



FROM TREASURE BOX TO TOOLKIT

THE DEMOCRATIC RESPONSIBILITY
OF MUSEUMS

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Introduction: Museums and Their Influence

Going to a museum is a universal experience. No matter where one goes in the world, it's pretty much the same drill—place a sticker on your lapel, check your bag, stare at some stuff, read labels you don't understand, and have a well meaning-guard watch your every move. Or so it used to be. The very purpose of museums—and the expense it takes to run them—have been seriously questioned from those in and outside the field over the last 30 years, pushing the sector to rethink its role in society.

“Museums have so much to tell us about migration and immigration. You go to any museum...and there will be objects from all over the world. Some of those objects date from a colonial period when we were taught to look down on them. Today, we are taught to value them.”

The observations in this paper aim to provide an overview of this discourse as well as echo and amplify the voices of my colleagues in the United States and Germany, working in galleries, boardrooms, and neighborhood streets to shift the museum model from a treasure box to a toolkit.

In the age of fake news and anti-intellectualism, museums are an essential source of information. A study conducted by the American Alliance of Museums, cites museums as the most trusted source of information over the government, academic researchers in addition to local newspapers.¹

Museums, as leisure-time spaces, have a unique ability to educate and foster effective public discourse if they were to contextualize their collections within the frame of contemporary life and politics.

As Gail Lord, the author of *The Soft Power of Museums* says, “Museums have so much to tell us about migration and immigration. You go to any museum—on any subject—and there will be objects from all over the world. Some of those objects date from a colonial period when we were taught to look down on them. Today, we are taught to value them, because they are in a museum. ...So museums for a start can really help us appreciate the cultures of the people [migrating] who want economic equality and who want human rights.”²

Moreover, the history of European museums is rooted in political structures. The first collections were the curiosities of royal households. In the United States, private philanthropists mostly founded museums, yet their role in shaping regional and national narratives was no less intentional. So in transitioning from a space that collects and preserves objects to a space that uses art and artifacts as instruments for social change, there are a number of theoretical and practical shifts that must take place.

¹ Lake, Snell, Perry. Public Opinion Survey. American Alliance of Museums: 2001.

² Lord, Gail. Resources & Tools. *The Soft Power of Museums*. <https://www.lord.ca/resources/tools/topic/soft-power/1/14>. October 2017.

How can simple rules like silence be rewritten so that a museum becomes a cacophonous space of discourse and questioning? Or how can new patronage models play a role in the public debate around surveillance, digital record keeping, and institutional transparency?

What if museum administrators view their jobs not as physical form gatekeepers but as arbiters of social cohesion and political activism? These are all questions facing the field in Germany and in the United States. Globally, there is a significant change and innovation happening in the museum sector. Many museums are boldly rethinking strategic and everyday practices so that museums become more effective anchors of democratic societies.

Roots of the Conversation: New Museology

New Museology³ is the multi-disciplinary study of the role of museums in society that emerged in the late 1980s. New Museology breaks with the stream of museum professional literature developed in the early 20th-century by focusing on the purpose and theory of museums, rather than the practice of operating a museum. It contends that in professionalizing the field, an emphasis on best-practice techniques has neglected Museum Studies' placement within academia.

Peter Vergo's *New Museology* was one of the first books to call attention to this neglect, when he wrote, "what is wrong with 'old' museology is that it is too much about museum *methods* and too little about the purposes of museums...Unless radical re-examination of the role of museums within society...takes place, museums...may...find themselves dubbed 'living fossils.'"⁴ Thus, New Museology attempts to address the theoretical, political, and social underpinnings of museums as a means to encourage practitioners to willfully address the feminist, racial, post-colonial, and political movements that shaped collections, exhibition design, and museum pedagogy.

While New Museology emphasizes the necessity of theoretical examination, it has also fundamentally altered museum work in the United States, the United Kingdom and is emerging as the main discourse in Germany both in university classrooms and in galleries. Applications of New Museology—either explicitly or inadvertently—have shifted operations from the acquisition and preservation of collections, towards the visitor and prompted museums to rewrite mission statements, reallocate budgets, and broaden educational activities.

Museums as Political Spaces

Perhaps the first assumption that New Museology disputes is museums as politically neutral spaces. This argument unfolds in two parts: first with the establishment of 18th-century

³ Vergo, Peter, ed. 1989. *The New Museology*. London: Reaktion Books.

Macdonald, Sharon. 2006. "Expanding Museums Studies: An Introduction." In *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁴ Vergo, Peter, ed. 1989, p. 3-4. *The New Museology*. London: Reaktion Books.

museums in spaces associated with political regimes, and second, through the history of collecting and display. Fiona Kaplan, Donald Preziosi, and Tony Bennett are the three theorists that primarily articulate this idea.

The European idea of the nation-state was originally intended to unify disparate rural groups under one, central power. While economic and political arguments were made, the supposition of a shared culture made a powerful case for unification. As Kaplan describes, the nation "is glossed with a declared identity."⁵ Museums both today and of prior decades⁶, frequently affirm, discredit and reframe narratives, which produce a national identity.

