

Conference Publication

Making Cultural Heritage Truly Common
11-12 October 2007 Helsinki

Kaija Kaitavuori, Frans Mäyrä, Esko Nummelin,
Richard Sandell, Diana Walters and Anne Ågotnes

11.3.2008



Kulttuuria kaikille
Kultur för alla
Culture for All

Content

Introduction	3
From accessibility to participation – museum as a public space, Kaija Kaitavuori	5
Target groups and special needs	5
Participation.....	7
Preserving the Virtual Cultural Heritage: Museums for the Game Literate Generations, Frans Mäyrä.....	9
From Digitalised Culture to Digital Culture.....	9
Realms of Crafts.....	9
Keeping in Contact with Values	10
Literature	12
Collecting individual experience, Esko Nummelin.....	13
Innovation capital and the individual.....	13
From maintaining a monopoly of values to serving customers	14
Culture belongs to everyone, but what is culture and how is its supply produced?	15
Finances above all.....	16
Museums in a Changing World, Richard Sandell.....	18
Achieving sustainable access, Diana Walters.....	20
Retirement age and people in retirement: A challenge for museums, Anne Ågotnes	22

Introduction

Society and the population structure are changing. Whose right to cultural heritage will be at stake in the future? What are the accessibility issues concerning our cultural heritage? Who have fallen through the net?

Making Cultural Heritage Truly Inclusive was a conference held in Helsinki 11-12 October 2007. This publication includes articles from chosen conference speakers. The writers are Kaija Kaitavuori, Frans Mäyrä, Esko Nummelin, Richard Sandell, Diana Walters and Anne Ågotnes. In these articles the writers address the conference themes even more thoroughly than was possible within the conference program.

Kaija Kaitavuori is the head of education at the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma. Kaitavuori's article *From accessibility to participation – museum as a public space* describes the museum institution schematically and discusses target groups and their needs. Kaitavuori debates the idea of accessibility and how it is closely linked with the practice of thinking about diverse audiences and visitors. Kaitavuori also tackles the idea of participation and how it gives a new dimension to accessibility.

Frans Mäyrä is professor of Game Studies and Digital Culture at the Hypermedia Laboratory at the University of Tampere. He has researched the relationship of culture and technology and has specialized in the cultural analysis of technology. Mäyrä's article *Preserving the Virtual Cultural Heritage: Museums for the Games Literate Generations* describes the relationship between digitalized culture and digital culture and brings up examples of cultural treasures which exist only in the digital world. Mäyrä also discusses how the traditional values in the museum field should be updated to relate to the virtual cultural heritage as well.

Esko Nummelin is the director of the Pori Art Museum. In his article *Collecting Individual Experience* Nummelin discusses the expectations of the individual museum-goer. He questions the values of the museums in connection to their ability to serve their customers well. Nummelin also examines what is meant by culture for all and by accessible cultural services and brings up the need for proper assessment in accessibility work.

Richard Sandell is the director of the Department of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester. In his research Sandell has explored the social agency of museums and their potential to engage with issues of social inequality. The article *Museums in a Changing World* (published in *Museo-lehti* 4/2007) debates museums' responsibility towards the increasingly diverse societies in which they are operating and also the role museums might or should have in shaping societies which are more open to diversity. Sandell presents some project examples of the actual work museums have done in Britain to support alternative ways of understanding the diverse society and to challenge negative stereotypical representations.

Diana Walters is the programme director of the Masters Programme in International Museum Studies at the University of Gothenburg and a museum consultant. In her research Walters has explored the responses to disability in contemporary museums. The article *Achieving 'real' access* raises the question of how the accessibility development in the museums can be sustained. Walters focuses on two aspects - the training of professionals and the importance of research. She also brings up the challenges and troubles which the Nordic welfare model carries with it in terms of understanding disability.

Anne Ågotnes is the senior scientific adviser at the Bergen City Museum/Bryggens Museum. Ågotnes has several years' experience of museum programmes for senior citizens. In her article *Retirement Age and People in Retirement: A Challenge for Museums* Ågotnes discusses why people in retirement age are such an important new target group for museums. Ågotnes also presents the actions Bryggens Museum has taken to attract senior citizens. These include special exhibitions and lectures.

The conference *Making Cultural Heritage Truly Inclusive* was organized by the Finnish National Gallery, the National Museum of Finland and the Finnish Museums Association. It was part of the Finnish presidency programme of the Nordic Council of Ministers and it was supported by the Finnish Ministry of Education, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the organizers. The conference was part of the project "Tillgänglighetsnätverk för museer i Norden" (2006-2007).

This conference publication is aimed at the cultural heritage sector, all the cultural service providers and at anyone who is interested in the accessibility of cultural sites. The conference organizers are truly grateful to all the writers in this publication for the extremely interesting articles and for their full support and co-operation.

From accessibility to participation – museum as a public space, Kaija Kaitavuori

I am going to start with a schematic description of the museum institution.

Traditionally, museum is defined by two core functions: it takes care of its collection and it displays its collection in public. The first function puts emphasis on activities like collecting, cataloguing, caring for, archiving; and serves the values of memory and history. These functions call for specialized professionals such as conservators and researchers – in general, academic professions. The institution is comparable to the university. The second function focuses on activities like exhibiting, showing, mediating, producing, informing; the corresponding list of professions is curators, technicians, communications staff, front of house staff etc. – in brief, all those tasks that come along with the aim of serving audiences. With this function the museum aligns itself with other cultural institutions, such as theatres or science centers.

