A BOOK BY NINA SIMON

Chapter 1: Principles of Participation

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It's 2004. I'm in Chicago with my family, visiting a museum. We're checking out the final exhibit—a comment station where visitors can make their own videos in response to the exhibition. I'm flipping through videos that visitors have made about freedom, and they are really, really bad. The videos fall into two categories:

1. Person stares at camera and mumbles something incomprehensible.
2. Group of teens, overflowing with enthusiasm, "express themselves" via shout-outs and walk-ons.

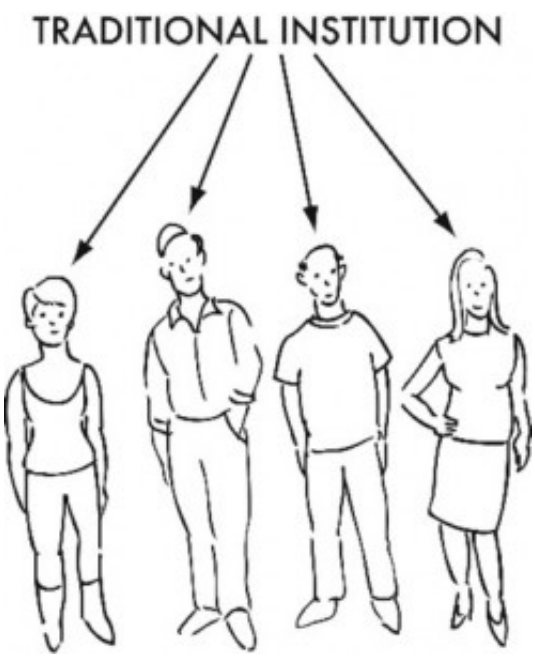
This is not the participatory museum experience of my dreams. But I don't blame the participants. I blame the design.

How can cultural institutions use participatory techniques not just to give visitors a voice, but to develop experiences that are more valuable and compelling for everyone? This is not a question of intention or desire; it's a question of design. Whether the goal is to promote dialogue or creative expression, shared learning or co-creative work, the design process starts with a simple question: which tool or technique will produce the desired participatory experience?

Designers have answered versions of this question for many kinds of visitor experiences and goals in cultural institutions. Professionals know how to write labels for different audiences. They know what kinds of physical interactions promote competitive play and which promote contemplative exploration. And while they may not always get it right, they are guided by the expectation that design decisions can help them successfully achieve content and experience goals.

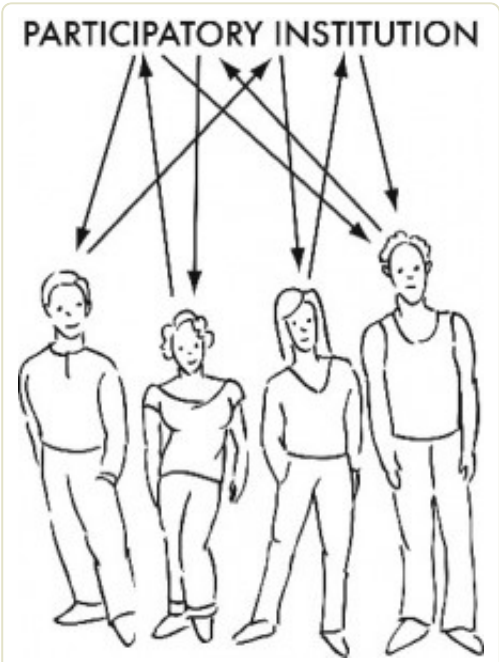
When it comes to developing participatory experiences in which visitors create, share, and connect with each other around content the same design thinking applies. The chief difference between traditional and participatory design techniques is the way that information flows between institutions and users. In traditional exhibits and programs, the institution provides content for visitors to consume. Designers focus on making the content consistent and high quality, so

that every visitor, regardless of her background or interests, receives a reliably good experience.



Drawing by Jennifer Rae Atkins

In contrast, in participatory projects, the institution supports multi-directional content experiences. The institution serves as a "platform" that connects different users who act as content creators, distributors, consumers, critics, and collaborators. This means the institution cannot guarantee the consistency of visitor experiences. Instead, the institution provides opportunities for diverse visitor co-produced experiences.



Drawing by Jennifer Rae Atkins

This may sound messy. It may sound tremendously exciting. The key is to harness the mess in support of the excitement. Being successful with a participatory model means finding ways to design participatory platforms so the content that amateurs create and share is communicated and displayed

attractively. This is a fundamental shift; in addition to producing consistent content, participatory institutions must also design opportunities for visitors to share their own content in meaningful and appealing ways.Supporting participation means trusting visitors' abilities as creators, remixers, and redistributors of content. It means being open to the possibility that a project can grow and change post-launch beyond the institution's original intent. Participatory projects make relationships among staff members, visitors, community participants, and stakeholders more fluid and equitable. They open up new ways for diverse people to express themselves and engage with institutional practice.

Making Participation Physical and Scalable

Most institutions prefer to experiment with participation behind closed doors. Cultural institutions have a long history of prototyping new projects with focus groups. Some museums co-develop exhibitions with community members, whether to represent the unique experience of certain ethnic groups or to showcase works of amateur art. These participatory design processes are often institutionally defined, time-limited, and involve a small number of participants.

The growth of social Web technologies in the mid-2000s transformed participation from something limited and infrequent to something possible anytime, for anyone, anywhere. We entered what MIT researcher Henry Jenkins calls a "convergence culture" in which regular people—not just artists or academics—appropriate cultural artifacts for their own derivative works and discussions. Some cultural institutions responded, as did some music and television studios, by locking down their content so it couldn't be used in this way. But as time has gone on, more and more content providers have opened up their material and have invited people to create, share, and connect around it. Particularly for cultural institutions with a mandate to use their collections for public good, digitization and accessibility of content has become a top priority.

But participating with visitors on the Web is just a start. There are also incredible opportunities for cultural institutions to distinguish themselves by encouraging participation in the physical environments of museums, libraries, and arts centers. These institutions have something few Web companies can offer: physical venues, authentic objects, and experienced real-world designers. By combining professional design skills with the lessons of participation pouring out of the social Web, cultural institutions can become leading participatory venues in our cities, towns, and neighborhoods.

For an institution to manage participation, staff members need to be able to design experiences that invite ongoing audience participation sustainably. Traditional participatory bodies like community advisory boards and prototyping focus groups are important, but those forms of participation are limited by design. Participation has the most impact when designers can scale up collaborative opportunities to all interested visitors. This means offering every visitor a legitimate way to contribute

to the institution, share things of interest, connect with other people, and feel like an engaged and respected participant.

This leads to an obvious question: does every visitor really want to participate in this manner in cultural institutions? No. Just as there are visitors who will never pull the lever on an interactive and those who prefer to ignore the labels, there are many visitors who will not choose to share their story, talk with a stranger, or consume visitor-generated content. There will always be visitors who enjoy static exhibitions conferring authoritative knowledge. There will always be visitors who enjoy interactive programs that allow them to test that knowledge for themselves. And there will increasingly be visitors—perhaps new ones—who enjoy the opportunity to add their own voices to ongoing discussions about the knowledge presented.

Many museum professionals argue that there are some visitors for whom participatory experiences might be entirely off-putting. This is true, but the converse is also true. There are many people who engage heavily with social media and are incredibly comfortable using participatory platforms to connect with friends, activity partners, and potential dates. There are people who prefer social and creative recreational activities and avoid museums because they perceive them as non-social, non-dynamic, non-participatory places. Just as interactive exhibits were introduced in museums to accommodate the presumed educational needs and active desires of young audiences, participatory elements may draw in audiences for whom creative activities and social connection are preconditions for cultural engagement.

In 1992, Elaine Heumann Gurian wrote an essay entitled “The Importance of ‘And’” to address the need for museum practice to accommodate many different and potentially conflicting goals, including scholarship, education, inclusion, and conservation. She commented that we too often think of different institutional goals as oppositional rather than additive, and that “complex organizations must and should espouse the coexistence of more than one primary mission.” While the addition of new pursuits to an institutional plan does force some either/or decisions around policies and resources, it need not inhibit the ability to deliver on multiple promises to multiple audiences.

Participatory techniques are another “and” for the cultural professional’s toolbox. They are tools that can be used to address particular institutional aspirations to be relevant, multi-vocal, dynamic, responsive, community spaces. Again, I come back to the analogy with interactive exhibits. Interactive design techniques are additive methods that supplement traditional didactic content presentation. Interactive exhibits, when successfully executed, promote learning experiences that are unique and specific to the two-way nature of their design. And while there are some institutions, notably children’s and science museums, that have become primarily associated with interactive exhibits, there are other types of museums, notably art and history museums, in which interactives play a supporting role. The

introduction of interactive exhibits does not require an entire institutional shift, and in most cultural institutions, interactive exhibits are just one of many interpretative techniques employed.

I believe the majority of museums will integrate participatory experiences as one of many types of experiences available to visitors in the next twenty years. There may be a few institutions that become wholly participatory and see their entire institutional culture and community image transformed by this adoption. But in most cases, participation is just one design technique among many, one with a particular ability to enhance the social experience of the institution. Implementing participatory techniques requires some changes to institutional perspectives on authority and audience roles, but these changes may be as small or large as a particular organization's commitment.

Participation at its Best

Whatever role they play in your institution, participatory elements must be well designed to be useful. Poorly designed participatory experiences such as the video comment station mentioned at the beginning of this chapter do little to enhance anyone's experience.

The best participatory projects create new value for the institution, participants, and non-participating audience members. When you are driven by the desire to create new value, you end up with products that are transformative, not frivolous. Consider the story of Bibliotheek Haarlem Oost, a branch library in the Netherlands. The library wanted to find a way to invite readers to assign tags to the books they read. By describing books with phrases like "great for kids," "boring," or "funny," readers could contribute knowledge to the institutional catalogue system while also providing recommendations and opinions for future readers. The participatory act of tagging thus would add benefit to institution and audience alike.

The challenge was how to design the tagging activity. The most obvious way would be to ask readers to type the tags into the library's online catalog, either from home or at the library. But the architect designing the library, Jan David Hanrath, knew that very few readers would do that. So Hanrath's team did something very clever: they installed more book drops.

The library created a book drop for each of a set of predefined tags. They also built shelves inside the library for the individual tags. When patrons returned books, they placed them on the shelves or in the drops that appropriately described the books. The tags were electronically connected to the books in the catalog, and the new opinions were made immediately available both to in-person and online visitors.

No patron would call the activity of putting their books in book drops "tagging," and that's a good thing. Participation at Haarlem Oost was made easy and its rewards

for the next set of visitors searching for a good book were immediate. There were few barriers to adoption or significant infrastructure or support costs. It worked because it was a clever, simple distillation of the core idea of tagging. That's what I call good design.

Exhibit voting bins outside the MHC exit. Photo courtesy Daniel Spock.

Doing a sorting activity is a constrained form of participation, but that doesn't diminish its ability to be useful. When I shared the story of the book drops with Daniel Spock, director of the Minnesota Historical Society's History Center (MHC), he was inspired to adapt their model to his institution. Visitors to the MHC wear buttons in the galleries to show that they have paid admission. On their way out, visitors often throw away the buttons, and some end up littering the exit. Spock's team designed a very simple voting mechanism so that instead of littering, visitors could toss their buttons into one of several bins to "vote" for their favorite exhibit they'd seen that day. The simple participatory activity invites people to share their opinions and gives the staff feedback instead of trash. That's what I call value.

What Does Participation Look Like?

Dropping buttons into bins may not sound like substantive participation. Many cultural professionals focus on just one kind of participation: the creation of user-generated content. But people who create content represent a narrow slice of the participatory landscape, which also includes people who consume user-generated content, comment on it, organize it, remix it, and redistribute it to other consumers. In 2008, along with the release of the book *Groundswell: Winning in a World Transformed by Social Technologies*, Forrester Research released a "social technographics" profile tool to help businesses understand the way different audiences engage with social media online. The researchers grouped participatory online audiences into six categories by activity:

1. *Creators (24%)* who produce content, upload videos, write blogs
2. *Critics (37%)* who submit reviews, rate content, and comment on social media sites
3. *Collectors (21%)* who organize links and aggregate content for personal or social consumption

4. *Joiners (51%)* who maintain accounts on social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn
5. *Spectators (73%)* who read blogs, watch YouTube videos, visit social sites
6. *Inactives (18%)* who don't visit social sites

These percentages add up to more than one hundred percent because the categorizations are fluid and many people fall into several categories at once. I fall into all of the first five categories. I'm a creator when I blog, a critic when I make comments on others' sites, a collector when I assemble "favorites," a joiner on many social networks, and a spectator when I consume social media. The percentages keep changing (and are different for every country, gender, and age group), but one thing stays constant: creators are a small part of the landscape. You are far more likely to join a social network, watch a video on YouTube, make a collection of things you'd like on a shopping site, or review a book than you are to produce a movie, write a blog, or post photos online.

And while 24% of people who engage in the social Web are creators in some capacity, on any given participatory site, the representation of creators is much smaller. Only 0.16% of visitors to YouTube will ever upload a video. Only 0.2% of visitors to Flickr will ever post a photo. In 2006, researcher Jakob Nielsen wrote a landmark paper on participation inequality, introducing the "90-9-1" principle. This principle states: "In most online communities, 90% of users are lurkers who never contribute, 9% of users contribute a little, and 1% of users account for almost all the action."

