



**NATIONAL
RESEARCH
AGENDA
FOR THE
MUSEUM
SECTOR**

National Research Agenda for the Museum Sector

Colofon

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Part 1

National Research Agenda
for the Museum Sector

1. Museums and scholarship

Museums are of immense importance to society. They form a dynamic cultural sector and make a major contribution to knowledge development, historical awareness, identity and social cohesion; they also play a significant economic role. Research is essential if museums are to fulfil and further strengthen their social role in the future. Apart from the area of collections (such as presentation and conservation), the greatest need is for new ideas and insights regarding knowledge transfer, audience experiences, economic impact and the connecting role of museums in our society. These are aspects that few museums have investigated. Added to that, links with universities, cultural institutes and researchers tend to be of an ad hoc nature, preventing museums from benefiting from the knowledge these people and organisations can offer. It is therefore vital that museums collaborate with other research institutions and disciplines and harness their knowledge and expertise.

Until now the scholarly tasks and activities of museums have primarily been based on the value of their collections. Presentation and conservation take up virtually all of a museum's research capacity and they determine the relationship with universities. The sharp rise in importance of a museum's social function makes it imperative that they work together with other researchers and disciplines, such as social psychology, marketing and communication, information sciences and business administration. Other parts of the museum organisation will also have to play a part in formulating the research questions.

Collaboration between museums, research universities and universities of applied sciences, the Karel van Mander Institute and the Cultural Heritage Agency can strengthen the research mandate of museums, as outlined by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science in the Museum Policy Memorandum 'Strength through cooperation' [Samen werken, samen sterker]. Earlier the Council for Culture, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and the Asscher-Vonk Committee had advised that scholarly research should be fostered by better coordination. Closer links should also be sought with relevant programmes of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and KNAW, and with university initiatives such as the research agenda of the Dutch Postgraduate School for Art History (OSK).

NWO runs several programmes relating to the museum sector. Science4Arts, for example, is specifically geared to research partnerships between the arts and sciences on the conservation and preservation of art objects. In the CATCH programme (Continuous Access To Cultural Heritage), IT researchers and heritage managers are working together on making collections digitally available. NWO has also recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Rijksmuseum, the Cultural Heritage Agency, TNO and the Delft University of Technology to facilitate and carry out scientific research in relation to art objects and heritage values.

In November 2014 the Dutch Postgraduate School for Art History (OSK), which brings together vari-



Museum De Fundatie, Zwolle

ous major Dutch museums as well as the Cultural Heritage Agency, presented its art history research agenda ('Perspectief. Onderzoeksagenda Kunstgeschiedenis'). OSK emphasised its wish to draw up a coherent research agenda 'in which, for example, collaboration between academic researchers and extra-university research centres (including museums) features prominently, including in the area of academic training'.

The museum sector does not presently have a common research agenda, however. The Minister of Education, Culture and Science has therefore tasked the Karel van Mander Institute, NWO, KNAW and the Cultural Heritage Agency to work with the museum sector to develop the first collective agenda. This remit is based in part on the consultation round in which the Minister consulted different institutions in the museum sector for the Museum Policy Memorandum.

The resulting Research Agenda for the Museum Sector is first and foremost a tool of and for the museum

sector. It will allow museums to formulate targeted knowledge questions and to shape and guide their relationship with researchers and universities. This involves more than framing the research questions the scientific field needs in order to arrive at the desired knowledge. It is certainly just as important to apply and safeguard that knowledge by transforming it into tools and insights, procedures and competences for use in museum practice.

Alongside other research agendas and programmes, this Research Agenda aims to link up with existing initiatives and to consolidate the scholarly work carried out for the museum sector by researchers. Museums need substantiated answers to the knowledge questions facing them both now and in the future. Armed with this knowledge, they will be able to consolidate their major significance for society.

2. Efforts and ambitions

Museums have traditionally had strong links with research and scholarship. Some, such as university museums, have grown directly out of efforts to build scientific and scholarly collections. Some of the national collections also have their origins in academic scholarship, as is evident to this day. The national museums in Leiden – the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities, National Museum of Ethnology, Museum Boerhaave and Naturalis Biodiversity Center – all employ research staff of high standing and have links to the university through professorships and senior lectureships. Scholarly fieldwork continues to form part of their museum policy, albeit to a lesser degree than in the past. Directors or curators of some other museums also hold university chairs.

There are other museums that foster links with universities and academic research. Teylers Museum and the Zeeuws Museum, for example, have deep roots in the 18th-century tradition whereby the enlightened middle classes established scientific societies. The majority, if not all, of the historical museums developed from local historical societies, which enthusiastically research their local history. A remarkable society in this respect is the KOG, the Royal Antiquarian Society of the Netherlands, which is affiliated with the Rijksmuseum and whose collection is on loan to the Rijksmuseum. KOG has also funded a chair at the University of Amsterdam since 1990.

The policy memorandum ‘More than Quality’ [Meer dan Kwaliteit] (2011) vested the research mandate with six core institutions that play a leading role in

the scholarship network: the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Dutch National Museum of Antiquities, National Museum of Ethnology, Naturalis Biodiversity Center, Museum Catharijneconvent, Literature Museum (and the Netherlands Institute for Art History/RKD).

Figures on the research capacity of museums are based on Museumcijfers 2012 and Heritage Monitor. For the Research Agenda, a short supplementary study was carried out on the museums surveyed in the Heritage Monitor.

According to Museumcijfers 2012,¹ 5.19% of salaried museum staff fall into the ‘scholarship’ category, compared to 4.42% of unsalaried staff. This equates to 306 and 163 FTEs respectively.

In 2012 data was also collected for the Heritage Monitor² to ascertain how many FTEs museums devote to scholarly research. The figures are based on the core institutions, supplemented by other major museums. With the exception of Naturalis, this proved to be about 50 FTEs for the museums in question. The discrepancy can be explained by the difference between scholarly work and scholarly research.

Scholarly activities of museums

Responses from museums reveal a clear aspiration to retain, safeguard and strengthen scholarly research as an integral part of the museum mandate. Recent developments, some of which have trig-

¹ www.museana.net

² www.erfgoedmonitor.nl

gered seismic shifts (such as the merging of three ethnographic museums into the National Museum of World Cultures), appear to have sparked a new energy for shaping the scholarly remit.

The National Museum of World Cultures is developing a Research Centre for Material Culture designed to bring together the research lines of the merging partners and to secure the museum a new position on the international stage. Following the addition of SKKN research agency to the organisation, Museum Catharijneconvent has remodelled its research policy, placing it in a new perspective. As a research centre, it has now included in its objectives its intention to share and develop knowledge through targeted collaboration with sister museums and researchers.

Different museums are thus giving increasing prominence to scholarly research. Museum Boerhaave has also stated its aspiration to become a node in the knowledge network, with a strong position in the history of science and scholarship sector. It is seeking alternating partners such as Philips Research and the Medicines Evaluation Board.

In its current collection plan the National Museum of Antiquities has announced that a separate research plan will be devised in 2014, together with a research agenda. And in late 2014 the Van Gogh Museum will begin drafting a new research policy plan.

For various museums the scholarship mandate takes the form of a programme of lectures, seminars, conferences and other meetings or events. The role of curator in these museums is not confined to the scholarly underpinning of a selection of artworks and the presentation of the results in an exhibition. The researcher network is also being harnessed for peripheral programmes that are increasingly autonomous in nature.

Traditionally, curators and research staff have published in academic journals on a regular basis. Although the future seems less promising for some of these journals, museums are seeing opportunities for putting out their own journals. The Rijksmuseum Bulletin is a peer-reviewed,

scholarly journal targeting an international audience of researchers and other interested people. In November 2014 the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam launched a peer-reviewed journal, *Stedelijk Studies*, in partnership with six universities. It is an e-zine and is also aimed at an international, academic-level audience.

It is not always the size of a museum that determines its scholarly aspirations and efforts. Small museums can have grand ambitions, inspired perhaps by the specific niche in which they operate. The Klok & Peel Museum in Asten, which boasts one of world's top five collections of bells (carillons, church bells), has recently taken the first step towards establishing an international centre of expertise in campanology. Leiden's Japan Museum Sieboldhuis has forged links with a broad university network, thereby making smart use of the many research opportunities offered by its unique collection. The Natural History Museum Rotterdam has an impressive staff of curators who are affiliated with the museum as volunteers and who have taken on a substantial share of the research work. This position of honorary curator is a fairly common occurrence in natural history museums.

The Heritage Monitor survey of museums for the Research Agenda, supplemented by several other major museums, shows that their main focus of scholarly research is on exhibition development, collection history and composition, and the conservation and restoration of objects. A few museums also reported that they conducted research into the workings of society. The Amsterdam Museum explores the connecting value of museums through collection and exhibition projects with a participation focus, in neighbourhoods such as Amsterdam-Oost. The Stedelijk Museum, Van Gogh Museum and Rijksmuseum are taking part in a University of Amsterdam PhD study into the educational value of museum tours. This spring the Rijksmuseum will produce a research agenda centred on collaboration and public relevance.

3. Broadening research

The purpose of the Research Agenda is to identify the research conducted by, for and about museums to strengthen their social significance. According to the Netherlands Museum Association publication 'More than worth it' [Meer dan waard'] (2011), that significance is based on five museum values: collection, connecting, educational, experience and economic. Given the social significance of the modern museum, it is no longer enough to simply develop knowledge in relation to collections. New ideas and insights into the sociocultural role of the museum as a social institution are essential to ensure that museums will continue to fulfil a meaningful social role and ambition in the future. This will involve educational methods and techniques, audience reach (including digital) and experience, the economic aspects of museum operations and the preferences of modern museum consumers.

The breadth of this research task surpasses the focus and possibilities of many individual institutions. What is needed is an interdisciplinary approach. It is essential for museums to work together on setting research agendas and on structuring and implementing research. The museum sector needs to work in partnership with academics and research institutions in order to find answers to today's knowledge questions and those of the future.

The Research Agenda for the Museum Sector fits within a wider trend of adopting a systematic approach to society's knowledge and research tasks. Recent years have seen the formulation of research agendas in a range of social domains. An example from the sports sector is the '2011 -2016 Sector Plan

for Sports Research and Education' [Sectorplan sportonderzoek en -onderwijs 2011-2016'], the result of collaboration with ministries, research universities and universities of applied sciences, research institutes, NOC*NSF, sports associations and sports services. Interesting examples abroad include the 'English Heritage Agenda 2005-2010' and publications put out by the American Center for the Future of Museums.

The Research Agenda has drawn on research data from comparable research agendas, specific analyses by experts and general field consultations of the museum sector. The key questions in drawing up the Agenda were:

- Which trends are relevant to the functioning of museums?
- Which tasks or challenges will museums have to face in the next ten years? To what extent are museums equipped to respond to these trends or cope with these challenges?
- What knowledge is needed to support the social role and significance of museums in the short and medium term?
- Who can best collect this knowledge and within what kind of alliances?
- How can this new knowledge be broadly and effectively applied?

Research agenda and implementation plan

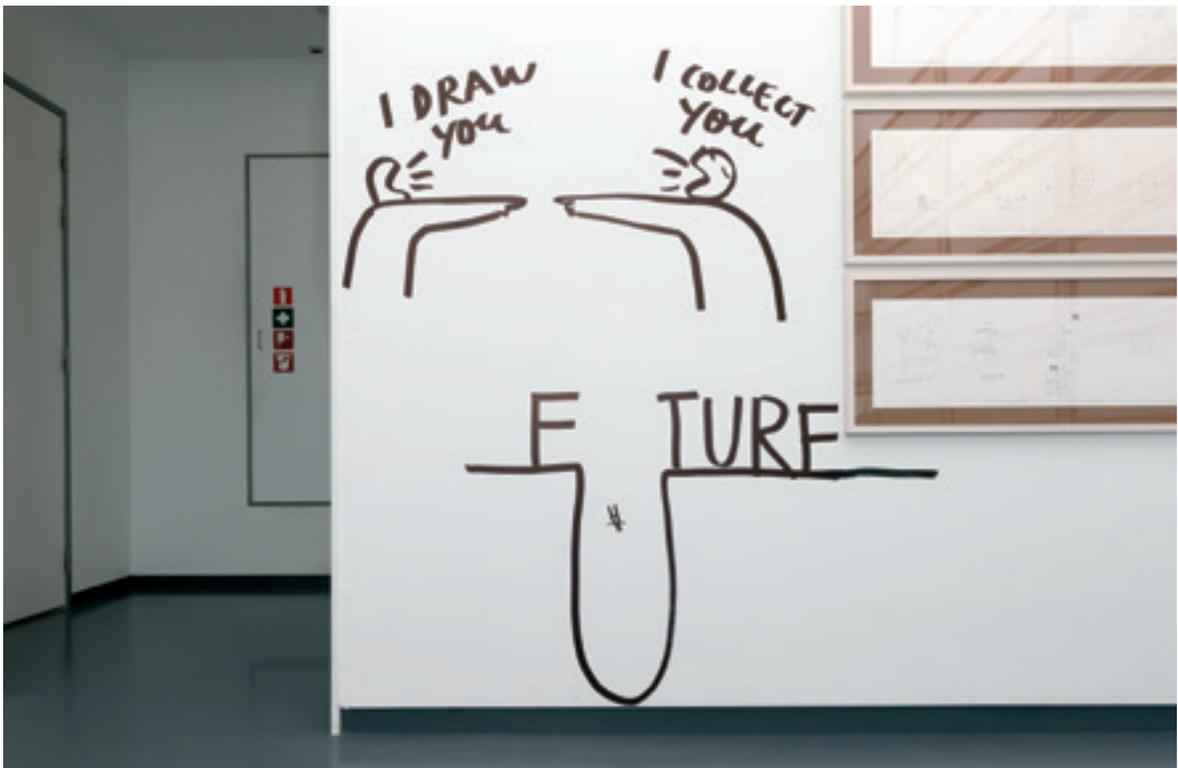
A decision was made to distinguish between a *research agenda* as a content-based framework and an *implementation plan*. The Research Agenda contains the most important and urgent research questions for the future of museums. In order to identify these questions, discussions were held with many museum sector representatives and other experts. In addition, five experts have written essays on relevant topics. These are presented in Part 2 and contain valuable insights and recommendations that have been used in the drafting of the Agenda.

The Research Agenda will serve as a foundation for the future implementation plan, which will provide guidance on *how*, *when* and *by whom* the necessary research can be organised, within the available national and international financial frameworks, and within existing and future research programmes. As mentioned above, the research tasks exceed the focus and possibilities of many individual museums and will require an interdisciplinary,

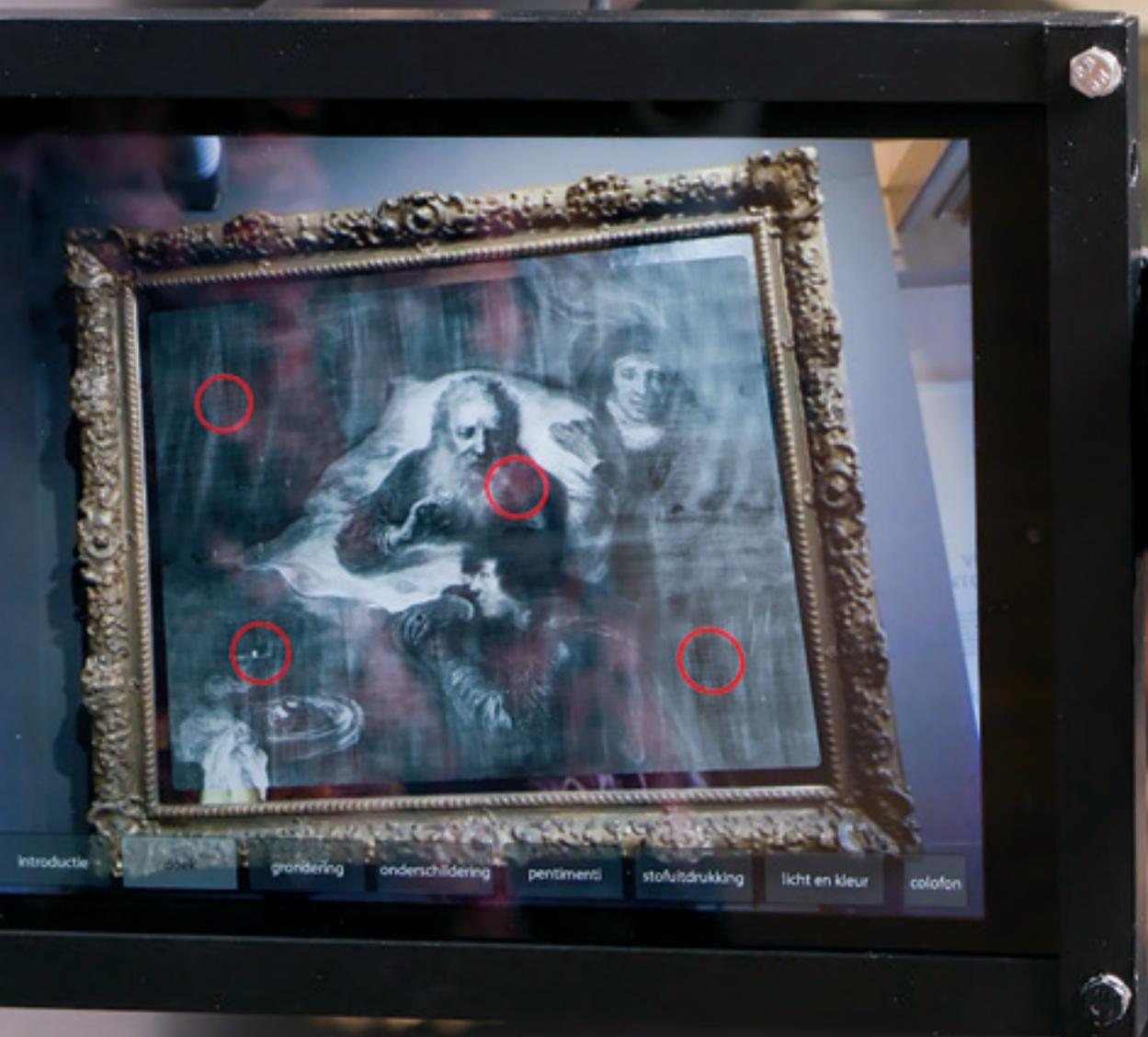
supra-institutional approach. This could take the form of discipline-based research (e.g. art historical, natural historical, ethnographic, historical) and/or interdisciplinary research. It could also involve materials research, restoration research, teaching and content research, research into learning strategies and outcomes, knowledge transfer using new media (e.g. augmented reality, embodied cognition) and expertise in the fields of communication, business administration and economics.

