museum. © Danish Museum of Science and Technology.





Figure 3. Pop Up Museum in Copenhagen Airport.  
© Danish Museum of Science and Technology.

One of the advantages of working this way is to test new ideas quickly at a low cost but with a big impact. We can test some quite radical ideas on a small scale. It's important for us that we define a research question for all our experiments and that we collect data and make analyses to create new knowledge and insights, which we can use to further develop our practice.

### Experiments

One of our experiments was to develop an activity targeted at people aged 25-40 who are visiting the museum without children. We created a date activity, where participants can experience the museum together in a fun way and get to know each other at the same time – and potentially ignite a romance. This was untraditional for us as most of our activities are targeted at children and families.

Another experiment is a pop-up museum in Copenhagen Airport, where we wanted to investigate how we can create conversions around science and technology-related topics in a setting which might not initially be a place to discuss such topics. At the same time, we wanted to get in contact with citizens, who would never even think about visiting our museum, as they didn't see it as something for them.

We are also testing an educational program targeted at students from vocational schools – a group of students whom museums have rarely made educational programs for and a group of citizens, who are some of the most underrepresented visitors at Danish museums. We focus on hands-on activities, solving tasks together, having fun, and raising their self-esteem.

### Artificial intelligence

We are starting a project about how we can make artificial intelligence into a public matter and investigate how the museum can assume a new position in society, where we become a place to discuss, reflect, and produce new knowledge about how the development and use of new technologies in the society should be.

This includes a rethinking of how we create exhibitions and what takes place in these exhibitions. Instead of being a place where citizens can find answers and facts, we will be a place, where we collectively investigate potentials and

challenges with a new technology and thus produce new knowledge and insights about how to further develop and use new technologies in the future, such as artificial intelligence.

### **Are we really being relevant?**

The narrative is that Denmark is a rather equal society, where most people have even opportunities. But why is it that as many as 60% of the Danish population hasn't visited a museum within the last year? And why is it that people with higher educational backgrounds are extremely overrepresented among museum visitors compared to their share of the Danish population and the opposite; that citizens with lower educational backgrounds rarely visit museums? And why are women overrepresented at the museums making up nearly 2/3 of the visitors?<sup>2</sup> There's something rotten in the state of Denmark. And unfortunately, I believe this is not just the case for Denmark.

If we as science museums want to contribute to the creation of a more equal and just world, we need to change our practice so we can become increasingly relevant for both citizens with different backgrounds and the society in its entirety. I believe the research, mindset, practice, and ambition behind science capital can be a framework for this change to happen.

### **Safe spaces for unsafe ideas**

Museums have a rare opportunity to be – in the words of the American museologist Stephen Weil – “safe spaces for unsafe ideas”.

Let's challenge our existing mindset, let's take risks, and let's celebrate failures as part of the innovation, which is needed to open our doors for everyone in our communities.

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<sup>2</sup> Jensen, J. and Lundgaard, I. (2015). Museums – Citizens and Sustainable Solutions. Copenhagen: Danish Agency for Culture.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

*Jacob Thorek Jensen's* research and practice covers various areas within the complex institutions of museums, such as social and cultural inclusion, science communication, social learning spaces, curating the contemporary, sustainability, knowledge-producing processes, rethinking the uses of collections, and social cohesion. A common denominator is research and practical experimentation on how we can rethink the roles of museums and other cultural and informal learning institutions in society, so they become relevant for more diverse citizens.

## THIS IS BARCELONA. WELCOME TO THE CITY.

### City museums and urban sustainability in times of conflict

TERESA MACIÀ BIGORRA,  
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AND JOAN  
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#### ABSTRACT

City museums, as cultural institutions for urban knowledge, can play an important social role in 21<sup>st</sup> Century cities, both in metropolises with accelerated migration growth and in cities with a sudden arrival of refugees from wars, droughts and other environmental crises or gender, ethnical, religious or political persecution.

A city museum should be the mirror and the gateway to the city connecting historical narratives, heritage, landscapes and places, and enhancing participation in urban life. Its position at the crossroads of cultural and urban policies confers upon it a key role in the creation of knowledge and heritage, in the social and cultural cohesion of the city and in the renovation of tourism practices.

To undertake this task, the city museum requires a consistent narrative based on urban history, a minimum exhibition space and a range of urban visit options that allow locals and newcomers to position themselves and understand that they are part of the city.

The Muhba's project *This is Barcelona. Welcome to the city* contributes to social sustainability by welcoming newcomers from situations of conflict and offering a multi-format activity that provides them with knowledge about the city and cognitive orientation, which are essential to exercise the right to the city and make it one's own.

**Key words:** Urban history, heritage, narratives, citizens, social sustainability

### **Heritage, research and narratives**

If city museums are conceived as cultural institutions that accommodate the urban historical complexity of the city, they can play an important social role in 21<sup>st</sup> Century cities. The metropolises that mainly during the past century had an accelerated migration growth and the cities that now also deal with a sudden arrival of refugees from wars, droughts and other environmental crises or gender, ethnical, religious or political persecution have to be able to explain that growth, changes and continuities in order to enhance the urban participation.

By establishing new narratives, coming out of rigorous historical research, and by using objects, maps, arts and literature, city museums can show the origin and the growth of the cities, providing a multiformat corpus of knowledge that can be understood as a method to read the contemporary city.

The heritage inside the museum premises, in the form of objects and documents, and the heritage outside the museum premises, such as monuments, buildings, streets, plazas, markets, parks, festivals, traditions, music, literature, arts, etc, are basic pillars for building narratives. Without objects, documents and heritage, that is, without the witnesses of the city past, and without an appropriate research on them, the narratives lack of a consistent basis.

When economic, social and cultural flows all jump over boundaries, the relevance of cities as agents for social and cultural cohesion increases. The city museum should be the mirror and the gateway to the city, connecting heritage, spaces and historical narratives, and enhancing participation in urban life. If city museums devote themselves to presenting and representing the city and its inhabitants, they will be committed to build a more equalitarian and inclusive citizenship.



Barcelona Flashback  
exhibition at MUHBA  
Casa Padellàs.  
© MUHBA-Monica Martinez  
Bajo

## The city museum and social sustainability

A city history museum has to devote its public programmes to promote the dialogue about the city. This dialogue has to be about how we see, how we visit and how we think the city nowadays, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

To take part in this dialogue is required to know the city, to be able to decipher its grammar and its codes, that means to understand the urban processes the city went through over the years. The city museum can offer all these tools in a varied kind of formats of its public programming, from exhibitions to seminars, itineraries, books, guides and so on, and thus citizens have more resources at their disposal to participate actively in that debate. This basic kit of urban knowledge ensures conscious participation and sense of belonging to the city. Only the awareness of the need of active involvement of the inhabitants will push the transformations towards the commitment to social sustainability.

City museums can also reformulate new views of the city and create alternative types and forms of more sustainable tourist visits that include not only the city centre and the main monuments, but also the metropolitan city as a whole, with the growth -and transformation- of its spatial and social peripheries. Barcelona has grown and has been transformed in the last century and a half with large waves of migration from rural Catalonia, from all over Spain and, more recently, from different continents. And it has also lived the experience of refugees, as a result of the Spanish civil war (1936-1939) and lately as a result of the refugees' crises from other conflicts and wars.

The growth of the cities and the arrival of migrants can be easily understood while walking in the areas of former shanty towns or in a tour at the areas where new housing was built to host them. It is worth noting the social capital that those newcomers brought to the city. Incorporating them into the historical narrative of the city through the museum is a recognition that has not always been so evident.

The Barcelona History Museum (MUHBA), for example, undertakes this task with a consistent narrative based in urban history research and through spaces such as the Turó de la Rovira (shanties) and Cases Barates del Bon Pastor (housing estates) as sites that contribute to the historical explanation of the role of urban majorities in Barcelona.

### This is Barcelona. Welcome to the city

“This is Barcelona. Welcome to the city” is a Muhba project, in operation since 2016. Newcomers from Latin America, Africa and part of Asia have been part of it, as well as war refugees from the Mediterranean area and, more recently, from Ukraine. A city museum can be a very valuable asset to welcome people coming from situations of difficulty or conflict. This project is a multi-format activity, with a historical vision of the city and urban itineraries as a practice of knowledge and cognitive orientation, which are essential to exercise the right to the city and make it one's own.

It is carried out in collaboration with organizations that support refugees and newcomers. The museum works in joint public-community partnerships and collaborates with other institutions, neighbourhood associations, local studies centres, archives, university research departments, friends, volunteers, schools, etc.

“This is Barcelona. Welcome to the city” is a project integrated into the ordinary programming. It is a measure of the museum's ability to contribute to social



MUHBA Bon Pastor.  
© MUHBA-Pere Pratdesaba

sustainability, testing the potential and flexibility of all modalities of regular programming and collecting. The success of the proposal of welcoming the newcomers does not depend so much on museological innovation as on research on the history of the city in order to have a rigorous and open urban story at the same time.

This welcoming activity, with groups of 10-30 persons that many times need to engage translators, starts with an historical introduction to the city, that stands out that the city has grown thanks to several migratory waves that provided basic human and social capital for its human, social, economic and cultural development. Then, a tea or coffee is offered, as an informal way to talk to each other before going to explore the city. Finally, the group, with the museum staff and, if needed, the translators, follows an urban itinerary that runs through six squares and its heritage near the museum, summarising six key concepts to understand the city:



Urban tour starting at Plaça del Rei.  
© MUHBA-Teresa Macià.

- Plaça del Rei and the Royal Major Palace representing *history*, showing the dilemmas of the city through the ages, from the ancient romans to the contemporary city, in a scenario that enhances the importance of this Mediterranean city in Medieval times.
- Plaça Sant Jaume and the City Council as *power*: it has been the political city centre during 2.000 years, since the roman Forum to the headquarters of the government of the city and the Catalan nation nowadays.
- Plaça Nova, near the Cathedral, as a place that represents the old *festivities* in the city, where they can be grasp the former weight of the church and its role in the city, but also the different types of Catalan and intercultural celebrations that have brought citizens together over time.
- Plaça Santa Caterina and the Market to symbolize *trade*, where it is useful to talk about the commercial city and how the municipal markets were, and still are, the unifying axes of different neighbourhoods and places for sociability and inclusion.
- Plaça Catalunya and the metro and train station as the *connections*, a meeting point between the old and the new city where commercial, business, leisure, connections and vindications take place.
- Plaça Ramon Berenguer and its monuments alluding to the *symbolology*, a way to talk about the importance of decoding city symbols. Built at the beginning of the 20th Century, this square presents the roman's wall, its medieval reconstruction and the commercial Via Laietana street, that was opened to connect the new city to the port, a century ago.

During the walk, the guide uses pictures and maps and the museum delivers to the public attending the itinerary a folder with information about the city, courses, activities, and other additional data like maps of libraries and cultural centres where they are welcome to go and use computers and free wifi. All this information kit aims to locate newcomers and provide them with basic tools to promote adequate knowledge of their environment and help their integration.

The project is carried out in collaboration with organizations that support newcomers, take care of refugees at the first stages, volunteers and translators, and also language schools that teach for free Catalan and Spanish. These organizations bring groups to the museum to attend this programme that the museum offers for free.

“This is Barcelona” plays a key role in inclusive public policies and incorporates time and space of the city trajectory (urban process) into a cultural package that can be share among citizens.

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## BIOGRAPHIES

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**Elena Pérez Rubiales** works at the projects department of MUHBA (Barcelona History Museum) since 2017. After her BA in art history, she obtained a PhD in Production and Consumption of Culture by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, where she taught in the Humanities degree. Her scientific research focuses on the field of museology and its relationship with the museum experience.

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## **MILAN MUSEUM, CITY MUSEUM OR MUSEUM CITY? CONNECTING MUSEUMS, CITIZENS AND TERRITORY**

### **ABSTRACT**

Does a Museum of the City exist in Milan? Who tells the story of Milan? Perhaps the Civic Museums? Each civic museum touches on an aspect of the urban, social, and cultural history of the city, but does not generate a coherent and explicit narrative about the city and the citizens of Milan.

Do citizens tell the story of the city? They create narratives and promote research projects, websites, maps, itineraries, and festivals, tell the story of the city's complex identity, in the museums, but also in the streets and squares, courtyards and restaurants, churches and historic stores, parks and stations, factories and civic libraries.

The research intends to reflect on the city's ability to respond through its museums to the needs of visitors and residents alike to learn about the city. The goal is to identify effective tools to tie together the civic museums, in a unified and coordinated narrative, incorporating and enhancing the stories, testimonies and content that emerge from the citizenship too.

**Key words:** Milan, citizenship, identity, belonging

In 2019 in Kyoto we presented the outcomes of the *Next door museums* conference, about the role of museums vis-à-vis the resident community (Fabi, C., Fratelli, M., Miedico, C., & Ravagna, A. (2019), *Museums as Hubs for cultural and personal Services*, in *City Museums as cultural Hubs: Past, Present and Future*, Kyoto, Japan, Book of Proceeding, 178-189).

Following the *Connecting cities, connecting citizens* meeting in Barcelona, December 2021, we asked ourselves some questions related to the narrative of Milan's identity through its museum and cultural heritage. Who is interested in the city's narrative? Who narrates the city of Milan? Do civic museums tell the story of the city?

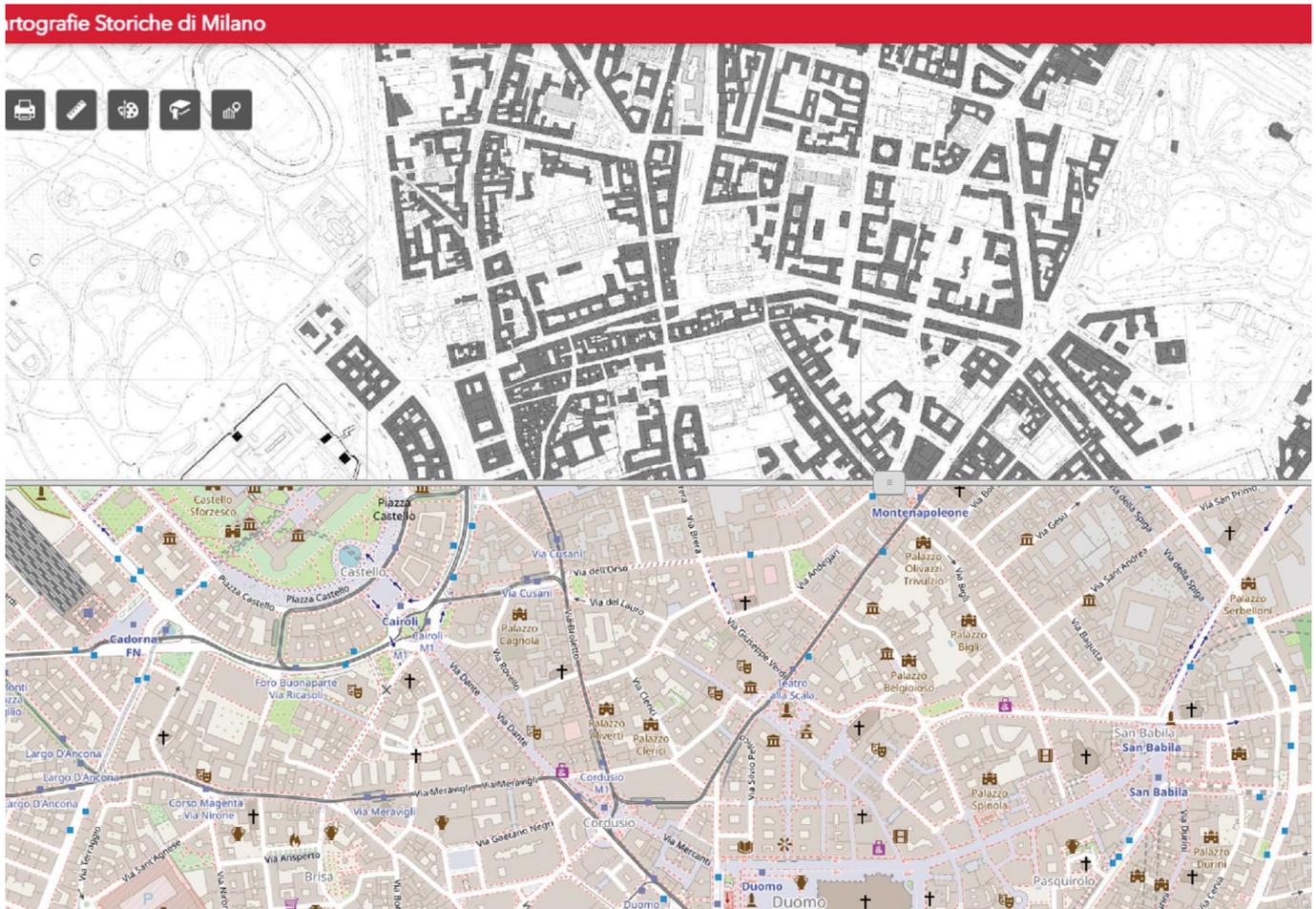


Photo 1. Geoportal of historical maps of Milan

### Who is interested in the city's narrative?

During 2019, visitors to Milan's museums totaled more than 4.7 million. In the same year tourists reached EXPO numbers and between April and July 2022 exceeded those in the same months of 2019. Tourists who plan to visit Milan once or a few times in their lives focus on Duomo - Scala - Castello Sforzesco, if possible Cenacolo, soon moving on to shopping streets and food and wine stimuli. (Foresti, G., Spiga, E. (2020). *Turismo a Milano nel post COVID-19: criticità e opportunità*, in *Intesa SanPaolo, Focus Territorio, Direzione Studi e Ricerche*,). On the other hand, informally interviewed tour guides (GITEC - Guide Italiane Turismo e Cultura, Centro Guide Milano), report that the city's history and identity matter most to citizens, who also ask to discover lesser-known places and neighborhoods, the most characteristic stories, and citizens who played an important role in the city's history. Cultural curiosity receives a great boost in the opportunity to meet people and share interests and experiences; local visitors are willing to pay more

than twice the cost of a museum admission in order to enjoy a cultural experience in company.