Participation inequality isn't limited to the Web. Even the most popular participatory opportunities in cultural institutions attract a small number of people who want to draw a picture, make a comment, or contribute to an exhibition. The surprising thing about participation inequality is not that it exists in the real world but that it exists on the Web. Some people believed that the ease of Web-based publishing tools would turn everyone into a journalist, a musician, or a contributor to a wiki. But that's not the case. There are some people who are drawn to create, but many more prefer to participate in other ways, by critiquing, organizing, and spectating social content. This isn't just a question of making creative tools as easy to use as possible. There are some people who will never choose to upload content to the Web, no matter how easy it is. Fortunately, there are other participatory options for them.

Encouraging Diverse Forms of Participation

When museum professionals express objections to participatory practice, one of the most frequent claims is "we don't want to be like YouTube." While I agree that museums should not focus on showcasing videos of cats doing silly things, as a platform, YouTube is an extraordinary service that carefully and deliberately caters to all kinds of social media participants.

At first glance, YouTube looks like it is made primarily for two audiences: creators, who make and upload videos, and spectators, who watch them. YouTube's tagline —"Broadcast Yourself"—is targeted to the creator audience. Even though only 0.16% of visitors to the site will ever upload a video, YouTube's designers know that the participation of these creators drives the content and the experience of everyone else who visits the site. That's why, despite the fact that the vast majority of their audience are spectators, YouTube's tagline is not "watch funny videos of cats."

A deeper look at the YouTube homepage reveals ways that other types of participation are encouraged as well. Prime real estate is devoted not to creators but to other kinds of participants. You can join YouTube and collect favorite videos across the site. You can critique videos by commenting, rating them, and posting follow-up video responses if desired. These ratings are shown on the homepage, which means that critics and their opinions get top billing alongside the video creators themselves. Finally, YouTube displays the number of times every video has been viewed. Your participation as a viewer affects the status of each video in the system. Just by watching, you are an important participant.

While the top navigation bar invites users to upload videos, the majority of the YouTube homepage is geared toward watching and rating videos. The main area displays "featured videos" to watch, not tools to share your own videos.

YouTube provides appealing services to all kinds of participants, but the platform's designers spend more time trying to convert spectators into joiners, collectors, and critics than they do trying to encourage more people to become creators. Why focus on these "intermediate" participatory behaviors? First, these behaviors have relatively low barriers to adoption. It's much easier to rate a video than it is to make one—and so conversion is more likely to be successful. But the other key reason is that the platform's value is more dependent on the number of active critics, collectors, and joiners than the number of creators. YouTube doesn't need ten percent or even two percent of its audience to make and upload videos. The overall YouTube experience would likely be worse for spectators if the service was glutted with millions more low-quality videos. The more content there is, the more content there is. In contrast, the more interpretation, prioritization, and discussion there is around the content, the more people can access the videos (and the conversations) that are most valuable to them.

Despite the diversity and popularity of participatory options, many museums are fixated on creators. I share Forrester's statistics with colleagues, and they say, "Yes, but we really want people to share their own stories about biodiversity," or, "We think our visitors can make amazing videos about justice." Many cultural professionals see open-ended self-expression as the paragon of participatory experiences. Allowing visitors to select their favorite exhibits in a gallery or comment on the content of the labels isn't considered as valuable as inviting them to produce their own content.

This is a problem for two reasons. First, exhibits that invite self-expression appeal to a tiny percentage of museum audiences. Less than one percent of the users of most social Web platforms create original content. Would you design an interactive exhibit that only one percent of visitors would want to use? Maybe—but only if it was complemented by other exhibits with wider appeal. When I encounter a video talkback kiosk in a museum as a visitor, I never want to make my own video. I don't choose to be a creator in those environments, and thus my only other option is to be a spectator. But I would love to rate the videos on display (as a critic) or group them (as a collector). Unfortunately, those potentially rich participatory experiences—ones which would develop my ability to detect patterns, compare and contrast items, and express my opinion—are not available to me in most museum settings. By making it easy to create content but impossible to sort or prioritize it, many cultural institutions end up with what they fear most: a jumbled mass of low-quality content.

The second problem with focusing on creators is that open-ended self-expression requires self-directed creativity. Much of contemporary learning theory rests on the idea of "instructional scaffolding," by which educators or educational material provides supportive resources, tasks, and guidance upon which learners can build their confidence and abilities. When it comes to participatory activities, many educators feel that they should deliberately remove scaffolding to allow participants to fully control their creative experience. This creates an open-ended environment that can feel daunting to would-be participants. In an open-ended activity, participants have to have an idea of what they'd like to say or make, and then they have to produce it in a way that satisfies their standards of quality. In other words, it's hard, and it's especially hard on the spot in the context of a casual museum visit. What if I walked up to you on the street and asked you to make a video about your ideas of justice in the next three minutes? Does that sound like a fun and rewarding casual activity to you?

The best participatory experiences are not wide open. They are scaffolded to help people feel comfortable engaging in the activity. There are many ways to scaffold experiences without prescribing the result. For example, a comment board that provides ballots for people to vote for favorite objects and explain the reason behind their preferences offers a better-scaffolded experience than an open-ended board with blank cards and a question like "What do you think?" A supportive starting point can help people participate confidently—whether as creators, critics, collectors, joiners, or spectators.

Who's Involved in Participation?

Participatory projects aren't just about empowering visitors. Every participatory project has three core stakeholders: the institution, participants, and the audience. The audience may mean the institution's visitors, but it can also include other constituencies who might have a particular interest in the outcomes of the project

—for example, participants' neighbors or associates. For a project to be successful, the project staff should be able to articulate and satisfy the interests of each group.

From the institutional perspective, participatory projects have value when they satisfy aspects of the mission. Institutions do not engage in participatory projects because they are fun or exciting but because they can serve institutional goals.

This is easier said than done. Many cultural professionals are more familiar with providing visitor experiences than thinking about how visitors can usefully contribute to the institution. When designing participatory components to exhibitions, I always ask myself: how can we use this? What can visitors provide that staff can't? How can they do some meaningful work that supports the institution overall? When staff can answer these questions easily and confidently, participation can yield powerful results for institutions and participants alike.

CASE STUDY: Climate Conferences at The Wild Center

At The Wild Center in Tupper Lake, New York, participatory engagement is tightly tied to the institutional mission. The Wild Center is a small natural history museum with a mostly seasonal tourist audience, but its mission is quite ambitious: to "ignite an enduring passion for the Adirondacks where people and nature can thrive together and set an example for the world." Executive Director Stephanie Ratcliffe believes that igniting passions and setting examples cannot happen without community participation, and her team identified climate change as a key contemporary issue of interest relating to human coexistence with nature. Staff members felt climate change was not receiving the local attention it deserved from both a business and environmental perspective, and they saw the opportunity to become a place for dialogue around the issue.

In 2008, the institution started inviting builders, politicians, and scientists to come together in dialogue in a series of climate conferences. These conferences served as a hub for locals to understand and act on specific threats that climate change poses to the Adirondacks. The underlying message was that positive action on climate issues could improve town function and business efficiency.

Local citizens responded enthusiastically. After an event focused on "Building a Greener Adirondacks," blogger John Warren wrote:

> Two years ago I was lamenting that no local public leaders were stepping up to the plate on trying to understand what global climate change would mean for the Adirondacks (and its ski-tourism industry) – thankfully, that has changed. The Wild Center in Tupper Lake has taken on the lead role of informing their neighbors about the potential impacts of global warming (such as the impact on amphibians), showing local builders what they can do to mitigate those affects, and organizing scientific meetings to discuss and assess the progress of climate change in the Adirondacks.

Climate conferences are now a core part of The Wild Center's strategic efforts to accomplish its mission. The institution has hosted national and regional conferences for policy-makers and has distributed reports and videos from these events on the Web.

In 2009, The Wild Center initiated a yearly Adirondack Youth Climate Summit to bring together educators, high school students, and college students in dialogue about research and action on climate change. The institution has also has become a lead partner in a local coalition to produce an Adirondack Climate and Energy Action Plan.

Over 200 students and school administrators gathered at The Wild Center in November 2009 for an Adirondack Youth Climate Summit. Photo ©Nancie Battaglia

The climate events helped established The Wild Center as a national player, and equally importantly, as a local community resource. Participating in this highly strategic way with community members in The Wild Center's geographic area enabled this small, young institution to become a powerful voice of and for its constituents.

Outcomes for Participants and Audiences

Outcomes of participation may be as diverse as the goals of the institution overall. These outcomes include: to attract new audiences, to collect and preserve visitor-contributed content, to provide educational experiences for visitors, to produce appealing marketing campaigns, to display locally-relevant exhibitions, and to become a town square for conversation.

You should be able to define the specific way that a participatory project can benefit your institution and be ready to connect that value to your institution's mission statement. It may be valuable for one museum to receive lots of snail shells collected from visitors, whereas another institution may find value in providing a forum where visitors discuss their opinions on racism. It's also important to clearly state what kinds of participation would *not* be useful. Contributed snail shells that would thrill one institution might be a nuisance for another.

Unfortunately, many cultural professionals settle for an unambitious value of participation that is not compelling to institutional directors nor stakeholders: *visitors will like it*. This is not a robust value. It trivializes the mission-relevance of

participatory projects. If you focus solely on participation as a "fun activity," you will do a disservice both to yourself as a professional and to visitors as participants.

Yes, it is fun to help paint a mural or construct a giant model of a molecule. But these activities also promote particular learning skills, create outputs that are usable by others, and promote the institution as a social place. The more you think about which mission-relevant goals you want to support, the more likely you are to design a project that satisfies more than the visitors' desires to be entertained. As Geoff Godbey, professor of leisure studies at Pennsylvania State University, commented in a Wall Street Journal article: "To be most satisfying, leisure should resemble the best aspects of work: challenges, skills and important relationships." Participatory projects can accommodate these interests and are often better suited to providing visitors with meaningful work than traditional museum experiences.

Participatory projects suffer when visitors perceive that the staff is pandering to them or wasting their time with trivialities. Participatory activities should never be a "dumping ground" for interactivity or visitor dialogue. In cases where visitors are actually asked to "do work," that work should be useful to the institution. It's fine to design participatory projects in which visitors produce work that could more quickly or accurately be completed by internal staff members; however, the work should still be of value to the institution ultimately. If the museum doesn't care about the outcomes of visitors' participation, why should visitors participate?

Meeting Participants' Needs

In the book *Here Comes Everybody*, technologist Clay Shirky argued that there are three necessary components for a participatory mechanism to be successful: "a plausible promise, an effective tool, and an acceptable bargain with the [participants]." The institution must *promise* an appealing participant experience. The institution must provide access to *tools* for participation that are easy to understand and use. And the *bargain* between institution and participants—regarding management of intellectual property, outcomes of the project, and feedback to participants—should accommodate participants' needs. Even if your promise, tools, or bargains have to change over the course of a project, you should always be able to articulate what you offer and expect clearly and openly. Doing so demonstrates your respect for participants' time and abilities.

Note that you can substitute the word "volunteer" for "participant" for a snapshot of the ways an institution's most dedicated supporters would like to be engaged. Volunteers and members are people who express self-motivated commitment and interest to dedicate time and resources to institutions. Too often, staff members struggle to find fulfilling and substantive activities for volunteers to do. But when institutions can clearly convey how participants' actions will contribute positively to the institution and to future audiences, volunteers of all types respond enthusiastically.

When it comes to the promise, staff members need to offer participants something fundamental: personal fulfillment. Institutions have explicit mission-related goals that dictate which activities are valuable to pursue, but individuals don't have mission statements. Instead, participants have a wide range of personal goals and interests that motivate behavior. John Falk's research into visitors and identity-fulfillment indicates that visitors select and enjoy museum experiences based on their perceived ability to reflect and enhance particular self-concepts. If you think of yourself as creative, you will be fulfilled by the opportunity to contribute a self-portrait to a crowdsourced exhibition. If you see yourself as someone with valuable stories to share, you will be fulfilled by the chance to record your own recollections related to content on display. If you perceive yourself as helpful, you will be fulfilled by the opportunity to pitch in on tasks that clearly support a larger goal.

Watching a performance or passively walking through an exhibition does not give people this kind of social, active fulfillment. Especially for adult visitors, museums rarely offer challenges that encourage participants to work hard and demonstrate their creative, physical, or cognitive ability. Games researcher Jane McGonigal has stated that people need four things to be happy: "satisfying work to do, the experience of being good at something, time spent with people we like, and the chance to be part of something bigger." Many people visit museums in social groups to spend time with people they like in the context of something bigger. Creating content can give visitors satisfying work and the experience of being good at something. When you put these together and invite people to participate, the institution can meet all four of these needs.

When presenting participatory opportunities to would-be participants, be explicit about how they can fulfill their own needs and contribute to a project with larger impact. Just as casting activities as being "just for fun" devalues the mission-relevance of participation, it also minimizes visitors' understanding of how they can make a meaningful and exciting contribution to the greater community. If you need participants to make a project successful—whether a research project that requires distributed volunteers, a feedback project that requires diverse opinions, or a creative project that requires many hands on deck—say so. The most compelling promises emerge from genuine needs on the part of the institution.

When it comes to the tool, participants need clear roles and information about how to participate. The tool should also be as flexible as possible. Participants don't need to engage with the same project in a uniform way or at the same level of commitment. You may not want staff members coming in whenever they feel like it, but flexibility is an asset when it comes to participation—you want participants to be able to engage when and how they are most able.

When participants contribute to institutions, they want to see their work integrated in a timely, attractive, respectful way. Too many participatory projects have broken feedback loops, where the ability to see the results of participation are stalled by opaque and slow-moving staff activities like content moderation or editing. In some

cases, it is completely acceptable to have a lag between participatory action and outcome for intermediate processing. But if a delay is required, it should be communicated clearly to participants. This can even be turned to the institution's advantage. For example, the museum may send an email to a visitor days or weeks after the visit to inform her that her sculpture is now on display or her story integrated into an audio tour.

