

Citizens' Assemblies in Museums: Democratising Representation

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Introduction

It has been commended that ‘power is at the centre of archival work [given that]: it is the power to retain, the power to discard, the power to partially shape what is remembered and how (Finigan, 2020).’ It has also been stated that politics is a struggle between competing groups ‘manoeuvring to assert rival interests (Boswell, 2020).’ A simplification of these observations would equate archival work to political activity, thereby positioning museums as quintessentially political institutions.

If indeed museums are political spaces, then they should be held to the same democratic standards of transparency, public engagement and representation that are demanded of other political institutions. A more equitable distribution of power, achievable through the democratisation of museums stands to eliminate many issues prevalent within museums today. Such issues revolve around the difficulty in representing minority cultures and heritages, manifesting in the propagation of restrictive, historical narratives, distortions of cultural nuances owing to misunderstandings, ambiguities surrounding authorship and tendencies towards passive spectatorship and sensationalism.

Section 1 of this paper will first develop these theoretical challenges, taking a critical perspective of current practices of curation. Having established this, we will then advance the argument that museums are inherently political spaces and explicate the democratic standards that museums should seek to uphold. There will then be consideration of the existing institutional resistance to change.

Section 2 aims to discuss a particular approach to the democratisation of museums, advocating for the implementation of deliberative democracy through the use of citizens' assemblies. The section begins by describing what citizens' assemblies are and how they typically function. A case study will be presented to illustrate a successful instance of the implementation of citizens' assemblies in the museum context. Building on this example, this paper will then propose guidelines for the further democratisation of museums, using the Museo de America as a case study for these recommendations.

Section 1: Current Practices

Introduction: The Role of Museums

Museums serve a dual purpose, their instrumental function is to preserve human history, while their intrinsic value is the legacies they represent as a source of education for posterity (Snyder, 2023). Such monumental functions are matched with proportionately significant responsibilities. For history to be preserved, there is a responsibility on museums not only to conserve the condition of the artefact, but also to represent them authentically, refraining from harm by means of an imposition of hegemonic narratives. To educate, museums bear the responsibility of historical accuracy, a mandate that demands inclusion of narratives told by authentic voices. This is necessary in order to cultivate a wider cultural understanding amongst the public, an essential step to uprooting the entrenched hegemonic power imbalances, which manifested historically through the dominant colonial history narratives that were used to suppress cultural heritage and culture of minority groups. A change in attitude towards the non-inclusive nature of cultural representation is essential in order to stimulate dialogue and discussion about the existence of vestiges of colonial structures and institutions. This section will address the existing issues that museums face, the politicised nature of museum work and history, and some potential explanations for some existing resistance to change from the point of view of museums.

1a) Crisis of Representation

In simple words: People are not being represented how the people want to be represented, and artists are not being represented how artists want to be represented. In more complex terms, the crisis of representation involves a gap in understanding of identity, culture and their manifestations between two sets of people: the artists and the people whom they represent through their works, and curators and the artist(s) they represent through their exhibitions.

Representation of People: Exoticism and Biases

Since the colonial period, there has been an ongoing issue of misrecognition by artistic institutions at the forefront of the art realm that marginalised and underrepresented groups are facing, where the representation of said groups does not align with their own conception of identity. Cultural elements are also misunderstood, mostly out of ignorance but sometimes

deliberately, and are taken at face value with little regard for their significance for the group they belong to. This process of exoticization leads to not just the creation of a convoluted understanding of cultural identity, but to the “otherization” of foreign groups through the downplaying of the importance of their culture within not just their communities, but also on a global scale (Huggan, 2013).

Similarly, this process of misrecognition can be seen outside the colonial history circle in the way that other groups have been affected by biases; historically, marginalised and underrepresented groups have not just been misunderstood, but occasionally almost completely excluded from representation in art, due to the conception that their existence could not be seen through an aesthetic lens that is authentic to their experiences.

One example of this is found in the *raison-d’être* behind the anonymous collective Guerrilla Girls, a group of artists dedicated to fighting sexism in the art world; The reason behind the birth of the Guerrilla Girls is a picket against the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 1985, fuelled by the lack of representation of women artists in an exhibition titled “An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture”, which included only 13 women out of 165 artists represented. The Guerrilla Girls then conducted a survey about the works represented in the Metropolitan Museum, where they found that while only 5% of the artists on display were women, 76% of the nude models were women painted by men (Cordova, 2024).

Representation of Artists

Curators, like most (if not all) human beings, have their own preconceived notions about the work of a certain artist about whom they are creating an exhibition, which are shaped by their bias, educational background, socioeconomic status, among others. These notions may lead to a clash between how the artist views their work and how the curator interprets it against their own backdrop, and may hamper how the works are being displayed and parsed to the audience. This does not imply that artists want to be understood in one specific way which suits their narrative and self-identity, but rather that they want to avoid being victims of harmful stereotypes, and promote bringing a new perspective to their works that is constructive and adds a new dimension to the message conveyed. In 2013, Frieze published an editorial by 8 artists discussing their relationship to the curatorial realm; British artist Ed Atkins talks about how “in working directly with an artist – rather than at a remove with simply the work of an artist – the curator [...] might confront a conspicuously alien aspect of their own identity and, at least partially, actually be the artist – no doubt in all their banality

and anxiety”, which could be seen as a way to challenge these preconceptions by reaching a mutual understanding with the artist’s point of view that is still informed by the curator’s experiences, rather than constructing an entirely biased point of view that may not align with how the artists envision their works to be understood (Fox, 2013). While this does hold true for retrospective exhibitions of living artists, it may have different implications for exhibitions of older artists who may not have the ability to defend their works or reach a mutual understanding with the curator; In the absence of an artist, curators may have to rely on the approval of either the art community to which said artist belonged -this raises the problem of treating artistic communities as a monolithic organised entity capable of reaching decisions- or the general public, which may be a more straightforward approach that takes into account the direct audience of such an exhibition, but nevertheless needs to be an informed approval to avoid perpetuating stereotypes and public misconceptions. The issue of representation of artists takes on a whole different dimension when considering thematic exhibitions combining works from different artists, or even cultural museums where the concept of authorship does not necessarily translate well due to the circumstances in which artefacts were acquired (more on this in the section titled Question of Authorship).

Sensationalism

Exhibitions sometimes use controversial or sensational elements of the artist’s life or of the history of a certain artwork or artefact to promote the exhibition in the media, often at the expense of the actual narrative of the exhibition. This practice of creating sensationalism around the exhibition to attract visitors creates a sort of false expectation in the audience who may be disappointed by the difference in narrative between the exhibition and how it is publicised, and also may lead to the creation of a stigma around the artist and limiting the level of understanding of their life and engagement with their work. While the work of some artists revolves around their life and struggles, and carries significant activist messages, others may not want to have their work understood almost exclusively through the narrow lens of their own issues. In an interview with professor and curator Clara Zarza about her experiences with the curation of an exhibition about the American artists Bobby Baker, she points out that her biggest concern during the curatorial process for the Bobby Baker show was with the marketing department, who wanted to base the promotional material on Baker’s history of mental illness, rather than on her own works, which she had to rectify to avoid sensationalism at the centre of attention and main point of attraction for the show. (full interview transcript is presented in Appendix A).

Question of Authorship

The question of authorship involves the delineation of the concept of “crediting” in two situations: Authorship of art or artefacts on display, and authorship of exhibitions.

Of Art

Although the issue of authorship in art does have other considerations such as contemporary art studios and collective authorship, it is being discussed here from a colonial history perspective primarily. It is very hard to identify an author or creator for a lot of colonial-era artworks or artefacts, either due to the nature in which they were acquired or due to the lack of credible documentation ascertaining origin or authorship. This issue becomes particularly salient when mistakenly attributing authorship of a certain piece due to cultural similarities that are hard to distinguish by an inexperienced individual; an example of this is the misappropriation of “Islamic” art originating in the Middle East as either Arabic, Persian, or Turkic, which lumps together three cultures that share few points of similarity into a broad category with no regard for the nuance (Golshiri, 2009). An underlying reason for this may be due to the way Western culture had interpreted such artefacts at the time of acquisition. Many objects were stripped of their cultural significance (whether be it art, religion, function) and were reduced to a manifestation of a “foreign” culture. One manifestation of such a phenomenon is the Cabinet of Curiosities, also known as a *Kunstkabinett*, where a massive collection of “foreign” objects pertaining to different fields of science are shown with no narrative other than “foreignness” and used for “learning entertainment” purposes. While the concept of the *Kunstkabinett* has largely faded away from the public eye, it laid the basis for modern cultural museums, especially considering that many colonial-era collections originated in the *Kunstkabinett*. According to art historian Mark Meadow, “by unpacking the cabinet, the museum [is] critiquing itself, examining its origins in those collections” (Wallentine, 2023).

Of Exhibitions

While curation may seem to be an individual process guided solely by the curator, it involves more collaboration than anticipated. While the curator is usually responsible for the creation of the underlying concept and selection of works to be shown in the exhibition, this vision cannot be achieved or realised without the intervention of technical specialists who also project their own understandings and limitations onto the execution of the concept. This

raises a situation in which either the curator receives most or all the credit for the process of curation as the creative ‘head’ behind the project, or credit must be shared equally amongst all contributing members. In reality, this also brings into question that curators often do not receive credit for their work, much less interact with the general public. Prof. Zarza in her interview discusses how some of the issues faced in the process of curation had to do with the “difference in language”; people working on exhibitions come from various technical and professional backgrounds, where the terminology used to describe elements may differ significantly, and it is up to the curator to reach an understanding that allows for the creation of a coherent narrative.