Even during the pandemic, many guides offered online visits on Milan, finding unexpected and continued success until the end of lockdown.

The tourism sector intercepted the business potential related to cultural and social need. The number of agencies and professional guides, offering urban itineraries has gradually grown, and with it the type of proposals: historical-artistic, enogaogastronomic, literary, related to crafts or chronicle, dialectal or folkloric, on foot, by bike, aimed at different categories of tourists. (Some examples: <https://www.acantomilantours.com> - <https://www.milanoguida.com/en> - <https://www.operadartemilano.it> - <https://amilanopuoi.com/en> - <https://www.miguidi.it> - <https://www.milanoconvoi.it/index.php/eng> - <http://www.associazioneclessidra.it>).

Since 2018, the civic museums have activated training meetings with licensed guides in order to build together a shared and qualified narrative of the museum heritage.

### Who narrates the city of Milan?



Photo 2. Sant'Ambrigio ad Nemus neighborhood, reconstructive hypothesis in 1850 (Courtesy of Urbanfile - La voce della città)

Novels and stories about Milan by historians, researchers, artists, writers and poets are endless. The digital tool has in recent years given the possibility to basically anyone to collect, enhance and share images and stories. We have selected some examples of websites created by passionate and enterprising citizens, among the most reliable, with the highest number of views, and which have benefited from a contribution from the municipality.

The website [Storiadimilano.it](http://www.storiadimilano.it) collects and makes available sources, studies and curiosities about the city. It is open to contributions from teachers, researchers and even simple lovers of Milan history (<http://www.storiadimilano.it>).

The site [chieracostui.com](http://www.chieracostui.com) has been created in 1999 by Edoardo De Carli, who had noticed in his students a worrying ignorance about the city. The virtual archive was created to remedy this oblivion and now has 31,245 records and an average of 4,000 views per day to date (<http://www.chieracostui.com>).

[Urbanfile.org](http://www.urbanfile.org) focuses on the choices of the Administration and construction companies, and thanks to interaction with users, it describes architectural and urban projects in real time and has become a point of reference for citizens. There are 16,000 articles available online and its average daily views are 15,000. Editors also devote ample space to historical research, graphic and iconographic documentation, and create virtual reconstructions illustrating the city's urban development over the centuries (<https://blog.urbanfile.org/category/milano>).

Dozens of Facebook and Instagram pages collect an immense private heritage, combining storytelling with personal stories and images that would probably not find its place in a museum. ([https://www.facebook.com/MILANO.sparita.e.da.ricordare/about?locale=it\\_IT](https://www.facebook.com/MILANO.sparita.e.da.ricordare/about?locale=it_IT) - [https://www.facebook.com/IoAmoMilano.it/?locale=it\\_IT](https://www.facebook.com/IoAmoMilano.it/?locale=it_IT) - <http://milanocuriosa.blogspot.com/> - [https://www.facebook.com/milanopersempre.it?locale=it\\_IT](https://www.facebook.com/milanopersempre.it?locale=it_IT) - [https://www.facebook.com/andreacherchimilano?locale=it\\_IT](https://www.facebook.com/andreacherchimilano?locale=it_IT)).

Civic museums appear only indirectly on web and social pages created by citizens, and this data confirms the importance of questioning the role of museums by the city's narrative.

Milan is no longer just a business city and countless cultural enhancement and itinerary building projects have been developed by the Administration. One

example is [milanoarcheologia.it](http://milanoarcheologia.it), interested above all for the ability of publisher to build a collaborative network. (<http://milanoarcheologia.beniculturali.it/>).

Memorial sites were mapped and surveyed, actively involving associations, cultural institutions, and inhabitants in various collection and storytelling actions. (<https://www.comune.milano.it/web/milano-memoria/luoghi-della-memoria> - <https://memomi.it/>).

The Adolfo Pini Foundation has involved museums, archives, foundations and cultural associations and narrates the city by providing mapping and itineraries related to its illustrious people (<https://www.storiemilanesi.org/en/> - <https://percorsi.casemuseo.it/?lang=en>).

The city's public and private museums are also mapped in various sites, the most comprehensive work being probably that carried out by MuseoCity, a nonprofit organization. Starting in 2016, MuseoCity works with 90 institutions only in Milan, it organizes annually in March a three-day event entitled Milano MuseoCity. It engages both with museums, connecting one to another with annual themes and activities, both to the public, offering new interpretations and unexpected stories and relations between institutions, characters and towns (<https://www.museocity.it/>).

Heritage mapping has led to various types of signposting over the years, so much so that in some areas different types of signs overlap.

The most in-depth project is the mapping carried out by the Italian Touring Club between 2009 and 2013. More than 230 metal totems were placed and a QRCode provides access to content in 9 languages; most of the content can still be accessed online, but only on site by framing the qr code.

As we have seen countless are those who narrate the city, or an aspect of it, but an 'official' narrative is complicated by the very nature of the ever-changing city, as a saying goes: *Milan is always the same, because it is never the same.*

Since 1861, the resident population has quadrupled, the city has welcomed people and cultures from all over Italy and the world, incorporating dozens of villages, that were once autonomous municipalities, skyscrapers take the place of farmsteads and new neighborhoods have sprung up.

The Administration has identified 88 Local Identity core - NILs. Some NILs have been matched based on common historical and identity characteristics, identifying 40 neighborhoods, the Administration is developing local services in order to meet the needs of citizens within 15 minutes of their residence.

The Culture Directorate has focused on reorganizing cultural services, recently presented in Barcelona, enhancing places of cultural enjoyment and production open to citizens, and identifying new spaces for culture and sharing (Minoja, M.E., Briatore, S., Andreotti A., From Museum Districts to Cultural Districts. Linked Open Museums as a Cultural Strategy, in *Connecting cities, connecting citizens: towards a shared sustainability*, Barcelona, Book of proceedings, 33-39).

Knowing the different characteristics of neighborhoods and the changes generated by new activities and new citizens, it is therefore a necessary tool to identify and enhance the characteristics and potential of each. The result is quick and light description of Milan's neighborhoods, which is housed in the YESMILANO website, promoted by Milano & Partners, the City Promotion Agency founded by the City of Milan and the Chamber of Commerce to activate collaborations and partnerships with local businesses, global brands, universities, cultural institutions and other public entities. For each neighborhood, after a brief description of the

main features, the site provides information on how to get there and why to go, points out the 5 things NOT TO BE MISSED, the places most dear to residents, and curiosities. Alongside the digital narrative, YesMilano offers a calendar of guided tours of the neighborhoods. The site also gives space to the city's museums, but the monumental and art historical heritage remains a marginal part of the narrative, not always integrated into a narrative that tends to stop at a quick description of its present (<https://www.yesmilano.it/en/neighborhoods>).

### Do civic museums tell the story of the city?

The city's cultural heritage is shown in depth in its museums. They certainly identify and tell the story of the city's many historical faces: the Roman, medieval and Renaissance Milan, the Spanish, Habsburg, Napoleonic and post-unification city, the industrial Milan and the burgeoning 20th century collecting (<https://www.comune.milano.it/aree-tematiche/cultura/musei-e-spazi-espositivi-informazioni>).

The civic museums help to focus on Milan's identity over the past one hundred and eighty years, starting with the opening to the public of the first civic museum in 1844: the Museum of Natural History, (<https://museodistorianaturalemilano.it/il-museo/storia>).

After the unification of Italy, conspicuous donations from Milanese collectors led to the formation of an important Civic Collection of history, art and science, later displayed in the many venues of the Civic Museums. Some of the Administration's most recent museological projects respond to the need to fix and at the same time interpret the plural identity of the city of Milan, internationally recognized as the capital of fashion, contemporary art and design.

In 2010, the transformation of the Museum of Palazzo Morando, once the Museum of Milan, into the Costume Fashion Image Museum, reaffirmed Milan's international leadership in the fashion industry, in a district formerly characterized by convents for maidens initiated into tailoring, and from this evolved into a

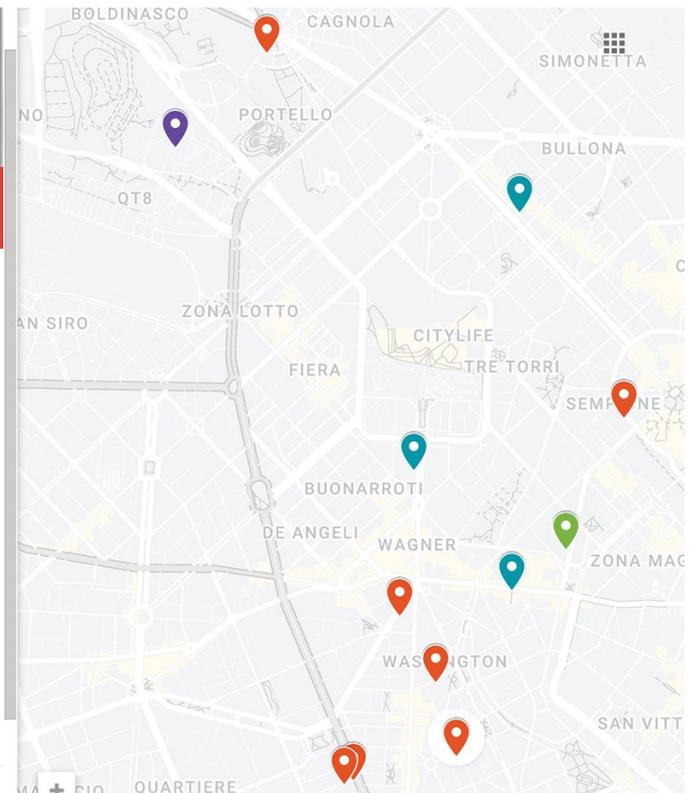
Photo 3. CASVA: *The voices of architecture, in and out of the archive* (<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/viewer?mid=1XktHIYqF-7xHwPHgbqgrXupKd9d4wOaC&ll=45.48298808881201%2C9.1884299&z=13>)



ie  
Stromboli 19, Poliambulatorio

orizione  
rio Terzaghi e Augusto Magnaghi, Poliambulatorio (59-1960)

il 1959 e il 1960 Magnaghi e Terzaghi progettano per l.A.M. (Istituto Nazionale Assistenza Malattie) il imbulatorio di via Stromboli 19. ificio si compone di cinque piani fuori terra e di uno ninterrato. L'ingresso avviene da via Stromboli, su cui si lge una facciata caratterizzata da piccole finestre ribuite in maniera asimmetrica. 'acciata principale invece è rivolta verso via Moisè Loria, atterizzata da fasce marcapiano in lamiera smaltata le e da balconi aggettanti.



quadrangle in which the most prestigious fashion houses are based (<http://www.costumemodaimmagine.mi.it/>).

The creation, in October 2020, of the Office of Art in Public Spaces, with the aim of flanking and facilitating the implementation of new urban art operations, identifies the city's vocation toward new developments in contemporary art (<https://www.mudec.it/milano-arte-pubblica/>).

CASVA, a museum and archive of projects by local architects and designers, will open in 2024 at its new location in the former municipal market in the QT8 District. The institute chronicles Milan's role in the development of Italian Design. IULM University students are mapping city buildings, whose plans, drawings and models are preserved in CASVA. The research, which is in progress, has also allowed them to analyze how the appearance of the modern city is changing (<https://casva.milanocastello.it/>).

The Fabbrica del Vapore is an exhibition and cultural production area designated since 2000 for youth creativity. In 2022 it was entrusted to the Department of Culture, and the new management has launched a project to narrate and musealize the facilities and the neighborhood in order to build a recognizable and coherent identity. The area, formerly agricultural, has experienced strong industrial development since the 1800s; Milan's streetcars were produced here, including the 'mythic' 1928. The project involves the neighborhood's cultural institutions and private actors, including the Monumental Cemetery and the ADI Design Museum, schools and parishes, farmsteads turned into restaurants, the Fire Department Museum and the Municipal Transportation Company, the Chinese neighborhood, and today's citizens (<https://www.fabbricadelvapore.org/>).

### **Does narrating the city of Milan promote collective well-being?**

Milan is a city characterized by dynamism and change, which wants to enhance its identity. It is necessary to build a "Museum of the City" suited to it, polycentric, and capable of telling a millennial, and multiform history. A museum that tells the story of Roman and contemporary Milan, the city of the Partisan Resistance and the city of fashion and design, the Milan of industries and that of suburban rap, the city of Ambrogio and that of Saidou Moussa Ba.

There is a need for an open and dynamic virtual space where to bring together and enhance the content that already exists, both that created by citizens and that offered by museums.

Virtual space multiplies the narrative potentially indefinitely, but it is not enough to meet the needs of citizens who want to take physical possession of the city as well, gaining social gathering places that meet their cultural and social needs. Therefore, storytelling must necessarily translate into physical space as well, where the citizens can meet, feel they are participating, and see their energy and enthusiasm enhanced.

Cultural participation and the sharing of identity places fosters a sense of belonging, which is one of the basic needs of human beings. The individual well-being generated by the simple fact of not being alone and marginalized in an unfamiliar city inhabited by strangers increases the well-being of the whole community.

Museums are ideal places for the construction of neighborhood identities when they manage to connect the narrative of collections and venues to the city, the citizens and the neighborhood in which they are located, but in Milan they are all located in central districts. A possible Museum of Milan, Plural City, should therefore have rooms in Libraries, youth centers and Universities, which are already active, for example, in Bicocca or San Siro (<https://www.unimib.it/eventi/progetto-del-museo-diffuso-delluniversita-bicocca-museocity2021> - <https://www.mappingsansiro.polimi.it/>). The Museum of Milan should also find space in private museum institutions and involve the Community Museums that have sprung up on the



Photo 4. Mare Culturale Urbano. © maremilano.org

initiative of associations and citizens, for example, in Greco, Niguarda, Ortica, and Barona (<https://mubig.it/> - <https://orticamemoria.com/> - <http://www.eumm-nord.it/> - <https://mauamuseum.com/cities/milano/>).

Exhibition halls and educational workshops of the Museum of Milan are in many places in which the Administration has launched projects of cultural and social aggregation and enhancement, including, for example, the venues of Mare Culturale Urbano (<https://maremilano.org/>).

Connecting the halls of the Milan Museum together requires the willingness and ability to nurture internal resources of the Administration, capable of activating experimentations and projects with the territory; to generate collaborations between different stakeholders, public and private; to activate a participatory process to identify an appropriate form of management.

One museum at a time, one neighborhood at a time.

The research would not have been possible without the precious collaboration of Silvia Adler ([www.museocity.it](http://www.museocity.it)), Maria C. Minciaroni (Touring Club Italiano), David Prelini (Yesmilano), Claudio Nelli (Urbanfile).