Regardless of the timeline, rewarding participants involves three steps that should remain consistent. First, the institution should clearly explain how and when visitors will be rewarded for participating. Second, it should thank visitors immediately upon participating, even if their content will now go into a holding pattern. And third, the staff should develop some workable process to display, integrate, or distribute the participatory content—and ideally, inform participants when their work is shared.

At their best, these three steps are immediate, automatic, and obvious to visitors. Imagine a children's museum that includes an area where visitors can build sculptures or toys out of found objects. Visitors can place their creations on a conveyor belt that moves throughout the museum for all to see. In this case, there are no labels necessary. Visitors see what will happen to their sculptures when they put them on the belt, and they understand of how that might fulfill their self-interest in sharing their work with their community of fellow-visitors.

Providing a good bargain for participation means valuing participants' work. This doesn't require giving every visitor a gold star for participating. It means listening to participants, providing feedback on their efforts, and demonstrating how the institution will use their contributions.

Whether the institution asks for a long commitment or a brief encounter, clarity and honesty are the keys to helping participants feel comfortable contributing. This includes addressing issues of privacy and intellectual property. What happens to the videos that participants record in the gallery? Who owns the ideas they share with the institution? Being clear, specific, and honest about participants' roles in participatory projects helps people know what to expect and evaluate whether an opportunity is right for them.

Lack of clarity erodes trust between institutions and participants and can lead to substandard experiences for both. In August of 2008, I worked with the Chabot Space & Science Center on a participatory design institute in which eleven teenagers designed media pieces for an upcoming Harvard-Smithsonian exhibition on black holes. Unfortunately, while the Harvard-Smithsonian representatives were enthusiastic about encouraging teens to "be creative," they were unable to give the teens any specific information about how their work would be integrated into the final exhibit. There was no initial design, no graphics, and no idea of where the teens' work would fit into the overall website. This lack of clarity made teens suspicious that the client was "hiding" the goals from them and preventing them

from meeting the criteria for success. In the end, the teens' work was not in line with the client's final website design, and their work was marginalized rather than being featured in the final product. Lack of clarity at the beginning led to a somewhat frustrating experience for participants and an unsatisfactory product for the institution.

When complete clarity is not possible, honesty suffices. The Chabot project was not a failure. While we could not give the teenagers the answers they wanted, we were direct with them about what we did and didn't know and supported them as best we could. Staff members can change their mind, make mistakes, and evolve with participants if they are honest every step of the way. And the more the staff can express to participants—in actions as well as words—how their work helps the institution or other visitors, the more participants will see themselves as partners and co-owners of the project and the institution by extension.

Creating Quality Outcomes for Audiences

Participatory projects are not solely for institutions and participants. There is another populous constituency: the audience of non-participating visitors. How can a participatory project produce outcomes that are valuable and interesting to the larger institutional audience? Some participatory environments are continually open and evolving, so that any audience member can electively become a participant, but most projects limit participation to a small group. It is simpler to say, "You can submit your idea until the end of the year" or "We will work with twenty teenagers from a local high school to develop this project," than it is to construct a system that can let anyone participate at any time. For many institutions, constraining the scope of participation is an appropriate starting point for collaborative engagement.

No matter how large the participating group, the audience for their work matters. Participants' experiences, no matter how superlative, must be weighed against the experience that others will have with the outcome of their work. A mural isn't just for those who painted it; it must bring pleasure to others as an art object as well. Likewise, exhibits, research, marketing materials, programs, and experiences produced in collaboration with visitors must be compelling outputs in their own right. That is not to say they can't be different from standard institutional programs. Ideally, projects developed using participatory models will have unique value that cannot be achieved by traditional processes.

Audience goals, like participant goals, are based on individuals' diverse and idiosyncratic criteria for fulfillment. You can't please everyone, but staff can decide what kind of experiences they want to offer and design participatory platforms to accommodate those. Some visitors are looking for high-quality consumer experiences and do not care about the process by which those experiences are developed. For those visitors, project staff need to make sure the participatory process can deliver a product at the desired levels of rigor, design, and content. Other visitors want to familiarize themselves with participation from the "safe

space" of spectating before jumping in. For those would-be participants, staff members should design in mechanisms that celebrate, encourage, model, and value participants' work. The more specifically you can define the intended audience for a project, the more successful you will be at designing a participatory project that will satisfy their needs.

How Does Participation Work?

There are two counter-intuitive design principles at the heart of successful participatory projects. First, participants thrive on constraints, not open-ended opportunities for self-expression. And second, to collaborate confidently with strangers, participants need to engage through personal, not social, entry points. These design principles are both based on the concept of scaffolding. Constraints help scaffold creative experiences. Personal entry points scaffold social experiences. Together, these principles set the stage for visitors to feel confident participating in creative work with strangers.

Participation Thrives on Constraints

If your goal is to invite visitors to share their experiences in a way that celebrates and respects their unique contributions to your institution, you need to design more constraints, not fewer, on visitor self-expression. Consider a mural. If given the chance, very few people would opt to paint a mural on their own. The materials are not the barriers—the ideas and the confidence are. You have to have an idea of what you want to paint and how to do it.

But now imagine being invited to participate in the creation of a mural. You are handed a pre-mixed color and a brush and a set of instructions. You know what you are supposed to do to be successful. You get to contribute to a collaborative project that produces something beautiful. You see the overall value of the project. You can point out your work in the final product with pride. You have been elevated by the opportunity to contribute to the project.

This is a well-scaffolded participatory experience. In successful participatory projects, visitors don't build exhibits from scratch or design their own science experiments. Instead, they participate in larger projects: joining the team, doing their part. Constrained projects often provide opportunities for partial self-expression—a flourishing brush stroke here, a witty sentence there—but the overall expressive element is tightly constrained by the participatory platform at hand. Meaningful constraints motivate and focus participation. As Orson Welles put it, "the enemy of art is the absence of limitations."

The Denver Art Museum (DAM) provided an excellent example of a constrained participatory museum experience in their *Side Trip* gallery on display in the spring of 2009. *Side Trip* was an interactive space that accompanied an exhibition of psychedelic rock music posters called *The Psychedelic Experience*. In one *Side*

Trip activity, museum educators invited visitors to make their own rock music posters.

Photo courtesy Denver Art Museum

Rather than giving people blank sheets of paper and markers (and reaching a narrow audience of self-motivated creators), the DAM educators devised an activity that blended collecting, critiquing, and creating. Visitors were offered clipboards with transparencies attached. There were stacks of graphics—cut-out reproductions from the real rock posters on display next door—which visitors could place under the transparencies to rearrange and remix into poster designs of their own choosing. Visitors then used dry erase markers to trace over the graphics, augment them, and add their own creative flair. When a visitor was satisfied with her recombined poster, she handed it to a staff member, who put it in a color copier to create a completed composite. Each visitor was given a copy of her poster and was given the option to display a copy in the gallery.

Visitors carefully constructed their own rock music posters at the Denver Art Museum by placing graphics under transparencies and drawing additions on top. *Side Trip's* immersive environment encouraged visitors both to connect to the pscyhedelic era and to behave differently than they would in other galleries.

The results of this physical "remix" activity were beautiful, intricate posters. As a *Side Trip* visitor, I couldn't easily tell where the remixed artifacts ended and the participants' additions began. 37,000 posters were made over the run of the show, compared to total exhibit attendance of 90,000. The average amount of time spent making a poster was twenty-five minutes. This was a popular activity that visitors took seriously.

The poster-making activity was successful because visitors didn't have to start with a blank slate. Their creativity was scaffolded by graphic cut-outs that also tied their creative experience to the artifacts in the show. The constraints gave participants a comfortable entry point to engagement without limiting their creative potential. It invited visitors who did not think they could make art to engage confidently with a positive result. It created an attractive, high quality body of visitor-generated content for spectators to enjoy.

Why aren't more museums designing highly constrained participatory platforms in which visitors contribute to collaborative projects? The misguided perception is that it's more respectful to allow visitors to do their own thing—that the highest-

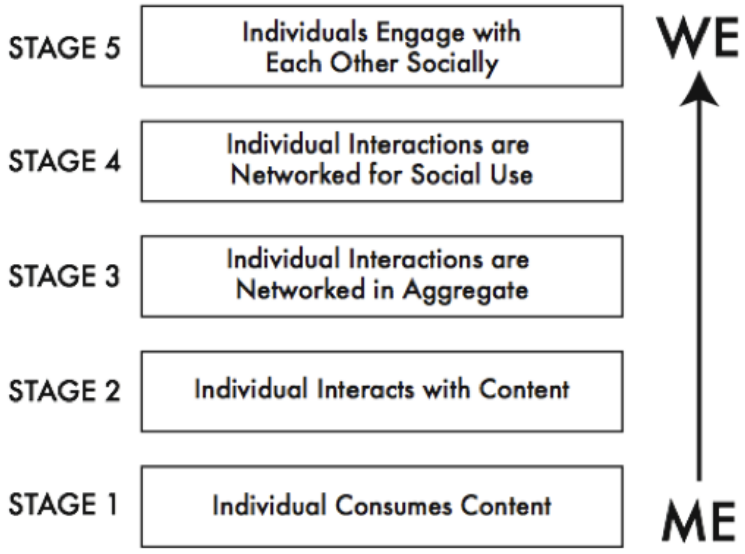
value participatory experiences will emerge from unfettered self-expression. But that idea reflects a misunderstanding of what motivates participation. Visitors don't want a blank slate for participation. They need well-scaffolded experiences that put their contributions to meaningful use.

Going Social

So far, we've looked at a few techniques for designing experiences that invite diverse participation and produce meaningful work. But another key focus of this book is the design of experiences that encourage people to participate socially with each other. To design successful social experiences, you don't start by designing "for the crowd." Instead, think of yourself as a cocktail party host. Your job is to graciously and warmly welcome each individual, and then to connect her with other people whom she might connect with particularly well. When you connect enough individuals to each other, they start feeling like they are part of a communal experience. I call this "me-to-we" design, which builds on individual (me) experiences to support collective (we) engagement.

In other words, you don't start from the top down to design a participatory space. Transforming a cultural institution into a social hub requires engaging individual users and supporting connections among them. While at a party a host might connect people for a variety of reasons—shared professional fields, shared love of Basset Hounds, common personality traits—in a museum, staff members should connect people through the content on display. By introducing individual visitors through the content they both love, hate, or have a personal connection to, staff can motivate dialogue and relationship building around the core focus of the institution.

This evolution of the visitor experience from personal to communal interactions can be expressed via five stages of interface between institution and visitor. The foundation of all five stages is content. What changes is how visitors interact with content and how the content helps them connect socially with other people.



The five stages of social participation.

Each stage has something special to offer visitors. *Stage one* provides visitors with access to the content that they seek. *Stage two* provides an opportunity for inquiry and for visitors to take action and ask questions. *Stage three* lets visitors see where their interests and actions fit in the wider community of visitors to the institution. *Stage four* helps visitors connect with particular people—staff members and other visitors—who share their content and activity interests. *Stage five* makes the entire institution feel like a social place, full of potentially interesting, challenging, enriching encounters with other people.

These stages are progressive in that you cannot consistently design physical environments for a stage five experience without providing the groundwork of stages one through four. They are somewhat flexible; there are some highly social people who can easily jump from stage two to stage five, whereas other people may feel most comfortable never moving beyond stage three. Not all institutional projects should be designed for upper-stage experiences. Each stage affords a different kind of visitor experience, and most visitors experience multiple stages in a given cultural experience.

At present, most institutionally designed experiences are on stages one and two. I do not advocate a re-staging of all visitor experiences but rather the inclusion of a greater diversity of experience types, including some that promote the social over the personal. While many traditional museum visitors may be happy with a blend of stage one and two experiences, there are other potential visitors for whom the introduction of stage three, four, and five experiences can make the institution more enticing and meaningful.

Many cultural institutions provide facilitated experiences on all five stages. Tour guides and educators frequently help visitors feel comfortable and confident engaging socially with each other. Facilitated educational programs like camps or reenactments provide stage five opportunities to work in a team or group. The

problem is that when the facilitator isn't there or the event isn't happening that social engagement ceases to exist. Designing stage three and four experiences can lay the groundwork to support and encourage unfacilitated social experiences. These frameworks enable visitors to do it for themselves whenever they like.

For example, consider the experience of visiting a historic house on a guided tour. There are many stage one experiences in which visitors can look at things and learn information about the house. There are some stage two opportunities for visitors to touch things, ask questions, and dig into personal interests. Because many visitors tour historic houses in groups with strangers, there is the potential for experiences on stages three to five. Guides can ask individuals to vote for the room they'd most like to live in and see how they compare to others in the group (stage three). Guides can encourage subsets of people who have particular interests, say, in the lives of servants, to spend time in dialogue with each other around artifacts related to that interest (stage four). And the best guides make the group feel like a close-knit team, working together to answer each other's questions and discover new surprises (stage five).

Without a guide, a visit to a historic house is much less social. Visitors look and learn on their own with the companions who accompany them on their visit. The institution makes stage one and two experiences available, but not upper-level social engagement. If visitors engage with strangers, it is based entirely on personal initiative.

How could a historic house encourage visitors to have social experiences with each other outside the guided tour? Stage three and four activities can be designed as unfacilitated experiences. The stage three "vote for your favorite room" mechanism could be a cardboard floor plan on which visitors vote by sticking a pin on their favorite rooms. Visitors could have stage four interactions with other people with similar interests prompted by labels that encourage visitors to share personal memories with strangers through audio-recordings or letter-writing stations.

Designing unfacilitated opportunities for social engagement makes visitors more likely to see each other as potential sources of information and enjoyment in the house. Once this feeling is widespread, the house is ripe for stage five experiences, in which visitors feel comfortable pointing things out to strangers, having brief discussions about their own memories, and so on.

