Museums: Supporting the Varied Needs of their Communities

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My efforts for this paper included careful deliberation as to what topic to focus on, searching for sources that could support my arguments, gathering feedback from others, not to mention writing the paper. The strategy involved planning out these steps and working through each one. However, the process was more challenging than this list might lead one to believe. I struggled with narrowing the topic for this assignment. It was hard to latch onto just one aspect. Indeed, looking back at notes from brainstorming, I see that my thoughts were quite different from where they ended up, and I remember wrestling with what direction to go.

Library database searches helped lead me to a more focused route. By typing in key terms to the Worldcat Discovery search tool, I was able to jump from resource to resource and consider how I could weave them all together. I still, ultimately, chose to tackle three themes, but the ability to download articles or instantaneously pull up portions of books helped guide me, especially as a distance student, to the topics that I pursued. The theme of "third spaces" had been outside of what we'd covered in class and emerged due to my research. This process led me to discover that there might be some gaps in the literature in terms of how "creative placemaking" and "museums" intersect. The research also led me to new resources related to "cultural democracy." Overall, my paper ended up integrating ideas and sources that arose as I was using the Goucher Library system and from prior knowledge. This experience reinforced the fact that research can evolve as you go and build on previous thinking. It's an important reminder that the research process benefits from time to explore various avenues in order to push into new territory.

Museums: Supporting the Varied Needs of their Communities

Museums have long been institutions dedicated to preserving objects and significant cultural

and historic artifacts. Growing out of cabinets of curiosities in the 16th century, museums have a

strong association with presenting information through exhibitions. Historically, these experiences

have been designed by curators with deep academic knowledge of the topics at hand.[1] And while the

educational mission of museums has been acknowledged and promoted for years through

programming efforts, recently museums have been going further to embrace their roles as

community spaces. Indeed, this work is pushing museums to re-envision their overarching role and

the type of work they do. This paper will examine how museums are particularly suited to being

"third spaces," encouraging cultural democracy, and supporting creative placemaking.

The Evolving Role of Museums

As described on the American Alliance of Museum's (AAM) website, "Museums tell

important stories by collecting, preserving, researching and interpreting objects, living specimens

and historical records."[2] Indeed, museums have traditionally fulfilled these roles on a vast variety of

topics ranging from art to science to history. Yet in the last 30 years there also has been an increased

focus on the work of museums to be of "public service."[3] In an overview on how museums have

been changing, Alexander and Alexander indicate that at the end of the 20th century scholars and

museum organizations such as AAM and the International Council of Museums were broadening

their view of what museums can and should be to their communities. They highlight how Stephen

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[1] Edward P. Alexander and Mary Alexander, *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums.* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2008), 5, 192.
[2] "Museum Facts," American Alliance of Museums, accessed December 2, 2017, http://www.aam-us.org/about-museums/museum-facts.
[3] Alexander and Alexander, *Museums in Motion,* 283.

Weil and Bonnie Pittman were among those making the case for museums to be places of "service to audiences [a role which] trumps the traditional demands of collections and cements the museum solidly within communities."[4] This thinking reflects the evolving nature of how those in the museum profession view their responsibilities to their visitors.

Museums as Community Gathering Spaces

One idea that expands the notion of what museums can offer and that has resonated with the field is that of being a "third space." Ray Oldenburg used this term to propose that people generally inhabit three types of environments: work, home, and someplace where they can interact with others in informal ways.[5] Examples of this in-between space typically include places where people can drop-in and relax either by themselves or with others. The subtitle of Oldenburg's 2005 book *The Great Good Place* outlines how various locations can serve this role including "Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community." Even though Oldenburg mentions different places that can fulfill this need, he argues that there is a lack of these outlets in current American life.[6]

Museums are starting to recognize that they can offer their audiences a similar type of place for informal encounters. As a Foresight Research Report notes:

> In recent years, museums have jumped on the third space bandwagon, realizing that modeling the concepts of third space would be a great way to reach new and expand existing audiences. During this time, museums also realized that audiences were not just focused on educational experiences, but were interested in social experiences, too. Audiences wanted to

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[4] Ibid., 284.

[5] Ray Oldenburg. *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*. (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2005), xvii.