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**Chiara Fabi** is an Italian art historian. She received her doctorate in 2011 at the University of Udine, with a dissertation on the early career of the sculptor Giacomo Manzù (1929-1945). Since that time she has conducted post-doctoral research on the visual sources for Marino Marini's sculptures, and took part in the National Research Project (PRIN) working on "The multiplication of art: visual culture in Italy, from popular to specialized reviews, magazines, and daily newspapers." She published several essays on the reception of Italian art abroad during the 1930s (*L'Uomo Nero*, no. 10, 2013) and on the "osmosis" between official art and the popularization of art history in Italian illustrated magazines (*Studi di Memofonte*, no. 11, 2013). In 2015 she published a catalogue of the Collection Marino Marini at the Museo del Novecento in Milan (Silvana Ed., 2015). Until 2021 she served as curator of the Casa Museo Boschi Di Stefano in Milan. Actually is the coordinator of Acquario, Museo di storia naturale and Planetario, Comune di Milano

## CONSTRUCTIVE BELONGING

### Participatory Approaches to Cultivating Democratic Communities

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper looks at ways to approach the idea of belonging, in particular civic belonging, in a community context, with examples from different city museums. It connects those approaches to democracy, especially in relation to concepts of rights and resiliency. Finally, it concludes with a review of a few inspirations for fostering participation through exploration and play.

Belonging, as a concept for cities, can be restrictive, oriented around division and exclusion, or it can be constructive, engendering long-term relationships across difference. Belonging is complicated, and there is a challenge for museums to represent, discuss or even promote inclusive and constructive belonging.

The Greensboro History Museum's 2022 exhibition, *North Carolina Democracy: Eleven Elections*, was a challenging case for trying to build constructive belonging in an exhibition that illustrates the history of restrictive belonging. Exploring both rights and resiliency has offered a pathway towards cultivating democratic citizenship within museum programmes and exhibitions.

Participatory approaches that inspired those pathways include museum efforts aimed at playing together and exploring together. Play encourages imagination and dialogue as a way to get people thinking about relationships to power. Exploring offers opportunities to visit sometimes familiar places in new ways.

**Key words:** Democracy, participation, belonging, resilience

At the December 2021 CAMOC conference in Barcelona, I talked about the Greensboro History Museum's Democracy Tables project. This was a collaboration with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Communication Studies Department where we organized informal but meaningful conversations on topics important to city residents. I also alluded to the musical technique of the remix to talk about how the pandemic and protests of 2020 and our rapid response exhibition *Pieces of Now* (Perkins, 2021) reshaped our approach to Democracy Tables and the overall democracy project. Today, I'd like to continue in that adaptable and remixing spirit to explore some other connections related to our Project Democracy initiative, which began with a Smithsonian traveling exhibition, *American Democracy: A Great Leap of Faith* (Rubenstein, 2017), but grew into a complex reflection and response to where the people of Greensboro feel that they belong (or do not belong) in the cultural, political, and social life of the city.

In this paper, I start with a look at some ways to approach the idea of belonging, in particular civic belonging, in a community context. Then I connect those approaches to democracy, especially in relation to concepts of rights and resiliency. Finally, I review a few inspirations for fostering participation through exploration and play.

### **From Dialogue to Belonging**

The times I know that I am doing my job right happen when someone tells me that – because of an exhibition or a program or a project – they feel that their community has a newfound sense of belonging at our museum, especially if they had felt excluded previously. Here is one example: Since the 1980s, Greensboro, North Carolina has been a resettlement destination for indigenous people of the highlands of Viet Nam. The ethnic tribes and linguistic groups are often referred to as Montagnard people. In 2015, the museum helped Montagnard youth in Greensboro produce a documentary film (Kramer, 2015) and a festival day. At the museum, performers sang and danced. Craftspeople demonstrated traditional weaving techniques. There was food and community. For that day, it felt like the youth not only belonged – it was as if they were actually in charge of the whole museum. Importantly, that relationship has remained strong. Over the last three years we have hosted youth summits for the Montagnard American Organization, and collaborated on programs with topics ranging from Asian American voting to digital storytelling.

At the same time, I sometimes struggle with the concept of belonging in relation to democracy. This is because belonging can be divisive. It can mean that I belong in a group that defines itself by who is accepted and who is excluded. Michal Niezabitowski's (2021) message about social polarization in different parts of the globe has not lost its relevance since the Barcelona conference. Our daily news feeds are of violence, injustice and exclusion precipitated by division, no matter our country or region of the world.

But let's also acknowledge the ways that belonging has been – and can be – constructive. Because the other side of the coin is that a sense of belonging based on strong social or civic bonds can activate the kinds of participation that expand democracy. The Czech Velvet Revolution of 1989 precipitated immense change through collective action. Of course, all civic movements have their gaps, flaws, negotiations, complications. Not to mention their fierce opponents. And democratic reforms that do succeed still require immense societal effort to sustain. Which all goes to say that belonging is complicated!

There is a challenge for museums to represent, discuss or even promote inclusive and constructive belonging. To do so we have to aim for the more empowering



*Photo 1. The exhibition NC Democracy: Eleven Elections highlights how different ideas of belonging affect rights but may foster resiliency. © Robert Harris / GHM*

rungs on the ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969). It reminds me of the idea of the ‘dialogic museum’ that Jack Tchen and Liz Ševčenko (2011) talk about: museums can be spaces that can reveal new truths; those truths can force consideration of unresolved legacies; and that consideration can prompt action. Partnership and co-creation can manifest belonging, but there is always risk in untested relationships.

### **Rights and Resilience**

Let us turn to another case. Let’s say we are trying to tell the history of democracy in the state of North Carolina. US states have considerable political autonomy, in particular when it comes to voting. (In fact, there is no delineated right to vote within the US Constitution. State legislatures set almost all of their own voting rules.) The history of voting in North Carolina is a story that can be seen through both sides of belonging. On the one hand you have a group in power who works to exclude those it sees as not belonging in the body politic – at different times, women, people of color, Native American Indians, immigrants. Yet those groups continue to organize, protest and insist on their rights to participate in the state’s democracy (Leloudis & Korstad, 2020).

What kinds of rights? Voting, obviously. Right to assembly and protest. Free speech. All of them intersect with ideas of participation and belonging. All of them are explicit, written out in laws and constitutions. But other civil rights and civil liberties are still missing. Take the right to the city for example (Harvey, 2020). This was of course the theme of CAMOC’s Krakow Conference in June 2021. You won’t find that concept in any foundational document where I’m from. But it is implicit in the work of political protest that claims the streets as the means to demand an expansion of peoples’ rights, as in the example of Moral Monday protests that took place in the state capital, Raleigh, from 2013 to protest against proposed legislative changes to voting rights and other restrictions (Barber & Wilson, 2016).

Interestingly, much of North Carolina’s negotiation of democratic participation and belonging has been fought in its cities. Sometimes that meant that a dominant group claimed the space of the streets to punish the group that was insisting on expanded rights. What’s sometimes referred to as the only municipal coup d’etat in US history took place in the city of Wilmington, North Carolina, in November 1898. White supremacists opposed to the continued political participation of the city’s Black residents overthrew the elected city council and launched a massacre that probably killed hundreds (Zucchini, 2021).

It is a story of political consequence of divisive belonging. After the Wilmington Coup and Massacre, white voters passed laws that effectively ended African American political participation in North Carolina for 50 years. And yet, that episode also speaks to the strength, determination and resilience of a community that over those 50 years would work to reclaim its role in the state's democracy. In 1968, Henry Frye, a Greensboro lawyer who had been prevented from registering to vote in the 1950s, was elected to the NC Legislature (Covington, 2013). He later became chief justice of the state supreme court. Can resilience be applied to the work of democracy over decades and decades?

'Resilience' is a term not typically used in official US political discourse. We do hear about climate resilient cities. But what about democratically resilient communities? Ones whose citizens have the tools to support and sustain their civic participation? How can we encourage and grow such communities? Is it through promoting dialogue? Facilitating participation? Cultivating belonging? Alongside the *NC Democracy* exhibition – and inspired by our work with the Montagnard Community – we have been developing a project supported by Smithsonian Affiliations and the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience to engage more of Greensboro's broad immigrant and refugee community in participatory ways of learning about and seeing themselves as part of Greensboro's long history of immigration (Greensboro History Museum, 2023). Pilot programs are under way – and hopefully I will be able to talk to you at our New York conference about some of the outcomes. But the aims are to foster belonging and cultivate resilient citizens.

### Playing Together and Exploring Together

So how do we foster belonging and cultivate resilient citizens? I want to quickly mention two pools of inspiration for the project. 'Playing together' is a participatory approach that can get people thinking about their relation to power, or their relation to each other. One inspiration is the work of social practice artist Sheryl Oring (2016). She types up people's messages to leaders on manual typewriters then mails them to those leaders while also keeping an archive. While the words can be serious, there is a playful element in the interaction with the typist and the use of old technology. To go along with our *North Carolina Democracy* exhibition, we're creating a series of games inspired by the National Museum of American History's Unity Square. The games encourage imagination and dialogue

but are simple enough for most anyone to play.

Playing together is a participatory approach that can get people thinking about their relation to power, or their relation to each other. 'Exploring together' is a way of fostering dialogue and generating belonging by visiting places in new ways. Those of us who attended the Barcelona conference remember Flora Mutere-Okuku's description of youth-led excursions in Nairobi (Muthuma & Mutere-Okuku, 2021). In the East Los Angeles neighborhood of Boyle Heights, community members have worked with students to develop tours that claim space for immigrant owned businesses threatened by gentrification (Boyle Heights Museum, 2020). Museums also can go to places to explore opinions. The Museum of London's (n.d.) Brexit Talks project went into different boroughs to collect individuals' perspectives on the impact and meaning of leaving the EU. At the Greensboro History Museum, we have explored the history of politics and political pioneers as a bicycle tour. Not just a history tour, it was also a way to lift up a story of rights written in the physical city. I see all of these as ways to embody belonging. Games embody resilience by encouraging participants to model actions to accomplish shared goals. Exploration embodies rights by claiming spaces of belonging.



Photo 2. The museum's Democracy Games in Connection Point are modeled on Unity Square interactives originated at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.  
© Lynn Donovan / GHM



Photo 3. Greensboro History Museum's Juneteenth Pedals and Politics Bike Tour in 2022 gave participants a new civic-context view of familiar places in the city.  
© Felipe Troncoso / GHM

And there are hundreds of other examples. Such approaches can also be ways for museums to do what Elaine Heumann Gurian (2022) refers to as 'centering,' occupying a civil civic space that accepts uncertainty and encourages "people to come together to learn about, live uneasily with and tolerate partial and exploratory resolutions for issues of consequence" (p.19). Even if we don't agree, we can still belong.

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# FEMINIST CITIZEN LABORATORIES IN MUSEUMS IN MEXICO

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## ABSTRACT

Social sustainability would not be possible without citizen participation at its multiple levels. From museums, as platforms for understanding, reflection and mutual convergence between communities and interests between people, it is an ideal space to make visible and provide solutions to the concerns and problems of society through the dialogue of those who experience them directly.

The exercise of citizenship by women supposes not only their representation without gender stereotypes, the visibility of their achievements and actions, but also their direct action in museum discourses and museographic messages, thus the museum acts as a polyphonic voice. Citizen laboratories are spaces that, with their multiple tools, enable not only dialogue between various agents, but also provide methodologies to find practical solutions to specific problems. Through them, the museum becomes a meeting place, takes on the role of mediator, facilitator of ideas, and bridge to implement prototypes.

This document will address a specific case in Mexico, which has managed to implement various initiatives in different museums throughout the Mexican Republic, that have contributed not only to social inclusion, but also to provide tools for the exercise of cultural citizenship by collaborators and direct benefits to women visitors and museum workers.

**Key words:** Gender perspective, citizenship, women, Citizen laboratories

## **Introduction**

Citizen participation within museums is one of the strategies for museums to focus on the objective of protecting human rights and encouraging their exercise, that is, being a tool for social sustainability. The exercise of citizenship by women supposes their interference in museum discourses and museographic messages, with this the museum acts as a polyphonic voice and catalyst of their realities, past, present and future.

Citizen laboratories, with their multiple tools, enable dialogue between various agents (museum, citizenship, government, academy) and provide methodologies and mechanisms to find practical solutions to specific problems. Through them, the museum becomes a meeting place, mediator, and bridge to implement prototypes designed by citizens within its action spaces.

## **Citizenship and cultural action in museums**

Society, through social struggles, political efforts and various forms of social and cultural resilience, has developed processes of sovereignty and transformation for the exercise of human rights and citizenship. In this sense, citizenship refers to “a series of cultural, symbolic, political and economic practices that define the quality of rights and obligations within the State.” (Limón and Real, 2019), while sovereignty are defined as freedom and independence, that is, having the tools to develop in a space of coexistence and incidence (Bobbio, 2002).

Through the exercise of human rights, all people, without exception, should have access to aspects as essential as life: culture is one of them. The UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity establishes the right to participate in cultural life from individual and collective spheres, enjoy scientific progress and its applications, protection of moral and material interests corresponding to scientific, literary productions or artistic and freedom for scientific research and creative activity.

In this way, the States have the obligation to provide the tools for the equal exercise of these rights in the diversity of the groups where the culture develops, to protect and guarantee them. For this, five characteristics are necessary: availability, accessibility, acceptability, adaptability and suitability; all of them can be implemented in digital environments.

## **Citizen laboratories in museums: inclusion from a gender perspective**

Based on the ideas previously exposed, from the exercise of cultural rights and the eradication of violence against women, some museums have the possibility of activating safe reflection spaces, artistic, cultural and scientific configurations for the visibility of violence against women. gender, the importance of women in the past, present and future, social positions, among many other proposals.

Historically, museum public studies have introduced the voice of visitors, allowing direct interaction with them and their inclusion in the museological and museographic process from planning, design and production. However, despite these efforts, their results, not every time they arrive at practical solutions and remain in the analysis.

Within this context, the LICs (Citizen innovation laboratories by its acronym in Spanish) constitute an alternative to involve people in direct actions, where the consultative aspect is a part of the process but not its objective. In this sense, the concept of innovation and its peculiarity with citizen participation is generally determined by the creative development of a new process or its improvement,

often associated with phenomena of a technological nature, but not limited to them. (Godin, B, 2008).

The horizontal character differentiates the citizen dimension from other types of innovation, the center of the action is citizenship and its participatory inclusion through the mapping of skills, knowledge, needs and contexts; Therefore, it adapts to multiple realities, achieves levels of syncretism, involvement and listening, in what we can call “knowledge communities” or “knowledge societies” (García, 2004) and as “distributed peer networks that have shown as a key actor in the very construction of the Web, Free Software or Wikipedia” (García, 2018). In this way, the common threads are experimentation, uncertainty/error and trust, which are an essential part of any space for cooperation in problem solving.

In this sense, LICs are meeting spaces for the creation of diverse prototypes, so their results are solutions that can be improved and that adapt new experiences (Pascale & Resina, 2020). However, its impact can have repercussions on public policies, moving from neutrality to social change (Criado, 2015). For this to be possible, three fundamental aspects are necessary: horizontal dynamics, mediation tools and an environment of constant experimentation aimed at creating free knowledge/culture.

The logic for the participatory and multilevel operation of LICs is the quadruple helix in their innovation model (Arnkil, 2010), the generalization of “open innovation” and various forms of social innovation expressed in the form of “co-working” spaces” or “peer to peer economy”. That is, the interaction between different agents involved: government, industry, academia and citizens, in equal parts, for the generation of open innovations.

### **Laboratory Case: Women in the Museum.**

The aim of this article is to present a specific case study of the procurement of feminist citizenship by and for women within museums, this being the one that was carried out through the Raquel Padilla Ramos Observatory of Museums (OMRPR), Mexican collective that seeks to transform, propose and carry out actions to depatriarchalize the discourses in museums. It arises from the workers of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), which has 162 museums under its custody, in the face of the femicide of the anthropologist Raquel Padilla. Among their actions is direct work with the public, which is why the LICs were one of the strategies they implemented in 2020.

*Laboratoria Mujeres en el Museo*, organized by the OMRPR, had the participation of more than 70 women from various disciplines and origins, gathered to create prototypes with a gender perspective. This LIC was supported by INAH with the accompaniment of MediaLab Prado. Two projects were developed (Significant Disclosure and Collective Mapping), with a total of five prototypes:

- Lactate in freedom
- Mapping of collaborators:
- Auto diagnosis
- Exhibition evaluation
- Documentary video

These prototypes have been implemented in at least one museum space within the INAH, either completely or partially.

### **Museum inspectors. Hybrid and feminist strategies in museums.**

On the other hand, the initiative of the “Laboratory for Participatory Reinvention in Museums” (LRPM), with the aim of making “proposals, alternatives, strategies

and methodologies on social and community participation in museums, especially in institutional ones.” (LABS LIBRARY, 2022), managed to incorporate other actions in the same sense but with other scopes. It was carried out as a joint action and in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Sports of Spain, through the Distributed Citizen Laboratories program, in a simultaneous international action carried out in November and December 2021.