A third definition for museum is often phrased by calling it a learning environment. This is the realm of the, in Finland relatively young, professional group of museum educators. Thinking of the audience as learners gives them a more active role than that of mere viewers and recognizes their potential personal agenda.

Put schematically, the picture could look like this:

MUSEUM is...	FUNCTIONS as...	SERVES...
A Collection	An Archive	Researchers
A Cultural Institution	A Mediator	Audiences, viewers, visitors
A Learning Environment	An Educational Institution	Learners

Target groups and special needs

In museum education it is customary to direct activities to defined groups, to think about target groups. Targeting is a reaction to the concept of “general audience”: today we rather talk about audiences, in plural, instead of *the* audience, collectively. Targeting is based on awareness of people’s different needs and e.g. learning styles. By serving diverse audiences we want to respect each visitor’s individuality. On the other hand, because it is not possible to individualize all activities and services, in practice we make generalizations: we group people according to characteristics that we think are decisive

for their needs and behaviour. (This is a paradox: the motivation for grouping is individualization and differences, and the result is generalizations and similarities.)

Typical groupings in museum education are made by age. Other defining factors can be life situation (programs for families, students) or geography (local visitors, tourists). Target groups can be based on learning styles or visiting frequency (regular visitors, non-visitors). And so on.

The idea of *accessibility* is closely linked with the practice of thinking about diverse audiences and visitors. An accessible museum, ideally, serves well many kinds of audiences and provides every visitor with a possibility to participate and experience things in their own individual way. A very concrete outcome of targeting has been what we are used to calling “special needs groups”. These are most often defined by a disability of some kind. There are programs designed for these groups, e.g. providing guided tours in sign language or securing services for wheelchair users. These measures facilitate access to museums for people who otherwise might not even consider coming. Being labelled as a special needs group can, however, despite good intentions, have a counterproductive effect. What is named *special* may seem strange or extraordinary. For the user of the service, however, it means an ordinary and basic thing in his/her life. Instead of being singled out as special and extraordinary, the approach should strive for equality, equal opportunities.

Targeting arises from good intentions and it certainly has its benefits: the activities and services for audiences can be modified and tailored to suit different people. By analyzing audience groups it is also easier to plan a sensible use of resources. At the same time, there are pitfalls in using target groups. A group is always an assumption, and an assumption can also be false. In any case, being defined as a member of a group is never the only defining feature of a person, and other features may be hidden or ignored. Being treated as a group can also shadow the internal diversity of the group of people. In many cases this may not create a problem, but too efficient targeting may result in forcing people into categories and labelling. The worse thing to happen is to be grouped and defined according to an irrelevant feature: e.g. being part of an ethnic group is no reason, as such, to take part in an activity or to come to the museum. Defining groups is not a neutral and purely descriptive endeavour: it also constructs and creates these groups and shapes reality.

It is a relatively new practice in Finland to minutely think about target groups and to tailor parallel programs for them. In the UK things are well ahead. The Victoria & Albert Museum structured the audiences of their new display in the following manner: *independent learners, families, school groups, students from further and higher education, local audiences, ethnic minority groups, foreign visitors, specialists, amateur*

and professional audiences.¹ The learning needs of these groups were analyzed, and the most suitable services and activities were designed accordingly. This reasoning acknowledges that the same exhibition presents itself very differently to the different viewers: the non-professional amateurs as well as the experts are both “special needs groups” and need special attention and services.

Participation

The idea of participation gives a new dimension to accessibility. In addition to thinking about how different visitors reach the museum and how they can enjoy the program, specific attention is also given to thinking of how people can participate in the functioning of the museum and influence it. What is usually called *the accessibility of decision making* comes close to this kind of participation, but I still think it is fruitful look at the question of participation separately.

The idea of participation is linked with the idea of the museum as a public space. It starts with such questions as: who has ownership of the museum, who has the right to say and to decide in the museum, how can we give voice to groups outside the museum and how can the museum serve as a platform for questions and themes presented by the users of the museum.

There is a clear difference between the approach of producing programs and events for an audience and the approach of giving space for an audience to make their program. In the first case people (or the *target* group) are considered audience, in the latter they are actors or users. In the participatory approach the people outside the museum are seen as mature citizens who have opinions and things to say about the museum, and who have their own relationship with the content of the museum, as well an understanding about the meaning of the museum in their own life and in society.

Seeing things in the light of participation, we can add one more line to our table:

MUSEUM is...	FUNCTIONS as...	SERVES...
A Collection	An Archive	Researchers
A Cultural Institution	A Mediator	Audiences, viewers, visitors
A Learning Environment	An Educational Institution	Learners
A Public Space	A Forum	Users, citizens

.....

¹ Gail Durbin, *Interactive Learning in Museums of Art and Design*, 2002.
www.vam.ac.uk/files/file_upload/5752_fuke.pdf, downloaded 14.11.2006.

Here the question is not only of what you get from the museum (experience, information, learning...) but of two-way communication: the museum providing a platform and resources for action, encouraging access to production, interpretation and discussion. Instead (or aside) of defining target groups, the museum is letting people form their own communities. The museum space becomes a political space, a space of dialogue and debate.

Increasing outside participation can be met with suspicion within the museum. There are many fears that if the expert power is shared even a little bit the whole authority collapses and anarchy prevails: just about anybody can come and say or do anything. Many are horrified of the possibility that people may say banal things about art and the museum. To limit the right to think and to discuss only to specialist and experts seems tantamount to suspecting that there is no qualified and inventive thinking outside the museum at all. This suspicion goes hand in hand with the fear of compromising quality, of dumbing down contents, a fear that the rich content of the museum will become diluted, simplified and poorer if it is treated with anything else than professional tools.

