Graham Black: Meeting the audience challenge in the 'Age of Participation'

Published as: Meeting the audience challenge in the 'Age of Participation', *Museum Management and Curatorship,* 33(4), September 2018, pp302 - 319

Introduction

In 2016 I published an article (Black, 2016), arguing that many museums in the developed world were at severe risk of losing their core audience of interested, well-educated professionals, who make up over 70% of attendees. To remain relevant to this audience in the 21st century, in a society that is changing at web-speed, requires a profoundly different, much more participatory, museum experience – one that involves creating new and more meaningful opportunities for engagement. This new paper builds on its predecessor to explore what is meant by a 'participatory museum experience' for the informal visitor. This focuses on engaging people with museum collections and the stories they tell in a framework of social interaction that gives priority to the process of learning, not the outcomes. This is a contrasting view of participation to Nina Simon's model of building community. I further argue, however, that the approaches I propose are relevant not only to core audiences but also to the broader, more diverse audiences that Western museums are currently working to engage and to sustain.

Museum audiences in the 'Age of Participation'

By the mid-1990s, tourism bodies had recognised that the professional class had turned into 'new consumers' - affluent, highly informed, well-educated, media-savvy, socially and culturally diverse, more individualistic, and extensively travelled – and with more choice in how to spend leisure time and money. One result is a core museum audience with increasingly demanding expectations of quality, choice, and variety, and of new but personalised experiences in which they could take an active role (e.g. Poon 1993; Sharpley 1996; Middleton 1998; Yeoman 2008).

Since the 'noughties', core audiences have begun a further transformation as power and initiative switch to the Millennial generation and 'Digital Natives' (Prensky 2001). Their preference for technology, search for challenge and personal value, and expectations of a high quality personal experience (Deloitte 2016) are already resulting in very different demands being made of museums – not least in how they expect to engage, a capacity for collaboration and an emphasis on both creativity and social impact. Underpinning all of this is attitudinal change, based on the rapid rise of new technologies that, by allowing 'people to connect, communicate globally, and customize their experiences to their own preferences and needs, [ensure] public expectations of participation have taken root in every fertile inch of our human culture' (McLean, u/d: 1).

'Participation' is a catch-all term, but two of its meanings have direct relevance to contemporary museums. In the 1960s and 1970s, the term 'participation' was seen

as a founding principle of modern democracy, concerned with empowering people through their inclusion in the political decision-making process (Carpentier, 2012: 14). This original political meaning never fully disappeared and gained new relevance in the UK in the late 1990s as an essential element in the New Labour government's social inclusion agenda and, through this, had substantial impact on UK museums (Black 2005: 48ff; Sandell 2003). It also permeates the work of Nina Simon (2015), R.R. Janes (2009), Lois Silverman (2010) and others.

Secondly, in the 1990s, the term was extended as the 'Age of Participation', initially relating to alternative approaches to business governance (McLagan & Nel, 1995), but later promoted by Scott McNealy when chairman of Sun Microsystems, to reflect the transformative impact of new technology. It is in this sense that it relates to the Millennials and is reflected in Mclean's quote above. And the speed of societal change linked to new technology has been unrelenting. The first Smartphones went on sale in 2007 and transformed the world. Now it is impossible to imagine life without them, ubiquitous in our daily lives and linked closely to the issue of participation:

> … participation has become a key feature of … our lives… content we shape and produce ourselves by sharing, liking, tweeting, instagramming and blogging, preferably as and when it happens since instant status updates are the ultimate proof of participation.
>
> Jalving, 2017: 8

Within the online world, we have seen the rise of what has come to be called 'participatory culture' (Jenkins et al,2006: xi). Here we have people taking part creatively, contributing, supporting each other, feeling a sense of belonging – and believing in the importance of their contributions. And this has a direct impact on how people are engaging with culture:

> This shift is about more than just technology. People are thinking about the experience of culture differently than in the past, placing value on a more immersive and interactive experience than is possible through mere observation…
>
> Brown & Novak-Leonard (2011, reprinted 2014)

But the downside is that this audience is time-poor. Research in the UK, the USA and the European Union speaks consistently of increasingly fragmented leisure time, due not least to the work commitments of dual income homes and an accelerating pace of life. Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, there has been a fall in museum attendance amongst younger, well-educated but less committed generations, in other words the Millennials. Can we do more to counter this generational fall-off? Are museums failing to provide the experiences Millennials want? For comparison, we can look at how Millennials view television. Susan Wojcicki, CEO of YouTube said:

> We see an opportunity for TV to be remade... The next generation are never going to say "It's fine. I was used to having everything on demand, but now I'll wait for my show on

> Wednesday, 6pm." I just don't think that's the way the world's going to go. The world is going to have to adjust to them."
>
> Susan Wojcicki, CEO of YouTube, quoted in Dean (2016), p4

To survive, let alone flourish, museums are going to have to adjust to them also.

Matching lifestyle expectations: a high quality social and recreational environment

> … more and more museums are putting themselves in their "customers' shoes." They are adopting both the mind-set and infrastructure to do what it takes to make visitors want to come, to feel welcome when they arrive, cared for and engaged during their stay. And by the time they leave, they're eager to return.
>
> Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, 2000: 3