While national identity is amorphous and abstract, Kaplan suggests that ethnic, religious, and ideological identities contribute to the understanding of objects. She suggests that these aspects of life also attach themselves to the idea of the state. Much of her work defines these categories and cites examples of how they shaped historical and memorial sites. For Kaplan, understanding this tautological influence is important and enables one to recognize how national identity has guided exhibitions and program management. Her argument assumes that one category of identity (e.g. ethnic, religion and ideology) dominates a group's inward and outward understanding of itself. Written in 2006, the concept of globalization and postmodern identity politics is only given a nod when she writes, "cultural differences and multiple identities further complicate the choice of subject matter, content, and interpretation in museums."⁷ Moreover, in concluding arguments she advocates for a museum model that paradoxically does not neutralize itself but instead uses its influence to actively rewrite national narratives. She, like so many in museum literature, promotes this position in order to give voice to those groups who were ignored by prior versions of national history.⁸

While Kaplan develops her argument as a historical analysis of nationalism, Tony Bennett cultivates the idea of the museum as a political space through the lens of autocratic regimes in general. Employing Foucault's Structuralism, Bennett's somewhat radical assessment compares museums to the 18th-century punitive system, laying out what he calls the museum's "Exhibitionary Complex."⁹

In the 18th-century punitive system, criminals were placed on public display in addition to serving out a work sentence. The stockade functioned as an exposition of the government's authority. In addition, the stockade served an educational purpose—demonstrating laws in

⁵ Kaplan, Flora E.S. 2006. "Making and Remaking National Identities." In *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon MacDonald. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁶ Major examples include the Musée du Louvre, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz [Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation], Metropolitan Museum of Art's American Wing and the Centennial International Exhibition.

⁷ Kaplan, Flora E.S. 2006, p. 156. "Making and Remaking National Identities." In *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon MacDonald. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Bennett, Tony. 1999. "The Exhibitionary Complex." In *Representing the Nation: A Reader*, eds. David Boswell and Jessica Evans, pp. 332-361. London: Routledge.

physical form. Developing alongside the stockade, coincidentally, was the birth of the modern museum. Bennett claims that, much like the stockade display, exhibitions are a demonstration of power. Unlike prisoners, objects in the 18th-century were "freed" from confinement within the private estates of lords and kings were brought into the public domain. Bennett furthers his comparison of museums and political structures by reasoning that:

1. spectacle is a form of surveillance;
2. the state maintains control over the cultural/museum sector through soft-power and arms-length governance;
3. and the exhibition is a persistent reminder of power and one that has been institutionalized or made permanent by the museum.¹⁰

Much of Bennett's argument is premised on the *Great Exhibition of 1851* in London.¹¹ Part of a series of World Fairs, the *Great Exhibition* was visited by roughly six million people and was one of the first instances where the new working-class gained access to objects owned by former royals and ruling elite. Strict rules concerning visiting times, attire and the social etiquette, constructed what is now referred to as informal learning environments. As such, the *Great Exhibition* was a "civilizing" event and reinforced a number of elitist values concerning social behavior and education. This indoctrination of elitist's values was magnified by the fact that upper-class citizens watched the working-class wander through the exhibition from second-floor galleries. Therefore, the elite class not only asserted social control through exhibition etiquette but also engaged in surveillance and spectacle. According to Bennett, this process is replicated in modern museums and is evident through the similar behavioral protocol still requested of visitors today.

Donald Preziosi in his essay, "Art History and Museology: Rendering the Visible Legible" picks up on the identity forming and authority-dominating ideas expressed by Kaplan and Bennett.¹² Agreeing with Kaplan, Preziosi asserts that modern culture developed alongside the national-state. A la Bennett, Preziosi also recognizes that objects' meanings are transformed by their placement in collections. However, Preziosi contributes a third layer to New Museology discourse in his discussion of art history.

Preziosi asserts that objects reflect a series of "mirrors" that produce an art object's dual "referential and differential" meaning.¹³ First, on a macro level, an object represents the formal qualities as defined by its context within art history. Second, the museum practice of displaying only exemplarity objects presents the object to the visitor as singular and unique. In addition,

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Preziosi, Donald. 2006. "Art History and Museology: Rendering the Visible Legible." In *Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon MacDonald, pp. 50-63. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

¹³ Preziosi, Donald. 2006. "Art History and Museology: Rendering the Visible Legible." In *Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon MacDonald, pp. 53. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Preziosi asserts that art objects act as mirrors of the self, reflecting back either one's association or disassociation with an object's dual meanings. Summing up this Constructivist point, he states, "The museum object (rather like an ego) does not strictly coincide with the subject, but is rather an unstable site where the distinction between inside and outside, and between subject and object, is continually and unendingly negotiated in individual confrontations."¹⁴

Preziosi's essay not only reinforces the New Museology tenant that objects have numerous meanings but also associates this idea with individualism. Departing from museums as spaces where only communities, classes, and nations at large are defined, Preziosi suggests that the art object can shape personal identities as well. Like the art object that is defined both by its context and uniqueness so too is the observer singular in their identity *and* a representative of society. This argument also digresses from Bennett and Kaplan in that it assumes an agency on the part of the visitor to interpret his "reflection" rather than depending on an authoritative museum voice to reveal his identity.

