A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON HOW A CITY MUSEUM CAN BE A PARTICIPANT IN THE LIFE OF THE CITY

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INDEMNITY CLAUSE

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Peter Denham
10 January 2016

DEFINITION

Cultural Organisations: Throughout my report I refer to cultural organisations, cultural institutions and museums. I have used this interchangeably and refer to these in a general way to describe any organisation that deals with the development and promotion of cultural activities as its principal purpose for the benefit of the general public.

All photographs: Peter Denham

Cover: Folk City, an exhibition exploring the rise of folk music in New York, Museum of the City of New York. Note the public programs sign advertising a series of concerts associated with the exhibition.

Above: New York skyline

Back cover: Ai Weiwei Straight, 2008–2012, Royal Academy of Arts, London. This work features reinforced bars illegally salvaged from an earthquake site in China. The poor building construction resulted in many deaths, including a school of children whose names are listed around the walls. The bent reinforced bars were taken back to Ai Weiwei’s studio and straightened by workers as a remembrance and a protest against corruption.
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INTRODUCTION

Cultural institutions over the past two decades have been slowly rousing themselves from an internal gaze strictly focused on research and their collections to being publicly aware organisations that want to share ideas and engage with audiences so as they can experience, participate and truly learn in order to foster understanding for the benefit of their society.

My career working in the cultural sector for the past 25 years has been driven by my aim to bring greater awareness and understanding of the importance of cultural activities in society. It is founded on a belief that a rich cultural environment will raise the quality of our lives.

The development in museum practice to look outward and involve their audiences has been a huge step for the sector, one that is proving difficult to comprehend for some but is also more challenging to implement in a real sense. The opportunity for the cultural sector has opened up and museums are embracing the need to provide audiences with opportunities that will be meaningful and connect with their lives, and give them a truly enriched experience.

The aim of my Churchill Fellowship was to learn how museums can truly be a participant in the life of the city. Moving from a once static and aloof organisation, museums continue to raise their profile by being inclusive and active, to become an important voice, contributing to the city’s wellbeing.

At a time of global mobility and city population increases, there is a need for interaction and understanding. With a diversity of offerings city museums can play a leading role, to promote acceptance of our individual and cultural differences, and ultimately, celebrate the city’s rich identity.

The opportunity to travel to cultural organisations around the world to learn from their experiences so that I can implement and share these ideas in Australia has been a remarkable experience. I travelled to 16 cities across 10 countries and visited more than 100 cultural organisations to meet, discuss and experience what these museums are doing to engage with their audiences and participate in the life of the city.

I would like to thank the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia for putting their faith in me and providing this incredible opportunity. I am indebted to Museum of Brisbane for their support and providing me the time to undertake my Fellowship, the many individuals and organisations that I met who were so accommodating and collegial in sharing their ideas and experiences, as well for their warm hospitality. I would also like to thank Philip Bacon and Ian Galloway for supporting my application, and my family for their love and understanding.
At a time of increasing global urbanisation, cities are competing for talent, tourism and investment, while at the same time needing to maintain a quality of life for its residents. On my Fellowship I travelled to 16 cities in Russia, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, United Kingdom, United States and Canada. It was evident that museums have the opportunity to play a great role in the life of the city.

Museums are fast becoming a place for people, a place of social interaction, knowledge creation and exchange. City museums interact with their immediate environment by supporting a social fabric that enhances local identity and a sense of place, for both residents and visitors. Museums are in an ideal position to lead the conversation and provide a place for interaction and participation.

The museum can become the city gathering place, for people to socialise, engage and communicate. Through their cultural programs and social initiatives museums can establish informal relationships with other organisations in the city and foster social involvement. A museum that contributes to creating a more liveable and inclusive city is also contributing to a higher quality of life and a more vibrant social and cultural scene, which in turn will attract the economic benefits so imperative to a city’s success.

To be instrumental in the life of the city, museums also must be an inclusive and unhindered space for debate and social involvement in a changing city. In this way, museums can assist future policy development and direction for the city.

Inclusive and participatory activities at the museum and across the city are essential in order to make the museum accessible to all, to empower residents and visitors, so that they can connect to the city and with one another. The use of new technology will further enhance audience interaction and provide essential communication tools beyond the museum’s walls.

The role of the city museum in supporting cultural policy making as well as its place in the cultural policies of the urban government, have been identified as an area that needs cultivation in the face of the growing impact of cultural and creative industries in the social and economic lives of cities, in urban regeneration projects and in city marketing. The link between how creative a city can become and the role of the city museum deserves further support. Museums in turn, need to be better at articulating the qualitative and long-term benefits in order to gain this support.