The Research Agenda is aimed at the museum sector as a whole, and for the longer term (i.e. a ten-year timeframe). The challenge is to broaden the scope of research and to strengthen collaboration between academic and museum researchers, and even more importantly perhaps, to translate new knowledge and insights into concepts and tools that can be applied in practice.

This application is especially important for the full breadth of the museum sector, which is largely made



Drawings by Dan Perjovschi, from the collection presentation 'Once upon a time ... The collection now', Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven 2013. Photo: Peter Cox





up of smaller institutions. The Netherlands has a dense network of small and medium-sized museums, which do more than fulfil an important social role for a wide range of target groups. Their links with their immediate environment, the local community, afford them a unique position in society. It is in the joint interests of the museum sector as a whole to develop the knowledge that will fulfil and build on this social role.

The Research Agenda is specifically designed to support the museum sector and to stimulate research for and by the sector. An agenda of this kind will make it easier to deploy resources and seek funding. The Agenda will also help museums to link up more effectively with research programmes of the NWO and other organisations at home and abroad that promote research.

Research and talent development

The Research Agenda is the first important step in this direction and will require the sustained commitment and efforts of all the parties involved. As announced in the Museum Policy Memorandum, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science will provide the initial impetus for implementing the Research Agenda by making research grants available. To encourage talent development in the area of museum research, a number of scholarships will be offered each year through NWO to museum staff wishing to research themes contained within this Agenda. Although these scholarships represent an investment in knowledge for the museum sector, they are above all an investment in talent and in people. More information on the scholarship criteria and conditions can be found on the NWO website. The following chapters will take a closer look at the social role of museums and the knowledge this demands.

4. At the heart of society

Society is subject to change, as are the needs of the public and the role of government. Museums also have to change in response to this. They are increasingly turning their gaze to the outside world, shifting their focus to their identity and profile, and to new ways of reaching out to their audience. They are entering into new alliances and partnerships in a host of different areas. Museums are becoming increasingly entrepreneurial, responding to market needs through their programmes and seeking new sources of income and new partnerships in order to fulfil their mission.

The central issue for the Research Agenda concerns the knowledge that museums need in order to safeguard and strengthen their social significance during this process of innovation. With a view to today and the future, the research tasks for the future must also take account of the full significance of museums.

Knowledge development and exchange occurs through national and international networks. Thanks to digitisation and social media, knowledge is accessible to anyone, at any time and at any place. At the same time, the technological revolution is making the boundaries between real and not real, between authentic and fake, more fluid.

There has been a marked change in audience behaviour. Public preferences are many and varied and cannot simply be linked to clearly-defined target groups. What many people want most of all is to experience something special; it matters less to them where this occurs, whether in a museum, at a festival or elsewhere. Others are primarily seeking more

in-depth knowledge. Visitors want to be engaged, to have a say in what they see and do.³

The traditional dividing lines between the different cultural disciplines are also becoming blurred. The emergence in many cities of 'houses of culture', which serve as a combined library, museum and archive, are a manifestation of this. Shifts are also occurring in the role of public authorities as the government gradually takes more of a back seat. Decentralisation is placing local authorities centre stage, also when it comes to cultural development. The role of Europe is of growing significance and occupies a prominent place in Agenda 2026.⁴

The policies of public authorities and institutions are placing growing emphasis on being able to measure performance. As fewer subsidies are available, other sources of funding – from funds, businesses and private parties – are becoming more important.

The role of museums

'Museums for tomorrow' describes museums as 'mirrors into the past and the future'.⁵ Through their authentic collections, they link together the past, present and future. There is a growing need for authenticity and meaning, especially in a society where

³ See also 'De Cultuurverkenning. Ontwikkelingen en trends in het culturele leven in Nederland', Council for Culture, The Hague, June 2014.

⁴ 'Agenda 2026, Toekomstverkenning voor de Nederlandse museumsector', Netherlands Museums Association, September 2010.

⁵ From 'Museums voor Morgen', Netherlands Museums Association and Association of State-funded Museums, 30 September 2012.



Museum Night Rotterdam. Photo: Bas Czerwinski

information is so abundantly available. Thus museums potentially occupy a growth market, but also one where they face growing competition from other forms of leisure activity, including commercial activity. The trick is to find their own unique place within that market. This will depend on the type of museum, its size, location and the opportunities afforded by its collection, etc. The future scenario outlined below sets out the possible aspects of tomorrow's museums.

Museums for tomorrow

Museums respond to the need for stories and images that give structure and meaning to the profusion of information facing people in their everyday lives. Museums can use their collections and networks to continually tell new stories and add new contexts. Museums are not neutral, value-free institutions. They draw from a vast pool of knowledge that exists in-house and elsewhere and which provides the 'frame'⁶ that enables them to tell meaningful

and inspirational stories. They employ specialist knowledge to offer answers to questions that matter to visitors. They are showcases for the latest scientific and scholarly insights.

In that sense museums are also showcases for research institutions that are not equipped to produce their own publications; they add social value to scholarly research. Depending on their profile and mission, they establish links with other cultural and social institutes and operate within a variety of social networks. Interaction with the public and the needs of the public are vital.

Tomorrow's museums are not conveyors of information. Rather, they invite people to share in thinking and doing, and in dialogue. For the public, a museum is not only a place of contemplation and 'serious pleasure', but also a platform and meeting place for people and ideas.

⁶ See Odding's essay p. 60 which uses the term 'frame' and refers to 'a subjectivity based on facts'.

5. New pathways

In the rapidly changing social landscape, museums are searching for new pathways to demonstrate their relevance, secure financial and other support, connect with partners and sponsors, and meet the needs of an exacting, highly diverse audience. Where do the challenges lie and what knowledge is needed to cope with the challenges of the future?

This chapter answers that question by describing the **three lines of research** that encompass the social significance of museums. Each research line is inspired by one or more of the public values from ‘More than worth it’ that were selected as guidelines for the Research Agenda. The research lines frequently overlap; they are not mutually exclusive. For each line of research, there is:

- a. a brief analysis of the current state of affairs
- b. a summary of the main ambitions, and the research questions that arise from this.

1. Museums generate knowledge and context

A museum’s unique collection represents a capital resource whose value cannot be overestimated, not only in a cultural sense, but also as a source of knowledge in today’s information society. It regularly emerged during discussions in the run-up to the Research Agenda that the connection between the collection and the public must be paramount. How can the significance of collections be enhanced for the public? What are the ways to strengthen citizen involvement in heritage?

Researching the collection

Museums have traditionally carried out research to gather relevant knowledge and facts about the collection – about material aspects of collections, about conservation and restoration. Knowledge of these material aspects continues to be hugely important. ‘So long as authenticity is one of our unique selling points, we should want to know as much as we can about the authentic object.’⁷ Research into the hist-

⁷ Comment from a participant in the session on collection value, part of the workshop on the research agenda organised by the Cultural Heritage Agency on 24 April 2014.

1. Museums generate knowledge and context	Collection value Educational value
2. Museums offer emotion and inspiration	Experience value
3. Museums enrich society	Connecting value Economic value

ory of collections, collection-building and valuation is also very important for building, exchanging and selecting collections in the future. Further exploration is needed of the exciting opportunities this research offers for boosting citizen involvement in cultural heritage. Restorations under the public eye, for example, or presentations on research into material aspects of paintings have proven to be a major public drawcard, helping to promote public support for museum collections and activities.

Knowledge resource

With their collections as a constant resource in an ever-changing society, museums are always looking for new meanings of objects in relation to current social events. In this continuous search for existing and potential meanings, they make connections between collections and knowledge 'inside' and 'outside' the museum.

Museums are often described as 'treasure troves'. The more dynamic terms 'workshop' and 'tool box' also cropped up regularly in discussions on the research agenda.⁸ This ties in with the notion that it is not so much factual knowledge that matters in the 21st century, but being able to use knowledge in a range of contexts. Education, the classical function of museums, then becomes 'creating meaning and knowledge', with maximum scope for input from the user. In this way of thinking, the museum serves as a contemporary learning environment, which can also be deployed for educational purposes. This entails allowing room for interaction and participatory learning, dialogue and reflection, with less emphasis on the transfer of information and factual knowledge.⁹ Thus the educational value lies less in communicating 'ready-made' concepts, and more in shared experience and reflection, and in demonstrating that there is more than one perspective on reality.

This approach aligns closely with changes occurring in education itself. In order to further enhance the quality of museum education, there is a need for knowledge development about learning and teaching in muse-

ums, about the tools and learning outcomes that they generate, as highlighted in Carla van Boxtel's essay.

Digitisation

Something of great significance for *all* museum roles is the ongoing process of digitisation. Digitisation obliges us to place museums, as physical institutions with authentic collections, in a whole new perspective. Collections are being digitised at a rapid pace. Via Google, visitors can stroll through a virtual museum and even create their own exhibition. This enables museums to make new presentations and add new meanings across institutional boundaries (see, for example, the website on Delft pottery at the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, or on Asian ceramics, a collaborative project involving four museums that have linked their own collections to collections elsewhere and added information for the user). Digital technology allows us to study real objects in a level of detail that was not previously possible, while social media permits direct contact with the public and reaching out to new audiences.

In the digital domain, the distinction between managers and users of knowledge is becoming blurred. Users can add knowledge themselves, or be invited to do so (see www.velehanden.nl).¹⁰ This can have major benefits for museums: the public's knowledge enriches and adds colour to knowledge about the collection. It offers opportunities for the crowd-sourcing of knowledge and for community curating of museum presentations, which volunteers find both enjoyable and meaningful. Digitisation also opens up new possibilities for supplying content for educational and commercial applications.

Digitisation and making collections accessible necessitates the ongoing standardisation of systems. Digitisation and technological advances give rise to new issues relating to copyright, ownership, authenticity, interactivity and the preservation of born-digital collections. This will require both a generic vision and specific solutions that focus on individual museums. With an eye to the future, this means ensuring

⁸ See, for example, Esche's essay, p. 40

⁹ See, for example, Van Boxtel's essay, p. 50

¹⁰ The public's contribution to the Amsterdam City Archives via velehanden.nl is estimated as the equivalent of 16 FTEs over a 9-month period.



the connectivity of information systems and organisations inside and outside the museum sector in an international context, as recommended by Julia Noordegraaf in her essay."

Ambition and research

1. *The first ambition is to boost the significance of museums as knowledge and learning environments and as places where stories are told.*

This means finding answers to the following questions:

- How can we learn more about the ageing processes of material and born-digital objects and collections, about conservation and restoration, and the history of collection-building?
- How can the quality of museums' contribution

to education be enhanced by increasing in-house knowledge about learning and learning outcomes? At present, there is only limited knowledge about how different types of collections can be used within the school curriculum.

- What is the role of museums as a knowledge resource given the increasingly informal nature of heritage knowledge? Among other things, this means finding out more about visitor reception and the returns on museum attendance. Related to this, more needs to be known about the nature, quality, reliability and benefits of the knowledge contributed by 'amateur experts' and the extent to which supervision of these individuals is possible or desirable.
- How can museums help to make scholarly research accessible?

" See Noordegraaf's essay, p. 30.



The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam makes art accessible for people with Alzheimer's (and other forms of dementia) and their carers. Photo: Tomek Dersu Aaron

- Under what conditions can research be strengthened by public-private partnerships and commercial application of research results?

2. Museums offer emotion and inspiration

Today's public have become 'cultural omnivores' who do not readily commit to one particular thing. On top of that, they want 'immersion, intense experiences, atmosphere and excitement'.¹² Increasingly therefore, museums are offering visitors a total package of encounters and experiences. Some visitors will opt primarily for pleasure, entertainment and relaxation, alone or with family or friends, combined with a visit to the museum cafe or shop. For others,

museums provide a quiet place and an opportunity for reflection. Museums are also places of memory where people are encouraged to think about identity, both individual and collective. Experience value is first and foremost about the power of museums to touch and inspire people.

Experience and authenticity

Visitors in search of experience are concerned about more than the museum's collection. The building and atmosphere, and how they are treated as visitors are just as important. Social context also plays a role: if they are accompanied by friends, their visit has a different impact than if they come as part of a school group, alone or with family.

¹² From the Council for Culture's 'Cultuurverkenning' (Culture Survey); see note 1.

The authenticity of their collections is a characteristic feature of museums. It is what sets them apart from other institutions in a changing, increasingly virtual world. Authenticity is not just about whether the items on display are ‘real or original’; rather, it is largely a matter of construction (by the museum) and perception (by the visitor). Studies show that museums are viewed as highly reliable. It is not yet clear to what extent the authenticity of objects or the selection of certain objects plays a role in the public’s appreciation.

Authenticity is evolving, partly in response to rapidly changing technology, and in future the distinction between real and virtual, original and reproduction, will become even less obvious. Thanks to digital technologies such as 3D, it is possible to make life-like copies of objects. Recent years have seen popular exhibitions involving merely reproductions of the work of Rembrandt, Vincent van Gogh or historical objects, such as ‘Tutankhamun, the Exhibition’ in Amsterdam Expo.¹³

The active visitor

‘In a museum, not only can you see how a Roman soldier was attired, you can also experience the weight of his helmet.’¹⁴ Learning is not just a cognitive process; it goes hand in hand with physical and sensory experiences and emotions. According to this view of learning, known as embodied cognition, knowledge is anchored in physical action, emotions and perception. Active involvement on the part of the visitor acts as a powerful stimulus to experience. It seems that new technologies and the use of multimedia will create almost unlimited new opportunities for experiences in the future. The question is how museums can encourage visitors to not only consume, but to take an active role and in this way create their own experiences.

Ambition and research

2. The second ambition is to enhance the experience value for visitors and thereby to reinforce the museum’s impact.

This involves finding answers to the following questions:

- How can museums consciously deploy an experience as a tool for generating meaning, inspiration and powerful learning lessons?
- When do these ‘transformative’ experiences occur and what causes them? More knowledge and understanding is required about the different types of experience-based interventions and methods (e.g. narrativity, role playing, living history, the use of new media) that can be used in museums for different categories of visitors. Useful here are the many studies that have looked more generally at experiences.
- What is the significance and impact of authenticity as a unique value for the museum experience in a society that is increasingly dominated by virtual reality? How can this be harnessed to strengthen the embedding of museums in society?
- What shapes and guides the experience of individual visitors and how can museums personalise the museum experience?

3. Museums enrich society

Museums make a significant contribution to society, in both a material and immaterial sense. They forge connections – between generations, places, networks, stories, people and organisations – as well as making a substantial contribution to the local and national economy.

Connecting

Museums are places where people and ideas come together. They are attractive settings where people like to spend time and be seen, with the shop and cafe as valuable additions to the museum’s offerings. Museums are a locus of discussion, driving the debate about current social issues and changes.¹⁵ Increasingly, museums form part of the public space and are physically organised so as to be welcoming and accessible.

¹³ The poster for another major crowd-puller, ‘Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition’, composed largely of copies, expressly states that authentic objects are on view.

¹⁴ Boxtel’s essay, p. 50.

¹⁵ In his essay, Esche argues (p. 40) that the idea of public edification should be abandoned, given that the hierarchical society has come to an end. He also states, however, that art museums can be a positive force in developing a democratic society.

More and more, museums are demonstrating their social responsibility by actively seeking links with other sectors such as care, welfare and sport (e.g. through special programmes for the elderly in nursing and care homes). City museums are forging connections with particular population groups and neighbourhoods, thereby contributing to social cohesion and participation.

By binding volunteers, museum friends and corporate friends to them, museums consolidate their roots in society. Their capacity to engage with these groups has been boosted enormously through social media like Twitter and Facebook.