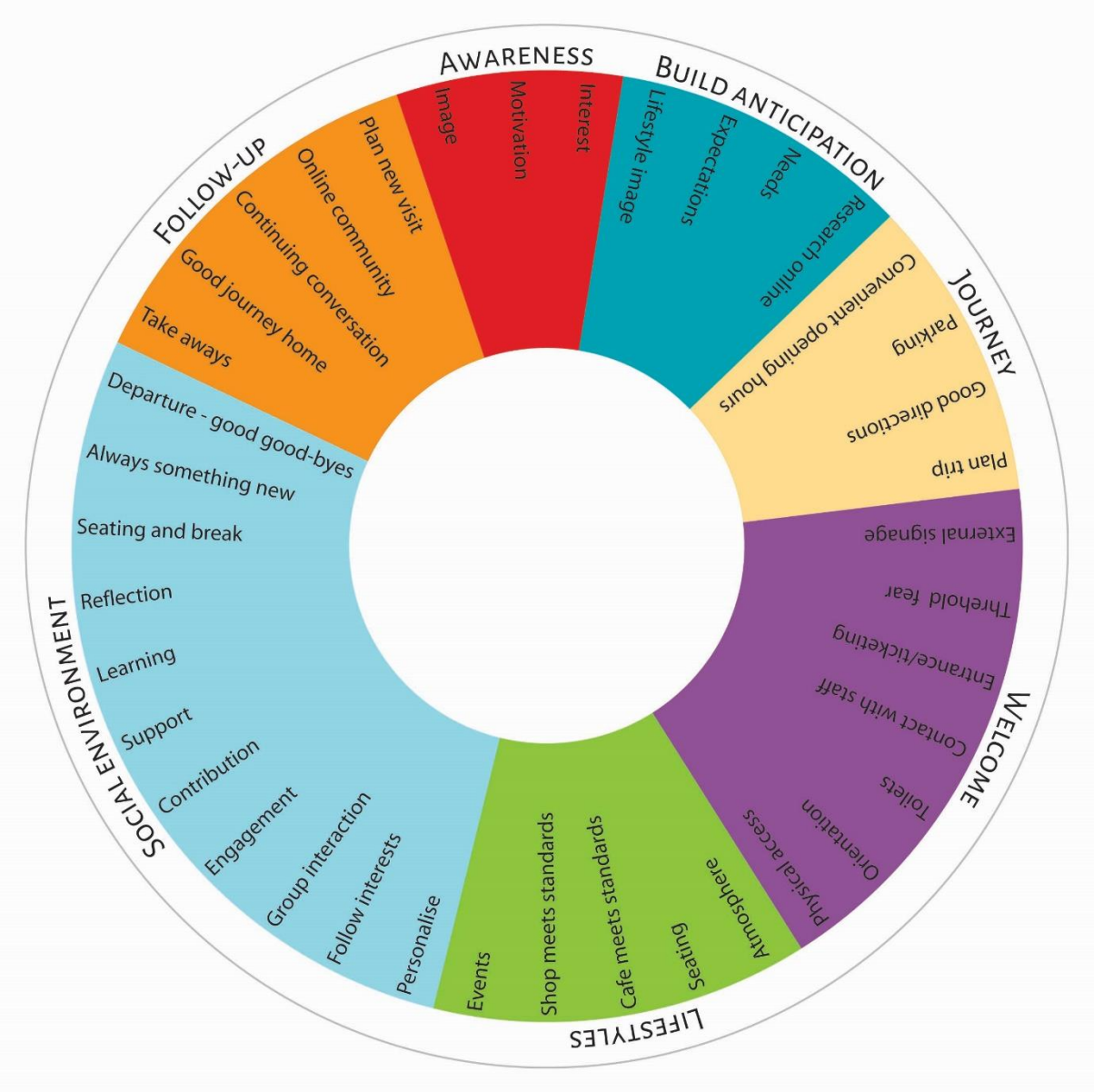
Museums and galleries are social spaces. Most of our audiences visit with friends or families. They plan their museum visit from the expectation that they are on a leisure outing. They transfer their concept of the ideal leisure experience - one which is 'fun, entertaining, exciting, relaxing, a place where one could take friends, a place where one could get lost in…' (Boomerang 1998, 41 –42, quoted in Scott 2000, 41 –42; Black 2005, 80 –81) – to the museum environment. It has taken a long time for museums, which see themselves as learning institutions, to recognize the need to place equal emphasis on the social alongside the cultural but, slowly, they are giving much more attention to the creation of a high quality social and recreational environment that matches the contemporary lifestyle expectations of visitors. A smiling face at reception in not enough. The well-travelled professional class expects a global quality, personalised, social and recreational environment for their visit People who feel welcomed and relaxed in such an environment are far more likely to engage with collections and to re-visit regularly. And a friendly external image and on-site environment will appeal beyond the core professional class audience to play a critical role in broadening the range of people who come to the museum.

Thus, all museums should be audience-centred, developing their visitor services to match the expectations of their users, with a focus on external image, visitor needs, and ensuring an environment that is warm, welcoming, supportive, engaging and rewarding. In a survey of international cultural heritage tourists carried out by VisitBritain in 2014, 'a warm and friendly welcome' was the most important factor in encouraging them to visit more often. This is the first, vital step in engaging our users with our collections. And the evidence is that museums which commit to this visitor-centred approach will see audiences, membership subscriptions and donations rise (Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, 2000: 7).

Yet, while the primary reasons for their visits are social and recreational, most users also expect to discover something new (Borun, 1977, Miles, 1986; Blud, 1990, Rosenfeld & Terkel, 1992; Black, 2016). Seen from the audience's perspective,

therefore, a museum visit is a holistic experience, encompassing every aspect of visitor engagement from initial consideration of a visit to post-visit memories, as outlined in figure 1.

Figure 1: The holistic museum experience



The larger institutions have led the way in changing their product in response to these expectations, with an emphasis on visitor services and on ancillary spaces and activities. Thus, we see lifestyle expectations met by the quality restaurant and shop; the theatre with lectures, film, and live performance; dynamic events programming; evening openings and activities; and the external plaza for promenading and events. The Pompidou Centre, established in 1977, open late, 'filled with life, food and drink', and with an animated external plaza, is one precursor of this model (Davis, 1990: 41). The blockbuster exhibition sits alongside these leisure spaces as essential to the offer.

In recent years, a range of museums, again led by the larger institutions, have targeted Millennials through lifestyle programming. In the UK, 'Live Fridays' at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, 'Tuesday Lates' at the Sir John Soane's Museum in London, and many others have attracted a regular audience that is 15 years younger than their daytime adult equivalents. In Denmark, the National Gallery holds *SMK Fridays*, their 'intelligent get-together' with talks, beer, a burger bar and a boat trip (Høholt, 2017: 20). However, Brooklyn Museum describes the impact in the most positive light, in discussing their *1stFans* events on the first Saturday of each month: "…the in-person benefits rock – people socialise and make new friends while attending awesome meet-ups around museum content" (Brooklyn Museum, 2010). Here, as at the other venues, a sense of belonging comes from a membership that brings lifestyle and social benefits as well as engagement with collections and the museum.

Research by Culture24 (2018) showed that such evening and night-time events in UK museums and galleries have been a feature since 2001 when the Victoria and Albert Museum in London started its regular 'Friday Lates' programme. The UK Lates scene now involves museums and galleries all over the country. Culture24 estimate around 8,000 UK Museum Lates annually, with potential for much more. The researchers concluded:

1. Lates thrive when they are well supported and integrated into a venue's core offer
2. Lates make an increasingly significant contribution to a diverse night-time economy
3. Lates are a source of income generation and a proven route to new audiences
4. Creating a social space is the key to successful Lates events
5. Innovative programming raises quality and increases income
6. Regular and festival Lates event programmes combined build capacity and sales
7. Evaluation focused research leads to high quality programming and better policy decisions
8. Museum professionals want opportunities to share Lates programming knowledge, experiences and good practice

Culture24 (2018), *Executive Summary,* p5

Lates programming could clearly represent a game changer for medium-sized and larger museums in terms of engaging Millennial audiences in the evenings, when they are actually available. But it is not all positive. Most events involve music, food and alcohol, with the obvious associated problems. There is also still much to learn in ensuring it is a museum-related event as well as a social gathering. For example, evaluation of the highly successful Lates programme at National Museum Scotland

showed how important it was to ensure the museum activities were in the social zone, not separate from it (Barron & Leask, 2017).