[6] Ibid., xviii.

participate in activities and share in conversations… [C]ommunities now perceive museum spaces as more than the museum itself, but as places to engage socially, emotionally, and intellectually.[7]

Certainly, museums are and more could be prime locations for serving their communities in this way because they often have many of the characteristics of third spaces that are crucial for carrying out this type of work. Perhaps the most obvious way that museums support these objectives is to encourage visitors to engage intellectually in a variety of subjects. Whether through exhibits, programs, lectures, discussions, or other types of offerings, museums are indisputably natural locations for getting visitors to think deeply about a topic.

Several examples of how museums can meet the social needs of their audiences come to mind. Museums typically have cafés, spaces where visitors can enjoy something to eat or drink while spending time with others. As various travel websites report, museum cafés have recently been getting press as establishments in and of themselves and have been praised as places "you need to eat at now."[8] Moreover, hoping to fill a social gap in people's lives, museums are holding events aimed at bringing people together. For example, Peabody Essex Museum's PM "after hours party series" includes opportunities to enjoy art, listen to music, eat, drink, and generally "interact with artists and performers, tinkerers and thinkers."[9]

In regard to supporting the emotional realm of visitors, many museums recognize that they have spaces and artifacts that can help visitors in their day-to-day lives or soothe them during times of incredible stress. For instance, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, has been able to meet visitors' wide-ranging emotional needs in a variety of ways. From occasional Saturday morning yoga classes

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[7] David Bloom et al. "Foresight Research Report: Museums as Third Place," (California Association of Museums, 2012), 8, http://art.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/CAMLF_Third_Place_Baseline_Final.pdf.
[8] "10 Museum Cafés You Need to Eat at Now," TripSavvy, accessed December 8, 2017, https://www.tripsavvy.com/the-worlds-best-museum-cafes-4144731.
[9] "PEM/PM," Peabody Essex Museum, accessed December 8, 2017, https://www.pem.org/visit/pempm.

that help people stretch mentally and physically to supporting the psyche of the Boston community after the 2013 Marathon tragedy by hosting a community art-project initiative as well as through special loans from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the MFA recognizes that it can be a place "of solace and inspiration."[10]

Not only do museums have many of the characteristics of third spaces, but it seems they already bring in people looking for these types of opportunities. Indeed, research has shown that visitors are motivated to attend museums for a variety of reasons beyond seeing the exhibits on display. John Falk's "Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience" is perhaps one of the more well-known pieces of recent literature that looks into this issue and proposes that visitors fall into five different types: "Explorer, Facilitator, Experience Seeker, Professional/ Hobbyist, and Recharger."[11] While this work is not without its critics, Falk argues that people who land in the category of "Rechargers" specifically go to museums in order to soak up what the space has to offer and "to avoid, if only briefly, the noisiness, clutter, and ugliness of the outside world."[12] In other words, these individuals seem to be seeking what Oldenburg had described as a "third space" experience or someplace where they can relax by themselves or with others.

While these are all examples of how museums can and already are acting as "third space" venues, one question for museums, as they look for ways to take on this role in a more official capacity is, how can they continue to meet this need as times change? Indeed, a Discussion Guide created by the Institute of Museums and Library Services explains, "The challenge for museum and

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[10] "Namaste Saturday," Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, accessed December 9, 2017, http://www.mfa.org/programs/series/namaste-saturday; "To Boston with Love," Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, accessed December 10, 2017, http://www.mfa.org/exhibitions/boston-love; "Homer, Leighton, Manet: Paintings from The Metropolitan Museum of Art," Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, accessed December 9, 2017, http://www.mfa.org/exhibitions/homer-leighton-manet.
[11] John Howard Falk, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*. (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2009), 158, Kindle.
[12] Kathleen Tinworth, "Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience. by John H. Falk." *Museum Anthropology* 34, no. 1 (2011): 83; Falk, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*, 203, Kindle.

library leaders is to identify what the 'Third Place' will look like in the future and how their institutions can enhance their positions as forces for civic engagement and social cohesion."[13] This document emphasizes how museums "already act as safe communal spaces for people to interact with one another" and suggests that museums will be able to contribute to the physical and virtual third spaces of the future that will bring people together or allow for personal relaxation.[14]

