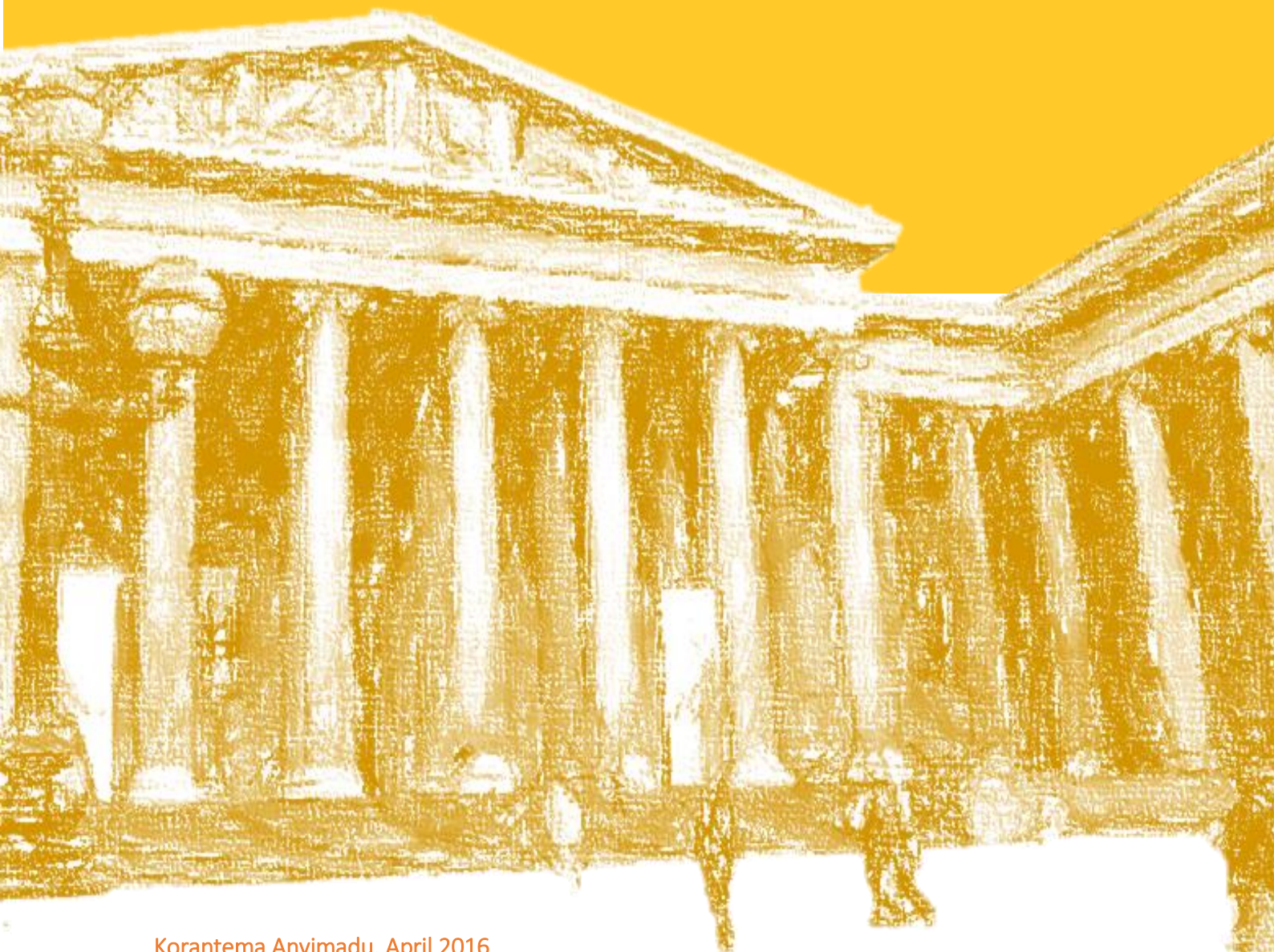




Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship Report

# Museums are...?

making museums matter



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Museums are...* looks at the different ways in which museums, galleries and other heritage institutions engage a variety of audiences. How do these spaces actively encourage people who may not be typical museum-goers? What are the barriers keeping people away, and what can be done about it? Over 6 weeks, I interviewed museum and gallery staff in San Francisco, Oakland, Santa Cruz, Berlin, Cologne, Amsterdam and The Hague, as well as informally collecting thoughts and opinions from the general public in these cities.

This report highlights the main issues that prevent new audiences from visiting museums, including expensive entry fees; a lack of diversity within the museum workforce leading to programming and exhibitions that are not representative of the community; the persistent perception of museums as elite spaces; the stereotypes of certain visitor groups held by museums themselves.

To break down these barriers and ultimately open up museums to a wider audience, this report recommends that UK heritage institutions should:

- Keep it free
- Hire more diverse staff
- Learn about their neighbours
- Collaborate
- Be current
- Make it social
- Challenge perceptions

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Korantema Anyimadu is from east London and works as a freelance Museum Educator. She is currently a Coordinator for *Youth Travel Ambassadors*, the London Transport Museum's youth engagement programme. Korantema is also a student at University College London (UCL), working towards an MA in Cultural Heritage Studies. She was previously an Events Coordinator at the Early Intervention Foundation and has worked at the Barbican, the Natural History Museum and Create, a creative arts charity. Korantema is passionate about the potential cultural institutions have to be a meeting point for communities. She keeps a blog at [Coffin In The Shape of An Eagle](#).