The LRPM brought together projects that fostered a space for cooperation, where any person or group that was interested could influence the museum environment, regardless of their professional experience. Three projects were selected to be developed with the citizens and linked to the native peoples, the city and feminism.

One of the projects presented in this laboratory was “Let’s build a new look: feminist visual narratives in museums” which sought to trigger a series of critical ideas on the representation of human diversity within museums to rethink, analyze and build new narratives to depatriarchalize discourses with personal citizen experiences.

Mediation was a fundamental part of generating links and ties for the definition of objectives, goals and activities within each milestone; in addition to open and participatory listening. The documentation of each step is also essential, not only for historical use, but also as a tool for recovering ideas and reflections within the milestones and their future definitions.

The result of this laboratory was the construction of a toolbox to integrate the gender perspective in museums from three approaches: critical and active participation of the public (purple proposals), information on feminism and the gender perspective (purple information), documentation of feminist actions in museums (purple visibility).

To this end, "Museum Inspectors" was created, which consists of a series of tools/strategies and a collective figure in a hybrid way. The project is contained in a web page<sup>1</sup> where you can find the specifics of each activity (Table

Tool	Description	Type
Self-care booklet	Tool aimed at museum workers for feminist self-care and as a reflection on their work space.	Purple information
Violence Free Museum	Decalogue that makes visible actions to make the museum a space free of violence	
Museum violencemeter	Image that shows the different types of violence that women experience inside museums.	
Femhack	Activity for them to identify, intervene and transform macho content with the registration of the content, the "hacking" and its dissemination on social networks with the #femhackeomuseo.	Purple proposals
Purple look	Instrument for the visit to reflect on the representation of women with triggering questions.	
Women in the Museum	Activities that have women at the center, to make it easier for visitors to use their voice and give their opinions within the museum.	
Repository	Compilation of the actions that have been carried out in the Mexican territory to depatriarchalize the museums.	Purple visibility

<sup>1</sup> <https://sites.google.com/view/inspectorasmuseosmx>

## CONCLUSIONS

LICs have a wide potential for action in museums since culture is fed by experimentation, speculation and uncertainty, through the human nature of wonder, learning and coexistence to generate strategies from critical devices and participatory experiences. However, there is still a long way to go for them to be a substantial part of museums, due to the barriers to horizontality that are required, the results that are not easily measurable, and their long and intricate process.

Museum inspectors and other citizen initiatives are not only examples of how it is possible to change the dynamics, work and power within museums; but they also make evident the need to document and disseminate the processes to make them replicable and adaptable to any space and time. The museum is the ideal mechanism since it provides both the physical place and the mediation that implies the continuous development of knowledge and capacities in dialogue with the different lines of action.

The implementation of Museum Inspectors has been officially carried out in the Ex-convent Museum of Culhuacán since March 2022, with artistic experimentation workshops for women, the dissemination of purple information and Femhackings with guided tours.

These are just some examples that it is possible to change the dynamics, the work and the power within museums. The museum is an ideal space for social sustainability, since it provides both the physical place and the mediation that implies the continuous development of knowledge and skills in dialogue with the citizens. The museum is a bridge between past, present and future societies.



Image 1. Femhack activated in the "Museo ExConvento de Culhuacán, México City, 2021.

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#### BIOGRAPHY

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# REDUCING URBAN INEQUALITIES: THE POTENTIAL OF CULTURE AND THE CITY MUSEUM FOR THE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE OF PORTO

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## ABSTRACT

Porto is the second-largest city in Portugal and an urban hub of relevance for the entire northwest of Iberian Peninsula. It is known for its long and important history, but it's also a living, contemporary city, looking into and planning for the future.

The future of Porto will be marked by strong efforts towards improving its urban sustainability. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, comprehensive actions to improve urban sustainability of Porto are reflected in the annual sustainability reports (introduced in 2017) and are also the key component of the Municipal Master Plan (2021).

A pathway to achieve urban sustainability is through reducing urban inequalities: this is why a number of future developments in Porto will focus on a specific area, Campanhã, in the eastern part of the city, which has been underdeveloped and, until the present day, detached from the rest of the city.

This paper is centred on the vision of the sustainable future for Campanhã, marked by reconnecting and integrating this area with the rest of the city and beyond. It will tackle the potential of culture, and especially the city museum, as a part of a larger network around Porto's urban sustainability goals.

**Key words:** Porto, Campanhã, social sustainability, city museum, future

## Introduction

This short paper is about one of the seven civil parishes of Porto, Campanhã, which, until the present day, has been cut off from the rest of the city, at both physical and socio-economic level.

The sustainable future of the city depends on decreasing urban asymmetry, and efforts and actions have been ongoing in Campanhã to achieve that official planning goal for this decade.

Cultural sector, including the city museum in the making, is a part of the broader strategy of Porto for urban sustainability.

## Campanhã today: underdevelopment, stigma, urban asymmetry

Campanhã is situated in the easternmost part of Porto and it is the largest of its seven civil parishes. However, even a quick look at the city map reveals that this area is physically cut off from the rest of the city, by the railway and by the ring road. It is complicated to arrive there by car from other parts of Porto, and to move on foot is almost an insurmountable problem.

Social segregation is an issue as well: a large portion of about 30,000 people who live in municipal housing in overall Porto comes from Campanhã; this parish is dotted with social neighbourhoods.

Back in 2010, the data artist Eric Fischer created the *Geotaggers' World Atlas*, consisting of maps of one hundred big cities, showing places where most photos were taken (Fischer, 2010). This atlas contains the map of Porto, and shows that the most tagged locations are the historical center, the riverfront and the oceanfront, the Serralves contemporary art museum, the Crystal Palace gardens, Casa da Musica and the Foz neighbourhood. An analysis of what is missing in this map, rather than what is tagged, provides a striking illustration of how the city ends before Campanhã.



Image 1. The map of Porto from the Geotaggers' World Atlas, showing a striking level of data scarcity in Campanhã. Source: Eric Fischer (2010), *The Geotaggers' World Atlas*, p.72 (Porto). Available at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/walkingsf/sets/72157623971287575/>



*Image 2. A graffiti at the social neighbourhood of São João de Deus. The street artist has condensed the expression of stigma and isolation felt here in this one word: "Tarrafal". (Tarrafal is an island of the Cape Verde archipelago, in the Atlantic. During the Salazar's dictatorship, it was a dreadful place, isolated from the rest of the world, where political prisoners were sent).  
© J. Savic, 2019.*

The image of Campanhã today is about stigma and underdevelopment: Campanhã has constantly been worst-placed of all civil parishes of Porto when it comes to employment rate, education levels, cultural infrastructure and every other parameter related to prosperity and well-being.

### **The vision of the sustainable future for Campanhã**

The near future of Porto will be about reducing urban inequalities in Campanhã in order to improve urban sustainability of the city as a whole. The main planning document for the next decade, the Municipal Master Plan (*Plano Diretor Municipal*, <https://pdm.cm-porto.pt/>) was adopted in 2021, and reducing urban asymmetry and eliminating stigma are among its seven main goals.

Importantly, the area of Campanhã has an umbrella planning document, the Strategic plan of East Porto, which helped bring together a series of projects in different areas which had started independently in this part of the city (*Masterplan Estratégico...*, 2019). Now all of them have their place in a holistic vision for the future of Campanhã and the entire city. Campanhã has been catching up with the ongoing developments related to the rehabilitation of heritage, mobility, innovation and job opportunities and cultural infrastructure happening in other parts of Porto.

Several large infrastructure projects that touch Campanhã have been planned, and some are already coming into being. One of the most interesting ones is about repurposing the old abandoned railway branch to create a quick connection between Campanhã and the historical center, either by creating an urban park for pedestrians and cyclists, or by building monorail. The future project will tackle environmental sustainability, mobility and urban connections (see: <https://ramalalfandega.cm-porto.pt/>, Portuguese only). Another project is about creating an innovation district with satellites in Campanhã, stemming from the university hub in the neighbouring area of Asprela. The idea behind the innovation district is to make Porto more interesting and competitive for businesses at European and broader scale and to attract investment.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The city authorities have commissioned the renowned consultancy company The Business of Cities from London to produce a study for the future development of Campanhã. The document is not public, however, I had an opportunity to gain insight into its recommendations, at a lecture held by Pedro Baganha, the city councilor for urbanism, for master students at IPAM Porto in spring 2022. The study highlights lessons to be learned from international experience, including, importantly, a series of mistakes to be avoided, such as not being attentive to the citizens' and local communities' needs, and not fostering their well-being or sense of belonging.

As for the already completed transformative projects, the new transportation hub of relevance for the entire city and region was inaugurated in Campanhã in July 2022. The architect, Nuno Brandão Costa, has worked on other projects in this area, such as the rehabilitation of the social neighbourhood of São João de Deus, situated in the vicinity (2014-2019). At the architectural competition of 2017, Nuno Brandão Costa's proposal for the Campanhã bus terminal was unanimously awarded the first prize among 22 designs. Its main merit is in going beyond solving the mobility problem and focusing on environmental sustainability. This is well illustrated through the title in the newspaper *Público*: "They asked for a bus terminal and he designed a park" (Coentrão, 2017).

A series of other initiatives centred on well-being or social and environmental sustainability has been going on in Campanhã. One of the most remarkable is a part of URBiNAT, an EU-project about regeneration of underserved city districts through co-creation with citizens. The goal is to establish new social and nature-based relations within social housing neighbourhoods and between different neighbourhoods. This is done through diverse territorial, technological, participatory, social and solidarity economy initiatives, where citizens are invited to participate and share their experience and knowledge (see: <https://urbinat.eu/cities/porto/>).

Finally, several municipal programs have been developed with the aim to improve cultural infrastructure of Porto and ensure it is spread in all parts of the city, including Campanhã.<sup>2</sup>

### **Reinforcing the cultural network: The Museum of Porto**

There are substantial changes to the cultural network of Campanhã and overall Porto to look forward to in the years to come, and they involve the city museum. There has been a long-time need for a city museum in Porto, however, only in 2020 the conditions were met to establish one, under the name *Museu da Cidade* (The City Museum). The announcement was made at an unfortunate moment, in February 2020, right at the dawn of the three-year COVID-19 pandemic.

The initial concept was that of a "museum at the scale of the city itself": the museum spread across the city, offering a multitude of possibilities to explore and interpret Porto. It would consist of 17 "stations" with no hierarchy and no "main" building.<sup>3</sup>

In March 2023, the new institution was renamed into the Museum of Porto, as a part of a remodelling project addressing its "concept, vocations and polynuclear structure" (Sobrado, n.d.).<sup>4</sup> Following the new concept, the museum in the making will have the headquarters, to unify multiple museum buildings and sites into a coherent whole. Two historical edifices, not belonging to the list of 17, have been contemplated for that purpose: New Customs House (from 2024), and the palace of São João Novo, which hosted the Museum of Ethnography and History of the Douro Litoral Province until the early 1990s (as a permanent solution, after the necessary substantial works on the rehabilitation and adaptation; according to: Queirós, 2023, Portuguese only). However, no further details or the precise time frame have been made public by the time of conclusion of this paper (June 2023).

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<sup>2</sup> One of the most interesting is *Cultura em Expansão*, whose first edition was launched in 2014.

<sup>3</sup> The concept, coordinated by the artistic director Nuno Faria, was based on rethinking the network of the existing municipal museums, complemented with new structures spread across the city, and semantically linked through five programmatic axes. For more details, please refer to my article *Heritage and Design: Constructing an Imaginary Museum of the City* (2021), in *The Right to the City: CAMOC Annual Conference 2020 (2021)*, Krakow, Poland, May 2022, *Book of Proceedings*. ICOM – CAMOC (e-book). 108-113.

<sup>4</sup> Jorge Sobrado is the present director of the Museum and Libraries of Porto.

Three of the 17 spaces belonging to the Museum of Porto are situated in the area of Campanhã: the former warehouses of the EDP company, the Bonjoia Estate and the old Slaughterhouse of Campanhã. Neither of the three is currently in use: the first two need reactivation and repurposing, however, the timeline and details of their museological programme have not been disclosed yet in the new museum concept.<sup>5</sup>

The third site is expected to transform the entire area: the old Slaughterhouse of Campanhã, abandoned for decades, will soon be reshaped into a cultural, civic, commercial and entrepreneurial hub. Out of the total area of 20,500 m<sup>2</sup> in 11 buildings, about 8,000 will be attributed to the Museum of Porto and other municipal services. The clearing and preparatory works began in 2021, followed by construction and conversion works from 2023. The estimated completion time is the end of 2024. The only solution to finance the works, estimated at 40 million euros, was through a 30-year concession.

The design, by Kengo Kuma and the studio OODA from Porto, was chosen through an international competition in 2018. Its most striking feature is the rooftop, which gives a sense of unity to the entire complex, and makes references to the urban landscape of Campanhã through the materials. Viewpoints and a pedestrian bridge are carefully planned in order establish a visual and physical connection with the nearby metro station and the rest of the city.

In the words of the OODA team (<https://ooda.eu/work/matadouro/>):

“Here, what matters is what *Matadouro* will give to the city. A new typology of covered outdoor spaces, an urban system of walkways, with streets and squares joining a series of buildings. The trigger for all this, what captivates us most, is to question the rehabilitation, not of one or more buildings, but to make and create a more ambitious system that integrates something broader and which is the city.”

<sup>5</sup> The former warehouses of the EDP company are situated near the Freixo Bridge at the bank of Douro and date from the 1920s. Architect Guilherme Machado Vaz was commissioned to develop a rehabilitation design for this complex, which was completed in 2021. The aim was transforming the complex for cultural purposes, while preserving the industrial spirit. However, the works have not begun in 2022 as initially planned and no further information is available on the future of this site as of June 2023. The Bonjoia Estate contains the main 18<sup>th</sup>-century edifice designed by Nicolau Nasoni, the most well-known Baroque architect of Porto, as well as the new building, formal gardens and green spaces that form a cascade towards the river. At the time of the CAMOC Prague conference, in summer 2022, the project tackling its reactivation and repurposing for the city museum was in the initial stages, as a part of the previous museum concept. Current plans for the estate and its role in the Museum of Porto network are not public.



*Image 3. Matadouro, one of the project renders featuring an aerial view of the complex and the idea of bridge building. © OODA (source: <https://ooda.eu/work/matadouro/>)*

At this time, the exact purpose of the spaces in the complex of *Matadouro* belonging to the Museum of Porto is not public (Lusa, 2023).<sup>6</sup> Despite the undetermined variables, the relevance of this project at the city scale is unquestionable. *Matadouro* is not only about the new Museum of Porto node - it's about creating and reinforcing connections and creating new urban identity for Campanhã. It's a regenerative project, aiming to give back the lost scale to the city and simultaneously representing a touchstone for future developments in East Porto.

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<https://www.culturaemexpansao.pt/>  
<https://ooda.eu/work/matadouro/>  
<https://pdm.cm-porto.pt/>  
<https://ramalalfandega.cm-porto.pt/>  
<https://urbinat.eu/cities/porto/>

<sup>6</sup> The only information available at present is from an announcement from March 2023, which indicates that the Municipal Gallery, now situated in the Crystal Palace gardens, will be moved to *Matadouro* at the end of 2024, once the construction works have been completed.

## BIOGRAPHY

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# MUSEUMS FOR THE FUTURE GENERATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Climate change is a one of the defining crises of today, and the overall goal of the project presented here was to understand how museums can take action to combat climate change and develop participatory practices to do that.

In museum activities there is a growing focus on community participation. The museum in this study aimed to develop participatory communication efforts that created a shared space to discover social norms in everyday life and to reflect critically on them. Participatory theatre methods, social media, museum props, objects from the collections and embodied data were activated to engage young citizens in negotiating social norms and co-create knowledge around their possible impact on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions together with researchers, actors, and museum professionals.

The project is an example how to develop participatory methods for museums in supporting them to work with changing social norms in society and create safe spaces for communication. The result shows that the methods used were engaging young citizens in shaping and reshaping the social norms around climate goals but also effecting the museum as an organisation. The museum became a safe space for the young citizens.

The direction of museums working with the defining crises of today with young citizens, creates museums for the future generations.