In reality, the process is quite the contrary: when a 'laic' person gets involved with a new subject and becomes familiar with it, comprehension of the complexity and richness grows; the more you learn, the more you appreciate. On the other hand, as Antti Raike pointed out at the conference, a huge amount of knowledge comes through the museum doors, and the museums are very disinclined to appreciate and to get hold of it. We need to find ways of giving space to the visitors' knowledge and of using it.

It is true that with this approach the museum will, indeed, give away some of its power to define and to set the rules of discussion. This does not, however, mean giving away its professionalism. On the contrary, it means that museum professionals have to explicitly articulate their expertise, make it more understandable, and engage in the discussion on equal terms with others.

Preserving the Virtual Cultural Heritage: Museums for the Game Literate Generations, Frans Mäyrä

The daily life in industrialised societies has undergone substantial shifts during the last couple of centuries. Particularly during the last few decades, during transition into so-called information or network society has the speed of change increased further. These changes reach to the fundamental levels in our culture, challenging the ways cultural institutions operate, as well as the forms of culture they will address. In some areas, these changes are already taking place and reality.

From Digitalised Culture to Digital Culture

Contemporary information, communication and media technologies are based on digital, or numerical calculation. The binary code in its multiple forms, as digital data as well as various computer programs is the *lingua franca* of information society; when images, sounds or even behavioural patterns are stored and manipulated as numeric code, it becomes possible to create new kind of phenomena. It is now possible to combine words, images, sounds and three-dimensional spaces, make them react to user actions in multiple ways, and share the access and authorship of these information environments with thousands of users.

Traditional efforts in the area of digital culture and cultural heritage have been focused on *digitalised culture*, rather than *digital culture*. Digital scanning, photographing and indexing the classic cultural heritage from our history is valuable work and dearly in need of more resources at the moment. At the same time, there has also started to emerge culture that is native to the new digital environments. There are sites like www.virtualheritage.net, which showcase the ongoing work of expanding the preservation efforts of the world heritage with new technologies, and simultaneously making experiences of places like temples of Angkor, or remote European castles available for wider public. But there are temples and castles today that can easily collapse and vanish – almost without a trace – even while those sites are important parts in the lives of even millions of people.

Realms of Crafts

One of the examples of such cultural treasures is Azeroth, a fictional world created inside *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard, 2004), an online fantasy role-playing game. Containing several continents, currently over two hundred known and mapped cities, Azeroth is regularly visited by the reported over nine million subscribed players.

According to surveys of these people, the average weekly playing time in these virtual worlds generally exceeds twenty hours, in many cases reaching double or triple of that count (Yee, 2003–06). In the spirit of role-playing games, much of this time is being spent in building one's character and in other creative activities. The range of available virtual professions spans from herbalism and mining to blacksmithing, leatherworking and engineering. Those skilled in these virtual arts and crafts regularly use their abilities to create unique items, reflecting their aesthetics and taste, while also carrying some special, in-game significance such as magical enhancements. It is difficult to estimate the cultural value of such virtual entertainment and labour, but economist Edward Castronova (2005) has calculated that considering the real-money market value of virtual properties in online auctions like eBay, the Gross National Product of online game worlds can easily surpass that of 'real countries' we know from the maps of this Earth.

Keeping in Contact with Values

The armours, dresses and castles of virtual game worlds might seem to have little to do with the core tasks of museums and other memory institutions we currently recognise. Thinking deeper, such elements might actually be pointing the way towards the future. The material forms adopted by cultures of different eras have always been only the surfaces or focal points for cultural significance. Many important things are generally invisible, as everybody who has designed a museum exhibition knows. The artefacts of the past require their contextual information to convey their true meanings for museum patrons. Even paintings and other works of fine arts are regularly accompanied by nametags, artist information and exhibition guidebooks. The beauty might be in the eye of the beholder, but the educated appreciation of art and culture is grounded in learning and cultural information. This is where the virtual meets the real. Already today several major museums offer various audio tours that make use of simple audiovisual enhancements to deliver guidance for the visitors. Also online 'virtual exhibitions' are being developed with different technologies to enhance the basic information provided in museums' web pages. The immaterial information that resides in the minds of experts is thus beginning to enter into new kinds of information processes. However, this is only a start. (For more on the digitalisation and transformation of museums, see e.g. Anderson, 2004; Hemsley, Cappellini and Stanke, 2005; Keene, 2005.)

Museums should not isolate themselves from their users. To keep up with the challenges of changing world, it is important to learn new ways to communicate and reach out to people. The network-enabled, online communication and information technologies are collaborative and dynamic by heart. They provide opportunities to engage users in new ways and to invite their participation in the collective saving and sharing of cultural heritage. The rich material collections in world's museums remain currently under-utilised in this sense; there are innumerable memories, thoughts and other sources of significance that stay locked within the individual minds. Providing better, easily accessible tools of participation for non-expert users to engage with the

virtual versions of cultural heritage, is the direction where the knowledge and understanding of experts and museum users alike is going to be mutually enriched. Museums would no longer be commonly misunderstood as collections of dead objects, but perceived as meeting places of minds, and as living and expanding repositories of ideas and experiences.