Spectatorship

The second issue regarding the audience has to do with the way it interacts with the exhibition, and the knowledge that they gain after having experienced it.

In his 1987 book titled “The Emancipated Spectator”, French philosopher Jacques Ranciere discusses the concept of stultification, which he explains, through an experiment by Joseph Jacotot, as “teaching whatever the instructor considers relevant to the purposes to others”. In other words, transposing this concept into the art realm, the audience is stultified when they are “spoon-fed” the message behind an artwork or the narrative behind an exhibition, allowing for no room for introspection and the introduction of personal perspective to add another layer of depth to the understanding of said experiences. (Ranciere, 2009).

Extreme Ends

Stultification can take place on either extreme ends of a spectrum: the first of which is reducing the complexity of the message behind an art piece / exhibition to the point that it is very easily digestible and does not require much thought to understand. One way that this has manifested is through the rise of social-media-friendly exhibitions, or “Instagrammable” exhibitions, where the main focus of the exhibition is not to provoke thought and sentiment, but to provide for a fun documentable ephemeral experience. This “dumbing down” and massification of exhibitions to accommodate as many people as possible has led some critics to say that museums have lost their importance as cultural heritage hubs, and have fallen victim to the wrong kind of democratisation of art. This is not a recent issue, however; French artist Daniel Buren, in his statement “Exposition d’une exposition” in 1972, talks about an alternative, or perhaps original understanding of the issue with exhibitions - “The subject of exhibitions tends more and more to be not so much the exhibition of works of art, as the

exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art”¹, in the sense that the exhibition itself is treated as a uniform work where the focus should not be on the content of the artworks presented, but rather on the fact of the exhibition itself (Fox, 2013).

The other extreme is more prevalent in contemporary art circles, and involves the conceptualization of the “Artist as a Genius”. This process is known in the art world as “cultural mystification”, as described by art critic John Berger in his book “Ways of Seeing”; cultural mystification entails “explaining away what might otherwise be evident”. In other words, the message is occluded to the point that the audience may struggle to understand the piece without proper guidance from the artist or curator who explains the significance of the piece / exhibition leaving the audience members in a state of confusion as they are unable to parse the message in their own terms and therefore are unable to project their own understanding and perspective onto it (Berger, 2012, pp. 14-16).

Participation and Trust

Perhaps increasing the general public’s engagement with the museum’s ecosystem beyond the exhibition viewership may help neutralise the stultifying elements of museum frameworks. This could manifest in two ways, either allowing the audience to look into the inner workings of the museum institution, or the externalisation of the relationship between the museum and the general public through collaborative initiatives to give back to the communities they represent and coexist with. One particular example of the latter is the Museo Situado (Situated Museum), an active collaboration network between associations from the Madrilenian neighbourhood of Lavapiés and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía. Museo Situado was established in 2018 as a response to the growing disconnect between the museum, seen as part of the Golden Triangle of Art in Madrid’s centre, and the neighbourhood that hosts it, which has a high population of immigrants and minority groups, and functions as an assembly-based organisation for the neighbourhood to discuss matters pertaining to Lavapiés or the museum’s initiatives. This project highlights a problem that is often overlooked; a mistrust of the museum as a powerful institution, or perhaps a misunderstanding of outreach attempts. Ana Longoni, former Head of Public Activities at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, mentions that the start of the project required “a gradual process of gaining trust because, at first, the collectives did not understand very well what the museum wanted from the neighbourhood” (Gigante, 2024).

¹ Original in French: “De plus en plus le sujet d’une exposition tend à ne plus être l’exposition d’œuvres d’art, mais l’exposition de l’exposition comme œuvre d’art”.

1b) Museums as political institutions

This section of the paper seeks to establish museums as political arenas by delving into the nature of archival work and its social and political implications. Having established this, this paper also seeks to present a case for the democratisation of museums since such measures are imperative to advance their legitimacy and relevance within a contemporary society.

To present the case for the democratisation of museums, it is necessary to challenge the notion that museums are neutral spaces, instead asserting that they are political spaces.

National museums claim to assume political neutrality (Richardson, 2022); they refrain from commenting on contemporary political matters and also extend this apparent neutrality into the manners in which they present history. While individual perspectives may be showcased through exhibitions, the historical accounts offered for specific artefacts are supposedly objective and free of moral or ethical judgements. The importance of the image of neutrality is of the utmost importance to a range of institutions, particularly those involved in the media, law and governance. To be perceived as such is a necessary condition for public confidence in the credibility and legitimacy of the system. This public confidence is ultimately the sustenance necessary for the continued existence and stability of public institutions.

History is Political

History defies reduction to a linear chronicle of events, it rather a complex mosaic of experiences and perspectives, there is no objective truth or definitive account, making neutrality an impossibility, ‘museums are not benign, neutral spaces, but politically loaded sites (Finigan, 2020).’ History, which museums seek to present, is characterised by countless power struggles, its point of intersection with politics. a single event which may be construed as exploration and innovation and pioneering by some may be interpreted as colonial invasion and exploitation by others. Thus, the assertion of neutrality is compromised by the fact that recounting history is an inherently subjective and political exercise.

Ownership is Political

The histories, and provenances of contents of the collections are also deeply political. Much attention has been drawn to this fact in contemporary discourse, with scrutiny directed at the

modes of acquisition of cultural artefacts. Museums of former colonial powers are the primary targets of this scrutiny since many possess extensive collections of artefacts that were obtained through acts of looting and coercion and during periods of colonial expansion, disregarding their spiritual and historic value to their original communities (Blacklock, 2023). There are two political dimensions to this.

The first political dimension is that this prompts questions concerning restorative justice. Some conceive of the retention of controversial artefacts by former colonial powers, against the wishes of their original communities as a demonstration of an entrenched power asymmetry which found its origins in colonial history (Blacklock, 2023). This is deemed to be strictly incompatible with any claim of neutrality leading some to criticise an apparent contradiction between the rhetoric and action within these institutions. While it is the national government who is responsible for the legal claims and ownership of these artefacts, museums become the subject of politicisation through the custodianship of these contested objects and the power struggles they symbolise.

The second political dimension is the capacity of the contents of museums to affect the diplomatic relationships between countries.

Repatriation of relics such as the recent return of Benin Bronzes from Germany to Nigeria in 2022 (Oltermann, 2022), or even a willingness to enter into concerning the ownership of the artefacts stands to improve diplomatic relationships, conditional on the facts that this is achieved without a narrative of philanthropy on the part of the former Western Powers.

The inverse is also true, controversial museum collections and the unwillingness to enter discussions concerning ownership may strain diplomatic relations. The recent cooling of diplomatic ties between Greece and the UK serves to illustrate this. A diplomatic meeting between the Greek and UK premiers was abruptly cancelled by the UK government, allegedly due to notice that the Parthenon Marbles would be raised as part of a wider agenda. The ownership of the Parthenon is disputed by the Greek after the British Empire were given the relics while Greece was under Ottoman rule. The matter also came at the cost of all other possible aspects of collaboration that were to be discussed and strained the diplomatic ties between the countries (Smith, 2023).

It is clear that the recognition of cultural sovereignty, and the productivity of the geopolitics is deeply entwined; it is also evident that a lack of consensus about the ownership of cultural artefacts, is capable of hindering both.

The case for democratisation

Having dispelled the myth that museums are neutral spaces, it is also necessary to note that museums possess many of the hallmarks of political institutions; centralised power, and authority, a structured governance system composed of directors, trustees and curators, responsibility for representation and a reaching social effect. Yet their political power is exerted implicitly, through what the relics represent, or the undertones of the narratives constructed around them. This distinctive expression of power within museums serves to contrast conventional political entities and makes it difficult to distinguish the political nature of them. For this reason, they have evaded scrutiny and demands of adherence to democratic standards that political institutions would typically receive. Embracing the notion of democratising offers constructive opportunities for the improvement of the current museum model.

Addressing the perceived elitism of museums

Held in high esteem as repositories of culture, knowledge and the history of ancient civilisations, museums have garnered frequent criticism for purportedly exuding an aura of elitism and inaccessibility which alienates disadvantaged social groups. They are often thought to cater to the understandings of the educated, middle-class (Fleming, 2002). The recognition of this dynamic has prompted many efforts of redress through initiatives and programmes spanning over decades; however, it is ultimately the institutional attachment to and retention of the current museum model which has facilitated the endurance of this exclusionary dynamic.

The ‘pursuit of academic excellence’ by experts and museum coordinators comes at the expense of ‘communicating effectively’ with the average person as audience member (Fleming, 2002). Through the presentation of specialised or abstract information, an intellectual hierarchy emerges between expert curators and the audience, who assume the role of passive recipients of this prescribed content (Jung, 2014, p. 274). With their own capacities for interpretation impeded or the opportunities for participation blocked, individuals may feel ‘marginalised’, struggling to engage with these institutions. This dissonance may result in the misunderstanding that museums are simply ‘warehouses of irrelevant and meaningless objects (Jung, 2014, p. 274).’

The democratisation of museums stands to dismantle these perceptions of elitism. By embracing inclusivity and empowering the lay person with agency, reciprocal benefits emerge. For museums, the discourse surrounding the interpretation of artefacts, or the meanings of exhibitions will be enriched by a multitude of perspectives. Inclusivity would also contribute to the deconstruction of intellectual hierarchies and the neutralisation of stultifying practices. Moreover, the democratisation of museums represents an expression of principles of equity since individuals may feel valued and respected through their contributions to the dialogues regarding their national heritage, reinforcing the message of inclusivity. By making museums more accessible, their social role will be redefined, evolving into hubs of discussion and exchange.