**Key words:** Participatory culture, sustainability, local development, citizens, museum

## Museums and sustainability

New forms of activities are being developed at museums. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has promoted participation in those new forms and describes the role of museums in relation to democracy, inclusion, sustainability, and local development. It suggests that museums can address and enhance sustainability, since they can work with communities to raise public awareness and support research and knowledge creation to contribute to the wellbeing of the planet and societies for future generations. There is a growing focus on community participation in museum activities<sup>1</sup> and museum audiences are envisioning a new type of museum, one that goes beyond participation and interaction, that demands a new social order of museum values that break down past hierarchies.<sup>2</sup>

An approach to global sustainability has been presented in which climate researchers define planetary boundaries within which they expect that humanity can operate safely. Transgressing one or more planetary boundaries may be catastrophic due to the risk of crossing thresholds that will trigger large scale environmental change. One of the seven planetary boundaries are on climate change.<sup>3,4</sup>

To reduce our impact on the environment, there has been work done on trying to make people change their behaviour. However, changing behaviour is difficult and the focus has been criticised<sup>5</sup> and the attention has been turned from an individualistic and rationalist approach to behaviour change towards the social and collective organization of practices as broad cultural entities that shape individuals' being in the world.<sup>6</sup> Communication efforts need to shape a shared space to discover social norms and to reflect critically on them.

## Carbon Dioxide Theatre

The project Carbon Dioxide Theatre's overall aim was to take urgent action to combat climate change connecting directly to Sustainable Development Goal 13: Climate Action. This project engaged young citizens in critically reflecting on social norms and practices around climate goals and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, through participatory methods. The core of the project were five workshops, that took place in the exhibition premises in a county museum in the middle of Sweden. The workshops in the project were open to anyone interested in the subject, but had a core of young citizens (between 15–20 years old), museum staff, actors, researchers in the fields of interaction and participatory design, and designers from RISE (Research Institutes of Sweden) and the University of Southern Denmark (SDU). Although the young citizens took part in their free time, the project also provided the opportunity for summer jobs.

## Participatory reflection and communication

The project focused on giving young people (and all participants) the opportunity to reflect together on social norms and on climate goals and carbon dioxide emissions using improvised theatre as a main tool. That meant that the group worked without scripted plays, a lot of different props from the museum were available to everyone to include in the story when needed in the moment (see an

<sup>1</sup> see for example Simon, 2010; Pierroux et al 2020

<sup>2</sup> Giannini and Bowen, 2019

<sup>3</sup> Quantification for the boundary of climate change: CO<sub>2</sub> concentration in the atmosphere <350 ppm and/or a maximum change of +1 W m<sup>-2</sup> in radiative forcing (Rockström et al 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Rockström et al 2009

<sup>5</sup> Brynjarsdóttir et al. 2012

<sup>6</sup> Hargreaves, 2011

example in Figure 1), the stories were improvised together and were based on real-life experiences but performed as fiction. The improvised situations were mutual exploration, not finished theatre plays intended to be played for an audience.



*Figure 1. During the workshops different group improvisations around climate change opened the space for collective reflections. Props from the museum were available to invite into the improvisations. Photo by the author.*

With a range of theatre methods that gave room for improvisation and the emergent stories, the group started exploring daily situations in the first workshop, in which dilemmas around carbon footprints came up. Different stories were told – such as having parents who were divorced, and the mother invites you to fly to Thailand and the father has another idea effecting the climate less. The negotiations go beyond the carbon footprint – it also includes navigating the relation with both parents, and carefully navigating the parents' expectations.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, several other reflective methods were developed through the project. The museum's existing collections gave the opportunity to reflect on the temporality of social norms. Objects in the museum's collection can tell how Sweden has gone from being one of Europe's poorest countries to one of the world's richest and thus contributing to challenge several of the planetary boundaries.<sup>8</sup> Taking the collections as the starting point, the project introduced different exercises to allow the objects themselves to tell us about their lives i.e., a form of

<sup>7</sup> Schaeffer et al 2020

<sup>8</sup> named by Rockström et al 2009.

Figure 2. "I don't want to be dead in 12 years" a sticker created by the young participants based on conversations with visitors during their summer job period.



object theatre.<sup>9</sup> These rapid “object life stories” recurred several times during the project.

Besides the participatory theatre and object life stories above, a teatime session, an interactive valuation game, interaction with a “factor 5 framework”, a LCA Visual Database, and different life-cycle visualisations were developed in the project.<sup>10</sup> Through the interactions with young citizens, the project invited for norms to be negotiated through co-creation of knowledge. The interaction continued between the young citizens in the project and the museum visitors during the summer job (Figure 2).

### Opportunities and challenges for the museum

The project brought both new opportunities and new challenges to the museum. On the one hand, the project provided opportunities for participatory practices; initiatives have continued and new projects have formed.<sup>11</sup> This project provided an opportunity to learn more about how to develop new participatory practices in museums. In the end of the project the participants mapped the change of emotions through the project. The feelings mentioned related to the start of the project was *nervous, anticipation, curiosity, excitement*, during the project *sadness, happy, overwhelmed, respect, hopelessness, hopeful, impressed, embarrassed, togetherness, anxiety, empowerment*, and in the end of the project *motivated, strong, proud, love, and hope*.<sup>12</sup> The project created safe spaces for young citizens to express and reflect on the climate change.

On the other hand, the project did meet unexpected challenges. Even though the museums aim was to find new ways of working towards participation, the museum staff were not fully prepared for the relationships that were created between the members in the project. These relationships brought a responsibility of care beyond what the museum was prepared for. And this implies an ethical perspective on continuation after the project and on shared responsibility for each other since the museum activities are a part of the social and collective organization of practices around sustainability.

<sup>9</sup> Friis et al 2015

<sup>10</sup> Schaeffer et al, 2020, p. 66 pp

<sup>11</sup> Schaeffer et al 2022; Schaeffer 2023

<sup>12</sup> Schaeffer et al 2020

## Result

The museum developed its role as an arena for democratic dialogue about our present, based on the county's history. The result shows that the methods used were engaging young citizens in shaping and reshaping the social norms around climate goals but also effecting the museum as an organisation. The museum became a safe space for the young citizens with relations that continued to develop after the project ended. The project activated the norm shaping and negotiation around climate goals with participatory methods to socially explore current research on required limitations to our carbon emissions.

### Do you want to learn more?

The project and the methods are described in detail in the book *Carbon Dioxide Theatre – at the museum*.<sup>13</sup> The book aims to inspire you to explore how museums can develop new ways of working together with visitors to tackle today's global challenges.

More information can also be found in *“Our Burden – Carbon dioxide theatre for climate action”*<sup>14</sup> and in *“Teatime: Exploring ways to support diverse narratives on sustainability through design”*.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Schaeffer et al 2020

<sup>14</sup> Reitsma et al 2019

<sup>15</sup> Gottlieb and Schaeffer 2022

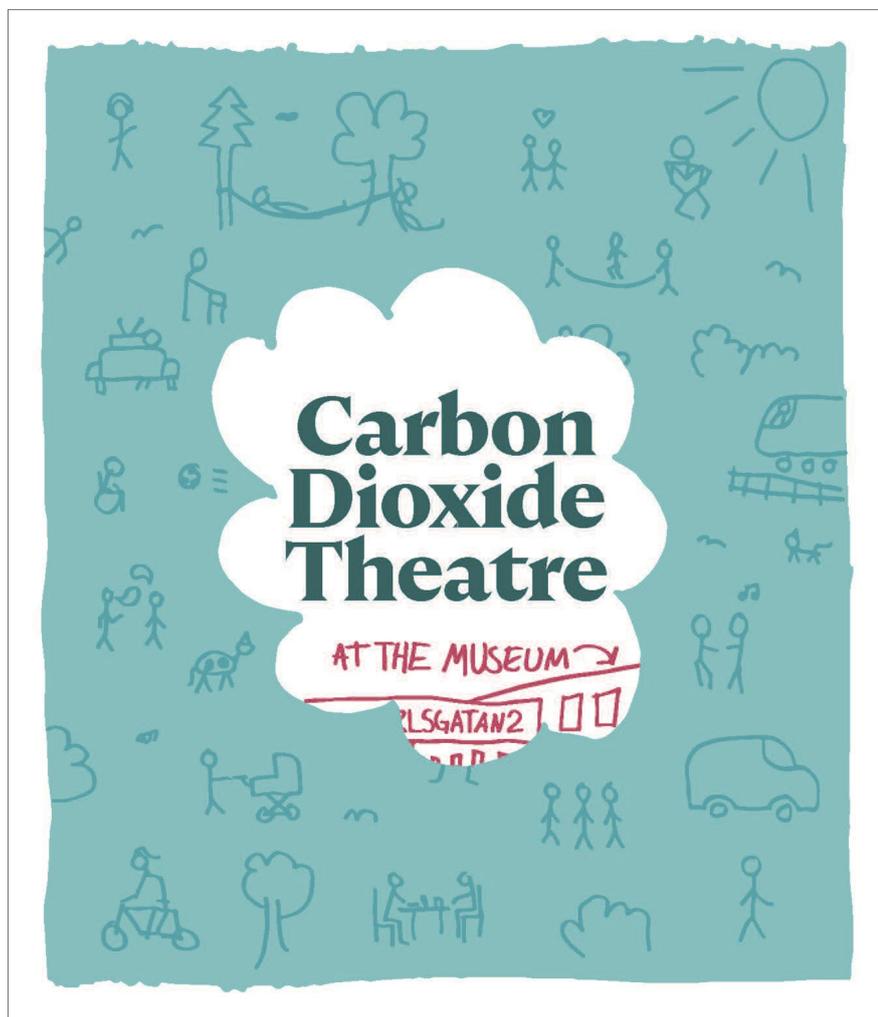


Figure 3. The co-created book, made together with the young participants. Available online in English and Swedish at <https://www.vastmanlandslansmuseum.se/koldioxidteater> Further reading in English: <https://vastmanlandslansmuseum.se/vara-projekt/koldioxidteater-pa-vastmanlands-lans-museum/>

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## TO LIVE AND BREATHE: WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN WASHINGTON, D.C.<sup>1</sup>

RACHEL F. SEIDMAN

*Smithsonian's Anacostia  
Community Museum,  
United States*

### ABSTRACT

The Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum has tackled issues of environmental justice since its founding in 1967. A new exhibition curated by Rachel F. Seidman, "To Live and Breathe: Women and Environmental Justice in Washington, D.C.," (May 19, 2023-January 7, 2024), seeks to center local women's stories and place them in historical and national context. Seidman sought to honor activists' own words and insights through oral histories, a community advisory board, collaborative collecting, and exhibition design.

**Key words:** Environmental Justice, women, Washington, D.C., oral history

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<sup>1</sup> My research, exhibition, and travel to ICOM Prague was supported by the Smithsonian's American Women's History Initiative.

## **The Anacostia Community Museum's Place in Washington, D.C.**<sup>1</sup>

Washington, D.C. is known as the place where you find the White House, the U.S. Capitol, and a lot of museums and monuments. But Washington, D.C. is also a residential city, with vibrant neighborhoods, a diverse population, and a rich history. For most of its existence, Washington was majority African American, and many residents proudly call it Chocolate City. But for a variety of economic, social, and political reasons, the Black population has declined over the last half century, and since 2011, is no longer a majority (*Tavernise, 2011*).

Like in many cities in the United States, inequality is rampant in Washington, D.C., and different neighborhoods have vastly different access to resources, infrastructure, and environmental benefits like clean air, shade trees, parks, and safe drinking water. The Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum, where I work, is located east of the Anacostia River, in a majority Black neighborhood that, while it has a long history of vibrant Black businesses and community pride, has suffered from a lack of investment for many decades. For example, many people who live here have little access to full-service supermarkets (*Sánchez, 2022*). The neighborhood has plentiful green space, with multiple wooded areas and a park along the river, but much of the natural space is not highly accessible and suffers from pollution due to illegal dumping of trash (*Arnold, 2023*).

The Anacostia Community Museum [ACM] has a long history of tackling issues of environmental justice. ACM traces its founding to the civil rights era and the Black power movement. Originally established as the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum in 1967, the museum's exhibits and programs sought to preserve and share the rich history and culture of Anacostia's community. ACM pioneered a groundbreaking approach that gave rise to community-based museums across the country. One of their very first exhibitions, more than fifty years ago, was "The Rat: Man's Affliction", which grew out of local children's concerns and fascination with the dangerous pest that infested the neighborhood. The exhibit, which included live rats in cages, sought to both explain why there were so many rats and empower residents to tackle the issue. (*Kinard & Nighbert, 1972*)

More recently, over the past fifteen years, the museum's Urban Waterways initiative has undertaken research, documentation, exhibition and community engagement around the Anacostia River and the people who live near it. Unlike D.C.'s more famous river, the Potomac, which flows past the capital's main tourist attractions and was cleaned up decades ago, the heavily polluted Anacostia River was ignored until local activists started fighting to reclaim it. Under the guidance of my colleague Katrina Lashley, the museum has been engaging with local activists and community members for years to document and strengthen their work. In recent months the museum launched a brand new Center for Environmental Justice, which will continue to grow and develop these connections.

### **Building on ACM's History in Creating To Live and Breathe: Women and Environmental Justice in Washington, D.C.**

I was hired in 2021 to curate an exhibition about women and environmental justice in Washington, D.C. As a newcomer to the city, and as a white woman, my ability to tackle this important topic relied on decades of work, relationships, and trust that the museum has garnered since its founding. The exhibition I curated, *To Live and Breathe: Women and Environmental Justice in Washington, D.C.*, builds on this long history, and contributes to our current mission, which is to tell stories

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<sup>1</sup> My research, exhibition, and travel to ICOM Prague was supported by the Smithsonian's American Women's History Initiative.

of everyday people who use their collective power to tackle complex issues and advance a more equitable future for all.

“The environmental justice movement,” as distinct from more mainstream environmental activism, took shape in communities of color who suffered unfairly from toxins in their neighborhoods. The term “environmental racism” was coined by activists in Warren County, North Carolina, who fought to stop the state from building a toxic waste dump in their neighborhood. The movement that coalesced in the late 1980s and early 1990s seeks to protect people of color and economically disadvantaged communities from unfair environmental burdens, as well as make sure they have access to environmental benefits, and can have a voice in the policies that affect their lives. What many histories of the movement have ignored is the primary role that women played from the beginning until today. This exhibition sets out to tell their story through the local lens of Washington D.C. The exhibition celebrates ordinary women making extraordinary change. It puts today’s local women activists’ insistence on access to clean air, water, and land into historical and national context, and showcases the powerful legacy of women’s environmental justice work in Washington, D.C. and beyond.

As curator, I was inspired by environmental justice activists’ insistence that “we speak for ourselves.” I have used that as guidance throughout my curatorial process. In the research phase, I worked with community advisors who helped me identify the stories that needed to be told, shared their own stories and connected me to others; provided images and objects; and gave me feedback on my interpretation. In the script-writing phase, I elevated my interviewees’ voices above my own curatorial voice as much as possible. In the design phase, I have insisted on open-ended interactives, in which we at the museum can learn from our visitors and not just the other way around. All of these approaches help reach ACM’s goal to have visitors leave more informed, inspired and energized to affect change in their own communities.

### **Exhibition Structure and Design**

The introduction to the exhibition highlights the 1991 First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington D.C.; this turning point event launched the national phase of the movement. Drawing connections between the causes of civil rights, labor rights, women’s rights and environmentalism, women of color took the lead in creating the new environmental justice movement. In addition to photographs, video, and oral histories, we are showcasing a quilt that environmental justice activists created in the wake of that event to honor the names of people who had died from environmental toxins. The quilt was lost for over a decade, like the historical record of so much of women’s work in the movement. We seek to recenter their narratives and highlight their work, so that people understand the critical role women have played in the movement.

Part of what I hope to show in the exhibition is that today’s activists are drawing on an even longer legacy—in Washington D.C., women of color had been making similar arguments a century before the movement itself got a name. This exhibition seeks to draw these connections, celebrate the achievements of women change makers, and inspire people to consider how they too might help increase environmental justice in our city.

I structured the exhibition around another mantra of the movement, that the environment is not just out in the wilderness, but is “Where We Live, Where We Work, Where We Play, and Where We Pray.” The exhibition’s sections look at D.C. environmental justice campaigns in each of these and connects current day organizing to women’s activism in previous generations.