# Museums are...?

## making museums matter

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### INTRODUCTION

#### “Museums are pale, (fe) male and stale...”

The UK has some of the world’s most famous museums and galleries. Renowned institutions like the British Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Tate (Britain and Modern), and the Natural History Museum boast approximately half a million visitors each year. The demographic of these visitors, however, is not representative of the general population of the UK. According to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport’s (DCMS) [Taking Part Survey](#), results show that the majority of museum-goers are female, between 45 and 74 years old, come from upper socio-economic groups, have higher incomes and are more likely to be white Caucasian than from a Black or Asian ethnic minority (BAME). This situation is just as pervasive in urban areas like London, where most of the UK’s major museums are situated and where populations are generally more diverse. Although the DCMS figures are not consistent over the years, disparities in age, income and ethnicity are consistent.

In 2007, former Culture Secretary David Lammy announced that UK museum boards were ‘pale, male and stale’. The majority of museum board members and directors are still men, but below senior level, most museums are predominantly staffed by women. More than 50 percent of museum visitors are female. When describing museums and galleries, many of those I interviewed used terms such as ‘the white cube’, ‘navel-gazing’, ‘19<sup>th</sup> century’, ‘old-fashioned’, ‘elitist’ and ‘uptight’, demonstrating that the ‘stale’ of the former Culture Secretary’s comment still stands.

#### “Museums are magic...”

I asked a number of interviewees to describe museums in one word. Respondents replied with a range of words including ‘fun’, ‘eye-opening’, ‘engaging’ and ‘magic’. Museums are greatly enjoyed and valued by many people. They are [eighth in the top ten attractions for the UK](#), drive tourism, support the local economy and are often vital for community cohesion. As public institutions, I believe they should serve as much of the public as possible. In other words, museums should aim to be as inclusive and welcoming as they can.

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship was an opportunity for me to find out why people from a variety of backgrounds do not visit museums more, whether museums and galleries acknowledge this issue, and what they are doing about it. I travelled to Germany, The Netherlands and California, USA, as all of these locations share similar issues surrounding diversity, which are in some cases starker than in the UK. Through this research I was able to explore the innovative and creative methods that museums and galleries use to attract new visitors from varying backgrounds and cultures in order to answer the question: **how can museums be made to matter to the communities around them?**

This report will give a summary of the obstacles that prevent more diverse audiences from visiting museums. I will present twelve case studies that outline the effective approaches that some German, Dutch and Californian institutions have taken to diversify their visitor bases, and will make recommendations for museums in the UK to attract audiences that better reflect the communities in which they are situated. The main findings of the fellowship are also presented in a video which can be found [online](#).

## FIELDWORK BACKGROUND

### United States of America

I travelled to California on the West Coast of the United States (US), where I visited museums and galleries in San Francisco, Oakland and Santa Cruz. Many museums on the West Coast are experimenting with museum programming and structure, which made it an ideal location for research. In the US, only 9 percent of museum visitors are of minority backgrounds; the majority of visitors (79 percent) are Non-Hispanic White. Figures from the [American Alliance of Museums](#) show that in 2008 the population of the US was 66 percent White Caucasian, 15 percent Hispanic, 12 percent African American, 4-5 percent Asian & Pacific Islander, 1 percent Native American, Alaskan and others. The disparity between the diverse population of the US and average museum-goers is therefore quite pronounced.

### The Netherlands

[Museum Vereniging](#), Holland's Museum Association, developed a Cultural Diversity Code in 2011 to increase the number of 'non-western' visitors to its museums. This code was developed as an acknowledgment that inequality exists within the museum and heritage sector. Additionally, the latest Dutch [Museum Monitor](#) report showed that more than half of museum visitors are over 50 years old. Older people visit museums on average at least four times a year, whereas younger museum-goers visit, at most, twice a year. As part of the WCMT fellowship, I visited Amsterdam and The Hague. Amsterdam is an incredibly popular tourist destination, and claims to have more museums per square mile than any other European city.

### Germany

Museums in Germany are embedded into the federal structure of the country. German museums tend to be very academic and are traditionally focused on scientific research. The [Museumsbund](#), Germany's Museums Federation, acknowledged that museums need to be better at including issues of cultural diversity, such as migration, into their programming. This is especially true as Germany has one of the highest rates of in-migration in Europe. During my WCMT fellowship I visited Berlin, famous for its Museuminsel (Museum Island) and its impressive collections. I also visited Cologne, another popular destination for tourists seeking a cultural getaway.

## ISSUES

I asked interviewees what might be preventing more diverse audiences from visiting their institutions. The main responses are summarised below, many of which are intersecting.

- Cost**  
 Where there was a fee to enter the museum, it was seen as a hindrance. This was deemed especially true for young students, and families who would have to buy several tickets.
- Diversity within the museum workforce**  
 Diversity amongst museum staff was considered poor in terms of age, gender and socio-cultural background. Many interviewees believed that if there was a lack of representation within a museum, the outputs of the museum would reflect this.
- Diversity of museum exhibitions, programmes and events**  
 The presentation of different cultures within museums was often seen as weak. If there is not a greater breadth of cultures, backgrounds and interests displayed in museums and explored through exhibitions, audiences will fail to see that museum as relevant.
- Perceptions of museums**  
 The stereotype of museums as boring, old, elitist and only for the educated may still be an important factor. Some museums have struggled to shake off this perception in recent years, while others are yet to embrace the challenge.
- Perceptions within museums**  
 Museums can demonstrate stereotypical perceptions of their audiences, in much the same way that the general public has preconceptions about museums. Certain groups are sometimes seen as not 'right' for a 'proper' museum environment – for example, teenagers are perceived by some institutions to be loud and disruptive.