To do this, museums must be centred on the audience, have an outward focus, be open to collaborations and networked to gain the necessary support. The museum needs to be active across the city and approachable to all. This will lead to a greater sense of ownership beyond government parameters so the city itself recognises a high level of ownership of the museum. This approach will see the museum become a powerful but inclusive space for ideas.

Throughout cities of the world, there is a heightened awareness of the value of cultural institutions to the city, as they give a depth of experience and are a place for shared understanding. They are importantly identified as a city destination, attracting new visitors to the city. Many cities are supporting major expansion plans to capitalise on this opportunity. In turn many museums are undertaking ambitious projects to provide a wide appeal, the best of these are immersive, interactive and

Behind the façade, a project of photographs of community participants in their homes, projected in their neighbourhood at night for all to see and celebrate, Copenhagen.
I intend sharing the knowledge gained from my Churchill Fellowship, much like my findings – in an open and inclusive way. I have been fortunate enough to have already discussed with media at home (612ABC Radio, The Courier-Mail) and will look for further opportunities. I have also been invited to share my findings with the Lord Mayor of Brisbane and Brisbane City Council’s Establishment & Coordination Committee, as well as Council’s Creative Brisbane Advisory Board.

I am also looking to arrange talks with industry bodies such as Museums & Galleries Queensland, and at Museum of Brisbane. Above all, my finding will be implemented in future activities, including exhibitions and public programs at Museum of Brisbane.

Peter Denham
2015 Churchill Fellow
Director, Museum of Brisbane
PROGRAM
1 SEPTEMBER – 30 OCTOBER 2015

MOSCOW
Memory and Migration, the City and its Museum,
Committee for the Collections and Activities of
Museums of Cities (CAMOC) 2015 10th Anniversary
Annual Conference
Museum of Moscow
Garage Centre for Contemporary Art
Tretyakov Gallery
The Jewish Museum and Tolerance Centre
Bolshoi Theatre
The Kremlin
Museum of Archaeology

GOTHENBURG
Gothenburg City Museum
Rohsska Museum
Gothenburg Museum of Art

COPENHAGEN
Museum of Copenhagen
National Gallery of Denmark
National Museum of Denmark
Danish Museum of Art and Design
Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek
GL Strand (The Art Society)
Nikolaj Contemporary Art Centre
Louisiana Museum of Modern Art
Maritime Museum of Denmark, Elsinore

BERLIN
Berlin City Museum
Hamburger Bahnhof
Altes Museum
Alte National Gallery
Neues Museum
Bauhaus Archive

Humboldt Box
Reichstag
Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe
Berggruen Museum
Sammlung Scharf-Gerstenberg
Brohan Museum
Berlinische Galerie Museum of Modern Art
Jewish Museum
FHXB Friedrichshain Kreuzberg Museum

AMSTERDAM
Amsterdam City Museum
Van Gogh Museum
Rijksmuseum
Stedelijk Museum

THE HAGUE
Maritshuis
Gemeente Museum
Museon, Museum of Science and Culture

ROTTERDAM
Museum Rotterdam
Museum Boijmans van Beuningen
Het Nieuwe Instituut

GHENT
STAM: Ghent City Museum
MSK: Museum of Fine Arts
SMAK: Museum of Contemporary Art
Design Museum
St Bavo Cathedral

PARIS
Pavillon de l’Arsenal
Musee Carnavalet
Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, Moscow

Bauhaus Reuse, a temporary pavilion, which offered a range of activities which focused on the importance of reuse in design and construction. Bauhaus Archive, Berlin

The Louvre
Musee d’Orsay
Centre Georges Pompidou
Atelier Brancusi
Musee du Quai Branly
Musee Picasso

LONDON
Museum of London
Museum of London Docklands
Barbican Centre
Victoria and Albert Museum
Artangel
Hayward Gallery
Wellcome Collection
British Museum
Imperial War Museum
Natural History Museum
Science Museum
Royal Academy of Arts
Courtauld Institute
Design Museum
Tate Britain
Tate Modern
National Gallery
National Portrait Gallery
Whitechapel Gallery

MANCHESTER
Whitworth Art Gallery
Manchester Art Gallery

LIVERPOOL
National Museums Liverpool
Museum of Liverpool
FACT (Foundation of Art and Creative Technology)

International Slavery Museum
Merseyside Maritime Museum
Tate Liverpool

BRISTOL
Bristol Museum and Art Gallery
Arnduff
M Shed

NEW YORK
Museum of the City of New York
Tenement Museum
Museum of Modern Art
Metropolitan Museum of Art
Whitney Museum
Solomon R Guggenheim Museum
MoMA PS1
New Museum
Museum of Art and Design
National September 11 Memorial & Museum

SEATTLE
Seattle Art Museum
Seattle Asian Art Museum
Museum of History & Industry

VANCOUVER
Vancouver Art Gallery
Museum of Vancouver
Contemporary Art Gallery
MUSEUM AS PLACE-MAKER

The exhibition Jim Shaw: The End is Here at New Museum, New York.
We are living in a time of unprecedented global urbanisation. It is estimated that by 2050, 80% of the world’s population will live in cities and that in Australia the figure will be 90%. Coupled with this movement is the forecast increase in immigration world-wide by up to 50% in the next 10 years. This rapid rise in mobility and the advances in communication technology have made our world effectively smaller and much easier to traverse.