Third Space Case Example: Worcester Art Museum

One specific institution that has put time into thinking about how it can be a third space for its community is the Worcester Art Museum (WAM). This museum, which has well-known European, American, and Asian art as well as a renowned armor collection, has recently struggled with attendance numbers.[15] Thus, in 2014, as part of an effort to be more inviting to the community, WAM worked with students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute who were taking part in an initiative with the Worcester Community Project Center to consider how it could become a third-space. The students involved in this project undertook a literature review and additional research to learn more about third spaces so they could offer suggestions to WAM. During this process, the team went on site visits, gathered interview and focus group data from staff at WAM, and surveyed visitors about general reactions to third spaces and specific questions about WAM. Site visits to other local third space examples included popular chain stores where people like to spend extended

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[13] Erica Pastore, "The Future of Museums and Libraries: A Discussion Guide" (IMLS-2009-RES-02). (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2009), 9.

[14] Ibid., 9-10.

[15] "Collection Highlights," Worcester Art Museum, accessed December 9, 2017, http://www.worcesterart.org/collection/collections.html; Steve Barker et al. "Creating Third Spaces at the Worcester Art Museum." (Worcester Community Project Center Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 2014), 21, https://web.wpi.edu/Pubs/E-project/Available/E-project-050514-083355/unrestricted/Creating_Third_Spaces_at_the_Worcester_Art_Museum.pdf?_ga=2.57918313.278535070.1513127563-1612277633.1510513303.

periods of time, a bookstore that includes a bar, a supermarket, another museum, and a garden.[16] They also interviewed owners of the bookstore to learn how it became a gathering place. These experiences gave them a first-hand look at how other third spaces are set-up and a sense of how WAM could use this thinking to have a deeper connection with their community.

Ultimately, the project team offered recommendations for how the museum could better embody third space characteristics and made renderings of how certain areas in the museum could be adapted. The students made suggestions that "WAM should have free admission, Wi-Fi and food and drink accessibility."[17] They felt that the museum should continue to offer events that pull in the community and could build off of past Third Thursday programming that included music. The team of students made recommendations for how specific galleries and spaces connected with the museum could be enhanced and reconfigured to enhance visitor comfort. They also noted that further research could focus on learning more about the demographics WAM wants to target, a cost analysis of their suggestions, and investigations of additional examples of third spaces.[18]

As the work done by the Worcester Art Museum made clear, if museums are interested in being third spaces, they need to consider visitor needs. Central to making someplace an inviting third space is considering the actual environment as well as the feelings that visitors have in that space. "The Convivial Museum" by Kathleen McLean and Wendy Pollack provides guidance on key aspects that can help museums with the process of "welcoming people and making them comfortable, engendering trust and fostering relationships, and inspiring action."[19] They identify a range of factors that contribute to visitors' experiences including the "approach, steps & stairs,

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[16] Barker et al., "Creating Third Spaces at the Worcester Art Museum." 24, 26.
[17] Ibid., vii.
[18] Ibid., x-xi
[19] Kathleen McLean and Wendy Pollack. *The Convivial Museum*. (Association of Science-Technology Centers, 2011), 1.

entry, orientation" along with "seating, ambience, sound, light."[20] All of these things contribute to

the notion of "being alive together."[21] By paying attention to these areas, McLean and Pollack

propose that this will lead to a "convivial museum" which is an idea that pushes the notion of "third

space" even further. To McLean and Pollack,

> It is not enough simply to bring people together. There are plenty of places where people
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> congregate, socialize, and talk. Convivial museums deepen the conversation and foster a
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> genuine meeting of minds by offering up some "third thing" as a focus of common interest
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> and concern. That third thing could be an inspiring object or work of art, a program about a
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> pressing local issue, an intriguing phenomenon, a provocative story. Sharing these
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> experiences with others and grappling with what they mean transforms a museum visit into a
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> convivial experience that opens the way to engagement.[22]

The "third thing" that McLean and Pollack acknowledge as unique to museums is that they can

encourage visitors to have deeper engagement with the topic at hand, the people they are with, or

perhaps even themselves. Thus, while it is important to encourage museums to consider themselves

as places where visitors can take part in third space activities, museums are actually different from

other locations that fall into this category. This is because, not only can museums be the setting for

these types of experiences, but museums can offer additional forms of engagement. The next section

of this paper will explore this idea of engagement through the lens of cultural democracy.

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[20] Ibid., iii.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 105.