The museum social learning experience: prioritise process NOT outcomes

As noted above, audiences come to discover something new as well as for a social experience - they believe museum collections are worth learning about, but the social and learning elements must be considered together. Learning is about process and outcomes - the process is about how we learn, while the outcome is what we gain from learning (Black, 2005: 129). Since their origins, most public museums have concentrated on outcomes – particularly the knowledge gained by visitors. Most still see the permanent display, with its one-way transmission of knowledge in ordered, bite-sized pieces, as the core of their public provision. This focus drives a continuing definition of the visitor experience, by most museum professionals, as largely learning outcome-driven. This has meant that museums continue to promote didactic display approaches - as close as they can get to a formal learning experience. This concentration on didactic outcomes may mean curators feel in control of what their visitors see and learn, but it has blinded museums to the way most informal visitors use their galleries. In a nutshell, most users do not explore museum displays in the focused manner that the didactic display approach demands:

> Visitors want a range of choice and control in their museum visit in general. Adults and children want to determine for themselves when, where and how they experience the museum. However much exhibition curators and designers think or hope they can direct visitor attention and learning in specific ways, visitors 'do it their way'.
>
> Adams & Moussouri (2002: 14-15)

As Rounds points out, this can lead to curatorial judgements of visitors as non-diligent, unfocused, unsystematic, random and haphazard meanderers (Rounds, 2004: 390). There is an alternative explanation – and one that seems much more likely, given that most visitors are well-educated professionals – which is that they are choosing how they use their museum visit. In practice, the audience behaviour referenced in the quote above fits well into a general definition of the nature of informal learning as "…unorganized, unsystematic and even unintentional at times, yet accounts for the great bulk of any person's total lifetime learning" (Coombs and Ahmed 1974: 8).

As a socially-driven leisure activity, visiting museums is a pleasurable, communal, three-dimensional, whole-body-and-mind experience. It requires no special training or skills. It is place-specific ('situated'), voluntary, exploratory and spontaneous. The ability to experience and interact together is crucial. Members of family and social groups come to the museum together because they find such places interesting and enjoyable venues in which to share quality time. Their response to exhibits and experiences is frequently reflected in their interaction with each other (Rosenfeld, 1979). Given their leisure imperative, what most users want is a social museum

experience in which they can relax, chat, interact, explore and, if they so desire, participate, contribute or even collaborate.

They are active participants in creating their own, personalised museum experiences, choosing for themselves what to engage with individually or together and how. They engage physically, socially, intellectually and emotionally as they see fit - perhaps pinballing between exhibits that interest them or following the family approach of 'forage, broadcast and comment' documented by McManus (1994). Rather than concentrating on outcomes, audience behaviour shows it is the learning process that matters most. This means actively exploring the exhibition and experiencing new things as they go along – things they find immediately and intrinsically rewarding.

And the real challenge to our understanding of the process of informal learning in a museum is to recognise that it is substantially a social and leisure-based activity. This is what drives the visit and also drives how museums should deliver much of their content. This is NOT about 'dumbing down' or 'edutainment'. It is about the 'seamless integration of social learning and enjoyment' (Perry 2012: 12), which can only deepen and enrich the user experience. People always learn better and more when enjoying themselves.

What the social learning experience means for museum display: 'Participation'
Didactically driven museum displays consistently target individual users. Many actually both get in the way of social engagement and actively discourage reflection by constantly moving visitors on to the next element or isolating individuals, for example through audio tours. So, the museum world must come up with an alternative that responds to the ambition of our audiences to explore and interact together. And the answer seems to be 'Participation'.

Developing participatory exhibits based around social interaction requires a change in mind-set for museum personnel, from a top-down imposition of didactic content to a bottom-up approach which starts with direct user engagement with collections. Participatory exhibits are driven by the users and so are about the process of learning. They are discussed in detail below, with examples. For now, the key point to note is that, at the heart of the participatory exhibit, and central to learning as a social activity, lies that most ancient of technologies – conversation. If we can get our visitors talking with each other, reflecting on what they have discovered and done in the museum, they will create new personal understandings. Conversations in museums are both personal and mediated: personal in the sense of belonging to the people involved but mediated by the museum around its content – which means we have the ability to promote curiosity through engagement with real objects and thus stimulate and influence conversation. But such conversations also transform the museum display from the single voice of the curator into a multi-sided engagement.

Reflection is intimately connected to conversation and the social learning experience. It enables users to establish relevance and learn from it (constructing new meanings and understandings in the process). Art Galleries claim great success in the ability of their art works to stimulate deep and meaningful reflection. It is both frustrating and depressing that other forms of museum display make such little, if any, attempt to support it. The box below illustrates some of the participatory approaches that I have attempted to use or witnessed others using.

Box 1: Providing opportunities for reflection

Encourage conversation and social interaction
Create 'conversation spaces' and people-watching within galleries to help people learn from and engage with each other – seating is central to this
Provide opportunities to practice an activity or skill
Provide opportunities to contribute content - and to read and respond to other people's contributions
Provide feedback and/or rewards to motivate further engagement
Provide additional layered content on site and online
Give people takeaways plus provide opportunities to contribute afterwards online – to encourage continuing thought and conversation

Lists such as this are not guarantees of engagement and learning. This element of the display process is experimental and dependent on users wanting to engage. The way forward for museums is to pilot and to ensure displays are flexible enough to enable regular change.

Designing museum spaces for participation

Once museums recognise that interaction amongst companions is a major contributor to the user experience and to learning (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Packer & Ballantyne, 2005), it is surely common-sense to create participatory display approaches that use social interaction to stimulate and support the process of museum learning. Key to this is recognising the need to design spaces for the audience as well as for the collections and interpretation. These include mental spaces as well as physical ones – spaces that encourage people to pause and reflect as well as to physically take part. There is little guidance in how to do this, so we are in the realms of experimentation, flexibility and multiple use. My preliminary suggestions would include:

Pro-active spaces: Multi-purpose spaces giving a flexibility that makes possible small-scale performance/living history, object-handling sessions, spaces for school or family groups to gather, etc., with seating as a fall-back when the space is not otherwise in use (Peressut, Colombo & Postiglioni, 2014: 10-11).