### **Where We Live, Work, Play and Pray**

To give you one example, when you enter the Where We Live section, you find yourself in a space that evokes a kitchen. You learn about the efforts of Rhonda Hamilton and her neighbors, who fought to get better air monitoring and protection when their public housing neighborhood was suddenly caught up in a rush of rapid development; toxic dust from the local industry and the bulldozers digging in toxic dirt led to a rapid rise of asthma attacks and other illnesses. What I discovered was the inequality of asthma rates in our city and Black women's efforts to confront them echo their arguments from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century about another lung disease, tuberculosis. Black women played an important role in D.C. then, too, insisting that Black people's high rates of TB were not from natural susceptibility, but from environmental and economic injustices like poor housing conditions, dangerous workplaces, and biased healthcare. An interactive encourages you to sit at the kitchen table, identify environmental issues where you live, then draw or write your ideas for improving them, and post them on the nearby refrigerator doors.

In Where We Work, visitors learn about campaigns to protect Asian American women's health in nail salons, where toxins cause serious illnesses and miscarriages among employees, and stories of women who are returning to work in agriculture and aquaculture that their forbears left generations ago.

In Where We Play, we share stories like that of Crummell School, formerly a community centerpiece, but long closed and dilapidated. Neighbors have fought for decades to turn it into a recreation center for their community where there is not a single park or playground for local children. With the help of a local women-led organization called Empower DC, they recently won; the mayor budgeted millions of dollars to make their vision come true. Truly a remarkable achievement.

In Where We Pray, we address the idea that for many women, environmental justice work is spiritual at its root. Lucy Vargas immigrated to D.C. from Columbia. Inspired by Pope Francis's encyclical letter *On Care for Our Common Home*, she is passionate about recycling, including collecting rain in trash cans, buckets, and gallon jugs to water her plants. Ruby Stemmler started an organization called EcoLatinos; she often works through churches and connects immigrant communities to environmental programs like the one that provided Lucy with a new rain barrel.

In the final section of the exhibition, called Deep Roots Nourish New Growth, I highlight the work of Josephine Butler, an environmental justice activist before the movement had a name. From the 1940s to her death in the 1990s, Butler worked as an environmentalist, as well as in labor activism, women's rights, peace movements, school desegregation efforts, and helped found the DC Statehood Party. When a journalist asked her how she kept all the issues straight, she said "it's all the same thing." The exhibit draws parallels between her approach and that of young climate justice activists today, who, while they may not have heard of Josephine Butler, adopt a similar intersectional approach that is pushing the issues into the future. The Anacostia Community Museum has long modeled a community-centered approach that seeks not just to document the past but to help shape the future. I'm proud to be a part of it.

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**Rachel F. Seidman** is a curator at the Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum, where she curated the exhibition "To Live and Breathe: Women and Environmental Justice in Washington DC," (Open May 19, 2023 to January 7, 2024). Previously, Seidman directed the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, where she taught history, American Studies, and women & gender studies. She also taught at Duke University and Carleton College. In 2019 Seidman was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Turku in Finland. She holds a Ph.D. in history from Yale University, and a BA from Oberlin College. Her most recent book is *Speaking of Feminism: Today's Activists on the Past, Present and Future of the U.S. Women's Movement*, (UNC press, 2019).

## REMEMBER AND RECONNECT: REDUCING ISOLATION AND DEMENTIA IN A CITY MUSEUM TOWARDS A MORE SUSTAINABLE CITIZENSHIP

### ABSTRACT

The last decade has seen well-being move onto the agenda of governments, agencies and cultural organisations. The Sustainable Development Goals identify “good health and well-being” as critical elements in creating a peaceful and prosperous future, which can be related to two other SDGs, “reduced inequalities” and “sustainable cities and communities”.

The proportion of the population in older age groups is significantly increasing in urban western communities. There is evidence of the benefits of participatory arts for older people and people with dementia, with improvements in mental and physical health and engagement with others (AHRC Cultural Value Project, 2016).

Museums are perceived by the public as supporting their efforts to achieve a sense of well-being in four dimensions: personal, intellectual, social, and physical types of well-being (Falk, 2021). The increasing pressure of dementia in older age is one important aspect of our urban societies that museums, which museums can help to reduce. Programmes like “Happy Museum” and “Museums on Prescription” have been fundamental sources of inspiration and knowledge. The Museum of Lisbon delivers programmes dedicated to promoting well-being, namely of babies and their mothers, and of people with intellectual disabilities.

This paper is focused on the challenges of a new project intended for adult audiences with dementia: “*Spot the Place: meetings at the museum*”. It was designed by the Museum of Lisbon in partnership with the Alzheimer Portugal Association, the art museum MAAT, and the Institute of Health Sciences/ UCP (Catolica University), the latter adding evaluation tools to the project. The goal is to increase the levels of well-being of small groups of people diagnosed with Alzheimer, together with their caretakers.

The project started in 2021 with one group of twelve people (six persons with dementia and their caretakers, working in pairs) during six sessions on a weekly basis. In the beginning, there were too many questions about how to deal with the participants’ different perceptions and emotional reactions. The key issues gradually diminished throughout the following sessions, thanks to the interdisciplinary approach.

This programme consists of participatory sessions that combine storytelling, collection items and the museum spaces, where all parties try to learn from each other. Being a city museum, the project is rooted in a sense of place, built on knowledge about the city landscape, identity, and characteristics. In the activities, participants recover some of their lost memories about where they live or used to live, leading them to improve their capacity for creativity and storytelling, to better communicate with their caretakers, and to feel a stronger sense of self-value. On the other hand, participants have referred to the importance of leaving their homes to go to the Museum, a safe but joyful space to talk, remember, and reconnect.

The Museum is turning this challenging project into a long-term one rooted in the city’s history and values, which should lead to more consistent well-being benefits and thus help reduce social inequalities and promote urban sustainability.

**Key words:** City museum potential, museum reform, minimum city museum, expansive cities, African city museums, European city museums

## Article

The last decade has seen well-being move onto the agenda of governments, agencies, and cultural organisations. The Sustainable Development Goals identify “good health and well-being” as critical elements in creating a peaceful and prosperous future, which can be related to two other SDGs, “reduced inequalities” and “sustainable cities and communities”. While interactions among urban and global systems are intrinsic to urban sustainability, approaches to its key elements, including citizen engagement, prosperity, and well-being, should be based on the sense of place.

The proportion of the population in older age groups is significantly increasing in urban western communities. There is evidence of the benefits of participatory arts for older people and people with dementia, with improvements in mental and physical health and engagement with others (AHRC Cultural Value Project, 2016, to quote one of many research resources).

Over the last decades, it has been stated by scientific studies from the areas of health and culture that the arts, including museum programmes, can provide opportunities for social interaction, movement, and activity. Hence, the arts can have a role in mitigating some of the behavioural factors associated with an increased risk of dementia. Research has found that regular participation in activities in museums or galleries decreases cognitive memory decline, as also some chronic pain in individuals over 50 (The Social Biobehavioural Research Group, 2023).

The public perceives museums as supporting their efforts to achieve a sense of well-being in four dimensions: personal, intellectual, social, and physical types of well-being (Falk, 2021). Personal well-being is related to one’s interests and a sense of identity, to which we may add a sense of place as part of it. Intellectual well-being is linked to curiosity and learning that can help to overcome challenges as an individual and as part of a community. Physical well-being has to do with physical health, interaction, and safety. In the sphere of social and physical well-being, museums can be primarily helpful in enhancing the sense of belonging to a family, a group, or a community, in a safe, peaceful, and inspiring environment.

The increasing pressure of dementia in older ages is one crucial aspect of our urban societies, which museums can help to reduce. Programmes like “Happy Museum” and “Museums on Prescription” that convey ways of measuring the impact of museums on people’s subjective well-being as an alternative to instrumental benefits have been fundamental sources of inspiration and knowledge. Engaging practices in museums with elders, people with special needs or community groups less likely to participate in arts programmes are a way of progressing more sustainable development.

The Museum of Lisbon has been delivering long-term programmes that promote the well-being of babies and their mothers, as well as people with intellectual disabilities. This paper is focused on the challenges of a recent project intended for adult audiences with dementia: “Spot the Place: meetings at the museum”. The Museum designed the programme in partnership with the Alzheimer Portugal Association, the contemporary art museum MAAT, and the Institute of Health Sciences/ UCP (Católica University), which added evaluation tools to the project. The goal is to increase the levels of well-being in small groups of people diagnosed with Alzheimer’s at early stages, together with their caretakers.

In the context of the social and human challenge presented by dementia and the absence of clinical and pharmacological interventions that are anything other than palliative, the potential of arts therapies and arts participation for older people



*Spot the place 2021.  
@ Museum of Lisbon.*

has led to initiatives where the arts are used to support people with dementia themselves (AHRC Cultural Value Project, 2016)

As a city museum, we have come to develop this programme rooted in the sense of place, built on knowledge about the city landscape, identity, and cultural diversity. The project began in 2021 with a group of six people with dementia and their caretakers working in pairs for over six sessions on a weekly basis. There were 16 sessions with 37 participants at first, associating storytelling, observation of collection items and the museum spaces, inside the building and out in the gardens, where all the involved people have had the enduring challenge and goal of learning from each other.

Many questions arose about how the museum mediators should deal with the participants' perceptions and emotional reactions. By the third set of sessions, the museum mediators had improved their ability to reach a deeper engagement with the participants to the point that they could share more of their personal life stories and relate with their own bodies, aches, and personal main achievements. The key issues gradually decreased across sessions, thanks to the interdisciplinary approach and the help of the health experts and participants. The patients and caretakers have repeatedly mentioned the importance of leaving their homes to go to the museum, which they have considered a safe but joyful place to talk, remember, and reconnect.

During sessions, some participants have recovered part of their lost memories about the places where they live or used to live. They have been seen improving their storytelling capacity and ability to engage with their caretakers more positively. In some sessions, a higher self-value emerges from their smiles and words. Those have been the ones who more often express their wish to come back to the museum.

One of the obstacles in bringing this type of audience to the museum is the need for more logistic support for transportation and the lack of availability of family members or staff from the care homes to bring them. This has proven to be a drawback in the process, which the museum alone has been unable to get around. Under the monitoring of the project's partners, the museum mediators have developed new creative approaches to the city's history and values, adapted to each group and even to each person. The analysis undertaken by the health expert and the Alzheimer's association prompted quite positive results, not as much in decreasing dementia levels, which is very difficult to achieve, but generally improving participants' well-being and mental health.

*Spot the place 2021.  
@ Museum of Lisbon.*





*Spot the place 2021.  
@ Museum of Lisbon.*

What makes this endeavour even more complicated and incomplete is that this process is not like any other community engagement process. It requires flexibility and a constant need to adapt in the face of unexpected reactions, negative or positive. There are no two equal sessions, as it mostly depends on each participant's mood or state and their ability to respond to the incentives in the shape of words, objects or sounds, either from the mediator or the fellow participants.

The programme went ongoing to become a twofold permanent museum service: the same pack of six-week sessions for newcomers always in pairs, adults with dementia and guardians from very diverse social and cultural backgrounds, and a long-term session due every two weeks from some of the couples from previous sessions that were able to stay connected to the museum programmes. A third option, since 2023, is an on-demand tour for people with dementia, which is still on a trial stage.

Experience has shown that recovering memories is not the primary goal and does not help them in the long run. What seems to matter the most is to get participants to improve their sense of well-being, even if for a short while, their capacity to communicate with their caretakers and the rest of the group and their capacity to tell stories and be creative. To feel a stronger sense of self-value might be the utmost goal of this programme.

Working in different mental health engaging programmes has proven useful for the museum staff to understand better and widen our perspectives about achievable goals and how to make a difference to those in need.

After a break of two years during the Covid pandemic, the museum resumed the co-created project with a theatre group comprised of mentally disabled adult actors, working on a third play about the history of Lisbon to be presented to the general public and school children groups. It came to our knowledge that the lack of practice had negative effects on the health of some of the actors, let alone their speaking abilities. Their joy, as that of their families when the new play was prompted, shows how relevant simple programmes like these can be.

Following some of the best practices of other museums and research centres, the Museum of Lisbon is, thus, trying to generate consistent well-being benefits, contributing to reducing social inequalities and growing more sustainable citizenship.

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## PLANETOPIA – SPACE FOR WORLD CHANGE: MUCH MORE THAN AN EXHIBITION

JACQUELINE STRAUSS

Museum of Communication in Bern,  
Switzerland

### ABSTRACT

The Museum of Communication in Bern is hosting the exhibition *Planetopia – Space for World Change* from November 2022 to July 2023. But Planetopia is much more than a classic exhibition. Because the issue of sustainability challenges us all. How do we move from knowledge to action? We begin with dialogue and exchange: in the Museum team, with non-visitors and with project partners from near and afar.

First, we seek a commitment from all our staff and optimise our own operations. Fortunately, we don't have to start from scratch. Over a 10-year period, multiple measures have already helped us to slash electricity consumption by 30%.

For the public, we run participatory pop-ups. Such as at the Furka Pass, a high-altitude Swiss Alpine pass comprehensively documented by our historical photo collection. But thanks to *Planetopia*, we no longer focus on the PostBuses on Alpine roads, but suddenly see the backdrop of receding glaciers.

As public and social spaces, museums bear a responsibility for social action. With the *Planetopia* project, we simulate this in the museum context and seek to have an impact both internally and to the outside. By creating Switzerland's first major exhibition made of 90% recycled materials, for example.

**Key words:** Climate crisis, dialogue, sustainable exhibitions, change

## Article

*Planetopia – Space for World Change* can be experienced as an exhibition at the Museum of Communication in Bern from 13 November 2022 to 23 July 2023 (Welcome – Museum of Communication Berne (mfk.ch)). But as we begin the project in summer 2020, it soon becomes clear more than just an exhibition is needed. The issue of sustainability challenges us in multiple ways. Virtually every fact about the climate crisis is on the table. But it is evidently difficult to change one's behaviour, and old habits die hard. Not entirely surprisingly for the Museum of Communication, we give dialogue and personal exchange a chance in the face of a complicated global situation. From now on, the focus is on the preparation process for the exhibition and we communicate on three channels: in the Museum team, with non-visitors and with project partners. And so I want to describe here why *Planetopia* is much more than a classic exhibition.

### Start behind the scenes

Before we decide in favour of an exhibition on sustainability and the climate crisis, we seek a commitment from our own Museum team. This is the first indication that we're leaving our comfort zone. Of course, different employees have different attitudes. In our workshops, as the whole Museum team contributes ideas, it dawns upon us: before we present good suggestions to visitors, we should start with ourselves and implement not just large-scale programmes but also tiny steps. Since then, we have turned lights off more in our offices, taken the stairs instead of the lift, produced smaller print runs and drunk tap water instead of bottled water.

Thanks to our internal discussions for *Planetopia*, we were then able to step up our game when the energy shortage hit in winter 2022/23. We turned the heating down, shut off the hot water tap, shortened the ventilation running time and went without outdoor lighting. The widening of the air-conditioning corridor in the exhibition spaces, though somewhat risky at first glance, is effective. Surprisingly, our analyses revealed that cooling in summer consumes more energy than heating in winter. Thanks to our restorers' expertise, we now work with higher tolerance values all year round.

The relocation of the Graphic Collection proved a logistical challenge; that too came from a *Planetopia* team workshop. Climate control in the 170-square-metre storage room on the second floor directly beneath the flat roof was very energy-intensive. Today, the Graphic Collection is housed in the basement, where the natural cooling is sufficient. Not that the basement had been empty. It was used for storage, e.g. IT equipment, wine for the Museum café, printed marketing materials or the Museum stationery. The huge efforts invested in all areas reap a double reward. Not only is everything more climate-friendly, we have also gained space for meetings and flexible workplaces on the vacated upper floor.

Fortunately, we didn't have to start from scratch. We have been progressively implementing climate-friendly measures in the Museum buildings for 10 years now. For the outdoor depot, we added an innovative wooden hall that doesn't require air conditioning. This aesthetically appealing pioneering building by architect Patrick Thurston already won the national gold medal at the 2015 "Prix Lignum" (Architectural Office Patrick Thurston – News – Prix Lignum 2015). We now operate the Museum, including the outdoor depot, without fossil fuels and have switched to LED lighting.

We worked very hard over 10 years to reduce our electricity consumption by 30%, even though the audience grew by a quarter in the same period. *Planetopia* has encouraged us to keep at it in future. Internal change succeeds when employees are involved from the beginning through dialogue and become part of the solution and the success.

## Pop-up in the Alps

Externally, *Planetopia* 2021 kicks off as a participatory project with pop-ups outside the Museum. The project team leave their bubble and start talking to complete strangers about the ecological crisis. For example, at an open-air swimming pool on the Swiss Central Plateau or a traditional market in rural Emmental.