Museums as a Force for Cultural Democracy

It is typical for museum programs and exhibits to have goals related to engagement. Indeed, as explained in the report "Strengthening Networks, Sparking Change: Museums and Libraries as Community Catalysts," museums are often regarded as institutions that can provide "cultural engagement" so their audiences have the "opportunit[y] to experience [their] own cultural legacy and those of other residents."[23] Yet it has only been relatively recently--with the growing emphasis on co-creating exhibits and programming--that museums have started to truly embrace efforts that support the notions of cultural democracy. In doing so, museums have been able to widen their approaches for creating welcoming and inclusive environments.

While museums have not necessarily always considered their role as connected to cultural democracy, there is recent evidence that more and more organizations are supporting work that illustrates these ideals. Cultural democracy at its most basic includes:

- "protecting and promoting **cultural diversity**, and the right to culture for everyone in our society and around the world;

- encouraging **active participation** in community cultural life;

- **enabling people to participate in policy decisions** that affect the quality of our cultural lives; and

- assuring **fair and equitable access** to cultural resources and support."[24]

As will be shown below, museums are well equipped to foster all of these ideals, especially work that brings community members into the creation process.

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[23] Michael H. Norton and Emily Dowdall. "Strengthening Networks, Sparking Change: Museums and Libraries as Community Catalysts," (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2016), 9, https://www.imls.gov/publications/strengthening-networks-sparking-change-museums-and-libraries-community-catalysts.

[24] "What is Cultural Democracy?," Webster's World of Cultural Democracy: The Institute for Cultural Democracy, accessed December 9, 2017, http://www.wwcd.org/cddef.html.

Supporting Cultural Diversity and the Right to Culture

Museums can and should take a leading role in terms of making sure that all people are able to safeguard and share their cultural practices—as listed in the first aspect of cultural democracy above. Indeed, in our society, museums are often considered standard bearers for what represents culture and seen as the places that are actively involved in saving culture for future generations. The creation of new museums that can care for and share objects and stories of those in their communities is the clearest reflection of how museums can support the ideals of cultural democracy. While many individual museums are working to include more diverse representation, another welcome trend is the opening of museums honoring specific cultures that have long been neglected. The recently opened National Museum of African American History & Culture in Washington D.C. and the American Writers Museum in Chicago, are just two examples of new organizations committed to promoting the cultural diversity within the US that has often been overlooked.

Moreover, lately museums are choosing to take on a range of topics that might not have been explored in the past. For example, museums are more actively presenting history and issues pertaining to LGBTQ cultural experiences. The Levine Museum of the New South's 2014 exhibit "Publicly Identified: Coming Out Activist in the Queen City," which "breaks new ground as it documents and preserves a chapter of Charlotte's history not previously told," is just one example.[25] Similarly, more acknowledgment of women in science is being highlighted by exhibits and programming like the work at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History which is currently hosting "The Bearded Lady Project: Challenging the Face of Science" exhibit and offering a range of events

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[25] "Publicly Identified: Coming Out Activist in the Queen City," Levine Museum of the New South, accessed December 9, 2017, http://www.museumofthenewsouth.org/exhibits/publicly-identified-coming-out-activist-in-the-queen-city.

to raise awareness of women's contributions to science.[26] These efforts reinforce how museums can be spaces that celebrate the range of cultural diversity.

Engaging People in Culture

Many museums today are involving non-museum professionals in the creative work that they do. Co-curation techniques have been one of the main ways that museums are exploring in order to allow those outside of the museum field to actively participate in cultural experiences. These types of experiences are illustrative of how museums can contribute to cultural democracy since this concept encourages visitor involvement with "cultural activities rather than just consumption as passive audience members."[27] Typically, when one thinks of efforts related to cultural democracy, the image that come to mind is one of "community animation…[where] an artist-organizer uses both artistic and organizing skills to help the members of a community discover and express their own cultural identities and exercise control over their own cultural development."[28] While not necessarily always led by an "artist-organizer," recent museum work that includes community members supports this sentiment.

In her chapter "Whose Questions, Whose Conversations?" in the book *Letting Go?: Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, Kathleen McLean provides an overview of several recent exhibit development experiences at the Oakland Museum of California that have actively included the voices of non-museum experts. For example, teenagers were enlisted to help create an exhibition on the idea of "cool" while Native American advisors made significant contributions to the exhibits about their people in California. Other advisory groups consisting of members of the Latino,

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[26] "Celebrating Women in Science," Cleveland Museum of Natural History, accessed December 9, 2017, https://www.cmnh.org/womeninscience.