Transparency

The demands for the transparency of museums have amplified alongside the subjection of the provenance of the collections to heightened critical examination (Wróblewska, 2022, p.82). Transparency, as to performance and the decision-making processes enables individuals to monitor the internal workings of the institution. There is an established relationship between transparency and accountability, only through the access to readily available records of activities can citizens be 'aware of administrative practices to denounce dysfunctions and question actors on their conduct', enhancing their performance (Mabillard & Zumofen, 2017).

Today, museums should be institutions that the public can trust, yet the achievement of these aims is arguable impeded by opacity that characterises the operations of some of its most important aspects which have been identified as the 'authorship (of exhibitions or texts), decision-making processes (relating to the museum program and hiring policy) and power relations within the institutions (including funding dependencies) (Wróblewska, 2022, p.82).' To exemplify a facet of the need for transparency within museums, the aspect of authorship shall be expanded.

Museums assume a pivotal role in the dissemination of societal narratives thereby moulding public perceptions, national identity and a society's collective memory. This embedded authority engenders a corresponding obligation for transparency in the construction of these narratives; of the methodologies, processes and decision-making criteria underpinning the curatorial process.

Museums stand to become more transparent by providing clarity on the operations behind curation, and the ethical stands that must be adhered to through the practices. Additionally, enhanced engagement and critical awareness serves to catalyse the evolution of museums towards their optimal forms.

Representation

The discourse regarding representation within the senior ranks of museum administration and curatorship corresponds with the dialogue concerning the judiciary. One perspective of the argument suggests that if both curators and judiciary officials are expected to discharge their duties with impartiality, capturing a universality of experiences, then there is no need for demographic correspondence. In the context of the judiciary, the ECHR has stated that courts need not only be impartial, ‘they must be *seen* to be impartial (Baratashvili, 2021).’ This argument can be extended to museums as another institution where public perception is key. A lack of representation may significantly impact the public’s confidence in the ability of curators, in spite of their credentials, to capture the aspects of their identities, or to speak on their behalf. The extent of the public’s engagement within these institutions is therefore contingent on the perceptions of a museum's capacity for authenticity, an aspect reliant on the presence of a representative curatorial body.

Internationally, the field of curation seems to attract a homogenous profile of workers, marked by an underrepresentation of ethnic minorities . This trend reflects broader systemic inequalities visible in high level professional roles across various sectors.

The conspicuous absence of representation relating to cultural, ethnic, or socio-economic diversity (McCambridge, 2017), arguably weakens the confidence of a multicultural public that their experiences or heritage will be accurately portrayed. This may be an aspect of the disengagement of ethnic minorities within these cultural institutions; they may anticipate encountering well-worn hegemonic narratives or biased perspectives where their cultures are presented as subaltern.

A democratic paradigm shift holds the prospect for the demographic transformation of museum visitors, as exhibitions and the narratives they tell may resonate more profoundly with their audiences. Democratisation would not only foster a sense of empowerment, but would also serve to better represent an ever diversifying public.

Conclusion

The argument for the democratisation of museums hinges on the recognition of their political nature, one which is evident through the tone of their historical narratives, the power struggles which underlie the ownership of their relics and their effects on geopolitical relationships. Democratisation may aid museums in the achievement of the democratic standards of transparency and inclusivity that are imperative for public engagement, perceived legitimacy, and continued relevance.

1c) The Museum, a Conflict of Tradition and Progress

The institution of the museum is founded upon the observation of culture. Although largely influenced by cultural context it is orchestrated from an anthropological lens in order to inform the uninformed. Its permanence as an independent actor in our politically divisive context enables it to resist the push for change and evolution. This resistance is evident within existing structures and academic frameworks. The inflexible nature of museum curation renders the experience a slave to tradition; however, is also what provides its importance as an educational institution. There are established divisions that deter museums from fulfilling their potential to unite socio-political society through a shared identity and national pride. In order to ensure a successful transition to a place of greater cultural relevance, the process of curation must become equitable and therefore in line with the liberal political agenda of our modernised society.

Background

There are an increasing number of concerns raised about the museum curation process and whether it ethically reflects the subject it is representing. As we have established the primary function of a museum itself is to represent historical events and inform understanding of the given subject. Through representing a collective memory, race and ethnicity in the presentation of material remains and academic studies (Sodaro, 2018). The three primary roles of the socio-cultural museum in the prominent literature are; to act as truth tellers in representing history and preserving the integrity of the past, to serve as a space for reparation and healing for those who have been personally affected by the given historical events and finally to morally educate those who visit to ensure the worst of historical events do not repeat themselves (Sodaro, 2018). History must act as not simply a warning for the present but a careful examination of past inventions and how their construction was influenced by bias and potentially misinformation. Every museum must be observed as a separate case as each one has different environments and historical weaknesses associated with aggregation of the objects themselves and the way in which exhibits are displayed. As ethnographic museums, focused on the evocation of cultural and historical artefacts as opposed to art museums, become increasingly accessible for the wider public than any other time in history the greater criticisms coming to light are putting these cultural institutions among others in crisis (Snoep, 2020). Many of them are built upon colonial legacies and misrepresentation of identity, which sends a strong message in the national museum system that certain minorities

are not worthy of being represented. This inequality produces conflict through the clash with museologies dynamic resistance to change, which some believe requires the breakdown and restructuring of the system itself to inspire meaningful impacts. However this is a radical approach and could have far-reaching effects on the construction of national identity and is a complex issue to resolve.

Traditions & Progress

The domain of the museum has from its inception been held in the hands of the elite. Utilised by the elite as a vehicle to explore cultural development and study the human experience, however the attachment to tradition limits the opportunity to progress. The exoticism explored through the cabinets of curiosities etc. reflects a wealth of superiority inherent in the class system, where the other becomes tokenistic and cultural items are appropriated at length due to insufficient understanding of cultural importance. Essentially tradition is inherent in the institution, which often provokes intellectual and socio-political conflict through oppositional approaches to cultural representation. However this conflict between these traditional values and how they are portrayed to the modern audience is dependent upon a societal cleavage. One which traditionally appeared between those who are privileged and therefore given the opportunity to appreciate such establishments and those who were prohibited by their social-standing (Ariese & Wróblewska, 2023). Although policies have been implemented by prominent developed nation states in order to promote education and association between classes and the cleavage remaining is largely insignificant, there remains an established division between intellectual elites and the contemporary audience, however without opening a wider discourse with the public it is difficult to determine its effectiveness at fair representation and the future of the museum itself. This is important as national museums are emblematic of national identity and the chosen historical narrative. These are institutions supported by government funding and direction, without which definition and purpose would remain unclear. Tradition must be upheld to retain the important position museums hold in society currently however it can work symbiotically with advancement and a desire for progress when given a political agenda.

National Identity & Globalisation

The dilution of national identity places the museum in a precarious role where it is confronted with the reality of modernisation. The role of the museum and its curatorial dynamics are integrally defined by identity driven narratives and as such put at risk by the international agenda which bypasses traditional geostrategic boundaries. In response to the wave of counter cultural movements against modernisation and excessive levels of political liberation, they force the international community to seek the protection and sanctity of national identity (Habermas, 2016). This has far reaching impacts on how social interaction is defined and how we perceive our own historical origins. Museums are pressured by the public to revolutionise their practice and therefore concerned as to their role and purpose in this era of modernisation and neoliberalism. The idea of national identity has been emancipated by the international agenda and as a consequence concerns are growing around the ethical dimensions of cultural exhibitions (Simon, 2010). The complexity of achieving a realistic portrayal of history that is also supported by all participating actors is undermined. There are inherent challenges in presenting contentious historical events and how these are affected by the political economy (Autry, 2013) as history is a mosaic of complex perspectives.

Overhaul vs Reform

Counterculture and rebellion against the institution of the national museum is expressed through public dissatisfaction and the minimal relevance it obtains within an environment and culture it does not effectively represent, which forces the hand of those resisting change to make alterations in their current curatorial practice. Common arguments for the redundancy of the museum include the failure to adapt in the modern world and retain relevance for the modern viewer in an modernised environment where postcolonial thought has never been more prominent (Colwell, 2008). However a complete overhaul is not necessary and the museum could instead implement reforms in order to provide new perspectives on national history. Whereas other forms of exhibitory space renew their public spaces on a short term basis such as art galleries in order to maintain relevance as museums fail to do so. Throughout our extensive research we have determined that feedback and increased participation with the exhibitions by the public and a higher turn around of exhibits can be achieved by politicising the museum. The space can be dynamically transformed in order to reflect a new constantly evolving society (Simon, 2010). However it is important that

ethnographic elements are executed respectfully since de-colonisation of exhibitions is important to some societal groups but is also a very polarising subject. Moreover when it comes to ownership of indigenous objects the legal implications for museums and how they go about their exhibitions are far from few. As the subject remains incredibly contentious and the inherent challenges, exhibitions themselves continue to influence and corrupt the construction of a cultural memory (Autry, 2013). This tension that has been established repeatedly between the cleavages of traditional and modern values, intellectual elites and the public and finally the developed and developing world cannot be fixed by isolating these issues and failing to apply reforms.