It is therefore, of the utmost importance that cities are positioned for this movement and ready for change by becoming multi-functional, adaptable, open and offering opportunity to all. People want to live in creative and cultural cities full of possibility. History shows that it is these people, who create and support economic and cultural innovations that lead to growth in the city. Competition among cities for talent, tourism and investment will continue to intensify and cities will position themselves for the greatest benefit.

Surrounded by the distractions and allure of city life, as well as living in an environment of continual change, many people will struggle to maintain a sense of identity. In a world that is seemingly connected like never before, members of the community will also face the problem of isolation and disillusionment. Cities will need to foster a sense of belonging, express who we are and have greater acceptance and understanding of others. For a city to flourish in the face of global urbanisation, it must have an inclusive identity, where difference is celebrated and never judged.

Cultural institutions, especially city museums, are in a unique position to provide support for and give expression to both the city’s and the individual’s needs.
A museum that contributes to creating a more liveable and inclusive city is also contributing to a higher quality of life and a more vibrant social and cultural scene, which in turn will attract the economic element so imperative to a city’s success.

There is a strong push for museums to be seen as the ‘agora’ – the gathering place in ancient Greek city-states, the centre of city life. Others have described it as the shift from the museum as cathedral to museum as town square. Museums are fast becoming a place of social interaction, knowledge creation and exchange, where people can feel part of the city.

Museums are accessible and meaningful spaces in which communities and individuals can meet. Carols Ghosn, CEO of Renault states that ‘You learn from your diversity … but are comforted by commonality’ so these opportunities must be encouraged in such an environment. Such spaces can contribute to a community’s vitality, which in turn can inspire new ways of thinking and encourage collaboration and partnerships across the community. Hive, a not-for-profit community organisation in Vancouver believes that such places can assist in building a network of knowledge, connection and innovative action in order to take on society’s complex challenges.

Top: Peter Denham and participants at a community event, celebrating, cooking and eating the produce from their community garden project, Urban Nature: The Museum Garden, Copenhagen City Museum.

Above: Museum as town square, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Note the counter offering multi-lingual museum guides.
In this new world paradigm, cultural organisations are becoming more responsive and developing exhibitions and other projects that explain and investigate issues facing society – locally and globally. This move from traditional, passive institutions to ones that are responsive and dynamic, has seen a major shift in programming that is underpinned by a need to shed light on these issues and contribute to the community.

The 10th conference of CAMOC (Collections and Activities of Museums of Cities, a committee of the International Council of Museums), was an opportunity for this group of museums to reflect on the various approaches taken over the last decade, to assess current approaches to museums and importantly, to look at future directions.

The conference had the theme of Memory and Migration, which was very timely given the global migration crisis. Many of the presentations showcased immigration themed exhibitions that focussed on the actual communities within a city.

People create cities and they continue to give cities shape and meaning. Besides our Indigenous population, we are all migrants to the city. While some people may have been here for generations or have newly arrived, we are all in one way or another migrants from another part of the country or another part of the world. Migrants bring memories of their past, their culture and their habits with them. Migration in this way continually redefines a city’s heritage and narrative. As the tellers of the city’s story, museums approach all such stories within an inclusive framework.

Every space in our cities has both collective and individual memory and each develop different narratives (and characteristics). By celebrating and highlighting both the collective and individual narratives we can identify as a group and also celebrate difference and learn from one another on how to look at the city anew.

While it is important to acknowledge and celebrate difference, rather than highlighting difference, museums need to move towards a more holistic approach to ‘who we are’ as a city – how past communities have shaped the city, its current make up and (articulate) growing trends.

In the process of project development and the traditional stereotype of museums, people feel or are excluded. Museums must continue to redefine themselves to ensure they are welcoming places for all and that the individual contributor or visitor will be able to interpret and relate to the content. Museums are establishing cultural policy that ensures the participation of the greatest number of people, so they become places where knowledge, enhancement of civil consciousness and a reconsideration of identity should be possible.
In part to establish their worth and place in the city, museums have been undertaking select community focused projects. Museums around the world have undertaken many projects looking at minority groups within the wider community. For example, there have been many immigrant exhibitions as was evident from the Moscow CAMOC conference.