[27] [Edited out for blind review], [Title of course] Class Lecture Goucher College, August 26, 2017.

[28] "What is Cultural Policy?," Webster's World of Cultural Democracy: The Institute for Cultural Democracy, accessed December 9, 2017, http://www.wwcd.org/policy/policy.html#DEF.

African American, Asian Pacific, and Teacher communities also assisted in the planning of an exhibit about the 1960s and 70s. Their involvement included suggesting specific community members who could share personal memories of the times. McLean acknowledges that this work is not easy and is still not the norm in most museums, but underscores the continuing need of museums to find ways to bring visitors into a collaborative development process: "We need to find ways to bring the museum's expert knowledge *into conversation* with the people who attend our museums—people who bring with them their own expert knowledge."[29]

Cultural Democracy Case Example: The Wing

One museum that has had much success doing this type of work is The Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience (The Wing). Located in the Chinatown-International District of Seattle, The Wing employs a community-based model that involves the community in all stages of the work of their organization. The Wing's values state "*People give us meaning and purpose. Relationships are our foundation. We desire community empowerment and ownership*."[30] One of the most evident places where input from the community occurs is in their exhibit development. Written documentation of this process states that "Behind each exhibit are community members making decisions – determining exhibit directions, setting priorities, making selections, and guiding execution each step of the way."[31] Key to this work is the "Community Advisory Committee (CAC)" that they build for each exhibition. Involving 10-15 people, this committee "serve[s] as the primary decision-makers and are charged with developing the main messages, themes, content and

[29] Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski. *Letting Go?: Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World.* (Philadelphia, PA; Walnut Creek: Pew Center for Arts & Heritage; Distributed by Left Coast Press, 2011) 79, http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=767292.

[30] "Our Values," The Wing, accessed December 9, 2017, http://www.wingluke.org/our-values-1.

[31] "Our Process," The Wing, accessed December 9, 2017, http://www.wingluke.org/our-process.

form of the exhibit and its related components."[32] The CAC also plays a role in reaching out to other community members and finding artifacts and oral histories to include. Besides the members on the CAC, the museum also pulls in additional community members to record and transcribe oral histories, to loan materials, to do research, and to volunteer as docents once an exhibit opens.[33]

Nina Simon in her book *The Participatory Museum* highlights how "At the Wing Luke Asian Museum, co-creation and community partnership is a way of life, infiltrating all its efforts, from exhibition design to board recruitment to fundraising."[34] She cites The Wing as a museum that truly allows the co-creative process to occur. To her, this entails making sure that "Co-creative projects originate in partnership with participants rather than based solely on institutional goals." The benefits of co-creating are "1.) To give voice and be responsive to the needs and interests of local community members. 2.) To provide a place for community engagement and dialogue. 3.) To help participants develop skills that will support their own individual and community goals."[35] In carrying out these things, museums can better reflect and celebrate the experiences of those in their communities, thus making them places that can support cultural democracy efforts.

Encouraging Engagement in Policy

Museums have also been pursuing initiatives for "enabling people to participate in policy decisions that affect the quality of [their] cultural lives," another key concept related to cultural democracy.[36] For this work, museums have been more actively inviting their audiences and staff to

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Nina Simon. *The Participatory Museum*. (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2010), "Chapter 8: Co-Creating with Visitors," http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter8/.

[35] Ibid.

[36] "What is Cultural Democracy?," Webster's World of Cultural Democracy.

get involved in many ways. Not only have museums, in part driven by funding needs, stepped up their advocacy efforts for themselves as institutions devoted to cultural work, but they have also created programs that engage people in discussion and deliberation about relevant, often political issues. Advocacy resources and campaigns have been set up by organizations like AAM and Americans for the Arts to get the word out about how incredibly valuable museums are to their communities.[37] While these are typically aimed at museum professionals, the ramifications of this work end up affecting all who visit and rely on these institutions as locations of cultural engagement.