I'm not suggesting that institutions replace educators, front-line staff, or volunteers with exhibitry. Staff interactions provide the most consistent kinds of social experiences, and staff can be an important bridge to support and enhance even the most social exhibit design. Indeed, many of the examples in this book rely on staff or volunteers to work successfully.

But staff cannot be everywhere. Designing physical spaces to support interaction means that it can happen anytime, even when guides or staff members are not

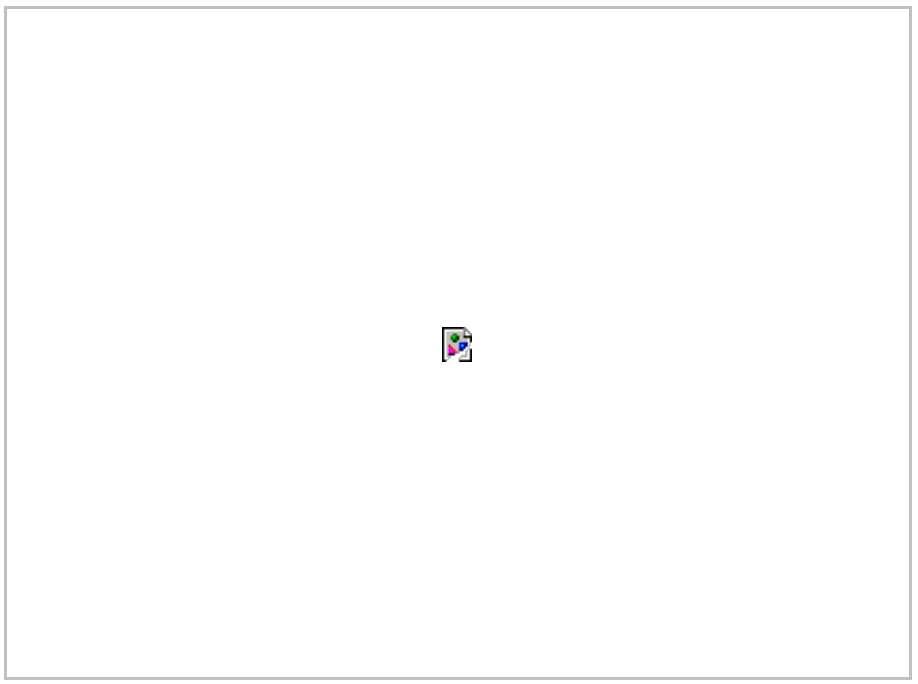
available. The goal is not to replace staff but to scale up the opportunity for social engagement. This is what the social Web does so well. It leverages the interests and profiles of individuals to create opportunities for new connections and social experiences.

Let's look at an example of me-to-we design from the corporate world that successfully provides experiences at all stages around a frequently disliked, voluntary activity that takes place all over the world. No, I'm not talking about visiting museums. I'm talking about running, and a platform called Nike Plus.

CASE STUDY: From Me-to-We with Nike Plus

Nike Plus (Nike+) is a combined iPod and shoe sensor product for tracking personal running. It provides real-time data about your progress as you run and stores your data for later review online. You can create goals for yourself and challenge other users (both friends and strangers) to run at your pace or complete a target number of miles. You can also create motivational playlists for the iPod to give you a "power-up" audio boost when you most need it. When you start to lag, your favorite song will get you back on track.

Nike+ uses me-to-we design brilliantly to support a product, an activity, a community, and ultimately, a healthy lifestyle. It offers experiences on all five stages of user engagement.



The five stages of Nike+.

Nike+ is built on two basic products: shoes and music. These provide a stage one experience—you consume music as the pavement consumes your shoes. There's nothing special about Nike+ on stage one.

On stage two, Nike+ distinguishes itself by providing real-time data tracking. It is responsive to your actions and provides you with feedback to influence further

action. Nike+ users report that the experience of being tracked actually improves their performance. The real-time statistics help motivate people along their runs, and reviewing the data later helps them spot their weaknesses and set future goals for improvement.

Nike+ gives users points and virtual trophies for completing personal goals. The game-like tracking system makes for an addictive individual stage two experience. But the individual experience with the system can only take you so far. If you take a break from running or stop looking at your statistics on the Web, the memories of trophies and goals slip away. Why run? It's not even a human encouraging you—just a stupid machine.

And that's where stage three comes in. In the online environment for Nike+, users can see the goals and runs set by other people, and use them as inspiration. Seeing the aggregate actions of other runners in the stage three environment helps people see themselves as part of a community, even if they don't connect with other individuals directly. If fifty thousand other people can run ten miles, maybe you can too.

Then Nike+ goes further, offering "collective challenges," in which users team up based on a wide range of similarities or affinities (gender, age, political affiliation, athletic ability) to accomplish shared running goals. This is a stage four experience. When you engage in a collective challenge, you don't just focus on your own running goals or compare yourself to the masses. You have external goals for which you are accountable to virtual teammates. You're motivated to run so you can meet the challenge and contribute to the team. Here's how one enthusiastic blogger, Caleb Sasser, put it:

> And the coolest part about Nike+ running? Like any good online game, you can challenge your friends. First to 100 miles? Fastest 5-mile time? Your call. These challenges wind up being incredibly inspiring — running against good friend and athletic powerhouse J. John Afryl kept me on my toes — and they're also incredibly fun. Logging in after a long run, uploading your data, and seeing where you are in the standings, is a pretty awesome way to wrap up your exercise. And more importantly, sitting around the house, wondering what to do, thinking about jogging, and then realizing that if you don't go jogging tonight you're going to lose points and slip in the standings — now that's true, videogame motivation.

The combination of game mechanics with social challenges makes Nike+ a powerful stage four experience. But what about stage five? One of Nike's goals—and a major component of their online presence—is to encourage people to run together. The company sponsors races and running groups all over the world.

There are many Nike+ online forums and opportunities for meeting up with real people in your real neighborhood to go running. But there are also Nike+ users who have clamored for ways to run with their distant virtual teammates. It's not crazy to

imagine a future version of Nike+ that allows you to talk real-time to a running partner halfway around the world as you both navigate the streets.

Think about what a strange feat Nike pulled off with this product. Nike took a non-screen-based, often anti-social, occasionally loathed or feared activity—running—and turned it into a screen-supported social game. It transformed the motivation to run from being about exercise to being about social competition. Nike+ took an uncontrolled venue—the streets and trails used by runners all over the world—and created a compelling experience around it. For its users, Nike+ transforms running into a pervasive, fun, socially driven experience. And if Nike could do it for something as feared and despised as running often is, surely you can do it for your cultural institution.

***

Where do you start in designing systems that can help visitors connect to each other through their content interests? Before considering social opportunities for stage three, four, and five experiences, it's important to begin by getting to know visitors as individuals. Remember the cocktail party analogy. If you want to help visitors and staff members connect with the people who will be most interesting and useful to them, you need to welcome them personally and acknowledge their individual interests and abilities. Chapter 2 is all about ways to make cultural institutions more personal so that visitors can feel comfortable, confident, and motivated to participate.

Chapter 1 Notes

[] Learn more about convergence culture and Jenkins' book with that title here.

[] See pages 14-18 in Elaine Heumann Gurian's book, *Civilizing the Museum* (2006).

[] For an example of a radically participatory institution, check out the case study in Chapter 8 on the Wing Luke Asian Museum.

[] Tagging is a term that refers to a collecting activity in which people assign descriptive keywords ("tags") to items.

[] The statistics shown here are for adults over 18 in the US as of August 2009. Up-to-date data for different countries, genders, and ages are available from Forrester Research here.

[] These statistics come from the "Principle in Action" page on the 90-9-1 website.

[] See Jakob Nielsen's October 2006 article, Participation Inequality: Encouraging More Users to Contribute.

[] Consult the work of Lev Vygotsky for foundational material on instructional scaffolding. For a museum-focused discussion, see George Hein's *Learning in the*

Museum (1998).

[] See John Warren's October 2008 blog post, Wild Center: Local Leader on Adirondack Climate Change.

[] Explore the full slate of The Wild Center's climate initiatives.

[] See Jared Sandberg's July 2006 *Wall Street Journal* article on active leisure.

[] For a longer discussion on the multiple values of participation, see Chapter 5.

[] See Chapter 11 in Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations* (2008).

[] See John Falk's book, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* (2009).

[] McGonigal shared this list in a cultural context in a December 2008 lecture, "Gaming the Future of Museums." See slide 22 in this presentation for the list.

[] See page 170 for an example of a stage five program at the Conner Prairie historic park called *Follow the North Star*.

[] See Cabel Sasser's effusive August 2006 blog post, Multiplayer Game of the Year.

« PREFACE: WHY PARTICIPATE? CHAPTER 2: PARTICIPATION BEGINS WITH ME »

9 Trackbacks

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By **MuseiTeknik - IKT, utställningar och förmedling :: Bokrecension: "The Participatory Museum" :: April :: 2010** on April 27, 2010 at 3:43 pm

> [...] "How can cultural institutions use participatory techniques not just to give visitors a voice, but to develop experiences that are more valuable and compelling for everyone? This is not a question of intention or desire; it's a question of design. Whether the goal is to promote dialogue or creative expression, shared learning or co-creative work, the design process starts with a simple question: which tool or technique will produce the desired participatory experience?" (3) [...]

86 Comments

Jay Geneske

I'm wondering how the Me to We experience alters with performing arts, especially in traditional settings. What is the intersection of the physical and virtual?

Posted July 15, 2010 at 9:24 am | Permalink | Reply

Judith H

Nina, bravo for noting that volunteers are participants and visitors. Too often volunteers are marginalized; they are perceived as being people who support the museum rather than participate in the life of the museum. I've known many volunteers who were experts in specific areas – far more so than the curators were – yet who were refused the opportunity to create content and share their knowledge. It will be a big step for many museums to give up territoriality, relinquish elitism, and recognize that inclusion is the way to build a community and an audience.

Oh, and happy birthday!

Posted July 17, 2010 at 11:30 am | Permalink | Reply

By **Musings: The Participatory Museum – Principles of Participation « Making Olympia 1865** on April 29, 2010 at 11:12 am

[...] focused on reading Chapter 1: Principles of Participation. In this write-up, I've sprinkled numerous quotes from Nina Simon because they are so good [...]

Avi Skolnick

Hey Nina. I have been reading your book in a bit of an odd manor, skipping around chapters. (Chapter four was my favorite.) I am a volunteer at EMP in the education department and I have gotten so many ideas from your book. I'm actually bringing my ideas to my boss and begging her to let me meet you one of the times you're in our office buildings. I would love your feedback. What you have done here is brilliant, and easy to understand. Often the guidelines I've been given are complicated for me because I am only a teenager. The examples and diagrams are useful to me because I feel that if I was just given one I may not fully get it.
Well done!

Posted July 27, 2010 at 10:27 am | Permalink | Reply

By **The Participatory Museum – Principles of Participation « On the LAMs** on May 26, 2010 at 5:06 pm

[...] focused on reading Chapter 1: Principles of Participation. In this write-up, I've sprinkled numerous quotes from Nina Simon because they are so good [...]

By **Hakkame pihta! | Museoloogia lugemisrühm** on February 2, 2011 at 2:18 am

[...] korral arutame raamatu The Participatory Museum eessõna ning 1. ja 2. peatüki üle. Hakkame koos käima paari-kolme nädala tagant külakorda eri muuseumides [...]

Beth

I think you can also substitute the word "intern" for participant, in addition to volunteer. Speaking as a perennial intern (hoping for a real job one of these days), the most satisfying internship experiences have been those where I can point out the actual end product to which I have contributed. When the task is copying and filing or something mundane, knowing the purpose or end use is helpful both for completing the task in a useful manner and for improving motivation.

Posted October 26, 2010 at 1:16 pm | Permalink | Reply

By **Esimene lugemine | Museoloogia lugemisrühm** on March 20, 2011 at 6:08 am

[...] monolooge, vaid muuseumi pinnal leiavad aset mitmekihilised kahekõned, mida Simon visualiseerib 1. peatüki skeemidel sotsiaalsest [...]

Libby Palmer

Is there a Northwest version of I LIKE MUSEUMS?

Posted November 27, 2010 at 2:24 pm | Permalink | Reply

By **Glory** on January 4, 2012 at 12:21 pm

Glory...

[...]Chapter 1: Principles of Participation – The Participatory Museum[...]…

ninaksimon

@Libby Palmer: Nope, but talk to Jim at Sumo and see what they can do!

Posted January 13, 2011 at 8:29 am | Permalink | Reply

By **Readings « Digital Cultural Production** on September 10, 2012 at 2:55 pm

Jennifer

I'm reading this book as part of my course text for an Early Childhood Course. Relating it to

[...] Nina Simon, Principles of Participation [...]

By **Museum as a research field « Musings** on November 28, 2012 at 1:19 pm

[...] also hold that it should not necessarily be the central point of concern for all institutions. As Simon (2010) stresses with reference to Gurian, 'the importance of 'and" is a vital principle; that [...]

By **Readings | Digital Cultural Production** on February 22, 2013 at 7:37 am

[...] Simon, Principles of Participation [...]

Eastman-Vandreburg

classroom practice, it is interesting to consider how Forrester's research can relate to the different learning styles of children. Those that are more prone to be "spectators" pose a difficult situation for educators to assess their learning. As an educator, I always try to scaffold children's learning, yet it is difficult to see the process in those children who are more reserved or less vocal in class. I hope with further reading I get some more strategies getting to know them and on moving them from "me to we."