Representation & Democratisation

The reason why it becomes so politically difficult and sensitive to approach these issues in the museum is underlined by the nature of the political order itself. These challenges are defined by the democratic boundary problem which outlines the issues that arise in the absence of universally recognised principles (Whelan, 1983). Some boundary problems in this scenario include who has the right to democratic decision making and how representation should be facilitated amongst different social groups (Owen, 2012). When there is no clear authority on ownership and representation, cultural identity can be appropriated and undervalued. Borders no longer retain their geographic and or ideological conditions and so the discrepancies of historical accuracy and the legacy of colonisation becomes paramount. The mass communication of cultural values and information following the period of mass globalisation has led to the aforementioned conflict between social groups who are no longer limited by their informational boundaries and now seek to express themselves through an ideational identity (Habermas, 2016). This identity remains intrinsically connected to culture and critical questions are raised about whose voices should be replaced and who has been marginalised in the construction of national history. The presence of ignorance and misinformation requires a democratisation of museology. Where political processes exercise a citizen's democratic right to policy similarly they can be used to exact a citizen's right to self determination and the exhibition of their cultural identity through the vehicle of the museum. Deliberation is occurring in the public sphere and without consolidating it within the museum process' the legitimate concerns will prosper and not allow museums to develop along with a modernised society.

The evolution of purpose

Identification is crucial and finding a way to depict the whole nation and its ethnic background in a single museum is a huge task, avoiding overcomplication such as new trends in immigration and historical revelations makes this task far easier for museums and the government, however it can run the risk of not being democratic. The transformation of the modern museum is one which is necessary however its practical evolution is difficult to determine. There is a construction of memory which museums are built upon and so to critique them is to critique the institution of the museum itself placing it in a precarious position.

Conclusion

Museums have far greater potential than they are currently fulfilling to reflect their narratives with greater accuracy and a moral foundation in doing so inspiring greater discourse and societal interaction with exhibitions. However, museums face some challenges in achieving a comprehensive and balanced narrative that helps propagate cultural heritage, some of which may serve as the impulse to critically evaluate processes of representation and models of management and decision-making. A space for reflection and deliberation allows museums to move beyond previous concerns and criticisms by integrating the public. If the public has the opportunity to contribute to a construction of national identity, it will allow them to realistically represent the modern socio-political agenda despite the sociological founded loss of identity and cultural synonymity. Political virtue supports national identity in doing so respecting the traditional aim and academic literature of museology itself.

Section 2: Citizens' Assemblies

Introduction

The implementation of citizens' assemblies within the context of museums will help foster collaboration and dialogue between the general public, experts on museums and culture, and museum administration and curatorial team. We propose the creation of two assemblies to tackle the two main aspects of museum operations (collections and exhibitions), and will use the Museo de America, a state museum dedicated to Spain's history in the Americas during the Spanish Empire era, to explain the structure of these assemblies and some of the logistics behind it.

2a) Democracy in the Form of Citizens' Assemblies

Deliberative democracy achieved through citizens' assemblies represents a single form of democracy's 'various interpretations' (Vrydagh, 2023, p.1). citizens' assemblies are understood to be 'participatory institutions' where a representative body of lay citizens convenes to "deliberate over a public issue so as to exert a public influence (Vrydagh, 2023, p.3)".

citizens' assemblies have a rich history of precedent yet within contemporary political discourse, they have attracted renewed interest in the numerous challenges that beset modern democracies. Thus, in their process of democratisation, through the direct implementation of citizens' assemblies, museums stand to circumvent the challenges of traditional representative democracies. In a citizens' assembly, there are typically three key phases; learning, where participants are educated on the subject matter by experts, stakeholders and advocates, discussion and conclusion (McKee & Pannell, 2024). There are also thought to be three core principles underpinning CAs, which are deliberation, inclusion and public influence (Vrydagh, 2023, p. 4).

Deliberation

Deliberation is held to be distinct from debating since its primary objective is not to persuade but rather to facilitate a 'mutual exchange of reasons oriented [...] to reach a shared practical judgement, (Owen & Smith, 2015, p228)' a means of consensus building. This is the notion at the heart of the theoretical paradigm of deliberative democracy, that 'all citizens' [...]

affected [by a policy] can participate in deliberation and will receive equal consideration (Vrydagh, 2023, p. 4).’ Under this form of democracy, legitimacy is determined on the extent to which a policy reflects the will of these individuals.

citizens' assemblies are designed to facilitate informed deliberation and reflection. Additionally citizens' assemblies invite a diversity of opinions into the deliberative process, through the recruitment of participants who represent the demographic variations of the society. In managing citizens' assemblies, it is essential to implement measures that mitigate any events potentially undermining the deliberative democracy process. A major aspect of this is the control of dominant voices to ensure that all participants have an equal opportunity to contribute effectively to discussions since, having ‘a seat at the table is very different from having a voice at the table. (Curato et al., 2019, p.68)’

Inclusion

Since citizens' assemblies aim to create the ideal conditions for deliberative democracy, the diversity of its participants should mirror the heterogeneity of the wider population.

However in democracy, inclusion has been obstructed by the trilemma posed by the principles of political equality, deliberation and mass participation (Vrydagh, 2023, p. 4):

- In instances where political participation and mass participation may be achieved, deliberation lack the necessary depth, ie. in elections
- Deliberation and mass participation naturally preclude political equality; as previously acknowledged there will always be dominant voices
- Thus the final arrangement pairs political equality with deliberation, with citizens' assemblies being a single manifestation. However in such circumstances mass participation may be omitted (Vrydagh, 2023, p. 4). .

However this may be the most favourable opinion, particularly in considering the justifying rationale. The forfeit of mass participation in a conventional sense may be redressed through the process of sortition, the means of selecting those who will participate in the assembly.

A strict approach to sortition demands that the citizens' assemblies become ‘deliberative microcosms (Vrydagh, 2023, p. 7).’ of the society in which they are implemented. Thus they are legitimate to the extent that they are statistically representative of the broader public. Thereby the decisions that they reach would be the same as those that would have been reached through mass participation, given the opportunities and level of understanding. Yet there are questions as to the viability of this approach; to satisfy these high demands of

representation, there would have to be far too many participants, which may again come at the expense of the quality of deliberation.

An alternative approach to sortition aims to make CAs small enough to be genuinely representative while representative enough to be genuinely democratic (Vrydagh, 2023, p. 4). Though the random selection of participants is still of paramount importance, the primary goal is one of correction, to engage the social groups who are typically excluded from discussions of socio-political relevance.

While the demands of statistical representation may be departed from, the composition of CA should be targeted to ensure that all groups are represented. While mass participation may not be achieved to its full extent, the most suitable alternative of representation typically is.

Political influence

For citizens' assemblies to serve their purpose of enhancing 'the democratic legitimacy of the political decision making process' the outcome of their deliberations must be integrated into public decisions. If not, the entire system would 'dissolve into tokenism (Vrydagh, 2023, p. 9).' frustrating its participants. The outcome of the efforts of the participants *must have* and *must be seen to have* public influence. This political influence may manifest itself in two different ways (Farrell & Stone, 2020, p. 240):

Strong Vision

This places confidence on the fact that the citizens' assemblies as truly representative of the population and reveal 'what the public would think, had it [...] opportunity to consider the question at issue. The strong vision would challenge any current institutional practices, by replacing and 'side-lining' any decision-making elites. The will of the assembly is what is to be enacted.

Weak Vision

A differing approach views citizens' assemblies not as a challenge to the authority of the political elites but rather as a process by which the political elites and ordinary citizens' can work together. The outcomes of the deliberations taken into advice or absorbed into the policies of the professionals (Farrell & Stone, 2020, p. 240).

2b) Germany, a Case Study for Democratisation

While doing research on how to comprehensively address every critical issue and structural component within our citizens' assembly we discovered a program run by DemocracyNext, a non-profit institution dedicated to preserving democratic institutions and values in a global political system currently at high risk from authoritarianism. The use of citizens assemblies in this area ensures innovative museum governance which supports deliberation and participation with diverse and broadly represented groups of people. The successful conduct of a citizens assembly at the Kunsthalle in Bonn in addition to one being held at the SKD in Dresden sets a precedent for the integration of history and politics the experience gained allows for experimentation in the area, as such the utilisation of this formative case study allows us to reframe its potential in other national settings (*Gesellschafts-Forum*, 2024). In that effect, enabling an efficient, truly democratic deliberative process which can be applied in Spanish museums.

DemocracyNext

The DemocracyNext organisation is a prime advocate for the expansion of applied democracy in society and how this expansion ensures greater equality and representation in a society driven by an inequitable hierarchical system. The application of democracy can inspire greater contributions from the public therefore improving the quality of an institution. In applying democratic values and strategies to a cultural institution, DemocracyNext is a pioneer of museology since it advocates for the evolution and development of the institutions themselves (*Gesellschafts-Forum*, 2024). As mentioned, The chosen cases are the Bundeskunsthalle and the SKD, although there is a disproportionate focus on the Bundeskunsthalle.. The aim outlined by DemocracyNext and the Bundeskunsthalle was to ensure the museum remained an active meeting place for socialisation and connectivity in addition to the provocation of ideological discussion on the chosen topic (*Gesellschafts-Forum*, 2024). The implemented structure consisted of groups ranging from thirty to thirty-five people selected by a lottery system to represent the demographics of the city it inhabits, moreover participants were required to currently live in Bonn or Dresden to be considered.. The use of extensive deliberation over the period of 4-5 days means the recommendations from participants can be much more comprehensive and based on consensus. Throughout the process the participants created a series of different personas through which to observe the museum from. This simulates the experience of a diverse range

of museum visitors. different personas that were established allowed participants to commiserate with those who don't feel represented or included within the museums domain. In terms of representation this is incredibly pertinent to our project as cultural museums handle delicate topics like historical discrepancies amid modern grassroots movements. These movements question the place of the cultural museum in a modernised society however administering the citizens' assembly through this strategy supports the role of these museums by helping them evolve to the realities of a diverse modern society with complex global roots. This structure was also followed by the other museums included in the project.