Taking a few steps into this direction of developing the 'immaterial museum' will bring us back to the online game worlds and other works of digital culture. These creations are works of the digital generations, those people who experience interactive technologies as natural parts of their social and professional lives. One way to characterise the ongoing transition on cultural skill sets is to look at the changes taking place around the concept of 'literacy': on top of traditional emphasis of being able to read and write textual media, new media literacies are being developed and added on top of each other, like layers in an onion. Many of the crucial skills related to being able to operate in the world of interactive media are parts of so-called *games literacy*: being able to understand the lexicon and grammar or interactive media forms, and being able to enjoyably participate in the playful interactions they allow. This kind of skills have only been developed since the 1970s, when the first electronic games, computer game and video game classics were introduced. Since the 1980s onwards, children in the technologically advanced countries have been practically immersed in game worlds of various kinds, leading into almost one hundred percent engagement rates with digital game cultures. (Cf. Ermi, Heliö & Mäyrä, 2004; Kallio, Kaipainen & Mäyrä, 2007.) Past years have also seen a strong rise of activity in games research and the formation of game studies, a new academic discipline created to advance understanding and learning of games.

The crucial question related to this explosion of virtual world, virtual architecture, folk arts and customs that take place in virtual game worlds is: where are the museums dedicated to these, virtual experiences? If an increasingly important part of cultural creativity is realised in these digital domains, what happens when the game devices are no longer commercially produced or supported, and the online game servers are taken down? Are we in danger of missing important parts of our cultural history or even more radically: losing entire worlds, and their works of art, due to technology becoming obsolete? There are several possible solutions available for archiving and maintaining the memory of these places and contents, if we just are motivated enough to do it. Furthermore, considering the potentials of new media and games for extending and enhancing museums with new experiences and forms of participation, I see an increasing need in the future for cultural institutions to join forces with the professionals and active users operating within the Internet and game cultures.

Literature

- Anderson, Gail, ed. 2004. *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*. Walnut Creek, Calif: AltaMira Press.
- Castronova, Edward. 2005. *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games*. Chicago (Ill.): University of Chicago Press.
- Ermi, Laura, Satu Heliö, and Frans Mäyrä. 2004. *Pelien voima ja pelaamisen hallinta: lapset ja nuoret pelikulttuurien toimijoina*. Tampere: Tampereen yliopisto, hypermedialaboratorio. Online: <http://tampub.uta.fi/haekokoversio.php?id=53>.
- Hemsley, James, Vito Cappellini, and Gerd Stanke, eds. 2005. *Digital Applications for Cultural and Heritage Institutions*. Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate.
- Keene, Suzanne. 2005. *Fragments of the World: Uses of Museum Collections*. 1st ed. Amsterdam: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Kallio, Kirsi Pauliina, Kirsikka Kaipainen, and Frans Mäyrä. 2007. *Gaming Nation? Piloting the International Study of Games Cultures in Finland*. Tampere: Tampereen yliopisto, hypermedialaboratorio <http://tampub.uta.fi/haekokoversio.php?id=202>.
- Yee, Nick. 2003–06. "The Daedalus Project." Online: <http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus/>.

Collecting individual experience, Esko Nummelin

Innovation capital and the individual

Museum clientele – museumgoers – have expectations concerning the services of museums, which in turn seek to respond to best of their ability. At its best, a museum can be a critical and analytical interlocutor, open to new ideas and views, and having a role that is significant in society in producing or enabling innovation capital. The traditional relationship between the museum visitor and the museum, however, is neither unequivocal nor unilateral.

If someone visiting an art museum sees in an exhibition, for example, Kazimir Malevich's painting "Black Square" from 1915 we take it for granted that he or she is familiar with basic information regarding the piece, i.e. the history of early 20th-century modernism and the Russian avant-garde. For the exhibitor, the museum, this involves established models of operation and interpretation that in most cases require the visitor to have sufficient background knowledge or at least a shared cultural basis within which the information presented is interpreted. From the viewer's perspective, museums traditionally follow quite a uniform manner of presenting art, which visitors accustomed to complex and varied present-day communication may regard as restrictive in an old-fashioned way and representing only one possible, though by no means only, manner of presentation and interpretation.

It is obvious that a work like Malevich's painting cannot be experienced solely through observation. Its visual surface provides extremely little information. Without knowledge of its origins and art-historical role, the painting would remain unknown to viewers. Knowledge and learnt models of operation are more at issue here than perception or observation. Without sufficient background knowledge and the adoption of the museum visitor's role, the viewer would remain on his or her own and there would be no contact even in the sense of the traditional museum visit. Nor is it completely impossible for the exhibition activities of an art museum swearing by individuality, creativity and open-mindedness to be more prone to restrict experience and to construct stereotypes than to liberate audiences to engage in independent, unbiased thought and the exchange of ideas arising from their own cultural basis.

Cultural accessibility means awareness of the bilateral nature of activities, of the interactive nature of the dialogue between the visitor and the museum, and between the institution and society.

From maintaining a monopoly of values to serving customers

It can be claimed that the overriding idea of modernism was the utopia of the universal. Modern art, abstract art, was – or should have been – the way to a universal language. People wanted to believe that it was possible to create art similar to mathematics that could be experienced regardless of the context of presentation and the culture at hand. Modern art was to be like the world of mathematics, where the meaning of a number does not depend on who happens to be dealing with the numbers.

The value of a work of art independent of the context of presentation and culture was made possible by an independent global art market. Art was a good investment. The utopia of modernism was also a safe one from the perspective of the art collection and the museums, for knowledge of the quality of art was in the keeping of museums. Museums represented expertise. They symbolized solidity and the unchanging nature of the system of values, and their task was to maintain the idea of the existence unequivocal qualities. In this sense museums were meant to educate and pass on knowledge. Hierarchical knowledge and related values were to be passed on to citizens, subjects, whose limited ability to serve in the role of a recipient of art or the museum visitor needed improvement.