Many museums have also been leading a movement to demonstrate the increased role they play in society. The Museums Association in the United Kingdom has produced a vision Museums Change Lives on the increased social impact of museums. It demonstrates that museums can be ambitious about their role in society:

Museums change people’s lives. They enrich the lives of individuals, contribute to strong and resilient communities, and help create a fair and just society. Museums in turn are immensely enriched by the skills and creativity of their public.

National Museums Liverpool comprises seven museums, including Museum of Liverpool and the International Slavery Museum. The nationally funded museums in Liverpool have been at the forefront of this move to contribute to contemporary life and show their strong sense of social purpose. The Executive team of David Fleming, Carol Rogers and Janet Dugdale, described their next community project which looks at the city’s ageing population. This project will be delivered in the community with a small exhibition at the museum exploring issues such as dementia, isolation and how to keep active in old age.

One of the challenges with this approach is that it is concentrated on a small percentage of the community. While such projects build trust and meet the outcomes with such groups, it does not always reach the intended target of the wider community. As a result, the initial aim of the project to share understanding of a particular community group can be lost. This approach is also resource heavy and needs a long and committed development period. While such projects are incredibly worthwhile they must be balanced with all the other work and demands on the museum. Museum of Liverpool has worked well to tell the wider story of Liverpool to balance this focused approach. In a number of cases the smaller temporary projects have been included into the city’s permanent exhibition.

Importantly, Museum of Liverpool’s ageing project and subsequent activities will be delivered in the community. While costly, it has far greater benefit and meaning to the participants, many of whom are unable to travel to the museum or feel uncomfortable in an institutional setting. This is particularly so for disadvantaged and migrant communities. Working with community groups does not convert to numbers through the door at the museum (an issue with a museum’s performance indicators and the issue of quantitative versus qualitative measures), which are often key when considering funding. Such projects need the acceptance and support of the funding bodies and the museum board to count the community participants as an essential part of the museum’s audience.

Other projects with the same intent but without the intensity can be just as successful. In recognition of the rising African population in Europe, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark undertook a series of three annual, major exhibitions on the important contribution of contemporary African art and design. Although it was somewhat removed from the subjects, through a number of commissions, partnerships, interviews and research, the series provided an insight into African culture today.
Another challenge with focused community projects is building long-term relationships with community groups. Once a project is completed, the challenge of sustaining an ongoing engagement with participants is difficult to maintain. A number of museums, including the city museums in Gothenburg and Rotterdam, employ dedicated staff to provide this link and continue to work on other community projects. The Tate Modern, London employs a number of staff to work with the local community of Southwark and Lambeth. Recognising the fact that this cultural institution is a major destination in the city for visitors, the Tate Community project aims to offer opportunities for local residents to be involved in projects with contemporary artists, writers, musicians and participate in developing new walkways and a community garden. With the impact of the new extensions to Tate Modern still to be felt, this is a long-term project that will change considerably due to the number of visitors to the area.

The Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg District Museum (or FXHB), representing one of the 12 districts in Berlin, has recently taken a far more adventurous approach to community engagement. This district crosses the former east-west divide and is home to many immigrants, a large percentage from Turkey. The curator, Sophie Perl, toured me through FXHB’s permanent exhibitions and the current temporary exhibition We Will Rise, on the current refugee movement. For this project, in a gesture of inclusivity, the space was handed over to the community group to curate and develop. However, problems ensued; the group had never worked in a museum context and the exhibition did not reach other audiences as it was focused only on the groups concerns and quickly became political, all to the detriment of the museum. FXHB was happy to admit that a more collaborative approach would have not only reduced problems but ultimately been more beneficial.

Another approach to highlighting effective research and community projects in a related field is at the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) in Bristol, United Kingdom. The NCCPE works with academics and students to highlight projects in the higher education sector that are making a valued contribution to 21st-century society through its public engagement activities. Occupying space in the Arnolfini, Bristol it is approachable space for the predominately culturally aware and youth audience at the contemporary art gallery. Projects are then delivered in many formats: community, universities and online. This also demonstrates to funding sources the importance of the projects that are being undertaken and could be a model that the peak museum bodies in Australia could replicate.
While all the city museums I visited showcased the history of the city and wanted to make connections to the residents, traditional permanent exhibitions by their nature can be heavy and like the city itself they require change and animation. To counter this and ensure a more dynamic and wider story reflecting the city today, many museums are undertaking projects that work right across the community.