## CASE STUDIES

### 1. Engaging younger audiences

“By young people for young people” N8 Amsterdam

N8 is a Dutch organisation whose main focus is engaging youth groups with museums in Amsterdam. The organisation aims to encourage newer, younger, and more diverse audiences through creative multi-arts projects and events. One of these events is the annual *Museumnacht* (Museum Night), an evening that sees up to fifty museums and galleries open their doors to the public till the early hours of the morning. Based on Berlin’s successful *Lange Nacht der Museen* (Long Night of the Museums), *Museumnacht* began in 2000 with thirty participating museums and galleries. The most recent *Museumnacht*, held in November 2015, was a sell-out success, with 32,000 tickets sold and fifty institutions participating.



Photo © N8

Like the UK's *Museum Lates* programme, *Museumnacht* allows visitors to interact with the museum in a completely different way than during normal opening hours. Visitors participate in games and activities, watch live performances, dance at silent discos or are even invited to sleep over among the collections. These events allow various arts organisations to collaborate. For example in 2014, N8 worked in partnership with the Amsterdam Museum (see

case study number 10) and a street art collective to **put on an outdoor exhibition**. On the day of this exhibition, the Amsterdam Museum had nearly twice as many visitors as usual. At the latest *Museumnacht* the **Junior Company of the Dutch Ballet performed** at the NEMO Science Centre, the EYE Film Museum held a workshop on sound engineering, authors gave literary performances on canal boat cruises and a hip hop DJ played at the Amsterdam City Archives.

*Museumnacht* is extremely successful. Over the course of one night, museums receive an average of almost 50 percent more visitors, with three quarters of those being between 18 and 35 years of age. Two thirds of these visitors are from the greater Amsterdam area, showing that despite Amsterdam’s reputation as a destination for international tourists, *Museumnacht* encourages the inclusion of the local community.

I asked one of N8’s project managers, Roel van den Sigtenhorst, what the winning formula is. He told me that the key to encouraging younger visitors to museums is ensuring that young people are involved in designing the programmes and marketing museums to other young people. N8 only has five permanent members of staff, who are not permitted to stay in their positions after they reach 30 - a fairly radical but seemingly effective policy. The team recruit collaborators across various fields, including journalists, screen-writers and musicians, to work on various projects. Roel said that recruiting people from a number of creative fields – not just from within the museum sector – enables exhibitions to be avoid the usual biases and to take on a fresh perspective. A group known as *Nachtbrakers* (Night Owls) researches what young people are talking about, what they find relevant and what they look for in an event. These perspectives are then incorporated into the plans for



*Museumnacht* and other projects. The idea behind this is 'by young people, for young people'; getting those who know best to tell you what they think. Roel also explained that in order to stay relevant, museums need to experiment more, take risks and not rest on their laurels. Considering how popular traditional museums, such as Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum or Van Gogh museum, are with tourists, there may not be an urgent financial need to change practices. However, if these museums want to encourage new and diverse audiences, there is definitely a strong argument for change.

## 2. Engaging teens

*"To a 5<sup>th</sup> grader you're a rock star!"* De Young Museum, San Francisco, Museum Ambassador Programme

The **De Young Museum** is a copper-plated bronze building that was re-built after the destructive San Franciscan earthquake in 1989. The new building was fully reopened in 2005. A large tower that gives visitors panoramic views of the city houses the museum's education department, which works with about 80,000 pupils in public schools across San Francisco. Speaking with Emily Jennings, Manager of School and Teacher Programs, I learnt that the department's mandate is to work with as many school children as possible as to better represent the diversity of the Bay area.

For 34 years, the De Young's **Museum Ambassador Program** has been the benchmark for museum teen engagement. Established in 1982, the Program was awarded by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities for its ability to make a 'remarkable difference in the lives of youths and children'. As part of the Program, students are trained to give presentations at elementary schools and community centres across the city, and to lead tours at the museum. Students are paid minimum wage for their training and are supported by mentors. Being an immersive Program, Emily tells me that the real aim is to cultivate young educators, to make students feel empowered and spark their personal growth. As Emily tells me; "it's so fun to watch teens that might not really be celebrated in any other aspect of their life go into a classroom and because you are a 5<sup>th</sup> grader, any teen is a rock star!" She believes that as the teens are celebrated by younger audiences and teachers, it nurtures their confidence.

Teens are often seen as problematic by museums, either because they are thought of as a tricky group to engage, or as potentially disruptive museum visitors. The museum's internal perceptions of teens can prevent the opportunity for new, interesting work being created. Emily tells me that if they are trained and supported well, teens can be great co-collaborators with the museum. Society today exists in a 'culture of the new', meaning that we rarely want to revisit experiences over and over again. Having the teen voice represented could help to improve the lived experience of the museum for atypical museum audiences.