By the new millennium confidence in the existence of unequivocal measures has gradually begun to be shaken, although faith in the value of artworks in monetary terms and commensurate artistic value is still strong. The postmodern society has challenged museums and their role in shaping values and maintaining the monopoly of values. At the same time, globalization and European integration have shed new light on the role of the museum as maintaining nationalist ideology and producing national identity. The governed subject has become a client.

The situation is particularly new in Finland, where less than two per cent of the population comes from elsewhere. As the country's museums community has based its work throughout its history upon Finnish identity and national ideals, the question arises whether museums are still responsible for producing, maintaining and nurturing national identity. If this is the case, does our museums community have sufficient resources to carry out this task? And if not, what tasks should then be assigned to our museums in the new situation?

In any case, museums, which have viewed their clientele from the perspective of the nation, have had to refocus. Instead of the masses, the people and the groups representing its various dimensions, the museums should discover individuals, recognize individual clients and their needs. Through the reassessment of this national institution's self-image and description of its tasks, there has also been focus on the financial structures of activities. The established client base no longer seems to be sufficient and it should be expanded.

The core issue is what is ultimately the goal of seeking new client groups and how prominent a role is given to financial issues when setting goals.

Culture belongs to everyone, but what is culture and how is its supply produced?

What do we mean by culture for all, cultural services accessible to all? The *Accessibility in Art and Culture* programme of Finland's Ministry of Education states that accessibility means that everyone has the possibility to participate. In practice this would appear to mainly concern individual events for clients and the identification and removal of its related physical, knowledge-based and economic obstacles.

For the museums community there is the risk that with focus solely on the client interface, the role and tasks of museums as memory organizations in society will be obscured even more than previously. If this happens, the capability of museums to produce or facilitate innovation capital will not receive the attention or economic input necessary for the basic task. There will be focus on individual projects and their problems, leading to fragmentation of the whole, dispersed resources and a situation in which the development work for clearing obstacles to cultural accessibility will lack a solid foundation. Before a museum can even imagine addressing its clientele, it must have something to say.

The perspective of the museumgoer, the user of services, opens up from the individual, whereby the criterion of a successful service transaction is individual experience, varying according to the person concerned. From the perspective of the museum's role as a memory organization, accessibility entails issues of both the recording of information and equality in the dissemination of information. It is only when the processes of documenting and producing information are unbiased in relation to the different dimensions of multicultural society that cultural balance can be successfully sought also in providing information and with regard to the individual client.

Instead of an approach based on a local service transaction, the development of cultural accessibility should be based in a goal-oriented way on the overall national perspective of the museums community. When successful, improving accessibility and expanding existing clientele would enhance the standing and role of museums in society. In practice this would imply a process in which museums would evolve from mouthpieces of the nation-state maintaining systems of values into centres of information and meeting-places of cultures, actors in a modern multicultural society.

The ability of an individual museum to serve cannot rely solely on locally based capabilities. Everything ultimately depends on how the whole – the Finnish museums community – is organized.

The role of the museums community as a memory organization is falling into the background in developing the field. The compiling of individual information and the efficient use of client-based experiences is possible only through a joint information management structure. So long as locally produced information is not available at the national level, resources will be lost and service capabilities will suffer. The situation is by no means improved by the lack of a national strategy for the documentation of visual culture and related information and for the pedagogical objectives of art museums, or the undeveloped state of information management infrastructure. Taking into account the cultural background and individual needs of clients cannot succeed so long as the Finnish museums community is less than the sum of its parts.

Finances above all

In order to develop accessibility we must be able to assess the results of activities, and these results depend on the set goals. Easiest to evaluate are immediate client service transactions and economic success. The experiences of individual museumgoers and users of services can be charted with questionnaires, and the numbers of visitors and economic results can be given in numbers. The most difficult thing to evaluate is how the nation-wide tasks of museums in producing national cultural assets and cultural capital are carried out.

In the market of information provision and distribution the museums community is a small actor. In 2006 there were 4.5 million visits to museums in Finland, of which over half, i.e. 2.8 million, were by ticket-paying visitors. The number of annual cinema visits alone in Finland is almost 8 million. With cultural provision and distribution extremely concentrated in international comparison, the museums community is marked by a strong local character. From the perspective of identity, the nature of museums as emphasizing locality is a resource, while for generating the provision of services locality far too often means insufficient resources.

The capabilities of museums for carry out documentation or to produce new information cannot be compared in any way, for example, with the volume with which large newspaper publishing houses produce material on contemporary culture. The extremely limited productive capability of museums and fragmented material solely in local distribution cannot generate a volume of demand upon which the costs of the system could even partly be based. With insufficient supply there will be no demand. Random demand will not encourage financial decision-makers in local government to invest in the national structures of maintaining cultural assets, and the costs per unit of services provision will remain very high. It is obvious that the real opportunities of museums to produce individual services customized to the needs of clients are extremely limited.

As the municipalities own two-thirds of all museums in Finland and the state only one museum out of ten, a considerable portion of the country's museums are dependent on how municipal finances develop and the future role of museums as part of providing

services at the municipal level. It is obvious that questions related to innovation capital and national cultural assets will easily fall into the background in local political decision-making. Local politicians find it easiest to follow the development of numbers of visitors to museums and ticket revenue. For them, developing accessibility only has instrumental value, with accessibility meaning the expansion of clientele in any way that will ensure the future ability of museums to develop their cash flow, i.e. their own share of the funding, thus helping the municipal economy to respond to its own challenges.

Reason and wisdom have already played their part.

They belong to the old world.

It is all about entertainment, it's all about fun.

It's all about business.