Posted February 19, 2011 at 10:44 am | Permalink | Reply

ninaksimon

@Avi Skolnick: Thanks, Avi! Please send me an email and we can start the conversation virtually and try to meet up next time I'm in Seattle!

Posted February 19, 2011 at 10:54 am | Permalink | Reply

ninaksimon

@Jennifer Eastman-Vandreburg: Jennifer – This is a great comment. It's one of the major differentiators between online projects and educational projects – educators actually care about improving participation equality, whereas web developers often take what they can get. That's changing now, as more sites like YouTube and Wikipedia look at equity, but I actually think it's a venue where educators and museum folk can lead the way. You'll find some good content on this in chapters 2 and 3.

Posted February 19, 2011 at 10:58 am | Permalink | Reply

Jennifer Eastman-Vandreburg

Nina,
Thanks, I am looking forward to further reading. I never new how much work went into museum exhibits (or at least good participatory ones). It's amazing how alike they are to best practice in education.

Posted February 21, 2011 at 6:32 am | Permalink | Reply

Peg Kennedy

I am enjoying reading the Participatory Museum. Your argument on scaffolding open-ended activities allowed me a sigh of relief. I have been in the open-ended position of having to create something that was not scaffolded and have felt

exactly the way you described. Now I know that other people have felt this way also. I have also seen this in the classroom. I presented my class with all kinds of materials for an art project one day so they could “create” anything they wanted. I somehow knew ahead of time that I had better give them some kind of base on which to create. I felt this gave them a starting point and made the creations more portable. The creations were great.

Posted February 26, 2011 at 2:06 pm | Permalink | Reply

Ross W

Nina firstly your ideas are novel and intuitive about developing participatory experiences for all visitors and how they experience these different aspects of their participatory experiences in the museum irrespective of his or her background. Nina you obviously use the big search engines like Google, Yahoo and Amazon which provide different links to the museum…. In the book “ Here Comes Everybody”, by technologist Clay Shirky who talks about meeting participants needs… just an idea but don’t you think the designers could try incorporate a virtual aspect to the participatory museum rather than just watching it or reading about it and therefore bring the museum into the 21st centaury. I mean if your audience can become creators, collaborators, consumers and even critics commenting on their experiences, why not becoming physically involved which surely may attract a bigger following.

Posted July 15, 2011 at 5:55 pm | Permalink | Reply

Tony

I am what is deemed in this chapter, an ‘inactive’. I look for what I need, and concede that sometimes I look for information about TV shows that I don’t need to know. I do not need to engage socially with others. I have no desire to know who “likes” what, or what they had for dinner last night. One problem that I found with the internet is that how credible is the information. Many, including myself call Wikipedia “the source of all knowledge”. We say this tongue in cheek, but future generations might believe it to be true, and deem us idiots-just as we deem the Ancient Greeks and their belief in the Delphic Oracle.

Posted July 17, 2011 at 1:30 pm | Permalink | Reply

Larissa

Hi,
I would like to make a comment in support of what Tony discusses about the credibility of the information that we find on the internet, and in fact, in almost any digital form.
You say early on in this chapter that "supporting participation means trusting visitor's abilities as creators, remixers, and redistributors of content". But, can and should we trust people to provide us with the information regarding our past, who are not qualified and do not necessarily know what they are talking about. As Tony provided the example of Wikipedia, any old body can go and put information up on Wikipedia and others will believe it to be true. This will be the same if you allow the general population to be such an influencing part on the history that is told at museums. I do not disagree with the idea of participatory museums, but I think we must be cautious in any situation where "regular people" can have an influence over historical fact and knowledge.

Posted July 17, 2011 at 2:06 pm | Permalink | Reply

Sarah

Digital History is not limited to that of 'Wikipedia'. The ability of well-credentialed historians to put historical documents online and and retrieve valid historical records with relative ease and minimal cost, will inevitably benefit historical writing and research. The accessibility of digital media benefits smaller organisations that are involved in historical research on smaller scales as people in areas which are declining in population are able to communicate with relevant former residents more readily and thus gain historical information, as observed by Cohen and Rosenzweig. A genealogical internet site can unite the descendants of families dispersed globally without significant cost involved.

Posted July 17, 2011 at 7:07 pm | Permalink | Reply

Marissa

I would just like to say firstly that this website is very useful as a source because it is easier to access for readers, and also allows room for comments such as these. According to Cohen

and Rosenzweig, the evaluation of the success of a website should be dependent on how well people use it rather than just numbers. Reading the comments above, I believe that this has been achieved. People are learning and debating about these topics which continues to educate others such as myself. This is an important asset for this site. Another asset I would like to point out would be the displaying of the reviews and Nina's experience. In relation to the comment by Larissa, Nina you have shown the validity of your website and although you do take other peoples views into account, it is not to the extent where "any old body" could give false information without it being controlled. It is important to understand that although the internet may not always be a trustworthy source, there are many benefits to having it as a source, as shown in this website.

Posted July 17, 2011 at 8:03 pm | Permalink | Reply

Nicole

I think that the key to avoiding a situation like Wikipedia vandalism in a museum context is to stick to the theory that participation thrives on constraint, which Nina talks about in this chapter. On Wikipedia, anyone can write any random thing on any page, and it's up to other users to determine what's relevant and what's complete rubbish. If, however, a participant is constrained to making a certain kind of response to a particular topic, I think that the response produced is ultimately far more relevant.

Posted July 17, 2011 at 10:37 pm | Permalink | Reply

Ross W

Waaaw…. tony calling Wikipedia of all things 'the source of knowledge' lol jeeez mate u do understand that anybody can post any bs on wikipedia and that doesnt mean that its true. Wikipedia is but just a source of infomation that is very unreliable, u say that u dont really need to engage with others…..Duh guess what you doing just that by posting a comment about what you beleave or dont beleave. You may want to rethink your statement…lol

Posted July 17, 2011 at 10:40 pm | Permalink | Reply

Larissa

I agree that digital history is not limited to that of Wikipedia, or other completely untrustworthy sites. And I agree, that digital history can have benefits for the population and historical study due to its accessibility around the world. However, I think it is important to listen to the arguments of historians such as Gertrude Himmelfarb, a “neo-luddite” who debates that the positives of digital history comes with harms, and harms of which we can not ignore. One of which I already mentioned is the reliability and trustworthiness of the information that we find online. Online sources do not go through the same scrutiny of editing and publication that books do, and therefore their content cannot be trusted as well as that of a book. Also, Visual or digital sources hold only their audiences for brief durations. They are not read and analysed slowly like a written source. Now in the circumstance of this site – an online book – you may argue that the positives of a book remain when it is placed online. However, the fluidity of the internet means that majority of people who begin reading this book, particularly students, will not finish it, as they can easily find something, as, or just as interesting or easy to read as this book. Therefore, people are not listening to the full arguments that scholars have to say. When they get only a few more focussed books out from a library, however, they are more likely to read the entirety of the book, as their sources are more limited. As an historian I think it is crucial that students and scholars are encouraged to rely on written sources. Rely perhaps on the internet to find relevant sources, of which they can then get in front of them. I apologise that my argument is not directed at you Nina, but I think people must realise the general dangers of digital history.

Posted July 18, 2011 at 2:09 am | Permalink | Reply

Tony

Ross, I suggest that you READ my post. I meant the comment sarcastically. I am only doing this as a means to an end. Digital history is good in the reagards that you can have a non linear view of the world. With an actual book you can read. However, how can you access digital history in the back blocks of nowhere, with no power. Actaula books are prone to the same things as digital methods, yet they can be read without

power.

Posted July 18, 2011 at 4:15 pm | Permalink | Reply

Nicole

Good point Larissa! On the other hand, I think one of the main reasons students etc ultimately won't read an entire book presented online is exactly because it's still set out as a book. While this website is set out quite well, maybe presenting the same ideas in a more internet-friendly fashion (with hyperlinks to museum websites or other parts of the book or whatever) might help to get the same points across just as effectively. Thoughts?

Posted July 18, 2011 at 4:15 pm | Permalink | Reply

Barbara

I think it's important to be aware of the problems associated with the reliability of digital sources that Larissa mentions. It's also important to remember that there are going to be gaps in the information, when people withhold information that they regard as private . And there are some people (not all of them old) who are put off by interactive exhibits in museums. They go to a museum to get reliable information from an authoritative source and are not interested in what they see as just other people's opinions.

Posted July 18, 2011 at 4:18 pm | Permalink | Reply

Nicole

I think a really well designed interactive exhibit could provide reliable information for non-participants that's just as useful as non-interactive displays. It's all about finding the middle ground.

Posted July 18, 2011 at 4:32 pm | Permalink | Reply

Scott

People have talked a lot about unreliable websites throughout this page.
I feel unreliable websites are not worthless as some seem to be implying, I am in support of this 'Tony' character- I agree that wikipedia is a good modern source of knowledge. If you know anything at all about a topic you will very quickly be able to tell if you are reading nonsense and disregard it. With the allowance of participation in

websites they steadily work towards more correct and simple explanations which will be more useful then one persons take on a topic.
The internet is relatively new and so are its users, I am of the belief it will grow up over time as people become more tech savvy and the novelty of being able to mess with people anonymously wears off. Simple explanations and provocation of discussions will also be built on, as is shown by forums such as these.
Perhaps museums trying to incorperate new technology to include visitors will be the same.

Posted July 18, 2011 at 4:39 pm | Permalink | Reply

Sarah

Wikipedia as a form of digital history has been acknowledged as being unreliable and inaccurate, however studies indicate that wikipedia has very marginal inaccuracy and only minor difference when compared to the encyclopedia Britannica. Daniel Terdiman conveyed in the article, 'Study: Wikipedia as accurate as Britannica' that generally when people read wikpedia they ackonowledge that the literature may not completely be accurate, however when they read an encyclopedia such as that of Britannica the information is acknowledged as absolute truth which is not always the case. Therefore accuracy is relative. Issues regarding legitimacy and accuracy of information pre-date the Internet.

I agree with Nicole in that ultimately students won't read an entire book online because it is still presented like a book. Digital history and the increasing use of digital media promotes new forms of learning and education. Gone are the days of out-dated, boring and inflexible methods of learning and recording. We must embrace the fact that we are increasingly moving deeper into a digital revolution. Therefore in regards to not reading masses of information, perhaps it is necessary ot develop even more interactive and attractive designs which will captivate the audiences. As the greater population watches more digital picture and listens to dialogue more readily than they read books, perhaps museums, historical institutions and historical records online should increase the amount of interactive visual and audio learning and recording devices in order to attract and captivate their viewers.

Posted July 18, 2011 at 4:46 pm | Permalink | Reply

Isobel

Nina, it is encouraging to see that museum studies is being considered from a contemporary perspective. I commend your application of the potentials and implications of Web 2.0 to an institutional context (that is, acknowledging that communication in the real world should reflect the changing nature of communication online which is no longer linear and uni-directional but consists of a web of multi-directional connections). However, like others who have commented before me, I am also sceptical about the potential of this 'participatory' approach which means that (factual) information shared is not always reliable and as you mention here, the institution is unable to guarantee a consistency of visitor experiences (in certain cases perhaps visitors will be disappointed with an institution they visit on recommendation from someone else whose experience of the same thing has been different, and might therefore be discouraged from returning). I think the idea of participatory culture that you explore is an interesting one, and certainly reflects on the experiences we have online, but remain wary about its limitations. At what point do constraints/scaffolding get too limiting? …For example, the participants of the book tagging exercise were limited to the pre-set tag-words. Did they have the opportunity to give more than one tag? Was there an opportunity to tag with "other…"? And as @Jay Geneske asked, where is there an intersection between the physical and the virtual? While the online gaming experience allows players to interact and communicate both onscreen and through headsets (as in the Nike+ example where users can interact on the website, virtually), I don't think this necessarily counts as a stage 5 experience, until there is some physical interaction between participants.

In the end I would agree with @Nicole and say that there needs to be a balance between the static, informative aspects and the participatory aspects of an institution. But this in turn raises more questions such as: should these elements be incorporated and/or juxtaposed, or segregated and available to different audiences with different preferences?

Posted July 18, 2011 at 5:20 pm | Permalink | Reply

Larissa

Tony & Barabara, fantastic points. Not only can internet sources be unreliable, but they are not always as accessible as many people believe them to be, and their are gaps in the information. Some groups are favoured over others and some information isn't included at all. I also understand that a book can not provide an entire history, but neither can the internet, and this is a mistake that some people make.
Nicole, perhaps not, though changing the setting of an online source may make it more user-friendly but it still does not determine its reliability or extend the accessibility for those in society who do not have the means to access the internet.
Scott, the problem with sites such as wikipedia (since it seems to be a common example) is that not all people know when they are reading nonsense. People do not necessarily go surfing on the internet to find information on a subject they already know about, they go looking for information they do not know, and therefore may not be able to tell if it is nonsense. In particular with a website like wikipedia, or any other online encyclopaedia source, people will go there first, as a starting ground for further research.
All in all, we may be facing a "digital revolution" but that does not mean we should entirely trust this new technology. Like books, radio and television, we must critique this new technology to its depth before we can begin using it as a reliable historical source of information.

Posted July 18, 2011 at 5:22 pm | Permalink | Reply

Isobel

In regards to some of the other comments here: @Ross W suggests an interactive element to the Participatory Museum which may "attract a bigger following". @Larissa argues that in general, written sources outweigh online sources in terms of validity, and @Nicole and @Sarah argue that ebooks have less appeal to students than multimedia-oriented approaches to displaying information.