Museum Rotterdam, The Netherlands is taking one of the most contemporary approaches with their new permanent exhibition due to be launched in their new museum building (designed by star architect Rem Koolhaas) in 2016. They are using the perspective of the city to move beyond the set of attributes that traditionally identify and describe the function of the city and instead, will ask viewers to see it through selected individuals’ eyes. Nicole van Dijk, Curator & Project Manager, believes that the city museum is a place of debate and social involvement in the changing city. The museum is taking a very interesting approach to the new permanent exhibition, Rotterdammers on the Map. It puts people at the centre of the new permanent exhibition and follows the journey of five residents as they move around the city. This includes the use of GPS to track the daily movements of each of them. Visitors will be able to participate, interact and connect in areas around the stories by leaving their own stories and thoughts on the city’s future.

In Copenhagen, Denmark the lead curator at the city museum, Jakob Parby provided an overview of their approach to the forthcoming new city exhibition at the yet to be opened new museum in the centre of the city. Copenhagen has always been a fluid place with constant change and there will be an influx of new people while others leave. The exhibition will focus on migration and mobility as an urban norm rather than the exception. This varied interpretation, allows for the museum to highlight moments and the many people who have contributed to the development of the city, without focusing too heavily on one particular community group.

The city museum in Gothenburg has taken an interactive and exploratory approach to the city’s urban history and the challenges it is facing. Described as ‘a meeting place for anyone who wants to take a fresh look at the city’, the exhibition Urbanum utilises new technologies, film, photography and objects, and encourages people to decide on aspects of the city’s urban development for themselves. The museum has worked closely with the city council who have published two discussion papers looking at the impacts of urban development on children...
and the community. A table and chairs are provided for discussion and debate, and are utilised by interested community groups.

*Amsterdam DNA,* is the permanent exhibition of the Amsterdam City Museum. It looks at the city, on one hand as a world city and on the other as a small, friendly and idiosyncratic place where the spirit of enterprise, creativity, civic values and freedom define the city’s ethos. In a challenging group of buildings, the museum has produced an interactive and engaging journey through the city’s history by employing design to great effect.

STAM – Ghent City Museum, Belgium also has a large permanent exhibition located across the museum’s site, which constitutes a 14th, 17th, 19th and a new 21st century building. This is an experience that is delivered with a contemporary approach and utilises new technologies. Christine De Weerdt, Director and Lars De Jaegher, Curator remain focused on this huge undertaking in a city of 250,000 people but are still able to deliver a considered, changing exhibitions program.

Museum of London, one of the largest city museums, holding an extensive collection, has a vast permanent exhibition exploring one of the world’s great cities. The Director, Sharon Ament acknowledges that to truly know the city is hard, as it is ever changing and always on the move. Recently, they have begun a new exhibition program *Show Space* that will extend their collection focus and unapologetically, the Museum utilises a popularist approach to their programming.

Like the National Museums Liverpool, M Shed in Bristol is another nationally funded project to help revitalise the city’s fortunes. The museum is named for the shed identifier on the disused docks and has become a major attraction for the city. It focuses not only on the city’s former industrial and maritime history but importantly interweaves stories and moments from day-to-day life across the city’s history.

In a city full of world-class museums, the Museum of the City of New York is a much more discreet offering. Set in a colonial revival building across from Central Park, at first glance it embodies the old stereotype of museums, somewhat removed from the day-to-day hustle and bustle of New York. However, the exhibition program and presentation is one that is contemporary and informative, with exhibitions covering the history of the city through to current events. One exhibition on the New York Marathon, timed to coincide with the 2015 event, included running shoes, and outfits through to stories of individuals and why they set themselves the imposing challenge.

Museum of Vancouver has been one of the first city museums to lead the change from a museum that attempted to bring the world to Vancouver but instead, to one that reflects and connects Vancouver to the world. It began a series of provocative and thoughtful exhibitions on and for the residents. Nancy Noble, CEO explained that their aim is to provoke, engage and animate the city, so as its residents look anew at the city around them. A permanent exhibition telling the story of the city, was for the first time recently updated with the consultation of the local Inuit people, and is complemented by a changing exhibition program further exploring aspects of city life.

Museum of Vancouver is in an idyllic but out of the way parkland setting, and the Museum is planning a long term move to the heart of the city in what is the current home of the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG). Maryann Jordan, Development Director from VAG introduced me to the...
advanced plans for the new art gallery. Designed by star architects Herzog & de Meuron, it will be a visitor destination that will provide a greater depth of experience in the city.

This was one of the most notable aspects of my trip. Although the economic situation is tight, many cities have recognised the value of cultural offerings to the city. Museums attract new residents, foster a sense of pride and ownership, give depth of experience, and are a place for shared understanding. There were many ambitious projects newly opened, currently under construction or in development, throughout all the cities I visited.