Museums in a Changing World, Richard Sandell

To what extent should museums and galleries be responsive to the increasingly diverse societies in which they find themselves operating? More particularly, what role might they have in actively shaping societies which are more equitable, more open to diversity, at ease with (and more respectful) of difference?

These questions – questions which potentially challenge the fundamental purposes and responsibilities of museums, as well as their underlying values – continue to provoke fierce debate within the international museum community. Although the purposes and social obligations of museums remain contested, there is nevertheless a growing interest in many parts of the world, in the potential for museums to not simply reflect society but to contribute towards positive social change.

Let me use a particular example to illustrate these trends. Over the past two years, nine UK museums and galleries have worked in partnership with the University of Leicester in the UK and with a ‘think tank’ of disabled activists, artists and cultural practitioners, to develop a range of experimental interpretive projects – exhibitions, displays and educational programmes for schools – each primarily concerned with disability and the lives and experiences of disabled people. This might be seen as part of a wider movement within museums to reveal the hidden histories of communities and groups (women, minority ethnic communities, sexual minorities, faith groups and so on) but Rethinking Disability Representation is perhaps distinctive in its explicit desire to change the ways in which visitors (and society in general) thinks about difference. Although wide ranging in terms of theme, content and approach, the projects share a common guiding purpose – to challenge widely held negative stereotypes of disabled people and to engage the public in informed debate around (often contentious) disability-related contemporary issues. By the end of this year, all the projects will have opened to the public.

The Imperial War Museum, for example, has developed a series of sessions for schools which draw on their rich collections to encourage children to explore the experiences of disabled soldiers returning from wars, past and present, and to question their own and society’s attitudes towards disabled people today. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery presents visitors to its renowned fine art collections with personal (and often highly political) responses from local disabled artists to historic paintings which contain depictions of disabled people. This new approach to interpretation invites visitors to look at paintings in a wholly different way and to engage in debates surrounding the contemporary rights of disabled people.

The nine projects together build on and respond to recent research, carried out by the University’s Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, which found that collections

of all kinds – fine art, archaeology, social history, decorative arts and so on – held significant amounts of material which related to disability but that this was rarely displayed. Although few museums had purposefully explored disability-related narratives or representations within their displays, many curators expressed openness to exploring the hidden history of disability through their collections. However, the research also identified considerable anxiety amongst museum practitioners - in particular, a fear of 'getting it wrong' - about the field of disability representation and identified a number of dilemmas which had operated to restrict experimentation in this field.

Taken together, the 9 projects will seek to address the cultural invisibility of disabled people in current museum displays and to offer alternative ways of understanding disability which challenge negative stereotypical representations prevalent in many media. Our ultimate aim in developing these projects is to equip museums of all kinds with the confidence, knowledge and skills to become more actively involved in framing, informing and hosting the debates which society has about difference.

Questions about the social purpose and role of museums and galleries continue to divide those who work in museums but early indications from the museums who have already opened their disability related projects suggest that visitors of all kinds are welcoming the opportunity to engage with the provocative and timely questions contained within the exhibitions they encounter.

Note:

Rethinking Disability Representation was initiated and is managed by RCMG (the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries in the University of Leicester's Department of Museum Studies) and is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, NESTA (the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts), with contributions from the University and the nine partner museums involved.

Achieving sustainable access, Diana Walters

The language of access has permeated many aspects of the museum and heritage world and is now a serious part of the industry. Reasons for this are numerous, but the introduction of anti discrimination legislation in many countries and widespread adoption of notions of inclusion mean that public funded organizations are expected and even compelled to engage in accessible practice at some level, and are often asked to demonstrate this. For those of us who have been engaged in this work for many years, this is a welcome development. At last, debates about audiences have broadened and museum professionals, of all types, accept that access is a serious issue. There are many excellent examples of projects and initiatives that have demonstrably touched peoples' lives and have required museums to look at their own practice and policies in a new way.

A key question that arises for this is how can this development be sustained? What does the profession need to do to ensure that the access achievements of the recent past continue and develop so that they become embedded within the organizations and practices of heritage? This article focuses on two key aspects; the training of professionals and the importance of research.

Research on attitudes towards disability amongst museum professionals carried out by the author revealed that understanding of disability and access generally is low. The language of inclusion is often adopted, even that of the social model² of disability, but the driving forces for engaging in accessible practice are more likely to be funding, marketing, targeting new audiences or exhibition development. Whilst these are all good reasons, there is no guarantee that they are underpinned by either a strategic or even a genuinely inclusive understanding. This could be, for example, where museums engage in consultation with 'excluded' groups which leads to both empowerment of the communities consulted and a deliberate shift towards sharing the museum's authority.

This notion of power sharing implies that access must be considered at the highest management levels. Yet, almost always, the impetus for inclusive change comes from the lower levels. Dedicated and creative heritage workers fight constant battles to keep access on the agenda, often because of deep personal and professional conviction. It is not unusual for this work to be undertaken as a kind of extra curricula activity alongside the mainstream work. The notion of power sharing would be difficult to conceive if the engine driving this work forward is, primarily, located outside of senior management structures.

.....