Enriching

By attracting highly-educated creatives and knowledge workers, museums add to a city's positive image and appeal, and help to create an attractive business climate.¹⁶ Museums and historical heritage attract visitors and tourists from home and abroad. They make the city a more attractive destination and encourage people to stay for longer, which benefits the local economy. By investing in spectacular new museum buildings (like the ones in Zwolle, Leeuwarden or Den Bosch), a city makes a significant investment in itself. Museums market themselves and their programmes in keeping with the identity of their city and region, for example, as a developing knowledge city, or a city of innovative industry and design. Some museums explicitly present themselves as a powerhouse of knowledge and creativity within their city and region, and they link their collections to the business community, creative industry and training programmes. They function as cultural programmers or as focal points within their environment. Increasingly, cultural institutions are collaborating within urban nodes.¹⁷ Museums also contribute to national image and

identity.¹⁸ Through their power to attract national and international tourists, they represent a significant economic value.

Ambition and research

3. The third ambition is for museums to build further on their added value for society and to make this publicly visible. The choices that museums make here will vary enormously, both in focus and scope. What they have in common is their call for new networks and partnerships and their preparedness to step outside established frameworks and boundaries.

This ambition requires answers to the following questions:

- How can the social role of museums and the added economic value and associated performance be made visible and evaluated?
- What do digitisation, new partnerships and changes to the costing structure of museums (less subsidy, more private funding) mean for museum business and revenue models?
- How can the socioeconomic contribution to the city and region be documented and monitored?
- How can new audience groups be reached and how can they build up an enduring relationship with the museum and collection?
- How can museums enhance the quality of physical and mental health? How can they expand and strengthen the social significance of the collection and the museum organisation?

¹⁶ See Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*; and how it is transforming work, leisure, community, and everyday life (2002), and the various publications by Gerard Marlet, including *Atlas voor Gemeenten 2007*, 'De betekenis van cultuur voor de stad'.

¹⁷ In its publication 'Cultuurverkenning', the Council for Culture foresees increased collaboration between the various platforms, museums and societies, as well as the sharing of equipment and services.

¹⁸ It is no surprise to see museums featuring prominently at key moments, such as the Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague in March 2014.

6. The future

The Research Agenda for the Museum Sector calls for a new partnership between the museum sector and scholarship. The research lines indicated in the Agenda require a reorganisation of the sector's relationship with universities and researchers. This is because the research task for museums of the future, as outlined in the Research Agenda, calls for a collective approach by museums and other organisations in the research and science sector. This will benefit research and will assist with participation in existing and future research programmes at the national and international level.

The Research Agenda has laid the foundation for an implementation agenda in the future. The implementation agenda will provide guidance on how, when and by whom the necessary research can be organised, within the available national and international financial frameworks, and within existing and future research programmes. As with the Research Agenda, the implementation agenda needs to be developed together with the museum sector and the relevant research-sector institutions. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science will take the initiative for coming up with a joint plan of action.

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Part 2

Essays

Introduction

To maintain and consolidate their social function, Dutch museums will work more closely with each other and with researchers and research institutions in the years ahead. They will pursue and secure an active role in framing the research questions that will provide the necessary data and insights to support the preservation and presentation of collections, and in particular the significance of museums as unique and indispensable players in a vibrant society and economy.

With the publication of 'Meer dan waard' [More than worth it] in 2011, the Netherlands Museums Association communicated a clear position on the social significance of museums both now and in the future. However as much as a museum might serve as a guardian of heritage, identity and culture, it is more than its collection. Museums have their own distinct educational function in today's information society, where knowledge and access to knowledge help determine success and wellbeing. Museums have always had the capacity to connect people with one another and in our dynamic, globalising and individualising society, the need to do so is greater than ever before. The significance of experiences for the development of individuals and societies remains a largely unexplored territory, but it is one where museums stand to gain a good deal and to which they can make a valuable contribution. Museums occupy their own niche in the creative industry and are a key factor in creating an attractive working and living environment for the creative class, the new economic drivers of the knowledge society. Over and above the value represented by their collection, museums have an educational, connecting, eco-

nomical and experience value. Therein lies their major social significance.

New knowledge is required if museums are not only to maintain their position in the future but also to strengthen their contribution to society. This knowledge encompasses all aspects of their social role. We need to find out what trends will be relevant for the functioning of museums, to what extent museums are equipped to respond to these trends, what knowledge is needed to support the significance of museums in the short and medium term, and how to apply this new knowledge broadly and effectively.

Five engaging, high-profile thinkers from museums and academia have each written an essay contextualising the broad social significance and function of museums. They have taken as their starting point one of the five values in 'More than worth it' and used it to develop a vision on the place of museums in society and the social challenges facing museums in the near future.

The essays served as a background and basis for the discussion held on 24 April 2014, in which a wide range of representatives from the museum and university sectors talked about the research questions that can generate knowledge that will strengthen and broaden the social function of museums.

Collect and Connect

collection value | Julia Noordegraaf





Collection value in a digital age

In a recent episode of the current affairs programme *Tegenlicht*, viewers were transported into the artificial reality of digital copies and reconstructions ('Hoe echt is echt'/How real is real, VPRO, Nederland 2, 9 March 2014). The makers of the programme paid a visit to the Taiwanese company Next Media, which is highly successful at making virtual reconstructions of news events where no camera images are available. Using a database of some 30,000 virtual character models of real-life people, together with Hollywood techniques for manipulating facial expressions, the company's 500 staff produce some 30 minutes of film per day, among others for the American broadcaster NBC. The programme also showed the work of American journalist Nonny de la Peña. By placing the audience in a virtual reconstruction of Guantanamo Bay prison, to which journalists did not have access, she immersed the viewer in an audiovisual reality that they could not otherwise experience.

The *Tegenlicht* episode sketched a near future in which we can no longer distinguish between real and not real, between fact and fiction. This is no great disaster according to philosopher, artist and scientist Koert van Mensvoort, who was interviewed for the documentary. He feels we should abandon the Western practice of placing such a high value on the authenticity of the original. He believes we overrate the sharp distinction between real and not real. In reality, he says, it is often impossible to draw a clear boundary between original and reproduction, and Asian societies are much better than Western societies at recognising and utilising the value of simulations and copies. For journalists, this is a horrifying prospect: if we cannot even ascertain whether the filmed reality we see on television is real, then nothing less than truth itself is at stake.

In its vision for the future, the Netherlands Museums Association also presents a scenario in which new digital media supplants the old analogue media, with potentially major consequences for the accessibility, experience and appreciation of museum

collections (Nederlandse Museumvereniging: 12).

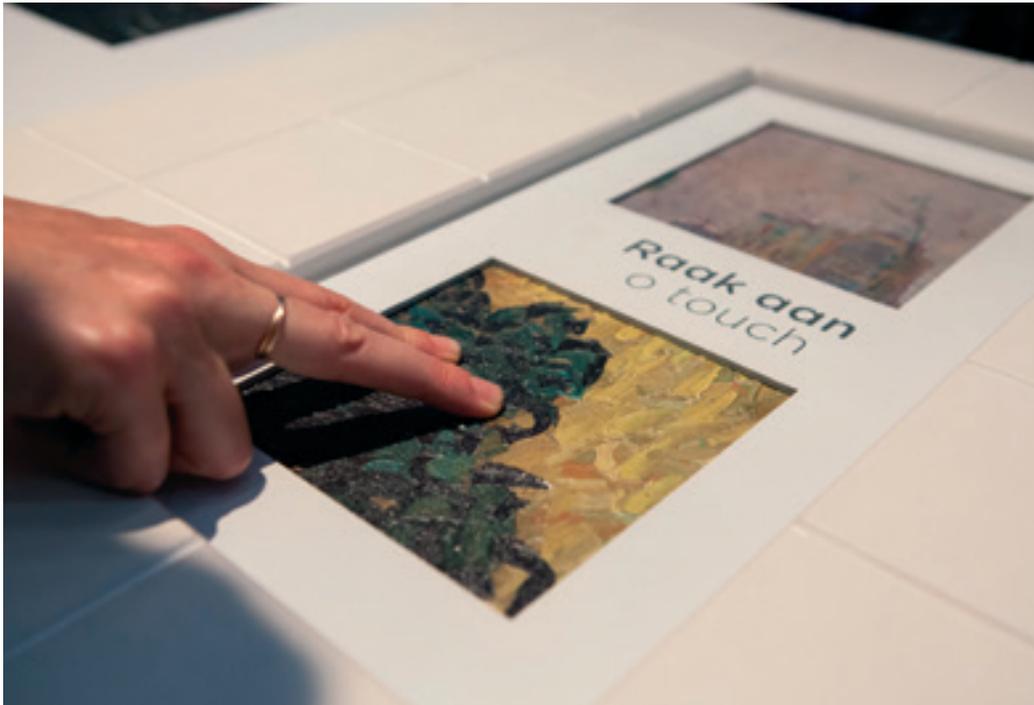
The rapid development of digital technology is one of the trends facing museums in the next ten years, together with an ageing population, a government that is pulling back, the growth of international cultural tourism and a changing knowledge landscape. This essay will address some of these trends. What social and technological changes can we expect? How will they influence the collection value of museums? What knowledge is needed to ensure that museums can align their collection value accordingly, and how should we achieve the production and application of that knowledge?

Digital and analogue

The episode of *Tegenlicht* also featured an event surrounding Vermeer's painting *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, organised by Dutch entrepreneurs in a Taipei shopping centre. This involved showing digital scans of the original, aided by an actress and a life-sized Miffy, both of whom made their entry dressed in a girl-with-the-pearl outfit and accompanied by the announcement 'here we see past and present coming together'. The suggestion is clear: this is a future scenario in which you can no longer distinguish a digital copy of a painting from the original. This scenario stirs our deep-rooted fear about a world awash with kitsch, in which authentic originals are displaced by copies and reproductions.

This fear is nothing new: it goes hand in hand with the advent of any new technology, which is often much less 'new' than we suppose. While it is true that every media technology renders reality in its own way and, because of the specific nature of the medium, also helps to shape it (Gitelman 2007), it is not the case that every new technology signifies a break with its predecessors. The new media are different, but they also take on aspects of the old (Bolter and Grusin 2000).

Rather than posing a threat, the new, virtual representations are a supplement to existing, analogue collections and can help to boost their visibility and reach. For example, digital scans can acquaint a country like Taiwan, where the original has never been exhibited, with Vermeer's painting. And the digital reproductions of Vincent van Gogh's paintings in the Google Art Project allow us to home



3D prints of details of paintings by Vincent van Gogh in the 'Van Gogh at work' exhibition (Van Gogh Museum). Photo: Lara E. Tompa

in on details, something we can only approximate in a museum by examining the painting closely with a magnifying glass, which of course is not allowed for security reasons.

This is not to say that we will soon stop wanting to go to the Van Gogh Museum to look at his paintings – people will always feel a need for contact with the original, physical work. When we stand before the original, we are closest to the artist: his hands held the brush whose strokes we still see on the canvas. The new 3D prints that the Van Gogh Museum developed together with Fuji allow us to feel that texture ourselves for the first time, bringing us into even closer contact with the originals. In that sense, digital reproductions will boost interest in original heritage, rather than reduce it. That is also what exhibition curator Joy Lai said in Taipei. In the *Tegenlicht* episode she commented that, while digital scans increase an artwork's accessibility, they can never replace the spark and emotional power of the original.

In short, in a highly digitised future, museums can continue to exploit the aura that surrounds originals. This will mean developing more knowledge about

the respective strengths of analogue and digital collections and how they can exert a positive influence on one another. Experiments in which new media technologies are deployed in exhibition rooms and then evaluated through audience research should point to the right mix of digital reproductions and analogue originals (see, for example, De Vet and Van Kregten 2014).

Research into audience engagement with virtual collections online (quantitative and qualitative analyses of user statistics and ethnographic studies of concrete cases of use) should reveal an effective strategy for connecting the 'virtual aura' of the collection elements with the original (Gorgels 2013). Historical and theoretical media research into the nature and role of digital technology can help us identify the possibilities, impact and limitations of the new media. It goes without saying that museums should work closely together with researchers and students at universities and universities of applied sciences, as well as with developers of new media technology.

Born-digital – redefining authenticity

Whereas digital reproductions are primarily a supplement to existing analogue collections and presentations, born-digital objects confront the museum sector with more fundamental questions about authenticity. This is very evident in today's artistic practice, which no longer invariably produces a concrete, collectible and exhibitable end product. Curators at Tate Britain, for example, are exploring ways to preserve interactive artworks that are still in development, such as the website of the fictitious but highly realistic Lima Museum of Contemporary Art, a work by the Peruvian artist Sandra Gamarra (<http://li-mac.org>). Similarly, how should you present works made for the computer screen, such as *My%Desktop* (2002) by the Dutch artist duo JODI, in a museum space designed for objects of a different kind?

It is not always possible to preserve artworks of this kind in their original functionality and form. This means having to accept mutability if you want to ensure that the work is accessible in the future. This has far-reaching consequences for a conservation practice that is still strongly geared to the material authenticity of an art work, to preserving the original look and feel. It calls for a new way of defining authenticity in terms that are not purely material, by analogy with the performing arts, for instance (Laurenson 2006). Herein lies an exciting challenge for scientific and scholarly research, whereby a technological understanding of the nature and 'behaviour' of complex, interactive works of this kind is combined with theoretical reflection on authenticity, and collection and conservation practices, in order to develop new models for conserving and restoring our future heritage (see Noordegraaf et al. 2013).

The specific nature of born-digital objects – rapid technological obsolescence, interactivity, technical complexity, management and storage costs – also has implications for the design of the heritage landscape. The emergence of hybrid objects such as interactive publications, multimedia art or a second screen for television programmes makes the traditional role division (where X belongs in an archive, Y in a museum, and Z in a library) problematical.

In a technological sense, digital publications, archival records, museum objects and media produc-

‘Whereas digital reproductions are primarily a supplement to existing analogue collections and presentations, born-digital objects confront the museum sector with more fundamental questions about authenticity’

tions are all very similar and the complexity and high costs of preservation make collaboration on generic solutions inevitable. This calls for a reconsideration of the institutional divvying-up of the heritage landscape, also because current and future 'digital natives' are not concerned with these historical divisions. As the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science states in its 'Werkplan Infrastructuur Digitaal Erfgoed [Work Plan for Digital Heritage Infrastructure]' (2013: 1):

Users of digital heritage no longer care about the boundaries between sectoral domains. And as knowledge about heritage is increasingly informalised, collection management institutions are unable to invoke their authority quite so easily. In the digital environment you have to earn your connections through the way in which you share information and enhance it (through context, connections and good presentation).

This means that collaboration in a large Digital Collection Netherlands is inevitable: in ten years' time there will be a national infrastructure for digital heritage (see Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2013). The big question here is how digital sustainability can be achieved through customised solutions (case-by-case solutions demanded by high-quality cultural objects such as digital art), alongside bulk, generic solutions for the archiving and conservation of digital books and newspapers, websites and multimedia television programmes. Here too, collaboration between national coalitions for digital sustainability (National Coalition for Digital Sustainability/NCDD and Cultural Coalition for Digital Sustainability/CCDD)

and research institutions and private partners is the obvious way forward.

Digital natives – from consumers to participants

Besides museums, research institutions and private partners, there is a fourth group poised to become more closely involved in the production, management and use of museum collections – the public. In ten years' time, a range of user groups will be working actively on all core tasks of museums. They will add their voice to selection decisions, assist with identification and description, observe restoration projects and help with the conservation of complex, multimedia objects such as net art, interactive websites and second screens (e.g. by cleansing underlying databases). They will also be active users of digitised and born-digital collections and will help enrich these collections by supplying contextual data, or even adding their own objects to the collection.

This change reflects a significant demographic trend: a rapidly ageing population. A growing number of pensioners seeking new challenges will be eager to take on museum tasks in order to deepen and extend their knowledge. This is useful for museums since this group has time at their disposal, as well as stories to tell about parts of the collection, stories that would otherwise soon be lost: 'the change from "memory to history" is embodied in this generation' (Nederlandse Museumvereniging 2010: 5). Successful examples include the 'Tags en uitleg' [Tags and Explanation] project to describe the Maria Austria Institute's photo collection the 'Glashelder!' [Crystal Clear] project to index glass slides for the Naturalis Biodiversity Center (both on the Vele Handen [Many Hands] crowdsourcing platform, www.velehanden.nl), and Operation War Diary of the National Archives (UK), in which 'citizen historians' help to classify and describe unit war diaries from the First World War.