Reflection zones or *conversation spaces:* seating in circles, with coffee tables holding books, articles and newspaper cuttings. The circle is important, encouraging

conversation. These zones could be expanded to include *contributory spaces* - locations integral to the displays where users are encouraged to contribute thoughts and content (discussed below). They could also double up as *object-handling* locations.

Participatory exhibit spaces: exhibits that social groups or families (perhaps even 'strangers') can gather around and engage with together.

'Trail' spaces: stopping points in front of key exhibits for families using museum trails and activity backpacks, with room to sit/lie on the floor.

'Pathways' or 'Entry Points': giving users the chance to observe others participating, contributing, etc. before deciding whether to become more closely involved themselves -vital in helping people feel comfortable and confident in contributing.

Social spaces: designed to support museum activities within social events like Lates programming.

External spaces: both the equivalent of a piazza outside the museum for events and enjoyable gathering and becoming a 'museum without walls', reaching out to and engaging with local communities.

None of this is intended to deny the continued importance of object display. Rather, my ambition would be to engage users more closely with the objects. One example will suffice. In Colchester Castle Museum, a pro-active space in front of a display of Roman jewellery was used for a small living history performance where a Roman 'slave' dressed her mistress. The replica jewellery used was identical to the real jewellery on display. The performance was followed by a lively discussion about the displays.

Types of participatory exhibits

Let me start by saying that an interactive exhibit is not the same as a participatory one. An interactive exhibit is still the single voice of the museum. The user is involved, but the museum continues to hold power. The visitor does something, the exhibit does something back and the visitor is then normally expected to learn a specific piece of information dictated by the museum – so it is outcome-driven. Here is a critique from the Exploratorium in San Francisco, spiritual home of the modern interactive science exhibit:

> Their investigatory activity was driven almost exclusively *by the museum*: they followed the label's directions about what to do, what to notice, and how to understand the experience… they rarely go beyond the museum's instructions to ask and pursue their own questions.
>
> Gutwill & Allen (2010:9)

By comparison and, as discussed in my previous article (Black, 2016: 396), participatory exhibits: seek to stimulate social interaction amongst visitors (both within and beyond those they are visiting with); are driven by the direction that the user or group want(s) to go in; can work on different levels; and the end-point is frequently outside the museum's direct control. They can vary from simple additions to the visitor experience to requiring sustained involvement.

Simple participatory exhibits have long been a feature of children's museums and some science museums. As such exhibits have become a commonplace in museums, so this in turn has led to a new critique – that involving visitors in activities is now an end in itself. This ignores the strategic role of such exhibits, as part of audience engagement strategies developed in response to audience expectations to socially interact and learn new things. We have reached a stage now where it is possible to suggest a typology of such exhibits. To illustrate my case, I have defined five elements: 'Taking part', 'Responding creatively', 'Belonging', 'Empowering' and 'Stimulating Action'.

Taking part
This is the element that meets the needs and expectations of the bulk of the museum audience. Participatory exhibits that seek to elicit a direct response to collections exist in immense variety, not least for families. They can include:

- Tactile engagement with the 'real thing' provides the most important difference between a museum visit and any other form of contact with the past, particularly online – and is central to the participative museum. To hold Roman pottery or the fossilized remains of prehistoric creatures, and to discuss these with experts, will always stand out, with museum personnel able to share their knowledge and enthusiasm. Importantly the direction of the session will be dictated by the questions posed by the users.

- Trails and activity packs have been in use at places like the V&A and Denver Art Museum for over twenty years and are now relatively ubiquitous. Yet they still 'transform the otherwise adult spaces of the galleries into family environments' (Denver Art Museum, 2017: 3). They give families a sense of purpose that can encourage close observation and discovery. As part of the pack, providing the children with a 'discovery tool', like a torch, can add another dimension.

- The taking and sharing of selfies is user-driven but can follow a museum purpose. In 2009, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York asked visitors to submit photographs of themselves beside their favourite works as part of its *It's Time We Met* project. More than 1,000 were submitted, with two selected to lead a new advertising campaign.

- Voting is a perennial favourite. At Worcester City Art Gallery, U.K., curators selected their favourite forty paintings and then asked visitors to vote for their favourites and say why. This allowed other visitors to respond to the comments in turn. Boston Art Gallery, Massachusetts, did this on a bigger scale with its Impressionists, in a 2014 exhibition, *Boston Loves Impressionism*.

- 'Tinker stations', where both children and adults can 'build' items relating to displayed objects are increasingly popular - especially in the U.S.A. (see, for example, ASTC 2012).

- Individual exhibitions can be transformed by simple participatory elements. Engagement with an exhibition of historic games toured by the British Museum was transformed at New Walk Museum, Leicester, by the provision of replicas and an enabler to teach visitors how to play.

- Gaming represents one of the great hopes of museum directors, many of whom believe that augmented reality and alternative reality games will attract new audiences of all ages for the immersive experiences they represent. And there is great potential. From the social experience of sharing fictional narratives that are history-based, in storyworlds (DigitalmeetsCulture, 2018) to teams competing in scavenger hunts, with objects as clues (Blair, 2009), gaming can support the holy grail of 'active prolonged engagement' by visitors (Gutwill & Allen, 2010). They engage emotionally as well as intellectually. They reward engagement through feedback and potentially access to another level. And the most effective ones work off mobile phones. But it is early days. Most games have clear rules to follow with little chance of open-ended play. They tend to be set up for use by individuals, not groups. There is the likelihood of too much play and not enough learning. And, of course, good games are expensive to create and regularly update.

- 'Good goodbyes' matter. Most museum visits tend to end with a whimper rather than a bang. Yet if we are to build a relationship, we want users to part on a high note – a conversation with a staff member, an A board listing 'future events', an opportunity to record your favourite experience of the day, a sticker for a successfully completed trail. In 2011 the Museum of Modern Art in New York initiated a project that was an instant hit. Visitors were given a card with the words "I went to MoMA and…" where they could draw or write their own impressions, experiences and opinions. These could then be shared by being hung on the wall in the museum lobby. The project was later digitalised: the cards were scanned and projected onto the wall.

Creative response

This refers to the capacity of museum objects and exhibits to promote a creative response from visitors. To date this has focused particularly on artworks but could be much wider. Underpinning this element is the significant role museums can play in the democratisation of creativity. Museums have outstanding potential to act as 'agents for creativity', in inspiring both individuals and communities to learn how to think and act creatively, a critical human resource in the 21st century (Vergeront, 2013). There is also a vital role that museums can play - helping children think and act creatively, as school curricula increasingly abandon the Arts. Much creative activity in museums is programme driven, but opportunities can also be built into displays. Examples include:

- The age-old provision of art trollies filled with art materials has enabled generations of children to engage directly in producing their own 'works of art' in galleries. At Palo Alto Art Centre, the concept was expanded into 'Art Carts', including suggested activities as well as materials (Larson, 2017). And Denver Art Museum has instead developed dedicated spaces they called 'Create Corners', '…designed so families can make their own creations'. What all three examples share is that the activities take place 'while surrounded by original works of art' (Denver Art Museum, 2017: 3).