The nature of conversation within the citizens' assembly in the German case consisted of identifying the purpose of the museum itself and how it can be strengthened through various forms of interaction and creative freedom to the public. In order to provide foundational information on the curatorial process in the earlier stages, participants were walked through the values and history of museums, placing emphasis on the history of the Bundeskunsthalle itself. This ensured participants understand the importance of the exhibition process and how it reflects broader cultural identity and its transformation. The initial brainstorm was held with a panel of experts and identified answers to questions such as “What creative freedom should residents have in the Bundeskunsthalle in the future?” and “What themes and priorities should the Bundeskunsthalle set in order to convey democratic and participatory values?”. Identifying the purpose and role of the museum through the use of these questions emphasises the importance of participants' recommendations .

Participants: Proactive, Positive

The successful involvement of participants relies upon their interest and interaction with the chosen subject. Although initially in the case of the Bundeskunsthalle the participants as a collective felt disconcerted by their lack of expertise, the process produced impressive results and recommendations, acting as a necessary feedback mechanism for the cultural institution. They endeavoured to generally make the space more inclusive, through various collaborative schemes such as those written below (*Gesellschafts-Forum*, 2024).

- visitors bringing in their own artworks and promoting unticketed events to the wider public; this ensures inclusion of lower socio-economic backgrounds and a wider outreach for the museum
- Appealing to a younger audience through advertising schemes with celebrities and the promotion of events and exhibitions within public spaces.

Furthermore the feedback collected from participants was predominantly positive and the experience was described as enlightening. The participants have expressed a strong interest in seeing their recommendations put into practice, to the extent that they get in contact with the museum curators and commit time and effort into putting their ideas across. Which speaks to the value of these citizens' assemblies and the effect they have on participants, society becomes more invested in the issue at hand as the decisions are brought to the collective rather than solely decided by the highest authority. The only recommendation for the structure of the citizens' assembly itself was to repeat it in order to ensure a continuation of the feedback structure so the museums can evolve in time with their respective societies. Democracy can only be upheld through ongoing efforts to address systemic barriers and ensure meaningful participation from all members of the community.

The democratisation of museums is a revolutionary application of democratic deliberation which can have far reaching consequences for the future of representation and national identity. ; The idea of social inclusion and collaboration with the community in order to produce a more effective museum experience introduced by DemocracyNext, where the promotion of transparency and creativity among participants helps the aforementioned museums evolve with German society and its national identity, the potential for future developments in this area are limitless, supporting the power of the people and giving them a say in their own historical representation.

2c) Museo de America, a Hypothetical Proposal

To introduce our proposal for the establishment of citizens' assemblies in museums, we will be using the Museo de America in Madrid as a hypothetical case study to explain the procedure, structure, and scope of the proposed assemblies. The selection of this particular museum is due to the issue of universality, and how responses to such a problem may need to be more inclusive in nature.

Universality of Audience and the Museo de America

Regardless of how well-intentioned an exhibition organiser may be, it is very hard to create an exhibition which caters to a universal audience that transcends socioeconomic status and cultural background. The concept of 'affordance', borrowed from the realm of design, states that there is a certain understanding that is brought forward by a designed object, but that there is also a possibility of differing interpretations. In this same sense, artists and curators alike have very limited influence over how audiences perceive and react to the works in an exhibition and the underlying narrative, and it may lead to some backlash and controversy when dealing with sensitive subjects.

An example of this division can be seen in the response to Spain's revision of colonial legacy; Ernest Urtasun, the Spanish minister of culture, had stated in January 2024 that Spanish state museums must revise its colonial history narratives, presumably in order to create a less-biassed representation of history and to attract more progressive visitors, but the move was met with immediate backlash from traditionalists and right-wing parties that decried the move as "historical negationism" and "Hispanophobia". One case highlighted in particular is the Museo de America, a state museum located in Madrid. The museum, located at the edge of Ciudad Universitaria, is the second least visited state museum in Spain, receiving barely 65 thousand visitors in 2022, in comparison to the Museo Arqueologico Nacional, the most popular state museums that received more than 450 thousand visitors in the same period. Isabel Bueno, Associate researcher at the University of Warsaw, states that the main problem with the museum is that it lacks a coherent story; "[It is] an old museum with a non-existent discourse, not even a sensationalised one. The general public of nowadays has more need for knowledge"² (Marcos & Koch, 2023). Andrés Gutiérrez Usillos, the current director of the

² Original quote in Spanish: "Un museo antiguo con un discurso inexistente, ni siquiera tendencioso. El público de ahora tiene más necesidad de conocimiento. Además, ya viene con la mirada descolonizada".

Museo de America, also stated that they are currently trying to mount more exhibitions, which could be seen as the main point of attraction for the general public (Koch, 2023).

Therefore, the aim should not be to rewrite history and create a “villains and victims” narrative, but rather to widen the historical perspective and include as many voices as possible, while still respecting the point of view of the general public which will be interacting with the museum.

Proposal: Citizens' Assemblies in the Museo de America

While this section uses the Museo de America as an example of how to create the citizens' assemblies, the basis of it can be used as a framework for democratising museums, by adapting the core elements to the context of each museum and its audience.

Due to the complex nature of museum operations, involving both collections (which are often permanent in structure but allow for some form of rotation of artefacts and artworks owned by the museum) and exhibitions (permanent, long-term, or seasonal), there will be two versions of the citizens' assembly that focus on each of the two institutional structures:

1. “Temporary” citizens' assemblies that address the curation of temporary exhibitions. There may be several temporary assemblies running at the same time depending on the size of the museum and the amount of exhibitions it runs concurrently. They feature specialised informative sessions about the topics of the exhibition, and have a higher turnover of members.
2. A “permanent” citizens' assembly which deliberates on subject matters concerning the permanent collection hosted at the museum. This assembly can issue periodic recommendations on what artefacts/artworks to add to display, and can occasionally serve as an intellectual “ethical moderator” that issues reports and recommendations on museum-related issues and themes.

Temporary Exhibitions' citizens' Assemblies

The exhibition citizens' assemblies are more generic in nature, as they deal more with specialised exhibitions and require a deeper level of information, therefore for the sake of clarity, we will use current and past exhibitions in the Museo de America as a base for this hypothetical case.

- a. Prior to the temporary exhibition assembly, the curatorial team of the museum will create 3 preliminary narratives for the exhibition including a tentative list of artefacts/artworks to be displayed, which will serve as the basis for the deliberations.
 - i. “Mayans, a living population: biology and culture in current Maya society”³
 - ii. “Slavery and African Cultural Legacy in the Caribbean”⁴
 - iii. “Postures, objects, and meanings of rest in the Americas”⁵

These proposals could be centred around one theme, or could be entirely different topics. To facilitate explanation to the assembly, the museum can use a format similar to press releases (*Así me siento: Posturas, objetos y significados del descanso en América*), albeit more expanded to include explicit reference to topics to discuss, and a more expansive (yet not definitive) list of works or artefacts to include.

- b. The pre-exhibition assembly takes place over 2 weekends in 2 sessions each (total 4 sessions) with the following structure:
 - i. **Session 1** introduces an overview of the work of the assembly, the guest expert speakers, and the topic(s) of the exhibition, before explaining the basics of each of the narratives proposed for the exhibition.
 - ii. **Session 2** introduces the relevant experts who will give talks about themes related to the proposal and the history of some of the artefacts and other works, addressing any questions or concerns from the assembly regarding the themes explored (but not the actual content of the exhibition, as that is reserved for the curatorial team to answer). In the Museo de America case, it could feature guest speakers such as Mayan anthropologists, representatives from the Caribbean countries’ embassies in Madrid, historians from Latin American universities, among others.
 - iii. **Session 3** is a continuation of the expert informative sessions, but allows for room for discussion with the curators to understand the reasoning and logic behind the proposals.
 - iv. **Session 4** consists of group deliberation on which proposal the mini-public recommends, which they can vote for at the end of the session, reserving the

³ Original Spanish name: “Los mayas, un pueblo vivo: biología y cultura en la sociedad maya actual”

⁴ Original Spanish name: “La esclavitud y el legado cultural de África en el Caribe”

⁵ Original Spanish name: “Así me siento. Posturas, objetos y significados del descanso en América”

- right to vote for none of the proposals if they feel they are not adequate, providing a small justification for such a vote.
- v. The proposal that receives a majority of the vote overall will be used by the curatorial team to build the exhibition as they see fit.
- c. In case of a substantial number of participants voting “none”, there are 2 potential scenarios:
- i. In case of a plurality vote for “none”, **an additional session** will take place with the curatorial team to have the option to listen to feedback about the chosen proposal and incorporate it accordingly.
 - ii. In case of a majority vote for “none”, **an additional session** will take place with the curatorial team to understand the mini-public’s reasons for rejecting all three narratives, then **a shortened version of the citizens' assembly will take place over one weekend**, where the curatorial team will have to propose two alternatives that tackle the issues highlighted by the citizens' assembly. **Session 1A** will involve the explanation of each of the two proposals as well as having more discussion, before voting on the proposal in **Session 2A** (this time with no option for voting “none”).
- d. After the pre-exhibition assembly is concluded and the development starts, there will be **2 check-in/feedback sessions**: one halfway through the preparation of the exhibition where the mini-public gets to visit the space and see for themselves how the narrative works in practice, followed by feedback from the mini-public itself (with the possibility of another similar session if the preparation takes longer). The **last session** will take place after the conclusion of the exhibition, where there will be a last chance to give feedback on not just the exhibition, but also on the conduct of the citizens' assembly itself.

Permanent Collections' citizens' Assembly

The permanent collections citizens' assembly has two functions: The first is to recommend changes to the permanent collection displays, conducting a review of any elements pertaining to it (items on display, information cards, display locations, visit itineraries). The second is to issue recommendations about museum-related cultural issues, such as attributing works,

representation of cultural heritage, and returning artefacts to their home countries (non-exhaustive).