Many other museums, such as Musee Carnavalet, the city museum in Paris, are undergoing transformation to ensure they remain relevant and connected to the city they represent. With huge collections to care for, many of these museums are under resourced to introduce a more dynamic level of exhibitions and projects.

A smaller, more agile and responsive organisation in Paris is the Pavillon de l’Arsenal that was established by the city for the information, documentation and exhibition for urban planning and architecture in Paris. Through its program the centre encourages excellent design of and approaches to spaces within the city. It has a permanent exhibition, City in the Making dedicated to the metropolis of Paris as it was, is and will be. The centrepiece is a 37sqm interactive digital model/map developed in partnership with Google and JCDecaux. This powerful collaboration allows visitors to explore and interact on touchscreens in detail with sites across the city.

Another single focused organisation was the Wellcome Collection in London. A privately funded organisation, this free museum for the ‘ incurably curious’ has a high quality exhibition program that explores the connections between medicine, life and art. On my visit, there was an immersive exhibition looking at memory by artist Alice Anderson who wraps objects in very fine copper wire.

Another unique museum experience that traces the lives of individuals in the city is the Tenement Museum in New York’s Lower East Side, an immigration portal for 200 years. The museum preserves the history of immigration through the personal accounts of those that built their lives in the neighbourhood. In what were once slum apartments, the museum is now able to tell the stories of people from over 20 nations from 1863 and 1935, with visitors able to experience the extant rooms. In line with the growth of city museums, is the establishment of World Museums, particularly in Europe. Based on historical ethnographical collections, these museums are attempting to provide an understanding of cultures around the globe. The Humboldt Forum under construction in Berlin is the most ambitious of these projects. Somewhat a political statement, it will consist of a university, two museum collections and a library, all focused on telling the story of civilisation. For Germany, it symbolises respectful and equitable cohabitation between cultures and nations of the world. Described as ‘a unique and internationally influential centre for art, culture, science and learning’, The Humboldt Forum is on the site of the original Berlin Palace and architecturally based on the palace design.

Many other museums provided invaluable information through observation, advice and ideas, ranging from exhibition design to audience interaction (including marketing, new technology, crowd control and way finding) to ensure that visitors are encouraged to concentrate and enjoy the museum experience.
As part of a major contemporary exhibition, art institutions will sometimes look for the opportunity to deliver an external project in the city. These artworks help connect people to the power of art, especially reaching those that do not intend visiting the museum. The Arnolfini, Bristol’s contemporary art museum held the exhibition Richard Long: Time and Space. This renowned artist lives and grew up in the area. A small, yet poignant example of an outdoor project was Long’s Boyhood Line on Clifton Downs. Made from white quartz, this trail of rock follows the worn walking tracks he used as a boy across the lush green parklands.

Over the last two decades, Artangel has commissioned and produced nearly 100 external projects by contemporary artists given the opportunity to imagine and realise something extraordinary. Their work is underpinned by the belief that artists can make us see and think about the world in new and enduring ways. These projects in the public realm range from the extraordinary to the everyday. Rachel Whiteread’s House, 1993–94, cast the interior of an ordinary terrace house in East London, bringing attention to the diminishing availability of low-income housing. This temporary public sculpture established both the artist (who won the Turner Prize for best young British artist in 1993 for the work) and Artangel as an independent organisation that had the commitment and ability to realise major projects. Co-Director James Lingwood has overseen in recent years major sculptural work by Antony Gormley, a light sculpture by Ryoji Ikeda through to new work by musician PJ Harvey.

In part due to the nature of their focus, other cultural organisations have been reluctant to work outside of the museum’s grounds. However, for city museums this is now changing and in order to reach the community...
they represent, institutions are looking for opportunities to deliver projects and activities across the city. Such projects, take careful planning in gaining the relevant permissions, logistics and staffing that can make such projects costly. Rotterdam City Museum has delivered many small projects throughout the city (including a working lunch diner at a building site) in order to reach and gain access to the communities for projects ultimately delivered back in the museum. When delivered in the right way, these activities do become touchstones for residents and can make an important ongoing connection.

One of the most ambitious external projects attempted is The Wall, established by the Copenhagen City Museum and funded by the city. Copenhagen is building a new metro line through the city and this project follows the path of the work site. This moveable 12-metre, interactive touchscreen wall enables viewers to search the history of their area through images and also upload their own photographs to share with others. Only possible as part of the bigger city project, now running for three years it has been a huge success for residents and particularly visitors to the city.

The Pavillon de l’Arsenal also produces a number of offsite projects in Paris. Co-Urbanisme was a project that involved collaboration with groups across the city to realise 15 temporary projects and structures that explored how people live in the city and to ask viewers to consider the future. Another external project in development, Circular Pavilion made entirely with reused materials, such as old apartment doors, was part of the COP21, the 2015 Paris Climate Conference.