### 3. Engaging refugee communities

“Refugees Welcome...” Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin, Discovering Nature Project

The **Museum für Naturkunde** in Berlin (Museum of Natural History) is surrounded by regions such as Wedding and Kreuzberg, which are home to some of the most multicultural populations in Berlin. In summer 2015, the museum worked closely with primary school teachers, a social support team at a refugee hostel and artists from the Kanuclub zur Erforschung der Stadt (canoe club for the exploration of the city) to run the Discovering Nature project. Sponsored by *F. C. Flick Stiftung gegen Fremdenfeindlichkeit, Rassismus und Intoleranz* (Foundation against Xenophobia, Racism and



*Graffiti in Berlin*

Intolerance), the museum engaged primary school children from Welcome Classes – after school classes to help integrate refugee children with German culture. The group of children, along with their parents and siblings, are invited to explore Berlin’s natural environment by going on canoe trips to the Karow Pond natural reserves outside the city, and trips on the River Spree, which runs through the heart of Berlin. The children were encouraged to take photos, make sketches and to keep a diary of their experiences. During the

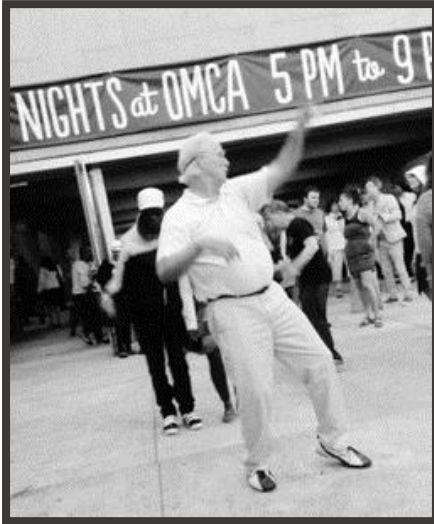
second phase of the programme, the children’s families are invited to the museum to watch them ‘show and tell’ their stories and pictures from their week.

The aim of the project was not just to engage the children with their new (and sometimes radically different) environments, but also to help them overcome language barriers and encourage them to socialise with other groups. Alexandra Moorman, a science educator at the museum, told me that the programme was especially successful as the parents also took part in the programme. For refugees, it is unfortunately often the case that parents can be extremely isolated, after all, children of those families are able to socialise at school and tend to pick up new languages quicker and more easily. The whole family are given a free museum pass for the year, enabling them to visit again and again. Alexandra told me she had seen the museum slowly become a social place where refugees can meet and forge new friendships.

Discovering Nature is set to continue in 2016, building on the experience gained from the pilot project in 2015. Hopes are to expand the project to other areas in Berlin, and to increase the contact time with the groups. Alexandra mentioned that it is essential that museums contribute to the lifelong learning and education opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers that find their way to Germany. Taking into account the current situation in the country, this goal is especially relevant.

#### 4. Engaging the neighbourhood

*"I'm not just black during black history month..."* Oakland Museum of California, Friday Nights @OMCA



*Dancing at the OMCA*

The [Oakland Museum of California](#) (OMCA) lies on seven acres of land near Lake Merritt, the 'jewel of Oakland' as Cynthia Taylor, Associate Director of Public Programmes, explained to me. A survey conducted by the museum a few years ago showed that their average visitor was White-Caucasian, over 40 years old and female. The survey also showed that as big as the museum is, 15 percent of the Oakland residents did not know it even existed. This prompted the OMCA to ask a lot of important questions about what they were doing wrong or were not doing at all. According to Cynthia, the OMCA were not very good at engaging with the local community and they were not attending local events or festivals, but slowly that all began to change.

Although the OMCA had previously held events on the Mexican Day of the Dead Festival, the east Asian Lunar New Year festival, and Black History Week, the trend of having a week or a month to celebrate other cultures was not enough for Cynthia. Cynthia told me; "I'm black every day, I'm not just black during Black History Month... I now felt the pressure of, okay, how are we going to represent *every day*?" To try and change perceptions of the museum and to better represent the diverse Oakland community all year round, Cynthia and her team decided to open up the doors of the museum with their [Friday Nights @ OMCA](#) programme. Every first Friday of the month, the museum closes off the surrounding streets, hosts local street food trucks, hires a local live band, DJ and opens its galleries till late. Hundreds of people mill about the museum, chatting, laughing and socialising with friends; dancing; browsing local craft stalls; taking part in special guided tours; drawing and painting and exploring the museum grounds.

Over an average year, the OMCA attracts about 150'000 visitors between Wednesday and Sunday. 90'000 of those visitors come to the museum on Friday nights alone. With reduced prices, the relaxed, party atmosphere and family-friendly activities, many more people, and not just usual museum-goers, are encouraged to visit the museum. One man I spoke to in the queue for some New Orleans cuisine told me he had lived in Oakland all his life, and only started coming to the OMCA when the Friday night events started.