These projects involve more than committed volunteers. Effective crowdsourcing is about utilising the expertise of amateurs, with the museum showing true engagement, ensuring something is done with the invested time and knowledge, and signalling which aspect of the museum's core process will benefit (Centre for the Future of Museums 2012: 6). For a long time there was scepticism about the quality of input from these amateur experts (Fleurbaey and Eveleigh 2012). However, crowdsourcing has since

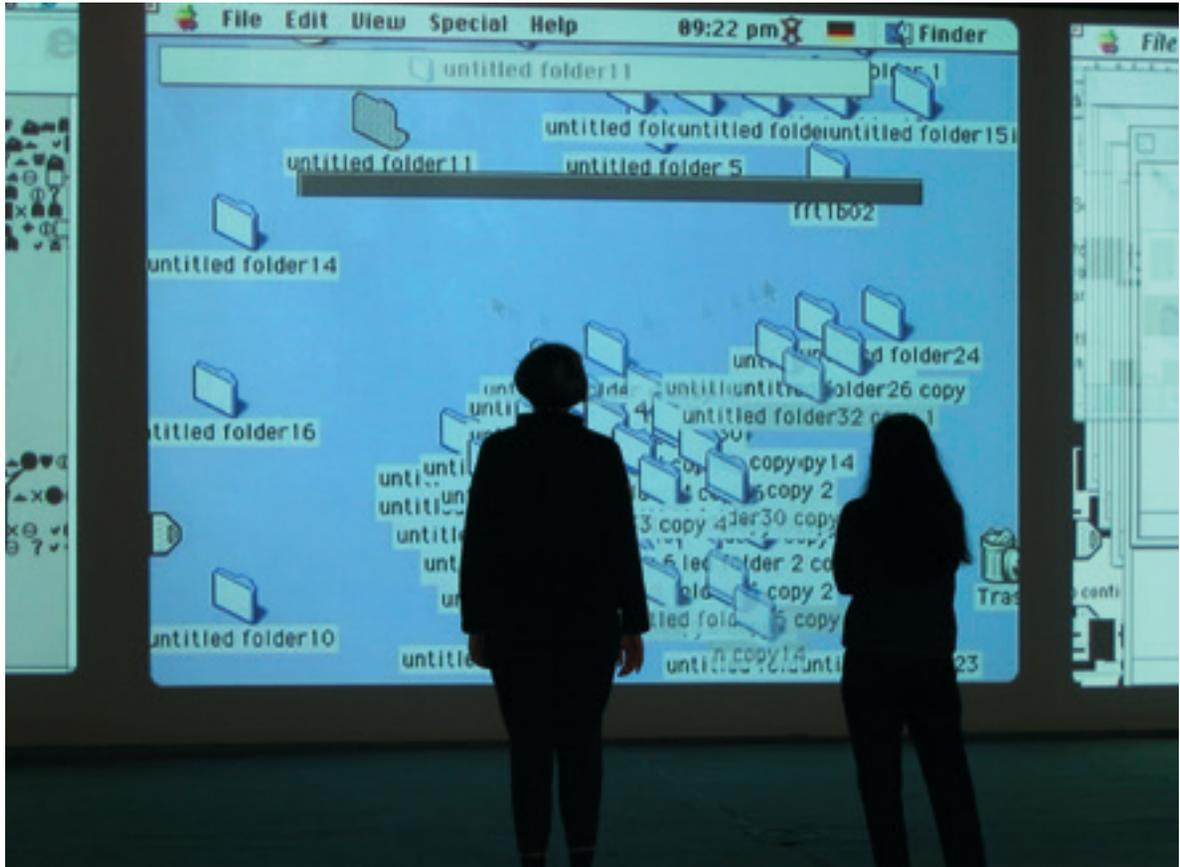
become a permanent fixture and volunteer input has proven to truly supplement – and frequently match the quality of – input from professionals (Noordegraaf 2011; Aroyo and Welty 2013). Thanks to joint research by heritage institutions, humanities scholars and IT specialists, we will have a clearer idea ten years from now of the kind of knowledge generated by the efforts of amateur experts. On the other hand, new projects will also entail greater direction of users in order to bring amateurs' expertise and skills more in line with professional standards.

Crowdsourcing and community curating represent a challenge for the traditional role of museum authority: you have to want to share your collections and knowledge and take the results seriously (Centre for the Future of Museums 2012: 7). This is not to say that there is no place for experts any more. On the contrary, the online domain has created a greater need for content curation (Rosenbaum 2011). This presents an opportunity for museums, as they can distinguish themselves in the online domain through their curatorial expertise, by offering reliable information about interesting and relevant remains from the past. However, this is at odds with the increasingly blurred institutional boundaries. Digital users tend to be interested in a specific topic – they are not interested in the particular 'door' they enter to find their information. It therefore makes more sense to focus on a collection or theme than to set up an institutional portal.

Or as Gitta Luijten, then director of the Mondriaan Stichting, put it in 2011: 'The public value of museums increases if the collection, rather than the museum itself, is the point of departure. The collection allows us to provide a perspective on our times. We can also shed light on social relationships by placing them in a context. That is what justifies the existence of museums in our society' (DGP Groep on behalf of Netherlands Museum Association/NMV: 72). The question, however, is how museums can continue to make the connection with the analogue collections within their walls, thereby safeguarding the value contained in experiencing the original.

The changing knowledge landscape – the digital humanities

Focusing on collections and their associated themes is also important for responding to changes in the knowledge landscape. Last year, when the news



'My%Desktop', JODI, 2002

magazine *De Groene Amsterdammer* asked a selection of Dutch researchers and scholars in the humanities – traditionally the academic discipline with closest links to the museum sector – about developments in their field, it found that a number of quiet revolutions are taking place ('Ten revolutions in the humanities', 30 October 2013). The old picture of individuals engaged in the solitary study of a limited corpus is gradually making way for team research into large digital datasets and using new, digital research methods. More and more, researchers are working beyond the boundaries of their own discipline, both within the humanities and outside it, in collaboration with sociologists, cognitive scientists and IT specialists.

Now that the heritage sector has taken the lead in large-scale digitisation of collections, the humanities have begun to mine this treasure trove of data. Ten years from now the digital humanities

will be a fact. Most researchers will be familiar with digital data and methods, and will use them to generate new knowledge (see the 'Digital Humanities: Hype or revolution?' lecture series, organised by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research; www.knaw.nl/nl/actueel/agenda/digital-humanities-hype-of-revolutie).

Like amateur users, researchers are also chiefly interested in specific subjects or themes, which involves bringing together different collections and searching them simultaneously. An early example of this kind of knowledge production is the 'Culture in Context' project, carried out in 2007 and 2008 by the Reinwardt Academy in partnership with several heritage partners and knowledge institutions. This project brought together data on theatre performances and film screenings from the information systems of various institutions into a virtual collection of 'pub-

lic entertainments' (Van Asseldonk et al. 2009).

The project showed that, besides technical problems (connectivity between datasets), there are also cultural challenges, such as the differences between museums (where curators carry out research) and archives (where archivists make inventories and descriptions, but do not themselves enrich the collections by adding contextual data). The challenge for the future will be to boost connectivity (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap 2013: 1). This will involve *information* connectivity (linking information from many sources by means of a technical infrastructure based on information principles, standards, APIs and metadata) and *organisational* connectivity (building networks across institutional, domain and national state boundaries).

Public-private partnerships

A final significant trend is that of a retreating government. In the future, even more public tasks will be left to market forces than is currently the case. For museums, this means having to further intensify their collaboration with private-sector partners. In addition to social value, museum collections also represent economic value, both in analogue (tourism) and digital form (content for applications aimed at entertainment and education). An advantage of exploiting this economic value is that audience reach can be increased through the development of applications that museums would not be able to pay for by themselves. A disadvantage of capitalising on collections is that the emphasis falls primarily on themes and parts of the collection that are already visible and popular, at the expense of less 'marketable' collections and core tasks.

In the online domain, collaboration with major market players such as Google, Facebook and Microsoft can also raise privacy issues, whereby access to online museum collections is 'paid for' – unnoticed – by user data (Van Dijck 2013). Museums enjoy a good deal of trust and they must continue to honour that trust by maintaining high standards of transparency and responsibility. If public-private partnerships are to be meaningfully deployed, it is important to develop new knowledge about the prerequisites for these standards.

Clearly, in order to produce this knowledge, museums must work together closely with researchers and

students from universities and universities of applied science, as well as with developers of new media technologies. Ideally, consortiums should be created for each knowledge domain (analogue-digital collections, preservation and presentation of born-digital collections, new forms of public participation, use of collections in research) involving museums both large and small, researchers from universities and/or universities of applied science, and private partners. The objectives, desired outcomes, interim results and the programme of testing, adjusting and implementing research outcomes need to be established clearly in advance.¹ Relevant expertise can be tracked via [Narcis](#), Google and knowledge institution websites, professional associations such as the Netherlands Museum Association, and [CLICK-NL](#), the Dutch Creative Industries' knowledge and innovation network. This collaboration can be scaled up to European and supra-European levels by tapping into the international networks of museums, knowledge institutions and companies.

Smaller projects in which the objectives of the different parties are well-coordinated often need little in the way of additional funding, with the research institute supplying the knowledge and researchers, the museums providing the collections, test environments and dissemination and valorisation opportunities, and the private partners providing the technological expertise and prototypes. Large projects can look for their funding to private funds and research and innovation grants from the Creative Industries top sector (especially via [CLICK-NL Cultural Heritage](#)) and, at the European level, to grants from the new [Horizon 2020](#) framework programme.

Conferences and other meetings of the Netherlands Museums Association are an important platform for promoting the application of the knowledge acquired in this way. A condition is that these meetings should be cross-sectoral so that collection managers, presenters, educators and marketing staff can together discuss and implement knowledge about collection value. For projects with a digital component, the DEN Foundation (Dutch knowledge centre for digital heritage) can function as a platform for disseminating this knowledge. Best practices can be documented, viewed and observed via the [project bank](#). This type of network also exists at the international level, such as the International

‘The visibility and social relevance of a museum’s core tasks, and public engagement with them, will be enhanced if committed volunteers are routinely included in the processes of selection and acquisition, classification and description, conservation and restoration, exhibiting and informing’

Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA), and the Presto Centre for audiovisual collections. These networks have already provided experience in the production and application of new knowledge, within projects such as NeCCAR (which brings together academics, museums, art dealers and restoration workshops for research into the conservation of contemporary art) and EU Screen (in which television researchers and archives work together to contextualise and provide online access to European television heritage).

Finally, there are great opportunities for providing lifelong learning in partnership with educational institutions, as well as for strengthening alliances with primary and secondary education, thereby passing on the value of museum collections to the new generation of digital natives. Obvious examples are to work with departments of education and primary teacher training at higher professional education institutes and universities on developing new knowledge about how cultural heritage can be used effectively in primary schools, and on applications for putting this knowledge into practice. Partnerships with the creative/media industries are another way of using museum collections to promote historical awareness – witness the success of TV documentary series like *De Gouden Eeuw* (The Golden Age, 2012-2013) and *De slavernij* (Slavery, 2013). Moreover, the potential of the myriad interested volunteers still remains largely untapped.

Herein lies a golden opportunity to strengthen the connecting value of museums and their collections

and to further boost their social relevance. Generic platforms like *Many Hands* or special thematic projects make it fairly easy to harness large numbers of volunteers for core museum tasks. The visibility and social relevance of a museum’s core tasks, and public engagement with them, will be enhanced if committed volunteers are routinely included in the processes of selection and acquisition, classification and description, conservation and restoration, exhibiting and informing. In this ‘museum as workshop’ approach, where volunteers are active participants rather than mere paying visitors, the collection value of museums will secure the sustainable future it deserves.

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1 A small-scale example of such a partnership is the *Modeling Crowdsourcing for Cultural Heritage* project, a collaboration between the University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam City Archives, Picturae and an advisor from University College London, carried out in 2013-2014 with financial support from the University of Amsterdam's Centre for Digital Humanities and Creative Industries Research Centre Amsterdam. A description of the project can be found at: <http://dare.uva.nl/record/1/416883>.

Art museums in a hybrid society

connecting value | Charles Esche

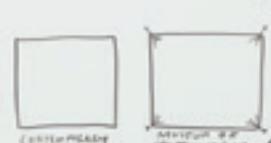


Drawings by Dan Perjovschi for the foyer of the Van Abbemuseum, 2006. Photo: Peter Cox



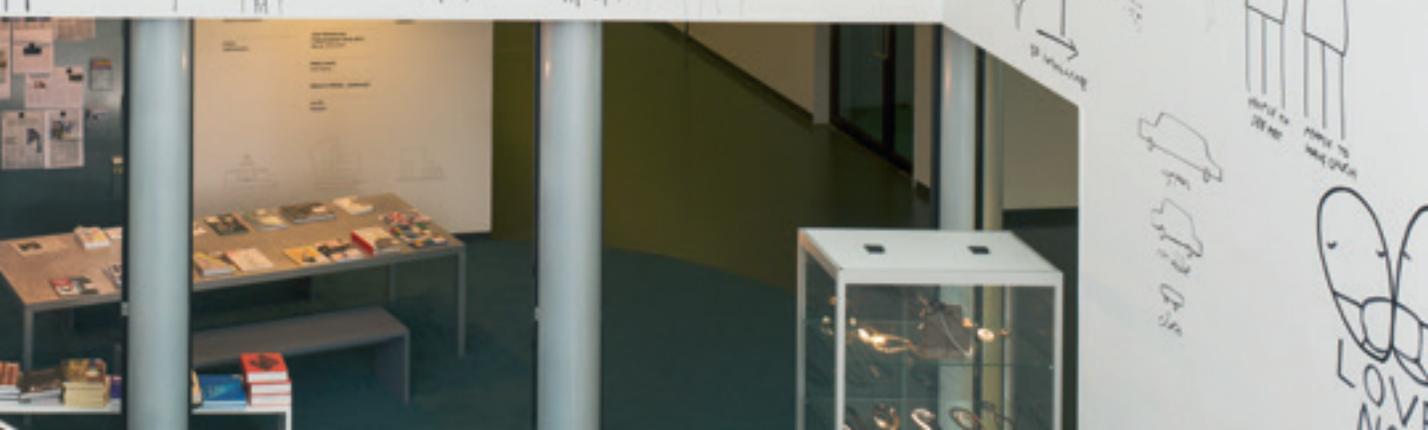
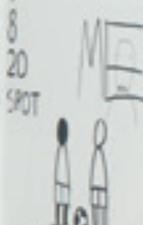
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GLOBAL VILLAGE:
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‘What we look for is a way to live, a fresh chance at coexistence’

Brian Holmes

‘Art is not part of culture; it reflects that culture. It hovers above it like a helicopter.’ That is how theatre director Johan Simons described the relationship between art and culture in the television programme *Zomergasten*. In describing the pendulum swing between attraction and repulsion, he sheds a different light on the connecting power of art. Critical reflection and distancing oneself are just as important as coming together. Connecting is not a trite stringing-together of things. Rather, it first requires you to abandon a particular position so that you can review its value and then reappropriate or change it. This calls for space – both mental and physical. A contemplation of the role of Dutch art institutions, such as museums, means reflecting on that space and on how to create space in a hybrid era of sweeping globalisation, European integration and internet communication.

But it is not just the content of Simons’ observation that shows what institutions we need to fulfil this connecting role; so too does the form. Simons is a celebrated theatre director who has been able to draw on a wide range of available support opportunities to develop his talent in many different theatres in the Netherlands. He is currently working in Germany, where he is becoming acquainted with a different artistic climate and administrative culture, knowledge that he will bring back to the community in the Netherlands. This doesn’t just happen by itself. It means appearing on *Zomergasten*¹ – one of the most remarkable television formats ever developed by public broadcasting. Simons is an oak tree grown on the topsoil of the Netherlands-European institutional substratum.

If we want to ensure that a new Simons will share his or her views and experience of art in 2030, by

means of an as yet inconceivable public communication channel, we will have to painstakingly nourish that depleted topsoil. Although a sturdy oak, Simons belongs to a previous generation. The Occupy/Indignados movements, the Arab spring, the collapse of the world economy following careless and opportunistic deregulation of financial markets, the rise of populist politics throughout Europe and the recent crisis in Ukraine – all have meant that today’s horizons are very different from those of the 1960s and 70s.

Generally speaking, it would be true to say that 1989 heralded a major rupture within European democracies. Over time, the Dutch and European communities have become weakened by an unhealthy form of technocratic politics, associated with too decided a belief in the virtues of the free market.

Art for tomorrow’s user

A small but significant part of this destabilisation process has been the lopsided reforms of the institutional infrastructure for art. The technocratic approach that politicians have applied to themselves, with everything revolving around management and marketing, has also become the deciding factor in arts policy and art institutions. The upshot is a skewed relationship between business and art professionals on the supervisory boards of Dutch museums and, under the motto of ‘creative industry’, an increasingly blurred fusion of economic and arts policy. In such a climate it is difficult to feel the connecting force of art’s pendulum swing.

In retrospect, we can say that art institutions have been reformed without due reflection on art’s changing position in a changing world. Consciously or otherwise, the emphasis has come to lie on a one-sided search for more efficient funding models to prop up an outmoded, modernistic view of art. This is most evident in the counterproductive form of art autonomy that is prevalent in the Netherlands, thanks in part to Thorbecke. Philosopher and critic Stephen Wright recently summed up the situation as follows: ‘Autonomy [...] has come to denote almost the opposite of what it set out to name.’ Autonomy should liberate people from a ‘self-imposed immaturity’, to use Immanuel Kant’s definition of the essence of the enlightened individual at the end of the eighteenth century. Not art, but the public must be au-

¹ Translator’s note: A live interview programme in which a guest compiles and comments on their own favourite evening of television viewing.

tonomous. Autonomous citizens engage with their environment in a different way; they view themselves not only as consumers, but as ‘users’ – another of Wright’s terms – who wish to develop themselves, but who also feel responsible. If we want to avoid a situation in the coming years in which the helicopter of art takes off with no one at the controls, we need to reflect fundamentally on how we use art and how we can encourage people in its use.