The Bauhaus Archive in Berlin (in partnership with an urban planning cooperative and sponsored by Ikea) established Bauhaus re use, a temporary pavilion, in parklands close to the archive. Looking at the importance of reuse in design and construction, this pavilion had a multitude of programs for all ages. In addition to workshops for children and young people, it consisted of an information centre, and provided a discussion platform on architecture, design and urban development.

This year the Serpentine Galleries in Hyde Park, London has celebrated the 15th anniversary of the world-renowned Serpentine Pavilion. The pavilion series has seen famous architects and artists build an annual structure that is then utilized for a range of activities and public engagement opportunities. In part, necessity due to a lack of space but also responding to the original function of the galleries designed as a place to enjoy the parklands, the pavilion this year by Selgascano (Spanish architects José Selgas and Lucía Cano) was full of animated and engaged patrons.
As the above examples demonstrate, the more active museums are now looking to engage and provide a memorable experience by involving audiences both at the museum or at offsite projects. Until recently, community participation to date has been defined by working with the relevant communities to tell their stories, to involve them in the process and to get their input on what should be shown and shaping the content of an exhibition. The focus now has turned to a greater interaction with the museum’s audience.

Museums are now more than ever competing for people’s time against leisure and commercial pursuits. With the economic slowdown, funding bodies are expecting museums to better justify their role and how they benefit society in the present time and not just the long term. This has seen museums looking to enhance the visitor experience, becoming more socially inclusive and looking at ways that the museum can interact with the audience rather than it being a passive place to visit.

Audiences are now expecting more fulfilling and participatory experiences, allowing them to explore the museum in a different way, discover their own creativity and ultimately, give greater meaning to themselves and the world around them. As cities continue to grow, our place in society is under continual change and it is here that museums can play a vital role in providing space — both physical and metaphorical — for understanding. By offering a mix of free and paid activities, museums can provide audiences a range of activities that are accessible to all.

The city museums in Gothenburg, Copenhagen and Rotterdam, among others are implementing and formulating ways for ongoing participation in their city projects by their audiences. Visitors are encouraged to interact with the content and leave their thoughts in written or recorded form about social issues. Topics range from asking for positive solutions to such issues as the environment, immigration, urban spaces and transportation, to highly personal topics like depression and loneliness, all issues about living in the city today.

Artists have always been involved in exploring and expressing issues that are confronting society. Today, more and more artists are making participatory artworks that rely or involve the audience in some way to assist in completing the work. Many large-scale, participatory artworks are being commissioned by cultural organisations. While art museums are naturally at the forefront of this practice, many other museums are employing artists to respond to particular subject matter, the Wellcome Collection is but one example.
Coupled with this is the utilisation of new technologies on and offsite which enables access and connection online to the museum’s activities, archives and collections. New technologies are now a major part of the museum experience and have become an expected part of a visitor’s museum experience. Digital interactivity is a key way for museums to engage with audiences, especially a younger demographic. Theses include exploration of a topic through to conversations and takeaways using photography and email. The use of social media also means that information and conversations can continue long after a visit.

New technologies are also utilised for audience input and evaluation, which is imperative in order to make audiences central to everything a museum does – to create significant, memorable and relevant experiences. Audience evaluation is a very important tool for understanding, not what audiences want or don’t want but how to work with them and how to translate information to them in ways that are meaningful.

Gothenburg City Museum has implemented a highly innovative project using new technology to reach those people not able to attend the museum due to disability or other reasons. A robot makes it possible for people in the community to experience the museum from their homes. An additional benefit is that visitors at the museum also begin interacting and it has the added potential to take people out of social isolation. People are able to book the robot on the museum’s website for an allotted time, download a program for the participants needs in order to control the robot and then a guide will walk with the robot explaining the exhibition and artworks. This is an aspect for the museum of the future that will no doubt continue to evolve.
In recent times cultural organisations have greatly expanded their public program offerings to further attract and engage visitors. It is fast becoming a vital part of the museum experience, complementing the collections and exhibitions by providing different ways of learning and interaction. These inclusive activities go hand-in-hand with the idea of museum as a social, more welcoming place. Social commentator, Robert Putman believes that participation in cultural activities is one of the most effective means of creating a civil society in which people work together to solve problems and create knowledge.

This breath of new life in public programming has provided a whole new dynamic for museums. Museums are instigating activities that are multi-disciplinary and across artforms. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York is just one example of such programming, introducing performing arts – Spanish music and dancing – to help contextualise and bring to life their Spanish holdings, and of course, offering a Spanish menu in the café. Other programs can be more profound, being able to listen, meet and discuss with the exhibition subjects themselves, say of an African immigrant displaced for a decade before arriving in a new city who is willing to share his story.