2 The social model of disability states that it is the environment that creates disability. This has been widely adopted by the European cultural sector. For a background to the social model, see Oliver, M, 1996, Understanding Disability, MacMillan, pp.30-42

A key aspect of responding to this situation has to be the integration of access into both formal and continuing professional development for heritage workers. This must begin with the understanding that the museum (or heritage organization) has a role in society and that exclusion (deliberate or otherwise) of specific communities is a contravention of human rights. This is one of the core philosophies of the museum studies masters at Göteborg Universitet³ where access is integrated into all aspects of the two year programme. Based partly on the diversity of the students themselves, the challenges of access are explored, theoretically and practically, and its strategic potential is examined. If the museum professionals of the future have been exposed to access debates, then at least there is a better chance of future engagement. Of course, this is by no means unique; many other courses have a similar feature, but there is limited evidence that such responses to access achieve the status of other areas of debate. This is particularly true of disability. Museum studies anthologies in recent years have reflected a general trend towards a broad consideration of access⁴. Education is being boosted by models of life long learning, issues of identity based on diversity of ethnicity and gender is frequently discussed and the implications for practice are also considered. However, the question of access for disabled people has not been included in any of these 'mainstream' publications, despite many significant developments in the field. This is at least in part due to a lack of research in this area and consequently a limited critical mass for museum professionals. Much of the available published material about access fits more closely to advocacy than to research, and whilst this may be pragmatic it does not necessarily add to knowledge.

For the Nordic countries, there is also the specific issue of the welfare model. In terms of understanding disability, there is a real clash between this and the social model as discussed earlier. The welfare model is basically an expert model; resources and intervention are based on what is felt to be best for the individual, with society generally footing the bill. In the social model of disability, this equates to disempowerment and paternalism. Disabled people arguably are denied their individuality in the face of social engineering. Clearly, in terms of heritage, the implications of this are potentially huge. How are disabled people viewed within society and how does heritage reflect and enforce this disablement? Seen in this way, the targeting of disabled people for an exhibition or an event may in fact increase segregation. Challenges to the welfare model must therefore include a consideration of heritage and specific research on this question is crucial.

In conclusion, the question of access must be viewed on a number of levels. The achievements of the recent years are phenomenal but they must be anchored in strategic understanding based on research and professional development. The

.....

3 See <http://www.museion.gu.se/museumstudies/>

4 See, for example, Corsane, G (ed.), 2005, *Heritage, museums and galleries*, Routledge and MacDonald, S (ed.), 2006, *A companion to museum studies*, Blackwell

museum and heritage profession has a potential role in the lives of excluded people but only if it is prepared to work alongside communities and share its authority with them.

Retirement age and people in retirement: A challenge for museums, Anne Ågotnes

I am a senior adviser at Bryggens Museum, now part of the Bergen City Museum. Being 61 years old, I am heading towards retirement and becoming a senior citizen. In many ways, I will belong to an extremely important target group for museums. There are several reasons why:

In the years to come, we – the future senior citizens or people in retirement – represent the results of marked increases in social and health care, welfare and social changes during the second half of the 20th century in Northern Europe. During the first half of the present century, people in retirement will become a large and very important population segment. Most of us are well educated, have been employed and are rather well-to-do. We travel, we visit museums and museum shops, we bring along young relatives. We have time. We have money. Senior citizens of earlier generations than mine usually had more time than money.

I will present our museum's experience of preparing special programmes for senior citizens, most of whom were born during the first half of the 20th century, and some of whom have unfortunately lost their short-term memory, but not their long-term memory.

Bryggens Museum presents cultural history through permanent exhibitions which focus on the Middle Ages, temporary exhibitions, and an auditorium housing 170 persons. For 14 years now we have arranged "Pensjonisttreff" meetings for senior citizens on Mondays at noon in the auditorium. They are popular, usually one-hour lectures, attended by 60 to 150 visitors. We often combine the meetings with a visit to our cafeteria, exhibitions or a social event. In average, we arrange 24 meetings a year, but concentrate on the "off-season" months of September – April. During some of these months, Norwegian senior citizens can account for up to 20% of the total number of visitors – due to the "Meetings" programme.

We started the "Meetings for senior citizens" in 1993. Today, there are several locally arranged "Senior Universities" in Bergen. Our 14 years of experience of arranging "Meetings", however, represent a period of fundamental change in the attitudes of society and of elderly people, and some striking trends of social and demographic changes.

In 1993, "Pensjonist" (retirement pensioner) was a word of revere in Norwegian. Employees could retire at the age of 67-70. Many women were housewives but would also consider themselves as retirement pensioners at that age. Today, 14 years later,

few women are full-time housewives. One can choose to retire at the age of 62. This means an opportunity to pursue interests – and to visit museums – at a younger age and over a much longer life-span. When planning the “Meetings for senior citizens” today, we ought to have similar changes in mind, including better aids for those who have problems hearing, seeing and moving around!

Today, the meetings are attended by people who have the opportunity to visit the museum at 12 o'clock noon. In 1993, the segment “senior citizens” was dominated by elderly housewives, who constituted as much as 80% of the group. The term “Meeting” included them. By introducing this term, and not the term “Senior University” or “Lecture”, we struck a note with a visitor segment that normally would not attend lectures: women with no higher formal or university education.

The fact that women dominated the “Meetings” of the 1990s may have reflected different attitudes at that time: upon getting older, women intensified social networks with friends and could pursue new “careers” as hobbies or activities. Some men, however, lost their identity – which may have been strongly linked to their work – upon retirement.

The senior citizens don't always have similar interests: In 1997, when men constituted only 15-20% of the participants, one lady remarked to us that the lectures themselves did not interest her. She attended the “Meetings” in order to find a male companion, a new husband perhaps. If this should have happened, it would have been a wonderful accomplishment for a museum striving to be accessible to everyone!

Nowadays, men represent about 40% of the visitors at the “Meetings”. This is not due to new themes for the “Meetings”, but in my opinion mostly because of changes in attitudes. Upon retirement today, men also seem to pursue new “careers” related to non-occupational interests. In the past 14 years, a predominance of former, full-time housewives has gradually been replaced by retired people of both sexes – and of a steadily younger age of retirement – from an average of ca.70 years to an average of ca. 65 years.