- a. Prior to every meeting, the curatorial team and the exhibitions and museology department create a list of potential review items to be discussed within the assembly.
- b. This assembly meets **quarterly** in double sessions over a weekend each.
 - i. **Session 1** introduces the current status of the museum's collection, and potential opportunities (such as adding a small set of artefacts to the displayed collection or expanding information available about a certain section). Guest speakers can be invited to talk about themes pertaining to such opportunities (i.e inviting an expert on a specific set of artefacts currently not on display to explain its relevance and importance, or historians to expand on the knowledge found in the museum about a certain era). It then allows for discussion with the experts and the curators of the museum.
 - ii. **Session 2** is the main deliberation session, where the assembly discusses the priority of what could be changed and what could remain as is. The vote can be conducted in two ways:
 1. Ranking the proposed changes, by order of importance.
 2. Voting Y/N for the adoption of individual measures.
 - iii. The measures that are considered of higher priority are then studied by the curatorial team to understand how it can be implemented, and request it from the administration of the museum.
- c. Alternatively, some quarterly meetings can be dedicated to the discussion of cultural issues (as mentioned above), using the same CA format. To facilitate this, a contact point could be set via the Diffusion and Communication departments to accept topics from experts previously invited to the assemblies (temporary or permanent), who develop a question and a plan on how to inform the assembly on the topic.

Selection System, Number of Participants

Following the principles of sortition explained in Section 2A, the selection method allows for the creation of a sample of the general population that is relevant to this project that is

representative of the diversity of the public, and ensures that all members are interested in participating.

The method involves two steps, first inviting all members of the general public who are interested in participating through a publicity campaign by the Ministry of Culture and the Museo de America that allows people to register the relevant details for the sortition process. To ensure that the subsequent sample is representative of the general public as close as possible, there will be some factors to be used:

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Level of education
4. Income level
5. Geographical criteria such as place of residence or rural/urban balance.

The last item is particularly important to ensure equal representation of the Spanish population. One proposed stratification is as follows:

1. 50% residents of the Comunidad de Madrid, split between 40% Madrid-born city/metropolitan area residents, 30% non-Madrid-born city/metropolitan area residents, and 30% rural CdM residents.
2. 50% residents of other areas in Spain, with 60% of that coming from areas outside the biggest metropolitan areas (Barcelona, Valencia, Sevilla, Bilbao, Malaga).

In terms of numbers, we propose a group of around 50-100 people for the temporary assemblies, and 100 people for the permanent assembly. We envision that the temporary assemblies will see a new group of participants for each assembly since its timeline is not fixed, while the permanent assembly can keep its members for a maximum of 2 years to ensure regeneration and a reasonable turnover.

It is important to mention that the proposed division is merely illustrative, and is left to the Museo de America and the Ministry of Culture to decide the specifics of the make-up, but it is imprescindible to ensure equal and fair representation and the interest of the mini-public to be created.

Roles of expert advisors and facilitators

The experts invited to the citizens' assemblies will represent a wide range of opinions and intellectual groups, to ensure a comprehensive narrative that minimises bias, and will give talks pertaining to either the topics of the proposed exhibitions, elements of the cultures represented in the permanent collections, or general museum culture issues. Some of the expert and interest groups could include:

1. Embassies and cultural interest sections in diplomatic missions
2. Indigenous rights activists
3. Indigenous and Spanish artists
4. Spanish Virreinato-era historians
5. Indigenous and Virreinato-era art experts from Spanish/Latin American universities
6. Research bodies (such as the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas)
7. Museologists and curators
8. Tourism boards

Questions/Topics

The main defined questions that are included in this proposal correspond to the main functions of both the temporary and permanent assemblies:

- a. Temporary assemblies: “Which of the following 3 proposals do you think is the most comprehensive representation of the potential topic of the exhibition?”
- b. Permanent assembly:

In the case of the permanent assembly, there is the possibility of other question formats that address museum culture issues, such as the following examples:

- a. “How do you view the current museum's representation of Afro-Caribbean art?”
- b. “Of which art form/era do you want to see more acquisitions into the museum's collection?”
- c. “What is your opinion on establishing dialogue with conservation archaeologists to study the current state of some of the artefacts featured in the museum?”

Communication, Transparency, Commitment

It is essential that the museums commit to take the recommendations issued by the assemblies into account and implement them as needed, as otherwise the assemblies' actual role will be much more diminished. Since the assemblies issue recommendations on various topics, there are different levels of commitment necessary:

- a. Temporary assemblies: the recommended proposal for the exhibition will be used by the curatorial team. As it is only a proposal that requires further development, the curators can take liberty in how they build the exhibition as long as they are adhering to the base requirements of the proposal and not deviating from them. The assemblies will get the opportunity to check the progress of the exhibitions and flag any potential issues (but they do not have the power to change the actual exhibition or stop it).
- b. Permanent assembly: the recommendations will vary according to the question proposed, but they will be studied by the museum's management and either implemented as proposed or not (meaning the administration cannot alter the measures proposed ex post facto). In case of cultural issues, the final result will be released by the assembly to the public, as an "intellectual" component to the assembly's work.

Potential Drawbacks

One of the main objections to the use of citizens' assemblies is the argument that there would be a lack of accountability in any scenario where non-elected representatives are expected to speak on behalf of their wider society. Accountability is understood to be where an agent is expected to answer to another for some state of affairs (Vandamme, 2023, p. 36); to prove that their judgements were reasonable and within the scope of their powers.

In representative democracies, elected representatives are expected to account for their actions to their voters. Thus they are typically motivated to act ethically in the interests of re-election. Removal from their place in office is the ultimate sanction. Since participants of citizens' assemblies do not rely on the approval of the public, they supposedly have no motivation to act in the interests of the public, they are free from such constraints.

However, such assumption relies on a narrow construction of accountability, one which cannot be disentangled from the use of sanction. Vandamme suggests that a more nuanced

argument would be that accountability of citizens' assemblies will not be able to be established *in the same way* as in the case of elected representatives (2023, p. 36). He points out that there are various dimensions to accountability. Aside from sanction based accountability, there may also be 'discursive accountability' which stresses the 'demand and supply of reasons and justifications' (2003, p.37). In the context of CA, discursive accountability may be achieved through transparency in practices, where there is a requirement for the provision of public reports on activities and deliberations, which may be made publicly available.

It is also important to note that in the context of CAs there is a difficult balancing act between the concepts of independence and accountability, both of which are integral to good democratic practice (Vandamme, 2023, p. 36). The greater the impact of public scrutiny or pressure on their assembly, the lower the chances of the assembly yielding authentic responses, ultimately defeating the object of the citizens' assembly. Furthermore, since our proposed model for public influence within citizens' assemblies is that they are advisory, that there is simply a mandate for professionals to use the assemblies' recommendations as a basis for their policies, then these key-decision makers remain accountable in the conventional sense (Vandamme, 2023, p. 36).

Thus, the conceptual challenge of a lack of accountability in citizens' assemblies may be effectively navigated.

Conclusion

While a novel concept that is yet to be implemented on a large scale in museums, citizens' assemblies bridge the gap between the traditions of the museum as an institution and popular participation in decision making through creating a middle ground where the general public is informed and educated in a balanced and comprehensive way about issues that pertain to how they want to see their history and identity presented, and allows for changes that satisfy all parties involved. DemocracyNext's success in their citizens' assemblies project in Germany, as exemplified by the Gesellschafts-Forum Bundeskunsthalle, shows that there is potential for replicating success in other museums that want to invite the public sphere to participate and engage with culture and heritage at their own terms.

Closing Remarks

This paper has examined the theoretical challenges that arise as a result of current curatorial practices, and how concentration of power and narrative control solely in the hands of curators inevitably risks the misrepresentations of peoples and artists while also leaving ambiguities as to the authorship of exhibitions and relics themselves. This centralisation of narrative control also stiles public engagement, reducing audiences to passive consumers of prescribed content.

The deconstruction of the fallacy of neutrality is vital for the case of democratisation of museums. Museums are political entities, the stories they convey are reflective of contemporary and historical political dynamics while they also have the capacity to impact geopolitical relations with regards to debates concerning ownership. The structural organisation of institutions also parallels that of typical political entities. Given that museums are political, they must adhere to the principles of transparency, inclusivity and representation necessary for good democratic governance.

Instituting deliberative democracy seems the most appropriate approach in the democratisation of museums and may be achieved through the implementation of citizens' assemblies. This offers a novel and unique opportunity for the public to exert influence over narratives that pertain to the national identity. Exhibitions would also be enriched with a variety of perspectives and a deeper understanding of cultural nuances.

Drawing inspiration from the successful initiatives of DemocracyNext in Germany, we have presented a similar methodology for the application of citizens' assemblies. The Museo de America has provided the foundation for our proposal. To distinguish between temporary exhibitions and permanent collections, we have recommended a dual approach to the governance and responsibilities of the respective assemblies, also providing a possible description on how the task of sortition may be approached.

Rather than overhauling the system entirely, our proposal aims simply to make it more accessible and inclusive by promoting public involvement. The recommendations arising from the deliberations of the citizens' assemblies would be advisory, allowing the assemblies to work in tandem with existing professionals.

While the use of citizens' assemblies often faces criticisms for a perceived lack of accountability, this concern can be effectively addressed by establishing accountability through innovative and discursive means.

Transforming museums through democratisation represents a powerful means of revitalising these cultural institutions by renewing public interest and guaranteeing their ongoing relevance in contemporary society. By adopting a more inclusive approach to governance and narrative construction, museums may foster a deeper connection with a broader audience. Museums would transform into vibrant and interactive spaces that reflect the dynamic nature of culture itself.