The question that we need to ask and answer is how we can preserve the connecting power of art for the users of tomorrow. This calls for an analysis of the characteristics of our own time, a documenting of the kind of research needed for an appropriate response, and an identification of the aspects of arts policy that we need to recalibrate in preparation for the twenty-first century. It calls for an interdisciplinary look at all art institutions and their broad anchoring in society, especially in relation to education and the media, so that art can be a positive force in the development of our democratic society. This essay will use the instrument of art museums to address these questions.

The end of modernism

The contemporary form par excellence is the hybrid. Like cars that are powered by more than one fuel, people can also operate in an increasing range of contexts. Communities have become less rigid and hierarchical. Elites are now fluid, and relationships are dynamic and international. Small businesses effortlessly operate across borders at the European level, people find a spouse on Erasmus exchange programmes and a growing number of second- and third-generation children of 1970s migrants are entering the upper echelons of society. Despite the renaissance of identity mentality and nationalist populism, society has become increasingly diverse – ‘super diverse’ even, to quote former Rotterdam professor Tariq Ramadan. All these changes have been greatly influenced by the opportunities presented by internet technology and the globalisation that this entails. A key question for art museums is how to use their collections and knowledge to activate the connecting force of art in a hybrid society.

First of all, art museums will have to extricate themselves from the modernist model that is founded on notions of specialisation and separation. Con-

temporary society is no longer the orderly patchwork of postwar modernism, in which every social function had its own institution and own merits. This means saying goodbye to the kind of autonomy that has prevailed for the past fifty years, and accordingly, surrendering the notion of ‘edification’. The idea that people should be elevated to a higher level within the autonomous pillar of art is a prime example of a hierarchically structured society geared towards specialisation.

A hybrid society does not need art experts who take ordinary users authoritatively by the hand, but museums that link art with the everyday world of people’s experience, thereby creating room for new forms of use. A museum is not a treasure chest filled with art serving as meaningless aesthetic entertainment, but a toolkit that can be pressed into active service in a range of contexts. Art can only connect if the walls between disciplines are removed.

Art should once again be granted a place in politics, in social debate and in corporate ethics, where it can create room for a fresh perspective, new ideas and critical reflection, and where it can stimulate the collective imagination about tomorrow’s world. Art should no longer occupy its own place, but should once again be internalised by the different social players. In short, art should no longer be the subject of frivolous news items, but should serve as a critical wedge to open up social issues, such as the discussion about *Zwarte Piet*,² migration, Srebrenica or the derailed banking sector, and to look at them afresh.

Museums should take the lead by using their collections to tell stories about relevant social themes. They should also seek new ways to exploit their collections and original forms of partnership with other social players. Rather than putting every effort into finding new funding, that effort should go into encouraging new forms of use that will enhance art’s connecting power in a hybrid world.

Management in a hybrid society

In a hybrid society, public and private systems are closely interwoven. This requires a museum management culture in which the relationship between commercial and social interests can be thoroughly

² Translator’s note: Saint Nicholas’s increasingly controversial blackamore companion.

discussed. It calls for experimentation with, and knowledge of, governance models in which the interests of artistic content and social and commercial interests can be mediated effectively.

In the case of art museums, this means that art professionals (such as experienced arts-sector managers, as well as artists and other relevant professionals) should join forces with policy advisors, current and former politicians, members of social interest groups and entrepreneurs to reflect on the different objectives and possible governance models that would be appropriate for museums in a hybrid society. The focus should not be on striving for a standard model, but rather on allowing for diversity, in order to meet specific needs, take account of regional interests and make room for experimentation.

Democracy 2.0 – art in the public interest

A second key characteristic of contemporary society is the intensifying democratic process. Internet has not only shrunk our world and linked people together economically, politically and socially, it has also restructured the public domain. Here too the modernist model of separation and ordered hierarchy has been eroded and replaced by new dynamic, hybrid forms. Hybrid society comes with a Democracy 2.0. The mechanism of representation has come under particular pressure, affecting the very foundations of the political process.

Museums emerged in the nineteenth century and were part of the gradual development of modern democracy. The first museum users were a small group within the moneyed classes of the nineteenth century who called the shots. In the twentieth century the exclusive democracy of the elite evolved to become a mass democracy, with mass media and an arts politics centred on edification and emancipation. Today's internet era operates by way of networks and does not function well with closed disciplines or institutions. Democratic debate is no longer governed by classical media such as newspapers or television, but by Twitter and Facebook. As our age searches for hybrid forms, art and its use are breaking through the now permeable walls of the museum.

In order to arrive at the right museum model for today's democracy, it is important to clearly suggest the ways in which art and democracy are linked. For although art plays a role in any human society, the

experience of art has a specific function in a democracy. The French philosopher Jacques Rancière refers to an 'aesthetic regime' that is closely linked to the notion of democracy, whereas the Canadian philos-

‘A museum is not a treasure chest filled with art serving as meaningless aesthetic entertainment, but a toolkit that can be activated for use in a range of contexts’

opher Lambert Zuidervaart analyses art as a keystone in a 'democratic culture'. What these two, very different, philosophers identify as a central feature of a democracy is the possibility of rendering personal experiences visible and linking them to general ideas and public values, whereby these experiences and ideas can be discussed and shared.

Art is not the only instrument in this exchange. Engaging with art makes people more adept at participating in democratic discussion since art possesses a radical openness that is essential for democracy. Art is all about the experience. However abstract or engaged an artwork might be, what it does first and foremost is to make something visible without defining what that is. In an organic and unique way the art experience unites thinking and looking, idea and feeling. These connections are the foundation for the socially connecting force of art, which can offer an experience that draws people toward understanding and discussion.

This is the important contribution that art can make to a democratic society. Dialogue and experience should complement one another in a positive way. Art collections are a powerful tool in this regard because they can activate experiences from the past in the present. Not only do we see what was; we can also reappropriate the past and learn to use it as a reservoir of many histories that help us to interpret the present.

But if a new concept for a collection is to be meaningful, you have to be able to share and discuss it. It is therefore highly problematical that Dutch arts policy focuses almost entirely on the production and presentation of art, while ignoring its reception.

For some years now Grizedale Arts has been operating on the outskirts of the small village of Connistan in the picturesque English Lake District. Located on an estate once belonging to John Ruskin, this small arts initiative runs the local Mechanics Institute programme. Grizedale Arts is an innovator in the search for new ways of using art and finding constructive links between leading contemporary artists and the village community. Their philosophy is to first identify the community's wishes and then to find an artist who can best carry out the work. Thus they have reactivated a village ritual with the help of Jeremy Deller, designed a new public lending library with Liam Gillick,

and are currently working with the village on an open call for the redesign of a new local cricket pavilion. They developed the Office of Useful Art for Tate Liverpool and, more recently, the Honest Shop in the Van Abbemuseum. Grizedale Art is without doubt one of the most original and surprising places where art responds to the hybrid world. Grizedale Arts is supported by Arts Council England, but enjoys so much village support that the salary of a staff member is paid out of contributions from the local community. www.grizedalearts.org



'Naked Machine' ('Volkswagen Modern'), Surasi Kusolwong, 2000-2011.

Photo: Pieter Vos

The recent attention to art education does nothing to plug that gap. This is because, like the chain from young to old, in which school art lays the foundation for later engagement with art, the chain within the adult audience, from maker to viewer, also has to be in balance. The decoupling of media policy and arts policy and the demise of Dutch art magazines (in the wake of the previous cabinet's cutbacks) have made it difficult for art to function effectively in today's society. The impact of this imbalance can also be seen in museums. With shrinking arts sections in newspapers, especially regional papers, a significant loss on capacity among national arts magazines, and the internet calling for experimentation and investment, museums are being forced to invest more of their falling budgets in reflection and criticism. If arts policy wishes to focus on connection, it has to encourage connection along the entire chain of production, presentation and reception in a coherent and balanced way. The government needs to bring parties together rather than approach education, media and art institutions as separate social domains.

Art and heritage as a vibrant part of Democracy 2.0

A hybrid society introduces new forms of art and other ways of engaging with heritage. These are developed and applied in the field and explored at universities. Because of its strong tradition of autonomy, the Netherlands does not have a culture in which this knowledge and understanding can make a vibrant transition into public debate and the political arena. Alongside research and experimentation in the field, there needs to be an active tie-in with social systems. How can

social players like politicians and opinion leaders engage more effectively with the country's cultural production? It is important to initiate a cultural turnaround by proactively breaking through the modernist 'pillar' structure and seeking a connection between social parties and museums.

This will require an understanding of the network. Who has access to what knowledge and experience at what time, and how can this be utilised? Politicians, opinion leaders, museum professionals and artists have to engage in dialogue with one another about the barriers they encounter when drawing on each other's knowledge and insights.

The arteries of the hybrid society are the internet data streams. Information is no longer centrally distributed, but can be both sent and received by anyone. This means the end of twentieth-century mass communication. Innovations in how people acquire and exchange ideas present what is perhaps both the biggest challenge and the greatest opportunity for a hybrid society. It is vital that the old infrastructure for knowledge and dialogue be transformed so that it can respond to the new situation. This means a complete turnaround for radio, television, newspapers, magazines and publishers, in terms of both their social function and the way they do business.

For museums to function effectively, there needs to be a clear relationship between different media partners, in which the substantive mission of museums is paramount. This will require museums and the media (radio, television, newspapers, etc.) to enter into consultations with one another and reflect in general terms on the division of roles. A focal point here should be how public and private funding flows come together and how the interests of both groups remain distinct.

In line with this communication shift, research needs to be conducted into the relationship between different occasions in the production and reception of culture. Is there a balance between art that is produced and what is discussed and/or received? And who has access to what forms of art experience and/or reception? This requires a broad, interdisciplinary study in which art historians and art philosophers, drawing on sociological and anthropological approaches, chart the dynamic between what is made and how it is used.

Towards a Dutch-European policy that connects with the world

It is obvious that a return to a national focus would be a disastrous step backwards for Dutch museums. While the refurbished Rijksmuseum may relate Dutch history, it does so by approaching the Netherlands as a place in the world, not its centre. Our inextricable link with neighbouring countries, with Europe and with the world as a whole must be given a distinct place in the vision of Dutch museums. The key lies in a creative reflection on the options for using Europe as the starting point. Europe is all too infrequently addressed as a unique project in which the specific history of this part of the world, and the specific social forms associated with this, are used to tell its own story.

As institutions, museums for example are to some degree a European invention, linked to the specific role that historical awareness played in the formation of our present-day European community, with all its different countries and traditions. A Dutch-European museum policy should therefore bear an organic relationship to this European tradition. The aim should not be a return to Europe as the centre of the world, but the emergence of Europe as a place in the world. Geopolitical tensions since 1989 show that, like the United States and Russia, Europe has failed to develop a new self-image that aligns with its current position in the world. Europe continues to spend too much time wrestling with its own past, in which feelings of shame and superiority shuttle back and forth in uncoordinated fashion, and it relies too heavily on American solutions. Europe can only occupy a constructive place in the complex world order if it looks for its own story – one that is not told as an export product or as representing a colonial power, but as a starting point for a discussion among equals.

Research agenda – Europe and the Netherlands in the world

As both a political and substantive layer above the national and regional, the European Union is poorly reflected in current practice. It is vital that national and regional arts policies, as well as the policies of individual institutions, look towards Europe and the world, both in practical terms and in relation to content. What should be supported from Brussels and what is the responsibility of national and regional

With the recent launch of the Society of Arts, the Netherlands has taken a small step towards anchoring the position of art more broadly and deeply in the public domain. But the focus on art alone betrays modernist traits and is not without risks. An interesting combination would be a cross-fertilisation between the Society of Arts and the German model of the Ethics Council. This Council was established in 2001 to advise the German government on ethical medical issues surrounding euthanasia and the anonymous relinquishing of babies. The Ethics Council is made up of academics, politicians and relevant professionals, but it could offer a wider perspective if it were

augmented by artists or art professionals. They could then broaden the advice given by such a council, as well as, for example, find a more original format to advance the debate in collaboration with museums or other art institutions. One topic that a Dutch ethics council could consider is how to address the Srebrenica tragedy. Alongside leading scholars, an artist like Marko Peljhan, for example – with his *Territory 1995* – would not be out of place.

<http://www.ethikrat.org/>

<http://www.ladomir.net/>

Territory-1995-Istanbul-Biennale-2009

authorities? This research needs to be developed in active consultation with Europe and should involve both responding to one another and jointly reflecting on practical and substantive issues. Discussion partners from outside Europe should be included in the dialogue: international interest organisations like the International Council of Museums, as well as regional arts professionals from, say, Southeast Asia or North Africa.

Reciprocity in the public domain – art, economics and politics

A final characteristic of today's hybrid society is the disproportionately large role that economic thinking plays in the search for solutions to social issues. The dominance of a commercial and economic approach has damaged not only art's potential contribution to society, but also the functioning of democracy. The Dutch Senate's recent study of the consequences of employing privatisation as a panacea in post-1989 politics can be cited here as a sign of growing awareness of this problem.

Unfortunately, neoliberal thinking continues to dominate museum policy. Efficiency and commercial exploitation of the collection are the order of the day. These approaches do not open up any new pathways for uses of art and its connecting force, but are deployed for the sole purpose of providing funding for the old-style classical, modernist museums. It is a way of avoiding thinking about the role that museums should play in creating a constructive exchange between art, economics and politics. We need to redefine the relationship between art as a public given and the private sector so that we can defend the public

interest, with support from business. This means not only reducing the share of private sector representation on the supervisory boards of museums, but forging a new, reciprocal relationship between museums and the corporate world. It should be just as natural for an artist or museum professional to have a seat on a company's board as it is for a business person to sit on the supervisory board of a museum.

The importance of this reciprocal relationship is well illustrated by the positive impact that good art institutions have on the business climate. Good art institutions are indicators of a strong democracy and a buoyant and resilient community. Businesses benefit not just from art's spectacular image, but from its connecting power in the community. In short, a company also reaps the benefits of arts education, arts magazines and all the other forms of support that art needs in order to flourish. If we wish to move towards a more differentiated form of funding for art institutions, it is important to think about how to support the entire chain of art production and reception, not just the blockbuster exhibitions and spectacular acquisitions that are most attractive to sponsors.

What should we measure and why? Towards a better understanding of the field and funding

Since the 1990s museum organisations have become increasingly professional in business terms, placing too much emphasis on too narrow a set of indicators for success. For practical reasons, operations are heavily geared towards visitor numbers, financial health, the impact on tourism and creative industry, and peer evaluation. What is missing are more spe-

cific measuring systems that will help museums to translate their intrinsic objectives into measurable targets. It is not yet customary in museum boardrooms to translate intrinsic and commercial objectives into measurable guidelines. For example, what kind of museum experience does a museum wish to offer? And how can you test whether this has been achieved? An important step forward for museums would be to develop a wider range of instruments for articulating their ambitions more clearly, effectively and transparently.

The position of museums and public institutions has changed radically as a result of the wholesale globalisation of the art market and the immense interest in elite art and heritage worldwide. Museums are limited in their ability to participate in the international market, and the insured values of collections are having an enormous impact on museum budgets. It is essential that collectors, galleries, artists and the museum sector join forces to chart the impact of rising values on the international functioning of museums and to reflect on areas where joint action could be useful. Possibilities include a more conscious approach to gifts and a national indemnity system.

Twenty years from now

If the government were to launch a broad discussion about seeking a new arts system to respond to the needs of a hybrid society, we can expect that in twenty years' time:

- Art will occupy a place at the heart of society as a vibrant and valuable tool in the public discussion about who we are and where we want to go.
- Art will no longer be a 'pillar' of its own, but will have links with many different social players.
- Museums will be open, public institutions that support new ways of using art.
- All levels of government and private parties that support art will be fully aware of the chain that links production, presentation and reception, and there will be clear, organic relationships with educational and media policy.
- The private sector will embrace a new ethics that views art as more than just a marketing tool, and

In 2010 four European museums jointly set up the museum confederation L'Internationale (www.internationaleonline.org). In 2013 they were joined by two more museums. The members are committed to working together to conduct research and mount exhibitions, and to seek enduring forms of collaboration. The idea is to respect one another's regional anchoring, while at the same time facilitating an international dialogue in which collections and knowledge are shared. The confederation is currently working on a second project, a five-year research and exhibition programme entitled *The Uses of Art – on the legacy of 1848 and 1989*, which is being supported by a European grant. L'Internationale is an example of a partnership seeking a typical European format that is also open to the rest of the world. The current members are Moderna Galerija (Ljubljana, Slovenia), Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (Madrid, Spain), Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (Barcelona, Spain), Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (Antwerp, Belgium), SALT (Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey) and Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven, Netherlands).

Steven ten Thije's essay *The Uses of Art*: http://issuu.com/vammedewerker/docs/vam_radically_yours__09_2013?e=2161518/4960991 (vanaf pagina 13); Interview with Charles Esche: <http://metropolism.com/features/a-cosmologyof-museums/>

is able to use art to strengthen the society in which its employees live.