Cultural Democracy Case Example: Museum of Science, Boston

Specific museum efforts aimed at visitors with the intent of encouraging participation in policy issues often include forum-type discussions which allow community members to weigh different sides of the particular matter. Over the last 15 years, the Museum of Science, Boston (MOS), has emerged as one of the science centers leading these efforts. Starting in 2003, this work continued through involvement in the Nanoscale Informal Science Education Network (NISE Net) and has since grown into a regular type of programming for the museum with over 100 forums to date covering topics related to medicine and nanotechnology, the loss of biodiversity, and the impacts of hazardous waste sites. Based on the practice of public engagement with science (PES), which usually defines PES "as a 'dialogue' or 'participation' model in which publics and scientists both benefit from listening to and learning from one another—referred to as mutual learning. The model is premised on the assumption that both publics and scientists have expertise, valuable

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[37] "Advocate," Americans for the Arts, accessed December 9, 2017, https://www.americansforthearts.org/advocate; "Advocacy," American Alliance of Museums, accessed December 9, 2017, http://www.aam-us.org/advocacy.

perspectives, and knowledge to contribute to the development of science and its application in society."[38]

Indeed, the societal connections of these programs are stressed in a guide to "Public Engagement with Science" developed by staff from MOS through a project which focused on questions related to the field of synthetic biology. This document lists among the outcomes for PES-projects the notion that these experiences can help audiences be better prepared to "make decisions about shaping the future through our everyday actions" and that through forums there is the option to gather "thoughtful citizen input to policymakers at local, national, or international scales."[39] The guide goes on to share insight into how to set-up, evaluate, and disseminate information about these unique discussion events. Overall, this work indicates ways that museums can play a role in helping people think through and contribute their voices to important issues that affect their lives.

Enabling Access to Culture

Finally, museums, like other organizations, are responsible for "assuring fair and equitable access to cultural resources and support" on a number of levels.[40] Not only do they need to be ADA compliant, but they must work to make sure that the content they present is accessible to people of various ages, abilities, and backgrounds.[41] Moreover, museums are aware that the actual cost of entry can be a barrier for some, and, consequently, offer free or reduced options. These options often include specific days or evenings where admission price is lowered, reciprocal museum or library

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[38] Larry Bell et al. "Public Engagement with Science: A guide to Creating Conversations Among Publics and Scientists for Mutual Learning and Societal Decision-making," (Museum of Science, 2017), 4.
[39] Ibid., 17.
[40] "What is Cultural Democracy?," Webster's World of Cultural Democracy.
[41] "Universal Design for Museum Learning Experiences," Museum of Science, Boston, accessed December 10, 2017, https://www.mos.org/UniversalDesign.

passes, or partnerships with companies like Bank of America that cover costs.[42] These efforts are important for museums to continue in order to offer the access required for achieving cultural democracy. Although, it is important to note that research has shown that free entry does not always result in people feeling as if they will be welcomed in these spaces. Indeed, findings from the study "'Not Designed for Us': How Science Museums and Science Centers Socially Exclude Low-Income, Minority Ethnic Groups" underscore how in order to truly offer everyone access to their resources, museums need to do a better job at promoting and creating welcoming spaces that counteract "social exclusion."[43] Thus, while museums can and should take into account the key principles associated with cultural democracy, museums also need to heed these in the context of the feelings connected with third spaces, as discussed in the first section of the paper.

Altogether, the co-curation and forum experiences offered at The Wing and at MOS represent strong examples of cultural democracy in action. As Lillian Lewis and Sara Wilson McKay argue in their article "Seeking Policies for Cultural Democracy: Examining the Past, Present, and Future of U.S. Nonprofit Arts," these opportunities are available for non-profits, including many museums. These organizations, especially when they have the proper funding, have the ability to offer experiences that support "the civic involvement of Americans through direct participation in cultural learning, communication, and self-expression."[44] Thus, by offering community members ways to contribute to exhibits and programs or take part in discussions related to broader social

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[42] "Arts & Culture," Bank of America, accessed December 12, 2017, https://about.bankofamerica.com/en-us/what-guides-us/arts-and-culture.html#fbid=AstGz3MSGiw/hashlink=museums-on-us.

[43] Emily Dawson "'Not Designed for Us': How Science Museums and Science Centers Socially Exclude Low-Income, Minority Ethnic Groups." *Science Education* 98, no. 6 (2014): 983-984.

[44] Lillian Lewis and Sara Wilson McKay, "Seeking Policies for Cultural Democracy: Examining the Past, Present, and Future of U.S. Nonprofit Arts," *Studies in Art Education: A Journal of Issues and Research in Art Education* 49, no. 4 (2008): 298.

issues, museums are able to realize the aims of cultural democracy and, thus, help meet the cultural engagement needs of their communities.