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Appendix A: Interview with Prof. Clara Zarza

This interview was conducted with Prof. Clara Zarza, art historian, curator and assistant professor at IE University, on March 15, 2024 in her office in the IE Tower campus. The interviewers are Alex “AlHasan” Boubou (co-author of this paper), and Sadia Humayra Diba, who is co-authoring a similar paper on accessibility in museums. Please note that the interview was transcribed using digital software, so it reflects speech-to-text patterns rather than written text.

Alex Boubou

So the first question that arises is what does your role as a museum curator entail? Like, for example, an exhibition that is targeted toward one artist or showcasing the work of one artist in particular?

Clara Zarza

So, what I would say is, first, that may change a lot depending on the institution and the, let's say, local team. So, there are two things to understand that are relevant. One is that museum exhibition spaces, non-commercial galleries tend to have internal creators and then individual creators for a set project. So, in my case, I was the individual creator for a specific project collaborating with the in-house creator. Aside from that, depending on the size of the institution, they may have a bigger or smaller team. So for example, the space designer, the one that chooses, let's say the identity of the exhibition in terms of graphic design, in terms of, I don't know, advertising around it etc, etc. Maybe someone internal or maybe someone that you choose independently, or sometimes you can negotiate that.

La Casa Encendida is not a huge institution. They do have a good internal team right at the time when I was working, they had an internal creator, and an internal assistant curator. So, the internal curator was more someone with whom I could discuss ideas at the level of: how are we going to go about the exhibition? What I want to present, and it's also the person to whom I would present the project as an external creator for approval. Then the assistant curator is more the person with whom I discuss all of the elements that are practical, from what kind of lighting do we want, how to experiment with different lighting, on what number of white do I want for the white walls, and if there's anything else, do we need to build any furniture for the institution? All of that goes with the assistant. And in this case, they also had an internal graphic designer or designer of the identity of the exhibition, with whom, of course the external curator, so in this case, me, would always be the head of that project. So you're always collaborating and taking final decisions. It's not that you're given, I think, but it's always a collaboration with a team that is pre-existing. So what I would say is that to me in this context.

My focus of responsibility or my role as creator was really to not only choose what you're going to show, but decide on how you're representing what you're showing to, how you're building a narrative, how you're communicating ideas about. So the artist is representing things, but you're also representing the artists as creators. More in that intellectual narrative mediation that is my role.

Alex Boubou

That actually raises the question, was there, for example, any sort of like clash between what the ideas that you bring as an external curator and what the museum's, I wouldn't want to say the word agenda, but how they perceive, for example, say the work of Bobby Baker and how they would have wanted to represent it. Was there some sort of clash in that sense?

Clara Zarza

So let me nuance this answer because it's yes and no. I would say that, when you present the project, the intellectual part of the project, "why this work? Why this selection of works?" and what I'm trying to say with this curatorial project, you're already discussing it with the institution's director and with the head curator, so there is an alignment already, very much at the beginning. And there I encountered no difficulties where I encountered maybe a bit more difficulty is in collaborating, it may be also due to inexperience in that sense, because the degree of experience that I had collaborating with intellectual peers is far broader, coming from academia, than the one I had collaborating, for example, with the marketing department or collaborating with the graphic designer. Yeah, right. So for the graphic designer, there is a different set of concerns that in some cases I understand and we can speak the same language and sometimes are different. So there he was trying to articulate his own narrative as he prepared the identity of the exhibition. And then there was not so much a clash, but I think just an effort at speaking different languages or having different concerns on what you're trying to communicate or how.

The experience of a little bit more clashing, I think, was with the marketing department, because I think the marketing department or the press department, the one that communicates with the press and issues the press release and gives a little bit of a selection of what images from the show are going to be sent for press, Etcetera. Because to me, one huge concern in this exhibition is that the artist that I was showing has, like many other artists, traditionally being represented through her personal experience of mental disease and generally personal biography. And to me, it was important to remove that element of sensationalism from the narrative and to me, addressing that with the marketing and the press team was very important and trying to make it not the center of the discussion.

Alex Boubou

Like making sure that that is not the way that Bobby Baker should be represented, especially when you're pushing it out to like broader media.

Clara Zarza

Yeah, because it would also be the easiest way to make it visible and attractive to a broader audience. So trying to find maybe other easy tools for attraction that wasn't the sensationalistic narrative about the personal experience of the art.

Sadia Diba

Yeah. So I just wanna know, what do you think is the purpose of museums? Like what strategies do you think we should use to achieve those purposes? And what do you think about the issue of democratizing museums? Does it mean something to you does provoke something to you or is it just like something that you didn't really think about ever?

Clara Zarza

No, it's a huge concern to me. My background is as an academic. As an academic, you tend to work very much your ideas for, in a certain sense, an elitistic circle, not elitistic necessarily in terms of class, but definitely in terms of interest or knowledge. You're writing already for a subgroup of intellectuals specialized in the field right and to me, what is what was radically different and very exciting of creating a curatorial project that also had the visibility that La Casa Encendida had was that... I always feel like academia has a very slow process of reaching the broader audiences. You first write this very academic paper, that very academic paper may have an impact on the way things are taught, the way things are taught may have an impact on the way things are seen and it very slowly. Maybe in the frame of 10 or 15 years, a new idea reaches let's say everyday life.

What I think museums' role is, or at least museums roles and think here. I'm thinking about contemporary museums, which is something very different because here it's not about what are we preserving from history but rather "What are we showing? What news stories are we telling?". In that sense to me, it should be something that is accessible to all, not only in practical terms, so not only in economic terms, in terms of space and accessibility and in terms of having elements that engage in different ways different audiences.

But also intellectually and with that, what I would like to say is that. There are many ways to make a discourse sound extremely sophisticated, and sort of wink at the audiences you want to impress, and there are other ways in which a discourse can be incredibly oversimplified, and even taken to the superficial, and to the stereotypical. And to me, the role of good curatorial projects is to do none of those is to try to maybe not create a very narrowed closed down discourse, but bring out ideas and questions and materials that can engage in different ways, different audience. In an article I build an argument and I want the argument to be what I want to say, and this is the narrative in an exhibition. There is a construction of a certain narrative, but to me it had to be much more open, less argumentative or less about a message and much more about how can I let the art speak and engage. How can I articulate it in ways that I open up to, maybe things that you wouldn't look at immediately but without telling the audience what they show?

And in terms of accessibility, we thought a lot about it. It's a huge concern for Bobby Baker. Bobby Baker herself has made her whole art about democratizing art and about making art live in a certain way. The museum space. Because the museum space felt distant and elitistic and about, say, mystifying, or magnifying the spectacularity of art. Her practice has often been in, I don't know, a Botanical Garden, or on the streets or in a bar, or she's intervened, or in a school, or she's intervening in different spaces a lot in order to engage with different audiences, and that's always a big concern. So the first thing that we had to discuss, it's a lot of the material was drawings that Bobby Baker had done over the years. And so they had to be in [...] show glasses (vitrines). Whose size are we measuring to set this up right? Who is going to [see it]? What Bobby and I were discussing is we wanted so that kids or someone in a wheelchair can look at the vitrines and not just someone that's standing at a, let's say, supposedly normal height, or let's say standardized normal height. So we started there in very pragmatic terms of the exhibition is how do we make this something that we can look at, and that was, for example, something that had more debate with the institution; we wanted to lower it more, but the institutions say they can't lower it that much, and there was a bit of a back and forth on can we lower some things more and something that how come we play around it. I don't think that we solved the issue, but it was definitely a big part of the discussion, how do we make certain materials more available. For example, for some of the materials that were a bit maybe higher and at that standardized height, we also reproduced in an iPad format that was lower and that you can move through.

Exercises like that were part of it, and in terms of discourse it was about introducing much less text on my part than many exhibitions do, and maybe providing some more information outside of the exhibition space, like through the web page or through a little video that you could look at or things or interviews to the artist, but not necessarily when you're-

Alex Boubou

It's to avoid giving the narrative, like spoon-feeding the narrative to the audience essentially, You have to look for individual pieces to kind of piece it all.

Clara Zarza

Also, if you maybe after seeing the show you want to explore more rather than sort of pre-emptively.

Sadia Diba

Have you seen like, democratization change over time in museums? Have you seen like that? Is there any factors that are influencing it?

Clara Zarza

Museums historically are born with the aim of democratizing historically a big contextualization of the museum was the Louvre after the French Revolution, and now the collections are not owned by the upper class or the monarchy, but are owned by the people

and should be accessible to the people. And that's an idea that is very much, let's say, the second thought anyone ever had about the museum. If the first one was preservation the 2nd was that. There's always been a discourse of democratization, and I think more and more museums have to justify their democratization as part because most museums are either state-owned or financed

to a certain extent or are, let's say, supported by endowments or donations. there's always this importance, and I don't want to sound cynical, of showing and proving that this is a social agenda that should be as outreaching as possible. So I think that's very much the status quo of the discourse. I think more and more that effort becomes more nuanced and complex.

It's not just about having free open days, but it's also about accessibility. It's also about what elements would make it accessible to different people, social classes, sizes and bodies, etc. What I would say is that exists in parallel to a much less explicit effort to retain the specialness of the museum, the uniqueness of what you're going to see. And it's hard to retain the idea that this is an exceptional place with exceptional things while making it completely accessible, and I think sometimes that comes into tension, and I think sometimes there's still certain obscurity, maybe not so much in how easy it is to go practically or physically, but yes, how much it may feel something that is there for you right?