While I agree that today (in the middle of this "digital revolution"), our attention spans are relatively short and we prefer to consume media

that is more visual and less written, coming from an academic viewpoint I think you have really exploited current technology in a positive way to get your book read. By clicking the “buy” link above, I can see that the Participatory Museum is available as a paperback book (for those who think that physical books are more legitimate than websites), a downloadable file for those who like to read on their ipad/ereader etc, and this version online, which, although requires the same linear reading experience of a book (rather than clicky, visual, audiovisual pages to be explored), it does allow for a more participatory experience- we can read chapters (or parts of chapters) in any order, comment on chapters (and participate in debate) and even suggest material to the author for future editions (participation which is moderated). I think the Participatory Museum succeeds in linking the traditional old-media form of the book with the possibilities of online participation.

Posted July 18, 2011 at 5:37 pm | Permalink | Reply

Marissa

In regards to wikipedia, an eagerly debated topic here, I agree that not all people understand that this may not be a reliable source. However growing up I was subjected to constant warnings of the validity of wikipedia and its origins in the many schools I went to. I believe that though wikipedia itself broadcasts on its site that it is based on other peoples knowledge and it should also display that it may not be considered entirely correct by scholars etc. I also use wikipedia to give me ideas of other topics, related to the one I am researching to give me key words and concepts. I am sure I am not the only one that uses wikipedia to give me a quick account of what something is. I understant that it may not be entirely correct, but if it is just for a quick understanding I dont see too much of a problem. In relation to the arguements about whether digital history is a good or bad thing for historians, this “digital revolution” is happening whether we want it or not. It is my belief that historians (and other scholars) should attempt to understand the concept of digital history because to be able to encourage younger people to our disipline, we need to be able to have some impact on the internet as well. Could you imagine

(hypothetically) in the future every disipline being made available on the internet apart from history, because I have no doubt that other disiplines are doing so to keep up with technology. History would be the one disipline which would be based on books and other non-digital sources. Who would want to study a disipline that is not keeping up with technology. I personally would, because I love books, but I could imagine many would not.

Posted July 18, 2011 at 5:50 pm | Permalink | Reply

Larissa

Isobel, I agree, Nina has done a great job of combining the traditional and the digital on this website. However, in the case of digital history as a whole, having the traditional options available to their audiences is a constraint that not many digital sources will be able to, or be willing to, follow. And this traditional aspect, say the ability to purchase a paperback copy of the book online, is something which I consider an important aspect to the study of history and something which every digital source should have to do. However this is impossible, and hence the digital medium may fail us once again.

Posted July 18, 2011 at 6:04 pm | Permalink | Reply

Isobel

In terms of this whole wikipedia/authority/authenticity debate, I find it useful to refer to the introduction of Cohen & Rosenzweig's Digital History guide, particularly pages 8-9 in which they admit that information found on the web is not always trustworthy, but they also note that "the web is more often right than wrong" (with the example that Google will return the most search results for correct information than similar but lesser acknowledged or incorrect versions). They summarise:

"Of course, issues of quality, authenticity, and authority pre-date the Internet. But digital media undercut an existing structure of trust and authority and we, as historians and citizens, have yet to establish a new structure of historical legitimation and authority. When you move your history online, you are entering a less structured and controlled environment than the history monograph, the scholarly journal, the history

museum, or the history classroom. That can have both positive and unsettling implications."

I think we can conclude that the internet has both advantages and disadvantages when it comes to cultural and historical information published on it. Perhaps it would be more useful for us to steer back to the main focus of this chapter and think about possibilities for the juxtaposition and/or integration of user-generated (participatory) content and more authoritative, "serious" content within cultural institutions.

Posted July 18, 2011 at 9:42 pm | Permalink | Reply

Ross W

Tony…lol, sorry no offence mate but i read your post and posted my comments about your wikipedia view not realising your sarcasm but i had already posted my response be4 realising what i had done and once posted you cant erase. As for the problems peole would have about accessing digital histories in a place where they dont have power….all i can say is true peole will come up against small problems like that but im pretty sure the numbers wont be that big (but i may be wrong).

Following 'Isobel's' comment about the dis/advantages of cultural and historical infomation generally appeals to your different web audiences and communities who end up congregating on/offline to discuss this topic. Trusted colleagues on your site make recommendations to audience members on were to meet and what to read which can have a knock on effect which ends up attracting more audience memders to the site.

Thinking out of the square here were digatal history is concerned can be considered by many as an ideal way of preserving history so that the new generations can learn about the (past, present and future) of what is called the human race and its inevatible life span. Using Google, Amazon or Yahoo search engines obviously with the correct keywords directs you to the desired webpages or links you would need to access the correct data you looking for. Even the world wide web which is adapting to all the new inproved tecnologies is still extremely hard for sites to determine it's success or if they are reaching

there intended audiences or goals. Never the less participation in digital histories can help you get to know you audience members better with communications via postings.:-)))

Posted July 19, 2011 at 3:29 am | Permalink | Reply

Nicole

I think we're all mostly in agreement that the internet currently shouldn't be treated as the definitive guide to accurate historical knowledge. However, I think it's interesting to note that websites such as Google become 'smarter' (and more reliable) the more they are used, as Nina says in Chapter 3. To paraphrase Cohen and Rosenzweig, who also discuss Google, one technique used by search engines is to place emphasis on websites which are linked with multiple other 'authoritative' sites on the same topic, thus suggesting websites to users effectively based on the website's reputation as a reliable source. Currently, this doesn't mean the first site on a Google search is historically accurate, but in the future this could mean the internet has the potential to become far more reliable for historical research.

Posted July 19, 2011 at 8:07 pm | Permalink | Reply

Gina

Nina, Firstly I would just like to say that I think the contents of your book is well thought out and carefully displayed in an organized and easy to follow manner. The idea of a participatory museum is a great idea; you mention the problems with the institution are not the fault of the visitor but that of the design; I agree with this statement, without specific guidelines or "scaffolding" participants will feel lost and uncertain.

I agree with Larissa, Yes we are facing a digital revolution, the internet is just the newest technology with sources of information, we will need to decide for ourselves whether it is a reliable source or not. I also agree with Marissa, all disciplines including history need to keep up the current technology, and if that means displaying the material online then I think it's a good thing. True, reading a book from the library is an accurate source but that is not to say that the internet doesn't contain accurate sources either, academic journals and ebooks are all

written by academics. What it really comes down to is accessibility and time. An online source certainly is more accessible to the majority of people, and is also less time consuming. Searching for key words in an online document to find particular chapters which are relevant to your research is easier and less daunting than if you were to read an entire book to find what you are looking for.
Nina you have done just this by presenting your book online, viewers are able to quickly and easily find the links for the different chapters relevant to them and thus also makes it easier to access them as they are online. We, as readers are even encouraged to participate as are able to add our own thoughts, similar to the idea of "tagging" the books in the library with tags of what they thought of the particular book.

Posted July 19, 2011 at 8:11 pm | Permalink | Reply

Mitch

@Judith H: I see your point regarding volunteers making a contribution but do you think that sometimes "creating content" and "sharing knowledge" in this sense often just results in a failure of people to gain a critical understanding? Literary critic Harold Bloom, for example, has argued that interactivity results is people experiencing more of themselves while the opportunity to access the thoughts and lives of others is lost. I think it's an interesting point.

Posted July 20, 2011 at 1:36 am | Permalink | Reply

Mitch

@Tony: Tony, are you suggesting that information on the Internet is largely inaccurate? Of course sites such as Wikipedia have articles which are not entirely accurate but regardless, the vast majority of information on the Internet is pretty credible. Issues of quality regarding sources certainly pre-date the emergence of the Internet.

Posted July 20, 2011 at 1:44 am | Permalink | Reply

Mitch

@Gina: "An online source is certainly more accessible to the majority of people". Gina, I see the point you are making, that online resources provide other opportunities of accessibility, but

sadly, no. Online sources are not accessible by the majority of people at all. two thirds of the world's population don't have access to a telephone, how many people do you think have access to the Internet? One of the great challenges of making the Internet truly valuable, is making it genuinely accessible. But as long as international conglomerates control the rights to information and charge exorbitant prices to access it, I can see that happening in the near future.

Posted July 20, 2011 at 1:58 am | Permalink | Reply

Marissa

Mitch, I can understand your argument that accessibility is not available to a majority of the world, but I could imagine neither are museums or libraries. In third world countries would they be focusing their economic efforts towards museums and libraries over food and health etc? I acknowledge that they are starting to put money towards education but I would still argue that they are struggling to survive before focusing on education. This may not be true in many places, but I am just arguing that to an extent museums and libraries are not all accessible (though I am not arguing more than digital). Not pretending to know solid facts, this is just what I understand to be true.

Posted July 20, 2011 at 4:06 am | Permalink | Reply

Nicole

All this talk of accessibility reminded me of the 'if the world was a village' scenario:

http://www.100people.org/statistics_100stats.php

Most of you have probably seem it before, and I assume it's a little out of date. However, it's interesting to note that only one person has a computer in this simulation. Digital history isn't accessible to the other 99.

Posted July 20, 2011 at 2:50 pm | Permalink | Reply

Mitch

@Marissa: I wouldn't disagree with a lot of what you are saying, however, I'm just making the point that the idea of the Internet making vast quantities accessible to people all over the world

is a little misleading. For example, in Africa, only about 10% of the population have access to the Internet, while in Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, not much more that one third of the populations have access to the Internet. Even in Europe, the "developed" part of the world that it supposedly is, the statistics are just over half (http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm). The reality is that the majority of the world's population and we are talking about BILLIONS of people here, will never use the Internet in their lifetime.

You mention third world countries and sure, museums and libraries are not easy to come by there either. But the initial costs of establishing a small, modest library made up of hardcopy's is a lot more affordable than establishing infrastructure for Internet connection and computer availability. This is why small schools in poorer countries still manage to collect books while the Internet remains unavailable.

When the technology of the Internet came to be, enthusiasts claimed it had the power to make information accessible to people everywhere. Of course, this is largely true, however, this notion has simply never come into fruition. Marissa, people like you and I, sitting in the comfort of our home, perusing the Internet at will, are in a privileged minority. We can have what we do only because others are made to miss out.

Posted July 20, 2011 at 3:36 pm | Permalink | Reply

Gina

Mitch, yes I can understand your argument, while we live in a 1st world country it's hard to understand the conditions and lack of technology in 3rd world countries. For people in first world countries internet is more accessible than books, and if you do have it, then why not take advantage of the technology at hand. I would agree with Marissa, before developing countries even think about getting advanced technology such as the internet first they need to concentrate on the basics, providing clean water and sanitation. There are still about billion people who do not have access to clean water and 2.5 billion who don't have access to sanitation facilities worldwide (UNICEF). As for education the main focus is learning to read and write first.

Teachers in third world countries are mainly volunteers or very low paid as it is, it's simple too costly to expect to have all third world countries to have access to the internet in the near future when they can hardly afford to teach children the basics.

Posted July 20, 2011 at 4:50 pm | Permalink | Reply

Tony

Mitch, of course information on the internet is flawed. And I will openly admit, so is the information in books. Virgil's "The Aeneid", and Homer's "Odyessy" are both stories about the same incident (Trojan War). Both cannot be right, as one is from a Greek perspective, the other from the Roman one. All information is contested, that is what makes it interesting.

Todays schools aim to teach children how to blog. Not read, write and do math. But blog. Why? I asked this when I went through teaching, I ask this now. What does a child have to say? I saw children that did not know how to add simple equations (yes, I am aware of age and experience), but they were quite happy to tell random people about their day. Is there a need? It is anew revolution, but let the child particpate at the museum (digital or otherwise), not give them all this now, and leave nothing for their future to discover/ experience.

Posted July 20, 2011 at 5:44 pm | Permalink | Reply

Mitch

@Tony: Tony, do you think everybody needs to have an opinion, do you think everybody's opinion is of equal value? You mention Virgil and Homer's works; are they both wrong, both right or is one recollection better than another?

While historians love to debate "opinion" and "perspective" and cite these two components as being integral two the study of history, and no doubt they are, but does that really mean all perspectives are equal? Is there really no truth?

Posted July 21, 2011 at 12:26 am | Permalink | Reply

John

Firstly, Thank you Nina for a very smart website with plenty of great ideas.

Everyone who has contributed seems to be concerned one way or the other with the accuracy or the authenticity of information on the internet. But is anyone concerned with the authenticity or 'authorisation' of the various items within Museums already? For years many indigenous peoples around the world have fought for the return of cultural artefacts from museums and various institutions. While I understand their struggle, I respectfully disagree with many of them believing that these culturally valuable artifacts would be better preserved within Museums. But I do believe Museums need to find ways to work better with indigenous peoples and make them feel more apart of the 'process'.This is already an extremely complex issue but unfortunately is too often ignored. But now with history online, can we really guarantee that cultural artifacts or 'sacred artifacts' will be 'respected'?

@Larissa I agree when you said "Like books, radio and television, we must critique this new technology to its depth before we can begin using it as a reliable historical source of information". The internet otherwise will become another means of indigenous peoples being maginalised and pushed to the side by the mainstream, indigenous peoples must be included within this 'viral revolution' so that grievances are settled and that respect is given to their various cultural histories and artifacts.

Posted July 21, 2011 at 1:35 am | Permalink | Reply

Larissa

Thank you Gina and John, you seem to have understand my argument well. I believe there are positives to digital history, but we need to be cautious of this new digital revolution.
You raise a good point about indigenous people and the respect that their sacred objects or heritage may, or may not have, on the internet. However, this is not a concern just for indigenous races but all people and their histories. This potential lack of respectability is another problem that I see within digital history. Artefacts can be watched over in museums, documents protected, however the internet is such a large and mainly uncontrolled environment that I feel these histories may not have the protection they deserve. Should all photos, videos, or documents

be allowed to be distributed at will by the masses?