## 5. Adapting the physical space

“Sind sie bereit für die Schwules Museum\*?” The Schwules Museum\*, Berlin



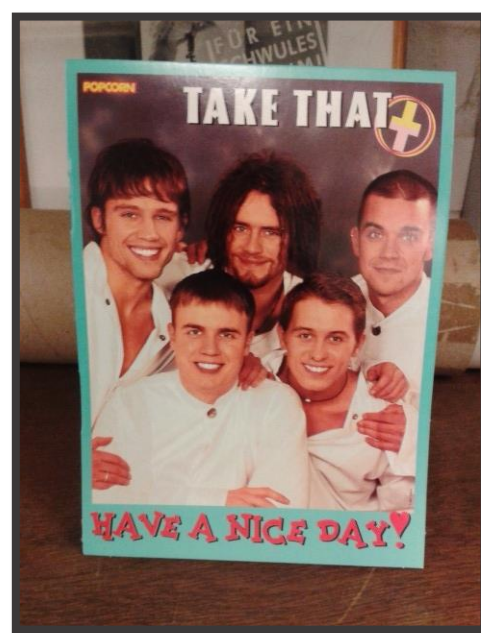
*"Are you ready for the Gay Museum\*?"*

The *Schwules Museum\** (Gay Museum\*) in Berlin is dedicated to representing the stories and histories of Lesbian, Gay, Trans, Bi, Intersexual and Queer groups. The star at the end of the title signifies diverse interpretations within the term ‘gay’, and is used to capture all identities that fall outside of traditional gender norms. This reflects the museum’s aim to be open and accessible to all. Founded in 1985, The Schwules Museum\* was initially controversial. Current museum marketing reflects this, posters stating, “Sind sie bereit für die Schwules Museum\*?” (Are you ready for the Gay Museum\*?). The name of the museum itself also reflects this – ‘schwul’ occasionally being used as a homophobic slur in German. Having one of the largest archives for LGBTIQ research in Europe, in the basement of the museum you can find everything from original, signed albums of Take That, to hordes of personal collections of adult films. The museum has a distinct community feel and is almost entirely ran by volunteers, including the museum’s café and gift shop (and has been for the best part of 28 years).

I talked to Hannes Hacker, a museum trainee, about the museum and its aims for the future. Hannes mentioned that engaging diverse audiences is not just about the content of the collections, but also about the physical space of the museum. For hard of hearing, visually or physically impaired people, museums should be able to offer the right light, access, and equipment so the exhibition is inclusive. This also extends to the facilities of the museum. The Schwules Museum\* is a great example of this with its unique toilet designs.



*Hermaphrodites Toilet Sign*



*Take That Album in the Archives*

Toilets are unisex instead of being separated into male and female, something many groups might find uncomfortable. The doors are branded with slightly tongue in cheek signs that read 'Hermaphrodites: Gents and Ladies please use other toilets'. Unisex toilets are also something used by the Amsterdam Museum in The Netherlands, but are generally quite rare in many museums. Toilet facilities are a ubiquitous feature of museums that are usually overlooked, but a very simple way to ensure every facet of the space is welcoming.

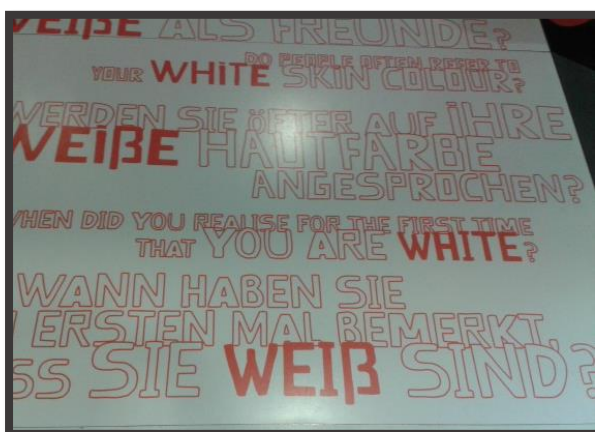
Despite being inclusive in that regard, Hannes tells me that the museum has to deal with other issues of inclusivity. With the majority of volunteers being white, middle class homosexual men, and the trainees at the museums mostly being female, there is a need to include more voices from BAME LGBT groups, as well as people from different social or class backgrounds. Stories of the youth is another aspect that Hannes believes the museum needs to acknowledge, and there are plans in motion to expand the educational outreach arm of the museum.

## 6. Facing stereotypes head on

*"We are a place that should be free for thinking..."* The Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, Cologne

The **Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum** (RJM) in Cologne has won a number of prestigious awards, including the Council of Europe's Museum Prize in 2012, for its innovative permanent exhibition. As an ethnographic museum, the RJM has a host of artefacts from all around the world, but the different angle the museum takes is to present those artefacts from the eyes of their particular cultures.

One exhibition in particular has a creative and unique way of addressing racism, stereotyping and prejudice. In a clinical, white room known as the 'cliché container', visitors are encouraged to open doors that reveal 'typical' stereotypes of the African continent, and juxtaposes these stereotypes with a different perspective. For example, when you open the door that reads 'Africans are cannibals', inside you'll find a tub of 'grounded up mummy' that wealthy 18<sup>th</sup> century Germans used to eat in the belief that it would improve their life-span. If you open the door that reads 'Africans are savages', after a scene of the film, Zulu, plays, you are shown a clip of a football match where mostly white, German supporters abuse the black players on the pitch. The aim of this room is to talk frankly about stereotyping from past to present. In the RJM's Junior Museum, a wing dedicated to younger visitors, children and youth groups' responses to the exhibition are displayed.