The most exposed pop-up is on the Furka Pass, a high-altitude Swiss Alpine pass at over 2400m. And at the very same location that is comprehensively documented in the Museum of Communication's photo collection. In the Postal History Collection, public transport over Swiss pass roads is an extremely popular motif. These pictures were added to the collection because of the vehicles depicted – from the stagecoach to Swiss Post's modern articulated bus. Thanks to *Planetopia*, we suddenly see our historical photo collection with new eyes: where we previously focused on the depictions of PostBuses on Alpine roads, now we suddenly notice the backdrop of receding glaciers. On the Furka Pass, where the ice towered several metres high 30 years ago, all that remains today are rocks, scree slopes and a lake of milky meltwater. The glacier tongue ends about 300 metres further up the valley.



Picture 1. Collection Museum of Communication (GAB\_4498): PostBus on the Furka Pass CH, 1922. © Robert Spreng

Picture 2. 100 years later at the same place: PostBus on the Furka Pass CH, 2021

On a sunny day in summer 2021, the pop-up project team provocatively place a small table with a sunshade in the car park by the pass road. The adjacent Hotel Belvedere is aptly named for the once-magnificent views of the gigantic glacier. There's a constant stream of traffic: cars cornering, motorbikes roaring and a few single-minded cyclists. During this intervention on various occasions by the project team, gratifying numbers of motorised passers-by let themselves be engaged in conversation about glacier shrinkage and the climate crisis.

### Happy Museums

The *Planetopia* project encourages us to collaborate with partners from near and far. Just two examples:

The Museum of Communication is part of the forward-looking Museum Quarter Bern project ([www.mqb.ch](http://www.mqb.ch) / Museum Quarter Bern). Eleven institutions in Bern's Kirchenfeld district team up to develop a new urban space and leisure destination. In 2022, a long-term project, *More Nature!*, is launched to upgrade the green spaces and boost biodiversity in the Museum Quarter. Biodiversity, sustainability and the future of the planet are key issues for all institutions. The idea for the *More Nature!* project came about in connection with the *Planetopia* exhibitions at the Museum of Communication, and *Insect Mortality* at the neighbouring (Natural History Museum of Bern ([nmbe.ch](http://nmbe.ch))). With the help of experts, ideas on promoting biodiversity on the grounds of the Museum Quarter Bern are gathered and then implemented by the staff themselves. On the day of action in October 2022, people pick up hoes and shovels, plant wild plants and shrubs or create piles of branches and stones. Even the drab green lawn in front of the Museum of Communication ends up bursting with diversity. The action shows how much can be achieved collaboratively with simple means. Which is why the *More Nature!* project is to be continued and expanded.

As part of the *Global Happiness* exhibition by Helvetas, *Happy Museums* (Network for Sustainability in Museums | Happy Museums | Aarau) is initiated in Switzerland in 2020. *Happy Museums* contributes to a global, sustainable future in the museum and exhibition sector. It wants to get as many Swiss museums and exhibition venues as possible to address the issue of sustainability. Using operational analyses and educational and exhibition activities, it seeks to encourage museums, visitors and the local population to make concrete changes in their behaviour. The inspiration for this Swiss network, on whose steering committee I am privileged to represent ICOM Switzerland, came from Hilary Jennings. She launched *The Happy Museum Project* in the UK (Happy Museum Project) and incorporates all aspects of sustainability – ecological, economic, social – into her museum work.

### Last but not least

After an internal and external preparatory phase, *Planetopia* is also an exhibition in which we want to explore with the public what ecologically responsible living will look like in future. Visitors grapple with the major ecological challenges of our time and discover the different ways they impact our lives. Here they encounter mountains of clothing, generate their own electricity for gaming at home, think about forms of mobility and assess the ecological impact of our shopping baskets. Yes, it forms quite a collection of sobering facts. And really makes you think. But *Planetopia* goes further and gives ideas for action and proposes solutions. Where can I do something? What makes good sense? Thus the exhibition motivates people to take action. "It's in our hands!", is the underlying message again and again. At the end of the exhibition, the Museum invites visitors to commit to a personal *Global Change Agreement* – a customisable pledge to make their everyday life more eco-friendly.



Picture 3. *The future of our planet: Young visitors and mural at the Museum of Communication in Bern*

The strength of the exhibition lies in its direct, plain-spoken approach to the issue, providing soundly researched background knowledge yet without ever slipping into doom and gloom. Instead, it uses this starting position to motivate us all to become part of the solution. We create space for world change.

Even when building the exhibits, we critically examine our own processes and habits. We make a particular effort to be ecological and consistently focus on recycling and avoiding waste. With OFFCUT, *the Atelier for Sustainable Scenography* (Scenography | OFFCUT Zurich), the Museum of Communication brings additional practical experience into the project. The final result is presumably the first major exhibition in Switzerland to be built of around 90% reused materials. Yet the space is very stylish without looking shabby. The walls are taken from an internet giant's temporary trade-fair displays and re-purposed. The Museum borrows IT and AV hardware or uses slightly older models from other projects. Pupils from the neighbouring school donate their trainers for the scenography. Apart from a few materials and technical items, we procured everything second-hand. However, this takes much more effort. And the approach doesn't save us money. But that's not the point. It's about trying out alternatives and gaining experience. With *Planetopia*, the Museum of Communication sends a clear signal and shows that things can be done differently. Who knows, it might inspire other museums too.

### **We need to talk**

We can draw on the core competencies of our Museum for all activities around *Planetopia*. Communication in all its facets, innovative educational formats and the participation of wider circles are at the heart of our daily work. We are enthusiastic about explaining complex scientific content and making it accessible.

The ecological crisis is an enormous challenge. It is high time we engaged in a debate on a broader scale and took a positive approach to the issue. We leave the bubble of the Museum and enter into a dialogue with society. At the same time we challenge ourselves and raise questions on the role of the Museum. As public and social spaces, museums have a responsibility for the actions of society. The project *Planetopia* is our way of trialling this. We are approaching the task far more comprehensively than in our usual exhibitions and are seeking to make an impact both inwardly and outwardly.

The climate is a burning issue and we know a lot about it; nevertheless it appears to be difficult to follow up on our good intentions with action. This is what we need to talk about – urgently.

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Sustainability In Museums Network | Happy Museums | Aarau

Happy Museum Project

Scenography | OFFCUT Zurich

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*Jacqueline Strauss* has been director of the Museum of Communication in Bern since 2010. Under her guidance, the museum presents unexpected temporary exhibitions like *Sounds of Silence*. She oversaw the effective refurbishment of the museum, which won the Council of Europe Museum Prize in 2019. Strauss is also a board member of ICOM Switzerland. Between 2006 and 2010, she was in charge of culture promotion for Canton Bern, and from 1998 to 2006, she was head of the Office of Culture for the city of Thun. Before that, she was joint head of a cultural centre while studying history and politics. Having received her master's degree, she went on to do a MAS in Arts Management and a CAS in Rhetoric and Presentation.

# ITALIAN MUSEUMS AS DRIVERS FOR SOCIAL WELLBEING: MNEMONIC THE ITALIAN DIGITAL HUB OF CULTURAL RESILIENCE

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## ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the results of the MNEMONIC project, launched in 2020 by the Polytechnic of Turin to critically collect, analyze and network the cultural production developed by Italian museums and cultural organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. It deals with the emergence of digital projects as a response to the crisis through collective cultural actions. Italy was the first European country to implement a national lockdown, leading to the closure of museums and cultural heritage sites. Although digitalization wasn't well developed yet, various digital, collaborative, and creative cultural initiatives emerged to address the lack of cultural and social life during the pandemic. These initiatives and their impact on citizens highlighted the contribution of culture and heritage to mental health and well-being. The MNEMONIC digital atlas of Cultural Resilience documents and preserves the plurality of this fragile production by providing a platform for networking among cultural and heritage organizations and all interested stakeholders. Based on a Web Geographic Information System (GIS) and interactive modes, it highlights the adaptive properties of Italian museums and cultural institutions and provides a space-time framework for understanding the development of digital cultural offerings. It reveals the extraordinary resilience, responsiveness, and creativity of Italian cultural institutions in their digital efforts, demonstrating the intrinsic relationship between culture and societal wellbeing.

**Key words:** Cultural resilience, digital heritage, societal wellbeing

## The Italian cultural reaction to COVID-19 pandemic and its digital acceleration

The paper highlights some aspects of a broader research project undertaken by a team based at Polytechnic of Turin<sup>1</sup>. The pandemic has created a new and unexpected scenario, even in terms of culture and cultural heritage. In Italy, where the first major lockdown took place in March 2020, safety measures, with the succession of events, have triggered new types of behavior. Because of the pandemic, museums and cultural heritage sites have been closed, in-person events and activities have been cancelled and have stopped running. However, since the beginnings, an amount of unexpected and unusual collaborative, and creative cultural initiatives appeared, especially as digital projects (Tamborrino 2020).

We have learnt now that such a response to the crisis has been a shared challenge also in other countries to the interruption in the world of museums and cultural institutions of its normal functions for society (Agnetti et al. 2020; NEMO 2021). However, Italy has served as a sort of role model as it was the first country in the world to declare a national lockdown due to the COVID-19 virus. During the initial period, other countries attentively observed Italy's response. Moreover, the digital response is especially surprising considering the low level of digitalized heritage and expertise in museums. For these reasons, the Italian approach necessitates a case study to better understand how these initiatives have been developed to cope with the lack of cultural and social life. This will help identify the relevance of culture and heritage for societal and individual wellbeing.

On one hand, the crisis has clearly demonstrated the vulnerability of some relevant Italian museums and cultural institutions due to the national digital backwardness. This includes a lack of digital services, scarcity of digital collections, delays in digitalization, and a shortage of experts among the staff. On the other hand, the crisis has also sparked a new digital acceleration. The need to adapt has driven the exploration of digital cultural formats, as seen in some international museums, yielding interesting outcomes (Tamborrino 2022; Zuanni 2020). By overcoming obstacles and delays and achieving a meaningful quantity and quality of digital content, Italian cultural institutions and organizations have demonstrated extraordinary resilience, responsiveness, and creativity.

Mapping 'cultural resilience' also means mapping the relationships between culture and societal wellbeing. The Covid-19 pandemic had profound mental health effects on the general population by impacting social lives (WHO 2022), including more traditional community engagement and access to heritage. This understanding confirms the fundamentals that inspire the Faro Convention, promoting a broader understanding of heritage in its relationship with communities and society (Pavan-Woolfe & Pinton 2019). Furthermore, a growing body of evidence has demonstrated how heritage and museums are beneficial for social and individual wellbeing (Chatterjee & Camic 2015). To cope with the risk of cultural immobilism, Italian culture and heritage have demonstrated an exceptional and pervasive response in the production of digital cultural formats. Italy's history of several states, unified only in the mid-nineteenth century, has resulted in non-centralized cultural institutions with long-lasting local cultural organizations. Beyond the vast number of Italian museums and cultural institutions, a multifaceted range of cultural organization types has also contributed to this response. This large-scale phenomenon, inclusive of local organizations distributed throughout all Italian regions, identifies the Italian approach as a role model. Its strong characterization enables it to engage local stakeholders and have a significant impact on a national

<sup>1</sup> The team under the coordination of Rosa Tamborrino includes the second author and more researchers of the Polytechnic of Turin and University of Turin. The biannual research project "Digital Atlas of the Memory of the Present. Cultural and Natural Heritage in Italy during lockdown," with the acronym "MNEMONIC" has been funded by the Department of Urban and Regional Studies, and Planning in response to a competitive call from the Polytechnic of Turin. (<http://www.mnemonic.polito.it/>)

scale. It surpasses being just a response to a need; it can be defined as a kind of 'Cultural Resilience', a resilience of cultural institutions, culture, and heritage at large, which fosters societal resilience (Tamborrino et al. 2022). As a result, this cultural adaptive approach to the crisis has led to the creation of a new digital heritage, which is extremely fragile and susceptible to dispersal or loss. While available on the web, it does not receive the same exposure as the collections of huge famous museums. Nevertheless, this digital heritage represents the memory of a recent past that, despite being disruptive, needs to be preserved and made accessible. These reflections have laid the foundation for the MNEMONIC research project.

### MNEMONIC: Digital Hub of Cultural Resilience

The MNEMONIC project's primary goal was to document the expressions of this heritage as a creation of cultural and collective memory. It sought to design and develop a platform for visualizing and managing the mapped information, making the results publicly accessible on the web. It meticulously mapped the digital cultural production, with the aim of creating a prototype of a synthesis format that is open to accommodating such diversity, including subsequent integrations, and flexible in its potential uses. MNEMONIC mainly consists of a multimedia and interactive atlas, based on Web GIS, connected to a data pool, and a digital platform. Its primary aim is to safeguard an ephemeral yet significant cultural production, making memory accessible while sharing the research results. While temporary exhibitions in museums may be ephemeral, they typically produce a catalogue of information stored in archives. In contrast, digital web formats are entirely ephemeral, often disappearing or changing without leaving any trace. The project has identified a wide range of organizations that play important roles as stakeholders. These initiatives have been organized by diverse entities, including national museums, local museums, associations, libraries, archives, university museums and collections, municipalities, and others. Since March 2020, MNEMONIC has collected over 700 cultural initiatives, with 250 of them

The screenshot displays the MNEMONIC website interface. At the top, the logo 'MNEMONIC' is followed by the tagline 'Italian hub of cultural resilience'. A navigation menu includes 'Atlas', 'About', 'Consortium', 'Team', 'Themes', 'Dissemination', 'News', and 'Contact'. Below the navigation, there is a search bar and a 'Guide' button. The main content area is divided into four filter panels:

- WEB EXPERIENCES:** Digital Formats Type, Modality, Proponent.
- SPATIAL EXPERIENCES:** Public Urban Spaces, Microspaces, Outdoor Activities, Urban Image, Heritage Sites, Proponent.
- TIMEFRAME:** Pre-great Lockdown, Great Lockdown, Post great Lockdown, Soft Lockdown, Current Emergency, Projections.
- NARRATIVES OF CULTURAL RESILIENCE:** Cultural Natural Heritage, Digital Heritage, Intangible Heritage, Urban Heritage, Resilience Heritage, Audience Engagement, Community Participation.

The central part of the interface is a map of Italy, densely populated with blue icons representing various cultural initiatives. An 'Icon legend' box is visible in the top right corner of the map area. The map is overlaid on a standard geographic map showing city names and regional boundaries.

Fig. 1. The Mnemonic Atlas. ♥ mnemonic.polito.it

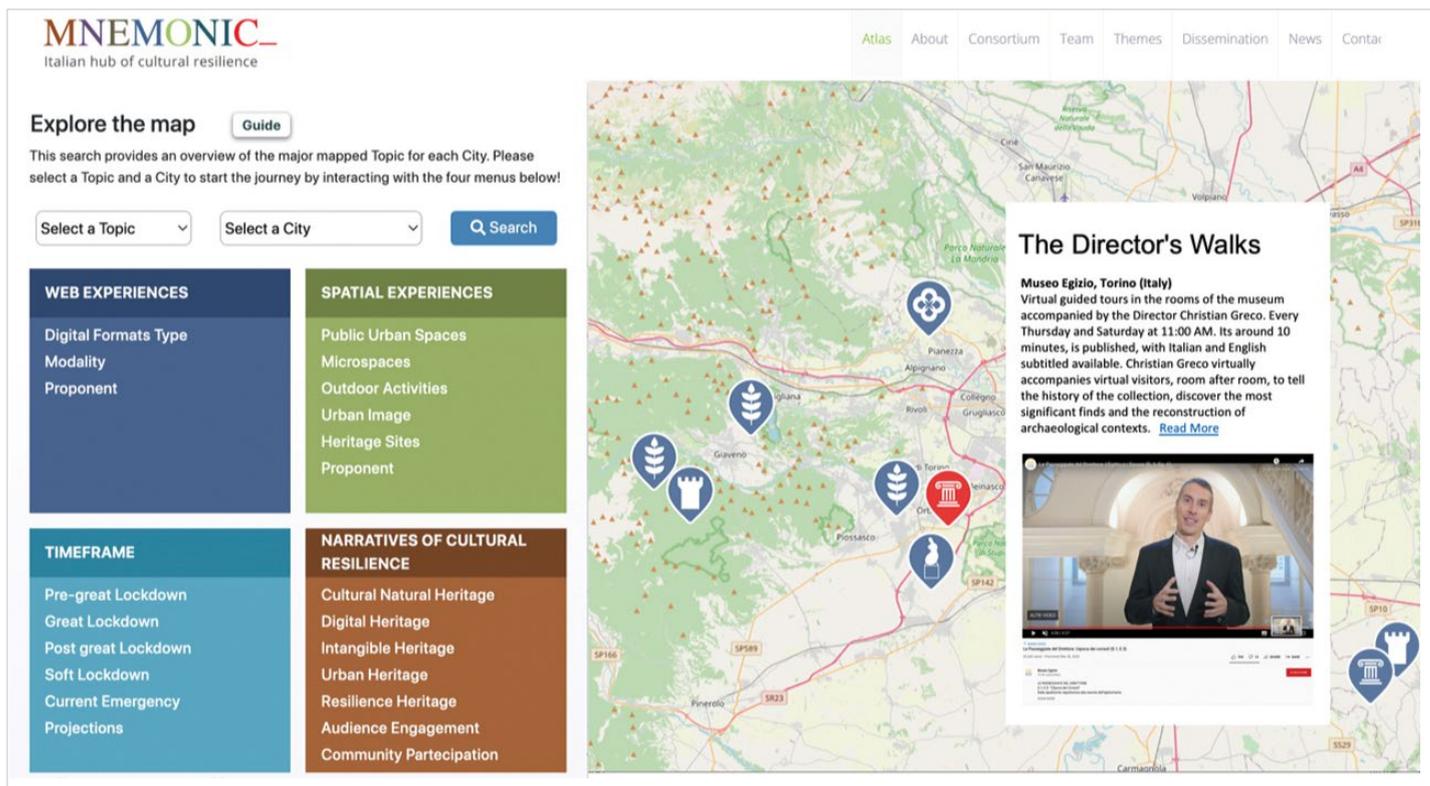


Fig. 2. “The Director’s Walks” virtual guided tours by Egyptian Museum in Turin. ♥ mnemonic.polito.it

being promoted by more than 190 Italian museums. These initiatives represent the richness of the widespread heritage found in different Italian regions and highlight the non-centralized tradition of Italian cultural institutions.