*Some photos may deceive, or may tell the truth. This photo from Bergen 1928 seems to be of a bachelor of good standing. On the right, a new story seems to appear: - through a young child's feet. Today, that child would be 80 years old, and might have attended a "Meeting for senior citizens" or an exhibition at Bryggens Museum.
(© Bergen University Library)*

Bryggens Museum recently carried out an exhibition project entitled “*Portraits of Visitors to the 1928 National Exhibition*”, with senior citizens as an important target group. Bergen University Library had received 1 200 photos by a local photographer, K. Knutsen. The majority were portraits of visitors to the National Exhibition in Bergen in 1928. The head of the Library’s photo archives contacted us, and in 2006 we opened an exhibition presenting the museum/library cooperation project, supported by the Arts Council of Norway. The exhibition presented 106 photos of visitors to the event in 1928. Very few individuals had been identified by name. 2006 was one of our last chances to get in touch with persons who had any connection to the people who were photographed in 1928, 78 years ago.

When planning the exhibition, we took into account a group that is easily ignored by museums. During the last 15 years, this group has become more numerous and visible: Elderly people who can not take care of themselves, and are being institutionalised. We thought about people in wheelchairs, people with Alzheimer’s disease, or those who were senile, or in similar conditions. When preparing the exhibition, the head of the Library’s photo archives visited certain institutions in Bergen showing the photos from 1928, and got a great response.

Our exhibition of photos was well suited for people recognising and remembering – maybe only – things from their childhood. The photos were enlarged to 1 x 1,5 m. No text accompanied any of them, only registration digits. The photos were grouped under a few headings: “Friends”, “Families” and “Children”. The introductory texts were short and mainly designed to provide information for the younger generations. And copies of all the collection photos were accessible in books and digitalised – in spaces where visitors – if they recognised something – could write comments.

We had many objectives with this exhibition:

- To present to the public a selection of fine portraits of people living in or visiting Bergen at one particular point of time, May-September 1928.
- To establish cooperation between a museum and a library/photo archive.
- To show today’s Bergen public what an astonishing mixture of people – also from surrounding and isolated areas – had visited Bergen during a number of months in 1928.
- To present the photographs to the ever-diminishing group of people who could still remember the 1928 exhibition, and to identify more of the persons on the photos.
- To present to our visitors, including the ones demented due to high age, a visual impression of the 1928 population. And – hopefully – to appeal to memory through the sense of sight.

All Bergen institutions for elderly people were invited to the exhibition. They were offered guided tours, which few of them wanted. This target group did not want to listen, talk or read, or were unable to read. However, when observing the visitors, most of them evidently recognised or remembered clothes, postures, experiences of being a child, what a grandmother looked like, etc.



Several of the photos present families spanning three generations. The family's status could often be discerned. This might be a grandmother of working-class origin with two grandsons, judging by the wear and tear of their shoes! (© Bergen University Library)

The photos from 1928 tell about the status of the anonymous people; through dress and attitude. A married lady from the countryside would often wear a scarf on her head to indicate her status, while a rich city widow could be recognisable by her black hat and/or widow's veil. Details such as shoes and stockings, umbrellas, hats, the way the hat is worn, watch chains, and furs, or even the pose of a person, seemed to be recognised by many of the senior museum visitors with hardly any short-term memory, but who remembered these things well from their childhood. It was a pleasure to observe people from institutions arriving in wheelchairs, silent and looking seemingly depressed, and leaving the museum still silent, but with a spark in their eyes.

Certainly senior citizens arriving from the "Meetings" could "read" even more. Many photos express social signs which by now have disappeared. During the exhibition period, we arranged "Meetings" for senior citizens every Monday, and many of the attendants re-visited the exhibition after having a cup of coffee. But what is more interesting: a small number of the persons in the photos from 1928 were identified by name, and some of them even with stories connected.

However, in my opinion, one thing made this exhibition more interesting to a museum working in a relatively big Norwegian city with rather extensive demographic changes during the almost 80 years since 1928: The composition of the city's population has also changed – with a larger number of inhabitants from non-European countries today than 80 years ago. Bergen has by tradition always been inhabited by quite many second or third generation immigrants from abroad – but mostly from other North European countries such as Germany, Holland, England, Scotland or Denmark. We did not see many people in the photographs that could be recognised as immigrants. And the exhibition did not appeal to any notable extent to today's immigrants in Bergen: many of them being from Asia or Africa. However, I must admit that we did not even try very hard to point them out as a "target group" for the exhibition.

In today's society we – senior citizens of around 60 years of age – represent a group of museum visitors who are well-travelled, who might retire at a younger age, live longer or be healthier compared to our predecessors, due to improved health care and general welfare, as both the men and women among us are more well-to-do than ever. We are educated, most of us have been actively employed all our grown-up lives, we seek new challenges and adventures which could be found in a museum. And we bring our friends or relatives, or maybe our grandchildren, to the museum for shared experiences, shared adventures, shared pleasures, or even to spend money in the museum's cafeteria or shop, or – as in this case of a not so very different event in Bergen in 1928 – to be photographed.



*This might be a very well-off widow or grandmother with three granddaughters, visiting the National Exhibition of Bergen in 1928. In contrast to the grandmother with the two boys, she appears to be clinching her purse closely in her hands. But she clearly was willing to spend money on services, such as those of a photographer, connected to the exhibition. And, as a rich woman, she clearly had the opportunity to do so.
(© Bergen University Library)*