Museum Models: Temples, Forums, or Contact Zones?

Several metaphors have been applied to museums as theorist debate the purpose of the museum. From the Greek understanding of the museum as a Temple for the Muses¹⁵, to the 20th-century idea that museums act as a public forum¹⁶, to the most provocative idea that museums are cultural contact zones,¹⁷ museums in any iteration involve the display and interpretation of objects. In reality, many museums manifest all or a combination of all these metaphors via their mission statements and daily operations. Likewise, the public perception of museums is also embedded with these ideas and influences patronage, understanding of exhibitions and visitorship.

The idea of the museum as a spiritual space is perhaps the oldest understanding of museums. Museums of Ancient Greece were Temples to the Muses, goddess of the arts and sciences. Temples were filled with objects that paid homage to the gods as well as exemplified man's reach for the divine.¹⁸ This idea of the museum as a spiritual space was reinforced through the neoclassical architecture of museums in the 18th and 19th-century. Likewise, museums presented themselves as reflective, sacred spaces that lifted and enlightened the human spirit. However, this metaphor was contested with the development of the public

¹⁴ Preziosi, Donald. 2006. "Art History and Museology: Rendering the Visible Legible." In *Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon MacDonald, pp. 56. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

¹⁵ Alexander, Edward P. 1979. *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History.

¹⁶ Weil, Stephen. 2002. *Making Museums Matter*. Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press.

¹⁷ Clifford, James. 1997. "Museums as Contact Zones." In *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

¹⁸ Alexander, Edward P. 1979. *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History.

education movement and historical research on the founding of seminal museums like the Louvre.¹⁹

Museum professionals like John Cotton Dana²⁰, Stephen Weil²¹ and Duncan Cameron,²² advocated for a museum model that served the public not as a reflective sanctuary but as a lively “forum” where ideas would be dispersed and debated. Akin to a town square, this model aligned democratic civil societies, public education, and service movements. As opposed to the temple, which sanctifies the object, forums employ objects as supporting evidence of political or historical narratives. This idea coupled with the history of museums as extensions of the state suggests that museums’ educational mission is a function of civil society.²³ In the museum as a forum model, museums were deemed necessary elements of thriving democratic communities, where citizens could contribute to society in both their patronage and as well-informed, freethinking minds, empowered to participate in other civic arenas.²⁴

James Clifford extended the forum metaphor a step further when he argued, in 1997, that museums are “contact zones.” Predicating his debate on the colonial history of museum collections, Clifford asserts the historical tensions and moral implications of conquest and domination are carried out within museums. Clifford’s “Museums as Contact Zones” also established a practical model for working with community groups, where museums invited groups associated with collections into the museums as a means of tipping the balance of power. His main example is in his work with the Portland Art Museum and the Northwest Coast Indian Tlingit Tribe. Leaders from the Tlingit were invited to the museum by curators to discuss the collection in hopes of gaining new information about the objects’ use and purpose. Instead, of discussing these topics, the objects recalled stories of oppression and recounting these histories dominated the meeting. Clifford, through his ongoing work with the Tlingit, views museums as spaces where power imbalances continue, as museums ultimately retain ownership and interpretation rights. Museums thus do not merely neutrally present culture but are spaces where specific narratives and representations of cultures are formed. Understanding museums as contact zones is, for Clifford, a first step in reciprocity and repatriation. While Clifford’s concept centers around his professional experience with Tlingit, the theoretical

¹⁹ Alexander, Edward P. 1979. *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History.

²⁰ Dana, John Cotton. 1917. “The Gloom of the Museum.” In *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Gail Anderson, pp. 13-29. Lanham: AltaMira Press. First published by The Newark Museum, 1917.

dana (1917)

²¹ Weil, Stephen. 2002. *Making Museums Matter*. Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press.

²² Cameron, Duncan F. 2004. “Museums A Temple or Forum.” In *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Anderson, Gail, pp. 61-71. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

²³ Weil, Stephen. 2002. *Making Museums Matter*. Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press.
Black, Graham. 2010. “Embedding Civil Engagement in Museums.” *Museums Management and Curatorship*, 25:129-146.

²⁴ Black, Graham. 2010. “Embedding Civil Engagement in Museums.” *Museums Management and Curatorship*, 25:129-146. (Black, 2010; D. Cameron, 2004)

underpinnings of his writing have been applied to other disenfranchised groups' confrontation of Western-masculine narratives within art, science and history collections.²⁵

In conclusion, the idea of a public forum was built into museum missions in the late 1800s and early 1900s. However, in the second half of the 20th-century, new ideas challenged the museum as a utopic, democratic organization. Museums, as self-defined arenas for civil society, were becoming contested institutions. No longer sanctuaries, museums were understood as elitist, Western-biased contact zones by post-colonial revisionists, equal-rights advocates, feminist, and socialists.²⁶ Feminism, racism, capitalism, and marxism or more generally "the isms," as Genoways refers to them, challenged the authority of the museum, contesting it as a democratic platform where many voices are heard and represented.