*The cliché container*



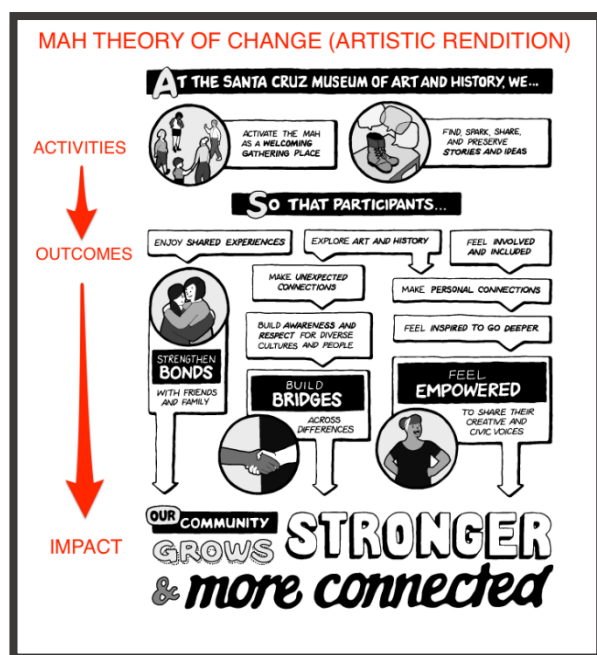
*"Go back to where you came from!"  
"What am I supposed to do in Dortmund?"*

Oliver Lueb, Head of the Oceania department at the time, told me that museums are often afraid of upsetting their ‘neutral’ statuses and will not comment on conflictual or problematic issues in society. Racism and prejudice is something that sadly permeates through many communities and Oliver believes that exhibiting these issues at museums should be commonplace. If difficult topics can’t be discussed in the museum context, then where can they? In Oliver’s words, “We are a place that should be free for thinking, that should be free to help people feel and act as they are”.

## 7. The Participatory Museum

“We want to connect people and bring people together...” Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, California

*The Participatory Museum*, a book written by Nina Simon, Director of the [Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History](#) (MAH), lays out how museums can work closely with community members to make museums more inclusive. MAH was the guinea pig for Simon’s participatory projects and was a clear success story; the museum tripled its audience numbers in three years, doubled the amount of staff and led the way in innovative community approaches. I met with Stacey Garcia, Director of Community Engagement, who talked me through their new [theory of change](#); a document that sets out the museum’s strategy including its aims, steps to achieve them and what impact they will have.



Theory of Change image © Museum2.0

Through their theory of change, MAH realised their aspirations were to create a museum that represented the demographics of their society, that connected people and brought people together. After conducting a visitor survey, they found that the demographics of their visitors in terms of age, income level and location matched the city’s demographics. Ethnicity, however, did not match. Santa Cruz is mostly a bicultural community, with a 30 percent Latino and the rest is majority white Caucasian. The museum, therefore, decided it was vital they focused on engaging the Latino community in Santa Cruz. They began by hiring interviewers to survey local Latino families, to find out what they wanted from their museum.

Having learnt that many families from the Latino community requested more outdoor

festivals and wanted to see arts events that represented their culture, MAH have now embarked on including these elements in their programming. The museum already works with over 2000 individual and organisational collaborators but by seeking out more Latino collaborators, by having bilingual marketing material and by developing a new open space outside the museum, [Abbotts Square](#), MAH hopes to attract more of the Santa Cruz Latino population. This long term goal is part of every department’s objective, and is closely related to their theory of change.

Stacey told me; “We were an organisation that was completely in the red and no one was coming to the museum. What we learnt is that the best way to engage with the community and the best way to change that, is to really and honestly involve community members in the process and work with them”.

## 8. Engaging LGBTQI groups

“Traditionally museums are places of exclusion rather than inclusion.” Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, Homosexualität\_en’ exhibition

As a state funded museum, the **Deutsches Historisches Museum** (German Historical Museum) is a grand, neo-classical building. The ‘**Homosexualität\_en**’ (‘Homosexuality\_ies’) exhibition was something out of the ordinary for the museum. Johannes Junker, who works in the education department of the museum, told me that in his personal opinion museums are traditionally places of exclusion rather than inclusion. Johannes believes the key to showing audiences that museums can be inclusive, is to curate exhibitions that connect to visitors on a personal level.

To date, museums have not been good at representing LGBTQI history in their collections. This exhibition was the first comprehensive exploration of the politics, history and culture of



*"Homosexual Only" Sculpture at the Deutsches Historisches Museum*



*Flyer for the Homosexualität\_en Exhibition*

homosexuality in Germany, from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Spread across the Deutsches Historisches Museum and the Schwules Museum\*, the exhibition explored themes including coming out stories, homosexual ‘cures’ in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and lesbian and gay movements of the 1960s.

As part of his role in the museum, Johannes leads tour groups for school children and teens. With this particular exhibition, he told me that the level of engagement was really high, not just for people who identify themselves as LGBTQI, but also for people who are interested in relationships and gender. Thus, the exhibition was not only great for encouraging people who could identify with the themes displayed, it also encouraged audiences who wanted to learn more about the issue.

The exhibition itself was multisensory. There were multimedia stations showing personal interviews, an A-Z of photos and LGBTQI memorabilia, and immersive sound booths. As a very visual exhibition, it was easy to understand the context of the displays without reading a single text, which

according to Johannes is a vital part of its inclusivity. Johannes believes an exhibition like *Homosexualität\_en* is crucial for changing perceptions of what a museum can be.