To encourage a more educational outcome, the Gemeente Museum in The Hague has dedicated a whole floor in the museum for Wonderkamers, an interactive display utilising the museum’s collection (much of which would normally be in storage). Designed for students and intergenerational learning opportunities, the activity looks at different sections of daily life, history, fashion and highlights of their collection, such as the work of Piet Mondrian. This huge undertaking was a way for the museum to be more accessible and deliver a truly memorable experience. As research shows, if a museum can connect to a young person they then are more likely to become lifelong advocates of cultural activities.

In the same area of The Hague, The Museon was a major site for the Just Peace Festival a weekend of events celebrating the UN declared International Day of Peace. This was a tangible way for a world museum that ‘aims at transferring knowledge about man and his relation with nature and culture’ to connect to the people of the city.

Out-dated museum practices are passive, at arms length, and a one-way conversation that directs the visitor what to think. Participatory practices involve visitors, allowing them to observe, make up their own minds, contribute and create, in a more relaxed museum environment. Visitors are now asked to assist in making artworks – in some cases it is their combined contribution that ultimately brings the artist’s work to life. While there are many challenges with this approach; funding, planning and a commitment from the museum, it has great potential and benefits. This level of interaction and engagement ensures that the visitor leaves enriched, energised and stimulated about what they have seen, and ideally, looking at how they can further contribute more widely in the community.

These initiatives shown by leading museums around the world indicate a desire for change. These activities echo the UNESCO recommendations of May 2015, to not only protect cultural heritage but to support the development of knowledge, support museums and in their roles and make them accessible to everyone.
Many projects that I experienced during the Fellowship are great examples of how a city museum can be a participant in the life of the city. These projects will greatly assist museums becoming the gathering place in their city. Museums can be the place makers, which lead the interaction between people and place; a coming together that develops a sense of belonging and a shared communal bond.

The best city museums act as a starting point for the discovery of the city, which can lead people to look with fresh, more informed and tolerant eyes at the richness of the present urban environment and to imagine beyond, looking at future possibilities.

Museums preserve memory and provide ways to look at how to adapt the knowledge of the past to changing contexts. Museums support and amplify the work and ideas of the community. As people come together in a context of shared experience, they find ways of engaging, exchanging values, information and understanding.

If the museum can interact across the city, delivering projects that are memorable, participatory and relate to people’s own experiences, they will build the museum’s profile and that of the city.

In this way, the museum can be a primary voice and mediator in the life of the city. Cultural organisations, especially city museums, can lead the conversation about a city and wider universal issues. Museums can provide comment and advice not only on the history of a subject or theme but also facilitate potential options for the future.

Understanding the history and culture of a city, gives a confidence and surety to move forward. It is through building a sense of community and a profile that the museum can connect and benefit a city’s growth and development. Ultimately, as an active participant in the life of the city, the museum can assist and strengthen the evolution of a city’s identity.

CONCLUSION: MUSEUM AS PLACE MAKER

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Ai Weiwei Tree 2015, Royal Academy of Arts, London. Made from reassembled pieces of dead wood from the hills of southern China, Tree has been likened to the modern Chinese nation, where ethnically diverse peoples have been brought together to form ‘One China’, a state-sponsored policy aimed at protecting and promoting the nation’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While museums must continue to undertake the important role of collecting, documenting, researching and displaying our evolving culture, to truly be a participant in the life of the city, museums will:

- Be a gathering place for the city, a place for social interaction, a communal space for conversations in a safe, inclusive and welcoming environment. For this to happen appropriate space and support is essential.

- Encourage participation, so that the museum is a place where the visitor can not only visit exhibitions and activities but also participate and be inspired. Offering participatory activities and opportunities for visitors is an essential element in the future direction of museums.

- No longer be ‘expert’ but ‘enabler’. The museum will allow access to information and activities for greatest understanding and ensure there is something for everyone. Where possible, translations and other methods will be utilised to improve access and inclusion.

- Provide a diversity of programming and offerings that are appealing, meaningful and relevant across the community.

- Deliver a combination of free and paid activities that provide access to all but will be mindful of the resources required to undertake such activities.

- Provide auxiliary offerings, such as café, restaurant and shops, to encourage socialising and for economic sustainability.

- Co-create / collaborate and partner with other organisations and individuals in the community and deliver projects across the city.

- Utilise new technology to engage audiences, communicate and interact onsite, online and through social media channels.

- Position the audience front of mind, seek input from audiences and the community when planning and developing content, and then continuously evaluating throughout the project.

- Profile how the museum makes a difference to the city and how it helps to make an inspired, creative and compassionate place to live.

- Realise its potential in the city with the support of the community and government.