- Museums will use art's connecting power to build bridges organically between the stories of the community, nation, Europe and the world.

Charles Esche (1962) is director of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and co-founder of Afterall Journal and Books. He curated the Bienal de São Paulo 2014. Other exhibitions he has curated over the past twenty years include 'Strange and Close' in CAPC, Bordeaux (2011), 'An Idea for Living' at the U3 Slovene Triennale (2011), the 2nd and 3rd RIWAQ Biennials in Ramallah, Palestine (2007/2009), the 9th International Istanbul Biennial (2005) and the 4th Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (2002). He is on the board of CIMAM (International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art) and chair of CASCO – Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht. He was awarded the European Cultural Foundation's Princess Margriet Award for Cultural Change in 2012, the Minimum Prize from the Pistoletto Foundation in 2013 and the CCS Bard College Prize for Curatorial Excellence in 2014.

N.B. I wrote this essay in a personal capacity but it is the outcome of a close collaboration and exchange of views with colleagues at the Van Abbemuseum. I wish to thank the following people for their input: Christiane Berndes, Annie Fletcher, Diana Franssen, Ulrike Erbslöh and Steven ten Thije, all of whom helped to shape this text.

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Turkey has almost no public infrastructure for contemporary art and support is therefore in private hands. The research and exhibition institution SALT, supported by Garanti Bank, is a good example of how a private party can champion an institution that presents itself entirely as a public institution. In recent years SALT has evolved to become a unique, leading institution in the Turkish art world and beyond. SALT collects the archives of important Turkish artists and is a lively hub for lectures, discussion and debate at the highest level. More so than any of its current European counterparts, SALT demonstrates that a heritage institution can receive support from private parties without having to focus completely on blockbuster exhibitions and on maximising visitor numbers. <http://www.saltonline.org/>

Towards greater value in museum education

educational value | Carla van Boxtel





Children taking part in 'Measuring art' class, part of the Boijmans language and numeracy programme. Photo: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

Ambitions, teaching challenges and professionalisation

Museums tell stories based on their collections. This is what makes them such rich environments where people's curiosity is kindled and where they can construct knowledge and meaning. This educational value should lie at the heart of every museum. What educational ambitions are appropriate for the challenges of our times and the years ahead? A museum's educational ambitions are reflected in its educational orientations, or approaches. These are not new and they often occur in combination,¹ but the specific way in which they are interpreted is subject to constant change in response to social dynamics. I will use three approaches to discuss which educational ambitions match the challenges of our times.² I will then explore the implications this has for the teaching approach and the demands placed on educational staff. Finally, I will make recommendations on how to develop and disseminate the requisite knowledge through different kinds of collaboration and research.

Ambitions

The central aim of the *content-based approach* is to transfer specific content. The nature of this content is of course highly dependent on the collections that a museum holds. Thus a museum with a collection of Realist artworks could offer a workshop in which secondary school students learn about the Realist movement. However, if museums base their educational objectives solely on the content of their collections, they run the real risk that the knowledge they wish to convey has no obvious relevance and meaning for visitors and that the learning that is initiated is confined to the acquisition of knowledge.

Educational sciences and the education sector are undergoing a switch in focus from knowledge transfer as an end in itself to the ability to *use* knowledge in a range of contexts and to *create* new knowledge and meanings. Learners acquire the concepts and skills that characterise a particular domain in order to understand and interpret phenomena and to come up with solutions themselves or to create new knowledge or products. In other words, it is not only

about 'knowing that', but also about being able to use that knowledge to 'think and create'.³ The Education Council of the Netherlands (Onderwijsraad) recently stressed the importance of these '21st-century skills'.⁴ It is therefore a coherent whole of meaningful knowledge, skills and attitudes that can be learned in a museum context.

The challenge for museums is to specify these goals for the diverse range of target groups that they serve. What does 'learning to look at art', 'experiment' or 'empathise with the past' mean for children at a day care centre? What does it mean for secondary school students, families, or visitors to a museum website? The general objectives of many museums focus on developing attitudes, such as an enquiring attitude or the ability to deal with a wide range of perspectives. However, it is often unclear just how museums interpret these goals, and how they hope to achieve them through their chosen educational approach. After all, each goal calls for appropriate learning activities.

In the *personal development approach*, the emphasis is on the development of individuals based on their interests, prior knowledge and views. Museums can help children, young people and adults discover who they are and can be, and where their talents lie, as well as foster those talents. As cultural heritage contributes significantly to our sense of identity,⁵ learning about this heritage can give young people and adults a better understanding of who they are. This calls for an approach involving reflection on what heritage means for others and for ourselves, and how this meaning is influenced by who we are, as well as who we wish to become.⁶ Yet this more reflective approach, aimed at fostering personal development, appears to have been adopted in only piecemeal fashion by museums.

Tailoring education to specific groups and individuals is no easy task, especially as groups become harder to define. The process of identity building has become increasingly complex in today's society. People participate in a wide range of communities and practices, such as family, the work and living environments, leisure time and social media, engendering a layered and dynamic identity. Despite some degree of continuity, our identity is also what we choose to project in a specific situation at a particular time – it is not simply a label that people

attach. People do not wish to be labelled ‘elderly’, for example, and be expected to behave accordingly in every respect and in all situations. This means that in the context of museum education, aligning activities with individual interests, experiences and prior knowledge cannot be worked out entirely in advance: at least in part it will have to be worked out during the visit itself.

International comparative studies show that many talented pupils in the Netherlands are performing below their ability level. The primary focus here is

for collaboration with other organisations, such as welfare institutions, local media, libraries and clubs. An important challenge is how to transform these ‘grand ambitions’ into concrete educational activities. Museums could focus on eliciting and supporting *processes* that are important for achieving these aims, such as comparing and reflecting on different perspectives and entering into a dialogue on social issues. The society-oriented approach also calls for self-reflection on the part of museums. How do the stories they present function as anchors for specific

‘Tailoring education to specific groups and individuals is no easy task, especially as groups become harder to define.’

on cognitive performance, such as literacy and numeracy skills, but talent development needs to be interpreted more broadly. The Education Council of the Netherlands recently emphasised society’s need for creativity, problem-solving abilities, collaboration, cultural and moral sensitivity, consideration and craftsmanship.⁷ All pupils should be challenged, both inside and outside the classroom, to develop their own specific talents in whatever area.

Museums could play a bigger role in this by providing challenging, knowledge-rich learning contexts and by allowing for individual programmes. The peer-to-peer programmes offered by some museums tie in well with the ambition of talent development, for example. Based on the personal development approach, museums should also aim to foster a positive learning identity among children, young people and adults who are less cognitively able.⁸ It is important for this group to experience that learning can be fun and that their own talents matter.

Lastly, the *society-oriented approach* centres on contributing to a better society. Through education, many of today’s museums aim to play a connecting role and to highlight social issues. Museums should be a place where children and adults can come together to exchange experiences, and to reflect on and debate issues of social relevance. Through educational activities that focus on their immediate surroundings, museums can support goals such as neighbourhood renewal, combating social exclusion and strengthening social cohesion. These aims call

identities? And to what extent are the stories geared toward knowledge construction (rather than knowledge transfer) and dialogue?

Teaching challenges

Once ambitions have been clearly defined, appropriate pedagogical approaches should be developed, implemented and evaluated. In my view, the ambitions and developments mentioned above call for an ability to apply different kinds of activating teaching methods, pedagogical content knowledge and dialogic education. Both schools and museums are shifting their focus from transferring knowledge and meanings to *constructing* knowledge and meanings in interaction with learners or visitors.⁹

Museums are responding to this shift by placing greater emphasis on actively exploring, creating and exchanging. In a ‘classical’ tour, visitors are generally expected to listen to a guide talking about a series of museum objects and in this way acquire the knowledge being conveyed. An ‘interactive’ tour is more about looking, thinking, and talking about objects together, about constructing meaning together. By asking questions, the guide initiates a dialogue with visitors, prompting them towards meaningful learning activities that will activate prior knowledge, reflection, empathy and the adoption of a different perspective.

When using activating teaching methods, it is important to think hard about *what kind of activities*

serve specific objectives. In fact, what is required is pedagogical content knowledge. If a historical museum wishes to foster an historical awareness of time, meaningful activities would include making comparisons between present and past and contextualising historical objects and stories. Fostering creativity, on the other hand, calls for other activities.

Closely linked to this shift towards a more activating form of teaching is an increasing focus on experience.¹⁰ In a museum, not only can you see how a Roman soldier was attired, you can also experience the weight of his helmet, while 3D technology allows you to ‘enter into’ the world of a painting. Museum learning experiences are ones that are anchored in physical action and accompanied by stimulation of all the senses. This ties in with recent theories about embodied cognition,¹¹ which posits that knowledge is anchored in physical action, emotions and perception.

The experience-based approach also raises questions, however. Does a multimedia experience detract from the power of the objects themselves? Does an overabundance of sensory stimuli result in cognitive overload, which hampers rather than facilitates learning? What part do emotions play and should museums consciously ‘manipulate’ them? Will experience alone result in learning or should it be accompanied by, say, contextualising and reflection?

Many museums opt for an educational approach that centres on active exploration and enquiry. Enquiry-based learning is not by definition dialogic, however. Why is it important to promote dialogue? Dialogic education means that investigating, creating and constructing meaning is a joint undertaking involving the articulation

Both schools and museums are shifting their focus from transferring knowledge and meanings to constructing knowledge and meanings in interaction with learners or visitors.

of experiences, prior knowledge and associations and having people interact with one another.¹² This interaction is not an end in itself, but should be initiated and supported with specific objectives in mind and to achieve better linkage with the learning needs of individual visitors.

Dialogue also calls for the presenting and eliciting of different perspectives. This means that museum educators must be familiar with the plurality of stories and meanings associated with the museum’s collection and presentation. Acknowledging the dynamic view of cultural heritage means that museums should not communicate an essentialist narrative about the meaning of a museum object, but should accept that there is an ongoing social process of meaning construction and multiperspectivity.¹³

Educators

Until now, little has been done to define the knowledge and skills needed by educational staff, such as museum docents, heads of ‘public and education’ departments and guides, in order to best exploit the educational value of museums.¹⁴ Tran and King have compiled a desired knowledge base for science museum educators.¹⁵ In their view, educators must be able to function in a context (physical, social and temporal) which, while offering unique opportunities, also has constraints for learning. They have to be able to build on the often very diverse interests, frames of reference and backgrounds of a wide range of visitors. They have to be able to talk about objects and integrate them effectively into a story, explanation or meaningful discussion that helps to achieve the educational goals. This requires not just teaching knowledge and skills, but also content knowledge. Tran and King point out that educators must also be aware of constructivist and sociocultural learning theories that describe learning as an active, social and situated process of meaning construction. Museum visitors should be invited to look, contextualise, investigate, ask questions, think critically and creatively, discuss and reflect.¹⁶

Collaboration and research

The professions of museum educator and guide have been evolving in the Netherlands since the 1950s.¹⁷ However, they still lack a specialised vocabulary



Photo: Amsterdam Museum, Jeroen Oerlemans

that characterises a profession and that can be used to analyse practical situations and to identify and solve problems.¹⁸ This is due in part to the different backgrounds of educators and guides, the different collections and objectives, the paucity of professional development activities specifically targeting this group and the fact that there is as yet little research on teaching and learning in museums. To achieve the much-needed professionalisation, two things have to happen: improved collaboration and research.

In terms of collaboration, a distinction can be made between collaboration with others in the same role and multiprofessional collaboration. The former involves cooperation between educational staff from different museums within permanent networks. Network meetings should provide opportunities not only to exchange good practices, but also to question one another as critical friends, to address dilemmas and to analyse failures together. Participants can also consult about ways to make the production of meaning and knowledge a more integral part of the museum, and about how educational value can play a part in collection-building and exhibition policy.

Multiprofessional collaboration involves cooperation between people from different professions. Educational staff must achieve long-

term collaboration with teachers, other cultural institutions such as archives or libraries, and local organisations such as after-school care. How can we better utilise one another's expertise? The Netherlands has relatively few large-scale educational projects involving various museums within a city or region working in partnership with schools and other organisations. The Urban Advantage project in New York City, which aims to boost the professional development of teachers, principals and parent coordinators in schools, has developed a programme in which school pupils visit different museums over a multi-year period.¹⁹

Given that the Netherlands boasts so many museums, that so many school pupils visit museums every year and that museums offer educational activities targeting other groups (such as families with children, company employees or immigrants on an integration course), it is surprising that almost no academic studies have been done on teaching and learning in museums. One might expect this type of research to be carried out at universities and universities of applied sciences offering museum-related courses,²⁰ but it is almost non-existent.²¹

Museums and university research groups could collaborate on research much more than they do at present. Universities are home to a great deal of relevant expertise, such as teaching and



Photo: Rijksmuseum van Oudheden

content expertise (e.g. teaching history and art, fostering an enquiring attitude) and expertise on communication, dialogic education, interest, motivation, learning with new media (e.g. augmented reality, game-based learning) and embodied cognition.

Research questions could be more theoretical or empirical in nature, involving both fundamental and applied research. What do sociocultural and socioconstructivist perspectives on learning mean for museum education? To what extent do a museum's educational activities reflect a dynamic understanding of heritage, culture and identity?²² What part does authenticity play in meaning construction by visitors? Is there a difference between learning about art objects in the classroom using digital images and learning through authentic objects in a museum? How do you encourage participatory and dialogic teaching in the context of an educational tour and what does this mean for the way museums are organised? What does international research tell us about the benefits of a museum visit by groups of pupils? How can we link up with both the current social debate and the experiences of individuals? To what

‘Dialogue also calls for the presenting and eliciting of different perspectives.’

extent do museums nurture an awareness among young people that culture has value? How do the socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds of visitors affect their appreciation of certain educational activities, their exploratory behaviour and the content of conversations? What tools can we use to document the quality of learning and teaching in a museum? What methods are most effective for promoting children's exploratory behaviour?

There is also a need for more design research. A thorough problem analysis could lead to the design or redesign of a specific museum lesson or teaching method. It could be used to investigate how effectively a problem is solved or an educational activity improved. As well as collaboration with university researchers, there is also a need for educational staff within museums to carry out more research into museum education.²³

A final comment

All museums need to ask themselves what their aims are with regard to exploiting their collection to develop appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes. How do they seek to foster the personal development of museum visitors and a better society? Do they believe that one approach is more important than another and how do they combine the different approaches? The challenge is to formulate goals, based on the various approaches, for the museum as a whole, as well as for specific exhibitions or activities and for different groups that the museum wishes to reach. Defining those educational aims and objectives is not a question of marketing. It is not about 'packaging' educational objectives in fine – but ultimately hollow – words, nor about boosting visitor numbers.

Instead, it is about the added value that education can give to a museum visit. In order to achieve and consolidate that added value, there is an urgent need for further professionalisation and expertise development to improve the quality of museum education. And the way to do this is to intensify collaboration and stimulate research.