Museums as Financial Mobilizers and Community Placemakers

Clearly, there are multiple ways that these organizations can be of service to their communities. Besides acting as spaces where people can come together and actively engage in their cultural lives, museums can have an impact on the economy of the region. As cited by AAM, "Museums employ more than 400,000 Americans and directly contribute $21 billion to the U.S. economy each year and billions more through indirect spending by their visitors."[45] Specifically, as locations which aim to draw in local and out-of-town visitors and often have additional amenities such as cafés and shops, museums play a role in bolstering local economies in the area. Again, AAM points out that "Seventy-six percent of all U.S. leisure travelers participate in cultural or heritage activities such as visiting museums. These travelers spend 60 percent more on average than other leisure travelers."[46] These figures underscore how museums can be a financial benefit to their communities.

In addition to being economic drivers, museums can be central to creative placemaking efforts. As defined by Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, creative placemaking involves "partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shap[ing] the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities."[47] This work "animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local

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[45] "Museum Facts," American Alliance of Museums.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, *Creative Placemaking*, National Endowment for the Arts., Mayors' Institute on City Design., United States Conference of Mayors., and American Architectural Foundation, (Washington, DC, 2010), 3. http://www.nea.gov/pub/CreativePlacemaking-Paper.pdf.

business visibility and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired."[48] While, at times, other types of arts-based institutions such as performing arts centers or community-based arts organizations have received more attention in regard to their creative placemaking initiatives, museums can contribute here as well.[49]

Museums and their wide-ranging array of offerings support many, if not all, of the goals laid out by Markusen and Gadwa. Indeed, it is common for museums to be actively involved in both the architectural and cultural landscape of their area. In referring back to some of the museums already mentioned in this paper, it is clear that museums such as The Wing have a strong presence in their neighborhood. Indeed, the museum serves as a hub for neighborhood tours of the Chinatown-International district which has seen "a 14% increase in visitors to the neighborhood from 2013 to 2015 through The Wing."[50] Moreover, The Wing's purposeful decision not to have a café but a store instead increases retail in the area while ensuring that local restaurants are supported.[51] As can be seen, the work of the museum certainly contributes to creative placemaking in the Seattle area.

Museums are also constantly in partnership with local schools, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and individuals. This is the case for MOS when it runs forum programs. Through this work, they connect with subject matter experts from pertinent fields and local academic institutions in order to present broad perspectives about the issues. Through this process, the museum is building relationships that help bring people together to consider matters that are important for their communities. Museum have other examples of partnerships that often result in actual artistic projects that feed into the creative placemaking of a community. For example, the MFA was part of

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Elizabeth Strom, "Cultural Policy as Development Policy: Evidence from the United States." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 9, no. 3 (2003): 251.

[50] "Go Beyond Our Walls," The Wing, accessed December 9, 2017, http://www.wingluke.org/go-beyond-our-walls-1.

[51] Ibid.

a community-based art effort after the Boston Marathon bombings. This resulted in an installation called "To Boston with Love" that displayed throughout their central lobby hundreds of small, quilted banner flags sewn by people all over the world as a visible reminder of the strength behind the city.[52] Just as these mini-quilts lifted up the city after the tragedy, indeed, it is typical for museum offerings, either on-site or off, to meet the aim of pushing people to "celebrate, inspire, and be inspired."[53] These examples underscore how museums can and should certainly be involved in creative placemaking conversations because their work can support the region's economic resources and cultural cohesion.

Creative Placemaking Example: MASS MoCA

An additional illustration of a museum that has contributed to efforts to support the revitalization of a city is that of the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) in North Adams, MA. MASS MoCA is "a vast complex of 19th-century mill buildings and occu[pies] nearly one-third of the city's downtown business district."[54] From the 1940s to 1985, the site was home to the Sprague Electric Company which at one point employed "4,137 workers in a community of 18,000."[55] With the closure of Sprague and the declining economic base of the city, the impetus came to turn the buildings into a cultural center. Leaders from the local government, businesses, and art communities came together and over the next decade secured funding, undertook architectural updates, and refined the vision for the museum to support the larger community.[56]

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[52] "To Boston with Love," Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
[53] Markusen and Gadwa, *Creative Placemaking*, 3.
[54] "History," Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, accessed December 10, 2017, http://massmoca.org/about/history/.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