New Museology attempts to respond to questions of why museums exist and how they relate to other dialogues within public education, economics, and politics. These questions are repeatedly pondered as museums were asked to demonstrate their public value throughout the 20th-century. Toggling between two functions—theoretical research and the ability to communicate that knowledge to a novice audience—is embedded into the

development of museums. Peter Vergo, Tony Bennett, and Stephen Weil among many others articulated this theoretical basis for museums in an attempt to incite museum administrators globally to be more thoughtful about their work and, as a consequence, strengthen the museum's public value.

In practice, there is no museum that purely embodies one of these models. Each museum's unique history, collection provenance, and strategic leadership inform how these theoretical models shape the visitor experience.

²⁵ B.T. Lynch in "Collaboration, Contestation and Creative Conflict" questions this model as a true interruption of centuries-old power dynamics. Lynch argues that "contact zones" are not frontiers, as Clifford suggests, but rather "invited space" where the museum maintains its authority. She prescribes that museums in working with communities must rescind their authority and facilitate not simple meetings or discussions but implement "creative conflict" scenarios. "Creative conflict" is a resolution strategy that employs theatrical techniques so that dissent can be voiced and heard. Lynch experienced the positive results of this conflict resolution strategy when she worked with teenagers at the British Museum. In a program called "Talking Objects," teenagers contested curatorial interpretations of the Rosetta Stone. This model she said, reoriented the power away from the museum and enables teenagers to discuss the relevance of objects in contemporary society. The program running from 2000 to 2013 has relied on a number of theatrical exercises since, including "performing" Hokusai's print, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, an India Jade Terrapin and the Ice-age Swimming Reindeer. Creative conflict techniques help negotiate new relationships between the powerful and disenfranchised, the academic and cultural expert, and as a consequence, new narratives are written.

Lynch, B. T. 2011. "Collaboration, Contestation, and Creative Conflict." In *The Routledge Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Janet Marstine. London: Routledge.

²⁶ Genoways, Hugh H., and Ireland, Lynne M. 2003. "The 'Isms,' Challenges for Modern Museums." In *Museum Administration: An Introduction*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltraMira Press.

Implementing New Museology Thinking: Current Challenges and Solutions

What exactly is holding back museums from practicing New Museology? There are three key areas—funding and economics, collaborative leadership, and transparency—that present both challenges and opportunities for the field.

Funding & Economics

Coinciding with the introduction of New Museology in the 1990s was an explosion of museums. Children's Museums were established as a new institutional archetype, franchise business models²⁷ developed, white cubes were built to house both private and corporate collections, and century-old museums focused on financial gains via blockbuster exhibitions and gift shops. Museums turned to this economic approach with sincere intentions to update the negative stereotypes of dusty museums and make them more appealing. However, this sea change, according to the New Museology's critique, was turning the museum into centers for spectacle and consumption, once again inadequately meeting democratic ideals.²⁸ The scale had tipped too far towards renovations and marketing budgets, leaving little remaining funds for education programs for underserved youth and fair-pay for non-senior staff. Individual analysis of each museum is necessary to determine if this critique is valid. Nonetheless, understanding how fundraising works in Germany is an important part of understanding the sector as a whole.

As a general rule in Germany, 90% of budget support is derived from government funds and is applied to general operating expenses. The remaining 10% comes mostly from corporate support, major gifts, and gifts from Friends groups.²⁹ The bulk of this private money is applied toward new, forward-thinking projects. But for real change to happen in an organization, innovation needs to move from the organizational fringe and into the core operations. Anecdotally, German museum professionals often comment that European donors only want to give to special projects. This is also a challenge for American fundraisers. How does one make general operating expenses sound exciting? Well, when business-as-usual, is groundbreaking, pioneering, and community-centered—the normal business of museums becomes an attractive investment.

Furthermore, there is no denying that the German culture of giving is growing. In 2015, 4 billion euros of private money was donated, a figure that doubled over the last ten years. In fact, 42% of Germans made a donation in 2015, despite the fact that 80% of the population

²⁷ With the 1990s, a second explosion of Museums of Contemporary Art occurred. An often-cited example is Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, which opened in 1997. Touted as an example of economic development, the formation of a new contemporary art center transformed this Northern Basque town.

²⁸ Lorente, J. Pedro. 2011. *The Museums of Contemporary Art: Notion and Development*. Surrey: Ashgate.

²⁹ Deutscher Spendenmonitor. Fundraising Verband.

http://fundraisingverband.de/assets/verband/Pressemappe/Pressemitteilungen/2016/Deutscher%20Spendenmonitor%202016_Pressecharts.pdf. October 2017.

agrees that the government should do more to support nonprofit organizations.³⁰ There are two fundraising structures that demonstrate how philanthropy in Germany is moving from a wealthy man's tradition to an everyman's value.

"The secret of community foundations' success is anyone can participate – with money, time or ideas. Community foundations can respond in a flexible and non-bureaucratic way to new challenges and needs at a local level."