The choice of digital tools for the research project has been a relevant aspect. The Atlas has been designed to provide a space-time framework that defines the theoretical and methodological context for creating the Italian Atlas of Cultural Resilience. It has been designed to support the management, integration, storage, visualization, and sharing of a vast collection of heterogeneous data related to cultural and natural heritage. This is achieved through an interactive environment that allows for guided and structured engagement. The user experience is dual: users can either simply and freely navigate the map and click on one of the topic icons or opt for an advanced search on the left side. In the advanced search, users can choose a specific topic and one of the approximately one hundred cities. They can also select different digital format types or specify a particular time span. The results of the advanced search are displayed on the map in the form of topic icons, making it easier to recognize the initiatives. By clicking on a selected icon, a pop-up displays further information, including links to digital web sources (Fig. 1).

### Fostering Italian social resilience through digital cultural initiatives

By exploring and analyzing the results of the Italian cultural initiatives, it becomes evident that they were purposefully designed to foster societal resilience and a strong sense of belonging.

During the first Great Lockdown the Egyptian Museum of Turin launched “The Director’s Walks”, virtual guided tours in the rooms of the museum accompanied by its Director Christian Greco (Fig. 2). Twice a week, every Thursday and Saturday at 11:00 for around 10 minutes, with Italian and English subtitles available, Christian Greco virtually accompanied visitors, room after room, to tell the history of the collection, to discover the most significant finds and the reconstruction of archaeological contexts. The initiative was available on YouTube

and on the museum website. The digital format chosen was characterized by a colloquial language and characterized by the unusual active participation of the main cultural institution representative, with the aim of reconnecting the institution with its audience and cope with the sense of isolation generated by the lockdown.

A relevant number of initiatives were supposed to be like series or initiatives scheduled in specific days and hours in order to contribute in recreating habits and a sort of weekly or monthly routine. They tried to reach their audience at home by converting their formal traditional cultural offerings into new informal and “domestic” initiatives. The Pinacoteca di Brera produced a video, with an introduction by Director J. Bradburne, collecting the voices and photos of the objects of those who participated in the “A museum in your home” initiative launched by the Milanese Brera Art Gallery in March 2020, during the lockdown. The project invited the audience to choose the most important object that everyone keeps in their home to reflect on the meaning of collecting as an experience that each of us experiences in their own lives and on the meaning of a museum as a large house that collects the treasures of the whole community.

Alongside the significant presence of museums, the research has shed light on initiatives promoted by third-sector organizations, associations, foundations, as well as small municipalities or informal groups of citizens. Often adopting bottom-up approaches, these entities have contributed to the resilience of the nation through cultural means. While the bigger part of Italian museums faced inadequacies due to technological backwardness or government measures, the creativity, entrepreneurial spirit, and agility of small organizations, new cultural centers, or informal groups of individuals have emerged. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in small cities and villages of southern regions, where a wealth of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including ceremonies, traditions, celebrations, and events, blends harmoniously with urban spaces, fostering a strong sense of urban identity and social cohesion. The profound sense of community, tradition, and belonging in these areas is notable. Despite the challenges posed by the circumstances, these initiatives have been adeptly preserved in digital formats, ensuring the retention of the sense of place and belonging, and keeping them alive in the collective consciousness. Festivals and civic and religious rituals were transformed into digital formats, exemplified by the “Palermo Sospesa” event, dedicated to Santa Rosalia, the patron saint of Palermo, and her significant miracle in the 17th century, which was reimagined as “the party that isn’t there”. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Municipality made the decision to convert the annual religious and cultural celebration, known as the “Festino di Santa Rosalia”, into a film produced through collaboration between the Municipality and numerous cultural institutions in Palermo, including the CSC (Center for Contemporary Culture) and the Academy of Fine Arts, among others. These innovative endeavors demonstrate the resilience of Italian cultural heritage, embracing digital means to connect with communities and foster social cohesion in times of profound crisis.

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## MUSEUMS AS RESEARCH AND CREATIVE HUBS IN THE CONTEXT OF PARTICIPATORY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents the development vision of the Museum of Contemporary Art of the Republic of Srpska in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina and shows that a museum whose audience mostly comes from the local community can support its emancipation, education and creative growth. Presented is a case study of a small museum, as seen globally, renovated and adapted into a creative hub, whose partnerships have allowed it to transform both itself and its local community. Over the last five years, the MSURS has actively worked on audience development through new museological practices, making this pivotal to its mission and vision. A major renovation and adaptation project of the MSURS building was initiated to create new functions, such as a public library and a research centre that specialize in contemporary art, an area for two-way artist residency programs, and creative industries support. By transforming its building and by expanding and diversifying its activities, in cooperation with local, regional and international partners, the MSURS has made an impact on its audience, i.e., its local community, at an emancipatory and educational level, resulting in its sustainable development and helping to build a new identity of the city and its dwellers.

**Key words:** Museum building, renovation, adaptation, audience creation, activity diversification

## Introduction

Museums in Southeast Europe are faced with a unique situation. Previously in Eastern Bloc countries, where funding was provided solely by the state, they completely differed from the sustainable systems widely adopted in Western capitalist countries. With the collapse of socialism/communism, Eastern European countries went through economic, ideological and cultural transition. The museums were suddenly denied funding and were mostly left to their own devices. One finds the most apt description of this in Piotr Piotrowski's *The Critical Museum* (2013). Here, Piotrowski provides a coherent explanation of the problems that arose using Poland as an example, and offers possible answers and solutions to the provoked crisis. He sees the role of museums as crucial in transition: like agoras in ancient Greece, in young democracies they can serve for exchange of ideas and opinions. With certain modifications, the model he proposes for Poland is also applicable in almost all Eastern and Southeastern European countries.

To different extents, ex-Yugoslav countries have been or are still in transition. Slovenia and Croatia, as EU member states, have largely overcome transition-induced crises and developed excellent cultural policies, thus also museums, with the rest still in transition, with extremely low budgets allocated to culture and a commitment to systemic and infrastructural investment either non-existent or incidental.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is no exception. The peculiar political model the country is organized around and its division into entities make the situation in culture even more complicated, with both state- and privately-funded cultural institutions barely keeping their heads above water. There have been no significant systematic improvements in any aspect of culture for thirty years. The institutions that stand out are those that go an extra mile to create their own micro system of sustainability by actively collaborating with local and foreign partners, running projects and applying for resources to multiple art and culture support funds.

After 50 years in existence and the organization of over 500 exhibitions at home and abroad, the Museum of Contemporary Art of the Republic of Srpska (MSURS) has trodden a long and winding path. Founded as the Art Gallery of the City of Banja Luka after a devastating earthquake in 1969, over the last half-century it has enlarged its collection, organized important cultural events and shaped the local art scene, only to be renamed and promoted to a museum in 2004, becoming the only contemporary art museum in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Vujković, 2006, pp. 50-57).

In 2010, the idea to transform the MSURS in line with ICOM's recommendations and examples of good practice of city museums around Europe was born. First, its audience was profiled and its visitor policy changed, with the audience made the number-one priority and invited to take part in activity development. The analysis showed the audience mostly comprised local people (over 80%), so naturally the MSURS undertook it to modernize itself to meet the local cultural needs, while stepping up collaboration with regional and wider European museums and cultural institutions. In the following period, its policies and work made it regionally relevant.

In 2018, a need arose to work on the infrastructure and create space to match the activities, operations and public roles of the MSURS. A major building renovation

and adaptation project has been launched (ongoing; to be completed in 2026) to increase the floor area for public use and expand activities of the museum. In addition to exhibitions and publishing (more than 200 titles published to date), the MSURS will get a new library and reading room specialized in contemporary art, which will form part of a new research center. The adapted building will have premises for residency programs, a conservation and restoration studio, and a contemporary art research center. This will make it an open-access creative hub. In 2023, the MSURS became a research base of Banja Luka University, also increasing its research efforts, intensifying cooperation and having frequent educational events. These changes were inspired by Piotrowski's (2013) claim that small and medium-sized museums can implement transition policies more easily and quickly and respond to social needs more promptly.

With mainly local visitors, the MSURS can be seen as a kind of city museum, i.e., one that pays great attention to the cultural needs of its community (Žilber, 2005). However, it is not a local local; rather, it has channeled its efforts into bridging the global trends in culture and their impact, relations and dynamics on the one hand, and the needs of the local audience on the other. This has made the relationship between the MSURS and its audience dynamic, as visible in the ever-growing number of visitors and diversification of activities at the museum.<sup>1</sup>

### **Creating new programs: the challenges**

In the 21st century, cultural institutions must adopt new approaches, develop new skills and create new partnerships to respond to the challenges of audience development and meet the expectations of today's public. They must integrate with their communities as open, socially responsible places so as to unlock their own full potential, not only to benefit the occasional visitor or tourist, but also the wider community, engendering in it feelings of pride and loyalty and creating the need for more frequent visits (Marstin, 2013).

The MSURS is an art museum that organizes temporary exhibitions of modern and contemporary art by local, regional and international artists in its collection, guest exhibitions, and exhibitions of new art. Since its promotion from a gallery to a museum, it has focused on combining tradition and contemporary art with high professional standards, which has earned it the recognition of both art professionals and academics.

The success of a museum is measured by its visitor turnout, expert and audience evaluation of work quality, and the number and relevance of implemented projects. In times of social and financial crisis, museums must adapt and improve activities in a financially accountable manner, optimally mobilizing their own resources and establishing and working in effective local, regional and international partnerships. These guidelines underlie the strategy devised by the MSURS, which is also in accordance with the Cultural Strategy it follows.

According to contemporary museological standards, visitor turnout is one of the measures of success of a museum and a rationale for its existence. This pushes museums to consider ways to increase attendance at events geared towards audience creation. Increasing visitor turnout is not a goal per se – it should be the outcome

<sup>1</sup> See more in the annual MSURS publications *Inventory 2016*, *Inventory 2017* and *Inventory 2018*, Banja Luka, Muzej savremene umjetnosti, 2017, 2018 and 2019.

of increased offer quality and diversity, of adaptation to trends in society, and proof of well-designed activities and museums being on the cultural maps of their cities, states, regions and beyond. The hoped-for progress is achievable through partnerships with educational institutions, in projects like the establishment of the MSURS research base and research centre, but also through cooperation with tourist organizations, with museums advertized as must-see places for tourists.

Another important precondition for success is financial accountability. Since it is subsidized, the MSURS must demonstrate modern management skills through planning, rational expenditure and finding ways to obtain additional funding.

How wisely human resources are managed is no less important. Increasing the number and scope of activities with the current personnel requires optimal organization and hiring short term for individual projects. Museology and cultural heritage protection require continuous employee development to respond to challenges facing contemporary museums. In that sense, being a central museum, the MSURS can also become a place to continuously organize professional development for other museums, galleries and cultural centres in the Republic of Srpska, as a creativity and multidisciplinary incubator.

The course taken by the MSURS means continuous development; the goals set will not change – only projects will change. The key task will continue to be professional, high-quality study, presentation and promotion of contemporary art and contemporary cultural heritage implemented through basic museum products – exhibitions of the MSURS collection, contemporary art shows, publishing and accompanying events, in cutting-edge and technologically advanced conditions of system quality.

### **Program quality improvement**

Three objectives have been set to increase work quality: transformation of the building, exhibitions of and a focus on the MSURS collection (primarily through revision of the permanent exhibition, and its quality preparation and staging), innovative presentation, and audience strengthening (by enhancing program presentation level and quality and participation in international projects).

The first objective requires that the renovation, adaptation and conservation of the museum building continues and is completed. The second concerns adding new items to the collection under professional guidance, digitizing the museum documents and collection, and establishing a relational database.

The third objective, the technology upgrade to be achieved with the adaptation of the premises intended for public use, will allow creative application of modern technology in everyday work and the staging of exhibitions and other audience-oriented events. Beyond conventional modes, communication with the public should follow modern trends, which will necessitate website redesign, design of an MSURS app for smartphones, regular social network updates, creating conditions for digital educational presentations in the lobby and during exhibitions, etc. (Savić 2012). A line of secondary museum products (souvenirs) should be designed, with new ones continuously added to accompany new exhibitions.<sup>2</sup> Communication

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<sup>2</sup> The MSURS is running a special project called 'Reculture', supported by Creative Europe and aimed at rebranding cultural institutions in the Balkans and creating new visual identities for them. The program will be implemented in 2022-2024 and its results visible following the implementation.

with the media should be improved and their attention increased multiple times, which will increase the number of visitors. Children's events should be developed to be accredited and recognized in the region as examples of good practice. The number, quality and variety of publications should also be increased, and international cooperation significantly improved.

### **Organization system quality enhancement**

In the past, significant progress was made in enhancing the quality of work and technology conditions. In the upcoming period, the system will need to be rationalized and the technology modernized, with a focus on human resources and financial accountability.

The first objective, making the system rational, will include reviewing the job classification system, adding new positions to better respond to how modern museums are to function, and revising the rule books in accordance with museological standards.

The second objective, technology modernization, is only achievable in accordance with the actual possibilities. The key project is that of archive modernization, the creation of a digital database, as well as efforts to, as far as possible, switch to digital internal communication.

The third objective will concern focus on the human resources, with significant progress expected through the organization of expert seminars at the MSURS itself and through capacity building. This should result in new partnerships, research contributions and the growing reputation of the MSURS staff, as well as the quality of the implemented projects. The funds invested in professional development will thus amply justified.

The fourth objective – financial accountability – has successfully been implemented and is measurable. By combining several models and levels of funding, financial operations have been improved, and the strategic decision to reinvest the profit in the work of the museum has helped to improve our activities and operations year by year.

### **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, transforming the MSURS as envisioned will depend on continuous implementation of activities as planned, which are to be consistently followed to make the completed projects visible as shortly as possible. The strategic plan behind this project is an important institutional framework that requires an analytical look into the past and a visionary gaze into the future. All plans, both those fulfilled and failed, provide clear guidelines for what is to be striven for in the years to come.

With the transformation activities completed, this will help to leverage the development and progress of the MSURS in a new direction and create new meaning for its employees, the exhibiting artists and contemporary art researchers. A different relationship with the audience will additionally stimulate the interest of those already following the work of the museum, and also draw new visitors.

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**Professor Sarita Vujković, PhD**, is a contemporary visual art theorist and critic. She holds a Bachelor's degree in History of Art from the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, a Master's degree in Theory of Art and Media from the University of Arts in Belgrade, and a doctorate degree from the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. She is an associate professor and lecturer at the Department of History and Theory of Art, Academy of Arts, Banja Luka University. An author and selector of contemporary art exhibitions, she has worked at the Museum of Contemporary Art of the Republic of Srpska (MSURS) since 1998. As director of the MSURS (since 2014), it has been her mission to diversify its activities and to work in association with other museums and cultural organizations, with the aim of promoting national, regional and international-level cooperation.

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