Posted July 21, 2011 at 5:49 pm | Permalink | Reply

Barbara

Interesting to read John's mention of indigenous people. The Kete Hamilton project at the Hamilton Public Library has found that a disappointingly small number of Maori have come forward to share their stories.(see ketehamilton.peoplesnetwork.info).
I'm not surprised at this. Indigenous people in many countries, not just New Zealand, have found items of their culture taken over and treated disrespectfully by "experts" from Euro-centric cultures, or even used to make money for commercial firms. Historians may regret the loss of information, but it's up to them to show that the knowledge will be treated appropriately. If the digital history will be available to anyone, I can see why some very knowledgeable people will wish to keep silent.

Posted July 21, 2011 at 8:35 pm | Permalink | Reply

Larissa

That is a very good example Barbara, and I feel, as you say, that if people are unwilling to share information to museums then they are even more unlikely to want to share it with the entire world via the internet.
It is also an interesting point to bring up in this discussion when this book is discussing participatory techniques. Nina, or anyone else, can you think of any ways that we could encourage particular participation? For example getting Maori or other indigenous races to tell their stories?

Posted July 21, 2011 at 10:23 pm | Permalink | Reply

John

Thank you Larissa and Barbara. And I totally agree that this is a concern not just for indigenous races but all people and their histories. I do think its really helpful to use indigenous peoples to show how cultural artifacts and histories can be exploited. The Kete project is a great example of a lack of indigenous participation Barbara. As many would know passing down knowledge orally is still extremely

important within Maori communities, it somewhat tackles the issue of controlling who receives the information and for many Maori, it is a spiritual issue as well. For many when they speak of their ancestors, they are, in ways, invoking their ancestors especially when talking about stories concerning important events, great care is taken on how they word and convey these stories. I realise that many museums and organisations would like to work with indigenous peoples but it takes more than holding meetings at venues chosen by them and just simply putting invites through noticeboards. If indigenous peoples are going to share their histories, they need to feel connected with these institutions. Trust needs to be built overtime which unfortunately many institutions aren't willing to give. Perhaps many indigenous believe they have made great leaps outside 'their world' but the mainstream does not seem interested to step into theirs?

Posted July 22, 2011 at 5:08 am | Permalink | Reply

Barbara

Thanks for your comments, Larissa and John. A lack of trust in what might happen to the stories or images or objects is at the core of the unwillingness to share information. If anyone doubts this, they only need to go into a souvenir shop and look at the cheap tacky plastic objects made in China that are for sale. There was a big protest years ago when the image of a chief's head appeared on a souvenir teatowel. Many, but not all Pakeha are willing to give Maori the courtesy of respecting their traditional practices, but Pakeha don't have a good history of respecting the cultures of others.
There are other considerations as well, such as the different versions of events held by different iwi or hapu. There's also the issue of cultural practices that are now regarded with horror, like infanticide and cannibalism, which Maori might feel need to be concealed.
I think your're right, John, many Maori feel that they are bicultural while Pakeha are not.

Posted July 23, 2011 at 3:45 pm | Permalink | Reply

Amanda

This was a brilliant chapter and I agree wholeheartedly with it. I think that interactive exhibitions (such as the ones you mention in this

chapter) in museums are a great idea. I went to my local museum with a friend, where we checked out an exhibition about the history of our town. That was an interactive exhibition, and it was certainly much more interesting and educational than if it had been an ordinary exhibition where you stand around and stare at things. I would like to add that it's not just museum exhibitions that could be made interactive; more museum websites should have interactive online exhibitions and information. Two very good examples of museum websites with interactive exhibitions/information are Te Papa in Wellington, New Zealand, and the British Museum in London, the UK.

Posted July 23, 2011 at 9:06 pm | Permalink | Reply

Tony

Susan Pierce as well as others writes a lot on the way museums collect and display items that they have obtained. Not all items are foundthrough legitimate deals. Theft was common, with the justification being that the natives did not know how to use it propery, and they (the uncivilized) would damage this "precious artifact".

The irony is two fold. One, that the item that they "rescued" could have had no real value, and instead had an imagined value placed on it by the collecter and museum. Two, that the item that was taken did have an actual use, and when it was taken and placed in a museum, it was actaully used incorrectly.

Providance is vital, and yet items often get mislabeled by accident (or on purpose). Not to mention the actaul purpose of the collection. To what aim and idea is the museum itself. Often the curators ideas and beliefs show through exhibits.

Posted July 24, 2011 at 3:29 pm | Permalink | Reply

Sarah

As Amanda has pointed out with her example of the Te Papa museum, many museums are embracing digital media in putting their content online. However these museums still have a fair way to go in regards the amount of content online. Archives provided by museums online are sporadic and inconstistent. Therefore there needs

to be a full collection of archives online rather than a selection as digital media is the direction of history in this 'Digtial Revolution'.

In regards to artefacts, it is possible to photograph artefacts if they wish to be included and then placed on digital media. Though online artefacts seem boring to view in comparison to the real thing, in this digital age, three-dimensional views and high definition allow for an 'unreal' experience.

Posted July 24, 2011 at 6:09 pm | Permalink | Reply

Drusilla

If artefacts are mistreated in the real world, then why should a museum go out of their way to treat them any differently? If a museum is trying to represent its audience in some way, to get a greater sense of its local community through participation (which is something that is, arguably, made easier when institutions use digital media) then if that local community doesn't respect the value of traditional artefacts then a museum would reflect that. Participation would mean that the museum, or website, would reflect that lack of respect.

Posted July 24, 2011 at 7:26 pm | Permalink | Reply

Amanda

@Tony: The Greeks claim that the British stole the Elgin Marbles off them, but if the British hadn't taken them, they could've been blown up by the Turks. Instead, they're safe and sound in the British Museum. So perhaps they really did want to save the artifacts from being damaged?

Posted July 24, 2011 at 9:23 pm | Permalink | Reply

Tony

The point I am trying to make is that there is an imagined value placed on the items. Post Enlightenment, the romantic ideal of hunting tied in with collecting of artefacts. It was a way to conquer the vast unknown, and bring back trophies. While I am sure that there were some collecters with good intentions, many collected with the justification that science was the top tier, and there was also the need to put everything into a grand order. Although what was Howard Carters intentions, when he was in Egypt.

Posted July 25, 2011 at 3:55 pm | Permalink | Reply

Barbara

The process of collecting and displaying artefacts is subject to changes in “fashion” and to changing attitudes to indigenous people and their rights over their cultural objects. The debate over the so-called Elgin marbles is one thing. Closer to home in NZ we have the issue of the preserved tattooed heads which are now being returned to NZ for respectful burial. No wonder Maori are often unwilling to join in oral or digital projects.

Posted July 25, 2011 at 5:03 pm | Permalink | Reply

Isobel

I am impressed with the knowledge and opinion you all hold about the collection and display of historical objects in museums and the implications associated with this practice. However, because this chapter is about principles of participation, I wonder how we can bring an element of participation into the collection/display of historical objects while maintaining respect for the objects themselves and the cultures they come from?

Posted July 27, 2011 at 2:14 pm | Permalink | Reply

Marissa

@John: I understand that Maori pass memories on orally as I am sure many other indigenous people do. Admittedly that is a limitation of digital history as it could be seen as another form of exploitation from the colonizers. But perhaps it also must be made known to the indigenous people that digital history is the innovative way forward for history, and that if they want their history to remain preserved without the worry of losing it through time and generations they should perhaps submit their ideas to a museum or a digital museum. Just an idea.

Posted July 27, 2011 at 4:03 pm | Permalink | Reply

Marissa

@Barbara: Up until now I have never heard of the Kete Hamilton Project and I bet many people haven’t. Have they held events or meetings with which to gather interest? I agree with Larissa that participatory methods may be used in this

instance to improve interest and information. Perhaps a youtube venture could be created. They could create one account and upload Maori peoples orally spoken histories and memories and link it to the site. They could have competitions for the best descriptions or most watched videos. Another idea would be to create a facebook like page where Maori could create a profile, write down or video record their histories and communicate with other whanau throughout Waikato or even New Zealand. As Nina has pointed out it is all in the display of the site. I have visited this site and it does not look like the most exciting site, and once you bring in these participatory elements, you may start seeing Maori visitors.

I understand that some history must be kept private, and many physical museums do not show all of their collections. But if that is an occurrence in the real world as well as the digital world, the digital museums must not be the only ones at fault.

Sure indigenous people may lack trust in the protection and welfare of their histories, and it is not like Europeans have the most trusting of pasts (stealing or conning artifacts or stories off the Maori for their museums, for example in 1881 Reischek claimed to have permission for an expedition and so removed bodies from Kawhia that were products of the war, John MacKenzie), but most historians, like Nina, are only concerned for the protection of said history. When museums were first introduced they were seen as “imperial archives” and were a tool for European exploitation (MacKenzie). However that is in the past and although we cannot gain the understanding and forgiveness from the Maori, we must not be punished from doing what we think is right (protecting and sharing history), from the actions of our ancestors.

Posted July 27, 2011 at 4:14 pm | Permalink | Reply

Nicole A

@Nicole:

I agree, whilst books often cram a lot of information into a small book to make it look more reader friendly the readers often get so confused after the first chapter that they give up and search the index for anything that might help them. This online ‘book’ is well laid out that i feel

like i am just reading a web page and i soon forgot that i was reading and entire chapter that was originally in book form. This page is reader friendly and as Marissa points out great for those who wish to comment and in some cases argue points about the chapter itself.

Posted July 27, 2011 at 4:20 pm | Permalink | Reply

Marissa

I agree with Tony in the fact that museums are not entirely unbiased themselves. Museums can be indeed used as a source for historians to understand what version of events was being displayed and what historical facts or artifacts were being hidden. Many groups such as the East India Trading Company owned museums and only showed what they wanted the public to see. People automatically assume that museums are always correct, when in actual fact, they are usually just biased accounts educating people. That is where I believe participatory museums and digital history come in handy. Bouncing ideas off people who may already know much about a topic to be able to make comments on it is a healthy means to learning. As sharing knowledge is a key feature of a museum, and by having people communicate their ideas, they are less likely to be led into the biased nature of the museum. Digital history takes the form of a non-linear path where the world is literally your oyster (you can look at whatever you want) whereas physical museums take a linear approach where you can only take one path. An example of this is the Te Papa Museum website where people are invited to participate and comment on the museums blog. Although this is not 100% participatory, we are at the age where it will be improved on.

Posted July 27, 2011 at 4:21 pm | Permalink | Reply

Marissa

@Sarah: Museums are on their way to a digital revolution this cannot happen in one day! Tools are still being constructed to aid us in this aspect. Rome wasn't built in a day.
Yes they can seem boring to view online, but if people have the time to visit a museum go for gold. I personally think online artifacts are a good way for students and teachers who do not have the time to visit could do so without taking too

much time. Also they may even be able to digitally visit a museum in Europe!

Posted July 27, 2011 at 4:25 pm | Permalink | Reply

Barbara

Larissa, I hadn't heard of the Kete Hamilton prject until recently, either. But in an article about it Smita Biswas commented that few Maori were engaged with the project. I think the knowledge they undoubtedly have is probably being saved in places they trust, which are not available to everyone. That means historians must first gain the trust before they get the information.
Reading about the kete project coincided for me with reading about the Wai262 claim, where Maori claim ownership over native flora and fauna as well as over their material and oral culture.
I'm not sure that owning manuka and weta and tuatara, which have been around for literally millions of years before humans arrived, isn't going too far.

Posted July 27, 2011 at 5:56 pm | Permalink | Reply

Jason

Participation. According to chapter 1 I'm an inactive(I actually read all of chapter one), but still I'm participating. The world wide web is useful to a degree but as others have pointed out its reliability in some instances has to be questioned. With increased reliability on technology and more and more participatory styled sites in a way we lose our ability to connect on a personnel level. We can talk to people through the internet and still not be able to put a face to the name for whatever reason. Cell phones were originally designed to communicate the spoken word nowadays most people just send a text. A loss to real-time participation in many ways. Information retrival is the internets forte, one that is based on capitalist theories. I suppose traditional museums aren't participation oreintated but at least they choose a topic and focus on the topic; generally to the best of their ability. An internet site can have so many paths attached to it that eventually you can find yourself looking at something totally unrelated to the subject. It becomes a question of does this new technology remove our ability to focus. A book is one medium where focus is more easily controlled and developed. The nike case study I

think aptly shows businesses taking advantage of the internet to promote their product and to make it alright by calling participatory and that you are part of world wide web family where effectively you are a number. Each site records visits by numbers not names. It really is a scary thought so why not encourage individualism while we can rather than be part of the collective like the borg.

Posted July 27, 2011 at 7:19 pm | Permalink | Reply

Isobel

I think the internet is an asset to the discipline of history. Digital history can manifest itself in so many ways- from official museum websites to personal photos/stories/anecdotes/histories presented either individually on blogs or collectively on platforms such as the kete project. Where history is concerned, the internet provides a greater opportunity than ever before for individuals to record information about the here-and-now (or their past) for others to engage with and reflect upon. These audiences could be culturally, geographically or even temporally (in the future) removed from the creator of history, yet the internet provides the platform for a greater scope of personal/public history/memories to be recorded, collected and interpreted.

However, I am myself a huge fan of “traditional” museums. From natural history to contemporary art to local history… There is something I love about being able to walk through a museum space and look/learn/read/reflect without having to necessarily contribute, create, argue or expose anything about myself to strangers. So, I maintain my original position that there is a place for both Web 2.0/participatory culture and more “traditional”/authoritative/static institutions. In my opinion, the ideal situation would be for the two approaches to continue and grow (perhaps institutions could combine approaches by having a traditional museum set up in the physical space and a super-interactive website, for example), but for neither one nor the other to dominate.