First are *Bürgerstiftung* or community foundations. Between 1996 and 1997, Reinhard Mohn, founder of the Bertelsmann Foundation, was interested in fostering a "bottom-up" giving culture.³¹ On a research trip to the United States, he learned about community foundations and met a like-minded partner Christian Pfeiffer. Together, they created the first German community foundations in the cities of Hannover and Gütersloh. 20 years later, there are over 300 community foundations in Germany, giving about 335 million euros in grants from roughly 30,000 individual donors. These numbers will continue to rise. The Global Fund for Community Foundations reports that nearly 16,000 new donors joined community foundations in 2016. In addition to engaging citizen in fundraising, community foundations also contribute to mounting volunteerism. Over 1 million volunteer hours

were attributed to community foundation work in 2016.³² According to Ulrike Reichart, head of the Community Foundation Initiative in the Association of German Foundations, "The secret of community foundations' success is anyone can participate—with money, time or ideas. Community foundations can respond in a flexible and non-bureaucratic way to new challenges and needs at a local level."³³

While the philanthropic sector in the United States is 97% times bigger than Germany's, giving via community foundation activities in the United States, flat-lined according to the Foundation Center.³⁴ Serving as the middleman between local organizations and community activism,

³⁰Spendenmonitor. Fundraising Verband.

http://fundraisingverband.de/assets/verband/Pressemappe/Pressemitteilungen/2016/Deutscher%20Spendenmonitor%202016_Pressecharts.pdf. October 2017.

³¹ 20 Years of Community Foundation in Germany. Global Fund for Community Foundations.

<http://www.globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/latest-news/2016/9/30/20-years-of-community-foundations-in-germany.html>. October 2017.

³² Community Foundations in Figures. Initiative Bürgerstiftungen. 2016.

³³ 20 Years of Community Foundation in Germany. Global Fund for Community Foundations.

<http://www.globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/latest-news/2016/9/30/20-years-of-community-foundations-in-germany.html>. October 2017.

³⁴ 734 grantmaking community foundations exist in the United States, giving \$4.2 billion annually. Community Foundation: Key Facts. Foundation Center.

http://foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/research/pdf/keyfacts_comm2012.pdf. October 2017.

community foundations are one of the most vibrant giving vehicles in Germany today and represent a growing donor prospect pool for fundraisers.¹

Another development fostering the culture of giving is crowd-funding platforms. Crowdfunding as a community-building tool is increasingly convenient for both donors and the organization. An increasing number of philanthropically inclined individuals use these sites as search engines for innovative social projects. For passion projects and established NGOs alike, crowd-giving websites are affordable, tech-friendly systems. Moreover, it is uncommon for even an established German nonprofit to have a database system which tracks more than address information. So while the online fundraising strategies in the United States are dominated by upgrading existing systems to make giving online easier and more robust, German fundraisers often leapfrog directly to this new third-party tech infrastructure as a means to track gift history.

The biggest online donation platform in Germany is betterplace.org. Since 2007, projects on the site have raised 48 million euros—13 million euros alone were raised in 2016.³⁵ Kickstarter, in comparison, has facilitated 3.4 billion dollars in project support since 2009.³⁶ There are currently 23,000 registered projects on betterplace.org (516 of which are listed under the umbrella tag “culture”), creating a massive dataset and overview of the German civic engagement sector.³⁷ These sites also help automate the donor stewardship and cultivation cycle. Giving reminders, thank you notes, and project impact emails are built into the process. Outside of these sites,

SECTOR COMPARISON

AT A GLANCE

GERMANY

€123



Government
Funding
per Capita

€200
MILLION



Private Support of
the Arts Annually

€4
BILLION



Total Private
Donations Made
Annually

6,710



Total Number of
Museums

100
MILLION



Museum Visitor per
Year

USA

\$0.47

\$18.21
BILLION

\$390
BILLION

35,144

850
MILLION

³⁵ Two-Pager. Betterplace.org. <https://www.betterplace.org/c/medien/files/2012/10/Two-Pager-betterplace.org-Zahlen-und-Fakten.pdf>. October 2017.

³⁶ Stats. Kickstarter. <https://www.kickstarter.com/help/stats?ref=hello>, October 2017.

³⁷ Discover Projects. Betterplace.org. <https://www.betterplace.org/de/discover-projects?categoryId=6>. October 2017.

these tried and true relationship-strengthening techniques, in practice, are all too often only made with major donors, if done at all. As small donors experience a new level of interaction with an organization thanks to these online tools, they will come to expect that these services as standard aspects of the giving partnership. German development officers should take more advantage of these tools to bring efficiency and enhanced communication to their fundraising practices.

Fundraising could be a valuable community engagement tool for any German nonprofit. Museums that take efforts to make people feel at home—at ease, able to be themselves, and safe to take chances—not only learn more, but also take ownership over those spaces by coming back with friends, investing in memberships, and advocating for those spaces in times of uncertainty. The fundraising sector will continue to grow, professionalize, and have positive impacts on society at large. German citizens are committed to improving society. The fact that they demonstrate this commitment through increased private financial investment as well as pressuring the government to continue to be the main patron of arts and culture is a strong sign for civic engagement.