- In *Oh Snap!* in 2013, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, selected and exhibited 13 new works of photography and then invited people to submit their own photographic responses via the internet. Each day the museum printed out new submissions and displayed them beside their inspirations.

- In 2013, the Indianapolis Museum of Art staged *Inspired by Matisse,* alongside its *Matisse Life and Colour* exhibition (2013). This involved a competition for drawings inspired by Matisse, with an *Inspired by Matisse Studio* opposite the gallery entrance which included large visuals, video material for inspiration and kiosks with software. Digital drawings could also be submitted online and made available for comment. There were four age categories. The result was almost 4000 submissions and very positive visitor feedback. (Fantoni et al 2014).

Belonging

Belonging begins with taking part - you take part because you feel you belong – and you feel you belong because you take part. It then goes much further as people cease to be one-off or occasional visitors and move towards becoming an active and influential part of the museum community. It requires a major change in mind-sets for both the museum and its audiences. It means museums recognising and engaging with users as active participants, contributors and collaborators – as partners on a learning journey together. It means responding to lifestyle expectations while also understanding and appreciating the expertise and experience that users can bring to

the table. It means developing new approaches that support and stimulate users to become more actively and regularly involved. For users, belonging means transforming their attitudes from that of one-off visitors to people seeking a long-term meaningful and participatory relationship. This will only happen if the users believe it is worth the effort.

For both museums and users, 'belonging' goes well beyond the provision of participatory exhibits to incorporate opportunities for close involvement, but most of this lies beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, I am going to use an example from the digital revolution. As noted above, within the online world, we have already seen the rise of what has come to be called 'participatory culture'. How can museums meaningfully enhance access to their collections, in a participatory environment where many people already take material online and actively share, sort, classify, collaboratively re-think, re-classify, re-publish and re-use it as they see fit? In 2012, Martijn Pronk, head of publications at the Rijksmuseum, and his team 'set the collection free' by launching Rijksstudio, giving free online access to hundreds of thousands of high resolution images from the museum collections – to be used as anyone saw fit. In 2015, he spoke of two key areas where users have responded. First came those who established their sense of belonging by creating their own online 'Rijksmuseum Collection' through selection of their favourite images. By 2014, around 150,000 people had already created their own Rijksstudio online (Davis, 2014). Of this use, Pronk said:

> The success of Rijksstudio is that it adapts the museum proposition to regular online behavior using known technical solutions. Many people like to view nice images online, collect them, download and share them. Anytime and anywhere.
>
> Pronk (2015: no page number)

But beyond this, the museum also invited the creative sector to use the images for free. Here, Pronk said:

> We have placed much of the collection in the public domain. It is out of our control. So even if we wouldn't like a certain design there's not much we could do. We knew this when we set the collection free.
>
> Pronk (2015)

But the museum went beyond providing free access to images, to actively embrace the designers and publicise their work. In 2014 it introduced an annual award for the best products, marketed as 'create your own masterpiece'.

Other galleries have followed suit to a limited degree. In August 2013, the Getty Museum introduced its Open Content Program (Getty u/d), initially involving 4600 images. The National Gallery of Art in Washington DC has introduced open access to images of those works it believes to be in the public domain. The UK National Gallery gives free access to c35,000 images at up to 3000 pixels.

Empowering

Power is central to participation, so where does the distribution of power lie in the socially interactive museum? Traditionally, museums have been about control – deciding what visitors see, do, read, etc. Promoting a participatory environment requires a new balance of power between the museum and its audiences. A museum that is committed to audience participation will recognise that people will bring their own expertise and experiences with them. The museum will want to empower that audience to unite these with museum content to develop its own responses to exhibits, to reflect and construct its own meanings, to contribute content. This means the museum:

> … must give up its traditional authoritarian voice so that users are free to question, debate, collaborate and speculate – seeking out those issues that most concern them - and are given the support and inspiration required to do so.
>
> Black (2012: 11)

Here we immediately run into two problems: the single-voiced museum display that leaves no room for alternative points of view; and the barrier that is museum staff. Both problems come down to the same issue - like all professionals, museum staff want to protect their authority. But a museum focused on protecting its own authority will fail to free up the museum visit to give users more power/control of their own outcomes, opportunities to contribute directly to content and the potential to influence the nature and ethos of the organisation itself. And the stimulation of user contributions to content is central to the participatory ethos.

User Generated Content (UGC) has the potential to make a remarkable contribution to the development of the museum's mission, and to the conversion of visitors to users who feel they are part of the museum's community rather than outsiders. Not only does the making of a contribution convert the contributor into an active participant, it also immediately diversifies content and the range of voices heard in the museum – revealing the museum as an "…open place, one that encourages participation and is willing to engage with a variety of opinion and ideas to create richness" (Durbin, u/d, no page number). It also shows the value the museum places on the expertise and understanding of its users. Meanwhile, the very act of including UGC decreases the power of the museum as a gatekeeper.

Yet none of this denies the role of the museum in developing and transmitting knowledge. Valuing user contributions does not mean curatorial absence. Audiences will continue to want to hear the authoritative voice of the museum. What they increasingly will not do is accept museums as single-voiced and authoritarian – they will expect to have the opportunity to reflect on and respond to that voice (Stein 2011).

I recognise, of course, that existing research suggests few members of the public will actually make contributions. Best known is Jakob Neilsen's (2006) work – quoted in Simon (2010) and elsewhere -which suggests that user participation in terms of contribution to social media and websites often follows a 90-9-1 rule:

- 90% of users are "lurkers" who read or observe, but do not contribute
- 9% of users contribute from time to time
- 1% of users participate a lot and account for most contributions

But this is in relation to online activity and reflects a very different environment to a museum gallery. It can be contrasted, for example, with the many thousands who contribute online and on site, and intersect between the two, at Tate in London. This raises its own problems, from the practical to the ethical (see, for example, Kidd & Cardiff, 2017), but UGC is now integral to the Tate offer.