## 9. Encouraging inter-faith dialogue

“Lots of my pupils are Muslim, they won’t want to go to a Jewish Museum...” Jüdisches Museum, Berlin

The *Jüdisches Museum* (Jewish Museum), is one of the biggest museums in Berlin. It is located in Kreuzberg, an area with a high population of people from Turkish and Arab backgrounds. The museum is therefore surrounded by many communities who identify as Muslim. Diana Dressel, the Head of the Education Department, explained that year after year they noticed the museum was attracting visitors from all over the world but not from Kreuzberg. To improve the numbers of local visitors, the education department concentrated on opening up dialogue between groups of different faiths through lectures, debates, exhibitions and workshops. For example, the *Jewish-Islamic Forum* allows interested groups to meet and explore various issues relating to Judaism and Islam.

The Jüdisches Museum’s education department has forged a partnership with the Berlin-based Islamische Federation (Islamic Federation), an organisation that delivers Islamic lessons in schools. Alongside the Federation, the museum works closely with students from Kreuzberg with behavioural difficulties. Students were invited to the museum to learn about the history of the Middle East and of the Kreuzberg area. Pupils were then tasked to create a photography exhibition themed around what they had learnt, and gave guided tours of their artwork at the museum. Parents and family members were invited along to the opening of their exhibition. Diana told me that there was a supportive and welcoming atmosphere, as well as an element of surprise from the individuals who had never visited a museum before. Diana has found that stereotypes about the museum can usually be a huge barrier to engagement, and this is a particular problem at a Jewish museum. Diana explained that teachers were often hesitant to take school groups to the museum, saying things such as “lots of my pupils are Muslim, they won’t want to go to a Jewish Museum”. However, once that initial effort is made both by the museum *and* the teachers, visits from such schools actually become more frequent.

## 10. Using online platforms

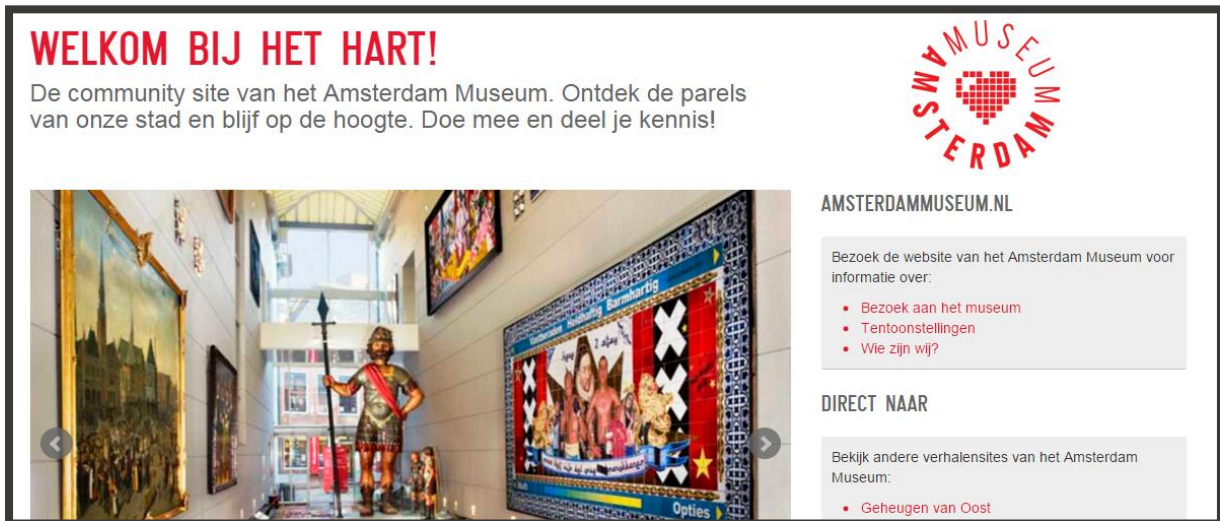
“Museums have been living in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for too long!” Amsterdam Museum, the Netherlands

Amsterdam is a city with over 180 nationalities. Mirjam Sneeuwloper and Hester Gersonius from Amsterdam Museum’s Public Education team, told me it is crucial for the museum to represent the diverse community in Amsterdam.

Six years ago, the *Amsterdam Museum* had one corporate website but it has since developed an extensive online platform. Its current online community pages have been built to inspire collaboration amongst the public, and to encourage participation with what the museum has on offer. *Hart* is one of the museum’s online platforms. It combines Flickr, Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter and Instagram with the museum’s online publications, archive, online collection, blog and forum, all in one place. Visitors to the website can directly contribute to the museum’s physical exhibitions. From submitting their football tattoos to the *VOETBAL HALLELUJA!* (Football Hallelujah!) exhibition, to submitting personal



stories of living in east Amsterdam for the [Geheugen van Oost](#) (Memories of the East) exhibition, visitors are able to see their stories directly reflected in the museum's exhibitions. It gives the public a certain ownership over what the museum produces. The Memories of the East website was Amsterdam Museum's most visited website when it was launched, and it inspired the museum to begin a similar Memories of the West project. Mirjam and Hester told me that their dream is to set up a project for every region in Amsterdam.



*Hart - Amsterdam Museum's online platform*

Although the online platform is an important part of the museum's audience engagement, Hester stresses that technology is not the only answer to interacting with new audiences. Technology has become an important aspect of museums and galleries over the last few decades, but Hester believes that more recently there has been a turnaround in that trend. People now want to engage with the museum in a hands-on way.

Hester and Mirjam both acknowledged that something is stirring in museums in Amsterdam. The dust has started to settle after the financial cuts many museums received five years ago, and museums in the city have become more democratic, working more closely with the public, smaller museums and other cultural institutions. As Hester said, "Museums have been living in the 19th century for too long...now they are finally catching up and sprinting towards the 21st century".