Who speaks? Who decides? The Potential of Collaborative Structures

Another implication of New Museology is that internal organizational structures should be altered to reflect democratic ideals. Deirdre Stam, for example, calls for organizational frameworks that promote collaboration. This is especially true for exhibition development. Multiple voices should be heard and evidently expressed through the curation process, in the drafting of interpretive text, and through the planning of supplemental public programming. Likewise, Stam calls for the greater inclusion of front-line museum staff in typical curatorial activities. She makes the case that visitor services officers are more socially focused. Their expertise of the visitor experience can help design audience-centered programming models. Lastly, Stam calls for a greater accountability on behalf on museums overall. Management practices and collections should be transparent and accessible. The adoption of emerging social technologies and project management tools is a solution to the issues of internal collaboration and external transparency.³⁸

Fiona Cameron echoes the view that multiple voices must be folded into museum practice when she calls for changes in collections management. Size, material composition, condition, and even location of collections are unquestionably recorded because collections management has developed under the mantle of preservation. Beyond provenance and curatorial statements justifying insurance coverage, information regarding an object's significance is not habitually cataloged. Cameron, however, argues that as museums open up professional practices to include diverse voices—namely in educational activities and through exhibition themes—so should those values transfer to collections records. By expanding data sets at acquisition and during any collaborative project, Cameron contends there will be an

³⁸ Stam, Deirdre. 2010. "The Informed Muse: The Implications of 'New Museology' for Museum Practice." In *Museums Management and Curatorship*. 25: 267-283.

opportunity to resolve the multi-disciplinary classification of objects, as well as to explore new applications for collections information, so as to increase public access and appreciation.³⁹

Kathleen McLean is another advocate for restructuring the museum towards the collaborative. In "The Dynamics of Dialogue," she states that museums work well with outside groups, naming docents and trustees among the external constituencies that museums work with regularly. She suggests that museums should go a step further by mimicking this collaborative approach in its internal operations and specifically advocates cross-departmental working groups. Rather than "siloing" departments by distinct tasks and goals, McLean calls for flat organizational structures that utilize the expertise in a number of areas.⁴⁰

Teamwork models have bred a sector-wide debate concerning the role of the curator, who in prior exhibition models oversaw all development responsibilities. Because of this tension, some museums have been slow to implement a teamwork approach internally, despite pursuing robust external community engagement programs. On the other hand, professional development organizations like the Association of American Museum Curators and the Center for Curatorial Leadership are actively redefining the definition of the curator to include community engagement skills.

Educators, by working directly with the public, have taken the lead in developing collaborative working methods. Unfortunately, this work does not often reach the boardroom where long-term strategic changes or budgetary decisions are made. In Germany, decisions on new strategic projects often move through a layered, multi-agency government approval process, placing even more distance between the on-the-floor educator and the "chairman." However, true collaboration involves not only a disintegration of external hierarchies (museum vs. community) but internal organizational structures that reinforce top-down decision-making. For audience engagement to be impactful in the long run an internal participatory culture is necessary.

Radical Transparency

Lastly, transparency must underpin all of these changes, if museums want to maintain their status as trusted sources of information. In Germany, 40% of the public still view fundraising with distrust and skepticism.⁴¹ People continue to view corporate sponsorship as free advertising and tax deductions as a means for the wealthy to skirt their social contract

³⁹ Cameron, Fiona. 2012. "Museum Collections, Documentation, and Shifting Knowledge Paradigms (2005)." In *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. Anderson, Gail, pp. 223-238. Lanham: AltaMira Press.

⁴⁰ McLean, Kathleen. 2011. "Whose Questions, Whose Conversations?" In *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair, et al, pp. 70-79. Philadelphia: Pew Center for the Arts and Heritage.

⁴¹ Spendenmonitor. Fundraising Verband.

http://fundraisingverband.de/assets/verband/Pressemappe/Pressemitteilungen/2016/Deutscher%20Spendenmonitor%202016_Pressecharts.pdf. October 2017.

obligations. As more and more museums in Germany depend on support from the private sector, showing the 'who', 'how much', and 'what for' of organizational data is an imperative.

One basic way that the United States addresses transparency is through Form 990. Since 1941 the United States Internal Revenue Service requires all non-profits to complete a 990. The form outlines basic financial and governance information, such as annual operating budget, CEO salary, and top donation figures. This main data source, which can be requested by anyone is commonly posted voluntarily on websites.⁴² Organisations that deny or are tardy in filling requests can be fined.⁴³ The 990 is a useful tool for private donors to learn more about an organization's health and is an invaluable source of aggregate data that can be analyzed by researchers.

In Germany, a mere 30 percent of foundations publish annual reports for public use,⁴⁴ making statistics regarding the impact and the use of funds difficult to gather.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, efforts are underway to make transparency a sector priority. The Initiative von Transparency International Deutschland e.V. (Initiative for Transparency, German Chapter) encourages nonprofits of all sizes to list on their websites similar information to that of 990.⁴⁶ This is a well-supported and well-known campaign among nonprofit professionals. However, many organizations are hesitant to take part. Many nonprofessionals say that they do not participate because budgetary figures are not openly discussed even internally. It seems that taking the leap to post institutional information online would open a can of administrative and management worms.