Meaningful UGC will rarely happen of its own accord. Museums committed to user participation must recognise that a process-oriented, participatory display is not completed when it opens, but only comes to life when audiences are both present and participating. It also means taking care in the design of contributory spaces. This must recognise that UGC is a process – the act of reflecting and then contributing, as well as a product. The crucial thing is to make people feel at ease so they are willing to think and respond (whether in hard copy or via smartphone). Comfortable seating; tables with books, articles, newspaper cuttings; simple questions and balanced sign-written quotes on the walls; painting and photographs; the opportunity to read and respond to the comments of others – all this can make a difference.

Beyond core museum audiences, there is also a continuing need to re-examine the power relationship between museums and their local communities. This has been mentioned above in relation to the social inclusion agenda in the UK and the work of Simon and others in the USA and elsewhere. I have discussed this elsewhere (e.g. Black, 2012) but recognise that others can speak much more authoritatively on this subject that I can. I restate my view, however, that the participatory approach discussed above is as relevant to the broader audiences museums seek as to their core attendees.

Stimulating action

A further area of empowerment of museum audiences comes in the area of stimulating visitor behaviour. This is based on an underpinning principle of the Interpretation movement, originally linked to the promotion of active support for environmental conservation:

> "Curiosity leads to knowledge
> Knowledge leads to understanding
> Understanding leads to action"

There is a widespread assumption that environmental interpretation will influence visitor behaviour. Such an approach is a ubiquitous element in visitor management at environmentally sensitive sites – often protected natural areas established primarily for conservation purposes owing to rare or unique natural phenomena which, for these very reasons, then become popular tourist destinations. Site managers use a wide variety of interpretive media and approaches to achieve this end. Evaluation of more than twenty impact evaluations suggested personal relevance is key to visitor response, as was message repetition (but over-repetition can have the opposite effect). Other researchers highlight the triggering of emotional responses and providing visitors with a tangible opportunity to act upon newly formed attitudes and intentions. Overall, however, the researchers concluded:

> The complexity of interrelationships between information assimilation, attitudes and behaviour change is extremely complex and difficult to evaluate…
>
> Munro et al (2008: 10)

Can participatory exhibits targeted at influencing museum visitor behaviour be effective? In terms of visitors taking action, there are a few outstanding digital examples of this principle in the stimulus of pledges, including:

- At the Pledge Wall in the US National Holocaust Memorial Museum, visitors can pledge to take part in action against genocide. Within the museum, their written pledges are projected at large scale on to the wall.
- The 'Power of Children' exhibition at the Children's Museum of Indianapolis culminates at the 'Tree of Promise'. At computer keyboards in the gallery, children can make a promise that will change the world that will "float up" into the tree, and can send that promise home or on to others via email. Those who complete their promises will be 'recognised' and congratulated by the Tree on their return.

However, such examples are rare and there is also a shortage of evaluation relating to exhibits developed to influence behaviour. Yet a core principle in museum support of civil engagement is that display and programming can promote dialogue and understanding and, through this, increase tolerance and respect (Black, 2012: 227). This leads us back to conversation, and the underpinning principle of the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, that 'change happens when people are given the space to engage in conversations that move them' (Katrikh, 2018: 8). To achieve this sort of challenging dialogue, the museum seeks first to create a safe environment in which it can occur – this 'allows for individuals to take risks while understanding that they will not be penalized for contrary opinions'. When it works, participants leave changed, with many motivated to take action on contemporary issues. Working with the Ulster Museum in Belfast on its new gallery on the Northern Irish 'Troubles', Dierdre MacBride of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council described the

environment required as '… a safe and open space in which dialogue and understanding… can occur… a space in which reflection and possibly reconciliation can emerge even while we are dealing with hurtful living memory.' (MacBride, quoted in NMNI 2018).

Changing the museum as an organisation

Just when museums need to be at their most audience-centred – participatory, fast-moving, flexible, dynamic, and experimental:

- Moribund, top-down organisations ensure there is no strategic vision for the future; and
- traditional permanent exhibitions physically prevent change and present audiences with an image of museums as didactic, passive, and never-changing.

In theory, the role of the participatory museum is to support audiences to become an involved part of the museum community. In practice, to achieve this will require a change of mind-set by museum managements, underpinned by a re-balancing of organisational power from the current top-down hierarchy, leadership and organisational structure to actively support participatory practice. It requires institutional commitment, a managerial receptiveness to experimentation, a capacity to drive change for the long term and the support of all those working for or volunteering with the organisation involved. These attributes are rare in the museum field. A report on innovation in Australian museums sums up the problem:

> While the study identified many examples of innovative practice... initiatives tend to be isolated, episodic and difficult to sustain in the long term...Only a few... organisations have made fundamental changes to their planning, structures and operations to place innovation... at the core rather than as add-on activities.
>
> Mansfield et al (2014: xi)

Yet change cannot be driven through. Any attempt to do so will result in what Phillips (2004: 370) calls *'silosclerosis',* where departments end up fighting each other to protect their territory - curators vs. educators vs. administrators vs. developers – rather than working together. Strategic vacuums make this worse, with individuals pulling down the lids on their individual boxes for personal protection. Yet most people know they must re-define and adapt to their future roles. So, change is possible but needs effective leadership and consistency of purpose. It requires a leadership group with a shared vision, that acts as one.

Interestingly, a change of external focus can bring organisational transformation. Thus, Samis and Michaelson, in researching their book *Creating the Visitor-Centred Museum* discovered that

> '… a visitor-centered focus leads to organisational transformation. The two are so integral to each other that we found they had to be considered in tandem.' (p4) …'We saw new teams, with new members, leaders and duties – and, most importantly, a new outlook… we believe that their impact will redefine how museums operate in the years to come.' (p6).
>
> Samis & Michaelson (2017, 4 & 6)

And organisational change is also a direct result of a focus on social inclusion. In the UK, the most exciting work on this in recent years has been the *Our Museum* initiative of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (Moriarty & Medlyn, 2016), an on-going project that began in 2008 and is specifically intended to facilitate a process of organisational change within UK museums and galleries that are committed to active partnership with their communities. The project has involved nine institutions, large and small – ranging from National Museum Wales to the Ryedale Folk Museum - and their associated communities in a reflective, collaborative experience where they have shared experiences and learned from each other, based around the concept of museums and communities as active partners. Crucially, the initiative has shown how organisational change processes play a significant role in placing community needs, values and collaboration at the heart of museum practice.

Putting these two experiences together, it becomes clear that developing participatory approaches is impossible in a hierarchical structure where all decisions are taken by a single person at the top. Instead, you need commitment from across the organisation. Changing to an essential team-based approach makes it possible for the process of developing participatory content to be seen as a strategy for transforming the museum itself.