## 11. Ladies Night

*"Tell them it's okay not to like all the art!"* Gemeentemuseum den Haag, The Netherlands

The [Gemeentemuseum den Haag](#) in Holland's capital, actively reached out to the poorer suburbs of The Hague as part of a three year social inclusion programme. The objective of the programme was to build relationships with visitors from Muslim backgrounds. Separating each project by area, the museum offered every region it worked with free events and special workshops for three months. Jolanda van Zijl, a Programme Officer with the Outreach Department, told me



Screenshot © Gemeentemuseum den Haag website

about one of these events called ‘Ladies Night’. As the title suggests, the event was aimed at women, specifically young, Muslim, women. The event welcomed between 800 and 2000 women to the museum, which staged lectures, guided tours, fashion shows, and local stalls selling hijabs, jewellery and music. For this event to be a success, Jolanda told me it was essential that people from the local community were involved. She also explained how local groups were instrumental in spreading the word about the event. Jolanda herself spent a few days visiting local shops to invite women to the museum’s event. One girl Jolanda met in a park told her family, who

told their friends at the local bakery, who told their friends and so on. 20 percent of the visitors were reached this way, through word of mouth.

Jolanda explained it was also important for the museum to be seen as a welcoming place. To achieve this, tours were delivered in ‘simple language’ and visitors were encouraged to make their own minds up about what was on the walls. As Jolanda put it, it was important to “tell them it’s okay not to like all the art!”

## 12. Using mobile technology

“So there is normal history and there is queer history?” Museum Europäischer Kulturen, Berlin

The [Museum Europäischer Kulturen](#) (Museum of European Cultures) showcases the everyday life and culture of Europe. Its collections include wide-ranging objects from a Turkish kebab shop sign to a selection of advent calendars. Early in January 2016, the museum released a new app called Blinkster that allows visitors to explore objects of its ‘Cultural Contacts. Living in Europe’ collection through different perspectives.

When visitors photograph an object with their phone, they receive additional information about that object, from three different voices; the perspective of a member of the community, a member of the museum staff and the ‘gender-queer’ perspective. Elisabeth Tietmeyer, Museum Director and Léontine Meijer-van Mensch, Assistant Director, saw this as an incredibly important development. Museums, they told me, often fall into the trap of producing one dominant narrative about their collections. Léontine described this process as ‘othering’. While events like LGBT Week and Black History Month are important, museums end up only representing the histories of minority groups at particular times of the year. Elisabeth and Léontine argue that museums inevitably suggest that there is ‘normal history’ and ‘queer history’. This new app allows the objects to be seen and understood in different contexts in parallel, and includes the opinions of those that museum visitors (and museums themselves) may not naturally consider.

## CONCLUSION

### “The onus is on the museums...”

17 museums and six weeks later, this report still only covers a tiny snapshot of what is going on globally with museum audience engagement. Undoubtedly, many UK museums and galleries have been taking on lots of new initiatives. To name only a few examples, *Strengthening our Common Life* aims to increase diversity within the museum workforce, *the London Transport Museum* works closely with local communities to co-create exhibitions, The People’s History Museum in Manchester hosts regular *open forum discussions* on current politics, *Share Academy* seeks to create links between Higher Education establishments and UK museums, Liverpool hosts a *Light Night* every year – a late night event that is a celebration of arts, creativity and heritage. The list goes on. The UK has not shied away from tackling challenges, but there is still a large untapped audience that are yet to be shown why museums matter to them. As one interviewee put it, “the onus is on the museums to find programs that can connect and relate”.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

During my research a number of issues were repeatedly visited by interviewees in The Netherlands, Germany and USA. The following recommendations are based on these conversations:

- **Keep it free**

In the UK, we are lucky that a large proportion of our museums are free. Cost was seen as a major barrier to many non-museum-goers in countries where entrance fees are the norm. When museums that usually have paid ticketed entrance reduce their prices, or make it free for a special event, they see visitor numbers rise. With museums in the UK under constant threat of budget cuts, it is worth considering how introducing paid entrance will affect museum audiences.
- **Hire more diverse staff**

The easiest way to produce relevant content, to make the museum space inclusive, and to attract particular audiences, is to hire people who know best about it. Advice from some interviewees included hiring more people from different socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, age groups, interest fields and abilities. This is not to say that museums should only do active discrimination – it works both ways. Museum perhaps need to find a way to encourage more diverse individuals to apply.
- **Learn about your neighbours**

Many organisations had conducted, or were planning to conduct, visitor surveys to find out what their communities’ interests were. By understanding the audience you want to reach, and listening to their views, it’s easier to develop effective programmes.

- **Collaborate**  
Partnerships and collaborations were seen as crucial to successfully engaging a range of people. By piggy-backing on already established groups, a door is opened to new communities and opportunities. Collaborations also allow for fresh perspectives to be brought into the museum.
  - **Be current**  
It is important to be culturally relevant by commenting on current social and political occurrences, and for the museum to be a safe space for debate and discussion.
  - **Make it social**  
People like social activities. Make the museum a space where people can come together and have fun!
  - **Challenge perceptions**  
Museums have to work hard to change the stereotypes that many people still hold. All museums are not boring, elitist or one-sided, but how can that barrier be broken? Museums also need to challenge their internal perceptions of certain visitors and to keep an open mind.
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