However, the lack of transparency in Germany's cultural sector fuels public skepticism and prevents healthy organizational change. Museums should make a range of raw data available on their websites, on data collecting agencies like the European Group for Museums Statistic, and other similar research agencies. In addition, they should contextualize this data by comparing goals and outcomes⁴⁷ and by speaking openly about their challenges and

⁴²About Form 990. IRS. <https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-990>. October 2017.

⁴³ Anyone can request a copy of a nonprofits 990 form. If the organization does not provide the form within 30 days of the request, a nonprofit could be charged \$20 per day with a maximum penalty of \$10,000. Organizations may charge an "administration fee" for sending the 990 form. Practically speaking, most organizations post the form on their website to reduce this administration task. Censorship is of this form is not allowed with the exception of blocking out donor names, which generally is not done. About Form 990. IRS. <https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-990>. October 2017.

⁴⁴ Strachwitz, Rupert Graft. 2001. "Germany." In *Foundations in Europe: International Reference Book on Society, Management, and Law*. Schülter, Andreas, et al. Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers.

⁴⁵ Strachwitz, Rupert Graft. 2001. "Germany." In *Foundations in Europe: International Reference Book on Society, Management, and Law*. Schülter, Andreas, et al. Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers.

⁴⁶ In fact, this projects was supported by the Robert Bosch Foundation.

⁴⁷ Institutions like the ICA and Smithsonian have pioneers these data transparency in reader-friendly dashboards.

limitations. Simply put, radical transparency should be an ethical imperative if museums wish to serve civil society.⁴⁸

Sector Spotlight: C/O Berlin

Since 2010, 500 museums have been founded in Germany. This growth, which parallels a global bloom, is an opportunity for museums to come of age with New Museology as a strategic underpinning. One such example of a private museum that manifests these ideas is C/O Berlin. Amazingly, none of the three founders—photographer Stephan Erfurt, designer Marc Naroska, or architect Ingo Pott have a museum background. They simply met while working on the Reichstagsgebäude (parliament building) renovation. Perhaps this is the secret to this rule-breaking space, which often feels like Berlin's living room—it's a house built by friends.

C/O Berlin's name is both a nod to its first home—a post office—as well as the founding idea that the space would “take care of Berlin.”⁴⁹ The first location, situated in the Mitte neighborhood, was at the intersection of the cultural scene after the fall of the wall. Scrappy brick partitions and maker-esque info desks represented the “just do it” attitude espoused by many rebuilding East Berlin. But like far too many arts organizations in thriving global cities, new rental agreements forced C/O to find a new location. Stephan Erfurt, who continues to head the space today, did not view the move begrudgingly but as an opportunity to reintroduce to the city to C/O, reaffirm its role as a player in the international photography scene, as well as upgrade to a “museum-grade” climate control system. In 2014, after 15 years of continued audience growth, its collection and 50 employees moved to the Amerika Haus, a cultural center built by the US government during the Cold War.⁵⁰

The move was financed through an ambitious 3 million euro campaign. C/O Berlin is also unique in Germany because it relies entirely on private funding. Corporate sponsorships, as well as membership dues, are the primary channels of support. C/O currently has 305 members⁵¹ (up from 150 in 2010⁵²) giving a minimum of 250 euros annually.

A 500,000 euro campaign is currently underway for their new “Perspective” workshop series that connects professionals in the areas of photography and design with refugee and other underserved youth. But the civic engagement does not stop there. Currently on view is the multi-part exhibition and program series entitled *Watched!* This show combines artwork with

⁴⁸Marstine, J., Bauer, A. A., & Haines, C. (2014). *New directions in museum ethics*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.

⁴⁹ President's Lecture Stephan Erfurt: Managing Museums in Critical Times. Berlin School of Creative Leadership. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-qJaCeArZQ>. October 2017.

⁵⁰ The building is leased to C/O from Berlin. About 20% of museums in the United States lease buildings from a government entity. The most famous example being the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

⁵¹ Join & Give. C/O Berlin. <https://www.co-berlin.org/en/friends>. October 2017.

⁵² President's Lecture Stephan Erfurt: Managing Museums in Critical Times. Berlin School of Creative Leadership. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-qJaCeArZQ>. October 2017.

multi-disciplinary thinkers to consider, “What effect does [governmental and private surveillance] have on us? ... And how can contemporary art and media theory contribute to a better understanding of our modern surveillance society?”⁵³

“We wanted to do everything a little bit differently from other museums. We wanted to make it personal.”

C/O Berlin is an example of how having a progressive attitude toward museum work makes an organization feel less like an institution and more like a community center. “We wanted to do everything a little bit different from other museums. We wanted to make it personal.”⁵⁴ Indeed, the personal

comes through. From the smiling receiving lines by staff on opening nights to the t-shirt-wearing staff to Leitch Sprache (simple German) translations on the website, C/O Berlin has a welcoming accessibility in everything it does.

Sector Spotlight: Deutsche Historisches Museum

Germany is also seeing bold leadership champion the ideals of New Museology. With the onboarding of Raphael Gross as President of the Deutsche Historisches Museum (German Historical Museum, DHM) in Spring 2017, this sleeping giant is preparing to take another look at Germany’s national history.