On the other hand, I think there's the other extreme which is the search for big numbers of visitors and the effort to create, especially with contemporary art, big installation art to create exhibitions that are what was called the blockbuster show, something that is just going to look very mediatic, very on the opposite, easy to digest, easy to understand, and unproblematizing. I actually just read last night this hilarious critique of MoMA's latest [...] AI related art piece and how it's made to just be fun, instagrammable and not pose any questions. So I think that's the other extreme of this democratization is, let's just make it reproduction of entertainment culture.

Alex Boubou

Do you think that there is a difference, for example, between state-owned museums like Museo Reina Sophia or Museo del Prado versus a smaller museum like La Casa Encendida and Museo ICO? Do you think that there's a difference in the way they approach the topic of democratization? Like, for example, there is the official Spanish narrative on colonial history or contemporary Spanish art, so would smaller museums perhaps be more willing to kind of expand and push the boundaries of democratization as opposed to bigger museums?

Clara Zarza

I absolutely think so. I think there's two interesting things in relation to that. State-owned museums [...] are normativize. In legal terms, they have to fulfill certain requirements, they have to respond to certain requirements, and that way they're similar to universities; We have to prove that we've done this number of exams, we have to then pass a sort of let's say state examination. They have to justify. That happens too, for example with state-funded neighborhood cultural associations. Right. It's like, OK, what was your program? Did your

program address every kind of audience? For example, if you think of Espacio Abierto Quinta de Los Molinos, which is not an Art Museum, but it's a Cultural Center, they have to prove they have activities for 3rd age (retired people, 3ª edad), for children... What I think happened through that is that, because that has to be sort of evaluated at the end of the year. It also becomes much, much more conventional on how democratizing is understood.

Whereas La Casa Encendida, which is interesting because it's in between; It has some elements of state funding, but it's much more independent and it comes from an independent funding as well, I think they can experiment much more with what that democratization may mean. They don't have to compile a series of predetermined boxes in the same way. So I feel like they tend to do a lot, but maybe are focused on very different audiences rather than trying to make everything they do accessible to everyone. La Casa Encendida, for example, did have a lot of. Elements of the program to make their big exhibitions etc. For example, one part of my task was to plan how and collaborate with the person that did the visits for disabled audiences, mental disabilities in general, and they brought different groups to visit, and there was a specialist organizing those. I had to team with her to sort of work out how we would go about it, but she had a very specific specialty on how then she would perform those visits. Similar with children there was. So they definitely had that element. But I feel that then they go on to experiment on projects that can address small subcultures, that can engage... like for example, they said, if you want to do any kind of project that relates to the exhibition and may allude to another set of population; we did a project with [Stay-at-home mothers] and how they could engage with the exhibition, and we had this fantastic workshop in which they engaged with Bobby Baker doing sort of an art project with Bobby Baker and then engaging with the exhibition. So they they don't necessarily need to meet, let's say, all the quota in the same way and therefore have room for elements of experimentation that I think are interesting.

Alex Boubou

So recently the Minister of Culture here in Spain, Ernest Urtasun, mandated that state museums kind of revised the colonial narratives or the colonial legacy that is presented through the museums. One museum in particular, Museo de America, is actually the second least visited State museum in Spain (I think the smallest is somewhere in Valladolid). Do you think that state museums perhaps now have this kind of institutionalized resistance to change? The Minister of Culture wants to kind of change those narratives, but there's like a lot of pushback by some museums saying "We don't know how we can represent it differently". Do you think that that would be an issue in the long run?

Clara Zarza

Specifically, I don't know enough about the subject, although it touches me closely because I used to go as a kid so much to the Museum of America and it's a museum I've never gone back and haven't taken my children to because it has gained a certain depressing atmosphere. Somehow I think part of that is the lack of curatorial renovation. So not just in terms of discourse, but the effort. If you go, for example, the the opposite case, the Archaeological

Museum, the Archaeological Museum was a museum that was getting a little depressing a couple of years ago, just out of dustiness and lack of effort to engage its audiences and now has made a fantastic effort to make it a place you want to be in and has a way of presenting information that is much more complex, and has different layers and engages with different audiences. For example, if you go with kids, they have itineraries where the kids have to find different objects... like they've made it so that it explains its context so much better.

The Museum of America, one of the big debates, is something that I remember as a kid fascinated me with the shrunken heads. And this is a big museological debate. What do we do? Do we remove that? Just remove it because it's very problematic to show it? Or can we show it in a way that rethinks and questions? And it's a debate that really comes everywhere in relation to new race consciousness, also the problems that certain tendencies towards cancel culture have provoked; like, should Disney just take away the part in Peter Pan where the supposed and still called Indians, which are the American Natives are represented in a ridiculous way? Or is it enough to present a text at the beginning as you find now in Disney?

I think that in small state museums in Spain, the resistance -And this is not [...] enough of an informed understanding- is similar to the change in the educational system, which is we don't have resources to do this transition well. So how are we going to develop a nuanced discourse about something we're not familiar with, if we don't have the team, if we don't have the curator? I think it's a matter of not just individual resistance to change, but of state investment. If you want to make a change such as that one, it requires a lot of people thinking how it's going to be done properly, because the path is not obvious.

Alex Boubou

One issue particularly that was highlighted with the Museo de America is just like you said, the lack of curatorial renovation. They said that there's like no coherent narrative, it's just a disjointed aggregation of artifacts, essentially, and they did not even build a narrative that supports, for example, the Spanish view on colonialism, nor that of anti-colonialism, that is. Here I bring up a quote [...] from Lucy Lippard about how there are overlapping histories, the overlap of any kind of narratives. Of course, there's the Spanish understanding, but there's also the understanding of, like the Native Americans or other people that were colonized. But like, she says that there's kind of like this impossibility of collectivizing we cannot represent all of these different histories all at once. So is it perhaps that, such a museum would need to represent only one view or the other? Or is it [...] catering to make many exhibitions that could represent like the different views instead of you know making it for entire museum level?

Clara Zarza

2 responses to that first to the later [sic]. I think the museum can find, with the right time and effort as a curatorial team, many paths to solve that issue of too many narratives to tell others at once right. Maybe you don't have to tell all the narratives. Maybe you can open up issues

and questions without deciding all the overlapping histories of how even the museum came into being.

In that way, the Reina Sofia did a very interesting strategy which was, slowly over time because of budgetary issues, hiring specialists to create itineraries. So the museum setting is set, but then they have a special list on, for example, “performance and the body”, that chooses a series of pieces through the exhibition and creates an itinerary that you can, as a visitor, choose to make, and then it prepares a series of information and texts. [It’s] just one of the ways in which you can overlap narratives, even over time, if you wish to make that more complex.

The other part is that [...] everything you do from a class to an exhibition to a permanent collection, to a documentary, you are making choices right of what you're living in and what you're bringing out. Maybe there are overlapping histories that are relevant to the museum, but maybe not all of them are as relevant currently because it also doesn't have to be permanent for the rest of eternity. So maybe we can make a curatorial revision to the museum for the next 50 years, and not for the next 300.

Alex Boubou

It's just to make sure that perhaps we are not rewriting history, but revising how history is shown so that everybody kind of gets equal treatment, yeah.

Clara Zarza

Yeah. And in that sense, what I'm trying to say is that I don't think that should diminish the desire to make this revision, that it's too complex or too many things we could look at. In the case of the museum, the Archaeological Museum, there was such an investment in a team of creators and specialists that there was even a series of months in which they were just debating whether the Museo Arqueológico Nacional should be called that, or Museo Nacional Arqueológico, and the nuance of the meaning; is this representing the whole nation, or is it the central museum, with all of the implications that are relevant at the time to Spanish politics? So what I'm trying to say is that, with the right investment and the right team of creators and specialists, there could be very rich and varied possibilities of building revised narratives that don't have to be a “mono narrative”. It doesn't have to substitute one narrative with the next, it can be much more.

Alex Boubou

How do you think that group curation would work in that in that sense? So, for example, say that you kind of like allow the audience to have a voice in in deciding how which pieces they want to represent (want to see represented, that is) or how they want it to be represented. How do you think that would work? How would the relationship between the curator and the audience would be in that sense? Since usually the curator is not somebody that the audience interacts with whatsoever or even hears the names of, really. They're not aware of their existence.

Clara Zarza

It's hard to give a good answer because I haven't experimented yet with that kind of project. I am very wary of processes in which there is a clear authority and there is a strategy on the part of authority to waiver that authority, but just temporarily. It's a little bit like the emancipated spectator. This idea of [...] the professor, I am the one with authority in this context, I waiver the authority over this period of time within these conditions, and then I decide back.

So I think, [in] fantasizing or idealizing too much about the level of absolute impact that that could have, right or that absolute freedom of those participants that that could have, even if it was given and conditioned, there's so much preconditioning of "I don't know about this. I can't say [anything] about this". I guess with children, they have less of that cultural conditioning [...], but I think many people would say "maybe I would do that, but what do I know?" There's a sense of that, even if you created conditions. At the same time I do think it's important for the specialist whatever also that it implies- to revise its position, both in terms of its authority, but also in terms of how much the specialist thinks the specialist knows about what the audience needs. But at the same time, I think things have to then be filtered back and questioned.

So to me, collaboration is about having different participants at different stages. I would have to dedicate a lot of time to think, how would that work in a way that I would be convinced by. I think you can take that in many ways. You can have, let's say audiences participate prior to it. You can have different members of the team.

It's a little bit like a film, like a curatorial project, is never an individual project, and recognizing the lack of individuality, the role that so many layers play in that, but also understanding that there is a process in which that goes back to, let's say, a certain degree of centralization. There are more and more curatorial collectives, which is something that I think is very interesting because it's different people from different backgrounds, maybe non not non-specialist, but gives that element of not one figure deciding.