Conclusion

Too many museums, museum managements and museum personnel appear not to have noticed the extent to which their world and audiences are changing. They are comfortable in dealing with the past but seem to find the present and future much more difficult. But the world is changing, our audiences and their expectations are changing, our funding regimes are changing. The days when museums could act as arbitrary gatekeepers to their collections and the stories they tell, could insist on retaining full authority over their content and could assume that visitors will accept the museum experience on offer, whatever it is, are long gone. Most museums now need to transform themselves to remain relevant to 21st century audiences.

I cannot predict what the future will be like. I have focused instead on what we can do now to help prepare us for what is to come. But such preparation must be based on a strategic vision. My 'vision' is centred on participation. Participatory museum users should feel a sense of belonging. Thus, developing a participatory museum is not focused on increasing visitor numbers but, rather, on building lasting relationships between a museum and its audiences and/or communities and

converting audiences into cultural participants, thereby increasing the museum's relevance to the communities it serves.

References

Adams, M. & Moussouri, T. (2002) The Interactive Experience: Linking research and practice, *Interactive Learning in Museums of Art and Design Conference*, London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 17-18 May 2002, accessed on 21/03/2018 at: http://media.vam.ac.uk/media/documents/legacy_documents/file_upload/5748_file.pdf

Barron, P. & Leask, A. (2017) Generation Y and 'Lates' Events at the National Museum of Scotland, *Museum Management and Curatorship* 32(5), pp473-490

ASTC (2012) *Inspiring Visitors to Tinker, Create and Innovate,* Association of Science and Technology Centres blog, 22/08/2012, accessed on 21/03/2018 at: http://www.astc.org/astc-dimensions/inspiring-visitors-to-tinker-create-and-innovate/

Black, G. (2016) Remember the 70%: sustaining 'core' museum audiences, *Museum Management and Curatorship,* 31(4), pp386 - 401

Black, G. (2012) *Transforming Museums in the 21st Century,* Abingdon: Routledge

Black, G. (2005) *The Engaging Museum,* London: Routledge

Blair, E. (2009) *Interactive Games make Museums a Place to Play* 12/01/2009, accessed on 21/03/2018 at: https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=99244253

Blud, L.M. (1990) Social Interaction and Learning among Family Groups Visiting a Museum, *Museum Management and Curatorship,* 9, pp 43 - 51

Boomerang! Integrated Marketing and Advertising Pty Ltd (1998) Powerhouse Museum Brand Audit and Positioning Options, Sydney: internal report for the Powerhouse Museum, quoted in Scott, C. (2000) Ch. 3 Positioning museums in the 21st century, in Lynch et al *Leisure and Change: implications for change in the 21st century*, Sydney: Powerhouse Museum & University of Technology, pp37- 48

Borun, M. (1977) *Measuring the Immeasurable: a pilot study of museum effectiveness,* Washington DC: Association of Science Technology Centres

Brooklyn Museum (2010) *1stFans: Shifting Focus and Moving to Meetup.com,* accessed on 21/03/2018 at: https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/community/blogosphere/2010/11/03/1stfans-shifting-focus-and-moving-to-meetupcom/

Brown, A.S. & Novak-Leonard (2011, reprinted 2014) *Getting in on the Act: How Arts Groups are Creating Opportunities for Active Participation,* San Francisco Ca: James Irvine Foundation

Carpentier, N. (2012) *Media and Participation: a site of ideological-democratic struggle,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Coombs, P.H. and Ahmed, M. (1974) *Attacking Rural Poverty: How non-formal education can help*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Culture24 (2018) Three-part study on the role and impact of museum lates: *A Culture of Lates; An International Culture of Lates; Late Like a Local,* London:

Culture24, accessed on 21/03/2018 at: http://museumsatnight.org.uk/festival-resources/news/our-research-reports-on-museum-lates-are-here/#.Wp5_eufLjIU
Davis, D. 1990. The Museum Transformed: Design and Culture in the Post-Pompidou Age. New York: Abbeville Press.
Dean, J. (2016) From YouTube to Our Tube, *Sunday Times Culture Section,* 10th April 2016, pp4-6
Deloitte (2016) *The Deloitte 2016 Millennial Survey,* accessed on 21/03/2018 at https://www2.deloitte.com/ge/en/pages/aboutdeloitte/articles/millennialsurvey1.html
Denver Art Museum (2017) *Kids & Their Grownups: New Insights on Developing Dynamic Museum Experiences for the Whole Family,* accessed on 21/03/2018 at: https://denverartmuseum.org/about/research-reports
Dichtl, J. (2016) *New Report Reveals Each Generation Less Likely to Visit Historic Sites Than the Last.* Washington: AASLH, February 22, accessed on 21/03/2018 at: http://blogs.aaslh.org/new-report-reveals-each-generation-less-likely-to-visit-historic-sites-than-the-last/
Digital Meets Culture (2018) *Focus on Museums and Games,* 21/03/2018, accessed on 19/03/2018 at: http://www.digitalmeetsculture.net/article/focus-on-museums-and-games/
Durbin, G. (u/d) *User generated content on museum websites*, accessed on 14/03/2017 but no longer available online
European Commission (2013) *Eurobarometer 399: Cultural Access and Participation,* European Commission: Directorate-General for Education and Culture, accessed on 21/03/2018 at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_399_en.pdf
Falk, J.H. & Dierking, L.D. (2000) *Learning from museums: Visitor experiences and the making of meaning,* Washington DC: Whalesback
Fantoni, S.F., Jaebker, K. & Leason, T. (2014) Participatory Experiences in Art Museums: Lessons from Two Years of Practice, *Museums and the Web 2014,* accessed on 21/03/2018 at: http://mw2014.museumsandtheweb.com/paper/participatory-experiences-in-art-museums-lessons-from-two-years-of-practice/
Getty (u/d) *About the Getty: Open Content Program,* accessed on 21/03/2018 at: www.getty.edu/about/whatwedo/opencontentfaq.html
Gutwill, J.P. & Allen, S. (2010) *Group Inquiry at Science Museum Exhibits,* San Francisco: Exploratorium
Høholt, S. (2017) The Art Museum Today: Participation as a Strategic Tool, in Jalving, C. (ed.) The Art of Taking Part: Participation at the Museum, *ARKEN Bulletin,* Vol. 7, 2017, Denmark: ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, pp 19-34, accessed on 21/03/2018 at: https://issuu.com/arken_museum/docs/bulletin_2017
Jalving, C. (2017) The Art of Taking Part: Participation at the Museum, *ARKEN Bulletin,* Vol. 7, 2017, Denmark: ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, accessed on 21/03/2017 at https://issuu.com/arken_museum/docs/bulletin_2017
Janes, R.R. (2009) *Museums in a Troubled World,* London: Routledge