DHM was founded in 1987. Today its tally of roughly one million objects is the combination of previous collections and institutions—the Museum für Deutsche Geschichte (Museum for German History), the central historical museum of the German Democratic Republic, military collection of the Royal Russian Armory, a reference, image, and movie archive as well as a catalogue of “flight, expulsion, and reconciliation” records from several periods of crisis and movement. In 2008, DHM was reincorporated as a foundation but remains under public ownership and the responsibility of the federal state. The Kuratorium (Board of Trustees) is made up of five members of the government at various levels and is responsible for all management decisions including program calendar, budget, and senior staff appointments.⁵⁵

In 2003, architect I.M. Pei added a special exhibition hall to the building. Like many museums, the addition provided an opportunity for DHM to show more of its massive collection. Since then, the hall has become known for large—and at times—overwhelming special exhibitions as well as a leader in accessibility for people living with disabilities. In 2014, after extensive co-design work with the blind community, DHM installed a guidance system of ribbed tile for the seeing impaired. Furthermore, as of October 2016, exhibitions have rotating label boxes, which were installed at wheelchair height and rotate through information in five languages.

⁵³ Watched! Big Data. C/O Berlin. <https://www.co-berlin.org/en/node/720>. October 2017.

⁵⁴ 10 Jahre C/O Berlin. C/O Berlin. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EJB60mT6_g. October 2017.

⁵⁵ Foundation History. Deutsches Historisches Museum. <http://www.dhm.de/en/about-us/foundation-history.html>. October 2017.

Small videos screen communicate in German sign language and analog sides scroll from braille, to English and to German at both a native and beginner level. Moreover, all objects are displayed so that they can be experienced using at least two senses. This impressive interpretation work is all done within the context of addressing provocative subjects of racism, social integration, and German colonialism in Africa.⁵⁶

"I'm interested in how to handle conflicts. ...I am concerned with the development of public discussions based on empirical evidence and references."

Nonetheless, like so many museums this kind of progressive visitor-center approach all too often happens only in temporary exhibitions and takes too long to make its way into core operations and strategy. Gross, in this new role, is interested in tackling this issue by remaking the DHM's infamous permanent collection gallery.

In 2006, a permanent exhibition was installed as the museum attempted to embody its claim as Germany's national museum. With the backdrop of reunification and controversies about how the government could use the museum to win political points, the exhibition was positively received as a well-balanced, encyclopedic account of German history from 18th century to 1990s. However, today this exhibition feels dated. Gross is quoted as saying that this exhibition, which has been barely modified in ten years, is "boring."⁵⁷

He plans to take his time to get it right but for starters, he approaches the new exhibition by saying, "We live in a time that really is not boring. You almost want to say: unfortunately. The obvious thing would be to think: we have to be much more up-to-date! A big, spectacular talk show. But that would be a mistake. Our job is to strengthen the historical judgment...It's not about breaking taboos or artificially sticking things up. I'm interested in how to handle conflicts. ...I am concerned with the development of public discussions based on empirical evidence and references."⁵⁸

This year, DHM will celebrate its 30-year anniversary. It is exciting to see the continual evolution of this museum as a repository for Germany's national history, to a physical location for unification, and now as an accessible home that promises to become an active place to understand contemporary struggles. This new direction is going to take time and money but with leadership in place, the potential for relevance is certainly there.

⁵⁶ Portele-Anyangbe, Friedrun. "My Project: Museum for All." *Deutsches Historisches Museum Blog*. www.dhm.de/blog/2016/07/04/my-project-museum-for-all. October 2017.

⁵⁷ Staas, Christian. "Wir sind kein Therapie-Ort." *Die Zeit*. 26. April 2017.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this Fellowship, I regularly heard from colleagues that, in Germany, access to culture is a right—not a luxury. This idea as a museum for everyone was not new but in this context resurfaced fundamental questions. What obligations come with civic responsibility? How can the democratic theories of New Museology help broaden who controls cultural assets? Which parts of society really feel a sense of ownership in cultural institutions? What influence do museums have in politic debates?

Now at the conclusion of my fellowship year, this paper is being written during the coalition negotiations for a new federal government. The populist right party, Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, AfD) won 13 percent of the vote and will, therefore, take over control of some government committees. As I type, the AfD is being considered to chair the Kulturausschuss (National Committee for Culture). This body directs policy and budgets regarding culture. The AfD has obtained a seat at the table and the stakes feel high.

How seriously museums consider their democratic responsibility seems more consequential than ever. Both the German and American museum sectors are on a trajectory to make museums even more trusted sources for information and contextualization. The tremendous support of the German government for museums is a remarkable safety net for collecting organizations. They should view this financial security as an opportunity to experiment and push the ideas of what a museum can be even further. American museums, where private investment remains steady, can call upon the coalitions of engaged visitors and friends that they have built over the years to lean into the social justice issues. If both sectors do this, I believe they will see their significance and influence in society grow. It is my hope that the summary of the theories that have guided museum workers for decades is a refuelling reminder for advocates to continue to work to make museums vigorous spaces for effective public discourse.

¹ Infographic sources:

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