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- 1 These orientations were identified in 1974 by Eisner and Vallance. See Elliot Eisner and Elizabeth Vallance, 'Five conceptions of curriculum: Their roots and implications for curriculum planning', in: Eisner, Elliot W. and Vallance, Elisabeth (ed.), *Conflicting Conceptions of Curriculum*, Berkeley, 1974, 1-18.
- 2 I do so based on my knowledge of current developments in the education sector and educational sciences and on my experience with heritage and museum education. This experience largely derives from my role as researcher in the NWO project 'Heritage education, plurality of narratives and shared historical knowledge' (2008-2014) at Erasmus University Rotterdam (project managers M. Grever and C. van Boxtel, researchers P. de Bruijn, G. Savenije and S. Klein) and the project 'Rondleiden is een vak! Professionalisering van rondleiders en verbetering van educatieve rondleidingen in kunst- en historische musea' at the University of Amsterdam (2013-2017, in partnership with the Rijksmuseum, Van Gogh Museum and Stedelijk Museum, supported by SNS Reaalfonds and the Mondriaanfonds).
- 3 John Bransford and Daniel Schwartz, 'Rethinking transfer: a simple proposal with multiple implications', in: A. Iran-Nejad and P. D. Pearson (ed.), *Review of research in education*, 24, Washington, 1999, 61-100.
- 4 Onderwijsraad, *Een eigentijds curriculum*, Den Haag 2014.
- 5 Willem Frijhoff, *Dynamisch erfgoed*, Amsterdam, 2007.
- 6 See Maria Grever and Carla van Boxtel, *Verlangen naar tastbaar verleden. Erfgoed, onderwijs en historisch besef*, Hilversum (scheduled for publication in autumn 2014).
- 7 See the Onderwijsraad report, *Een smalle kijk op onderwijs*, Den Haag, 2013.
- 8 Educationalist Monique Volman emphasises the importance of encouraging engagement and the development of a positive learning identity in her inaugural lecture *Kennis van betekenis. Betrokkenheid als kwaliteit van leerprocessen en leerresultaten*, Amsterdam, 2011.
- 9 Eilean Hooper-Greenhill makes a distinction between a pedagogy of transfer and a constructivist pedagogy. See Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, 'Het museum als leraar. Museumpedagogie als uitdaging', in: *Volgt de*

- gids? Nieuwe perspectieven voor educatie en gidsing in kunstmusea*, Koning Boudewijnstichting, 2001.
- 10 Rob van der Laarse, *Bezeten van vroeger. Erfgoed, identiteit en musealisering*, Amsterdam 2005.
 - 11 For literature on embodied cognition, see for example Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and Antonio Damasio, 'We feel, therefore we learn: the relevance of affective and social neuroscience to education', in: *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 1 (2007) 1, 3-10; Arthur Glenberg, 'How reading comprehension is embodied and why that matters', in: *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 4 (2011), 5-18.
 - 12 Robin Alexander, *Towards dialogic teaching: Rethinking classroom talk*. York 2008; Rupert Wegerif, *Dialogic education for the Internet age*, London, 2013.
 - 13 See also Carla van Boxtel, 'Something to talk about? The potential of a dynamic approach of heritage in heritage education', in: *EUROCLIO Bulletin*, 30 (2010) 53-63 and Carla van Boxtel, Stephan Klein and Ellen Snoep (eds), *Heritage Education. Challenges in dealing with the past*, Amsterdam, 2011.
 - 14 Defining the competencies that museum guides should possess forms part of the research project 'Rondleiden is een vak! Professionalisering van rondleiders en verbetering van educatieve rondleidingen in kunst- en historische musea' at the University of Amsterdam (2013-2017), conducted by Mark Schep.
 - 15 Lynn Tran and Heather King, 'The professionalisation of museum educators: the case in science museums', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 22 (2007), 2, 131-149. See also Albertijn and Hoefnagels, 2012.
 - 16 See for example Ibanez Wolberg and Allison Goff, 'Thinking routines', *Journal of Museum Education*, 1 (2012), 59-68; Margaret Burchenal and Michelle Grohe, 'Thinking through art: transforming museum curriculum', in: *Journal of Museum Education*, 2 (2007), 111-122.
 - 17 See Agnes Grondman, Melissa de Vreede, Karin Laarakker and Odette Reydon, *Over passie en professie. Een eeuw publieksbegeleiding in Nederlandse musea*, Utrecht, 2010.
 - 18 Lynn Tran, 'The work of science museum educators', in: *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 23 (2008), 2, 135-153.
 - 19 See www.urbanadvantagenyc.org
 - 20 Research of this type would be appropriate for grades one and two teacher training programmes, the Reinwardt Academy, and the University of Amsterdam, which offers a Master's programme in Museum Studies.
 - 21 Exceptions include the already mentioned research programme on heritage education at Erasmus University Rotterdam, the recently launched research project on educational tours in arts and history museums at the University of Amsterdam, and research into children's exploratory behaviour conducted at Science Center NEMO by Tessa van Schijndel, Rooske Franse and Maartje Raymakers, department of Developmental Psychology at the University of Amsterdam. In spring 2014, NEMO will launch NEMO Research and Development in partnership with the University of Amsterdam, aimed at research into learning science.

- 22 See the dissertations by Pieter de Bruijn, *Bridges to the Past. Historical Distance and Multiperspectivity in English and Dutch Heritage Educational Resources*, and by Geerte Savenije, *Sensitive History under Negotiation. Pupils' historical imagination and attribution of significance while engaged in heritage projects*, both of which will appear in October 2014.
- 23 A growing number of teachers are either involved in research or conducting their own research, for example as part of academic teacher training (*academische opleidingsscholen*) or in the context of a PhD scholarship for teachers. They should serve as examples to everyone in the museum sector.

On truth and valuation

experience value | Arnoud Odding





The First Painting Gallery in Teylers Museum, 2014. Photo: Hilde de Wolf

When reflecting on a research agenda for museums, it is essential to know what purpose museums serve. Why do we still have them? Why do we not close them down? It is not until we can explain their *raison d'être* that we are able to answer questions about the role of museums, the knowledge that is required and the research that therefore needs to be done. For much of the twentieth century, this question about the *raison d'être* barely needed to be asked. The answer was clear: they served a higher purpose. They helped society to advance and they played an important part in the 'civilising offensive'.

The new century has brought changes to this once self-evident and largely unchallenged conviction. All of a sudden, questions are being asked – by society and politicians alike – about the need for and purpose of museums. Museums and cultural organisations must now articulate what they do, why they are doing it and what the public is getting in return for their taxes. Museums are scared stiff. Some believe that populist rhetoric has been taken to its logical extreme, while others are trying to reflect more deeply and look for the reasons behind it. Populism, they argue, can only thrive in fertile soil.

There has been a good deal of reflection on the meaning and value of museums in the past few years. The Netherlands Museums Association (MV) has made a valiant effort to identify the 'five core values' that together make up the social significance of museums: collection value, connecting value, educational value, experience value and economic value. These are fine terms and a useful launch pad for policymakers, but to be honest, I don't find them entirely satisfactory. Collection value – what does that mean? Where do those jars and pipes and paintings derive this value from? And connecting value? Doesn't sport connect people just as well, perhaps even better? Educational value? What is it that we should tell school pupils, and why? I could go on. These five core values sound good but they are too imprecise and, for me, they fail to reflect the true justification for museums. If we do not identify that *raison d'être*, these values carry little weight. Museums derive their weight from a more fundamental *social* value. The question is: what is that value?

The scholarly origin of museums

Let's attempt to answer that question by looking at the history of museums. Museums arose out of collections, collections that were assembled for two reasons: a desire to study a particular subject and as a show of power. In fact, this demonstration of power has been the only constant throughout the history of museums. The first collections were put together by princes and nobles and to this day these most important temples of our culture are veritable magnets for the rich and powerful. For our purposes, however, it is more important to look at what has changed.

The eighteenth, and especially the nineteenth, century saw the emergence of many new museums, most notably in Europe and the United States. A need on the part of an individual scholar or scholarly society, or the private obsession of a well-heeled citizen, were the main drivers behind this passion for collecting. Collections were neatly arranged and placed in display cabinets or hung on walls so that the objects could be better studied and compared.

Museums made an enormous contribution to the professionalisation of knowledge and scholarship, especially in the nineteenth century. But with advances in science and technology, there was less of a need to have all these objects constantly within reach. By now, all those stuffed birds and other creatures had been compared and identified to everyone's satisfaction. With the advent of photography and reproduction technologies, there was no longer a need to have all those paintings constantly on show. Many collections, especially those held by universities, were no longer a major asset; instead, they had become a financial burden.

Popular edification as the new *raison d'être*

If the changes had stopped there, many collections would probably have come to grief. Fortunately, the end of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of another *raison d'être* for museums. After the upper middle classes had emancipated themselves in the early nineteenth century, the lower classes in turn became increasingly restive. Spurred on by social change and higher levels of education, more and more people laid claim to power and influence. Census suffrage was extended to general suffrage – initially just for men, but later for women too. If everyone had the right to speak, it was of course important

that we – as civilised people – could understand one another and speak the same language. Museums began to play their part in the ‘civilising offensive’, educating people to become better citizens.

Pure scholarship gradually retreated behind the university walls. In museums, research staff set themselves the goal of studying their own collection, increasingly with a view to public presentation. The upshot was that fewer and fewer objects were placed on museum display in the course of the twentieth century. After all, far fewer objects are needed if the point is to tell compelling stories rather than make scientific comparisons of objects. Visitors will be able to concentrate better without the distraction of a multitude of objects.

And whereas nineteenth-century museum galleries functioned as both depot and presentation space, in the twentieth century exhibition rooms and depots became separate entities. Opening times were extended and attracting the public grew in importance. Exhibitions became more professional, as did the educational work of museums. A museum visit became a routine part of the school year in the twen-

tieth century. Although some museum professionals still believed that museums were all about knowledge and scholarship, their primary task was popular edification. That was the reason why governments took financial responsibility for a growing number of museums. This makes them quintessentially social institutions: they originated as private initiatives but these days derive most of their support from public funding.

So what has changed in the last few years? Why is the government pulling back? Has it lost faith in the civilising offensive, or is that offensive perhaps now complete? To answer these questions we need to look at the major changes taking place in society. What has happened to cause this apparent hesitation on the part of government?

‘Museums made an enormous contribution to the professionalisation of knowledge and scholarship, especially in the nineteenth century’

The Oval Room in Teylers Museum today. Photo: Kees Hageman



The rise of the information society

The key change in recent years has been the emergence of the information society. Everyone is constantly in touch with everyone else. With just a few clicks, we all have access to virtually all conceivable knowledge in the world. A young man somewhere in North Africa, not yet twenty but with a second-hand smartphone, can access more knowledge than the president of the United States could two decades ago. The people of today get their knowledge and information from everywhere.

Information has changed from being a scarce commodity in the nineteenth century to a superabundant one in the twenty-first. The fact that it is a commodity has major implications for society's traditional hierarchies. As authorities are no longer automatically recognised, the authority of museums is also subject to erosion. The people themselves decide whether they wish to be edified. This has put an end to the civilising function, thereby undermining the main justification for funding museums. If people no longer need edification, why should so much money continue to be poured into museums?

Obviously, the information society is not the consequence of the internet alone. The advent of radio, television and other mass media has helped pave the

be quantified – How many school children visit the museum? Has attendance continued to rise? Has own revenue percentage increased? How many tourists have been attracted to the region and how much did they spend in the retail sector? These are all fine statistics, but they do not reflect the fundamentals. Public authorities seek refuge in quantitative arguments because there is no longer widespread consensus about the qualitative justification for museums.

Seeking inspiration

Once again, what purpose do museums serve now that they have lost virtually all their relevance for fundamental research and are no longer needed for the civilising offensive? What is their function at the start of the twenty-first century, a time when people are increasingly inundated by information, images and stimuli? Some museum staff routinely ask themselves this question, while others are oblivious to the fact that the world has changed and that answers from past centuries no longer suffice.

And yet the answer is so simple. Why do people, entirely of their own volition, come to museums? They come because they want to experience something, to see something beautiful, to enjoy a great day out, to

‘If everyone had the right to speak, it was of course important that we – as civilised people – could understand one another and speak the same language’

way. The axiomatic importance of museums for popular education was also being undermined early on. From the 1980s on, public authorities have come up with different arguments each time for supporting art, culture and museums. The purpose of museums has been to oil the wheels of the economy, to help disadvantaged sectors of the community engage with our culture, or to stimulate cultural tourism in the regions. Some even point to the ‘intrinsic importance of autonomous art development’.

Depending on the arguments put forward, public authorities adapt the criteria on which museums are judged. Qualitative parameters no longer suffice. Increasingly, the emphasis is on aspects that can

expand their horizons – in short, because they want to be inspired! That is what we mean by experience value. People don't want to be edified – they already are. They come to see beauty, to be astonished, to find confirmation; they come for silence, for peace, to be stirred; they come for understanding and for things that they have not experienced before. The twenty-first-century museum is a museum for the communication and network society.

Museums of the twenty-first century can provide an inspirational environment, an environment in which we can look at our world afresh and be challenged to approach something from a different angle, to read a book, to enter into a discussion,

to develop an idea – to simply enjoy, live and experience. People do not come to museums because society tells them it's good for them but because they themselves want to come.

Objectivity versus subjectivity

Now that we have identified the museum mandate for the twenty-first century, we need to look at how we can interpret this effectively and at the role of research. What kind of research is needed? Do we mean academic research of the kind carried out by universities – the kind of research where scholars seek out the truth, where they strive for objectivity, for a value-free interpretation of the facts they gather? Being value-free and objective are of course illusory goals, and this applies to academia as well. Nevertheless, academics do their best to proceed in as rational and well-considered a manner as possible.

This is very different from what happens in the day-to-day practice of museums. Instead, we select a particular perspective, we highlight a certain aspect, one that we feel is of sufficient interest to serve as a focal point. Curators choose – that's their job. By choosing, they create or reinforce meaning. Meaning is the combination of knowledge and valuations that determines our relationship with a phenomenon or object in the outside world. Meaning is fluid; it changes through new knowledge and new valuations. The museum provides a context for a particular topic or a series of objects – or, to use today's jargon, the museum judges and appraises, and in so doing 'frames' the visitor.

Where academic researchers seek objectivity, museum staff seek subjectivity. This is not to say that museums take liberties with the truth. On the contrary, they do make use of objectively verifiable facts, but they select what they need in order to tell a meaningful or inspiring story – otherwise, it gets boring. Whereas academics may be less interested in a fully intact amphora from the Roman period than in a potsherd from the Etruscan era, the museum will choose the complete amphora because it helps to tell a more compelling story. Potsherds are dull, certainly if displayed in endless rows of drab cabinets.

While the work of curators and academics may not be diametrically opposed, it is not the same either. This is because of the different aims that they strive



Drawing of the First Painting Gallery in Teylers Museum, Johan Conrad Greive (1837–1891), 1862

for – or should strive for. Because let's be honest: although most museum research staff would like to be taken seriously as 'real' academics, this simply does not make sense. With the new research agenda, we need to create clarity. Universities exist for value-free scholarship and museums for valuation, in keeping with their respective *raison d'être*. Let us not confuse these different kinds of knowledge and interpretation, as this could lead to failed scholarship and ineffectual museums.

Creating a smart synergy

Now that we have defined the problem clearly, it is time to add nuance. A model that works in theory is all well and good, but the reality is always too complex for a simple model. The first question then becomes: Is there really no room for pure research within the museum walls? Of course there is, and some institutions are still doing this. What I have attempted to show above is the fundamental difference between the subjective orientation of museums and the objective orientation of the pure scholar. For too long this distinction has not been made clearly enough. The ongoing question is whether pure scholarship should maintain a foothold in (at least some) museums. Wherein lies the added value, given that universities are generally the more logical place for this kind of research? Museums must be able to give a clear response to this question on a regular basis.

‘The key recommendation for the research agenda is that museums should abandon their nineteenth-century desire for objectivity and embrace a subjectivity based on facts’

Then of course there is the need to be au fait with the latest research findings in order to work effectively as a valuating curator. This makes close collaboration between museums and universities essential, something to be encouraged wherever possible. It creates a marvellous synergy whereby the scholar seeks to draw a true – or at least highly nuanced – picture from which the curator singles out what is most meaningful and inspirational. It is through collaboration of this kind that both types of specialist understand where the other is coming from, thereby giving one another a clearer picture of their own role and motivations. Academics do not need to present an – in their eyes – simplistic account and curators do not have to tell stories that are dull as dishwater.

Academics often say that they find their work creative – creative within the boundaries set by their discipline. Museum staff go one step further: they have to single out the things that are potentially the most meaningful and develop them for maximum impact. The more knowledge each individual has at their fingertips, the greater the need for interpretation. Without interpretation we would drown in information.

The key recommendation for the research agenda is that museums should abandon their nineteenth-century desire for objectivity and embrace a subjectivity based on facts. Museums can only play a significant role if they focus on interpreting the world, on being selective. Museums are all about valuating, opinion forming and interpretation. Only in this way can they be inspirational and enhance experience value.

Postscript

On 24 April the Cultural Heritage Agency in Amersfoort facilitated a seminar on the forthcoming research agenda. This involved a broad exchange of views about the difference between the objectivity that drives academic scholars and the subjective role of museum curators. The seminar identified two shifts in the museum sector that are closely linked to the changing role of museums – from an institution that teaches to one that inspires.

The first shift we discussed concerned the issue of real versus not real, or the difference between authentic and fake. Authenticity is perhaps the greatest treasure that museums possess. ‘We have the genuine articles and they are what gives us an advantage over other institutions that don’t have them. They are what will always bring people back.’ While this might seem irrefutable logic, the more we thought about it, the more we began to doubt. If you can make a technically exact copy of these ‘genuine’ objects, so that you really cannot tell the difference, why should people visit museums to see other ‘genuine’ works? Does the sense of authenticity persist? And will it still persist in two or three generations’ time?

It is remarkable how often museums use reproductions to support their stories. What was unthinkable fifteen years ago now occurs with increasing frequency. With 178,000 visitors, the Tutankhamun exhibition at Amsterdam Expo was one of the best attended exhibitions of recent years, but it did not contain a single authentic object. But what is authentic? How does that concept evolve and what are the implications for museums? How can they use it to their advantage?

The second shift that we are talked about in April was the changing role of museum visitors. When twentieth-century museum-goers were admitted to exhibition rooms containing exalted works of art, they were expected to be silent. They had to pay attention in order to properly absorb the knowledge served up by the museum. This is changing as today’s visitors evolve from passive absorbers of knowledge to active participants, sometimes even creators. We could cite countless examples. Take for instance the Textile Museum with its textile lab, where each year hundreds of artists and designers experiment with the latest techniques. Or the National Glass

Museum with its glass lab, where artists create new works and children come to make Christmas decorations. Then there is the Centraal Museum that offers workshops in which visitors can make something themselves. Or the Rijksmuseum Twenthe, where exhibition openings have become lively salons, filled with debates, performances and free workshops.

Once again, museums are becoming places not only where knowledge is transferred, but where discussion and creativity is unleashed. Does this all relate to the broader changes in how museums perceive their role? Or is it attributable to other causes? Are museums enjoying a renaissance as a 'study circle', as they did in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? Or will they lose that role to organisations such as libraries, educational institutions or ad hoc initiatives that, thanks to digital technology, can organise themselves with far greater ease than in the past? Should museums still confine themselves to a single physical location, or to their own collection? What is needed to respond more effectively to the full range of social changes? And ultimately, why shouldn't museums lead the way?