The museum's mission statement is clearly based on creative placemaking ideas and states: "Through innovative collaborations, MASS MoCA helps artists and their supporters create and show important new work, bringing to our visitors bold visual and performing art in all stages of production, creating a stimulating center of creativity and commerce that brings life and economic vibrancy to its region."[57] The museum continues to grow in size by expanding into additional mill buildings and by developing the breadth of its visual and musical programming.[58] It has successful partnerships with local schools in the region through the Kidspace program which fosters ongoing arts experiences for youth.[59] While studies have shown that MASS MoCA "makes a convincing case not just that an arts organization was associated with economic revitalization, but that it *caused* the revitalization," it is important to note the difficulties they have run into and still face.[60]

Certainly, the museum has had to work to build connections with locals in town. As seen in the documentary "Downside Up" produced a few years after MASS MoCA was opened, the contemporary art displayed at the museum was not always an immediate fit with the community. Even today, the economic health of the city is still fragile. As a May 2017 article on the website Curbed.com noted, "Storefront occupancy has tripled, but one in four stores downtown is still empty. Unemployment is still a factor, and the real estate market hasn't rebounded. In a city built for more than 20,000, only 13,000 live here today."[61] Nonetheless, even with the continual challenges

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[57] "About," Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, accessed December 10, 2017, http://massmoca.org/about/.
[58] "Mass MoCA Thinks Big with Latest Expansion," Boston Globe, accessed December 10, 2017, https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/art/2017/05/20/with-expansion-mass-moca-enters-new-era/1rkr4TX5MX6bAHfEsI58wK/story.html.
[59] "Arts Education in Museum Spaces: The Enriching Kidspace at MASS MoCA," Americans for the Arts, accessed December 10, 2017, https://www.americansforthearts.org/blog-feed/arts-education-in-museum-spaces-the-enriching-kidspace-at-mass-moca.
[60] "[Createquity Reruns] MASS MoCA and the Revitalization of North Adams," Createquity, accessed December 10, 2017, http://createquity.com/2014/09/createquity-reruns-mass-moca-and-the-revitalization-of-north-adams/.
[61] "Can Contemporary Art Help Revitalize Rural America?," Curbed, accessed December 10, 2017, https://www.curbed.com/2017/5/31/15712130/museum-contemporary-art-rural-development-mass-moca.

that the museum faces to make sure that the local community benefits from MASS MoCA, it

presents a strong case for how a museum can play a role in building creative centers on a large scale.

The example of MASS MoCA emphasizes how museums, in a sense, can be "anchor

institutions" for their communities. Although not generally considered in the same category as

hospitals and universities or "organizations around which localities could re-build their economies,"

this term can be used to describe how museums sometimes function.[62] In the "Strengthening

Networks, Sparking Change: Museums and Libraries as Community Catalysts" report, the authors

indicate that museums "tend to be place-based, perceived as public assets, and have a public service

mission."[63] Thus, museums have characteristics similar to those of traditional anchor institutions.

Indeed, the economic contributions of museums can be very substantial. Moreover, the IMLS report

emphasizes the importance anchor institutions play in meeting the social needs of their community.

These ideas relate to all of the work museums do to create spaces where people can relax, socialize,

and participate in culture.

Conclusion

Overall, it is evident that museums have been supporting and can increase their backing of

third space initiatives, cultural democracy efforts, and creative placemaking. Through this work, they

are expanding the notion of what museums can be to their local communities—i.e. a local hang out

spot, a place to engage deeply in cultural life, or a location that supports the creative work and

broader economy of a particular city. To carry out these ideas, museums need policies that

acknowledge these aims and allow them to meet these goals. Ideally these policies should emphasize

how they will carry out work with other organizations and individuals in the community as well as

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[62] Norton and Dowdall. "Strengthening Networks, Sparking Change," 7.
[63] Ibid., 8.

specifics that can guide the internal work of the museum. In order for museums to adapt how they go about approaching the development of exhibits, events, and programs to better support any one of these ideals, it would be key to adjust their processes from the very beginning to be more community-focused. If museums are able to assess their current actions and undertake efforts that align with these three areas, they can bring in new audiences, have stronger connections with their communities, and reflect the broader role that museums can fulfill in the cultural landscape.

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