Posted July 27, 2011 at 10:43 pm | Permalink | Reply

Ross W

*Jason- I agree with you when you say that the world wide web has become a very useful tool to people to have instant contact with each other via all these new technological forums one can join like Face Book, MSN and Skype to name but a few which like you have pointed out is drawing society further away from the good old personal contact we used to enjoy and have with our friends and families.

Posted July 28, 2011 at 3:30 pm | Permalink | Reply

Barbara

Isobel, you've expressed my views exactly. It isn't a matter of either/or, but to take the best that the digital world has to offer and combine with traditional sources.

Posted July 28, 2011 at 3:41 pm | Permalink | Reply

John

Barbara I completely agree, while I understand that people can feel spiritually connected to plants and natural objects, I don't agree that people can claim 'total spiritual ownership' over the natural world.

I believe the main issue with museums is TRUST. Museums have to be prepared to build long, strong relationships with cultural groups whose items are being displayed. Museums cannot expect to have one 'universal way' to deal with these groups either; every group is different and unique and so needs to be treated as such. I believe that if the group feels as though they are being acknowledged and honoured enough within the process, these 'cultural barriers' will slowly fall. I saw this with a Waikato tribe; an author approached the tribe and wanted to write a book on their ancestors. She attended many Marae hui and gatherings and built a strong relationship with the tribe. The book is called 'Bravo New Zealand' for those interested and the author still keeps in touch with the tribe. I believe that the relationships that museums share with the various cultural groups who's items they claim to be honouring is the most important issue. From there, then participatory methods can then be woven around those relationships; otherwise if there is no respect being given to the many cultural groups, there is no point in participatory

methods in my belief.

Posted July 28, 2011 at 6:08 pm | Permalink | Reply

Erin

Hi, I have found reading this chapter very enlightening and interesting!
But I would just like to ask, do you not think that reading static text or looking at images is participation and interaction? These acts, I believe, are the basis of interaction, something that most visitors to a Museum will take part in (ie. reading given information, looking at an artifact). I have always seen digital approaches within exhibitions in Museums to be almost a way of drawing those less willing to participate in to reading/viewing, like a facade of digital excitement which leads to the same principles of Museum interaction that have been around from the start. Does anyone have any views on this point, or examples where this is not the case?

Posted July 29, 2011 at 2:57 pm | Permalink | Reply

Erin

@Barbara:
I was thinking along the same Wavelength as you, Barbara, Kete, while a fantastic format and very useful, is not necessarily going to tell us about the aspects of a community we want to learn about. Firstly, it is still new, the fact that most of our third-year History class hasn't heard of the project shows that most of the population still doesn't know of its existence. Some groups or people who have valuable information and memories which belong on Kete don't have access to computers or knowledge on computers to be able to upload their information to it, and, as you have said above, some aspects of Maori culture are sacred and protected. Kete is something that will become more and more useful as it grows and once the community knows more about it. Perhaps after some real-life workshops with people in the community who otherwise would not have heard of or been able to use Kete it will be a more all-round useful source. I say lets spread the word and get people to use this site like they do Facebook!

Posted July 29, 2011 at 3:07 pm | Permalink | Reply

Amanda

On the subject of Wikipedia, not all articles are rubbish and not trustworthy. I came across an example where a professor got his students to write Wikipedia articles for a project. Naturally, those articles would have been accurate if the students who wrote them wanted to pass the project.

On the flipside, someone once edited the plot section for the Twilight book New Moon's Wikipedia page to say "WHINY BULLSHIT WHINY BULLSHIT WHINY BULLSHIT WHINY BULLSHIT WHINY BULLSHIT WHINY BULLSHIT". Obviously this was not going to be very helpful to someone who actually wanted to know about New Moon's plot, although it was pretty funny. Cases of blatant bias like that are probably very rare though.

Posted July 29, 2011 at 4:54 pm | Permalink | Reply

Amanda

@Isobel: I agree with you, I like traditional museums too. I also like history-oriented websites, such as the BBC website's history section with its interactive reconstruction of an ancient British chariot, which was more interesting than reading about how said chariots were made in a book. There is also place for a participatory section because computers make saving photographs easier, so people are more likely to save their old photographs instead of throwing them away like in the past.

Posted July 29, 2011 at 6:58 pm | Permalink | Reply

Erin

@Amanda: I find it very interesting to learn that the British Museum has such an interactive website. This is only surprising because having recently visited here, It was interesting to find that there was almost no digital (or non digital) interaction within the exhibitions at all. Having checked out many of the biggest Museums in the UK, I found this to be somewhat of a trend. Perhaps they feel that their exhibitions and artifacts stand up on their own without digital aids? Either way, it seems that British museums were extremely conservative with their digital approaches as opposed to Museums I attended in continental Europe. At first I thought British

museums to be anti-progress, but having looked at the British Museum's website now (http://www.britishmuseum.org/) I can see that digitisation is in progress. I appreciate the use of technology to give those who can't visit the museum the experience of viewing and learning about the exhibitions. Shouldn't this be the most important aspect of digital history? Allowing greater access to those all over the world?

Posted July 31, 2011 at 1:11 pm | Permalink | Reply

Nicole A

@Marissa:
Marissa i completely agree with your point of view on how museums are always assumed to be correct; clearly, and it has been proven time and time again, museums are not always correct and are a view point on how the world at that time can be viewed and from who's stand point. An example would be Germany during World War II, Hitler not only had billions of books burned and destroyed but he also only showed in museums at the time what he deemed to be a pure view on history. Story's of Jews and the trials they have been through were not portrayed only hatred and stories on how bad they were could be seen. Modern museums still have a prejudice on what they can and cannot show on display. Certain artifacts cannot be shown as they are offensive to differing cultures, also many artifacts are being shipped out to their original countries as they were 'stolen' and need to be returned to their original owners. This limits museums and gives way to my point about how digital museums can be a good thing in the display of items that can not be there 'in person'. Eventually (if they haven't already been made) 3D holographs can be made to show artifacts that may be too fragile to have on display or that are no longer in possession. Also video links to people around the world could be used to show artifacts in their home country which can link into other information that we may not have in our country. Videos and digital logs of people discussing their views on World Wars and battles they were in will be useful as many of the surviving members of the war are dying out. I believe that digital history can be so useful for the future, we just have to keep an eye on the repercussions of our actions and how they may effect our environment.

Posted July 31, 2011 at 3:25 pm | Permalink | Reply

langlang33

You actually make it seem so easy with your presentation but I discover this matter to be really some thing which I think I would never understand. It seems too complex and extremely broad for me. I am looking forward for your next post, I'll try to obtain the hang of it!

Posted September 9, 2011 at 11:31 pm | Permalink | Reply

Jennifer Kincaid

"…design participatory platforms so the content that amateurs create and share is communicated and displayed attractively."
*******I LOVE this idea******

Posted June 20, 2012 at 10:52 am | Permalink | Reply

Jennifer Stencel

I love the idea of the Side Trip Participation project. I would love to do this for Banned Book Week- using the covers from the books to mash up and create a new ad/poster.

Posted August 31, 2012 at 1:22 pm | Permalink | Reply

Brittany F.

I find this website to be perfectly interactive and engaging, similar to how Simon believes that museums should be. From this section, I like how Simon differentiates between a traditional institution and a participatory museum. A participatory museum is one that gives its visitors a way to engage with the institution, aside from just receiving information. I also did not realize how measuring participation could be so vital to a museum or any institution, such as the buttons from Minnesota History Center.

Posted April 25, 2013 at 8:57 am | Permalink | Reply

Ruth Chapple

One of the first things that struck me was the differentiation between a participatory and traditional museum. I really love the idea of the participatory museum because the viewers are involved. The participatory museum also allows the visitor to have a different experience each visit. The great thing about the participatory model is that each experience is based on the

other visitors and museum staff that contribute. This is a great idea for museums that are struggle for visitorship and for visitors who are wary of static exhibits. I also really love the participation model through constraints. Visitors are able to create and contribute within a set of parameter. They may not have total freedom to create from scratch but they are able to add to a bigger picture and work with others

Posted April 25, 2013 at 11:13 am | Permalink | Reply

Matt

@Ruth Chapple:

I too think the idea of having a participatory model with constraints is a good one. This is clever idea but also a seemingly paradoxical one; how can a museum encourage creativity and original thought by placing limits on it? I'd prefer to think of scaffolding not as putting constraints on creativity, but providing structure and guidance so visitors feel comfortable thinking out of the box. My question is: how can museums use scaffolding to increase participation, without putting constraints on creativity? Also, how much guidance is appropriate? Is it best to have only a structured starting point, like the Denver Art museum's rock art, or should the whole activity be rigidly structured?

Posted April 25, 2013 at 11:35 am | Permalink | Reply

Mindy Reeder

I love the ideas you put forth in this book on how to better engage visitors to a cultural institution. The section in this chapter dealing with scaffolding was especially interesting to me as I spent time in an education program during my undergraduate work. Scaffolding and the work of Vygotsky is what always made the most sense in my mind in terms of being a future educator. However during my 120+ hours of observations in high school history classes, it would seem that scaffolding is often neglected, especially in New York State, as educators now feel the added pressure of "teaching to the tests". It is essentially becoming more time and cost efficient to simple give the information explicitly to the learners and be done with it. My thoughts concerning cultural institutions and scaffolding are, is this where most of our institutions are

heading? With the influx of technology each and every day into the lives of most people, is it now easier just to hand over the information rather than engage? At what cost to our institutions? How do we engage the public in these artifacts when it becomes seemingly more apparent every day that the younger generations would rather plug in and tune out than engage?

Posted April 25, 2013 at 12:44 pm | Permalink | Reply

AGarceau

The case studies offered in the first chapter about bringing more opportunities for visitors to participate and relate to exhibits are done in a way that makes these things contemporary, although these examples dealt with more modern topics. What ways can historic collections be conveyed in a relevant, contemporary way without imposing an interpretation that takes away from the historical context?

Posted April 16, 2014 at 8:05 am | Permalink | Reply

Ellie Burhans

I love the discussion of YouTube in the book, and was thinking about how it could be utilized at the museum I volunteer with. Currently we do not utilize YouTube, and I think it could be valuable too. The NYS Military Museum is responsible for the history of the NYS National Guard from its inception to current day. Currently there is little in the museum relating to the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf Wars or the military actions in the middle east. Because money is short, while there are plans for exhibits, none are installed yet and they have not announced to volunteers when that will happen.

Still, many veterans from these wars are understandably disappointed when there is no mention of their war in the museum. Many have taken family members with hopes to explain what they were a part of. While vets of recent wars are still living, we will soon begin to lose our vets of the Korean War. I think the museum could interview such veterans and post parts or in whole the interview on YouTube. It could be part of an amazing oral history exhibit, and could in fact draw people to come to the museum.

Posted April 16, 2014 at 7:46 pm | Permalink | Reply

Merfat Bassi, Brittany Garison, & Danielle Naylor

Nina,
I think both of them, the traditional museum and the participatory museum, are important because institutions let the audience feel free and more comfortable to decide if they prefer one of them or both. I like your “me-to-we” design; it is a great one. As you said the five stages are progressive, which means “step by step”, and people have interacted with them differently depending on their personalities, perspectives, and educations. Also, staff members should have enough experience and ability to deal with the audience regarding their backgrounds and needs.

Posted September 28, 2014 at 8:11 pm | Permalink | Reply

Katlyn Levitt

Nina,
I was inspired by your “me-to-we” design discussion. For much of my short career in museums, I have seen the five stages facilitated by an educator or have one nearby to help guide the experience when necessary, but like you said when the facilitator is not there these opportunities cease to exist. For my institution this has been a major barrier, facilitating social experiences in the galleries amongst walk-ins during non-program days. Our new interpretation manager is changing that, but for an institution not known for on the spot interpretative materials in the galleries it has taken some time to get everyone on board. We recently rolled out new adventure kits families can check out to take with them into the galleries. For the most part, they will interact within their family, but other patrons seeing this experience may ask questions about the kit which can lead to larger discussion so it’s a start to hopefully something larger. The case study you presented-Nike Plus-was a wonderful example and has given me an idea to present a fun competitive aspect to our family loyalty program so they may interact with one another. They do after all belong to the same program-shouldn’t they get to know one another? And perhaps sometime in the future another component for the families to make profiles and track their progress online.

This design has made me also think more of the lone participant during facilitated programs. There

is social interaction with other participants, but they may be the ones to initiate the experience with fellow patrons. It has made me consider how educators can help participants move out of the comfort zones of their groups and interact with strangers within the program more. Like you said, not everyone wishes for this type of experience, but that doesn't mean it cannot be an option. To incorporate this potential experience is a conversation I hope to have with fellow coworkers in the near future. Your book has been a great inspiration and I plan on checking back often to read your blog I have discovered. Thank you!

Posted September 30, 2014 at 6:42 pm | Permalink | Reply

Caroline

I'm glad that you mentioned the story about Bibliothek Haarlem Oost and consistently referred to "cultural institutions" rather than just museums in general, as I feel that librarians could get a lot from your book. As a library science student, I feel that creating participatory exhibits isn't something most librarians think about. There's a lot of discussion in the library science field about how libraries can create value to remain relevant in today's society, and I think that effective participatory services and exhibits are key to creating value that patrons can see and understand. I've seen so many boring and/or completely ignored library exhibits that it's pretty disheartening, but if librarians were to consider what the public needs to interact with these displays and exhibits in a satisfactory way, I feel that this would be much less of a problem. It may take some effort to adapt your suggestions to the limited resources available to a lot of libraries, but I will definitely keep your book in mind as I make my way into a career in this field.

Posted October 1, 2014 at 9:44 pm | Permalink | Reply

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The Participatory Museum (RSS) + **Sator-ii** theme by Felipe Lavín