The current research question facing museums is not how we can fulfil the traditional museum mandate a little better, but how high we dare to fly. Above all else, we need to ensure that the research agenda is an innovation agenda.

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Further reading

On the information society:

Alessandro Barrico, *The Barbarians*, 2010.

On stagnation and renewal:

Clayton Christensen, *The Innovator's Dilemma*, 1997.

On creativity:

Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 2004.

On life as an art form:

Seth Godin, *The Icarus Deception – How High Will You Fly*, 2012.

On all things possible:

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 1974.

On perception and experience:

Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*, 1999.

On scholarship:

J.J. Voskuil, *Het bureau (The Office)*, 1996-2000 (all seven volumes).

Museums from an economic perspective

economic value | René Goudriaan





Museum Night Rotterdam. Photo: Bas Czerwinski

Analysing future opportunities and threats

If you look at museums from an economic perspective, you will soon discover that they are a special kind of organisation. People who don't go to museums and who therefore don't contribute to their upkeep (apart from indirectly through taxes) do nevertheless benefit from their presence in our society. They might, for example, sell refreshments, a night's hotel accommodation or a souvenir to visitors who have come to the Lakenhal in Leiden specially to see Lucas van Leyden's 'Last Judgement', or to people who always wanted to see with their own eyes the beautifully situated Museum Belvédère in Heerenveen. What's more, not everything can be expressed in monetary terms. Museums also contribute to external effects, such as national pride and national identity, that are difficult to quantify (Frey and Meier, 2006). This makes it hard to measure the economic value of museums.

These hard-to-measure benefits are often conveniently forgotten when it comes to determining the economic value of museums, although they are one of the main reasons for government funding. Fortunately, there are exceptions.¹ The economic value of museums is made up of more than their contribution to the gross domestic product. It can be difficult to calculate, especially as some cultural organisations do not have official museum status. The Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam, for example, which has no collection of its own, attracts a large audience

annually to its exhibitions, yet these figures will not be found in the annual reports of museums. The Nieuwe Kerk only featured in the statistics when the Stedelijk Museum was a temporary guest there with its 'Holy Inspiration' exhibition (winter 2008-2009).

One thing is certain: museums are currently experiencing a worldwide boom. In 2012 the Louvre attracted almost ten million visits, one million more than the previous year. The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, designed by American architect Frank Gehry, opened its doors to the public in 1997 and has since revitalised the sleepy Spanish port city. Imposing temples of art have risen in Qatar and Abu Dhabi in recent years, while China is poised to become the museum nation of the future. It now boasts more than 4000 buildings, some of which are still either empty or only partially filled (thus driving up art prices), and a further 6000 are scheduled in the next fifteen years (Garschagen, 2014). And in the United States alone, 850 million people visited a museum in 2012 – more than all the visitors to American amusement parks and major sporting events combined (The Economist, 2013).

In the Netherlands too, interest in museums from at home and abroad is greater than ever. The public is flocking to the refurbished and reopened Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the Mauritshuis in The Hague. President Obama posed in front of Rembrandt's 'Nightwatch' in the fully renovated Rijksmuseum. And a short time ago, extensions to Museum De Fundatie in Zwolle were completed with the addition of a spectacular superstructure on the roof. As in other countries – witness the imposing Ordos Art Museum in the Chinese Gobi desert – the prevailing trend in the Netherlands is to make the buildings themselves impressive. They can make a statement and show self-assuredness.

¹ Recently, a first attempt was made to document in detail the economic value of museums in the Netherlands, based on current knowledge and the available data (Marlet, Poort and Van Woerkens, 2011). Unfortunately, the sketchy information and the difficulties of measuring a significant portion of the economic benefits frequently obliged the researchers to fall back on assumptions rather than hard figures when quantifying the benefits. This is not their fault. They were cautious in their estimates and did not make any exaggerated claims about economic benefits (in contrast to the economic impact assessments conducted by many consultants).

22 million visits a year

Things can change quickly in the museum world. At the beginning of this century a policy paper from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science reported that museum attendance had stabilised, the Dutch museum-going public was ageing and new target groups therefore needed to be attracted (Tweede Kamer 2001/2002). Nevertheless, according to Statistics Netherlands (CBS), museum attendance in the Netherlands rose to more than 22 million in

2011, and this figure is expected to climb still higher. Compared to the rest of the cultural sector, museums have survived the economic crisis well (Blankers et al., 2012).

This sounds wonderful and suggests grounds for optimism, but what will the situation be like in, say, ten years' time? Will the new seniors of the digital age frequent museums as often as their present-day counterparts? Will foreign tourists from East Asia and elsewhere continue to come in such large numbers? We also have to ask ourselves whether museums – with their limited budgets – can cope with an increasing number of visits or whether this will come at the expense of their sometimes vulnerable collections, or even of the building itself. And are all museums experiencing a growth in the number of visitors, or just the 'superstar' museums (Frey, 1998) with their top collections and magnificent buildings?

We should also remember that growth cannot go on forever; it has to stop sometime. After all, there are limits to people's budgets, income and leisure time. Never before have consumers had such a range of options for spending their disposable income and their free time, and the number of leisure activities will continue to grow in the digital age.

For the present, however, everything is still looking rosy, although it is not entirely clear why. A scientific basis is lacking. Academic disciplines such as cultural economics have yet to prove themselves.² This is something that the museum sector and the government will have to address. The leisure market is becoming an international battle ground and museums will have to come up with evidence-based knowledge – about the audience, what they want, the impact of new developments such as 3D printing, attracting a larger audience, etc – if they wish to survive. Museums owe it to society and themselves to take on that responsibility.

² Cultural economists could learn a lot from health economists, for instance, whose discipline evolved much earlier, although they rarely do so. Many of the problems in health economics bear a strong resemblance to those in cultural economics (information and control problems, hard-to-measure performance and quality, external effects, professional autonomy, regulated markets, commercial and non-commercial suppliers, etc.).

‘Are all museums experiencing a growth in attendance, or just the ‘superstar’ museums with their top collections and magnificent buildings?’

Enticing the public

Over 22 million visits (almost 30% of which are made by foreign tourists) do not mean that every Dutch citizen goes to a museum at least once a year. It is 22 million visits, not 22 million individual visitors. According to 'Cultuur in Beeld 2013', published by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 48% of Dutch adults went at least once to a museum in 2012. This amounts to approximately eight million Dutch people. It means that the other eight million come less than once a year, or not at all. The same applies to the 850 million visits in the United States – it seems a lot, but there too, only half of the population enters a museum in a course of a year.

It was long believed that visitors would simply come if admissions to museums were free. Admittedly, attendance does rise slightly at first, but it then levels off again. What also happens is that the existing audience comes more often, but almost no new visitors are attracted in this way (Goudriaan et al., 2002). The museum-going public are fairly indifferent to price. In fact, in an age when admission fees are rising more rapidly than ever, and much faster than the general inflation, museum visits are increasing dramatically. Price rises result in only a marginal drop in visitors, partly because admission charges amount to only a quarter of the total cost of a museum visit (including travel costs and refreshments). A museum's offerings are much more important than the price of admission.

Museum visits have risen significantly in the past 25 years as the public function of museums has gained greater prominence. Art historical and scholarly research is no longer the absolute core business of museums, and we see this reflected in the museum staff. More and more people with a financial-economic background now work alongside art historians. Museums engage in marketing, communications and fundraising, and they have depart-

ments for public outreach and education – and increasingly, a commercial director. In short, there is a greater focus on the public (and on finances). This is because the public is important and, in a worldwide trend, today's public is very interested in the past and in contemporary art. More events are being organised to entice them to museums: debates, live bands, theatrical performances, Museum Night, sleepovers for children. In other words, museums have ceased to be boring.

About eight years ago my children accompanied me to the Tate Modern in London, where the 'Test Site' installation by German artist Carsten Höller was exhibited in the Turbine Hall. This artwork consisted of five slides, three storeys high, which people could thoroughly 'test'. My children were delighted; encased in a canvas sack, they took the opportunity, time and again, to slide down a 58m-long tube. It meant they were also prepared to put up with 'that Rothko painting', as well as Höller's deeper ideas behind the installation, although they, like three million other visitors, did exactly what the artist had in mind – namely slide. For those of you who are worried that museums are in danger of becoming little more than fairground attractions, rest assured: my children enjoyed themselves so much that they are now planning, on their own initiative, to see Rothko's work at the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag.

This is just one example of how museums can reach out to new target groups, and lure those visitors back at a later date. 'Low-threshold' initiatives can help to broaden the audience and make collections more accessible.

But there are more potential visitors. People in the Netherlands have more and more chunks of free time, plus endless possibilities when it comes to spending that time. But mobility has also increased; we travel more. And if we go to an exhibition in Dubai, this is at the expense of Dutch museums. Added to that, the baby boomers are on the march. In better health than their counterparts a few generations ago, they are still adventurous and probably won't confine their museum visits to Dutch museums. They are also increasingly familiar with the opportunities of the digital age.

Over the next ten years Dutch museums will have to focus more on attracting audiences. The large 'superstar' museums especially will be in a better

position to do so (unlike small museums with their sometimes tiny budgets), as will museums in the Randstad conurbation, where the population will continue to rise in the coming years.

Broader access to collections

Museums will also work on digitising their collections. This is already happening, but museums still tend to be rather timid in this respect, with some neglecting it altogether. Most websites will tell you how long it takes to walk to the museum from the train station and what exhibitions are showing. But apart from the odd picture and a brief description, they rarely give more detailed information about the collection. Good museum apps, indispensable in the mobile phone age, are still few and far between. The internet can be used to generate more interest, as experiments have shown (Geukema et al., 2011). With digitisation, museums can also respond more effectively to their increasingly diverse audience – from the Facebook generation to seniors, from new immigrants to native Dutch people, from people with few qualifications to the highly educated.

A range of online games have been developed to attract more children to Dutch museums (see www.museumkids.nl). For example, children can win a treasure map that they then pick up from the museum in question. Initiatives of this kind can be highly effective. They are a good example of how museums can co-operate with fairly limited resources and succeed in reaching a new audience (Geukema et al., 2011; Notenboom et al., 2014).

If a museum presents its entire collection on the internet, the public can pay a virtual visit that is akin to, or a full substitute for, a real visit, but this does require a much higher quality of presentation than is now the case. The internet offers opportunities to add new experiences and to tell the stories accompanying the collection. An online visit may not be a full substitute for a traditional, physical one, just as a musical recording is not a perfect substitute for a live concert, but a digital museum visit can encourage people to visit a museum in person. Or it may cannibalise physical visits – this is difficult to predict. There are both opportunities and threats here.

People from outside the Randstad or abroad, for whom a trip to a museum may be too far or too expensive, are the primary audience who can connect



Shop in Stedelijk Museum Schiedam. Photo: Frans van Leeuwen

with a museum through an online experience (e.g. as a friend of the museum). Over time, they may become so enthusiastic that they put aside their reservations and save up for a visit. They won't be people who come every year, but certainly once every three to five years.

On the other hand, people from Asia and Eastern Europe are still choosing the Netherlands (and Europe) as a holiday destination and are taking in a host of museums. This is currently an economically significant group. In the wake of the financial crisis, we are heavily reliant on them; the Bijenkorf department store in Amsterdam was restyled with this group of very wealthy customers in mind. These visitors may be tempted in the future to view a *virtual* thematic exhibition, where they can see and hear an interesting and fascinating story. In their case this could perhaps be at the expense of a 'real' museum visit.

Larger 3D range

As more and more people use the internet, the trend of browsing through collections with just a few clicks of the mouse is set to continue, opening up marvellous opportunities. There are fantastic oppor-

original – although it is unlikely to tempt the seasoned connoisseur. Another benefit of perfect copies that are virtually indistinguishable from the original is that this obviates the need for collections to travel, something that always entails the risk of damage to a painting or sculpture. The Smithsonian Institute in Washington is already making active use of 3D scanning and printing to enhance the accessibility of its collection (Neely and Langer, 2013).

In addition, museums should be able to 'sell' their entire 3D range online to a wide audience – even at night-time, since the up-and-coming generation can no longer conceive of sales that are bound by time and place. We see this trend at Bol.com, where you can place an order at any hour of the day. Museums currently make their images available on the internet free of charge. The question is whether this business model is sustainable if museums have to invest heavily in sophisticated digital systems for accessing their collections. This forces us to think about copyright and property rights (Bertachini and Morando, 2011).

Getting to know the non-visitors

Economic trends continue to be hard to predict, and this is equally true in the museum world. Usually there are net effects. For example, if wages rise and incomes increase, this could boost the number of museum visits. But if the price of leisure time goes up accordingly, more people may prefer to keep working (and earn more money) than enjoy their free time. While some effects are heading in a positive direction, it is hard to say which ones will prevail. We also see this at the CPB Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis: no-one can predict exactly when the financial crisis will be over once and for all; the precise moment is difficult to pinpoint. The only certainty we now have is that the centre of economic activity is shifting to East Asia, something that museums will have to respond to in their marketing.

It is important to design scenarios – economists often base these on simulation models and correlations from the past. Museums should do the same (ARUP, 2013); doing nothing would be worse. Museums have to ask: How far should we go with digitisation? Should we all embark on individual digitisation projects or – since museums prefer to learn from one another – should the Cultural Heritage Agency or the Netherlands Museums

There is still so much more interesting data to be mined from research into statistics, which all museums could benefit from.

tunities here to attract a larger audience, certainly in collaboration with the creative industry (it has to be an integrated experience, not just about looking at pictures). This might even create new job opportunities. We are talking about disruptive innovation: it could become so cheap to develop a technology in the Netherlands that the work will once again be carried out here. This is a positive spin-off.

Yet another new development is 3D scanning and printing. This can enable Dutch museums to lend exact replicas to museums abroad, raising their profile and that of their collection. Certainly, the public in Asia does not have an issue with high-quality copies, and a 3D replica is a useful alternative if a museum does not have the option of buying the

Association play a leading role (with some financial support from government)? Collaboration also helps to keep costs down. This issue is too important to leave to Google. What attracts foreign visitors to Dutch museums and what will happen in the event of major shifts in exchange rates between the euro and other currencies? What are the implications of 3D scanning and printing? How can museums exploit Netflix or Spotify? These and other questions are something we all need to think about.

To answer these questions, museums need to find out as much as they can about their digital and physical visitors – and especially their current non-visitors. This latter group are people who did not acquire the habit of visiting museums when they were children. How do you entice this group to come? And how do you make sure that their children will come? Often, this has to occur through school. The question then becomes: How can we make sure that every school class makes at least one visit to a museum?

Collecting big data

In terms of market research and big data, there is still a lot of information that museums can capture. The Albert Heijn supermarket chain, for example, uses WiFi to track the route that customers take through the store, the shelves they stop at and the specials that detain them the longest. This generates extremely interesting information. It is good to note that the Drents Museum is now conducting a similar study in partnership with the University of Groningen.³

Museums could also become better at mapping out the world of the new rich, since that's where the money is. These are the potential sponsors who can buy a football club – or a museum. (Other potential sponsors include small and medium-sized businesses in the town where a museum is located, a group that tends to be overlooked by sponsorship recruiters.)

There is also plenty of room for improvement when it comes to systematically gathering information about your *own* museum visitors: What categories of visitors can be identified?

Who pays how much? Who gets a discount? Who comes on a school trip? To what extent is price differentiation helpful? Museums can then share this information with one another. For example, just a tiny intervention to reduce energy costs may enable you to purchase an artwork or organise special experiences for the audience. Working together on statistics is strongly recommended. 'Museana', an excellent initiative of the Netherlands Museums Association, is at present only of limited use for research purposes. There is still so much more interesting data to be mined from this kind of research, which all museums could benefit from. This won't be an easy step, since museums also have to compete with one another.

It would also be helpful if universities were to conduct more economic research into museums. In the past, only the social sciences have occasionally highlighted some aspects of museums. However, a discipline like 'cultural economics' is virtually non-existent in the Netherlands (apart from to some extent in Rotterdam). The traditional focus has been on the performing arts and much less so on museums and the visual arts. This type of research would have to be hosted by an Economics faculty in order to get economists interested in studying the economics of museums. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science could also place more emphasis on economic research in the area of heritage. At present, it is mainly private research organisations that explore the economics of the museum world; this knowledge is hardly available at universities.

More research will make more information available about visits and visitors. It might also tell us more about the role that museums play in a company's choice of location. Are house prices really driven up in the vicinity of museums that attract huge crowds? Do museums also attract national and international companies with highly-educated employees who are keen to have diverse cultural offerings in the neighbourhood? Does a museum like the Eye film institute really contribute to the local development of North Amsterdam? We can only arrive at evidence-based answers to these questions if we conduct robust research. There is little place for economic impact assessments in which museums make overly optimistic claims about their economic benefits (including the customary double counting).

³ See <http://www.trovatofoundation.org/stichting.html> and <http://www.emerce.nl/nieuws/museum-intelligent>

Only by harnessing more scientific and evidence-based knowledge can museums maintain their position in the leisure market in the years to come. Only then will the museum world continue as a thriving business.

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