Jenkins, H. with Purushotma, R., Weigel, M., Clinton, K. & Robison, A.J. (2006) *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: media education for the 21st century,* John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, accessed on 21/03/2018 at: https://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/files/Sept30TLConfronting.pdf

Katrikh, M. (2018) Creating Safe Spaces for Visitors and Staff in Museum Programs, *Journal of Museum Education,* 43(1), pp7-15

Kidd, J. & Cardiff, R. (2017) 'A space of negotiation: Visitor Generated Content and Ethics at Tate, *Museum and Society*, 15(1), March 2017, pp43-55, accessed on 21/03/2018 at: https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/museumsociety/volumes/volume-15-2017

Larson, L. (2017) Engaging Families in the Galleries Using Design Thinking, *Journal of Museum Education* 42(4), pp376-384

Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund (2000) *Service to People: Challenges and Rewards: How Museums can become more Visitor-Centred,* New York: Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund

Mansfield, T., Winter, C., Griffith, C., Dockerty, A., Brown, T. (2014) *Innovation Study: Challenges and Opportunities for Australia's Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums*, Australian Centre for Broadband Innovation, CSIRO and Smart Services Co-operative Research Centre, August 2014, accessed on 21/03/2018 at: www.historyvictoria.org.au/.../GLAM_Innovation_Study_September2014-Report_Fi.

McLagan, P. & Nel, C. (1995) *The Age of Participation*, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers

McLean, K. (u/d) *Museum exhibit prototyping as a method of community conversation and participation,* accessed on 24/04/2018 at http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.afsnet.org/resource/resmgr/Best_Practices_Reports/McLean_and_Seriff_Museum_Exh.pdf

McManus, P. (1994) Families in Museums, in Miles, R. & Zavala, A. (eds) *Towards the Museum of the Future,* London: Routledge, pp81-118

Middleton, V.T.C. (1998) *New Visions for Museums in the 21st Century,* London: Association of Independent Museums, p29

Miles, R. (1986) Museum Audiences, *International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship,* 5, pp73-80

Moriarty, G. & Medlyn, S. (2016) *Our Museum Special Initiative: an Evaluation,* accessed on 21/03/2018 at: http://www.phf.org.uk/publications/our-museum-special-initiative-an-evaluation/

Munro, J.L., Morrison-Saunders, A. & Hughes, M. (2008) Environmental Interpretation Evaluation in Natural Areas, *Journal of Ecotourism,* 7(1), 2008, pp1-14

Nielsen, J (2006) *Participation Inequality: Lurkers vs Contributors in Internet Communities,* uploaded 9 October 2006, accessed on 24/04/2018 at https://www.nngroup.com/articles/participation-inequality/

NMNI (2018) *Ulster Museum opens new Troubles Gallery,* accessed on 13/04/2018 at: https://www.nmni.com/news/ulster-museum-opens-new-troubles-gallery

Packer, J. & Ballantyne, R. (2005) Solitary vs Shared Learning: Exploring the Social Dimension of Museum Learning, *Curator* 48(2), pp177-192
Rose, J. (2016) *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites,*
Peressut, L.B., Colombo, C.F. & Postiglioni, G. (2014) Introduction, in Peressut, L.B., Colombo, C.F. & Postiglioni, G. (eds) *Museum Multiplicities,* MeLa Book 10: Politechnico di Milano, pp 8 - 16
Perry, D.L. (2012) *What Makes Learning Fun? Principles for the design of intrinsically motivating museum exhibits,* Lanham: AltaMira Press
Phillips, W. (1993 reprinted 2004) Institution-wide Change in Museums, in Anderson, G. (ed, 1st edition) *Reinventing the Museum,* Walnut Creek: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, pp367-374
Poon, A. (1993) *Tourism, technology and competitive strategies,* Wallingford: CAB International, p114
Prensky, M. (2001) Digital natives, Digital Immigrants, *On the Horizon,* 9(5), Maryland: MCB University Press, October 2001, accessed on 21/03/2018 at: http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf
Pronk, M. (2015) A few questions to… Martijn Pronk from the Rijksmuseum, *We Are Museums* blog, 14/04/2015, accessed on 21/03/2018 at: http://www.wearemuseums.com/a-few-questions-to-martijn-pronk-from-the-rijksmuseum/
Rosenfeld, S. (1979) The context of informal learning in zoos, *Roundtable Reports*, 4 (2), pp1-3 & 15-16
Rosenfeld, S. & Terkel, A. (1982) A naturalistic study of visitors at an interactive mini-zoo, *Curator* 25, pp187-212
Rounds, J. (2004) 'Strategies for the Curiosity-driven Museum Visitor', in *Curator* 47 (4), 2004, pp. 389-412.
Samis, P. & Michaelson, M. (2017) *Creating the Visitor-Centred Museum,* New York & Abingdon: Routledge
Sandell, R. (2003) Social Inclusion, the museum, and the dynamics of sectoral change, *Museum and Society* 1, pp45-62
Sharpley, R. (1996) Tourism and consumer culture in post-modern society, in M. Robinson, N. Evans & P. Callaghan, eds., *Proceedings of the Tourism and Culture: Towards the 21st Century conference,* Sunderland: Centre for Travel and Tourism/Business Education Publishers, pp203-15.
Silverman, L. (2010) *The Social Work of Museums,* London: Routledge
Simon, N. (2015) The Participatory Museum Five Years Later, *Museum2.0*, 4th March 2015, accessed on 21/03/2018 at: http://museumtwo.blogspot.co.uk/2015/03/the-participatory-museum-five-years.html
Simon, N. (2010) *The Participatory Museum,* Santa Cruz Ca: Museum 2.0
Smithsonian Newsdesk (2016) *Visitor Statistics*, accessed on 21/03/2018 at: www.newsdesk.si.edu/about/stats
Stein, R. (2011) *Is Your Community Better Off Because It Has a Museum? Final Thoughts about Participatory Culture (Part III).* Indianapolis: Museum of Art,

accessed on 21/03/2018 at:
www.townofchapelhill.org/home/showdocument?id=34408
Vergeront, J. (2013) Creativity and Museums, *Museum Notes,* 13/03/2013, accessed on 21/03/2008 at https://museumnotes.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03/creativity-and-museums.html
Visit England (2015) *Visitor Attraction Trends in England 2014,* London: Visit England accessed on 21/03/2018 at:
https://www.visitengland.com/sites/default/files/va_2015_trends_in_england-full_report_version_for_publication_v3.pdf)
Yeoman, I. (2008) *Tomorrow's Tourist: scenarios and trends,* Oxford: Elsevier